

Growing Up in Ferndale



A Baby Boomer's Memories of Life
in Mid-Century Suburban Detroit

By Thomas F. Coleman

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Thomas F. Coleman

Dedication

This book is dedicated to my classmates, both living and deceased, from the *Class of 1966*.



After we graduated from St. James High School, each of us moved in our own direction and established our own lives. Some stayed in Michigan while others moved to other states and even other countries. Most, but not all, married and had children. Lots of those who did have kids, now have grandchildren and even great grandchildren.

After we left St. James, more than a few male members of our class went off to fight in the Vietnam War. Some of them were physically injured or emotionally scarred by what they experienced in the military. I am grateful for their service to the nation.

We may be scattered throughout the United States, and have lived very different lives with a wide range of occupational and professional interests, but we share a common bond nonetheless. We spent many of our most formative years together – at St. James and in Ferndale – and, at least for me, those memories endure.

I feel that my experiences in Ferndale – whether good, bad, or somewhere in-between – contributed to who I am today. I therefore remember the Class of 1966 with deep and lasting affection.

I also gratefully acknowledge my eight brothers and sisters: Larry, Dan, Gary, Maryann, Cathy, Carolyn, Diane, and Michael. Without them, growing up in Ferndale would not have been half as much fun or nearly as interesting. Life in a large family has had its rewards.

Finally, even though he entered into my life a decade after I moved from Michigan, Michael A. Vasquez has been my spouse, life partner, and best friend for the past 35 years. As such, he has experienced the effects of my life in Ferndale – a life that contributed to my strengths as well as my weaknesses. His patience and understanding are most appreciated.

Introduction

When I received an invitation by email in March to attend the 50th Reunion of the Class of 1966 of St. James High, excuses started to pop into my head. It would cost too much to travel from California to Michigan. I would not recognize most of the people there. I really don't have much in common now with my classmates from five decades ago.

After mulling things over for a bit, I decided that I would decline the invitation. But then, memories from my childhood and teenage years started to surface. Over the course of 11 years – from second grade when I started school at St. James to twelfth grade when I graduated – I had spent more than 13,000 hours with my classmates. And that was just during school hours. Hundreds of additional hours were shared with my St. James friends in recreational activities from the time I started school in Ferndale until the time I entered college.

The weekend of activities the organizers had planned for those who would attend the reunion offered a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. There would never be another 50th Reunion! And none of us are getting any younger. I was reminded of our mortality by the passing this year of my close high school friend Fran Paul. She left us in March. A few years ago, Fran shared with me that her eventual knowledge that I was gay helped her to better understand her own son when, as an adult, he disclosed to her that he is gay.

Going to the reunion would not bring back friends like Eddie McQuade who died as a young man suffering with PTSD after his return from the Viet Nam War. But it would provide me an opportunity to hug Mary Crotty, or reminisce with Sandy Avery, or talk about changes in church doctrine with Mel Westover. Perhaps I would get to know some of my other classmates better – find out who they really are and what they really think about life, knowing what they know now.

So I decided to accept the invitation. Once I made that decision, the emotional and mental juices started to flow. Memories flooded back to me. I started to think about my life – from the beginning in Highland Park, the move to Royal Oak, the years in Ferndale, and the move to California. “Don’t let all these memories go to waste,” I thought. “Preserve them and share them.” I followed my instincts and listened to my heart. The result is this book about *Growing Up in Ferndale*.

I realize that the experiences of my classmates may be much different than mine. But some of our shared experiences and memories will be similar. For memories of mine that are different, perhaps they will help a few dozen Baby Boomers who grew up in Ferndale see those two decades from a different perspective. Looking back at the St. James years, through the eyes of someone who was a “great imposter” walking a social tightrope during much of that era, will hopefully be an enriching experience for classmates, family members, and others who decide to read these memoirs.

The Journey to Ferndale

1948 - 1950

Highland Park – Where it Began


Form 23 Mar 11 3:12 PM

Highland Park General Hospital
FOOT PRINTS

BABY: Boy Coleman SEX: Male
DATE OF BIRTH: 3-15-48 WEIGHT: 6-10-48

BABY

Left Foot Right Foot



The image shows a hospital form with two footprints. The left footprint is on the left and the right footprint is on the right. The form is titled 'Highland Park General Hospital FOOT PRINTS' and contains handwritten information about a baby named Boy Coleman, born March 15, 1948, weighing 6-10-48. The word 'BABY' is printed in the center, and 'Left Foot' and 'Right Foot' are printed on either side of the footprints.

My journey to Ferndale began in Highland Park, Michigan when I greeted the world at 11:37 p.m. on March 15, 1948. Unlike my mother who was born at home just a few blocks away, I was born at Highland Park General Hospital. I was one of more than 1,000 babies to be delivered at that hospital in 1948.

My first official designation was “Boy Coleman” or at least those are the words placed on the hospital record that bears my tiny footprints. That generic designation would soon be replaced with a formal name chosen for me by my parents.

Because they were members of the Roman Catholic Church, and intended to baptize me into the Church in the coming weeks, the name they selected for me was that of a canonized saint. My middle name was given in honor of my paternal grandfather. So from that day forward – and for the last 68 years – I have borne the name of Thomas Frank Coleman.

The name given to a child is significant. It can have major psychological and social ramifications. Fortunately for me, I liked my name. I was lucky that my name, or any twisted derivatives of it, could not be used by other children to mock or tease me. During my younger years, I was usually called “Tommy.” As I matured and entered middle school years, I started to refer to myself as “Tom” and asked others to do the same. I never used the name “Thomas” in oral communications, reserving that name solely for formal occasions when I had to sign my name to a document or fill out a business or governmental form.

It was not until decades later that I explored the significance of my time and date of birth through astrology, the year of birth through Chinese astrology, and my designated names through name numerology. Through the lens of conventional astrology, I am a Piscean. Chinese astrology says I am a Rat. Name numerology suggests the names Thomas and Frank have very significant connotations and influences.



Highland Park General Hospital



Visitation Church and School

the eastside of Detroit and raised in the parish of St. Anthony Church in Detroit, after they married they attended Visitation Church which was located just a few blocks outside of the boundaries of the City of Highland Park.

My parents and grandparents, on both the paternal and maternal sides, had a significant historical connection with Highland Park. My father's side lived in that area from 1918 and well into the 1940s. My mother's parents lived there from 1920 to 1950 when they moved to the suburb of Royal Oak.

When my father, Murray F. Coleman, was born in 1920, his parents were residents of Highland Park. The family of Roy and Margaret Coleman lived in one of several apartments above a series of adjacent stores on Woodward Avenue just south of Six Mile Road. When his father died in 1932, the family continued to live there.

After my parents married in 1943, they moved into the living quarters above the residence of my mother's parents on Fullerton Avenue – a duplex in Detroit which was located just a few blocks outside of the boundaries of Highland Park. That is where I lived for the first two years of my life. While I was too young for anything but the vaguest memories – perhaps just impressions of my life there – I did sense receiving double the usual amount of love, some from my parents and an added dose from my grandparents.

But like it or not, none of these “esoteric” practices or philosophies would enter the realm of my consciousness until I was well into my thirties. My journey to Ferndale and my life in Ferndale would be influenced – indeed dominated – by the dogma and teachings of the Roman Catholic Church. I was initiated as a Catholic in a baptism ceremony at Visitation Church on April 11, 1948. This is the same church where my mother was baptized in 1921 and where she attended school for 12 years. My mother's parents, Frank and Catherine Steil, were devout Catholics. Although they were born on



George Steil (left), his wife Katherine (far right), and his son Frank and daughter-in-law Catherine in front of their duplex at 2158 Fullerton Avenue.

My Grandma Steil had a rocking chair and she no doubt sat in it rocking me to sleep or just giving me the comfort of her unconditional love. As a place to start one's life, the house on Fullerton and the area in which it was located provided a solid foundation.

As a result of living in the Highland Park area during all of their formative years as children and young adults, my parents were influenced by the economic, social, and political forces and environment of that time and place. Their environment surely had an impact on their personal beliefs and views of the world around them. In turn, they had – or at least they attempted to have – an influence on my perspective of myself and of the society in which I was living.

Not only did I have ancestors who lived in Highland Park, some of them died there as well. My paternal grandfather, Roy Coleman, died there of heart failure in 1932. For several years he was a manager for the Belle Isle Creamery Company. He was also reputed to be a freelance bootlegger, bringing alcohol from Canada and distributing it in Detroit during the prohibition era. His daughter Jean died there in 1923 at the age of 6 as a result of injuries from a car accident on Woodward Avenue when she was crossing the street in front of the apartment complex where they lived. My mother's paternal grandfather, George Steil, died at the home of his son Frank.



39 Geneva Ave. where Sarah Renton died.

My grandfather Roy's mother, Sarah Renton, died at 39 Geneva Avenue in Highland Park at the home of her daughter Jenny Coleman Freer after a six month illness. Roy, Jean, and Sarah are buried at Woodlawn Cemetery, which is located about a mile north of the Highland Park city limits.

For my parents, grandparents, and their loved ones, Highland Park was the location of many special occasions – births, birthday parties, weddings, and funerals. The story of my journey to Ferndale, therefore, requires a close look at the social and economic fabric of Highland Park during the era in which the Coleman and Steil families lived there.

Highland Park was incorporated as a village in 1889. In 1907, Henry Ford purchased 160 acres of land on which he built an automobile factory. This caused the population of the village to increase dramatically. The village incorporated as a city in 1918. Chrysler Corporation was founded in Highland Park in 1925. An area which was home to only 927 people in 1900 housed more than 52,000 by 1930. The population decreased slightly to about 48,000 people by the time I was born.

I, and thousands of other infants born in Highland Park in the years following World War II, are known as "Baby Boomers." Returning military veterans started families and provided labor for the expanding economy. The "American Dream" broadened from home ownership to include car ownership as well. Husbands became fathers and breadwinners while wives became mothers and homemakers. At least in terms of the white population, the emergence of the Baby Boom generation

laid the foundation for a culture portrayed by popular television sitcoms such as Leave it to Beaver, the Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet, and The Donna Reed Show.

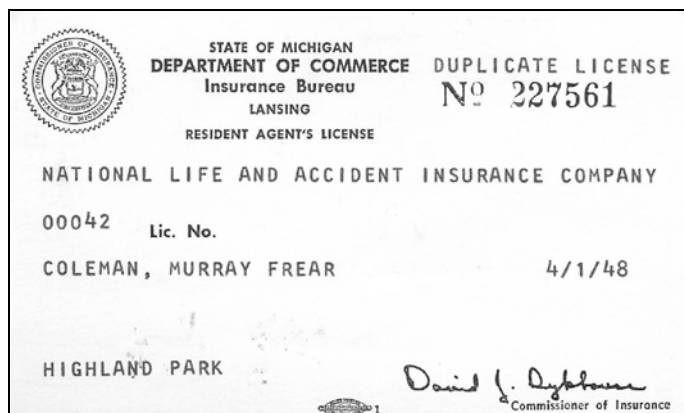
The automobile industry had a major influence on my mother's side of the family. Her father Frank and her paternal uncles all worked for auto makers. My grandfather first worked for the Packard Motor Car Company and then, for several decades until he retired, Grandpa Steil was employed as a tool and dye maker for General Motors. The culture of the automobile industry permeated Detroit which soon became known as "Motor City" and later as "Motown."

Ford closed its plant in the late 1950s. "White flight" from the city after the riots in 1967 changed the racial composition of Highland Park and its vicinity. A city that had an overwhelmingly white majority in 1950 now has a population that is 93 percent black.

Racial tension was stirred up during the Great Depression of the 1930s when Highland Park resident Arthur Lupp founded the Michigan branch of the Black Legion – a secret vigilante organization affiliated with the Klu Klux Klan. The Legion was opposed to immigrants, Catholics, Jews, blacks, and labor organizers. Some public officials and business leaders in Highland Park belonged to the Black Legion. A chief of police, a mayor, and a member of the city council joined this group. The reign of terror of this organization ended when a few dozen of its members were convicted of murder and conspiracy to murder in the late 1930s.

I can only imagine the damage this group did to race relations in Highland Park during the decade it was prominent there, and the lingering effects it may have imprinted on the residents who eventually were confronted with a situation where a growing influx of black auto workers wanted to live closer to work. This is not to say that all, or even most, residents of Highland Park were blatantly racist. But cities and communities in Wayne County – the county that included Detroit and Highland Park – were racially segregated. Actual or perceived threats to that status quo were not welcomed, much less accepted, in that era.

The white population of Highland Park was at an all time high in 1950. It began to drop dramatically in the following two decades, with the 1967 riots in Detroit as a catalyst escalating the speed of "white flight" to the suburbs during the following decade.

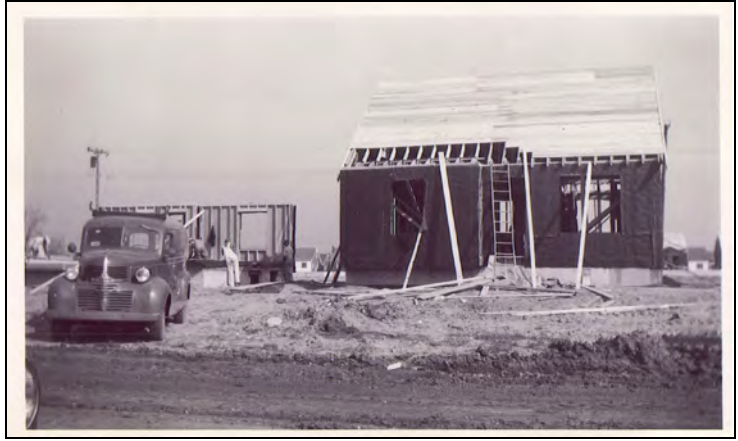


My parents moved from Highland Park to Royal Oak when their family expanded from two children to three in March 1950. Despite the move to Oakland County, my father continued to work in Highland Park for more than two decades. He was a door-to-door insurance salesman with a territory in that area. By the early 1960s, his assigned route was overwhelmingly black.

1950 - 1954

Royal Oak – Moving to the Suburbs

The decision of my parents to move to Royal Oak was motivated in large measure by their need for larger living quarters with more bedrooms. The emergence of new housing tracts in Royal Oak and other suburbs was part of the post-war development of moderate-sized and low-cost homes, with affordable financing for war veterans. My father, an ex-Navy petty officer, took advantage of this opportunity.



Kathleen and Murray Coleman moved in 1950 with five-year-old Larry, two-year-old Tommy, and baby Danny to a new bungalow they purchased in Royal Oak. Suburban living it would be for the Colemans for decades to follow, with Royal Oak being a temporary stop on the way to Ferndale.

My initial impressions of the world around me were formed from ages two



The three boys – Danny, Tommy, and Larry – in 1951



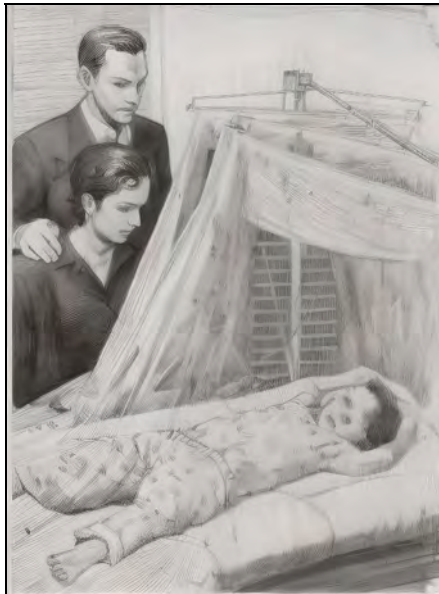
Christmas 1952 at the house on Blair St.

to six during the few years we lived in Royal Oak. I formed my first memories of Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy there. It was the house on Blair Street where I learned how to speak and how to read.

Life was simple for the Coleman family from 1950 to 1954. My father drove to work in Highland Park and went door-to-door selling accident and life insurance. My mother tended to the house, nurturing and teaching her children basic life activities. To keep herself connected to the outside world, she became a part-time sales representative for Avon products.

Royal Oak encompasses about 11 square miles of land. It was first incorporated as a village in 1891. At the time it became a city in 1921, the population of Royal Oak was about 6,000 people. The population increased significantly in each subsequent decade – 23,000 in 1930, 25,000 in 1940, 47,000 in 1950, and 80,000 in 1960 – until it reached its peak population of 86,000 in 1970. Today, about 59,000 people live in Royal Oak.

The 1970 Census documented only 26 black people living in Royal Oak, out of a total population of 85,000. That increased to 116 black people in 1980, and 330 in 1990. The 2000 Census reported that the population was 95% white, about 1.5% black, and 1.3% Hispanic, while the 2010 Census shows an increase of the black population to 4.3% and Hispanics to 2.3%, with 2.4% Asian. Even though the overall population is still 90% white, the city is becoming slightly more diverse in its racial and ethnic composition. The Royal Oak of today is quite different than the virtually all-white community it was prior to 1970.



Parents watch boy in oxygen tent

My idyllic life in Royal Oak was marred three times by serious illness. I was afflicted with pneumonia on three occasions between the ages of two and five.

Pneumonia often begins as an upper respiratory tract infection that moves to the lungs. Fluid and debris gather in the air spaces in the lungs and block the normal passage of air, making it harder for the lungs to function normally. Breathing becomes labored. Pneumonia can have very serious consequences for children. Some 2 million children in the world die each year from the illness.

On each occasion, my symptoms appeared suddenly while I was sleeping at night. I had a hard time breathing and would run to my parents bed, crying and pleading for help. As I struggled for breath, my parents would become alarmed. I would start to panic, thinking I was going to die.

My mother would put Vicks VapoRub on my chest and throat and heat up a pan of water into which she would put another gob of the stuff. My Dad would get the car running and I would sit in the front passenger seat, with the pan of water on my lap and a towel over my head. I would breathe in the vapors as my Dad would speed me to the hospital a few miles away. I would beg him to drive faster as I struggled for air, wondering if I would die before I got to our destination.

