

Christmas 2021



Dear Family and Friends,

Merry Christmas 2021

I'm guessing that this starts like all the letters you will receive this Christmas; addressing a 22 month pandemic: how we try to cope with it, how it has affected our lives and our work and our vacation plans, and everything else. Serious stuff. You are all in our prayers.

Given the above, it's pretty difficult to deliver a light-hearted review of the year. But I'll try.

One of the good news items of 2021 was the 100th birthday celebration in April for my mom, Elaine. She currently resides in an Assisted Living Facility in Carmel, Indiana, just north of Indianapolis. The staff members there like her because she is very much lucid and talkative, as opposed to some of their residents who are mostly quiet and non-communicative. As part of the birthday celebration Mom got a Proclamation from the Mayor of Carmel, a flag that had flown over the Capitol, and a (somewhat delayed) letter from the President. The Assisted Living Facility where she resides consists of seven cottages, and one was vacant so we had a great place for our catered meal plus we also had a small band for music. Sister Ellen who lives in Carmel made it all happen, and it was great.

But now that the topic is on age, you might be surprised to note that neither Jay nor Joyce is getting any younger. Well, Jay, anyway. To begin with, I don't call it *Getting Old*. Let's just say I'm trying to *Outlive My Warranty*. And it doesn't make me old that I remember when multiplication was called "times tables," and that I actually had to win to get a trophy, and that paper bags were blamed for destroying our trees - and plastic bags were the solution.

Now to some of our activities.

Joyce is now working on her entry to the Horticulture Competition for the 2022 Florida State Fair. Horticulture is kind of like Gardening for those of you, like me, who cannot handle such a big word. Although the competition is not until February, the rules are that you must have been working on your project for four months - that's for some of you who were thinking. "Why not go out and buy something the day before the entries are due?" Joyce's entry will be in the Special Competitions Division in the "Succulents in Alternative Planters" category. Aloe and cacti are types of succulents. And the container she will be using is a *crab trap*. Don't laugh. In the 2019 Florida Strawberry Festival her container was a *bird cage* and she won not only her category, but also Best of Show, beating out every other entry in every other category. (Side note: Joyce has a **bunch** of horticulture ribbons and when I ask what she is going to do with all of them, she tells me she is taking them with her. So I have a call in to the local funeral home to check on the price of a double-wide coffin.)

Jay is not so exciting. Still golf and Pickleball. He likes Pickleball a lot better "because I don't lose as many balls." And he pursues an occasional marathon. A marathon of binge watching some dumb series on Netflix. He is still a Director of a Sunday School class and spends time in that regard. He has also been working on Games. Since he is really an introvert and not much fun at social occasions, he has some games ready to whip out on short notice, if desired, and he is currently posting some on the BradenClan Website. And speaking of the Website, he tries to keep it current and continues, as a loyal Seminole, to add Gator jokes.

Even with a significant COVID threat, with some precautions the Tampa and central Florida area with its attractions provides a lot of close-in activities and fun, and for this year that included trips to Universal Orlando and Discovery Cove, to the beach at Treasure Island (St Petersburg), and to visit Robert and his family in Alabama (and they have since moved "up the road" to Georgia).

Now wishing you the best for this Christmas and the coming years. May you continue to grow in God's grace, mercy, and love.

The Braden Family: Jay, Joyce, kids, grandkids, and (spoiled) puppy

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Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV): "For I know the plans I have for you..." declares the Lord

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NIV): "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways ...," declares the Lord

