

# **GENIE MOUSE: A MEMOIR**

**As Told to Jan Collins**

## **Preface**

My children call me a survivor, and I guess that's true. I'm almost 88 years old and have survived a nearly fatal house fire, Cy's heart attack when he was just 35 and I was pregnant with our fourth child, Cy's subsequent dementia, the loss of a beloved daughter, eight major surgeries and several minor ones, bilateral breast cancer, four bouts of pneumonia, and the shingles and its painful aftermath.

But here I am, a grandmother nine times over and a great-grandmother of nine (soon to be ten), as well. I never dreamed I'd be a matriarch like this. I guess I never thought beyond my own children, just raising them and getting them off to school and starting a life of their own. I never gave a thought to grandchildren and great-grandchildren. But I love being a

great-grandmother. I have more time for it, and then the babies can always go home at night.

I wish Cy could know about all this family. He would love it. He was so good with children – he could always put babies to sleep, you know. He'd rock them and walk with them, and they'd nod right off.....

## **Chapter One: Beginnings**

I am of Irish and German extraction, while Cy's heritage was French and Irish/English. The Comerford/Mellus [originally Melhousen] clans came from County Cork, Ireland, and Neiderhausen, Germany, respectively, while the Martineau/Collins families came from France (then to Canada), and from Ireland (then to England).

One of the Martineau uncles from Cy's side of the family managed the famous Chateau Frontenac hotel in Quebec, while Bernard Coffee, my great-grandfather on the Mellus side, was an actor and dancer in Dublin. Cy's paternal grandfather, Ambrose Collins, owned and operated a pub called the Granville Arms in Northampton, England, and Cy's paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Hill, was active in politics and served as a town assemblywoman.

Cy's maternal grandmother, Henadine Pinault, whose family was French-Canadian, never did speak English. Known as "Mimi," the only time I ever met her was after our wedding Mass in February 1943 when, still wearing our wedding clothes, Cy and I went to visit her at her daughter's house, where Mimi was ill and bedridden. She kept exclaiming, over and over again in French, how beautiful it all was. She died three months later.

My paternal grandfather, Henry Frank Mellus, was a mailman in an old industrial section of Detroit called Delray, which was quite ethnically diverse. So "Grandpa Heine", as we called him, spoke several languages, including German and Hungarian. His mother, Amelia Schroeder, was born in Germany and was quite an astute businesswoman. Widowed young, she rode horses in Montana and owned rental properties in the old Corktown area of Detroit.

My maternal grandmother, Katherine "Kitty" Keenan, and her husband, Fred Comerford, were second-generation Irish from County Cork. Kitty had beautiful auburn hair that spilled down almost to her knees. After Fred died of alcoholism at age 37 - leaving Kitty with four young children - she married a tall sea captain from Norway named Iverson. He commanded Ford Motor Company ships that carried ore from Norway across the ocean and then up the Detroit River to be made into steel for

Ford automobiles. Iverson was a big, big man with a huge walrus mustache, and we all were terrified of him.

Cy's father, Cyril Ambrose Collins, came to America from England by ship with a teenage friend at the age of 16. Three years later, just a few weeks shy of his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, Cyril Ambrose Collins married Mary Rose DeLima Martineau, age 21, at St. Ann's Church in Detroit. The date was November 3, 1915. Their second son, Cyril Roy "Cy" Collins, was born on April 13, 1918, in the middle of the terrible flu epidemic that was sweeping the country and the world.

Cy was very close to his mother Rose, who was a wonderful cook and talented seamstress. They would laugh and laugh when they were together, and he was just crazy about her. When Cy was about 12, Rose had a leg amputated; I was never clear whether it was due to an auto accident or cancer of the bone – I heard different stories. But she was fitted with a heavy, heavy wooden leg (the only option in the 1930s). The straps that were attached to the wooden leg wore deep grooves into her shoulders, but she never complained. In fact, she delighted her grandchildren by sometimes putting a baby bonnet on her stump, painting a little face on the stump with lipstick, and making "Little Rosie" dance. Rose, whom the kids called "Grandma Bobo," was quite the gal in her own way.

