

**~30 days of gratitude~**

**November 2023**

**Mary Beth Rew Hicks**





~30 days of gratitude~ day 1

11/1/23

Welcome to Grateful Year Eight!

As usual, I come to the blank page of November 1<sup>st</sup> with a large helping of overthinking and a heaping portion of here-comes-winter dread, with no idea what to write about today. I am grateful for the beautiful Halloween morning sunrise on my way to work yesterday. I am grateful, always and every day, for Rich's humor on the dimming days leading up to November, for begging me to not disappoint my adoring fans (he means himself), and for his wonderful suggestions of what to write (which I will not share here.) I have in other years (including the very first year) begun day one with how grateful I am that he is my person. As usual, I do not want to begin with my gratitude for the nachos we ate for dinner tonight. (Of course we did, and I am grateful for them). But the beginning of the month always feels like this, like it will take effort to "come up with" a post. So, I think I will embrace that, and say I am grateful to have learned that this practice requires work, to know to expect it, and to know that I can also expect the multitude of benefits that result. I don't mean benefits/results in a "The Secret" sense, because focusing on gratitude does not magically make only good things happen to me. In seven years of gratitude there has been loss, grief, a pandemic, in addition to nachos, butterflies, popcorn and cranberries. I have ridden the waves of all the different emotions. Gratitude doesn't eliminate the hard things, but it does provide a whole lot of perspective. Gratitude has yet to let me down. I'm still me, still ambivalent when November pulls up to the curb and tells me to jump in, but jump in, I do.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 2

11/2/23

I am grateful for date night. It might sound like same gratitude, different year, but there is always something new, exciting, or silly on our dates. Tonight there was an enormous, gnarled, and bulbous jack-o-lantern perched on a curve of the bay road as we drove to dinner, a plate of crusty, buttery garlic bread with some sort of aged cheese melted on top, and our server (who we know by name by now) had the rest of our “usual” order memorized. I look forward to Thursday date night all week.





~30 days of gratitude~ day 3

11/3/23

I am grateful for poetry. One of my forever favorites is by e.e. cummings and ends with “it’s always ourselves we find in the sea.” A few memorable ones I’ve come across this year have been Ada Limón’s “Joint Custody,” Camille Dungy’s “Sanctuary,” and Kate Baer’s “What Children Say.” This week I was introduced to Andrea Gibson and when I turned on their album *Hey Galaxy* on the drive to work this morning, I cried during each of the first three poems. The lines that got me first, in “Your Life” were,

“Choose to spend your whole life  
telling secrets you owe no one

to everyone, ’til there isn’t anyone  
who can insult you

by calling you what you are”

And for the poet the insult had been one about being gay, whereas the insult I remembered (because the gift of poems is they take you right there) had been one that cut me so deeply a long time ago. I don’t need to tell it to you to make the story make sense, because all you need to know is that if someone called me this same thing now, my smile would just shine. And so I cried in my car instead, big ugly sobs while gripping the steering wheel just before the traffic light by the pawn shop and the kite store. Which is about the closest I can come to describing the inner life of this grateful 45-year-old woman.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 4

11/4/23

“Gratitude doesn’t eliminate the hard things” as someone once said. Today I am grateful that Lisa kitty allowed me to give her a bath. We are in a little bit of denial that Bart and Lisa have arrived in kitty old age at fourteen. Lisa has (probably) cancer in her jaw that is making it harder for her to do normal cat stuff. Grooming is especially difficult for her now, and it was time to give her a hand with that, but cat baths are generally not done for good reason, and I wasn’t sure how it would go. She didn’t love the idea, but she held still on the towel I had warmed in the dryer and let me rub her with warm wet washcloths and comb her fur. She did not extend a single claw, and now has a nice lemongrass-cedar scent (a big improvement). I knew she had not held it against me when I wrapped her in another warm towel and she willingly snuggled on my lap getting rubbed down for a half hour after the bath. Her purrs and tail twitches communicated that she feels grateful, too.





