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GUEST COLUMN

## Guest column: 'Saturday Night Fever' at Merry-Go-Round marks homecoming for Sullivan family

Kelsea E. Edgerly | Special to The Citizen  
Aug 23, 2015

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From left, Mary Ellen Wrabley, Denise MacGaffin and Dierdre Englehart visit Owasco Lake during a recent Sullivan family homecoming to the Auburn area.

Provided

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**W**hen my brother Samuel Edgerly landed the role of Tony Manero in "Saturday Night Fever" this summer at the Merry-Go-Round Playhouse, he only had a vague inkling of the family affair the experience would ultimately become.

The Auburn area has been home to the playhouse since 1958. And, coincidentally, our great-great-great-grandparents, Dennis and Bridget Sullivan, called Auburn home, as well. Only it was over 175 years earlier.

In 1840, Dennis, Bridget (nee McCarthy) and their first of eight children, Maria, emigrated from Cork County, Ireland to Rochester, New York, and a few years later settled in Auburn, where Dennis found work as a fireman at a local furnace, laying the foundation for generations of Sullivans to come.

The last of their eight offspring was Michael C. Sullivan, my great-great-grandfather, who worked as an engineer at the former Auburn Women's Prison from 1893 until his death in 1917. He and my great-great-grandmother Ellen had four children, the youngest of which, Katherine Louise Sullivan, was our great-grandmother. Katherine ("Nana" to us) lived in Auburn until she graduated from high school, when she headed to New York City to attend nursing school and where she eventually met my great-grandfather, George Lincoln Higgins. They later married and had three daughters: Mary Ellen Wrabley (our grandmother) and Denise MacGaffin and Dierdre Englehart (my great aunts). As young girls, the three daughters traveled to Auburn on several occasions for family vacations, visiting cousins and spending summers by Owasco Lake.

And so it was to be that an ancestral expedition of sorts developed when our extended family traveled north the last day of July from Maryland, Washington, D.C. and Virginia to watch Sam perform. It also marked the return of all three daughters together again in Auburn for the first time in years. The group was rounded out by their husbands (my grandfather Raymond Wrabley and great uncles John MacGaffin and Charles Englehart), my mother (Mary Ellen's daughter) and father, and me.

We spent Saturday afternoon at St. Joseph's Cemetery, where we quite literally stood upon the shoulders of our ancestors in the Sullivan family plot. The house my great-grandmother grew up in still stands on Woodlawn Avenue, so of course we knocked on the door and asked the current tenants for permission to take pictures (they said yes).

That evening, all 10 of us entered the Merry-Go-Round Playhouse to watch “Saturday Night Fever.” And as the lights came down on us, they rose onstage on Sam: a sixth-generation Sullivan making his mark in Auburn, just as Dennis and Bridget, our great-great-great-grandparents, had done so many years before.

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