William Sylvester “Bill” Mellus eloped with his childhood sweetheart, Violet Cecelia Comerford, by hopping the streetcar to Toledo on November 15, 1921. He was just 18, she was 20. After they were married by an Ohio justice of the peace, Bill and Vi returned on the streetcar to their respective homes and kept the marriage a secret until they knew I was coming along. I was born on February 12, 1923, in Grandma Marcella Mellus’ house on Lisbon Street in southwest Detroit. When I was very little, I couldn’t pronounce my name, Geraldine Mellus. So I called myself “Genie Mouse.” Even when I was an adult, my father often called me Genie.

## **Chapter 2: Early Years**

My parents, Bill and Violet, lived in a modest little house across the street from Bill’s parents. Grandma Mellus had an electric stove and an icebox, and when the ice wagon (drawn by horses) would drive by two or three times a week, Grandma would put a sign in the window telling the iceman how many pounds of ice she needed that day. He would place tongs around the blocks of ice and haul them into the icebox.

I was quite close to my grandmother. I used to sit on her porch in the summer and listen with her to the popular soap opera "Helen Trent". Grandma Mellus had diabetes and heart problems. She died in 1939 when I was 16. In those days they had the funerals at home; Grandma was laid out in the living room. The family just put a wreath on the door and the neighbors came over.

This reminds me of another story. When I was 7 or 8, one of my little girlfriends died of scarlet fever. Because it was a highly contagious disease, the health department tacked up a quarantine sign on my friend's front door, forbidding people to enter or leave the house. So her family placed her body in a home-made coffin and propped her up in the front window. It was quite scary for us children, of course.

We lived in the house on Lisbon Street until I was about 9 years old. There was an alley that ran behind the house, and my mother was always careful to make sure that my sister Shirley and I did not wander into the alley, where there were people who went up and down the area collecting junk. My mother called them "sheenies". I think now they might have been Gypsies.

We lived on Lisbon Street during the depths of the Great Depression, and I remember hungry men who would come to our house asking for food. My mother would give them a can

of beans and a spoon, and they would sit on our steps eating their supper. It was a very bad time.

My mother was the homemaker; Dad was always working. It was a nice childhood. We had a radio, but I didn't use it much until I was a teenager and began listening to Big Band music. I took tap-dancing lessons and piano lessons. I read a lot. I don't remember having a bicycle until I was in high school. In the nice weather, I would lie out on the grass under the tree and watch the clouds. I was thrilled -- that was the height of my day. In those times, that was what we did. We jumped rope or would lie looking at the clouds. (My grandson Brian Richards had a school report to do several years ago and questioned me about my early years. He couldn't get over the lack of everything, and was amazed that I would spend hours just looking at the clouds.)

I probably loved looking at the clouds because when I was in the sixth grade, I had actually flown through them in an airplane. This occurred when my classmates and I went on a field trip to a local airport, where we were treated to rides in a small open airplane. I wore a helmet and goggles and sat in the front cockpit. The pilot sat in the rear cockpit. What an exhilarating experience! I was hooked (and actually took flying lessons later in my life when I was a teenager). Can you imagine anything like that being allowed today? Everyone

connected with such an outlandish field trip would be sued from here to kingdom come.

I also loved to ride the streetcar. When I was 11 or 12, my Dad was given some passes to the Detroit Symphony, and so my friend Gladys and I rode the streetcar to the symphony. I was just enthralled because I had never been to a symphony.

My Dad would take us to school in the mornings – it was three miles away—but I walked home because there was only one car and Dad had it. There was a Woolworth's store at the corner of Fort Street and Southfield, and it had big steam heaters. My friend Mary Luptak and I would walk home together, and on cold winter afternoons, we'd stand in front of the heaters to get warmed up, then continue walking home. Sometimes I still dream about walking home from school. It must be when I'm really cold! I always held hands with my girlfriends when we walked to and from school – it was a girl thing – but today, many people would say you're gay.

