Chapter 22: Reluctant Move — Return to Downstate Michigan

Some moments in life seem ordinary at first, until you realize everything is about to change. Nearly five years after my divorce from Tom, I often thought about the future for myself, Barbara, and John. My siblings and their children lived downstate, and I missed their support and family gatherings. Moving downstate would bring me closer to family and open up new professional opportunities.

Still, the thought of leaving Harbor Springs was difficult. The trees, trails, friends, and small-town rhythm were all part of our story. It had been our home for more than ten years, and Barb and John had grown up here, attending elementary, middle, and high school.

But things were changing. Tom had taken a job in Lansing, and Barb was a junior at Michigan State University in East Lansing. Moving closer to her had its benefits. However, John was in high school, a sensitive and important time. I wanted to listen to his thoughts and feelings before making any decisions.

One quiet evening, we sat together on the deck, and I broached the difficult subject.

“John, how’s school going?”

“Fine, Mom. Yeah, it’s great that you’re helping me and Mike get ready for the SAT,” he replied with a smile.

“I love helping you guys. Hard to believe you’re already a junior. Before long, you’ll be heading to college like Barb.”

"I'm thinking Michigan State too."

"That would be something. You've been with your class since first grade—lots of good friends. Do you think any of them might go to State too?"

"Maybe. Not sure yet. Most are thinking about their choices."

Those friendships meant a lot to him. I took a breath and gently changed the subject.

"John, there's something serious we need to talk about. A job might open up downstate, near Aunt Mary, Uncle Bill, and the rest of the family in Dearborn. It's a rare opportunity. I know the timing's not great for you, but I want you to think about our possibly moving."

He paused. "I still have my senior year at Harbor."

"I know, honey. That's why I'm not rushing this. I need you to think it over with me. If the job opens up, it could really help us. But I care most about what you think."

In the weeks that followed, we had several conversations—talking through every angle. Could John finish his junior year and then transfer as a senior? Was it fair to uproot him now? Could he stay in Harbor while I moved? Should we sell the house? Every decision was loaded with love, responsibility, and unknowns.

In January 1990, the job became available: an ideal position with a large intermediate school district in Wayne County, close to family and full of promise. I told John, bracing for his reaction. It surprisingly brought me comfort.

"Mom, I guess it's like going to college a year early," he said calmly. "If that works for you, I'm okay with it."

His maturity and support touched me deeply. That moment still stands out as a sign of his strength and our bond. I accepted the position, which brought about many changes, decisions, transitions, and goodbyes.

John spent the rest of his junior year living during the week with Jim and Cheryl Bedells, our best friends and nearby neighbor. I commuted back to Harbor on weekends. While starting my new job and before we sold our home, I lived with my brother, Ted, and his wife, Fran. I will always appreciate my nephew Matthew, who kindly gave up his bedroom to me during our transition.

More than anything, our reluctant move to downstate Dearborn came with a renewed sense of love and resilience. Barbara, John, and I were walking into a new chapter—together.