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Gratitude

LORETTA EVERETT
ERICSA President



A

s the holiday season comes upon us, I'm shocked the year is already almost over and 2025 is just around the corner. For me, 2024 has been one of the busiest years yet. Being the President of ERICSA has provided me an opportunity to attend other conferences and see what great things the other organizations are doing in the child support community. I've learned so many new things at each conference I've gone to and am inspired by all the great things we, as a community, are striving to achieve.

I want to thank the board and presidents of NTCSA, WICSEC and NCSEA for welcoming me to their conferences. I also want to thank the exhibitors and sponsors for each of those conferences. Learning about your services and the value that you add to each conference is immeasurable. I encourage anyone reading our newsletter to extend a handshake or greeting to your child support colleagues. With the recent disasters across Western

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North Carolina and East Tennessee, I saw the child support community come together and offer assistance to one another as only our community can. I'm so grateful to be a part of a community that cares about families, communities and each other. I had heard several times before joining ERICSA that it was like a family. The whole child support community is like family. When times get rough, we usually know a contact that can help us get through it and I've actually used two of mine this week.

Thank you for all your dedicated work. I wish you all a happy holiday season. Hopefully, I'll see you all in May in Norfolk. Nick Palos and the conference planning committee have done a great job getting things organized. ■



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Gratitude and Grief

RIEDA ABRAMS-MILLER

Vice President of Exhibitors and Sponsors



I love writing a gratitude article for this edition. I am grateful for the opportunity and always learn a little something new in the process. This year is no different. Living in gratitude is a path, not a destination. Some events come along and can knock us off that path – at least for some time.

In August, I lost my mother and, I admit, it's a struggle. It isn't difficult for me to be grateful for her, how she raised me or the countless things she taught me. It isn't difficult, at all, for me to be grateful that she is no longer in pain. None of that diminishes how much I miss her. None of that makes it easier to watch my father miss her.

In my search for help in processing my grief, I found some steps for practicing gratitude after a loved

one dies. While these things are not new concepts in practicing gratitude, in the context of grief, they are good reminders. (my comments in *italics*)

1. Recognize the little things.

Try and account for every small act of kindness or effort from others to make you feel better in your sorrow. (*Every "I'm so sorry about your mom" helps, it really does.*)

2. Find one thing each day.

Make a list of tiny everyday blessings and take note of one small thing to be grateful for each day.

3. Write a letter of gratitude.

The deliberate act of writing a letter to express all that you are grateful for and having your loved one who died in your life is very healing. (*My daughter gave me a notebook to help me "talk to Grandma."*)

continues



4. Allow grief to take shape.

Lean on your grief instead of trying to suppress it or avoid it. Allow yourself to feel the pain of your loss and remind yourself that you're grieving as a result of the love you have for your loved one who's passed. *(A dear friend said the same thing to me. It took me a minute to realize that crying doesn't mean I'm stuck in grief, it's only a moment in time.)*

5. Find your happiness.

When we experience gratitude, we're reminded that we can find happiness despite our pain and sorrow. Gratitude helps us embrace our grief to use it as fuel to propel us forward in our healing.

6. Start journaling.

A gratitude journal can help you keep track of all the things that you're grateful for in your life presently. Writing and recording your everyday thoughts and the things you're grateful for helps you develop a daily practice that helps keep you accountable. *(For me, this includes writing down dreams about her.)*

7. Change your perspective.

You can learn about grief and gratitude by sharing the experiences of others. Listening/reading about others'

grief journeys and how they've worked through their loss may help you embrace your experiences. *(Hearing from friends how they navigated their grief at the loss of a parent/partner/child has been very helpful for me.)*

Read the whole article here: [How to Practice Gratitude When You're Grieving | Cake Blog | Cake: Create a Free End of Life Plan](#)

I've learned that none of these things mean the sadness will go away. I didn't really expect it to, my mother was too important to me. Trying to live in gratitude helps me through the harder moments. I am grateful to every single person that lets me talk about her and ugly-cry while doing it, every phone call to check on me, and every card. If you are on the side of supporting someone after the loss of a loved one, do not discount the importance and impact of these small acts of kindness.

As we head into the holidays, to anyone traveling a similar path as I, please extend the grace you give others to yourself. Be kind to yourself and do what soothes you. Let others love you, even if, in the moment, you don't think you can reciprocate. ■



Start Each Day with a Grateful Heart

TAMMY PEARSON

ERICSA Secretary and Communications Committee Chair



GratITUDE: being thankful for what you have; I don't think I have too much, and I don't have too little; I could say it's just enough. Having what you do have and what you want are different things. I have

come to realize that being grateful for what you have is where the true blessings are. I read that the word gratitude was derived from the Latin word gratia, which means grace, graciousness, or gratefulness. I can see that gratitude would include all these meanings. Gratitude is being thankful for what we have or receive, whether it's tangible or intangible. I believe with gratitude, people acknowledge the goodness in their lives, and that helps them to connect to something more, larger than anyone or anything else.

Over the years, I feel that people express gratitude in multiple ways. For me, it was when I got sick about eight years ago and then just a few weeks ago when Hurricane Helene hit Western North Carolina, the place where we raised our children. I

struggled with the gratitude part during this time; I asked why I got sick, why this area got destroyed, and why this family? I lost a dear friend, a mentor, due to this storm. I had to try to find a reason to stop questioning why her, why this place? I am still extremely sad that my friend is gone. I am, however, very grateful that we met, and that she was part of my life and will always be with me.

