

Susan "Sue" O'Neal's Story

March 2019

Prelude: Susan "Sue" Pauline (LaFrance) O'Neal was of French Canadian descent and her heritage can be traced back to a pair of original settlers of New France, now Canada, Anne Gillaume and François Dubois dit LaFrance. Her family made their way across Canada and into New England just a few generations before she was born. Her ancestor was a Filles du roi, Daughter of the King, traveling to Canada, which was paid for by King Louis XIV of France.

The Early Years

I was born on March 2, 1943 at St. Luke's Hospital in New Bedford, Massachusetts, in the midst of World War II. At the time Mom (Pauline LaFrance) and Dad (Ed LaFrance) lived in an apartment on Purchase Street in New Bedford. My mom was an only child who love to play violin, dance, sing and really enjoyed school. She never had the chance to finish high school, something she always told me she regretted. My parents met while my mom attended New Bedford High School and my dad who was four years older and worked in advertising and as a DJ at a local radio station, while he was in the National Guard.

My parents were married in December of 1941. Right after mom got pregnant with me, my dad joined the US Army and was sent to the South Pacific to help fight in the war. He came back after getting malaria and developing asthma. My father was a dreamer, artist and worked as a salesman most of his life. I remember he was not very nice to my mom and I remember her talking to me about it at a very young age.

Mom was soon pregnant again with my brother Ed, after he returned from the war. He was born twenty-one months after me. My dad went away to art school at the Rhode Island School of Design on the GI Bill and I remember it just being my mom, my brother and me for a while. Mom was working when Dad was at school studying acting. I remembered him playing Henry Higgins in Pygmalion (the predecessor of My Fair Lady). I also remember that Mom and Dad were having marital problems during this time, which caused me to assume more responsibilities at home. Mom confided in me too much for my age, which meant that I knew too much. In retrospect, I feel that was unfortunate because I felt I needed to take sides regarding relationship issues that I did not fully understand. The story that I remember the most, was the day mom came back after trying to surprise her husband at school to find him in the bathtub with another woman. Mom was so upset, but somehow, they worked through it. My parents did not always get along, but they stayed married until he died.

I was a pretty quiet child, not speaking until around the age of two, but when I did speak, I did so in complete sentences. I might not have started talking at a young age, but I was walking by the age of 9 months and my mom said I was on the go ever since. I remember my mom could sew really well and would make my clothes until I was old enough to make my own. I also remember learning to read very young and it seemed like I always had a book in my hand.

Our family then moved to East Fairhaven, Massachusetts, one town from where I was born. Mom and Dad bought a two-family house, with financial support from my Mom's parents. Our family lived downstairs, while my grands-parents lived on the second floor. I remember a few details about the house, such as there being no hot water. Our hot water came from heating water in a pot on the stove. A gas stove heated the downstairs, while a kerosene stove upstairs provided limited heat. My room had no heat, so I remember always being cold during the winter. When I got too cold, I would sleep on a couch near the kerosene stove.

My grand-père (Mom's dad), Delphis Bourbeau worked as a butcher at the local A & P. I remember that he took a bath only once a year and smelled to high heaven most of the time. It was a family joke. Somehow, he still had girlfriends while he was married. He would drive them around in his fancy car even where Mom and Grandma would see them drive by, as my mom and grand-mère walked to the movie theatre. I remember Mom being pretty upset with my grand-père about it. One of my grand-père girlfriends had the name Lillian, the same name as my Mom (Lillian Pauline Bourbeau LaFrance) and was said to be named after her. Mom has always gone by the name Pauline which was her middle name rather than Lillian, knowing her name's history.

At the time Mom had two jobs, she worked in a shoe factory and a pizza parlor and my Mom's mom, Yvonne Bourbeau (Grand-mère) worked in a factory setting strings on a knitting machine at a silk factory. She bought me little paper dolls quite often from the local 5 and dime store. She had broken English, more comfortable speaking French. Later in life, she had mental issues, I remember she would yell out her window at the kids playing in the street to go away. Her mom, my great grandmother, died when she was 16 years old. She had Alzheimer's when she became old and she would wander around.

We would cook and eat dinner together almost every night. Money was very tight, but with my grand-père being a butcher, we had the luxury of meat once a week. My mom was a good cook and I remember her making pot roast, meatballs, vegetables of all kinds and baked beans. My dad was more adventurous in the kitchen making some really weird stuff. Sometimes it was really good and sometimes it was not so good.

One of my earliest memories around the age of four, was being allowed to go to the grocery store across the street from our apartment by myself to get food for

dinner. Mom would put the money in a handkerchief and fold it up for me to carry. I would wait out by the street until Mom would open the window and look out for cars on the street. She would give me the all-clear and I would cross the street by myself. The reverse would happen when coming back. I would wait for her to come to the window and give me permission to cross the street come home. I loved to help in the kitchen and remember asking a lot of questions.

Shortly after moving to East Fairhaven, when I was four, I met Edna (Bradford) Cushing. She was related to Massachusetts Governor Bradford; whose descendants were said to have come to America on the Mayflower. We became best friends – and at 76 are still friends. We have been in touch over the years, Edna now lives in Naples, Florida. At the time, I remember that Edna's father was very religious and was opposed to things like dancing and playing games, especially on Sundays. One exception was his approval of square dancing, so we started square dancing and eventually we were part of a local troupe that performed in various places. We were pretty good dancers – and I loved it.

My brother Peter was born in 1947, five years after I was born. Ed and I already had things figured out and now we had a little brother to deal with. Ed was pretty laid back and funny and Peter thought he was funny, but he was more of a prankster. My brothers loved to play baseball and we always had a group of friends around. Ed was the best at making friends.

My Dad's parents, Grandma Dora and P  p   Pete (Joseph Rosario LaFrance) lived in Fairhaven. I am not sure why we called him P  p   Pete, but we all did. He was the oldest of eight children. My dad had 4 sisters (Pauline, Dora, Rose and Clair and he had 3 brothers (Joseph, Raymond and Merrill). I remember that my Aunt Dora LaFrance, who was a big-time model in a department store. She never got married or had any children that I am aware of. Then there was Dad's brother Joe who also lived in California. I remember that he spent some time in prison for some nasty things that I do not remember. He was a better man when he got out. My Aunt Rose was my very favorite aunt and I really liked my Uncle Raymond who we spent time with even after I grew up. We did not see all of our family that often, but I always had a few favorites.

Whenever we were with my dad's parents, I remember my P  p   Pete would say "Did you clean your ears?" every time I went outside to play.

My dad's side of the family had family also had connections near San Diego California. His dad used to buy houses, fix them up and would sell them. He was really handy with tools and so was my dad. I think he did a lot of work on their house in Massachusetts. They eventually moved to California where he worked at the shipyard as a steam fitter in the belly of a ship. My grand-m  re, Dora, was very religious. Both sides of my family were catholic and my mom would take us to church. I got my first communion and confirmation and remember my pretty

white outfits. Grand-mère Dora loved to cook and would even make meals for the priests in her parish and helped them in all sorts of ways. She was a great cook, especially making cakes, pies, stew and big family dinners. I loved to watch her in the kitchen, as questions and learn all I could, she was an inspiration to me.

I am pretty sure I would have been considered a good girl as a child. I started taking care of my brothers when I was ten and while Mom was at work. I would also help with dinner and anything else my mom needed me to do. One fond memory was the Morris family that lived across the street from our house. We would stay with them until Mom came home from work many days. They were Afro-American and they were so nice to me. I was introduced to integration early and to this day never can understand why people do not like people of other races.

As I stated earlier, my brother Ed (actually Edmond) was born twenty-one months after me. From back as far as I can remember, Ed was a good kid. He was kind, easy-going and everyone's friend. Above all, we were "best friends" throughout our childhood. Ed was a good friend my whole life, until he died of leukemia when he was 67. Ed went into the service, Air Force and was an intelligence agent. He used to call my mom every day until she died and after that he started calling me. I really enjoyed when he called. He loved to tell jokes and would make me laugh. I remember attending his first wedding to Patty in Texas. They had two children, Joy and Preston. Ed later married Donna who had three children, Gina, Angelo and Anthony. After Ed died, Donna started checking in on me.

