

# **On Becoming a McCarthy**

**Timothy F. McCarthy**

**2025**

## To My Children and Theirs

We should all know where we come from. In this book, I'm going to tell you about my branch of your family and what's been important in my life. Perhaps you will find counsel, but in any event, you will find your past.

At 72, it seems a good time for me to look back and share with you what I know so far about our family. I'm writing this to you: Timmy, Kevin, and Caitlin, and your kids, Rose, Noah, Rowan, Teague, Stella, and Isla, in the year 2025. I will share what I know about my ancestors as far back as 1863, what I know about my own experience, and my experience of your lives thus far.

Mostly, you will find how I "became" a McCarthy. Taken as a clan, there are currently 76 (direct/bloodline) descendants of William J. McCarthy, and he came from dozens of very interesting characters.

I hope you enjoy it and take it as a model to pay forward to those who will follow you. At best, my words will inspire. At worst, I'll show you what not to do.

With love, your dad and grandpa,

*Timothy Francis John McCarthy*



*All twelve of my family of origin at Bill and Ev's wedding in 1963.  
Left to right: Bill, Miller, Terry, Mary, Kathleen, Dad, Mom, Steve, Sheila, Felicia, Tim, and Jane.*

## My Branch of Our Family Tree

My grandparents (1870s-1950s)

William Joseph and Mary Ann Rock McCarthy

Maggie and Stephen McDonough

My parents (1900s-1990s)

William Joseph McCarthy

and

Margaret McDonough

Me (1952- )

Tim (married Alice Lorraine Bethel)

My children (1980s- )

Timmy

Kevin

Caitlin

My grandchildren (2010s- )

Noah  
Rowan  
Stella

Rose  
Teague

Isla

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## Chapter 1: Your Ancestors

Dear Kids,

Among those I will describe to you in this section are people that I never knew. So why would I care about them? Because they were interesting people, and they led interesting lives. By learning about them, I learned more about myself and where and from whom I came.

For instance, I've learned that I may have gotten my love for writing from my uncles on my mother's side, who were prominent national writers and publishers. Or where did my love for service come from? My father's mother's family created an asylum for medical doctors with substance addictions called the Mountain Clinic in Olean, New York. Or perhaps it was my dad's cousin, Father Steve Towell, or my mom's niece, Sister Mary Kay Brooks, who dedicated their lives to God.

Do such qualities come from nature (our DNA) or nurture (the cultures of our families and ancestors)? Why do some of the faces in these photos bear a resemblance to my siblings or me? Why do I see my own face in yours?

Whatever the answers, these are the ties that bind for better and for worse. Whether we stop to notice and learn from our history is up to us.

Before I share the more specific knowledge I have of my parents and theirs, it seems this summary about one more generation back will shed some light.

### My great-grandparents

Both of Dad's paternal grandparents (McCarthy and Garrity) were born and raised in Ireland. Mary Garrity Barr McCarthy in Merrisk, County Mayo, and John B. McCarthy in Caheragh, County Cork.

Both of Dad's maternal grandparents (David A. Rock and C. A. "Cate" Mountain) were born and raised in western New York state (Olean). Both are of Irish descent, although it's unclear how far back.

Mom's paternal grandparents (McDonough and O'Connor) were born and raised in Ireland: John McDonough, Jr, in Limerick City, County Limerick, and Catherine (Kate) O'Connor in Bandon, County Cork.

My mom's maternal grandparents (Henry Wheatley and Eleanor Clements) were born and raised in Charles County, Maryland. The Wheatley side can be traced back to the colonization and formation of "Mary Land."

Count it all up and you'll see that four of my eight great-grandparents emigrated from Ireland in the mid-1800s. That means that we are quite surely of Irish descent. Here's some of what we've learned about each of them.

### My mother's grandfather, John J. McDonough

- John's father, John McDonough, Sr., was born in 1809 and passed away in 1863 in West Derby, Lancashire, England (near Liverpool)
- John Jr., was born in Limerick City in 1822
- Baptized at St. Mary's (Catholic) on February 16, 1828
- John was six when he and newborn sister Elizabeth were baptized on same day.
- Married Catherine ("Kate") O'Connor (Connors/Conner) in 1836 in Bandon, County Cork
- Emigrated to Belleville, Ontario, Canada, where their first child, Francis McDonough, was born on January 2, 1855, in Belleville, Ontario, Canada
- Had three more children, all presumably also born in Canada: Michael McDonough in 1858, and twins Patrick and Stephen McDonough in 1861 (Patrick died at 37)
- Died October 14, 1864, buried in St. James Cemetery in Belleville, Ontario, Canada

### My mother's grandmother, Catherine (Kate) O'Connor/Connor/Conner

- Born in County Cork, Ireland, 1819
- Baptized Catholic on October 17, 1819, in Bandon, Cork, Ireland
- Married John J. McDonough in 1836. They had four children: Frank, Michael, Bridgit, and Patrick, the identical twin to our grandfather, Stephen.
- Died March 12, 1897, in Belleville, Ontario, Canada
- Buried in Section D, Row 2 at St. James Cemetery in Hastings, Canada

### My father's grandfather, John B. McCarthy

- Born June 1827, in Caheragh, Cork, Ireland, fifth child of Daniel McCarthy (1800-1865) and Honora Driscoll McCarthy
- Baptized Catholic on June 24, 1828, in Cork, Ireland
- Emigrated to Boston, MA, in May of 1844
- Moved to Quebec circa 1847
- Married Catherine Hayes (1829-1858) in Brookline, Boston, MA, on February 1, 1851
- Settled as farmer (not naturalized; a non-voter, according to the 1855 census) in Friendship, Alleghany, New York, USA
- Son Charles born in 1856
- Catherine died in 1858 in Friendship, Alleghany, New York
- John B. remarried to Bridget Brogan (1820-1869) in 1860 in Boston, when he also became a naturalized citizen of USA
- John and Bridget had one child, Anna, in September, 1864
- John B.'s father, Daniel, stayed in Ireland. He died in Caheragh in 1865
- Bridget died in 1869 in Belfast, New York
- John B. remarried a third time to widow Mary Garrity Barr in 1870 in Belfast, New York
- Mary Garrity Barr McCarthy brought Susan J. Barr (1863-1952) and Philip James Barr into the McCarthy family when she married John B.; John brought Charles and Anna McCarthy
- Together they had two more children: William John, my grandfather, in 1872 and Sabina A. in 1874. (Sabina lived until 1932.)
- John B. passed on July 11, 1907, in Belfast, Alleghany, New York

### My father's grandmother, Mary Garrity Barr McCarthy

- Born May 1, 1838, in Murrisk, County Mayo, Ireland, to John Garrity (1799) and Alice O'Malley (1799)
- She had an older brother, Owen, and a younger sister, Sabina, born 1842, both also born in Murrisk, County Mayo, Ireland
- Mary emigrated to USA via Ellis Island June 13, 1856
- She moved to Boston, Suffolk, MA, to live with her brother, Owen, an iceman. She was listed as a domestic worker at a small hotel in Boston.
- Married Philip James Barr in Boston, Suffolk, MA, on January 12, 1863
- They had three children: Susan J. Barr, 1863, James Patrick Barr, 1866, and Mary Elizabeth. James Patrick died May 29, 1867, and Mary Elizabeth was born six months after her father's death, December 18, 1867, and died at a young age.
- Mary married John B. McCarthy in June 1870 in Belfast, New York
- She had another two children with John: my grandpa, William J., and his twin sister, Sabina.
- Mary passed April 27, 1922, in Belfast, New York. Her funeral at St. Patrick's and burial in Holy Cross Cemetery were on April 29<sup>th</sup>.

## My grandparents

Three of my four grandparents died before I was born, so I have no direct knowledge of them.

### Mom's folks

Steven and Maggie (Wheatley) McDonough were pretty typical Americans of their generation. An engineer (train driver) for the Rock Island Line, Steve came from Bellville, Ontario, to Des Moines to find better work. He was based in West Des Moines, Iowa, and overnighted at a bunkhouse in Brooklyn, Iowa. The manager of the bunkhouse, Henry Wheatley, introduced Steve to Henry's daughter, Maggie. They married and lived humbly: she the homemaker, he off to work every day. They raised five children, all of whom graduated from college. Each died several years before I was born. My favorite story about my Grandfather McDonough is that he was proud to be American, voting faithfully in every election since he immigrated. When Mom and her sibs cleared out Grandpa's things, they found he was still a Canadian citizen: he'd never completed his paperwork for American citizenship! He was voting illegally all those years.



*My mother's parents' wedding photo.*



## Dad's folks



*My dad's parents.*

From the stories I heard, my dad's mom, Mary Ann Mountain McCarthy, was tall, intelligent, and prone to headaches and mood swings. She too was the homemaker type, raising another five children who all completed their college educations, two of whom became medical doctors. Dad adored her and hung onto her every word.

I do have clear and fond memories of Grandpa McCarthy, who passed in my seventh year. His father settled in upstate New York (Olean/Belfast) near other family members who'd fled the Irish famine.

When world champion boxer John L. Sullivan, a notorious drinker, was sent away from New York City to prepare for a prize fight, he trained in the Olean/Belfast area. Grandpa was a very tough teenager and was hired as a workout/sparring partner, called a "pony boy," by the boxer's handlers.

Until his late twenties, he worked as a wildcatter in the oil fields of northwestern Ohio. He went broke and returned to Belfast to marry his sweetheart, Mary Ann Mountain. They settled in Findlay, Ohio, where he ran Prudential's local insurance office for 50 years.

In my early years, I saw Grandpa McCarthy several times a year, either at our house or on a road trip when Dad would take all of us to Findlay. He was a gruff, tough, big-shouldered, cigar-smoking, wide-in-the-waist guy with a big voice who was a magician with carpentry. In his retirement, he visited all his children frequently and would always ask for or suggest a project. He built our stairs to the beach, a tool shed, and an open-roofed area to store our bikes and lawnmowers. He then built a one-bedroom, one-bath apartment, using two car spaces in our four-car garage, and a huge open room on the top of that same garage. I clearly remember that at the end of one day of building, he sat with me to look over his work, saying, "Okay, Timmy, now let's gloat."

Other memories include him touching our hand with his teaspoon as he took it out of his coffee. When the hot metal hit our skin, he'd say, "Telegram!" He would invite any or all of us to play cards with him at the dining room table. His favorite and ours was a version of rummy he called Tunk. When you laid a winning card down, you would knock your knuckles on the table and holler, "Tunk!"



*My grandfather (Dad's dad),  
WJ McCarthy.*

He drove a big old black sedan 1948 Ford, I think, with a rather unique red roof—unique because, having been frustrated by not being able to find his car in parking lots (he was in his 80s by then), he took a can of red house paint and simply painted the roof of his car so he could spot it.

W.J. and Mary Ann raised two boys and three girls, one of whom was William Joseph, my father. All five were highly educated, earning between them two medical doctor degrees, a master's degree, and two Bachelor of Arts degrees.



*Formal childhood portrait of (bottom to top of photo) Rose,  
Mary Lou, Catherine (Kit), my dad (Bill), and John.  
Birth order: John, Rose, Bill, Mary Lou and Kit.*

## My Dad



*My dad's medical school graduation photo, hospital staff photo, and retirement photo.*

I could write a book about my dad, **William Joseph McCarthy**. He was born July 30, 1904, in Findlay, Ohio, to William J. McCarthy and Mary Ann Mountain of Belfast, NY, where his father had also grown up.

Dad, who went by Bill, was one of five siblings.

- John J. McCarthy became a medical doctor practicing in Lakewood, OH.
- Rose McCarthy went on to marry Paul Morrissey. Together, they built Granville Tractor and Farm Supply near Grand Rapids, MI.
- Mary Lou McCarthy earned a BA and an MA from Ohio State and married my mom's brother, Steve McDonough (who was Paul Morrissey's best friend). Through these two couples, the McDonough and McCarthy families became friends, and my father met my mom.
- Catherine (Kit) McCarthy graduated from Ohio State, where she met and married William Stowe, a medical doctor and architect. They settled in Dayton, Ohio.

My Dad was larger than life to most people who knew him. He earned his B.S. from St. Bonaventure University in 1925 and his medical degree from St. Louis University in 1929. In 1931, while doing his residency at Cleveland's St. Vincent Hospital, he was recruited to Ashtabula to become the "local Catholic doctor." He opened his office at 211 Park Place, where he practiced until his surgical retirement in 1969. He then went on to serve seven years as Chief of Emergency Medicine at Ashtabula General Hospital.

He married Winifred Miller from Chicago in 1937, and they had William John McCarthy (Bill) in 1938, David Miller McCarthy (whom we called Miller) in 1939, and Terrence Brendan (Terry) McCarthy in 1941. Winifred died during a difficult pregnancy in 1943 at age 34, leaving her loving husband and five-, four-, and two-year-old sons behind.

My mom was at Dad's first wedding because her brother (Steve) had married my dad's sister (Mary Lou) a few years before. There is even a story of Mom visiting Winifred and Dr. Bill and their sons in Ashtabula when Steve and Mary Lou were there in 1941. After a year of grieving Winifred's death (and a series of nannies), Dad visited Margaret McDonough, then a journalist at the Chicago Tribune, in the summer of 1944. During the Christmas holidays, he proposed, and on April 7, 1945, Bill and Margaret were married in Mom's hometown of Des Moines. They moved to 3907 Edgewater Drive, where they lived the rest of their lives. They went on to have Mary (1946), Kathleen (1947), Stephen (1948), Sheila (1949), Felicia (1950), me (1952), and Jane (1954).

Dad was very professional. He took pride in his appearance and was meticulous in both dress and manner. His hands were beautiful, strong from years of surgical procedures but also so steady and precise that he was often called on to thread my mom's needles and disentangle my sisters' jewelry.



*3907 Edgewater Drive, on Lake Erie, in Ashtabula, Ohio.  
My dad bought the place in 1941, and it was sold from the family estate in 2000.*



He was the most curious person I've ever known; he loved to learn. He freely observed beauty and brilliance and felt free to comment on either, whether the stars in the sky or a beautiful piece of music. Dad was intense. He could move people to tears of joy or sorrow by his lack of tact. He would flatly tell a patient they were too fat; he used bitter sarcasm on his children.

He was deeply devoted to his family, obedient to his parents and wives, and believed that his children were the "flowers in his eternal garden." He was an extremely complicated man.

### **My father's impact on me**

My father's impact on his youngest son remains strong in my 71st year. His light was luminous, his darkness a shadow. My strongest memories reflect his legacy in me and shine through the moments in each of these favorite memories, even when his other side inevitably popped through.

I remember him on his knees with a rosary in his hands. My father took his faith as life and death. Prayer was never far from his lips while driving the car, leading us in the rosary in our younger days, kneeling at his bedside, and during daily and Sunday mass. The McCarthy pew was an entire row in the front left of our church. My sense was that he was in another place during prayer and petition; tears often flowed down his cheeks in passion or rapture.

Dad carried himself with dignity and self-assurance. In yardwork or leisure time, he dressed like a dad—white t-shirt, long dark socks, madras shorts, and bad hats. Other times, he dressed to the nines, and his bearing was precise. He dressed from a closet in the hallway downstairs, just outside the boys' bedroom (all girls were lodged upstairs).

Dad immensely enjoyed our playfulness (until he didn't). In that vein, I picture him sitting with hands full of ride tickets at the amusement parks, driving us to his family home in Findlay as we sang endless verses of "100 Bottles of Beer on the Wall," and standing tall so we could see him as we ran wild on our frequent short trips to places such as Niagara Falls.



*Dad, 1952.*

My favorite memories of Dad are of his professional dedication and manner. It would be hard to imagine someone who enjoyed being a doctor more than W. J. McCarthy. It was amazing to watch his social awkwardness disappear. Everyone knew when Dad was making his rounds because he would whistle when he walked the hallways. His bedside manner left impressions still discussed in his hometown today. He welcomed any or all of us kids to his office, the hospital, and even on house calls, as he enjoyed the company. And so we had a ringside seat to see his steady, surgical hands and hear his precise questions leading to diagnosis.

Most of all, I remember the neutralizing effect his voice, words, and actions had on the people he served in their most difficult moments. While his patients and their family members might be screaming and crying, Dad's voice would remain steady, even, reassuring, and most of all, precise in his explanation of what was going on.

### **Dad's best advice**

Most of Dad's best advice related to health, learning, and faith. He consistently reminded all of us that "health is all you've got, and you need to mind it and be grateful for it." His health education focused on moderation in the use of any mood-altering substances. Beyond smoking and alcohol (he cited his own misuse of both in his youth), Dad also included caffeine and chocolate.

Exercise was another constant reminder. His favored means were walking and swimming since "They don't damage your bones and heart." "I have to keep moving," he would say about his own aging process. And move he did, taking his wood-cutting equipment over the bank between our front yard and the lake to find sources of firewood. His tools included a buzz saw and a wheelbarrow or a tarp to carry the chopped wood up the hill and home. In the tool shed, he kept a sledgehammer and wedge, and when we boys were home, he'd say, "Let's go out and split some wood."

On the learning side, his greatest advice came from example. When I was 17 and he was 65, I stumbled in at 2:00 am and found Dad studying for a new medical certification, his books spread around the dining room table. A few years later, when he was offered the chance to extend his career, he established the first 24-hour emergency-room system in our small-town hospital. When the hospital administrator, Mr. Dubach, said, "Do you want the job?" Dad said, "Only if you'll give me a year to study how successful hospitals do it."

Dad's religious beliefs were far more doctrinaire than our mother's, and still, I admired and learned from his spiritual ardor. He attended early mass most days, said at least one rosary each day, and whenever he wasn't busy, he'd be reading or praying.

## My Mom



*Mom's engagement photo, 1945.*



*Mom in her 80s.*

My mom was an incredible human being, and her story, well told, would be page-turning fiction.

Margaret McDonough, often called Marg, was born in 1909. She grew up the fifth of six children born to Maggie and Stephen McDonough in the (then) small railroad town of Valley Junction (now West Des Moines), Iowa. Her dad was an engineer on the Rock Island line, and her mom the classic homemaker of that period, making chicken dinner from scratch (starting with the chickens her dad raised in a lot nearby) and sewing all her children's clothes.

Her eldest and youngest brothers, Bill and Ed, became clothing salesmen. Her sister Katherine graduated from Drake with a library degree and spent most of her life as the librarian in Albert Lea, MN. Her two brothers, Frank and Steve, became nationally prominent journalists at a young age—Frank the publisher of *Better Homes and Gardens* (Meredith Publishing) and Steve the national science editor for the Associated Press. A year after Margaret graduated from St. Joseph Academy in Des Moines, her brother Frank helped her pay for her entry into Iowa State University's school of journalism, saying, "If a father can't, a brother should."

Mom began her career at the *Chicago Tribune*, selling and editing classified ads. A few years in, she made it to *Tribune*'s famous owner/publisher Robert "Colonel" McCormack's office. She was assigned to upgrade and professionalize the national newspaper's internal employee magazine, the *Little Trib*, a job she did from age 29 to 36. Then along came my widowed father, WJ McCarthy. Remember, the McCarthys and McDonoughs had known each other for years after WJ's sister, Mary Lou, married Marg's brother, Steve. On April 7, 1945, this "middle-aged" professional Chicago woman married my dad (and his three young boys) and moved to tiny Ashtabula, Ohio. This is where Mom's story begins to seem fictional.

Mom's brother, Bill, an usher at their wedding, dropped Mom and Dad at their wedding reception entrance and said he was going to rest a bit in the parking lot as he wasn't feeling well. Twenty minutes later, Mom sent her nephew, Mac, to check on her brother, who found Bill dead from a heart attack. Maggie and Steve insisted their daughter continue her honeymoon with W.J. in Mexico.



*Mom in her Tribune years.*



Marg loved to say she married Dad for her boys since she'd been told she could not bear children. She then proceeded to raise the boys while giving birth to the other seven of us. A single professional journalist in Chicago in 1945 was by 1954 the homemaker mother of ten in a small Ohio town.

During her first five years in Ashtabula, while adjusting to the homemaking role and small-town culture and raising her new sons while adding a baby each year, Mom lost all her immediate family except her sister Katherine and brother Ed. Bill's passing at her wedding was followed first by her mom, and then, a month later, her brother Steve in 1946. Her dad passed in 1947 and her brother Frank in 1950. Five babies and five deaths in five years.

The most beautiful part of this story is that I only learned of these heartaches later in my life. What I knew of Mom was a gentle, soft-spoken, quiet, strong, loving woman, about 4' 11" tall, who quietly managed a big house where all were welcomed. All our friends knew Mom as "Mom" and brought their trials and troubles to our kitchen table.



