

Part 5: Reaping the Harvest

I don't recall much relaxation in those early days of retirement. There was more to do and catch up on than one might think. To start with, we had to prep the house for sale and move forward with the contract on the new one.

There were also a few travel plans that Ria and I had been waiting to schedule. A rail trip, from coast-to-coast, had always been on Ria's bucket list but the perfect opportunity hadn't existed. Suddenly, we had nothing but time!

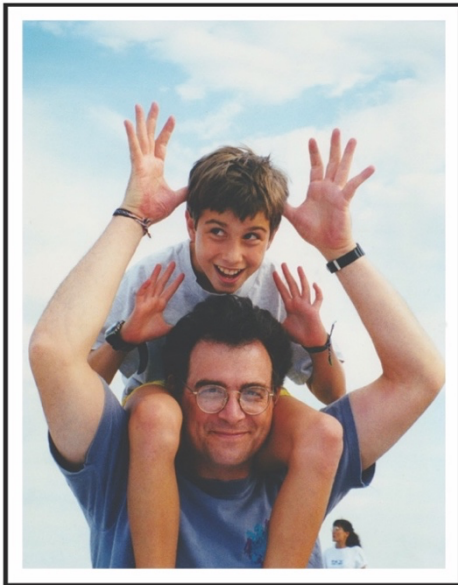


Plus, my sister Pat had just relocated to Seattle to take a promotion with the Small Business Administration as Director of Public Affairs for their Northwest Region. (That role had been preceded by her founding a nationally recognized organization to support women entrepreneurs!) Naturally then, Seattle became our destination.

I should note that both of my sisters became single again during the late '90s. While it was a painful and difficult time in both of their lives and in the lives of their children, they both found a way to rebuild. And – although it took years – they eventually both established late-in-life friendships with their two Eds.

Conversely, during these same years, Pk had been telling us of a long-held friendship which had recently been turning romantic.

Joe Broderick was a graduate student in the Rutgers History Department who, in addition to teaching English, took a part-time job in Pk's office. At first, Joe was assisting faculty members with individual grants but soon his role turned full-time, publishing a newsletter with grant opportunities. That's when Joe and Pk began sharing an assistant and collaborating on a web-based version of his publication. Also, together they submitted the first electronic grant from Rutgers to the National Science Foundation which made them the go-to team to help faculty navigate this new tech.



I'll cut to the chase. Joe proposed to Pk in a hot air balloon in the early spring of 2000!

Ria and I both loved Joe for Pk. He was highly educated, a gentleman, tall, good looking, and an excellent father to his two children Sara and Gary. We'd soon learn that Joe came from a fine New England family of bright academics and that his kids were no different.

Sara (pictured here) was younger and would spend half her time with Joe and Pk and half with her mother. Gary was finishing up high school, so he mostly stayed with Joe's former wife, joining us for family occasions and some holidays. I can tell you that Pk was very excited about the "instant family" aspect of the union.



Edward and Joe became fast friends too. And Joe's mother, Barbara, immediately took Pk in as family, in a relationship that's a model of its kind.

We threw an engagement party for them, and as usual Nick was right by my side, this time in his capacity as Pk's beloved godfather.



They set their date for the following summer which kicked off a frenzy of planning and searching for venues and vendors. By Ria's directive, everything would be first class. "We have one daughter; let's spare no expense!"

Of course, I agreed without hesitation. Ria and I were determined that everything would go forward: the new house, the coast-to-coast rail trip, and Pk's dream wedding – exactly as we'd always imagined it – despite the fact that we had just – and without any warning, whatsoever – lost a (literal) fortune!

Just like that.

In March of 2000, the “dot-com bubble” burst. From its peak on March 10, to the week ending April 14, the NASDAQ fell 25%. And by October of 2002, the market had given up all of its gains made during the bubble.

We lost
\$650,000.

April 14th,
“Black
Friday,”
became
the single
worst
point-loss
day ever!



