

What Can I Count on Today?

By Jane M. Martin

"Better to lose count while naming your blessings than to lose your blessings while counting your troubles."

~~Maltbie D. Babcock

With twinkling eyes and a happy smile, Josie was a favorite patient of mine. She carried herself with confidence and grace – yet a bit of mischief – in spite of severe COPD and in the past having suffered cruelty and betrayal.

"So, how do you stay so cheerful, in spite of your bad lungs – and everything else?" I asked.

"It's simple, darling. I ask myself every morning, 'What can I count on *today*?' " Josie uttered the word, "today," in a hushed, almost reverent, tone.

I looked at her, puzzled. She told me a story. And I'm sharing it with you here.

It was four o'clock on a hot summer afternoon in 1962. Josie, a single mom, punched the clock at the aircraft factory, jumped in her car and picked up her girls. Her modest wage covered rent, food, clothing and gas, but little more. So, although Josie wasn't able to take the girls out to movies or buy them toys, but with a spark of creativity and a flare for adventure, she gave them a good life. And today she had a special surprise she was sure her girls, Patty seven, and Bonnie five, would love.

"Let's go girls! We're off to the lake to go swimming!"

The girls were thrilled! That afternoon the three had a fun time, playing in the water and swimming until they headed home after seven p.m.

The next day, same as always, Josie picked her girls up after work. "Girls, I have another surprise for you today. Let's go for ice cream!"

The girls were not nearly as thrilled at the thought of this as they were with swimming the day before. But on went to the ice cream shop, Josie reached into her purse for the last of her meager change, just enough to pay for three scoops of ice cream in three waffle cones. Mom and her daughters climbed into the car, eating their treats and heading for home.

Patty and Bonnie sat low in the back seat, sulking. They looked at each other and began to chant, "We want to swim! We want to swim!"

"Girls..."

"We want to swim!" they said, more loudly each time. And they kept it up.

Josie said, "Give me your cones."

The girls continued to fuss. "We want to swim," the chant continued.

"Give me your cones!"

Quiet now – and a bit confused – they handed their mother their ice cream cones.

With her left hand on the wheel, and her right hand holding two half-eaten ice cream cones, with one swift stroke Josie tossed the cones out the driver's side window.

"Mom! Our ice cream! Why'd you do that?" The girls began to sob.

"Yesterday we swam and we had a wonderful time. Today we can't go swimming. You had a nice treat in your hands but all you could do is complain that it is not what you had yesterday. Forget yesterday and appreciate what you have today."

Celebrate Each Day

By Jo-Von Tucker

People with chronic illness learn very quickly that life is worth celebrating, and with the dawn of each new day comes a whole new world of ways to enjoy it. As sicker people, we seem to appreciate life more, probably because we realize that the time we have left may be brief.

Still, even if we have been living with COPD for a long time, we may need to be reminded of the joy of just living! We should open up our eyes to each new day, full of possibilities. Who knows? This might be the day that a cure is found for emphysema; where research finally proves that lung tissue *can* be regenerated.

Who can tell if this day will provide us with happy memories to be filed away to recall later on? What if this is the day when we get a chance to do a good deed for someone in need? What if this is the start of improved health for me? Or, how about I just enjoy my favorite meal this evening?

There are so many ways we can celebrate life... each person should have their own list of favorite things to do. Sure, a great time for me might be less than exciting for someone else. But we all know what special things bring a lift to our heart, a little dance to our step.

One thing we can all do to help us celebrate life is to find ways to help others. There is great joy to be found in doing good things. Maybe we can choose a day to bring lunch to one of our fellow COPD'ers who has been confined to home. Or maybe we can just bake some cookies for a favorite person, or as a way to say a special thank you.

It could be that someone you know would appreciate help with grocery shopping. Or maybe you can drop off a copy of a good book for someone else to enjoy. The list is endless. And it is easy enough to find activities that don't require a lot of physical exertion.

Try to accept each day with the grace of a life that is well lived. Make the most of its opportunities. Fill the blanks and voids of your daily existence with positive thoughts and events.

I look back on the prognosis I was given fifteen years ago...two to five years...and I am grateful that I am still alive; still able to contribute to life around me and still able to function in my daily business of living, and able to meet more outstanding COPD people every month and able to reach out to each one of you as I write this.

Quality of life for people living with chronic illnesses may be hard to find sometimes, but it is possible! People with COPD, or any chronic disease, learn that life is worth celebrating, and at each new day dawns with a whole new world of reasons to enjoy it.