

## Four

# ROSEMARY McDERMOTT, DOTY/WEST MAIN NEIGHBORHOOD

I am Rosemary McDermott, my maiden name is McGilligan, and I was born on June 21, 1925.

I grew up on West Main Street, in the 400 block, which in those days was called "the Bloody Fourth Ward." There were Irish, Germans, a lot of ethnic groups, a mix of houses and shops. There was a Chinese laundry, and an Italian shoemaker. The Sweets, a Jewish family, ran a grocery store on the corner. My parents, the McGilligans, were Irish, and ran

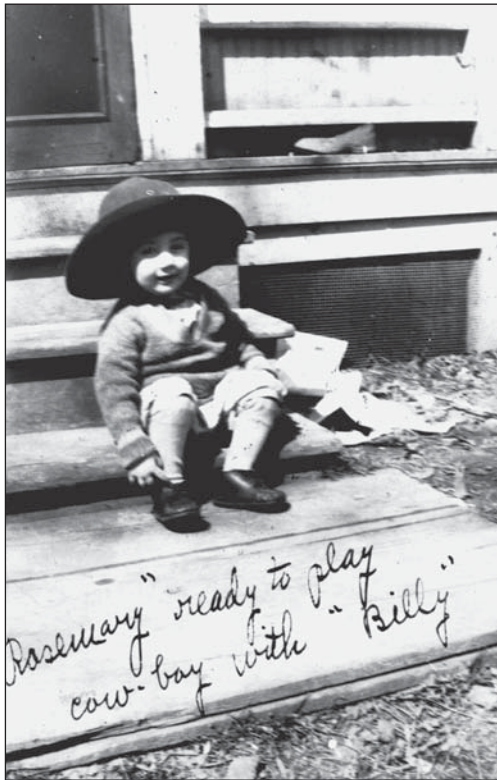
an upholstery business right behind the house. It was a delightful neighborhood. At one time, streetcars ran up and down Main Street.

My mother had eight brothers and sisters, and they all stayed in the neighborhood! My mother was a homemaker, and helped in the upholstery shop. She took all the phone calls and did the bookkeeping.

The whole neighborhood would be very involved in elections. When there was



*This photograph is the view from the Capitol dome toward West Washington Avenue and Rosemary's home. The four church steeples that can be identified are, from left to right, the First Baptist Church, St. Raphael Catholic Church, the First Congregational Church, and Grace Episcopal Church. The left foreground provides a close view of the decoration on a Capitol chimney. (Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi-8705.)*



This photograph is "Rosemary ready to play cowboy with Billy," in 1927. (Courtesy of Rosemary McDermott.)

somebody running for alderman in the ward, everybody campaigned. My father always had friends running for office. If there was an election for mayor, or city councilman—anything in that realm—he would be there. My mother would always have a big pot of Irish stew going, in the kitchen, and my father would volunteer to drive anybody who could not get to the polling place. If you could not get there, he got you there, and got you home, so there was no excuse. When it was raining, he carried an umbrella to get you right inside. He had an old Dodge car and he would pile in as many people as he could. And if they hadn't had anything to eat, he would bring them back to the house and they would have homemade bread and a bowl of soup or stew. The Fourth Ward was mostly Democratic.

Our house was at the foot of what they called Main Street Hill. When you stepped out the door and looked toward the Square, the cross on top of St. Raphael's Catholic Church stood out and shadowed over the rest of the neighborhood.

#### ***Saint Raphael's Parochial School***

The whole neighborhood went to St. Raphael's School. No matter what religion you were, you ended up at St. Raphael's. Then, after eighth grade, it split up between Central High School and Edgewood High School.

Dominican nuns taught us. The monsignor there knew every one of us, like he could read off the palm of his hand. There were 30 or 40 children taught by one nun in each room. The nuns knew discipline. And I think we had the fear of God in us—we certainly never crossed the nuns. They told us to do something, we never questioned it.

Punishment was a rap on the knuckles with a ruler. Not all of the nuns, but a few! I still have knuckles that remind me of that.

You started every day by going to Mass at 8:00. Then you stood outside the school, and they played a march on an old hand-wound Victrola, and you all marched in by grades.

#### ***Life under the shadow of St. Raphael's Cross***

There were mostly boys in the neighborhood. I had two brothers, who also went to St.

