

I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys.

~Charles Dickens

Today I am writing my holiday letters to the numerous people that I have met through the years. A special concentration on those whose lives are still admits a difficult journey. My gratitude this holiday season is not the fact that I am safe and comfortable, but the fact that God gave me the compassion and reality that my blessings are of something that I can share to help those whose journey has not yet been as blessed as mine.

One would tend to believe that my gratitude this holiday season would lie solely on the fact that I am home. While this is certainly a gift that I thank God for daily, it is not my only gratitude. I am deeply grateful for the journey that I have been on. The ability to live with all that I have, to have shared and

experienced life on a plain that most will never. I am grateful that I know what aloneness is, what being ostracized means and what being ill, hungry and assaulted does to ones psyche. This gives me the unique ability to relate to those who most won't even speak to. It has deepened my soul and my understanding of life.

These were gifts that I have been given. It has taken me the better part of this year to step out of the victim role. To build back the thick skin that I had once acquired. To not be hurt by others words and to realize that my purpose in life has very little to do with me. To find the confidence and the ability to hold my head up. What these gifts have provided me is the ability to hold compassion to the highest of standard despite anyone's judgments and prejudice.

It is my hope that during this holiday season that you all realize the meaning behind the chaos of the holiday. No one should feel guilty for what they have, but be grateful for it, deeply grateful. What responsibility we do have, those of us that have abundance, family and love is the reality that so many do not. Our prayers and holding those that are striving to survive life rather than thrive in it close to our hearts. It would simply be a

contradiction to believe in Christmas and not do this. If Jesus were alive today, it would not be my home he would visit, it would be the hospitals, the shelters the streets and the prisons that he would give his time.

It is my hope that regardless of your religion or personal beliefs that you truly allow the spirit of Christmas to come into your heart. If you have the privilege of buying Christmas gifts, do not complain of crowds and time. If you have the privilege of preparing meals for many, fall to your knees in gratitude. If you have the privilege to gather with those that you love and love you, celebrate them with all their difference and colorfulness – do not judge, it is not your right.

May you be blessed and grateful this holiday season.

God Bless

Cory