

Gerald: I had an Orange Socks interview with a woman I'll call Blanche. Blanche wanted to tell her story, but she did not want to run the risk of being recognized because of family complications. Blanche was in her mid-70s. Her husband died a few years previously. Blanche is the grandmother of a boy I'll call Bobby who came to live with her when he was six years old. Blanche's story is important because many grandparents have to raise a grandchild with a disability because of death of the child's parents or through court action, which was the case with Blanche. Blanche knew Bobby had problems as she initially watched from afar, but when he came to live with her, she realized the extent of his disability. It took several years for them to figure out Bobby was on the autism spectrum. He bounced around various schools because of challenging behaviors, and he was difficult to manage at home. His diagnosis was a process, but there were clues along the way, like he would flee anxiety-producing situations and hide in closets. Ironically, it wasn't until fairly recently that a definitive diagnosis was made, and Bobby is in his mid-20s. Blanche found the diagnosis a relief because it provided a measure of understanding. She could read about people on the autism spectrum, and the diagnosis provided a frame of reference for his behaviors. When asked about the joys of raising Bobby, she paused and said there weren't many. There were many behavioral challenges and family struggles. Blanche did say Bobby was improving and that he was more content. In fact, Bobby now lives alone in his own apartment. Blanche said something that I found very profound. She said, "You can't just let your grandchildren go; you have to do something." The joys, if you will, of having Bobby in her life were the changes in her. Blanche learned she was stronger than she thought. She felt she had been blessed with better health, as she had to rise to the occasion. Interestingly, even with the challenges in the years of raising Bobby and still having to be involved in his life, she said she would do it again. I appreciated my time with Blanche. It was an honor to learn of her experiences as a grandmother rising to the challenge of raising a child with a disability. She is a great example of someone who couldn't just let her grandson go.