Jean McCarty:

Music, Wisdom & The Bad Boys Home

by

Mike McCarty

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MIKE McCARTY

I spotted her standing near a table in the cafeteria area. "Hi, Ma," I shouted, walking quickly toward the white-haired woman in the worn, pastel sweater. She stopped talking to another elderly woman and looked up at me quizzically. She gripped the handles of her walker tighter. Soon, a smile crept in, and her eyes twinkled. "What are you doing here?" she said softly. I leaned down, hugged her, and replied, "To see you! Ma, you're looking good." Her smile abruptly vanished. Her dark eyes narrowed and she shook her head. "Liar," she said firmly. "Tell the truth."

I think she also told me to "cut the crap." But I couldn't be sure, because I was laughing; it was vintage Ma. She used the same shtick on me and her seven other sons when we were growing up. Sure, she's feisty at times, but some folks at her home call her "Smiley." Others call her "Jean," but those who get to know Jean Virginia McCarty find that she is often upbeat and chatty. She laughs, listens to you, and still is, to borrow one of her pet clichés, "one tough cookie." That latter trait was acquired when she was growing up in a big, rambunctious family on Detroit's East Side.

She also was a smart, pretty, and talented cookie.

Salutatorian of her East Commerce High School Class of 1945, dark-haired Jean Schmelzer became a typist with an eagle eye for detail, pointing out mistakes and omissions to the partners at Ernst & Ernst, a downtown Detroit accounting firm

that is now the globally prominent Ernst & Young. And she could type 80 words per minute on the big manual typewriters. But Jean wasn't *all* business. Far from it. She deftly played piano whenever and wherever, from family sing-alongs at home to local radio shows downtown. And once in a while on a Saturday morning during her grade school days, Jean wound up playing piano at a neighborhood tavern. Her father was there visiting his fellow pigeon-racing pals while his wife shopped nearby. When Jean popped in to fetch Papa, patrons urged her to play the keyboard, and she obliged. Her reward was a nickel and the chance to devour some "beer garden chips."

These and other stories of long ago are tucked away deep in Jean's mind. But accounts of the past are becoming harder to find for an 86-year-woman who resides in the memory care wing of an eldercare complex in suburban Detroit. Fortunately, snippets of her past are backed up. They reside in her children and her remaining siblings.

She still retrieves anecdotes, though they may not be about herself. Because when I visit, I can count on hearing a question or two from a few of the residents or caregivers: Are you one of Jean's boys? Which one are you?

My brothers field the same queries on their visits.

To know any of Jean's boys, you have to understand our roots. Our Catholic father, Bob McCarty, was a big, bald, Irish-American cop and Army vet who liked his beer and cigarettes and a good joke or story, the longer the better. Our Catholic mother, who comes from sturdy German and Belgian stock, was a household dynamo who, when she could carve out a few minutes, loved to play

Jean and Bob: *Christmas at home .*

boogie-woogie and a variety of new and old standards on the piano. Together, Bob and Jean raised eight boys in a tiny, wooden house on Detroit's gritty West Side in the 1950s and into the dawn of the '70s. Kids poured out of our packed house on Sussex Street like a clown car at Ringling Brothers. And we grew into guys with a wickedly sharp sense of humor. Or, as Ma would say, we became "smart-asses."

Is it any wonder Jean McCarty resorted to tough talk and unconventional measures to keep her boisterous brood under control? I can tell you some stories.

The Bad Boys Home

In religious-instruction class on Monday nights, my brothers and I were warned often about the raging inferno of hell. I'll concede the threat of eternal damnation was powerful, but it paled in comparison to my mother's arsenal. She used her weapons sparingly. However, when harsh tones, sticking a bar of soap in a sassy mouth, and the rest of her conventional discipline failed, she did not hesitate to launch her dreaded six-word missile: "Wait until your father gets home." The threat of a big Detroit cop on our case was usually enough to cow any one of us kids into submission.