Reaching the emergency room was a major relief. On all three occasions, my condition was severe enough to warrant hospitalization. After being admitted as a patient, the nurses would put me in an oxygen tent where I would receive a heavy dose of oxygen for two to three days. Once I was confined to an oxygen tent for nearly a week. My parents and grandparents would come to visit me, looking in on a little boy in a bubble. It was difficult for a youngster to remain confined for so long.

When I turned five, I attended kindergarten classes at Oak Ridge Elementary School which was just three blocks from our house. During the second week of my first grade classes there, I would come home and complain each day that I was bored. When my parents confirmed with the teacher that I was progressing much faster than the other students, they decided to enroll me in a Catholic school. The closest school they could find with an opening in first grade was at St. Benedicts in Highland Park. My father had to drive me to school on his way to work in the morning. A neighbor whose child also was enrolled at St. Benedict's would pick us up.



St. Benedict School in Highland Park

My brother Gary was born in 1953. Some or all of us boys would often spend time with our grandparents who lived two miles away. Because my mother was their only child, and since Grandma Steil was not employed, they had time for us and we were always welcomed there.



If we were lucky, we would watch our favorite television shows and spend the night afterwards. During a weekday, it might be the Soupy Sales Show or on Sunday it might be Lassie. The Howdy Doody Show (photo) was also a favorite.

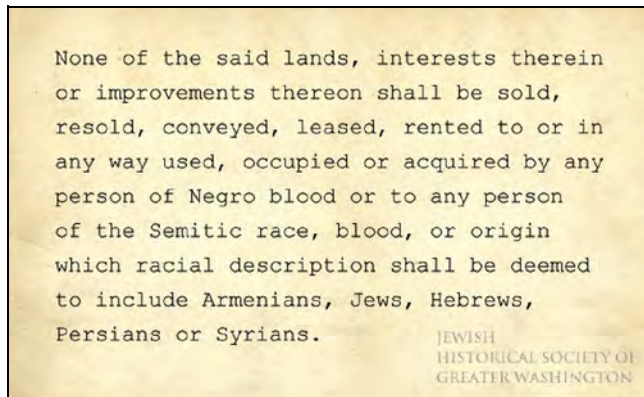
For us Coleman boys, living in a family in the suburb of Royal Oak – with doting grandparents nearby – was truly an era of innocence. We were naively insulated from the tension of the larger reality around us.

Part of that larger, and unpleasant historical reality associated with Royal Oak was the anti-Semitic social and political atmosphere that was promoted for nearly a decade by the pastor at the Shrine of the Little Flower – the largest Catholic church in the city. “The Shrine of the Little Flower was known as a place of hatred of Jews,” recalled Rabbi M. Robert Syme in a news story published in the New York Times in 1992.

The news story explained: “Starting in 1938, the Rev. Charles E. Coughlin delivered hypnotic, anti-Semitic orations from his pulpit at Little Flower. His messages, carried by the CBS Radio Network, reached audiences of 40 million, and crowds that numbered as high as 25,000 gathered on Woodward Avenue to hear Father Coughlin speak.”

Another source reported that Father Coughlin once said during a radio broadcast: “When we get through with the Jews in America, they'll think the treatment they received in Germany was nothing.” Although the Catholic hierarchy banned him from the radio in 1942, Father Coughlin remained pastor

of the Shrine of the Little Flower well into the mid-1960s. Allowing someone with such anti-Semitic views to remain in a position of religious authority in Royal Oak surely sent a subliminal signal to the community that such an extreme position merely warranted a slap on the wrist.



Anti-Semitism was not just an expression of verbal bias. It was incorporated into legal documents and real estate practices in the 1940s, remnants of which remained well into the 1960s. FHA lending policies redlined areas with high percentages of Jews. Restrictive covenants were a method of exclusion as well. Real estate agents were punished if they broke the implied social and economic agreement of not selling or renting to Jews or racial minorities.

The anti-Semitic diatribe of Father Coughlin – broadcast by radio for several years from his pulpit in Royal Oak to millions of Americans – reinforced centuries of Catholic teachings that it was the Jews who murdered Jesus. Catholic school children and adult parishioners heard the clergy blaming the Jews – as a people – for the crucifixion. This religious scapegoating coincided with biases that stemmed from independent economic considerations and social prejudice.

These attitudes and practices existed among some segments of the population in Royal Oak and other areas of Metropolitan Detroit long before I was born. As children being raised in the all-white and virtually all-Christian community of Royal Oak, I and other Baby Boomers were oblivious to the continuing existence of anti-Semitism or, for that matter, racial bias in our midst.

It would not be until many years later that I would eventually become aware of the complex political, economic, religious, and social forces that existed outside of the protective bubble in which I had lived as a child growing up in the suburbs of Detroit. But during the time I lived in suburbs such as Royal Oak and Ferndale as a child, I was blissfully ignorant of such matters.



Playful children oblivious to larger reality

~ ~ ~

Life in Ferndale

1955 - 1962

Grade School Years



Ferndale streets were lined with beautiful trees

My family moved to Ferndale in 1955. The house purchased by my parents at 215 N. Gardendale Street was as close to the City of Detroit as one could get and still be considered a suburbanite. We were two houses north of Eight Mile Road – the six-lane thoroughfare that separated Detroit (in Wayne County) from Ferndale (in Oakland County).

On the south side of Eight Mile Road were racially-mixed neighborhoods. The north side – where we lived – was virtually all white. As a seven-year-old moving into a new area, I was completely unaware of such things.

Ferndale was incorporated as a village in 1918 and had a population of 2,000 when it became a city in 1927. The city encompasses about four square miles of land. In 1912, a narrow strip of pavement was laid on Woodward Avenue through Ferndale – from Detroit on the south to Royal Oak on the north. The road-widening project occurred from 1924 to 1928, making Ferndale the first community in the United States to have an eight-lane highway running through its borders.

The population of Ferndale increased significantly in the 1920s when the Ford Motor plant was built in nearby Highland Park. Many of the new factory workers wanted to live in neighboring communities such as Ferndale. With the influx of these workers and their families, new schools were needed. Most of Ferndale's schools were built between 1919 and 1928 – an era known as the “boom years.” Lincoln High was built in 1921. St. James Parochial School opened in 1923 with 350 students.

In 1930, 20,355 people lived in Ferndale. By 1940, the number grew to 22,500. Through the early 1950s, there were trolley (inter-urban railroad) lines running through the median strip on Woodward Avenue, from Detroit all the way north to Pontiac. The trolley helped northern suburbs grow, as people traveled from new bedroom communities, where they lived, to Detroit, where they worked or shopped.



Trolley on Woodward Avenue in 1940s



People shopping on 9 Mile Road in the 1950s

Ferndale High School opened in 1958. The new school was developed in response to the continuing influx of new residents. The city's population increased from about 29,000 in 1950 to a peak of 31,000 in 1960.

Nine Mile Road became the main area for shopping in Ferndale. In addition to the Federal's Department Store, there was a Kresge's, F&M Drugstore, Sander's Candy Store, Winkelman's clothing, Hagelstein's Bakery, Betty Murray Hair Shop, and an A&P Supermarket. Ferndale Lanes was also available for those who liked the game of bowling.

After we moved to Ferndale, each year or two we would have a new addition to the family. My father was all in favor of birth control, but my mother was opposed due to the teaching of the Catholic Church. So our family would grow from four children when we arrived in Ferndale to nine children when my parents moved to Lake Orion in the 1970s.

We lived in a residential area one mile south of Nine Mile Road. Rows of small two and three bedroom houses lined both sides of the streets. Our block on Gardendale was an exception. The houses on our side of the street were facing a city park.

Taft Park had a playground, a baseball field, and a small activities building that was open during the summer months. The neighborhood kids all liked Mr. Upworth, a park watchman who worked there during the summer.

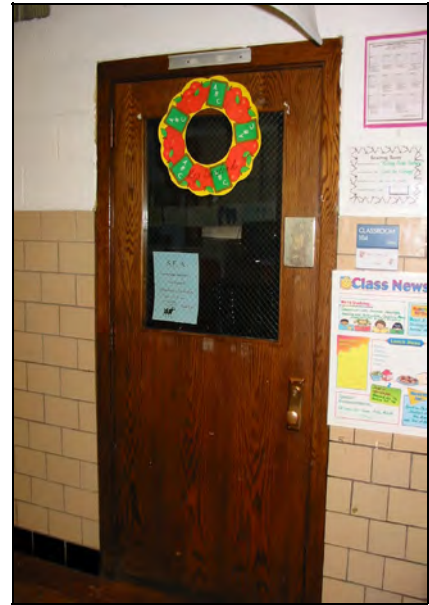
Since we were constantly darting back and forth to and from the park, our parents repeatedly told us to look both ways before crossing the street.

Only three of us kids were old enough to attend school. Danny was enrolled in kindergarten at Taft School across the street. Larry and I went to St. James which was within walking distance of our house.



Coleman kids posing in Taft Park in 1956

I entered second grade at St. James school when we moved to Ferndale. I liked our teacher, Sister Rose Agnes, so much that I would do volunteer work for her on Saturdays along with several of my classmates. In her spare time, Sister Rose Agnes supported the work of missionary priests in India. They were so impoverished that she would send them parcels filled with school and office supplies. In order to avoid the supplies being stolen by postal workers in India – something that apparently had happened in the past – she “smuggled” the supplies by hiding them inside of books. She would cut out the inside pages of the books, except for about an inch around the edges, and fill the empty space with supplies. When the books were closed, they would look like ordinary books – something that would-be thieves would not steal. I remember one time, however, when she wanted to hide paperclips inside a book but gave up in frustration. She could not find a way to muffle the sound of them when the parcel was shaken. I can thank Sister Rose Agnes for learning how to foil thievery.



Second grade classroom



Interior of Saint James Catholic Church in Ferndale

The grounds of St. James Parish had a church and a school, as well as a rectory for the priests and a convent for the nuns. The parish was part of the Archdiocese of Detroit. The nuns were members of the Order of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Almost all of the teachers at St. James were nuns. The school included grades 1 - 12. Our school day began with all of the students attending Mass at 8:00 a.m. We sat inside the church with each group of students sitting together next to their teacher. Stand, sit, kneel – that is what we did over and over. This morning ritual occurred each day before we started our classes. The Mass was said in Latin.

Although I tried to be a model Catholic school student – attending Mass before school, paying attention during class, doing homework in the evening, attending Mass on Saturday followed by volunteer work for the nuns, and going to Mass on Sunday – it took a year for me to adjust academically. In second grade I received mostly B's, but by third grade I received A's in all subjects (religion, reading, spelling, arithmetic, English, and health) except for art in which I got a B. I remained on the honor roll each year throughout my elementary and junior high years. I was mostly an obedient boy – volunteering in the choir and as an altar server – who openly aspired to be a priest.

American society in the 1950s is often remembered as “the good old days,” especially by older white people who long for an era they recall as being peaceful and prosperous. Many Baby Boomers and their parents, who lived in suburban areas at the time, think of the “Eisenhower years” – the eight years from 1953 to 1961 when Dwight Eisenhower was President – as idyllic.

To some extent it was idyllic – for some people. The men who returned from the war at the end of the 1940s married, started families, got jobs, and bought houses. The move from cities to the suburbs gave them the feeling of a fresh start. Instead of having to go to movie houses for entertainment, entertainment came to them as a growing number of households were able to purchase a television set. During the 1950s, the automobile came to dominate American culture. The number of cars in the United States doubled during that decade, from 39 million to 74 million. By 1960, some 80 percent of the nation’s households had one car and 15 percent had two or more.



Elias Brothers Big Boy drive-up restaurant

Fast food establishments sprung up all over the place in the 1950s. In addition to the first McDonalds in 1954, regional drive-ups such as the Big Boy restaurants became popular. Customers would drive up to the establishment, place an order over an intercom, and a waitress would bring the food to the car where it would be consumed by happy customers who listened to music on their car radio. Drive-in movie theaters also catered to these car-loving consumers. There were 3,000 such businesses operating in the United States by 1956.

Adolescents began to think of themselves as a distinct social group in the 1950s. The term “teenager” was rarely used in prior decades. The prosperity of the fifties allowed teens to stay in school rather than getting jobs to help support their families as many of their parents had done when they were that age.



Judy and Mickey having a milkshake

The teenagers of the 1950s had money to spend, either from part-time jobs or from allowances they got from their parents. A new class of consumers was created – young people who purchased clothing or records at new shopping malls, hamburgers at drive-up restaurants, or milk shakes at a local soda fountain at a five-and-dime. Merchants targeted them with advertisements on popular television shows such as Dick Clark’s American Bandstand.

But despite the growth of a prosperous middle class and a newly-identified subset of teenagers – idealized in retrospect by many older adults – there was another side to life in America in the 1950s that was anything but rosy. African Americans, then referred to as blacks or Negroes, were struggling for equality. Racial discrimination in employment, housing, and public accommodations was a way of life for millions of people of color in Detroit, in Michigan, and in the United States.

Racial discrimination was not prohibited by Michigan law until 1963 when the people approved a new state constitution. Article I, Section 2 set a tone of racial equality by prohibiting discrimination against people in the exercise of their civil rights on account of race, color, or national origin. Details of this new policy were left to the Legislature, which did not get around to enacting the Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act until 1976. Federal law was also silent on the issue of racial discrimination until Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

When my family moved to Ferndale in 1955, housing segregation was the norm. Ferndale and Royal Oak were white, Royal Oak Township was black, and Detroit was mixed and in the process of transition from majority-white to majority-black. The segregation in housing resulted in the segregation of public schools, since the boundaries of school districts were aligned with the boundaries of cities. Few, if any, businesses in Ferndale had black employees. So in addition to interactions with neighbors, socializing with friends, and attending school, shopping at stores was also an all-white experience.

As kids in elementary school, we rarely if ever thought about the issue of race. Interacting with other white people was the norm. We did not notice a lack of black people in our daily life. But people did notice, and often commented, on the occasional black face in an otherwise all-white suburban world.

I do not recall any teacher at school – whether in social science, civics, or government classes – or any adult family members ever mentioning the significance of the 1948 Supreme Court case of *Shelley v. Kramer*. That landmark decision prohibited courts from enforcing restrictive covenants that prohibited racial minorities from buying property in white communities. The communities stayed white because these contracts, forced on everyone who would buy land, prohibited them from ever selling to a member of the Negro race. These covenants had contributed to cities in Oakland County, such as Ferndale, staying all white. Despite the Supreme Court's edict, it took two decades or more for implied agreements among neighbors to give way to nondiscrimination in housing transactions.



1957 student harassed by whites opposing integration

I also do not recall any discussion at school, or at home, about the 1954 court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* – a ruling by the United States Supreme Court that prohibited racial segregation in public schools and paved the way for integration. I was probably out playing in the park when the nightly television news carried a story in 1957 about federal soldiers forcing a school in Arkansas to admit black students. At the time, the issue of racial integration of the schools was not discussed in our house – at least I don't remember any such conversations by my parents.



Top Hat hamburgers were popular

The only place that my friends and I would occasionally cross paths with black people was at the Top Hat hamburger joint at the corner of Eight Mile Road and Livernois which was about three blocks from our house. Although it was in Ferndale, it was at a main intersection south of which there was a growing black population.

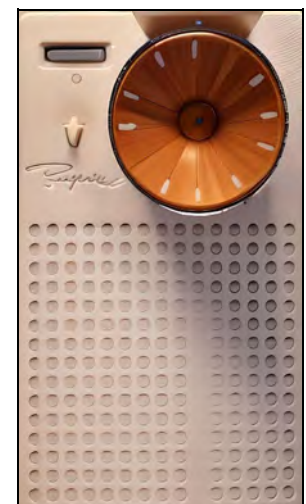
Since I was not into sports, I did not have any interest to play basketball on the newly erected “magic square” in Taft Park across the street from our house. It was a multi-purpose concrete area that was used for impromptu basketball games for young men in the summer, ice skating for boys and girls and adults in the winter, and square dancing for older adults during evenings in warm weather months.

The hoops attracted young black men from across Eight Mile Road who lacked nice basketball courts where they lived. So they crossed the “racial divide” and ventured into white territory to play a game or two of basketball. I do recall hearing words of disdain from people in our neighborhood who expressed their feelings that the young men should “stay on their own side.”

Although the problems of racial discrimination and anti-Semitism existed back then, my grade school days were mostly focused on learning in school, praying in church, chores, homework, playing with friends, watching television, going to the movies, and listening to my transistor radio.

Transistor radios first hit the market in 1954. Prior to their invention in 1947, radios were big and bulky because of the tubes and circuitry they required. Condensing a radio to something that could be held in the palm of one hand was amazing.

These compact gadgets became the most popular electronic device in history, with billions manufactured in the 1960s and 1970s. I probably got my first transistor radio around the age of 10 in 1958. A boy with his own transistor radio was in audio heaven.



1950s transistor radio



Boblo boat on the Detroit River

Special forms of entertainment, especially in the summer, included trips to amusement parks in places such as Boblo Island, Walled Lake, or Edgewater. We would jump in the car and off we would go to a land of roller coasters, tilt-a-whirls, and picnic lunches.

A excursion to Boblo would take us out of our comfort zone since the boat that took us from the foot of Woodward Avenue to the dock at Boblo Island would be filled with black and white children and adults. Listening to music on the way, we all did the Hokey Pokey together. Racial segregation did not exist on a Boblo day. It was all about fun and adventure.

After a special outing such as Boblo, I would return to the routine of daily life in Ferndale. Life was good. My Dad worked hard to make a living and put food on the table, my mother was a typical homemaker when she was not out selling Avon, and we kids had lots of freedom. The door to the house was almost never locked. We went to school, did our homework afterwards, and went out to play with our friends. We had so much fun playing that we grudgingly came home for dinner where we sat together for a family dinner each night. We would watch a little bit of television and then it was off to bed.

I excelled at all of my classes at school. I soaked up religious indoctrination and accepted the dogma of the Catholic Church without question. I sometimes “played priest” with my friend John at his house. He saved up money to buy priestly vestments, which we both alternated wearing while we “said Mass.” I was also enamored with the nuns. Without my parent’s knowledge I would sometimes adorn a home-made nun’s habit. John and I were so in awe of the clergy that we imitated priests and nuns as a form of play.



