From Mountain State to Motor City

In the mid-’40s, the mines were closing in Wheeling in the northern panhandle of West Virginia. Dad no longer came home from coal camp covered head-to-toe in the black sulfur-smelling dust of bituminous coal. Having worked in the mines since he was fourteen, dad decided that a change in careers was in order. He and my mother started a booming business, a local bar called the G.I. Joe. It wasn’t long before the poor economy took its toll on career number two.

My parents made a decision to escape the dire economic situation in West Virginia. Dad relocated to Michigan, temporarily leaving family behind, to seek employment in the automotive industry with the intent to eventually bring mom and offspring to the Midwest. It was a common occurrence in the 1940s for people from the south to out-migrate to the auto capital to improve their standard of living.

During this transition and, as the youngest in the family, I often accompanied Mom on the train from Wheeling to Detroit to visit dad who was temporarily living with Aunt Ida, his older sister, and her husband, Uncle Bill Trybuski at 4896 Lovett.

Riding the train with Mom provided wonderful alone time for me to be with her as we ate our packed lunches, told stories, and conversed about the passing scenery. There was no need to share Mom’s attention with my siblings during these mom-daughter adventures.

It was about 1948 when our family sold the Wheeling property and moved to Detroit. We lived in a flat above Aunt Ida and Uncle Bill’s grocery store that was located on 18th Street near Buchanan. Dad worked on the assembly line at the Dodge Main Factory in Hamtramck. During

these early days in Detroit, my three older siblings started school at St. Leo's on Grand River and 14th St. All of us attended Catholic schools through high school graduation.

Our Detroit home was in a diverse neighborhood with large families, including minorities, among whom were my African American buddies, Dewey and Frances. I tasted wild turkey that their father hunted and roasted. I enjoyed other strange and delightful dishes at their house. Our world was expanding in this city where many cultures gathered.

City life brought an abundance of new experiences. A majestic tree, which I cannot identify, stood in front of our house. It had long-hanging pods that resembled green cigars. My siblings and I tried unsuccessfully to smoke the pods on several occasions. Our fun pastimes included usual games like tag, hide and seek, kick the can, and selling lemonade from a stand.

One loving memory was when my big sister, Mary Jane, protected me from her friend, Sandra Strange, who got bossy with me as we organized our lemonade stand. Mary Jane could be assertive when she thought that family members, especially her little sister, were being treated unfairly. "Let her be, Sandra if you know what's good for you. She's just a kid and my little sister." Mary was never bossy with me, but she was certainly a person of strong character. You could see it in her determined stance, hands-on-hips, and in her direct speech. She didn't take guff from anyone.

We had our favorite television shows in the 1950s, the early days of media in the home. Dad had purchased a combination Admiral television, record player, and radio — big-time fancy. Ted and I liked the *Howdy Doody Show* and I recall Ted entering the "Howdy Doody Look-Alike Contest." He used lipstick to make freckles and held his hands like a puppet for a photoshoot. Wish I could find that adorable photo now. Ted didn't win, but he should have. Other shows we

watched were the “Kukla, Fran, and Ollie” puppet show, Sid Caesar variety show, and Milton Berle stand-up comedy … all fun memories.

Tight-Knit Family … that’s how the Starosciak kids were known among friends and neighbors. To this very day, even as retirees, we continue to be close.