Digital Extra

TEN PRACTICES FOR CHOOSING JOY

live happy

Deborah K. Heisz

and the editors of *Live Happy* magazine

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Jeff Olson: The Chain of Life

by Donna Stokes

Jeff Olson has invested his adult life building multi-hundred-million-dollar companies around the world, leading massive teams to tremendous success.

Now he's giving much of what he found along the way back to you. Right now, actually. He wants to show you the value of the moment to your happiness and fulfillment, no matter how insignificant it may seem at the time.

"The only thing you have is the moment," he says. "You don't have the minute that just went by or the one that's in front of you. The only thing you have is the moment you sit in."

As he emphasizes in his book, *The Slight Edge*, the moment is the key to finding purpose, meaning and your full potential, and part of his life's journey is to show as many people as possible how easy—and obvious—it is to get started.

Olson is both a champion and a living example, weaving his moments together to create an inspired life flourishing along with his companies. He recognizes the power of happiness—positive psychology—as the precursor to all we're seeking: health, success, love and tranquility, and he created the organization Live Happy so he could share with others what took him decades to find himself.

"If we walked down to a mall right now and professionally interviewed 100 people, what you'd find out is that 99 out of 100 of them don't know that happiness is a precursor to their health, finance and relationship goals," he says. "They don't know that it's easy to obtain. It's not about pursuing big things but about the little things you do in each moment. If they knew that, they'd start acting differently. What I'm all about is how can we get people

aware of this? And once they become aware of it, how do you give them access to it?"

Live Happy is Olson's way of doing just that: providing awareness and access. "It's about giving back, teaching people to come together in a community—accomplishing things together.

"This is going to sound crazy," he says, "but I'm driven massively by helping other people. I get more happiness, or satisfaction or a sense of well-being, when I see my actions have a positive effect on others."

How he gives back says a lot about him as well. His mantras are: Don't be in a hurry; slow down to go fast; master the mundane; read 10 pages of a good book every day. "You've got to understand that it's in the moment, in the day, in the grind where things happen," he says. "The biggest sucker bet is thinking that moment didn't really matter. But it really matters in a compounded effect over time."

At work he spends most of his time mentoring the eager person—whether customer, employee or business partner—who just walked in the door, carrying a new notebook and the right attitude, but who is still finding her way.

Browsing a social media site recently, Olson came across a joyful photo of the family of a woman he's worked closely with. They were celebrating their moving day. "Three years ago they had nothing, and today they're buying their dream house—her husband and her kids are moving into it and they're taking their picture in front of it. It brings tears to my eyes," he says. "I am emotionally driven and get a sense of worthiness or purpose in this life by being a part of something that helps people become a better version of themselves. That's where I find my happiness. By far."

He supports Big Brothers Big Sisters for many of the same reasons, and encourages his employees to do the same.

"To a certain degree I relate to people who are new in places or who are struggling," Olson says. "I think I've always felt that way. My life's pretty much been about overcoming that.

"If I had to describe my childhood, it would be described as 'less than,'" he says. "I'm not saying that to be sad or anything. My father died when I was really young and I never really knew him.…I wasn't one of the students who was the great soccer player or the great student or had a lot of friends… definitely not girlfriends," he adds, laughing.

"I didn't realize my childhood was a driver for my interest in Big Brothers Big Sisters, but subconsciously it was. These kids, it's not their fault. I agree we need to give these kids a better education. If you don't give them the right environments and the right associations, they don't have a chance.

"I love that Big Brothers Big Sisters is about giving your time, yourself. … I've always said that if you can clear stuff out of your garage and donate it, you should do that. If you can write a check, you should do that. But when you give yourself, that's the biggest gift you can give somebody. I'm really big on environmental associations. I'm really big about community, about culture, about synergy. People in a group can become and go to places they can't go to by themselves."

If you've read Olson's book *The Slight Edge*, you'll know that his personal transformation started with a moment of disgust at his teenage self, living as a beach bum in Florida, cutting grass for wealthy golf club members and realizing that he needed to change.

He discovered the power of happiness—positive psychology—after devoting decades to embracing the many aspects of personal development: reading books, listening to tapes and attending seminars. The problem with personal development, he found, was that in order to sell their books and seminars, their "quantum leap" philosophy could leave people discouraged, thinking that though they did everything right, they just weren't meant to succeed.

Yet "Happiness seems light; people are open to it; it's something people want to know more about," Olson says.