Tom (right) and friend at first communion

My first communion followed my first confession, both in 1956. At school we were taught that this is a sin, that is a sin, and the other thing is a sin. Mortal sins sent you to hell when you died, where you would be tormented by fire in excruciating pain for all eternity. Venial sins would only land you in Purgatory for an indefinite period of time, to be released to heaven only when God thought you had been purged of all sin. Eating meat on Friday was a mortal sin, as was murder, masturbation, and homosexuality. The sexual sins would not pose a problem until after I reached puberty.



Tom's birthday party in 1959 with siblings and friends

My brothers Larry, Danny, and Gary, and my sisters Maryann and Cathy attended my birthday party in 1959, as did my friends John McEachern, Ronald Schott, and John Klinger.

Turning eleven meant that I had to wait one more year before I would be eligible to work as a paper boy. My brother Larry earned money with a part-time job delivering newspapers for the Detroit Times. I wanted to do the same but I did not want to wait. I had a reputation for being impatient. Mom sometimes called me "Speedy Gonzales."

The Detroit Times published an evening newspaper in the city from 1900 to 1960. William Randolph Hearst bought a controlling interest in the paper in 1921. It was 1958 when The Times reached its highest circulation, with more than 430,000 papers sold each day. The Times competed with the Detroit Free Press, a morning paper, and the Detroit News, another evening paper.

In addition to being sold on newsstands, all three papers were delivered by boys between the ages of 12 to 18 who picked up the papers from a distribution station in their neighborhood. They folded the papers in a manner allowing them to be thrown to a subscriber's porch as they rode down the sidewalk on their bicycles.

I often went to our paper station to pester the manager for a paper route. I finally said that I was 12, even though my actual birthday was about five months away. I got the job.

I enjoyed hanging out with the other paper boys at the paper station after school. I also enjoyed the extra cash I earned from this part-time job. It enabled me to save money in the bank, as well as to buy consumer goods that caught my eye. Since we collected money from our customers each week and turned in the proceeds to the manager on Saturday, the transactions at the front door of customers afforded us an opportunity to get tips. Many customers were especially generous at Christmas. The excitement of counting those tips left an impression.



Cover of the Times announced the primary winner

When the circulation of the Times slipped to 400,000 in 1960, Hearst decided to sell the paper to the Detroit News. The sale caught everyone by surprise, including the adult employees and the newspaper boys. When we showed up at the paper station one day, we found ourselves being courted by employees for the Detroit News as well as the Detroit Free Press. Each paper was trying to get us to deliver their papers to our Times customers. Some boys went with the Free Press. I chose the News because I wanted to deliver papers in the afternoon, not the morning. From that day forward I would be an employee of the Detroit News. Same paper station, same paper boys, mostly the same customers, but a different newspaper.

Over the next few years I was part of the home delivery team for the Detroit News. I was one of about 35 boys working out of a paper station located about a block from St. James. This was a seven-day-a-week commitment. Rain or shine or snow, we were as dependable as the postal service.

Parents and teachers encouraged children to participate in extra-curricular activities – whether they were religious, educational, sports, or civic pursuits. For several years I served the church as an altar boy, providing assistance to priests as they celebrated Mass. I also sang in the boy's choir. Although I was not keen on group sports, my Dad forced me to play baseball. He rejected my preference for softball, probably thinking that he would toughen me up with hardball. I grudgingly participated in hard ball, but only because I had no choice.

It was in eighth grade when I had a big argument with my parents. Although the word homosexual was never openly mentioned, it was likely lingering in their minds. I had been doing very well academically during my first eight years in school. My two best friends – John and Ron – had applied for and been accepted to enter ninth grade at the University of Detroit High School. My placement exam put me in the top 30 percent of those who took the test.

The Jesuit-run school was reputedly academically superior to St. James. John and Ron said they were definitely going. I distinctly recall a heated conversation with my parents as we stood on the sidewalk in front of a neighbor's house. They told me that I was going to stay at St. James for high school. I could not understand how they would prevent me from attending a better school. I suspected, but had no proof, that they wanted to separate me from my two friends and to keep me in a mixed, rather than a single-sex, school.



They had no qualms about allowing me to be a Cub Scout for several years, a single-sex civic club for boys parallel to the Girl Scouts, a single-sex club for girls. I guess the difference was that now, on the verge of my becoming a high school freshman, I was entering a new era in which raging hormones would have a more dominant influence in my life. Of course, my parents won the argument since they had the money and they had the power. So I remained at St. James for the next four years.

The issue of homosexuality was never openly discussed in my house, by my parents, or among my friends and class mates during my elementary and junior high years. However, my mannerisms, preferences, and aversions probably caused my parents to unconsciously suspect that I might be a homosexual. Whether they ever openly discussed it between themselves or with others, I do not know. But I believe that the possibility of my being a homosexual was something they feared.

I do recall that I was severely punished when I overtly displayed homosexual tendencies at the age of five. My parents probably thought that a harsh punishment would imprint in me an indelible belief that homosexuality was bad and that my memory of the punishment would cause me to conform to the heterosexual norm in society. They were only partly correct.



The punishment did not alter my sexual orientation – something that was probably fixed at birth. Making someone pretend to be heterosexual is not the same as them actually being heterosexual. I think the punishment I experienced at that young age caused me to learn how to be a pretender – how to suppress a natural feeling and to produce an outward appearance that those in power wanted to see. The punishment I experienced was so successful that I would not even privately think of myself as a homosexual.

By the time I entered high school, I was dating lots of girls and going through all of the motions of normal boy-girl experiences – except that I was not sexually attracted to girls. Whether they knew it or not, the girls were “safe” with me. In baseball terminology, I stayed on “first base” with my dates, only rarely venturing to “second base.” Third base or a home run were unthinkable to me.

In my senior year, everyone in the graduating class was given a nickname associated with a popular movie. Mine was “The Great Imposter.” I never knew who specifically gave me that label or why and no one volunteered the information. Looking back, now I understand.

1962 - 1966

High School Years

I remained a newspaper delivery boy during my high school years. Each paper station had a “station captain” – an older boy, usually 17 or 18 years old, who supervised the delivery boys. Since gender roles still permeated our society, door-to-door newspaper delivery was limited to boys. Apparently someone had decided that such work was not appropriate for girls.

After several years of service as a paper boy, I was eventually selected to be the station captain. I was a senior at St. James high school when that happened. The new role had perks. I was given a key to the door and had access to this private space when it was not being used for distribution of papers. During my senior year, several boys from my class regularly had lunch with me at the paper station. Every couple of weeks, we got hold of some beer and listened to music, drank beer, and played cards at the station at night. Although I was not involved in sports, some of the “jocks” joined our paper station lunchtime gatherings and periodic beer bust fraternity.



The 1960s saw protests and political movements

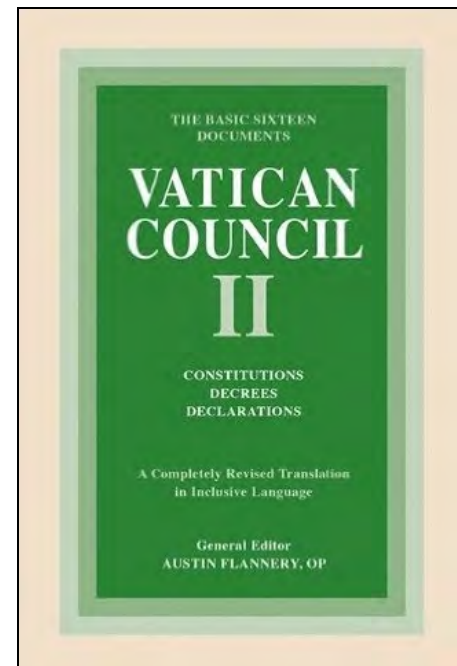
The 1960s ushered in an era of social, political, and religious upheaval. Just as these changes had a major impact on the larger society around me, they also profoundly affected the way I thought and felt about myself and others.

The Catholic Church was not immune from the power of transformation. St. James, as part of the universal catholic church, was drawn into and swept along with spiritually inspired doctrinal and organizational changes.

Pope Pius XII died in 1958. He was succeeded by Pope John XXIII, perhaps the most extraordinary pope in terms of Christian-Jewish relations. He was also exceptional as a religious leader who was committed to more meaningful participation in church affairs and rituals by the laity.

The transition from Pope Pius XII to Pope John XXIII fascinated me. I can remember listening intently to news broadcasts on my transistor radio – as I lay in bed one night – as the broadcaster explained that white smoke was seen emanating from the Vatican’s chimney. It was then announced that the cardinals had selected Angelo Roncalli to be the new pope. Little did I know that the church’s new supreme leader, soon to be named John XXIII, would stimulate radical changes that would have ramifications for decades to come.

A meeting between Pope John and Jules Isaac in 1960 was a precursor to the pope convening the Vatican Council II in 1962. Isaac was a Jewish political and religious leader who had experienced and studied the Holocaust, including the actions and inactions of the Catholic Church in the historic persecution of Jews as a people. Pope John, who had protected many Jews from persecution when he was known as Cardinal Roncalli, was open to reviewing church doctrines that were contributing to anti-Semitism.





Pope John XXIII

When he convened the second Vatican Council, Pope John included a mandate for the participants to study the relationship between the church and other faiths, including the Jewish faith. The Council was a political process involving 2,200 clergy members, hundreds of meetings, and political arguments between the liberal and conservative elements of the church.

Pope John XXIII, who died in the spring of 1963, never lived to see the results of this concave. Pope Paul VI was his successor. Vatican II continued and issued its results in December 1965.

One of those results was a document titled *Nostra Aetate* – Latin words meaning “In Our Time.” In an article published in the April 2001 edition of *The Jewish Magazine*, author Judith Rice explains that *Nostra Aetate* was the Pope’s proclamation that the Jews were not collectively responsible for killing Jesus. This changed hundreds of years of church doctrine to the contrary, including teachings that we had received in religion classes at St. James.

The pronouncement about the Jews in *Nostra Aetate* was only one of many remarkable results of the Vatican Council II. As young minds receiving religious indoctrination from the priests and nuns, we had learned that the Catholic Church was the one and only true church and that baptism in Christ was the only path to salvation. Another section of *Nostra Aetate* changed all that. It acknowledged the faith of Hindus and Buddhists and that there were paths to God other than the Catholic Church. “The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions,” the document said. “The Church regards with esteem the Moslems,” it added. Talk about religious upheaval in the 1960s – Vatican II was the equivalent of a religious earthquake.

Vatican Council II created many significant changes in the liturgy, one of which was saying the Mass, performing sacraments, and saying prayers in the language of the people instead of in Latin. Church architecture changed. The altar was turned around, so priests would say Mass facing the people instead of having their backs to those in the pews.

Another charismatic Catholic leader was John F. Kennedy. He broke through a religious barrier to the presidency when he, as a Catholic, was elected as president in 1960. Kennedy was loved and respected by the American people. He appointed his brother Bobby Kennedy to be Attorney General. Working together, the brothers used the power of federal law to force colleges in Mississippi and Alabama to enroll black students.



President John F. Kennedy

Kennedy is widely remembered for his role in the Cuban Missile Crisis. The showdown with Nikita Khrushchev and the Soviet Union is legendary. Kennedy’s assassination in 1963 was heartbreaking.

President Kennedy was assassinated in Texas at 12:30 p.m. Central Time on Friday, November 22, 1963. It was 1:30 p.m. in Michigan. We were in school when an announcement was broadcast by the principal to each classroom that the President had been killed. Classes were suspended and we were advised to return home.

As I walked home, I recall stopping by the home of my friend Ron, just a few blocks from St. James. His mother turned on the television set. I recall crying as I watched the news. People were in shock. How could this happen? Why would anyone do such a thing? The nation mourned, a burial occurred, and Lyndon Baines Johnson replaced Kennedy as President of the United States.

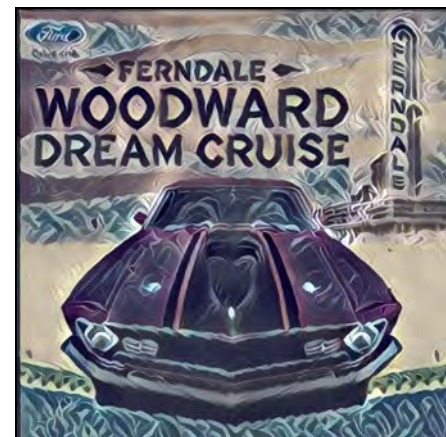


On a much lighter note, a new era in musical entertainment emerged in the 1960s. Not only did new singers and groups appear, but new genres of music were created. Plus, the advent of color television sets made variety shows even more enjoyable for families who could afford the new technology.

A new word was coined in the English language in the mid-1960s. Beatlemania was defined as “extreme enthusiasm for the Beatles, as manifested in the frenzied behavior of their fans.” The musical world, and the lives of teenagers, changed when the Beatles appeared on the Ed Sullivan Show on February 9, 1964. That performance was one of the most highly watched single episodes in television history.

The musical breakthrough of the Beatles was so successful that Ed Sullivan booked other exciting performers, such as The Rolling Stones, The Doors, Janis Joplin, Marvin Gaye, and Bob Dylan.

As teenagers, we wanted to do much more than sit in the house and watch television, no matter how inviting and enjoyable the shows were. We wanted to get out of the house so that we could mix and mingle with our friends – especially if we could get away from the watchful eyes and ears of our parents. As younger teens, we would walk to the houses of our friends where we would listen to music and dance in the basement. Sometimes we would tell our parents we were going to the library to do research or study, while in reality we were hanging out at the malt shop or some gathering spot that had little or no adult supervision.



After we turned 16, and got access to a car, some of us would “cruise Woodward” and turn up our car radios to attract the attention of other cruisers. On our way to Big Boy’s for a snack, we might stop at Giant Gas Station to buy a gallon of gas for 25 cents.



Tom and friend Ron in 1962

My neighborhood friend was Eddie McQuade. He lived four doors down from our house with his parents and five siblings. We and our siblings were often at each other's houses. We had interchangeable families.

Ron and I were also very good friends. He lived a few blocks away with his mom and an older brother. His oldest brother was in the seminary.



Tom and friend Eddie

Also in my inner circle of close friends was John. He lived about a mile and a half away, in the northern part of Ferndale. His family consisted of his parents and two older brothers. His house was built two decades before mine or Eddie's or Ron's houses. It seemed odd to me to have heat coming from steam-heated radiators. Most of us had newer homes with electric baseboard heating. But we all had a milk chute near our side door, where the milkman made deliveries in the 1950s.

John and I loved to go to movie theaters together. The only problem was John's parents who were devoutly Catholic and very conservative. For more than three decades, from 1934 to the late 1960s, the Catholic Church in America rated movies through its Legion of Decency. The church pressured Hollywood to submit every film it produced to Legion reviews in New York. The rating system ranged from an A (approved for all ages) to the dreaded C (condemned), with several variations in between. Producers would negotiate with the Legion, receiving a better rating for a wider audience if they edited out segments the Legion found objectionable.

John's mother would check "the list" before we were allowed to go to a movie. If a film was not on the list, we could not see it. Often we would go to Radio City theater on Woodward Avenue, just north of Nine Mile Road. Sometimes we would catch a ride from a parent to a nearby theater in Royal Oak. Other times we were adventurous and would ride a bus down Woodward Avenue to downtown Detroit to see a movie at the Fox Theater – an old and very ornate edifice that showed some of the blockbuster movies in the 1950s and 1960s. The sound in that theater was great.

John and I went to the Fox to see all time greats such as The Sound of Music, West Side Story, Laurence of Arabia, and Cleopatra. We loved the mysterious and exotic Dr. Zhivago. Radio City theater was the venue where we saw movies such as The Pink Panther and The Time Machine.



My circle of friends expanded from a small network of boys during elementary and junior high school, to boys and girls during my high school years. I started to date girls a lot during my freshman and sophomore years at St. James. While a few of my classmates went steady with one member of the opposite sex, I “played the field” and dated many different girls. Dances in the high school gym were popular, although a little awkward getting started.



TV's American Bandstand set the tone for school dances

The social convention at the time was that a boy would invite a girl to a dance or on a date. Periodically, but not too often, the tables were turned when the school sponsored a Sadie Hawkins dance where a girl would invite a boy. Either way, if a student did not have a partner for the evening, he or she could go to the dance as a single and mix and mingle with potential dance partners at the event. Once in a while, I ventured into Detroit to attend a “sock hop” at the University of Detroit High School where my friends John and Ron

attended school. They called it a “sock hop” because, in order to preserve the floor of the gymnasium where the dance was held, students would remove their shoes and dance in their socks.

Dancing at a sock hop was not as glamorous as dances were portrayed on American Bandstand on television, but with the lights dimmed and everyone dressed up and strutting their stuff, an evening of dancing was fun nonetheless. Of course, the girls had their hair ratted up to the hilt. The higher and puffier the hair, the better.



United Nations Club members

Although I socialized a lot with my three best friends in high school, I periodically took girls out on dates, and worked part-time as a paper boy and later as a station captain with the Detroit News. But most of my time was spent in school attending classes and doing homework. My love of learning and my academic predisposition was reflected in the grades on my report cards. I



National Honor Society

got nearly all A's in my classes during my high school years. I joined our school's chapter of United Nations Club and was inducted into the National Honor Society. I won second place in a debate competition sponsored by the regional Optimists Club.



Tom and Fran for the Senior Prom

After two years of serial dating in high school, I asked my classmate Fran Paul if she would like to go steady. She said yes. Fran and I got along very well. I was not part of the “in crowd” of male jocks and she was not part of any female clique of friends. We were both mavericks focused primarily on academics.

Fran lived in the neighboring community of Warren – a working class suburb where the Chrysler plant was located. Her parents spoke with a heavy Scottish accent which she displayed remnants of in her speech. She started St. James in ninth grade, so unlike me, she did not have a long history with most of the other 101 students at our grade level.