My littlest brother, seemed to always cause me trouble, he even ate the cardboard food from a play kitchen set. When I was older and dating Tom, he would call and tell my mom if he saw us out in the car. He liked to tell jokes too. After college he married his wife, Christine and they had two daughters, Suzanne and Lauren. He still lives in Freehold, New Jersey, where we moved and went to High School.

Before moving to New Jersey, I attended East Fair Haven School until I went to high school. I remember walking to school every day and it being very cold during the winters in Massachusetts. I liked school and was a good student, but I did not like Miss Willoughby, because she was mean. I did like my other teachers, especially Mrs. Morrow, who was my favorite. I recall that Mrs. Morrow also gave me violin lessons for a couple of years. I played the violin for several years, but finally gave it up because I could not coordinate my two arms very well. I loved music, but never really played an instrument.

I then went to Fair Haven High School. I continued to love school and was a good student. I was also still square dancing, which I loved. Edna and I danced in a gazebo in Mattapoisett and I remember people watching us.

As time passed, I assumed more responsibilities at home. I started dinner for the family every night while Mom was at work and that was the beginning of my interest in and passion for cooking. Mom also taught me how to sew and I made nearly all my clothes. I loved that and was good at it.

As I have said before, I always loved school but was shook up when I learned that Dad accepted a job in Freehold, New Jersey, which meant we had to move. We moved at the end on my freshman year in high school. I was nervous about what would be next.

The only trips I recall were car rides to visit Uncle Charlie Beaudry, grand-mère's brother, and Aunt Gertrude every other year. He was a barber and they never had any children. It was a long 2-hour ride, seemingly longer, because we often would have flat tires. On the alternate years they would travel to visit us. When they came to visit, we would always celebrate with a big clambake serving steamed clams cooked in a pit in the backyard and I remember the menu also included seaweed, French bread, corn and potatoes. I remember Grand-père making the table using his old Craftsman tools. I also remember that I had to sleep on the floor when they came because space was so limited.

Move to New Jersey

I was worried about leaving my surroundings in New England, but it was fortunate that our move to New Jersey was in the summer, which made the transfer to a new school tolerable. I started learning all I could about my new school, Freehold High School, and was happy to learn that there were many more courses and activities than my previous school. Even before the new school year started, my sewing continued and I started babysitting in addition to taking care of my brothers, while Mom worked.

When school started in the fall, I seemed to fit right in and met lots of nice people. Soon I joined the Thespian Club and remember being in one play, "Androcles and the Lion" and was proud of my one speaking line "I shall be the fish." That play was the end of my acting career, but I excelled at my other responsibility in the club, sewing and making costumes. In school, I enjoyed studying languages including Latin and French, but the subject I did not enjoy very much was math. I was also afraid of talking in front of other people, which I got much better at when I was older. I remember Mrs. English, my math teacher, as one of my favorites, even though math was not my thing. As years passed my path with Mrs. English's would cross again, which will be noted later.

My first date in high school was with Tony Miller, who turned out to be totally boring. I remember I went with Tony to New York City by bus to see a Broadway play, which was not very far from Freehold. I pretended to fall asleep on the way home because he was so boring. That was my only date with Tony, except for going to the Junior Prom with him later in the school year.

After that, I dated another Tony in my class, Tony Cipriano. He was nice and his parents I remember thinking his parents were rich. We dated a couple of years into college. Tony went to Penn State, so it became a distant relationship. I remember taking a bus to Penn State to go to a football game with Tony, which was fun. He later dropped me for someone else and I was devastated.

I did not know him, but Bruce Springsteen also went to Freehold High School. He was behind me in school a few years, but I do remember that he played in a band in places in Asbury Park at the shore.

In high school my best friend was Barbara Kawalski. We palled around the entire time we were in school. While in high school, I still had a lot of responsibility at home taking care of my brothers. Mom worked full time so now I was responsible for preparing most meals at home. She worked for the Asbury Park Press as manager of the Freehold office. She really liked working there and was very good with numbers.

I did well in school but it was finally time to graduate and the ceremony was held at the Freehold Raceway which was widely known for trotter and pacer horse racing. I never went to a race – it was not my thing.

I also worked at the Asberry Park Press for a short time, as a telephone solicitor, and I hated it. I worked as a docent at the Freehold Battleground Museum and for the Norkus Market, a local grocery store that was owned by one of our neighbors. My niece who remained in Freehold after college would also work for them. I was also asked to babysat for the Norkus children. Later, Donny and Jerry Norkus would be good friends of my brother Peter.

I always assumed I would go to college, but was never sure it would be possible, because we did not have the financial resources. I applied for a scholarship to Douglass College, the women's division of Rutgers University, in New Brunswick, NJ, in my junior year of high school and was notified that I got a full scholarship for tuition. I have to thank Mom for believing in me and encouraging me to be optimistic. I remember that Dad was too busy playing golf and other activities to care much, but I was thrilled – and that leads to the next chapter of my life.

College

The plan was for me to commute to college the first year and live on campus full time for the remaining years. To prepare for college, I worked and saved money for expenses. Besides babysitting and working at the grocery store, I starting working in the dietary department at Marlboro State Mental Hospital. I did all kinds of work. Miss Arrington was the head dietitian and she became my mentor. I know it sounds strange, but it was one of my favorite jobs and I loved the people I worked with at the hospital.

My vision when I started college was to be the best home economist ever. When I was not in class, I studied either at the library or the student union. New friends I made tried to coax me to play cards during my spare time, but I refused because I wanted to stay focused on my studies. My best friend at school was Sue Calabrese. We were in many of the same classes, planned to take the same major and had a lot of interests in common except that her family was quite wealthy. One extracurricular activity I participated in was archery, but that did not last very long, because I could not get the hang of it. I also remember playing field hockey in the cold grass, which I did not like.

I became aware of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) soon after starting college. It was a group that was focused on promoting equity for women and girls through education and research, things I really believe in. I could not afford to join the AAUW student chapter at Douglass, but I loved the organization, which became an important part of my life. More about that later.

The plan to live on campus the second year, which had been promised to me became an issue at home. Mom was in favor of it but Dad was not so sure. He thought it would be a waste of money. Fortunately, Mom's fortitude prevailed and I was excited, I would move from Freehold to New Brunswick.

I moved into Gibbons Hall, with Sue Calabrese's encouragement, we roomed together, a house for 18 students. It was ironic, but 6 of the 18 women we lived with had the name Sue, Susan or Suzanne. That really will make a difference very soon.

I ate dinners at the campus cafeteria, where the rule was that all women had to wear a skirt for dinner. I remember that resulted in some crazy outfits at times. I was still very shy about speaking in public but I received some good coaching from Mrs. English, my math professor. She was the same person that previously taught at Freehold High School and was a mentor. She also helped me improve my math skills to some extent, but I never became proficient in that area. We stayed in touch throughout my college career and my confidence in speaking improved over time, with her encouragement.

I met a guy from Rutgers, Jerry Hoogerheide, at the Rutgers library, which was across the city. He offered me a ride, along with a friend of mine, back to our house on campus. That led to the two of us dating for a couple of months, I remember one time he drove me home to Freehold. While there he was talking to my brother Peter about stuff and told him how he lost his leg in a train accident. I had been dating him several weeks and did not know that he had a wooden leg! I was okay with that, but then found that his parents were very strict Dutch Reform and had customs I found very weird. She wore a snood and high collar. Anyhow, that relationship did not last long.

Early in my sophomore year, my old friend Barbara from Freehold came to campus one weekend. We decided to go a mixer with the guys at Rutgers at the Douglass student union. At the mixer, I met a guy, Tom O'Neal, who asked me to dance a couple of times. He was a student at Rutgers and was there with one of his roommates who was on the Rutgers football team. I remember that they lost the game that day. We had a good time and I was sure I would hear from him soon, but it took him several weeks.