In school, I was good in English, history, and geography but awful in math. I still can't add or subtract or divide very accurately. I got my driver's license when I was 14, learning to drive on a car with a stick-shift on the floor. My Dad always had beautiful cars, usually Lincoln Zephyrs. My boyfriends were always crazy about his cars.



My parents took us on vacations from time to time – to Florida and, in 1939, to the Chicago World’s Fair. We also went to the New York World’s Fair. While in New York, we went to a night club owned by Lou Walters, the father of Barbara Walters.

I graduated from Lincoln Park High School in 1940 and decided to go to college. I’m not sure why I did that. Probably only four or five kids from my class went to college, and my parents never suggested it. But somehow I wound up at Marygrove College in Detroit. My roommate was Charlotte Whitcomb (Budde) from Atlanta. We are best friends to this day.

I stayed in college for 18 months, and then quit. In retrospect, I don’t know why I left because I really liked college. But I left school and went to work at The Mellus Newspapers as Society Editor for a year or so.

### **Chapter Three: “Newspapers Everywhere”**

Newspapers were my Dad's life, and, at least until I met and married Cy, they were my life, too.

When Dad was newly married and working in the circulation department of *The Detroit News*, he went to a fortune teller booth at the state fair. The gypsy read his fortune and told him, "I see newspapers everywhere."

Soon after, he took Mom for a drive, during which they passed the office of *The Wyandotte Tribune*. Dad suggested to her that he might try for a writing job there – something he had always wanted to do -- and, somewhat to his surprise, he was hired. Within a few months, he decided to go out on his own, putting together a \$750 stake from his savings and borrowing from his family. Within nine months, he was flat broke. So he went to work for Edward B. Gibbons, who owned four newspapers in the Downriver area. He stayed with Gibbons for nine years.

In 1933, Dad decided to go it alone again, launching his first four Mellus papers at the height of the Great Depression. He grossed \$275 his first week with a 5,000-circulation, eight-page weekly newspaper. By the time he sold to Panax Corp. in 1969, he was grossing as much as \$3 million a year and had seven newspapers with a total circulation of nearly 70,000.

The Mellus Newspapers office was originally in an upstairs room of our house on Lisbon Street. When Dad first launched

the paper, he did everything himself. He was always in his office typing, and the phone was always ringing. I had the bedroom right next to his office, and I always heard the typewriter going far into the night. Later he moved downstairs and turned the whole basement into his office. Then he started hiring reporters. People came and went and the telephone was always ringing, and Mom and Shirley and I were upstairs.

Starting his own newspaper was not a surprise, really, because Dad was always entrepreneurial. When he was just 7 years old, he began selling newspapers at dawn each day on a street in front of the neighborhood police station. And when he and his sisters, Bernadine and Marcella (Sally) were kids, they fashioned Christmas wreaths each year that Bill would then sell door-to-door, scooping them out of his wagon. Dad never finished high school, dropping out in the 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> grade. But his entrepreneurial drive was already set.

He was nicknamed “Wild Bill” and “Battling Bill”. The latter name came about because he would set aside Thursday mornings -- the paper was published on Wednesday – so that angry readers, such as the corrupt politicians he loved to expose, could come up to his office and try to punch him in the nose. Dad, who weighed about 260 pounds at the time, said that he used his stomach as a battering ram and usually won.

One of his most dangerous battles was against the Black Legion, a Ku Klux Klan-type of organization that in 1935 had an estimated 100,000 members in Michigan. He exposed this cult of “hooded avengers and killers” and published the names of many of the local members (some of whom were prominent businessmen and attorneys, appointed officials, and even police officers) on the front page. As a result, Dad later learned that he had been marked for death twice that year. The first plan – to shoot him in typical gangland style - was thwarted by the police chief. The second plan was to poison Dad, Mom, my sister Shirley, and me; that idea was eventually scotched because the hired killer said he wouldn’t mind doing away with “that son-of-a-bitch Mellus,” but to murder his family, too, the man thought, would be going too far.