Sure, I lost my breath, and I was preoccupied for about a month but then I started thinking, I only gave back the ‘value’ that I wouldn’t have had, if we hadn’t been invested so aggressively.

The internet was so new and so speculative that the usual benchmarks for valuing a stock (such as revenue and earnings) didn’t really apply. Or so we were told. It was the Wild West. All of that growth was being fueled by IPOs which had been popping up two and three hundred percent on their first day of trading. It was nuts. Established companies were adding “.com” to the ends of their names and seeing their valuations double.

And these IPO rollouts were such big business for the banks that they started trolling for start-ups which they could pitch to the mutual funds – that’s where I was invested. Schwab’s Firsthand Technology Fund was an aggressively positioned, high-growth fund that really knew what they were doing, until they didn’t.

The most exciting and dynamic stocks were the first to go down. And not just those fly-by-night start-ups, Cisco lost 86% of its value during this period. In retrospect, it's clear that consumer unease with early e-commerce was vastly underestimated but that was just part of the picture. I wish I had known the degree to which 'insiders' were flipping those stocks. But even they were burned when the bottom fell out.

There was nothing I could do but take it in stride and start over. And when summer came, we got on that train! I would have plenty of time there to think it all through.



From New York, with stops in Chicago, Omaha, Denver, Salt Lake City and "Frisco," the trip took about 12 days.

Through some of the most spectacular scenery in the country: mountains, lakes, deserts, and plains, all from the comfort of our first-class sleeper car. It was epic!



I shipped all of my suitcases ahead by FedEx to the Marriott in San Francisco with labels printed in advance for everything to be forwarded to the Marriott in Seattle a few days later. (Going out, Ria couldn't trust that system but, on the return, she carried little more than a handbag.)

We were tourists that week. Napa Valley & Fisherman's Wharf, and in Seattle, Pioneer Square & Pike Place Market. Pat also took us up to Victoria, BC for High Tea at the Empress Hotel.



It's impossible to have been on that train for 24 days without thinking of the settlers who traveled six months or a year through perilous conditions by wagon just to go one way. And this wasn't so long ago! When my grandfather, Ramon Menéndez, left Spain in 1868, the railroad across America was still under construction. And here we were in comfort and barely cut off from the flow of our everyday lives thanks to a miraculous new technology which was suddenly in the hands of just about every American – seemingly overnight!

So, despite our sobering loss in the market, I still believed in – and would continue to invest in – technology (and the future). In the final analysis, I wasn't surprised to discover that my mindset on investing was the same as it'd always been about everything else in life. That is, "Don't count the losses, only the gains!"

Upon return, we rolled into action on every front with our first priority being Pk's wedding. They wanted an outdoor ceremony which required additional care to find just the perfect setting. The Park Savoy Estate easily won out. Then, deferring to Ria's aesthetic, we selected the "Princess Wedding Package."



With that piece settled, we listed the Clarendon Court house for sale, finalized the contract at The Fairways, and began making frequent trips down to Lakewood to view progress on the construction.

Meanwhile, Edward had been building something of his own.



Taking a 10-year lease on a landmarked building near Washington Square Park in Greenwich Village, Edward and a few friends founded Manhattan Theatre Source.

In addition to performances, "The Source" was a one-stop shop for theatre practitioners, offering production services from set design to postcards.

They even had a video & recording studio in the back to make actor reels, sound cues, and voice-overs. In front was a petite café and window stage for live music, and upstairs a bookshop sold scripts. The third floor was a workshop for scenery & props.

Over a 12-year run they produced and presented hundreds of productions with Edward's comedy, "The Center of Gravity" amongst the brightest.



New York Magazine wrote, "Could this place be any cuter?"



Edward designed and built much of the space himself, as well as many of the theatrical sets, so, we were especially proud when it was named one of the Top 5 Downtown Theatres by New York Magazine!