~30 days of gratitude~ day 5

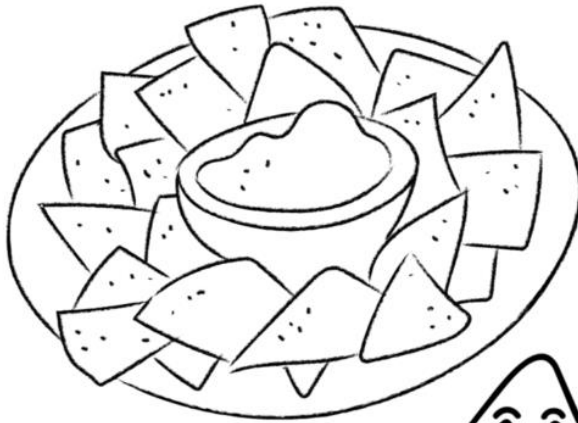
11/5/23

I am grateful for my husband's unfailing willingness to drive me places. Our annual pilgrimage to the Fill Your Pantry market started out a colorful forest drive and ended up a gray downpour. All I had to do was enjoy my heated seat and look out the windows. At the market, we obtained our usual bucket of honey and stash of responsibly raised meat, and I am grateful for the full freezer. I saw heirloom apple varieties I recognize like Winter Banana and Fameuse, which made me rattle off a few more in my head that I did not see, but know from my parents' orchards: Blue Pearmain, Hubbardston Nonesuch, Red Astrachan, Mother. I reveled in the varietal names of the dry beans I didn't buy, too. Found another mother called Good Mother Stallard, a mottled maroon whose namesake was someone named Carrie Belle. I am thankful for the growers and namers of all the good food that fills our bellies.



# NATIONAL NACHOS DAY

COLOR IN THESE NACHOS AND ADD SOME OF YOUR FAVORITE TOPPINGS!



**JOKE OF THE DAY:  
WHAT DID THE NACHO CHIP SAY  
TO THE CHEESE DIP? IT SAID, "I  
LOVE YOU. IN QUESO YOU DIDN'T  
KNOW."**



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~30 days of gratitude~ day 6

11/6/23

Nachos! It's their day, and this year, we happened to synch up (yes, for those keeping score at home, we did just eat them on 11/1. So?) I'm grateful for an easy evening meal following an easy grocery shopping (parking lot pickup has my heart). Hope you're having an easy evening, too.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 9

11/9/23

I am grateful for another stunning sunrise over the bay this morning.

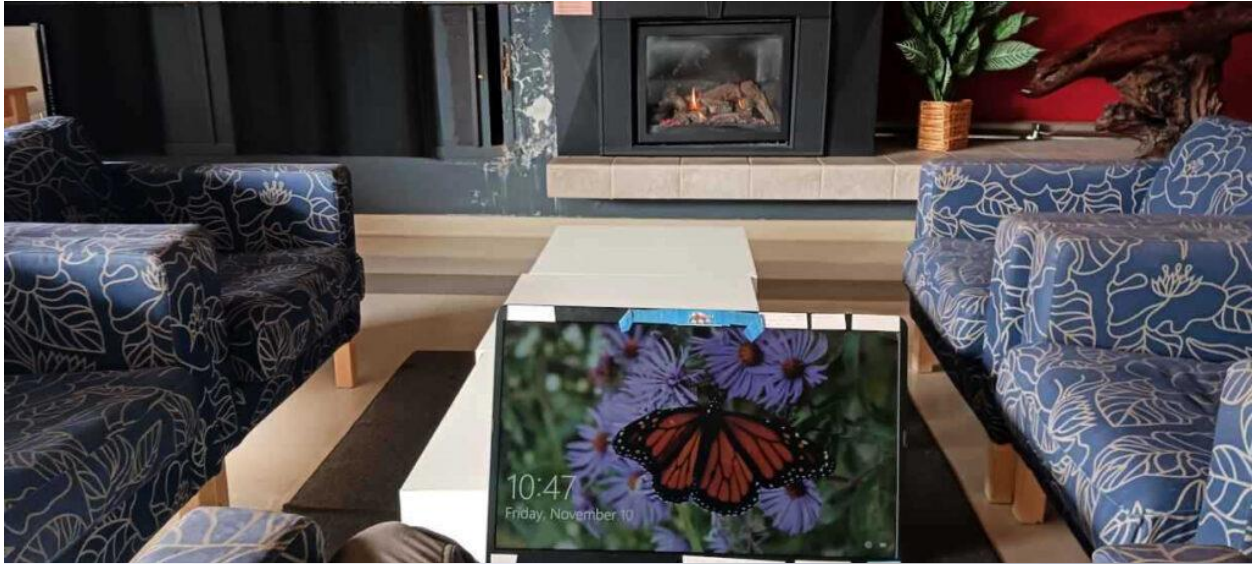




~30 days of gratitude~ day 10

11/10/23

I am grateful to have him home on this Friday night, watching Ice Age together over the official meal of November. (Photo from summer, when both these youngsters were smaller than they are now.)