Raphael's School and to Edgewood High School. I was the youngest. There was about seven years between me and my younger brother Bill, and about nine between me and the older, so I didn't play with my brothers, though Bill used to sell magazines and newspapers in the neighborhood, and I helped him deliver them. He sold enough subscriptions once to get a red wooden wagon, and he could put his magazines or newspapers in it and pull me with them while we delivered the magazines together. He was very good to me.

He always gave me money, a nickel or two. Right next door to my house was a little grocery store run by people from Switzerland. Their name was Stark. They made their own candy in the back of the store. Sometimes it was pretty stale, but if you got a piece of candy with a pink center it meant you got an extra piece free. And we used to eat and eat that candy, waiting for that pink center

to show up! They were delightful people. At that time, I thought, they were extremely elderly—probably they were 50 or 60 years old.

Next to the Starks was Leo Esser's butcher shop. Next to the butcher shop was Joe Fruth's barber shop.

One time, Joe Fruth told my father that his brother had a farm and if you wanted to buy a little piglet, they would raise them and when fall came they would butcher and you could have all the pork you wanted. My father asked my mother about it, and she thought that was a very good idea as it was hard to get good meat. They had done without it so much, during the war, so they thought this was a great idea, and he told Joe to go ahead and get him a pig. Spring went by and the summer went by and my mother said to my father, "Shouldn't those pigs be about big enough to be butchered by now?" "That's a good idea," he said, "I'll ask Joe when I go to get a haircut today." He



*Rosemary's First Communion was in 1935. She is shown with neighbor Phil Dawling. (Courtesy of Rosemary McDermott.)*

went down, and Joe was cutting somebody's hair, and my father asked, "Are they going to butcher our pigs pretty soon?" And Joe said, "Didn't I tell you? Your pig died!"

Well, how did he know whose pig died? We never did see any of that pork. It became a standard joke in our family, if something didn't work out right we would say, "Well, I guess your pig died!" We still use the expression, and my kids know the story so well. It just seems to cover everything in life.

Next came Scotty's Tavern. When work ended for the day, everybody used to stop in at Scotty's and discuss the day and have their beer. I used to try to deliver Liberty Magazine there, at the time of day I knew my father would be there, because he would always buy me a Coke. I thought that was really high living, to sit beside my father on a bar stool and have a Coke.

A strange thing I remember about growing up was Joyce's Funeral Parlor on West Washington Avenue. Everybody who died, from the Fourth Ward, was buried from Joyce's Funeral Parlor. And the wakes! We looked forward to going to the funerals because the wakes were so wonderful afterwards. You went back to somebody's house and there was a lot of friendship, and drinking, and food galore! With visitation at the funeral parlor, there were usually two nights. I was too young to be left alone so I went to all the wakes—and I could hardly wait for someone to die. Another party, that's the way I looked at it!

#### *Fun around home*

For fun at home, we played a lot of cards—casino, euchre, rummy, poker, bingo, and my mother would call the numbers. We played around a big oak dining table. Everybody had to be home by 8:00 in the summer. Our friends would come over right after supper, at 6:00, and the cards would be shuffled. Even some of the priests at St. Raphael's used to come down to our house to play cards.

At night, we would listen to all the radio broadcasts—they had stories. We would just sit and stare at the radio the way you do at the television, I don't know why. I remember Lux Radio Theater on Saturday nights. It was a two-hour program and it was a drama, with actors. The first time I saw on television someone

reading a script for a radio broadcast I was startled—I thought they memorized all that stuff, but they just stood there holding a script! When I first got my radio for my room, that was really living.

Sunday night, everybody sat around and we would have home-made ice cream. My father made what was called tutti-frutti. He would have a gallon crock in the basement and as each fruit would come into season, like blueberries, strawberries, he would put a cup of fruit in the crock, and a cup of brandy, and that would go on through the season. About Thanksgiving, my mother would make ice cream, and whoever was the oldest would go down. Finally I arrived where I was oldest and could go down and get a cup of fruit and bring it up and we would eat that on the ice cream. That was good stuff! All the fruit together, a cup of fruit and a cup of brandy. The fruit was very well preserved by the alcohol. And I found out the syrup was delicious, so when it was finally my turn to go down and get it I would take along a straw and sip up some of that juice, and that was really great, without the fruit. Then they found out what I was doing, and I think I lost my privileges for a while—I wasn't allowed to go get the fruit. We would ladle it over the ice cream or sometimes they'd put it over pound cake. The fruit never lost its color or shape. It was wonderful, really wonderful.

