

# Giving Thanks During a Difficult Year



Rob Buchanan

In a year that many agree is the worst in recent memory, it seems absurd to embrace gratitude rather than to scream as our best response to 2020. We've lost so much this year and continue living in unrelenting anxiety and uncertainty that justify a good scream. A scream may be necessary and even therapeutic.

However, for long-lasting relief I suggest switching to gratitude. The health benefits alone beat out other classic stress relievers like a caterwaul, punching a wall, or knocking back an adult beverage. Exercise, meditation, and yoga are also excellent alternatives for relief, but gratitude is quicker, cheaper and enduring.

What better month to welcome gratitude than November? In a year of great divide and disappointments when it seems we've been re-fighting the Civil War, it is fitting we first celebrated Thanksgiving as a nation during that war. After the Union victory at Gettysburg and during overwhelming turmoil, President Lincoln declared Thanksgiving a national day to be celebrated in November.

Frankly, the daily practice of a gratitude journal keeps me sane (so far) in this un-

imaginable year. For me, the simple act of thinking about and writing down three things I am grateful for delivers impressive benefits. I feel happier, more productive, and sleep better. And medical science confirms that my experience isn't unique; keeping a gratitude journal improves a person's life. Reflecting on what life would be without certain good fortunes, especially the unexpected and surprising ones, stimulates gratitude. I have found the exercise of writing them down forces me to pay attention to these "gifts" in my life that I'd otherwise take for granted. Surprisingly, boosts happiness, helps lift the fog of anxiety, and enables me to see the meaning of events going on around me.

As president, I could share that I am grateful to be an attorney with the State Bar of Michigan because it is an exceptionally good bar and delivers incredible services. Or I could share that SBM membership becomes even more advantageous in these difficult times. But that's for another day.

Instead, here are examples of three things I am grateful for this year as a Michigan attorney.

- **The rule of law shines in Michigan.** As I write this, election day was just two days ago and ballots in Michigan, Georgia, Pennsylvania, Arizona, and Nevada are still being counted to determine who will be president for the next four years. For months, our country has been awash

in hateful and fact-free rhetoric, and is ideologically divided in half. While little is known of what the future holds, we know our divisions will not disappear. For our nation to get through today's crises and the challenges ahead, we must restore civil discourse. And there is no better model for how to resolve our differences non-violently and effectively than the judicial system in Michigan. Though as attorneys, judges, and citizens we come from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and dispositions, everyone who enters a courtroom—in person or virtually—receives respect and gets a turn speaking to engaged listeners. Distilling the truth, punishing deceit, applying the rules the same for everyone, and fairly resolving differences is the objective of our adjudicative process and what makes the rule of law work. This model prizing truthfulness, equality, temperance, decency, and integrity should be the example for how to emerge from the dark rhetoric of these times.

- **New insights and difficult conversations about equality.** Culminating with the killing of George Floyd in May, 2020 became the year that endlessly postponed and painful conversations about race and inequality could no longer be avoided. It's not easy for any of us, especially attorneys and judges who swore to defend the Constitution, to admit the

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"Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others." —Cicero

country and justice system we love are imperfect and not colorblind. It's easy to focus only on our own workload rather than try to tackle these systemic problems. But it is wrong to do nothing. The world needs us as Michigan attorneys to step up and take action to try making it right. One promising effort is the State Bar of Michigan's work to reform indigent criminal defense in Michigan, triggering the Michigan Indigent Defense Commission in 2013. And, in 2020, new and ongoing national conversations by attorneys and bar associations about race and justice remind us of our sworn promise of justice for all and should inspire each of us to actually do something! There's no better time to start than right now.

- **New COVID-19 co-worker.** Like many people during the statewide shelter-in-place, our family welcomed a new

member this summer, a spirited golden retriever puppy. His name is Gatsby, because my daughters named our first dog Daisy when they were very young, just like all their school friends. My rebellion against the ordinary was calling her Daisy Buchanan, the reckless driver in *The Great Gatsby*. Our new puppy this year, the Old Sport, is a joyful little being, a calming co-worker, and always delighted to see me. Every day is an adventure and fun!

Because gratitude is both good for you and virtuous, I invite you to try it. Your turn:

I am grateful for

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

There, don't you feel better? Don't you see the path forward clearer? ■



Among the things the author is thankful for in 2020: A new co-navigator in good boy Gatsby

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