He had called to invite me to a Rutgers football game the next week and I accepted his invitation. There were just two small problems, I was not sure I could remember what he looked like and he was coming to a house with lots of Sues. I found out later that neither of us had a good memory and we both forgot what each other looked like. Our house was also one of maybe twelve houses that all looked the same, in the community. To solve this, my roommate Sue helped by standing on a chair and looking out a tall window on the second floor. She was watching to see each person that was coming to the house. I remember her yelling out every time a guy passed by. There were only two Sues home at the time, so I was pretty sure we would figure it out. Finally, Tom came to the front door, asked for Sue and everything worked out!

We went to the game and sat in a section with Tom's fraternity, Alpha Chi Rho. At that time, going to games was more social than the game itself. Guys dressed up, wearing ties and jackets and the girls dressed like they were going on a date. I remember having my first alcoholic beverage, a Bloody Mary, which Tom happened to bring with him. This is one of my favorite drinks to this day. After that, we went back to the fraternity house, where the party continued. Following that date, we had several others and pretty soon we were exclusive.

Tom drove me home to Freehold one weekend, which was not too far away. He stayed for dinner and met my parents and brothers. He seemed to have a good time. After he left, I remember my Dad asking me what I was doing with that young kid. Furiously, I responded by saying "S* *t in you hat and pull it down over your ears, he is twice the man you ever thought of being." I am sure that was a surprise coming out of me, but that is how I felt at the time. Luckily my Dad changed his mind later and came to respect Tom. After a few years together, we got "pinned" on the boardwalk in Asbury Park. After that, I wore his fraternity pin on a necklace around my neck.

My friend Sue and I roomed together until graduation, except one quarter when both of us lived in the Home Economics house. We were both studying to get a Home Ec degree. The Home Economics house was an old house for 18 students, similar to Gibbons Hall, but it was exclusively for Home Ec students. There we learned and had the chance to practice all phases of home management including planning and cooking meals for company and this helped me hone my skills in this area.

I also remember participating in activities at the Fulbright School of Political Science on campus, where I got my first taste and interest in politics. From that point, I have always supported a liberal view, which I naturally did before I knew anything about politics.

As I mentioned earlier, I was always afraid of speaking in public. One of my professors really helped encourage me to be more confident in this area. I was very grateful for the mentoring I received from her. Eventually I became more confident and my knees stopped knocking when I talked in front of people.

I really enjoyed college, the friends I met, new experiences and even learning my favorite phrase. When my roommate Sue would get frustrated, she would loudly shout "Sh*t, piss, corruption and snot, 99 a**holes tied in a knot, liver sh*t, liver sh*t, eat it!" It seemed to work for her, so I began using that phrase and it usually made me feel better. I still remember every word of it and you might hear me say it to this day every now and then.

Tom lived across town, near the Rutgers campus in an apartment with his roommates Pete Gruen, Dave Thorne (the football player) and Joe Lavenia. In a way, I became their unofficial housemother instructing them in making meals. The guys would call me occasionally asking for advice about recipes. I remember one time when Pete, who eventually became professor of philosophy at Princeton University, called me when he wanted to make Chinese food. I gave him a recipe and I told him that it would make a hearty meal for all four of the guys. Pete doubled the recipe immediately, letting me know that "my hearty was not the guys' hearty"! I remember them all and that we all got along really well.

During the winter of our senior year, Tom proposed to me and I accepted. We picked out an engagement ring that was nice, but affordable, we were both pretty thrifty. Tom knew I had a particular eye and he did not want to take the chance to buy a ring by himself. We found a ring at a jewelry store in Highland Park, which was near the Rutgers campus. They made the ring for us, which took a few days. Our plan was to pick it up together and have a special date to celebrate on February 17, 1965. The evening before, we decided to go to a local bowling alley that had live music and where we could dance. It was chilly on the dance floor that night and I remember we were dancing to "My Funny Valentine", an old classic. I told Tom that I was cold and he reached in his pocket, pulled out a ring and put it on my finger. He said "maybe this will warm you up" and it did! Tom had picked the ring up from the jewelry store earlier in the day, so he could surprise me – and did he. "My Funny Valentine" has been our song ever since and we decided to get married five months later on July 17.

Tom and I graduated from college on the same day in June 1965, but at different locations and times, so we were both able to attend each other's ceremony. I was proud of myself that day. I was the first in my family to graduate from college. I

did not grow up with the resources or wealth that many of my classmates had, but I learned to be resourceful, creative and to think for myself. Things were always tight, but I had made it!

At the time of our graduation, our country was deep into the Vietnam War and Tom was in the U.S. Air Force ROTC at Rutgers. It was almost certain that all healthy men would be drafted during those days. Tom decided to enlist, rather than be drafted, which provided him the opportunity to serve as a commissioned officer. Before he graduated, Tom was assigned to the Medical Service Corp, which is the hospital administration branch of the Air Force. His orders were to report for duty in early September. He would spend the first four months training at Gunter AFB in Montgomery, Alabama. After that his assignment was to go to Biggs AFB in El Paso, Texas. He would be replacing an officer that was leaving at the hospital there. We expected to be stationed in El Paso for all four years he would be on active duty, but that is not quite how it went.

Life After College

Tom and I were married on July 17, 1965 at St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church in Freehold, New Jersey. My college roommate Sue was my matron of honor and my dad's sister, Pat Van Cleef, and his sister-in-law, Carolyn O'Neal were both bridesmaids. Having only brothers, I was so happy to have two new sisters. Diane Fliesher, a friend from college, was also a bridesmaid.

Our reception was at the Elks Club in Freehold. The event was modest by some wedding standards, but was wonderful. My friends from the dietary department at Marlboro State Hospital volunteered to provide their services and prepared the dinner, with the food we bought, as their gift to us. We had lots of family and friends in attendance, there was a small combo playing live music, and we did a lot of dancing.

Our honeymoon was in Montreal and Quebec in Canada. We drove there from New Jersey. We stopped to have dinner at a restaurant on the way, that we visited 50 years later. We still had the menu and showed it to the staff. They could not believe we saved it after all that time. With no money in the bank or a credit card and remember we cashed the checks we received as wedding gifts throughout the trip. One of our stopes was in St. Hyacinthe a primarily French-speaking small city in Quebec, which was the hometown of my mémé, my mom's mom. I loved the towns we visited and exploring Canada, it was a great trip. We would make a similar trip, by car 50 years later for our 50th Anniversary. I also remember on the way back to New Jersey, we stopped at Lake George, NY, a beautiful area in upstate New York, where Tom vacationed with his parents several times when he was a boy.

After our honeymoon, we lived for a month and a half in a small furnished upstairs apartment in Trenton, NJ. The apartment was a dump and I recall once dropping a round object on the floor and it rolled to the other end of the apartment, because the floor was not level. There was no air conditioning and it was hot! Between our graduation and the start of his military service in September, Tom had a summer job working at the NJ Department of Labor in Trenton.

Life in the Air Force

The first week of September in 1965, we headed toward Montgomery, Alabama in our used 1961 baby blue Thunderbird. This would be the first time I had ventured south of New Jersey, where we would live at an apartment we rented long-distance. It took us a few days to get there. We found the apartment that we had rented.

It was a high rise "luxury" building in downtown Montgomery only a few blocks from the state Capitol, which we could see from the window of our studio apartment. The building, including our apartment, was infested with roaches, which did not make for good house guests. We were not sure exactly what it meant at the time, but Montgomery in 1965 was the center of national attention with the civil rights movement in full swing.

The infamous march from Selma to Montgomery occurred only a few months before. And we were driving around the city in our T-Bird with New Jersey license plates. The area was segregated with separate schools, bathrooms and water fountains. And the famed Alabama football team coached by Bear Bryant was all-white. This was completely foreign to me and I knew I did not like it, I had grown up in an integrated environment and that was how I thought it should be. The base where Tom's school was located was about 30 minutes from our apartment, so I often had to drive him there so I could use the car.

