

## **Childhood Memories and Gratitude**

### **Week 1**

**March 2<sup>nd</sup>**

When sitting down for reflection today, the memory I immediately thought back to was a life-threatening situation in fifth grade. My best friend, Meredith, and I both had just gotten electric scooters. These were not any electric scooters; these were the ones that had a seat and went quite fast. It was a sunny May afternoon when we decided to go out riding around the neighborhood, and since neither of my parents were home, I called my dad to let him know that we would be leaving for a while. I remember this phone call very well; he told me that he had just read an article recently about how frequently people get seriously hurt or even killed on these scooters so he wanted me to promise that I would wear a helmet. I recall giving him a hard time saying that Meredith's parents said she didn't have to wear one and that I was responsible enough to not have to wear one, but he insisted that I did.

Heading out that afternoon, I was very bummed that I had to ride around with the helmet on my head. After awhile, though, I forgot about it, especially since Meredith wore one also to make me feel better. As her and I were heading down the street, we hit a patch of gravel and both of our tires swerved. Our scooters crashed, and since mine completely flipped, I flew off of it. I remember hitting my head on the edge of the driveway and the feeling of my head bumping off of the cement as I lay there. I slowly got up after shaking the impact off, and my immediate reaction was to make sure that Meredith was okay even though she was standing. She got a couple of bruises, but was mostly shaken up so we headed home. Reflecting back on it, I am so amazed that I didn't look down at my own body at the time; I was more focused on making sure that she was okay. When I got home, however, I looked in the mirror and realized that I was covered in blood and that my helmet had a crack down the center. This experience has been one that has stuck with me for so long; I can never thank my dad enough for telling me that morning to put a helmet on. I know he loves me and that he wanted me to be safe, and I am so thankful to have him as a source of guidance. The experience made me very grateful for my friendship with Meredith, also, since I realized at that moment how distraught I was at the thought of something happening to her. It was a wakeup call to my fifth grade self, and it really made me more appreciative of the things around me.

### **Week 2**

**March 9<sup>th</sup>**

My reflection today is about a church experience I had when I was eight. Every year on Christmas Eve, my family goes to mass at our church. It is a big ordeal. We all get dressed up and have to get there at least an hour early because our church gets so full that people have to stand along the walls. Near the end of the mass, our priest always calls the children present up on stage so that they can sing a Christmas carol to the adults in the audience. I was really excited this year that I got to be apart of this singing, so I was looking forward to going up on stage the entire mass. The reason I chose this as my reflection is because of the feeling I had when I was up on the stage. I was standing beside countless other children, and we truly felt like a community even though I didn't know any of them. I had so much appreciation at that moment. I looked at the packed

audience in wonder and was thankful to be there in that moment with so many other people who were there for the same reason. I also looked at my family and reflected on how thankful I was to have them. They were all smiling at me, even my brother (who I expected would tease me about this later). It felt great to have them all there smiling and clapping, cheering me on.

Church has always been a huge part of my life. Growing up, I would often work with soup kitchens in Detroit through my church and I always prepared “donut Sunday” at my church with my parents by arriving early before the 8:00a.m. to organize the food. Out of all these experiences, the reason I remember this Christmas Eve mass when I was eight so clearly is because I felt at that moment that I knew what it meant to be apart of something bigger than you. I was so thankful and happy, and it was through this community of people that I felt this way.

### **Week 3**

#### **March 16<sup>th</sup>**

My reflection today is about Christmas Day. Growing up, my family always stuck to our rituals of what we did on Christmas Day. Everyone would wake up by 9:00 a.m. and then we would make a big breakfast together. We always make what we call “Kemmer eggs”. These eggs require a thorough run-down of our fridge. We go through and pull out all the vegetables we can find, meat, and anything else that we think would taste good in them. We also make lots of toast and use our fancy drink pitcher for our orange juice. My job was always to prepare a pitcher of hot chocolate since that was one of our favorites we would save for this morning. We would serve our food on our special plates and china that we save for this day every year, and it was always required that we could not have any electronics or other distractions at the table. The reason I reflect back on this day is that my parents really emphasized to me from a young age that this day was really about family. They would have us wait until we ate breakfast and cleaned up to open presents since eating and being together as a family was what was most important.

My favorite memory of Christmas Day was when I was 7 years old. I was so sick that when we opened presents I was wrapped up in blankets with a tissue box beside me with a warm mug of tea. Although I was feeling awful, my family still managed to make it just as special as always. My parents got us such thoughtful presents as always, and my siblings still joked around with me even though I was sick. This Christmas was so special, because the day leading up to it I was so sad that I was sick. I was complaining to my mom and dad that it was not going to be fun since I was feeling so ill, yet they all went out of their way to make it even more special than usual. We opened presents and sat around talking before we went and saw an afternoon movie (as usual). Still to this day, Christmas Day is one of my favorites. Even though my sister is now engaged and we have such busy schedules, it is the one-day that we still focus just on family time. I love it now, especially since I don’t see my siblings that often, because I have learned how appreciative I am of this time we have together. I always look back on the Christmas Days we have spent together with such appreciation for being able to have valuable family time that is sometimes hard to get.

