

Chapter 1

My Wife, Beth

Beth Barcus and I grew up in East Liverpool, Ohio, a town that borders West Virginia and Pennsylvania on the Ohio River. East Liverpool was once the center for manufacturing ceramic toilets and other ceramic tablewares.

Whenever I would start dating a girl seriously, my mother would say, "Make sure you study her family. If she comes from a good, solid family, where marriage is truly cherished, then that will be her attitude as well."

I could not have imagined a better family than Beth's. Her parents weren't particularly fond of me at first, but I admired them. Eleanor, Beth's mother, was one of five children who had been raised singlehandedly by her mother, Grandma Czech, whose husband died early in their marriage. Beth's

father, John “Bus” Barcus, worked in an automobile factory after serving in the navy during World War II. Eleanor and Bus had three daughters: Beth, Brenda, and Johanna. Beth was the oldest.

Bus and Eleanor bought a convenience store on the outskirts of East Liverpool. They were hard workers, and the store thrived. When I was coaching at North Carolina State, I would go home in the summers and work at the store myself as a change of pace. I have to tell you, it was the hardest job I have ever had. My children worked there too, picking up all the trash in the parking lot and keeping the store clean. They didn’t necessarily appreciate the opportunity.

When they sold their store, I bought Beth’s parents a home in Leigh Acres, Florida, near Fort Myers. At first, Eleanor hated retirement. She had worked all of her life, and she didn’t know what to do with herself. She eventually learned to golf and made a lot of new friends. After Bus passed

away, Eleanor came to live with us. Our children absolutely loved her.

My family was also very solid. When my father, Andrew, was away in the navy during World War II, my mother, Anne Marie, and I moved in with my grandparents in East Liverpool. Their last name was Tychonievich. My mother was the oldest of four siblings, the younger three being my uncles Bill, Walt, and Lou. My Uncle Lou was only ten years older than me. He was a high school football star, and I looked up to him until the day he died. He became my older brother, father, and best friend all rolled into one.

My dad had been in some of the most epic battles of World War II, including the Battle of Midway. I learned after he died that when the war ended, he was part of the troops preparing to invade Japan. Like many who returned from the war, the experience affected him in ways we didn't really know. He took a series of odd jobs when he returned; he worked on the railroad and drove a

bus, for example. My parents seemed to have a happy marriage until I went away to college and my father left home. My parents never divorced or remarried, but that was a tragic part of my life. It was devastating for me in my late teens, for my older sister, Shirley, and especially for my younger sister, Vicky, who was around the age of ten. I can only imagine how such separations are hurtful in other families with younger children.

Beth was a beautiful, exceptionally popular girl at East Liverpool High School. I was very shy and timid, particularly when it came to the opposite sex. I never had a date in high school. I never went to the prom. I didn't know Beth in high school, even though her girlfriends ran around with a group of guys I was friends with.

It didn't look as if Beth and I would ever get to know each other. I went away to college at Kent State University and fell in love with another girl, but that relationship didn't work out. She ended up marrying one of my fraternity brothers.

Everyone thought Beth would marry her high school sweetheart, Ron Frese. But before that could happen, Beth went to live in Pittsburgh to study to become an x-ray technician.

Around this same time, I was about to go into the army to fulfill my military obligation. Before I left, I took a trip to New York City with three of my friends. We did all of the touristy things during the day, such as ride the subway, visit the Statue of Liberty, and climb to the top of the Empire State Building. At night, we went to see plays. I remember the *Music Man* and *My Fair Lady*. We stayed in New York for a week in a hotel near Times Square.

On the way home, we had to pass through Pittsburgh, and my friends told me they wanted to stop and see Beth. She and her roommates were having some sort of a party. A party in those days was when boys and girls would gather together with beer or soda and a pizza. There were no drugs or alcohol other than the beer. I had no desire to go to the party or to meet Beth, but my friends

stopped anyway. Surprisingly, I had a great time that revolved around getting to know Beth.