~30 days of gratitude~ day 11

11/11/23

I am grateful for a few little spaces in my weekend for some extra writing time.





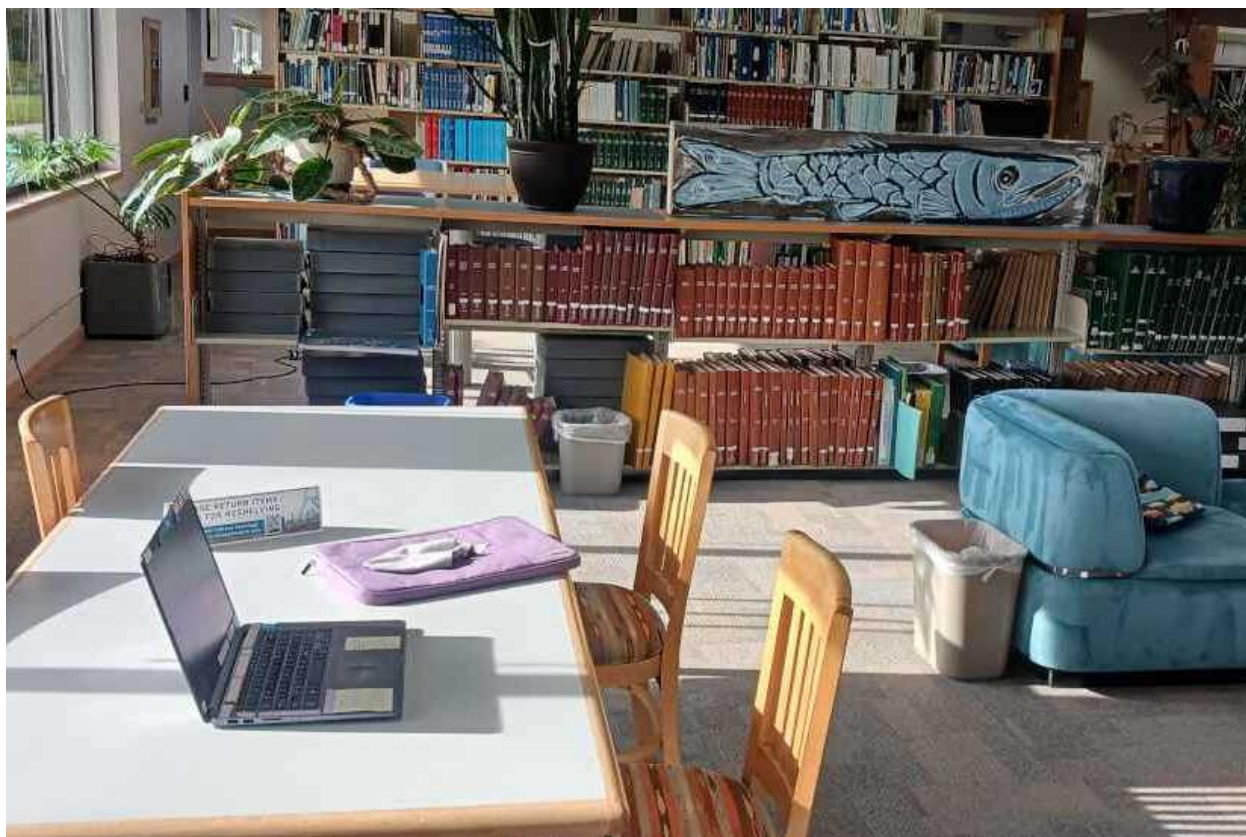
~30 days of gratitude~ day 12

11/12/23

Today was Don's celebration of life.

I am grateful to have gotten to know Don before he went on to join the mycelial network that feeds and communicates with the trees. I am grateful and honored that Jeannie included me in his celebration today. I am grateful that in my extra writing time this week I was able to write five pages and then cut them down to two and a half pages, to fit in a four-minute time slot. I am grateful that while my hands shook, I don't think my voice did. I am grateful Rich and Quinn were there holding my hands. I am grateful for the embracing response of the rest of Don's community (like literal hugs; his older brother whom I'd never met hugged me not once but twice), for new connections, and for the energy Don is already somehow instigating to keep his work going.