Fran and I enjoyed each other’s company and went to dances, school athletic competitions, movies, and other social events together. We sometimes double dated with my friend Eddie and his girlfriend Donna.

My first two years in high school were relatively smooth. The next two years, not so much. I started to think more independently, questioning the dogma of the Catholic Church. I stopped singing in the church choir and discontinued being an altar boy.

The principal of our high school, Mother Aurilla, was not pleased with the new trends in hairstyles and clothing fashions adopted by modern teenagers, including high school students at St. James. Girls started ratting their hair and wearing high and puffy hairstyles. Their dresses got shorter. Boys were starting to wear tight pants, sometimes showing more in the front than the Sisters of St. Joseph could bear to see. Blue jeans, manufactured by Levi Straus Company, soon became the craze. All the boys bought a pair of Levi’s. I was especially proud of my pair of white Levi’s.

Mother Aurilla decided to crack down on the fashion statements being made by the high school students over whom she had control. It was in my 11th grade that she instituted a new dress and fashion code for the school. Levi jeans were prohibited – period. No more tight pants for boys. If the pants showed any wrinkles behind the knees they were outlawed. Boys had to wear a tie.

For the girls, there was no ratting of hair. Mother Aurilla instituted a fingertip test. A teacher suspecting a girl of having ratted hair would put her finger into the top of the hairdo. If the hair was above the joint of the finger, the girl had to go to the restroom to comb it out. Under Mother Aurilla’s watch, this would be a no nonsense school.



The era as depicted in *Hairspray*



Tom's senior class photo in 1966

By my senior year, I had developed a reputation for challenging authority. It was hard for teachers to muzzle me, since questioning assumptions and disputing unproven claims was part of the scientific and academic process. Nonetheless, Sister Alexander did not like me raising difficult questions in her 12th grade religion class.

In the spring of my last year in high school, the powers that be decided to have a spiritual “retreat” for all of the students at St. James High. But instead of going to some remote countryside location, the retreat was held in the school gymnasium. In addition to prayers and spiritual lectures, this was advertised as a time when students could ask any questions and make any comments they wanted to – without any negative consequences. The process was supposed to be open and fluid. Supposed to be.

As the religion teacher of the senior class, Sister Alexander played a major role in running the retreat. She and the principal were concerned that none of the students would step forward to ask questions or make comments when the process would be opened to student participation. So they asked the president of the senior class to find a student who would break the ice when the time came. The president, Dave Dell, asked me in advance if I would make remarks to get the ball rolling at the designated time. I enthusiastically agreed. I definitely had something I wanted to get off my chest.

At a certain point in the morning session, with the gym filled to capacity with 400 students and a dozen or more teachers, the priest who was leading the session asked: “Is there anyone who would like to ask a question or make a comment?” I knew that was my cue to stand up and speak.

“There is something that has been bothering me for more than a year,” I belted out. I then explained how the new dress code was unfairly harsh and unnecessary and how one aspect of Mother Aurilla’s edicts was arbitrary and an abuse of power. Her ban on ratted hair for girls and Levi’s for boys had been a novelty to the press when it was issued. She had been quoted in an Associated Press story – carried by many newspapers from coast to coast at the time – as saying that she was not sure what Levi’s looked like, but they would not be worn at her school. I explained that banning something you have never seen was a perfect example of the abuse of power and the arbitrary assertion of authority.

When the students started hooting and cheering and stomping their feet, and even though I was not finished with my remarks, Sister Alexander stood up, turned to me, and ordered me to “shut up and sit down.” When I reminded everyone that there were not supposed to be any negative consequences for speaking out at the retreat, Sister Alexander ignored my remarks and repeated her command for me to stop. I obeyed. The next day, the current principal, Mother Nathaniel who had replaced Mother Aurilla that year, called me into her office and told me that my actions would have negative consequences not only for me but for my younger brothers and sisters who attended St. James.

A story about growing up in Ferndale would be incomplete without mentioning the role of tobacco and alcohol. My Dad was a heavy smoker and a heavy drinker. In fact, he suffered from the disease of alcoholism. Addiction to alcohol was not viewed as a disease at the time.



Ladies who smoked were elegant

In contrast to the excessive use of alcohol which was considered a moral failure, people who smoked – regardless of frequency – were glamorized by our culture. Advertisements for cigarettes appeared on billboards and were seen on television. Many tv shows had characters who smoked.

Although my mother did not smoke, my Dad did. He smoked at least a pack of cigarettes per day, if not more – at work and home.



It was macho for men to smoke

My siblings and I hated going with him in the car, especially on long drives, during bad weather when we could not roll down the windows. When we were confined in a closed vehicle with him driving, he would open the little air vent window at the left of the steering wheel and attempt to blow the smoke out that window. Of course, that did not eliminate the smell or the ill effects of second-hand smoke. The smoke had to travel from his mouth to that window and in the process it circulated throughout the car and made us feel sick. Despite our protests, he was so addicted to tobacco that he could not help himself. He was the Dad, he was the driver, and he would smoke.

By the time I was 15, I had succumbed to the influence of the advertisements and to peer pressure. I started to smoke with some of my friends. Purchasing a pack of cigarettes was easy. They were sold in vending machines everywhere. We would sneak off somewhere – out of the range of parental view and smell – and take a puff or two. Occasional smoking to look “cool” with my friends turned into my own addiction by the time I was 18. During my senior year in high school, I was sometimes smoking as much as a pack a day.

I was miraculously able to kick the habit one day when my older brother's father-in-law visited my parent's house one day. Although I had moved away from home by then – I was 19 at the time – I happened to be there visiting. He asked if I was still smoking. When I replied that I was, he patiently explained the ill effects of smoking and implored me to stop – before it was too late. Although I had received lectures from time to time by others about smoking, this time the warning really sank in. I walked to the kitchen and threw away the half pack of Marlboros I had left.



Stroh's Brewery was located in Detroit

Drinking was another matter. My friend Eddie and I started to drink alcohol by the time we were freshman in high school. His father always kept a few cases of beer at their house.

Eddie's father drank heavily after a hard day of work on a construction site as an electrician. He would always have cases of Pabst Blue Ribbon or Stroh's beer stored in the basement. After a few beers, he would not recall how many bottles he had opened, so when he was not around we would pop open a bottle or two and chug them down. The empties would be placed back in the case along with the ones he had consumed. No one would know the difference.

Drinking with other boys from school was something that happened once every week or two in the second half of our senior year at St. James. A couple of us had created fake identification. It was easy to produce a counterfeit driver's license in those days. The official license was produced on paper which was not laminated. So we would alter the birth date, and instantly we were 21 instead of 18. We would purchase a case of beer and, since I had a key to the paper station, a few of us would go there on a Saturday night to drink. Having such a place to hang out was very convenient.

My father's overuse of alcohol, and my tendency to challenge authority, contributed to any number of debates – indeed heated arguments – between us during my later years in high school. I was an idealistic young man who would not be silenced by brute force or corrupted by money. When I once told him that money was not important to me, he verbally lashed out and called me a “damned communist.” I did not know how to respond at the time because, quite frankly, I did not yet fully understand what a communist was.

I recall hearing the word “communist” used in a political context – especially during the “McCarthy” era in the 1950s when Senator Joe McCarthy tried to ruin the careers of people in the entertainment industry whom he branded as such. But I had never paid much attention to the term since I had not yet become involved in politics, beyond running for a position as an officer of our school class. So like it or not, I was now a communist – at least in the eyes of my father during a heated argument.

Despite what I had said to my father about not caring about money, I soon discovered that I did care about money very much, just not in terms of my personal accumulation of it. Rather, I got very upset when I saw one person cheating another, or when I felt that an employer was taking unfair advantage of low-paid and financially naive employees. That awareness emerged in 1966 when I decided that the Detroit News was financially mistreating the newspaper delivery boys.

As a station captain supervising 35 teenage delivery boys each day, I felt a sense of paternalistic protectiveness of the boys, even though I was only 18 years old at the time. Each year I saw, and

experienced, the working conditions getting worse.

Papers were often delivered late to the paper station, sometimes making the boys wait there two or more hours before the scheduled pick up time of 3:00 p.m. This caused them to be late for dinner and it cut into their time to do homework. They did not receive any extra compensation for the time they spent waiting for the newspapers to arrive.

The paper started to be delivered to the station – especially on Wednesdays – in two sections. They had to put those sections together before they folded each paper to make it easy to toss from their bicycle to a front porch without falling apart. Sometimes there would be advertising supplements they had to insert into the papers before folding them. Assembling sections together or inserting advertisement supplements took extra time. They did not get paid extra money for this work.

The boys had to collect money from their customers once a week for the newspaper delivery as well as for accident insurance policies that some customers purchased. The cost of the insurance was 10 cents per week. Despite it taking extra time and requiring extra responsibility for the boys to handle and process this money, they did not get extra money for performing this service.

My frustration with these working conditions eventually turned to anger at the abuse of power by the Detroit News and the financial mistreatment of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of delivery boys throughout the city.

By the spring of 1966, I was totally fed up. I decided to organize a protest against the Detroit News. The prior year I had met a representative of the local Teamster's Union. I don't recall the setting or the reason for the meeting, but he gave me his name and phone number and told me to call him if anything bad ever happened to me with the Detroit News. I put his business card in a safe place for future reference.



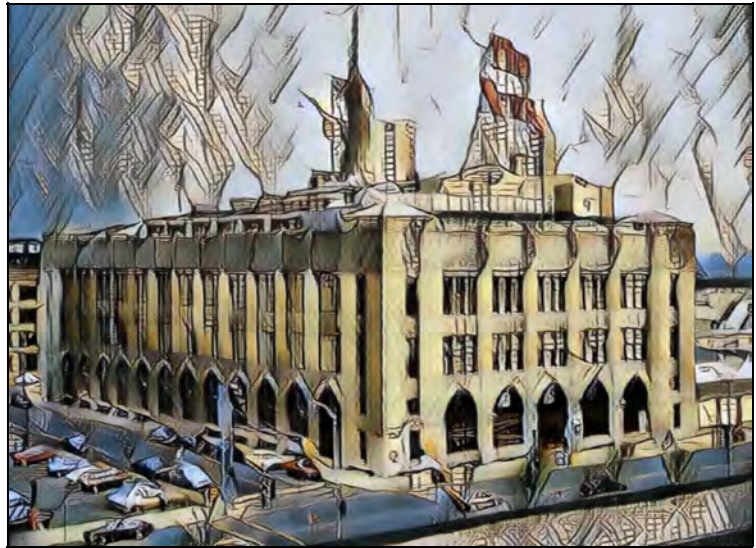
With that offer of help in the back of my mind, I invited the newspaper boys at my station in Ferndale to participate in a picket line at the headquarters of the Detroit News in downtown Detroit. About two dozen of them accepted my invitation. None of us told our parents or anyone else in a position of authority. This bunch of teenage boys were about to go rogue.

I wanted to get the biggest bang for the buck, so I contacted the news desks of the major television stations in Detroit to alert them to this novel news story – paper boys picket the Detroit News. We did fear retaliation, so we decided to disguise ourselves by rubbing charcoal on our faces to camouflage our identities. To be doubly sure of anonymity, I wore a motorcycle helmet and sunglasses.

We stood at the bus stop a hundred yards from the paper station, holding our picket signs at our

sides, and waited for the next bus. Startled at what he was seeing, the bus driver chuckled as we got on the bus. He took us to our destination a few miles away, we exited the bus, and started our picket line in front of the main doors to the Detroit News headquarters.

To my delight, the television cameras were rolling. We chanted some slogans and walked back and forth several times. A few of us were interviewed by reporters. About a half hour later, we boarded a bus and went back to the bus stop by the paper station. We were there in time for the arrival of the delivery truck. There was a television set in the paper station. As the boys folded the papers we watched the 5:00 p.m. news. There we were – on all three stations – picketing the Detroit News. The boys felt successful as they delivered the papers to their customers that day.



Two dozen paper boys walked a picket line here in 1966

For me, the feeling of success was short lived. The next Sunday morning I had arranged for one of the older paper boys to stand in for me as an unofficial station captain as I drove a mile away to meet up with another station captain to discuss expanding the protest and enlisting other participants.

Eventually when my identity as the protest organizer was discovered, I was summoned to the Detroit News headquarters for a meeting with newspaper officials. They tried to strong arm me into backing down from our demands that compensation be given to the boys for wait time when the delivery to the paper station was more than 30 minutes late, for assembling sections of the paper together, for inserting advertising fliers, and for collecting insurance premiums. They told me that meeting these demands would cost the paper more than \$1 million annually and that, rather than doing so, the paper would fire all paper boys and use adults to deliver the paper like was being done in California. To their surprise, I refused to back down.

The next step was the newspaper sending two officials – wearing black suits and looking a lot like the Blues Brothers – to my home to meet with me and my parents. Part way into the conversation, when they realized they were not making progress, one of the men turned my Dad's attention to the labor unrest of the 1930s. He reminded my father how a lot of people got hurt back then. My Dad bristled at what he was hearing, and understanding the implied threat that was lurking there, he stood up and told the men to get out of the house. "I will not be threatened in my own house," he said with a loud voice. As soon as they left, my Dad walked back into the living room, grabbed my arm, and said: "Look what the hell you have done." I think he half admired my courage, but he was not happy that the entire family was being dragged into this mess.



Once newspaper officials realized that I was not backing down, and that their strong-arm tactics would not work, they decided to fire me. They had discovered my half-hour absence from my post the day that I went to visit the other station. That was cited as the grounds for my termination.

I then found the business card of the Teamster's representative and hoped it might serve as my "get out of jail free" card. I called him and explained what had occurred. He escorted me to the offices of the National Labor Relations Board where I filed a complaint for wrongful termination. I argued that I was fired in retaliation for organizing the newspaper delivery boys and for representing them in an attempt at collective bargaining. A representative of the NLRB interviewed me as

I had the Teamster's representative at my side. The complaint was investigated and a few weeks later the Detroit News was ordered to reinstate me with back pay. I returned to the paper station, accepted the congratulations of the paper boys, picked up my check, and resigned. It was time to move on.

That summer, while I was waiting for the decision of the NLRB, I worked part time in Ferndale at Carl's Fruit Market as a stock boy, and part-time in Royal Oak at the Detroit Zoo where I alternated as a helper in the cashier's office and as an usher in the Chimp Show. They were not glamorous jobs, but I was able to generate spending money and to save money so I could eventually buy a car.



High School Graduates Tom and Ed

My attention was focused on attending Wayne State University in the fall. A few of my classmates from St. James would also be attending Wayne State and we planned to car pool together. I was fortunate to have received a General Motors Scholarship which would pay for my college tuition and fees for the next four years. If I moved into an apartment, my housing costs would be paid for too.

I graduated from St. James High along with 101 other students in the Class of 1966. This was a big step for most of us, moving out into the "real world" and beyond the protective bubble of Ferndale and the parochial confines of St. James.

Although I had been accepted at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, I decided to attend a commuter school instead. I would be enrolling in Monteith College at Wayne State University.

My new school was located in the heart of Detroit. I would be sitting next to, and exchanging ideas with, total strangers – men and women from all races and religions, many of whom would be from other states and even other nations. I would be embarking on a fascinating and slightly intimidating new phase of my life.

I had received an acceptance letter from Monteith College in April 1966. The following month I went to the Wayne State campus to take a placement exam which would assess my level of proficiency in various academic subjects. I took the bus to the campus from Ferndale, but on the way back I decided to save some money by hitch hiking back home. I did not know it at the time, but that decision would have a profound impact on my life.

I walked about a mile up Woodward Avenue when my first attempts to hitch a ride failed. Then I decided to give it another try. Within a minute or so, a car from the far lane quickly moved over three lanes and stopped where I was standing. When I got into the car, I noticed the driver was a handsome man, somewhat older than me, who had a very welcoming smile. He asked where I was headed and I told him he could drop me off at Woodward and Eight Mile Road. He would have none of that. He insisted on driving me to my house even though it was a mile out of his way. He was headed to a lighting fixture store on Woodward, a few blocks north of Nine Mile Road. He was the manager of the store.

When he dropped me off at my house, he paused a moment, and then asked if he could have my phone number. He said that he would like to take me to dinner some day. I obliged, got out of the car, and said goodbye. A little later, when my Mom got home, she asked how my day went. I told her about the placement test and my luck in getting a ride home. It was at that point that I started to feel nervous. I knew what I was feeling, but there was no way I could be honest with my mother. So I distorted things to increase the chance of getting the answer that I wanted.

I knew that I was sexually attracted to David. I knew he was 10 years older. I knew I would be condemned if I disclosed my true sexual orientation – something that I had been hiding, even to myself, for my whole life. So I told her that the young man, perhaps three years older than me, had asked if I would like to go bowling sometime. I asked her what she thought I should do. Maybe he is new to town, she said. “Go bowling with him,” she added. “You’ll probably have fun.”

Little did she know that she was giving her blessing to her 18 year old son going on a date with a man – a homosexual – 10 years older than me. I distorted the facts and fed her the information that I thought would result in the answer I wanted. My “white lie” resulted in a parental blessing to do something that both attracted and scared me. So I called David and scheduled a “bowling” date.

1966 - 1967

College Freshman

Over the next year, even though I continued to live with my parents and siblings at home in Ferndale, I went on numerous dates with David. The conscious decision to explore my sexuality and begin to acknowledge my true sexual orientation – at least to myself and my sexual partner – had ramifications

on my religious beliefs and practices. I stopped going to confession. I began exploring other religious options and went on new spiritual adventures.



Monteith Student Center in 1967

My days at Wayne State University as a freshman were spent part time in classes within Monteith College and part time taking general Liberal Arts classes. Monteith College was a small innovative general education college. The offices of the administration and faculty were located in three old Edwardian houses and an apartment building near the Library Mall.

