

## Chapter Ten: Claudette's Hartford Trail

*I'm Not Going To Sign That Paper!*

I was born Marie “Claudette” Beaulieu July 11, 1936 in Madawaska, Maine, the daughter of Fred L. and Lizzianne Beaulieu, fifth of ten children, seven girls and three boys. The Beaulieu family heralds proud connections to some of the earliest French-speaking Acadians in Canada's northeast provinces. By 1950, our family moved to a modest two-story house at 113 Francis Ave. in Hartford, Connecticut.



*113 Francis Ave, Hartford, CT*

Our Père worked as a “grinder” at one of the suppliers for Pratt & Whitney Aviation. P&WA was headquartered in East Hartford. Fred Beaulieu worked in a large shop at 1841 Broad



*1841 Broad Street, Hartford. Former site of  
Fenn Manufacturing Company*

Street, less than 2 ½ miles from our Francis Ave. family home.

By the age of sixteen I was both a student at near-by Hartford Public High School (Hartford High) and an after-school, part-time worker at Swahn Tool and Machine, 30 Bartholomew Ave., Hartford.

***Swahn Tool and Machine, 30 Bartholomew Ave. September, 1952***

“Is this your first job Miss Beaulieu?”

“Yeah I just turned sixteen. I really want to work but I haven’t been able to get a job

before. I’m going to school at Hartford High most of the day. I’m in a big family. My dad

works really hard as a grinder down on Broad

Street and I’d like to help out and have some money of my own too.”

“I’m sure you will do very well here Marie. We’re going to start you at a job that you will be able to do just fine. Come on over here and I’ll show you what you need to do.”

“Ok, but please call me Claudette. Three of us sisters have the first name Marie so we go by our middle names.”

“Oh that’s cute. Sure dear I’d be happy to call you that. Now Claudette come over here and take this pattern measure at this bench where you will work. The boys will bring over large boxes of parts that are ready for packing and shipping. But we want to check them to make sure that they are just right before we let them out of the plant. So you’re going to check four parts out of each box to make sure they are ok. We don’t check every part. Each box is a “batch” so we spot-check four in each box. When they bring the box over they’ll lift the top off the top section. The top compartment holds thirty parts but there’s a shelf that fits on the bottom that holds six more. You are going to pick up two parts from the top layer of the large box and hold them up against that pattern measure. The



*30 Bartholomew Ave. Hartford Former location of Swahn Tool and Machine*

part should fit right into space in the measure without having to force it and without it slipping right through cause it's too small. There shouldn't be any knobs or edges sticking up either. It's gotta' be a smooth fit right into the guide. You check any two parts from the top layer then any two from the single bottom layer. If they are all ok you slap a green sticker on the box and the boys will take it away when they bring the next batch. If there are any that don't pass the test you'll put a red sticker on the outside of the box and on the part that failed. Those go back to Lars in the stocking division. He'll check the entire box to see which parts we have to hold back, look for defects of other types and he'll take action to correct the problems. We'll replace the bad parts so the boxes we ship are up to specs; the men on the floor will follow-up to see that we don't get too many defective parts off the line. Lars—he's the boss's son you know. Have you met him?"



*Ed's birth-  
father, Lars  
Swahn, 1952*

"No don't think that I have."

"Well you'll know him when you see him—he's probably the most handsome guy here. He's married with a wife and young son at home. Anyway let me know if you have any questions or trouble. Once the boxes start coming to you they'll come pretty steady for about an hour at a time. Then there will be a little lag so be sure to use the bathroom during those little breaks if you need to. We'll be working on this specific part for most of the rest of the week. After we finish getting that order out of the door you'll see other parts in a variety of shapes and sizes as we work to fill other orders. But the work that you'll do will be similar to this as long as you are in quality control. You'll get a pattern

or measure of some type and boxes of parts to spot check. The drill is the same even when the parts change.”

“Thanks a lot Mrs. Winston. I’ll really do this good for you.”

“I’m sure you’ll be just fine here Marie—I mean Claudette. And before long I’m sure you’ll work your way up to a better job here to something that’s a little more exciting and different. You’re a smart and pretty girl—I’ll bet you’ll move up fast. But we start just about everyone by having them check parts this way. It helps teach new employees about the kinds of things we make and do and it helps us learn whether they are attentive enough to detail to do other jobs for us here.”

