

What Thanksgiving means to me 2009. . . . . Allan Dennis

Every year I write a "Thanksgiving Column" for the MYA Newsletter and, if you will indulge me, I'd like to take some of my columns from earlier years and share them with you, along with my current thoughts. I'd like to start with my column from 2005, the year my mom died. It expresses my ideas about Thanksgiving from a very personal point of view.

2005: "Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. It could be marketed as the "3 Fs" - family, food and football! I love being with my daughters, wife and our families for a few days we get to spend together mostly eating, playing cards and talking. The house smells so great with apple and pumpkin pies cooking in the stove. And there is usually a football game to watch (while I sleep) in the afternoon.

But this year's Thanksgiving will be different from all others I have ever experienced because my mom won't be there to celebrate it with us. I still have a difficult time dealing with that reality and want to reflect on my relationship with her and my dad in the hope that you MYA members who still have the opportunity to do so with your parents will take it to heart and be thankful.

**MYA students, there is nothing more meaningful than your relationship with your parents!** They were there before you were even born - thinking about you, wanting to have you and dreaming about you. When you were born, their excitement was immeasurable! All through your life they continue to do everything they can to help you realize your special talents, needs and dreams. My mom and dad never really realized what I do but they always acted like it was the greatest thing anyone could do with their life.

**MYA parents, there is nothing more wonderful than your children!** They look to you for everything - their values, their likes and dislikes - it's really scary! They need you to be their cheerleaders, their supporters and their cushion to the world. Their teachers can be constantly striving to improve them while your role is to provide unconditional love and support for them where they are now. Whatever I did as I progressed through my education and professional life, I always thought my parents were proud of me.

I used to send my mom programs from the orchestras I conducted. This year (2005) after the Kankakee Valley Symphony Orchestra November concert that I thought went very well, I bent down to pick up a handful of programs to send her one and realized that, because she passed away in October, I really had no one to send a program to because both mom and dad were gone - my dad died in 1985. This summer on our tour to Spain I saw a really nice photograph someone took and asked if I could have a copy to send to my mom. In mid-sentence I realized that wouldn't be necessary.

I hope all of you will find time this Thanksgiving vacation to let your family know that you love them, are proud of them and appreciate them. And if someone says "thank you" to you, be sure to respond with a smile and an appreciative "thank you" back. **There is never too many times it can be said or felt."**

2007's column talked about the things that I appreciate so much, including the following:

- **My Family:** Karen, the smartest and most beautiful person I've ever met; three talented, sweet and special daughters that are growing up too fast.
- **MYA:** MYA gives me the opportunity to do what I love – making music – and doing something positive with my life – working with students. Helping make an environment that is creative, nurturing and supportive for students to learn, work and use their talents and time in a positive manner means a lot to me.
- **Those who make MYA a special place:** That includes everyone of you – students, parents, faculty, staff, Board of Directors, Donors, etc. You all need to know how much we need you and how much we all appreciate what you do for MYA!

*And, from the 2006 column, I'd like to reiterate that I am thankful for being a part of the MYA family – a family that works and plays together sharing mutual values and goals; a family that feels confident that everyone is committed to a common "good" for each member of the family, albeit each person's might be different; a family where each member makes sacrifices for others in the family because we love them and want what is best for them.*

2009: *That is exactly what I want for every member of MYA. The simplest wish I have for everyone is that they feel they have a "home" at MYA and that they are loved. They can be who they really are and they will be accepted. I want everyone to feel comfortable so they aren't afraid to take chances to grow beyond what we are or think we are. I want us all to know that, if we don't succeed in taking a chance trying something new, we will still have the support and opportunity to come back home to our family at MYA.*

*That means we all need to nurture unconditionally and encourage our loved ones to step out and try to achieve beyond what we are now. Because by pushing the envelope of who we are now, we will grow to be a wonderful new person in the future. Just like the caterpillar that spins a cocoon and then turns into a butterfly or a rainstorm that results in a rainbow, we, too, can evolve to be something totally different from what we are now. I hope MYA will be a part of that transformation.*

*So please have a wonderful Thanksgiving vacation. Make an extra effort to say "thank you" to others in your family. Use the opportunity and time to build extra strong bonds between you and others in your family. Talk, listen and just be with others in your family to both let them know how much you care about them as well as take time to feel their love for you.*