

'Return to the Catskills'

Sonia Fuentes remembers • Part 3/3

BY SONIA FUENTES

After visiting [SUNY Sullivan], we drove further into my past – toward Woodridge, passing familiar villages... My brother, Hermann, met his wife, Helen, at Old Falls, a scenic area in Fallsburg.

When my family arrived in Woodridge in 1936, we rented rooms at the Welcome Inn on Broadway owned by Mr. and Mrs. Gorelikoff, with whom we remained friends after we moved out. We moved to the rooming house we rented on Broadway for five years from an elderly woman named Mrs. Maloff.

When Joan [Rhulen Farrow] and I arrived in Woodridge on Nov. 3, we met with Joan Collins, whom I'll call Joan C from now on, a lifelong resident of Woodridge who was sworn in as Woodridge's first woman mayor on December 7, 2012. Joan C writes a column for the **Sullivan County Democrat**, and had written a couple of columns about me in June 2010, and we stayed in touch by email. But this was the first time we had met, and it was also the first time she met Joan Rhulen Farrow, whom I'll call Joan F from now on.

Joan C joined us in Joan F's car and we drove around Woodridge together.

The elementary school I attended from 1936 until some time in 1941 is no more. The schools were centralized in the 1950s and '60s and Woodridge students attend school in the town of Fallsburg.

I was the teacher's pet in the third grade class of Mrs. Elliott (who, Joan C told us, has family members in Woodridge to this day and we saw signs with the Elliott name around town).

Mrs. Elliott would have me sit with her while she graded papers. She was the reason



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

The author in front of the handball court at the Pine Tree Bungalow Colony in Monticello. It was owned by her parents, Zysia and Hinda Pressman.

my first career ambition was to be a teacher, but my mother steered me away from that path by telling me that while teachers were revered in her native Poland, that was not the case in the US and that, furthermore, teachers in the US were not highly paid.

Joan C showed me where we had lived on Broadway and where the farm owned by the Yonkers family had been across the road. I used to walk across that road with a small aluminum pail and bring back milk from the Yonkers' cows, so fresh that I could see the bubbles that formed on top.

Joan C pointed out Glen Wild Road, where the Alamac Hotel had stood. The two sets of parents of the girls Rosalie Shapiro and her cousin, Joyce, owned the Alamac. There is a story about them in my memoir. Every year my mother used to make a birthday party for me, and Rosalie and Joyce always attended. They were the wealthiest children who attended and the only ones who never brought a present. Because of that, I asked my mother to stop having the parties, and she acceded to my wishes. But the following year when the day came around, I was so forlorn at

not having a party that my mother had to take me downtown to buy me a new dress to cheer me up.

There's another Woodridge story in my memoir about Shirley Mandel, the beautiful daughter of Morris Mandel, a local plasterer, and his wife, Nellie. One summer when she was about eighteen, Shirley, who had an air of innocence about her, fell in love with a man visiting Woodridge from New York City. The couple married, and Shirley accompanied her new husband back to New York.

Some time later, Shirley learned that her husband already had a wife and three children in New York. She returned to Woodridge crestfallen but soon married Sol Saperstein, a member of one of the village's large and well-known families, the Sapersteins. She had two more husbands after Sol, so presumably she lost her innocence along the way.

Woodridge played a central role in the story of a musician with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. His wife and young red-haired daughter lived in Woodridge, but he spent most of his time in New York City with the NBC Symphony Orchestra. When his

About the author

Sonia Pressman Fuentes was one of 10 inaugural inductees into the Hall of Distinction of the Monticello Central School District, from whose high school she had graduated as valedictorian in 1946.

Fuentes, who emigrated from Nazi Germany to New York with her parents and brother in 1934, was the first woman attorney in the Office of the General Counsel at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

She also gained fame as co-founder of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and Federally Employed Women (FEW).

She graduated Phi Beta Kappa from Cornell University in 1950 and first in her class at the University of Miami School of Law in 1957. She had a 36-year career as an attorney and executive with the federal government and multinational corporations.

affair with a woman violinist in the orchestra turned sour, he killed her and fled to Woodridge, seeking his wife's protection. She instead turned him in and he was arrested, found guilty of the murder, and imprisoned.

According to Joan C, urban renewal came to Woodridge in the 1960s and had a negative effect. The end result was the loss of a number of buildings in the business district, which continues to impact the village negatively to this day. The village is, however, dedicated to revitalizing itself both with increased seasonal and all-year real estate development.

After our tour of the village, Joan F and I said goodbye to Joan C and returned to Monticello.

So ended my just-over-one-day in the Catskills. A very special trip into my past.