*Mom and Dad in 1947 with Winifred's three boys, Bill, Dave and Terry and her first two, Mary and Kathleen.*

For 16 years after I left for college, Mom continued to care for Jane, her last baby, who had Down's Syndrome, while serving as the communications center for our family. Sunday nights were spent at her Underwood typewriter, sending letters to her kids and other relatives. After she let Jane go to my sister Mary, who cared for Jane for her last 18 years, Mom became caregiver to my dad, who struggled increasingly with Alzheimer's.

After Dad's passing in 1990, she continued to maintain the five-bedroom home on Lake Erie where we had all grown up, being visited by her ten children and twenty-eight grandchildren from around the country and Ireland. Her last two years were spent in assisted living in Orlando, FL, near her caregiving daughter, Sheila. Her homecoming mass and burial were attended by hundreds and were followed by the last raucous and crowded party we would ever have at 3907 Edgewater Drive.

### The gifts my mother gave me

These are the gifts my mother gave me. I've spent a lifetime trying to live up to them.

**Love for the written word.** Mom was happiest when near a book or a typewriter. It was more than her career of 11 years writing for the *Chicago Tribune*; it was in her soul. She said she fell in love with reading when her Aunt Doll brought her books as gifts. Her favorite was *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett. (Its first edition was published in 1911 when Mom was two years old.)

**Curious and patriotic.** Mom couldn't get enough news. She was an FDR Democrat through and through, and she spoke intelligently on matters of current events. Once most of her kids were gone, she worked the polls at every election, and if she got her back up on a certain issue, the editor of our local paper would hear from Mom. The newspaper publisher, a friend, once said to me, "Your mom is feisty."

**No tolerance for bullying or unfairness.** Mom said her feelings about this developed when she saw her little brother Ed, quiet and chubby, get pushed around as a kid. I inherited this to the extent that it has created problems for me; I despise pushy people and too often speak out when I should not.

**Memory keeper.** Mom kept scrapbooks and journals from every phase of her life. They come in very handy now as I compile the history of our family. I have hung on to journals, scrapbooks, stories, and photos of every phase of my life.

## Mom's best advice

Mom filled many journals with poems, articles, and quotes that she considered wise. I'll list a few of those later. But when asked directly for her advice, she was more inclined to ask questions about the situation. She wanted us to answer our own questions. I persisted successfully one time, however, and it qualifies as her best advice to me.

In the days leading to my wedding, after repeated requests for how to make my marriage last, Mom finally said, "If you stop talking about something, it's over." Those few words have come back to me on many occasions. First, it is now evident to me that the biggest troubles in my marriage were around topics that became off-limits for discussion. Alice and I are both over-sensitive and passive aggressive.



*Mom the advisor with our little sister, Janie, circa 1995.*



*Mom and me at her assisted living place in 1997.*

The worst of this became apparent when it came to our children's discipline. We were able to overcome our divergent views when our young humans were not ready to break away. But once each reached adolescence, that crack became a canyon. Neither of us were willing to risk dialogue and compromise. We created methods to subvert each other without direct confrontation, and our kids learned to either "take cover" when imaginary bullets went flying or to manipulate each of us as the situation allowed. Silent wars were what I knew growing up and sadly were repeated in my children's home.

My Dad was a widower, and my three older brothers were from his first marriage. After constant battles over how to raise them, Dad finally said, "Look, Margaret, you raise your kids the way you see fit, and I'll raise mine my way." It was a break that was then never further discussed and therefore never healed. The outcome was confusion and uncertainty among all of us about who was really in charge. After many years of reflection, I'd say it's why my brothers loved, but didn't respect, my mom, and why we feared our dad. That he had no discussion or compromise with Mom created the classic Irish "elephant in the living room" that no one dared speak of. There is some pain in writing this, but since these thoughts might help the reader in their own relationships, the pain would be worth the gain if it reinforces Mom's best advice. Never stop talking.

On the lighter side, here are a few of Mom's favorite advisory quotes—most not her own words, but ideas she believed.

- "You waited for us like one pig waits for another." (When one of us would start eating before all were seated.)
- "Divorce, never; murder, often."
- "'Twas ever thus." (When something seemed new but was not.)
- "Stay in touch with your cousins so you can remember where you came from."
- "Roots and wings." (Probably reflecting the Denis Waitley poem, she felt all parents' top priority should be providing solid roots but also the freedom to fly.)
- "Whoever needs me the most that day." (When asked who her favorite child or grandchild was.)
- "Be careful about judging someone unless you know exactly what that person has been through (that causes them) to act as they are today."
- "My beamish boy." (For me personally; she liked my smile.)



## Best gifts

### Best gift from Mom

Love, love, love, love, and love. Love is all I think of when I think of my mom. She was under five feet tall and had a bigger heart than anyone I've ever met. And she was tough. Her life represented every trite phrase I care about: "Seek first to understand," "Don't throw stones from a glass house," "Love thy neighbor as you love yourself."

I don't recall my mother ever *saying* those things. I just remember her practicing them. With her friends from church, many of whom were otherwise friendless; with each one of her kids and with all our friends; with her and Dad's siblings and the entire extended family. She was Mom to us all, mainly because she listened without judgment better than anyone I'll ever meet. Her questions demanded you take a broader perspective to answer. I don't know that I do that, but I try.

### Best gift from Dad

Earned self-confidence. Dad marched to his own drummer and never apologized for that. He could be arrogant, but he also admitted that "It takes forever to learn to live in your own skin." What I took from Dad's self-confidence is that only I can become my best self. From him, I learned an ambition for excellence and a willingness to exhaust myself in pursuit of it. Initially I followed his pursuit of perfection and nearly destroyed myself mentally. Now I seek balance.



*Mom visiting Dad at assisted living, 1989.  
"...for better or worse, in sickness and in health."*

## From your ancestors to us

I found it interesting to look back on the time periods covered by each generation I'm writing about.

My grandparents witnessed the dawn of:

- Vaccines: The development of vaccines played a crucial role in eradicating or controlling many diseases.
- Telephone: Alexander Graham Bell's invention revolutionized communication, enabling real-time voice transmission.
- Phonograph: Thomas Edison's invention made sound recording and playback possible and was a precursor to modern audio technology.
- Incandescent light bulb: Edison's invention transformed how people lived and worked, providing safe and reliable artificial light.
- Automobile: The invention of the automobile by Karl Benz transformed transportation and travel.

My mom and dad's generation saw:

- Antibiotics: The discovery of antibiotics revolutionized the treatment of bacterial infections.
- Airplane: The Wright brothers' invention opened up air travel and changed the world's perspective on distance.
- Radio: The development of radio broadcasting enabled instant communication across vast distances.
- Television: The invention of television revolutionized entertainment and news dissemination.

My generation has enjoyed:

- Heart transplants, pacemakers, joint replacements, and mapping the human genome. Biomedicine and surgery will continue to alter the next generation.
- The personal computer has transformed how people work, communicate, and access information.
- Internet and the World Wide Web: These inventions created a global network connecting people and information in unprecedented ways.
- Mobile phones allow for portable communication, connecting people on the go.
- Digital cameras made photography more accessible and transformed the way people capture and share images.

I can only imagine what my kids and theirs will witness after I am gone. Pretty cool!

## Chapter 2: My Childhood

When I think of my childhood, I believe I won the genetic lottery. For the most part, it was happy and carefree, particularly when compared to so many others. Both my parents were intelligent, successful people, and I never doubted their love.



We were not wealthy, but we lived in a beautiful home and neighborhood on Lake Erie, and food, education, and travel were not scarce.

There were 10 frames atop our living room mantle. Each started with our baby photo (above is mine). Then each was tucked into the frame to make room for school and graduation photos and then wedding photos.



*All of us in our Easter Sunday best.*

*L to R: Steve, Sheila, Jane, bunny, me, and Felicia, with Mary and Kathleen in the foreground.*

## How would you describe your behavior as a child?

It would only be fair to ask my surviving siblings to weigh in on this question, but here is the best of my recollection: I was the co-star of the show. Janie and I were the babies, and our parents and eight siblings loved us so much, they couldn't get enough of us.

- If ADHD had been a thing back then, I would've been diagnosed somewhere on the spectrum. I can remember times I felt like I could jump out of my skin.
- I was as temperamental and emotional as I am today. I had very high highs and very low lows.
- I badly wanted (and tried hard) to make people laugh.
- I was a good soul through and through.
- I said what I thought and thought what I said.
- I tried hard to love everyone I met. I felt getting along was important, and I still do.
- I was obsessed with finding fun— whatever I thought fun was on that day and at that moment.
- I was sincerely devout in my religion and enjoyed being a good altar boy and a good student.
- I craved approval and would do just about anything to get it. That included making a fool of myself.
- My father was my god-figure; I both feared and adored him.
- My mother was my security; everything was safe with her.
- My older brothers were like my dad to me. They were way more fun, but I still both feared and adored them and sought their approval.
- My four older sisters were like four mothers. Mary made me laugh and love freely. Kathie made me think and challenged me. Sheila was both my gadfly and my hero. Felicia was my muse.
- My brother Steve was my roommate, my tormentor, and my gateway to smoking and girlie magazines. I remember feeling the normal love/hate that brothers close in age are likely to feel.
- Music was and is salve for my soul. Whether friends Charley Fye singing to Tom Kilker's piano, my brothers and sisters playing records in the living room, Sister Angela doing singalongs every afternoon with her piano, or singing in the car (often with the Fyes on long trips), music set my soul free.



*Alice's favorite childhood picture of me because my mom let me choose my outfit for this grade school photo.*



## When you were a child, did you have a special hiding place?

When I was a toddler, Grandpa McCarthy added a second story to our four-car garage into one big room. A staircase led to the top of the garage, and my hiding place was under those stairs. I could slip through the steps near the top to reach a cement landing. A little older and braver, I could reach it by going over the railing on the top landing and climbing down.

By the time I was 10 or 12, the room we called “the top of the garage” was my hiding place. Dad had it remodeled, adding a big open-hearth fireplace and paneling. I remember opening the sliding windows and staring out at the lake or the neighborhood.

The space on the first floor intended for the other two cars was remodeled into an apartment: bathroom, living area, tiny kitchen, and one bedroom that shared a wall with the other two parking spaces. I was a young teenager when my sisters Sheila and Felicia moved out to the “apartment” during Sheila’s two years at Kent State Ashtabula. It was the perfect retreat for me: coffee, folk music, cigarettes, beer, and my sisters’ love and encouragement were perfect offsets to my temperamental dad.



*Gary Petrocello, calling to order a meeting of the Senior Men's Club in the room on top of our garage in 1969.*

It was also during this year or two that my band, Weed, used the top of the garage as our practice place. The neighbors didn’t care much for electric bass, two guitars, keyboard, drums, and microphones blaring through our Fender amps and Sure PA system, but I don’t remember Mom and Dad complaining unless we played past their bedtime.

In my senior year of high school, the top of the garage became the hiding place for me and many of my classmates. We redecorated the whole place and formed the Senior Men’s Club. Our meetings were actually parties to which everyone was welcome. I’ve never been to a gathering or reunion of my high school chums where stories of their times on top of the garage were not recounted!

## What was your favorite candy as a child?

According to my sisters, my baby teeth were all rotten by the time I lost them because of how much candy I ate as an infant. I don't remember that, but as I got a little older, I remember:

- Kit Kat bars. I enjoyed snapping it into its four parts and slowly savoring one at a time.
- Thin Mints—specifically Peggy Gray's.
- Halloween candy corn, the orange and yellow sugary things that look like little kernels of corn. I loved to bite the yellow top and then eat the orange bottom.
- At Christmas, my mom's snowball cookies (a pecan baked in dough and covered in powdered sugar) melted in my mouth. Is that candy? Who cares!
- Boxes of Christmas chocolates that had writing on the inside wrapper to tell you which candy was which.
- At Easter, malted milk balls and solid (not hollow!) chocolate Easter bunnies.

## What were your favorite toys as a child?

My most memorable toy was a large red metal toy tanker truck with a Texaco logo on it. When I was small, I could ride it, and as I grew, I crawled with it around the playroom. Janie would arrange stops and wait to fill up my tanker. It remained in our built-in toy chest for so many years that I recall our boys playing with it as toddlers when we visited my parents.

But my best toy memories were that one day during the week or two each summer that Uncle Ed McDonough would spend his vacation with us in Ashtabula. There was a dream-evoking toy shop downtown called Bo Peep's—maybe Little Bo Peep's. Without fail, Uncle's visits included one trip to Bo Peep's where we were all allowed to choose one toy.

Our family wanted for nothing, really, but toys and gift-giving were less indulged in than in many families, so there was nothing more thrilling than walking into that toy shop with my quiet uncle and spending a long time deciding what I would be taking home with me that day.



## What was your childhood bedroom like?

My bedroom was as unusual as my childhood was. It was an L-shaped room on the first floor at the front corner of the house. The first-floor bathroom was just outside my door, as was Dad's closet.

Two phones hung in the hallway: a party line for the kids and a private line for Dad's medical calls.

The room was redone for Dad and Winifred's first three boys, my oldest brothers, with beautiful built-in knotty-pine floor-to-ceiling desk and storage wall units. Our oldest brother, Bill, had the shorter hutch and desk on his side of the room next to his twin bed, while Miller and Terry had twin beds and a double hutch on their side of the L. It had a linoleum floor, and what wall space there was displayed sports pennants and a Cleveland Indians clock. The door had a large gash in it that my dad purposely never repaired to remind my brothers that they shouldn't throw wrenches at each other.

Steve and I were lucky; once the boys were off to college, we got to split this three-bed room into two (though on holidays when the boys were home, we would sleep together in one of the twins or be assigned to the playroom couch). Steve left for Chicago when I was 13, so I became the single occupant of a large bedroom—except by then, Mom had decided it also served as the guest room for males, so I shared the room often. (Note: Mom had ten beds in four bedrooms to assign not only to her kids but to the many frequent guests. Most arguments in our house happened when someone locked the door too long in one of the two bathrooms.)

The best feature of my childhood bedroom was that it was on the first floor and the opposite side of the house from Mom and Dad's bedroom. Each of us five boys, on more than a few occasions, removed the window screen and stepped off into the gentle night.

## Did you have any nicknames as a child? How did you feel about them?

We were a family of nicknames.

- Felicia: Flicka as a youngster and Flish since then
- “Sister Mary Oh Ha” for Mary
- “Calcalima McTarfat” for Kathleen
- Steve was Stevie and occasionally Steverino
- We rarely finished the “ila” in Sheila—she was just “She”
- Jane was Janer or Janie Babe
- Dad called Bill Billy and Terry Tarry (Tar-ee)
- None of us had the temerity to nickname Miller, our second oldest brother, but his adult friends called him Hanyok and Dump Truck.

Being the baby, I got lots of nicknames. Most consistent was Dad calling me Timbo and Timber.

Dad would give us little ones haircuts while we sat on the freezer in the kitchen. One evening, I fell asleep while he was doing it and ended up hairless, which in turn led to the name Fuzz. That stuck for a while. Then, between 7th and 10th grade, I grew to my current height of six feet while weighing 120 pounds. At home, that made me Bones, and at school, Jon Morson dubbed me Beanpole.

The only unfortunate nickname I received and hated was Bubblehead, bestowed upon me by neighborhood “pal” Alan Goldstein. That was the only one I ever remember being really irritated by, except when my brother Miller decided my monthly business newsletter was too preachy and named me Preacher Bones. The guy always knew how to press my buttons! Only high school classmate Pat Kilker called me (and still does) the nickname I always wanted: Mac.



*I'm told I wore a hat for a long time after Dad shaved my head.*

## What are some of your childhood accomplishments?

Here are some things I remember being proud of.

- Being an altar boy and wearing those cool clothes, especially for the high holy days.
- Delivering newspapers to make money to keep for myself. My first purchase—a new bicycle—was the first time I celebrated hard work's reward.
- Many other jobs, the most fun and regular of which was caddy at the Country Club in summers, which I did for seven years.
- The last two summers I worked at the Club, I was their shoeshine boy. My boss called me the “locker room concessionaire,” and I learned a lot about business and marketing from the experience.
- I was the Mother of Sorrows school 4<sup>th</sup>-grade spelling champion. I'm not sure why, but that has always stuck with me, perhaps since I was otherwise a mediocre student.
- I played every sport St. John High School offered over my four years. Basketball and cross country were the only ones I played for more than one season. I never lettered in any of them. Still, it made me part of something greater than myself.
- I was very active in school clubs, from thespian to library to student council. For senior year, I was class president.
- Probably my proudest accomplishment was learning guitar and training my voice. From freshman to senior year, I dabbled in voice lessons, church choir, lead singer for a garage band, and folk singer at coffee shops, after I had learned enough guitar to accompany my voice. I learned by ear, mostly from the guitarists I knew. As with most other accomplishments in my life, I faked music until I could make music. (My poor parents. 😊)



*Age 17, shining shoes.*



## Did you rebel as a child?



*Weed, the band, gathered for 1967 promotional photo in our practice room atop the garage at my family home. Left to right: rhythm guitarist Derry Nazor, lead singer yours truly, drummer Eddie Brown, keyboardist Craig Nazor, lead guitarist Alan Goldstein, and bassist Tim Andolsek.*

spent in work or class could be described as quiet rebellion. By then, my sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll experiment was serious, but that never struck me as a viable long-term plan. The irony of playing protest songs in bars and getting high while working for candidates who supported Richard Nixon never dawned on me.

At least as much as any other child, and perhaps more since I was a child of the 1960s.

By 15, I was using any free time I had to practice my guitar while hiding in my bedroom from my father and moving away from the mainstream by joining a garage band. The band's name was Well Ground Weed. In my naiveté, I didn't even realize it was a reference to marijuana.

By junior year of high school, I was smoking cigarettes and drinking 3.2 beer. By senior year, I'd fully morphed into the party guy by forming the Senior Men's Club, the party center located above my parents' garage.

I was and am a "con man light," but I still finished high school with reasonably good grades and a good reputation despite having some crazy stories. I'd not (yet) dabbled in drugs or sex.

College at Ohio State could be described as schizophrenic. I paid for most of my college expenses by working for the Republican Party (suit, tie, the works), and I rarely missed a class; yet every hour not

## What was life like in the 60s?



*John Zingg (right) and I playing at the Cork and Cleaver in Chautauqua, New York, in 1972.*

Just about everything you've heard and read about the 60s is true. My experience was a bit different from some others; the 60s covered my life from 8 to 18, and I was in a small town, and that experience seems to have differed from my big-city peers.

Music was easily the most significant part of the 1960s for me. There was a record player in our living room, a box with a turntable and accessories to accommodate 45 RPM singles and 33 RPM vinyl albums. There was also a 78 RPM switch, but the only thing it did was make everything sound fast and funny when we played records at that speed. Early on, the sounds were Kingston Trio, the Everly Brothers, and similar groups. When my sisters took over the turntable, we heard Broadway musicals and dance music, such as early Beatles and Dave Clark Five. By the late 1960s, my own interests descended into the Doors, Jimi Hendrix, Cream, and Crosby, Stills, and Nash.

Alcohol was the mood-altering drug of choice in our town and our home. We read lots about but saw few drugs in Ashtabula, at least in the sheltered home and parochial schools I attended. (This changed abruptly on my first day at Ohio State in the fall of 1970.)

Hair had become a statement for men and women, and it all seemed to be about holding it rigid. I sported butch wax and then later Brylcreem hairdos. My sisters spent hours in rollers and using irons (clothing irons to straighten, curling irons to curl), then finishing off with long stinky sprays of Aquanet to stiffen or hold together whatever creation they'd accomplished.

Finally, our family was the archetypal nuclear family of the age. We went to school every day on a bus. We had dinner together daily at 5:30 pm when Dad got home, and we went to church every Sunday together.



*Our family circa 1960 —  
brothers all off to college and sisters in high school.*

Bicycles had baseball cards clothes-pinned in the spokes to make noise. Television came of age as I grew up; we had no TV until I was about 7 or 8, then black and white until I was nearly off to college. The shows were clearly created to reflect the “great society” being established. *Father Knows Best*, *Leave It to Beaver*, *Andy Griffith*, and *Bonanza* established proper family behavior, and variety and comedy shows like Ed Sullivan, Lawrence Welk, and Red Skelton were entertainment for relief. Things got sillier later, with shows like *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Addams Family*, and *Gilligan’s Island*. By my mid-teens, the rumblings of change were in the air, but we were not allowed to watch shows like *Peyton Place* or *Laugh-In*.



