

Around this same time, I'd heard that a company making quilted mattress pads in Montreal was looking for new representation, though nobody up there would confirm this by telephone. I called back again and asked if the owner would be in tomorrow. The next morning, I flew to Montreal and sat in Mooney Rawas' office and landed the Kwilt Kraft line which I immediately turned around and sold to Sears.

Normandy Bedding, a line of woven bedspreads, came on board soon after that. I sold a lot of them!

Incidentally, it was about this time that Paul Dubé had called me to ask about bedspreads. I really wish there'd been more I could have told him, but I'd long since discovered that the products weren't nearly as important as the relationships.

By now, Nick and I were travelling across Canada together all the time. I bought into his wisdom of not making appointments before 11:00 am, since you always wanted to be available for the late-night entertaining. Together we saw every discotheque, cocktail lounge, hotel bar, and restaurant from Vancouver to Ottawa. Also, the 11 o'clock slot was perfect for keeping the meetings short and the lunches long.

When you have your own business, the power of "writing off" expenses is intoxicating at first. If Ria and I went out to dinner alone, it didn't always look like I was entertaining clients but if Pk and Edward came along (and they both ordered filet mignon with escargot bourguignon) it became quite believable!

We enjoyed dinner out as a family countless times during these years. Enough so that Pk and Edward knew their favorite dishes all around town. But none were so wildly anticipated by them as the thick prime rib dinners at Ed's Warehouse!



King Street was always abuzz with the theatre crowd from the Royal Alexandra and Ed's Warehouse was stuffed full of campy, oversized antiques, Tiffany lamps and celebrity memorabilia. The kids loved it.

That summer, I “expensed” our family road trip to Montreal since I needed to meet with some buyers and beat some bushes to let it be known that I was now in sales. News had not traveled as fast as I would have liked in some circles. An amusing case in point: one of Eaton's very minor wallet suppliers saw our family eating at a Japanese restaurant in Montreal and invited us back to his house for ice cream (thinking he was now entertaining the head buyer). His wife rode in our car to provide directions and Edward rode in his car. By the time we arrived in his kitchen, Edward had filled him in on my recent career change. Awkward.

I decided to raise my profile. So, I rented the space directly above The Silver Rail (where my lunch group had eaten for years). It was an industry hub, right on Yonge Street across from Eaton's main store.



Inside was a showroom with beds, rug displays, a small conference table, and a comfortable desk which offered a more desirable workspace than my home office.

I don't want to create the impression here that I had anything figured out. Far from it. I was making it up as I went along and was, very much, still searching. In fact, I had tried to buy two other small businesses at around this time. Fortunately for me, neither situation worked out.

The first was a small textile manufacturer which had recently converted from children's wear to being a contract workroom. They fulfilled government orders for military fatigues, operating gowns, kitchen aprons, and cleaning patches for rifles. The owner wanted to retire immediately, and he really liked my offer which was contingent on his son staying on as the cutting-table operator. It all looked like a 'go' until his accountant died, quite suddenly. Well, he replaced that accountant with a much smarter one who told him he'd be out of his mind to accept my terms.

Probably for the best, I thought, even at the time. That's when I became preoccupied with the idea of owning a cash business. I looked at several laundromats in and around Toronto before offering to buy one on Lakeshore Boulevard from a Korean couple whose convenience store on the opposite end of town kept them too busy to maintain the machines and empty out the coins every night. My lawyer was due to submit our official offer on a Monday, but as Ria and I were headed away for the weekend to Niagara Falls, I thought I'd write the couple a quick note just to state my intent. Naïvely, I also revealed the amount of our offer, giving another buyer a chance to swoop in and beat it. By the time we returned home, the deal was lost.

Ria, meanwhile, was just encouraging me to find a more reliable vehicle to take the kids to Disney World before they were too old to enjoy it. "Space Mountain" had just opened, and all their friends were making the pilgrimage. It was a 3,000-mile road trip and neither our little Datsun nor our Pontiac (with its leaky trunk) were up to the journey. I was thinking an Oldsmobile.

But one afternoon I wandered into a showroom downtown and, as I came through the doors, the first car I saw was spinning on a tall cake display under spotlights which sent sparkles in every direction. I thought Ria would like that! She'd always been a car person far more than me, but even I was dazzled. It was a white Sedan deVille with a white leather interior and top.

