



And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.

1 Peter 5: 10

STRONG FIRM & STEADFAST

Bea's Story

***By the grace of God, I am who I am,
but by the grace of God I am what I
am, and his grace to me was not
without effect. No. I worked harder
than all of them—yet not I, but the
grace of God that was with me.***

1 Corinthians 15: 10

***For it is by grace you have been saved,
through faith—and this is not from
yourselves, it is the gift of God—NIV***

Ephesians 2:8



Comprehension of Grace

Were it not for God's grace, the spiritual journey we travel on the road home would be not only unimaginable, but impossible for each and everyone of us; a concept that few contemplate during the waking hours of their moments in time. Instead, the frenzy of daily living gets in the way, surrounding ones being with noisy chaos and disharmony; a situation created because of mere human decisions impeding one's own progress through failing to cease the hurried state we choose to exist in throughout our lives; all brought on by an effort to comply with endless schedules and checklists designed by our own pen.

Yet, when an unexpected happening rears its ugly face, or the aging of the body brings us to an abrupt halt, forcing us into a time of aloneness, the sound of our own heart's rhythm suddenly reverberates like that of an enormous beating drum; one that never ceases; a noisy cadence that loudly calls us into a time of reality when we view our journey through the lenses of powerful magnification; a process that forces us to recognize that life according to "self" is useless, hopeless, and fruitless; a state of being that prompts remarks such as, "Is this truly what life is all about? What's the real purpose of man's existence? How is it possible to make it through another day? Why is the spirit willing but the body weak?"

Consequently, when we once again try to figure out the answers on our own without arriving at possible conclusions, guilt and feelings of failure that root themselves deeply in our minds, soon send us down a pathway called "materialistic treats"; that being a process of filling the starving soul with "paying myself" vacations or fancy clothes and cars. Then, shortly after, when the giant empty void shows up again within sheer moments, a vicious pattern of "trying to make myself feel better" quickly is established.

As a result, later when in the process of dealing with the stark reality called, "disease of the soul", the question, "Am I the only one feeling this lost and hopeless", erupts from our trembling lips.

Folks, please know the question just asked is as old as time; meaning each one of us has lessons to learn and difficulty understanding the purpose of life, all because we cannot let go of the wheel that is gripped so tightly by our own human hands. Thus, the result is that of a starving soul that only God can nourish.

Furthermore, when we search Scripture for people that shared the same dilemma as just described, we soon learn that, not only are we in good company, but each one lived a different story on their road home. Remember Peter, who denied knowing Jesus three times, Thomas, who needed proof that Jesus had risen, David, that morally allowed his values to drastically slip when it came to women, Joseph, who bragged to his brothers about the coat of many colors given to him by his father, Abraham, that pawned his wife off as being his sister? Oh, yes! Human beings that allowed self-gratification to get in the way of God's plan for their lives are scattered throughout the pages of Holy Script. Yet, in the end, they repented and allowed their Father to provide nourishment for their soul; a need brought on by their own self will; a part

of the human body that has an extremely limited scope. Instead of allowing God to nourish their soul, they had reversed the process; thus, grasping hopelessly at the wind.

Ladies and gentlemen, the bottom line for all of us is to realize without God's wonderful grace, we are all lost and without direction in our lives. On the other hand, simply recognizing each of us will have a different, unique story that we live on the road home, allows not only our own to unfold as it should but that of others as well. It will prompt each of us to accept the fact that we all arrive at our final destination from different directions and rates of speed.

Above all, internalizing the reality that the path to our destination is filled with hardship, rocky terrain, deep valleys, and high mountains should motivate each of us to grasp the hands of our fellowmen withholding judgement and offering encouragement, instead.

Thus, as you read the words that follow about a saint named Bea who is now at home with Jesus, you will receive inspiration from the fact that, although suffering from the same sinful nature which we all deal with every moment of our existence, her love for the Savior always served as an example of how to navigate the stormy waters of life. Although Bea's handsome physical appearance dictated the career path she would choose, and overtime, aged just like that of all her fellow residents, it was the special place that Jesus filled in her soul that helped her face the darkest of hours with an assurance that never waned; a decision that allowed her inner being to be nourished by her Creator, along with a faith that remained strong, firm, and steadfast until her last breath of earthly air.

Having now completed this introduction, dear readers, you are invited to read Bea's Story and allow yourself to, not only enjoy her one-of-a-kind personality, like that of no person you have ever met, but simultaneously discover your mind being transported into a world filled with laughter, sass, tenacity, and plain old southern grit; the stuff that formed the personage of a lady who possessed an aura that literally filled every room she entered; an individual labeled by residents and caretakers, alike, as having left in her wake, an enormous void that has yet to be occupied; all this occurring while leaning on a cane she affectionally named, "Mabel."