But sometimes, a few hours after the warheads exploded, we forgot about the imminent threat. And if we ignored Ma or blatantly defied her while she was multi-tasking on home chores, she reluctantly, but firmly, dropped her nuclear bomb. The sign that a deadly launch was imminent came when she stopped in her tracks, summoned a steely glare, and marched to our rotary-dial telephone.

The house went silent. My brothers and I knew what was about to happen. Ma picked up the black receiver and forcefully dialed a number, each swoosh-click-click-click more terrifying than the last. And when the dialing stopped, we watched in horror as she said gravely into the phone, "Hello, Bad Boys Home. I have a pickup."

Then she went with purpose to her stash of brown paper grocery bags, grabbed one, and thrust it into the hands of the offending party. The bad son was forced to trudge upstairs to our bedroom, fill the bag with some of his clothes, then come back down and stand outside on the small cement block that we called a front porch. Holding that bag of clothes. Waiting for a truck from The Bad Boys Home to arrive.

Porch angst: *This is where offending McCartys waited for a truck from The Bad Boys Home.*

Uncomfortable questions and images tumbled through my mind, one on top of another, during the times I was sent to our front porch with my bag. What did the Bad Boys Home look like? How long would I be there? Months? Years? Did I bring enough underwear? Would Ma and Dad visit? Did I have to finish my homework?

By the grace of God or the poorly maintained fleet of The Bad Boys Home, the truck never arrived, and usually within 45 minutes Ma would allow us to stay at home – after we frantically pounded on the front door while screaming, crying, and pleading on the porch, “Please, please, please, I’ll be good, don’t let ’em take me, I’ll be good. You’ll see. I won’t fight again. I promise. I’m sorry. Really! Please, Ma!”

I was always so glad to be back inside that I don’t even remember her calling The Bad Boys Home switchboard operator to cancel her order. Obviously, Ma had latched onto one effective behavior-modification weapon. And no amount of U.N. sanctions would cause her to disarm.

By the time I graduated from high school and went to Michigan State University, I knew I was safe. Surely The Bad Boys Home did not pick up in East Lansing.

Bob and Jean and work

College was a luxury my mother and father did not enjoy. But these two high school graduates were determined that their children would have it better than they did. And somehow – using every trick in her business high school bookkeeping lessons, her job know-how, and an industrial strength frugality that was seared into her as a child of the Great Depression – Ma managed to stretch a police patrolman's salary like it was an elastic waistband. There was enough to keep her family fed, clothed, and happy. And even enough to begin building a nest egg to help the McCarty boys attend college, if they wanted to go.

It wasn't easy. Ma gave Dad an allowance, and he looked for deals. Such as a dented or semi-squashed day-old chocolate cake from the A&P for 19 cents. Or the enormous bottle of cheap perfume he bought Ma as a birthday gift. Our big splurge during summer vacation was a day trip to the Detroit Zoo.

My brothers and I were expected to pull our weight. That meant odd jobs or any job when our school day ended. Our early business startups included paper routes, delivering handbills, and stocking shelves at grocery stores. And when we got older and acquired better jobs, we were expected to pay rent until we moved out of the house.

However, my mother's rental rule wasn't as strict as her mother's decree on Parker Avenue on the East Side. In the '40s, Jean was required to turn over every paycheck to Mama, who would then give her daughter an allowance for the next week. After all, the effects of the Black Tuesday stock market crash on Oct. 29, 1929, weren't just felt for the next 10 years; they would alter the outlook of a generation. That Great Depression attitude required all able bodies to help keep families afloat. And then some. When Jean's father lost his furnace job, he found road work through a Works Progress Administration project before finally landing a Wayne County job. And Jean kept turning over her paycheck and getting an allowance until one week before she

got married in June 1948. That's when Mama let her bride-to-be keep the entire check.

Jean kept right on working at Ernst & Ernst until I was born prematurely in September 1949. It was fitting that she went into labor with her first child while laboring at home, painting a room at her and Bob's first dwelling, a small East Side flat on Belvedere Street. My birth marked the end of Ma's work outside the home, but it was the beginning of a challenging new career: running a household whose membership would grow quickly. Along with her job description.