"It's been proven that you can take grumpy people and with little exercises that anyone can do can start rewiring the way their brain fires. You can take grumpy people and turn them into more positive people. And that turned me on. …Through Big Brothers Big Sisters and other things, I saw the power of giving back is that the person giving gets more than those who receive. It all just clicked for me. All these things converged. There's really something here in this space of well-being, positive psychology and happiness that the world doesn't know about."

Olson sees it as part of his life's purpose to share that knowledge as widely as possible. "That's what my goals are for Live Happy," he says. "I'm trying to create awareness, a community, a movement. We want to make a difference in the world much deeper than just content.

"When I see one person changing their lives, it just inspires me to do it more," he says. "But the thing I love more than that is when I see someone change their life, and then I see them change someone else's life. That's when I get the most excited.

"When I see someone change to the point they affect another person, it's kind of like the chain of life happening, then I really feel like I've accomplished something, that it's going to go on without me. You never know whose life you're going to change five or 10 years from now based on a person's life you change today."

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Love & Longevity

by Timothy Bloom

For more than 20 years, Marge Jetton kept a Friday morning appointment to have her hair styled. She met her regular girl in Loma Linda, Calif. at 8 a.m. sharp, and went through the same perm routine—the rollers, the football helmet-shaped dryer, the feather soft pages of *Reader's Digest* to flip through, and, of course, the easy conversation.

Jetton had a routine before her appointment, too. She performed a morning devotional, walked a mile, lifted weights and ate her usual oatmeal before climbing behind the wheel of her root beer-colored Cadillac Seville and setting out for the day. On the particular Friday when Jetton was joined by longevity researcher Dan Buettner for this ritual, she was counting the days to her 101st birthday.

Buettner recounts his meeting with Marge in his 2008 best-seller *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest*. "I don't know why God gave me the privilege of living so long," she told him. "But look what, he did!" Although grace was certainly welcomed along the way, Buettner's research shows that Jetton's longevity may have had much more to do with science than divine providence. The daily lifestyle she modeled—a similar one to all of the centenarians living in the Buettner-dubbed Blue Zones, the areas with the highest concentration of people age 100 or older—simply lends itself to a long, happy, meaningful existence. The author has devoted his career to studying centenarian-rich pockets of Japan, Mexico, Costa Rica, Italy, Greece and Southern California.

A clean diet and easy living is a faith tenant for people within Marge Jetton's Seventh-Day Adventist circle in Loma Linda, an hour's trip in the Seville from Los Angeles. But Buettner argues that the abundance of hun-

dredsomethings in this community has just as much to do with their connectedness to one another, their partners and families, and all the rest of the people in their lives—people like Jetton's hairdresser.

Buettner explains that people in the Blue Zones care about one another. They look out for one another. They *worry* about one another. And over the years, these deep and numerous relationships foster a sense of connectedness in Blue Zones centenarians, leading to increased happiness, a known *precursor* to longevity. In a meta-analysis of dozens of health and happiness studies published in 2011, the man known in academic circles as the "father of happiness," Ed Diener, wrote "The results leave little doubt that subjective well-being can predict longevity."

Jetton's connection to the world around her didn't end with worship or her trips to the beauty shop, of course. After the hair appointment that Friday morning, she took Buettner with her for volunteer work. Her compassion for others was part of the reason she felt a purpose in carrying on. She had lost her husband just a few years ago, two days shy of their 77th anniversary. "It took me a year to realize that the world wasn't going to come to me. That's when I started volunteering again…. I found that when you are depressed, that's when you do something for somebody else."

Buettner himself has worked to help others, not only sharing his findings in *The Blue Zones* and its three follow-ups, but also through the Blue Zones Project, aimed at introducing healthy centenarian habits in cities across the United States.

"There's a certain awe you have for someone who has reached triple digits," Buettner told an interviewer in 2013. "When you spend enough time with them, you discover a uniformity–they tend to have a sense of humor. They tend to listen. The grumps are kind of weeded out before age 100."

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Stephanie Cassatly: Forgiveness & Emotional Health

by Emma Johnson

For 20 years, Stephanie Cassatly lived in a state of anxiety—and anger.

In 1980, Cassatly's mother was held at gunpoint at her family's New Orleans convenience store, then ruthlessly shot to death.

