

By this time, I had pretty-well traversed Canada by way of visiting our “Main” stores in all the major Canadian cities. I had also been out to see a great number of our “Branch” and “Lower Priced” stores throughout Ontario in smaller markets such as Sudbury, St. Catherine’s and Kitchener.



I’d even flown out to some of Eaton’s most remote outposts like the one in Red Deer, Alberta where the plane was so tiny it had one seat on either side of the aisle. They had to take our luggage on a second plane and the pilot drove us into town!

But that January I learned that I was being sent to Europe on an 8-week buying trip! It would be a “grand tour” of sorts: Milan, Venice, Florence, Zurich, Frankfurt, Paris, Amsterdam, London, and Stockholm!

Of course, I knew from my many domestic trips, as well as the road lore of my colleagues, that I would mostly be seeing offices and hotel rooms. Still, the prospect of visiting all these historic cities (with an expense account) was something that a 10-year-old Eddie Menendez could never have even dreamed about.

They weren't sending Earl – they really couldn't. Until now, Bob Dezulé had been sending any buyer from his stable just to renew last year's orders. But over the course of several years, the inventory had grown stale and was piling up in warehouses.

While I didn't have a lot of time to prepare, I left with the plan and intention of discontinuing a large number of items and shuffling the entire budget around. I also knew that for this to work, I would need to make decisions on the spot about new items and take more than a few chances. Earl was dubious.

I had created this top-down formula whereby I would be deemphasizing units in favor of dollars.
(And by extension, margins.)

I'd be flying over First Class but had scheduled enough time to return by ship. I figured this would allow for a leisurely write up of my sales plans along with completed allocations of items by region and store.



I landed in Milan
where I was met by our Italian representative.
The first several days were a complete whirlwind!

Even from moving cars and trains and boats, the first sights and sounds of Italy were overwhelming. I bought brushes in Milan, straight from the factory, before traveling on to Venice for a water taxi ride to the colorful glassblowing island of Murano. At every turn there was another magical and unexpected scene!

I spent millions of lira on perfume atomizers and cold cream jars before charging on to Florence, where Eaton's had an office overlooking the Ponte Vecchio across the Arno River.

My colleagues
took me on
a priceless tour
of the sights.

We had such
a fantastic time,
I honestly don't
remember what
I bought there!



To this day, Florence remains one of my favorite places.



In Zurich, Switzerland,
I bought music boxes.

In Frankfurt, Germany,
it was men's leather
shaving bags.



In Amsterdam,
soap-on-a-rope!



And in London,
I was buying
cosmetic compacts
at the Stratton Company
when the call came in.



It was Eaton's Personnel Manager who said, "Harold Livingston 'has been retired' from his role as the Divisional Merchandise Manager over Ladies' Accessories. Seems you're a candidate for the position. Would you like your name to be put up for it?"

I said, “Absolutely.”

While Divisional Manager was a regional role covering the 14 stores in Ontario, it would shift me into a lane where I could move up inside of a larger department. Accessories for ladies included hosiery, handbags, scarves, belts, and gloves.

The following afternoon I received a call from Bob Dezulé, who informed me that I’d been chosen for the job and that, “Your new boss, Don Beaumont, needs you to start yesterday!”

“So, finish up your final week in Stockholm, allocate all of your purchases to the stores, complete the Christmas Catalogue, and submit a detailed marketing plan. Oh, and cancel that ticket aboard the SS United States; we need you to fly home!”



That was a long week!

But there I was, holed up in London’s May Fair Hotel getting right to it. An indelible ending to what had been a memorable first trip abroad.

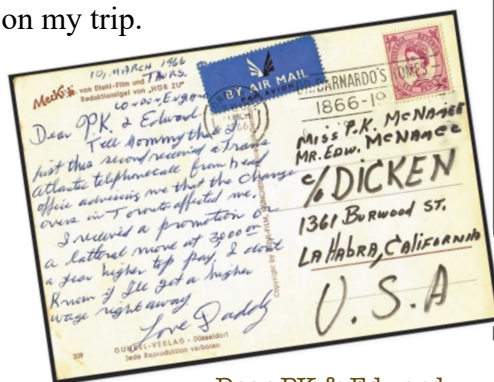


Paris.



Lorelei Rock
on the
River Rhine.

Which reminds me, while I was in Germany, I had picked up a series of postcards featuring Mecki, the Hedgehog and had been sending one to the kids from each stop on my trip.



10, March 1966
London, England

Dear PK & Edward

Tell Mommy that I, just this second, received a Trans-Atlantic telephone call from head office advising me that the changeover in Toronto affected me. I received a promotion or a lateral move at \$3,000 a year higher top pay.

Love Daddy

You'll notice, it's addressed, c/o Dicken, La Habra, California.

That's because Ria had – for those eight weeks – decided to take Pk and Edward out to visit her sister Patricia on the west coast. (And because Patricia was – at that time – married to someone named Dicken.) Both Ria and Frances were set on showing Patricia a way out of that union, but it was a delicate situation as there were already two children involved and their father had been Patricia's high school sweetheart.

