

## TIMELINE (#18B) MY FIRST GIRLFRIEND

### THE SANDRA COLLON STORY

In July, 1952, I met my very first girlfriend, Sandra Collon, while working behind the counter at Lost Lake Woods Club. She and her parents, a dentist and his wife from Romeo, Michigan, checked in for a 2-week vacation. She was 15 years old, and I was 16. We had our first date by double-dating with her parents. Dr. Collon drove us to the now-defunct Lincoln Theater, 8 miles away, to see "Battle of Apache Pass" (with Jeff Chandler). After the movie, we walked across the street to the drugstore where Dr. Collon treated each of us to an ice cream soda. He was a graduate of the University of Michigan. Although I had 1 remaining year of high school, he often encouraged me to attend U of M.



Sandra (age 15): Lost Lake Woods Club, Summer 1952

My dating with Sandra for those 2 weeks was confined to the clubhouse (especially ping-pong), the golf course, beach, and Badger Lake, since I didn't have a car. She and I kept in touch by mail until the following summer when their family returned for another 2-week vacation in July, 1953. I knew exactly when they would be arriving and anxiously awaited her return. However, instead of reuniting with me, she hooked up with another guest within 1 day of her arrival. This was a total shock and very devastating for me, especially when we crossed paths several times a day.

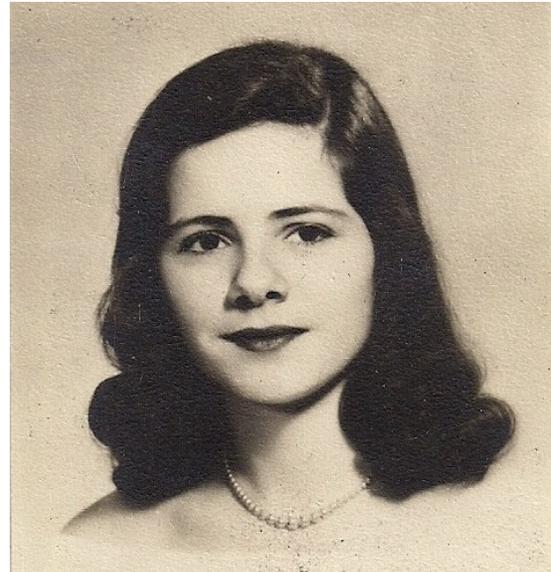
When I started at U of M in September, 1953, my first roommate was Bill Parks. He was also a resident of the small town of Romeo and was familiar with the Collon Family. He lived not far from them and went to the same school as Sandra. For several years, Bill kept me apprised whenever he heard anything about her.

Also in September, 1953, Sandra enrolled in the exclusive Kingswood School for Girls in Bloomfield Hills, just north of Detroit, for her 2 remaining years of high school. This private institution is a college-preparatory boarding school originally viewed as a "finishing school." It merged with Cranbrook School for Boys (on the same campus) in 1985, creating the Cranbrook Schools.

On 2 occasions in early February of 1955, I drove with a college friend from Ann Arbor to Bloomfield Hills to visit Sandra. On my first trip, she took me on a walking tour of the Kingswood campus, which was quite beautiful. On my second trip, I met her in nearby downtown Birmingham. We talked and went to a matinee movie where we saw "Battleground" and "Asphalt Jungle." Sandra had to take a cab back to school since she was not permitted to ride in a private car and had to return promptly by 6pm.

At 8pm, my friend drove me to Kingswood School for a formal dance. The hall was elegantly decorated and everybody looked splendid. I felt somewhat out of place, especially since I borrowed Bill Parks' dark blue suit for this special affair. I was relieved when I saw Sandra's parents and I visited with them. The dance was over at exactly midnight and everyone was promptly hustled out of the building.

Encouraged by her father, Sandra decided to go to Univ. of Michigan. In March, 1955, she contacted me and asked if I would show her and 2 girlfriends around the campus. I happily agreed and enlisted 2 Lloyd House friends, Jim Black and Larry Horacek, to help. On a Saturday afternoon, we escorted the 3 girls on a walking tour of the campus. We completed the day by sharing several pizzas at the near-campus Village Inn.



Sandra (age 18), high school graduation, photo: 12/28/54

After Sandra's high school graduation from Kingswood in June, 1955, I visited her at her Romeo home on 6/18/55. This few hour visit turned out to be the last time I ever saw her. She entered U of M in September, 1955, and I tried mightily to see her again- with no success. She lived in a small women's dormitory, Betsy Barbour Hall, just 2 blocks from West Quad, where I lived. Several times I walked past her dorm on the outside chance of seeing her; but I never did.

### UNRAVELING THE MYSTERY

I learned the following facts a little later via Bill Parks and his parents in Romeo:

1. When Sandra enrolled at U of M in September, 1955, she was immediately spotted and sized-up by one of the male student volunteers who was registering new students. His name is Ralph R. Watts and he admitted years later that his sole objective for volunteering was to identify attractive, incoming female students and obtain their names and phone numbers. In this case, he did a fantastic job! He and Sandra started dating shortly thereafter.
2. Ralph was a lanky, average-looking U of M cheerleader. In those days, only male cheerleaders were allowed. That football season, Ralph shaved an "M" on the top of his head. Whenever he bowed his head to the audience, we could see this "M" and always cheered loudly.
3. In January, 1956, Sandra got pinned to fraternity man Ralph.
4. During Spring Break, early-April 1956, Sandra and Ralph eloped and got married.

This elopement happened during the same Spring Break that I had my auto accident in Georgia (see Timeline #16). In fact, I reported it in the same letter to my parents (dated 4/8/56) that I provided them with the details of the auto accident.

## EPILOGUE

In September 2000, Bill and Carol Parks attended some function in Michigan and happened to meet Ralph and Sandra (Collon) Watts there. The Watts were still married after 44 years. Bill asked Sandra if she remembered dating me at Lost Lake Woods in 1952, almost half a century earlier. She said that she remembered me mostly as "That really smart guy." Bill took the accompanying photograph of them and sent it to me.



Ralph & Sandra (age 63);  
September, 2000