At the time, she was a pre-med student at Emory University in Atlanta, and while she attended the funeral, the young woman mostly buried her grief and her anger at the perpetrator, who was caught. "The whole family was traumatized, and we didn't have a culture of talking and healing. My father didn't believe in therapy and so I didn't get any," Cassatly says. While some aunts and an older brother were supportive, "I mostly sealed off the trauma and did not deal with it," she says. The killer was convicted and sentenced to life in prison.

"I didn't attend the trial or read the newspaper reports about the incident—I didn't even want to know his name—I only wanted to demonize him," Cassatly says. She returned to college, minimized trips home to further avoid the horror, and experimented with drugs and alcohol. Her mother's killer was never far from her mind, though she refused to learn any details about the ordeal. "I would have dreams that I would meet and kill him," she says.

The pre-med coursework proved overwhelming, and Cassatly switched to marketing and pursued a successful career in advertising in New York City. She also met and married a physician. The couple enjoyed thriving careers and had two beautiful daughters, and on the outside, Cassatly looked like a success story. But inwardly she lived with deep anxiety and distrust. "I was always waiting for the other shoe to drop–whether it was in relationships, as a mother, or in my career." She was moody and a hyper-protective

parent. She also constantly worried that something horrible would happen to her–leaving her own children motherless, too. "When you experience a trauma by violence, the grief is different than if it were by natural causes or an accident, which you can rationalize," she explains. "It was so frightening to me that someone could act with such disregard for human life. It robbed me of my ability to trust."

In 2000, Cassatly happened to hear a local prison minister lecture on prisoner's rights and forgiveness. "As he spoke I got more and more upset. I was so angry that he suggested that these people should have any rights," says Cassatly, who broke down crying during the presentation. In the weeks that followed, she couldn't shake his words. "His message got to me, and hung on me like a blanket."

She reached out to a local priest she knew socially, and asked for help understanding forgiveness. "The prison minister's message made me think that forgiveness was something I should consider, even if I thought I *didn't* want to do it."

Together with the priest she came to understand that forgiveness, for her, did not mean excusing the perpetrator's crimes, or that she should want him released from prison. Nor did it mean she would forget. "I came to define forgiveness simply as the idea that I would no longer hold in my heart a desire for him to hurt or die," Cassatly says.

That realization launched what would be a two-year quest to learn everything she could about the attack and the man who killed her mother. She asked relatives for newspaper clippings, made countless calls to police, court and prison officials, and spent hundreds of dollars ordering court documents. "When I read her autopsy report and learned that he had shot her directly in the chest, I literally felt sick," she says. "I walked around like a zombie for weeks and spent a lot of time crying."

Through her research Cassatly learned that her mother's killer had been a young man–just two years her senior–who had a sister, had left home at a very young age and had worked as a gay prostitute in New Orleans's French Quarter. He was addicted to drugs and hallucinating on PCP at the time of the killing. "I started to see him not as a demon, but as a troubled soul who did a terrible thing," she says.

Digging led to a phone number at the prison where the man was incarcerated. Nervously, one day on a whim, Cassatly called, and the prison

chaplain answered. "I was so terrified that (the killer) would come after my family, I actually used a fake name," she says. She told the chaplain: "I'm trying to forgive someone, and I don't know how to do it."

They discussed different ways they could approach her challenge, and finally agreed that the priest would approach the prisoner and say, "The daughter of the woman you killed is trying to forgive you. Do you have anything to say to her?"

When Cassatly followed up with another call the following week, the chaplain answered immediately, and delivered news she never expected. The man was dying of cancer.

"If you had waited much longer, you would not have had this opportunity," the chaplain said. And if she had called much earlier, she may not have heard the answer that she did.

The prisoner sent the message that he was extremely grateful for her words and, the priest said, he expressed deep and sincere remorse. He didn't have an excuse, he said, but that period had been a horrible time in his life. He had been abandoned by his family, was addicted to drugs, and was financially down and out. He had paid dearly for what he did, and hoped she would find it in her heart to forgive him completely.

"It was as if a window had been opened, a cold air blew in and I felt my mother sitting next to me for the first time since she died," Stephanie says. "She was right next to me, with her arms wrapped around me."

Also for the first time, Cassatly saw her mother's killer not as a faceless demon, but an imperfect man worthy of love. "By learning his identity, I was finally able to feel compassion for him," she says. "I was able to realize what a horrible, tragic life he had lived, and how alone. That compassion was the gateway to my forgiveness."

