

The Gifts We Don't See (Continued)

I've seen friends struggling with job security. I've seen friends faced with health issues. I've seen friends dealing with low wages, and high rent, and student loans, and no idea what to do after college. I've seen friends and family dealing with much, much worse. And while it seems harsh and perhaps tasteless to view one's own fortune in a negative aspect (in the sense of "wow, look what I *don't* have to deal with!), the comparison becomes so stark that it almost demands attention. Because here at CGA, despite the day-to-day hassles and annoyances and heavy workload we face, we are given so many resources, and spared so much true hardship, that our lives are, in a sense, a charmed existence.

We have our food, our housing, and our education provided for us; we're given a salary (effectively just for going to school) that's more than sufficient to cover books, supplies, uniforms, and small necessities. We don't have to worry about student loans, or debts we'll be paying off for years to come.

We have health care provided to us; were we to get ill, we wouldn't have to worry about where to find the funding to cover medical bills. We are physically cared for; we are safe.

We are promised a job for five straight years after graduation, with excellent prospects of either continuing in the service or finding another job from there. We don't have to worry about facing unemployment; we won't be forced to move back home simply for lack of a place to go and live and work. We are led into prosperity.

And the fact of the matter is, when we begin to consider the gift of sanctuary from things we don't want to be burdened with, then too the gifts of the many things granted to us become strikingly apparent as well...

We're afforded opportunities to travel all around the world for free. Somehow I doubt that, on my own at a civilian university, I would have been afforded the opportunity to see Hawaii, the Marshall Islands, London, Iceland, Nova Scotia, and Poland all in the course of two and a half years.

We're trusted with responsibilities that most 20-something-year-olds are not. We are put in charge of vessels, of projects, of organizations, of people within our first two years at school. For all the griping we do about our "lack of power," in relation to most of the college-age world, we're given quite a bit of opportunity for authority and leadership.

And most importantly, we're living in a place where we truly can relate to our classmates, our corps, like a family. Sure, not every single one of us likes or would choose to "hang out" with every single other person at CGA; but I would trust any of them to come to my aid if I needed them, as I would come to theirs. There's a sense of solidarity, of pride, and of compassion in the shared experience, and in our devotion to our service and our country. And that's the greatest gift of all.

These are the gifts we don't always see, but which are always there. And these are the gifts that make me thankful that I found a home here at the CGA.