



Christmas 2024



Dear Friends and Family,

Merry Christmas 2024!

Another year with a lot of things going on, both internationally and domestically. Lots to pray about. But at this time of the year we can still count our blessings, which are many.

Gasparilla. Yep, we again attended Tampa's annual Gasparilla Pirate Parade. Some say the parade is named after the mythical pirate José Gaspar; but I think the word *Gasparilla* really means get dressed up and drink too much, and I have 300,000 witnesses to prove it. Hey, but it's a great parade and where else can you spend a day watching floats and catching tons of beads? And then you can take the beads home and use them for . . . uh . . . uh.



Florida State Fair. You might want to skip this paragraph, it's boring. Yes, Joyce entered the Florida State Fair Horticulture Competition this year. About 300 entries in various classes. Yes, she won *Best of Show*, meaning her entry was better than any other entry in any other class of Horticulture. Yes, there were more ribbons to paper her office wall with.



Independence Day. We celebrated the day with Joyce's son Michael and his wife Karri at their home in Hudson, FL. They had some of their family members there also. Michael and Karri live on a canal that goes out to the gulf, and they have a boat and wave runners – though we didn't use them this time. We had a fun day of food, fellowship, and games. The evening fireworks were a blast – literally - and we could not think of a better way to set the whole neighborhood on fire.



Age. This year Joyce and I both turned 80. That's old! If you are wondering how I know this: Well, before, when I accidentally fell down, my friends just laughed; now they run over to see if my medical alert necklace for seniors has called for an ambulance.



Alaska. One of the ways we celebrated our birthdays was by an Alaska Cruise. We spent a bit, based on the occasion, and got ourselves a suite, plus some additional dining and entertainment perks. Unfortunately there was no perk that evaporates the food that you just keep eating, and eating, and eating . . . One of the things we liked best was visiting the Mendenhall Glacier – nice to see something older than you are.



Labor Day Weekend. Callaway Gardens, located in Pine Mountain, Georgia, about 50 miles SSE of Atlanta, is a wonderful resort with good accommodations and many activities, more than can be experienced in even a long Labor Day weekend. We have been there a number of times but Joyce's back now severely limits the type of activities she can participate in such as Callaway Gardens that requires a fair amount of walking. Instead, Joyce flew to Texas to be with some long time friends (Della and her daughters Donna and Denise) who needed a visit from Nurse Joyce. Back at Callaway with Robert's family and Karen's



2024 – An Eventful Year

Internationally, we have the war between Israel and the Hamas and Hezbollah terrorists; Houthi terrorists attacking American forces in the Middle East and in international shipping in the adjacent waters; China threatening the invasion of Taiwan while currently working to diminish American worldwide influence; and Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, now with North Korean troops, and Putin suggesting that nuclear war might not be far away. Revolution in Syria

Domestically the US has endured a year marked by a relentless onslaught of natural disasters across the United States. The year began with a series of powerful winter storms that brought heavy snowfall, icy conditions, and crippling cold temperatures to many parts of the country. As spring arrived, the focus shifted to severe thunderstorms and tornadoes ripping through several states, leaving behind trails of destruction and claiming lives. The summer months brought a different kind of threat: wildfires raging across the western states, scorching vast swaths of land. Hurricanes Helene and Milton caused terrible damage and flooding to the southeast. Joyce's son Michael and his wife Karri had five feet of water in their home due to Helene - the second time the contents of their home were destroyed in 13 months. Michael also lost his pickup truck. They are now in a Renaissance Inn courtesy of FEMA and hope to be back in their home by Christmas. Prayers for all those who suffered damage, many who lost their entire homes or business. And to the families and friends who lost loved ones.

family, we again rented two 6-passenger golf carts to get us around the resort, and to enjoy all the amenities. But the truth is that the kids (grandkids Daylin, Braden, Skyler) LOVE to drive the golf carts and to go hunting for golf balls on the resort's golf courses. Obviously I had another great time, but next year I think we can rent golf carts, and go hunt golf balls right here on my local course in Valrico and save a ton of money.



November in Gatlinburg and Indy. Joyce and I split up again in early November. Joyce and daughter Michelle made the annual trip to Gatlinburg; Jay visited his sister Ellen and her husband Tom who live in Carmel, on the outskirts of Indianapolis. Joyce and Michelle wanted to see the changing of the leaves and maybe some bears, but most of the time it was too *Smokey*. Jay's visit with Tom and Ellen included Go-Kart racing at an indoor track in Speedway, Indiana. Just put pedal to the metal if you have a score to settle. Well, there were no scores to settle, but taking a Kart up to its max speed is a thrill like making a fifty foot putt. (Though I've never had that thrill; I get thrills making a five foot putt.)



The Elections. One good thing about this year is that they got Joyce away from watching TV shows about repairing old homes; instead she was glued to news channels to get the latest election updates, though she screamed a lot at the TV. Election night: Joyce and I decided that waiting for election results is similar to waiting for a grade on a group project: We know we did our part right, but we were worried the rest of you screwed it up.



worthless?

A question: What costs around two billion dollars, but is completely

The answer: Runner up in the presidential election.

Jay's Activities. Joyce has her horticulture achievements; I have my golf and pickleball struggles.

Golf: If your golf can't get better, then you need to find something to blame it on. My story, and I'm sticking with it, is that the gators who live in the ponds around the course, jump out and gobble up my golf balls so I can't find them. (And, in appreciation, I often feed them golf balls directly in the water so they don't have to take the effort to climb up on land – such as the one who joined me for the photo.)



PickleBall: Want a fact about playing Pickleball when you're old?

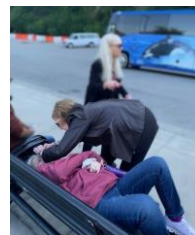
A: The warm-up takes longer than the actual game!

Nonetheless, I'm now pretty sure the secret to success in this game is to play with a group of people who are not better than you are.

Unfortunately, I'm still looking for that group.



Joyce's Activities. Joyce is still dealing with some pretty agonizing back pain that has defied treatments and some knee problems going back to a skiing accident years ago. Nevertheless, Joyce remains active with a number of groups to include some wonderful ladies who knew her parents before she was even born and are therefore called her surrogates, and the Fellowship Baptist Church choir that comes together for special events to include this coming Christmas Eve. She also remains current with her nursing credentials and her specialty certifications. To say that many people seek her advice remains an understatement. The picture here at right shows Joyce during our Alaska trip "jumping in" to assist a lady who had just taken a nasty fall. I'm counting on the same response when I do a face plant.



Sorry for the long letter. As French mathematician and philosopher
Blaise Pascal allegedly said, (with its conversion to English)
"If I had more time, I would have written a shorter letter."

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 sweet puppy Cinny

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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