A few months later Cassatly received a letter announcing that the man had died. The top of the document read: "Notice of Release." "I thought 'release' was a strange choice of words, but it was also so appropriate," she says. "Forgiving him released me."

In the years since, Cassatly has found that forgiveness released her from her constant anxiety—and brought her happiness she hadn't known was possible. "For the first time in my life I can be joyful in a way that I never was before," she says. Whether relishing news from her daughter about a promising job interview, or simply sitting on the dock of the river that flows behind

her Florida home, she can be present in a way that was impossible before she learned to forgive.

"Humanizing him gave me an optimism about life that I didn't know before," she says. "He was the one in prison, but I was also imprisoned. Forgiving empowered me to know that I can make choices that impact my own happiness."

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Reverend Sara D. Smith, Esq.: 'It's Fulfillment Through Making a Difference'

by Jim Motavalli

Justice. That's why Reverend Sara Deane Smith became a lawyer, and it's also why she didn't remain one. Smith, who hasn't lost her Kentucky drawl, is the senior minister at United Congregational Church (UCC) in gritty, inner-city Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The more than 300-year-old church (once the go-to Sunday destination for the city's elite) sits squarely in the middle of a South End neighborhood that is now multi-faith and multi-ethnic, with manifold needs. Addressing those concerns—poverty, hunger, illiteracy, addictions, mental illness—is what animates Smith and her congregation. And it's what makes her happy, too.

Through the window in Smith's homey third-floor office (dotted with signs that say "Anything is Possible with Love," and "God's Still Speaking") are rows of multi-family houses and an active, noisy street life. The church was until recently largely closed to that clamor, but the windows are now thrown wide open.

UCC now serves neighbors through church-run outreach activities and through a nonprofit group Smith helped found, Norma F. Pfriem Urban Outreach Initiatives. Local efforts include a free weekly "Feel the Warmth" dinner and food pantry, a monthly, mobile "Loaves and Fishes" program feeding 100 kids at a local housing project, a large annual Thanksgiving feast open to all, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, and an after-school tutoring program for at-risk elementary school students. The church reaches beyond Bridgeport through regular mission trips, including a recent service project in Haiti.

After meeting with two young congregants, Smith pulls up a chair. "Justice," she says. "That's why I became a lawyer. I wanted to save the 1,000-

acre family farm in Hodgenville, Kentucky, started by my granddaddy. But I was too late. By the time I graduated from law school in 1988, the farm was already gone. It was a wonderful place to grow up, and losing it really changed my mother and father."

Smith became a trial attorney for the U.S. Department of Labor in Washington, a long way from rural Kentucky. But fighting child labor violations turned out to be a frustrating experience. "It was all about conflict, and I'm a peacemaker," Smith said. "Mostly, I was pushing paper from one end of my desk to another. I liked the time in the courtroom, but that was five percent of the job."

Ministry, Smith said, was a calling "I fought for years. I preached my first sermon when I was 14." She grew up in the Methodist church, serious business in that part of Kentucky, but was ordained as a Congregationalist in 1996—and embraced the work immediately. "I'm a lot happier," she said. "I love what I do. I get up in the morning and think, 'What can I do today?' "This job is about making a difference in people's lives. It's 24/7, but very rewarding. I see the best and worst of people. I'm there when they're born, when they're sick in the hospital and when they take their last breath."

It's fair to say that Smith stands out in urban Bridgeport. "I'm a white woman, a lesbian, and I have this accent, but that hasn't been a problem in building bridges here, including to the Jewish and Muslim religious communities," she said. Smith chairs the local Tent of Abraham, which has coordinated open holiday celebrations, seders and iftar feasts, celebrating the breaking of the Ramadan fast. Rabbis and imams have spoken from the church pulpit. "To change the world, we first have to break down the stereotypes," she said. "When 9/11 happened, I knew that it isn't what Islam is really about. The Muslims here want to fit in; they thought the attacks were as crazy as we did."

There were other postings before Bridgeport. In 1996, after she was ordained, Smith became the campus minister at the University of Colorado in Boulder, counseling kids through life crises. In 2003, she got her first parish in Buffalo, New York. "Kenilworth UCC was faltering, and hiring me was a stretch," she said. "I became the first openly gay pastor of any denomination in Buffalo. They hired me anyway and it led to profound changes. This old German church not only survived, but thrived."

