



PART 2: The Teenage Years

There's so much stress to being a teenager. You know your independence is close, and you're pulling toward it, while at the same time you have such strong needs for the comfort and strength of your family. I had a lot of rules to live by when I was a teenager, and I can honestly say that most of the time, I really appreciated those rules. They made me feel safe, and allowed me to avoid making the kind of decisions I really wasn't ready for.

For example, we weren't allowed to date until we were 16. Until that time, we'd have friends over to the house – boys and girls – and we'd hang out in the backyard or on the porch. Sometimes we'd go out as a group or meet at a dance. It didn't seem unfair to us, even at the time. It was a lot of fun to hang out in a big group and we weren't all that anxious to be in a situation where we were dealing with guys one on one. Once we did start dating, we weren't allowed to date the same boy more than every other weekend. It was good, it gave you the excuse to get to know a lot of guys instead of getting too serious too soon.

We also had a curfew, although it was pretty lenient by the time I started going out. I had to be in by 11 o'clock. That was usually not a problem – I'm not a late night person anyway – but I remember one time I thought it was totally unfair. I had driven a bunch of my friends to a T-Rex concert, and I called home to tell my mother the show wasn't going to be over by 11. My mom said that was just too bad, I had to be in by curfew, so I had to make everyone leave the concert and drive home. That didn't sit real well with me, as you can imagine.



Mary, seventh grade

GETTING ALONG WITH MOM

I had a really rough time with my mother during my teenage years. Maureen had always been so much more nurturing to me than my mom, and I was convinced that mom really didn't like me. I loved her, but she didn't seem to have any compassion for me, and I didn't feel I could trust her.

One time when I was in high school, I rearranged my bedroom and put flowers and incense all around it. My mom came in and tore the whole thing apart, put it all back the way it was, and told me I was forbidden to have incense in my room. She took a pin to my Woodstock album and scratched out the first Country Joe song, the FISH cheer. I was so angry. I just wanted to be in control of my own life and she was so domineering.

She never wanted me to express my feelings. I remember the day I broke up with Fred, the guy I'd been dating during my first year of college. I came home after breaking up with him and I was so upset, lying on my bed crying, and my mom just walked in and said, "Stop it now, Mary Pat, you're not supposed to have feelings like this at your age. Come down and eat dinner." She hated my emotional side, and when you're a teenager, that emotional side is so strong. It was bound to be a problem.

Maureen had to come between us one time during a big fight when I was 16. We were yelling at each other and all of a sudden my mom reached out and hit me. She

I think I got my love for babies and the elderly from my mom. She was such a caring person. Like me, she felt honored to be able to take care of the neediest people.

was way out of line. I think it was especially hard for her to deal with that teenage resistance because I'd been so quiet as a child. My brothers and my parents loved to get into heated discussions about the topics of the day. I never got involved when everyone else in the family was yelling back and forth. My defense mechanism was to retreat, hold onto my strength for when I could use it. So when it starting coming out when I was a teenager, my mother really didn't know how to deal with it.

HIGH SCHOOL

Our high school, Nazareth Academy, was all girls. Our brothers went to another Catholic school, Padua Franciscan, about two-and-a-half miles away. That boys' school was associated with ours, and we'd have dances and other events with them. There was a lot of unfairness in the way girls were treated in those days, but we didn't really know any better. For example, the boys' school had sports teams and our school supplied the cheerleaders – we didn't have any sports teams of our own. Can you imagine life without soccer?

I had to work hard to get decent grades. School back then wasn't really any fun, there were no hands-on activities, just a teacher lecturing in front of the room. There were two tracks you could be in — secretarial or college prep. I was in college prep, and had to take all the hardest courses because my dad felt that the most important thing in life was to get a good education. Chemistry, high-level math . . . it was tough, but I have to say I was really well prepared by the time I went off to college.

BEHIND THE WHEEL

Learning to drive was a big deal for me because it gave me a whole new level of independence. I think everyone in my family took a turn at helping me learn. In fact the first time I drove was to help my brothers get out of a snowdrift when I was 13 or 14. Paul had a Rambler with buttons for the gears instead of a stick shift. The boys told me to get in and press the buttons for forward and reverse as they rocked the car to get it loose. Well it worked, but with that last push, I took off and nearly ran someone over because they'd forgotten to tell me how to stop.