June 3, 2001, Pk's wedding day finally arrived. As soon as you have a daughter, it's only natural to dream of this event. But walking her down the aisle was sweeter than I'd ever imagined.



Her cousins Pam and Kim Granowski were bridesmaids along with her girlfriend Lucy and her best friend from Metuchen High School, Mitchann LoBue.



Cliff Flaherty traveled from Toronto to officiate their ceremony! Joe's sister Ann and my sister Pat offered readings. And Edward was a groomsman, along with Joe's son Gary and his brothers Tom and Jamie (who was best man). Pk & Joe had taken dance lessons to fully enjoy their '40s-style Big Band and the following morning, they jetted off to a ten-day honeymoon in Hawaii.



Then, two months after the wedding our new house was ready!

14 Casco Court was a flowing three bedroom with three full baths.

There were formal living and dining rooms up front and a family room (with a wet bar) in back.

A loft space had the 3rd bed and bath plus, an extra den and a walk-in attic!



We wanted to attract guests and frequent visits from our kids.

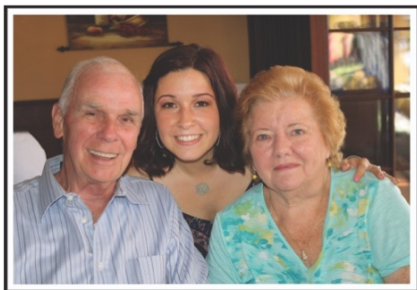


While The Fairways was typical of the the new gated communities, it was our particular location which had made us so excited to settle there. As you can see, Casco is a short street ending in a cul-de-sac with just six houses. Ria had added a Florida Room in the back to better enjoy the little aerated pond which was directly behind our lot. This spot also gave us a 270-degree unobstructed view, plus all of the peace and quiet that came with that.

But, by far, the best aspect of our location turned out to be all of our new neighbors!



Starting with Ed and Pat McConnell who were right next door.



(Ed & Pat with granddaughter Danielle.)

We'd actually met them in the sales office before we moved in. I said, "You'd better move fast, there aren't many lots left," and told them about ours. As it turned out, a cancellation two hours earlier made the lot right next to ours available. They jumped on it.

That was one of the luckiest things that ever happened to us!

For starters, I think we enjoyed Ed's passion for landscaping more than he did since we were looking out over his creations. And Pat was always looking in and after us. They were both deeply caring people and exceeded any definition of "perfect neighbors." Ed and I started a little charity drive to provide a complete Thanksgiving meal for a family in need. Twenty years later, Ed and Pat have kept up and expanded this tradition.

After dinner, if the weather was nice, some of the men on the court would meet up, quite casually, to hang out. Ria jokingly dubbed us "The Casco Court Intelligentsia." Gene Spampani, Ed McConnell, Adam Taliercio, John Bendell, John Ingraham, Len Catinella, and myself.

Convention wisdom says it's more difficult to make friends when you're older, but the advantage of a new community is that everyone is on the same footing. Beyond that, I can't say that we had that much in common to start. Sure, we were "men of a certain age," but John Ingraham had been a Naval Captain, Gene had played the saxophone, Len was an anesthesiologist, and Ed had managed the presses for the New York Times. But really what we had in common was good old-fashioned marriages and a desire to be exceptional neighbors to each other.

Now, our “Breakfast Club” comprised a slightly wider circle of guys allowing its membership to morph through the years. I’ve been so grateful for the connection and comradery of this group.

(This photo is from more recent days, but it illustrates the staying power of these friendships that I’ve enjoyed during my Fairways years and beyond.)