"Mabel"

Bea's Story

Anyone that arrived at Glendale Gardens Nursing Home would always depart wearing a smile prompted by the memory of having met a special resident named Bea; a lady that drew almost everyone's attention due to a quick wit that acted as a tonic to not only staff, but to her fellow residents, as well. Never missing a beat, her dancing blue eyes signaled to all present that she was fully aware of each and everyone that entered her sphere; thus, to such a degree that all staff members breezing into her room, did so at their own risk; meaning more than likely they were going to be the recipient of a "prank by Bea"; a situation that prompted them to cautiously enter her presence with rotating eyeballs.

As a result, sounds of laughter would loudly spill out into the hallway, accompanied by a soft southern accent; a combination that served as a camouflage as to what was about to unfold. After all, given that smooth southern drawl, only syrup coated charm would be the result. Right? No way! Just the opposite was true. Stay tuned and find out.

A Life Well Lived

Certainly, if you believe that a personality described by others being "as big as life itself", must be the result of a firm foundation built during childhood, you are on the right track as it applied to Bea.

Martha Bea, known to the residents and staff simply as "Bea", was born in Clarksdale, Mississippi among people who knew what enjoying the important things of life was all about. Her smile immensely broadened when telling about living on a farm with her loving parents and only brother, Douglas, in a three-bedroom home that was simple, yet comfortable. Flowers were planted in a beautiful array of colors all over the yard that provided fragrant bouquets for the family members' enjoyment. The space was bordered all around with large fields of cotton; a crop that provided a living for members of the community.

Her father worked long hours as a cotton gin manager, while her mother ran the household; along with the care of an enormous garden. People from the community were hired to till the garden in preparation for growing an array of vegetables; such as tomatoes, squash, carrots, peppers, potatoes, and an abundance of BLACK-EYED PEAS. Bea recalled with great drama how she assisted her mother in canning 500 quarts of vegetables in one season from their garden; a big job indeed! However, she was allowed ample time to enjoy playing with her paper dolls. Then, on Sunday, Bea's mother escorted the children to the local Baptist Church which built a strong faith that remained firm throughout her life.

Since Bea's mother had the reputation as an outstanding cook, Bea was expected to follow suit. After all, southern girls were supposed to acquire this skill at a very early age. Although Bea received ample instruction from her mother on how to prepare recipes, she never reached the same level of enthusiasm for concocting culinary dishes. In fact, she wrinkled her nose and stated, "I always hated to cook!"

Bea's face was known to light up when she recalled traveling to her grandparent's home for holidays and special occasions. There was nothing like the bonds that were formed during this time in her life. The family would gather around the table that was loaded with an assortment of favorite southern dishes, such as ham, black-eyed peas, cornbread, and delicious cakes and pies.

Bea and her brother, Douglas, attended grades 1-8 in a school that was located only three miles from their home. They would then complete their education traveling to the high school for grades 9-12. Bea recalls wearing beautiful clothes made by her mother, who was a wonderful seamstress. Due to her mother's talent, no one ever suspected they were handmade. She was very proud to wear the gorgeous gowns her mother sewed for the school dances; an activity that Bea dearly loved. Oh, how she cherished attending dances!

Unfortunately, when Bea was only 15, the unexpected death of her father brought on a great amount of grief to the family. It also caused the sad little family of three to move into town so her mother could take on the responsibility of making a living. Due to her mother's reputation for her delicious culinary creations, she was hired immediately as a manager at the local country club where she received enormous accolades from the members.

Bea furthered her education by attending Old Miss for two years where she was appreciated for her charming personality and good looks. In fact, she was recognized for her southern beauty, not only by her classmates, but by the judges in the Mississippi pageant. As a result, Martha Bea received the great honor of Miss Mississippi, an outstanding achievement for a young girl. However, when she told you about the honor, she would make light of it and say that all it required was to stomp around in a pretty gown her mother made for the big occasion. She described the gown as being made of heavy cotton lace with a long waist, accompanied by a flared hooped skirt. A matching long stole set the creation off to perfection. After winning the pageant, Bea was required to travel to different cities making appearances on behalf of the state of Mississippi.

As an additional benefit of being blessed with grace, looks and southern charm, Bea caught the eye of clothing manufacturers and was invited to model an array of garments throughout the country; especially New York. Casual attire was the type of clothing she loved to model the most.