## In what ways would you say you had a happy childhood?

Every person sees their childhood differently, even those who grew up together. I'm pretty sure that of my nine siblings, only Mary would agree with most of my assessments below. Of the 10 points I'll choose to measure, my childhood scores high on eight of them.

- I was loved deeply and unwaveringly.
- I was safe. We lived in a lovely neighborhood and went to small faith-based schools.
- It was fun. I had a lake just steps away, vacant lots in the neighborhood to play sports in, friends galore (including my sibs), and always someplace to go.
- My parents stood for something: education, hard work, achievement, and loyalty, amongst others.
- Our home was inclusive. It added to the tumult, but I can't remember someone not being welcome in our home.
- We were taught the benefits of work early. My sisters babysat, and the boys all had paper routes and caddied. We were young when we learned the benefits of having spending money in our pocket.
- Other than work and church, my parents had few outside interests, if any. They were entirely focused on being home with their family.
- Our parents provided great examples of faith, courage, and compassion.

The other two ratings are very low because they relate to moderation and peacefulness. These two are likely the basis of my siblings' unhappy recollections.

- Our home was emotionally violent. My father was prone to physical violence, although most of that was spent on the three older boys. Still, with the other seven kids, his stormy nature made our home very tense. Mom often said that we never knew whether Dad was going to "kiss us or kill us." His mood swings were extreme in both directions.
- Our home was absolute chaos. Twelve people living in five bedrooms and two bathrooms was bad enough, but we were all over the spectrum from introversion to extroversion. Plus, we all had very Irish personalities and control issues. In essence, we had 12 managers and no employees.

After subtracting the emotional uncertainty and the chaos, I still grade my childhood as nothing less than an A.

## How does life today compare to when you were a child?

I've long believed that "back in my day, we..." is a useless preface to unfounded complaints, most often stated by old people. Such opinions express resistance to change more than an objective view of life.

Of course, life was different without cell phones, safer and more affordable travel, a more global community, improved efficiency through the introduction and refinement of computers, the media storm caused by the internet and social media, huge improvements in education, and increased individual wealth and leisure time.

But life changes from every generation to the next. My parents experienced the transformation from a rural farm economy to an industrial metropolitan economy, from print communications to radio and television, and from trains and basic transportation to powerful cars and jets.

How different was the Gulf War from WWII, McCarthy and Nixon from Carter and Trump, news arriving from newspapers and radio to computer and phone?

Those able to adjust to change prosper; those who fight change stumble. And in fact, the most fundamental behaviors and disciplines—what got my mom and dad's generation through weal and woe—remain.

We thrive on connection and lose our way when we are disconnected. Peace is found in compromise, and resolution requires empathy. Joy is found in things that have little or no monetary value.

In any generation, successful lives are determined by discipline, persistence, and the ability to capitalize on opportunity and recover from loss.

Things change throughout everyone's lives. It's essential to embrace the change, but principles should remain the same.

## Your childhoods

Timmy, Kevin, and Caitlin: watching you kids grow has been incredibly interesting, especially when considered in context with what I have just written about my own childhood. I found some of each of your childhoods in the things I've written.

My witness is this: You were, like me, deeply loved. Like my siblings and me, you struggle to accept each other's faults and admire and are glad of their strengths. As your children grow, I think you'll share the longing your mom and I have for your closeness.

In different ways, you each craved attention and approval. (Don't we all?) To my delight, you each sampled many options for developing your talents and chose well. Timmy focused on hockey, love for the written word, and close social connections. Kevin went toward music, romance, and striving to be different. Caitlin developed her swimming, entrepreneurship, and passion for social change. Looking back, I can recall times when those skills and interests showed up when you were toddlers.



*1986: the first of a series of photos we took over the years with Caitlin in her Kevin/Timmy "chair."*

## Chapter 3: Young Adulthood



*Me, 18, at my sister Felicia's wedding reception at brother Bill's house in December, 1970.*

High school and college have an enormous impact on who we become, particularly in a social sense. My young adulthood taught me how to deal with disappointment. That was when the hard lessons became most apparent: that people can be selfish and mean; that my parents could no longer protect me; that work is hard. Adulthood is difficult, and young adulthood is a time of a lot of growth.

### Are you the same person you were as an adolescent, or very different?

As a human, I am quite the same. Yet, due to experiences that have caused me to modify how I think and behave, I see myself as very different 50+ years later.

At 15 and 71, I was and am an intense, temperamental, and anxious person. I was and am a people-pleaser; I resist both physical and mental conflict. I was and am a voracious learner, a lover of the written word, musically inclined, and a gifted storyteller. I was and am deeply committed to my Catholic faith and my country, and I see my life's mission as service to others. I was and am an addictive personality. I did and do realize that I can have anything I want if I am willing to work for it. Most of all, I was and am a person who seeks adventure, experiences, and meaningful relationships.

What makes me different as an adult are the truths I have learned to respect.

- Time is life's most precious commodity.
- Focus and discipline are required to live in each moment.
- Quantity is irrelevant, whether in food, fun, things, or people.
- Trust is great, but wise people also verify.
- The extreme of people-pleasing is enabling, which is painful. Unabated, it becomes a disabling addiction.
- Not every thought deserves a voice.
- Active listening is an underrated skill.
- Exclusion and judging are evil and all too easy to fall into.
- I don't know what I think until I write it down.

Therefore, today's very different Timothy Francis McCarthy is addicted to mostly good things. A mostly healthy diet and frequent exercise and rest are important. I've committed my last 20 years and the rest of my life to economic inclusion. I look at both joy and pain as valuable; through prayer and meditation, I cling to and push away far less. I know that pain is mandatory, but suffering is optional. And while I am still a relatively anxious and temperamental person, seeing things as they are has improved my relationship with myself and every other person I value.



*One of my proudest musical performances was singing the Ave Maria at Timmy's wedding in October of 2011.*

## What were your friends like in high school?

As is typical at most high schools, we had jocks (athletes), brainiacs (the smart kids), pops (the popular kids), nerds (poor social skills), and then a group of us who belonged to no group and operated on the edges. I was not a “bad boy” per se, but I enjoyed hanging out with the edgy people.

Jon Morson was a short, red-haired guy who was hysterically funny. I loved hanging out with Jonny and another very funny bad boy, Louie Annick, both of whom left our private high school mid-senior year. (Jon and Paula Holecko got pregnant, and Louie’s very troubled family ran out of money.) Interestingly, we stayed connected while they graduated from Ashtabula High School, and they connected me with a level-up set of bad boys from AHS.

The summer after my senior year with that gang was nothing short of rowdy; we all hung out any night I was not working at the country club. My very best friend throughout high school was another edgy guy who didn’t fit in with the jocks/academics/cool kids/nerds named Ryan Rocco. Ryan and I were inseparable from sophomore year through college and beyond. Ryan was tall, handsome, and even funnier than Jon and Louie. His mother let him use their Ford Falcon, and when she couldn’t spare their car, my mom would let us use her Ford Galaxy. Whenever we weren’t in school or working, we spent most of our junior and senior years driving around town. We also spent a lot of time on top of the garage and visiting my sisters, who by then were living in the apartment below.

Ryan was that one friend that you bare your soul to. Sadly, after staying close for another 15 years after college, we drifted apart (mostly due to his controlling wife). I only talked to him once in the last 30 years, and that was a month before he died.

The thing I remember most about my friends in high school—and we still gather six or eight times a year—is that I felt close with almost every one of them. There were only 100 kids in our class, and I was a people-pleaser and just enjoyed shooting the beans with everyone.

While high school covered a wide range of experiences for this temperamental guy, I look back on it fondly. Plenty of adventures, surely, but also a relatively sheltered environment with the great learning and faith discipline of a small-town Catholic conservative high school.



## What were your favorite subjects in high school?

Homeroom and gym. Just kidding.



*Me performing in religion class in 1968.*

benefit: We had a blast being among all the girls. Long-term benefit: The sixty words a minute I could type became useful in my political (writing) career and even more useful when computer keyboards came into being.

My favorite subjects are easy. I am, was, and always will be a writer and social scientist, so I loved English (when I had a good teacher), and the same goes for history, Latin, French, and social studies.

The sciences were challenging for me, but something interesting happened at St. John. My chemistry, biology, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry teachers were brutal. I hated them as much as I hated the subjects, and it was a chore for me just to get Cs and Bs. (My only D in high school that I recall was for a junior-year semester of chemistry.) But when I got to Ohio State and realized I could get through three semesters of higher math, sciences, and French, I changed my mind about Sister Delora, Sister Chad, and Mrs. Wallander, and have since been grateful for the discipline they put us through.

Sophomore year, Ryan Rocco and I were walking the halls and noticed that every student in the typing class was female. So, when the electives were first available for our junior year, we signed up for it and became the first two males to ever take typing at St. John. Short-term



*Ryan Rocco, becoming godfather to our first child, Timmy.*

## When did you get your first car?

I had not owned (or really needed) my own car until the winter of 1974. I was a senior in college when I was named manager of the Aronoff for Attorney General of Ohio campaign. Since I would be traveling around the state for the campaign, I asked Jack Warnock, the cousin of my new girlfriend, Alice Bethel, to find me something.

He sold me a 1963 turquoise Chevrolet Bel Air with 110,000 miles on it for \$500.

By the November election (we lost), I had added 80,000 miles to the odometer. In one day, I had breakfast in Toledo, a coffee clutch with the ladies in Shaker Heights, and then a dinner in Cincinnati for our candidate. Other than getting a lot of speeding tickets and rarely being home in Columbus, I remember it as a very exciting time representing Senator Stan Aronoff (the candidate), who was also my boss in the Ohio Senate.

I don't remember much mechanical trouble, although in October that year, Alice and I were headed to a costume party in Brahtenal (Cleveland) when we dropped a muffler. Repair places were closed, so we finished the trip in a very loud roar. Coincidentally, we were dressed up as a 1950s greaser (me) and gum-chewing, bobby-socks-wearing femme fatal (Alice), so when we drove in the mansion's driveway, Alice hopped up on the car's fender, crossed her legs, chewed her gum, and swung her pig tails while I gunned the engine until the partygoers came out front and checked us out.

As soon as I arrived in Michigan for my new job as Executive Director of Oakland County Republicans, I turned in my beloved '63 Bel Air to buy an almost-new 1973 Pontiac. The Bel Air had 200,000 miles on it and was a sturdy but dirty soldier by its end.



*My first car.*



## How did you choose where to go to college?



*My high school graduation picture.*

When Alice and I helped our children through this process, we hired counselors for each, took them on college visits, and discussed the options for months until they made their choice. My path to the same decision was quite different.

I had told my parents that college did not interest me. During my last two semesters of high school, I enjoyed a nice paycheck at Nelson Machine Company doing assembly line work. As a result, long after all my friends had applied and chosen their colleges, I had made no applications at all... until I realized one day while soldering barbecue grills that I could not do this eight hours a day for the rest of my life.

I contacted Ohio State University that May. At the time, state law decreed that they accept any high-school graduate with a GPA above 2.0. Upon receipt of their forms, I filled them out quickly and sent them in. Around mid-July, I received acceptance and an invitation to orientation, which I eventually skipped since Dad and I took a last-minute trip to Ireland in early September.

After my sister Mary's wedding to Mel Neighbor on September 18th, 1970, I hopped into the bed of Mel's parents' pickup truck with a bag of stuff and rode happily to campus without a clue of what would happen the following day.



## Did you pull any all-nighters in college?

Not “any”—many.

I got through college at Ohio State by scheduling my classes early in the day and taking great notes. This meant that by noon or before, I had the rest of the day to myself. I would generally do my homework at work (from sophomore winter quarter to graduation, I worked at the Ohio Senate most afternoons), which took care of everything except major papers, mid-terms, and final exams. The nights were mine for card games, hanging out with friends, playing music, and other recreation.

My journalist mother would say, “Nothing motivates like a deadline.” Most people—or shall I say poor students—postpone their work without consequence for as long as possible. By then, the consequence of turning in a paper after a deadline or flunking an exam is severe. My motivation was mostly that feeling of impending doom.

In those days, on a campus the size of ours, recreational drugs were widely available. The amphetamine market, now widely used by prescription to allow focus for attention-deficit sufferers, spiked during exam weeks.

The day before a big test or paper, I would line up my books, notes, papers, and a pot of coffee, and hope that I could get done by midnight. When I was unable to do so, I would walk around the apartment building or call a friend to find tiny little white pills called white crosses—amphetamine sulphate.

I’m not proud of it, but as we approached the end of most quarters (now semesters), I would set my work in order of worst grades to best, then cram like a crazy man, sometimes with a little more help than coffee. Once the paper was turned in or the test was taken, I would sleep for the rest of that day and night.

## Did you work while you were in college?

I've always believed that working in college saved me from the fate of too much leisure time.

The McCarthys were an industrious bunch. Mom and Dad encouraged the girls to babysit or work at McDonald's at early ages, and the boys took every kind of job imaginable. As we witnessed our parents putting in very long days of service to their family and their community, our work ethic was engrained early.

Since I'd made enough to pay for school during the summers after my senior high school and freshman college years, I didn't work much during the school year during freshman year. Both summers, I worked as the shoeshine guy, or Locker Room Concessionaire, at our local Country Club.

In the spring of my sophomore year, my brothers landed me a full-time job in a congressional campaign. I stayed with the campaign through the election, missing the fall quarter at school. When I returned to Columbus to start my junior year in the winter quarter, I used my campaign contacts (Mark Krause, manager of the congressional campaign) to get a legislative assistant job in the Ohio Senate for the minority leader, Stanley J. Aronoff. I worked for Stan for the remainder of my college career, from January 1973 until my March 1975 graduation.

During those two years, I took classes and worked in the Senate for a couple quarters, then skipped summer and fall quarters to work full-time on a campaign assignment for Senator Aronoff. In 1973, I served in his (failed) campaign for Ohio Attorney General, and in 1974, I worked for the State Senate Campaign Committee.

The best outcome of all this was that I was able to pay most of my college expenses and stay (mostly) out of trouble. I also gained a great resume and was able (with the help of my brother, Terry) to start a well-paid full-time job as Executive Director of the Oakland County Michigan GOP the Monday after the Saturday I graduated college.



*At college in 1975.*

## What advice would you give to a family member about going to college?

I have three simple pieces of advice, one from my Uncle John and two I learned on my own (I think).

*Your first semester sets the tone.* The summer before I began college, Uncle John said to me, “Whatever grade average you get in your first semester will likely be what you end up with at graduation, so focus as quickly as you can.” After graduation, I looked back, and what did I find? First semester, 2.75 GPA; career GPA, 2.85.

*Take your classes in the morning.* It always seemed better to me to eat my broccoli first so I could enjoy the rest of my meal. I scheduled all my classes in the morning, thinking to get them out of the way. Sure enough, freshman year was by far the most fun year I had. College is unlike high school because class time is comparatively limited. By noon each day, I was headed for the basketball court or the “oval” to throw the frisbee and look at girls during good weather, or play my guitar with friends, play euchre, or just watch TV during the bad weather. It was perfect for me.

*Don’t miss class and take copious notes.* While I liked reading, I hated reading schoolbooks. So I never missed class, and I took copious notes. That way, close to test time, I would just rewrite my notes while glancing through each chapter to see if I missed anything. Most professors test much more on their lectures than on the textbook itself.

## Your young adulthoods

Living through the teen years and early adulthoods of your children is hair-raising as well as satisfying. Each of our three children has been on a roller coaster ride, so I will memorialize a few of our parental highs and lows here for each of our offspring.



*Timmy's junior high school photo.*

**Tim.** Due to his nature and as is typical for the eldest child, looking back on Timmy's teens and early adulthood appears bland compared to the others... yet not without points of interest.

Timmy had to work harder academically, socially, and athletically than many of his more naturally talented peers. We were always thrilled when he excelled in any of these areas because each time was the result of admirable dedication. The early (and sustained) traction he got at Wittenberg University made us beam. And my best memories will always be when, in his junior year, he and I formed KTMcCarthy, a business that still exists.

Timmy's experiments with alcohol were concerning. Knowing alcoholism appears to be genetic (my three brothers and Alice's dad and uncle being alcoholics), these were frightening times for us. I thank God that Timmy had his own strength because I'm not sure Alice and I managed the situation at all well.

Tim was, is, and always will be a bit of the absent-minded professor. While living in Louisiana, he called me to ask for our car dealer's phone number since his graduation present was still under warranty. I gave it to him and asked, "What's wrong?" He said, "Oh, backing out of the carport this morning, I knocked the mirror off." Timmy thought that a warranty was the same as insurance.



**Kevin.** Probably the most like his dad, Kevin's highs were high and his lows were low. Our resident musician and humorist, Kevin's lack of self-confidence combined with his rebellious nature put him in situations that made for long, sleepless nights for his parents.

Every hug Kevin ever gave me, even when it was difficult to communicate, expressed his loving soul. And his easy connection to every member of our family always gave me good feelings. Almost every musical performance (there were many) made us smile and talk on our way home about his vocal and musical gifts. His first EP remains my favorite. At golf, I not only enjoyed his natural talent but how he played the social game.

Rebels lacking confidence tend to hang out with the wrong crowd, and with Kevin, it started with my brothers. 😊 From 8<sup>th</sup> grade through his San Francisco years, I can't think of a non-musical influence on Kevin that nurtured his confidence. Kevin, too, experimented with mood-altering substances, raising our antenna with concern. Like me, Kevin ran the edges of destructive behavior, and fortunately, like me, his car never jumped the guardrail.



*Kevin at 20 with Jasper, who was rescued off the windowsill of Kevin's first apartment in Lakewood.*

**Caitlin.** Right down the middle, this girl. Our empowered woman took her good old time finding herself and learned a lot getting there. While all five of us recognize that we must pay attention to our mental health, Caitlin seemed most open to learning about herself.



*Caitlin's high school (senior year) swim team photo.*

Every time I watched her swim or dance, a piece of me said, "Isn't this every father's dream?" She was aggressive with me in a manner that the other two were not, whether cuddling up to me or admonishing me for speaking inappropriately to her mother. No matter how I acted on a particular day, her strength always gave me hope and trust in my "babins." And her quick, clever mind delivered some of our family's best humor.

Unfortunately, she never got it right on boyfriends. I would say that's all dad's view, but her mom agrees with me. Each of her relationships were long, reminding me of her intense loyalty, but most were also toxic on some level. She collected wounded birds. Happily, today Caitlin is a new mother with her best friend since 7<sup>th</sup> grade, Michael Utesch.

One more thought regarding my children's emergence into young adulthood. All three demonstrated the ability to learn, the power to recover from mistakes, and the wisdom to leverage their strengths. In most cases, their missteps were eerily similar to the ones made by their parents, while their strengths appear to me to be unique to each. To this day, Alice and I are experiencing every parent's dream: that our children become a better iteration of their parents. Human progress demands it.

## Chapter 4: Relationships and People

When I feel my end is near, I will remember little of the material things I owned during my lifetime. My reflections will entirely be on the people and relationships most important to me. From my family to my business relationships to those I served in our foundation, I'm confident the memories will be rich.

### What was your parents' relationship like?

My mom and dad were unique, but their relationship mirrored the norms of the times. Each was fiercely loyal to the other. Dad was the breadwinner and decision-maker while Mom ran the home, and they enjoyed 45 years of outward tranquility—meaning that it looked peaceful from outside our home.

Their relationship was indelibly marked by Dad's first wife's passing. I believe that Dad never got over losing Winifred, the mother of his first three sons, Bill, Miller, and Terry. Mom and Dad went on to have me and my siblings: Mary, Kathleen, Stephen, Sheila, Felicia, and Jane.

The most telling comment I ever heard about their relationship was when Mom told me that she wished that Dad had treated her as well as he did his patients. With patients, he listened empathetically, conversed, and suggested ideas. With Mom, there were no real conversations; he just read his newspaper or medical journals while she tried to get him talking. Dad would call Mom a great conversationalist, yet I do not remember much dialogue between just the two of them. He was hot and cold in the extreme. He had two modes at home: preaching or silence. Mom was complicit in the lack of communication in that she was easily frustrated and very passive-aggressive. She generally spent her days working around Dad rather than with him.



*Mom and Dad in their late 50s/early 60s.*

Her compassion and easy smile covered a steely interior that was needed to weather the storms of her life. During the first five years of her marriage, she coped with her stepsons' and husband's aggressive behaviors and lost her parents and three siblings. In her strength, she saw those losses as obstacles to overcome, not lament. It's said that opposites form the sturdiest relationships. For better or worse, that was certainly true of my parents.

## How do you see yourself in relationship?

The healthiest relationships are between two self-aware people. However, relationships are built on perceptions that may or may not be accurate. Here's how my perceptions of others' perceptions relate to how I see myself.