I recall one incident when we were driving to the base when we witnessed a horrible automobile accident, which resulted in a death. An elderly Afro-American man was killed when he was broadsided at an intersection by a car driven by a white man. We were eye witnesses to the accident and had to sign a statement of what happened. We were then told we would have to appear in court to testify. We received notice of the court date and time and appeared as required, but when we got there, we found that the case was not on the docket. We never heard any more about it.

At the time, the Alabama governor was George Wallace, a strong segregationist. As I indicated, our apartment was in sight of the state Capitol, which proudly flew the Alabama and Confederate flags, but not the U.S. flag. I recall that Wallace was shot and injured several years later. I guess after that, he decided to change his tune about integration and eventually ran for president.

We lived in Montgomery for only four months, but we made a few good friends while we were there. They came from all over the country and were in the same situation we were in; the guys were in class together and we were all newly married. We had a round robin letter circulated among us for several years, even after we all went in separate directions.

Our time in Montgomery went fast and just a few days before Christmas we headed toward El Paso in west Texas in our baby blue Thunderbird. At the time, there were no interstate highways, so it was a long trip. Along the way we made a few stops, including New Orleans, one of my favorite cities, for a night where we enjoyed some good jazz.

While we were on the long trip across Texas, I remember one funny incident. We had a flat tire in a deserted area and pulled over on the sandy soil next to the road. The car was packed full of our stuff, but Tom managed to get the spare tire out of the trunk. He raised the jack to the highest level, but the wheel did not leave the ground. He was frustrated and was not sure what to do, when I walked found a small stick just a few feet away from the car and I dug a small hole under the flat tire so he could pull off the wheel and put on the spare. Tom was amazed at my ingenuity and was feeling sorry that he had not thought of that himself!

While crossing Texas toward our next home, we were listening to the news on our car radio and heard the announcement that several dozen military bases around the country, including the one we were headed to, were going to be closes for cost-cutting reasons. Robert McNamara was Secretary of Defense at the time and he was fixated on reducing costs in the military, while at the same time, we were at war in Vietnam. When we arrived there a couple of days later, it appeared that the base was already in shut-down mode. As it turned out, we were one of the last families to arrive. Tom was in charge of the hospital's materials management/procurement program and almost from day one, his responsibility was to downsize the operation and eventually transfer all of the property to nearby Fort Bliss, which had a huge regional hospital.

We lived in an off-base apartment a few miles from the base. As the months went by, more and more people got their orders to transfer to other locations and eventually Tom was the last officer left since he was the last to arrive. In the meantime, he received orders that stated he would be transferring to Clark Air Base in The Philippines. Tom was set to depart in July, about the same time as our first anniversary.

While we were in El Paso, we made a few more good friends. I remember there was quite a bit of entertaining among the officers and their wives. We also enjoyed walking across the border to Juarez, Mexico, which had a lively albeit, slightly X-rated night life. We would go out to eat and then watch a show or listen to live music, I never minded it, but there were some who did not approve.

We had to replace our T-Bird in El Paso, so we decided to buy a brand new 1966 red standard shift Mustang. Mustangs were a brand-new car back then and although neither of us had ever driven a standard shift car before, we decided to give it a try. The cost of the car was less than \$2,000 and the salesman offered to teach Tom how to drive it, but when we went to pick it up, Tom was nervous and stalled it several times right in front of the dealership and it was during rush hour. He was almost ready to give up on it, but then he got the knack and we drove home with no issue. A few days later the same thing happened to me, while Tom was teaching me how to drive it, but we were only in store parking lot and not a busy road. Once we got the knack, we loved the car and tended to always buy cars that had a stick shift after that.

Two months after buying our new red Mustang, we had a major sand and wind storm, which was quite common there, but we had never experienced. The car was parked in the apartment lot. When the storm was over, we found that the paint on all vertical sections the car were totally stripped down to the metal frame. Needless to say, the car had to be totally re-painted.

Tom orders came, stating that he would depart from Travis AFB in California to Clark Air Base in The Philippines on July 31, 1966. He was given leave time before he had to report. We packed our car and drove back to New Jersey. We planned that I would stay with my parents, initially, until I could join him, which we thought would be about a year.

When we got back to Freehold, we did have a few days to relax. We also had to get Tom ready to for life in the Philippines. We were permitted to send a car that the government would pay to have it shipped over. We were encouraged a few that were already there to send a cheap car, because there was a lot of car theft. We sold that red Mustang and we bought an old Pontiac for \$150. Tom drove it to the Brooklyn Navy Yard where it was to be shipped to the Philippines.

When Tom's short leave was over, he had to figure out a way to get to California on a military plane, because the commercial airline companies were on strike. There were virtually no commercial flights for several weeks and Tom could not take a chance missing his flight overseas that was departing from the west coast. He would wait on standby for a few days until a seat became available, but he made it.

I was used to my independence at this point, but I had accepted that I needed to stay with Mom and Dad but would miss my new-found independence. I went back to work at Marlboro State Hospital where I worked in high school. I loved the people there and it kept my mind occupied while Tom and I were apart. It also allowed us to save some money, which was still very tight.

While we were apart, Tom and I communicated using twin tape recorders. We each had one and we would record messages and mail them back and forth. Telephone calls were not easy and they were extremely expensive.

It did not take Tom much time after getting to The Philippines to find a way for me to join him quicker than I had expects. We decided not to wait for the government to pay for my travel, which took a long time, because there was such a long waiting list. I had to get a special visa and travel as a tourist, as military personnel we were supposed to follow a different path. It was expensive but it was worth it.

My flight departed from JFK Airport in New York to Manila on Philippine Air Lines and was to take 16 hours. Not only was it a long flight, but it was my first time ever fly in an airplane. We made a quick stop in Hawaii and I had time for a Mai Tai cocktail at the airport bar. I was nervous after landing in Manila, hoping that Tom would be there to meet me. I was relieved when I saw his blond hair in the crowd. Not only was this my first flight, I was also one of very few people on the flight who was not a Filipino and I didn't speak the language. I was glad Tom and I were finally back together.

It took a couple of hours to drive to Clark Air Base, where we would spend the next few years. Our home was just off-base in Balibago, where Tom had rented a furnished house that was located in a guarded compound a couple of miles from the base. The house had no glass on the windows, which was not as important in the tropics, but the windows had wooden slats we could shut to help keep out some of the rain. The house was actually quite comfortable, where we lived with a full-time live-in house girl, which was standard for Americans living there and was very inexpensive. We actually went through a few people until we found Solidad (Soli) who was so good she was like family.

Clark Air Base was a critical base during the Vietnam War and was also the home of General Westmoreland, who was the overall Commander of the war, and other senior officers. The based housed the planes that there were used for daily bombing missions in Vietnam, which was less than a one-hour flight away, so pilots would fly by day and be home at night. Tom was stationed at the base hospital which was a modern state of the art facility at the time. This was the first stop for American soldiers wounded in the war for care before being transported back to the U.S. Tom helped to manage the hospital and also assisted when planes arrived with casualties.

Clark was a very large and busy base and surprisingly I found that we had most of the comforts we had in the states. One thing we did not have was fresh milk. We had to drink concentrated milk which was not very tasty. The base had a great officers club, which we frequented often and many other amenities we were used to. It was very hot there and lots of rain, but we settled in and enjoyed life.

A met back up with a couple we met in Montgomery, Alabama, Mike and Sharon Childers. They were already living at Clark Air Base, so it was nice to already have friends there. We also made friends with several other couples and we hosted and attended lots of parties and get-togethers. We were all in a similar situation, so it was easy to be together.

Tom and I loved to explore and travel, so we spent our free time doing that, unlike some of our pals who did not like traveling far from the base for fear that something would happen. I remember taking a trip with the Childers to Baguio, which was in the mountains just a few hours away. The road up the mountain was so steep with hairpin turns, making it hard to move forward, even with the accelerator pressed to the floor.

After living in our house for a few months, we made a move to a nicer government-approved house, which was in the same compound and a couple of months after living there, I learned that I was pregnant and both of us were thrilled.

