

Chapter 7

Hopewell



I ended the previous chapter with a picture of mom visiting and Sheila as a baby. Here are the five kids a few years later. Monica, Sheila, and Mary all wearing Mary Janes. Peter at seven and John is just hanging on.

By this time Peter was healthy, Monica had survived her multiple early pneumonias. Sheila and Mary were in good health and John had recovered from his very early health problems. This is not to say that there were not multiple colds and other childhood problems making a full nights' sleep for the parents a rarity.

My memories of Hopewell are not very chronological. So I'm going to do a series of stories that may or may not be in order.

After finishing preschool, the kids all went together to Hopewell elementary school. The school is located on the other side of town, so the kids walked down Greenwood Avenue, over the bridge, over the railroad tracks, past Jimmy's corner store, where they could potentially pick up candy and on down to the main street through Hopewell called Broad Street. There was a crossing guard and they then proceeded a further two blocks or so to the school. Sometimes they rode a bicycle, usually there were more kids walking the same path.

One time when the older kids were at school and John was the only kid left at home, he apparently got tired of seeing the others leave and he found a spare lunchbox and took off by himself in the direction of school. Anne was working in the

back garden and did not see him leave. A worried neighbor returned him, having found him in Jimmy's corner store. He had to cross a couple of local streets to get there, as well as go over the bridge over the railroad tracks.

Anne knew the teachers much better than I did as I only met them at the student-teacher conferences. Since we had more kids than parents, we had to alternate as to which conference we would attend. I remember a couple of school plays, but the day-to-day interaction with the schools and the teachers belong to Anne.

While indulging in my usual home repairs and modifications I got to know the owners of the lumberyard and the local hardware store reasonably well. They were and are stereotypically stereotypes. Hopewell was in the process of modifying their zoning ordinance and somehow I was appointed to the planning board and ended up supervising the modifications to the zoning ordinance. Since Hopewell only had 2500 or so inhabitants, the zoning issues were not world shaking. A typical discussion involved whether or not a welding shop should be permitted next to an old-age home.

Our previous Hopewell landlords the MacAlindens, had sons who were in the dynamite business; they made their living by placing small dynamite charges inside a large commercial water tower and shaking it such that all of the scale fell off the walls. I wonder how you get started in such a business?



The dynamite family also provided a fireworks display on the Fourth of July in the field behind the local cemetery which was uphill from us. We annually went up among the tombstones and watched the display. Hopewell, of course, had an annual Fourth of July parade. The parade had a marching band, representatives of every local organization, as well as a military tank one year. I liked the little kids on decorated tricycles much more than the tank.

I obviously did little to try to blend in with the local population. I think I was trying to look like a mad scientist. There were a few other outsiders in Hopewell at this time, all of whom worked outside of Hopewell at various companies. We became part of a group of families that participated in meetings we called Living Room Dialogues. We would meet in each other's homes on a semi regular schedule and discuss a wide range of topics. We discussed abortion, same-sex marriage, and politics. We were all young married couples, of various religious backgrounds and wanted to appear open and at least willing to discuss other people's ideas and beliefs. These people became good friends in our community.

One year Anne had a series of interactions with the principal of the grade school who did not want to have a Christmas celebration. My memory is that the principal left after that term. The next year there was an opening on the school board. I decided to run for the position. Anne was my campaign chairman. We held a couple of open houses and sent out some campaign literature on the need for quality schools.

There was one opening on the school board and three candidates. I came in third. I seem to have antagonized the local American Legion as they helped bring in some elderly voters in ambulances to vote against me.

Such is politics. It could've been my beard?

We had a two-car garage at the rear of our driveway which had a peaked roof and an upstairs floor. The floor was open to the middle of the garage so I built a chicken wire enclosed climbing structure to this upper level at the back of the garage. The structure was made so the child could go up about 3 feet and then they had to go sideways to another section where they can go up another 3 feet so there was no danger of falling. We called this structure the Monkey House. One side of the garage was my work space and the other side was basically bicycle storage. We had a metal slide in the backyard and a swing set in the side yard, so we often had our own kids and some of the neighbors.

Cars

After we moved to Hopewell, I bought a small compact station wagon for commuting. We soon realized the Renault was too small for our growing family and we traded it in on a Ford Country Squire station wagon. It had imitation wood sides and a very, very large area behind the seat; I made a large foam pad to fill that area and we apparently let the kids ride back there unrestrained.

As I mentioned before our driveway at 59 N. Greenwood sloped back towards the garage. The Ford Country Squire had a defective parking brake and one day, after being parked near the house, it rolled down the driveway and semi-totaled the garage door. The neighbors across the street had just purchased a new Volkswagen camper minivan, which we really liked. We did not get the large car repaired, but we went out and immediately purchased a Volkswagen minivan, not the camper, but a red regular minivan. This minivan lasted us as long as I was working at RCA Labs.

The minivan was woefully underpowered and on a windy day you almost had to steer into the wind to stay on the road. It did have a large advantage on snowy days with the engine in the back above the drive wheels. This enabled Anne to drive up snowy hills while the standard cars were stalled at the bottom. The minivan has a sliding roof that could be opened. After many years, the weatherproofing seal on the roof opening wore out and the rain collected around the opening. If Anne drove around a corner, the water went over to one side and it rained inside the car. I seem to remember we kept an umbrella in the car for these occasions.

The driver in the minivan was at the very front of the car and was in an elevated seat. Anne recounts meeting a friend that had only seen her in the car who remarked "I always thought of you as tall." The minivan was basically Anne's home away from home during those years.

The Michigan Road Trip



This was a trip back to where I came from. It also gave the kids a chance to meet my Aunt Yula. We are gathered here by her fishpond in Ithaca. We also went north. We took the car ferry across Lake Michigan, throwing breadcrumbs to the seagulls. We went to Manistique and visited my aunt Manila (on the porch). She is known as Nil.



We then drove on up to the Sault St. Marie locks and stopped briefly in Canada. We then came back down through Michigan to the outskirts of Detroit and visited Uncle Earl and Aunt Ernie.



Anne remember Ernie made wonderful whiskey sours. We then motored on back to New Jersey.

The Jersey Shore Vacations



As an East Coast native Anne loved the Jersey Shore. We took a week at the shore each year. Several years we had the kids register for the first day of school and then we took them out of school and spent a week at a rented beachfront cabin at the Jersey Shore. It was much cheaper to rent once school started. There were minimal crowds and beautiful beaches. I'm sure the teachers were not happy about this.

A couple of years we went down and shared cottages with other Hopewell families who also had kids and it became a very happy party with the kids on the beach and the parents tasting gin and tonics. One of the days we were down at the beach, Monica was in danger of being swept out to sea. The entire group rushed out to save her. Obviously we were

successful. We also did a little bait casting for bluefish, as well as some crabbing.

One summer, RCA Labs celebrated its 25th anniversary with a large party at the laboratory. It was sort of hokey but nice. The RCA Laboratory chorus did a performance of a newly written RCA song called "Red Green Blue, Red Green Blue." It never became one of the top 10 songs nationally. Since RCA was also a record company, there were many free records and other gifts.

There were a couple of technical displays that I remember, the most impressive was a room air-conditioned by a wall of thermoelectric units. This type of cooling always remained too expensive for general use, it was impressive. They also had a computer terminal with a display where we could play a primitive game of pocket billiards. RCA Labs was very good to us as a family.

While I worked for RCA Labs, my work life was great as I will describe in the next chapter. My RCA life went on for some 17 years including time off for graduate school. The family was in Hopewell at 59 N. Greenwood the majority of this time.