

Still, a long-proposed trip out to Boise for that summer was not medically recommended. And since my ongoing goal was to bring my children (and now grandchildren) together with their respective cousins, I insisted that they travel without me at my treat. I particularly enjoyed receiving the photos from Kay's family condo on picturesque Payette Lake in McCall, Idaho. Brett and Kay keep a sailboat up there. What a wonderful and different experience for William & Aidan! And Pk & Edward!



Brett, Kay, Joe, Aaron, Brian, Aidan, Edward, Ellie, Pat, Pk, Pam & William

As soon as I was back on my feet, June and I were back on the high seas. We were cruising just to cruise! Royal Caribbean was launching a new and better ship each year in their quantum class: Anthem of the Seas, Ovation of the Seas – floating cities really.

Then Celebrity came out with a ship that seemed to top them all, the Edge. June and I sailed through the Caribbean with her son Gary that next spring.



It was also time for the next family cruise to make good on my promise to Ria. Pk and Edward had never been to the Canadian Maritimes so that became the new exciting rallying destination.



It was nine gorgeous summer nights in calm, cool waters with ports of call in the quaint New England towns of Bar Harbor & Portland, Maine before day trips into St. John, New Brunswick, and Halifax, Nova Scotia. Boston was also enroute!



I can easily count this cruise as being amongst the most special and memorable of my life. I felt incredibly grateful to be in the position to invite both of my sisters aboard as my guests. And equally grateful for all three of us to be enjoying good health at the same time. We spent every day and evening just

laughing about the old times and sharing our stories with family.

This cruise also marked the first time that June had joined us on one of our big family voyages. We had been together five years at this point and my respect and love for her had only continued to grow. So having her there made the portrait of my life (at age 86) complete.

Though neither of us held any desire or need to be married again, we enjoyed functioning as a couple, making plans, and depending on each

other. I never attempted to substitute for Gene in any way and June never once tried to compete with my memory of Ria. We both acknowledged that the love we held for our late spouses would not be diminished by our relationship. At the same time, we felt extremely blessed to be amongst a small number in our age group who had found fun and meaningful companionship.

I had mentioned some of June's gifts relating specifically to her intelligence, but it should be noted that college had not at all been in the cards for her. Though her father had been a talented tradesman, he provided only a modest income. He was a first-generation American, and June's mother had been an orphan girl from a Pennsylvania coal town. The future for the Della Sala children had not been a particularly bright one. It was a neighbor who'd noticed June was always reading and encouraged her to seek out scholarships to pay for school. June took it from there!



It's this origin story that informs and impresses me so much. And I can see it carried through in everything that June does. Strong character traits such as these are what allow you to meet someone new and feel that you've always known them. And in June's case, that you can always rely on them to do their best. I've enjoyed it when, from time to time, we've run into one of June's former students calling out, "Miss Della Sala!" and I've been able to see first-hand the impact that she's had on so many.

Her humble beginnings in Kenilworth, New Jersey were not so different than mine in St. Albans. We share that experience and perspective of raising our family's prospects in one generation. It's an enduring regard for the lifestyle that one may be afforded simply by working hard and remaining curious lifetime learners.

As I was staring down 90, I found myself reexamining that path. After all, it had been nearly eighteen years since I had retired. I would think about the people I worked with a lot, but rarely ever the work. I tried my best to keep in touch with the special ones.

My most valued colleague from all those years was Elena. We understood one another and saw the big picture in the same way. Whether conditions were absurd or miserable or monotonous or challenging, a look from Elena would let me know that I wasn't the one who was crazy. And she always had my back. Being able to stick out those twenty years at Georgia allowed me to get where I was, and she was a huge part of that. We still speak and write to this day. Here we are waiting for our lunch reservation at the Central Park Boathouse in 2014.



That was taken shortly after Tony Benson died from a form of brain cancer. We remembered him well that day with a cocktail. A year and a half after that we lost Derek Pierce, also to cancer. I can only picture them now in their prime – out on the town with an audience and a hilarious story to recount. There were far too many nights to remember (and some I couldn't recall the very next day). I think 'partners in crime' would be an apt description.

