Hold your head high, smile, and live right by God. Those were the mottos Cathy Sue Smith lived by, the compass her heart followed every day of her life. Cathy was a wonderful woman, who faced many challenges in her lifetime, yet she enjoyed many triumphs, as well. Her greatest triumph was found in her beloved family, who carry her love and lessons with them today.

Cathy’s story began on a cool fall day in 1955 in Paw Paw, Michigan. Those were turbulent times in this country, times of racial tension, the Red scare and the Cold War. On October 30, 1955, Jerry and Kay (Rininger) Mayo had a nice little treat the day before Halloween, with the birth of a beautiful baby girl, a daughter they named Cathy Sue.

Cathy was the oldest of the couple’s six children, and being the oldest, she was given the responsibility for helping care for her little siblings at a very young age. Her parents separated when Cathy was young, leaving her mother to raise six children alone and making Cathy like a second mother to them.

Cathy was a remarkable girl, and shouldered the burden of raising her siblings with a grace beyond her years. She did whatever she could to help out, changing diapers and feeding them, and when she was old enough, she found work to help put food on the table, too. She always made sure her brothers and sisters were taken care of before she would splurge on herself and even made sure her mom had the little extras in life, as well.

One memorable Christmas, Cathy helped her mother buy her little sister her first bicycle, and got her other siblings gifts, too, making it such a special holiday for the whole family. Seeing her family happy was always the best gift Cathy could receive.

To better help her family, Cathy left high school before graduating, seeking fulltime work. It wouldn’t be long before she would have a family of her own.

Cathy eventually got married, and before she knew it, she was the proud mother of six wonderful kids, Roger, Angie, Terri, Cathy Jo, Michael and Rikki, who all made her so thrilled. However, her marriage wouldn’t last, and like her own mother, she was left to raise four of the six children alone.

Just as she did growing up, Cathy once again shouldered her burdens with uncommon strength and grace, turning every challenge into triumph. No matter what she faced, Cathy held her head high, smiled, and lived right by God, and kept the faith that she would prevail. “Don’t worry about the things you can’t change, change the things you can,” Cathy always said.
Cathy provided for her children by working very hard, determined to not use any government assistance. She sold Avon products for many years, working under Donna Doctor’s guidance, and the two became very close friends. They enjoyed many successes together over the years and many good memories as well.

Cathy also worked for her brother Bob’s business, Merson Trading Post. Cathy served as the store manager, and was exceptionally hardworking and loyal. She was very meticulous with her duties, and had the store budget managed to the penny. She also made sure the store was spotlessly clean, too. Her biggest fault was always underpaying herself for the job she did so well, ever the gracious, selfless woman she was.

As hard as she worked, Cathy always cared for her family first and foremost. She was a wonderful mother and provider, and especially a magician in the kitchen, who could conjure a five-course meal from thin air. Some of her family’s favorite dishes were her wonderful chili, spaghetti, or the many casseroles she made.

Cathy also went back to school in her mid-30s, taking classes at the Plainwell adult education. The day she graduated was one of the happiest, and proudest, of her life, made all the more special because her entire family was in attendance. As she looked out into the audience and saw all their smiling faces, it brought tears to her eyes, overwhelmed by the happiness of the moment.

Cathy also had many close friends, and made many good friends at the First Baptist Church in Otsego, and later attended the Cheshire Hills Baptist Church in Gobles which was closer to her home. She loved gospel music of all kinds, but was particularly fond of the old-time favorites like Amazing Grace and I’ll Fly Away.

Cathy’s life was built on the bedrock of her great faith, the inner compass that guided her every day of her life. The guidelines she lived by were found in the Bible, from the promises of John 3:16 to the Golden Rule.

Cathy was a very strong, very proud woman, and was always proud of her appearance. She had veto power
over any picture that was taken of her, and always made sure she looked her best before it was taken!

Cathy’s strength and pride sometimes caused her to neglect her own health and she was always reluctant to take a day off from work or go to the doctor. Eventually this caught up with her, and on Monday, January 21, 2008, she was taken to Bronson Hospital with an unknown infection. Despite the doctors’ efforts, Cathy sadly died there on Saturday, January 26, 2008, at the age of 52, with her beloved family by her side.

Cathy was such a wonderful woman, a selfless lady of such great grace and strength. She faced many challenges in her lifetime, yet enjoyed so many triumphs. She was a loving daughter, sister, mother and grandmother, and a loyal friend to many. More than anything, she taught us to hold our heads high, to smile, and to live right by God, just as she always did. She will be greatly missed.

Learn more about Cathy, view her Life Story film, and visit with her family and friends Wednesday from 3-7 pm at the Life Story Funeral Home, Plainwell, 120 S. Woodhams. Because she loved to be at church, Cathy’s funeral services will be held at 1 pm Thursday at the First Baptist Church in Otsego. Members of her family include her children: Roger Smith, Angie Thompson, Terri Smith, Cathy Jo Smith, Michael Smith and Rikki Callaway, her 2 brothers Bob and his wife Deb Mayo and Ron Stampfler, 2 sisters: Carletta and her husband Patrick VantZelfde and Robin and her husband Sherman Kniss. Other members of her family include her Mother Kay Mayo and 5 grandchildren and several other nieces and nephews. Please visit Cathy’s memory page at www.lifestorynet.com, where you can share a favorite memory or photo, sign her memory book or make a memorial donation to the family.