Acceptance and gratitude

By Chaplain Corey T. Thornton

My family and I have been in Japan for a little more than a month now, so we are still fairly new here. We have moved around quite a bit in our lives and especially a lot since I received my commission into the Chaplain Corps. But, with all of the moving, nothing quite compares to this one. I came from a world where I was reasonably well educated and entered another world where I am functionally illiterate. I came from a world where I was a seasoned automobile driver and entered a world where I am like a beginner all over again. And the list doesn't stop there: laundry, ordering at restaurants, riding the train... Never before in my adult life have I lived in an environment where I was so utterly dependant on the assistance of others to fulfill the basic functions of my day to day living. It should be noted that, if so many of our new friends and neighbors were not so generous with their help, our stay here would be impossible.

I know that I am not the only one to have made this transition. I'm not the first and definitely will not be the last. It is also likely that this will not be the last occasion when my family and I will have to overcome the challenges and obstacles of life. Assuming that you, my reader, have had similar experiences of helplessness, you can now offer your support, saying that phrase that was made so popular by former President Bill Clinton, "I feel your pain."

So how do we handle the challenges that disrupt our lives? For many of us, when we were children we learned how to worry about our challenges. This likely happened when we made mistakes and experienced the consequences for those mistakes. You recognize these events when you say, "For as long as I live, I'll never do that again!" And we take these "I'll never do that again" lessons and hold on to them tightly, maintaining control. By the time we reach adulthood we have likely accumulated a good number of "I'll never do that again" lessons, and so we go through our lives, day in and day out, resting secure in our sense of control. Many of us take pride in these lessons and are eager to pass them on to others, to our children for example. And this is one way that we humans have been passing along our knowledge, warning others about the lessons of life so that mistakes will not be repeated. This course of things is all well and good until we find out just how little we are truly able to control and how little we really know about life. How often have you been pushed beyond your comfort zone? How often have you not been able to keep a grip on those "I'll never do that again" lessons of life that formerly brought you so much comfort? It seems quite regular for me and, as I shared earlier, this newest season of my life as a Sailor in Japan certainly fits.

While there is no stopping the constant changing of situations that so often bring challenges to our lives that remove us from our comfort zone and remind us of the true limits of our control, I have come across a lesson of life that has proven quite helpful and true. And it came from a source of which I was not expecting, the actor Michael J. Fox. Fox, who was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 1991, has certainly had some control-shaking experiences on life's journey. His method for dealing with these challenges is not a new one, nor did he come up with it on his own, but his ability to manage the struggles of his disease while continuing to be an actor, a published author, and the head of his foundation, reveals its effectiveness. Fox says that he practices the principles of acceptance and gratitude; accepting the situation that he is in, including those things that cannot be controlled, and being grateful for life and its blessings. It's a lesson that sounds simple but is not often easy to put into practice. Accepting life as it is, not as we would have it to be, is to admit that there is much to life that we cannot manipulate or significantly influence. It is also to acknowledge that we rely on the support of others. Looking at our situation in life as honestly as possible is a good start and often does not lead one to feelings of gratitude, but that is just where we are taught to go. To think about the blessings and advantages of life might be hollow advice if done by itself, but to do so after accepting one's situation in life is to choose life over death and success over failure. Sometimes just a moment of meditation or writing a list of our blessings can bring about a profound gratitude for our lives and those around us. After reading this lesson from Fox, with the added encouragement that, if he can do it while managing his disease, then I should be able to do it as well; I have found it to be the truest way to navigate life and the healthiest way to adapt to adverse circumstances.

The theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, expressed this concept in a now famous prayer that says, "God, grant me serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference…" May each of us find the serenity to practice acceptance and gratitude and to continue boldly down the exiting and challenging road of life.

George Washington chaplains reach out to new fathers at sea

By MC3 Devon Dow, *USS George Washington* Public Affairs

Within a recent three-week period, *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) (*GW*) experienced a baby boom. Averaging a baby each week, three Sailors have become proud fathers of newborns.

One of the Sailors, Culinary Specialist 2nd Class Christopher Coe and his wife Katrina, welcomed the arrival of their daughter Azaeleia Naomi Coe Aug. 25.

"Azaeleia is our second child and this is the first time that I have been underway when my child was born," Coe said. "It has been difficult at times for my wife and I being apart during her pregnancy, but she has a lot of support and is well taken care of. I could not be more proud of her."

One measure to help ease the strain of the deployed life of new parents aboard *GW* is a unique service provided by the Chaplain's Office. During evening prayer, which is given over the ship's intercom system, the chaplain will announce the birth of a *GW* Sailor's child upon the request of the Sailor or the Sailor's command.

Coe, who works nights in the *GW* forward galley, said he was working the night when he and the rest of the crew heard the remarks from the chaplain.

"It was very surprising to me to hear my name and my daughter's name during the evening prayer," he said. "It turns out it was my command who put in the request for me. It made me feel great to know that I had so much support from them. I will never forget it."

All requests for this service can be directed to the Chaplains Office. According to Religious Program Specialist 1st Class Nino Miranda, *GW* chaplains are always ready to assist Sailors whether in port or during deployments when Sailors are distant from their family and loved ones.

"This service is one of the important things *GW* chaplains do and they are honored whenever the opportunity arises," he said."*GW* chaplains realize how important this day is for a Sailor and his loved ones. Chaplains are more than counselors; they are also 'that someone' who cares for people, especially a Sailor who is anxious to hear news across thousand of miles."

Coe said he is now counting the day until the *GW* returns to its homeport of Yokosuka, Japan.

"I would like to thank my wife and my [three-year-old] son, Raidon, for all that they are doing while I am underway," Coe said. "They are both real troopers who are doing an excellent job taking care of our new family addition. I cannot wait to return to them."

CS2 Christopher Coe, from Carrier Air Wing 5 VFA-115 squadron, looks at a picture of his newborn daughter Azaeleia Naomi Coe Sept. 14. Coe is one of three Sailors aboard *USS George Washington* (CVN 73) who became a father of a newborn child all within a three-week period.

U.S. Navy photo by MC2 Jared Hill