

I Fall To My Knees

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I'm reading a book by Norman Vincent Peale: *Positive Thinking Every Day*. It has a little prayer or meditation or positive message for each day of the year. I feel, most of the time, that I could use more positive thoughts in my life! Actually, the book is one I bought for my mother. It is inscribed, wishing her "Merry Christmas and much love, 1996." When Mom died, my sisters set it aside for me.

Though it makes me feel good to think that as I turn the pages I am following her movements, I'm not really sure she ever read it. Probably, though.

Mom was a positive-thinker, a believer in miracles, a pray-er. She had so many children, I suppose she had to be.

My most sincere prayers have been for the health and well-being of my children. Or dogs.

For the most part, I'm not much on praying, though. When friends are ill or having difficulties, I'm careful to offer "best wishes" or "good thoughts" rather than prayers. Worse than not praying, I figure, is offering to pray and then not doing it. I cut my losses.

Even so, I've been spending a lot of time on my knees.

These longer, warmer days provide a chance to work in the garden.

Snowdrops are wildly blooming along the edges of my flower beds. Clusters of Narcissus and Daffodils show all shades of yellow. Tulips have fat buds at the top of their stems. Iris and Day Lilies have presented their fan-shaped leaves. Through it all are layers of wet brown leaves that fell from the maple trees last fall, long bunches of pale Day Lily stalks and leaves and the remains of the fall-flowering plants. Together, they hide the progress of persistent spreading weeds.

Every day I come home from work, stash my papers and bags, let the dogs out to enjoy the sunshine, and I drop to the ground. My tools are simple: one claw tool for loosening and lifting roots, one ratcheting pruner for wayward rose, grape or wisteria branches. The creaking, wobbly and rusty wheelbarrow stands nearby.

My rule is that I'll work at least one hour, and fill the wheelbarrow at least once with debris.

First, I pull all the dead stuff away, working with my hands around stalks, raking with my fingers through the blooms. Then I tackle the weeds.

Years ago, when I had about four fewer jobs, and much more impressive gardens, friends would ask me to come over in the springtime, to look at their gardens, and help them determine what was a desired plant, and what was a weed. I couldn't help. I don't recognize every good plant, and I don't know all weeds, especially in the springtime. My advice was this: "Pull what you *know*: pull the grasses; pull the dandelions. If you're not sure about it, wait until you're sure." Weeds show their true nature soon enough.

That's the way I do it. One at a time, I move the rocks that border the flower beds. Roots of grasses are visible there, as they try to move into the gardens. I dig in with my fingers. I try to use gloves, but can't get a sense for what I'm doing, so I usually set them aside. I pull roots up one by one, and follow them to the end, or until they snap. When an area is clear, I move on to the next rock, and repeat the process.

When I am working at the hardware store, I'm often thinking of things I need to accomplish for the news magazine, or for the townships. When I'm driving to and from other obligations, I'm planning art projects or remodeling projects, or plotting where I'll find time to get groceries or do a load or two of laundry. When I'm awake in the middle of the night, I'm running through to-do lists or writing articles and doing interviews in my head.

When I'm working in the garden, I'm hardly thinking at all. One leaf, one root at a time, I am in the moment. It's the closest thing to a meditative experience in my life.

The entry for May 1st, in my little book of positive thoughts, says this:

The secret of prayer is to find the process that will most effectively open your mind humbly to God. So experiment with fresh prayer formulas. Practice new skills and get new insights.

May 7th, I have heard, is the National Day of Prayer.

If the sun is shining, I'll be on my knees...with my hands in the dirt.