I've wanted this book to be a celebration of growing old but of course the flip side to that coin is having to watch your closest friends and colleagues move on. Going back further to Toronto and my Eaton's days, it was crushing to discover that both Alf Charmers and Bill Cable (my carpool confidants) had suffered from dementia before passing along within a year or two of one another. Last I heard, our fraternity of "Eaton's Irregulars" had dwindled from its original size of fifty guys to just ten attendees at last year's meeting. My lunch buddy, Hartley Cutten died a long time ago. Freddy Eaton passed only recently. Of my closest friends from that era only Alan Boothe remains. Writing this has reminded me that I must reach out; it's been too long.

Several of our closest friends from Strathdee Drive are still in the fight. Freda Marsden just turned 93 and I don't think she'd mind me telling you that. Verda Basili is living up at the cottage with her son Ricky. I do get to speak with Freda and Verda from time to time. Nick and Louis Basili passed many years ago, but their sister and brother-in-law, Gina and Johnny Seca are doing well, still in their home on Strathdee. I doubt that I'll be up there again to visit them, but it's been great to see them on Facebook.

I still talk to Cliff Flaherty pretty regularly. Avie is in memory care now which has been a definite challenge for the family but she's in good health otherwise and they all visit her frequently. Knowing Cliff & Avie, they will count every single blessing as double and see the beauty and humor in every situation they can.

Our old friends, Bob and Lynn Vogel have been struggling with Lynn's Alzheimer's for some time now. Bob is caring for her in their home with help. It's been heart wrenching but also touching to see how their vows, made more than half a century ago, have never been so much as strained. Bob's strength of mind, body and character have all now come to serve him. Perhaps we are all made in a certain way for a reason. I just don't know.

Ria's other best pal from AT&T, Irene Wu, had been widowed from Jon for over twenty years and we'd always stayed in touch. The sad news of her passing reached me only this month. I must reach out to their children. We were young adults together in our twenties with Irene and Jon, out at clubs, holding dinner parties in our first apartments and always laughing. That's still how I picture them. Irene's passing is yet another era come to an end.

My childhood friends Jack Eschmann and Ray Mullen are gone too. Jack after his third or fourth heart attack, Ray of cancer. My memories of them run the deepest. To think of them, I must try to remember myself first as a child then as a teen. Those images appear to me in flashes rather than whole sequences, but I recall stories and still revisit my time with those guys. The pictures in this book have also helped to bring that era back into my mind's eye and I find that more and more of it is coalescing every day!

Eddie Herrmann is another friend from the old neighborhood. Of course, he became my brother-in-law, but our timeline begins with parties and cars when we were still very young bucks. So, when he died in October of 2016 it was yet another sobering reminder that our turns around the sun were spinning down. Though Mary & Eddie had separated, they'd never completely moved on from each other's lives. He'd always be her first love.



In a tragic coincidence, Pat's stepdaughter Melissa passed away the same week as Eddie. In fact, their memorial services were held on the same day. Melissa was a brightness in everyone's



lives. That's a certainty. She was only 56 when she passed after a courageous and protracted battle with cancer. She and her husband Kurt exhausted every available avenue, and the only silver lining was that additional time it gave her to be with her children, Kurt & Christian, as well as Ed Hunt, Pat, Brett & Pam. She is missed.

This 'In Memoriam' section might have been several times its length with all the good friends, neighbors and colleagues that have gone before me. And though the pace of the parade does quicken as you get older, thank God you never become dulled to it. Over the next two years I would lose three of my closest and longest standing friendships, Marlene and Nick Moriates and Jerry Croteau. Nick and Jerry passed away just fifty-seven days apart.

Being philosophical at times like these is far easier and less selfish when the person you love is in great pain or living through experiences that look nothing at all like their former lives. This was definitely the case with all three of my friends.

Marlene succumbed to her cancer in 2016. Her daughters, Laura and Robin attended to all of her needs, appointments and treatments and later advocacy and visitations. She suffered horribly and somewhat privately which I understood and respected. Nick's own health was faltering too and when we spoke neither of us knew how to remain in light. It was all far too sad.



And then there was Nick. On November 26, 2018, a Monday, I learned the news of his passing. The twin facts that I had been expecting it and that we had talked about it openly did not make it any easier. Losing him was like losing the other half of my story because my story didn't exist without him in some sense.