As the pregnancy proceeded, I felt lucky to have Soli to help at home, but I remained pretty active. I also felt fortunate that the Clark Air Base hospital had a very good maternity unit. We were friends with several doctors and their wives and my obstetrician was one of them.

I was very pregnant and at the same time, Tom and I were hosting Gene, an officer that Tom worked with and who was new to the base. He was living with us while he was supposed to be looking for a place of his own. However, he was so comfortable with us, he did not want to leave, but I was ready for him to leave.

My water broke early one morning in October and I was sure this would be the day I would deliver. We called the doctor to let him know what was going on, calmly listened and assured us not to worry. He assured us that the birth would occur one way or the other. Tom woke up Gene and told him we would be going to the hospital that her water broke. Of course, he asked Gene if he wanted a ride to the base that morning. I was anxious to leave, but he took his time, getting ready very slowly, which made me mad. Eventually we got to the hospital and I was admitted.

Within a few hours, Christine Margaret O'Neal was born. It was October 17, 1967. It was customary at that time for mothers to stay in the hospital at least 5 days following birth and I was no exception and husbands were also not there for the birth. When I was ready to leave the hospital, I remember that our car was having problems and we had to borrow a friend's car, so we had to drive home with our new baby girl in an old VW. Not only did we have car issues, but Tom had to borrow the \$7 hospital bill so we could go home and we paid it back with his next pay check.

At home Soli was an enormous help to both Christine and me day and night. My only disappointment was that Gene was still there when we got home. We pointedly asked him to leave a few days after that and he did. We finally had our privacy. It seemed strange to go through the pregnancy and delivery without more family around, but we also knew that all along that would be the case.

The Philippines was subject to bad storms and I remember when a bad typhoon hit. The storm was predicted to be so powerful that the planes on the base were flown to other countries to avoid damage. We were hunkered down at home, the rain and wind were fierce, and the electricity went out. The wood slats in windows were closed, but that did not keep the rain out and the floors inside the house were completely wet from the mist spray caused by the wind hitting the windows. The only place in the house that was dry was the middle of the living room and that is where we put Christine, where she stayed secure and dry in her basinet.

Tom and I had the opportunity to go on a couple of trips while we were in the Philippines. We went on three different, one-week trips to Bangkok, Thailand and Hong Kong. One perk we really enjoyed, was being able to fly at no cost, but only when there was space available. We were very confident with Soli's ability to take care of Christine while we were away, so we felt comfortable traveling. Christine walked early, like I did we had to work hard to keep up with her.

On our way home from our trip to Bangkok, we boarded our flight, which was filled mainly with military personnel. We were told after the plane took off, that we would be making an unplanned stop and landing in Saigon, Vietnam to drop off and pick up passengers. It just so happened to be the day of the major Tet Offensive in Saigon. We landed at dusk and there were fires all around us including at the main terminal. Here we were new parents and we were in the middle of a war battle. I cannot lie, it was pretty scary, but passengers quickly deplaned and others boarded and we were on our way.

Our next trip would be to Hong Kong and it was enjoyable and relaxing. A few months after that trip, I learned that I was pregnant again. As far as I know, our next child was "made in Hong Kong." That was a common phrase in those days. We loved to explore the cities we visited and Tom was always taking photos of people and beautiful things.

I was exposed to many new flavors during our time overseas and learned all that I could from the foods we prepared and the places we ate. My love of the many flavors of the orient would be with me forever and I learned how to cook many different dishes over the years.

We also brought back with us unique pieces of furniture and art from our time in the Philippines that would-be part of our home décor our remaining years. It was

a scary time for our country and the world, but we were together and we made the best of it, something I tried to do in every situation.

Tom's two-year term in the Philippines was about to end, but we still had one year to go in his four-year active duty commitment, we hoped our next move would be back to the states. He received orders to go to Kincheloe AFB in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan for the last year. We would be leaving one of the hottest climates in the world and moving to one of the coldest.

Christine was about 9 months old when we moved and she was already walking. Unlike me, who did not travel by plane until I was in my twenties, she took her first trip before the age of one, traveling back to the U.S. Being born in the Philippines, but on a United States military based, she would carry with her a dual citizenship. Her original birth certificate remained in the Manilla upon our departure and we learned years later the building where it was stored was washed away in another bad storm.

The summer of 1968 was a tough time in the U.S. was having a lot of political unrest due to the continued support of our government for the Vietnam War. Many veterans returning did not receive a warm welcome and had to figure out how to return to civilian life. We came back, but had one year remaining to serve, so we had a very different experience.

From the Tropics to the Klondike

My first memory of returning back to the U.S. is the long, tiring flight with nine-month old Christine. We first arrived in California where we spent the night, before boarding a flight to Newark, New Jersey, the next day, where we planned was to spend a few days with Mom and Dad in Freehold before we made our way to Michigan. Our second flight with Christine was exhausting, as she did not sleep at all in the hotel and kept us awake the entire night. When we arrived in Newark, we were expecting to be picked up by my mom and dad, but they were not there. After a reasonable wait, we called their house and Mom answered the phone, so they quickly headed to the airport to pick us up. Somehow the dates got mixed up and they thought we were arriving the next day. By the time we got back to the house, we were all pretty exhausted.

We had a couple weeks of rest and recovery in New Jersey before heading to the next assignment in Michigan, where we were set to arrive in mid-August. Tom's next assignment would be as the Medical Supply Officer for Kincheloe AFB hospital. The base was near Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan which is on the upper portion of Michigan, almost to the Canadian border. Tom was now a Captain for the Air Force.

We knew we would be there for only one year so we wanted to make the best of it. I was officially pregnant with our second child, and due in March 1969. After leaving a hot climate that was hot year-round, we arrived in August, which was considered summer. We quickly learned that summer there was not very long and the joke was it happened during the “weekend between July and August.”

We soon understood what that meant, with cold weather arriving very quickly. Winter would begin around September and last until May. The winter between 1968 and 69 brought more than 250 inches of snow. It was so cold, we had to plug our car in at night to keep the engine from freezing. We also put a marker on the car antenna so that other drivers could see us since, since the snow banks were much taller than the cars.

Similar to our other experiences, we became friends with several people who worked at the hospital. This was the first time we lived in an unfurnished base house. We had brought our Philippine-made furniture with us, so it gave us a jump start. The house was actually a duplex that was on the base golf course. It was in a comfortable and in a nice neighborhood.

Sean Patrick O’Neal was born on March 5th, at the hospital on the base. He was born with almost white hair and was a good-natured baby with one exception, he would projectile vomit, which made for some messy situations. Christine was now a year and a half old and she loved her little brother. We were not close by, but we were back in the states and my mom was able to come and stay with us. Unlike in the Philippines, where it was customary to have someone that lived with us to help out, we were on our own and I was glad to have her stay and help out for a few weeks.

Our year in Michigan went by pretty quickly and it forced us to decide what to do next. Tom would be out of the service and it was time for him to decide what he wanted to do with his life. Tom really enjoyed health care management and the Air Force was trying to encourage him to maintain his commission and make the military his career. They even offered to send him to graduate school where he could get a Master’s Degree, but that would mean he would have to make a commitment for a few more years’ after that in the service.

Tom did not choose the healthcare field when he joined the service, it was chosen for him, but he really enjoyed it, even after spending some very difficult times overseas. He did his researched, as he always did, on Masters of Health Care Administration programs around the country. This would allow him to continue his education on his own and take advantage of financial help he received through the G.I. Bill. He selected the Medical College of Virginia in Richmond, Virginia, which was one of the top programs in the country, he applied and was accepted into the program. He would be starting classes in September, about the

exact time his four-year term in the Air Force would end. This gave us just enough time to pack up the house, two kids and move south to Virginia.

Back to the South

We arrived in Richmond in early September 1969 and searched for the apartment. We had chosen a place and rented it sight unseen, while we were still in Michigan. We were two adults and two babies with virtually no income, a car full of our belongings, and lots of positive dreams about the future. We had some limited financial support from the G.I Bill, but very little in savings, so we knew things would be tight for the next couple of years.