Dad made a lot of enemies, though, as a crusading newspaperman even before the Black Legion. In 1930 or 1931, when I was 7 or 8, Dad came home one night saying that somebody was after him. He slammed the door, pulled down all the shades, and sat on the floor by the window with a gun in his hand. And he would never let Shirley or me go to the movies by ourselves. He would always take us and pick us up. I remember that he was afraid for our lives.

Dad was largely self-taught, and he was a tough, exacting grammarian. Anne Cairns Federlein, who worked at the paper

in the late 1950s and early 1960s, remembers the unending grammatical arguments he had with Nick Raar, the paper's managing editor. "Wild Bill would smoke a cigar, and Nick would smoke cigarettes and rant while perched on the edge of the chair in Nick's office. They would argue over a comma as though they were in charge of the English language," she says.

Federlein, who later became the first female president of Kentucky Wesleyan College, has other vivid memories. "Now the only time Wild Bill was tame was when Miss Violet called. He was calm and sweet and could fool you, because the minute he hung up with her, he would begin barking orders again. I also worked on the switchboard, and when she called, the orders were to put her through immediately. Violet never waited a minute to discuss social plans with Wild Bill. Also, while I was working the switchboard, the process servers would call on a regular basis. Wild Bill would keep his Cadillac in a garage in the alley, and when the process servers came in the front door, he would tear down the back stairs and out the back door. The rule was for me or anyone on the switchboard to call Wild Bill and tell him someone wanted to see him. I would then tell the man he would be right down. Of course this was true, but he was down and out the back door. This was the only time I ever saw him move quickly."

The Mellus Newspapers, with Dad at the helm, won hundreds of local, state, and national awards for editorial excellence over the years. He also won praise for his marketing skills: he used green paper stock instead of the usual white color, and required his newsboys to hang the papers on the readers' doorknobs. Then he would take the advertisers around and show them block upon block of houses with the newspaper on the doorknobs.

Shirley and Mom and I used to go on "calls" with him. Even if we were going to dinner or to someone's house, we had to stop at a business while he sold an ad. My mother spent half her life waiting for him. They were always late for every plane they took anywhere, because he would always stop to call the office. Just imagine if he had had a cell phone then!

He loved his work but would often say, "I've got a tiger by the tail and I can't let go." Everything revolved around him because he wasn't a delegator. He had to edit every period, question mark, and apostrophe.

Playing cards was his only form of recreation. He'd play with the politicians and the fire chief and the police chief. That would make my mother so mad. She'd call the police or fire station at 2 in the morning and they'd say, "No, Bill's not here." But of course he was.

His other favorite thing was spoiling his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. A week or two before he died in 1979, Dad told me that he regretted not being a better father to me and Shirley. "I was always too busy," he said. "I worked too much." So he was determined that wouldn't be the case with his grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

When Kay and Jan were babies, he'd stop at our house on Commonwealth Avenue every day on his way to work, about 10 a.m. He'd clomp through the house to wake them up from their naps. Then, once they were awake, he'd go into the bedroom where the girls were in their beds. He'd bring them ice cream and always wanted to buy toys. Finally, I put a stop to that and said, 'Cy and I can't afford to buy these things. So it would be better if you would just buy for the kids occasionally.'

My mother was always buying for the kids and grandkids, as well. There was always a big shopping trip for the grandchildren in downtown Detroit before school started each fall, and often during the school year, too. And when she had great-grandchildren, she loved to shop for fashionable clothes for them, too.

