College Years, 1962-1967

After graduating from Visitation High School in 1962, I was awarded the Alvin Bentley Scholarship to attend Highland Park Community College. I continued living at home while working on my Associate's degree. Although I was paying for my education and my mother was receiving Social Security payments for me, she expected me to contribute to the household. I guess it was a significant part of our family culture for the older siblings to take care of the family. I vowed that I would never raise my future children to feel responsible for me, financially or otherwise.

My first job after high school was working at the Rosary Shrine of St. Jude located in our parish church, St. Dominic's. My task was to bottle holy oil for the sick, one of three consecrated oils used in the Catholic Church. I admired the handsome Fr. McKeon in his flowing white Dominican cassock when he came to the Shrine office to bless the gallon container of pure olive oil. My task was to carefully place the oil in one-ounce bottles and package the bottles with the prayer for the sick in three-inch by four-inch packing boxes.

The oil was unrefined with a strong distinctive odor, pungent and fruity like a ripe olive. As I carefully poured the precious golden oil into one-ounce bottles, one at a time, I devised a scheme to be quicker and more efficient. I lined up about one hundred empty bottles in a twelve-inch by twelve-inch box lid. I carefully filled each one with the fatty, unctuous liquid. *That was easy enough.*

My scheme did not, however, provide room to put lids on the bottles of oil. Respectful of blessed items, I carefully began removing bottles from the lid. Alas, the first spill of the greasy, slick liquid created an avalanche of tipped bottles. *Oh my God … that was not a good idea!* The

lid was saturated with the consecrated oil. Of course, I confessed my mistake to my boss and the carton lid was appropriately dealt with. It was a lesson learned to carefully think through tasks from beginning to end.

Living at College

After finishing my Associate's Degree in 1964, I enrolled at Eastern Michigan University and majored in education. I stayed on campus in the summers and worked to pay expenses which I supplemented with student loans. I lived in the newly constructed Wise Hall on Eastern's campus with my roommate Lucille Fox, a very Italian young lady; we got along fantastically.

Dorm living at Eastern was quite enjoyable. It was the first time I had lived away from home and I liked the camaraderie, nice meals, clean environment, and many new friends. I had a full dating schedule, most often with Tom Todd from my high school days. A couple of other serious boyfriends entered my life during my college years. One guy, Larry Doherty, was very special to me. After completing my junior and senior years at Eastern, I decide to stay at Eastern and complete my Master's Degree.

First Digs

After completing the requirements for a Bachelor's Degree in 1966, I enrolled in graduate school to earn a Master's Degree. Nancy Thomas was my roommate in an apartment we rented near campus. We planned nice meals, shared household tasks, and loved our apartment. I learned a lot from Nancy about domestic tasks.

I met Nancy in a junior-year Biology class and we clicked immediately. Nancy was a home economics major and graduated at the same time as I did. Following graduation, Nancy accepted a teaching position with the Wayne-Westland Schools and planned to stay at EMU in Ypsilanti. It made sense for two good friends to room together, Nancy as a new teacher, and myself as a graduate student.

I was excited to let my family know my next step to independence. “Mom, I have great news. I was awarded a fellowship and plan to stay at Eastern another year to complete a Master’s Degree. My friend, Nancy, and I found an apartment close to campus.”

“Keep me posted. Maybe we can visit sometime.”

“Absolutely. I’ll plan a get-together and Tom and Elaine can bring you. Our apartment is on Cross Street above a dentist’s office. I can walk to campus and Nancy has a car if we need to go a distance.”

Our new digs faced Cross Street, the main thoroughfare for The EMU Homecoming Parade. Parade floats and marchers strutted directly in front of our apartment’s floor-to-ceiling windows; what a great place to gather with friends. Our first challenge was furnishing the apartment. I had secured a few used pieces including a couch and a couple of dressers. Nancy’s parents helped outfit the rest of the apartment with a kitchen table, beds, and incidentals like a toaster. I fondly recall how kind Mr. and Mrs. Thomas were to us.

Our family never ate fancy meals like some of my friends’ families. Our large family’s mealtime was usually hectic and consisted of a large pot of food like chili or soup to satisfy nine kids and our single mom. For the first time in my life, I moved to an apartment and lived with

someone other than my family. I decided to step outside of my comfort zone of cooking vats of common food and learn how to prepare fine meals.

