

PARENTING

Birthday helps to show each day is a 'glorious gift'

With dread and trepidation I put on my new pair of reading glasses and faced my family spectated for the first time.

"Oh Mom, you look so young with those on," said my son, Bobby.

"They look excellent," piped in my daughter, Teresa. I made a note to remember their kind remarks when I dished out the ice cream later that evening.

All my family members had been heard from except my husband, Joe, who is usually more than generous in his compliments.

"I'm reserving comment for now," Joe said.

Not the response I was looking for. I listened to a snippy, "Oh you just wait til you think that all medicine labels were written for mice rather than people," coming out of my mouth.

I realized that the conversation had once again returned to an ongoing theme of this summer — getting older. This is the summer I turned 40, and, as the countdown began, I heard more than my share of unsolicited comments about how it's all downhill from here. I'm not crazy about the need for the glasses I now require, but I haven't experienced the panic, the depression and the aches that I'm told I should feel upon entering my fourth decade. Instead, I've had some wonderful opportunities this summer to spend time with lifelong friends and family members and to be thankful for the countless ways they have touched my life.

Earlier this summer, my four college roommates and I gathered overnight for the first time in a few years. The way the jokes were flying, we could have easily been sitting around our dorm room in Boston rather than a Long Island restaurant — except for the topics of conversation.

"Do you realize we've all known each other for more than half our lives? I've got to



family matters

BY EILEEN MARX

get back early tomorrow. It's William's birthday and I can't believe I'm the mother of an 11-year-old."

"One glass of wine is my limit now."

"No; I didn't decide to train for the New York City Marathon because I'm having trouble accepting the fact that I'm turning 40."

"I haven't had any health problems whatsoever, although my knees get a little stiff if I sit for too long, and sometimes I get this pain in my back..."

"Is it premature to give you a copy of *Menopause and Madness*?"

"Can we please have just one conversation tonight that doesn't come back to doctors, aging, death or the length of time we've lived on this earth!"

The following weekend I was able to visit with two of my closest high school friends. Teri, her husband and two children had spent a year in Indonesia — before the recent troubles began. They had fascinating stories to tell about living through the overthrow of the Indonesian government. Erin had her own fascinating stories to tell of what it was like to be a first time mother at 39.

As we sat in Teri's family back yard watching our children play, we became acutely aware of the passing of time. It seemed like just yesterday we were dressed in green plaid skirts lamenting how we had

the earliest curfews in our freshman class. How deep and strong our friendship has grown through the years.

It was easy to face 40 as my husband and my good friend, Janet, arranged for a surprise birthday weekend filled with family and friends. It was such a warm and loving reminder of what matters most with each passing year: the loving presence of family and friends, good health, a deepening faith and a growing awareness of self and others. As I looked at a wonderful photo collage that my mother had made for me, I wondered how the baby in the high chair clutching a blanket with her chubby fists could possibly be turning 40.

This has been a summer when I took special notice of what our culture tells us we're entitled to as we grow older — a luxury car, a wrinkle-free complexion, a diamond necklace and a lifestyle free from the worries of the rest of the world. There's nothing wrong in wanting to live long and well here on earth, but to focus on the superficial rather than the spiritual is to miss why God has blessed us with this extraordinary gift of life.

The knowledge that my friends and I have of life at 40 has come from times of great joy and great pain. For me, the realization of how precious life is and how easily it could be taken away came two weeks before my 21st birthday when I was the victim of a violent crime in Boston. It was much more difficult turning 21 that summer than it was turning 40 a few weeks ago. Every birthday since then I have felt blessed to welcome each new year. Joe has been with me on each of those birthdays and with each passing year he has helped me to see that love and faith are stronger than hate and fear.

Through my friends' life experiences, they too have tried to find meaning in what our time on this earth is ultimately all about.

I listened to one of my friends tell me that she would give up everything she has to spend one more day with her mother who died two years ago. Another friend's father died seven years ago and she wondered if she would ever be completely happy again. One of my roommates told me about her beloved 19-year-old cousin who died in a tragic car accident this spring. Through our tears she told me how her cousin had touched the lives of so many young people in her life. A college friend who has been cancer free for five years, spoke of the renewed fear she faced after a recent doctor's visit. A friend spoke of the pain of suffering a miscarriage a few months ago and another was filled with the joy of becoming a first time mom. A dear friend spoke of her gradual acceptance of the thought that she may never marry and another friend cried at the thought of never having a child.

As I continue to grow older — reading glasses and all — my prayer is "Lord, that I may see." I pray that I will never lose sight of the responsibility I have to reach out to my family, friends, neighbors and others in need of my help. May I see the need to offer not simply an outstretched hand but a compassionate heart to those in pain. I pray that I will never become blind to the role each of us has in building up the kingdom of God in our own lives and in the life of others. Please help me to see the big picture rather than becoming short sighted with trivial misunderstandings and disagreements. Let me see clearly that each day I am given is a great and glorious gift from God. May I never take it for granted. I pray that I will always see that the love of God, family, friends and my brothers and sisters in Christ is what I need most with each passing year.

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Marx lives with her husband and two children in Lawrenceville, N.J.



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Mike Mergers/Photo Intern

Wild wings

Children at Irondequoit Public Library were treated to "Birds of Prey" by Wild Wings Inc. of Hilton on July 19. Brian Mongi describes the claw of the turkey vulture being held by Cathy Spahn. Wild Wings adopts birds that have been injured to educate children and adults.

Events

☉ **FRI, SEPT. 17 — Book PJ Party:** hear *Tacky the Penguin* by Helen Lester; 7 p.m.; free; Barnes & Noble Booksellers, 3349 Monroe Avenue, Pittsford; 716/586-6113.

☉ **SAT, SEPT. 18 — Fall wildflowers:** explore field for fall flower finery; 9:30-11:30 a.m.; Mendon Ponds Park Nature Center, 3914 Clover St., Honeoye Falls; \$2 per individual, \$6 per family; 716/334-3780.

☉ **SAT, SEPT. 18 — Fall Harvest Fest:** create vegetable creatures, build bird feeders and more; 10 a.m.-1 p.m.; free; Children's Garden, Sonnenberg Gardens, 151 Charlotte St., Canandaigua; 716/394-4922.

☉ **SUN, SEPT. 19 — Mushroom Festival:** mushroom walk, tasting; noon-4 p.m.; Cumming Nature Center, Gulick Road, South Bristol; \$1.50 for students K-12, free for preschoolers, \$3 for senior citizens 62 and older, \$4 for adults; 716/374-6160.

☉ **SUN, SEPT. 19 — Christopher Bear's Parade:** parade starts at 2 p.m., followed by Gary the Happy Pirate at 3; to mark National Childhood Awareness Month; Seneca Park Zoo, 2222 St. Paul Blvd, Rochester; \$2 for 4-11, \$4 for 12-59; \$3 for 60 and older, 3 and under free; 716/467-9453, or 716/473-0180.