In the '70s, far more than today, even the word Cadillac meant best-in-class. I'd grown up with it having that connotation. I'd certainly never dreamed of owning one.



I told the salesman, "Don't let that car go!" and I returned with Ria and the kids that evening. As we approached the showroom, I said to Ria, "Let's divide the work."

You decide if you like the color, style, and features, and I'll figure out how to pay for it. How's that?" We drove it home that evening!



But before we could make it to Florida, it turned out there was still one little side journey yet to make. I enjoyed having coffee sometimes with this Baptist minister who was the head of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews. It was the summer of 1976 and they'd formed a committee and delegation through the Rotary Club to honor the U.S. Bicentennial, and they needed an appropriate logo for their brochure and letterhead.

As it so happened, Edward had shown me the cover page of his geography project the night before and I thought, this would be perfect for their letterhead, so I gave it to the minister.

This is a story of how life happens sometimes. Since Edward was a dual citizen, they thought that would make a nice 'hook' and they asked Edward and I if we would travel to Richmond, Virginia with their delegation.



Edward's name appeared on all of their literature.

During our tour of the Richmond State Capitol, Edward was asked to present their gift from Canada to the Governor of Virginia. Then the Governor brought Edward back to his office to let him sit in Thomas Jefferson's chair!

The next day we saw an air show and visited a warehouse filled with American candy, which was owned by our host family. He was encouraged to take entire cartons of it home to his friends!

That fall, a delegation from Richmond traveled to Toronto, and Pk, Edward, and I showed them around to all of our usual spots like Ontario Place and the newly opened CN Tower. Anyway, my point is, all that from a cup of coffee!

Our Florida trip took place over the following winter break. The Spirit of '76 was still in the air and a peanut farmer from Plains, Georgia had just been inaugurated as the American President.

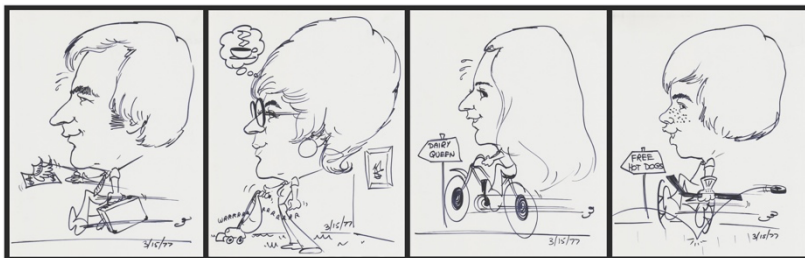
It was a perfect time for our kids to experience this country on an extended car tour. We made stops in Williamsburg and Knoxville, Atlanta, and St. Augustine (which my ancestor, Pedro Menéndez had founded in 1565). We ate at legendary American institutions like Stuckey's, A&W and Waffle House. And yes, we even visited Billy Carter's gas station in Plains!

But there was little doubt that Disney had been the highlight for the kids, and even for me. It wasn't the rides or characters that I'd found so fascinating...



it was their vision of the future. "Tomorrowland" presented technologies, ideas and architecture that we're just now seeing in our lives today.

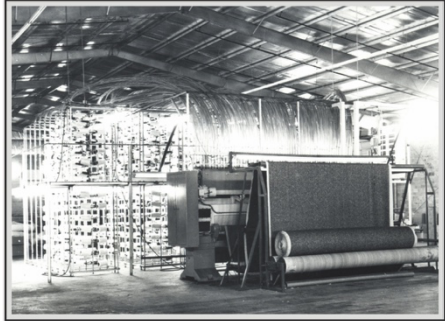
Just as the 1939 World's Fair had fired up my imagination at the age of 7, when I visited their "World of Tomorrow," I felt as if science fiction was coming to life. Except instead of television and the 'picturephone,' Disney was promising us solar power, electric cars, and space tourism. Today, more than ever, I find my investing tends towards these developmental technologies.



Caricatures from our visit to the Stars Hall of Fame Wax Museum in Orlando.

On the way home, we stopped in Calhoun, Georgia to visit the Brown family and tour their textile mill. We were met by Tommy Sr. and Tommy Jr. who showed off the operation to Ria and the kids. Spread out over 375,000 square feet, room after room of highly specialized looms, cutters, tufters, and folders took the dyed and washed yarns from giant spinning spools and churned out pallets of packaged goods.

