



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



December 17, 2015



LIZ QUIRIN

YEAR OF MERCY: Bishop Edward K. Braxton walks through the Holy Door Dec. 13 at St. Peter Cathedral in Belleville to open the Jubilee Year of Mercy. Doors in cathedrals and churches around the world have been opened to proclaim this a Holy Year of Mercy.

Good Decisions Can Be Made at Any Age

"Are you on cannabis?" asked the sandy-haired, uncomfortable-looking teen.



He was one of several hundred exhausted high school students waiting for final results at a debate tournament on a college campus. I was one of several dozen similarly exhausted judges.

I wasn't sure I heard him correctly. "Excuse me? Are you serious?"

"Yeah. Your eyes are really red," he trailed off, realizing that my patently unamused glare was the opposite of the acceptance he'd liked to have seen. My eyes were actually quite red, but that was entirely the fault of not being able to sleep in my uncomfortable hotel bed.

"Do you really think it's a good idea to ask a complete stranger about illegal drugs?" I asked him.

He looked a little pale, and then a little scared. "No."

I know that face. I'd seen it before – in my mirror. It was the face of someone who knows that they'd just made a very bad decision.

Everybody makes bad decisions. Some of mine were fairly innocuous, such as the time I went on a crazy roller coaster after downing five Butterbeers at a Harry Potter theme park. Some were potentially fatal, such as the time I decided to take a road trip after two all-nighters and ended up wrapping my Nissan around a tree.

Whoops.

Making decisions is an art that gets easier with time and experience. But good decisions are absolutely achievable at all ages.

For example, you can use the method of writing down a list of pluses and minuses when making a decision. Write down all of the positives and negatives

on either side of the paper. Be comprehensive, real and don't cheat. Seeing the whole picture laid out in front of you can help you choose the right path.

You can also do research, or ask adults who've already made good decision to help you. Want to be a doctor? Set up some time to follow around a local physician. Want to jump off that cliff into the river? Find out what's underneath the surface of the water first (your science teacher might know.)

Listen to your gut. If you're not sure you should get in the car and drive with a friend who's had a beer or two at a party, don't get in the car.

Don't make any big decisions while you're exhausted, angry or sad. Research shows that people make better decisions when their minds are rested and calm. Maybe the teen who asked whether I'd been smoking pot would have realized it was crazy to ask me that question if he, too, had gotten more sleep.

Don't kick yourself over and over for decisions gone bad. Tough situations and painful times often teach us more than happiness and bliss, and, properly processed, those learning experiences are some of the best you're going to get.

Finally, make the decision on your own. Don't fall victim to peer pressure. However great your friends are, they aren't you and they can't speak for what you want. Don't worry about what they think. Say no to crazy dares, to cigarettes and drugs, even if it might seem embarrassing.

I wonder if that's what happened to the teen at the tournament. When he left me, he walked back over to a group of giggling, laughing friends. Had it been a dare?

His question might not have been so funny, if I had been a campus cop. With a little practice, you'll make the right decision.

— Karen Osborne

(This column is part of the CNS columns package.)

The Empty Chair

When I was young, we used to file into my grandma's house through the side door on Christmas morning and



wait anxiously for the permission to enter the living room where what seemed like an enormous tree donned with silver tinsel stood tall above a sea of presents. I remember feeling giddy and impatient

as we waited for everyone to arrive so we could tear into those packages.

After just 10 minutes of opening presents where wrapping paper seemed to fly in all directions, all of the grandchildren would admire each other's toys, stone-washed jeans and board games while the adults helped my grandma finish up the holiday meal. Our family was too large to sit at one table, so most of the kids would retreat with their stacked plates to the back room, the men would head for the front living room with the TV blaring and my grandma, my mom and my aunts would sit at the kitchen table to eat, giggle and gossip.

I always wanted to sit at the coveted kitchen table, even as a child. My grandma would sit at the end, closest to the dessert counter filled with cherry, pumpkin and lemon meringue pies and my mom and aunts would surround the rest of the table while laughing hysterically and occasionally choking on bits of food in between giggles.

When the grandchildren, myself included, became mothers themselves, we earned a spot at the kitchen table, and joined the festivities with my grandma still at the head of the table. It wasn't a formal scene and there were no designated seats, but gram always seemed to nab that spot in front

of the desserts. I felt like part of the grown up clan as my sisters, cousins and aunts joined in the conversations that ranged from funny stories of the past to how my grandma could treat her corns.

As informal and unorthodox as these conversations may have been, they are what I look forward to every holiday. The conversations are still lively and downright inappropriate at times and the ladies still seem to migrate together. We all still say a prayer before we rush to the buffet of food and I inevitably drop something off my plate or wind up with a stain on the front of my shirt each year.

But, there is an empty chair. We aren't gathered around grandma's table anymore and her toothy grin isn't in sight anymore. It's been 15 years since she sold her house and 5 years since she passed in early December. The December we lost my grandma, we weren't sure if we could even celebrate Christmas with that looming empty chair.

We have moved the holiday celebrations to my aunt's house or my mom's to alleviate one family member from hosting each time as grandma always did. We no longer have a giant tree that covers presents for everyone, but we have each other. We have our own kids and grandkids running through the house. We have a TV set reserved for the football game and we have a table that eventually the ladies migrate to when the meal has ended.

And, without fail, not one holiday goes by without the mention of how grandma talked about her corns while sitting at the head of the table.

— Shannon Philpott

Shannon Philpott is a freelance writer and college journalism instructor, but most of all a mother of two teens. You can see her work at www.shannonphilpott.com.



OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE: The feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe i Dec. 12. Here young people bring flowers to Our Lady Dec. 11 before a liturgy at St. Joseph in Marion.

Fresh Take: a way to look at faith from a different perspective

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We want to give young adults something to "chew on," to think about when they're looking for something more than an on-line horoscope or the

latest star news.

This page offers columns we believe will interest our young adults. Let us know.

Email us at cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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