Chapter 10: John Kronk and Commonwealth — Holding On to Each Other

As time passed, life carried us forward — sometimes in circles, sometimes in surprising turns — but always with a sense of endurance shaped by love and sacrifice. After some time apart, Mom's relationship with Bernie Brunson resumed, and our two families were blended once again.

The next chapter of our lives began when we left the housing project and moved into Bernie's home at 6534 John Kronk, near Livernois on Detroit's west side. While the neighborhood was modest and decently kept, the house itself left much to be desired. A shabby two-bedroom rental directly across from a busy railroad track, it was a tight fit for nine people — Mom and her four children, including baby Jude, along with Bernie and his three children. Brother Tom was away serving in the army, and Mary Jane had entered the convent. Still, in this crowded space, we made do with what we had — sharing, stretching, and finding ways to coexist.

Despite the constant shuffle of daily life, Mom was steadfast in one of her priorities: our Catholic education. Ted boarded the city bus each morning to attend Visitation High School, while El and I walked to Our Lady Queen of Angels Elementary School. Even amid financial strain and personal challenges, Mom ensured our spiritual and academic foundations stayed intact.

In 1958, our family faced a frightening ordeal when our three-year-old brother, Jude, was diagnosed with spinal meningitis. He entered Herman Kiefer Hospital, where he received

treatment and, thankfully, recovered from a deadly disease. We had come so close to losing him, and the fear of that loss, in my mind, made us even closer as a family.

Not long after, our family grew again. While still living on John Kronk with Bernie and his three children, Mom gave birth to our baby sister, Bernadette. Her arrival brought joy and new energy into our busy home. Soon after, however, the family underwent yet another change.

To ease the crowding, we moved to a larger home on Bangor Street, still on the west side of Detroit. However, the unity we had briefly achieved began to unravel. Bernie eventually separated from us and moved to Indiana with his children. Once again, Mom was on her own — this time with five children to care for. She found an upper flat just across the street on Nall, and we moved once again. Brother Ted and I carried our furniture and belongings across the street and up a staircase to the new residence. We kept each other strong through yet another transition.

Throughout these moves, one anchor remained: our connection to St. Dominic's Parish. After a short time of living on Nall, and with the assistance of Father Ballard, we found a flat owned by a parishioner. Our new home was located at 4843 Commonwealth, just a couple of blocks from the church. Though far from luxurious, it offered a sense of routine and proximity to our spiritual home.

It was in our Commonwealth home, in 1959, that Mom gave birth to Margaret Catherine. We didn't fully understand her condition at the time, but Margaret was born with Down's Syndrome — something we had never encountered. I remember walking to the main Detroit

Public Library, a majestic building, and checking out books to learn about what Margaret might need, what she might face, and how we could support her.

Margaret was a sweet, quiet presence in our home. She was slow to develop motor skills and took longer to speak, but the care she drew out from each of us was gentle and sincere. I recall that she never crawled before walking. She slid around on the floor and was about three years old before she could walk on her own.

Her innocence softened the edges of our chaotic lives. Though resources were limited, our love for her — and each other — was abundant.

Through all the instability, one thing remained constant: Mom's unwavering love and determination. She kept us safe, enrolled us in Catholic schools, and kept us connected to our faith. Amid constant change, her care was a thread that held us together.