

(Un)Gratitude

By [Carol Howard Merritt](#)

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I stood in my bedroom, pacing. I was on the phone with my mom, scribbling notes on a sticky pad. I had tried to weave together the story of my life and found so many gaping holes that only she could fill.

Where did it occur?

When did that happen?

Why did you do that?

It was if the questions had been whispering at the back of my mind for decades, but I had been ignoring them. There was never time to ask them. Or never time to hear an answer. I have a verbose and lively family, which I love. But the downside to all of the jokes, interruptions, and “that reminds me” derailments is that I rarely get to hear a whole story from start to finish. This time I would. I had to. I was writing a memoir.

I feel ridiculous even writing that word. Memoir. I can barely say it. All the pretention. The French etymology. The word reeks of a scent that I can’t afford. I swore I would never write one. I’m not famous. I’m not related to anyone famous. I’ve had a monogamous sex life. I’m not old enough to reflect on my years. At least, I hope that I’ll gain more wisdom in the decades to come. I worry about picking up the pages of a book that I wrote and wincing at how ridiculous I was. It’s one thing to write about an external subject, reflecting on its parts. It’s an entirely different thing when your own soul is the subject matter. Too often we are most blind to our internal workings.

Nonetheless, after a series of circumstances, I found myself writing a book that’s delving deeply into my life experience. I have spent four years writing it, and it will likely take another few months to finish it. That’s much longer than I have spent on any other book. Now, with the guidance of the good people at HarperOne, I am rearranging the pieces again, trying to make them fit together.

Some days the memories feel bitter, and they leave me with an aftertaste that makes me furious at the whole world. Other days, they are filled with a sweetness that I would have never been able to extract without this process. Every day, I have a certain (un)gratitude. I ache with the difficulty, but I’m terribly glad I did it. In fact, I’ve come to the conclusion that everyone should write a memoir. Not that everyone should publish one, but that everyone should write one. Because, when else would you have the chance to call your mom and interview her? When else would you be able to listen to an entire story? When else do you get the chance to patch up the holes in your memory? How else can you have that haunting and beautiful experience of looking back on your life and appreciating the beauty of something so ordinary?

I am participating in the UncoSynchro blog, a writing collaborative effort from [#Unco14](#), focusing on subversive themes of faith and life. The theme for November is (Un)Gratitude. To read more reflections, check out [UncoSynchro](#).