- **Tough.** I put my head down when seeking progress, then bull my way through issues. This says to most people, "He's tough." Those who know me know that I'm sensitive and easily hurt. The "toughness" is a defense mechanism that, of course, helps (and destroys) my real aim of loving relationships.
- **Noble.** Tim the "do-gooder" is mainly doing good for the rewards that come from doing so (and they are many). I do not see myself as "noble" at all. The joy from sharing is its own reward.
- **Righteous.** On this one, they are too often correct, since it is true that I occasionally "lord over" others. It makes me feel stupid when I look back on a situation and notice this was true.
- **Successful.** I'm not nearly as successful at many things as I appear to be. I've just learned to impose discipline on myself over time. Good habits eventually create good results. I consider myself a "fake it 'til you make it" guy.
- **Egotistical.** I see myself as having a healthy ego. I pursue self-awareness to fully realize my potential by recognizing my bad traits and further developing my good ones. If that's egotistical, I plead guilty.
- **Capricious.** I work to be flexible, and I believe most good things are found in the middle. I also don't mind changing my position when convinced a different path is better. This can make me seem inclined to sudden changes in my behavior.
- Lastly, most people see me as **temperamental**, and indeed, that remains so. I'm a moody guy. Those closest to me, though, realize that many years of meditation and medication have caused marked improvement. I now work hard to pause between stimulus and response.

## What is your best relationship advice?

Ranked in order of importance to me:

- Once, I asked my mother why my brother Bill and sister-in-law Evvie divorced. She said simply, “Bill thought Ev should change. She disagreed.” This underlined for me my own startling recognition that I should stop working on Alice’s faults and work instead on my own. Things seem to have improved since then.
- Outside of addiction or mental illness, each party has 50% responsibility for relationship success. Although it may seem 60/40 or 40/60 at times, it’s always, always, always 50% in both fault and credit. The imbalance of one party taking on too much or too little responsibility hurts the relationship.
- Seek first to understand.
- “Dance like there’s nobody watching and love like you’ve never been hurt.”



*Alice and me dancing into Timmy's wedding reception, October 2011.*



## What qualities do you value most in your friends?

I learned from my mother that the first rule of friendship is acceptance. Simply said, if I'm judging, it's difficult, if not impossible, to be a friend.

To come up with an answer to this question, I gathered (in my mind) the friends I've been closest to for the longest. Putting us all together in one place, we constitute an island of misfit toys. I've had loud friends, quiet friends, funny friends, socially awkward friends, friends who wanted to lead, and those who preferred to follow. Some were/are very bright, some not so much; some tall, short; some stout, some small.

Amidst such diversity, I tried to identify the things we valued in each other.

**Acceptance** for sure is #1. They never had to be anything special for me, and I certainly never was interested in impressing them. They love(d) me for who I am becoming, and I love(d) them for the same. We've all enjoyed good times together and suffered through the bad without trying to lead or follow but walking together.

The second is **transparency**. If a friendship is growing, but I find that person trying to be someone they aren't or positioning themselves to me as something they are not, I'm less interested in making the friendship grow. I'm unable to become close to anyone who keeps their guard up.

And, of course, **trust** is the bond that never breaks. I believe that trust is earned, not given. I occasionally startle long-time friends and co-workers when I say that today is the day I must earn your trust. That's just another way of saying that trust takes years to earn but can be broken in one day.

The most interesting definition of a great relationship that I have ever heard is that **the best relationships are when each party feels they are getting the better of the deal.**

That's how I feel about my closest friends and how I hope they feel about me.

## Who inspires you?

My inspirations over time include:

- My mother, Margaret McDonough McCarthy
- My brother Terry's wife, Mary Janice McCoy McCarthy
- My father, William Joseph McCarthy, M.D.

Each inspired more by action than word—by the lives they lived, not the things they said. Inspiration creates aspiration for me, so I continue to seek Mom's gentle strength and empathy, Jan's unending patience and perseverance, and Dad's curiosity and faith.

I was inspired by Art Elliott, my first full-time boss; Jim Johnson, my last full-time boss; Father Norm Smith, who led me into the inner city; and Joe Cistone, who piqued my interest in and empathy for the poorest of the poor. Art demonstrated allegiance to his faith, family, country, and career. Jim indelibly taught me planning ("If you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there"), Norm taught me joyful giving, and Joe stretched my conscience beyond America's borders.

I've written in more depth about each of these first seven heroes in my book, *Empty Abundance*. Just as I've learned that what I read and think about reinforces my values, so whom I choose to share time with becomes who I am.

Every person who uses hope as their weapon of choice is my daily inspiration: my many friends who grew up poor, abused, or absent one or both parents; those suffering from their own addiction or that of someone close to them; physical or mental challenges; or horrible marriages or social stigma. When I witness a friend or colleague who is overcoming a barrier by choice and persistence, it inspires me to live the life and fortune I've been given more fully.



*Jan, who married Terry in 1965 and had a huge impact on my coming of age, is pictured here with her husband, Terry, and kids Colleen and Danny. From her June 1985 diagnosis of cancer of the spine to her May 1996 homecoming, she continued to manage her family, run her real estate business, and see friends and family for 11 years.*



*Parish yearbook photo, 1987.  
Alice and me in our mid-30s  
with Kevin, 7, Caitlin, 4, and Timmy, 8.*

Finally, my family inspires me. I've learned to honor the differences between my siblings and me and emulate their strengths. Since I met Alice in 1973, she has provided inspiration by how she carries herself with style and grace and loves without condition.

Our children are my greatest inspiration of all. Each of our three—your father, mother, aunt, and uncle—are hardy, faithful, empathetic beings. Each values faith, hope, and love, and demonstrates those values in their own unique manner. Most of all, they alter their paths as they learn what works for them and what does not. They are right-minded in recognizing that neither their parent's path nor anyone else's should be theirs; instead, their life should and will reflect their own individuality and independence.

I guess the lynchpin of everyone who inspires me is that each chooses faith, hope, and love over grievance.

## Has your relationship with your siblings changed over the years?

Yes. My relationship with every sibling (except Janie) changed over the years.



*All ten of us in 1956 gathered in our living room for Bill's high school graduation. Back row: Terry, David (later Miller) and Bill. Second row: Kathleen, Mary and Steve. Front row: me, Felicia, Jane and Sheila.*



*My brother Bill in Mom's kitchen, Thanksgiving 1983.*

**Bill:** My eldest sibling was, like my dad, a very intense, angry guy. Unlike Dad, he never showed his vulnerable side to me, perhaps because he didn't live long enough to mellow. When I was a kid, he was a daunting presence. He was smart, athletic, went to Notre Dame, and married a beautiful, intelligent woman. As I grew older, I felt I had to defend myself in his presence, which meant I considered everything I did and said around him in hopes that I would not set him off. That severely limited our relationship. He respected me and I respected him, so we did have many good times together, but I was left craving more.

**David Miller:** From my first awareness through my 20s, my second eldest brother was my hero. Miller lived raucously. He could be charming, funny, loving, and make me feel like I could conquer the world. When he was drinking or hung over, he could turn me into a pile of ashes. Bill was easy to defend against since he mostly wanted to kill me; Miller was more difficult for me since I never knew whether he was going to be my friend or my tormentor. He was an unhappy man, but I think he loved me, and I certainly loved him.



*My brother Miller, IBM formal portrait, 1969.*





*My brother Terry with our mom at our niece's wedding, 1996.*

**Terry:** I've often told people that our third oldest sib was the big brother I would have asked God to make me. Big, handsome, loud, outrageously funny, and by far the best salesman I will ever know. Unlike his two older brothers, Terry had a wide-open heart. When we were young, we could not wait for Terry to appear. We would all scream and yell, chase and be chased, and dance and sing with Terry. I learned later that his joviality was the mask he hid behind. He was intensely private and often withdrew from one or all of us. Nothing, however, could ever erase the family times, games, concerts, and trips we enjoyed together.

**Mary:** When I was a kid, she was a second mother, and as I grew up, she was my friend. Mary was the fireball among us. I would say she loves out loud. She would never leave the house, even if

to run a short errand, without kissing all of us. Later, like Mom, her home became a refuge for every single person looking for one, her front porch and kitchen table a place for conversation and rest. My already tremendous respect for Mary grew exponentially when she cared for Janie for the last 18 years of Jane's life. Mary never had much money, but while also raising her own rambunctious four children, she provided such a happy, safe place that our Down-Syndrome girl asked that her last name be changed to Neighbor, Mary's married name.



*My sister Mary with our sister, Jane, at Notre Dame football game, 1990.*



*Nice formal shot of my sister Kathleen taken by our brother Steve in 1984.*

**Kathleen:** As a kid, she was one of our two quiet, bookworm, brilliant siblings. Our parents felt she was gifted and sent her to a boarding school at Villa Maria, PA, so all of us knew her less intimately than we did each other. She went on to CW Post (Long Island University) and Ohio State, working through to her terminal degree, a Ph.D. in communications research. The big change in our relationship came when she was my advisor at Ohio State, one of many jobs she took to support her education. It's not a stretch to say that Kathie grounded me and kept me in school during a few of my wilder days. Our relationship broadened further when I followed her into the advertising business. We could talk for hours about our careers.

**Stephen** was my closest brother in age and relationship.

As kids, we were fierce with each other—me, the annoying little brother who slept in the same room and never left him alone. Steve left for college as I was entering high school, and we became peers. He loved having me visit, and I more so.

As with all of us, Steve and I have had our ebbs and flows, but I could not imagine a more loyal, loving brother than Stephen Edward.



*My brother Steve with his wife, Lin Coleman, at their wedding. Circa 1995.*



*My sister Sheila at our dad's 80th birthday celebration in 1980.*

**Sheila:** We were distant as kids, and I remember annoying Sheila until we were teens. Ever since, she has been my best sibling friend. Sheila is the best of us all in that she combines brains with courage, energy, ambition, and a very open heart. Our kids were around the same age, so that added to the fun as we spent countless hours figuring out what we were doing right and wrong with them. I guess the best thing I can say about our adult relationship is that she is the only one of my sibs with whom I never think about what I might say. We just talk and listen to each other.

**Felicia** was my best friend until she left for Ireland at 19 years old. Flish was a mom, a model, a confidante when we became teens, and a word and music muse for me. Life has been hard on Felicia since then, and there have been long, dry periods in our relationship interrupted by extremely nurturing seasons. She's deep, she's brilliant, and she loves me fiercely, but as with most of the McCarthys who inherited our father's nature, she can be mercurial.



*My sister Felicia at the Punderson reunion (Dad's 80th birthday), 1980.*





*My sister Jane, flirting with our sister Mary's and Felicia's husbands,  
circa 1973*

**Jane Moire** is the one sibling with whom my relationship never changed. Janie was always the object of my adoration and a very safe place for me to learn. She became the inspiration for my lifelong battle to be wary about judging others. Inside a mind that could not develop were the same strong and variable emotions of a McCarthy: rage, love, and a sense of humor. Understanding what Jane was saying was a challenge, and if you failed, it would piss her off. Then, out came the rage. But among her many gifts were rhythm, dance, music, and humor. She loved it all, and until she became frustrated by her body breaking down (without understanding why), she was always right out there in the center of things. She had no guile. She was particularly loving, amazingly so, with all of her nieces and nephews.

## Do you believe people can change? Why or why not?

People resist change. Most are successful at doing so unless and until something dramatic happens. Health crises seem to be the most motivating, but losing a loved one can also change the course of one's life. I've known people who turned inward and bitter when they lost someone close to them. I've also known people who changed to honor their lost loved ones by carrying on their spirit in their own lives. By doing so, they changed and grew as a person.

Change can also be motivated by failure. Many entrepreneurs learn from failure by changing their approach. Others use their failure as a cause of bitterness instead of learning and trying again. The bitter ones find it easier to blame other factors for their own lack of response to our ever-changing business environment. If you hear "I failed due to a lousy partner, the economy, the bank," it's rarely true.

Divorce is another change that frees some and embitters others. When my son recently divorced, a friend told him that "the length of a marriage is not a measure of success." Two of our three kids were married for about ten years each when the marriages ended. After lengthy dives into melancholy and then introspection, both are stronger. They've emerged as better people for having had the experience.

Self-realization is essential for that process. It's been a lifelong task for me to identify what is and is not working for me, personally and professionally.

My crucible moment was in 1995, at age 43, when I was experiencing occasional heart attacks. After extensive testing, it was found I was having anxiety (panic) attacks that presented themselves physically. Seeing no other option, I submitted to two and a half years of psychological therapy, at the end of which I was given medication and the assignment to study and practice meditation.

Twenty-nine years later, medication, meditation, music, prayer, and physical exercise allow me to see things as they are in the moment. Seeing reality in the moment allows us to deal more skillfully with change.

We fail mostly by refusing to change.



## The next generation(s)

Watching my children learn, struggle, and grow has been fascinating. All three of our children are now in their forties. On the one hand, they've all surprised us; on the other hand, they are generally where we expected them to be. The most enduring thing in their lives, as it will be in yours, are the relationships that survive the ups and downs of life. I can't wait to see what surprises are in store for me with the nine of you.

### Surprises

- All three have engaged in small businesses. Caitlin was the only one I expected to be a businessperson, maybe in a large company like her cousin Julie. Tim was to be a teacher and coach, and I figured Kevin would eventually make his living with music.
- They all married later than I expected—28, 32, and 33—and two of the three marriages did not survive.
- Our two divorcees became stronger, more loving, and surer of themselves from the experience.
- All three were/are more athletic than Alice and me; they all lettered in high school sports.

### No Surprises

- They are outstanding parents, in many ways better than we were/are. And we were/are very good.
- Each is grounded by love and compassion.
- They're all smart, each in a different way.
- All are funny—each in a different way.
- All three have worked their own way from relative poverty to relative comfort.



*Our three children: Timmy, Caitlin, and Kevin, on Timmy's high school graduation day, 1998.*

## Chapter 5: Marriage and Parenting

I think being a younger sibling was to my advantage. As I watched my older sibs and cousins navigate various relationships, I got a lot of insight into what works and what doesn't. Whether they admitted it or not, each had great strengths and great weaknesses in their relationships. I became especially analytical when I noticed one of them was particularly unhappy or happy in those marriages.

My own parents deeply believed in the primacy of family.

I believe that the ultimate goal of life is giving, so a full life can be achieved on any path. For my life, the choice was always clear: I wanted more than all else to enjoy a good marriage and children.

For me, good marriages and good husbands and wives all have one common characteristic: transparency. Without it, no relationship can last. And secrets unshared become obstacles to growth together. For me, the ideal spouse is someone who shares your values but does not have much else in common. Alice is an only child; I have nine siblings. Alice grew up Protestant non-ethnic; I grew up pure Irish Catholic. Alice worked for the Democrats; I worked for the Republicans. She's a listener; I'm a talker. Our different backgrounds created many conflicts, but over time, it became clear: *Viva la différence!* One partner's strengths cover the other's weaknesses and vice versa.



*Stella in her family's arms on the day of her birth, January 28, 2019.*

## How did you meet your wife?

Ah, the story of when I first laid eyes on Alice Bethel. One day, while John Hill and I were doing our homework in the Senate Chamber, a beautiful admin for State Senator Headley breezed through, and I said, “Oh my God, who is that gorgeous woman?” John replied, “You don’t want to go near her. That’s Crazy Alice.”

I didn’t listen. Soon after, I went down to the Bill Room, where she was working, with a trumped-up story that Senator Aronoff needed some bill or other. I got her talking (and bending over to get the bill), and she said, “I’m having a going-away party tonight, would you like to come?” She was leaving for Arizona later that week, and after the party, we stayed up all night and talked. Three weeks later, she was back, and we began dating seriously in September of 1974.

The question less often discussed is when I knew I wanted to marry her, which was pretty close to the time we began to date seriously. Alice was not just funny, brilliant, and pretty; she was very mature for her age, and I figured I needed an adult. (I think she did, too.)

I knew I wanted to grow old with her. I knew she’d be an amazing mother and a very independent partner. When I graduated in March of 1975, upon leaving for my first big job in Birmingham, Michigan, I told Alice, “I want to marry you, but I feel like I’m too young. Perhaps in a couple years?”



*Alice on a train through Switzerland  
on our 40th anniversary, 2015.*

She didn't buy that (she likes to say, "I felt like he was offering me a prison sentence"), so we didn't speak from March to late May. The week before Memorial Day, I called my mom and said, "I think I want to ask Alice to marry me." She seemed very pleased by the idea and said only, "Don't try to make her become Catholic." I asked, "Why?" and Mom said, "She and her mother are already very good Christians."

So I called Alice the next day and asked her if she would like to meet at Cedar Point amusement park in Sandusky for the weekend. To my shock, she accepted. After I asked her to marry me that Saturday afternoon, she said, "Let's talk about it." For the second time in our relationship, we stayed up all night talking, Alice asking the questions and me answering them. At 8:00 that Sunday morning, I called my brother Miller. When he said, "What did she say?" I had to admit that she had not answered me yet.

I turned to Alice and said, "He wants to know if you said yes." She responded, "Of course it's yes. I just needed to get you straightened out on some things first."



*2015 on our 40th anniversary trip to Switzerland.*



From the *Ashtabula Star Beacon* of August 1975

"Miss Alice Lorraine Bethel and Timothy Francis McCarthy exchanged vow and rings in the chapel of College of Steubenville in an open ceremony.

The Rev. Gerald King and the Rev. Stanley Scott officiated at the afternoon ceremony Nov. 8.

Parents of the couple are Mr. and Mrs. Joseph V. Bethel, Steubenville, and Dr. and Mrs. William J. McCarthy, 3907 Edgewater Dr.

The bride appeared in a gown of alana with A-line styling featuring a wedding ring neckline and long tapered sleeves. The bib effect bodice was enriched with accents of pear and re-embroidered Alencon lace. A watteau train of chapel length further enhanced the gown.

The bonnet headpiece of matching fabric was trimmed with re-embroidered Alencon lace and secured a French illusion chapel length veil. She carried a cascade arrangement of white orchids and lilies.

Miss Judith Gruber, maid of honor, wore a poly-knit gown in Tahiti color featuring a halter top and A-line skirt. A hooded jacket of matching fabric with marabou trim was worn over the gown.

Bridesmaids were the Misses Linda Fischer, Bobbe Pfahl, Mimi Hartman, Mary Korenberg, Kathleen McCarthy, sister of the groom, and Mrs. Carmen DeStefano. Kimberly Wilson, cousin of the bride, was junior bridesmaid. Their gowns and jackets were styled like the maid of honor's in a poppy color. Attendants carried bouquets of chrysanthemums tinted to match their gowns.

Michelle Trimmer, cousin of the bride, was flower girl. Brendan McCarthy, nephew of the groom, served as ring bearer.

Seating guests were William, Terry, Miller and Stephen McCarthy, brothers of the groom; James H. Bethel, uncle of the bride; and Jack Egan, college classmate of the groom.

Steubenville Country Club was the scene of the reception.

The bride is a graduate of Wintersville High School and Ohio State University. She was a secretary to the Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee.

The groom is a graduate of St. John High School and Ohio State University. He is executive director of Oakland County Republication Headquarters in Birmingham, Michigan. After a honeymoon trip through Upper New York State, the newlyweds will reside in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan."



Front page news: Tim's dreams come true, wins Alice, 1975.



## What qualities do you most value in your spouse or partner?

Through the qualities below, Alice is still teaching me by her example.

- Alice is love. She doesn't resist or choose it... she *is* love. Outside of people she feels have hurt someone she loves, she openly and simply loves others without conditions.
- She is fiercely independent and self-sustaining. It was the first thing that attracted me to her (beyond her very good looks). She owned her own nice car, lived in a lovely apartment, and dressed well with no support outside of her own hard work in the Senate and her budgeting skills.
- Her work ethic. Alice has never been scared of working hard. If she has a goal, she is determined to do whatever is necessary to achieve it.
- Her style. Since I met Alice, I've appreciated her sense for style: clothing, hair, nails, colors, furnishings—anything that requires taste and care to consistently deliver on. She has *flair*.
- She listens without interrupting.
- Alice rivals my mom for GOAT (Greatest of All Time). When our kids were young, Alice kept a marvelous balance between spoiling them and keeping them in line. They were raised with her values of compassion, faith, social grace, and love. And now, to her adult children, she is the ultimate source of safety and love for all three.
- Like her own mom but in a very different way, she is the perfect grandmother.

Our only shared strength is our work ethic. I'm still trying to learn from her on all the others.

## What are your favorite memories of each of your children growing up?

I should write down all of the thousands of memories I have of Timmy, Kevin, and Caitlin. Each of them developed in unique and warm and funny ways. First, a description of each personality from 1 to 13.