A Kenilworth search committee member says, "We needed someone with the energy and tenacity to help us realize our dream." The group's ini-

tial thought was that the congregation would never accept a lesbian minister but, says another member, "She blew us away!" The actual vote in favor was 91 percent.

Smith's historic call to Kenilworth led the national United Church of Christ to produce the documentary "Sailing on Faith: Look Who God Sent," which is now provided to all UCC Church search committees to encourage them to consider women, minorities, the handicapped, and lesbian and gay candidates for pastor positions.

George Carter is the non-executive chairman of People's United Financial in Bridgeport, working in the upper reaches of one of New England's largest banks. He remembers well the days when UCC was the city's power church. But as a member of the church's executive board and its ministerial search committee, he knew the church had to change.

"We were dying, losing members and experiencing a shrinking endowment," Carter said. "Some people wanted us to sell the building and move out of town. Most of our candidates were looking around and saying, 'Oh what a beautiful [220,000-square foot, 42 rooms, nearly 100 years old] building,' but Sara Smith saw the challenge, and had a vision we could rally around. She saw we could grow the church through outreach, and she has a way of getting people to work with her."

The change in orientation has made tangible differences in the lives of people in Bridgeport. A young couple, James and Patricia (pseudonyms), began coming to the church's community suppers in 2013. James was a substance abuser, and Patricia was pregnant—but they were homeless and sleeping in a park.

"We gathered a group around them," Smith said. "Church can't just be a place you get a blessing, we have to take care of people's emotional and physical needs. So we held an emergency deacons' meeting and one member of the congregation gave them rides, another provided a place for them to take showers. And finally one family offered them an apartment, a safe place for them to have their baby. They lived there two years, and in that time Jim went to AA meetings, got clean, and got a job. Now they're doing great and expecting another baby."

Taking part in outreach has also helped the volunteers themselves. Pam (a pseudonym) first appeared at Feel the Warmth as an angry high school student with bright pink hair. Having trouble dealing with the death of her stepfather, Pam was doing poorly in school and having difficulty communi-

cating. But she became a regular volunteer at Feel the Warmth, and helping people week after week brought her out of her shell. Pam got back on track and won a full scholarship to Temple University.

Loaves and Fishes grew out of the 2013 federal government shutdown that also closed free breakfast and lunch programs for needy kids. Clearly affected were students who lived in a public housing project near the church. Liz Dunn, a congregant, called together an emergency meeting of United's younger members and began the monthly program, which has continued since then.

Some project residents, helped in the early stages of Loaves and Fishes, are now volunteers helping the program grow. "I haven't felt this good in years," said a young mother of two passing out free oranges.

Albert (a pseudonym), a former prison inmate, first came to the church when he was about to be evicted and had one can of beans left in his pantry. He didn't want a handout; he wanted to work, and the church gave him a job in the kitchen. Today, he's among United's best employees. "I'd be sleeping under a bridge if I hadn't finally come in here," Albert said. "I walked past for years."

Smith says, "these stories and so many others enrich our lives." She found her calling at United, but her path might have been different. She says she had five other calls, some to "nice, suburban churches," but Bridgeport's UCC was a challenge she welcomed. "The community was demoralized, and the church was circling the drain," she said. "I could see what it needed." The transition was not entirely smooth—some didn't like change and left the church, but many stayed and the outreach brought in many new members, including young people to replenish the graying congregation.

Today, UCC has 350 active members, and its outreach programs frequently bring in volunteers from the suburbs around Bridgeport. Smith wants to do more, including adding a Sunday night meal (perhaps in collaboration with local synagogues and mosques), combating the neighborhood's "food desert" (a lack of healthy options, especially considering many don't have cars) with a church-based restaurant and food truck, and expansion of the community gardens that now threaten to take up half the church's parking lot. A winter emergency shelter program that saw many of the area's homeless finding a warm place to sleep at UCC will also be expanded.

Dr. John Michniewicz, UCC's music minister of 20 years, calls Smith "the church's and Bridgeport's biggest cheerleader. It's very clear that she's

responded to her true calling. It's evident when she speaks from the heart with a positive and uplifting message for everyone, from CEOs of important corporations to people who live on the street."

For her part, Smith says she couldn't imagine working anywhere else. "It's home and I'm happy here," she said. "But it's more than happiness, it's fulfillment through making a difference. It's not about being an important person—it's about doing important things."

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Zoe McLellan: A Lesson in Gratitude

by Gina Roberts-Grey

Starring on several hit television series including *JAG* and *NCIS: New Orleans* has given actor Zoe McLellan a lot to be thankful for. And gratitude has always been a big part of her life.

