



Sunflower Seeds

Celebrating Everyday Spirituality



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Relatives: Those People You Don't Get to Choose

by MELANNIE SVOBODA SND on MAY 27, 2013.

Last week I attended my niece's graduation at Colorado State University. Melannie (yes, she was named after me) received her PhD in ecology. I flew out there with my sister (Mary Ann), a niece (Lori), a nephew (John), and a grandnephew (Aaron) to celebrate this wonderful achievement.

For four full days I hung out with six relatives—including Melannie's husband, Mike. We ate together, rode in a mini-van together, attended the graduation ceremony together, partied together, slept in close quarters together, shared two bathrooms together, and spent all day Saturday in Rocky Mountain National Park together. Living for four days in such close proximity with six relatives (from three generations!) caused me to reflect on relatives in general.

I thought: we don't get to choose our relatives. We don't get to pick our parents, for example. They were given to us. And our parents didn't get to pick us either. We were given to them. When a couple has a child of their own, they are really welcoming a little "stranger" into their midst just as surely as when a couple adopts a child. There are no guarantees what kind of a child parents will end up with. Amazingly, most parents end up cherishing whomever they get.

We don't get to choose our other relatives either like our grandparents, siblings, in-laws, grandchildren, cousins, aunts and uncles. The only relative we get to choose is our spouse. We get to choose our friends too, but not our relatives. You can almost say, relatives are the people you're stuck with!

The truth is, though, many aspects of life we're "stuck with." We are born with certain physical traits—for better or for worse. The circumstances of our personal history are largely givens: the country we happen to be born in, the education we do or do not

About Sister Melannie Svoboda, SND

Sister of Notre Dame,
teacher, student, author,
speaker, listener, friend,
poet, farm girl.



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About Sunflower Seeds

Each Monday I'll post a short reflection, a simple musing on some aspect of spirituality—the everyday kind of spirituality that



includes things like walking in the park, slicing an onion for the casserole, caring for a child, studying for an exam, reading a line from scripture, laughing at a joke, or mourning a significant loss.

Along the way I welcome your questions, comments and insights too. After all, we're all in this life—this spiritual life—together!

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receive, the people we happen to meet, the opportunities we were given or denied, the religion we were handed down or were not handed down. It seems to me that the main choice we have in life is this: *what we choose to do with all the things we didn't choose.*

Our culture tells us that we can be whatever we want to be. It glorifies freedom of choice. Yet we all must work within our givens. Though these givens can seem to impede our choices at times, they also can direct or channel our choices. Scott Hamilton, the Olympic figure skater, was too small to participate in most sports, so he chose to become an ice-skater instead and went on to entertain and inspire millions of people.

Back to our relatives. None of us has the perfect family. By accepting our relatives—with their gifts, quirks, and even shortcomings—we learn to accept other imperfect but lovable people in our life. And by investing time and attention on our family members, we can be enriched in ways we never imagined: We can be doted on by a grandparent, encouraged by a parent, supported by a sibling, entertained by a grandchild, befriended by a cousin, and edified by a beautiful niece who gets her PhD in ecology in Colorado!

The “serenity prayer,” written by Reinhold Niebuhr and often used by members of Alcoholics Anonymous, says it well: “God grant me the serenity to accept those things I cannot change (like my relatives!), the courage to change those things I can change, and the wisdom to know the difference.”



Picnicking in Estes Park with six people I didn't choose but whom I'm blessed to call my relatives: Lori, Aaron, Mike, Mary Ann, Melannie, and John.

Have any of your relatives been a blessing for you?

What are some other “givens” in your life that have channeled your choices?

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Kathleen Magiera May 27, 2013 at 5:21 am



Sister Melannie,

My mother has been such a blessing in my life. We are very much alike in many ways and that caused friction in my younger days but now that has brought us closer together. My mother is constantly praying for me and is the one I often turn to for guidance. She is a model for me each day.

Kathleen

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND May 29, 2013 at 9:16 am



Dear Kathleen, It sounds as if you've got a really good Mom! Many of us struggle with our mothers when we're young. But if we can "hang on" during those difficult years, often we are blessed with a relationship that only gets richer and deeper! It was nice hearing from you, Kathleen! Sr. Melannie

REPLY

Bridget Holy May 27, 2013 at 8:12 am



Another Excellent Read Sister!!! I do have a Few Relatives I love being with, and a few well.....!

This Monday's Sunflower Seeds Really opened my eyes. Our Son and Daughter in law are giving us the Wonderful Miracle of our First Grandchild in December, this

part of your Sunflower Seeds is so very true, but being so happy myself, it really jumped out at me.

Thank you Sister I will Share this with many of my friends and a "few Relatives;)"

B

p.s. I am pleased you enjoyed your days with your realitives.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND May 29, 2013 at 9:18 am



Dear Bridget, Congratulations on the anticipation of your first grandchild in December! What a joy that will be! And thank you for your encouraging words about my blog. I appreciate them! Sr. Melannie

REPLY

Mary Schneider May 27, 2013 at 10:29 am



Sr. Melannie:

I love all of those whom I could not choose, and nearly all of the ones I chose myself. I freely admit that God did a much better job of choosing for me.

Thanks for another inspiring article!

Mary S

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND May 29, 2013 at 9:13 am



Dear Mary, Yes God seems to be good at choosing-and good at accepting things and people! Thank you for your response! Sr. Melannie

REPLY

Byron Kuxhaus May 28, 2013 at 4:47 pm



Interesting that I received this after visiting a gravely ill uncle on Sunday 5-26-13 not far from the SND complex east of Cleveland, Ohio. What a gift that we were able to converse, reminisce, laugh and even cry a little.

The best choices are often the ones made for us by God.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND May 29, 2013 at 9:11 am



Dear Byron, I couldn't agree with you more that "The best choices are often the ones made for us by God." Thanks for putting it so succinctly!
Melannie

REPLY

Kathy, SSj May 29, 2013 at 5:42 am



Thanks Melannie, I have 7 sisters and 5 brothers, lots of nieces, nephews, and grand nieces and nephews. I have been a Sister of St. Joseph for 36 years. My siblings claim my religious Sisters as their Sisters. As you wrote, I did not choose any of them but rather God chose them for me. Each sibling and Sister has added such variety to the fabric of my life. I feel as blessed as Joseph with his multi-color coat.

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND May 29, 2013 at 9:10 am



Dear Kathy, What a large family you have—both your blood relatives and your religious Sisters! I love your image of Joseph and his multi-colored coat! Thank you for writing! Melannie

REPLY

Kathy Hassink June 2, 2013 at 11:34 pm



Dear cousin - I have always considered my greatest blessing on earth is my family! I had wonderful parents, terrific siblings, fantastic aunts and uncles, cherished cousins and three children that I can't compare!!! Thanks to God that He put all of you in my life - I wouldn't trade my relatives for any thing or any one!!!

REPLY

Melannie Svoboda SND June 3, 2013 at 9:31 pm



Dear Cousin Kathy, Thank you for your wise words. We both are lucky to be a part of our large family! Cousin Dolly

REPLY

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