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Above, a color guard is one of the attractions of Festival parades. The AAA Heritage Day parade will be at 7 p.m. on July 8, the Touchstone Energy Junior Royale Parade will be at 6:30 p.m. on July 10 and the DTE ENERGY Cherry Royale Parade will be at 11:15 a.m. on July 12. Left, children participate in the Bicycle Rodeo, which will be held this year on Wednesday, July 9 from 10 a.m. to noon at the Horizon Outlet Center.



Cherry Memories
I have a really cool memory of the Cherry Festival from five years ago. I clown for the Cherry Royale parade as "Tacky" - she is about as far removed from me as they come, dressed in sequins and rhinestones and ever the femme fatale in her own mind. I love to play off the crowd and as I was passing the old Milliken's Building, there was a small group of people surrounding an elderly, distinguished looking gentleman in a wheelchair. He appeared tired and drawn. The group kept calling to me to come over and see "Dad." Needless to say, "Tacky" was more than happy to oblige and sat on his lap and flirted outrageously. The gentleman's eyes lit up and he chuckled and blushed the whole time. Six weeks later, I received a note from a family in the Manistee area. They wrote to thank me for spending time with their father at the parade. He had been terminally ill and died six weeks later, but for all of those weeks, kept laughing and talking about that "Tacky" who recognized a "quality" male when she saw one. It was one of the most touching and humbling experiences that reinforced for me that we never know how our acts will effect someone and the importance of spreading fun and love whenever we can.

Mary Raymer,
Grief counselor

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