

Mistake

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My Life

I was born in 1969 on a cloudy, rainy Wednesday, in a central Ontario town called Owen Sound.

The Prime Minister at the time was Pierre Trudeau,

A 3-bedroom home was \$25,600,

A new Ford cost \$2,985,

Gas was \$0.16 cents a liter,

Bread was just \$0.50,

And a liter of milk was \$0.41.

My parents were Rick and Donna Barrett. They were married in May of 1966; my mother was pregnant with my older sister Laura at the time of the wedding. A year later they had my brother Randy, and in October of 1969 I arrived. I guess I was a surprise because every time my mom

would introduce me, she would say, "and



**Mom and Dad's wedding
L to R: Mom's mother, Dad, Mom,
Dad's father and mother, Aunt Helen, Uncle Bill**

this is my mistake, my youngest Tracy."

I grew up in the small Hamlet of Hepworth, Ontario, population 500, between Owen Sound and Sauble Beach.

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Where we lived in Hepworth

before and now



The house in Hepworth

Chapter 1

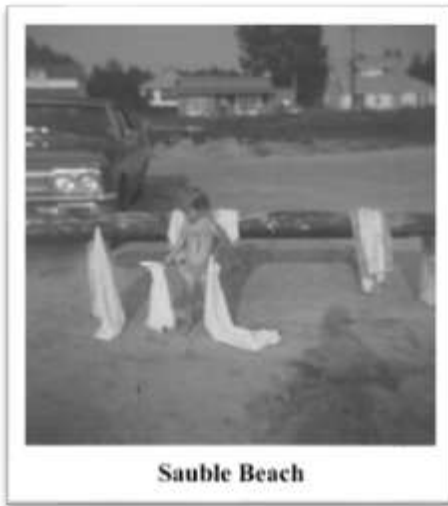
Summers were the best. Mom and the three of us would sometimes bike the seven kilometers to Sauble Beach where we would spend a few hours swimming and playing in the sand. Dad never came since he was a bus driver; He drove charters to the States and back.

He would be gone a week at a time, but when we were able to go to the beach as a family, we had a blast.

Dad would put us on his shoulders and we would dive off into the water.

Sauble Beach was on Lake Huron shores with seven kilometers of sandy beach. There were a lot of sandbars, and sometimes Dad would have to carry us out past some, because between each sandbar the water would get a lot deeper, past my head plus I was not a strong swimmer.

Back then you could drive right to the water's edge. I think you can still do that at some parts of the beach.



We would stay there till the evening a lot of the time, even if it rained, we would be in the water. The only time we would

run out would be if there was thunder; then you would know lightning was to follow.

Mom and Dad had a lot of friends, but the ones they hung with most were the Smiths, Lorna and Percy. They lived on a small acreage beside the gas station just down the road from where we lived. My earliest recognition of the Smiths was when I must have been two or three. I remember me being lifted and put in a crib with a little girl I came to be good friends with, Rhonda.

Rhonda was younger than me but we grew up playing together with my siblings and her siblings, Paul and Robby. I will tell you a secret: I had such a crush on Robby growing up. He was my brother's age where Paul was my sister's age.

They were a great family.

Every Sunday Mom would get the three of us up for church; our good church dresses hung on an old coat rack that my

grandfather made for my grandma. She would make me wear a polyester dress or pants which I hated because the feel of the material between my legs and fingers gave me the heebie-jeebies.



Sunday School outfit

But I had no choice but to wear them, so off to the church we'd go, which was just down the street, while Mom and Dad and Grandma (who lived with us) would go back to bed.

I liked church. It gave me an understanding of life; it's where I learned how to socialize and make friends. Laura and Randy and I would sit close to the front of the church so when the Minister called the children up to talk to us, before we all headed down to the basement for Sunday school, the three of us would be the first in

line. We would sing songs, play games, and talk about God and the bible, but the best part of church was gathering with the adults for coffee and snacks—*coffee yes!* is where my coffee addiction came from.

