Chapter 18: Movin' On — Howell, the Melon Capital

One quiet evening in 1972, as Tom relaxed in his rust-colored La-Z-Boy recliner, he brought up a question that would shape the next chapter of our lives: "Rose, do you think we'd miss Livonia if we relocated?"

We had lived in our first home since 1968. During those years, we grew close to our neighbors, loved having family nearby, and cherished our friends. When Tom brought up moving, it surprised me at first, though maybe it shouldn't have. I knew he was restless in his job as an elementary physical education teacher. He had just finished two years of night and summer classes to earn his Master's in counseling. I knew we were both ready for something new.

"It's important to be near family, but we don't have to move too far. Now that I'm certified in counseling, it might be a good time to move on."

I nodded, feeling both the weight and excitement of the moment.

"There's a lot to think about, Tom. Especially with the baby on the way. I'd really like to stay home for a while to spend time with Barbara and the baby. That part of life goes so quickly, and I don't want to miss it."

"I understand," he agreed. "Let's look into options. Howell isn't too far—it's just about an hour from here. We already have good friends there. That could make the transition easier."

"I know you've worked so hard to earn your certification," I said. "I'm open to moving, especially if we find something meaningful for you."

That opportunity to create a new chapter in our lives arrived sooner than we anticipated and helped set everything in motion.

After careful searching over the next few months, Tom was offered a middle school counselor position in Hartland, Michigan. Soon after, we prepared to move from suburban Livonia to semi-rural Howell, all while anticipating the arrival of our second child.

Our new life began with an unexpected joy—we met Rick Farquhar, Tom's new principal, and his wife, Karen. To our surprise, we shared more than just professional connections. Both husbands drove sporty cars, both families had daughters the same age, and both couples were expecting babies within weeks of each other. Even more coincidental—we both ended up naming our newborn sons "John." It felt like a sign that we were in the right place.

With encouragement from our high school friends Tom and Trish Rosenbergh, who lived in Howell, we built a modest home on former farmland off Oak Grove Road north of town, and about ten miles from Tom's school. Money was tight, but we worked hard to make the place our own. We painted, stained, planted, and shaped the land to create a welcoming home for our family. The simple ranch house at 171 Edgemont Drive became our anchor.

Moving day itself was a family affair. My brothers Tom and Ted helped load the truck and joined us on the drive to Howell. Their help, banter, and muscle made the day both stressful and joyful. True to form, Ted couldn't resist teasing.

"You've only been married a few years. How the heck did you accumulate all this stuff?"

With a grin, I replied, "Never you mind, Ted. Just be careful with that lamp!"

A New Home, A New Rhythm

Our Howell home soon became a gathering place for new traditions. Every summer, the Howell Melon Festival was a big event, celebrating the area's farming history with races, street

dances, classic cars, parades, and the Melon Queen. The festival brought everyone together. The cantaloupe hybrids were always the highlight, and I still remember their sweet juicy taste.

We never planted melons—they were everywhere in summer—but did grow other vegetables on our one acre lot. Our first attempt at farming in 1973 was ambitious, and our harvest was overwhelming. We soon realized our next garden needed to be smaller, especially with my return to work in the fall of 1974.

Leaving my stay-at-home role was hard, but I enjoyed purpose and connection as a consultant with the Livingston Intermediate School District. With both Tom and I working, we found Mrs. Agnes Whittum, a gentle, dependable woman who became a surrogate grandmother and our steady support. She touched every corner of our home. When my sister Margaret, who had special needs, came to live with us in 1978, Mrs. Whittum helped care for her, too. Her middle name must have been “kindness.”

In the mid-1970s, Tom started coaching tennis at Hartland High School. He loved the game he had played in college and cared deeply about his team, so much that people around Livingston County began calling him “Mr. Tennis.” He managed the first racquet club in the area for a couple of years before life set us on the path to our next adventure.

Our family’s journey around the state continued. In 1980, we packed up once more and headed to Harbor Springs in Northern Michigan, where Tom took a position as the Director of a local Racquet Club. New opportunities awaited us.