Boxed, tagged, loaded, and on their way to customers! In a very real way, I was part of that production line.



Georgia had tried to break into the Canadian market before but with no results. Within eighteen months, I was selling them to Woolworths, Sears-Canada, The Hudson Bay Company, Simpson's, and both Eaton's retail and mail-order divisions. And not small orders, railroad cars and 40-foot trailers full.

The Browns were honorable people. I had learned that whatever they said they were going to do, they did! And commission checks arrived like clockwork. They weren't my biggest line, but I liked bringing clients there to experience the family feel and southern hospitality.

That night, the Browns were putting us up at their famous lake lodge. Tommy's wife Joan met us out there with their two boys, Jeff and Rick, who showed Pk and Edward the dock. The lake and all the land around it, as far as the eye could see, was part of the compound. It was that kind of place. In fact, right after we left, the Secret Service began preparing it for President Carter's visit. Jimmy and Roselyn's son had married a Calhoun girl and their families were spending Easter together at Tommy's lodge.

After 3,000 miles, it was great to be back. I've referred to New York as "home" repeatedly throughout the last section but the fact remains, Ria and I had been in Toronto for 13 years at that point and we were blessed with very dear friends and neighbors who all enjoyed each other's company.

The '70s was still a time when neighbors dropped in or came around back. And Canadians always had a case of beer on hand. Impromptu parties around Jerry and Carol's pool or on our screened-in porch were my favorites. Verda and Nick would walk across the park if they saw a gathering. And Freda was just next door. "Well, now we've gotta call Avie and Cliff."



Missing here is Carol's husband Jerry Rea, who was so often the sole instigator of these impromptu gatherings. Jerry went out looking for a party and he either found one or he made one.

Back Row: Ria, Frank, Avie Flaherty, Nick Basili, Cliff Flaherty
Front Row: Carol Rea, Verda Basili, Velma, Freda Marsden, Edward
(Velma was Verda's sister and Frank was Velma's boyfriend.)

Like Verda, Freda had been a lifesaver to us many times over. Her girls, Sandy and Barbara had both been role models to Pk and our kids referred to Freda's mother as Nana. Interesting story: our previous neighbor swapped houses with Freda in Vancouver. That's how she got there! Houses, cars, furniture, everything. They just switched lives! I believe Freda's courage and practical mindset is to be found everywhere in that story. She was sharp and could call "B.S." in the cleverest of ways.

Freda's (now) ex-husband joined The Canadian Progress Club when they'd first arrived in Etobicoke and that's how they met Cliff and Avie Flaherty.



A more dynamic young couple, you'd never meet. Unparalleled charisma!

Cliff was the kind of guy who could do anything and proved it. Avie was a leader who elevated the discussion of every room she entered.

The Flahertys took us in! Their Christmas and New Year's traditions became ours. Cherished times!

Their oldest, Mike, babysat our kids and their three girls, Cathy, Jackie, and Barbara would fold Pk and Edward into the fray, as though they were cousins. And for the best part of a decade, our two families grew up together.

Cliff's mother Dorothy had been a professional dancer, and his father Cliff Sr., a drummer, so their parties were always topped up with pizzazz!



Cliff drummed too... in a pipe & drum corps. An entrepreneur, auctioneer, and finally Justice of the Peace, we used to joke that Cliff could have started his own church. But the best part about Cliff and Avie was how crazy they were for each other.

Our bond with the Basilis also grew tighter by the year. Verda and Ria were thick as thieves at their afternoon coffee clutches, and when Velma joined, they'd break out the purple bag.

Nick's sister Gina and her husband John Seca also became trusted and caring friends. "Johnny" owned a beauty shop and was the only one Ria would trust with her ever-more complicated coifs. John had a rare



gift as a gardener too and he raised a mini orchard in his back yard. I'd like to say he helped us with our nightshades, but the truth is – in less time than he could have shown me – he'd have our little garden planted, staked, watered, and weeded. He was an artist in everything he did. And Gina was raising her two boys Mike and Ronnie to be respectful and resourceful. Good people!

The point is, we had real roots there. And any idea or discussion we ever had about leaving Toronto resulted in dilemma – mostly around Pk and Edward. Perhaps we had the best of both worlds? I mean, maybe we weren't missing out. My sister Mary's girl, Karen, had been spending that whole summer with us. And the Hunts had traveled up on their first trip back from Boise. Nick and Marlene had brought Laura and Robin to vacation with us up at Lake Muskoka, and of course Nick was always in town.

