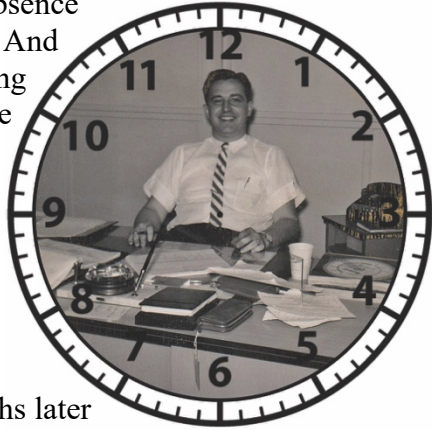


Ria finally took that leave of absence from the Telephone Company. And I knew that if our plan of starting a family was successful that she might not be working for some time so I put everything I had into making my job at Eaton's a success. I even set up a little home office out in our garage.



It wasn't more than three months later before my boss wanted to have a conversation.

He said to me, "Ed, if you take this, you'd be the second person from the New York office in a hundred years to be promoted to the Canadian Headquarters in Toronto."

And, without even being too clear on exactly what the position was, I immediately accepted.

Now for Ria, the notion of moving to Canada hadn't exactly arrived out of the blue. More than a year earlier, they had asked me if I'd like to "have my name put forward" for a position in Montreal. Ria and I had discussed it at the time and came to the conclusion that for various reasons – including language – that Toronto would be a completely different matter. So that's true.

It's also true that when I came home from work that night, Ria hadn't exactly remembered making that tacit agreement. But she was willing to go, if only because that's where Guy Lombardo and his Royal Canadians were. But I knew that for Ria, leaving home – which meant her whole extended family – was not going to be easy.

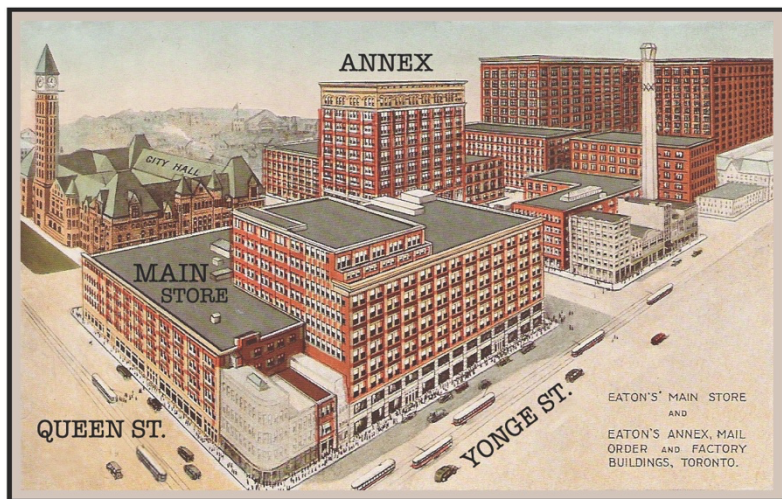
You know what? She never once complained.

From there, it all happened very quickly. I would go up first and Ria would work on getting us packed and sold out of Seaford. We scheduled some dates in November for her to join me to scout out apartments, but for now I was staying at the Westbury.

I don't even know if I understood what kind of job I was going into. I knew the title, Coordinator of the Lower Priced Stores. Fortunately, the person who'd created the role, Bob Kirkpatrick, was available to show me the ropes for a while before he moved over to Montreal to head up their buying office there.

At its Toronto Headquarters, Eaton's carried on a vast operation over a huge swath of city blocks, right downtown. Factories, warehouses, and mail-order fulfillment centers, as well as the Main Queen Street Store and the budget Annex (connected by an underground passage).

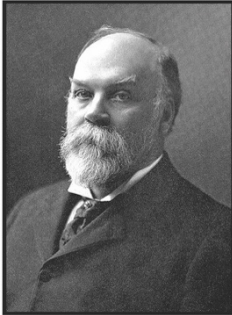
The Annex was a "Lower Priced Store."



In a flash, I had moved from the knowable comfort of our thirty-three-person office (working with my childhood best friend) to a boundless new world of personalities, hierarchy, and history, in this small but important corner of the British Commonwealth.

I knew that the Eatons had long been dubbed Canada's Royal Family by the CBC. Others compared them to the Kennedys.

Founder, Timothy Eaton, had left the business to his youngest son, John Craig, who died prematurely at the age of 45.



John Craig's widow, Lady Eaton.

Since none of their children were old enough to take over, a cousin filled in until one of the two older sons could be crowned.



