

## **The Joys of a Lifetime**

I have been focusing on my children, grandchildren and great grandchildren and the joy they bring to my life. There are some others. My nieces and nephews. They come and visit me, keep contact with me, check on me and are a joy to me. My oldest niece meets me in Frankenmuth for chicken dinner for my birthday. This started because I had related to her that my husband when he was in the beginning stages of dementia and Alzheimer's could be very stubborn. Usually, he was pretty easy going but sometimes that little spark of stubbornness would come out. One year we were going to Frankenmuth for my birthday. I had told him it was my birthday, and I wanted Chicken and all the side dishes in Frankenmuth. As we drove up 75, he spotted a Cracker Barrel. Now he loved Cracker Barrel, but I explained to him that it was my birthday, and I got to pick and, on his birthday, we had gone to Cracker Barrel. He seemed okay and did not argue any more. However, when we were seated in The Bavarian Inn in Frankenmuth, I ordered the Chicken and he instead of ordering the chicken also, ordered a Roast Beef Sandwich. This meant that I could not get the sides which I love. I went ahead and ordered the sides individually which adds considerable cost to the meal. I was a little "put off" by this but tried to remember it was my birthday and I was sure he didn't mean it in a stubborn way and tried to remember he was not aware of what he had done. I related this story to my niece and every year since then we have met in Frankenmuth for my birthday and at other times just because we enjoy each other. When she was a toddler, she would imitate me by watching me. She would walk like me and stand like I did and watch my reactions. She was a delight then and still is. Now we have expanded that dinner to include an overnight stay at a quaint hotel by the river and additional goodies at the hotel. Next year we plan on expanding it further with shopping and a ride on the Riverboat. My other nieces and nephews keep in contact with visits when they are on their way from Illinois to Bad Axe and with text messages. As some of you know one of my nieces passed away with cancer. A few weeks ago, I was cleaning out my texts and there was one from her. I could not bear to erase that message as she told me about her faith in a wonderful God. I had helped her on her journey and that message means the world to me. I received a beautiful inspiring message today from my nephew who lives in Illinois. He comforted me and eased my mind as we deal with the division in our country. Division that breaks my heart. He knew the words that would comfort me. Last week I shared text messages with my niece in Saginaw. 6 of my nieces and nephews lost their mother at a young age. She was 50. My heart breaks for them as we share stories about her. She was a good Mother and always loved her babies. There was a young girl in church years ago that would stand alone. Her hair had different colors in it every week. Her parents were getting a divorce. I went up to her and talked with her about her hair and how she did it. I could feel her pain, as we talked. We became friends and about a year ago we ran into each other in a restaurant, and we hugged, and she is such a beautiful person. Successful in her career and life. People touch our lives. I think God planned for that. My friends, children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and nieces and nephews plus the children who are not related bring me joy.

Grace Epperson