



Edward's first
Christmas
to remember.



I can admit that in later years, Christmas (and who got what) had become a blur, but seeing photographs from those early days brings back such vivid and wonderful memories of Ria and me setting out all of the gifts and ginning up the excitement!



If any of these pictures seem to paint an overly rosy portrait of how life was at this point, I'm sorry, but this is truly how I remember it to be.

Ria had an instinct for what Edward needed and an equally strong instinct for what Pk needed. And it was rarely, if ever, the same thing. For instance, Pk loved ceremony and tradition. Edward loved novelty and surprise.

And while I was off at work, Ria balanced all of our needs (and hopefully some of her own) with patience, calm and respect.



I'm not going to lie to you, Ladies' Accessories was a lot sexier than Toiletries. It just was. (Don't worry, she's a spokesmodel.)

This was a promotional cocktail party and press conference at the Royal York Hotel for our Hawaiian line. I'd just returned from Honolulu with a boatload of Hawaiian-made handbags and two or three thousand grass skirts.

Events like these were early instances of cross-promotion for Eaton's. Here, the airline and the Tourist Bureau were partners, offsetting our travel expenses amongst other things.

As it turned out, we couldn't sell the handbags at any price. The grass skirts sold out immediately! This wasn't Toiletries anymore – with accessories, there were fashions and fads, and styles could change over the course of a single season!

So then, how did (the otherwise mundane) category of hosiery become the big story that would dominate my attention?

It hadn't been that many years since Ethel Gant, a housewife, had sewn a pair of her own stockings directly to her underwear thus inventing the pantyhose. Production of pantyhose grew by 200 million pair, year-over-year, in the mid-60s. Then in 1966, DuPont changed the game again with the introduction of their new miracle fiber, Cantreце.

Ads like this one
from
Look Magazine
(September 1966)
were everywhere!



The revolution in hosiery had arrived just as I had.



Here I am at DuPont's production plant in Ontario trying to understand the wall of demand which we were suddenly facing.

As soon as I'd arrived on my new job, Don Beaumont said to me, "You've got a problem." We had twice as much inventory on hosiery as we were supposed to have. But on top of that, the stores were completely out of stock on all the best sellers!

I also learned that I'd replaced a guy who'd only been on the job for five months. And that neither he nor the guy before him – who'd created the problem – could fix it. Apparently, the clock was ticking.

I said, "Okay, load them up on all the best-selling styles. Give them 400 pair for every 100 pair they're supposed to have."

Well, that didn't solve it. They were still out of stock! Keep in mind, this was a 'must-have item' for women, which would most certainly lead them into a competitor's shop.

I ordered a new inventory to be taken. The warehouses were out of stock too, adding days to the feedback loop. I asked, "Can they make drop shipments directly to the stores? If so, do it for all the smaller stores." We could monitor the main stores to get a better handle on the orders (and the warehouses were closer).

There was another dimension to this too: display cases and staffing. See, pantyhose (unlike garters and hose) had become a self-help item. There weren't 16 different sizes anymore. Cantrese was so stretchable, they only needed small, medium, large, and queen-size. Further, the durability of the product leant itself to being wrapped around a card. So, we decided to display them in greeting card racks, spinning mid-aisle, or wrapped around a pillar.



All of this freed up the counter space and attention of our salesclerks to feature (and attentively mark down) the more traditional styles, which is where all of our overstock had been. Within eight or nine months, the problem was solved.

The other three divisions, Montreal, Winnipeg, and Vancouver all followed suit. We were the Toronto Division. And I was discovering that being in close contact with the branch-level merchandisers throughout Ontario was something that I really enjoyed. Working together towards the perfect mix of product and presentation (and then watching the profits go up) was the real fun.

We'd still go to them with, "These are the ten colors we like, the five you'll probably need, and the two that you must have," but after that, we'd share data, anecdotes, and hunches to get it right.

One day, Don Beaumont came to me and said, "Ed, did you realize that your phone bill is much, much higher than all of the other Divisional Buyers?"