“Well I’m a hard worker Mrs. Winston so you can count on that! And I really want the job so I’ll work real hard at it and I’ll be very careful with the parts. Thank you so much for all the help.”

***Home of Albin and Alfhid (Alli) Swahn, 49 Woodmere Rd. West Hartford, CT  
November 3, 1952***

“Hey Dad. Just want to thank you for letting me and Stevie stay here until Gertrude and I and I get into our own place after the wedding next spring. It just got to the point that I couldn’t stay in that house with Leona even if the paperwork isn’t done yet.”

“I know Lars. You’re our son. This is what families do. No one likes for marriages to end in divorce especially when young children are involved. But sometimes things just don’t work out and it’s best if the couple can make peace and solid arrangements for the care of the offspring.”

“Leona is pressing for custody. I suppose I’m going to lose that battle. I can barely stand to be near the woman for a moment when she visits Stevie. That’s probably going to make me look even worse the next time we see the judge.”

“How her visits go probably won’t make a difference Lars. She’s going to have a tough time getting Steven since you have a job and will have a new wife soon.”

“It kind of makes me wonder Pop. With having so much product turned out at the shop you’d think that I could save enough money and get a place of my own. Don’t get me wrong Dad—you pay me just fine. But saving for the child support payments and the alimony makes it kinda’ tough for a guy to put away much money. Gertrude and I are going to want our own place so I’m trying to put away enough to make a good down payment on that. Being able to live at home for a while helps a lot.”

“I know that are working hard every day at the shop son. I’m sure that things will work out for you—probably sooner than you think.”

“I gotta’ put a few extra hours in though Pop. You don’t have to pay me overtime or anything but I think I’ll stay a little later some days. I don’t have a lot going on since Gertrude won’t move to town until just before the wedding. Got a lot of time on my hands. I’ll do some of work that the guys don’t get to when they are on their off-days. It’ll help us keep current with the orders and put a little extra hourly money in my pocket.”

“Always thinking ahead son that’s good.”

***Road on the grounds of Cedar Hill Cemetery, 453 Fairfield Ave, Hartford, CT  
December 18, 1952***

Silence. Muffled. I don't hear anything except my own breathing. No screaming or crying—no whispers. And cold—God it's so cold. Why isn't there warmth from being covered like this? The icy leather sticks to my back and legs. Breathing without air—nearly suffocating. The searing heat does not touch the cold—it only makes the pain dig deeper. How long does this take? It's so dark and cold and silent. Now the weight shifts and sloughs off. I feel alone even here together. The cold reaches deep stealing all the energy from every nerve ending that should have been warmed.

“Pull yourself together there kid and come on up here in the front with me. I'll drop you off at home. And you know if you tell anybody about this it's going to make a lot trouble for both of us. I know you want to go back to work and you don't want everybody there talking about you and it wouldn't be good for me either. So let's keep this our little secret and nothing will come of it. Alright then—ok—watch your step going up to the house. Don't slip on any icy patches. I'll see you at the shop tomorrow after you get outta' school.”

After I quit the job and left school I was sent to the *House of the Good Shepherd*. I birthed a son and spent most of another year forced to live there. I wouldn't sign papers that would give up my son so they kept me at *Good Shepherd*. I got to see Francis Wayne once a week for an hour or so. I wanted to bring us both home but my folks wouldn't allow it. I don't care what anybody thinks about me; I'm not going to sign those papers!

I only saw Lars once after that. I saw him one time after ma mère forged my signature on those papers, I lost my baby and I left that place. I was walking home from the store. A car pulled up near my house and stopped and I turned around to see who it was. It was Lars. At first, I did not recognize him. His face was all swollen. Maybe he was on steroids for his war illness or something. He said to me “Boy a lot of things happened in the past couple years didn’t it?” I just said “it sure did” and walked away. I never saw him again. I didn’t tell him about my baby. He must have figured that he got me pregnant. I always wondered how he knew that I was out of the place they sent me. He must have been watching for me. I feel bad that I didn’t tell him about the baby. I had thought that I loved him. But not when I saw him the last time and not any time after that.

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