**Timmy** was a boy whom we often said was just wasting time between wearing a diaper and a business suit. He was more serious, geeky, smart, and gangly than any other three-, five-, seven-, or nine-year-olds I knew then or since. His legs were so skinny, he earned the name Chicken Legs; he'd grab his knees with his hands and do the Funky Chicken when we called him that. Once he found books, you could rarely find him without his nose in one—with Kevin standing at his side saying, "C'mon, Timmy, let's go outside and play!"



*Left: Timmy's high school graduation photo.*



*Right: Timmy age 4.*



*Kevin, age 3.*

**Kevin's** emotions were worn on his sleeve right from the start. We still remind him that his first month at home was one long, loud wail. Throughout his young life, he had only two speeds: *fast* and *sleep*. His funny and loving sides came out very early; that dude could take over a room and make every person there fall in love with him. He cared (and cares) deeply about every person he meets.



*Kevin in his junior year at  
Lake Catholic High School.*

**Caitlin** has always shown balance. That is, she was smart, a good student (when she wanted to be), and funny and loving as well. A bit differently than her brothers, she never hesitated to speak her mind. Even on uncomfortable occasions, we all counted on Caitlin for wisdom and the unvarnished truth. And she was also our “tiny dancer.” She loved to be busy, doing things, engaging others in dancing, choreography, swimming, and girly things.



*Caitlin in her junior year in high school with  
her college-aged brother, Timmy.*



*Caitlin, age 7.*

## Favorite Timmy Factoids

- He called his grandma “Mega”
- Spaghetti was *p’sgetti*
- Instead of sucking his thumb, he sucked his middle two fingers.
- His Aunt Kathi once asked how he felt about the library, and Timmy said, “I’d marry the library if I could.” (He was seven or eight at the time.)
- His Mega took him Christmas shopping when he was around three, and he bought his Grandpa Bethel a pink plastic bird cage. (We still have it.)



*Timmy and I in Ireland, 2013.*



## Favorite Kevin Factoids

- Cars were “go-gos”
- Candy was “gee-gees”
- Many of Kevin’s best infant stories were with his best friend and uncle, Terry, who once handed Kevin a wiffle bat, pointed at the Christmas tree, and told him that Santa would bring him a gift for every Christmas bulb he was able to break. When we heard the crashing sounds, we ran into the living room to find Uncle Terry roaring with laughter and Kevin wondering what he had done wrong.
- One of the many times Terry picked Kevin up to go somewhere with him, Kevin pulled the door shut, looked at his uncle, and said, “Thank God you got me out of that prison.” He was 10 at the time.
- At Township Park one summer afternoon, as I put his big brother’s Hot Wheels tricycle into the car, I asked five-year-old Kevin where his was. He said, “I gave it to James. He doesn’t have lots of stuff like we do.”



*Kevin headed to a gig in 2003.*

## Favorite Caitlin Factoids



*Caitlin wearing her angry bird hat gift, Christmas 2008.*

- She replaced Y with W; words like *yes* and *yep* were *wes* and *wep*. and *yellow* was *wellow*.
- *Ambulance* was *ambalance*.
- Frequently, she would ask whoever was in the house to sit in the living room so she (alone or with a friend) could “put on a show” for us.
- When she and her pal Allison Stenger got bored at their brothers’ hockey practices, they would clean the bathrooms at the Mentor Ice Arena.
- When she was 15, she told us she thought through most of her childhood that she had Down Syndrome, like her Aunt Jane, but we just weren’t telling her.

## Did you set any parenting rules for yourself that didn't hold up?

While there were many good parenting rules that held up, plenty did not.

- **Managing screen time.** This one may surprise my kids since we often recall when we put the TV in the closet for a year or more. But after a certain point, we were no longer vigilant. I cringe to think how much harder this would be today.
- **Homework rules.** I thought I would be there to help with and monitor homework, but I rarely was. I was either traveling or too tired to focus on it. I still believe this hurt all three of them academically. Alice stayed on them but was too easily fooled by their excuses.
- **Restraint.** Beyond a healthy father fear, I wanted to spare my kids the oppressive environment my father and three older brothers established in their homes. I did not.
- **Consistency.** Also, in response to my father and brothers, I wanted my kids to know what was coming from me. Alas, my mood swings made them learn to “expect the unexpected,” whether positive or negative.
- **United front.** Alice and I spoke often about presenting a united front and did well for a time, but eventually we fell prey to (both) our passive-aggressive natures. If we did one thing consistently poorly, it was undermining each other’s authority.

## What influenced you most as you figured out how to be a parent?

I was very fortunate because I could observe my parents and seven of my siblings raising their kids before we had ours. All demonstrated practices I emulated and avoided.

Alice and I struggled with figuring it all out. Early on, we would laugh, saying, “We need a license to drive but no training or certification to parent!”

Our path was made more difficult by the diversity of our childhoods: the only child of an addicted father and an emotionally brittle mother married the ninth of ten children to become parents with their own baggage. (Note Tolstoy’s famous quote: “All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.”)



*Our young family on Easter Sunday, 1992.  
Cait was 8, Kevin 12, and Timmy 13.*

As our kids are discovering, the most important lesson of parenting is to learn that if you're lucky, you'll get it right about 80% of the time. It scared both Alice and me that we could not be perfect. If I had a wish (which I do not), it would be that we would have both learned forgiveness for ourselves and each other earlier.

Our kids generally had lots of activities, good schools, good sports, lots of friends and cousins around, travel, and a safe neighborhood and home. We raised our kids naturally and successfully when they were young. But storms roiled our seas when our children came of age, and we remembered our own adolescent experiences. Both Alice and I did many things during adolescence that we are not proud of. On disciplining our adolescent children, we varied between fear that they might do similar things and belief that they probably should, given that both of us learned important lessons from those bad experiences. The result? We were very uneven.

Those fears, combined with my absences from home while building a business, created a fierce but mostly silent war about parenting between us. Neither of us is good with conflict, so when we did not agree, we often opted for passive-aggressive behavior. For example, I can remember standing silently in the kitchen while Alice delivered her opinion. Then I'd walk the kids down the driveway to tell them mine. Our kids suffered needlessly because of our division.

But we hung on and made it to the other shore by reminding ourselves often, then and now, that we mostly succeeded in the four primary goals for parenting we had

agreed upon before they were born. Our children would:

- Be secure in knowing they are loved by a mom and a dad.
- See us as good examples.
- Know our faith and values.
- Be as educated as they chose to be.

What remains certain for all parents is that your kids will remember what you did far more clearly than what you said.



## My parenting

In the sections on my parents, I reflected on which of them I favor more and the gifts they gave me. It's fun to turn that spotlight onto my kids in the following pages.



*2024: Caitlin, Rose Alice, Natalie, Tim, Mike Rowan, Kevin, Teague, Alice, Stella and Noah: my whole gang at Woodloch resort. A day of traditional games ended with a shaving cream fight.*



Alice and I often wondered which of us each of our kids took after more. That never worked since they all have many similar traits and many that are uniquely their own. Still, a few things are worth mentioning.

**Caitlin** is graceful, incredibly compassionate to those less fortunate, and sometimes a little lost in space, all traits similar to her mom. She lives out loud and has an appetite for risk like her dad. And entirely on her own, she understands poetry and people. Quite unlike any of the rest of us, she is unafraid—no, proud—to live her life as she sees fit.

**Kevin** is overly sensitive like his mom and equally connected to his children. Kevin has excellent instincts, like his dad, and is unflinchingly loyal, particularly to his family. Kevin's uniqueness is that he is more athletic and more creative than any of us.

**Timmy** is probably more his own man and the deepest thinker of all of us. He can assimilate a lot of data. He listens brilliantly, like his mom, and is endlessly curious and a reader like his dad, but everything else seems to have skipped a generation. In many ways, he reminds me of my dad and his great-grandmother, Wrenn Bethel. Fiercely independent and private, he does not find it easy to share information or feelings.



*My gang in New Orleans to see the 2008 NCAA championship game.*

## My kids as parents

What a delight it is to watch my own kids develop into parents. It's part payback and part wonder. Here are ways I notice my kids parenting differently than we did.

- Their kids are generally on a healthier diet than ours were.
- Our kids are parenting with a sharper eye on mental health.
- The dads are more involved in the day-to-day than I was.
- Spirituality is important but depends less on the ritual of Sunday church.
- The dads model participating in housework.

And here are some of the things that are the same.

- Exercise and sports of any kind are highly valued and encouraged.
- Hugs and laughs are plentiful.
- Both dads can get almost as grumpy as I did when patience runs out.
- The parents are heavily involved in school and community organizations.
- Family travel is a high priority.
- Cousins are valued highly.



*Teague and Rose with Kevin, 2023.*

## Isla Maeve

Just a few months before this writing, my little girl became a mother and rocked my world.



When it appeared that Caitlin Marie and Mike Utesch, her best friend since seventh grade, were going to succeed in having a baby together, I was reminded of another professional woman who had her first child at 37: my mom. Like Mom, Caitlin opened a new door on her life. It is fascinating to watch her grow into that role.

It is new and exciting to me particularly considering her success as a professional. One of Caitlin's great strengths is objectivity, which seems to already be peeling away in favor of a sensitivity and drive to meet Isla's needs. What will become of my party girl and the self-assured driven professional I've always known?

One thing is for sure: her singular focus is now Isla Maeve Utesch. Isla is now Caitlin and Mike's North Star. She joins a star just a bit south named Buster, their golden doodle.



*February 3, 2025.*

A bonus for me is watching Alice and Caitlin grow even closer than before. I've watched them talk every day since the baby was born, and I marvel at this mother/daughter intimacy.

## Chapter 6: Work and Money

My mother would say, “Work is the price you pay for living.” About money she would say, “Enough is good, but wealth is a burden.” In my time, I learned that work and money are great markers and yet neither should define me. I succeeded in my professional career as a political manager, a marketing manager, and an entrepreneur. I’m very proud of these things, since I love winning and enjoyed the challenge of each stage of growth in those endeavors.

Eventually, in my 55<sup>th</sup> year, my life’s work was rewarded with extraordinary wealth. Since the sale of my first business, WorkPlace Media, in 2007, I have enjoyed a new and far more fulfilling career in engaged philanthropy. There is now a great deal of research supporting the psychological benefits of service. Service to others provides far more meaning than the brief pleasures of material wealth.

### What was the strangest thing you wanted to be when you grew up?

I’ve never thought of it as strange that I wanted to be a comedian, but some people might. Then and now, I’m a people pleaser. I love to see people laugh. My mom referred to laughter as medicine for the soul. My brother Terry was the best joke teller and generally the funniest person I’ve ever known. Our home was filled with people of quick wit.

Red Skelton, Jonathon Winters, Dick Van Dyke, and Jerry Lewis could send me into fits of laughter. The first two were my favorites; Skelton because at the end of every show, he would speak softly and lovingly, while Winters always ended his show impromptu, telling stagehands to throw him anything and his challenge was to make it funny. I was in awe of both for their versatility.

I practiced on my friends and family, most often to groans and yawns. That’s probably why I gave the dream up early.

The other dream—but far less strange for the times—involved my thoughts of becoming a priest. That aspiration unfolded from ages 10 to 13 and was also caused by hero worship. The best priests I knew could be regal on the altar and entirely at ease off it. And they were terrific listeners, even to young kids like me.



## How did you get your first job?

I started my first full-time professional job the Monday after the Saturday I graduated from college. I became the Executive Director of the Republican Committee of Oakland County, Michigan. It was the premier political staff job in Michigan, on par with the state party posts. Not long after I took the job, a new chair named Arthur G. Elliot was elected as my boss and became the greatest mentor of my life.

How I got there is a funny story. My last semester to earn my BA in political science included 21 credit hours (I was in a hurry to graduate) and continuous interviewing. The best (and only) offer I received was to work in US Senator Bob Taft's office for a \$6,500 annual salary.

One night, my brother Terry called me and said, "I was working at Michigan GOP HQ today and the State Chairman, Bill McLaughlin, told me they're looking for an Executive Director for their Oakland County HQ. Send me a resume quickly." I sent it immediately and boosted my salary request to \$9,000 annually, hoping they could afford it given the prominence of the job.

A week or two later I was in the Chairman's office interviewing. It was going very well when he said, "The only problem we are having, Tim, is that we can't afford your \$14,000 salary request. Would you take \$12,500?"

With a bit of a forlorn look, I said, "Yeah, I guess I can do that since I really want this job."

I ran from the meeting to a payphone down the street and called Terry, who howled with laughter when I told him about the money discussion. I asked him how they got the idea that I wanted \$14,000. He said, "It's amazing what my secretary can do with a bottle of liquid eraser."



*Alice and I at our first GOP summer picnic. I got volunteered to man the dunk tank. When Alice missed with the baseball, she just walked up and kicked the lever.*



## What is the best job you've ever had?

This should be fun. First, all the jobs I can remember having, in chronological order.

- *Plain Dealer* delivery, four years
- Golf caddy, seven years
- Paid musician on and off starting at age 15
- Grocery stock boy, three months
- Gas station night manager, one school year
- McDonald's cook, one summer
- Piece worker in a machine shop, one year
- Shoeshine boy/Locker Room Concessionaire, two summers
- Professional political operative, seven years
- Advertising executive/account supervisor/Chief Marketing Officer, nine years
- Entrepreneur, 1988 to present
- Adjunct Professor, four years full-time and other occasional stints

The best job I ever had: Dad. That's my favorite job.

Since 1979, that has been by far the most challenging and fulfilling job I've ever had. From the early years of learning how to tend to basic needs, to the joy of playing with grade school kids, to the failure to be patient with teens, my job as a dad taught me the most and still does. And now with the cream of our crop rising to the top, we've been given a wonderful new job—grandparent.

We are working to do this job even better.

## When in your life did you feel the richest?

I feel the richest at family events.



*Fabulous photo of my dad clowning it up at one of our summer picnics with the Fye family.*

As a kid, our family focused on events. There were summer picnics in our front yard with the Fyes and reunions at Grandpa's home in Findlay, Ohio. Once my three older brothers were in college, many exciting events were stimulated when they brought friends home for weekends.

Big sibling wedding bashes started in 1963 and wound up with Alice and mine in 1975. Cousin weekends at Notre Dame were annual affairs from 1982 to 2000, usually attracting 50-80 family members. Major family reunions took place in 1984, 1995, 2003, 2008, and 2015. The next generation began a series of big weddings in the mid-1990s that continues to this day.

My parents gave us security, education, and lots of people to love us. That's real wealth.

Monetarily, our first "rich" moment was in 1982, when we bought our first family house on Allegheny Drive in Mentor. It was bigger than we'd hoped for (it was a fixer-upper) and was in the middle of the St. Gabriel faith community, which we thrived in. During that time, another rich moment was when we bought a used Ford station wagon for Alice, and it had electric windows.

Real wealth arrived on May 14, 2007, and July 21, 2021, when we sold our businesses. Since 2007, I have felt rich whenever I'm shopping in a grocery store, buying dinner in a restaurant, or planning a trip, and I don't even look at the price. Financial success has also fueled a delightful trek into engaged philanthropy, seeking economic inclusion for all.

December of 2012 began the richest part of our life when our first grandchild, Rose Alice, was born. At our wedding, we heard, “May you see your children’s children grow,” and now that time has arrived. We often take care of Tim and Natalie’s three kids, and we are with Kevin’s two every week. We anticipate becoming just as close to Caitlin’s first child, Isla Maeve.

I get goosebumps thinking about what’s in store.



*Rose at the 2016 Easter egg hunt.*

## If you had unlimited access to money, what would you do with it?

I do, and here's what I do with it.

- Live the life Alice and I have earned, which includes taking away the little bumps in life that wealth can. We have no mortgage or debt, we travel and entertain luxuriously (alone and with others), and we make our primary (sole) home our castle.
- Invest (with discipline) in immediate family members' lives and careers. First, this means awarding tuition- and education-related grants for any direct descendant of my father and his two wives, Winifred and Margaret. We also frequently fund reunions and family gatherings, travel to see family, and contribute to costs related to weddings, funerals, and other important family occasions. Finally, our resources are available for mental health and addiction treatment for family members who choose to seek help.
- Invest in others, particularly as it pertains to economic inclusion. We believe the USA's growing gap between rich and poor is a social issue. To gain both money and coaching from us, one need only create a solid plan and demonstrate work ethic and coach-ability. We've lent over \$15 million to 100+ businesses and individuals to date and plan to scale those investments significantly over our lifetimes and beyond. Most of this economic gardening takes place in our home county of Ashtabula, Ohio.
- Invest in social change. Two other matters of economic inclusion addressed by our foundation currently are America Mentors (<http://www.americamentors.org>) and Sea Change (<http://www.seachng.org>). The former is focused on helping first-generation and Pell Grant college students persist to graduation. The latter creates and improves investments and resources for social enterprise, to date primarily in central and northeast Ohio.
- Upon our deaths, as Warren Buffett suggests, we will leave "enough for our children that they can do something, but not so much that they might do nothing." The remaining 90% of our estate will continue to fund our and their initiatives in mindful giving. The time we have left on this mortal coil will be spent learning how to most effectively invest in sharing our advantages with others.



*Alice and I started our foundation around 2000.*

## What does generosity mean to you?

When my dad's first wife's family needed a place to spend their last days, my mom and dad welcomed Grandma Winnie, Uncle Eddie, and Uncle Bing into our home and took care of them without any fanfare. Other non-family members, such as our housekeeper Mrs. Kelly, as well as Helen Griggs and Eleanor Cole, were also quietly taken care of in the apartment addition to our garage. Looking back, I suppose their generosity was the influence that caused Alice and I to house Mark Woods, Jamie Johnson, and Christo Johnson.

Generosity is more gracious than philanthropy. It's a spirit—a graceful manner of loving others that by its definition attracts little or no attention. For example, giving up your seat, sharing your last stick of gum, listening to another's complaints, or paying the next customer's bill are generous actions, but not philanthropy.

I don't really know of a better feeling or a higher calling than learning to be generous. I'm not at all sure that it comes naturally; perhaps like building muscles through physical workouts, generosity is a spiritual muscle you develop over time.

**“Anyone who says money can't buy  
happiness hasn't given enough away.”**

**—Alex Hormozi**



## What does philanthropy mean to you?

I've written lots on the topic of giving, including a book, *Empty Abundance*, and many articles at [www.thebusinessofgood.org](http://www.thebusinessofgood.org), but here, I'll reflect on why it's important and how to get started.

First, philanthropy is no more than promoting the welfare of others. The Greek word *philo* means *love*, and *anthropos* means *man* or *humanity*. Philanthropists see themselves as members of a broader community. We believe that society grows through showing love for others in our community.

When people ask about starting a foundation, I frequently answer, "Who are you helping now?" Most people already have a cause, such as looking after someone in their family or their church or an old friend. Others work in soup kitchens, rescue stray animals, or join Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Any of these means they are already a philanthropist.

The history of our democracy demonstrates that social change is often underpinned by individuals who form around an ideal to create social change. Examples from the *Almanac of American Philanthropy*, by Karl Zinsmeister, include private funding of the colonial army and navy of the American Revolution, the abolition of slavery, women's suffrage, and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). When political will is absent, communities have organized and funded causes as varied as biomedical research and intractable poverty over long periods of time that resulted in improvements for American society.

While his *Almanac* is a heavy lift, Zinsmeister's later book, *What Comes Next*, is one of my many recommendations for learning about philanthropy. Other readable and useful works include:

- *White Man's Burden*, by William Easterly
- *Banker to the Poor*, by Muhammad Yunus
- *Forces for Good*, by Leslie Crutchfield and Heather Grant
- *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Viktor Frankl
- *The Gospel of Wealth*, by Andrew Carnegie
- *The Billionaire Who Wasn't*, by Conor O'Clery

As I reflect on my life, my greatest pride, beyond my loyalty to my family, will be that I have lovingly and freely paid forward to every community that nurtured me and helped me realize my hopes and dreams.

## The next generation(s) at work

The expected careers of our children versus what they are doing today makes me want to predict our five grandchildren's careers, recognizing that they are currently aged six weeks to 12 years.

**Rose Alice** will be a very successful sales and marketing executive—that is, if she chooses a utilitarian path. If she chooses a mission-driven life, she will be an outstanding teacher. As a child, she has demonstrated exceptional compassion, so I can easily see her molding young people's lives through thoughtful teaching. The only other path I can see is some form of pet care; she adores animals with a similar intensity to her Aunt Caitlin.