When Kay and Jan were younger, my mother and father loved to take the girls traveling. In 1958, they went to Los Angeles, where they met John Wayne and Katharine Hepburn at the Beverley Hills Hotel, and where they watched the

Mouseketeers perform at Disneyland; Las Vegas, where they met the singer Tony Bennett in the hotel elevator and comedian Ernie Kovacs, who was at the gambling tables with Grandpa; New York, Boston, Niagara Falls, and Washington, D.C. Of course, my Dad and Mom were young grandparents – just 40 and 42, respectively, when Kay was born.

Dad sold his newspapers in 1969, but didn't stay idle for long. He formed his own advertising and communications company, working out of the little stone house in his back yard. He took on all sorts of projects, including buying a rusting Great Lakes luxury cruise ship called the *S.S. South American* for \$200,000 in hopes of restoring it to its former glory and berthing it at Mackinac Island as a fancy floating hotel. (It never happened.)

He continued to wage colorful battles against anyone he thought was abusing the public trust. This included a local bank that he eventually sued. When the bank tried to serve him with a restraining order, Dad hid out all week in his house, then got a pilot friend to fly him by helicopter from the house on Grosse Ile to a card game in nearby Wyandotte. "I wasn't going to let a little lawsuit stand in the way of my weekly gin rummy game with the boys," Dad told *The Detroit News* in 1975. The newspaper ran a front-page story on the incident, accompanied by a photo of Dad getting into the helicopter.



He was truly an unforgettable character. But, then, so was Cy Collins.

## **Chapter Four: Cy**

I had several boyfriends before I met Cy, including a very nice guy named Bob Loeffler; Paul Prunkard, who continued to call the house in Dearborn from time to time when he was drunk and I had four children; and Harold Yates, a dashing British teenager in the Royal Air Force (RAF). Harold had been posted to Michigan during World War II to learn how to fly airplanes.

I was learning to fly airplanes, too, and I'd see Harold at Wayne Airport (now Detroit's Metro Airport). I took flying lessons for a year and a half, and flew a small Piper Cub solo one time to Ann Arbor. My instructor told me that I "flew by the seat of my pants," very instinctually.

As part of my training, I had one hour of flight instruction in a seaplane. We flew along the Detroit River, and my instructor kept reminding me to stay on the Detroit side of the river, and not to stray into Canadian airspace. I loved flying that seaplane! It is much easier to take off and land on water than on a concrete runway.

I had enough hours to get my pilot's license but needed to take a written test and some navigational exams, which I never did. I did, however, become briefly engaged to Harold Yates. We were both 18 years old. But then Harold was sent back to England (he became a decorated war hero) and I met Cy.

A high-school friend of mine called and said she was going on a date with Cy Collins, and that he had a friend at the dental school, Clint Something-or-Other from New York, and would I want to go to an East Side dance club with Clint? The four of us double-dated. Cy told me later that when he got home that night, he wrote to a friend in the South Pacific and said, 'Tonight, I met the girl I'm going to marry.' But I didn't like him at all. He was too flip and gabby. He called my Dad's paper the 'Mellus Blah-Blah,' and I didn't like that.

After we met, Cy kept calling me, and three times we had dates that I broke. When we finally had our first date, he took me to a Detroit Tigers ballgame – he always did love sports. We met in April 1942 and were married the next February, but, of course, these were war years and everything was speeded up. My mother and dad were so pleased to think it was Cy instead of Paul or Harold. They liked Harold a lot, but didn't like the idea of me living in England.

We had a party at the Drake Hotel in Chicago, where Cy presented me with an engagement ring (he thought it probably had been stolen) that cost \$56. My wedding ring cost \$9.

We were married at St. Henry Catholic Church in Lincoln Park on Feb. 27, 1943, soon after Cy finished dental school at the University of Michigan. Our reception was at The Dearborn Inn, considered a lovely, elegant place to have a wedding party.

We went to Dania Beach, Florida, near Fort Lauderdale, for our honeymoon. There was no transportation because it was wartime, so we took the train there and mostly walked when we were there. Once we took a bus to the dog races in Miami.