There can be no doubt that Ria's perception would have been a little different than mine. I was in New York for Market Week every April & October, entertaining clients alongside my oldest friend in the world. Nick and I liked a club called The Library. It was popular with our industry, so it offered great potential for serendipity. But "The Sleater Party" was the biggest event of the week. Nick would rent out The Copacabana and the industry would clamor to get in! By day, I'd meet my clients at the various showrooms. It was during these weeks that I really got to know the people at Georgia Textile's New York office.

As I'd said, Bill Watson was the President of the company. Joe Scanlon was the second in charge. They had a few other salesmen in New York to handle the smaller accounts plus fourteen more selling in different territories. I had my own agency, so I was outside of that organization.

I first became aware that Georgia might be looking at me as a management candidate in 1977. I had invited Joe Scanlon up to Toronto to co-host my booth at a big trade show in case we got a lot of traffic. That was his first opportunity to see how I lived. Ria and I had him back to the house. He saw my office, etc.

I realized that Joe and Bill Watson would be retiring in the next few years, and that they were looking for a plan of succession. They had candidates in mind, but none of their current sales staff were being groomed for those positions (I later learned).

Anyway, I think that's when Joe came to the conclusion that I would be the guy to replace him and ultimately Bill Watson. Apparently, he went back and told this to Tommy Brown who must have been hoping to hire someone in New York, since I didn't hear anything more about it until the following summer.

I was down in Calhoun visiting the mill, and alone with Tommy in his office, when he leaned over and buzzed his Treasurer, Jim Jackson, on the intercom. "Jim, how much are we paying those guys up in New York?" Thirteen seconds later, Jim bounded in with a single piece of paper and read off their salaries and bonuses. Besides it being a bizarre moment to have witnessed, I didn't recall hearing a clear offer being made. Nobody said, "Would you like that job?" So, I never said yes; I never said no.

I think they thought I had turned them down. Or maybe they had the impression that I was going to think about it. Anyway, a full year went by before the subject came up again.

In that time, it had occurred to me that my negative feelings about managing a salesforce were already publicly known to all. (Namely that I didn't want to do it.) Joe and Bill had recently been sharing that duty, but in the intervening year they had hired Ben Weinreb, expressly for the role of National Sales Manager. So, for me, that was one hurdle gone.

Then, I was in New York, visiting Georgia's offices when Bill asked if I'd be "at all interested in taking over for Joe as VP of National Accounts." I said, I would. He sounded a bit surprised.

It was then revealed to me that Ben Weinreb was up the block – at that very moment – having coffee with another candidate. "That's fine," I said. But a few minutes later, Ben came through the door to report that the other guy wasn't really that interested. And by the end of that day, I was hired.

First, they had to put me on the phone with the owners. Tommy Brown Sr. was on the line too. Later I learned that he was the one who really wanted me – based largely on the impression we made as a family when we had visited the mill that time, rolling up in our big white Cadillac.

I guess they thought they had to offer some decent money on the belief that I was doing so well. It was a generous salary and bonus, which I accepted on the spot. That was October of 1979. It took a few months to finalize the details which came to include a company car and moving expenses – including storage while we looked for a house.

I waited until I got back home to tell Ria in person. She was thrilled! It was just in recent months that we had discussed a couple scenarios for returning to New York. One possibility was to keep my sales agency anchored in Canada and travel up for meetings, just as Nick was doing. This was far simpler.

In between that day and January 20th, 1980, when we ultimately moved, I made several trips to the mill, always laying over in New York for a day or two to look for houses – for towns really. Manhattan offered suburbs in several directions: Brooklyn, Long Island, Westchester, Connecticut, New Jersey...

My goal was to position our new residence as close to Ria's sister Patricia as possible. Unfortunately, Staten Island itself wasn't commutable by train – something I knew I needed. And the traffic on Long Island had grown untenable since we'd left.

I drove through the most beautiful regions of North Jersey but concluded that they were too far from Pat and Pat. Next, I called NJ Transit to see which trains went directly into Penn Station without a transfer. The only town on those lines that I knew by reputation was Princeton so the next morning I was standing on the platform at Princeton Junction Station. I was looking to see if the people were carrying lunch boxes or briefcases.

