

Bury Me with My Pearls

Humor with a Spiritual Twist

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to the greatest pearl in my life, the queen of all gems, my mother,
Eleanor Welch McElveen Jenkins. She was a priceless.

*A capable, intelligent and virtuous woman-who is he who can find her? She is far more precious
than jewels and her value is far about rubies or **pearls**. Amplified Version*

Chapter I My Mothers of Pearls

Aspire to Inspire before you Expire

Grandmother McElveen had two suitcases packed: one for a possible hospital stay and the other for her funeral. “Eleanor, bury me with my pearls.” She said one day to my mother. “Oh, Mother!” exclaimed my mother. Then Grandmother McElveen glanced at Tootsie, my second momma, who worked for my family for almost 50 years. “Eleanor does not want to listen. Please make sure I am buried with my pearls.”

My mother told me this story during one of our many stays at Roper Hospital in Charleston, South Carolina. *Please make sure I am buried with my pearls.* This sentence looped through my mind all night. What a great title for a book!

“Jane, I want you to remember how I want to be buried.” I did not want to discuss this topic. But my mother continued, “For my music, I want my favorite song,” Please Release Me,” by Engelbert Humperdinck.” Momma always made me laugh; it was one of her pearls.

When you think of pearls and in the South we do love these gems, the beginning of the formation of the jewel is the nacre, the inner shell which makes up the pearls. Nacre is the mother of pearl. Its iridescent beauty is considered a treasure. Mother of pearl is very strong, resilient and is crucial in the formation of the pearl.

Just like Momma and Tootsie.

Friends called them all kinds of names: Maude and Florida, smoke and fire, Bert and Ernie, or Lucy and Ethel. You name the duo; Momma and Tootsie were an amazing team. I have seen them beat wayward lizards to death with brooms, leap on the kitchen table when a mouse was spotted in the house and put out fires with aprons. I've seen Tootsie drop to her knees laughing after my mother said something funny and I've seen them embrace in tears.

Momma, Tootsie, and I were a super-glue trio until I had to start first grade. I thought my heart was going to explode when I sat at the wooden desk that reminded me of a cage. All I could think of is how much fun I was missing. No more watching "I love Lucy" with Tootsie at 10 AM. No more running around the house as Momma and Tootsie tried to brush my honey-colored ringlets that Momma called knots. No more flour fights with Tootsie as she made her delicious biscuits and our pretend clothes-line tents would now be white sheets hanging lifeless on a wire.

Tootsie called me to give me a good tongue lashing after she found out that I had fallen off of a ladder and tore a ligament in my foot. "Girl, I done told you not to git yo'self up on no ladder! Dat is man's work." exclaimed Tootsie in her Gullah brogue. Then Momma grabbed the phone, "How many times have I told you that your uterus will fall out on the floor if you climb a ladder?"

No kidding, while shopping in Wal-Mart Tootsie and Momma would see a woman on a ladder. They would always comment, "She gonna be sorry. Her uterus is going to fall out." Can't you just hear the Wal-Mart folks on the loud speaker? "We need some help; we have a uterus on isle four...."

These are the women, my mothers of pearl, who helped form me into the woman I am today. They made me laugh and many times snort in a non-Southern Belle fashion. They also held me when I cried. They encouraged me and are the strength of my character; constant reminder of the importance of surrounding yourself with the right people. They also popped me on the bottom when I did wrong. Their message was to live well, love others and do the right thing regardless of how you feel. Their lessons stuck with me just like pot of Tootsie's steaming hot grits.

Mother of pearl is instrumental in the formation of pearls that has become a metaphor for something very rare, fine, admirable, and valuable. We should all aspire to be buried in our pearls and share the legacy of our deeds as we develop our talents. Just like a mother passes down her pearls to her daughter so should we proudly leave the next generation valuable lessons.

Who are the people you look to, lean on and learn from? Find the mother of pearl in your walk and pray for that protective shell. Seek out someone or something that provides safety and beauty at the same time. Seek someone who will tell you the truth in love, a person you trust and respect. Find that person or persons who have journeyed through life well and accumulated a beautiful, eclectic strand of valuable pearls. Then, become that person.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Galatians 5:22-23

Can You be a Pearl Inspector?

I have heard it said that you should not judge but, when it comes to the fruit of the spirit, you can be a fruit inspector. Why not a pearl inspector? Each of our pearls should represent the same qualities as the fruit of the spirit. You will never know if you have love, joy, peace,

forbearance, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control unless you are put to the test. Your life's work should be crafting through the help of the Holy Spirit, a strand of pearls representing all the gifts of the Spirit.

