

## Working Towards 14,000

I was in a bookstore last week and a book caught my eye: *14,000 Things to be Thankful For*. I picked it up and rifled the pages, stopping randomly in their list. Two words caught my eye: **Columnists** and **Lumberyards**

I put the book back on the shelf. After all, what more needs to be said?

Okay, I'm neither George Will nor Fredrich Weyerhaeuser. But well into my second decade as a sawyer, I can still count to 10. That by itself is plenty to be thankful for. And some people are reading this sentence in a newspaper.

A few years ago my friend Gladys shared with me her story. At the height of the Great Depression, after the birth of his seventh child, a man abandoned his wife and children. He left them in a rural house a little better than a shack, with a dry cow. Gladys was one of those seven kids. Mom and kids did what they needed to survive. They shot game, picked wild berries; neighbors shared what they had. The American Sunday School Union had started a ministry in the school house down the road, and the kids walked to church every Sunday.

Gladys shared how before every meal, the kids would each take a turn to ask the blessing and thank God for what had been provided. In each prayer, they also asked that God would bless and take care of the poor. It never occurred to her, or her siblings, that they were poor.

Gladys is one of the happiest people I've ever met. And those of her siblings who I've met also have a cheery disposition.

Abandoned by their father, living through the Great Depression in a shack, living hand to mouth. But they prayed for the poor every day.

They had learned the simple secret about thankfulness: look at what you **DO** have, not at what you **DON'T**.

Which made me ponder a bit all the things I have to be thankful for

I'm thankful for my beautiful and talented wife Shele, with whom I've shared 30 years of marital bliss, almost. (okay, we're 7 months shy of 30 years. That's "almost." What did you think I meant by "almost"?)

I'm thankful that my son Joshua made it home from his combat tour in Afghanistan alive and healthy, is newly married; is living close enough to share times with, and far enough away so we stay out of each other's hair..

I'm thankful to some parents in Texas whose son was with Joshua, but who didn't make it home. I can't begin to comprehend the magnitude of sacrifice that couple laid on the Altar of Freedom.

I'm thankful for my new daughter (in-law) Christen, who is smart, attractive, funny and more than capable of dealing with a husband and his family, who, at times exhibit residual vestiges of ODD.

I'm thankful my son Benjamin is doing well vocationally and educationally, and has quality friends. He is as thankful to live in Alaska as his mother is thankful she doesn't.

I'm thankful for Samuel, my youngest son. Although he has a 13 year-old's reticence for sitting still in a deer stand on a cold and windy morning, we still get to work together, and hang out. He even does what he's told, mostly.

I'm thankful that my folks, both octogenarians, are in relative good health and still live in their own home. And that they come to visit almost every week

I'm thankful to live amongst neighbors who, although we have differing opinions regarding religion, politics and canines, are more than just neighbors. We're friends.

I'm thankful to live in a country where leadership is decided by ballots instead of bullets, even if the ballots need to be recounted on occasion.

I'm thankful above all else, to Jesus, Lover and Savior of my Soul, who leads me at times through green pastures and still waters, and other times through arid deserts and turbulent rapids. Through it all, He promises to never leave or forsake me.

My list is far short of 14,000 items, but it's also not exhaustive. So if I didn't mention you, it doesn't mean I'm not thankful. After all, newspaper column space is limited.

Which may give you, the reader, something to be thankful for.