I drove around the neighborhoods that were within walking distance to the station and when I saw a home for sale, I'd just stop a person walking their dog and ask them what they thought it might be going for. That was good enough information for this level of my search. I wasn't ready to unleash any realtors, and again this is before the internet. I did this with a few towns, up and down the line.

On this particular trip, I was staying with the Granowskis. Ria and I had traveled down with the kids for Aunt Mae and Uncle Pete's 50th wedding anniversary. And when I showed the train schedules to Patrick, he focused in on Metuchen as a town that he knew. He had been there for their annual street fair and found it to be very charming. In fact, they were in the middle of a bold program to restore Metuchen to its vintage look with quaint new streetlamps, benches, and retail signage. Main Street, USA!



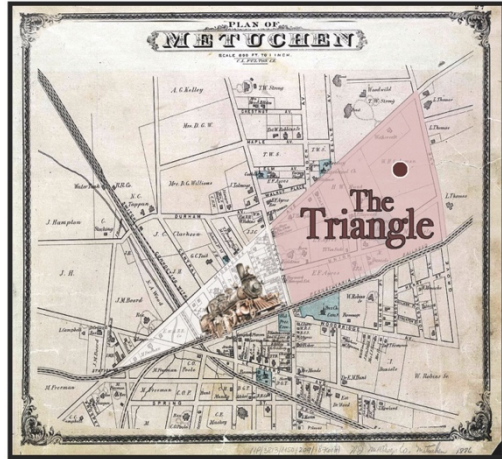
Metuchen's nickname was "The Brainy Borough." It was your quintessential "sleepy bedroom town." Three square miles with a population of 14,000. One high school with 800 kids, 200 per class. Their Catholic church was being anointed as a cathedral for a new Diocese and Thomas Alva Edison had perfected the lightbulb just down the road. In fact, Metuchen was surrounded by the town of Edison. People referred to it as "the donut hole."

Within this tiny oasis was an old-fashioned 1920s movie theatre, an ice cream soda shop where the kids all hung out, specialty stores of the sort where you'd know the proprietor's name, plus there were parks, ponds, and a Revolutionary War cemetery!

Its leafy streets were slow, safe, and quiet despite the town sitting at the nexus of where the Garden State Parkway crossed the New Jersey Turnpike (as well as other major Routes like 1, 27 and 287). It was 25 minutes to Pat and Pat's – door to door!

Sold!

It was time to unleash the realtors! I drew a triangle on the map to represent a walkable distance to both the railroad station and the high school. I added a note about preferring brick houses, made a dozen copies, dropped them off at realtors in town, and went home.



Metuchen was everything we'd wanted for Pk and Edward. We knew how jarring this change would be for them. We wanted to give them the excitement of moving towards something rather than just away. From the first, they were elated about spending more time with their cousins so there was never a big drama about our news, when it broke. They both really took it in stride.

And 46 Clarendon Court (the dot on that map) met all my criteria.



But not all of Ria's!

I never quite understood what she didn't like about that house. The process had been ironclad. Even she would agree with that. And she didn't stop us from buying it. It had curb appeal, a beautiful yard...

Edward thinks that it had something to do with the outdated wood paneling in the dining room and den. I could look past that.

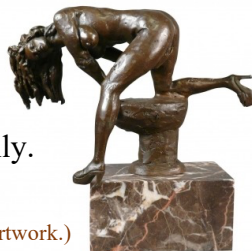


In any event, there became a good-natured understanding that Ria would select our next home with everything she ever wanted.

In the meantime, our sellers couldn't be out until April. The kids needed to start school in January, and I reported for work on February 1. We needed to rent something furnished and quickly!

The realtor introduced me to a pair of young swingers who were breaking up after she'd gotten pregnant. I guess the fun stopped. Anyway, their house would be available for a few months. All they needed to do was hide the nude statues and wildly erotic art (they could keep all the mildly obscene stuff on display). The master bedroom had a 7-foot square mirror built into the canopy of a 4-poster bed on a giant, tiered platform. I suspected that the real estate agent was a member of their swinging community.

It was a long, cold winter. This house was in the next town, so Pk and Edward didn't quite land into the pretty picture I described above but we got there eventually.



(By the way, Edward was 14 ½ and very much liked the artwork.)