~30 days of gratitude~ day 13

11/13/23

We're entering that phase of November when the gratitude really starts flowing, picking up momentum, and although I have one by 8 am, I also have seven more by 8 pm and it becomes impossible to choose. I am grateful for a sweet share from a farm girl I've known since I was a farm girl, of a post written by another farm girl she thought I'd appreciate. I am grateful for the sunshine day after a soggy, windy weekend. I am grateful for a sunny window table in the library at my work where I spent my lunch break with my laptop (more mini writing retreats whenever I can). I am grateful Rich made popcorn when we got home from work.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 14

11/14/23

Some nights in November I am just grateful to bask in the warmth of the wood stove and scroll back through photos of summer.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 15

11/15/23

I am grateful for my job. You know, when you picture what you will be when you grow up, and then you actually grow up and you are something, they can be two very different things. And yet, you can end up being grateful for the weird thing you ended up being, all the same. This is a picture of a weird thing, a fish called a penpoint gunnel, like a little squiggle of eelgrass, only a swimmy little animal, which I only know because of my weird job and how it sent me to Alaska, three times now. I think if I am still going to Alaska years from now and finding penpoint gunnels, I will be grateful.





~30 days of gratitude~ day 16

11/16/23

I am grateful for the sun melting into the ocean on my way home from work, and the red crescent moon dipping into the ocean on our way home from date night.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 17

11/17/23

I am grateful for writing, as a discipline and hobby and obsession. One of the things I like about writing personal narrative is that there are constant opportunities to reanalyze, rethink, reassess what I always thought was true. There is a story I tell myself, and then there is a story beneath that story that I have yet to discover, and when I do finally get at that deeper story, it is always more rewarding. Usually the surface story is something I've memorized about my life that feels true enough, and has served me well enough, but the story underneath is truer, and will serve me better. The story underneath is always the one with more layers, more complexity, more nuance, and less duality. There is moral certainty in the top story that I have to give up, though, in order to embrace the truer story.

My son required a neonatal intensive care unit when he was born, and that is where my attention has been during the war between Israel and Hamas: the NICU in Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza. There is no story I can embrace where 39 babies in critical condition must be used as a shield by either side in a war. There is no justification for infants who require breathing assistance to not

be receiving it, for their bundled bodies to be lined up in a row on a bed when they are prone to infections and should be in isolation, when they need warming beds, but the fuel to provide the electricity they require cannot reach their hospital because their “side” might pour it into a tank instead.

I read that 90% of the children in pediatric hospitals in Gaza are experiencing traumatic stress, and 82% of them say they fear imminent death.

I read that parents are writing their children’s names on their bodies—when children’s bodies arrive in the morgue, coroners find the marker writing on their legs and torsos. In some cases this is the only way to identify the bodies.

Women continue to give birth during this conflict, infants are being tended in a neonatal unit where the life support equipment helping children to make it through their first weeks of life has stopped beeping their heart rates, stopped inflating their lungs, stopped warming their tiny bodies. The medicines commonly needed in a NICU like surfactant and caffeine citrate have run out. Because I can remember how it felt to press my face against my son’s sedated body in a NICU cubicle, to wind my arms under and around his tubes and wires to be as close as I could to him, I can recall the comforting sound of beeping, the warmth of the incubator radiating from his body. The story I’ve carried was that I just wanted him out of there, that the NICU was a place of trauma that was keeping us from beginning our mother-son life together. I know that story served me in a way, but I know a truer story now, one in which I feel gratitude for that place and the bridge it provided to help my son make it to the start of that life. I imagine the terror and heartbreak of that comforting beeping going silent, the incubators going cold.

If we give up our moral certainty, can we find an answer that is not anti-Palestinian, nor antisemitic, nor anti-Islam? I do not know what it is, but I believe it precludes the slow sacrifice of babies requiring neonatal intensive care. The solution will not be born from the surface story that has seemed true enough and has served its purpose, but from a truer one that is harder to tell.





~30 days of gratitude~ day 18

11/18/23

I am grateful for a day saturated with writing, reading others' writing, reading my writing aloud, and hearing others read their writing. And a little lap time with yard kittens.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 19

11/19/23

I am grateful that Rich is at least as invested as me in my gratitude posts, and I cannot go to bed without him reminding me that I haven't written one yet. Good morning, love, I am grateful for you.