However, in just a short while, Bea's desire to travel to different places all over the country drew her attention toward becoming a flight attendant; a wish that required a change in career. As a result, she accepted a position as a flight attendant with American Airlines and flew all over the country. Even as a flight attendant, she was noticed by a skin care company and was hired to be a model for their line.

Consequently, it was while she was charming the travelers on one of the flights that she caught the eye of her future husband, Thomas; an engineer who was required to move frequently from one location to another. He was so smitten by the blond beauty with the sparkling blue

eyes that he found himself arranging his schedule to coordinate with Bea's itinerary, which soon prompted wedding bells to ring.

Two children, Tommy and Bea Bea, were born to this union which caused Bea to become a mother and housewife. Since her husband was transferred often, Bea and the two children were required to adjust constantly. Frequently, Bea would proudly tell you the names of her children and grandchildren; her life's greatest achievement. Above all, she wanted them to be good Christians and show kindness and manners to all God's creation.

Later in life, Bea lived in California where she became a real estate agent; selling exclusive properties. When dealing with this type of real estate, your sales are less in number because of a narrow customer base, but much higher in dollars. She recalled this career as very rewarding. However, the Springfield, Missouri area called her because of a desire to be closer to her son, Tommy.

Then, as time passed, health issues made it necessary for Bea to enter a nursing home where assistance could be offered for her daily living. Thus, it was at this time that her cane named "Mabel" entered the picture.



Although most residents needed canes or a walker to assure easy mobility, none of them would even come close to the one Bea used; meaning the character named Mabel attached to the handle literally made folks think she had a life of her own.

Folks, given the fact that Bea used it to keep ill-mannered people in line, perhaps the only thing missing was the ability for the facial expression to take on a menacing appearance when needed.

Given the fact that Bea literally detested a demonstration of improper etiquette from anyone, no matter the age, Mabel was used frequently to rein in individuals outside the boundary line of "polite society according to Bea's rule book." In fact, the one thing that would make her southern charm turn from syrupy sweetness into lemon juice was someone acting out. Not hesitating to set the individual straight, her behavior would border on rudeness. She would loudly proclaim, "Did their mama not teach them any better? Obviously not, so I will!"

Therefore, using Mabel as her disciplinary rod, she was known to actually poke even the men in the arm or back when disgusted with their actions. One resident in particular was the frequent target of Mabel's wrath due to the fact that his desire to show off a bit collided strongly with Bea's mama's teaching. Added to his list of improprieties was when he chose to act out in front of others by demonstrating his dancing ability; a poor choice on his part; especially given the fact that his awkward feet simply lacked agility. Thus, to Bea, having the reputation of being a graceful dancer, allowed his movements to absolutely send her into orbit; so much that Mabel actually took on a voice of her own in addition to taps on the shoulder. Yet, when all was said and done, this gentleman in question cried like a baby at Bea's passing;

behavior that caused some residents to wonder if he viewed her heart in a different manner, while at the same time extending to her the gift of grace.

Also, given the fact that Bea dined at a four top with three other male residents, it was soon discovered by the staff that no nonsense occurred from any of them. As long as the three fellows were in “Queen Bea’s” presence, proper etiquette was going to be followed. Otherwise, a conversation transpired that was laced with a southern accent, but far from sweet and kind. With Mabel resting on the arm of Bea’s chair, perhaps the culprit/s in question knew better than to cross the line. Instead, they would carry on conversations in a civilized manner, and actually enjoy one another’s company.

Another occasion that occurred on Bea’s birthday demonstrated to all present the depth of love she had in her heart for little children. Unbeknownst to her, a special luncheon celebration was planned that would hit her hot button of adoration for the younger generation.

Thus, having been privy to the fact that her special day would be celebrated; she was given the ability to plan her guest list along with the menu as follows:

fried chicken, mashed potatoes, gravy, green beans, rolls, iced tea, and cake. As a favor for attendees, a large Georgia peach served as a touch of southern charm. However, the biggest surprise that occurred was just prior to the cutting of the cake when a young man named Preston walked in dressed as “The Cat in The Hat.” Not only did he sing the birthday song to high heaven but also read the story that matched his attire to the group; an act that prompted Bea to not only supply him with kisses but extend an invitation to partake of the full menu. Accepting her offer, he proceeded to gobble down the delicious fare as Bea sat with her arm around him. Since his enjoyment of the food took precedent over acceptable table manners, “Queen Bea” let it pass, at least this time.

Another activity that demonstrated the competitive spirit that Bea possessed was when she enjoyed the game of Bocce ball during a social time with the other residents. Not only did she have a desire to win, but wore a disgusted expression that was obvious to all present causing them to remain silent when she missed the mark. View the two photos below for evidence of this fact.