Bill Byrne's parents were my parents' best friends, so there were a lot of Saturdays and Sundays of what you call cookouts today. We would picnic in one yard or the other, but there was nothing cooked on the grill. The food had been cooked in the house—cold chicken, or ham, or roast beef—but we would eat in each other's backyards. We spent many a time between the two homes.

#### *Swimming, sledding, and mischief in season*

We played baseball a lot at Brittingham Park, just a few blocks away. We used to bike together a lot. We could go to Brittingham Park and bike the whole length of the park, or bike to Doty School and back.

We would go swimming in the summer at Doty Beach, which was maybe three or four blocks away, at the end of Broom Street. We could go for one hour in the morning, and one hour in the afternoon, and maybe



*Rosemary's father is seen in the family's back yard on West Main Street, around 1937. (Courtesy of Rosemary McDermott.)*



*Seen here is a children's party. From left to right are Richard Springman, John Byrne, Donna Dawling, Rosemary, and Jimmie Dawling. Rosemary's friend Bill Byrne was present but not shown. (Courtesy of Rosemary McDermott.)*



*The A&W Root Beer stand at 900 South Park Street is seen here around 1950. A more modest A&W stand opened on that site in 1932. (Courtesy of Ann Waidelich.)*

on a summer night the family would all walk down to the beach while we swam for an hour more. There was a lifeguard and he had a high stool that he sat on. He was always very handsome, all the girls fell in love with the lifeguard every year. He took very good care of us. And the lake, well, it was just like the lake today. Everybody got ear infections, but we dearly loved it. That was the highlight of the summer.

Sometimes my father would take all the kids in his old Dodge car and go over to South Park Street, where there was an A&W Root Beer stand. If the mother and father had root beer, all the kids in the car got root beer free in little mugs, half the size of the big ones, and you got to keep the little glass.

Halloween was never good in my life, as I was always in trouble. We had these wooden spools that thread came on. We would notch them all the way around, and wrap cord around it. You would hold it up against the window and you would pull the cord and it made a terrible sound against somebody's window. I always had a lot of really good cord because of our family's upholstery business, and the McNamara sisters

would be out chasing us with their brooms, because we had soaped their windows. I don't think "tricks or treats" was the thing at that time. We tipped over garbage cans. Anything to be in trouble on Halloween. The rest of the year I was pretty good.

The hills were high around our neighborhood. In the winter, on Doty Street Hill and Main Street Hill, we would get on our sleds and slide the whole way, across the intersection and to the middle of the next block.

When I got to be older, about 13 or 14, we were allowed to go around the square, and eventually down State Street. That got very exciting during the years when the Wisconsin football team would have a bonfire at the end of State Street for Homecoming. The students would gather and walk around the Square, against the traffic, causing all kinds of problems. They would end up on State Street and try to rush the two theaters, the Orpheum Theater and the Capitol Theater. They would get inside, and then the police would come with their tear gas and shoot it into the crowd, and that dispersed it quickly. I was right in the middle of the action, it seemed.



*“Our corner of the Square,” is seen here in 1940. This is the view of businesses located on West Main Street as seen from Carroll Street. These include Felton’s, Forbes-Meagher Music, Fanny Farmer, Bandbox Millinery, Canton Restaurant, Home Savings, Western Union, F. W. Grand, Cop’s Cafe, E. W. Parker Jewellers, Badger Candy Kitchen, and Union Trust. (Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society, WHi-6424.)*

### ***Shopping on the Capital Square***

Right on the corner of West Main on the Capital Square was Felton’s Sporting Goods Store. Forbes-Meagher Music Store was the next place. I played the piano, so I would go there to buy sheet music, or we would get records—the big old “78” records, which I have a collection of yet. They had listening booths. You could pick out a record and take it into a little booth like a phone booth and listen to it. It always came in a little jacket and you were careful not to break it, because then you had to buy it. Of course the personnel in the store knew all the kids from Main Street.

At that time it would be the music of the 1930s and 1940s, the big dance bands. We just loved that music. I was the only one of my set that had a record player, so my friends would buy records and they would all come to my house and we would sit on the porch and play

our music. They thought I was very wealthy because I had that. I think my parents probably bought it because it was a good incentive to keep me home.