Some summers Mom would put us in summer camp through the church and would make us walk to the other side of town, which felt like miles but was maybe only a fifteen-minute walk. We went to someone's house but stayed in the back yard. It was ok but I would have rather played with my friends or gone to the beach. I don't remember much about the camp except most of the neighborhood kids were there so it made the time pass fast.

Chapter 2

Our house was a two-bedroom, two-story brick home right in the center of the main street of town. Across the street was the Royal Bank of Canada, Duffy Hotel was just down the road, and across from the Hotel was a hardware store. There were maybe five houses on our side of the road and everything was within walking distance.

The library looked like an old school house that was just two doors down from us; I loved renting books from them. Mom and Dad never had a lot of money, so they rented the house from a couple of older people next door who was known as the Cunninghams.

At the back of their property was an old train station, where a lot of towns kids would go to hunt for glass bottles and items from the past. We made it into our playhouse and spent many hours into the night playing and using our imaginations—we had a blast.

Now Mom would only allow us to play with kids on our side of the street (remember five or so houses were all there was); that made maybe three kids to hang with unless the kids from across the street came to the ball diamond right behind our house to play.

Children now-a-days spend too much time indoors playing video games and watching TV. Parents would kick us out once we had breakfast and we were not allowed back inside unless we had to pee or were hurt.

Grandma was not at all well and would sleep a lot, and because we were told we

couldn't cross the street unless someone was there to help us cross, we were limited on friends; but we always made the most of it.

We would make plans with neighborhood kids to meet at the ball park behind our house. Sometimes we would play truth or dare, baseball, or tag, and if we were there till dark, we would play dodge the bats; they would start to come out just as the sun was going down.

We were always told to never let the bats near you because they have rabies, and would get stuck in our hair. Funny how today all grown up, I come to find out they were dive bombing us not because they were trying to attack us, but they were after mosquitos. We didn't care. We still had fun diving to the ground when we saw them come close.

On the weekends we were able to stay up later then our normal bedtime. The three

of us kids shared the largest bedroom with a stove pipe right through the bedroom floor. I remember the smell of creosote that creeped out of the cracks of the pipe. I would rip a piece off and play with it like it like plasticine, not knowing it was bad.

With money tight back then the wood stove was our only source of heat. Dad's income was the only money we had, and with a family of six it was hard, but we had a roof over our head and food in our tummy. We were grateful for what we had.

Our school was within walking distance so we never had to take a bus, but it was sure cold in the winter when we had to walk to school. The school that I went to was Amabel-Hepworth Central public school. It was a small school but had the best monkey bars. I went to school there till the fourth grade. Lots of friends were made there; two in particular were sisters Roxanne and Christine MacMillan who

lived on Elizabeth St. not far from our house.

I started to hang out with them from around grade two on. We would walk home together and hang out at their grandparents' place. They lived right next to the memorial park, which was right across the road from where we lived. They would go there till their mom got home from work. I remember one day playing a game of freeze, where one person who is it would yell "freeze" and everyone playing would stop and not move while the one person walked around and if anyone moved, they were out of the game. Well! I was on the ground with my head down so I figured if she can't see me, she cannot see me move. I was doing so good till I felt a warm gush of something on my head; when I opened my eyes, I found one of the two chihuahuas, that belonged to Roxanne and

Christine's grandparents, peeing on my head and the girls laughing on the ground.

My Grandma, who was my dad's mother, lived with us ever since I can remember. She had trouble walking stairs, so she had her bed in the living room with an oxygen tank right beside her at all times.

She was a kind lady but she also had a mean streak in her. One day Mom was outside hanging laundry and Grandma and my mom got into a heated argument, not sure over what but it was intense for a bit. But that was the one and only time I saw Grandma mad.

Grandma had this budgie who lived in a cage at the end of her bed, and she would always leave the door open to let him fly around the house. We would come home from school to Grandma sitting at the end of her bed talking to her bird; She taught him lots of words like 'pretty boy', 'I love

you', and would sing the Andy Griffith Show tune.

