

From the Stacks
By Julie Orf
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Advertisers have mastered the art of playing on our dissatisfaction, constantly hinting that the new phone is that much smarter, or the new TV is the key to true domestic bliss. In fact, I am certain technology is actively campaigning against my contentment. My daughter and I recently chatted about penny loafers; moments later, my phone opened to a flood of targeted ads for stylish footwear. I promptly deleted them all. Why? Because as Bing Crosby crooned in the 1942 classic "I've Got Plenty to Be Thankful For"—written by Irving Berlin for the movie *Holiday Inn*—the best blessings are not found in what we buy, but in the simple things we already possess.

Take, for instance, the legendary luxury Bing sings about: a yacht. I cannot afford one, and honestly, I would probably be seasick before we cleared the harbor. You can keep your floating mansion. Instead, I will happily take my simple, four-wheeled vehicle. It reliably gets me to the grocery store, work, and church, and the only "maintenance" I truly worry about is removing the collection of empty Diet Coke bottles from the console—oh, and yes, gas and oil, too. My favorite feature? The way my pups love to ride when the back seat is flat and the windows are down. This dependable car is a workhorse that fulfills my daily missions without demanding a life savings, and for that daily, hassle-free freedom, I am profoundly thankful.

Similarly, I would not dream of a grand castle. Castles are notoriously drafty, impossibly expensive to heat, and almost certainly come with a few resident ghosts who perpetually complain about the Wi-Fi speed. No, thank you. My home is perfect because it is a living gallery of memories. I vividly recall watching our eight-month-old daughter crawl, giggle, and explore the long hallway for the first time. The current interior design scheme involves Tinker Toys, stray softballs, Teen Titans, and dolls with creative "hair-dos" strewn about, and those are the sweet pictures I hold in my mind. Our home does not have a moat, but two noisy barking dogs will alert us if a squirrel approaches the perimeter. It is defined not by historical pedigree or square footage, but by the security, laughter, and love it shelters.

I will happily pass on the caviar that Bing croons about. Tiny, salty fish eggs would be an acquired taste, and I simply cannot imagine the smell. Why bother, when the true fragrance of gratitude is the aroma of home cooking? Coming in from church on Sunday, my husband grins as he opens the backdoor, inhaling the beautiful mix of roast, carrots, and potatoes steaming in the slow cooker. (We also joke that bacon should be declared a man's favorite cologne.) Whether it is chocolate rolls, baked ham, chocolate gravy and biscuits, or meatloaf, we all gleefully trade the acquired, expensive

taste for the pure, comforting joy of our classic favorites. I am thankful for the smell of home and the joy around our table.

Lately, clearing things out, I am holding tight to sentimental treasures—the knitted baby blankets, a quilt with embroidered cotton stalks, and the charming books my children wrote in second grade. Happiness is not waiting on the next upgrade or luxury item; it walks through the back door yelling, “I’m home!” It is a text in the middle of the day from one of my kids asking a random question, knowing I will instantly respond. It appears as a synchronized hair appointment with my best friend, a chaotic game night with my siblings, a workday with amazing people, and the consistent, tail-wagging devotion of a rescue dog who is always happy to see me. I value these real-life blessings far more than any fleeting luxury. I do not just have plenty to be thankful for; I have everything that truly matters.