

Gratitude: Affirming One Another Through Stories

Len Froyen

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Froyen combines well-written personal stories with larger lessons and reflections about gratitude.

In *Gratitude: Affirming One Another Through Stories*, Len Froyen relates stories from his life that demonstrate why he feels grateful, and he encourages readers to reflect on their own reasons for gratitude. What separates the book from other affirmation-based works is the quality of Froyen's writing, which has the comfortable style of a spoken-word storyteller and produces wistful images of the highlights he describes.

Though Froyen is a deacon and the book is categorized as a religious/spiritual work, *Gratitude* avoids proselytizing, instead presenting gentle material in a way that works nearly as well for general audiences and avoids any judgmental stances. The stories of gratitude are broken into chapter-topics such as work, hardship, kindness, and forgiveness, and the chapters end with reflection assignments.

Much of *Gratitude* works as a memoir; Froyen uses a soothing, nostalgic prose style to recount the boyhood experiences for which he feels grateful. He writes about carrying buckets of water for his relatives' dairy cows, and the extra work required when winter temperatures increased both the cows' thirst and the difficulty of the trip to get water.

In another chapter, Froyen writes beautifully about taking his now-grown daughter to ride a pony when she was little, how "the circle of her delight stood in stark contrast to the one traced on the dusty earth by the slow gait of the ponies." He captures her joy during those rides and connects that experience to her lifelong love of animals and her care for her own horse.

Froyen combines his personal stories with larger lessons. In his chapter on misfortune, he describes being saved by a lifeguard when he was twelve, after he tried swimming in water too deep. He looks back on that event as an avenue to discuss how near-death experiences can change people, and how the others' deaths have impacted him. He writes a chapter about his gratitude toward his mother for a rewarding childhood, then he pivots to taking care of her as she lived into her nineties and how their bond continued to grow.

Other stories are simpler, such as how a stranger stopping to help with car trouble saved a family vacation, or how he turned the modern experience of constantly waiting in line into a personal opportunity to reflect on a regular basis.

All these stories are enhanced by Froyen's comfortable, easy storytelling, and a refreshingly sincere outlook on gratitude.

JEFF FLEISCHER (November 17, 2014)

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