**BIRTHDAY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**GRACE BYAS**

Hello everyone!!!! Well!!! It’s taken me **SIXTY YEARS** to get here.... no... I don’t mean the traffic was **THAT** bad on (**Name the Main Street in the area**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ !!! (**Wait for the laugh**) What **HAS** taken sixty years is for me to reach this milestone... to have lived an extraordinary life... so far... to have learned from, and loved, all of you.... and to get to the point in life at which **we** have all **earned** this celebration. As I look around this room and I see your smiling faces, I feel an indescribable warmth.... no... **NOT** from any hot sauce... and **NO**... **CERTAINLY NOT A HOT FLASH!!! (Wait for the laugh)**. It’s the warmth that only love, shared history, and an overwhelming sense of kinship can bring, and for **THAT**, I am truly grateful.

For some of you that have traveled from far and wide, thank you for being here. Words cannot express what it means to me that you took the time, made the effort..... and packed the snacks to sustain you on your journey!!! I want you to know that your presence means everything to me... **YOU** are the gift!

I once heard a line from an English poem.... it said something like, “I am part of all that I have met.” Isn’t that amazing??? Whether we know each other for a few days or for a lifetime, we are **connected**... our mutual impact is embedded deep within our individual and collective memory banks, and that has no bearing on if we know people for “a season, a reason, or a lifetime.” **THAT** we know each other, that we are present in one another’s lives... **THAT** is the great part.

People usually associate birthday with getting presents. I have to be really frank about this.... (**Turn to your husband and say**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, close your ears for **THIS ONE**... (**Wait for the laugh**). Jewelry is great.... massive floral arrangements are gorgeous... a perfect night on the town is **ALWAYS** special... but the real truth is that **YOU**...here... right now... bringing the love, laughter, memories, sweet thoughts... **THESE** are the greatest gifts I could have asked for... and while, **YEAH**... it’s **GREAT** to be celebrated.... it means the world to be able to come together in **GOOD** **TIMES**.... and I am happy and humbled to be the reason we’ve gathered tonight.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years ago, I met a young man....several of you were around when that event began to change the course of my life..... My wonderful sisters, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and my terrific brother, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ watched the romance unfold. (**Name your husband**) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, we’ve been together for \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years now.... you’ve been my partner in every sense of the word.... together we’ve created life, business, a beautiful family, and a incredible, enduring history ..... To our children, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, thank you for giving me the blessings of being a mother.... **YOUR** mother.... your energy and optimism keep me young.... eh... not **REALLY**!!! We’ve had our moments... **KIDDING**!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). Probably the greatest gifts of my life are you... our legacy...

Lucille Ball was known to have said, “The secret to staying young is to live honestly, eat slowly..... and lie about your age.” (**Wait for the laugh**). Among the many, **MANY** things that make me grateful **EVERY SINGLE DAY** are the friends that surround me.... that fill my world with sisterhood and solace.... great conversation, memories, laughter, and.... oh and.... the ever present fact that they will **ALWAYS BE OLDER THAN ME**!!! **THAT** keeps me **young**!!! I’m looking at **YOU** (**Name your friends that are older than you**), \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ !!! You’ve paved the way... You’ve showed me what it’s like to be grown up.... or **NOT**!!!! You’ve pointed to the areas where I can expect the next cricks and cranks and aches and pains.... but most of all, we’ve been there for each other...for the good times and the more challenging ones.... you’ve been there for the proverbial parties and you’ve made sure you stayed late for the “clean up...” because that’s what dear, old... **OLD**... kidding... friends do.

Growing older, wiser, more settled in our own skin, is one of the wonderful, mystical perks of maturing.... we are so lucky to live in a time when we can be vital, actively engaged, still curious about life at ever increasing stages in our lives.... Age really is just a number... as long as our minds and spirits and bodies can keep up, we’re all good to go!! The astronaut John Glenn said, “For all the advances in medicine, there is still no cure for the common birthday...” To that I say, **THANK GOODNESS**!!! .... and by the way, this one is **VERY** uncommon!!! And while I am old enough to remember his work in the space program, the words of an Irish philosopher mean a little more...”If I had to live all over again, I would do exactly the same thing... of course I have regrets, but if you are sixty years old and have no regrets, you haven’t lived...”

All in all, the first half of my life has been a great ride...even with the challenges, trials, second thoughts... to paraphrase Gloria Gaynor... “I **HAVE** survived... I **WILL** survive... I **WILL THRIVE**....” I look forward to laughing, loving, and celebrating with all of you for many more years to come!!! Thank you all!! I love you!!