Deal with one mess, and move on to the next. Comfort a crying kid, break up an argument or full-fledged fight. Cook dinner. Clean Dad's police uniform, lay it out for him, and get him off to work. Keep our clothes cleaned and pressed, and get us off to school. Work up the budget. And enforce it. The only times Ma sat were to eat dinner, play piano, or watch our little black-and-white television in the evening. And even then she jumped up to get us seconds, type school papers for us, and iron and fold clothes. Or move the rabbit ears antenna a little to the left on the TV. No, try going to your right. Pick it up and move ... that's it, a little more.

She went non-stop. Maybe that's why I call her "Ma." Some of my brothers use "Mom," but that sounds too June Cleaver-ish. Besides, I could never envision TV's motherhood icon of the '50s and '60s telling her younger son, "Cut the crap, Beaver." Or telling her other son, Wally, "Move it, fathead!"

Ma even inserted herself into some of our early jobs. Have you ever heard of a mother who helped her kids fold newspapers? Mine did. Twice a week in the basement. I delivered a free Detroit shopper to about 350 houses each Wednesday after school and Saturday morning, and my mother's night-before aid was sorely needed. But the route was so sprawling I recruited two of my brothers to help; we each delivered one-third. The arrangement was working well, until one of my brothers ratted me out. And the next week my income went from 50 percent of the profits to just 33 and one-third. But Ma never stopped folding papers for free, even after she ruled against me in the labor dustup.

Is it any wonder that my siblings and I required remedial religious training, especially to enforce that "do unto other brothers" thing? That was Ma's job, too.

Growing up on our knees

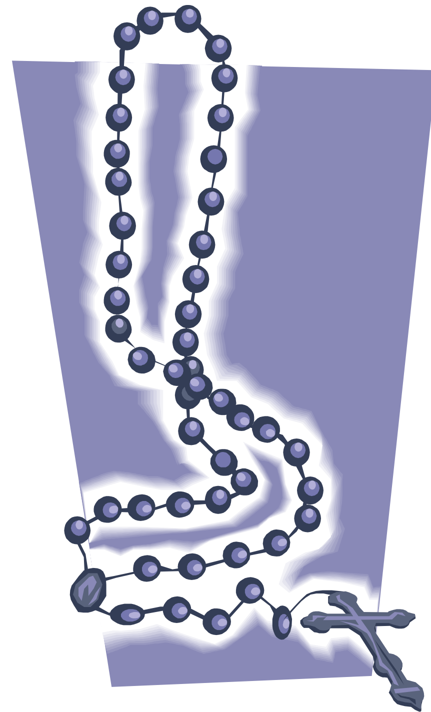
When Lent rolled around, even the McCarty boys and the other poor Catholic kids who went to public school knew that you had to give up something. There was one catch: It had to be something you liked. Which immediately ruled out my top three sacrificial choices: homework, vegetables, and my turn in the dish-drying rotation after dinner.

For a good month leading up to Lent, this choose-something-to-lose obligation was hammered into us – or, if you prefer, gently laid upon our conscience – by my mother, in addition to the priests at Our Lady Gate of Heaven Roman Catholic Church and the nun or civilian female who taught the weekly religious instruction class I attended.

I think the idea was to *choose* your own Lenten sacrifice. But my mother knew that it would be easier to paint and wallpaper our entire house by herself than to get her boys to choose what to surrender, much less to examine their conscience. So, in our younger years, she arbitrarily declared all McCarty boys would give up candy for Lent. Ma had experience in blanket decision-making. For instance, she wielded an electric hair-clippers, and gave us all brush cuts in summer and longer cuts with pompadours in winter. We would line up each morning so she could run a tube of Butch Wax over our closely clipped noggins, or she'd take a comb to our neat, cold-weather coifs. Henry Ford would have been proud of her assembly line. Besides, in domestic mass production, uniformity makes grooming and religious practice easier to police.

But one Lenten sacrifice apparently was not enough. Around 1960, Ma surprised her boys when she declared that, in addition to giving up candy, we would say the rosary with her during Lent. Every night! She tried to explain that this was not a punishment, but her words were lost on us.