J.C. Penney had a big department store on the Square. Burdick and Murray was another huge department store. When you would spend some money there, a little basket would come down to the cashier and they would send the money up to the office. I would watch that money go way up on a little pulley and there would be a woman in an office that would make your change and back it would come, and I would count it again and again to make sure she did a good job.

Around the Square, there was a Woolworth’s dime store, and further around there was the big Tenney Building, which housed a lot of doctors.

There was a store called Three Sisters that we liked to go to because they had the really



*Rosemary (right) and friend are modeling their “really modern” bathing suits from the Three Sisters. (Courtesy of Rosemary McDermott.)*

modern bathing suits. Once, we spent \$25 each on a suit and our parents nearly killed us because that was a huge amount of money. Mine was red and white, and one-piece, and I thought it was just gorgeous. They were knit, of very stretchy material, I suppose wool. This was before polyester.

Barrons department store was across the Square, and Manchesters, were just wonderful stores. Barrons had a tearoom, which was really high fashion. We wore white gloves and hats when we went to tea there. This was when we were maybe 14 or 15 years old. A mother, or an aunt, or a grandmother would take you there. They would have little tea sandwiches and actual tea. We thought it was just wonderful! The food was excellent. That was really high fashion to us, to wear white gloves and a hat—you just felt really important. That was a highlight.

Mosley’s Book Store was in the same block as Manchesters. My very first job at about 16 years old was working during the holidays at Mosley’s Book Store. The first thing I had to do was wrap a globe. Well, I nearly quit the job then and there, because there was no way

I could wrap that in a decent-looking package. No box, and no matter where I put the paper it was never in the right spot. But I struggled, and stayed there, through Christmas vacation.

The Square was always alive with shoppers and couples just strolling.

#### ***“Edgewood gets in your blood”***

Edgewood High School was a Catholic high school taught by Dominican nuns, and I went there from 1939 to 1943. Most of the group that I went to kindergarten and grade school with moved on to Edgewood. I can only say the best about it—wonderful memories.

This was far different from grade school! Freshman year, the people from St. Raphael’s, the people from St. Patrick’s, and St. Bernard’s and Blessed Sacrament, were all segregated like we were in wards. You only hung with the people you knew from St. Raphael’s. But then after the first year, everybody blended together, and become good friends.

Our generation wore saddle shoes, penny loafers, ankle socks, skirts, sweaters, and blouses. Because we went to Edgewood, your skirt had to cover your knees. If it looked like it didn’t



the nuns would have you kneel down and if the skirt didn't touch the ground you had better lower the hem. By about junior year, the nuns didn't mind earrings and lipstick.

At Edgewood, the nuns had tea dances every Sunday afternoon. They did not serve tea, but a punch, and dainty cookies. The boys wore a suit coat and tie, and they were very uncomfortable and glad when the whole thing was over. Until of course, they got to be juniors and seniors, then it wasn't such a bad deal. There was prom coming up.

At my junior prom, one of the girls I had known from St. Raphael's was prom queen. That was exciting, because she was our prom queen, she came from our group. It was just like today, very formal, but the dresses were not quite so exposing as they are today. As long as you had your neck covered up the nuns didn't mind too much. I remember the long white gloves came up over the elbow, in fact. They didn't have wrist corsages like they do now. Gardenias were the corsages of the day. Of course, if you touched a petal and it turned brown you were just devastated.

Nobody stayed out all night. You went to dinner, and you had your dancing, and by midnight you were in. Usually the parents took you and brought you home. You met your escort and got your corsage at the dance. When senior ball came about, the boy could pick you up at your house and take you to the ball.

#### *Marriage, work, or college? Wartime thwarts all plans*

The nuns were wonderful teachers. Teaching was their life, and they were more than willing to share it with you. The one who taught me shorthand was known all over Madison. If you said she taught you, you didn't need any other recommendation—you had the job. She placed many of us before we even graduated. I think I graduated on Friday, and on Monday I started work at the Commonwealth Telephone Company.

I thought about going to college, but my mother had been a secretary, and insisted that was the only world there was and you did not need college. And my brothers took over the upholstery business when my father died in 1944, so college was not in their realm, either.

Others from Edgewood went on to college. We had a doctor from our class, and a couple of dentists, and several went into the priesthood, and some went to the University of Wisconsin, and on to law school. In fact, one of my best friends was Marigold Melli, Shire at that time, and she was one of the first women really accepted in law, and she ended up being dean of the law school, and very well respected.

