

## BRANSON MEMOIRS 2010

This year, I thought I'd have to skip Branson. Since this is the 12<sup>th</sup> Reunion, and since I believe I've only missed 2 others, I was a little bit disappointed. Judy Eades urged me to go and offered to give me a ride down with her and Don. So I decided to go. Then Don damaged his knee and they wouldn't go after all. But Don's knee got better more quickly than was expected, so they decided to go after all. Then he fell again, and was not able to drive, so the trip was off. At this point, Phil Vrana gave me a call and offered to take me to Branson. Wonderful! And to make it even better, Karen and John Dulaney decided to take Don and Judy down. We all got to go.

I had my grandson Dillon give me a ride as far as the Lake Manawa exit on I-80, where we met Jean and Phil. Dillon helped get my stuff into their van and off we went. We arrived in Branson about 3 or 3:30 that afternoon. We could have gone to Lambert's, as many did, but we decided to take a pass this time. Instead, we visited with other members who had decided against Lambert's and eventually Phil went after pizza. That was really good.

There had been some dissension in the group, so quite a few of us were apprehensive about how this Reunion would go. We needn't have worried. The administrative board had everything well in hand. Everything went like clockwork.

Since our group was smaller than normal, the use of the Knights of the Round Table room was perfectly adequate as our hospitality room. Our usual room, Stonehenge, was used by the hotel for a full breakfast, complimentary with our rooms, and also provided a morning entertainer. We heard music and song while we ate our breakfasts, the singer being paid through tips left in tip jars on each table.

Friday was registration, which went more smoothly than it ever has for some reason. This is unusual for us. Generally speaking, the registration is supposed to start at 9 am and usually begins in actual fact by 1 pm or even later. This year we apparently were more organized.

On Friday afternoon, Jann Hartman gave a workshop on nutrition. She's a nutritionist and a good speaker. It was fun and informative. As a result of Jann's talk, I am even considering seeing if I can use tofu mixed with cinnamon as a cream cheese substitute on my morning bagel. I think this is going to take a bit of experimentation on my part, but I think it might give me a bit more protein and a bit less fat to start my day. We'll see.

Saturday was The Biggie. On Saturday night, we traditionally have a themed dinner. This year's theme was "Circle the Wheelchairs" Wild Wild West. Everyone went all out for this. I cannot believe the time and effort that went into our decorations! Each table had a centerpiece of a cowboy or cowgirl cutout, with bandanna print napkins and paper plates. The table favors were white plastic cowboy boots filled with goodies and tucked into bandanna print trimmed clear plastic bags. Mary Holbert had made plastic canvas napkin holders for each table, all done in shades of brown with the silhouette of a bronc rider on each one. They were so neat! The food was delicious. Chicken with barbecue seasoning, scalloped potatoes, mac and cheese, mashed potatoes and gravy, salad, and for dessert cake.

Linda DeRyke persuaded the man who puts on the Hank Williams Jr. Show at the Imax to perform for our group on Saturday night. He was very good and even gave out free tickets to the full show for those of us who wanted them and had some CDs that he sold via a free will offering. A very gracious man, I thought. Thanks so much, Linda, for getting him!

After dinner, the Bransoneers performed their usual silly skit. It was wonderful, as we knew it would be. Don "Big Kahuna" Eades had transformed his walker into a stage coach by duct taping a child's hobby horse to each of the front legs. All the guys were wearing masks and riding hobby horses. Well, all but Paul Genereau, who rode a wild flamingo. Paul was the Sheriff and pulled his orange plastic gun out of his gun belt for a bit of impromptu gunplay, complete with gun twirling, often during their parade around the room. The song Ghost Riders played during the performance. At the end, a bunch of us in power chairs and scooters began to follow them, forming a rather un-Conga-like Conga line. Of course, we were all in hysterics as is the custom.

After dinner, and after those of us who had brought gifts for the gift exchange had picked up our gifts, we went back into the hospitality room and had our raffle. That was so much fun that we are going to do it again next year. The sale of the raffle tickets brought in \$100 for our fund. After assuring everyone that I never win anything, I ended up winning four of the prizes!

On Sunday morning, we held our business meeting. We were handed survey sheets so that our input could make next year's Branson Bash even better. Personally, I don't think you can improve perfection. We have yet to decide next year's theme. Pirates was suggested as was Clowns.

On Sunday afternoon, Gary Presley, author of Seven Wheelchairs, spoke to our group on how he came to write the book and some of the problems and solutions he found as he wrote it. He also had some copies of his book on hand for sale. As a writer myself, I found it quite interesting.

We had good food the entire time. Lasagna, cold cuts, crudites, salads, cookies, cookies, and more cookies. Cobbler. All the soft drinks and coffee and bottled water you could ask for. We learned how to chop Romaine lettuce to get salad greens as well as leaves of lettuce for sandwiches. Linda De Ryke also taught us how to core the lettuce and told us it would keep longer once you removed the core.

Monday morning, we got ready to leave. GG had lent me her power chair for the duration and I was so grateful. The hotel is lovely, but I could not have managed all the walking, had I not had GG's chair to get me around. Toni also handed on a wheelchair that was given to her. It took a bit of duct tape to keep the arm where it belonged till the bolts could be reinserted after tapping new threads. I have to thank the guys who worked on that for me. And a huge, enormous thank you to Don and Judy Eades and Karen and John Dulaney for hauling this chair back for me on their trailer. They will deliver it to me when they get time. Which means I get to see them all again and don't have to wait clear till next June!

We met Nitize, Sheri and our nephew Zach at Cracker Barrel in Council Bluffs for an early supper before the Vranas left for Hastings, Nebraska and the rest of us headed home to Denison, Iowa. I

hated to part with the Vranas, we'd had such a good time on the trip, but we were all tired and I'm sure we were all longing for our own beds. I know I was!

I simply cannot thank enough the administrative board and everyone who worked so hard to make this year's Reunion such a wonderful time. It was the best, just the best. Nothing lifts my spirits and makes my heart sing like seeing all my Branson buds every year. It's a lot of work to keep it all running smoothly, but we are so grateful to those who oil those wheels.

This year, especially, I felt very blessed. It had been somewhat of a hard year for me, with lots of changes in my life. I needed, and I received, the healing support that I've always gotten from this wonderful group of friends.

See you next year!!