So, sometime after supper and after the dishes were washed and dried, four West Side Detroit kids got down on their knees and prayed in a back bedroom. The rest of my brothers were excused because they found loopholes in this Lenten rosary scheme: They were either too small or weren't born yet. My mother, who knelt with us, fingered the plastic rosary beads and started each prayer, intoning, for example, "Hail Mary full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus." We would pick up the rest of the prayer, responding in dutiful unison: "Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and forever. Amen."



For several years, my mother took us all the way through Lent on sheer will, because it was hard to concentrate on the rosary when we could hear the stirring sounds of a pro hockey telecast just down the hall. My father was watching the Stanley Cup Playoffs on our trusty set in the living room while we were saying prayers. Ma knew we loved hockey, but she never took into account that the National Hockey League scheduled playoffs before Easter. So, for us, "The Agony in the Garden," the first rosary decade of prayers, may as well have been "The Agony in the Bedroom."

First, a word in Dad's defense. He didn't join us in the rosary because, obviously, the hockey game was on. But he didn't need to, because married couples had their roles. Dad was the family breadwinner who worked long hours fighting crime in Detroit's 11th precinct. He also drove us around, played with us, and fixed things around the house. Mom raised the kids, cooked meals, and saw to it that we did our homework and got religious instruction.

But if Ma’s religion discipline didn’t take, we knew who we’d have to answer to. And it wasn’t Our Father. It was our father, who art in the living room watching hockey.

Dad had the television set’s volume on low, but we could faintly hear the play-by-play weave under and through our prayers, until the litany blended into a mishmash: *Our Father who art … in Maple Leaf Gardens, the high-flying Leafs under Punch Imlach ... hallowed be thy name … Bower makes the save, and Armstrong passes the puck … on earth as it is in heaven, give us … Toronto needs a goal to … trespass against us.*

In an effort to hear the game better, we tried to creep toward the hallway – on our knees while praying – without arousing Ma’s suspicion. We made our best gains when she closed her eyes in reverence or exasperation. But if she ever wondered why we didn’t end the rosary in the same position we started, or why our prayer responses got quieter, she never said a word. She just plunged ahead, into the next prayer.

Jean's noteworthy talent

That's how she has operated at all stages of life, simply plunging forward to the next task. Perhaps those Schmelzer roots had something to do with her unflappable fortitude. As a girl, Jean was called "Skinny Schmelzer" by some children, but the teasing didn't seem to bother her. Neither did the rigors of attending East Commerce, one of Detroit's top business high schools. Her brother Richard recalls his older sister Jean was "brilliant from Day One," excelling at Van Dyke Elementary and St. Edward's Catholic School, where she won an American Legion award in the eighth grade for highest grade-point average.

The third-oldest of seven strong-willed kids (three girls and four boys), Jean found solace in music. She loved to play the piano. "It was the most fun you could have," she recalled recently.

Several Schmelzer siblings were musical, too; guitar, banjo, vibes and drums were among their instruments. But Joan, the guitarist, said her older sister stood out: "Jean could *really* play."

The Schmelzers: From left, Richard, Jean, Jack, Margaret, Larry, Emma, Art, Joan, and Tom.

She picked up lessons here and there, including some sessions from a nun at St. Edward's School. And Jean quickly developed an ear for music. If she hummed a tune long enough, she could wing it on the piano. "Playing was relaxing," she mused. She especially savored playing by herself or playing while her mother sang.

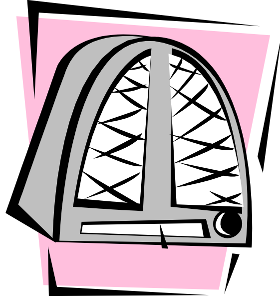
But Jean soon found that the ability to play piano for others had its perks. During her high school days, she found part-time work downtown, playing accompanying tunes at "the conservatory." This may have been the former Detroit Music Conservatory, which was in an old Woodward Avenue mansion.

