

# What better time of year for us to list our 'gratefuls'



**Melissa Favara**

Melissa Favara teaches English in Vancouver and lives and writes in North Portland, where she parents Ramona, age 6, hosts a bi-monthly reading series, and counts her husband and her city as the two great loves of her life.

BY MELISSA FAVARA  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

So, we had a spontaneous deep bedroom cleaning today. We sorted clothes for Goodwill and hand-me-downs for little Maret down the street; we excavated year-old New Yorkers and dust cattle from beneath our bed; we even found a dusty pacifier down there — as our Ramona, the owner of the pacifier is now six, that's evidence that we were in sore need of a clean. We got so enthusiastic that we skipped lunch, and then Ramona turned into the Tasmanian Devil and tried my patience by hurling clean laundry all over her bedroom floor and I almost wanted to strangle her.

I am grateful that I have a partner in this project who tagged me out, stepped in, and made the kid a waffle while I turned down my internal temperature enough to prevail over my temper. In fact, this Thanksgiving week, I am mightily grateful that Marshall — Number One Dad — and I have each other to compensate for our deficits.

In the past year, I have done that dance between decrying the condition of our home and life and realizing how unspeakably lucky we are to be a family, together, and in our house in Portland.

I was not grateful, initially, when Marshall and his family colluded for us to spend a week on the Delaware shore in August. I am not a beach person, and I have a phobia about being away from my house for any length of time; I worry inordinately about the cat and dog, and wake up wherever I am in a cold sweat worrying about whether I have turned the stove off. Seriously. And I hate the sun. And heat. I think I am reincarnated from a salamander and miss the days of cozing up indefinitely under a favorite damp log.

However, I am grateful looking at the photos from the trip that feature my East Coast in-laws with their arms around my shoulders, accepting me, the only person on the beach with a vintage bullet-bra swimsuit, massive black sunhat, giant sunglasses, gleaming white Oregon skin and visible tattoos. In the background, Ramona frolics in

the Atlantic. Thank you for pushing me out of my comfort zone to beachify our little gal.

I was very grateful three years ago when Marshall forgave me for violating the No-Cat-Until-New-Years rule and let me adopt Bentley the orange tom in October 2009. I was even more grateful when this lovebug, ostensibly an indoor model, discovered the dog door and abandoned the litter box for the great outdoors, sharpening his claws exclusively on the telephone pole in front of our house and decimating the rat colony that was eating my kale and threatening the sewer line.

I was not grateful this early October when Bents came home one afternoon with the fur glued to his forehead by pus and I had to throw down \$120 for antibiotics, a shave and wound drainage. I was even less grateful when he was gone overnight two weeks later and limped home the next morning with blood on his chest and forelegs and a bruise so bad he yowled when I tried to pick him up: vet tab, \$160. Apparently, there's some gangland-style turf war in the feline community on Kerby Street, and Bentley's a casualty.

We have closed the dog door for good, and Bentley is an indoor cat now. I am grateful for the following things: though he came close to death with the last infection, he pulled through; I no longer have to fret over the possibility that Mr. B. will be hit by a car; I will no longer find the tribute of a dead rat at my bedside — and most of all, Marshall, who hates a litter box, has graciously remained stoic about the fact that if I forget to scoop for a day, our house smells a little like pee. Thank you for being flexible.

Finally, back to today. We live in a special brand of happy chaos forged from the triplet towers of wanting to do all we can while we're alive, working too much, and both being kind of bad with money and a bit flighty. There are areas where Marshall, Ramona, and I are all a bit weak — we're messy people. We're easily distracted. We're all prone to flying off the handle when we're underfed. But man, ask me how I felt after Ro's meltdown and Daddy's coming to the

rescue and the ugly moment outside Goodwill when we dropped off our donation and were trying to make it back to the car with Ramona's newly acquired roller skates and an odd handmade instrument that I scored for five bucks, she ran away from us and terrified me with the possibility that she'd be hit by a car in the dark, rainy parking lot. I was not grateful for that moment.

But Marsh and I made giant eye contact, squeezed hands, and agreed not to react to our six-year-old like fellow six-year-olds. We grabbed the girl, got her in the car, got home, mainlined some cheddar cheese into her still-hungry self, and set to making dinner.