We invited Pat to come live with us in Toronto. There was even some serious discussion about moving into a larger two-family house. A year later, Pat finally did join us, though temporarily, before she and Frances moved back to Brooklyn and into the Lupo family home where Aunt Tess and Uncle John lived.

It's an important lesson and reminder about life, that even our so-called missteps are rarely ever that. Every experience makes us who we are and few of us would undo the events of our lives if it also meant giving up the blessings that came along the way.



In Patricia's case, her fairytale wedding had produced three charming, beautiful, and highly intelligent children, Pamela, Kimberly, and Douglas.

Little could she know that her fairytale was only beginning!

Meanwhile, my own sister Pat had been living through a very similar transition. Here I am several years earlier walking her down the aisle to her first marriage. By this time in our story Pat had already left Larry but not before crediting him with expanding her horizons on heady subjects such as the compatibility between science and spirituality. (Larry had a Ph.D. in nuclear physics and a master's degree in Religion.)



Pat's deep and intellectual approach to her Christian faith might not have taken hold, the way it has, had they not crossed paths.

Plus, our family portrait from that day remains the only known photograph of all four Menendez siblings together as adults!



(Eddie Herrmann, Mary, Pat & Larry, Ria, Me, Jeanie & Jim)

And once Pat's appetite for education had been reawakened, it set into motion a series of effects which would change her life forever. After her Philosophy, History and Literature courses at George Washington University, she began collecting the practical, skills-based training which would advance her career from the CIA to the FHA, through the USDA and onto the FAA where she would meet the future father of her children!

It was June of 1965, and the FAA was developing the first computerized Air Traffic Control System. Pat was working as a Budget Analyst on their multiple funding requests to Congress when she was invited to a "High Tea" by a friend and colleague. Apparently, her fancy silver service had been her passport to this tea party and a fellow guest was sent to help her transport it. This is how she met and began dating Edward Wallace Hunt.

Ed was a handsome economist who had recently left the FAA to do long-range budgeting for the Department of the Navy.

He and my sister hit it right off. They were “of the same world,” as Ria’s father would say. Their first date to hear Dixieland Jazz at Georgetown’s famous Blues Alley led to beach weekends in Rehoboth and ski trips to Vermont. And then when the Capitol emptied out for Christmas break that year, Pat and Ed found themselves snowed in, quite alone, and planning their life together. They were engaged that September for a scheduled elopement the following February, which was 1967.



And well, that brings Pat’s story right up to the current date.



I was digging into my new job and looking forward to our weekend outings in High Park to hear the bandshell concerts.

It was good to be home! Ria would kid me constantly about my galivanting across the country, and now around Europe, but it was all in fun. The truth was – and she knew – that I loved our life and would always have rather been home with the family.



I joined the Ice Brigade, a team of fathers who would hold the hose at midnight to put down a fresh layer of ice for everyone to skate on.

We were finally enjoying that 9-acre park behind our house. The one with the public pool and the tennis courts (which every winter would become an ice-skating rink).



(Over my shoulder you can see our white, enclosed porch.)

Nobody had fences yet. So, the municipality decided to plant a hedgerow of blackberry bushes along and behind our properties. One day they hammered in stakes to show the landscapers where it should go. It seemed a little too close. (I had pictured our yard being bigger, that's all.) Under cover of night, I snuck out with a flashlight, a ball of heavy twine, and a ball-peen hammer and shifted the whole row out by another few feet. I had to tweak the new angle, starting at about seven houses down from ours, carefully resetting each stake and keeping the line straight and believable with my twine. The real winner was the house on the end (the Severins). Geez, they probably picked up another four or five feet! To this day, I wonder if they noticed.

By now I had developed a personalized whistle which my kids could recognize in any scenario where they'd wandered off or needed to be found. It was five quickly alternating notes, such as a flute might make. This began (or represented) my aversion for yelling across open spaces or even between rooms. In the house, we started using bells to call each other to supper or to attention.



(February 1967. Pk was 34 ½ months old, Edward was 18 months.)

In later years, there would even be a gong! And most everyone in the neighborhood knew the sound (and meaning) of the large school bell which hung from the eaves outside our back porch. It could summon Pk and Edward in from anywhere in the park or even from a neighbor's yard on the adjacent street.

I had never in my life been a collector of anything but, in later years, when it became a perennial gift idea to "get Dad a new bell," I always appreciated the unique addition. These bells are now in the possession of my children where they belong. And I hope that they'll always remind them of me.



This was the beginning of the truly fun years. We were past the crawling and the cribs. Personalities and preferences were beginning to emerge.

Edward had difficulty speaking at first but developed expressive ways of making his wishes known. The doctors also noted his creative workarounds to a condition known as lingual frenulum. He was a bit tongue-tied and later required surgery to correct it.

In the meantime...