"That's great," I told him. "It means we're doing our job. Could it be that the other guys aren't calling enough?" I also pointed out that our sales were up too. Way up.

In fact, no matter what sales target they gave me, I found that we could easily beat it. Ultimately sales tripled in my division.



Then one Friday my phone rings and it's Jerry Despard, the big boss over all the divisions and he wants to take me to lunch at his club. He says, "Ed, we want to move you into the Principal Buyer's position."

I said, "Well no, that's Alec Boothe's job."

Alec was the uncle of Alan Boothe from my lunch crowd at The Silver Rail. Had Jerry Despard forgotten that the Boothers were a well-placed dynasty within Eaton's? For chrissakes, Alec had been a Major in the Canadian Tank Calvary which marched up the spine of Italy during the surrender of '45! How could they want to get rid of Alec Boothe?

By this point, our entrées were cleared, we were two cocktails in, and the dessert menu had just arrived. I said, "Jerry, even if my respect for Alec didn't preclude me from accepting this, I'm not entirely sure I would want to return to the CMO."

I had learned that I enjoyed being closer to the action. And that the only way to enact meaningful change from that altitude was to get the heads of all four divisions to do the same thing.

Jerry said, "But that's just it. We're moving into a final phase of central buying where the Principal Buyers will have far more influence over the Divisional Buyers. If you stay where you are you'll feel that change from the other direction."

As our desserts came, Jerry finished his case by telling me that their decision about Alec Boothe had been made and executed. And that Alec wasn't being fired but moved elsewhere within the company.

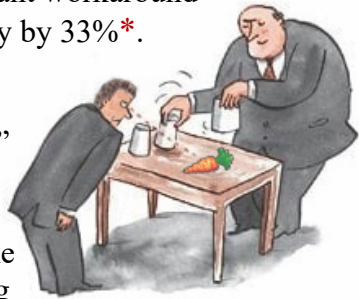
When I left Jerry's club that afternoon my answer was still, no.

- * It wasn't a rationalization to see that Alec was already out.
- * And if I didn't take it, I'd be answering to one of my cohorts.
- * And naturally, Alec would know that it was none of my doing.

All good points which Ria had made over the weekend however my thinking on this had already been set. Then, on Monday I was informed that the Head of Personnel for the entire company, Gordon Elliott, would be stopping by.

Of course, I knew that Eaton's Pay Policy didn't allow for increases of over 8% in any given year, but Gordon walked into my office and presented an elegant workaround by which he could increase my salary by 33%*.

He'd temporarily change the grid on the new position to "non-bonusable," then value the job I was currently in as though I'd been earning the full grid plus bonus, which I was not. The hocus-pocus of it was less interesting to me than the fact that they were not going to take no for an answer.



* From \$18,500 to \$26,900. You'll have to trust me, this seemed like an awful lotta money in 1968.

I finally accepted the position.

Alec Boothe and I had lunch together on several occasions that year. He was a first-class gentleman with much to share and teach. And Eaton's found a position for him in our high-class College Street Store as a Floor Manager. I sometimes wondered if that lower and very public-facing position had made it more difficult for Alec to bump into his aristocratic friends within the store, as he invariably would.

Whether it did or not, the demotion of Alec Boothe was one of the things that began to diminish my respect for the company.

Incidentally, just a year later, Gordon Elliott – feeling that he needed more hard-nosed retail experience – appointed himself the Manager of our Calgary store. I found that to be remarkable. He moved his family out there and immersed himself into the community. Then he started his own appliance store, doing charity work and fund-raising on the side.

Along the way, he learned that all the top brass at the big-name charity he'd been working with earned their bonuses based on a percentage of funds raised. (That's just how it functioned best.) Gordon closed down his appliance store and immediately began working his way up within that organization.

Needless to say, Gordon Elliott died a very wealthy man but that was hardly the point. In Gordon, the trait of recognizing and acting on opportunities was so clearly drawn that it became a lesson I could take with me. (Otherwise known as chutzpah.)

