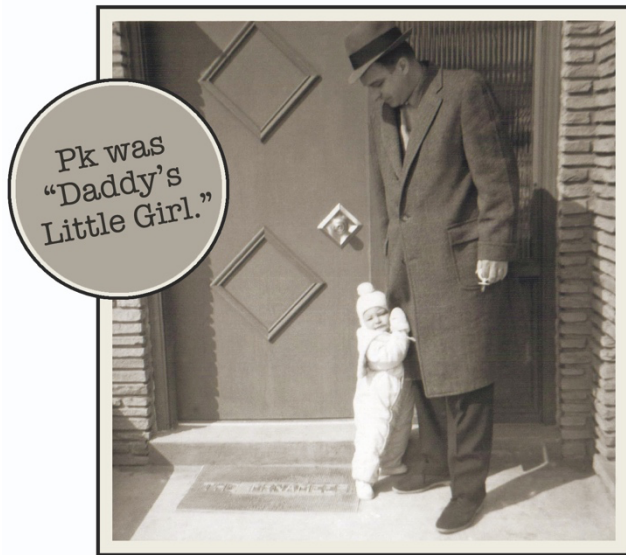


Part 3: Family Man



She was bright and playful and happy.



I just loved coming home every night from work to see her!

And for that one, brief autumn season everything was new and yet somehow calm. And then, just three months after Pk arrived, we discovered that Ria was pregnant again. The doctors allayed any fears of another miscarriage, but Ria immediately became concerned that they might try to take Pk away from us.

We were still receiving routine, follow-up visits from the adoption agency which took a very active interest in Pk's welfare.

We couldn't hide that Ria was pregnant nor did we try to but we were preparing to make our best case when Miss Kennedy assured us, "Patricia is adapting very well here. She's yours, so don't worry. We will never take her away from you."



And on
August 4th,
1965,
Ria gave birth
to our son,
Edward
Bernard
McNamee II.

Now with two babies, just 16 months apart and both in diapers, we certainly had our hands full, but Ria proved to be a perfect mother. Plus, her own mother Frances was on hand to share her expertise. Frances read to the children at every opportunity, and she carried Pk everywhere!

We joked that Pk's feet never touched the ground!

In turn, Pk treated her little brother like a doll. From the very earliest days of their childhood, she taught him everything that she'd been taught. In later years, there would be lessons, quizzes, and chalkboards but right from the beginning, Pk was always showing or telling Edward something or other!



Meanwhile Frances was also mentoring Ria on the refinement of their family recipes – the Parmesan and Bolognese dishes for which Ria would soon become a local legend.

The house was full of love, and life was pretty much perfect!

And at work, I now had both a regular lunch crowd and an entertaining carpool of Eaton's executives who lived nearby.

Bill Cable was fascinating. He had served in the Royal Canadian Air Force as the Navigator on a Lancaster Bomber which had been shot down over Germany towards the end of the war. He even suffered a brief stint as a P.O.W. He was now our Principal Buyer for Shoes. And Alf Charmers, a Merchandise Manager for our Ontario Branch Stores, kept things lively. Alf knew the inside track on everybody, and he had a great sense of humor.

I'll never forget, one time we were discussing a colleague (who was second in command under my boss) whose wife had died. Alf told me that he'd gotten married again to a much older woman who'd been in charge of the Lingerie Department back when this guy was just an office boy. I said, "Oh, she must still be very attractive then." And Alf said, "No. She looks like a bulldog eating shit out of a rubber boot." I realize it's not a very nice thing to say but we all nearly pissed ourselves laughing and it's a line that I've woven into quite a few jokes over the years.

My regular lunch group met at The Silver Rail, a venerable old tavern on the corner of Yonge and Shuter Streets which had the distinction of being the first bar in Toronto to get a liquor license when the city converted from a 'dry town' in 1947.



It was a rotating group of four or five guys, though it almost always included me, Hartley Cutten and Alan Boothe. I'd known Alan since my days in New York and he'd been generous in

introducing me around when I came to Toronto. Both his father and grandfather were on the Board of Directors at Eaton's and his Uncle Alec also worked for the company as a buyer, so Alan had a true understanding of how all the gears turned. I always found the logistics of the organization more interesting than the politics but of course they were intertwined; and our little lunch group could have solved the problems of the world if anybody had cared to listen.

I had now been in Toronto for exactly two years.

At my Annual Review, Harry Kennedy gave me a very solid rating. I think mostly because I hadn't changed things too drastically from how Bob Kirkpatrick had been doing them.



Then at the end of the meeting, it was my turn to speak.

I told him, "This position should be discontinued."

I just had no reason to believe that the Lower Priced Stores would get lost in the shuffle if the Principal Buyers (with all their multitudinous staffs) coordinated those price points too.

He said, "What?"

