

A Thanksgiving Approach to Intestinal Fortitude



Kathy Simons, WTS-LA President, Photo © John Livzey, 2018

When discussing Thanksgiving and everything it entails—from gratuitous gustation to bombastic relatives—the late-great and truly wonderful Erma Bombeck summed up her holiday experience most succinctly, “I come from a family where gravy is considered a beverage...” She also said, “Seize the moment. Remember all those women on the Titanic who waved off the dessert cart.” If that doesn’t put you in the proper holiday spirit, we’ve got nothing more to talk about.

Okay folks, this is a strange time in our nation. I think we can all agree on that. And I’m not talking about the fact that it’s already November. Yes, we have a very important election upon us. Yes, back East its way too warm for this time of year. And yes, our country has been visited by several 100-year storms just this fall alone. But I’m not even talking about any of that. I was going to talk politics, but it’s probably best if I maintain decorum and refrain. It’s like that old Scottish joke, “A gentleman is someone who knows how to play the bagpipes—and doesn’t.” I will say this, though. No matter what side of the political spectrum you identify yourself as occupying, there are a few things I want you to keep in mind as we make our inexorable way toward the endless loop of “holiday” and “seasonal” Muzak playing in every public space of “the built environment.” (Thank god for earbuds and Spotify...)

First and foremost: be thankful. It’s not hard. It takes little energy. It’s something simple that everyone can do. And it only takes a few moments each time, usually. Granted, even though Thanksgiving itself is up for interpretation politically and historically, I ask that you all put that aside, save it for another time and place, and please focus on the concept of thankfulness, of gratitude, of appreciation. A change has to start somewhere. Let it start with you. Teddy Roosevelt said, “Let us remember that, as much has been given us, much will be expected from us, and that true homage comes from the heart as well as from the lips, and shows itself in deeds.” Read that again. And then think about this. It’s about actions.

Everyone has their struggles. Some people have it better than others do. It’s always been that way. It will probably always be that way. But no matter where you are on that continuum, you can always make things better for someone else. And in doing so, you make things better for yourself. So, be thankful. Be grateful. Most of us have it pretty good when you consider the context of the world. In many places, simply going to the store can mean an accidental death sentence. For that matter, even in our own country going to a movie, a synagogue, or a supermarket can have consequences no one expects. So, appreciate what you have and be grateful for it. Then, act on that gratitude. And now I’m going to ask you a personal favor. And it’s political.

In too many places around the world it is impossible to vote or vote freely, fairly, and safely. In many places, it’s risky, politically dangerous, or even fatal. And yes, while our system is far from perfect—and we’re learning everyday about some of its more glaring flaws—it is still a system where our voices can be

heard. We are lucky. We have that to be grateful for. So, please go vote. There is simply no excuse for not voting. Too many people fought and died for your right to vote. Not voting dishonors their sacrifice. So, believe whatever doctrine you wish to believe, follow whatever political leaders you wish to follow, but don't be passive. Don't sit this one or any other out. Get up and vote. And while I'm haranguing you to do that, I'll drop another great quote about why you have a responsibility, an obligation to vote. Martin Luther King said, "Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter." Voting matters. What you're voting about matters. So, get out there on November 6th and scream your belief to the highest mountain.

Okay, now back to the previously scheduled gratitude. The thing about gratitude and thankfulness is this; it's contagious. It starts a cycle. And when you freely express these feelings, they return to you multifold. Don't believe it? Do the cynical among you decry the fact that there are perennial "takers" out there who only take advantage of each and every situation? Forget'em. That's their problem. In the end, they must live with themselves and their choices. Think about it in terms of WTS-LA.

In our chapter, people routinely do the selfless thing. They work for others. They help others. And in addition, our members regularly show gratitude, appreciating what others have done for them. And that's exactly what I'm talking about. Use the chapter and how we interact with each other as your guide for this holiday and this holiday season. Think of it as WTS-LA's attitude of gratitude and apply it to your professional and personal lives. And then go volunteer somewhere...

Normally, I would charge you all with a specific mission to organize, reach out, or collaborate somehow. Nah. Not this time. This time, it's all about you. So, starting right now, please be grateful and appreciative of what you have and the people around you. If you already have that perspective, push it further. Then, go vote, and enjoy it. Appreciate that you can go vote without fear or unintended consequence. Then, please go and have an absolutely wonderful and enjoyable holiday, complete with turkey, stuffing, cranberry sauce, and Erma Bombeck's favorite beverage.