Students in Monteith were taught in small discussion groups, with an emphasis on gaining the art of dialogue – expression of ideas orally and in writing – with peers and professors. Emphasis

was placed on helping students develop the capacity for independent work and communications. As a student in this experimental college, I took three sequences of classes – in social science, natural science, and humanities – as well as a required senior essay and senior colloquia. In addition to the small discussion groups, there were larger lectures by teams of professors working closely together. The multi-disciplined collaboration was very enriching.

For me, an education at Monteith was a dream come true. I received very personal attention in many of the classes, since the discussion groups often involved a full-blown professor teaching anywhere between two and 10 students. There was no faking it when it came to class participation. It was impossible to hide and hope not to be called upon – as many students did in Liberal Arts classes that had 200 students in an auditorium – because in Monteith the entire class could sit around a kitchen-sized table. I loved that we were encouraged to be independent thinkers and that emphasis was placed on writing. Most tests were essay style rather than questions with multiple choice answers.



Typical Monteith classroom in 1961 – pre “Hippie” era

It was during my first year in college that I received a phone call from the circulation manager of the

Observer Newspapers which served suburban communities west of Detroit. He had been given my phone number from the area manager who had supervised me when I was a station captain with the Detroit News. I was surprised to learn that my manager at the time was not offended by what I did in trying to bargain for better working conditions for the newspaper delivery boys, but instead was impressed with my creativity and determination. There was a manager opening in the circulation department at the Observer and my Detroit News supervisor had recommended me for the job.

I was hired and soon found myself working part-time with a suburban paper. I was supervising 10 adults who were at least twice my age – then 19 – and about 200 delivery boys in three cities: Farmington, Plymouth, and Livonia. This was a huge responsibility for such a young man, but I was determined to do a good job. During the second half of my freshman year, I would drive from Ferndale to Monteith College in Detroit on some weekdays, while three days a week, I would drive from Ferndale to Plymouth where the circulation department was headquartered.



Police response to 12th Street riot in Detroit on July 23, 1967

I recall working at the office in Plymouth on Sunday, July 23, 1967. The paper received a phone call that a riot had erupted on 12th Street in Detroit. The editor of the twice-a-week paper wanted to run a story about the riot in the next issue, with photos, but the photographer refused to go to the scene of the riot. He felt it was too dangerous. So the circulation manager offered to go. He asked if I would join him. I foolishly agreed and off we drove to Detroit.

When we reached the designated area in Detroit where the action was occurring, he drove the car down 12th Street as I sat in the passenger seat, dumbfounded by what I was seeing and hearing. He told me to keep down so that I would not get hit by a stray bullet. We saw buildings burning and heard gunshots firing. He took plenty of good photos, but it was probably the most foolish thing I had ever done. My life in Ferndale, with all of the safety and homogeneity of white suburbia, had not prepared me for an experience like this.

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Life in Detroit

1967 - 1970

A Search for Freedom

The riots of 1967 were a major turning point for Detroit. They were a catalyst that accelerated “white flight” to the suburbs. The slow but steady flow of white residents from Detroit to places like Ferndale, Royal Oak, Oak Park, Southfield, Livonia, Farmington, Plymouth, Westland and places even further north and west increased considerably.

While many whites felt anxiety and fear about living in Detroit, for me the feeling was quite different. I felt that I would find more freedom as a young man with a homosexual identity south of the Eight Mile Road divide. I was drawn toward Detroit, not repelled by it. There was nothing for a young



We lived in the upper unit

gay man in Ferndale or the adjacent suburbs. Although I say “gay” now, that term was not in popular use back then, even among men and women with a homosexual orientation. Those with such an orientation, and those who were supportive, used the term “homosexual.” Those who were opposed or antagonistic – which was the overwhelming majority of the population – referred to us as “queers” or worse yet as “faggots.”

By the end of my freshman year, I was also ready to move from the home of my family in Ferndale and to start a new life with David in Detroit. He and I rented the upper portion of a small bungalow house on Monte Vista Street, near Fenkell Avenue and Myers Street in Northwest Detroit. We lived in a little one-bedroom space, converted into an apartment, and

paid \$80 per month, including utilities. To avoid discrimination, when we applied for the unit we told Mrs. and Mrs. Schultz – an elderly couple who owned and lived on the main floor of the house – that we were uncle and nephew. I did not like engaging in deception, but David said that if we were honest about our relationship, we would not find housing anywhere in Detroit. At the time, there was no legal protection against sexual orientation discrimination in Michigan. To this day, Michigan state law does not protect members of the LBGT community from discrimination in employment, housing, or public accommodations.

It was the fall of 1967 and I was entering my sophomore year at Monteith College. By then I had a car and the commute from our apartment to the Wayne State campus was short. Now living outside of Ferndale and away from my parents, and with the new found freedom of a college campus, I decided to bleach my hair blond. This



19 year-old Tom in 1967

surprised my parents when I visited them, as well as the middle-aged adults whom I supervised at the Observer Newspapers. But it was my choice as an adult and I felt that people around me would just have to get used to it. By today's standards, bleached blond hair with dark roots showing would be nothing, but at that time it was an extremely bold move.

I made a bold academic move that year as well. One of my social science teachers announced that we would have to do a research project and write a paper that semester. We could select our own topic. I decided to research and write on the topic of "Homosexuality and Creativity." My focus was to explore whether homosexuals were drawn to occupations that could be considered creative.

Since I had started to go to gay bars in Detroit, I decided to interview men at the bars and to have them disclose to me, anonymously, information about themselves, their backgrounds, and their occupations. As I was chatting with a guy in the bar, I was mentally recording the information I was obtaining from him. I would "interview" three or four men per night and, when I got home at midnight or later, I would write down what I could recall from each interview.

The bars at the time were the Twilight Zone and Silver Star in Northwest Detroit where mostly white middle class guys mingled, some seedy places in Downtown Detroit where there were more people of color and where drag shows were performed, and the Escape Lounge on the westside which was one of the few places that had dancing.

After about two dozen interviews conducted at these gay watering holes, I wrote a paper on the subject. It was not scientifically based, but a collection of anecdotal disclosures impressed my professor. I'm sure he had never received a research paper on such an intriguing topic in his teaching career. My grade was likely based more on ingenuity and effort than pure academic standards.



We bought a triplex and became landlords in 1968

After living in the little upstairs rental unit for a year, I thought it was time for David and I to buy a rental income property so we could collect rent rather than pay it. I got a small student loan and he got a personal loan and combined we had about \$3,000 which was enough money for a down payment.

We bought a three unit building at 11305 Ward Avenue in Northwest Detroit. Since it had a full basement, we rented the three units and made basic living quarters for ourselves in the basement. We were now landlords.

During the next year, we repeated the same process and bought two more properties. One was a wooden duplex with a little wood house in the rear. The other was a four-unit brick building with a two-bedroom wood house in the rear. All of the places needed constant repairs so, in addition to my part-time job and school, I was spending time helping David clean and paint and screen renters.

All the time that I lived in Detroit and attended Wayne State University, the Vietnam War was raging. Some of my high school classmates had enlisted while others had been drafted into military service. I had avoided conscription because I, and millions of other men who were college students, received school deferments. We were exempt from the draft as long as we were enrolled in college.



A draft lottery was held on December 1, 1969

But college deferments ended on December 1, 1969. That was the date when a national lottery was held. The drawing determined the order of induction for men born between 1944 and 1950. A large glass container held 366 blue plastic balls containing every possible birth date of men between the ages of 18 and 26. I was one of the 850,000 young men affected by that lottery.

Those whose birth dates were drawn first knew they would be drafted within a year unless they enlisted first. Those who were drawn last knew they would not be drafted and therefore could plan their lives without the military in the equation. I

was not lucky. I knew that, barring unforeseen circumstances, I would soon be wearing a military uniform.

Unforeseen circumstances amazingly did occur when I showed up for my physical exam at the recruitment headquarters along with hundreds of other unlucky young men. We all had to strip down to our underwear and be examined by medical personnel. We also had to fill out a questionnaire.

One of the questions asked whether the draftee had homosexual tendencies. Although it was a simple yes or no answer, responding to the question was not so simple. Because of ridicule and discrimination, scores of men who were faced with that inquiry during World War II and afterwards had answered “no” even though the truthful answer would have been “yes.”

Even though homosexuality still carried a huge stigma in the 1960s, many men who wanted to avoid Vietnam, including heterosexuals, started to answer “yes.” To minimize the chance of false answers from straight inductees, the medical personnel screening them would openly ridicule a “yes” responder in front of a room full of others. The group intimidation tactic seemed to have worked, as very few men were willing to trigger such verbal attacks and emotional abuse by answering “yes” whether it was true or not.



Half-naked draftees were intimidated in groups

I, however, did answer “yes” even though I knew that anyone who dared to give that answer would be stripped naked and paraded in front of a few dozen men while being taken to another area for a “secondary inspection” where they were verbally assaulted and questioned further. That is what happened to me. The audience of other draftees laughed as I refused to change my answer. The dark roots that were showing under my bleached blond hair was the thing that clinched my medical deferment for what the government considered a psychological deficiency. At the time, I considered this medical deferment to be the only benefit the government ever conferred on homosexuals.



Marchers protest against the Viet Nam War

Mass protests against the war occurred in cities throughout the nation, including Detroit. A growing number of people felt the war was unjust and unwarranted.

By the end of 1967, more than 10,000 Americans had been killed in the Vietnam War. The deadliest week of the war occurred in February 1968 when 543 young men were killed and another 2,547 were wounded. By 1969, there were more than 549,000 American troops in Viet Nam. As the war escalated, so did the protests.

The week of August 23, 1968 saw protests and violence erupt outside of the hall where the Democratic National Convention was held in Chicago. Millions of Americans, myself included, watched the disruptions occurring as they were broadcast by television networks. Viewers were both fascinated and appalled.

So-called “Yippies” started the protests as they nominated a pig, Pegasus, for president. The next day a mass demonstration began. It’s focus mostly targeted the war. Throughout the process, thousands of protesters chanted: “The whole world is watching.”

The next evening, convention delegates nominated Hubert Humphrey for president and Edmund Muskie for vice-president. By the time the convention had ended, police reported that 589 arrests had been made, with 119 police and 100 protesters injured.



Injured journalist interviews activist

Americans experienced a tumultuous year in 1968. Civil rights leader Martin Luther King was assassinated that year. King’s death was followed by riots in several large cities, including Detroit. The deaths of 46 people were attributed to the riots.

Presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was shot and killed by Sirhan Sirhan, a 24-year old Jordanian living in Los Angeles. The motivation for the shooting was apparently Sirhan's anger at several pro-Israeli speeches Kennedy made during the campaign.

George Wallace ran a campaign for president, spewing bigoted remarks from coast to coast designed to stir up racial tension and attract conservative white voters to support him. Richard Nixon won the election.



On a lighter note, 1968 was a good year for movies. Hollywood released many popular films that year, including 2001: A Space Odyssey, Planet of the Apes, Rosemary's Baby, Funny Girl, The Lion in Winter, The Producers, and The Odd Couple. Space Odyssey grossed \$56 million, with Funny Girl coming in a close second with \$52 million in gross revenue.

I loved the nostalgia of Funny Girl and the futuristic imagery of Space Odyssey.

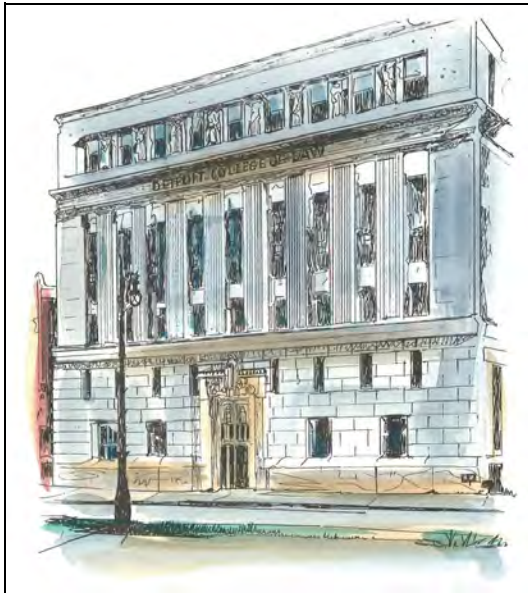
I entered my junior year in college in September 1968. I continued to work at the Observer Newspapers part time in addition to taking a full load of classes at Wayne State. With the repairs and management demands of the rental units, I had very little spare time, but I was able to take in a movie or go to a gay bar once or twice a month.

During my first two years of college, I could not decide on a career to pursue. The anxiety of not knowing what business or profession I would choose was killing me. Then finally, at the beginning of 1969, it finally dawned on me that my mother was right. She had advised me years before to enter the field of law. She knew that I was a natural born advocate and that I loved to argue. My going into the legal profession made sense to her. I dug deep into my heart and soul and felt that being a lawyer was right to me. It was a natural fit. I knew that being a lawyer was not about the money I would make. It was a way to develop the tools and the skills to advocate for the underdog, to fight discrimination, and to advocate for justice.

That "Aha Moment" stirred up the impatient impulses that I had always struggled with. I wanted to go to law school but I did not want to do another year in undergraduate school. If my undergraduate process played out to its logical conclusion, I would not graduate from Monteith College until June 1970. Law school would have to wait until September 1970.

Thinking about such a delay was difficult for me. I wanted law school and I wanted it right away. Fortunately, the independent thinking that Monteith College instilled in me activated an exploration of ideas on how to avoid having to finish my senior year in undergraduate school and instead go directly to law school.

Would the dean at Monteith consider such a thing? Was there a law school who would admit someone who had only completed three years of undergraduate school? My head was spinning with ideas. To my amazement, Dean Woody Ross agreed that my first year in law school could count as my fourth year in undergraduate school, as long as I could find a law school that would accept this “dual credit” program. I checked around and discovered that Detroit College of Law would cooperate with such a plan. It was a miracle! I could skip a year, go directly to law school, and still graduate from Wayne State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree. So that is what I did.



Artist's sketch of Detroit College of Law

Detroit College of Law was the first law school to operate in Detroit. The college opened in 1892 with 69 students. Among the first students was a woman and an African American – highly unusual for that era.

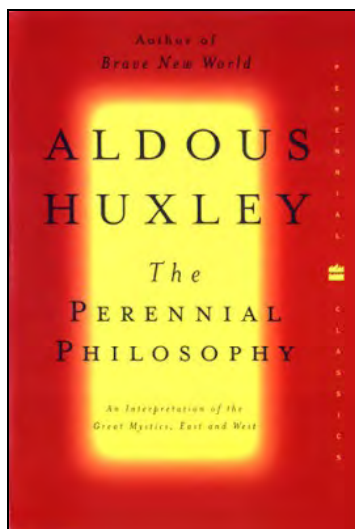
In 1997, the school relocated to the campus of Michigan State University in East Lansing. It was later renamed Michigan State University College of Law.

The transition for me from undergraduate school to law school was as hard, if not harder, than my initial transition from St. James to Wayne State. Law school seemed exponentially more difficult and the professors of law were extremely demanding. Some were outright brutal in their interactions with students, especially if the student seemed unprepared.

Preparation for classes was very time consuming. But I was determined to succeed, so I developed better study habits and quit my job at the Observer Newspapers. During my first year in law school, all I did was study. My diligence paid off. The result of my academic efforts, and my love of the law, revealed itself in a variety of ways. At the end of my first year, I was ranked first in my class.

In addition, the Bancroft-Whitney Publishing Company gave me an award for excellence in the study of contracts. My contracts professor went even further. He offered two free tickets to an Off Broadway production of a risque revue called “Oh Calcutta” for the student who wrote the best mid-term exam in the contracts class. It was one of the first theatrical performances that included full frontal nudity. That was not my motivation, but I was pleasantly surprised – and was the envy of my fellow students – when he announced the winner of the competition was none other than Tom Coleman. Not to disappoint anyone, I flew to New York and attended the performance. It was an exciting adventure, one to remember.





During my third year at Monteith College – after I knew that I wanted to bypass my senior year and go straight to law school – I discovered that I first had a requirement to fulfill. At Monteith, students had to participate in a senior colloquia as a condition of receiving a degree. So even though I was essentially going to be allowed to skip my senior year, I still had to fulfill this requirement. However, I was being permitted to do the colloquia in my junior year instead.

In the 1968-1969 academic year, the dean of the college was leading a senior colloquia titled “Mysticism and the Arts.” A dozen students would participate. We would be focusing on spiritually inspired writings, drawings, music, and paintings created by Eastern and Western mystics. The class had a profound effect on my life, causing me to experience a spiritual transformation. I released any attachment or resistance to religious dogma and instead allowed myself to

experience direct spiritual influences and experiences.

Then, in the summer of 1969 – when I had just started law school – I embarked on another spiritual adventure. One day when I was visiting my family at their home in Ferndale, my mother invited me to go with her to St. James parish where she was meeting with Shirley Beaupre who was trying to recruit religious instructors. Shirley had been hired to direct the religious education program for high school students who attended public schools. These students attended public schools for regular academic classes but went to St. James once a week, usually because their parents made them do it, to receive religious instruction. These had traditionally been called “catechism classes.” The catechism was a book explaining the do’s and the don’ts – mostly don’ts – of Catholic Church dogma. I went to the meeting to please my mother, but I had no intention of volunteering for the catechism program.

I sat there for a half hour or so, listening to Shirley make a pitch to my mother and a few other parents who were thinking about volunteering as catechism teachers. Shirley, who was then about 40 years old, had been a lay missionary in Africa for several years. She had just returned to the United States and was hired by St. James parish to rejuvenate its catechism program. After she successfully recruited all of the parents who were at the meeting, her eyes turned to me. “What about you?” she asked. “Would you be willing to participate?”



