

# Stories by Madelyn Rohrer

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## *In The Spotlight:*



## *Being Thankful*

Being thankful can sometimes be difficult during a year filled with challenges. Some of you may be nodding your head with that statement. Well, that was my 2024. That is why you have not received a newsletter from me in eight months. Nonetheless, in looking back, I do have much to be thankful for.

I am thankful for my husband Howard and for the years we had together. He passed away recently after months of declining health. But he was a man of deep and unwavering faith and, through it all, we were blessed with excellent doctors, nurses and caregivers.

I am thankful for all that I learned from Howard. As a music teacher and band director, he was an encourager with a flair for history. He taught his students not only songs and how to play musical instruments, but shared facts about the authors as well and what may have prompted the writing of any particular song. He carried that appreciation of history into his personal life...and mine. He was my very own self-appointed critic and often asked

questions when proofreading whatever story I happened to be working on at the time. I have to admit that sometimes those questions “ruffled my feathers,” thinking he was over scrutinizing, but sometimes they caused me to dig deeper into my research. Very often there was more to the story than what was on the surface – the story behind the story or perhaps the person behind the person. So I am thankful for his critical eye. I am also thankful for his willingness to be my background musical accompaniment when needed, and even his comically shameless promotions of my books and performances. He was a good friend.

And one last Howard appreciation note: He was always alert to estate sales, garage sales and secondhand stores, looking for used musical instruments that he could refurbish and give to a student (and sometimes an adult) who wanted to learn to play. He had quite an accumulation of such instruments and I am thankful to have had a part in distributing them on his behalf. I know there will be many thankful children and parents as well.

So what does “being thankful” really mean? In my mind it means appreciating not only what you have...friends, family and material goods, but the joy that comes from being able to share what you have with others. It doesn’t have to be anything big or materialistic – maybe just fixing something that is broken, reading to a child, a hug of comfort or words of encouragement. Being truly thankful is a positive feeling that dwells within you – something that you want to pass on to others, not just at Thanksgiving and Christmas, but every day.

On that note, I want to share a story of thanksgiving with you that was written by author Amelia Barr. It was included in her book of short stories “Winter Evening Tales,” last published in 1896. It is in the public domain, which means that her stories are available to storytellers to retell in their own words or with their own personal flair. This is my version of “The Story of Davie Morrison” that I have told several times in tandem with fellow storyteller and friend Linda Poland.

## *A Story of Two Brothers*

Sandy and Davie Morrison grew up in Aberdeen, Scotland in the late 1800's. It was a hard boyhood. Many nights they went to bed hungry, and often their clothes just weren't warm enough to keep out that cold wind that blew across the Moors. But they had each other and they were as close as two brothers could be, even though there were 8 years between them. Sandy remembered his father, but Davie didn't – he died when Davie was very young. But the boys loved their mother. She worked hard to earn the few coins they needed each week for food, some coal for the stove, and once in a while some clothes. They especially loved sitting around the stove in the evening listening to their mother tell stories and sing. She had a beautiful voice, as did Sandy and Davie.

Then tragedy struck their young lives. Their mother became sick and died, leaving the boys with little to call their own. Sandy knew he would take care of his little brother, although he wasn't quite sure how. He thought about America. They had a cousin, Alexander Morrison, who lived there. He wrote to his cousin and told him that he and Davie were going to be coming to America – New York - around November 1. Alexander was true to his heritage. He met them at the boat, found them a place to live, taught them his trade, which was plastering, and gave them jobs in his own newly-formed business.

But Sandy had an adventurous spirit and longed to explore the American Great West. He knew he couldn't take Davie – Davie was too young and too frail. It would be dangerous for both of them. So he bided his time until Davie was a little older and a little stronger. Then he told him of his plan to travel to seek his fortune:

"Davie, I promise you I will come back. And whatever I make, I will put half of it in the bank for you. When I come back, we will spend it together. I promise you."

Davie knew that if his brother promised something he meant it. There was not a doubt in his young mind that his brother would be back.

Twenty years went by and Davie did not hear from Sandy. It was understandable though. Their cousin Alexander had died and the business disbanded. The house he and Sandy lived in got torn down and a factory was built on its site. Davie moved several times after that. There was no way Sandy could have written to him even if he tried.

But Davie still knew in his heart that Sandy would come back as he promised.