John David, Gilbert, Lady Eaton, Timothy Craig and Edgar, with Florence and Evlyn in front.

John Craig's Will dictated that a sales contest should determine whether Timothy Craig or John David would inherit the business.

So, for one year, John David ran the main store in Montreal and Timothy Craig the one in Winnipeg. As expected, John David was the winner and became heir to, and President, of Eaton's. He remained so for nearly all of the time that I worked there.

As a consolation prize, Timothy Craig received two million dollars and a 10% lifetime discount.

But Lady Eaton still functioned as the queen bee of the dynasty. Each summer Ria and I would attend a soirée held just for Eaton's managers which she hosted at her 72-room mansion, Eaton Hall.



Though I was still the fresh face in town, Lady Eaton already knew me pretty well as "the kid from the New York office," from her many visits there.

(Inside the turret was a séance room with a zodiac mural on the ceiling to facilitate her avid interest in the occult!)

Her other passion was for creating luxurious dining experiences in the flagship stores. Her Round Room atop the College Street store hosted daily fashion shows. And the 1,300 seat Eaton Auditorium presented top acts like Duke Ellington and Billie Holiday. Eaton's "Seventh Floor" had been at the heart of the city's cultural life for decades.





In fact, from coast to coast, Eaton's had long been woven into the fabric of everyday Canadian life. Their popular catalogue became a perennial and handy reference book for every season.



And for children, the publication of their annual Christmas catalogue was any year's second most anticipated event, right behind the nationwide broadcast of Eaton's Santa Claus Parade, a beloved Toronto tradition since 1905 (19 years before Macy's).

But it was the ever-ready fleet of blue and red delivery vans which stirred excitement in the neighborhoods and came to symbolize the happy symbiosis between a company and a nation.



And so naturally, they made for a perfect toy!



By 1957, Eaton's had a department store in every Canadian province, once they opened Gander, Newfoundland. And they'd been moving towards a more centralized buying function which was now firmly in place.

The Central Merchandising Office or "CMO" was a new top layer of management designed to increase consistency across all stores. All buying now reported up through them! The CMO gobbled up the staffs of Divisional buyers, store-level buyers, and eventually the Catalogue buyers too. They wielded a lot of power for thirty-four people, given the breadth of product which Eaton's offered.

My new job had been created and added to the CMO, as almost an afterthought, once they realized that "nobody was looking out for the Lower Priced Stores."

So, there I was.



(This photo comprises the CMO plus some other brass. It was my first big meeting. Len Vincent is standing on the far right.)

“Lower Priced Stores” was really a catch-all term for any format of budget store. Whether that be a true basement store or an annex like The Annex, or one of the new standalone budget outlets like our stores at Don Mills Centre and Shoppers’ World.



Still quality goods but – take the case of men’s white shirts – they might cut the same style but use a 60-thread count instead of 120, or plastic buttons instead of pearl. Naturally, there was a competition for these types of goods since the Main Stores, the Suburban Stores, and the Branch Stores – not to mention the Catalogue – all wanted these price points too. So that’s what they meant by needing someone to look out for them.

And that’s about all I had time to absorb before Ria’s first visit. Now, lest anyone be envisioning the trendy and futuristic metropolis which Toronto is now



with
its 1,800 foot
CN Tower (tallest
in the world when
completed in 1973)...

This was the Toronto of November 1962
into which Ria landed on the first of
her two scouting missions.



With
its 460 foot
Bank of Commerce
Building (the tallest
in Canada when
completed in 1930).

It was a sturdy, Great Lakes port city on the verge of awakening.

I thought it to be filled with great promise.

Ria was understandably more skeptical.



Here, arriving at Toronto International Airport for the 1st time!

She brought good news. The house in Seaford would soon be sold to Mrs. Burke from the New York office, for her secret daughter. See, Nick knew about the secret daughter and he also knew that she needed a house, so... the long and short of it is, Ria would be ready to move up permanently by January!



We quickly found an apartment near the hotel, right across the street from historic Maple Leaf Gardens.



The Toronto Maple Leafs had won the Stanley Cup that year, as they would again in the following years. Before Ria arrived, or later if she went to visit family, I often had nothing to do so I'd catch the second period of a game. When everyone came out to smoke, I'd follow them back in and look for an empty seat.

The league only had six teams back then, so I saw all the greats: Bobby Hull, Gordie Howe, Frank Mahovlich, Jacque Plante. There really was no better reminder that I was now in a different country, with its own culture and heroes. And that it was cold!