I know exactly where I was when Pearl Harbor was attacked. My family had been invited to my brother's for dinner. He had just gotten married. They had the radio on, and Roosevelt came on and announced that Pearl Harbor had been attacked by the Japanese. I noticed that my parents were more distressed by it than I was—they were quite upset. Pearl Harbor really meant nothing to me at that point. It seemed like something very far away that really would have no effect on anybody.

As time went by, we became very patriotic, flying the flag, and making things to send to the servicemen overseas. I remember my mother making cookies and wrapping them for nephews.

The war was a big influence on everybody at that age because they were old enough to be drafted, or to volunteer to go in. They were going off to serve their country, very young and inexperienced. They were kids, you felt, there aren't words for it.

Madison really changed with the war. Of course gasoline was rationed, sugar, meat, and butter. Of course no one drove very much, because of gas rationing. You walked wherever you were going.

There were Army and Navy boys stationed in Madison. In fact, my husband was stationed with the Air Force in Madison, and I met him at a Rennebohm Drug Store.

We girls had practice for choir at St. Raphael's every Sunday afternoon, and we all sang in the junior choir. Afterwards we walked over to Rennebohm's on the Square and always had Cokes. Two of the soldiers were sitting having Cokes, too. We took ours to a booth, and they came over and asked if they could join us, and the next Sunday, I asked my future husband over for Sunday dinner with my family.

The Madison families really went out of their way to make the soldiers and sailors here feel very much at home. They would have them over for Sunday dinner and take the family car and



*The Rennebohm Soda Fountain, at 13 West Main Street, is seen here around 1934. In a few years, Rosemary would meet her soldier, Mac, here. (Courtesy of Wisconsin Historical Society, WHI-16908.)*

see that they got back to the field, because bus service wasn't that good at that time.

Up at the Badger Candy Kitchen, we would have wonderful chocolate sundaes, usually two or three of my friends. Of course, the soldiers would always have a friend they could bring for your friend. And then we would go back to our homes, we would put the records on, and we would sing and dance to our own type of music.

Later on Doty Street, they opened a USO club for the servicemen, where they would have live music and dancing on Saturday nights. It was right across from the old post office, downtown. That was a great gathering place for people to meet.

I have very fond memories of the war, in that respect. It brought a lot of handsome young boys around, and I think I knew them all.

My husband's name was Austin McDermott, but everyone called him Mac. His family was

Irish Catholic, from Boston, but his father wasn't so sure about the Irish. He thought they fought too much, and they do.

My Mac was sent to the China-Burma-India theater of the war, and I became engaged to him when I was 19. He wrote every single day he was gone, and I suppose I did, too, or he wouldn't have kept writing. He bought the diamond in India, sent it to his sister, who mailed it to my father, who gave me my diamond!

I had not met any of his family. When Mac came back to Boston, they wanted me to come visit so I went by overnight train. That was in April 1945.

I just fell in love with his family. I hadn't seen him in three years, either. It was really a wartime romance. We were married in July 1945, at St. Raphael's Church. I was 20 years old. We were supposed to be married at 9:00 on Saturday morning, but Mr. Skelton passed

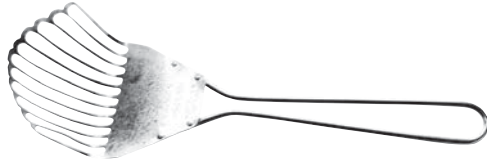


*Rosemary and Austin "Mac" McDermott are photographed on the occasion of their wedding, in July 1945. (Courtesy of Rosemary McDermott.)*

away, and they wanted the funeral at the time that our wedding was supposed to be.

The monsignor at St. Raphael's called to say, "I've moved your wedding to 8 a.m." Well, that was really early to be married, believe you me!

I always remember, shoes were hard to get at that time, so some that were at the wedding exchanged shoes at the back of the church so others could go to the funeral.



Rosemary McDermott raised two children, born in 1946 and 1953. The family traveled to Boston every year to visit Mac's family, the children enjoying the cross-country road trips.

Rosemary worked at Madison Newspapers in the national advertising department for 25 years. Her husband pursued a career with the Madison Board of Education. In later years, Rosemary worked for Meriter Hospital and for St. Patrick's Church until her husband's death in 1991. She now lives on Madison's near east side with the latest in a lifetime series of dogs.