Another case of seeing someone take the buck by the horns – quite literally – was my brother-in-law Eddie Herrmann. I've already mentioned his penchant for hunting but this time he returned to tell Mary that his favorite hunting lodge had been put up for sale by the little old German couple who ran it.

“Why not us?” said Mary, matching Eddie's excitement for buying the place. And together they made the courageous leap that would change the lives of their family for generations!

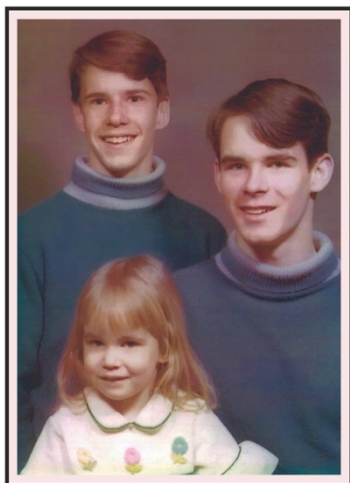


The “Lava House” was a quintessential, turn of the century boarding house with rooms for about eighty guests on a hundred acres of land in the upstate hamlet of Narrowsburg, New York.

Nestled into this picturesque bend along the Delaware River, Narrowsburg had long been an established crossing point from Pennsylvania, surrounded by scenic trails, campgrounds and State Game Lands.



It was to here that Mary and Eddie would resettle their family, leaving a suburban lifestyle on Long Island to take on new roles as full-time country innkeepers!



Their oldest boy, young Eddie Herrmann (as he's still called within our family) was 14 at the time and had already shown himself to be skilled, resourceful and industrious. He helped out in every way imaginable, including table service in the dining room.

David's winning personality and demeanor was ideal for greeting guests and helping everyone get settled into their rooms.

And little Karen was the darling of Lava House, often endearing herself into the momentary care of family or friends who were staying there, if her parents' other duties had called them away.

All of this served to create the family atmosphere of the place. And though Lava House had come with an established clientele of regulars – especially during hunting seasons – Eddie and Mary expanded its appeal into a family resort by adding a swimming pool, swing sets and additional cabins. Plus, Eddie's brother Vince operated the quaint General Store just down the road.

Lava House came along at just the right time – for all of us!

After our mother and father and brother died, we had lost our center as a family. As I'd mentioned, we'd been drifting in our own directions, quite removed from our collective experiences. But Lava House gave us the opportunity to build fresh, happy memories together. And it gave us a fun, rustic and carefree setting in which to bring our young families together.

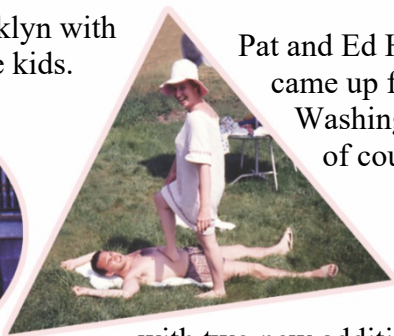


The McNamees & The Herrmanns
(Me, Edward, Ria, Pk & Mary, Karen, Eddie, David)
(Young Eddie Herrmann was holding the camera.)

And for one week every summer we filled the place!

Nick and Marlene came with their two girls, Laura and Robin.

Frances came up from Brooklyn with
Ria's sister Pat and her three kids.



Pat and Ed Hunt
came up from
Washington
of course,

with two new additions!



Melissa Hunt, Pat's new stepdaughter was kind and outgoing and a delight to be around.



And my nephew Brett was born just in time to join the big reunion!

Even Lynn and Bob Vogel came up with their two boys.
And of course, Theresa and Rocco brought their brood too.

Ria's dream of raising our two children alongside the children of our longtime friends and closest family was finally coming true.



To my right: Jimmy Vogel, Edward, Pk & Michael Macri

In front of me: Donna Macri, Robbie Vogel & Kimmy Dicken

To my left: Richard Macri, Pammy & Douglas Dicken