

THE PERPETUAL NEW KID

My mother's extended family in Alma, Michigan, was my greatest influence. That's because they gave me stability, even though my parents took their young family and went on to live in twelve different houses in nine cities and I attended ten schools by my senior year.

I was the first great-grandchild of our matriarch, Alice Mae Ellsworth, who was the delivery room nurse the night I was born. Her family doted on her, and she lived to babysit for my many second cousins.

After the Navy and college, my father hitchhiked down to Detroit and interviewed with Packard. He drove back up to Alma in one. It was the Golden Age of the Automobile. His career took off, and so did we, all over the Midwest. It we lived in Sioux Falls and Battle Creek, Mich., and in suburbs of St. Louis, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and Detroit. Holidays and summers in Alma stuck me to my big family like the marshmallows on the Jell-O salads at family potlucks.

My midwestern accent and I majored in French and Spanish at the University of Michigan, then to Ohio State's journalism school to write in it. I've had two husbands, both deceased, and added and dropped names in my byline, settling on my maiden name of Sullivan as middle and finally, last.

My husband, N. R. Sonny Kleinfeld, is in great health. I met him in the Chicago bureau of the New York Times, and moved to his apartment in Greenwich Village. We live in Tribeca and Water Mill, N.Y.