*Rose with Stella, 2024.*



*Rose Alice, 2019, at Geneva Township Park.  
Face paint by Sparkles the Clown.*



*Noah Joseph at 3 in Grandma and Grandpa's pool on Lake Erie.*

**Noah Joseph** will be a very successful engineer of some sort. Computer Science, AI, metallurgy, automotive... who knows? But the comfort he has shown since infancy with putting things together and his endless logical questions seem a good predictor. He also has a high potential for inventing in some manner, so I could see him in research and development. He's a deep thinker.



*Noah with cousins in background, 2024.*





**Rowan Zigmunt** will no doubt be a leader, which, of course, could send him in many directions. Teacher? Coach? Principal? Junior executive in a large business on his way to a senior, perhaps eventually C-suite, position? From his early years, Rowan has always been risk-averse, and therefore is more likely to be an intrapreneur versus an entrepreneur. The clearest thing watching Rowan from my perch is that he loves, loves, loves people and will always be physically very active.



*Left: Two-year-old Rowan at our home on Lake Erie in 2017. Right: 2023.*

**Teague** is my entrepreneur in waiting. He'll waste a lot of time between now and opening his first business, and he will fail at least a couple of times. Why? Like his dad, he has high risk tolerance and a short decision cycle. Also like his dad, this guy has a depth of feeling and personality that is likely to require counseling, so that's a possibility also. There's no better counselor than one who has been helped through counseling. Like Rowan, he will also be very physically active throughout his life. As my own father would say about my brother Terry, this guy has a jet engine in a locomotive body.



*Above: Teague, 2023. At right: Teague, Christmas 2019.*





**Stella** will be a non-profit executive, perhaps connected to The Business of Good in some fashion. Perhaps all six grands will be part of our mission and foundation, but Stella may become the leader. No one, including her mom, dad, or brothers, has any question about who runs 624 Greenwich Court. My Polish-Irish princess has shown an affinity early on to use charm or force to get what she wants in any given situation. She's a great hugger, and her energy will make her a force to be reckoned with.



*Stella in 2023, above, and 2025, right.*

## Chapter 7: Being in the World: Places and Adventures

Among my fondest hopes for my children and theirs is that they engage in a bigger world. Surely your world will grow at least as much as it has during my lifetime; so, therefore, will your opportunities for citizenship. I consider travelling freely an astounding privilege of America's wealth and independence and encourage you to take every advantage possible.

### How important is it to travel?

Travel makes you a bigger person. Once you see a different culture or taste a local flavor, your mind never returns to its earlier shape. Travel brings perspective.

By my late teens, my older sibs lived in Washington, DC, Chicago, and other USA cities. Felicia had moved permanently to Ireland, where she still resides. My travels for business, leisure, and mission work have taken me to every one of our 50 United States, Canada, Mexico, and Central and South America. I've visited my family in Ireland 15-20 times and added most of western Europe, Australia, and Africa to my travels. The only culture I've had no direct exposure to is Asia, so I will leave that up to you all.

Seeing every corner of our United States is huge and mind-bending. The diversity of people, cultures, and nature are as varied as the vast natural beauty of the Rocky Mountains west to Alaska, a New York City minute to the laid-back Hawaiian mahalo.

My chosen small-town Midwest community is unique and wonderful—perfect for me, but it created a sheltered view. To experience grandeur requires a visit to Paris and Sydney. An understanding of history requires taking in Rome and Vienna. I've witnessed breathtaking natural beauty on ocean islands and in Switzerland and learned a new definition of poverty in our travels to the slums of San Salvador and Kenya. Virtual reality is cool, but if you can do it, "real reality" is better.



*Me with Russ Perry, Mary's friend, on a trip to Washington, DC, in 1967.*

## What was your first big trip?

My dad was always great at loading us into the car (and giving Mom a break) anytime he was going just about anywhere—to the hospital or office or to Cleveland or Findlay to see his family. He also took us to places like Washington and Chicago to see our brothers. I remember several trips to Niagara Falls with all of us crammed happily into one room overlooking the falls, waiting for darkness when the colored lights lit the rushing waters of the spectacular falls.

But my first big trip on my own was at age 11. It was the summer of 1963, and Mom put me on the train in Ashtabula, telling me that Uncle Ed would meet me as I disembarked in Chicago. He and I took several weeks to visit family members I had barely known before.

We climbed onto another train in Chicago, this one to Des Moines, Iowa, where we stayed with the Schiltz family. Jane McDonough, widow to Mom's brother Frank, remarried a man named John Schiltz. Frank and Jane's three children, Damien (Mac), Joanie, and Steve, were grown and gone, and the two girls Jane and John had together, Mary and Suzie,

were about my age. My uncle was the Director of Catholic Charities in Des Moines. At the time, their home also included a migrant boarder named Mario, whom I enjoyed greatly. They lived in a lovely home, and we played a lot. John was a stiff-necked German, and their dinners were rather formal and sacred events; the manners of an 11-year-old boy whose family dinners were loud and chaotic were not appreciated.

Other Iowa visits included Uncle Ed taking me to the clothing store he worked at, and to West Des Moines, to the house where he and Mom were raised. I remember their next-door neighbors still lived there and enjoyed visiting with Uncle Ed and me.



*The Ashtabula train depot back in the day.*

We left Des Moines for a train trip to Albert Lea, Minnesota, where Uncle Ed now lived with his and Mom's sister, Katherine Brooks. She had long been a widow, and she and my uncle bickered like an old married couple. My lasting impression of Aunt Katherine was that she was slender with a strong face and was very well-spoken. I could picture her being a keep-it-quiet librarian (which she was), but she was very warm-hearted with me. Several times, Uncle Ed took me to work with him at a department store where he sold men's clothes. He made me his "sales assistant," and I recall being amazed that my quiet, soft-spoken bachelor uncle turned into a selling machine when customers showed up. We learned when he passed away that Uncle Ed was the proverbial "millionaire next door."

Also living in Albert Lea were Aunt Katherine's son Bill, his wife Mary, and their three kids. I cannot remember the younger boy or baby girl's names, but Bill, their eldest, was my age, and we had a blast playing together from dawn 'til dusk. The Brooks were also upright people, but quite a bit more fun to be with than the Schiltz family (even though I dearly loved my Aunt Jane, who dearly loved my mom).

The strongest memory from the trip was the last. Uncle Ed had to take me to the Rochester airport an hour away. He owned a two-seat Nash Rambler but hated to drive. He crept through town and onto the interstate, and after a few miles of people shooting by us honking their horns (I'm guessing he was doing 40 on a 70-mph freeway), he pulled off onto the shoulder. "Timmy, you'll have to drive." I was 11, and the car was a stick shift (on the column), but somehow, I got us back on the freeway and to the airport. My Mom howled when she heard the story, shaking her head and laughing while promising to send a letter admonishing her dear brother.

## What are some of the best family trips you've taken?

I have many great memories of family fun with Caitlin, Timmy, and Kevin. But being a grandparent takes that to a whole different level: less responsibility and more indulgence.

Once this missive is finished, I'm planning to dive into the box of photos, journals, and maps of our many trips together. I'm guessing we traveled as a family at least twice a year and often more. Here are some of my favorite memories at play with my family.

Early travel was, by necessity, to visit relatives. Luckily, we had several who lived in Orlando, FL, at the time. Our kids not only enjoyed Disney World early and often, but they were also taught all the tricks of the trade by their local family members, such as being at the gate as it opened with tickets in hand and running to Magic Mountain and other rides that would later be one-hour waits. Uncle Miller and Aunt Linda had their own carnivals at their home and beach house. Four-wheelers, jet skis, boats, golf, and much more were always accessible and fully paid for. We would pack sandwiches and drive 15 hours in the family truckster (our used Ford station wagon) so we could live like royalty once we arrived.

As my work travel crested in the early 1990s, more free trips became available for us simply by using my frequent flyer miles. One of the first and most memorable long trips was to Las Vegas, the Grand Canyon, and three other national parks out west. We were among the very first guests at the Excalibur, the first family-friendly hotel on the Las Vegas strip, when the kids were 11, 10, and 7. I bought my first video camera for that trip, so I'm sure I'll eventually find some film from it. Yellowstone, Jackson Hole, Bryce Canyon, Zion, and the Grand Canyon were all stops on this trip of just under two weeks. We flew into Vegas and returned from Phoenix.

The other frequent-flyer once-in-a-lifetime family trips included a Caribbean cruise, Christmas in Hawaii, Western Europe, California on Highway 1 (SF to San Diego), Myrtle Beach, Jeckell Island, and Savannah.

I remember many trips alone with Alice to places where I was doing business. Every time we were able to do these two-to-five-day trips, I thanked heaven for Grandma Bethel for her babysitting. I got to travel with the kids, too; every summer, each child accompanied me on a business trip. I cherish memories of my kids working with me in Chicago (many times for the National Restaurant Show), southern California, New York City, Dallas, Phoenix, and Miami for other conferences and client visits.

The third tranche of family travel started after they had all moved out but still enjoyed being together. This was further ramped up by the sale of our first company in 2007. New Orleans for the college football championship; Cayman Islands in a luxury condo right on the beach; another trip to Ireland, this time staying in an 18-room manor house in Cork; Vancouver, BC; and Silver Island, Maine, were among the BKK (Before the Kids started having Kids) trips we made together.



Since then, we've delighted in annual family luxury trips to destinations such as Scottsdale, AZ; Honolulu (North Beach), Captiva Island and St. Petersburg, FL; Walt Disney World; and Galway, Ireland.

Recently, our kids suggested that Grandma and Grandpa should take each grandchild somewhere special during their 12<sup>th</sup> year. Our first of these is now scheduled for a cruise on the world's largest and newest cruise ship, Royal Caribbean's "Icon of the Seas," for July of 2025. We will be hosting our 12-year-olds, Rose and Noah.

I get goosebumps just thinking about the travel to come.



*Vacationing with our tweens in Florida, 1994.*

## What places would you want to visit over and over again?

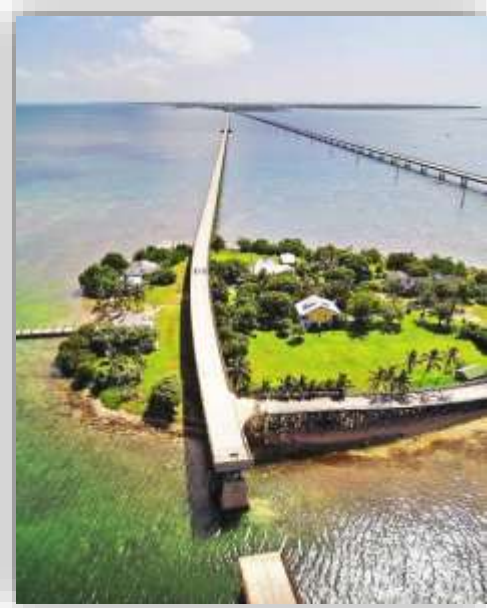
Our travel style is adventurous, so we mostly look for new venues, but here are a few I have visited frequently.

- **San Diego**, one of the few places in the world where the weather rarely changes. Most of the times I've been there, it's been 75 degrees and sunny. The ocean adds a great deal to the joy of being there. What makes it best, though, is the variety of experiences. La Jolla is the fanciest place I know, Miramar Beach is our favorite of many great beach towns, the coastal train is a fun ride, including a stop in Old Town, Hotel Del Coronado (even for drink or drive by), and, of course, the famous zoo.
- **Hawaii** is one of two places where people seem different to me. Of course, like San Diego, it is best known for its weather and water, but for me, no matter what island you visit, the culture really stands out. Aloha and mahalo are more than just greetings of *hello*, *goodbye*, and *thank you*. Hawaiians strive to hang on to their Polynesian roots, and I hope they always do. Then, of course, the tropical and mountain scenery is unparalleled in the USA.
- **Ireland** became my favorite place in the world mainly because my sister Felicia moved there to marry at 19 and is still there. Like Hawaii, the two things that stand out are the people and the scenery. Simply stated (I did not believe it until I witnessed it firsthand), in the meadows and mountains of Eire, there are shades of green you simply don't see anywhere else. Dublin is the heartbeat and nice enough to visit, but it is not much more than a city of industry. The grandness of Ireland is found once you leave Dublin City. My favorites are all in western Ireland, but I need to explore more of the north. Galway City is the populated jewel of Ireland; Westport is the classic small town; Cork has great history; and nothing compares to the Cliffs of Moher for untouched natural beauty. As of my last visit, the peaks of the cliffs overlooking the ocean and Ireland's Aran Islands remain unspoiled by tourist trappings.



*Alice on the Cliffs of Moher in 2012.*

## Tell about an adventure you've been on

*Marathon Island in the Keys.*

**Marathon Island.** Tom Hill is a friend who grew up fishing on Lake Erie and from his parents' cottage in the Florida Keys. One September, Tom invited me and a half dozen friends to a fishing week on the island. It was unforgettable. Early each morning, we would help Tom outfit his boat. One day, we would snorkel for lobster, and the next, we would line fish for dolphin.

Catching lobster simply requires a net, a spear, a snorkel, and a bit of patience. The clear water is shallow, and you swim looking down until you find a dark hole with a telltale lobster's antenna sticking out. You dive, place your net over the hole, and use your spear to "tickle" the lobster. Once he darts out of his hole into your net, you twist the net closed and swim to the surface to deposit your booty in the boat. The ultimate man's moment for me was when Tom attached a small hibachi pot to a stanchion, cooked a few lobsters, and served them with a squeeze bottle of butter. Dolphin fishing was quite different. We travelled miles out into the ocean to bring back a catch that we dropped off at a local island restaurant on our way back to the cottage, then returned to enjoy (free!) our part of their listed "catch of the day."

**Zaragosa.** Joe Cistone took me on an adventure to El Salvador that I would never have done on my own. Each day, our little group would visit sites where we would meet with the poorest of the poor. Sometimes we were in a car and sometimes in a small bus, but my favorite was when we were in the back of a pickup truck. Each day, Joe would take us to a site of unspeakable poverty—places where fellow human beings were killed in the name of rebellion. Every moment of our time in El Salvador, and subsequently in Naples, Italy, and Nairobi, Kenya with Joe, were adventures that planted the fire to support the oppressed that still burns in me today.

One silly but brilliant adventure was a visit to **Washington, DC**, that my brother Terry called the Great Capitol Caper. I was still in college, and Terry was flying into DC to do some campaign work for the Republican Party and attend the famous Press Club Annual Dinner, where even the President tries to be a comic. On our first night there, Terry suggested to a couple friends that we should go on a scavenger hunt, collecting things from each of the bars we hopped that night.

By the time we reached the last bar, La Nicoise (famous for its four Parisian owner-chefs, where servers moved about on roller skates), I had consumed a drink or three too many. Being the only one without a prize theft, on the way out, I pulled a glass globe wider than my body off a wall fixture and carried it with us out the door.

Terry and his friends were howling with laughter as we walked briskly to the car. Having no place to fit me and the globe inside the car, they stowed me in the trunk, leaving the lid open as we made the short drive back to our hotel.

Terry loved telling the story of standing in the elevator on our way to the fifteenth floor, when suddenly he heard a loud crash of glass breaking. Laughing at Terry's story, the guy next to me had dislodged the globe and sent it crashing to the elevator floor. The next night was the Press Club Dinner, where I wore a tuxedo and met President Gerald Ford and other rich and famous people. Quite the experience for a college boy!

### Have you served in the military?

The first military draft lottery since 1942 occurred the year before I was eligible. The number I would have been assigned was among the first selected. I had to do some soul searching as the second lottery approached, since I was eligible. I remember deciding that even though I was a full-time college student, if my number was called, I would go. As it turned out, that year's lottery ended at 195, and my number was 340. As afraid as I was to ship off—I've never even raised my fists in a fight—I knew I was free because for over 200 years, people have put their lives on the line. To this day, I thank most people I learn have served our country. There is no higher privilege than democracy.

### Is volunteering important to you?

Volunteerism is an essential area of democracy that I have served faithfully. My parents served their schools, church, elections, and professions in volunteer capacities throughout their lifetimes. I, too, have been active in every aspect of my communities. To me, that's the American Way.

The best volunteers are the ones without motive. I've often run into people who are church or school boards to exercise power or ideology. That would be unsatisfying to me. The best volunteering is done by people who simply love to see what their help can accomplish. For me, that has always brought satisfaction that money cannot buy.



## What have you considered the most important political/social/world events during your lifespan?

Anyone who has lived for 70 years in America has experienced huge political, social, and world events.

The decline of racism and the advance of all human rights are the most important social changes I've witnessed. Like war, poverty, and disease, these battles rage on; yet statistically and factually, we have seen a 70-year virtuous cycle regarding social issues. Also worth mentioning is the impact I've watched through the dawn of the information age. As industrialization was to my parents, computers, online media, and other technological changes have had massive social impact in my lifetime.



*1989: the Berlin Wall falls.*

Our grade and high school had bomb shelters, and we were trained on what to do in the event of a nuclear attack. So far, I've experienced presidents from Eisenhower to Biden who, along with the legislative and judiciary branches, have led us mostly along a path of peace and economic standards far in excess of what my parents experienced. They both lived through two world wars, a depression, and extraordinary death counts from diseases no longer even remembered by my generation.

Essentially, my life has spanned the establishment, death, and the current attempt at rebirth of communism in the Soviet Union. A more dramatic change has been caused by China's growth from an agrarian communist to a capitalist/communist blend as they have become a premier world power. Finally, global cooperation has had massive and mostly positive effects on the decline of deaths from violence, disease, starvation, and catastrophic events.



## If you could live anywhere in the world, where would it be?

Through years of trial and error, I now live exactly where I most want to be: 6739 Lake Road West, a six-bedroom former B&B sitting on my beloved Lake Erie. Ten or fifteen steps from our door at lake level, we walk onto a vast concrete patio and pier that juts out into the lake and includes a built-in fire pit. Over the past year, Alice entirely remodeled our home, expanding our upstairs bedroom space by hundreds of feet and tripling the windows overlooking Lake Erie.

Geneva-on-the-Lake has become a golf-cart community, and we are adjacent to a 700-acre state park, so we are able to take the grandchildren as far as eight miles east through the park, walking, running, or biking the miles and miles of trails. At the far end of the park is an old-fashioned summer resort with a strip bordered by retail businesses entirely centered on amusement.

The only other place I would live would be on the seashore anywhere in the southwest of Ireland. It's easy to see the kind of place we could build or buy facing the sea, probably on a hillside or cliff within walking distance of a small village. It would be a cottage, nicely appointed with American conveniences but not at all spacious or showy. Both are/would be lovely places for rest and recreation for our kids and theirs.



*The view from our patio on Lake Erie.  
My Dad loved to say, "It's a different show every night."*

## What are some of the most important elections you've voted in? What made them important to you?

While I have felt a particular urgency since Donald Trump's rise in 2015, I have always believed that every single election and every vote I cast is important. My first vote was cast one week after my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1970, and my most recent on November 5, 2024. I served as a political professional in every election from 1972 through 1978. Though only 12 at his death, I believe the greatest president in my lifetime to be John F. Kennedy, and the worst, by great measure, is Mr. Trump.

My parents voted without fail, and as soon as most of her kids were gone, Mom worked at every election at the polls. Alice and I both made our way through college working in politics. Since 2016, I've worked each spring and fall as a precinct election official.

The foundation of America's 250-year experiment is representative democracy. This means all citizens' rights are protected by law and that every citizen has the right to vote in free and fair elections. The reason it gets messy is that neither pure democracy (where citizens rule directly) nor pure republic (where officials "represent" citizens' interests) government has worked.

My reading of American history indicates that we surmount threats to our democracy through majority votes. Like all progress, these victories take time and suffering.

The Republican Right's assault on democracy through its southern strategy, gerrymandering, and abolishing limits on campaign finance during the past 25 years is not new. Substantial voting minorities have existed since the birth of our nation, and each takes about a generation to overcome. The struggles over taxation, property and civil rights, a united United States, women's suffrage, prohibition, and joining Europe's fight for freedom (twice) have all been long, ugly struggles. Equal treatment of all citizens and safety nets for the elderly, handicapped, and poor all took decades and many elections to become law. It is human nature for the advantaged to suppress the disadvantaged, but all these fights seem to eventually give way to the brilliant blueprints written by our founders.

The simplest truth is that the United States is and will always be an experiment. Successful experiments require failure followed by learning and then implementation of that learning. The issues in your day will be no greater or less than those of mine and your ancestors; they will just be different. Your role, as mine has been, will be to keep the experiment alive and ever-changing.

And that is the source of my belief that all elections are important. I'm just one of many before and after me whose vote is required to protect checks and balances of our governmental branches and the separation of church and state. If not me and you, then who? This thought applies perhaps more to our local governance since the officials running our towns, counties, and state governments directly affect our lives.