When we returned from our honeymoon, there was a letter telling Cy to report to Camp Hood, Texas. (He had finished a “crash course” six months early because they needed dentists in the Army.) I was fearful every day that he would come home and say he was ordered overseas. A lot of his friends were, and I was panicked about that. But it turned out they needed him at Camp Hood (now Fort Hood) to get soldiers ready to go overseas.

He reported to Camp Hood on May 1, 1943. I went with him by train and we bought a little Ford that cost \$600 once we were there. We shared a house and bathroom with the landlord and with Elda and Phil Barilla from New York, who

became lifelong friends. Cy took the bus to camp every day, 30 miles away.

There was no air conditioning , and Texas was unbearably hot, and I was pregnant with Kay. It routinely hit 110 and 115 degrees. We'd go to the movies on Sundays because they had fans, so then maybe it was 95 degrees instead of 115. Kay was born in Temple, Texas, on December 3, 1943. We were ecstatic, but we hated Texas. Once, I found a scorpion in Kay's crib – luckily, before it stung her.

One night in the summer of 1944, we went with Elda and Phil to a little restaurant that had a bar called the Moss Rose. I wasn't much of a drinker, and I had a gin fizz or something. Jan was born nine months later; Elda always said we should have named her Rose.

I got home from the hospital (I had returned to Michigan for Jan's birth) the first week of May 1945. I was still in bed at Grandma and Grandpa Mellus' house on Grosse Ile when we heard on the radio that the war was over, which meant Cy would be coming home! He arrived in August 1945, and we found a cute little house on Commonwealth Avenue in Southgate for \$10,000. The first year of Cy's dental practice with an older fellow named Dr. Kut, Cy made only \$600, but it was a start. The second year, he netted \$1,200.

Cy worked two or three evenings a week in the early days, and until 12 or 1 on Saturdays, too. We never had much money. When we came home from a trip to Florida with Kay and Jan about 1950, we had \$2 in our bank account. But it never worried us. Cy said, "Well, we had a good time." He considered it money well spent.

Thomas Michael Collins was born on January 21, 1952, and it was such a surprise, after two daughters, to have a son! I didn't think I'd have a boy. It didn't matter to me or Cy – he loved his girls. But it was such a shock to have the doctors tell me it was a boy.

A few months later, I had a gall bladder attack and my cousin Lois came over to the house to give me a Demerol injection for the pain. At about midnight, lightning struck the house and set some old tires in the basement on fire. It was April 13, 1952, Easter Sunday and Cy's 34<sup>th</sup> birthday. I was groggy from the Demerol, but miraculously, I was the one who woke up and smelled smoke. First I carried Tom, who was 11 weeks old, outside and placed him on a blanket under a tree in the front yard. Then I went back to the house to find Cy, who had awakened Kay and Jan in their upstairs bedroom. The smoke was incredibly thick, and so we all made a chain holding hands so that we could find our way out of the house. We went to our next-door neighbor's house and watched as the

firefighters put out the fire. We were incredibly lucky to have survived.

We lived with my parents on Grosse Ile for a couple of months while the house was cleaned and refurbished. But for months after the fire, our neighborhood smelled like burned rubber because of the tires that had smoldered in our basement.

In August 1952, I had gall bladder surgery. And in May of 1953, a few months after being elected to the local school board, Cy had a heart attack. He was 35 years old. I was 30 and about one month pregnant with Ann.

He was in the hospital – in an oxygen tent – for three weeks, and he didn't work for nine months or so. It was a terrible time. Here I was with three young children and Ann on the way, a sick husband, and no money. I don't know how I ever got through all that. I cried every day.

It was close to 18 months before Cy was able to go back to work full time, and during those months, Grandpa Bill bought our food and paid our bills. Otherwise, I guess we would have gone on welfare. We lived on "due-bills" that my Dad would exchange for advertising in his newspapers. I would grocery shop at those stores.

