

## LIFESTYLE TIPS

Have you ever had plans just really not work out the way you thought, hoped or dreamed they would? I'm confident most of you are nodding your heads right now and remembering the times. What was it for you? A cancer treatment that failed for someone you loved? A career that fell off the cliff? A relationship that eroded? Chronic pain or fatigue stealing your vibrant years? For me, I had the life I had always wanted. But in 2011 it all fell to pieces. I'm a woman of faith, the strong, long-standing, brave and bold kind of faith, the kind of faith that defines a person. And so, when my life fractured all around me, I was left disillusioned. This kind of thing doesn't happen to someone like me! How? What? Why? Why can be the most dangerous of questions.

In the middle of the court hearings and sleazy Texas lawyers and heartache and fear and confusion, I did something crazy. Instead of plunging deep into my anger and pain and seeking revenge, I remembered something that the people of my faith did way back when. They would pause, reflect and build a pile of stones in that "Place of Remembrance" so that when they, and the generations to



# Lifestyle GRATITUDE

By Megan Goldstein

come, would pass that place, they would be reminded of all they had and were grateful for.

So, I made a pile of stones. Only mine were made out of colorful construction paper and a sharpie. I sat down one quiet evening and just started pouring out my heart with the things I could be grateful for, even when there was seemingly nothing but chaos around me. Through tears I wrote on the little colorful circles.... Jessica, Kara, Family, my home, my espresso machine, my God, clothes, my minivan....to my surprise it just gushed out! The simplest of things became shining beacons of light in my darkness!!

When I looked up from my project, I had 25 stones. I taped them to the back of my bedroom door as a reminder every morning and every evening. This was the start of a practice that would continue to transform my heart, my mind and my life... *Gratitude*.

That same year Harvard Health published an article called "In Praise of Gratitude" about the many studies being done on the cognitive improvements that can be accomplished through the practice of gratitude. They said that gratitude interventions were associated with improvements to personal and societal well-being. Less depression, less anxiety, more optimism and more energy were found in test subjects who focused on and recorded the positive things they experienced each week. We often think that when we are happier then we can be more grateful. But the paradox is this—only *through* gratitude can you experience joy.

In 2015 I was introduced to an organization called Global Seed Planters. Founder Diane Brask is a powerhouse of a woman who is changing lives all over the world. I attended a fundraiser dinner for her new initiative called Sister Acts (not the comedy movie about nuns!), which serves women in Uganda. Many of these women live in mud huts, walk 5 miles to fill a can full of brown water, cook over cow dung, and are often the victims of domestic violence.

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I came home that evening so inspired and impacted by what I had learned! Standing there just pausing from the day in my kitchen, I glanced at my kitchen faucet. In a flood of thought I realized all of the things that have to be true in my life to be able to stand there and look at that kitchen faucet. You are probably already flooded with the same thoughts as you read this. I was in pain, working harder than ever, a single mom, on food stamps, still recovering emotionally from my divorce, sleeping on a mattress on the floor in a shared room with my kids BUT...I had a kitchen faucet. I broke into tears as I realized just how much I had to be grateful for in my life! If I am ever having a time where everything is hitting the fan and I want to sink down into depression...I just look at my kitchen faucet and I remember the women in Uganda and I give thanks for the clean water I have coming right into my home, and I count my gifts from there.

What if this is the secret? What if this year your life could change just by changing your focus? You could be happier right now. You don't have to wait until you can keep up with the Joneses, or 'til your ship comes in or until the stars align. You can pick up a pen and a paper, or in my case construction paper rocks....and start counting today.

**Five Ways to Practice Gratitude:**

1. Record three things you can be grateful for each day for 14 days. See how your outlook changes!
2. Write a thank you card to someone you have not formally thanked, but should have.
3. Consider your kitchen faucet....clean water....what does that actually mean is true in your life?

4. Filter your life experience through a global perspective...instead of comparing yourself to the "Joneses" consider the percentage of people on Earth who live at the level you do right now.
5. Cultivate a desire for the things and relationships you already possess. Look at your home and ruminate on the things that you like about it. Consider your life partner and record the ways they are a good match for you etc.

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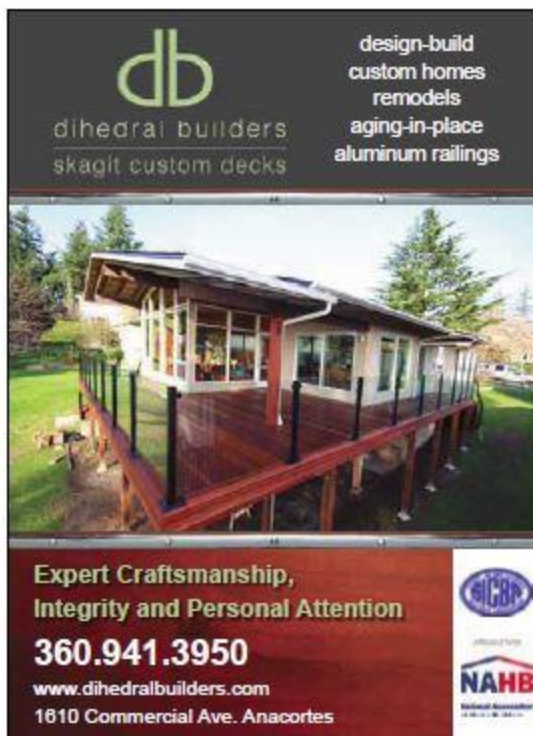
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