



THE BEST OF

# SHEEHAN

## GIVING THANKS

*In races and life in general, saying "thank you" should be part of the course*

We runners can be a self-centered lot. We are high achievers who focus on doing our best. In our preoccupation with performance at races, we often don't pause to think about who made the racing possible or take the time to thank all concerned.

Not that I find it difficult to explain the silence of people in that situation. If you wish to know human nature, said Thoreau, look inside yourself. I'm no better at expressing appreciation than anyone else.

I accept the race as if I'm entitled to it, never questioning how it came into being. I should say thanks at every water station, to every traffic guard, to the people at the chute and finally to the race director. Yet I rarely do.

This oversight extends to other areas of life as well. I accept hospitality on my trips and assume it to be routine.

People are nice to me, and I make nothing of it. Over the years, I've failed to express gratitude to any number of individuals who have contributed to my life. Thank-you's are so easy to say, yet so rarely uttered. So few of us speak the words directly, or write a note, or pick up the phone to say what we feel.

Many times we *think* "thank you" but never say it. For every person who writes a note of thanks, there are a hundred who intend to. More often, however, it is simply a matter of not thinking.

The past is soon forgotten in our push to the future. We do not meditate on the meaning of our experiences. Failing in that, we also fail to see the people involved.

Each of us has a role. Each of us is expected to fulfill it.

Why, then, thank my barber or waitress or mechanic or physician? After all,

they have just done their job, what they are paid to do.

The answer, it seems to me, is that the thank-you is part of my role in having my hair cut, my meal served, my car fixed, my illness cured. My thank-you completes the action.

Giving thanks is the role of the recipient. When the donor is not thanked, a chain of human interaction is broken. The action is incomplete.

Without the thank-you, the person doing the service or favor feels in some way a failure. As evidence of this, I see that the inevitable response to a thank-you is a "thank you" in return. All too often, a thank-you note provokes a response that reveals you are the first ever to tell this person how much he or she was appreciated.

I once made the cover of *The Runner* magazine, which stimulated me to dash off a quick and rare note to the editor. Marc Bloom wrote back, "It's interesting that we have not once received a thank-you letter from

any runner who has been on the cover—until yours."

It is true that our happiness should not depend on what other people think about us. Nevertheless, that happiness can undoubtedly be enhanced by good wishes and good words that go from heart to heart.

There are people who had a major influence on our lives and never knew it. There are people we loved and left, who could be told that those loving years were a gift we still treasure.

There are lives that have been intertwined with our own in helpful and meaningful ways. For all these people, it's never too late to say thank you. [1987] **R**

*For every person  
who writes a  
note of thanks,  
there are  
a hundred  
who intend to.*



At Or  
the b  
we've