I remember pulling up to the apartment complex and thinking that it was not too bad. I had hoped things would have been different when we returned, to the U.S., but we soon realized we were living in an all-white complex. Segregation was sadly not yet gone.

We entered our new 2-bedroom apartment and just about the same time, learned that the moving truck from Michigan was delayed, so we spent a few days and nights living rough and only having the stuff we brought in the car.

Tom was in school all day, every day and I was taking care of the kids who were now 3 and 2. I also started caring for another young boy, who lived with his single mother, across the hall from because she worked days and had not one to watch him. They were a handful, but it gave us a little extra income. We were a bit older than most of the classmates and only a few students had children, so most of the time it was just us.

We were there about nine months, but we did not do a lot because Tom had to spend a lot of time studying, plus we did not have extra money to spend. We did get to do some sightseeing on weekends, spending time in the areas with many historical things to see. We especially enjoyed seeing some of the restored plantations on the James River.

Tom's health care administration program lasted for nine months and consisted of academic studies at the Medical College of Virginia, followed by a 12-month residency program. His residency was at the hospital in Martinsville, Virginia, about 3 hours west of Richmond. It was in a beautiful hilly area in foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Our move to Martinsville was pretty uneventful. We rented a small, but comfortable house there that was on a steep hill. We were still north enough to have snow and sometimes due to the steep hill, it was impassable on snowy winter days.

We still did not have much social life, it was just the four of us most of the time. Tom had a great mentor at the hospital, which was a good way to begin his career. He also began to receive a stipend for the residency, so we had some income again. He worked hard at the hospital and the time went by pretty fast. I also worked at the hospital in the dietary department, as a supervisor. The people I worked with were great.

Having completed his degree and almost finishing his residency, Tom started looking for career opportunities. There were a number of possibilities and they were in many different states. With a little of my guidance, he narrowed the offers down to just two. The first job offer was with Project Hope, a high profile international health care nonprofit. Project Hope was known for its hospital ship that traveled around the world to help people and also several facilities in poor countries around the world. This would have meant a move to Washington DC and he would have had the position of vice president of international logistics.

The other offer was an assistant administrator position with a community hospital located in Williamsburg, Virginia. Tom would be part of the executive team of the hospital with responsibilities that were in line with his graduate studies. Williamsburg is one of the oldest cities in the country it is home to Colonial Williamsburg, which was and still is, beautifully restored part of the town, William and Mary College and Camp Perry. We had visited there a couple of times when we lived in Richmond and loved it.

Together we decided Tom would take the job in Williamsburg. We would have to move again, but we hoped this time we could settle down. We moved right after Tom's graduation in May 1971.

Living in Williamsburg

Following two short stays, in two different apartments, we bought our first home on Plantation Drive in Williamsburg. The house was located on the corner of a single street, in a nice neighborhood. There we would meet friends we would have for life. There were several families that lived on our street and we all became fast friends. It is also on this street where we met our best friends, the Barry's, who would remain our best friends for life. Kevin and Roslyn Barry lived a couple of houses down from ours. Kevin was an officer in the U.S. Coast Guard and was attending Law School at William and Mary. They had kids that were the same age as Christine and Sean, so both families really bonded. Along with Kevin and Roslyn, we have many friends in the neighborhood and would get together all the time playing cards, eating together or just to have some laughs. We remained friends with many of the people we met on that street in Williamsburg.

The O'Neal's and the Barry's moved often, but we made sure to visit each other often and we vacationed together in several places over the years. Kevin passed away of cancer a few years ago after a long illness. We still get together with Roslyn at least once a year, often in Williamsburg, one of our favorite places. Roslyn was such a good friend to me, calling often and sending cards. I cherish her friendship every day.

While Tom worked hard at the hospital, I worked as a school cafeteria supervisor. Williamsburg is also where I began volunteering. I helped to start the Meals on Wheels program in Williamsburg. I also began teaching, where I taught cooking and Touch & Sew, a modern way of sewing.

We had an active social life and really enjoyed the community. We loved to play cards and found a group of friends who enjoyed Bridge, one of our favorite card games. I have to admit I was pretty good at it and never forgot how to play the game.

Williamsburg was not far off the road when friends and family would drive to Florida, so we often had company while we lived there, which we loved. Christine and Sean started pre-school, as soon as they were eligible, then attended Waller Mill School that was right across the street from our house, then Magruder School, which required traveling on a school bus. Christine was one year ahead of Sean in school.

The kids had great friends in the neighborhood and there was always someone to play with, they would trick or treat together as a group, explore the woods behind the house and attend most block parties, entertaining themselves.

After working at the hospital in Williamsburg for several years, Tom was offered a job at Lorain Community Hospital, a larger hospital in Lorain, Ohio. Lorain is on Lake Erie and about forty miles west of Cleveland. It was a great opportunity for him. We visited the area together and we decided it made sense to make the move. We moved there during the winter in 1977. We were sad to leave Williamsburg, which would always be one of favorite places, but we could not pass up this opportunity.

Return to the North

Tom headed to Lorain in February 1977 to start his new job as COO/ associate hospital administrator, while the rest of us stayed behind to complete the sale of the house and prepare for the move. We were all together again a couple of months later. It was still winter in Northern Ohio and it was a shock to our system, with lots of snow and freezing temperatures. We were used to four seasons, but not as cold and it was already getting warm in Williamsburg.

One thing that I looked forward to, was being closer to my bother Ed. He and his family lived about an hour away on the other side of Cleveland, so for the first

time, we had family nearby. Ed worked Caterpillar plant in Mentor, where he was an executive.

After living in an apartment for a few months, in Lorain, we bought a house in Amherst, a smaller town next to Lorain. The house was in a small, nice neighborhood and close to everything. There were plenty of kids to play with and most of the families were our age. The kids attended school in Amherst and both graduated from Marion L. Steele High School.

I had a very active life during this period. I began to teach gourmet cooking, catered and later worked at the local synagogue preparing kosher meals for special occasions. I enjoyed using my cooking skills for work and we loved to entertain.

While in Amherst, I was involved with several clubs and volunteer groups, such as, Welcome Wagon and Lakeland Women's Club. I was also, re-introduced to AAUW, where I was now able to join and later would become a president of the local branch. I found it was my passion and I have been involved at several levels ever since then. I was also president of the school PTO, where the kids attended, for a period of time. I also enjoyed helping the kids with school projects and even worked on my math skills, which came back into play, as I helped Sean with his math, until he got ahead of me.

Our need to travel did not stop once we moved to Ohio and I remember one interesting trip in 1978, where we had planned to travel from Ohio to Florida and then New Orleans in time for Marti Gras. We had already had a lot of snow that year and another snow storm was on the way. Tom had a board meeting at the hospital the night before we were supposed to leave and was working late. He called and said he wanted to leave that night, as soon as he got home and we did just that. We drove directly south for about three hours hoping to beat the storm, but didn't make it, the storm hit. We had made it to Cincinnati, where we had to stop, the roads were not passable and we just made it to the next exit to avoid being stranded. We were lucky enough to find a room in the only hotel at the exit, we had made it to Wilmington, Ohio. We woke up the next morning, after it snowed all night and the snow was almost up to the top of our car. I was able to use my home ec skills yet again, when I assisted the manager of the hotel by making breakfast, at the adjoining restaurant, for everyone staying at the hotel. The roads were closed, so no one could come or go. I remember making lots of chili and hot chocolate. We ended up spending three nights there before the highway was passable and we were able to leave and start the trip over. That blizzard of 1978 was the worst in a century, but we had a great trip once we headed south.

While our kids were in high school and Christine was a senior, we hosted an exchange student from Japan. Sang Soo Kim lived with us for a year and

attended the high school. Before Sang Soo arrived, he sent letters to each of us and we realized that communication was going to be a challenge. His letter to Christine said that he could not wait to get there and "do all kinds of things to you." Actually, it was a good year. I enjoyed getting to know him, talk about cooking and foods he enjoyed and teaching him about American culture. He loved heavy metal music, he liked to wear all black clothes and he even pierced his ear, which did bother me a bit. Tom and I saw him again a few years later in Ireland.