#### **Week 4**

**March 23<sup>rd</sup>**

For today's reflection, I thought back to the time I was stuck in the elevator with my dad when I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. My family and my best friend's family, in addition to other family friends, traveled to Hawaii that year for Easter break. It was such a fun vacation; Hawaii has to be my favorite place I have ever been to. My dad and I were heading back up to our hotel room one afternoon when, all of the sudden, it stopped. We were stuck and called on the phone in the elevator for help, but the main issue was that we were stuck in between floors. Since this was the case, the emergency exit in the elevator wasn't really an option. I remember being really scared since we were stuck in there for a couple hours, but my dad was the one who kept me calm and kept me distracted by allowing me to play games on his phone. We finally were able to get out of the elevator when they passed a crowbar through the doors to my dad, and he pried them open so that I could jump into the arms of a worker below. My dad then had to follow after and jump to the floor below also.

It was one of the most terrifying experiences since jumping out of the elevator when you can see how far down below it goes is not a pleasant. The reason I remember this so clearly and view this event with wonder and appreciation is because first and foremost, I am very appreciative to those workers who devoted their time to help my dad and I get out of the elevator. I am also very appreciative of my dad, who I now can reflect back and see made the experience better by keeping me calm. I do view this event with wonder, because it is amazing to me how everything can be so perfect and you can be on a perfect vacation, and yet something like this can go wrong. This experience taught me that you can't control everything that possibly will happen, but you can be grateful for the people around you for making it that much better.

#### **Week 5**

**March 30<sup>th</sup>**

For the reflection today, I want to talk about my family's tradition for birthdays. Birthdays were always an important event each year in my family. My mom always had her work cut out; she had twins, so she always had to get double the presents at the same time. Also, she had me, who was almost born on Christmas and then almost born on New Years, so she always had to get Christmas presents and then head out again for birthday presents. Growing up, she would always joke about this with us. She would complain that our birthdays didn't make her life easy, and it became a family joke. The way my family celebrates birthdays has always been very special to me. Since our birthdays usually fall during the week, our ritual was to have a "Birthday Weekend" devoted to the individual whose birthday was the week prior. During the birthday weekend, the birthday boy/girl could decide to do any activity that they wanted and where they wanted to go to dinner. Since my brother and sister would have to share a weekend, my mom always had one pick the weekend before the birthday, and the other pick the weekend afterwards.

The reason I chose these birthday celebrations as my topic for today, is because I have always had so much appreciation for my parents for making the birthdays so special for

us growing up. Reflecting back on the many birthdays we have celebrated together, I am really thankful that we have this tradition of devoting a weekend to the individual. It allows us to do an activity that that individual really likes, and this gives us a lot of family bonding time that is so meaningful. For example, for my past birthday I asked my parents if we could go to the DIA and then get authentic Italian food in Detroit. I have always been the museum-lover of the family, but I was surprised by how into the exhibits my entire family was. It gave us all a chance to talk about our opinions and laugh, and having the dinner at the restaurant was a memorable experience because the waiter put this giant loaf of bread on the table. I always look forward to these weekends, and I appreciate them so much because it is our way of showing that individual how much we love them.

## **Week 6**

**April 6<sup>th</sup>**

For my reflection today, I wanted to talk about my garden that my dad and I would plant each year when I was young. My dad has always been very enthusiastic about my schoolwork; when he found out I was learning about photosynthesis in school, he went out and bought a bunch of pods so that we could plant seeds in each one. At first it was just in order to supplement my schoolwork, but planting these pods yearly soon became a ritual for us. He showed me how to plant each seed in the pod, and he let me pick which seeds I wanted to plant since those would be the fruits and vegetables that we would eat throughout the season.

I will never forget when he surprised me with the last packet of seeds that first time we were planting the pods. He pulled out a packet with a picture of giant sunflower seeds on it. I, of course, was ecstatic because I loved how beautiful and bright the sunflowers grew to be. I couldn't wait to plant my seeds in the ground when we were finished. That first summer with the seeds was a learning experience for me. I was really sad when only a few of our seeds grew to maturity, but my dad just told me that in the future we would have to get creative with how to protect them from the rabbits. Each summer, we got more experienced at how to grow the healthiest fruits and vegetables, and I always loved it because it was something that we did together.

I chose this as my experience for today, because this event is something I look back on appreciatively. My dad instilled all this wonder in me by watching something natural grow so beautifully. I am so appreciative of him for always going above and beyond to further my education. I am also grateful that this became a ritual for us. I loved this father-daughter time since we were able to talk and listen to each other. I believe doing this each summer made our relationship closer and closer over the years.