This is Nick exactly as he was when we first met and became friends in 1938. And this is Teddy's, his family's sweets shop which became the first of so many hangouts, haunts & stomping grounds.



For eighty-plus years, we followed each other through every chapter of our lives. Best man at each other's weddings, godfather to each other's daughters. I followed him up and down Linden Boulevard; he followed me around to the parties in Cambria Heights. Later, he followed me into Eaton's, and I followed him into sales. And we followed each other back and forth across Canada on myriad sales trips!

Our wives were best of friends, our families have been family, and only Nick knew the full arc of my life. He was present for every challenge and every celebration that we discussed over a thousand meals together and there's just no way of talking about any part of this ninety-year journey without our friendship being at the very center of it. I miss him a lot. Here's to you, Nick!

I was on the phone with Joan when Jerry passed. She heard the hospice aid call out and she rushed into the bedroom. That was January 22, 2019. My heart sank for Joan. For all of us really.

Jerry Croteau began building the foundation of his house when he was just 16 years old – stone on stone – which is not just a fact but the best metaphor for his entire life! Every step Jerry took, forward and up, was on solid ground! He knew how to earn, and he knew how to save. He paid the obstetrician for the delivery of his children in cords of wood and for the tuition at their private Catholic School in landscaping services!

And that's how Jerry went from being one of the poorest kids in Groton, Massachusetts to being one of its largest and arguably most influential landholders.

Okay, here's one of my favorite stories. Jerry was always very outspoken and active at these Groton Town Council meetings, but he was popular and for years he'd politely declined requests to run for Mayor or any of the other key positions. Then finally



with some trepidation, he allowed his name to be put up for Town Treasurer. He called me up to say, “Ed, why did I do that? I’ve got my own concerns to deal with. I worry that I won’t be able to give the job the proper attention.” So, on election day, he and Joan both went down and voted for the opposing candidate. When the returns came in that night, they were only too thrilled to discover that Jerry had lost by exactly TWO votes!

Now, Jerry’s life would make a good book! I’ve been telling his family that for 20 years. After all, “There’s no toe like Croteau!”

In September of 2019 I lost consciousness and crashed to the bathroom floor. Apparently, I was there for two hours. This was the first time that doctors started using the words “mini-stroke or TIA” (transient ischemic attack) to describe what I thought was a fainting spell. I’ve suffered no cognitive loss or paralysis so to me these seemed no different really than falling asleep. Except in this case, I was standing, and the result was a fractured spine!

I spent three weeks in the nursing home wing of The Pines where they could bathe and feed me and administer all my rehab routines. Even after I’d returned to my own apartment, I received visits from the on-staff nurses. I had opted-in to all of these services when I had broken my neck two years earlier and it was precisely for these kinds of ‘foreseeable uncertainties’ that I’d moved out of my house initially.



Three months later, my car began to accelerate uncontrollably in our Walmart parking lot! Through the gazebo display, but miraculously around all the pedestrians I steered towards a curb at the perimeter. I’d installed a dashcam just a few days earlier for fun. That video footage

proved my “runaway vehicle” case to the insurance company!

The final crash was in October of 2020. Again no one was hurt but this time I was technically at fault. I’d either fallen asleep at a light or had another TIA. Either way, it was time to hang up my chauffeur’s cap!



Luckily, my only active ‘sport’ is investing which I can do from the comfort of any chair. And even though I’ve done pretty well, I would never tell you that I know enough to be an investor. I work at it constantly but I’m never sure. So, when people ask for my advice, I just say read everything you can get. Barron’s and the Journal for sure. And don’t just page through them, read them! Don’t worry if you’re not sure what you’re looking for. That’s the point. Many of my ‘buys’ were because of something I read in the paper which piqued my interest. From there, I did my own research. For me, that’s the fun part! Those side investigations are how I continue to learn about the world.

I also have another method of finding individual stocks. I’ll look at the top mutual funds (as determined by their 3-year growth average) and see what their Top Ten holdings are. Then I’ll look to see if their Fund Managers are all going after the same stock. If so, I’ll take a real hard look at that one! If I decide then that I’d like to watch it more closely, I’ll put a small amount in. Now I’ve got some information and visibility into the company’s workings and it’s automatically going to demand my attention.