Meanwhile, Davie married a person very much like himself – a humble person, hard-working and full of faith. They had one son, and they named him Sandy after Davie's brother. Young Sandy grew up and took on the carpentry trade. He was a good worker, just like his father and made good money. Then he brought home a sweetheart – Sallie. She was not the type of girl that Davie and his wife would have chosen for their only son. She was nice enough, pretty, and smart, but she just didn't have "warmth." Her presence left them cold.

But Sandy and Sallie got married and a year later had a child. Life seemed to be treating them well...until the world around them began to change. Talk of war was in the air. Times got harder; war broke out. Then Sandy got a notice that he was drafted into the army. Sallie was expecting their second child any day. Without Sandy, Sallie and the children would have no way of supporting themselves.

Davie and his wife met with Sandy and Sallie and talked about what they could do, but they just didn't know. Davie's pay in his plastering job was not like it used to be. It had dwindled since the war broke out and he knew he could not support both families. Davie broke the silence:

"Son, your mother and I have had many good years. You need to have your good years now by being here and raising your family. Substitution is permitted. I will go into the army in your place."

"No, Father. You cannot do that. You are in your fifties. War is no place for a man your age."

"Well, I have another reason for going," he explained. "I know that my brother, no matter where he is and regardless of his age, will join the army to serve this country and will be looking for me."

"Father, I really do not think this is a good idea."

But there was no talking Davie out of it. His wife shed a few tears, but she was very much like Davie; she understood. She knew that if the roles were reversed, she would do the same thing for her son. Davie went off to war.

Three years of marching, sitting in foxholes, and the rigors of war took its toll on Davie. When his time was up, he was ready to go home. But things were not the same when he got there. His precious wife was gone. He found out she had become ill and was unable to care for herself. Most of their furniture was sold and she went to live with

Sandy and Sallie. She died three months before he got home.

Davie had no home – no place to go, other than to move in with Sandy and Sallie as his wife had done. It was fine at first, but he knew he was a burden on their family. He was no longer able to do the work he did before he went into the army, so he took the money he earned in the army, went downtown, and bought a newspaper stand. He would sell newspapers. But the effects of war were still being felt. People didn't have the money they had before – they weren't buying newspapers. Some would come along, read the headlines, and put the paper back. Others would take a paper but not pay for it. Many nights he came home with less money in his pocket than he had in the morning when he went to buy his newspapers. He watched Sallie put food on the children's plates in the evening and then on his. He knew there wasn't enough food for those children, let alone him. He needed to do something, but he didn't know what.

Then one night he heard Sandy and Sallie talking after he had gone to bed and they thought he was asleep:

"Sandy, it is time for you to take your father to the Public Charities Building. We cannot afford to keep him. We do not have enough food for the children and him. He will be better off there; he will have good meals and warm clothing."

"Sallie, we have talked about this before. You know I cannot do this. I love my father. Our children love their grandfather. Please don't ask me to do this."

"There is no other way, Sandy. You must do it. You must."

Davie knew that when Sandy and Sallie had a "discussion," Sallie always won. So he was not surprised when Sandy came home in the middle of the afternoon and said, "Father, let's go for a walk." He knew where they were going. They walked along for a while, talking a little. Then Davie took his father's arm and led him into a diner. He had a few coins in his pocket and wanted to have a warm meal with his father one last time. They ate and drank and talked about years past. It was a special time for father and son. Then it was time to go.

They continued on their journey. Sandy fell silent again. Davie felt so sorry for his son. He knew his son's tender heart and what he was going through. He wanted to say something to make him feel better, but he just couldn't think of what to say. They turned a corner and in front of them was the big Public Charities Building. Sandy shook as if

awakening from a sleep, spun his father around, and said, "I cannot go down this road any more, Father. It is time to go home."

Davie took his son by the shoulders. "Just a few more feet, Sandy. We can do it."

"No Father, I cannot do this. I won't do this. We are going home." He hailed a downtown cab and put his father gently in the back seat. He knew what awaited him at home, but he didn't care. He made up his mind that he would do whatever it took, but he was not going to do this to his father.

As they neared the top of the tenement stairs, they heard a chair being pushed across the floor. The door flew open. It was Sallie. She had tears streaming down her face and had obviously been crying for quite a while. "Oh, thank goodness, Father. I am so sorry! Please forgive me!" She led Davie over near the stove and fixed him a cup of hot tea.

The danger was past, but nothing was changed. He was still a burden on his family. He needed to do something but what? He went to work the next day and thought about it some more but could think of nothing. He came home and sat near the stove to read his newspaper as he did every evening. Then something he read made him jump up, shove the newspaper down in his pocket, put his old army coat on, and run out the door.