Every time Laura and I would do dishes, and as soon as he would hear the water running, he would come-a-flying and land on our shoulders, crawl down our arm and have us make a cup out of our hands so he could take a bath. He loved the water, flapping his wings and all.

Grandma loved her pets. She had this Pomeranian, fluffiest dog I had ever seen, she called her Cindy; Cindy was evil and very yappy! But she loved Grandma and Grandma loved her. Every time one of us kids would even think to go near Grandma she would snarl and try to bite us. We would sneak up to give Grandma a hug goodnight and she would attack our feet.

Eventually Cindy and the bird grew old and passed away. Grandma got another bird but decided another dog was too much

but she started all over again teaching this bird the same tricks as the last.

Grandma was older when she married my Grandfather Moses who already had three older children. When my dad was born Grandpa's children were grown and gone. Grandpa was much older than my grandmother but they loved each.

I think it was when he passed that Grandma came to live with us. We never really got to know my dad's sisters since they and their children were much older. So, we spent a lot more time with mom's sisters and family. We loved going to our aunts and uncles; most of the family would come over and play music and sing.

In 1979 I was ten. My mom's mom was dying of cancer and they wanted to have one last get together with all her children and family, so we had a family reunion at Grandmas place in Wiarnton.

It was so much fun seeing everyone there, we did sack races and had family pictures with Grandma; the best part was my mom's brother Uncle Wayne came home from the West Coast to say bye to Grandma. And that would be the last he came home for a very long time.



Grandma passed not long after the reunion.

Bad habits are hard to break and Grandma and Dad had the bad habit of smoking, and back then no one said a word about not smoking in the house., One day my siblings asked me to sneak a few cigs from Grandma for them to try, and knew if I got caught it would only be a slap on the hand not the butt, and me being easily influenced I said yes. So, when I stole a few

cigs and took them out back to the old fallen in well that was our fort we took turns trying the cigarettes, I coughed and coughed. No way, to this day, I do *not* smoke. But my siblings, now that's another story.

Grandma, not being well, never went far from the house. So, one day we were coming home from somewhere and pulled into the driveway to a lot of smoke coming from the back of the house where the garage was, fact is that was where we kept the wood for the wood stove, Dad was panicking when he saw the smoke thinking he'd lost all the fire wood he just bought. We all ran to the back to find a mattress that was in the garage smoldering. Dad got the hose and put it out; Luckily the garage was not damaged nor the wood pile, but Dad was pissed He came in the house and kicked us off the couch and made us stand in front of him. He asked each of us if we did it and of

course when things get like this I laugh, this is my way of dealing with situations, which didn't help things. But Randy finally came forward saying that he and a friend were playing with matches and when we had to leave, he thought it was out but of course it wasn't; just lucky we came home in time or could have been much worse.

I don't remember how old I was when Dad decided to buy us a trailer in a seasonal park near Wiarnton, called Mountain Lake Camp. This is where I met my best friend, Tammy Booley.

My parents and her parents became good friends, and Tammy being my age and her brother being Randy's age, we even shared the same birthday month of October except hers is on the twelfth and mine is the twenty-ninth, we became friends as well. We were inseparable all that summer, going swimming, roller-skating, crafting, hanging and just talking. We had a blast

and when the season was over it was hard to say good bye till next year.

I was about nine or ten when Dad's company said they were moving and if Dad wanted to keep his job, we had to move with the company to Owen sound. It was so hard to say goodbye to all my friends I had made in school, but knew I would be making new ones where we were going so was excited.

I was in the back of the bronco when we turned into the driveway of the mobile home park where our new home was. I remember seeing a girl at the corner by the mail boxes watching as we drove by. I ducked my head down hoping she didn't see me, but when I peeked my head up I noticed that the girl I was afraid to see was

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actually my best friend from our campground in Mountain Lake, Tammy Booeey.

