

Still, I didn't buy Ria that mink shawl or the matching full-length mink coat to brave the weather. Nor were they given out of guilt or in compensation. I just wanted to do something extra special for her with our unexpected windfall of \$3,800!



Eaton's was giving us what they called "a curtain allowance." 20% of what our house sold for to offset any incidental rehoming expenses. I thought, what a shame it would be to see all that money absorbed over time into mere sundries.

And maybe it did smooth our transition. There's no question that, at this moment, Ria was sacrificing her career for mine or at least for our shared vision of a family. All of this had been front of mind for both of us as Ria was finally pregnant! I flew home so we could spend one last Christmas in New York with our families before starting 1963 together in Canada.

In the meantime, it was Hugh Corbin, our Ladieswear Buyer from New York, who had been working with Ria on her minks – arranging for custom fittings in the old fur district near the old Penn Station (both of which are now extinct). Times do change.

Hugh was a terrific guy; very well liked. And he was comfortable being openly gay in the business world. I mention this only because it was something new in the culture. Hugh was on the vanguard of this parallel Civil Rights movement. This was seven years before the Stonewall Riots and four years before he and his partner could legally be served a drink in New York City.



Sadly though, when his partner left, Hugh jumped from the roof of his midtown flat. Never again would I doubt the depth of these relationships.

Ria and I left from Grand Central Terminal on the overnight sleeper car. This was not a visit to Toronto; we were officially applying for status as “landed immigrants.” Lawyers for Eaton’s had advised us to go by train since we were carrying documents, x-rays, immunization records and Ria’s furs. “Don’t pack ‘em in boxes, hang them up in full view!” We had everything in order.



The furniture and boxes had arrived there just before Christmas.

31 Alexander Street,
Apt. 1111
Toronto, Ontario
Canada



It was when Ria was unpacking and organizing and moving our boxes all around the apartment that she suffered her miscarriage. My concern was for her. She was experiencing the same loss, disappointment, regret, and frustration that I was, but on a far more magnified level.

When she came out of the hospital, we didn’t talk about it for a while. Nor did we immediately discuss adoption again. We had applied to adopt a child a year earlier but postponed it once Ria had conceived. Then a fateful conversation with Jim Paul while standing at the urinals at CMO headquarters got the ball rolling again. He said, “Ed, don’t wait. Get it going, right away!”

All four of Jim's children were adopted. He gave us the number of their agent at Catholic Families, a Miss Kennedy. Ria called the next day. Suddenly hope was restored, and the wait began.

Jim Paul was the Personnel Manager for the CMO and was exceptionally helpful to me during our adjustment period and beyond (starting with that curtain allowance). He told me that the position would be classified as middle management and therefore come with a country club membership, a staff typist, a secretary, and a full-time assistant named Bill Frost.

Luckily, Bill was a workhorse and already a veteran at creating the myriad product sheets which we needed to communicate (costs, colors, item numbers, and vendors, etc.) between all the merchandise managers and the stores. We became a well-oiled set of gears within this often-complex chain of communication.

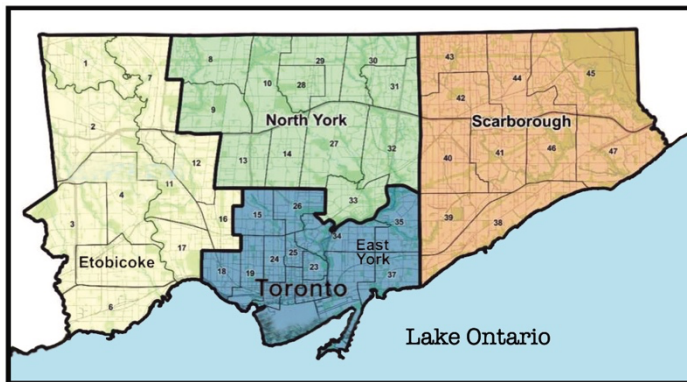
For the first month, they had us set up in temporary offices inside one of the factory buildings which was fascinating to explore. (Eaton's had long been expanding the number of lines which they manufactured under their own brand.) Finally, we moved into our own space on the 3rd floor of The Annex store.

In the office next to me was the Buyer for Cosmetics and Toiletries. He was an ex-pharmacist named Earl Arbour and I could tell – and was later explicitly told – that he didn't get along with people. Or should I say that being an expert, Earl knew what he knew – and he knew it – which seemed to prevent him from following any orders.

I got along fine with Earl, while noting his example of how not to be. And I found that by late spring I was finally settling in at work. And at home too, after what seemed to me (and obviously to Ria) as our longest winter.

We decided to go house hunting. After all, we didn't know when Miss Kennedy might be calling up with some news.