I said, “This job that I’m on? You don’t need it anymore.”

Thinking back now, it seems crazy. Here’s a role I had moved to a different country to do – changing our lives and everything in it – and here I’m telling my boss, in essence, not only do I not want to do this job, but I don’t think anybody should be doing it.

What did they do? They promoted me.

Well sort of. I never could tell if it was a promotion or not.

Remember Earl Arbour, the Cosmetics and Toiletries Buyer in the office next door? The one who couldn’t follow orders or get along with people? Well, I was to become his boss in a newly created position, The ‘Senior’ Cosmetics and Toiletries Buyer.

I discovered later that most people thought I was walking into a booby trap.

Earl Arbour had no idea why I was arriving. One day after working there a few months he said to me, “Why should I help you?” I said, “Gee Earl, why not?” I was treating him as if he was glad to see me and he really wasn’t.

Months later, Alf Charmers said to me, “Didn’t you know what you were walking into? You don’t know the story? Earl’s wife found a want-ad in the Toronto Globe and Mail for his job. She showed it to him over breakfast, “Hey Earl honey, doesn’t this sound like your job!” That was his first hint that things weren’t going well.”

His second was that they’d never made him a Principal Buyer. They’d organized his categories under The Principal Buyer for Stationary, Bob Dezulé, who’d never given a moment’s thought to toiletries or cosmetics. And now he had the headache of dealing with Earl. They needed to create a buffer between Bob

and Earl and apparently Len Vincent said to them, “Why don’t you try Ed McNamee in that position? He’ll get along with anybody.” So that’s how it came to pass.

Bob Dezulé had four or five young buyers over on the seventh floor of one of the factory buildings. One of them just bought adding machines and typewriters, another just bought pencils and pens, and I think somebody bought Christmas decorations. And then there was Earl and me with our secretaries and staff in an adjacent suite of offices with our little sample room.



Cosmetics and Toiletries included shaving kits, compacts and powder puffs, fine brushes and combs, soaps, Murano Glass bottles and atomizers, and mirrored vanity trays just to name a few of the myriad products we were responsible for stocking.

The actual make-up was sold directly by suppliers like Revlon, Max Factor and Maybelline at branded counters in our stores.

And though Earl had been recruited originally because he was a pharmacist, our new centralized ordering paradigm didn't work for drugs since they needed to be sourced within each province.

This still left a broad swath of goods on which I had to get up to speed, quickly. I knew that Earl wasn't going to be any help, so I began visiting the woman who supervised the sales floor at our Queen Street store. Mary broke it all down for me, "These two categories sell twice as many as these, and if you get a hundred of these, you only need twenty of these." That kind of thing.

And since I'd been trained by the Piece Goods Department, the basic inventory ratios (of Toronto vs. Calgary or Saskatoon vs. Montreal) were already second nature to me.

I must say, I've always felt indebted to Len Vincent, our Principal Piece Goods Buyer, for putting my name forward whenever an appropriate opportunity arose. I enjoyed that job.

As we headed into Christmas of 1965, there was a lot of real reflecting to be done. You see, I've told these recent events just a bit out of order, only to establish the breadth of change that was going on in my life at this point. But, against the backdrop of our new family and a new position, I lost both my father and my brother in 1965.

Coincidentally, my son was born on what would have been my father's 80th birthday, had he not passed away seven months earlier. And Jim had called Ria and me about visiting our new family in Canada but was killed three months later, before it could be arranged.

Suddenly I was feeling the distance from my family that Ria had always felt – only when it was too late to do anything about it.

I had lost touch. Even my sister Pat and I, who'd always been so close, knew very little of each other's everyday lives at this point. She was still in D.C. and in those days long-distance calls were far less frequent and billed by the minute. And perhaps we both relied too much on Jim and Mary to look after Dad while we got on with our lives.

After our mother died, Mary and Eddie Herrmann agreed to take Dad in to live with them at their home in Centereach, Long Island. He was now in his late seventies and becoming increasingly feeble. For example, if his cigarettes were on the opposite nightstand, he would call out to someone instead of just rolling over. There were also times when, for two weeks or a month, he would need additional care at a nursing home, after which he'd return to Mary's.

Then, on the night of January 13, 1965, he passed away in his sleep from heart failure. He was 79.

I postponed a business trip to Montreal and immediately flew to New York with the deed to the family graves so that he could be buried.

My brother Jim stepped forward to pay for all the funeral expenses from a long-held life insurance policy to which he was the beneficiary. And Jim and Mary made all the arrangements.



Then Mary and Eddie Herrmann hosted a reception that evening for family and friends. It was at this reception, and only by happenstance, that I learned of my brother's divorce – which had happened more than a year earlier!

Apparently, Jeanie had obtained one of those “quickie Mexican divorces” (made so popular at the time by Marilyn Monroe and Arthur Miller). She sprung the paperwork on him, took the kids and moved out of their house in Levittown and into an apartment nearby.

