

I'm a blessing counter. I don't mean I go around counting other people's blessings; *I mean I count my own!*

My unusual hobby began during the summer of 1936. It was a time when two men—one athletic and black, the other crippled and white—were very much in the headlines.

Jesse Owens was stealing the spotlight at the Olympic Games in Berlin while Franklin Delano Roosevelt was campaigning for the second of his four presidential terms. And thanks to a multi-syllable sickness, I was running an improbable fever of 108 degrees. Three doctors told my parents not to expect their 7-year-old son to make it through the night. But what those doctors didn't take into account was that Mom and Pop would spend that night talking to God.

More than 25,000 days and nights have gone by since Jesse Owens, FDR and I thumbed our collective noses at Adolph Hitler, Alf Landon and three red-faced doctors. The way I figure it, that's 25,000 blessings. Take it from a guy who collects them, I cherish each and every one.

My Blessing Book

But those thousands of blessings aren't the only ones in my collection—not by a long shot! When you consider yourself one of the luckiest and happiest men alive, your Blessing Book seems to grow bigger and better every day.

Thanks largely to loving, caring parents, I had a happy, fun-filled childhood. I was 21 when I met Mary Lou Rush on New Year's Eve, 1949. She was my best friend's blind date. Two weeks later, I lost my best friend...but it was a good trade: His blind date soon became the greatest wife and friend a man could hope for.

I was a struggling young sports writer when we met and, next to her, sports and writing were my big loves. She encouraged me to continue my career, and I went on to



25,000 BLESSINGS & COUNTING

BY ARN
SHEIN

spend the next 56 years getting paid for doing what I love so much.

I have so many fond memories of my writing career, they alone make my Blessing Book bulge at the seams. Perhaps my proudest moment came one September evening in 1959 when I was sports editor of *The Daily Item* in Port Chester, New York, and was honored by hundreds of readers and fellow sports writers. The very title of the testimonial dinner was enough to make a man's head spin: "Arn Shein Honor Night—A Champion in the Cause of Sports and Sportsmanship."

Sitting at the head table were my proud parents. Ida and Lou Shein were to pass away within the next few years, but on that evening, my father was popping his buttons and my mother's already ample chest was more ample than ever.

Five years after our marriage, Mary Lou and I were told by doctors

I've also had phlebitis, two detached retina, glaucoma, reflux esophagitis, legionnaires pneumonia, bronchitis, two cataracts, cellulitis, bursitis, angina, a heart attack, a hiatal hernia, root canal, tennis elbow, hemorrhoids and a partridge in a pear tree.

we would never have children of our own. It was my turn to talk to the Lord, and nine months later Lindy was born. Stacey joined the family in 1962, and Kelli came on the scene 16 months later. Three daughters, three blessings.

We had a big scare on Lindy's sixth birthday when we took her to New York Hospital where we hoped doctors could discover what was making our oldest daughter so sick the past few months. After weeks of testing, we learned that Lindy had severe juvenile rheumatoid arthritis. As bad as her case was, though, even that was a blessing. Of all the boys and girls on that infamous children's floor of New York Hospital (most of them suffering from leukemia), our daughter was one of only two who would leave there alive.

She still has rheumatoid arthritis, but today Lindy is a vibrant mother of two handsome young men. As for Stacey and Kelli, they are beautiful young ladies who have blessed us with five more grandsons and, finally, a granddaughter. Eight grandchildren, eight more blessings.

My Adventures With Doctors and Hospitals

A funny thing happened on the way to my 39th birthday party in



27-year old sports editor Art Shein with Walter Alston right after the Dodgers won their first World Championship in Brooklyn—1955.

1967. My world seemed to go hay-wire and, during the next 38 years, I was hospitalized 37 times and underwent 26 operations. I've been jabbed by so many needles since then, my understanding wife has disposed of every pin-cushion in our house. And I have long been on a first-name basis with some of the nicest ambulance drivers, doctors and nurses in New York and San Diego.

Thanks to two lens implants and the amputation of two toes, I have literally been operated on from head to toe. In between, I've had four total hip replacements, surgery on five fingers and a meniscus bone removed from my left knee. A coronary angiogram in 1982 proved to be a life-saver since it revealed a fistful of severe blockages and led to a tricky little six-bypass heart operation.

A good chunk of my health problems stems from a severe case of psoriatic arthritis throughout my system. But I've also had phlebitis, two detached retina, glaucoma, reflux esophagitis, legionnaires pneumonia, bronchitis, two cataracts, cellulitis, bursitis, angina, a heart attack, a hiatal hernia, root canal, tennis elbow, hemorrhoids and a partridge in a pear tree. And what decent red-blooded American would possibly exclude "the heartbreak of psoriasis?" Certainly not I!

My adventures also include 10 hip dislocations, which just might help explain why a person with the customary quota of two hips would require four total hip replacements.

Admittedly there were times during those adventure-filled 37 years

when I was tempted to feel sorry for myself. But whenever I did, I simply looked at other patients in doctors' waiting rooms or peeked through the doors of hospital rooms and realized how fortunate I was. Wherever I looked, there were a great many people far worse off than I.

Besides, I consider each of my 26 operations successful. As for those 37 hospitalizations, I always left feeling a whole lot better than when I had entered. And don't believe everything you hear about hospital food.

I love it!

You discover also how important good friends are, particularly in a life-threatening situation. When I had my six-bypass surgery, I was supposed to be hospitalized two weeks. They sent me home after less than a week, partially because I made a speedy recovery; partially because I was a disruptive influence.

When I left Scripps Hospital in La Jolla, California, the nursing staff estimated that I had more than 300 visitors, phone calls, get-well cards and gifts. It reached the point where my confused roommate thought he was lying in the middle of New York's Madison Square Garden during a rock concert.

Giving Thanks

How do you adequately express appreciation to so many wonderful people for their kindness and warmth? There's really no way you can. You simply thank God, sit down, open your ever-growing Blessing Book—and make another entry.

Fifteen months after the heart surgery, I lost four close friends in as many months and, for the first time in my life, suffered through a stage of depression. Each day for weeks my wife tried to talk me into attending a local creative writing class in San Diego. And each day I resisted her pleas. After all, it had

been 10 full years since my sickness forced me into early retirement as sports editor and columnist. But when she finally twisted my arm and I walked in to the writing class, the old juices began to flow. So did the words!

It wasn't long before I began sending my nonfiction writing to upper echelon magazines. As always, I felt my manuscripts were Pulitzer Prize material. The editors didn't necessarily agree with my assessment: Over the next four years my writing was rejected 96 straight times.

I didn't give up! After all, what else did I have to do? And besides, what's 96 rejections to a guy who survived 26 major surgeries?

My slump was broken in February 1988 when *Guideposts* published one of my inspirational articles. Then came sales to the world's two largest circulation magazines, *Modern Maturity* and *Readers' Digest*. My byline has since appeared 400 times in more than 50 national magazines, more than half of them to the religious/inspirational market. In addition, I now teach creative writing classes and am a regular on the lecture tour.

I was seven when I almost died in 1936. Although I turned 77 in September 2005, I'm busier and happier than I've ever been. After all, counting all those blessings takes a great deal of time! □



Arn and Mary Lou Shein make their home in San Diego, California. Arn, a former award-winning sports editor/columnist for a Gannet Newspaper Group daily in New York, has been writing professionally since 1949. Forced to retire in 1974 because of poor health, he turned to freelancing in 1988 and has since been published in more than 50 national magazines (including Plain Truth).