

## A Chorus of Thank Yous by Elizabeth Aquino

Gratefulness.org Editor's note: As we begin this year's season of thanksgiving with Thanksgiving Day in Canada (October 14, 2019) we offer the following invitation (originally published in 2015) to consider how gratitude might arise and serve "even as we mourn and starve and hurt."

Thanksgiving is a formal holiday for giving thanks, for sharing community with family and friends, but it's also the holiday that represents most vividly the paradox of feeling gratitude even as we suffer or cause the suffering of others.

Some of us live close enough to our immediate families that sitting down with them and sharing a meal on this one day is less about family and more about gratitude. Others who live far from family, who for one reason or another can't celebrate with family, make one with friends and neighbors. We all joke about the inevitable conflicts that arise when family is together, even as we hug and kiss and exclaim how children have grown, how wonderful it is to be all together.

For me, Thanksgiving is about paradox, about the challenge to do or think, be and hold opposing thoughts or circumstances at once. It is gratitude for the human impulse toward gratitude, even in the face of adversity.

A young girl from my son's school died this week suddenly and dramatically. She collapsed on the basketball court and could not be revived. I think of her parents especially this week as we move towards our national Thanksgiving. I see this girl's sweet face in my mind, and I struggle to conjure her mother's as she might have looked before this happened. Before. What did she look like before her daughter died? Should we know these things? Should we sense these things? That our children and loved ones can disappear so suddenly? Shouldn't we have the chance to fortify ourselves? Shouldn't we connect to them more, hold their gaze longer, smile more gently, hug them each day?

But we ARE given the chance. We are given the chance every single day that we are alive.

Can we be grateful enough to say: Thank you for all the sick children, their faces lifted to us for relief. We can show compassion. Thank you for the refugees, the displaced people in war-torn countries who stand at our borders asking for relief. We can crack our heart and the doors to our homes open. Thank you for the felled trees in our backyards, their absence a reminder of our past. We can plant two for every one. Thank you for the dying species of animals, the mutated frogs, the salmon who forget to swim against the tide. We can do better for them by every choice we make. Thank you for the politicians bought off by money, for the religious who exclude in fear, for the sun rising implacably over drought-deadened fields and for its setting, the dark. We can practice seeing with clear eyes. We say thank you, even as we mourn and starve and hurt. Thank you.

I do not believe in a god with specific plans or mysterious ways. I am not sure, even, of a place beyond this one, the one of fire and earth and water and air. I have no idea whether it'd be easier to be so, to have faith in that god, that other place, or more terrible because of that certainty. I know how to breathe the air, how to breathe, how to breathe, how to breathe. I know how to give thanks, give thanks, give thanks. These are the elements of Love, I think, chanced upon us by grace.