

The First Time  
*By Dan Hardesty*

One of the most traumatic experiences I have ever had was holding Ruth for the first time. Luckily we were in the hospital where there was adequate help if I should keel over. Fear of dropping her had me shaking so that the possibility was real, or so I thought. I had never imagined there could be such a tiny human being.

Over the years there were a lot of first times with Ruth. She was the first of our brood to seriously choke. She was only a few weeks old at the time and in just minutes her mother and I panicked, called her grandmother and were told to hold her upside down so she could cough up whatever was stuck in her throat. It sounded strange to us but we did it, all the time fearing her head might drop out off, so I held it up with my hands just in case.

When she was five years old she had the first outside adventure among the five sisters. She was in the first grade at the local parochial school which meant about a half mile walk. Several trips were made with her until she showed she was perfectly capable of getting there herself. She made it fine the first few days but then one Monday she came back home terribly upset. It seemed the school had been moved. She couldn't find it anywhere. After much questioning and retracing her path it was discovered she got up to Woodward Avenue but had forgotten to turn two blocks south. Actually we were quite proud of her for getting back home OK.

She was the first to hit the dreaded teen age years so was responsible for many completely unreasonable rules that were made so seven people could live fairly reasonably in a five bedroom, one bathroom house. With only one phone and a mother very active in community affairs, phone calls were strictly limited to five minutes. The caterwauling about that rule is what started me on the way to deafness. Ruth was in the vanguard of the school fights over the length of skirts and then the wearing of slacks by girls. I remember one meeting parents had with school administrators when they proposed allowing girls to wear slacks. Parents were completely against such a sacrilege until one of the young male teachers suggested maybe they should stand in front of a class with all those miniskirts sitting in the front row.

Inevitably the time came when Ruth left our nest. She was still only seventeen when we drove her up to Marquette in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, four hundred fifty miles from home, to begin her years at Northern Michigan University. I don't remember ever feeling such a sense of loss as we drove away, in effect, losing a child for the first time.