Because I had a car, I was selected to run out for the pizza. I figured the group wanted me to pay for the pizza too. Beth agreed to ride along to show me how to get to the pizza parlor. This was the first time I had ever been alone with Beth, and I was amazed how comfortable she made me, a shy person, feel. She asked me about the plays I had attended in New York. I politely asked her how her boyfriend, Ron Frese, was doing, and she told me she was no longer dating him and that she was dating a doctor on a very casual basis. This gave me the courage to ask her to go on a date with me.

I remember our first date as if it was yesterday, or more to the point, I remember what I was thinking after the date ended. I said to myself, "I don't have any idea who I'll marry, but I know the one person who I will not marry is Beth Barcus!" Why? She had eye shadow on, wore dark hose, smoked one cigarette, and kissed me on the first date. But

in fact, we really seemed to hit it off and went out on a date every night in the week before I had to leave for military service.

After I got out of the army, we continued to date and developed a great relationship. I knew I wanted to ask Beth to marry me, but I must admit the proposal was nothing very romantic. I never sought permission from Beth's father because I wasn't marrying him; I was marrying his daughter, and I didn't think he liked me anyway. The only thing that was important to me was that Beth would agree to marry me. The proposal really came about in our normal course of conversation. We talked about how we both wished to settle down and raise a family and what our desires and goals were for the future. I told her that I would like to spend the rest of my life with her, and she said she had no objections to that. We were engaged! Looking back, I do wish I would have proposed in a more special way, at least getting down on one knee. I will tell you that later in our

marriage, when we visited the Holy Land and the site of Jesus's first miracle at the wedding at Cana, I did get down on my knee and ask Beth to marry me once again. This time she responded with an enthusiastic "Yes!"

After we decided we would get married, I tentatively accepted a job at Conneaut High School near Cleveland to teach history, be the backfield coach for the football team, and live happily ever after.

Then, at 9:00 p.m. on July 9, 1960, Beth told me she didn't want to marry me after all. She wanted to date her old boyfriend, Ron Frese.

That news was enough to make me want to get as far away from her and East Liverpool as I possibly could. I'd been offered a graduate assistant coaching position (rare in those days) with the football team at the University of Iowa because my college coach, Trevor Rees, was great friends with the Iowa head coach, Forest Evashevski. I

originally turned down the graduate assistant position in order to stay home and marry Beth.

It took me exactly ninety minutes to pack up. I picked up my good friend Nevitt Stockdale, and we were on the road in my '52 Ford Fairlane to Iowa City, Iowa, by 10:30 that night. We drove all night to see if Coach Evashevski would still hire me. Somewhere out on the highway, Nevitt made a great observation. He said, "You and Beth have a love-hate relationship. You love her and she hates you." I didn't disagree at the time.

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I spent the year at the University of Iowa. I worked in the hospital teaching physical education to disabled children and served as a full-time assistant coach with the football team. The team had a great year; we were fortunate enough to finish second in the county. I also completed my master's degree in arts and education. It was just a marvelous experience. I had no intention of returning home.

In the meantime, there were two updates from East Liverpool. First, Beth had moved home, and she and my mom were working together at the East Liverpool Hospital. My mom had taken a job as a nurse's aide, and Beth had been hired as an x-ray technician. And second, Beth had had another change of heart and broke it off one last time with Ron Frese. Beth wanted to reach me, and she kept after my mom to have me call her, which I did not. Finally, Beth called me herself. That was the era when women did not call men on the phone very often, so I was impressed that she did that.

I was facing other pressures from home. During the interval that Beth and I were broken up, I would take some of the new girls I was dating to visit my Uncle Lou, the closest male in my life, and my mother. Both of them had the same comments: "She's really nice" or "She is very attractive." But then they would add, "But she's no Beth." I kept putting off giving Beth an exact date when I would come home from Iowa, but I also realized I still loved her and