After moving into our apartment and before Nancy's arrival, I planned a fancy dinner of steak and baked potato, just for myself. I took care to select fresh ingredients at a nearby grocery store and began preparation. I didn't realize a potato took much longer to cook than a steak. Needless to say, the potato was nearly raw and the steak was more than well-done. I still enjoyed the first meal I prepared just for myself.

I learned many domestic routines from Nancy experimenting with recipes like beef bourguignon, beef stroganoff, cherries jubilee flambé, streusel, and on and on. Nancy and I set up a budget, did our grocery shopping together, and divided cleaning tasks in the apartment. The experience of sharing responsibilities with a roommate helped prepare me for my future life as a wife and mother.

Spring Break 1967

It was spring break in 1967 and Eastern Michigan's campus was empty. Students and faculty abandoned the snowy streets of Ypsilanti and were off to warmer climes.

Money was sparse for a graduate student living day-to-day with a small stipend that barely paid the rent and living expenses. Heading south to escape to a warm climate was out of the question for my meager budget. My sister Mary Jane and her husband Bill graciously invited me to vacation with them in Bill's hometown of Hickory, North Carolina, a twelve-hour drive from Michigan.

Watching from the floor-to-ceiling windows in the front of my apartment overlooking usually-busy-now-deserted Cross Street, I excitedly anticipated the arrival of the newlyweds. It was the first time a family member visited me at college. Their familiar Ford pulled into the driveway. Most of my family worked for Ford Motor Company and drove Ford vehicles.

I heard Bill and Mary's gleeful voices as they bounded up the narrow stairway-minus-handrails to my apartment. The four apartment doors were cramped in the dark hall so I quickly opened my door to brighten their approach to the landing. Hugs and lovable greetings passed among the three of us as I welcomed them into my modest ten by twelve-foot kitchen crowded with a galley kitchen, aged white metal cabinetry, and picnic table for dining.

"Hey, what is that good smell?"

"I prepared fried chicken so we won't have to stop for dinner tonight."

"Sis, that was quite a trick making fried chicken on that cute little stovetop. Not much room in that pint-size refrigerator either. I thought our basement apartment in Highland Park had small appliances." We laughed heartily as we compared the features of our humble apartments.

My friendly new brother-in-law towered over the petite sisters. His wavy brown hair and dark eyes portrayed his Lebanese ancestry from his mother's side of the family. His slight southern drawl identified him with his upbringing in the South where his father and mother courted and married.

"Rose, you will love meeting the rest of the Ferguson family … we're hillbillies that love Lebanese food. Look forward to stuffed grape leaves and tabbouleh."

“Can’t imagine stuffing grape leaves, but has Mary made stuffed cabbage for you? There’s nothing like a good polish meal of golabki [gɔˈwɔmpki]. Add kielbasa and sauerkraut and you won’t need to eat for a week.” More giggles.

“Okay, let’s get on the road. We can go most of the miles today and have a short drive tomorrow.” Off we went to enjoy our long drive, sharing stories and laughs along the way.

On Our Way

“Rose, that was a great idea for you to bring fried chicken for this long drive to Hickory.”

“Yeah, Bill, I thought it would save time if we didn’t have to stop for dinner. I appreciate you and Mary for picking me up at my apartment. It’s out of your way.”

“No problem at all. We’re glad you can join us. My family always enjoys having you visit. Mary brought doughnuts to eat in the car.”

Mary giggled, “Yes, I love my sweets and I love you too, Billy Boy”

“I love you too, Mary. We sure won’t starve during our long drive to Hickory. Someday we’ll have highways and we won’t have to take these country roads. I hate all the stoplights. We’re almost at the motel now. Duck, Rose!”

“What??? Why do I have to hide?”

“They charge for extra people. No extra charge for a married couple. So, duck!”

“Will do! When we are settled in the room, I’d like to take a shower if it’s okay with you two.”

“Sure, whatever you want to do. Shower and get comfortable, Rose.”

We settled into the motel. “I’m going to shower now and you two newlyweds can have some private time.”

“Take your time in the shower, Rose. We’re more than halfway to Hickory; we’ll take off early in the morning and should arrive by early afternoon.”

I gathered my toiletries, went into the bathroom, and turned on the shower. *Wow, this water is hot* (as I turned off the water after dropping the bar of soap). “Oops.”

“Hey, turn that water back on and get back in that shower, Rose!”

“I just dropped the soap, Bill. I’m going, I’m going!” *Guess those lovebirds need some time alone without little sis.*

Oh, the wonderful times I had with Mary and Bill during that spring break in 1967 to North Carolina and many trips in the years that followed.