Bea being coached before throwing Bocce ball.



Look at Bea's expression! She did not like her performance.

Over time, as the seasons arrived and departed, allowing Bea to make acquaintance after acquaintance, it seemed to be a rhythm that would last forever. It was unimaginable to picture life at Glendale Gardens without Martha Bea; lovingly known as Bea. Trying to visualize the tall southern lady that leaned on "Mabel" for support as she gracefully placed one foot in front of the other, properly walking as she was taught during her career as a model, being absent was not even a thought for those that held her in such high regard. Yet, time marches on for all of God's children. As Scripture states, *"To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build..." (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-3)*

Consequently, one Easter just as the writer's family had finished dinner, a loud, frantic knock sounded at the front door; a gesture that harshly signaled someone was in dire need. Quickly responding, the writer found herself peering into the troubled eyes of Bea's grandson who delivered the news that she had collapsed at the dining room table. Since her son was the writer's next-door neighbor, it appeared that God had begun the orchestration of her final approach to heaven. Having established a close relationship with Bea over the years, it seemed only fitting that the first step of her final journey would be launched in this manner.

Thus, spotting Bea lying on the floor in obvious pain, the writer sat down and placed her sweet friend's head on her lap and spoke soothing words in her ear. Given her visual expression, it was obvious that she identified the familiar voice, and somehow received a bit of comfort. Then, in just a matter of minutes, the writer and Bea's son, Tommy, drove together to the hospital; a situation that was to be the beginning of the end for this dear saint; an unfortunate happening that prompted a gathering of family members to proclaim final words of love.

Thus, after many tests and examinations, attending physicians made the determination the best place for Bea to spend her final moments should be among all those that so dearly loved this special lady; meaning the nursing home; a development that caused news to spread like wildfire that she had returned; an action that drew both staff and residents from all over the facility to her bedside.

In fact, the behavior of a staff member that had grown to deeply love Bea, has been forever imprinted on the writer's brain; all due to the humble way she offered comfort just shortly before Bea's departure. Even though she had little children of her own to care for at home, she still put forth the effort of setting her alarm an hour earlier than usual for the purpose of spending time with her dear friend before clocking in. Possessing the premonition that Bea's time was almost finished on this earth, she stretched out beside her friend and gently held her in an embrace for an hour; a behavior that still causes the writer's eyes to mist over. Folks, are you clearly getting the image of this caring person's arms that held a departing saint as belonging to Christ? She had heard the voice of the Spirit and followed in kind. *"The King will reply, Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."* (Matthew 25: 40) Sound familiar?

Additionally, the same evening, after having concluded an extremely busy day, and anticipating how wonderful a restful night of sleep would feel, the writer was also drawn into the situation. Although prepared to greet the evening shadows and retire, God had other ideas in mind. As a result, just as the writer was ready to turn the lights out, instructions were delivered through her mind as clearly as if being face to face with another person saying, "Go! Go, now! Bea will not be here tomorrow!"

Ladies and gentlemen, given the dramatic manner in which this message was delivered, it prompted the writer to go into immediate action. Quickly dressing, she drove resolutely toward the nursing home, all the while whispering a prayer for her dear friend. Having been a volunteer with the elderly for a long while, it is easy to reason that, in cases such as this, time is of the essence. As Samuel demonstrated in Scripture how to respond after hearing a voice in the night with the words, *"Speak, your servant is listening;"* so should we all.

Therefore, after arriving at Bea's bedside, it was obvious that her time on earth was quickly drawing to a close. Although her eyes were shut, when she heard the writer singing "Amazing Grace", she responded with, "That is so pretty." Spending time with this departing saint was pure joy due to the fact that her desire was to be forever with Jesus. Since the celestial shores of heaven were in her sight, leaving her side was joy unspeakable and full of glory.

Finally, as the clock beside her bed continued to tick the moments away, her daughter released her by calmly announcing it was time for her to depart, and all would be well. Then, having completed the path God had set before her, Bea was held sweetly in the arms of her dear Savior on the rest of the road home. The angels were singing and saints rejoicing as a child of God entered into her eternal home. The Great Promise Keeper had never failed to be there for his

child; a home-grown country girl that hailed from Clarksdale, Mississippi and touched lives everywhere she traveled; all because she delivered the message of Christ with southern charm, laced with grit and sass. Without doubt, the belief that one day her Father would say, "Son, go bring my children home", kept her footing strong, firm, and steadfast.



Since friends that believe in
Jesus never have to say
goodbye, we will see you later,
dear one.