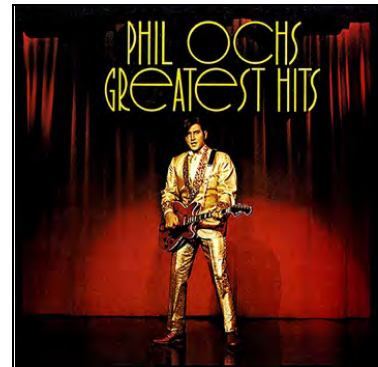
Shirley Beaupre in her 80s

Having recently experienced a spiritual transformation, initiated in large measure by the senior colloquia on Mysticism and the Arts, I decided to tell her exactly how I felt. After she heard what I had to say, I knew she would reject me as an instructor. I explained that I would not push Catholicism and would not even promote Christianity. Rather, I would expose students to a variety of religions and would use innovative techniques to help them to explore spirituality. To my amazement, she said that was exactly what she wanted. The following month I

became a volunteer instructor for religious education for 10th grade students in the catechism program at St. James. My sister Maryann and about two dozen other students attended my classes once a week.

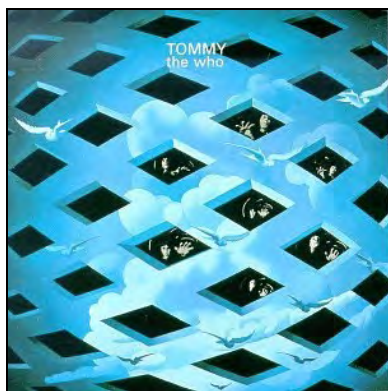


I decided to use music as a teaching tool. We would listen to a song and discuss the moral lessons imparted by the lyrics and the spiritual effects of the musical experience. Songs by folk singers such as Joan Baez and Phil Ochs were played. Peace, love, and equality, as well as economic and social justice were recurring themes during these classroom interactions.



On several occasions, I took the students on a field trip. One outing was to a Hare Krishna temple in Detroit where we chanted, danced, and ate Indian food with our fingers. Another time we went to a Quaker meeting. The week following a field trip, we would have a classroom discussion about the prior week's experience. These outings opened the minds and the hearts of the students to spirituality in a totally different way than they had ever known.

The music of Peter, Paul, and Mary was the basis for some of our weekly sessions. Blowing in the Wind. Puff, the Magic Dragon. Where Have all the Flowers Gone. The Great Manadalla. The music was compelling and the lyrics were moving. Students discovered that they could learn and have fun at the same time. Religion classes did not have to be boring or intimidating.



The rock opera Tommy was released in 1969. The Who did a masterful job of taking the listener on a musical journey into a fantasy experience that was filled with a wide range of moral lessons. Tommy was riveting and moving. Listening to it held our attention and caused discussions and debates on the overt and hidden meanings of the songs.



The original London concept recording of the rock opera Jesus Christ Superstar was released just in time for me to use it in class. While the opera had a traditional religious plot – well known to the students – the music was anything but traditional. Everyone enjoyed listening to the songs. Rather than pretending to go to “catechism class” and instead skipping religious instruction and hanging out somewhere and smoking cigarettes with their friends, these students attended my class without fail.

When I finished my first year of law school in June 1970, I was also able to graduate from Wayne State University and receive my Bachelor of Arts Degree. Two months later, David and I decided to take a vacation in California. Our friend Bill had moved from Detroit to San Francisco and he offered to put us up for a few days. Another ex-Detroiter, Jerry, who lived in Los Angeles invited us to spend a few days at his house.

I enjoyed San Francisco, but I liked L.A. even better – especially because of the warmer weather. I loved the racial and ethnic diversity of Southern California. Unlike Detroit, which was segregated into black and white areas, Los Angeles had a more diverse mix of people and its residential areas were more integrated – plus there was a large, and increasingly open gay community.

Over the course of those few days, we went to a variety of gay bars. A piano bar where the patrons sang show tunes. A Levi-leather bar with a crowd of masculine and handsome men. A dance bar where patrons included blacks, Asians, and Latinos in addition to white customers. The diversity and variety of the gay bar culture was intriguing. What was most amazing, however, is that the Los Angeles gay community had its own newspaper – The Advocate. The issue that was circulating when we were visiting Los Angeles carried a front-page story about the Gay Pride protest marches that had occurred in Los Angeles and in New York the prior week. Thousands of lesbians and gay men had marched in the streets of Los Angeles, demanding an end to police harassment and the repeal of sodomy laws that criminalized our love making. This was something that attracted me very much to the area. I knew that I wanted to move to California. I envisioned living in Los Angeles and becoming an advocate for justice and equal rights.



Just as I had once wanted to transition from undergraduate school to law school without any delay, I felt the same impatience about moving to Los Angeles. I knew that I would explore the process of moving as soon as I returned to Detroit when the vacation was over. That is what I did.

As I entered my second year of law school at Detroit College of Law in September 1970, and took on a part-time job as a law clerk with the firm of Elsmann, Young, and O'Rourke, I started to submit applications to law schools in California. I applied to some schools in San Francisco as well as Los Angeles, just in case no school in Southern California would accept me. Better to be in Northern California than Michigan, I thought. But moving to Los Angeles was my goal.

I received letters of acceptance from two Jesuit-run institutions: the University of San Francisco Law School and Loyola University School of Law in Los Angeles. I enrolled in the latter effective January 1, 1971. My dream was about to become true. I would be a gay law student in Los Angeles.

My first week living in Los Angeles was a real shocker – literally. The guy we had stayed with on vacation for a few days, Jerry, offered to put me up for a semester at his house. He lived in a two bedroom home in the heart of the city. The house was built into the side of a hilltop in the Mt. Washington area. My bedroom rested on stilts.



I arrived at Jerry's on February 7 and went to Loyola to register and buy books the next day. I had barely started to adjust to my new environment, when the unthinkable happened.

I was sleeping in my bed – with a bookcase headboard above and behind me filled with heavy law books – when I was awakened by a jolt. I saw flashes of light through the windows. My law books started to fall on my head. The Sparklets water dispenser at the edge of the room started to sway. The shaking continued and intensified. I was horrified. I could not imagine what was happening. I had never thought about earthquakes, much less experienced one, so I was not able to put a label on

what was occurring. I ran into the other bedroom in a panic. Jerry grabbed me and tried to calm me down. "It's only an earthquake," he explained. Only? Really? He held me down so that I would not flee the house and get hurt by falling objects outside. The shaking seemed to last forever, although the reality was probably about two minutes. Then there were the aftershocks, some pretty large, that happened over the next few days.

This was my initiation to life in Los Angeles. I made a decision that week. I thought about life in Michigan and compared it with life in California. I felt stuck in Michigan, stuck in a culture that seemed closed minded and guarded. There was no gay newspaper there. No gay community. Cities were segregated. Politics were conservative. In contrast, California was more open. More diverse. More gay friendly. I decided that even with its occasional earthquakes – which could be deadly – I would rather live and perhaps die in Los Angeles than continue to live in Michigan. I made a commitment to become a Californian. There would be no turning back.

At the end of my first semester at Loyola, I was forced to return to Detroit. I had run out of money and was not able to continue with law school in the fall. I was distraught by this reality, but it was my reality. So I got a full-time job at Korvette's department store and saved money. I asked Loyola for permission to take a short hiatus from my studies there. They agreed that I could return in the semester that would begin in February 1972. I applied for and was granted a scholarship which made resuming my studies at Loyola feasible.

Just as I was transitioning to a new life in the early 1970s, so were my parents and my siblings. My older brother had gotten married in the late 1960s and now had a child. My parents and my siblings who were still at home in Ferndale moved to Lake Orion. My parents built a house there – on land that had been purchased by my mother's parents in the 1930s. Their new house was situated right next door to the cottage my grandparents had built and that we had all enjoyed as a vacation spot for decades. Ferndale became a memory for the entire Coleman family. We all moved on.

Peripheral Influences: Lake Orion and Carsonville

Lake Orion

The Village of Lake Orion is a small community about 35 miles north of Ferndale. It is surrounded by a larger geographic area known as Orion Township. The history of Lake Orion is told in a book – Oakland County Book of History – published in 1970. It contains chapters about many villages, townships, and cities in Oakland County.

“Lake Orion's colorful past includes pioneers, a land swindle, a mineral spring with water claimed beneficial to both kidneys and liver, a floating island, a resort era where church assemblies competed for attention with a boisterous amusement park and rumored sea serpent,” explains the opening paragraph of the four pages of the book that are devoted to Lake Orion.

The first frame house was built in the early 1800s on the northern end of town and was used as a hotel. It was called Orion House. Then came the first village store. Then a post office, followed by a village doctor, and a lawyer. Several blacksmith shops were opened as the growing population created a demand for this service. In 1844, the first schoolhouse was built on the corner of Church and Anderson Streets.

The area, first named “Chautaugua of Lower Michigan,” became known as Orion in 1854. The area was incorporated as a village in 1859. Saloons were built to satisfy thirsty Teamsters who drove heavy loads of timber into Pontiac, a town several miles south of Orion. At the time, gambling and drunkenness were common in Orion. In 1882, the village reported income of \$1,023.32 of which over half was collected from liquor taxes.

When the railroad was built through Lake Orion in 1872, travelers from Detroit would ride a train to Orion. Once there, a steam-propelled boat would transport visitors to and from the islands on Lake Orion.

Then a bridge was constructed to Park Island where there was a dance hall, a viewing tower, and an amphitheater containing hundreds of seats. Lake Orion became a resort destination for a growing middle class.



An amusement park in Lake Orion back in the day

My Steil grandparents discovered Lake Orion in the 1930s. They bought a dozen lots in a residential area, known as Bunny Run, on the outskirts of the village. They eventually built a small cottage which was surrounded by the empty lots.

The subdivision had a modest country club for area residents that offered a place to gather with neighbors to swim and picnic. A small clubhouse provided a place for dances.

As a teenager, my mother brought her city friends to Bunny Run for summer activities. After she married, the cottage and the country club became a summer vacation spot for the Coleman family.

Bunny Run was a respite from the somewhat hectic city life in Ferndale. Mom would sometimes take us kids to the cottage for a week or so in the summer. Dad would commute to work in Highland Park during these mini-vacations.

Our grandparents would often join us on weekends. When I was about 12, I could sit on Grandpa Steil's lap and drive his car home from St. Joseph's Church after Sunday Mass. Our parent's friends or relatives sometimes would come to the cottage for a Sunday picnic or for a Steil family reunion.



The cottage was built in the 1930s



Dad, grandparents, friends, Tom and Larry



St. Joseph Catholic Church in Lake Orion

The gravitational pull of Lake Orion was irresistible to many Colemans. My parents moved there in the early 1970s. A few of my siblings went to school there. Some of them – Gary, Cathy, Carolyn, and Diane – continue to live in that area.

Lake Orion receives an honorable mention in a book about growing up in Ferndale because it was part of my overall childhood adventure. I think that I appreciated Ferndale more because of its contrast with Lake Orion, and vice versa. Lake Orion was a country cousin of Ferndale.

Carsonville



Aunt Betty, Dad, Danny, and me in 1951

Speaking of country cousins, we had some in Carsonville. My father's sister, Betty, married Casper Basler in the early 1940s. She moved to Carsonville, Michigan where her new husband lived. Casper, like his father, was a farmer.

They built a farm house where they operated a dairy farm. On their many acres of land, they grew fields of oats, alfalfa, and corn – some crops to feed the cattle and others to sell to grain distributors. Aunt Betty and Uncle Cap had several children. Charles and John were closer in age to my older brother Larry. Roger was a year younger than me. Connie, their only daughter, was close in age to my sisters Maryann and Cathy. When our parents took us to the farm to visit, we had cousins to play with.

Every summer we would have a “foreign exchange” program of sorts. For several years, Larry and Dan and I would spend two weeks in Carsonville where we would experience and learn about farm living. In addition to recreational activities such as fishing, hiking, and swimming, we would spend several hours a day, a few days a week, helping with chores. We rode on the hay wagon as our uncle would drive the tractor and the baling machine would crank out bails of hay that our cousins would haul up onto the wagon and stack them higher and higher. Shoveling manure in the barn was no fun.

Going to church with them on Sunday exposed us to a different religion. They were Lutherans and we were Catholics. We liked going to the county fair. We learned about farm animals, including milking a cow by hand and gathering eggs from the hens. We would help our grandmother pick berries from raspberry bushes in the family garden. It was exciting when Uncle Cap would allow us to drive the tractor.

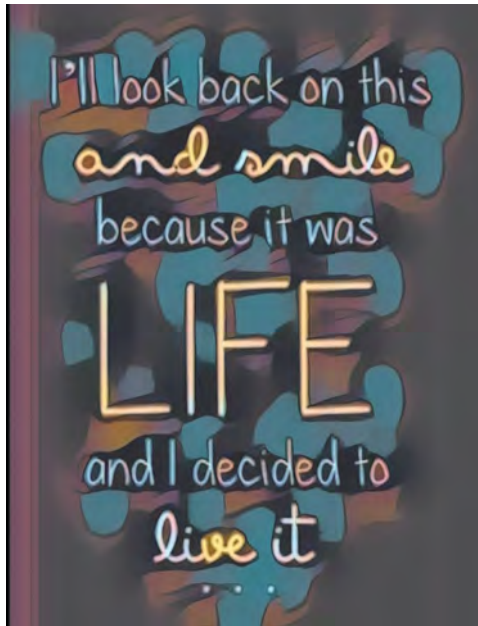
Our experience spending time on the farm was a sharp contrast to life in Ferndale. We knew where the milk came from when the milkman delivered it to our door or when we poured it on our cereal. We no longer took for granted the distribution of food. We knew how hard it was for farmers to plant, tend, and harvest crops on vast expanses of land in the heartland. City life in Ferndale seemed a lot easier when we compared it to the life of our cousins on the farm in Carsonville.



Coleman kids in farm house kitchen with Aunt Betty and Grandma Finney in 1970

Epilogue: Michigan in Retrospect

Looking back at my life in Michigan, and my experiences in Ferndale, is much different than living that life and having those experiences in real time as they unfolded. Then, I was naive and inexperienced. I was more inclined to accept things at face value during the 1950s and then more likely to challenge things, perhaps more than the situations warranted, in the 1960s.



Given my experiences during the 50 years since we graduated from St. James in 1966, I feel that I am in a much better position to understand what was really happening in Ferndale in the two decades that I lived in or was connected to that community. There were many social, economic, and political forces at play back then – forces of which I was not aware at the time. I barely knew what was happening with my own body and mind and what was occurring in my own neighborhood. I was mostly oblivious to the genetic and historical influences or the national and world dynamics that affected our daily lives in Ferndale.

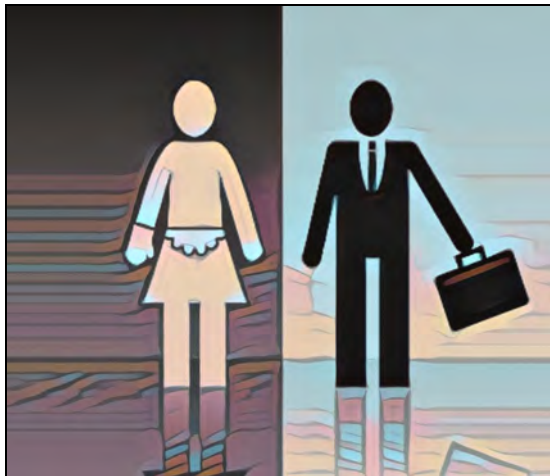
With seven more years of education after St. James, and decades of participation as a legal and political advocate, I am in a better position to reexamine my life, including the forces that influenced it and shaped my view of myself and others as I was developing from a young boy to a young man.

Some of the issues on which I was influenced at the time, and which I am now better able to understand, include race, religion, gender, and sexual orientation. Society had very rigid and often punitive strictures on these matters when I was growing up in Ferndale in the 1950s and 1960s. The white race was implicitly considered superior, men had more authority than women, and strict adherence to the Christian faith and Catholic doctrine was the *only* path to heaven. Everyone was assumed to be heterosexual and anyone who deviated from the heterosexual norm was considered to be a pervert. If you operated your life within these parameters, you would have a pleasant life. If you did not, there would be a price to pay. Ridicule, ostracism, and discrimination was the price.

There was an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in the society in which we lived back then. The society of the 1950s was built upon the society of the 1930s and 1940s. During those two prior decades, prejudice against Jews was overt. Verbal attacks against the Jewish community were broadcast from Royal Oak to millions of Americans over the airwaves on a weekly radio program emanating from the Shrine of the Little Flower Church. Homeowners in Oakland County signed restrictive covenants in the 1930s and 1940s in which they agreed not to sell property to a Jew.

Remnants of this anti-Semitism endured in the 1950s and 1960s. I recall hearing adults in my extended family criticizing Jews for selling houses in Detroit to black families as the Jews moved to the suburbs. They were breaking the code – transformed to an unwritten code due to a 1947 Supreme Court decision outlawing such discriminatory practices. My own parents were unhappy when I made friends with a young man of the Jewish faith in my senior year. I now understand that their displeasure stemmed from their own societal brainwashing as they were growing up.

In terms of racial discrimination, social pressures were stronger and personal attitudes were more firmly held than were feelings about Jews. Perhaps that was because black people were more visible and easily identifiable. Racial segregation was a way of life in the 1950s. The social unrest and political turmoil associated with demands for racial equality made white people more than a little uncomfortable. White flight from Detroit to the suburbs accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s. On a personal note, I heard others using the “N” word on a recurring basis during my two decades in Ferndale. Many adults who used such language were mimicking the terminology they heard as they were growing up.



In terms of gender, the roles of men and women were based on societal and historical stereotypes. The same was true for boys and girls. Boys should play with trucks; girls with dolls. Men were doctors; women were nurses. Bosses were men; secretaries were women. Priests were men; nuns were women. With some exceptions, men went to work to earn a paycheck, while women stayed home to raise the kids, cook, and do housework. Crossing over the gender barrier line was highly frowned upon.

Sexual orientation biases were very firmly held. The subject of homosexuality was not discussed among my friends or between adults in social conversations, at least not in my earshot. The subject did occasionally come up, in a brief and rather obscure way, when the topic of mortal sins were mentioned during a religion class. Other than a general awareness that homosexuals would be condemned to hell for all eternity, I had no information on the subject. I was afraid to ask for a book on the subject at the library. Such books were kept in a restricted area. Everyone was presumed to be heterosexual. No one would ever have imagined a boy dating a boy or a girl going steady with another girl. There was simply no room for homosexuals in polite society.

