



## **Josie Gockenbach (Merkle)**

Writing a bio can be approached in various ways. Tongue-in-cheek, sarcastic, serious, humorous. And, of course, if one looks at one's life and sees it as boring and uninteresting, then there may be an inclination to jazz it up, invent instances and scenarios that make it more appealing. So here goes. Junior year in college, I dropped out of school, hopped a plane, went to New York, pounded the pavement and knocked on audition door after audition door, applying to Julliard and waiting tables to attempt to keep the creditors at bay. I landed a few minor roles, did not get accepted to Julliard, and was lonely as hell. O.K. None of that is true. But it almost was, and I was afraid the poor and lonely part would be, so instead of going to the Big Apple, I decided that I would leave Rollins College, go

home to OSU and change majors to something more "practical." So I majored in speech and hearing therapy, although I had no aptitude for science at all, so the choice of major was an example of a complete lack of self-knowledge. I graduated, never became a therapist, but did meet my best friend and love of my life in a bar (of course) on campus. After one date, that was it, and we married a year and a half later.

So what do I have to relate that may be interesting and true? The summer after I transferred back to OSU, I worked as a volunteer with Project Hope, an organization similar to Doctors Without Borders. I lived on a Navaho reservation in Gallup, New Mexico, and worked with Native American children who had cleft palates. I loved it and fell in love with the culture and people. In 1971, after we got married and moved to German Village, I worked in my father's bank, starting as a teller and then on to a mortgage loan officer.

Then life sped up. Four children in 5 ½ years, Ned starting his own real estate company, kid's school and sports, volunteerism, Girl Scout leader, director of talent shows at school, an occasional radio commercial, very occasional play. A good life.

When the kids were in junior high and high school, I went back to OSU to get a second degree in education, and spent a few years as a "super" sub, teaching high school English, theater and speech to inner city students. That was an experience, rewarding, frustrating, sometimes scary.

One of the reasons I left theater was my obsessive addiction. If I couldn't do it all in, then I wasn't interested. But about six years ago, a local director asked me to take a part in his show. I knew him, trusted his talent, and of course, had no kids at home. I was a grandmother, not actively responsible for anyone. So I thought for a second and said yes. Since then, I've been fortunate to appear with several companies in town, as well as act in a few short films and television documentary and commercials. Moral: it's never too late to follow your dreams.

My biggest joy and happiness, however, is my family. Husband of 45 years, 4 adult children, and 8 grandchildren - so far.