For years we'd only had one car, and that one was gone most of the time when my father was away on business. When I was in high school, my mom got her first car, a big old second-hand Oldsmobile. I used to drive that boat to school, loaded with a bunch of my friends. But it was so exciting when I was in 11th grade, and my mom got a brand new brown Pinto. The excitement was short-lived though. The second day we had it, I took it out to Parma Town Center with my girlfriend Cindy. We parked it way out at the far end of the lot, where there were no other cars, but when we got done with our shopping and came back out, sure enough, it had been hit and scratched. When we got home, my dad took one look at our faces and walked right out to the car. We both started crying, following him out to the street saying, "We don't know what happened, honest we don't!" Amazingly, I didn't get grounded. But since then I've been pretty wary of driving new cars.

When I was 16 or 17, my dad said to me, “Don’t ever come home pregnant. I will disown you as a daughter.” That had a big impact on me. It’s not the way I’d choose to deliver the message, but I understand what he was saying: Get yourself educated so you can take care of yourself, and then start having fun.

If one of my girls happened to get pregnant before finishing college, I’d say definitely keep that baby. But get through college, do whatever you need to do to prepare yourself for a professional career, so you can take care of yourself and the baby. It’s a hard road, trying to get your education while you’re raising a child.

BOY CRAZY

I started getting boy-crazy in the 7th and 8th grade. Kids would have boy-girl parties and we’d play games like spin the bottle. I got my first kiss in one of those games, from Mark Brandt, a guy I still keep in touch with. I had so many crushes – I loved Patrick Miller from the first grade on, and Clifford Miles, a red-haired freckle-faced boy who left our school after 4th or 5th grade. Later I had crushes on a bunch of St. Edwards guys. Michael McKenny – I was in love with that guy all through high school, but he didn’t know I was alive!

It didn’t matter too much, though, because I had great girl friends. Kathy Downs, Denise Monroe, Cindy Palaibis – I’m still in touch with all of them. There were so many times we’d go up to my bedroom or to Cindy’s and just talk and talk and talk. On weekends we’d go to the Parma Town Shopping Center or walk up to Byer’s Field where the high school football games were happening, just to hang out together.

I was always really self-conscious about my looks, especially my nose, because I thought it made me look like my dad. One time when I was walking to the bus stop, some guys drove by and yelled something about my nose, and I just cried. My brothers didn’t help much. They were always telling me how ugly I was, how I would never find a boyfriend. All those comments really got down to the root of me. When I’d complain about it to my mother, she’d just tell me not to let them get to me. My dad would tell me I was pretty, but the way he said it, I couldn’t really take it seriously. After a while, though, some of Mark’s buddies started looking at me, and one of them asked me out, so that made me feel a little better.

In general, my self-esteem was pretty good. I wasn't in the popular group, but I was on the edge of it. I always wished I could be a little more outgoing, but for the most part, I was OK with who I was.

FASHION

Like most girls, I loved fashion and clothes. But going to Catholic school really cut down on my wardrobe needs. We had to wear uniforms: grey wool pleated skirts with a grey blazer and a white blouse, saddle shoes and bobby socks. When you knelt down, your skirt had to touch the pew. And if you took your jacket off, you had to be wearing a slip underneath. In tenth grade – big thrill — we got summer uniforms that were cotton in pastel colors. You actually got to choose between several colors! I really didn't mind wearing a uniform. Our parents didn't have that much money, so we couldn't have had the wardrobe we wanted anyway.

Sometimes my parents would give me their credit card so I could go clothes shopping at the mall. When I got home, I'd do a fashion show for them. I loved that, it gave me so much freedom. But when I started dressing like a hippy, toward the end of high school, my mom was not happy. Going out, I'd hide a shirt in my purse and change it in the car. It wasn't anything especially tight or revealing – nothing like what some girls wear today – but she really hated that hippy style. I'm so glad my girls aren't into the kind of trashy dressing that's popular today. You'd like to think you've raised your kids to have enough sense about dressing that it will carry over once they start making decisions on their own.

Maureen on Being a Teenager

I was such a goody two-shoes when I was a teenager. I didn't have that rebellious, opinionated streak that Mary had. But I really hated high school, and when I finally got out and got into college, all I wanted to do was party. So consequently, I couldn't maintain my grades, and after two semesters my parents said that was it. I got married when I was just turning 20. That was such a powerful era. So much was changing. There was rebellion on every front, and it really impacted a lot of families. Between me blowing college and Paul running away from home, my parents had a pretty hard time of it in those years. I think by the time Mark and Mary were teenagers, mom and dad had been through so much they'd really loosened up.