In turn, that led to a part-time gig nearby at WXYZ Radio, as one of the background musicians for the Detroit station's locally produced shows. This was still the golden era of radio, and "The Lone Ranger" topped the popular, live programs originating in the station's spartan studios atop the Maccabees Building on Woodward.

On the 15th floor of the Maccabees, Jean Schmelzer entered a world of actors, musicians, scripts, and exciting shows such as "The Green Hornet," "Challenge of the Yukon" and, of course, the popular show about the legendary masked man of the West. "The Lone Ranger, which got its start at WXYZ in 1933, quickly went regional and national while still emanating from Detroit.

When WXYZ moved to larger studios in early 1944, Jean may have gone along and played piano in the wood-paneled rooms of the Mendelssohn Mansion on Jefferson Avenue.

At WXYZ, Jean got to see radio celebrities such as Brace Beemer, who played the Lone Ranger during the period she was there, and Al Hodge or Bob Hall, who voiced the Green Hornet back then. She never got to talk to the leading men, but the actors who portrayed their sidekicks usually stopped to chat. She recalls they were older men. John Todd, a stage-trained actor who played Tonto, the Lone Ranger's pal, was in his late 60s when Jean was there.



Recently, when asked what shows and music she played at WXYZ, Ma said simply, "Whatever they wanted." She smiled and added, "I would have played for free."

Not long after her radio job was up, television came on the scene and, in the '50s, "The Lone Ranger" would gallop across the screen and into Bob and Jean McCarty's living room, where their boys were watching.

Ma still sat down at the piano when she found a few minutes in the evening, usually after the dinner dishes were cleaned and put away along with the clutter of another McCarty family day. Meanwhile, as the years rolled on, three brothers took up guitar and played with my mother. We gathered around her piano or organ. These jams were lively sessions, with lots of singing. Ma sang, too, in between calling out the chord changes. When I hear classics such as "Ramblin' Rose," "Anytime," and "Crazy," I can still hear Ma's voice over the lyrics: "G ... D7 ... G again ... now C." And after a jam ended, it was hard to keep from humming Jean McCarty's uptempo version of "Just a Closer Walk With Thee."

The music stops

And then the piano fell silent. In the spring of 1991, Jean lost her husband, and we McCarty boys lost our father. A sudden heart attack at home felled the larger-than-life man. Bob McCarty was only 65, and was working as a security guard at a

local hospital while collecting his Detroit Police Department pension. Dad and Ma had begun to travel outside Michigan, and seemed to be enjoying their newfound freedom, without eight children underfoot.

Life without Dad was unimaginable. And the McCarty boys couldn't help but wonder what our mother was going through. After all, Bob McCarty was the handsome, joking man she began dating in 1947 after he returned from a 2-year hitch in the Army and donned a Detroit Police Department uniform. Love blossomed quickly, and the next year, 22-year-old Bob McCarty married 21-year-old Jean Schmelzer.

Wedding memories: *In 1948, Bob and Jean tied the knot, and posed with her parents and Bud and Marge.*

And this was the man and the woman who were fierce defenders of each other and their family. When my mother returned from the hospital after giving birth to Larry, her fifth son, a smiling couple from the neighborhood brought over a cake and a brochure about rhythm birth control. Dad threw out the cake and the neighbors.

And this was the man and woman who served us at the dinner table. Their arms moved furiously. Dad dolloped the mashed potatoes with a big spoon as if he was on a precision bombing mission, each scoop hitting a plate with a hearty thwack. Ma moved around with her fried chicken, dropping her missiles by hand. They worked as a team.

But now, in 1991, the team was no more.

At a rosary service leading up to the funeral, Ma sat quietly in the front row. Before the service began, a priest with a thick Irish brogue approached. With a smile, the cleric asked, "So, Mrs. McCarty, what county was yer husband from?" Ma

paused, looked hesitantly at him, and replied nervously, "Macomb?"

