

Thanking Those “Don’t See” Friends at Thanksgiving (Feature Article)

by Kathleen Spring

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Thanksgiving may have started with Pilgrims and Indians being thankful for the harvest, and it may today involve family, football and turkey, but the true universal meaning of the holiday is to give thanks.

While giving thanks for food, health, home, family and friends is priority, people might consider extending their thanks, in the spirit of the Thanksgiving holiday, to include those invisible people whom we “don’t see,” and those personal castoffs whom we “don’t want to see.”

There is a wide circle of invisible people whom we “don’t see” who help make our lives easier, more fun or meaningful. This could be the gal at the coffee shop who knows our regular order, or the newspaper carrier who puts the paper inside our screen door who deserve a thank you during the Thanksgiving season.

A table full of seniors, sharing a cup of coffee, identified those helpful people in their lives for whom they were grateful:

Janet values the trash man who has efficiently picked up her garbage for 20 or more years. This sanitation engineer takes pride in his work, and she has seen him scurry after a single wayward lid.

Leo says that his younger neighbors watch over him, since the death of his wife Helen. They sometimes invite him to dinner and have offered to take him to the airport.

Kate appreciates her urban mail carrier, who always delivers the mail to the right mail box, with a friendly smile. When she orders seedlings, the carrier will deliver it to her door, instead of leaving it in the unprotected mail box.

To help you recognize more of those vital people who are taken for granted, but who influence our lives in small and great ways, take a look at a book called “Consequential Strangers: The Power of People Who Don’t Seem to Matter...But Really Do” by Melinda Blau and Karen L. Fingerman. Think of it in terms of the adapted African proverb that “it takes a village to raise a child.”

There’s another group who makes life more meaningful, but who might not be remembered at Thanksgiving. What about those friends who do not qualify as significant? Most people only have one confidant. The remainder of their friends may not be the perfect friend, but each one of them satisfies a need, such as bringing laughter to our lives. The love here is conditional but integral. The Thanksgiving season is the time to thank them for being themselves and being in our lives.

Mary Jane says she misses her mother’s cooking, but she can satisfy her occasional cravings because her friend Helga loves cooking ethnic dishes from the Old Country.

Jennie appreciates having Suzie as a friend, with her spotless house, because she is the only one who can understand Jennie’s need for perfection.

Donald says he could never go on vacation if it were not for his friend Rick who loves dogs and is willing and happy to dog-sit for him.

What about those “don’t want to see” friends and relatives whom we try to avoid? How can we be grateful for having them in our lives?

Wouldn’t it be wonderful to bring the love originally felt to the forefront of our relationships? What are we willing to give up in order to feel the loving connection again? Relationships involve some sort of compromise. Make a plan and be ready for an extraordinary Thanksgiving season. It is easier to truly hear and understand someone when listening from a standpoint of love.

Wow! That is a whole forest of significant people who surround you. If you fall down, they will hear you. Have you ever felt the possibilities of love and thankfulness more than you do at this moment? Go out and show it. What you give will be returned, making it a truly meaningful Thanksgiving Day.