"Thank you, Mommy," she said on receipt of the cheddar. "May I please watch one video?" Yes, you may. We then offered an extra chapter of Harry Potter if she would spend the time before dinner putting the books that remained on her bedroom floor away. "Yes! I'd like my room to be less chaotic! Did I use that word right?" Yes, Ramona, you did. And I'm grateful that she put the books away and that at dinner we did our nightly ritual that's a riff on the Quaker grace Marshall's family does — when we dine with the in-laws, we hold hands around the table, close our eyes, and take a moment of silence, at the end of which my father-in-law says, "Amen," and we squeeze the hands we're holding.

At our house, we hold hands, make eye contact with each other, then fling our arms over our heads and shout, "Hooray!" before going around and saying our "gratefuls" — what are we grateful for today? Ramona was grateful for the roller skates we got for her at Goodwill. Marshall was grateful that we were having dinner together. I was and remain grateful to be partnered with someone who compensates for my weaknesses and collaborated with me on making a kid who is excited to pet strange dogs and learn new words and who, when nourished, can turn it around and make me feel that I'm not flying this whole child-rearing thing. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

## Dear City Council: A prescription for healthy streets

The following is the first in a two part article. This first part outlines a set of guiding principles for Healthy Streets. The second will offer a framework for implementation.

BY ROB SADOWSKY  
CONTRIBUTING COLUMNIST

I write this letter to the Portland City Council as it seats two new members: Mayor Charlie Hales and Commissioner Steve Novick. As you sit down over the next few months building new relationships, making new appointments, swapping bureaus and considering new directions. I offer this prescription for healthy streets:

**Our streets have the potential to transform our communities.** Transportation policies of the past too often divided communities, particularly those most underserved. Instead, be inspired by the potential offered by building livable communities that are vibrant, active and economically sustainable for everyone.

**Transportation is regional.** Policies and programs must be tailored to meet the unique needs of the tri-county region and the diverse communities within the region. Transportation systems and policies link us all. The Portland economy is strengthened by building connections and filling gaps in the network that make it more difficult for our residents and employees to move within



Healthy Streetbeat is a monthly column for Street Roots written by the Bicycle Transportation Alliance (BTA). Rob Sadowsky is the executive director of BTA.

the region.

**Collective action is stronger than individual action.** Portland needs to embrace partnerships with civic, transportation, recreational, educational, social-change, health, environmental, business, development and community organizations. We need to move away from divisive politics that pit people who walk, take transit, drive cars, and ride bicycles, or who help move freight around the city, against each other. Perhaps most importantly, we urge you and your bureaus to listen first before taking action.

**Good transportation policy transcends demographics.** Be conscious of social equity issues in transportation and strive to engage diverse constituencies, particularly across lines of gender, age, income, race and ethnicity. It is simply not

enough to hold a public hearing to engage constituencies; you need to go out and listen first, build shared goals and engage in meaningful dialogue.

**A truly multimodal network is a balanced system that meets many shared goals.** Strive to achieve a balanced transportation system that accommodates the needs of all users while mitigating the effects of congestion, high speed and risky driving behaviors.

**Deliver results.** It's not over when projects are funded, plans are adopted or policies are approved. We expect implementation to lead to on-the-ground progress.

**Change behavior through encouragement and education.** It's not just about building the network. We are building a balanced transportation network through education and encouragement. We must continue to invest in Sunday Parkways and Smart Trips as well as in maintenance and construction.

**Confront reality and let data drive decisions.** We need to use current data and transportation modeling to guide decisions. The reality of today is that fewer people are driving cars and more people are biking, taking transit and walking. Our land use policies, parking policies and on-the-street plans for the network need to celebrate this

new reality.

**Tell it straight.** If we are going to continue to lead the nation in building livable communities, we need to come straight out and tell our citizens that the transportation choices we make have a direct impact on all of us. Larger, heavier vehicles mean our roads are more costly to maintain. Reducing our transportation carbon is essential to prevent increases in asthma and other respiratory diseases. Ultimately, investing in a balanced transportation system will save us money.

**Be bold and unique.** We are Portland. We are innovators who set the tone for the rest of country when it comes to many things, transportation included. This bold and unique character attracts new businesses whose employees are looking for a healthy lifestyle that allows them to easily navigate their neighborhoods and urban core by walking and biking. Healthy streets are simply a key ingredient for economic success.

**Hire and recruit the best people who can implement this vision.** You will have many choices ahead in bringing on new staff to implement policies and citizens to serve on committees. Let's go out and recruit people who not only have experience with implementation, but also share these guiding principles and vision.