I’m still always interested in what Warren Buffett is doing. And I still watch Neil Cavuto when I can, but I find that most of those TV analysts like Mad Money’s Jim Cramer are just entertainers (if not frauds). They’ll implore you to “buy now” on a company that’s being run by one of their golf buddies.

I think about my portfolio as being divided into three sectors. One half is in Developmental Technology. The other half is split fairly evenly between Biotech and Big Tech. Biotech would be companies like Eli Lilly or Biogen which are both bringing out new Alzheimer’s medicines. Big Tech would be any of the modern-day blue chips: Oracle, IBM, Microsoft, Google. I try to stay current; I own a little bit of Zoom and also some Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram.

I've also been in and out of Tesla and Apple to varying degrees. Not because of their current (and very popular) product lines but because of their stated vision for the future. I'm not interested in buying a commodity business or keeping track of their orders department. Whether good or bad, that's not for me. I want to know which ideas in development have huge growth potential.

Then I have a category I call Soup & Sandwiches, cornflakes, and that sort of thing. Kellogg's, Heinz, and Kraft are in there.

There are also a few stragglers: Pacific Gas & Electric, VISA and Caterpillar – that's been one of my big winners. My best performing mutual fund currently is called Columbia Global Technology Growth. But over the long haul, Vanguard's S&P 500 Fund did better than any stock or mutual fund that I own. I never invest in a format, no matter how successful or stable it might seem. Retail formats change. Technology formats become obsolete overnight. Look at Eaton's. As mighty and permanent as it once looked, it was just a style of presentation, and it went out of fashion. It happens every day. And yes, Eaton's story and my experience there most definitely informed my philosophy.

So, when you put all of that together – and mind you, those are just the bold strokes – and I'm constantly tweaking the ratios – but it's done very well. In fact, when I sat down with a broker at one of those sales pitch seminars, he told me that he could not duplicate my returns and that I should keep on doing exactly whatever I was doing. Which I am.

And today, as I await my 90th birthday, I'm hot on the trail of a new stock, a company in line to become Apple's collaborator in the smartglasses space. And when I'm ready to make that trade, it will all be executed via smart devices, in-app purchases, and online accounts. I'm happy (and quite honestly proud) to report that I'm right up to date and still managing my own affairs.

Throughout this book, I've touched on the technology of the day to provide some context for young readers. I've written less about current events and almost not at all about politics. That's because it's not my story. Technology is an ever-forward advance which has carried me with it. Politics is merely a back-and-forth argument which I've rarely involved myself in.

The truth is, there are times when the pendulum needs to swing a little to the left. And it does. And then times when it should correct a little to the right. And it does that too. And I'm glad that there are people who want to have those arguments all day. I'm just not one of them. For all of the divisive rhetoric, the positions of our two major parties are not all that different. Regulations are tightened a little until they need to be loosened, and then tightened again. Tax rates go up and down by a few percentage points from one decade to the next. I think if they took the money out of politics, the need to gin-up the respective bases might dissipate, and then everyone could see that we've just been fighting over the 50-yard line all of these years.

Every candidate moves to the middle after the primaries are over and even further to the center to actually govern. Why does everyone seem to forget that? Both parties have voted us into wars and both parties support the social safety net. And no one in American governance in my lifetime has been either a Nazi or a Communist despite what their campaigning opponents or the pundits (who are just selling soap) might want to tell you.

Even those who would "dramatically level the playing field" are still capitalists. And in many cases, they're not wrong. It's just a matter of degree. I've never been a Democrat or a Republican. Besides the fact that I've voted for candidates from both parties, I tend to take issues on one at a time, and there has yet to be a platform which represented all of my views.

My conservative views are all to do with self-reliance and laissez-faire economics. My progressive views are towards free education, civil rights, and women's choice. I do believe that America should be the policemen of the world. And I think there should be no automatic weapons outside of the military. But you won't find all of those on one ticket.

As for the truly complex issues, like immigration and health care, if there were simple answers somebody would have found them by now. Certainly, both parties have had their chance.