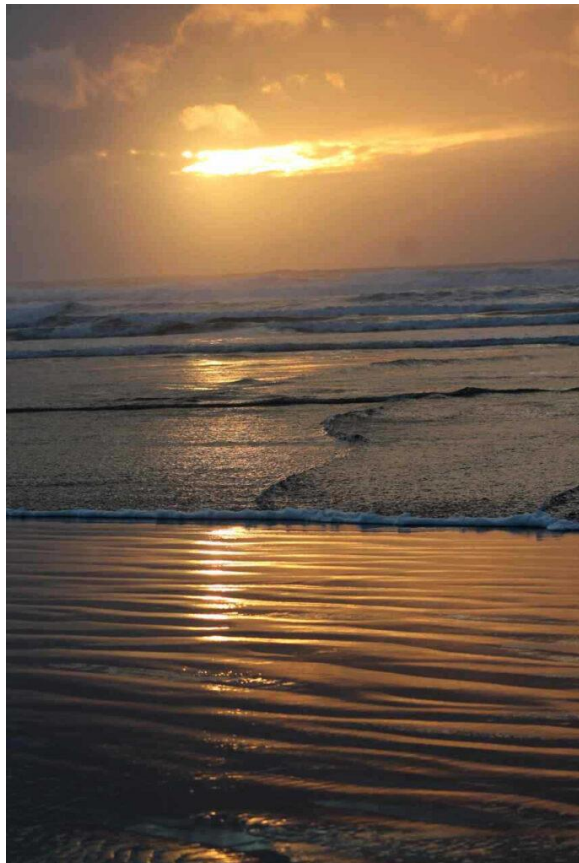


~30 days of gratitude~ day 20

11/20/23

I am feeling grateful for my mom and dad today, and realized I didn't take any super awesome pictures of them together this summer, so I will remedy that on my next visit. I did take pictures of them separately back in June, Mom and Quinn, heads together as she showed him how to make soap, Dad on the tractor, and there is a snapshot of the two of them blurry and laughing at the dance party following my MFA graduation. I am grateful for the comments on my previous post, appreciating the love between Rich and I, and wondering if we know how lucky we are. I know it is rare, and I do know we are lucky, and I also am lucky to have witnessed another rare pair, all my growing up years.





~30 days of gratitude~ day 21

11/21/23

I am grateful to have finished work with time before sunset at 4:43, for a walk to the water's edge, and ten minutes of listening to the ocean.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 22

11/22/23

Can you find my husband in this photo? I can, because even though I can't read the name on his coveralls, his sideburns are unmistakable. I am grateful for him (again, I know, ew, but the 22<sup>nd</sup> is our day). He does fascinating things at work like suspend a very heavy engine on very short straps and move it from point A to point B inside a fishing boat with zero room to maneuver. Sometimes he welds and fabricates, sometimes he operates a crane, and other times he solves impossible problems like the one in this image. Which I'd like to thank his coworker for taking, because sometimes when he tells me about his day, the stuff is barely believable. For the first few years we were together and someone asked me his occupation I said he allegedly welds, because I hadn't actually seen him do it. I mean, making things out of metal and fire? But then I did see him do it one time. And it was all true.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 23

11/23/23

I am grateful to have Quinn home, where he can up his apple-peeling game.





~30 days of gratitude~ days 24 and 25

11/24 and 25/23

Giving myself two days of gratitude credit, because I was away from my laptop for a full twenty-four hours (and I know it's unusual, but I don't use Facebook on my phone). I am grateful for the uniquely special relationships you can come across in blended families. There is something so refreshing about a four-year-old saying, "Nana, can you ask Quinn if he will play Candyland with me?" In earshot of the sixteen-year-old, who says, "Sure!" without reservation, and then they go play. Something extra tender about the way the sixteen-year-old knows how to play up what a tricky hiding spot the four-year-old has hidden in this time, during hide-and-seek. It reminds me of when the sixteen-year-old was just barely five and cheering on the college track athlete, yelling along with her teammates to "push it, girl!" and how she was totally game to color with him in his dinosaur coloring book in the stands after her race. Now he is showing her daughter how to dig up dinosaur bones in a phone app, and trots along by her side in the park as she pedals her princess bike with training wheels.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 26

11/26/23

I am grateful for these brothers of mine, this year and every year. I'd be grateful just for their excellent brotherness, but they are also superb in the department of uncleness. I hear B's laugh and T's sense of humor in my kid, and it was sure nice of them to share.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 27

11/27/23

It was just four days into my first year ever of writing gratitude posts when I first declared my gratitude for “sleeping kitties purring near the crackling fire.” One of the things that has hit home for me during this eighth grateful year is that gratitude does not stop or even slow down time. My kitties were so much younger then, and this year, their age suddenly showed. Three years ago, I included this Brené Brown quote in my gratitude post, and it still resonates.