Cy had insurance on his hands, but not on his life. He couldn't get life insurance after that.

In 1956, we moved to our two-story house on Meridan Drive in Dearborn, where I lived until moving to Northville in 1990. The house cost \$33,000 and was a perfect size for our family.

The 1960s and early 1970s were good years, with all the kids in school and Cy apparently healthy. He and I traveled to Greece and Turkey, to Europe, and to the Caribbean numerous times. We took some family trips – a memorable one to Paradise, Michigan; another to Europe; still another to the East Coast and Quebec; and several to Florida to visit Cy's parents, who lived in Clearwater. In 1960, Cy and I toured Europe and England for five weeks. I wrote travel articles on the trip for The Mellus Newspapers; one of them was a first-person account of the royal wedding of Britain's Princess Margaret and Lord Anthony Snowden in London.

We had dinner when we were in London with my old flame Harold Yates, who had gotten quite stout but still had his wry sense of humor. Harold and I stayed in touch for nearly 65 years, sending Christmas cards and occasional letters back and forth until he died about five years ago.

It was also around 1960, when John F. Kennedy was running for President, that I became a Democrat. Grandpa Bill

had always been called “Mr. Republican,” and I never questioned his politics much, and I voted Republican myself. But JFK was so appealing in every way, so magnetic – plus Jan was a “Kennedy Girl” when she was in high school, wearing a Kennedy banner and hat and standing in the greeting line once when he landed at Detroit’s Metro Airport during the presidential campaign.

Anyway, from the 1960s on, I began paying attention to politics instead of allowing my views to be defined by others. Today, I guess I’m more of a Socialist than anything else. I’ve always been aware of the poor and the suffering in the world, and I believe strongly that we need to help those less fortunate than ourselves.

The 1960s were also when I first went back to college, part-time, to try to finish up my college degree. I took quite a few courses (one of my favorites was on China’s history and culture) as late as the 1970s at Eastern Michigan University and the University of Michigan-Dearborn, but I wasn’t motivated enough to finish, I guess. Now I do it in my dreams. I’m always back in high school or at Marygrove, looking for a classroom.

It was also in the 1960s that our first grandchildren, Michael and Michelle Malcho, were born. It was a happy time. But this was also when I began tuning in to the Vietnam War, and by the late ‘60s, I was very much opposed to it. I used to



have regular arguments – some of them quite heated - with friends and acquaintances who were in favor of that war. I told people that I would personally escort Tom over the border into Canada before I would see him in Vietnam, and I meant every word. With the exception of World War II, I can't understand how war ever makes things better. It just kills people, and many of those people are women and children.

I also think that it was in the 1960s that the world changed. Everything was different after that – and often not for the better. In my mind, I have always conflated those changes with The Beatles coming onto the music scene.

In 1972, Cy had a second heart attack, but he recovered fairly quickly. A couple of years later – in 1974 – we decided to buy some property in Hessel, Michigan, just over the Mackinac Bridge in the Upper Peninsula, and build ourselves a second home. We kept three cabins that were on the property and renovated them so that our kids could use them.

Establishing a “family compound” up North turned out to be a very good decision. For more than 35 years now, Hessel has been a wonderful place where children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and friends have been able to relax and spend time together. Kay especially loved Hessel; it was a magical place for her.

In 1977, Ann joined Cy's dental practice after her graduation from the University of Michigan Dental School. The next year, after his graduation, Tom joined the practice, as well. Cy was "pleased as punch" about his children joining him in the dental profession, he told The Mellus Newspapers, which ran an article about it.

In 1980, Cy underwent a triple bypass, but a year or two before that, he started having memory loss. From the time he was about 60 years old (in 1978), he was showing signs of decline. On a cruise that we took to Scandinavia and the Arctic Circle about that time, he sometimes got lost on the ship. Another time he took the car out for a drive, became lost, and kept going until he ran out of gas. We had the police out looking for him.