The pearl of love sounds so sweet and pretty, doesn't it? Well, hold on to your strand because the Lord may place you in a situation with un-loveable folks.

Matthew 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Ah, come on? Love these folks? YES, but you do not have to like them. I said many times, "I love them with the love of Christ but I do not like them." God in His wisdom knew that loving the unlovely is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit.

We hear the term Agape love used quite often in relation to the purest form of love. This is kind of love Jesus Christ has for his Father and for his followers. We cannot operate in Agape love without divine intervention. God also knew that praying for our enemies is for our benefit. So many people will stubbornly refuse to do this. Praying for your enemies is mostly for your sake. It has everything to do with your obedience to your heavenly Father. It means trusting His word and the power that will be released if you follow this Biblical truth. We are cheating ourselves of having peace and blessings by not praying for our enemies. I Corinthians 13:13 reminds us that the greatest of gifts is love.

The fruit or strand of pearls list continues with joy, peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. But what about forbearance? After reading the Hebrew and Greek definitions, it simply means to hold back and be still. Refrain from action. In a spiritual sense

this means to let God do His work with His perfect timing. This has been a difficult lesson for me to learn.

God know every inch of us so he allows circumstances to teach us who we are. Life unfolds and only we can decide how to handle these challenges. Trials will do one of two things either reveal our spiritual maturity or grow spiritual maturity. If we are wise, we will pay attention to both learning and growing.

In the language of formation of the pearl, these times of growth are referred to as irritants.

Oh, yes. They attach themselves to the most unexpected events.

Chapter II **The Power of the Irritant**

The growth cycle of a pearl starts with a grain of sand. It is the first irritant that begins the formation of a jewel.

My Grain of Sand, Debra-Sue

I remember it well. The day finally arrived when the high school girls were coming to my first-grade class to select the cutest girls to compete for the coveted title of, Little Miss Merry Christmas.

I was a tomboy. My uniform of choice was corduroy pants, flannel shirt and penny loafers. I brushed my hair and shined up the coins in my shoes. I was looking fine.

The only glitches were my over-sized lips and the loss of my two front teeth. That did not stop me from marching myself to the front of the classroom and smiling my heart out.

There was a snicker and lots of whispering as all the attention in the room was focused on my appearance. Making matters worse was the precious “pearl” who was standing right beside me.

Her name was Debra-Sue and she was the class Diva. Her momma put a stick-out dress on her, poodle socks and she was wearing her Easter shoes. Bright red lipstick coated her lips. I am sure it was the tester tube left by Miss Ann, the local Avon lady.

Debra Sue's hair was a mass of ringlets and bows glued in place by extra-hold Aqua-net. As we say in the South, "her hair was jacked-up to Jesus." A major Category Five hurricane could not touch her "do." To make matters worse, she had ALL of her teeth.

Of course, she was picked to be in the pageant.

Something strange happened to me that day. I became more determined than ever to be better. I was motivated. You see, Debra-Sue was my first grain of sand.

My brother was helping with the pageant and he told me they needed a fishbowl for the contestants to select questions. I immediately flushed my fish and cleaned up my fishbowl for the pageant.

The night of the pageant was pure magic. I sat on a broken chair on the front row of that old high school auditorium. I was mesmerized by "wannabe" beauty queens wearing Mike Benet, empire waist gowns; with matching shoes glide across the stage. My heart was pounding as MY fishbowl was brought to center stage. The big-hair girls each put their long, white-gloved hand in my fishbowl and retrieved a small slip of white paper.

That night was the beginning of a seed pearl that started from being irritated enough to redirect my young mind. I knew it was the beginning of something big, something special.

Little did I know seventeen years later, I would be walking across the stage competing for one of the most prestigious titles of all, Miss America.

And it all started with a girl who was my first irritant. Thank you, Debra-Sue.

Can you remember when you had that first twinge of feeling that this is not fair? Maybe you still have those moments. Hummmmmm.

If we want to grow and become better in our roles, then embrace those times when growth is needed. Do the twist. Think about what you are learning and how you are growing in your faith walk. Be a student of life and realize that in most every experience, there can be valuable lessons.

Columnist Ann Landers wrote, “If asked to give what I consider the single most useful bit of advice for all humanity, it would be this: Expect trouble as an inevitable part of life and when it comes, hold your head high, look it squarely in the eye and say, “I will be bigger than you. You cannot defeat me.”

You go, Girl!

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