“Gratitude is vulnerability. I’ve had the honor of sitting across from people who have survived tremendous things. No matter what the trauma was, they said: ‘when those around me are grateful for what they have, I know they understand the magnitude of what I’ve lost.’ So often we’re afraid to be grateful for what we have because we think it’s insensitive to those who have lost. However I think gratitude, in some ways, is healing for people.”

It was earlier that day that my father-in-law had died. There have been a fair few November nights over these years when I have felt daunted by my commitment to keep on showing up to reflect on what I’m grateful for. Two years ago, November arrived just as we returned from Oklahoma following my mother-in-law’s death. This November I spoke at a gathering of Don’s friends and family because Don died earlier this year. In these times it’s not that hard to access



gratitude, it's more that it's hard to rein it in, to narrow it down, to not feel compelled to attempt to reckon with every single thing about a person's whole life for which I feel gratitude. Those nights when nachos, while a great dinner option, cannot be the subject of the post because there is too too too much else.

As I sit here deciding what I'm grateful for tonight, I keep glancing over at Lisa kitty where she is lying stretched out on the cushion in front of the wood stove, and I stare for a minute to see if the fur on her belly is still lifting with another breath. She has let me give her four baths now. On the last one, she barely complained, but lay in front of me, letting me wring warm washcloths across her back. If you know Lisa like we do, you know she curses like a sailor, dropping f-bombs every other meow, so this submissiveness was telling. Last night she climbed on my lap and let me pet her for a good hour or more, though she has been extra solitary lately, crawling into a box or a drawer for long stretches of hours. But after work tonight she greeted Rich with meows to hurry up and light the fucking fire, then curled up in front of it. It feels meaningful that she is here with us this evening, front and center by the warm crackling fire, in our midst, for a wee bit longer.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 28

11/28/23

Lisa held on until this morning, but before I went to work, she took her last breath. Rest well, sweet kitty, I will miss you.

I am grateful that work asked so very little of me today, other than to absorb research talks about Pacific cod, one of my fish loves, so basically I watched tv about Alaska and flashed back to my summer wilderness time in Kodiak. Some nice escapism. Usually my job asks much more in a day; on Monday I tagged fish—performed thirty-one minor surgeries—before lunch. Today, light duty, but lots of brain engagement, which was what I needed.

And my friend of the uncanny impromptu casserole timing nailed it again, so that after I got home an hour late after driving home the long way to avoid the accident bogging down traffic, dinner was already made. (I'm looking at you, camp boss.) So grateful.



~30 days of gratitude~ day 29

11/29/23

I am grateful for this month of sunrises. Every November marks a new beginning for me, ever since I started doing this crazy thing. Sunrise seems a fitting symbol, and the ones I've witnessed this month, including this morning, have been exquisite.





~30 days of gratitude~ day 30

11/30/23

It has been a month. I sprinkled some seeds on our Lisa kitty's grave this afternoon, to get a nice soaking now that our rain is setting in, so some wildflowers can start rooting in before spring. Three years ago, I said this about seeds: "If I had a theme this year it might be the seeds of gratitude planted in the gratitude garden, and how they are an investment in my future nourishment. Whenever I notice and appreciate the snuggly kitty on my lap, the warmth emanating from the wood stove, or my hardworking husband coming home from work, it's another seed in the seed bank. These dormant spirals of potential, storing an idea for next year, waiting it out through the harsh conditions of winter. So many adaptations to fly, float, cling, catapult, shake, or shatter, to make sure they deliver on the promise of future abundance."

It hasn't been all eulogies and graves this November. It has also been Candyland and apple peels, sunrises and sunsets, yard kittens and mini writing retreats, nachos and casseroles, twinkle lights and wood stove fires, warm towels and heirloom apples, poems and bay road drives, garlic bread and ocean soundscapes. I've been warmed, fed, cheered on, cheered up. A chorus of voices of complementary gratitude has sung out from all of you who climbed on the gratitude bus with me for yet another year. I'm so grateful to begin winter once again from this gratitude grounding.