That was then. This is now. Racial discrimination is illegal under state and federal law. The federal government led the way with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The Michigan Legislature passed a parallel law about 10 years later. I’m sure that racial discrimination still exists in Ferndale, Oakland County, and Michigan – as it does to some extent everywhere – but it is now condemned, not condoned, by society. The same is true for discrimination against religious minorities.

Gender stereotyping and sex discrimination are also illegal under state and federal law. Social mores

have changed in terms of the proper role of men and women in society. Women serve on city councils. Michigan has had a woman governor in the recent past. Girls are taught in school that they can excel in any business or profession. Many, perhaps most, women have jobs outside of the home. Some men are stay-at-home dads. While the Catholic Church still holds firm to a male-only priesthood, the Vatican is on the verge of authorizing women to be deacons of the church.

In terms of sexual orientation discrimination and gay rights, an ordinance prohibiting such discrimination was proposed there in 1991. After three referenda on the matter in subsequent years, such an ordinance was finally adopted in 2006. State law does not protect members of the LGBT community from sexual orientation discrimination. The Michigan Legislature and the Michigan Supreme Court refused to repeal or invalidate the state's sodomy law, but the United States Supreme Court forced the state to do so in 2003. Gay marriage was once prohibited by state law, but the Supreme Court invalidated that law in 2015.



As a community, Ferndale is more LGBT friendly than ever before. Affirmations, an LGBT community center, is located on Nine Mile Road near Woodward Avenue and has been there for several years – right in the heart of the city. The number of gays and lesbians living in Ferndale has steadily grown over the years. A news story published in 2001 explained that sexual orientation is no longer an issue in Ferndale. In civic affairs and social life, people do not assume that everyone is straight. Instead, it is assumed that a significant number of residents are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender.

Two LGBT-owned bookstores opened in Ferndale in the early 1990s. They specifically catered to the LGBT community. Cobalt opened as the first gay bar in Oakland County. Craig Covey ran for city council as an openly gay person in 1995 and came in last; he ran again in 1999 and won. After serving a few terms, Covey was succeeded by another openly gay man as mayor.

There have been other indicators that Ferndale is more than gay friendly. Motor City Pride moved to Ferndale in 2003. Then, in 2011, when it moved back to Detroit, a second pride festival – called Ferndale Pride – was launched. According to the 2010 Census, among Michigan cities Ferndale is second only to its neighbor to the north, Pleasant Ridge, for the highest percentage of households with same-sex couples.

Increasingly having more racial and ethnic diversity in its population, and becoming a place that more gays and lesbians want to live, work, socialize and seek entertainment, I would consider living in Ferndale if it weren't for my aversion to Michigan winters. With all of the social, economic, and political changes I see occurring in Ferndale, I am becoming increasingly proud to say that I grew up in Ferndale.

About the Author: Living in California

When I was a little child
All my dreams were running wild
I had the whole world at my feet
Was never hurt, I let my actions speak

I never doubted . . . that I would find it in myself to be
Now I'm gonna shout it
Let the whole world sing it along with me
You can be who you wanna be

So don't stop ever believing, keep on dreaming
Got to be strong and take the fall
Hold on to the feeling, the path we're leaving
This is your chance to take it all

In the moment it all sounds
Tears of joy will drown the crowd
Feel my heart just beating fast
This is how it feels to live and laugh

Lyrics, "Take It All" – The Reason 4

The British pop group, The Reason 4, released this song in 2011 – some 40 years after I transferred from Detroit College of Law to Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. Like many aspects of life, the lyrics ring only partially true for me.

When I was a child, I did have the whole world at my feet. But I was hurt – pressured by the world around me to modify my dreams; to let my actions speak, but only when they conformed to the expectations of authority figures at home, school, church, and in the community.

Imagine what it would be like to hold your breath for much longer than you can bear it . . . because the sound of breathing would alert a gunman to where you were hiding. Imagine walking a tight rope twenty feet above a danger zone . . . as shifting winds caused you to remain keenly aware of every step you took. That is what it was like growing up as a boy who could not share his true feelings, hopes, and dreams – all because they did not match societal rules and stereotypes.

It was not until I moved to California that I never doubted that I could be who I wanted to be. The taste of freedom and the experience of diversity inspired me to believe in myself, to dream about a world where justice prevailed, and to be strong. Once I experienced those feelings, and knew that



Tom at age 10 in 1958

I had inside me what it would take to be an advocate for equality and justice, I was willing to be strong and take the fall. Perhaps I was fortunate that my Dad made me play hardball as a child, because what I was about to encounter as I promoted these lofty ideals was going to be tough.



Tom and other gay law students fight injustice

It was during my second year in law school – after I was adjusted as a student at Loyola in Los Angeles – that I mustered the courage to break the implicit code of silence and invisibility. With a handful of other students at Loyola, UCLA, USC, and Southwestern law schools, I founded the first gay law students association in the nation. I took it a step further and became the first openly gay representative of any law school in the Law Student Division of the American Bar Association. I asked the dean if being so open about my sexual orientation would bar me from becoming a lawyer. Homosexuality was still a felony in California. Would the Committee of Bar Examiners exclude me from admission to the bar on the grounds that I lacked “good moral

character” which was a prerequisite to admission? The dean did not know the answer. I decided to take the fall and risk it all. I would go for broke and fight for justice as an openly gay law student. I was lucky. Unlike a friend of mine in Ohio who had to undergo formal hearings, with hours of testimony about his sexual activities, I was admitted to the bar without an inquisition.

The first few years of my law practice were devoted to fighting police harassment of gay men. The police spent millions of dollars sending undercover vice officers out into the community to entice and entrap gay men into compromising situations. They were arrested and forced to plea bargain because, if they did not “cop a plea” and if they were convicted after a trial, they would be required to register as sex offenders for the rest of their lives. Teachers, doctors, and even lawyers lost their professional licenses because of police entrapment. I gave it all that I had. After six years of persistent struggle, I won a case in the California Supreme Court in 1979 that changed everything. The court adopted new rules that prohibited such entrapment. My wildest dreams came true!

My tactics then changed from litigation to politics and coalition building. During his second term as Governor, Jerry Brown appointed me in 1981 to be executive director of the Governor’s Commission on Personal Privacy. I used that position to work with the 25 commission members, to build a network of special interest groups to advance the privacy rights of each of these constituencies. Gays and lesbians. Seniors. People with disabilities. Nontraditional families.

It was in 1980 that I had another “Aha Moment” – only this time it was very personal. Although it was in a professional context at my law office in Hollywood, the moment I met Michael A. Vasquez I knew I was in love. Looking into his eyes was transformational for me. I soon discovered that he felt the same way about me. Within a few weeks we were dating. That led to courtship, followed by engagement. When we decided to marry, that led to an exploration of where we would marry.



At that time in history, there was no nation on the planet that recognized same-sex marriage. So we struggled for a while over where the ceremony would occur. It was then that the independent thinking promoted at Monteith College, and the decision I had made at Loyola to fight for equal rights, conjured up a solution to this dilemma. We would exchange vows in international waters – a location where no nation has jurisdiction and where we could exercise our basic human rights as citizens of the world. So that is what we did. We chartered a triple-decker boat that normally took people to Catalina Island, and went with nearly 300 guests – including both of my parents and both of his parents – out to

sea. We exchanged vows in some rather choppy waters beyond the three-mile territorial limit. That was it. We were married – at least in our own eyes and the eyes of our families and friends.

The following decades saw me taking up one cause after another – each with its own urgent call to my passion for justice and equal rights. When the Privacy Commission ended, the California Attorney General tapped me for a position on his Commission on Racial, Ethnic, Religious, and Minority Violence. I stood shoulder to shoulder with African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Jews, Christians, men, women, seniors, and people with disabilities. We worked for eight years formulating methods to promote understanding and appreciation for diversity, as well as ways to combat violence and hate crimes against minorities.

Then came my “family diversity” era – a decade of promoting respect for all family relationships, whether traditional or nontraditional, married or unmarried. Much of this work was with the media, perhaps more than with courts or legislatures. Promoting an expanded definition of family in public policy and by private businesses, I found myself on national television, on radio talk shows, and in newspapers coast to coast.

Next up was the “singles rights” era – more than a dozen years in which I promoted equal rights for single individuals and for unmarried couples, regardless of sexual orientation. I headed the American Association for Single People. We walked the halls of Congress promoting equal rights for this invisible, but growing minority of unmarried Americans. I fought and won court battles for unmarried heterosexual couples – people who had been denied equal benefits at work by employers who wanted to save money, and people who had been denied housing by religious landlords who wanted to impose their personal beliefs on others.

Before I moved on to disability rights, I worked for two years with my colleague, Dr. Nora Baladerian, and my spouse Michael, to fight for the rights of teenagers who were sometimes shipped off to boot camps or boarding schools by their parents. The parents hired kidnapers who took these

kids to remote locations where they were “reprogrammed” to be compliant and obedient sons and daughters. Never mind that some of them committed suicide and that others were emotionally scarred for life by the mistreatment they received at these facilities. By working in cooperation with other like-minded reformers, we were eventually able to bring this industry to a grinding halt.

Then came the era of disability rights – a time in my life that continues to the present and which has no end in sight. I have been, and am, fighting for the rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. My work for this cause was inspired by my friend Dr. Nora J. Baladerian. It is also completely supported by my spouse. A major portion of our focus involves promoting a greater awareness of, and effective responses to, abuse of children and adults with developmental disabilities. This is a national problem. People with such disabilities are at much greater risk of abuse than the generic population.

Another aspect of my work in the field of disability rights involves reforming the adult guardianship system. Just like some seniors who have dementia or other cognitive impairments, some adults with intellectual disabilities need to have a guardian appointed by a court to make decisions on their behalf. On the surface, this seems benign enough. Unfortunately, things are not always as nice as they seem in theory.

The reality is that court systems throughout the nation are using these guardianship proceedings to unnecessarily, and illegally, strip millions of adults of their right to make decisions. Decisions regarding medical care, housing, education, finances, social contacts, sexual relationships, and marriage. While the overkill of the guardianship system also affects scores of seniors, much of the brunt of these injustices is experienced by adults with developmental disabilities. That is where I am devoting my attention. I have become the primary reform advocate in the nation on this issue.

Just as I found my proper place in the world when I moved to California, I have now found the most appropriate role at this stage of my life. Using the advocacy skills I have developed with all of these other issues and causes, I am now and into the indefinite future will be providing a voice for those who are not able to articulate and advocate for themselves. Someday, when I die and if I



Press conference in 2015 announcing complaint to Justice Dept.

am able to look back at my life, I may find that this stage of my life – as an advocate for people with developmental disabilities – was the main event in terms of professional advocacy. All the rest may have been training, helping me to develop the skills necessary to take on an establishment and power structure that is resistant to giving this vulnerable population access to justice and equal rights under the law.

Addendum: Advocacy in Michigan

I re-read the book, from start to finish, about a week after it was released. This caused me to reflect on what I had written. Questions started to arise. Had I written too much? Too little? Was it too serious? Should I have included more about the fun I had in Ferndale as a child? Did I leave an impression that after I moved from Michigan to California that I never looked back – that I abandoned my home town and home state?

Having mulled these questions over for a few more days, I decided to write this addendum to include some additional memories and retrospective observations, especially about my subsequent civil rights advocacy in Michigan. The stories about those advocacy efforts involve several key people in my life: Daniel R. Sivil, Rudy Serra, “The Coleman Sisters” (Cathy Coleman, Carolyn Skalneek, and Diane Coleman Rogers), and a teenager I will refer to as “Emma”.

Daniel R. Sivil *Sexual Civil Liberties*



Dan Sivil (upper left) and members of ASP

Dan Sivil was a resident of Oakland County. He lived in Troy. I met Dan in the late 1970s when I was the co-chair of the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties. The committee was a group of lawyers, lay advocates, and scholars from various academic disciplines who worked together to repeal or invalidate state laws criminalizing private sexual conduct between consenting adults. Although he was neither a lawyer or a professor, Dan joined the National Committee in his capacity as a lay advocate for sexual civil liberties.

At the time I met Dan, Michigan had criminal laws prohibiting sodomy as well as three “gross indecency” statutes – outlawing oral sex between males, between females, and between a male and a female. There was also a law criminalizing cohabitation between an unmarried man and an

unmarried woman. In addition to their use in criminal prosecutions, these laws were sometimes cited as a rationale to deny employment to government employees, housing to tenants, professional licenses, and to deny or restrict visitation or child custody to gay, lesbian, or unmarried parents.

Dan was the president of the Association of Suburban People in the late 1970s and early 1980s. ASP

was an association of gay men who lived in suburban Detroit. The group held social events, some of which had an educational component. Dan was also involved with the Michigan Organization for Human Rights – a statewide organization advocating for the civil and constitutional rights of the LGBT community. In 1979, Dan arranged for me to speak at a MOHR conference in Southfield. My topic was “Consenting Adults: The Need for Law Reform.” The following year, Dan set up a speaking engagement for me on a radio talk show at WDET-FM to discuss the “Status of Sexual Civil Liberties in Michigan.”



Jay Kohorn Hands Award to Tom Coleman

In 1981, Dan organized a sexual civil liberties conference which was held on the campus of Wayne State University. I had just been appointed to serve as the Executive Director of the Governor’s Commission on Personal Privacy in California. The conference brought together members of the National Committee and members of the Privacy Commission to discuss strategies for advancing sexual privacy rights through advocacy with legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. The strategies would help advocates in Michigan and the other 49 states.

The National Committee held an awards banquet during the conference. Many of my family members who lived in Michigan attended and witnessed me receiving the Mathew O. Tobriner Civil Liberties Award “In recognition of outstanding work and in evidence of high achievement in the areas of civil

liberties and personal privacy.” The award was named after a California Supreme Court justice who had written many opinions protecting and expanding civil liberties, including sexual civil liberties. He gave his blessing to the use of his name for this honor – an award that was presented to me by my friend and colleague Jay Kohorn.

In response to his invitation as president of the group, I spoke at a meeting of ASP in Troy in 1982. My presentation focused on the “Importance of Privacy as a Strategy in the 1980s.”

The comradery I developed with Dan through the National Committee, and his willingness to include me in these activities in Michigan, provided an opportunity for me to use my ever expanding advocacy skills and professional networks to advance the cause of civil liberties in my home state.

Rudy Serra

Privacy and Marital Status

Rudy Serra was born at Selfridge Airforce Base in Mt. Clemens Michigan. He attended Taft Elementary School and St. James Junior High School in Ferndale and graduated with honors from Ferndale High School.



Rudy Serra, Tom Coleman, and Mary Jiordano at book signing event in Ferndale

Although Rudy lived only two blocks from my family's home, I did not know him when I was growing up in Ferndale. He knew of the Coleman family because one of my sisters sometimes went to his house to play with his sister. But Rudy and I did not interact during that era.

It was not until 1993 that I was referred to attorney Rudy Serra by a colleague – probably Dan Sivil. I was looking for a Michigan attorney who would sponsor a brief I was writing in two cases pending in the Michigan Supreme Court. *People v. Lino* and *People v. Brashier* provided an opportunity to argue that Michigan laws criminalizing private sex between consenting adults were unconstitutional. I contacted Rudy and he agreed to sign onto the brief as co-counsel. We jointly filed the brief on

behalf of Spectrum Institute, the National Committee for Sexual Civil Liberties, and the Triangle Foundation. Even though these cases presented the court with an opportunity to make private consenting adult sexual conduct off limits to prosecution, a majority of the justices sidestepped the issue. Since only three justices would have declared the statute unconstitutional as applied to consenting adult behavior, our hopes for judicial invalidation of the law were dashed.

Criminal penalties for consenting sex would remain in place in Michigan for another decade. In 2003, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled that states lacked authority to criminalize such consenting adult behavior. It took the nation's highest court to protect the privacy rights of Michigan residents.

Five years later, I invited Rudy to be co-counsel on a brief I wanted to file with the Michigan Supreme Court. The case of *Biaz v. Hoffius* involved a landlord who used his religious beliefs against unmarried cohabitation as an excuse to deny a rental application from an unmarried heterosexual couple. Although Michigan had a statute that prohibited marital status discrimination in housing, the landlord claimed a "religious freedom" exemption from the fair housing statute. Citing the "free exercise" clause of the federal Constitution, the landlord argued that he could not be forced by the state to rent to people whom he believed would be committing sin in the rental unit. To rent to an unmarried couple, the landlord argued, would involve him in the facilitation of sin.

I had previously been involved in similar litigation and had won that case in the California Supreme Court. In a 4 to 3 decision, a majority of the justices had ruled that landlords could not use their religious beliefs as a reason to deny housing to an unmarried couple. The court ruled that the state had authority to prohibit marital status discrimination by for-profit business owners, including landlords. I wanted to work with Rudy to achieve a similar precedent in Michigan. We filed a brief on behalf of Spectrum Institute and the Triangle Foundation. In a split decision, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled for the tenants. However, before the case was final, a rehearing was granted after one justice left the bench and was replaced by another. The new justice sided with the dissenters and formed a new majority, sending the case back down to the trial court for further

review. Our victorious precedent was erased and the issue was left unresolved. Kicking the can down the road seems to be something the Michigan Supreme Court is fond of doing.



In 1995, Rudy arranged for me to speak to the legal committee of the Triangle Foundation. I made suggestions for law reform activities to be included in their strategies to advance the legal rights of the LGBT community.

In 2009, I published “The Domino Effect: How strategic moves for gay rights, singles’ rights, and family diversity have touched the lives of millions.” When I sent a copy to Rudy, he suggested that I do a book signing at the Just 4 Us bookstore. He also put me in contact with folks at Wayne State University. I did the book signing event in Ferndale which Rudy and my St. James classmate Mary Jiordano attended. I spoke at the law school on “The Future of Gay Rights, Singles’s Rights and Family Diversity in Michigan.” In June 2016, as soon as I finished my new book – *Growing Up in Ferndale* – I contacted Rudy, knowing that he still lives in Ferndale and has many connections there. As usual, Rudy has been very helpful. He gave me some good suggestions for distribution of the book.

