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James Carroll column: What's on your wall?

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I will tell you a secret; I like calendars. This time every year I begin my search for the calendars I want to have for the upcoming year. I'm drawn to calendars that depict unspoiled beaches, magnificent forests or imposing mountains. Some years I want to see historic locations like the Roman Coliseum or photos of famous golf holes from around the world; other years, I look for photos of the night sky and outer space.

I put these calendars in different spots in my house because I invariably ask myself while standing somewhere with no calendar "what's today's date?" I keep doing that more and more, by the way, and the older I get, the more it scares me to think I'll probably be found one day with every wall in my house covered with a calendar. Seems like a scene you'd see in an old episode of the TV show, "The Twilight Zone."

In my kitchen, I have one of those calendars where each day is on a separate square page with just the words "TODAY IS." I tear off yesterday's page and toss it away as I make my morning coffee. I first bought that type of calendar after seeing one when my mother had a stay in a nursing home. It was always on the wall right in front of her bed. I liked its simplicity – one day at a time, not a monthly sheet of small boxes filled with appointments and meetings. I like that I can see the date from across the room without wearing my glasses. I like that I am forced to rip off yesterday's page – it feels good to do that.

While doing some research recently, I came across a passage from a book that I read long ago titled "Man's Search for Meaning" written by Victor Frankl.

Frankl used the type of calendar in my kitchen to make a point:

"The pessimist observes with fear and sadness that his wall calendar, from which he daily tears a sheet, grows thinner with each passing day. On the other hand, the person who attacks the problems of life actively is like a man who removes each successive leaf from his calendar and files it neatly and carefully away with its predecessors, after first having jotted down a few diary notes on the back. He can reflect with pride and joy on all the richness set down in these notes, on all the life he has already lived to the fullest."

No, I didn't start digging through the trash to find yesterday's calendar page, but this passage made me stop and think. Maybe we can't always write about something good on today's calendar page, but it's been there on the days past, and it will be on the days to come. To all the pessimists out there, I hear you. With all the depressing stories in the news, you've got good reason to be negative.

But every morning, a simple calendar with nothing else on it except a date stares at me from across the room. When I tear off yesterday's page, I see today's date – proclaiming I made it another day – and because of that, I must be grateful for the life I have.

I bet all those patients, like my mother in the nursing home, knew that all along, and hoped that their kids would someday look at their calendar and understand it too.

East Falmouth resident James Carroll's career as a lawyer talking to jurors taught him the importance of speaking from the heart.