**BIRTHDAY SPEECH**

**FOR**

**PATRICIA PEARSON**

Hello everyone and thank you so much for being here to celebrate this happy occasion with me. Every year, every trip around the sun provides us with an opportunity to take a look…. To take stock… to look back and see from where we’ve come, to measure what we’ve endured, and to count the blessing we’ve been given, no matter what, and to use those blessings as fuel to go on and conquer the obstacles and speed bumps in our path. Sometimes those bumps are more like boulders. They can seem too big to tackle… too massive to move…. Too impossible to navigate….. but I have learned that, throughout life and especially through this past year, that there’s a way to move those massive challenges that conspire to stop us…. And that’s through the undeniable force and energy we get from the love and support from family and friends. In the past, I knew my life was rich and filled with blessings. This past year, when it seemed the odds were stacked against me, it was the love, devotion, and caring of family and friends that got me through. Each one of you is a lifeline… A force of power and goodness that breathed life and hope into me, even when I thought of giving up. How do I spell gratitude??? It would be a **verrrrrry** long word made up of each of your names.

I’ve heard it said, “Life is not always easy to live, but the opportunity to do so is a blessing beyond comprehension. In the process of living, we will face struggles, many of which will cause us to suffer and to experience pain.” (**if you want to make a little joke, you can say**) … **NO KIDDING**!!!! This past year was a **DOOZIE**!!! (**And wait for the laugh**). I don’t mean to make light of any situation, but **really**…. If we lose our ability to laugh, **THEY** won…. And **THAT IS NOT GONNA HAPPEN WITH ME**!!!

Today is special. I get to acknowledge another year of life. I get to be with all of you, take stock, give thanks, and allow gratitude to wash over me. When we’re younger, birthdays mean gifts. This year, I realize the best gifts of all…. The intangible ones… more wisdom, greater internal reserve, profound appreciation, especially of the little things, and, of course, the absolute joy of celebrating another year of life after being diagnosed with cancer a year ago today…. Today, I officially declare the Day of Stepping into Grace, Gratitude, and **GORGEOUSNESS**!!!

While I fought the fight against “The Big C,” (**or you can say cancer…. whichever you prefer**), strangely enough, I realized I had opportunity… I had choices…. Thank God I chose to fight…with each battle, my eyes opened further. With each challenge, awareness and inner strength grew…. dare I say, “**virally**??” There were many lessons learned…. I learned how certain forms of tolerance expand. I learned how other forms become, well, intolerable. I learned to respect quality of life and I learned to focus on what really counted. Most of all, I learned that struggle begets wisdom…. Whether we like it or not. One of the most precious lessons I learned is how good God really is. I mean, we know he’s good on **good days**… (**Say that with emphasis and wait for the laugh**) …. Now I know he’s not just a “fair weather force.” I learned throughout my trials to take one step…. one day at a time and trust God.

We have all heard expressions…. “No person is an island….” “It takes a village….” I am part of all that I have met….” Each one of these sayings means so much more to me after the year I’ve gotten through. While there were many times I felt alone…. Rationally I knew no one could go through this for me, I knew I had my fellow “warriors…” feeding me strength through love and prayer. You are my reason to fight. I’m so grateful to my friends, and most of all, to my family…. To my three children, Lori, Chris, and Wardell Jr, I love you all very much and I thank you for all that you’ve done….. when I think of you and count my blessings, the good news is, I run out of **fingers**!!!! Too many to count!!!! …. and that includes my amazing grandchildren… **ELEVEN** of them…. I **TOLD** you I run out of fingers!!!! (**Wait for the laugh**). To Tajher, Nyla, Tre, Nyell, Lorel, Deuce, Destiny, Ayanna, Prince, King, Princess… **WOW**!!! Thank you for being the lights of my life…. And for lifting my spirits when you didn’t even realize the magic you create!!!

I want to give a very special thanks to my lifeline, my rock, my greatest cheerleader, my husband, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ , who is **ALWAYS** there for me, no matter what…. I bet when we took our vows \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ years ago, you didn’t really think I would hold you to the “in sickness and in health part!” Did you?!?! All these years later, I never doubted your love and devotion and I am so grateful you’ve been by my side through all of this. Thank you isn’t enough, but it’s a start. I love you!!!

And to all of my friends here, and those that are celebrating from other locations, please know that I honor each one of you every day, with clear eyes and a full heart. Thank you for sharing your strength when I really needed it. God Bless all of you. You’ve all made this gal feel pretty special. I love you all!!! Thank you!!