I am grateful to my friend and colleague, attorney Rudy Serra, for collaborating with me on civil liberties cases and projects in Michigan. With his collaboration, I have been able to apply some of the knowledge and advocacy skills I have developed over the years to promote the protection and preservation of civil liberties in my state of origin.

The Coleman Sisters ***AASP and Unmarried America***



Front (left): Diane, Carolyn, Mom, Cathy, Maryann
Back: (left): Tom, Dan, Gary, Michael, Larry

Three of my sisters – Cathy Coleman, Carolyn Skalneek, and Diane Coleman Rogers – live in Oakland County. Although I moved to California several decades ago, I have remained in contact with my siblings, five of whom live in Michigan and three of whom live in Arizona.

Soon after the Supreme Court sent the Hoffius case back to the trial court for reconsideration of whether the landlord’s religious freedom claim would trump the tenant’s statutory claim of marital status discrimination, a legislator decided

to introduce a bill that invoked a “nuclear option.” It defined “marital status” in a way that excluded legal protection for unmarried couples in any context, be it employment, housing or other business practices. If a bill were enacted to strip unmarried couples of their civil rights protections, then the issue of a religious exemption would be moot. Landlords, employers, and other businesses would be able to legally discriminate against anyone living in an unmarried relationship. This bill – HB 4258 – was the most radical assault on the civil rights of unmarried Americans I had ever seen.



About the same time HB 4258 was introduced, I was launching a civil rights venture for unmarried Americans. A businessman who believed in equal rights for single people asked me to help him create a new national organization. Just like there was AARP for seniors, there would be an AASP for single people. The term “single” was defined as anyone who was not married, regardless of whether they lived alone or with a roommate or relatives, or whether they had children or not. The American Association for Single People – later renamed Unmarried America – would advocate for all unmarried people, whether single, divorced, or widowed. At the time, there were 80 million such adults. In addition to an educational nonprofit that people could join, we formed a companion Equal Rights Campaign to advocate for and against legislation affecting the rights of this unmarried constituency.

Because I had never done anything like this before, I turned to my three sisters in Michigan for advice and assistance. Each of them had various talents that would be helpful. Cathy was unmarried at the time, so I hoped she would participate as a civil rights advocate for single people. Although Carolyn and Diane were both married, they were supportive when I approached them for help. Carolyn was good with accounting. She agreed to serve as treasurer of the association. Diane had experience in advertising and marketing. She agreed to help with those aspects of the project.

One of the most immediate projects was to deal with HB 4258. I wrote a lengthy legal memo analyzing the bill and exposing the ramifications it would have on more than 3 million adults in Michigan, including 350,000 single parents, 300,000 unrelated adults who live together, and thousands of seniors and people with disabilities who cohabit because they would be penalized by pension plans and government benefit programs if they were to marry.

Cathy agreed to serve as the President of the Michigan Chapter of the Equal Rights Campaign. We issued a news advisory on March 8, 1999, advising the media that Cathy and I would be appearing the next day at the hearing on the bill in the House Judiciary Committee. We did appear and testified against the bill. We also gave interviews to print and broadcast media after the hearing.

The next day, a story ran in the Detroit Free Press titled “House Debates Redefining ‘Marital Status’.” The story summarized my testimony, explaining that the ramifications of the bill went way beyond the issue of housing. “Coleman said the new definition of marital status would apply to all other civil rights protections. He said the changes would strip away protections unmarried couples have in their jobs, in schools and access to public services.” The story quoted me as saying: “This is the worst assault on the rights of single people that I have seen in the entire United States.” “It is

using a meat cleaver to perform constitutional surgery.” It also quoted what the author of the bill had to say about our testimony in opposition to the bill. “We kind of got beat up in there,” Rep. Clark Bisbee(R-Jackson) told the newspaper.

When the committee declined to bring the bill up for a vote, the author quietly dropped the measure. I later received a letter of thanks from Representative Elizabeth Brater, a Democrat on the Judiciary Committee. “The written materials provided by the American Association for Single People (AASP) . . . were extremely helpful,” she said. The letter explained that AASP had played a pivotal role in defeating the bill. I had my three sisters to thank, especially Cathy who personally advocated with me in Lansing, for this legislative victory for our new AASP.

A few years later, AASP morphed into Unmarried America, although the advocacy mission remained the same. Carolyn continued to volunteer as a board member and treasurer for several years. Diane provided her skills as a graphics artist in helping AASP develop newspaper advertisements and other promotional materials, including for special events.

One of those events was a gathering of Unmarried America supporters in Washington, D.C. in September 2003. We held an informational briefing for members of Congress and their staffers in the Rayburn Office Building. We also walked the halls of the House and the Senate office buildings to deliver materials to all Senators and Representatives – including those from Michigan – informing them of what the federal government can do to protect the rights of single and unmarried Americans.



This message was especially timely, considering that census data released in 2003 showed that a majority of the nation’s households were headed by unmarried adults. In terms of households and living arrangements, we had become an “unmarried majority” nation, with Michigan being an “unmarried majority” state. We wanted our elected officials to be aware of this shift in demographics and to make legal and political adjustments to protect this new, and generally silent, majority. Our message was amplified when an October 2003 issue of BusinessWeek Magazine ran a cover story on Unmarried America. That story – which I had pitched to the magazine and nurtured for several months – put politicians and corporate executives on notice that policies and practices of the government and private enterprise would need a major revamp to accommodate this new demographic and the changing political reality. Policies premised on the assumption of a married majority would have to give way to the fact that most households no longer contained a

married couple. The “marriage gap” in voting patterns would also catch the attention of the Democratic Party which was fast becoming the choice of single and unmarried voters, especially female voters. We were entering uncharted political territory and I was leading an organization that was rallying the population through our educational and advocacy activities.

The Case of Emma

Abuse of Teenagers

After three years of full-time promotion of singles' rights through AASP and Unmarried America, my spouse and I moved to Hawaii in January 2003. We operated the organization from our home in Kona as an online information and education service. In the late summer of 2004, we decided to move back to Los Angeles and to rent out the Hawaii home. As we were in the process of transitioning from Hawaii to California, our relocation activities were interrupted by a distress call regarding a teenage girl who lived in Oakland County, Michigan. My sister Diane called me from her cellphone in Canada where she and her husband and daughter were on vacation. That fateful call changed my life for the next two years.

The story about the rescue of "Emma" is worth retelling here since it is another example of my advocacy efforts in Michigan. I have told the story previously when I wrote my professional memoirs in *The Domino Effect* in 2009. Rather than rewriting the story from scratch in this book, I will simply "plagiarize" myself by taking a section from that book and repeating it here.

In August 2004, I flew back to the mainland for a family reunion. My mother and many of my siblings and their spouses and children lived in Michigan. After about a week of partying and family activities, it was time to return to Hawaii. I was scheduled to catch a plane from the Detroit airport very early the next morning, so I wanted to get to sleep by 10 p.m. Unfortunately, my bedtime plans were changed when my niece, Cameo, introduced me to her friend, Emma, and asked if I could speak with them privately. The three of us found a secluded place in the house and sat down for a chat. What a chat! Emma lived in an abusive home with a controlling father and a passive mother. For several years, her father had created a household filled with fear. Emma and her siblings would never know when their dad would become enraged. He would destroy furniture, yell and scream, and intimidate the family. Things had gotten so bad that Emma had attempted suicide on two occasions. She was depressed and afraid. Cameo wanted my advice as to what Emma should do.

Needless to say, I did not get to bed as scheduled that night. I arranged for Emma to spend the night at Cameo's house. My sister Diane called Emma's mother and asked for permission for Emma to stay at their house for a few days. My sister Carolyn lived next door to a clinical psychologist who provided counseling and therapy to children and teenagers. Carolyn called Dr. Vanessa who scheduled an appointment for Emma the next day. The game plan was that Emma would tell Vanessa about the ongoing abuse. Vanessa would then have a legal obligation to report the problem to the Child Protective Services agency. I called my friend, Nora Baladerian, to get her opinion on this strategy. Nora is a clinical psychologist who specializes in child abuse. Nora gave her OK.

I flew back to Hawaii. For the next few days, I would get updates on how things were progressing for Emma. She saw Dr. Vanessa three times. Vanessa interviewed Emma's sister who confirmed that ongoing abuse was happening. Vanessa reported the abuse to the county. The county called the parents in for an interview. Things were moving in the right direction. Emma, who was 16, returned to the school campus for a football game which occurred two days before Labor Day weekend. She was scheduled to start a new part-time job the next day. Cameo and her family were on a short vacation in Canada.



Diane and Cameo Ask Me to Help Emma

On the Sunday of Labor Day weekend, I picked up the phone and took a call from my sister Diane. She was concerned that something may have happened to Emma. Cameo had received a call on her cell phone, while they were still in Canada, from Aaron, a friend of Emma. No one had seen or heard from Emma since Thursday night after the sports event. She did not show up at work on Friday. Aaron had received a short text message from Emma on Saturday morning. "Help, I'm scared." My sister Diane called Emma's house. Emma's mother told Diane that they had sent Emma to a boarding school out of state. She

would not disclose the location of the school or its name. Calls then started flying back and forth among various friends of Emma. One of them finally confided to Cameo that Emma's mother had told her in confidence that Emma had been enrolled in Spring Creek Lodge in Montana and that she would not be home for a few months.

Diane called me with this information. Spring Creek Lodge? Montana? This did not sound right. Why would Emma disappear so abruptly? She was scheduled to attend her first day of classes on Tuesday. She was supposed to have started a new job. Could this have something to do with the fact that Emma's dad had been reported to the authorities for suspected child abuse? Emma was suicidal. She was in therapy with Dr. Vanessa. We checked with Vanessa and she confirmed that Emma was scheduled to see her on Tuesday afternoon after school got out. No one had consulted Vanessa about the effect of an abrupt move on Emma's fragile emotional condition.

I told Diane and Cameo that I would try to do some research on the Internet about Spring Creek Lodge and that I would report back to them as soon as I had any relevant information. In the process of doing my research, I came across the address and phone number of Spring Creek Lodge. So I called and asked to speak with the executive director. The assistant director got on the phone and we spoke. He would not confirm or deny whether Emma was there. I told him that she was suicidal and that her therapist wanted to call her to speak with her. "That is not going to happen," I was told.

When I hung up the phone, I got back on the Internet to find more information about Spring Creek Lodge. I found several news stories and other postings indicating that Spring Creek Lodge is more like a prison for juveniles who are held there against their will, deprived of all outside contact with the world, watched 24 hours a day by another teen inmate, disciplined by their teen-inmate-watchdog, sometimes isolated in an isolation hut, placed on a limited diet of bananas and beans, etc.

The Lodge was part of a larger affiliation of similar facilities, known as the World Wide Association of Speciality Programs (WWASP). WWASP was being investigated by a congressional subcommittee in Washington for abuse and neglect of teen inmates, had been referred to the Justice Department by a congressman for investigation, had some of its facilities closed by government agencies, had many facilities sued for abuse by parents, and had many other complaints against them for abuse and mistreatment of teens.

Emma was in deep trouble. I later learned that Emma had returned home about midnight on the day of her disappearance after having attended a party following the football game. She went to bed and then was abruptly awakened at 3 a.m. by a total stranger who forced her out of the house and flew her to Montana against her will. Emma's parents were aware of the situation.

I called Vanessa and brought her up to date on what had happened. I asked her to call the facility, inform them that she is Emma's treating psychologist, and request to speak with her. Vanessa later reported back to me that she made the call. She had a conversation with the "communications director" of the facility. Vanessa found out that the clinical director of the facility does not even have a professional degree. They would not allow her to speak to Emma.

I then had a long conversation with a child abuse prevention professional in New York. I was referred to him by Nora Baladerian. He was very concerned for Emma's welfare, especially considering her risk for suicide, the abduction, and her involuntary confinement in a non-therapeutic facility. He encouraged me to get more aggressive, to shift this to the legal arena, and to get as much publicity for this case as possible to make it high profile. He said that only such aggressive action would cause her release from confinement and her return to Michigan where she could get the therapy and support she needed. Failure to get aggressive might result in her death.



An Isolation Room at Spring Creek Lodge

I followed the advice and immediately placed two calls to child abuse hotlines, one in Montana and one in Michigan. I explained the situation about the abuse, the intervention of Child Protective Services in Michigan, Emma's suicidal risk, her abduction to Montana, the abrupt end of therapy, and the refusal of the facility in Montana to allow Emma to speak with her therapist in Michigan.

On September 8, I received an e-mail from the International Survivors Action Committee (ISAC), a nonprofit group run by individuals who have survived involuntary confinement in facilities like the one in which Emma was being held. This was in reply to my request for information about Spring Creek Lodge. She said that time was of the essence, since Child Protective Services would probably take more than two weeks to respond, and since the contract Emma's parents signed with Spring Creek Lodge authorized the staff there to transfer Emma to a facility in Jamaica if she is "resistant" to their orders. ISAC had been monitoring Spring Creek Lodge and similar facilities for years.

I forwarded the e-mail message, with my own cover note, to everyone I thought would be interested in having Emma freed from confinement, including government officials and advocacy groups in Michigan. My cover note said that if CPS or Michigan authorities did not have Emma returned to Michigan this week (at least for an interview with authorities), then aggressive legal, political, and media action would be taken by me. I then made phone calls to several nonprofit groups and several agency officials in Michigan.

On Wednesday afternoon, there was a breakthrough. I received a call from a supervisor with Child Protective Services in Michigan. They were preparing a petition to file with the Probate Court. They hoped to have it filed by Thursday morning at the latest.

About noon the next day I spoke by phone with a social worker who informed me that a judge had entered an order temporarily placing legal custody of Emma with the CPS and directing the CPS to have Emma returned from Montana to Michigan. The social worker was on her way back to her office to set in motion a process to have the local sheriff in Sanders County pick Emma up from Spring Creek Lodge and turn her over to the social worker who was planning to fly to Montana on Friday to bring Emma back. We were making progress, or so it seemed.

I called the social worker on her cell phone at 5 p.m. Hawaii time to check on her progress with officials in Montana. I was concerned because I had read information that Spring Creek Lodge, which housed up to 500 teenagers, was the largest employer in Sanders County. The facility had strong connections with local officials. I planned to leave her a message asking her to call me as soon as Emma was on the ground in Michigan. To my surprise, the social worker answered the phone even though it was 11 p.m. in Michigan. She sounded very upset and shaken. I was informed that the Sanders County sheriff was refusing to honor the court order from Michigan.



Emma's Case Evolved into a New Project

My adrenaline started to rush. I decided to call the Child Abuse Hotline in Montana again. They told me to call back in the morning. I then searched through the Web site of the attorney general's office in Montana. I found a telephone number for the Missing Persons Clearinghouse. I called the number and spoke with Tom. I informed him of the critical facts. We agreed that as I continued to make other calls, he would look through the attorney general's Web site and try to find names of people for me to contact in the morning. He promised to call me back a little later.

About 30 minutes later I received a call from an assistant attorney general in Montana. I was surprised because of the late hour there. I told him the story. He promised to make calls in the morning to key officials in Michigan to verify the facts. He would have them fax him the court order after which he would contact the district attorney and the sheriff to urge them to cooperate with Michigan authorities to implement the court order to return Emma to Michigan.

The assistant attorney general followed through as he had promised. He verified the facts and then put pressure on the Sanders County sheriff to honor the Michigan court order. The Michigan social worker flew to Montana with a deputy sheriff. Things in Montana had unfolded so strangely that they were not going to take any chances with anything going wrong when they were in Montana. Emma flew back to Michigan and was placed with her grandparents.

About a week later, Michael and I left Hawaii and returned to Los Angeles. This whole ordeal with Emma had happened at a very inopportune time for us. During Labor Day weekend and for the following week, we were packing our belongings since we had decided to rent out the house in Hawaii and to return to Los Angeles to live. With Michael assuming almost all of the duties associated with moving, I had been able to devote most of my time to the rescue of Emma.

I stayed in communication with the ISAC group and got updates on its activities. About a month after we returned to Los Angeles, I received a report that a teenage girl had committed suicide at Spring Creek Lodge. The institution had managed to keep the incident out of the media. But ISAC had its sources. I was saddened to hear of this tragedy, but glad it was not Emma. We had secured her release in the nick of time, or she might have used suicide as her only escape from imprisonment.

My involvement with Emma's case, and the connection with other abuse victims through the ISAC group, prompted involvement in yet another civil liberties cause. Nora and I started the Emancipation Project. For the next two years we devoted countless hours advocating for the closure of these despicable institutions. My spouse, Michael, participated in the project. In a special intervention, we went to the Utah State Capitol to "blow the whistle" on child abuse at Majestic Ranch – an institution similar to Spring Creek lodge but for children as young as eight. Our efforts, combined with the advocacy of others with similar interests – and with the help of some federal officials – eventually caused the closure of Spring Creek Lodge and led to the downfall of the entire "reprogramming" industry. My response to the call for help in Emma's case had ramifications well beyond protecting the rights and well being of one teenage girl in Michigan.

Final Words



Even though I moved from Ferndale to Detroit in 1967 and from Michigan to California in 1971, I have always retained an emotional connection to Ferndale and a close bond with Michigan. Those connections, when merged with my ongoing commitment to civil liberties, have kept me active from time to time in Michigan's legal and political affairs.

My association with Rudy Serra played a part in keeping my relationship with Ferndale active during the last two decades. Plus, staying in touch with my family members who live in Michigan, was an inspiration for me to visit the state on a regular basis. Those personal visits have had the added effect of reminding me of Michigan's geographic beauty.

Although my transition from Michigan to California occurred more than four decades ago – and I want to underscore that I dearly love California and consider it to be my home – the four sections of this Addendum demonstrate that I never lost touch with the state where I was born and raised.

In terms of my relationship with "The Wolverine State," I guess the situation can be wrapped up best by saying: "You can take the boy out of Michigan, but you can't take Michigan out of the boy."