He was sick, really, for 12 or 13 years. Still, it was a terrible day when a physician at Ford Hospital diagnosed Cy with dementia. She said, "One day he will forget you, and I said, 'Oh, no, he'll never forget me.'" Maybe he did, maybe he didn't; we never really knew how much he knew. Cy died at a small nursing home in Hessel in January 1991. It was such an unfair ending for a wonderful, kind, loving man who laughed a lot and only tried to make people happy.

Every day he used to say to me, "You're the best thing that ever happened to me." He was the best thing that ever

happened to me, too. He permeated my whole life. Everything revolved around him. He was the light of my life.

When I remember my life with Cy, I think about the poem – one of my favorites -- by W.H. Auden called “Stop All the Clocks”:

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,  
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone,  
Silence the piano and with muffled drum  
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let the aeroplanes circle moaning overhead  
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is Dead,  
Put crepe bows round the white necks of the public  
doves,  
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,  
My working week and my Sunday rest,  
My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song;  
I thought that love would last forever: I was wrong.

The stars are not wanted now: put out every one;  
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;  
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.  
For nothing now can ever come to any good.

## **Chapter Five: Life After Cy**

In 1990, the year before Cy died, I sold our house in Dearborn and moved to a condominium in Northville. It was more countrified then; Beck Road, which runs in front of the condos, wasn't even paved. I have some lovely neighbors, and I have made some good friends here.

These friends, as well as my loving and caring family plus my wonderful doctors, nurses, and technicians, made all the difference when I was diagnosed with bilateral breast cancer in 1999. I haven't talked about it much, but this was perhaps the greatest trauma I have ever experienced. I was completely shocked and unprepared for the two lumpectomies and the 72 radiation treatments that followed. Happily, I made a full recovery, which has allowed me to live a full life.

I have done quite a lot of traveling in the past 20 years – to New Zealand to visit Penny Dean, Jan's "pen pal" of more than

50 years; to Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the Philippines with Kay for Mary and Roger Chua's wedding; to Australia, Morocco, Egypt, and Jordan, and to Europe a number of times.

I feel like I've been a widow forever, because Cy was sick for so many years before he died. It was just a gradual transition from having him ill all those years to being a widow; it wasn't an abrupt change. But it was never the same after that. You're always a fifth wheel, or you're alone.

There have been a lot of wonderful times, but there have been wrenching times, as well. It was such a terrible day when Kay told me she had melanoma. I remember that my skin felt like it was prickling all over; it was so dreadful. Her death has been a very difficult thing for me to accept, and I'm no longer sure what I think about God and religion.

I've had this love/anger relationship with the Catholic Church since I was young, actually. I think the structure of religion is good for raising children, but I've always quarreled with various Church doctrines that never made any sense to me, such as the prohibition on birth control. The way the Church treats women as second-class citizens also bothers me enormously. There are so many female scholars whose brilliance has never been given credence, and it is women, after all, who have been the conscience of the Church, the keepers of the faith, and the Church's moral guide throughout the

centuries. Despite my best efforts, I still haven't reconciled my conflicting views on these issues.

Sometimes I'm asked what I fear most in regard to future generations, and my answer is: the loss of solid values. So many young people today don't seem to know the things that make good character. We knew right from wrong, what was sinful and what wasn't. Today, the view seems to be: "If you feel good, do it." And many people don't stop to think if what they want to do is right or wrong, or if it will build character. Even the honor code that used to be followed by politicians has vanished. It's all very distressing.

All in all, though, despite some painful times, I've had a wonderful life. I don't regret passing up a career outside the home because if the most important thing in life is to love and be loved – and I believe this to be true – then I made the right choice. For nearly 50 years I was married to the love of my life, and we raised four wonderful children together. They raised their wonderful children, who are now raising *their* wonderful children.

We are blessed.

Northville, Michigan

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