Q: How can I be more grateful this year?
A: Gratitude runs deeper than saying thank you, writing a note of appreciation, or other pleasantries we share to make someone feel good. Living a life of gratitude can benefit people psychologically, physically, and socially, according to an article in Psychology Today. It improves our self-esteem and increases our mental strength. Gratitude is shown to decrease aches and pains, and is associated with higher

SLOW DOWN THE UN-DECORATING.

Just because January is here doesn’t mean the tree needs to come down. Sure, if you have a natural tree, it does have to be taken out when
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there are more needles on the floor than on the tree. But, short of that, it can wait. I have friends who keep theirs up every year until their daughter’s early February birthday. The little girl loves finding her birthday presents under the tree. Another friend who has an artificial tree keeps hers up all year round, decorating it differently every month: hearts for February Valentine’s Day; shamrocks for March St. Patrick’s Day; joke books in April, etc. Visiting her each month to see her tree is a treat.

THERE’S A REASON THAT ALMOST EVERY CULTURE HAS A FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS IN WINTER.

Lights push away the winter gloom and create a warm and friendly atmosphere. Shine some light on the darkness. Keep some holiday lights up in your living room. Burn candles. If you have a fireplace, use it. If you live where you can do such things, consider having a bonfire and roasting marshmallows with the kids – even without kids.

FIND REASONS TO CELEBRATE REGULARLY AND OFTEN.

Take a look at some of the websites that list obscure (and often hilarious) national holidays. If you are worried about keeping your New Year’s resolutions, you can start with the National Personal Trainer Awareness Day on Jan. 2 or National Fruit Cake Toss Day on Jan. 3. Almost any day of the year can be a holiday. Make some treats. Invite some friends over. There’s nothing like a friendly get-together with some good food to warm up a cold winter’s evening.

FIND A WAY TO ENJOY WINTER.

Spending months being mad that it isn’t warm outside is a prescription for feeling down. Dress for winter and get out there. Being in nature is healing, whatever the weather. Go for a walk. Take pictures. Ski. Snowshoe. Skate. If you really can’t stand it out of doors, celebrate the winter months by curling up in front of a fire instead of in front of the TV. Or make some hot chocolate and call a friend.

STAY CONNECTED IN YOUR COMMUNITY.

Instead of withdrawing into a lonely cocoon after New Year’s, check your local paper or town website for happenings during the rest of the winter months. Yes, it can be difficult to motivate yourself to go out after dinner when it’s dark but being around people who are enjoying themselves is one way to feel a sense of community and belonging. Make a commitment to get out to some concert, museum, new movie or get-together at least a couple of times a month.

DO RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS.

Gifts of our time or attention or providing small services are as meaningful as anything that we wrapped for under the tree. Getting out of ourselves by doing positive things for others gets us into a more positive frame of mind. It’s transformative.

IF NOTHING IS AS EXCITING TO YOU AS CHRISTMAS, GET A JUMP ON NEXT YEAR.

I collect stocking stuffers all year long. I frequent thrift shops, antique stores, and garage sales, always on the look-out for things I know various members of my family will enjoy. If you are crafty, there’s a whole 11 months ahead to have fun creating, knitting, building, glue-gunning. The end of the holidays isn’t the end of the world. It’s just the turn of the calendar. It’s up to each of us to find the “holiday spirit” in every day (all right, at least most days).

WORRIED ABOUT DEBT?

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