Gratitude is a way for people to appreciate what they have. Instead of always reaching for something new in the hope that it will make them happier or into thinking they can't feel satisfied until every physical and material need is met. Gratitude helps people refocus on what they have, instead of what they lack.

I read that writing thank you notes can make you feel happier, enjoy the friendships you have, and become more appreciative. It doesn't hurt to write yourself one either; be grateful each and every day.

When we give cheerfully and accept gratefully, everyone is blessed. ■



Gratitude Messages from Board and Committee Members

I am grateful for our child support community's willingness to mentor – especially when it comes from the most unlikely places. I was first introduced to the ERICSA community by Past President Pam Sala. At the time, Pam worked in Oakland County in Michigan. She thought it would be a great idea to invite me, a State of Michigan Judiciary employee, to an upcoming ERICSA conference as a moderator. Despite not knowing each other very well and working in very different parts of the child support program, Pam took me under her wing and introduced me to people from all over the country – and from all over the world. Without Pam's guiding hand, I would have never gotten involved with the supportive ERICSA community that I love.

Elizabeth West

I'm grateful for the time I have to spend with close family and friends.

Tommy Howard

I'm grateful for the opportunity I have had in my child support career to work alongside so many amazing people. The common heartbeat of the child support community to serve and help others has kept me going for over 33 years.

John Hurst

I am grateful for my family who keeps me grounded, and also being a part of ERICSA and NTCSA because I have met so many wonderful people and learned so much from everyone.

Jennifer McFaggan

I am truly grateful for being part of an organization that treats each other as a family. They are always available with a smile and a virtual hug. I can count many in ERICSA as my friends who are willing to help with cases to help the children.

Susan Smith

I'm grateful that intergovernmental child support is such a complicated topic that people think I'm really smart because I sound like I know what I'm talking about. Oh, and I'm grateful for my two children, Georgie & Jared (I have to say that last sentence or I get in big trouble!).

Rob Velcoff

As I reflect on so many recent world events, it brings me gratitude to know that the simple things in life such as volunteering time, being kind, showing love to our neighbors or simply sharing a smile can create a positive impact for others. My roles within the Georgia Department of Human Services as well as the various community involvements that I participate in, grant me the fortunate opportunity to simply help make a difference in someone else's life. I am humbly thankful to be able to give back in so many ways!

Monica T. Hall

In this season of gratitude, I am thankful for so many things. Family. Friends. Health. Happiness. Please remember to always be *Kind, Loving, Caring and Sharing.*

Corrina Smith

I am most grateful for my family and friends and those who make this world a kinder gentler place. Kinder and gentler – that includes every child support professional doing this noble and integral work every day, on the front lines, with great effort, to support whole families by providing services and programs to make their lives better.

Ann Marie Oldani

Having an attitude of gratitude brings happiness into our own lives as well as those around us.

Stacie Alexander

This year, as in every year, I am grateful for the beauty and gifts from nature, the love and support from family and friends, and the knowledge and experience shared with colleagues. I am most grateful for the wonderful world we live in.

"And into the forest I go to lose my mind and find my soul."

—John Muir

Theodora Andreopoulos

I am deeply grateful for our resilient ERICSA community.

My heart is filled with appreciation for those I've had the honor of meeting, who have generously shared their courageous stories, reminding me of the extraordinary strength within each of us. I hold close those facing profound challenges, and it is a privilege to stand beside you as a colleague and friend, offering hope, encouragement, and support. I am humbled by the genuine connections we share – people who, with steadfast determination, continue moving forward, step by step. Together, let's press on, strengthened and united by our shared commitment to serve.

Sharon Pizzuti

"You can't be stressed and thankful at the same time. If you are feeling blessed, you won't be stressed." —Jon Gordon

Sarah Hurst

Thank you to the incredible people in my life—family, friends, and colleagues—who continually inspire, support, and challenge me. I'm grateful for each of you who make the journey meaningful.

Lisa Skenandore

I am grateful for the ERICSA community for their willingness to volunteer and serve on committees, and for all the friendships I have developed with ERICSA committee and Board Members over the past 15 years. I look forward to the times we see each other in person!

Margot Bean

I am fortunate to have loving and supportive family and friends who uplift me on the challenging days and celebrate the joyful ones. I am genuinely grateful for my expanding community of child support friends who inspire me professionally and personally.

Melissa Rael

I want to start with expressing my gratitude for my supportive family. I'm also thankful for the opportunities the ERICSA family has provided to connect and collaborate with child support colleagues nationwide. It's a privilege to serve on a Board alongside such dedicated people who genuinely care about child support families and those who work with them.

Petrina Travers

I am grateful that I work in a community of selfless professionals who are willing to share their knowledge and experience with all of us. I am also grateful for the mentoring I have received throughout my journey in the child support world, both locally, and within the national community. Thank you everyone for helping me do the best I can do for the families I serve in New York and within the ERICSA community at large.

Nick Palos

In all things,
give THANKS!

Tomiko Hicks

I continue to be thankful for the world's growing dedication to equity and well-being. I am also extremely thankful for my family, friends, and coworkers who make my days easy and allow me to find moments to laugh.

Scott Eder

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