I think that perhaps George H.W. Bush (41) was the only person who was actually qualified to be President going into the job. But then, great leaders are often made by their circumstances (Truman comes to mind). I was happy to vote for Barack Obama. I wanted to be part of that historic change and we've rarely had a candidate so inspiring. I voted for Reagan. I voted for Kennedy. So, what does that tell you? Perhaps that I value communication from a President over ideology.

So, I'll leave it there and note that the one 'political' subject that I've mentioned throughout has been Civil Rights. Because, like technology (and unlike those other ping-pong issues) it has also been an inspirational march ever-forward that has fundamentally transformed all of our lives. I'm just extremely grateful that it's been during my nine decades on this planet that most of the real progress has been made so that I could be here to witness it.

This is Naomi Wadler, Barbara & Stuart's granddaughter (Julie's daughter), a brilliant young spokesperson and thought leader. Here she was speaking out against gun violence in Washington. To me, she represents the promise and potential of the coming generation.



In spring of 2019, June took an apartment down the hall from me at The Pines which turned out to be a very prescient move!

The Covid pandemic was almost certainly harder on everyone else than it was on June and me. Yes, we went for more than a year without seeing our families and friends, but The Pines did an exemplary job of keeping us safe. As 'senior living' statistics for deaths and infections became national headlines, our rates remained near or at zero! Plus, they brought us our meals (we weren't washing groceries) and we weren't worrying one day to the next about our incomes evaporating. Even during the very strictest lockdown periods, June and I were afforded special permission to visit each other's apartments. So, we had it good.



It's unclear exactly where I contracted Covid. It could have been when I was in the hospital with one of my TIAs. Luckily, it was one week after my first Pfizer shot which must have mitigated any symptoms. I was released after ten days. June's symptoms were easier to spot but both of us sailed through it.

While Zoom and FaceTime had been around, Covid seemed to normalize their use. If anything, I spoke to Pk and Edward more during this period. And by the second spring, we were able to get together in a restaurant for my 89th birthday! Here I am enjoying some homemade rice pudding which Jen makes for me from Ria's famous recipe.



By far, the worst part of the pandemic for me was not being able to attend my sister Mary's funeral. Mary passed away peacefully at home on November 29, 2020. Despite having suffered three strokes in the prior decade, Mary kept moving and smiling. Her personal stamina had been a hallmark of her being.



This is how I like to think of her. Young, active, working hard or playing hard, dancing or camping, waterskiing... Mary was up for anything!

She had a terrific sense of humor and she wasn't at all prudish. But balancing out that side was a devout faith rooted in active bible study.

Mary was all about her family and they were all about her.

She had 10 grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren! And we all miss her very much. I'm so thankful now for all the unique and quality time we got to spend together in her final years.

And so, ironically, and certainly poignantly it was after the restrictions of Covid had lifted that June and I realized it was finally time to move closer (geographically) to our families.

June had two granddaughters and a son in Ohio, and she had provisionally picked out a senior living community there to move to, when the day came. As for me, after so many hospital stints, and our recent time apart, Pk became highly motivated to find me a place closer to her and the boys in Kendall Park. She carried out a hard-target search of every senior living community in the Princeton area.

Everyone agreed that HarborChase was the place. The descriptor that everyone kept coming back to was, “It’s just like being on a cruise ship!” It was certainly a lot more swank than I needed and once I got over the sticker shock, I acquiesced. It’s a brand-new facility, just eight minutes from Pk’s in one direction, and four minutes from the highly regarded Princeton Medical Center in the other. Edward came down and set up my new space last fall.



You'll find
me in
Suite 2114.
Drop by
anytime!

There are three dining rooms, a cocktail lounge, a barista counter, gaming and activity centers, an on-site hairdresser and even an arts studio.

Some of the services, such as outings are yet to ramp up to full speed awaiting additional residents – I was amongst the first to sign up – but they’re always adding something.

My health status? Well, I’m being treated for the typical things, blood pressure, etc. and I do workarounds a chronic vertigo upon waking up or sitting up but it’s nothing I can’t handle. In every important way I’m still operating under my own steam, and I feel pretty good for ninety. April 24, 2022, is just a week away!

This is where a book would traditionally say, “The End,” but I certainly hope it isn’t. As long as I’m feeling the way I do, I’d like to go another ten years and who knows, maybe I’ll be coming out with a 2nd edition. Thank you for taking the journey!