"No, no, Mrs. McCarty," the priest replied with a slight laugh, and left it at that. My mother smiled, but I never did find out if she came to know the priest was talking about Ireland, not suburban Detroit. I was grateful for the exchange, because it broke through the icy bleakness.

Soon, Ma would play the piano, again, and, in her mid-60s, she would learn to drive a car. Dan taught her. The fourth-oldest McCarty brother moved back home after Dad's death, and was a great help to our mother. And she to him. Diagnosed with systemic lupus at age 18, doctors gave Dan five or six years to live. With humor and determination, he would endure intense pain, a kidney transplant (from his older brother Rick), a hip replacement, experimental treatments, and steroids that gave him a "moon face." And he would beat the doctors' prognosis. Dan died at age 40, five years after we lost Dad.

And Ma was alone. With two graves to tend.

Sure, she volunteered at church. My brothers and I visited her at her house. The grandkids did, too. We'd take her out to eat, or stay in and sing and play around the piano or organ. But through the night, only she was at her house in Utica. And gradually, age and the hard years of caring for her family and friends caught up with this woman of average build and exceptional endurance.

She began to slow down. She was driving less, and occasionally getting lost. When her car collided with another vehicle in a nearby supermarket parking lot, she gave up her keys. When she fell down stairs at her home and nearly bled to death in May 2010, she gave up her house. She convalesced at a local nursing home, and my brother Kelly and his family took her in, but her care needs grew quickly. By December 2010, she was in a retirement home. By early 2013, she had moved to a senior care complex's assisted-living quarters, and in June she moved across the parking lot to her current home in the complex's memory care unit.

Her old piano is in a gathering area in the assisted-living building. Ma donated the instrument when she made the move to her current quarters. She rarely played the piano in recent years, even when it was in her room. She'd look at her aged hands and explain to me in a matter-of-fact way that she just couldn't play like she used to. But during an autumn visit to her old building, she spotted her former piano in a quiet corner. She simply left her walker, sat on the bench, and played, according to her impressed caregivers. It was as if Ma and the piano were two dear friends who hadn't seen each other in a while, and they had a lot of catching up to do. The muscle memory that stubbornly refuses to leave my mother's fingertips carried the conversation.

Today, Ma is just miles away from her former house, which was purchased by a young family making their own memories. And I find myself thinking about recollections of the woman who laughed with us, upbraided us, and taught us. All nine of us. That includes Dad.

Ma's wisdom

Her wisdom was a mix of practicality, determination, faith, humor, and hope. To an outsider, it may have seemed as if the young McCarty boys had only one rule in life: Come home when the street lights go on. But there were more. It's just that Ma and Dad's statutes and curfews kept changing as the family kept growing, and playing enforcer became as futile as playing a piano without the black keys. But there were ironclad rules, albeit unwritten ones.

For example, if any McCarty boys ran into trouble, no, make than *when*, Dad and Ma would defend us to the hilt – unless we lied about our plight or were at fault. And if my folks ever *found out* that we were guilty of either one, the offending boy would be in a far deeper mess. And there was a third asterisk: If you were in a dispute with one of your schoolteachers, complaining to Ma was useless. She took the teacher's side. Always.

Her practicality was frequently on display, from making meals on a skimpy budget to making casual conversation. After

Ma's fourth or fifth boy, a neighbor asked, "Don't you want a girl?" Her reply: "Not now." Surely, the questioner simply asked about feelings. But Ma's response instantly factored in the need for another bedroom and new clothes instead of hand-me-downs.

Perhaps her most memorable advice to me came after I told my parents that Karen and I were going to be married. Dad and Ma were elated; so were Karen's folks. Later, I cornered my spiritual mentor, hesitantly telling my devout Catholic mother that Karen and I would be married in her church, and that I would stay Catholic and Karen would remain a Lutheran. Then, I braced myself as I asked the woman who had a picture of the pope next to the crucifix on her living room wall, “What faith do you think the children should be raised in?”

Without hesitation, my mother answered, “The mother’s, of course.”