"I love the power of a 'Thank you' and the fact that if might be able to change someone's day," she says.

So whether she's taking her toddler, Sebastian, to the aquarium or is in line at the grocery store, she always tries to sprinkle a little gratitude in the air. "The other day we were leaving a parking lot and there was an attendant there collecting fees. It was a hot, humid New Orleans day and as she handed me my change, I told her 'Thank you so much for what you do every day.' It was a simple little thing, but I know that without her standing there, my son and I might not have had the convenience of parking where we did. And I wanted her to feel appreciated."

Belief that a "Thank you" just might change the world, or even one tiny corner of it, spurs McLellan to teach her son what she calls "more than just good manners." Her goal: to possibly turn around a stranger's bad day or let co-workers know how grateful she is they're in her life. "'Thank you' shouldn't be something we just say because it's what parents and teachers instill in us," McLellan says. "It's a *feeling* we should convey. I think being on the receiving end of that could have a profound effect on someone."

But while she relishes letting a barista know she's grateful for a morning jolt of java, she also likes to demonstrate gratitude when the circumstances don't immediately call for it. So McLellan will often randomly choose a person in her life as the recipient of a special, appreciative message. She might send her publicist a nice email thanking her for always having her "heart"

and her best interests in mind, or knock on a neighbor's door to thank him for the lovely garden that the whole street is able to enjoy. "Saying 'Thank you' when someone hands you something or does something for you is one thing, a good thing. But I try to see the opportunity for gratitude in other aspects of my life—to never lose sense of the gifts I'm given and the power of appreciating them."

But without realizing it, McLellan says, she recently found herself slowly losing her own sense of thankfulness.

The pain of a divorce from fellow actor J.P. Gillain began to erode her positive outlook. And while she didn't stop saying "Thank you" to parking lot attendants, co-workers and baristas, she wasn't feeling as grateful as she typically does. "I was in the thick of divorce and it was a very rocky road for a year or so," she explains.

At this tough time, McLellan experienced anger at circumstances related to her son's father and wrestled with parenting decisions he made. And the pain of ending a relationship and battling for more than a year about ending it took an emotional toll. "Then one night, when I was tucking Sebastian into bed, it hit me that I shouldn't let this man, or any situation, ever rain on my joy and my heart," McLellan said. "And that if I do allow that, I'm not in my gratitude. I'm not living a grateful life."

McLellan says that moment of clarity reminded her that her gratitude is bigger than a divorce, a painful relationship or even an acting job she might not get sometime in her career.

"A few years ago I was single, but ready to be a mom," she says. "And I wanted to have a baby more than anything else in the whole world. The feeling was so strong." That's when McLellan met J.P. at a coffee shop, after he approached her to say hello. The two hit it off immediately and began dating. While dating, McLellan got pregnant with Sebastian. "We tried to do what we thought was the right thing, to get married and become partners." It didn't work: The marriage lasted about a year.

But the moment of clarity McLellan experienced that night made her realize it was wrong to stay stuck in anger. As she gazed at the little face she loved, she says, "I realized my gratitude for this little boy, a child I wanted more than anything else, is bigger than anybody, than anything. And when I had that sort of epiphany, a sort of peace washed over me.

"My son is the person in my life I am the most grateful for, and the reason I do everything I do," she says. "I don't want him to see me in a state

of negativity or lacking gratitude. And if that negativity or lack of gratitude was aimed at his father, I imagine that could be hurtful to my child when he's older. In that moment, I vowed I will never again let anything stand in the way of the gratitude I have for my boy." Instead of being angry at her son's father or over the fact that her relationship ended, McLellan left her son's room grateful to the man she was divorcing.

"As Sebastian was drifting off to sleep I thanked him for choosing me to be his mom and everything else disappeared. All the hassles associated with the divorce and darkness disappeared. It all faded away when I experienced gratitude in a way I hadn't realized existed," McLellan says.

Now, in addition to appreciating all the good that life offers, McLellan is grateful for the turbulence she has experienced, too. "I can still look at my ex and say 'Thank you!' because without his coming into my life, I wouldn't have Sebastian, this precious gift. I'm grateful for the pain because there's something so much bigger. And being grateful instead of bitter or angry feels good and lightens my body."

Thanks to the power of a grateful attitude, the radiant actor is also one very happy mama.