It just so happened that around this time, Len Vincent and his wife Jen asked us over for dinner. And when we told them of our timeline, they became eager for us to contact a real estate agent friend of theirs to look at a new development going up in Etobicoke (a suburb about 15 miles west of downtown Toronto).



We both liked the idea of a newly constructed home. Richmond Gardens was being built in a lush valley with new parks and schools and recreation facilities planned. “And it’ll be right near St. George’s Golf and Country Club!” said Len. Not that I had any intention of becoming a golfer, but on that, we set a date to ride out there with their friend the following weekend.

Then Jen asked Ria how she’d been adjusting so far. And Ria just said, “I miss my family.” So, Jen said, “Good thing you didn’t go to Hong Kong or Japan!” Jen then turned to Len and said, “Oh! I think Ria and Ed didn’t know anything about that.”

The backstory then emerged of how the Board of Directors had been wanting to open a satellite buying office somewhere in the Orient, from scratch, and had asked Len Vincent for names of potential candidates who might lead it.

Len reportedly told them, “The only guy I know who could fill that job is Ed McNamee from the New York office.” To which, Harry Kennedy apparently said, “Well, if he’s that good, let’s get him up here in Toronto and see what he can do.” And that’s how Ria and I learned of the circumstances which led to our current situation in life.

We liked Richmond Gardens immediately. Particularly an area which backed up onto a 9-acre park with an elementary school, a public swimming pool, tennis courts and a significant library!



There were some finished houses but mostly it was empty lots and wooden frames. The developer had already put in curbs and sidewalks and run the sewers and underground electrical lines.

One house in particular caught Ria’s eye. She loved the way it was “set back” but wondered if it could be built using the stone facade which she’d seen on a different house. Just then, the realtor noticed the truck of the builder who’d put up both houses. “Hey, there’s Nick Basili. Let’s go talk to him!”

Nick escorted us through a finished home nearby with the same floor plan. He and Ria clicked immediately. And he was happy to build it in the stone and accommodate any other alterations. So, we just picked one of his three available lots, which was easy.

We'll take that one!



(Looking back
over the park
towards
the new
Elementary
School.)

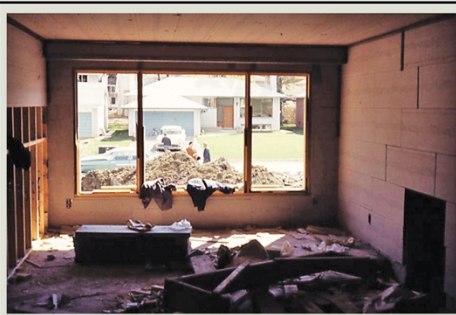
Nick loved working with Ria, as did his brother and partner, Lou Basili. They were all perfectionists and spoke the same language.



They pushed the back of the house out by another four feet to accommodate a larger bathroom and some of our existing furniture. And then there were little extras and refinements along the way which all came together with joyous efficiency.

The Basilis were a large, close-knit Italian family just like Ria's and over time we became friends with just about all of them. In fact, Nick's wife Verda soon became one of Ria's closet friends. They lived in a house just opposite ours, on a corner of the park.

By the end of summer our house was coming together and we asked Ria's mother if she'd consider coming up to Canada to live with us. It made perfect sense as Ria's sister Pat was now out in California.



I'll never forget, November 22, 1963 was moving day. We were watching the men take our furniture out to the van when a neighbor told Ria that President Kennedy had been shot. I pulled our television from the pile of things to be moved and plugged it back in. We all stood there in disbelief for as long as we could but we had to keep moving. That night was our first sleeping in the new house. It was a day of intense emotions.

26 Stratthdee Drive



Miss Kennedy from Catholic Families began a series of home visits just as soon as we were set up for them. We had already passed the initial interviews down at her office. While the adoption process seemed to be taking forever, she assured us that we were the kind of couple they were looking for.

Ria's mother, Frances, was already living with us when Miss Kennedy came back to tell us about a baby girl who would soon become available. The birth mother had wanted to raise the baby herself but was only 17 and ultimately agreed with her father that adoption could give both of them a chance for a good life.

To that end – and seeing that her baby had tested very well on cognitive skills exams – the birth mother wanted assurances that the child would be fully educated. Ria's mother who was sitting there piped in, "Well, we educated our daughter as you can see, so I'm certain that she'll want to educate her daughter as well."

The baby was currently living in foster care. We had not met her. We hadn't even seen a photograph. All we were told was that she was half Italian and half Irish. We went down to the agency to pick her up and she took to us right away!

Without question,
it was the happiest
day of our lives.



August 12, 1964.
She was just
19 weeks old.

We named her Patricia Kathleen.



Then almost immediately,
I nicknamed her Pk
and it stuck!