Tom and I joined to the Town Club in Ohio, a dinner-dance club that had 5-6 events a year from very casual to formal. We were also in a gourmet club where several couples rotated hosting dinners that we all helped prepare. We found new friends to play Bridge and we both played golf, Tom more often than I did, but I really enjoyed it.

I am not sure when I started, but I developed an interest in arts and crafts and that love has remained to the present. I had a big room in the basement where I kept all my supplies, fabric and sewing machine.

Tom and I love all types of music and we attended concerts, live music and loved Blossom Music Center. While we loved most music styles, our special love was for jazz. Tom always had a great music system and kept our life filled with music.

We made a lot of friends in Ohio and among them Marge and Doug Mulder. I met Marge while our sons played Little League and her husband, Doug was one of the coaches. Marge and I were bored watching the games, so we tried playing tennis but we found we both preferred talking rather than getting sweaty. Our families became very close and we have been close friendship ever since. The Mulders now share their time between Ohio and Florida and we have visited them both places and kept in close touch over the years.

Through the Mulders, we met Gary and Peggy Springer and we all became good friends. Peggy and Gary's had a daughter Jennifer, who was just one year younger than Sean. When we met, Sean and Jennifer were nine and eight years old. Later, when they both were in high school, Sean and Jennifer began dating, fell in love, and in 1991 they were married. They chose the Fairchild Chapel at Oberlin College. The college was about 30 minutes south of Amherst and we often attended concerts and events there. We love the town and it was wonderful that the wedding was held there and what a bash that wedding reception was!

We would often travel from Ohio to New Jersey to visit my parents. Sometimes for a short trip and others to take the kids so they could spend some time with them. While we still lived in Ohio, my dad became ill with colon cancer. Over time, he had changed a lot, I felt like he was a better man. He was more respectful of other people and the relationship between Mom and Dad had improved considerably. I never forgot the past, but I was sad when he died. Mom

continued to live in Freehold for a while, but eventually we move her to Ohio so she could live closer to us. After a short period of time living with us, she moved to her own apartment. Over the years Mom had changed and she became very difficult to be around. She had some mental health problems, complained a lot and our relationship was pretty strained. I worried that Christine and Sean's relationship with her was also quite strained at times. After Sean got a little older he and Mom ended up getting quite close. Christine also spent time with her at her apartment and things seemed to have gotten better.

After working about 3 years in Lorain, Tom was recruited by St. Vincent Charity Hospital in Cleveland to be their Chief Operating Officer. St. Vincent's was a major inner-city teaching and research hospital. It was a big promotion and a great opportunity for him. Fortunately, it was close enough that we did not have to move again and the kids could stay at the same school. He was able to commute from Amherst every day.

As an administrator's wife, his new role meant I would have to be in a new social setting. There were an abundance of formal hospital and charity events. I didn't care much for the new social scene and never really felt a part of the community's "society." I attended them all and often made my own dresses. I still enjoyed sewing and making my own formal attire.

One activity I did become involved with was Cleveland's public radio station. For a few years I served on their advisory board and also helped with fund raisers. While I did not really enjoy the social scene in Cleveland, I did enjoy the arts, music and entertainment we enjoyed.

During Christine's senior year of high school, she trying to decide what she wanted to do next and she was not sure she wanted to go to college. One weekend we drove to Akron so that Sang Soo could see a friend living there. Christine was with us. We visited Kent State University, which as not far from Akron during the same trip. While there, Christine looked up a friend from high school attending Kent State and like what she saw. She sent in an application and was soon accepted. She moved to Kent State after graduating from high school the next school year. She studied business and received a degree in marketing. She lived on or near the campus and graduated four years later. Her dorm over looked the four students that were killed during protests and violence during the Vietnam War.

In his senior year, Sean and I visited several colleges with the University of Virginia being his apparent favorite. Ohio State University was barely on his list. He and I visited both universities on the same trip. He was sure he was going to attend school in Virginia, but he loved what he saw at Ohio State University and he decided to forego visits to any other colleges. He graduated high school a year after Christine and moved to Columbus, Ohio to attend OSU. He would go on to

get his B.S. degree in mechanical engineering and then he stayed on another year to get a Master's Degree. After graduation, he and Jennifer were married.

During the time, the kids were in college, Tom then went through some rough changes in his work. The hospital industry was changing and his boss, the CEO, at St. Vincent's was forced to leave the hospital due to some conflicts and for a year and a half Tom was appointed interim CEO of the hospital. During that period, he helped engineer a merger with another Catholic hospital in the area. The CEO of that hospital, who had about 15 years more experience than Tom, ended up being CEO of the new multi-hospital system and he wanted to bring in his own team in, so Tom lost his job and it was time to move on.

Tom looked at many opportunities in the area, but within a few weeks he was contacted by a national hospital management company that managed hospitals around the country and he was given the opportunity to interview for a hospital CEO position in Bentonville, Arkansas.

I would keep in touch with the many friends we made while living in Amherst and I stayed active in AAUW after we made the next move, which would be to Arkansas. We had driven through Arkansas our first year of marriage, but we had not been back since.

The biggest claim to fame of Bentonville is that it is the location of the home office of Wal-Mart, which soon after would become the largest corporation in the country and then the world. He took the job of interim CEO for 90 days, so that both he and the hospital board could evaluate each other. I stayed in Ohio and he traveled to Arkansas and stayed in a rental condo in a retirement community, Bella Vista, Arkansas, just north of Bentonville.

I visited Tom during this period a couple of times and found that he was very happy with the job, the area and the people. I also had the chance to meet people in Bentonville and toured the area, I was pleased as well. After the 90-day interim period Tom accepted the job on a permanent basis.

As had happened many times before, I had the responsibility of preparing the house to be sold, packing things up and coordinating the move of our household goods to Arkansas. This move actually happened just a few days before our 25th anniversary. During one of my trips to Bentonville we went house hunting and we found our dream home in Bella Vista.

I soon joined Tom in Arkansas, while Christine and Sean continued studies at their colleges. That May, Christine would graduate from Kent State and made the choice to stay in Ohio and find a job after graduation which was not easy in 1990.

Sean would remain in college for a few more years. Fortunately, he had a second "home" in Ohio. He stayed with Jennifer's parents when he was not at school. My

mom would also stay in Ohio where she had developed a lot of friends and was very active.

Move to Arkansas

As our household goods were being picked up to move to Arkansas, Tom came back so we could drive back to Arkansas together while our furniture was in transit. We actually started the trip by stopping at Sean's rooming house near Ohio State to drop off the remainder of his stuff. We then stayed at a nice small hotel in St. Louis. The second night, on our 25th wedding anniversary, we stayed in a romantic hotel in Eureka Springs, Arkansas, which was just an hour from our new home in Bella Vista. Our furniture was scheduled to be delivered the next day. The day the truck arrived Tom had a busy schedule at the hospital, so I was responsible for the management of the unloading. Luckily all went well and that night we slept in our own bed again.

When we arrived, the hospital went to work for was struggling financially, which is why its operation had been turned over to the management company Tom working for. On his first day at work, he set up 24 hours of meetings so he could meet the entire staff as a hospital runs 24 hours a day. The most asked question during this time was whether they would get paid the next payday. It took a while, but Tom led the hospital's financial turn-around and it began to grow. He also recruited several highly qualified physicians to the area and things got better every year.

After a short period of time, we moved my mom to Arkansas to live near us. She was lonely in Ohio and we felt she should live close by. We purchased a nice condo for her to live in that was within walking distance from our house. That was convenient since she was no longer driving. She joined a church and made several friends. We also took her with us to most of the places we went. Sadly, throughout all this, we continued to have a strained relationship.