Martin Luther King, Jr., said, "Democracy begins to end when we become silent about things that matter."

### **My kids in the big, big world**

What a delight it is to sit back and watch you all explore the world and contribute to it. It's pretty easy to remember the highlights.



*My sister's family and ours in Dublin in 1994, one of my favorite trips.*

**Timothy's** first big long trip came as his reward for college graduation. Tim did the classic Eurail-pass-and-hostel trip and covered some 12 or 15 countries in a month or six weeks. I don't remember any details except being very proud of his independent nature and our meeting him in Ireland for a family wedding. Other trips I've admired Timmy for include minimalist sojourns to Patagonia and through the Grand Canyon: no electronic devices aided either journey, and they didn't even take tents to the Grand Canyon.

**Kevin**, my risk taker, never thinks twice about going anywhere, anytime, for any reason. Two of my favorite memories of him in this big, big world are his little beater car that took him coast to coast several times, as well as his trips to Nairobi and Calcutta, which were both mission-driven and spartan. The "beater" was a 2002 Suzuki Esteem (small wagon) he bought with 20,000 miles on it from a friend in 2003. Though rarely used locally while he lived in San Francisco (2004-2012), he put over 100,000 miles on it for his various adventures, including trips home, to New York City, and as a singer/songwriter on tour.

Our whole family went to Kenya for an immersion trip in 2008 (with our foundation partner, International Partners in Mission), which resulted in a new perspective of what poverty and repression mean in our world. About a year later, Kevin went to India on his own to work with IPM's local partner, Mahesh. The most memorable story from this trip was its purpose: to help strengthen a caste of people who sift through trash from the dumps for things to sell. It seems the local police and other "authorities" would (and may still) tax these desperately poor people as they leave the dump for the day.

**Caitlin** is no less a traveler than the other two. Mainly, I admire her for "forgetting" to return from her trip to Chicago 24 years ago. 😊 I remember taking her on a walk through Chicago on her college visit there, recommending ways to stay safe as a young, attractive woman in a big city. She's never asked for another bit of advice... and never needed to.

While disappointing at the time, she had the nerve at 19 to quit school and run off to New Mexico with her boyfriend for over a year. I remember right where I was toward the end of that escapade when she called me and said, "Dad, we tried this your way: straight to college on your dollar and the straight path. Now I've tried it my way. How about we meet somewhere in the middle?" That was one of no less than five or six times I can remember being completely blown away by my only daughter's mature approach to life.

I guess I wonder more about whether the big, big world is ready for my kids.

## Chapter 8: Having Fun

My life was ever more fun than it would have been because of Alice. I've always loved the crazy in "Crazy Alice." She was far more mature than me, so what she taught me was more than just fun (which I was already pretty skilled at). She taught me that life was a balancing act. She never missed a day of work, happily stayed overtime when asked by the Senator you worked for, kept a clean apartment and a clean car, and visited your parents faithfully. But when she played, you *played*. Dancing, singing, laughing, she was among the most popular women in the legislature for her dependability as a worker and also as a fun chick. Beyond her tutoring, I've also learned a couple of things about having fun.

Work/life balance is a very popular term at the time of this writing, and I do not believe it exists. I've sought instead something my friend Brian calls work/life management. I learned early on that doing equal amounts of work and play is impossible since each has moments of greater need. There have been times when my family's needs far exceeded my career needs, and so I suspended work in favor of my family. Other times, my work required me to do less for my family than I would have wished to do.

I've ended up believing that one should work hard when it's time to work and play hard when it's time to play. And the result, I feel, has been a pretty good balance. I'm both a good family man and a good professional.

Beware of staying either at work or at the party too long.



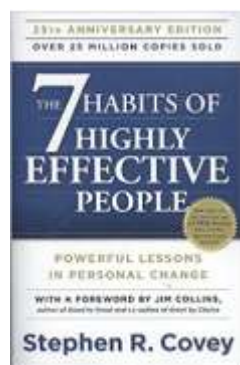
*Alice and I during our engagement, circa 1975.*



## What was a book that really made a difference for you as an adult?

A life-changing book? I have many.

The Old and New Testaments. When my mom told me not to ask Alice to convert to Catholicism, I asked why. Mom said, “Because she and her mom read and follow the Bible, and we can learn from them.” The Bible is an ageless primer on how to live a good life.



*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, by Stephen Covey. For my money, this is the secular version of the Bible. I try to follow these habits as closely as I try to follow the commandments.

*Man's Search for Meaning*, by Viktor Frankl, and *Night*, by Elie Wiesel: two extremely hard-to-read books that should be required for conscience formation. May we never forget the human cost of hatred and exclusion.

*Warmth of Other Suns* and *Caste*. These two Isabel Wilkerson books, the former fascinating, the latter soul-crushing, serve the purpose of reminding us of the stupidity of racism and selfishness.

*The Agony and the Ecstasy*, by Irving Stone: the one book historical fiction lovers (like me) can't miss.

*Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*, by John le Carré. The greatest spy novel by the best-of-all-time spy novel writer.

Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, and anything written by Carl Hiaasen, for when you just need a good laugh.

*When Everything You Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*. Rabbi Howard Kushner does his version of getting off the hedonic treadmill. I read this during a weekend away in 1989 and its simple, actionable thoughts are still with me.

*Factfulness*, by Swedish statistician Hans Rosling with Ola Rosling and Anna Rosling Rönnlund. Facts still exist. This nicely researched book compares some historical facts with what our media-drenched brains think of as facts. Science and history need not be altered to match one's political beliefs.

## What are your favorite musicians, bands, or albums?

Music is the foundation of my life. It has four functions that I will use to preface my answer to this great question.

**Laugh.** Laughter stimulated by music began for me with our Uncle Charley Fye, his children, and my own siblings. Summer nights and car rides became singalongs featuring old vaudeville songs such as “I Had But 50 Cents” and the “Donut Song.” Added to these were Kingston Trio’s “M.T.A.” and Irish classics such as “Mrs. Murphy’s Chowder.”

**Cry.** You can start here again with Irish classics such as “Danny Boy” and “Parting Glass,” underscoring our mood-swinging DNA. I cried cathartically in high school with the sad love songs, lamenting my own teen angst, and to this day am moved by church classics such as “Were You There” and “Be Not Afraid.” My dad would cry when he heard music that was beautiful, often instrumental such as “Laura’s Theme” from the movie *Dr. Zhivago*.

**Think.** Music has been huge in forming my conscience. What I consider folk music’s golden age occurred during my adolescence. Still today, the singer/songwriter genre drives my thoughts.

**Inspire.** I’m inspired by great musicians of every kind—not just the great poets who make me think but technically brilliant stuff.

Reflecting on these thoughts, here are my favorites.

- **Musicians.** Jimi Hendrix, Eric Clapton, Andre Segovia, Bela Fleck for technical prowess; Bob Dylan, Paul Simon, and Leonard Cohen for poetry and meaning.
- **Bands.** The Beatles, Cream, Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young; David Wilcox, Avett Brothers, Caamp
- **Albums.** *Revolver*, *White Album*, *Are You Experienced*, *Eat A Peach*, *Ziggy Stardust*, *Fragile*



## What are some of your favorite sounds?

- Water reaching the shore, whether at Lake Erie or on the many vacations we have spent on the ocean shores of California, Florida, and Ireland.
- The voices of the people I love. Nothing really compares, especially when they are children. I often sigh or smile when I hear them. I have a very strong memory of my mother's comforting, soft, peaceful voice.
- Music of any kind—except country, Irish country, heavy metal, and slowly played Catholic church music. Note: there are many great Catholic songs and hymns, but for some reason, most parish musicians play them like dirges.
- Real laughter, neither canned nor nervous. I particularly love to hear the sound of my wife Alice and grandson Noah, both of whom laugh without inhibition.
- Wind, particularly when I'm on a boat or motorcycle or sitting in darkness on a breezy summer night.

## What would you save if your house was on fire?



*One of our rescue cats, Petunia Picklebottom, better known as Tuna.*

Now that we have finished scanning the photo books and journals of our memories to digital safety, I have little to save. Alice and I have often said the reason we do not lock our home when we leave in the daytime is because there is nothing valuable in it then. We do lock our home at night, though, because people are in it. Those are our valuables.

My parents exemplified “travelling light.” Possessions belonged in their proper place in their mind, far less important than things like health and relationships. During the last 20 years of Mom's life, she would ask her kids and their spouses to take something with them whenever they left her home. She called it “giving with a warm hand.”

With that preamble, I can name four things I would save if I had time and my house was on fire: Alice, our cats Petunia (Tuna) and Sweet William (Willie), and my guitar.

## What's your favorite holiday tradition? Where does it come from?

Holiday traditions are the stuff that security and love are built on. The common thread of my favorite tradition is that people gather. Holidays are the ultimate excuse for being with those you love and who love you.

- **Summer barbecues.** The first tradition I recall remains a foundation of my childhood. Every summer I can remember, on Memorial Day, July 4<sup>th</sup>, and Labor Day weekends, my mom and dad put on a days-long celebration in our front yard. The base was the 25 people (four parents and 21 children) with the surnames Fye and McCarthy. As we grew up, the elder children brought friends and spouses. Those times remain a favorite memory of everyone who was there.
- **Birthdays.** My mom's simple tradition was built around "Today, you get whatever you want." The best part was that each of us got to choose dinner and dessert. Another birthday tradition was on your 16th, you got to put on a big party for all your friends.
- **Christmas.** On December 5th, Mom would have us put a shoe outside our bedroom door because the 6th was St. Nicholas Day. In the morning, "he" would have left candy and/or a small toy in the shoes. Also, our tree was brought home and decorated by us all on Christmas Eve (never before that day as is the current tradition). This became more joyful as the elder kids moved away because it meant they'd all be back by the time we were decorating. Another long-gone tradition is that our trees had plenty of tinsel—shiny, thin strips of decorative garland that mimic the effect of ice.
- **Easter.** For our very Catholic family, there was much more to Holy Week than coloring Easter eggs. We prayed the rosary together in the living room. On Good Friday, we were asked not to speak from noon to 3:00 pm. After attending Good Friday services, Mom would make hot cross buns, which we all loved. (Look it up.) Easter vigil on Saturday was when giving things up for Lent was over and a day spent primping for Easter Sunday. We boys all had to get haircuts and try on our clothes while Mom and the girls went shopping for hats and dresses. Of course, we went to confession mid-afternoon. On Easter morning, my dad put hair irons on the stove and curled the hair of each girl who wanted it done that year.

## What are your favorite possessions? Why?

My favorite possessions are my memories. Some of them are tangible: letters, emails, photos, and videos that I've kept over time that remind me of a life well-lived and love shared gladly. They spur feelings inside me that are exceeded only by the present moments I'm learning to appreciate more as I gain awareness and insight.

The last two generations of my family were wonderful writers. Their writings identify the source of traits I carry—both good and bad—and am passing on to those who follow. In the present generation, I'm saving writings from key times such as weddings and funerals, family trees, and missives from and to each other. In my own family, I collect key memories marked by cards, notes, and emails.

Recently, I pared about 5,000 photos down to 1,500 that are now saved to a website named [www.mccork.org](http://www.mccork.org). I plan to continue that process. Perhaps AI will improve the efficiency of this boring, detailed task. I'm collecting videos in the same manner.



The chorus of a song by David Wilcox underlines my feelings about possessions.

“Let me dive into the water  
Leave behind all that I’ve worked for  
Except what I remember and believe  
And when I stand on the farthest shore  
I will have all that I need.”



## Tell me about one of the best days you can remember.

My life has been so incredible that I must name many of the best days.

**October 27, 1952**, was the day of my birth. It was probably the best of all since I would not be writing this had it not occurred and because I hit the genetic jackpot.

**March 19, 1975**, I graduated from Ohio State and felt I'd achieved adulthood. The following Monday, I started work at the Republican Committee of Oakland County, Michigan, and never looked back.

**November 8, 1975**, was our wedding day. It's no cliché that I would not be at all who I am without Alice.

**September 27, 1979**: Timothy Patrick's birth. Alice and I had a bet on who guessed closest to the time of birth: a microwave for her or a guitar for me. A couple of hours after Tim showed up, Grandma and I were shopping for a microwave.

**December 16, 1980**, was Kevin Joseph's birth. We were entertaining a big advertising client for lunch at La Maisonette, a fancy restaurant in downtown Cincinnati, when I got the call that Alice was headed to the hospital. Never a day drinker, it was unnerving that I was in the delivery room with a martini on my breath.

**April 17, 1984**: Caitlin Marie's birth. Our only kid born in Cleveland (the other two were in Cincinnati at Christ Hospital), I remember specifically counting her fingers and toes and thanking God that we had a healthy girl. I also remember Alice's first words when we talked the next day: "I've got my little girl now. We're done."

**July 4, 1988**, was the day we started Contract Marketing, our first business venture. Alice and I spent the day printing, collating, and postmarking 165 new business introductions while Aunt Kathie and Uncle Skip took the kids to the Air and Space Museum for the day.

**May 14, 2007**: the day we sold WorkPlace Media (originally Contract Marketing) to a private equity company, Riverside. We had all our employees for a celebration lunch at Molinari's in Mentor, then took a limousine to Lola's in downtown Cleveland for a celebratory dinner. The big moment was when we got the call at about 5:30 p.m. that the money had been transferred. After that, it was all a blur.

**May 14, 2011:** Caitlin's wedding day. More than the day, I remember months of joyful planning and organizing that ended in a glorious week of celebration on Catawba Island, Ohio.

**October 1, 2011:** Timmy and Natalie's wedding party at Kirtland Country Club was a smash, and I got smashed. What I remember most is that everyone danced and sang all night to both polka and rock.

**June 23, 2012:** Kevin's wedding was a garden party in a beautiful home in fancy Westport, Connecticut. It belonged to his bride's grandmother, Rose, whose daughter Clare was his mother-in-law. A favorite memory was when Kevin honored his new family by playing and singing the Irish ballad, "My Lovely Rose of Clare." Kevin's Grandmother Bethel sang for him and his wife, Chiara, during the ceremony. Finally, I remember a hilarious debacle of a fireworks show.



*One of my best days ever: Timmy and Natalie's wedding, October 2011.*

**July 21, 2021:** The day we sold Raising Cane's of Ohio operating company back to the franchisor, culminating an 18-year odyssey with my son, Timmy, that resulted in several people (including me) becoming independently wealthy.

If I spent hours remembering other best days, they would all be family weddings, reunions, and funerals. While well over 60 events, each had something special about them that I can recall with great clarity.

## Having fun with you kids

Fun is a key yet often overlooked part of family bonding. The kinds of fun the five of us had together ran along the same lines as what I grew up with.

- **“Bored” games.** It’s a phrase well known in our family that started when kids were young with nothing to do on a rainy day. What began with Candy Land and Operation grew to LIFE, Monopoly, and Scrabble. Now we all enjoy Trivial Pursuit, Scattegories, and Sequence when we get together.
- **Card games.** The most beloved has always been Spoons, which is essentially musical chairs played on a tabletop. When it gets physical, it gets fun. UNO was known as Crazy Eights to us until Natalie brought her family’s UNO addiction; it’s now popular with all three generations. Finally, to fully become our friend and family, one must join us in games of euchre, rummy, or gin.
- **Outdoor sports and games.** All our kids, and now their kids, love being in and around the water. From pool games with the little ones to waterskiing and tubing as they grew older, the pictures in my mind are indelible. We were also attracted to volleyball, basketball, and other just-for-fun competitions.
- **Music.** From singalongs while riding in the car to getting out the guitar to get us all singing, music is a big form of fun for all five of us. The best of these times are still when Kevin or I pull out the guitar around a firepit, and everyone gets to choose songs we like to sing together.
- **Concerts.** Since concerts were something Alice and I enjoyed, we started the kids early. Each probably has a memory of their first concert, and since age 16, each of our three attend many concerts each year. We attend shows with them frequently, too. My favorites are when Kevin “is” the show.
- **“Cousin Grab Ass.”** This term, coined by my brother, Miller, covered the many times a year that my siblings’ 28 children were together. Running, yelling, playing, and fighting created noise and action. My Dad would ask, “What’s the greatest gift you can give a kid?” His answer? “Another kid.” And so it continues for another generation, as our six grands wait breathlessly for another CGA week or weekend.

The five of us are achievers. We are all intense. We all have good work ethics and love to accomplish things in our careers and communities. ‘Twas ever thus with my siblings and parents, so I thank goodness that they also taught us the importance of letting off steam and enjoying one another.

## Chapter 9: Middle Age and Beyond

A lot of big changes in your life happen between 30 and 60. My Dad liked to say that the 30s are for learning, the 40s are for earning, and the 50s are for sorting it all out.

### What were you like when you were 30?

In 1982, Alice and I celebrated our seventh anniversary of marriage. We had two little boys at the time: Timmy, who turned three that year, and Kevin, who turned two.

In March, we moved from Cincinnati to Cleveland to accommodate a change in my employment. I moved from Fahlgren and Ferris, where I had been an ad executive on the Ashland/Valvoline Oil account, to another ad agency, Lowe Marschalk, where I became the Director of Tires, Batteries, and Accessories (TBA) advertising for the Standard Oil account.

Our new home was on Allegheny Drive in Concord Township (Mentor). Our home was quite a bit nicer than I'd expected to enjoy this early in my life. We chose to live in Mentor to be within reach of Mom (74) and Dad (78) and have the kids within reach of my big fat Irish family.

We enrolled at St. Gabriel Parish. That year, we both did retreat weekends that changed our faith journeys and deeply embedded us in St. Gabe's growing community of families.

I weighed 225 pounds (I've been 180-190 mostly since then) and was a heavy cigarette smoker. I was establishing my reputation as a young man in a hurry in the corporate world, working 60-hour weeks at the agency and



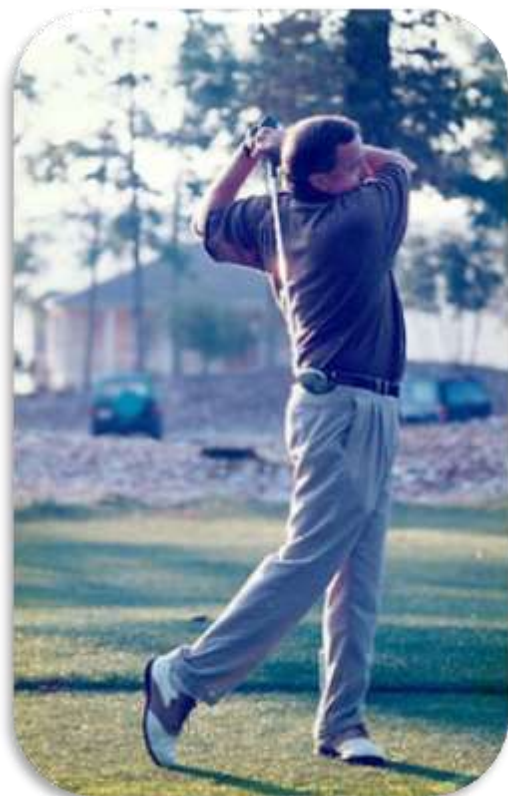
*In my 30s on a cruise with Alice, 1992.*



establishing (mostly) good relationships there (in Cleveland and NYC) and at Standard Oil (then SOHIO). We were a very high-profile account (amongst the top five in the entire company), which gave me exposure to our main office on Madison Avenue in NYC. I was learning from people with great skills and reputations in the national and network advertising business.

After dinner—at least on the weeknights I made it home in time—I would relieve Alice by taking the boys and their Big Wheels to the township park nearby. We spent hours on the swing sets or riding on the path around the park. In the winter, we took sleds to slide down the hills. A lovely memory.

Early stages of a successful career; beautiful wife and kids; fun community and family at hand... it was a heady time.



*Left: golfing around 1988.*

*Right: Me with Alice at the Service League winter ball, 2004.*





## What were you like when you were 50?

The year was 2003. I was a frustrating person to be around. My racing mind created tension for myself and those closest to me. Impatience, anger, and resentment remained frequent daily visitors. I appeared to those around me as a person with his pants on fire.

A few years before, I'd been diagnosed with dysthymic depression, a persistent form of the malady that required two and a half years of therapy and some major tools to cool my hot-running engine. My therapist said I was living a self-defeating existence by hoping that I could control others and then have them thank me for it. Medication, meditation, prayer, running, and music became my wellness mainstays, as they remain today. Therapy encouraged me to let go of my wife and children by learning patience and trust in their self-development while turning inward toward my own. The same attitude at work had me grudgingly letting go of closely managing the leadership team at WorkPlace Media.



