

Giving Thanks

✘ I have lots to be thankful for and consider myself a very lucky lady. I'm married to the "bestest husband in the entire universe" and have a fantastic sister-in-law who's more like a sister to me, her three children and their spouses, and my four grandnephews and two grandnieces. In addition, I have other family members and a wonderful circle of friends for whom I am very grateful.

I live on an island in the Pacific Northwest and when the skies are blue and the air is fresh and clean, I think that a blind person need only take in a deep breath to "see" the color green.

Above all things precious to me is the blessing of having been born in America – a country whose Founding Fathers recognized that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights and incorporated those rights into the Declaration of Independence – the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

But, I would not have been so fortunate had my father not emigrated from Buchen, Germany. My father was the youngest of several siblings in a family of farmers. Because it was difficult for my grandparents to feed their entire family, it was decided it would be best for my father to go to America. So, in 1924, according to the family history, my grandfather sold a pig for \$50 and sent my father off to America. He left Hamburg on the *Deutschland*, and arrived at Ellis Island on September 7, 1924. Had he not left Germany, he'd never have met my mother in Brooklyn, NY, and I would never have been born.

It would not be for many years after his death in 1972 that I would truly recognize the invaluable gift he gave me. One of the few regrets I have is my failure to let him know just

that.

I've traveled on five continents and, while it's always fascinating to visit other countries, there isn't another place on earth I would rather live than in the United States.

When I hear people complain about how bad things are in America, I often think of what I saw in Dakar, Senegal. I often think about the enclosed market in Dakar which housed rows and rows of fish, with no refrigeration other than ice, and not so fresh looking fruits and vegetables, which produced an almost unbearable stench as I almost skidded on the wet floors or tripped over the dozens of cats roaming through the aisles. It's a very big difference from the comfort and convenience of shopping at my local Safeway or Walmart.

No where in Dakar had I seen rows and rows of air fresheners or the myriad of deodorants, toothpastes, candies, bottles waters, or the variety of cereals we take for granted here at home. I saw one store on a main shopping avenue with an enormous table which had probably a hundred shoes to be picked through to find a matching pair in the correct size. It was a far cry from stores like Foot Locker which has dozens of athletic shoes neatly displayed in every size and color imaginable.

While riding on the bus around Dakar, the streets were in such disrepair that the sidewalks were cracked wide open as if an earthquake had just hit the city. Buildings were gutted and rebar was removed to be used in other buildings. Some stores were actually old cargo containers now sitting upright.

A very specific memory I have getting off the bus in Dakar was the dozens and dozens of goats in the streets preparing to be bought and slaughtered for the celebration of Tabaski.

Alongside those goats, I saw a young man literally crawling on a dirt sidewalk begging for money. I didn't want to stare at this pitiful human being, but I'm convinced that his limbs

were so deformed that he moved insect-like along the sidewalk. So, when I see “homeless” people in Seattle leaving St. Francis House with loaves of bread and then throwing the slices on the street to feed pigeons it makes my head spin.

It also infuriates me when I hear bleeding-heart liberals lamenting the plight of those same homeless types when, in fact, Seattle has more free services than probably the whole of Senegal. There are places in Seattle that will feed anyone three meals a day for free and no one needs to sleep on the streets. There is one proviso – you can’t use drugs or alcohol.

One of my husband’s clients, who left Vietnam when she was 13 years old, made a few comparisons. She told him, “you people live in Heaven, and you don’t know it. In my country, if you don’t have food, you starve; if you don’t have clothes, there’s no where to get them; there’s no help at all.”

While riding the bus one day, my husband sat next to a young man who was looking out the window at the Seattle Courthouse Park also known here as Muscatel Meadows. My husband said to him, “a lot of people in the park today” to which the young man responded, “Yeah, there’s a lot of bums out today, I used to be one of them. But I have my own apartment, I have a job and I’m off alcohol. No reason to be homeless in Seattle.”

It’s sometimes hard to appreciate what you have unless you know what the alternatives can be. Some people value what they have, others don’t. If I hadn’t traveled and experienced life in other countries, I might not appreciate how wonderful my life is here in America. Unfortunately, too many people don’t get to see how the rest of the world lives and can only feel sorry for themselves. To them, I say, “go and live in Dakar for six months and come back and tell me how horrible life is here in the U.S.”

So, while we celebrate Thanksgiving, I am grateful for my

wonderful husband, family and friends and to my father who gave me life in America, I'd like to say, "thanks, Daddy."