Just a couple of months after Tom started his new job, we were able to take a trip to Ireland to celebrate our 25th anniversary. It was hard for him to do this so soon after he started, but it was worth it. A friend of ours from Ohio days worked at the American Embassy in Dublin. We stayed with him for a couple of days before touring the country for 2 weeks. On the night we arrived, we attended a party at the Embassy hosted by the U.S. ambassador.

Soon after we moved to Arkansas, Christine came to visit us for the first time. She had graduated from college and was working in a sales position at the time. The day before she arrived Tom was having lunch with Bill Fields, the VP of Merchandising at the time, of Wal-Mart, and the subject of Christine's visit came up. Bill said he would like to meet her and Tom said he thought he could arrange that. Christine met with Bill, and she was invited back to meet some other executives the following day and the next thing we knew she was offered a job as

an assistant buyer for the Craft Department at Wal-Mart. Christine was engaged at the time to Peter, a man in Ohio where they had planned to stay. She tried to interest her fiancée to come with her to Arkansas, but he was not interested in making the move. She decided to move here unattached, since the opportunity was too good to turn down. She soon met Randy Meier, who at the time Randy was divorced and raising four young kids by himself. When we met the Meier family when they to our house for Thanksgiving Day dinner in 1991, Scott was age 8, Lori age 7, and the twins Robert and Ryan were 5. After a couple of years they were married at a beautiful outdoor ceremony on the water's edge at the Loch Lomond Yacht Club in Bella Vista. We loved Randy and the kids from the time we met them. Randy and Christine had one child together, Jordan Christine Meier who was born in 1997. Their story is a whole other wonderful story. In 2019 Randy and Christine celebrated their 25th anniversary.

In our third year in Arkansas, Tom and I showed up at a surprise party for us hosted by the hospital board chairman. Attended by the hospital's board members and many members of the medical staff, as well as, many community leaders. At this event, the Bentonville mayor proclaimed that day "Tom and Sue O'Neal Day" and presented us with the "key" to the city. That was followed with a gift of an all-expense paid mini vacation to New Orleans. We were stunned, but so grateful.

As mentioned earlier, Bentonville is home to Wal-Mart and one evening soon after we arrived Tom was invited to give a one-on-one presentation of the hospital's new strategic plan to Sam and Helen Walton. At the time Sam was the founder and CEO of Wal-Mart and the world's richest person. The presentation went well and Tom had a good relationship with Sam until he passed away a few years later.

During this time, I stayed active in the community and with AAUW. I served as president of the local branch for 4 years, then another 4 years as state president. I was also involved with the League of Women Voters and the local Democrat Club. I have always been passionate about voting rights and educational opportunities for women.

Sean's first job was working for Lexmark in Lexington, Kentucky. A few years later he was recruited by Dell Computer in Austin, Texas where he and Jennifer then moved and where Dell's headquarters is located. Their three wonderful children, Natalie, Caroline and Spencer, were all born in Austin. In 2018, Sean and Jennifer celebrated their 25th anniversary and we felt privileged to be there to surprise them. Again, their history together another exciting story.

As Tom's hospital was getting back on its feet, a lot of changes were occurring in the health care industry and there was a lot of consolidation due to managed care and evolution of hospital into multi-hospital "systems". Tom and his board

thought the best way for the hospital to survive and thrive was to find a larger partner. That led to a merger of Bates Hospital with Northwest Medical Center in Springdale, which was about 25 miles away. Tom helped engineer the merger and he became the COO of both hospitals. That later led to the sale of the non-profit hospital system to a for-profit hospital company. Many changes were made and after a few years Tom did not really feel he fit in. He had an opportunity to transfer to another non-profit hospital within the group in Michigan, but neither of us wanted to move again. To make the decision easier, we learned that our granddaughter, Jordan, at age 3, was diagnosed with leukemia. We did not know what was in store with that but we did know we wanted to be nearby to be available to help. Jordan was treated at Arkansas Children's Hospital, where received great care and today she is disease-free and a graduate from the University of Arkansas.

After several years working at Wal-Mart, Christine left and did consulting with a number of Wal-Mart vendors. She and Randy started their own company, DMD Industries, a company that manufactured and distributed all kinds of arts and crafts supplies. The company started in their garage and I was one of the three people who worked there. The business grew rapidly and several years later there were over 450 employees. I continued working for the company and eventually I managed the company's outlet store, which was in the same building and I really enjoyed that I met so many people working at the store and still run into many of them today. They sold the company and a few years later started a new company named Canvas Corp, which made and distributed products for the same industry.

We decided to stay in the area. As it turned out Christine and Randy's business needed some temporary management help, particularly at a time when Jordan needed their time and attention. Tom started working with their company and has been working with them since then. He just can't seem to retire.

We decided to go into business for ourselves and started a custom framing business in my home. I came up with the name, "A Framing Affair... Your Place or Mine". Tom and I bought the business from friends who were moving away. I acquired the skills from them and the business was set up in our home. Some customers came to the house, but more often I worked with customer in their home or office. Yet another situation where my math skills came into play but my fraction skills needed to be upgraded for cutting the frames with precision. I loved to help people frame artwork, photos and create special pieces for their home. I thoroughly enjoyed operating this business, but had to stop when I had some health issues with my legs and I could not stand on my feet for a long period as the work required.

For our 40th anniversary, Tom, Mom and I were invited to take a one-day drive to a surprise location. All we knew was that we were to travel light. Christine and

Randy were also going and our job was to follow them. After a several-hour drive, we arrived at a hotel in downtown Memphis and soon were surprised to see family and friends from all over. We had great time for a couple of days and also received a gift from our kids to take a week-long vacation in Sedona, Arizona which we thoroughly enjoyed and have gone back again since then.

My mom passed away in 2008 while recovering in a nursing home after fracturing her arm from a fall at her condo. She apparently died on an embolism, but we will never know. I had mixed emotions about her passing. I loved her and appreciated her standing up for me when I was young but at the same time her death seemed to make me free. It was a strange feeling. Family came to town for the funeral and Sean wrote and delivered the eulogy at her funeral.

For our 50th anniversary, we drove north and attended a wonderful O'Neal family reunion at Pete O'Neal's home in NJ. After that we re-traced our honeymoon trip and drove to Quebec and Montreal. It included spending several days at the Montreal Jazz Festival, something we had wanted to attend for several years. I was even interviewed by a radio station while we were there. We had a great time even though our movements were a little slower.

In 2018, after being convinced by Christine, we moved from our, larger than needed, home in Bella Vista to a smaller relatively new single level house in a 55-plus community in Springdale near where Christine and Randy live. We live about 10 minutes from each other so we can spend a lot more time together than before. We love the house and the community. Our neighbors are friendly and look out for each other and there are lots of organized activities and get-togethers – and there are no stairs.

Health Changes Over Time

Not fun to talk about, but as I got older things began to change with my health. I was generally pretty healthy most of my life although whenever I thought about exercising, I had the idea that if I waited long enough, the feeling would pass. I developed atrial fibrillation (A-Fib) when I was in my thirties which meant I had an irregular heart beat which I had to live with. I also gained weight during my thirties, forties and fifties, which slowed me down and I know it was not good for my overall health. Later, I was afflicted by things that often come with getting old such as arthritis. I had surgery in 2008 to remove a cancerous sarcoma in my leg and have had a number of other medical issues too numerous to name. My latest events were a heart ablation (which did not work), a pacemaker and replacement surgery on both knees (at different times). Fortunately, I had lost a lot of weight a couple of years ago which helped with the success of the knee surgery.

The Future

Tom and I will have been married 54 years this year and we both feel blessed with our education, our experiences, our friends, and especially our loving family. We have 8 wonderful grandchildren, 6 great-grandchildren and one more on the way. Health permitting, we hope we can continue to travel, enjoy life and spend more time with family.

Sue passed away on July 8, 2020. She was surrounded with family the final days of her life as we navigated the Covid-19 restrictions. Music played 24 hours a day and we sang her favorite songs and she sang with us when she was strong enough to do so. No longer in pain, she was at peace the last moments of her life.