Back: Adam Taliercio, Ed McConnell, Gene Spampani, Mauro DiBartollo, Me
Front: John Ingrahm, Rick Pellilo, Rich Vail & John Bendell

It was quite soon after we’d moved in that Ria, and I signed up for a Fairways-led bus tour up through Montreal & Quebec City. It was on this trip that we met Pat and Carl Iacono, and Charlie and Marge Gallano. Pat and Marge had similar backgrounds to Ria. (Pat had even been a math major at the same college!) This expanded our social circle even further and other tours followed, to places like Lancaster, Pennsylvania & Bellows Falls, Vermont.

Though we were enjoying this retirement renaissance, we still kept up with all of our golden friendships. In fact, it wasn’t too long before Marlene & Nick joined us by moving just twelve minutes away to neighboring Manchester, New Jersey!



Nick hadn't retired all at once. He was far too much of a people person to just stop but he'd had enough of the big city and being on the road, so he took up a part-time career in real estate sales.

As it so happened, Pk and Joe had been looking for a house and Nick became their realtor.

Together they all homed in on Kendall Park, New Jersey. (It was exactly halfway between Princeton & New Brunswick.)



And in the summer of 2002, they purchased this classic colonial.

Naturally, this begged the question from Ria, "Why such a big house?" Sure enough, Pk and Joe invited us over for dinner a few months later to tell us that Pk was pregnant! There really aren't words to describe the elation that we felt. Pk had warned Joe that her mom would cry uncontrollably. We laugh now at the extent to which Joe was still shocked by Ria's waterworks.

That August, a week after her 93rd birthday, Aunt Tess passed. How often it is that one soul leaves just as another is arriving.



And only now can I fully appreciate Tess' own 90-year journey. Born in 1910, she was raised in a time before penicillin or air-conditioning. She was eight when Charlie Chaplin came to fame in the flickers and the First World War ended!

She more likely traveled to her christening in a horse-drawn carriage than an automobile, yet lived to see the internet, cell phones, and the International Space Station. Just incredible!

Six weeks later,
our first
grandchild
was born!

William
James
Broderick

(7 lbs. 5 oz.)

September 23, 2003



I don't think it would be overstating it to say that
for Ria and me, life was now complete.

Not that we didn't still have good stuff to do and places to go but boy was it difficult to tear ourselves away!

Because just six weeks after William was born, Ria and I were on a boat to Belize City in Central America. One of Ria's other big bucket list items was to see the Panama Canal and we had already booked a cruise to do so with Theresa and Patricia (who had, by this point, moved to Florida full-time).

On board with us were Anne & Frank Stabile, neighbors of ours from The Fairways who, being snowbirds, were also neighbors and great friends of Rocco and Theresa's down in Delray Beach!



We'd sailed out of Miami, docked in Belize, then continued on to Colón, Panama, passing through the Gatun Locks onto Lake Gatun, the world's largest man-made body of water.



The Eighth Wonder of the World, had raised our ship 85 feet through four locks. We sailed through Banana Cut and into Gamboa.



The canal opened in 1914 after a combined twenty-three years of labor, first by the French, then later by the Americans, who ultimately succeeded. More than twenty-five thousand men died in its construction, many from yellow fever or malaria. Others were killed in avalanches or explosions from the dynamite or the coal-fired steam shovels.

Once again, I found myself in the fortunate position of spectator to history's harshest chapters. Born at the right time, in the right place, but with a deep appreciation for the sacrifice of the many.

We'd take the railroad from Gamboa out to the Pacific Ocean and back to circumvent the tedium of the remaining locks. This would also provide the best views of the architecture and lush jungles. The only problem was the railroad was booked solid!

I happened to know that the Panama Railroad was owned by one of the mutual funds I was invested in so I called their offices to see what they could do for me. To my astonishment they called me back in twenty minutes to say, "You're all set, I just spoke to the president of the railroad. He'll come down to meet you at the boat and escort you to the train to make sure that you all get on."

And sure enough!



It was an exceedingly memorable trip.
Yet, never had we been so happy to get home.



Then really,
those next
few years
were all about
spending
as much time
as we could
with William.

He was the happiest little fellow.
And the light of our lives!