My question was tinged with old Catholic guilt, and her answer was colored with pure old common sense. It was a recognition that we all have roles to play, and this one wasn’t mine. Her reply also flew in the face of a church rule, as I understood it: Children of Catholics in mixed-religion marriages should be raised Catholic.

The bottom line? To my parents, my 1972 nuptials meant one thing: One down, seven to go.

The legacy of her advice? Karen and I gave Ma four grandchildren who were raised Lutheran but were unafraid to experience other Christian denominations. And her legacy is still growing. In all, my mother has 18 grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren spread out over several states.

Her smile

Now, the white-haired woman in the pastel sweater over a light blue top is smiling at me. She is sitting at a cafeteria table, with her walker parked nearby. She's just several feet away, and is closer than the dozen or so other elderly women seated nearby and the three caregivers standing over in the corner. All are watching me.

When I began playing the guitar, Ma's smile grew. Standing with the guitar strap over my shoulder, I looked down at my notebook of song lyrics and began singing "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," one of the staples that Ma played so many times on her piano in our tiny house in Detroit, and in later years in the suburbs.

Front row seat at the table: *Ma puts up with me and my guitar.*

As I sang, I looked up to see my mother. She was singing along quietly, matching me word for word. And I was the one who needed a cheat sheet for the lyrics. I played more old songs, and when I didn't catch her crooning or humming, I saw her relaxed, gregarious smile. It was the same smile that her siblings and her sons remember vividly, the one that describes trust and love better than words could accomplish.

And when a woman in a walker slowly passed by her table, Ma greeted her and laughed.

My mother did not have a piano. She wasn't in a radio studio or an accounting firm or a McCarty living room. On this day, like every day, she was living a lesson that she long ago taught Dennis, Rick, Dan, Larry, Kelly, Jerry, Steve, and me.

Be happy with what you got, Buster.

Epilogue: 2019

Six years later, Ma has traded in her walker for a wheelchair. Her dementia has worsened, and her soft speech

quickly descends into unintelligible sounds. But through it all, she still has a ready smile and laughs heartily.

Two years earlier, Ma had a good time at her 90th birthday party in February 2017. We got a separate room at Shelby Crossing and had a party with family. Steve got fast food. And, of course, we had a birthday cake.

Ma maintained her smile and laugh even as her faculties faded. And at 12:42 a.m. Sept. 4, 2019, Steve texted all his brothers that Ma "slid out of bed" and was taken to Henry Ford Macomb Hospital. The diagnosis: broken femur. Surgery would be too tough on her heart. Doctors immobilized the leg and put Ma on pain control meds. My brothers and I knew what was next. On Sept. 5, the hospice process was started and our mother was released back to her old room at Shelby Crossing.

On Saturday, Oct. 5, Ma breathed her last. Rick and Dennis were there when it happened.

The funeral at St. Michael Catholic Church was beautiful. And the priest shared stories about working with Ma when she volunteered at St. Michael. For instance, when he was told Ma could play the piano, he asked her to play a tune. The priest was expecting something from the Forties. Instead he got "Bad, Bad Leroy Brown." And when she was introduced to a young volunteer on work relief, Ma told him, "That's my purse. You touch it, and I'll kill ya."

A few days after the funeral, I received an email from a woman whose husband has resided at Shelby Crossing Legacy for the past two years. That's how she came to know Ma. Sue Starrs' message:

"Dear Mike and brothers:
...Your Mom and I connected on many levels. She looked a bit like my Grandma, so that primed the pumped. We shared a common love of music and sang together many times. I loved her spunky, sweet disposition. She had the attitude to enjoy what she could enjoy. Her fingers didn't always cooperate, but it seemed her cup was always half-full, not half-empty. In those last weeks as she was bedridden I'd drop by to visit, leaning way in to hear her as her voice got softer. I knew the story of the "Bad Boy Home".... loved it. ... My sympathy to you and your family. I only knew Jean two years, but miss her too."

We love and miss our mother.

The McCarty boys: *Celebrating Steve's wedding in 1993 are, clockwise from bottom left, Dan, Dennis, Mike, Jerry, Kelly, Rick, Larry and the groom.*