The newspaper in his pocket was opened to a personal ad that said, "If anyone knows the whereabouts of David Morrison who left Aberdeen, Scotland in 1890, please contact this office. We have news that may be to his benefit." He knew it must have something to do with his brother! He was finally going to find out what happened to his brother!

He found the address and went in. A man sat at a desk inside the door, writing. Another man stood in the corner, warming himself near the stove. He stood there for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, the man who was writing looked up and said, "Well old man, what do you want?"

"I am David Morrison and I am here to see what you want."

With that, the man who was standing in the corner swung around and said, "Davie! Davie, me lad!" While Davie had expected to hear some news of his brother, he did not expect to be looking in his brother's face. It was such a surprise that he fainted. When he woke up, a very concerned brother and a doctor were looking down on him. "That was a lot of stress and shock on an impoverished body. Give

him a warm meal and a glass of wine and I believe he will be alright.”

Well, it didn't take long for that to happen. The two men were in a fine restaurant enjoying a good meal and a glass of wine and catching up on the years of being apart. Davie learned that his brother did join the army looking for him as well as to serve his country. Their paths never crossed and they both returned home to poverty. But Sandy took his army pay and invested it in an oil venture and it was successful. Then he invested in oil again and again it was successful. He handed his brother a bank book made out in the name of David Morrison for \$15,000 – his half of Sandy's fortune. He kept his promise.

Davie didn't know what to say except “thank you.” He thought for a few seconds then asked: “Sandy, what are you going to do with your money?”

“Well, Davie, I was looking for a farm to buy and those people in the office where I was today found a farm up in New Jersey that they said was in a good location. It is \$12,000 but it should be worth many times more than that in a few years. I wanted to see if for myself and I did. It really is a good farm and in a location. I am going to buy it.”

“Well, Sandy, do you suppose we could buy it together? Do you have a wife? Children?”

“No, Davie. I did have a wife; she died many years ago and we never had any children. You are the only family I have and I was hoping you would want to do this together.”

It was a wonderful reunion and they agreed to meet again the next day. But right now, Davie was anxious to get home and tell his children about Sandy and their good fortune.

When he walked up those tenement stairs, the door flew open. “Father! Where have you been? We have been so worried about you. Sandy is at the police house now...”

Sallie was interrupted as the door opened up downstairs and Sandy rushed in. “Father! We didn't know where you were. Are you alright? You have a strange look on your face.”

“Children, we need to talk,” he answered with a smile. He told them all about his brother coming back and the farm they were going to buy together up in New Jersey. “But first, I want to do whatever you want me to do for you...you need to decide.”

No one slept much that night. He heard Sandy and Sallie talking into the wee hours of the night. When they met the next morning, Sandy said “Father, we have decided that we will go wherever

you go. We do not want to be apart from you ever again. We will move to New Jersey with you. We will rent a cottage – a place of our very own that does not share its walls with any other families. And if you would help get me set up there with my own carpentry business, I would be very grateful.”

A few days later, the Morrison brothers purchased their New Jersey farm and got settled into their new home. Sandy and Sallie and their children, which now numbered six, followed soon after. They found the perfect cottage in a nearby village. It was built out of field stone – the kind that is found in New Jersey and Pennsylvania. It was on a very large piece of land with full grown trees and lots of fruit trees. Sandy's carpentry business was established and was off to a good start.

That year, they celebrated their first Thanksgiving together as a family. With Davie at one end of a large table and his brother at the other, and with Sally and Sandy and their children gathered on the sides, there was a bountiful feast in front of them. They gave thanks, each in their own way.

Davie was thankful that his brother was safe, had come back, and was in good health. He was thankful for the good fortune he received that he was able to share.

The elder Sandy was thankful that the brother he left behind so many years ago was alive and well...the brother he was able to share his good fortune with. And now he had a family again, something he had been missing for a long time.

Sandy and Sallie had much to be thankful for that day as well. They just received the deed to their cottage – their very own home that did not share its walls with other families. It was paid in full – a gift from two generous and loving gentlemen. Their children were in good schools and would never know cold or hunger again. Sallie was a different person. She smiled. She laughed. She Sang.

And Davie was thankful that Sallie now knew the real meaning of warmth, compassion, and love.

It was a very special Thanksgiving.

*Best wishes to all of you for your own very special Thanksgiving. Have a Blessed Christmas and may your new year be kind and bountiful!*

*Madelyn Rohrer*

