

Chicago Tribune

OPINION COMMENTARY

David McGrath: In honor of the holiday, I am grateful for these outstanding Americans



By **DAVID MCGRATH**

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What's the single best gift you can imagine getting? Super Bowl tickets? A vacation to Bali? A new SUV?

After six decades of giving and receiving presents, I can vouch that there is no better gift than heartfelt thanks from another human being.

As evidence, readers may recall [an earlier op-ed of mine this year](#) about how, because of my family history, my doctor recommended a calcium test that measures arterial plaque buildup, despite my apparent good health. The test uncovered a blockage in a major artery, known as the “widow maker,” and it led to the installation of a stent to protect against a heart attack or stroke.

Weeks later, I received an email from a woman in Duluth thanking me for saving her husband’s life. I figured she had the wrong person, since I had not administered CPR or Narcan to anyone in recent memory. I learned she had urged her husband to get the calcium test after reading my op-ed, even though he was relatively young, strong and symptom-free. The test showed two of his major arteries with 90% blockages and one with 80%, necessitating emergency triple bypass surgery to prevent imminent death.

I hardly deserve credit, which is owed, instead, to modern science, his cardiac surgeon and nurses, his wife and my own physician. I was just a messenger.

Nonetheless, I was riding high on endorphins after that email, so happy for him, his family and for the purest kind of joy one feels from a stranger's gratitude.

Paying it forward on Thanksgiving, therefore, I wish to thank the following people.

My sister Rosie, a year ahead of me in our family of 10, was my bodyguard, mentor, money lender and provider of wheels in my youth and became my sage and selfless confidante in adulthood. Love you, Sis.



Author

David McGrath, in buggy, with big sister Rosemary McGrath, circa 1952. (family photo)

Clarence Page, Pulitzer Prize-winning Tribune columnist, allowed for an exception to full retirement by continuing to craft one column a week because he loves his job and Chicago and, more crucially, because many of us would flounder, absent the anchor of his political guidance, which he's been gently offering to Chicagoans [for more than 50 years](#), one masterpiece at a time.



Chicago Tribune columnist Clarence Page in 2014. (Bill Hogan/Chicago Tribune)

Ted and Jane Fudacz, both 97, a South Side couple happily married for an astonishing 70 years with seven children, 18 grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren, have been loyal Tribune subscribers for nearly a

century and readers (as well as critics) of my own op-eds for the last 25 years — truly an exercise in kindness, if not mercy, considering their consumption of journalistic gems by the likes of Mike Royko and Mary Schmich.



Jane

and Ted Fudacz, circa 2018. (Laura Fudacz)

In 1981, when I destroyed the passenger side stereo speaker in my GMC van after turning up the volume to its highest level for Eddie Van Halen's tornadic guitar solo in Michael Jackson's "Beat It," I never would have inferred a connection between my musical taste and that of my father, whose hi-fi blond wood cabinet was stuffed with albums by Sarah Vaughan and Count Basie in 1959. Yet, we were both beguiled by rhapsodic waves of sound produced by musical genius **Quincy Jones**, who collaborated on songs with artists ranging from Frank Sinatra to Jackson. The [beloved hometown South Sider](#) died earlier this month at age 91, and we'll be thanking him daily for years to come.



Musician and record producer Quincy Jones poses in New York in 2014. (Drew Gurian/Invision/AP)

Thanks to **President Joe Biden** for his unprecedented legislative accomplishments that improved American lives and created millions of jobs, including the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act; and for his courage and no-strings-attached devotion to his country that led him to decline to run for a second term, a sacrifice not seen since President Lyndon Johnson in 1968.



President Joe Biden speaks on Aug. 19, 2024, during the Democratic National Convention at the United Center. (Brian Cassella/Chicago Tribune)

Former Republican U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming risked and lost her congressional seat to stand up for democracy. I also thank her for her wise and dignified [statement on X](#) the morning after the election: “Our nation’s democratic system functioned last night and we have a new President-elect. All Americans are bound, whether we like the outcome or not, to accept the results of our elections. We now have a special responsibility, as citizens of the greatest nation on earth, to do everything we can to support and defend our Constitution, preserve the rule of law, and ensure that our institutions hold over these coming four years.”



Former

Republican U.S. Rep. Liz Cheney of Wyoming during a town hall with Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris at the Sharon Lynne Wilson Center for the Arts in Brookfield, Wisconsin, on Oct. 21, 2024. (Jamie Kelter Davis/The New York Times)

Posthumous thanks are overdue to **James Dewar** of Schiller Park, a baker at Continental Baking Co. [who in 1930](#) invented the insanely popular, buttery-tasting Twinkies with the surprise fluffy filling inside, with which my wife, Marianne, rewarded our children on Sundays if they behaved in church. And thanks to Hostess for including two per package. For my frugal mother to purchase eight packages to supplement our school lunches at St. Bernadette in the 1950s would have been excessive and extravagant, whereas her conscience was clear when we would divvy up just four.

Finally, I am grateful for **Chris Chelios**, former star defenseman for the Chicago Blackhawks who also called Evergreen Park home as a child and whom I was pleased to see one morning this past year at a restaurant in Villa Park. He meets his mom for breakfast each week so they can catch up, and he is still willing to have a word with any star-struck schmo who can't help interrupting them to say hello. Thanks are owed not just for the thrills he provided as a three-time Stanley Cup champion and Hockey Hall of Famer, but also for teaching us about priorities and showing how there is nothing more important than family.



Chris

Chelios attends a ceremony to retire his No. 7 jersey before a Blackhawks-Red Wings game at the United Center on Feb. 25, 2024. The Chicago-area native played for the Blackhawks for nine of his 26 NHL seasons. (Armando L. Sanchez/Chicago Tribune)

It's your turn, readers. Thank someone and make their day.

David McGrath is an emeritus English professor at the College of DuPage and author of the newly released book "[Far Enough Away](#)," a collection of Chicagoland stories. Email him at mcgrathd@dupage.edu.

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