*In my 50s, on a 2013 trip to Ireland with Timmy.*

WorkPlace was (finally) making very good money, and we were reinvesting most of it to prepare for the eventual sale of the business and to provide operating money for The Business of Good Foundation. We were also in the early stages of our journey of philanthropy, gaining traction in our sixth year of working and worshipping in the inner city of Cleveland. Our parish, St. Philip Neri at E. 82<sup>nd</sup> and St. Clair, became home to nine programs offering services to the neighborhood's poor.

All three of our kids were finding themselves, too. Timmy returned from Louisiana to Columbus, Ohio, to begin Raising Cane's first franchise business. Kevin moved to San Francisco and Caitlin to Farmington, New Mexico. Alice was successfully breaking into a gift basket business that helped her focus more on her own development now that the kids had flown the nest. Plus, Alice put on my best birthday celebration ever. It seems that my 50th year was a jumping-off platform for all our family members to begin developing themselves into the transparent, learning, giving, and forgiving people that we are today.

## What are your daily routines?

My mornings haven't varied for years.

- Turn coffee on
- Get cat food and fix bowls for Willie and Tuna
- Coffee now brewed, grab computer and retreat to the great room.
- Check my Outlook calendar to mentally prepare for meetings
- Read sports page, usually CBS Sports and Plain Dealer
- Morning spiritual reads: Daily Good, Daily Dharma, and Seth Godin, among others
- Ponder these while taking time to notice my breath
- Read *The New York Times*, *Bloomberg*, and *Economist* daily newsletters
- By now, I'm one hour and three cuppas into my day, so I transfer to the kitchen and set up my work at the kitchen table, switching to ice water for the rest of the day.
- Toast four small tortilla rounds and spread with fresh avocado
- Get to work in earnest, starting with responding to emails. Then transfer to my daily to-do list, which I keep on legal pads.



When I'm home, I also have an evening ritual that begins sometime after 5:00 p.m.

- Pour a beer for me and a glass of wine for Alice
- Sit at the kitchen table, playing my guitar and singing to her while she finishes her day's tasks, makes dinner, or reads
- Deal the cards for one game of gin and one game of casino while listening to a playlist on Sonos or Spotify. My record lifetime win/loss record? I'm currently down 12 games.
- Retire to the great room for dinner with television or a book

## What are the best parts of getting old?

By far the best part of getting old is learning how few things really matter. I look back on the thousands of things that I worried about and wonder why I wasted so much time and energy considering others' judgment and opinions of me.

I also love the slowing of old age, taking my time to savor moments that I did not enjoy as much as a young man. Perhaps because I feel good about the life I've led so far and the people I'm surrounded by, I'm experiencing the opposite of the grumpiness I expected and see in other aging people. My overwhelming attitude is gratitude.

Finally, the impulsiveness and impatience I've long been known for is fading. There is a song by Ryan Montbleau whose title I strive to be: "75 and Sunny."

## What are the most challenging parts of getting old?

Movement is the primary challenge of getting old. That's why I use stretch bands, and I jog a few miles every other day. I want to postpone the inevitable difficulties I will have with mobility. Another challenge that occasionally makes me a grumpy old man is being typecast by younger people. I guess my white hair leads some to think I'm already feeble, and that pisses me off.

## How do you deal with pain, both physical and mental?

I am Alice's reverse in physical pain tolerance; I'm a baby. I watched her live through two years of intense pain after breaking her ankle badly and finally getting it replaced. If I even turn an ankle running, I'm off looking for my mommy to kiss it and make it feel better. Same with mental pain. I had a bad experience with my sister's children a few months ago, and I'm still living in regret, thinking about what I might have done differently.

I'm hopeful that each of you will learn to take pain as opportunities to learn. I had to turn and face my way of dealing with pain at about age 40, when I entered therapy. Here's what I learned.

- Pain is never really overcome. Those who try to bull through it or medicate it are ultimately only worse for trying that path.
- Therapy, and any counseling from professional or personal trustees, is mostly a process of learning about oneself. In my case, I needed convincing that, rather than the world around me causing my pain, my enemy was me. How I act and react to people and the world around me sets the tone for who I am.
- I had to face things like shame from my childhood, bad habits I'd acquired, and the pain that I caused other people. That which you can't recognize, you can't overcome.
- Upon my dismissal, my counselor recommended I take up mindfulness meditation. To this day, it is the second most important practice I cling to for my mental health. #1 is my Christian Catholic faith.
- Mindfulness—in my case Vipassana (known as bare attention) meditation—brings me simply to each moment I'm living. There is a saying in our practice that "pain is mandatory; suffering is optional." Our practice of bare attention helps us realize five hindrances to healthy living: clinging, pushing away, anxiousness or restlessness, torpor (not caring), and doubt. All of these are thoughts, not things. They appear, then go away—if you let them.
- For me, the most important thing mindfulness teaches is to pause between stimulus and response. If I pause, I increase the chances that I will respond more skillfully.

The people I studied under included Jon Kabat-Zinn, who has written many books and, most interestingly, started his research by establishing a medical clinic centered on stress reduction at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Forty years later, the research is vast and proves beyond any reasonable doubt that both physical and mental pain can be relieved by meditative practices.

## Are you scared of dying?

I remember being overwhelmed by the fear of dying as a younger person. The traditions of my Catholic faith encourage focus on the afterlife, and by nature, I am an intense personality. Put those together with a zest for living and experiencing all that I saw my elder siblings go through, and I'd say the thought of dying early paralyzed me until I was at least 55 years old.

Now my thoughts are quite different. While few welcome death, and I'm no exception, I am well with my soul on the matter. One reason, of course, is that I do believe Jesus's death precedes my entrance to eternity. I am saved. And at least as importantly, and more so in the Judaic tradition, I believe that a life well-lived is its own reward.

## What do you think happens after we die?

We go to heaven. What is heaven? A state that, while long depicted in word and art, is impossible to describe. My favorite Bible passage is Philippians 4:4-7, which advises that we can achieve "...a peace that transcends all human understanding." That is the heaven I seek while I'm here and beyond. At birth, our existence begins, and as my faith teaches me, it remains throughout eternity.

**"I am convinced that it is not the fear of death, of our lives ending that haunts our sleep so much as the fear... that as far as the world is concerned, we might as well never have lived."**

–Rabbi Harold Kushner,  
*When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*



## Watching you all get older

It's a privilege of old age to watch your kids and grandkids develop, but I often feel like the native Americans must have felt when they watched Chris Columbus "discover" America. That is, I've been doing what they are now doing for many years, so it's funny to have them tell me of their discoveries.

My best observations are rich in gratitude and forgiveness. In earlier years, my energy was my contribution; today, my wisdom is the best I can offer. Here are some notes.

- Each of you has confronted major setbacks.
- I'm thankful that I've been around this long. I've now witnessed each of you in your 40s. It's a privilege I do not take lightly.
- Proving heredity, you are each starting to confront both mental and physical changes that come with aging McCarthys/Bethels.
- The edges of your personalities are (finally) fading. Sibling rivalry is good until it's not.
- Your view of life changed dramatically when you became parents, just as ours did.
- You are each settled in your ways, but I hope not so much as to become narrow-minded. It's a fear I still have for myself since life's essence is change.

My dad loved to say, "It's a different show every day," and that is so, so true. I've now seen Rose enter young womanhood (gracefully so far). Noah looks like he may grow to be a big man physically while recognizing his unique talents. Rowan stuns me with his activity, a guy who just loves to be doing something... anything. Teague is an athlete, also has high energy, and is as engaging as Rowan and Rose. Stella runs to catch up and has the skills to make me guess she will surpass most of them athletically. She and Rowan also demonstrate the highest degree of self-confidence. And February 3<sup>rd</sup> was the debut of the Isla Maeve show. Every time we see each of them, we notice something new.

## Chapter 10: What Makes for a Life Well-Lived?

Life is a finite thing. As I recognized this, everything opened up for me. I read a book titled *4,000 Weeks* (by Oliver Burkeman), which is precisely how many weeks we live if we make it to 80 years old. And since time is precious, this final chapter of my book will answer specific questions about life. Here is my summary of what made my life worth living.

- My higher power. For me, this is God, made human in the form of Jesus Christ. My relationship with my God formed all that follows.
- My destiny. In my faith, we are promised eternity in return for a life well-lived. If nothing else, it is a worthwhile template for my ambitions.
- My higher purpose. All worthy lives are built around a higher purpose, whether it be a mother whose child required lifelong care or a scientist whose discovery changed the trajectory of the world. My higher purpose is serving others in my unique and pragmatic manner.
- My lasting relationships. The epitaph I would most like to see engraved on my tombstone would be, “Good son, good brother, good dad, good husband, good grampa, good workmate, and good friend.”
- My wealth. To my everlasting surprise, it turned into generational wealth that I recognized early was best and most enjoyably used in the cause of social justice.

## How has your life turned out differently than you imagined it would?

Sitting in Papa Joe's Pizza in 1974, my college roommate Jack Egan and I imagined our lives out loud. I expect most of my imaginings regarded my family, but I specifically recall a dream of making \$40,000 a year by age 40. I also remember saying that after a few years elsewhere, I wanted to return to my hometown and live on Lake Erie. These and all my other dreams have been reached and exceeded.

- ✓ The dream of a beautiful, smart, loving wife I would grow old with... check.
- ✓ Having ten children who could recreate the loving chaos I grew up with... check, kind of, since while only three, they've provided plenty of loving chaos.
- ✓ That I would live long enough to know and enjoy my grandchildren... check. Six to date, who provide extreme joy with very little responsibility on our part. My friend Joe Gibson once called grandchildren "the dessert to our lives." He added, "And you and I had a pretty good dinner, too, McCarthy."
- ✓ That I would perform music professionally... check, kind of, since I've enjoyed "playing out" for money, served as a paid music director for three faith communities, and soloed to large crowds at three major American cathedrals.
- ✓ That I would teach professionally... check, here again, sort of. I've been paid to teach advertising both for the Ad Association and for Kent State University (for three years to pay our rent while starting our business). I still guest lecture every semester at Ohio State's Fisher School, and I spent seven years on the Vistage Speaker national circuit, completing 223 three- to four-hour gigs covering most major US cities.
- ✓ I wanted to build a base of knowledge that would cause me to be sought after as an advisor... check.



*Presenting a commencement address at Ohio State's Fisher Business School, 2015.*

What did I not fully imagine? That my love could continue to grow as it does for Alice, my children and theirs, and my friends and siblings. I remember wanting to fill my cup with love. I never expected that the cup would keep overflowing into my seventies.

## What has made your faith stronger?

The Bible uses gardening metaphorically, and that works well for me in this case.

**Planting.** My parents were both deeply faithful people who followed all the traditions of the times. Twelve years of Catholic education also had a huge impact. By high school, I was learning to sort Catholic doctrine from Catholic practice, which is entirely faith, hope, and love.

**Tending.** When I was about 25, Dad visited me in Michigan. We went to morning mass one day, and afterward, he complimented the priest and asked him, “Where did you get your faith?” The priest answered, “It was a gift from my parents.” That thought stuck with me. For the rest of my parents’ lives, I initiated conversations with each about their spiritual views. Weeding, watering, and nurturing faith requires a great deal of attention. In my case, it requires inspiration such as daily prayer and readings, attention at services (of any religion), and watching people’s actions to notice their demonstrations of faith. I’ve been close with and in service to many priests, nuns, and non-profit organization heads because seeing them give themselves to others so freely shines a light on my path.

**Harvesting.** I feel like I experienced two major harvests that renewed my faith.

- First, in 1982, when our boys were very young and Caitlin was not even born, I was invited to Christ Renews His Parish, a weekend retreat program at St. Gabriel faith community in Mentor, Ohio. We had just joined. I still have the folder with all the materials in it from that and the follow-up retreat six months later. The experience deeply affected me and was the beginning of a serious practice I still follow. It also instigated my entry into music ministry; I grew as a guitarist and cantor for 25 years. Each time I played and sang, I felt (and still feel) like I’m evangelizing my love for Jesus Christ, and more importantly, my commitment to faith, hope, and charity. It is said that when we sing, we pray twice.
- In 1997, we joined a new parish, Divine Word, in Kirtland, Ohio. I continued my music ministry as director, and I approached our pastor, Norm Smith, about how I might be of further service. That began a 10-year journey into the inner city of Cleveland, specifically St. Philip Neri parish at 82nd and St. Clair. There, we built many programs for the poor and the voiceless and were in turn inspired by those we served. I have many Fr. Smith stories, but the one I hold most dearly is when he told a grieving widower, “No, I cannot give you spiritual sugar to explain Judy’s death, but I can promise that I will walk in faith with you through this pain.” The refrain of one of my favorite hymns says, “The harvest is plenty, laborers are few; come with me into the fields. Your arms will grow weary, your shoes will wear thin; come with me into the fields.”

## Faith: the longest project

The kids asked me about the longest project I've ever worked on. "Project" could mean a lot of things, so I will consider this broadly. As of 2024, I've spent:

- 7 years building a private investment firm, Cara Zale
- 18 years growing Raising Cane's
- 19 years growing WorkPlace Media
- 26 years building The Business of Good Foundation
- 27 years playing fantasy sports
- 39 years running three miles every other day
- 49 years of marriage
- 55 years of playing music



*The interior of Mother of Sorrows church I grew up in, circa 1956.*

I'd say the longest project is the one I'm still working on: my faith journey. Since recognizing a higher power in Sunday church as a little boy, it's been a long and winding road. As a young teen, I fiercely considered becoming a priest, but then I discovered my interest in girls. My college years were a lost period, as I practiced only when I was home or with my family. The next fierce period started with the birth of our children and joining vibrant faith communities in Birmingham, Michigan, and Cincinnati and Mentor in Ohio.

My re-entry into church music ministry in 1982, I think, was the longest fuse lit in my Roman Catholicism. I worked diligently and enjoyed the fruits of that labor by (still) playing meaningful music at meaningful events 40 years later.

Since 1995, my faith journey has been significantly broadened through the practice of meditation. The primary outcome has been learning contemplative theory from thought leaders of many faiths, including Buddhist, Judaic, Protestant, and Catholic approaches. The most recent development of my faith project is that while I practice one faith, I believe that all faithful people—in fact, all people of compassion—are holy.



## What is social justice? What does it mean to you? Is it essential to a life well-lived?

My best definition of social justice is outlined in the Declaration of Independence: that all humans are created equal and are entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Any work I've done in my life in favor of that ideal gives me pride, and things I've done that were unjust cause me regret. The broadest forms of social justice are beyond the scope I've chosen to pursue. Advocacy is something I admire but have only done for individuals. That is, great advocates—such as King, Keller, Eleanor Roosevelt, DuBois, Mother Theresa, and Morrow-Lindbergh—acted bravely to broaden America's thinking, most often regarding equality. My political skills are suspect, but even more so, I lack the kind of mental toughness and physical courage those people demonstrated in their lifetimes.

Dedicating my life to social justice started in my own business. Having 15 years of experience in toxic business atmospheres that favored political skill over competence, I focused on the self-development of every one of the 4,000+ employees we've had over time. Helping everyone find their place within our companies regardless of their caste, education, or prior experience became a social obligation and a damn good business strategy. It's harder to do, but great cultures power great performance.

As my financial needs declined at the turn of the century, I began building a structure for social change, specifically focused on the working poor. While directly serving the poor in Cleveland's inner city, I learned that most programs are aimed at short-term solutions to poverty. I realized that the longest-term solutions are rooted in education and entrepreneurship. Just a job feeds short-term needs, and thankfully the safety net provides short-term needs. Instead, we focus on college and vocational training and aiding un-bankable entrepreneurs to establish and grow their own businesses, which changes lives forever. Our work provides the working poor the opportunity to retain the fruits of their labor.

More on this can be found in my other writings, speeches, and videos at [www.thebusinessofgood.org](http://www.thebusinessofgood.org).

## What personal expectations do you hold for yourself?

Thank goodness that at 72, I'm finally figuring out that my personal expectations of myself are unachievable. It has taken many years to unwind my intense quest for perfection. On one hand, I regret that my own expectations negatively affected my relationships with many people over the years. On the other hand, I believe I've accumulated a circle of mutual respect with others who enjoy pursuing, in Abraham Lincoln's words, "the better angels of our nature."

A few broad concepts that describe my expectations for myself follow.

- **I strive to become my best self.** Among many experiences that led to this posture was the time I said things in an important presentation as a young advertising executive that mimicked my boss and business hero, Jim Johnson. Jim confronted me in the hallway after the presentation and said, "What the hell was that?" I said, "I thought you'd be proud of me," to which he responded, "My job is not to make you the best Jim Johnson you can be; it's to make you the best Tim McCarthy you can be." That thought never left me, and I've applied it ever since, both to myself and those I work with.
- **Curiosity** is the coal that feeds the fire that moves my engine forward. My parents' relentless pursuit of knowledge was not lost on me. "The mind stretched to a new idea never returns to its original dimension," said Oliver Wendell Holmes. I feel more alive when I'm learning and most useful when I've accomplished something unexpected. This ranges from playing a new song well to winning a business battle to reading to understand more about heuristics (how the mind works). It also applies to making my grandchildren laugh and learning anything new.
- Above all, I strive to **be useful**, a concept perfectly contained in this, my favorite quote of all time, from George Bernard Shaw. *"This is the true joy in life: being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one. Being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it what I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."*

## Who have been your heroes? Who are you a hero to?

I am incredibly uncomfortable with the term *hero*. It's too much responsibility for this guy. It would wear me out trying to live up to others' distorted view of my work.

Most of the people who are my heroes are on the front lines of serving individuals who are fighting their way through social disadvantages, such as generational poverty, social stigma, physical or mental disability, and former incarceration. They have the end in mind but not the means, and that seems to be where I fit. Upon being thanked for time or financial support, I often tell them, "My work on your strategy and financial investments are the easy parts. Your work is where the rubber meets the road."

As a young advertising guy, I read a suggestion in an Ad Age column that we should all have a *pride file*: somewhere to keep items that remind us of the better angel in our nature.

I'm now 45 years into keeping a pride file. I still look back at them to encourage my growth in giving. Early on, it contained things I'd written or published—quality advertising I'd been a part of creating, for example. Later, it contained more communications from people to whom I'd lent a hand. My life has been a series of cycles both vicious and virtuous. A pride file is one method to keep track of my progress on the latter.

Who am I a hero to? If I am a hero to anyone, I wish that it would be because they see me as a person walking through the world looking for people to help.

*My hero, Rich Clark,  
founder of St. Martin de Porres High School in Cleveland, 2021.*



## What would you consider your motto?

**“Faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love.”** I was taught that this verse from the Bible—1 Corinthians 13:13—is the essential teaching of Catholic Christianity. Sixty-plus years later, the phrase incrementally grows in my heart and mind as my purpose and method for living. Each day, I remember to make my morning offering, usually when I’m running and often accompanied by silently reciting the rosary. I contemplate what each word means.

- **Faith:** that I may continue to believe in what I cannot see. I nurture this gift from God and my parents by practicing it by believing in myself and those around me in service to our communities, reflecting that we see God in this life only in and through each other.
- **Hope:** instead of praying for results, I ask for strength to live with my trials and that I see and strive for better outcomes for myself and those around me. Most of all, I wish to trade anxiety for hope as much as I can remember to do so.
- **Love:** that I may love without compensation. I also contemplate the need to love myself, and that only by letting go of my own shame and regret can I allow those around me to do the same.

## What do you think is the meaning of life?

Learning life’s meaning has been a passion of mine for as long as I can remember. My dad was a philosopher, so I guess I come by it naturally. Here are my thoughts on meaning.

- Meaning is the outcome, never the goal, of service to others. Like happiness and love, targeting meaning is like grabbing mercury; happiness, love, and meaning are the byproducts of sharing.
- Meaning is just as reciprocal as philanthropy. That is, meaning and giving are never one-way. By helping others find their meaning, I find mine.
- Service, in its many forms, creates meaning and interdependence in church, family, neighborhood, business, government, and globally.

And at this moment, my dear ones, **you** express both the meaning and the purpose of my life.

## How will *you* live?

To date, I've lived my life well. I hope these stories shine some light on your own path to a good life. I am, after all, your ancestor.

If I had only thirty seconds to say something to the McCarthys I will never know, it would be:

- It takes a lifetime to learn to live in your own skin. Recognize who you are and work each day at becoming something better.
- Become immersed in your community. Everything you will learn will be from outside your "self."
- The surest way to receive is to give.

How will you live?

That is entirely up to you.

"Everyone has it within them to say,  
"This is who I am today, that I shall be tomorrow.'"

–Louis L'Amour