My mom never laid out any restrictions about makeup, though I didn't ever wear a lot. The girls in my group were into a more natural look: long straight hair, clean faces, flowing clothes. There were still a lot of greasers in our school at that time — Maureen had been one — with thick blue eye shadow and ratted hair. That look wasn't for me.

THE SOCIAL SCENE

The first concert I ever went to was the Monkees in seventh grade. My girlfriend Claudia and I went together. It was in the Indians stadium in downtown Cleveland, and my dad dropped us off in the parking lot outside. When I think back, I can't believe he did that! We decorated a sheet with pictures of the band members, to try to win free tickets to the show. Of course we didn't win but somehow we got tickets anyway, and we were in heaven. Both Claudia and I were in love with Davey Jones, the singer. After the concert, a bunch of us girls swarmed over to the Monkees' hotel room, but of course they weren't there. We had a blast anyway.

Around that time, seventh and eighth grade, the highlight of our social life was parties. We were also in a church group, which our parents chaperoned. You weren't allowed to go to the high school dances until you graduated from eighth grade, but as soon as we could, we started going to those dances every Saturday night, from 7 to 10 o'clock. The nuns were the chaperones there, and as you can imagine, they kept a pretty close eye on things.

When I was 15, I got a fake ID so I could go to the bars. Everyone had one, it was no big deal. And we didn't drink – I didn't even like beer – we just went for the dancing and to meet guys. The drinking age in Ohio was 18, though that was just for a low-alcohol beer we called “3.2 beer.” You had to be 21 to drink real alcohol.

TROUBLE

I think the biggest trouble I ever got into was that summer I was 15. Maureen was married but she had come home to live because her husband had been drafted. My family had a trailer at Clay Park, which was about a 45-minute drive from home. Maureen decided to take Tommy and me camping there for a weekend, and I invited my friend Kathy to come along. The first day we were there, Kathy and I met a couple of lifeguards, and Maureen said it was OK if we went to the drive-in with them. So we took off and Maureen and Tommy went to sleep. Well it was an awful B-movie about motorcycle gangs and cops, and the gang members kept calling the cops “pigs.” So the movie's over and we're driving out past what we thought was a security guard, and one of the guys we were with leans out the window and yells “PIG!” But guess what, it turns out it's not a security guard, it's a real cop, and he jumps in his car and comes after us. We were in a 1956 Chevy station wagon so we were really easy to pick out. The boys were 18 and they got arrested for contributing to the delinquency of minors (we hadn't told them we were only 15), and we got arrested for being out after the city curfew. They put Kathy and me in a cell together and we had to wait for Maureen to come bail us out. But that wasn't the worst of it – the worst was when



Maureen and Mary

Maureen's Side of the Story

You can't imagine how freaked out I was. It was one o'clock in the morning and there's a flashlight beam coming in my tent and this cop standing out there saying, "Wake up Mrs. Bosa, your sister's in jail." We didn't have a telephone, so they'd had to come out to the park to get me. I got in a bunch of trouble with my parents too. I was supposed to be responsible for her!

we had to call my dad and tell him what happened. He got there, didn't even look at Maureen, just said, "Mary Pat, Kathy, get in the car." So we sat there holding hands, digging our nails into each other while he yelled at us all the way home. I was grounded till I turned 16.

That was probably the last time I got into really big trouble with my family. But I did get into a little trouble of another kind just after I graduated from high school. And it was all for the love of cherries. I can't resist them. Just a few days after I graduated, around June 1st or 2nd, I went into St. Vincent's Hospital to have surgery on my nose. I had a deviated septum, so they fixed that and did a little plastic surgery at the same time. They took some of the bone from my nose (that nose I'd never liked) and put it in my chin. About the time I was starting to feel a little better, one of my friends came to visit and brought a big bag of cherries. Well I was supposed to be on a liquid diet, but I couldn't help myself, I kept popping those cherries in.

The next day, when the doctor came in, my face was all swollen up, black and blue, and the bandages around my mouth were red from all those cherries. The doctors were mystified: I had been making such good progress – what could have happened? I didn't admit to a thing. I wound up staying in the hospital an extra week!

I have to say that getting my nose fixed really helped my self-esteem. I had gotten pretty good at ignoring my brothers' comments, but there was always a little bit of me that was vulnerable. To keep from worrying about my looks and other superficial stuff, I set myself some pretty high goals for school and for my life after graduation. That really kept me focused on what was important. But after the operation, when I was looking and also breathing a lot better, I really started to believe in myself wholeheartedly.



*Mary, Hanna, and Emma
visit the old family home
in Parma*