Again, I only learned any of this at the reception because I was standing with Jim and a group of his closest friends when Jeanie came over with a tray of hors d'oeuvres and in front of everyone professed her undying love, “Jimmy, I can't live without you! I want us to get remarried.”

Jim had a ready answer. “We could all live together in the house, that's fine,” he said. “But I'm not gonna get married again. I will live as a single bachelor – come and go as I please – and you can do the same.”

I could tell right there that she wasn't going to take the offer.



And I suppose I knew that Jim and Jeanie weren't having an easy time of it but I never realized that it had developed to that level of mistrust between them.

Anyway, just a few months passed before news reached my two sisters that Jeanie had met a man in her apartment building named Royal and that she was now married to him!

My father didn't have an estate, per se, just what was left of my mother's, for which I was still the Executor. I had overseen the repairs and sale of our house in Cambria Heights, which netted \$18,500 for my father's ongoing expenses.

I tallied all those receipts as well as other expenses such as having our dining room table refinished and finally returned to Aunt Catherine from whom it was borrowed.

At one point early on, Jim approached me about taking a small distribution to purchase a camper trailer up in the Catskills. And around the same time, Pat needed a little extra money to plan her wedding. After counseling them both on why this would be setting a bad precedent, we decided that Mary could probably use a little extra too, for Dad's incidental expenses. So, we each took \$400. Fortunately, the balance of \$14,000 lasted as long as our father did. In the end there was about \$300 left.

Oddly, one of my favorite memories of my siblings was at an accounting for the estate. Ria and I had invited everyone over for a barbeque – this is right before we left for Toronto. I had prepared duplicates of the estate ledger for each of them and I suggested that they review the entries to see where every penny had been spent. A few hours after they left, I realized that they hadn't spent much time, if any, reviewing the ledger. The three copies were left behind, unopened in the trash.



I always felt that this was emblematic of the trust and respect we had for one another.

You hear so many stories of rancor and rivalry between siblings, particularly in these situations, but that just wasn't us.

And in the very end, we might have divided the \$300 four ways but by that point Jim had passed and Jeanie was no longer taking our calls, so I suggested to Pat that the balance be remitted to Mary for linens and towels and other items that had likely never been accounted for. So that's what we did.

It was November 16, 1965, nine days before Thanksgiving. Jim was upstate, putting-in supplies for a week of hunting with friends when a dense mountain fog descended over the road. His truck veered off a small wooden bridge, down an embankment and into a rocky creek. We were told by the Sheriff that Jim's neck was broken, killing him instantly. He was only 35 years old.



Lifelong friends came from great distances to attend Jim's funeral. My brother had always been very popular especially with the ladies which – in his freshly minted bachelor life – was apparently true once again. One woman after another arrived at his wake professing their love for my brother, all crying out that they would never know another man like Jim. One of them was even married!

But even though Jim had accumulated a few close girlfriends and Jeanie was now married to Royal, on this day, she was still the grieving widow. She made all the arrangements, including an impressive flower display over the casket reading, "My Eternal Beloved," et cetera, et cetera. Royal made a courtesy appearance but then disappeared until after the burial. He was very generous I thought to give this time to Jeanie.

It's a sad reality that my sister Pat and I have had no contact with Jim's wife nor his two boys for many years now. While fractured relationships are common, it was never a part of our family culture so I feel that, for my children and grandsons, I should explain how it is that they've never met their first cousins James and John Menendez. Perhaps someday they will; that's my sincere hope.

I mentioned that Jeanie wasn't taking our calls. This began after a period of her making daily calls to my sister Pat to find out if she remained the beneficiary on Jim's insurance policy. Once it was confirmed that she was, Pat never heard from Jeanie again.

I continued to try. Ria and I called many times from Toronto, and always if we were in New York, in case an opportunity to get together presented itself. We'd invariably get an answering machine or a click, but never a return phone call.

Then, in November of 1979, we finally spoke. I remember the date because Ria and I were down in Brooklyn for Aunt Mae and Uncle Pete's 50th Anniversary. I'd reached Jeanie's mother earlier in the day, so I guess Jeanie had time to prepare for a call that evening when we rang again. She was very cordial. She asked about Ria, so I asked if she'd like to speak with her. "Oh yes," she said, very enthusiastically. Then just before I handed over the phone, I asked Jeanie if she still had the deed to our family cemetery plots. She switched from pleasant to irate!

"You and that damned cemetery plot! Goodbye!"

"Hold on," I said, "didn't you want to say hello to Ria?"

"No! Goodbye!"

All future calls ended within a few seconds. Obviously, there was some underlying resentment which I was blind to. If there was something I did or said, I would have gladly apologized.

Several years after that, Mary told us that Jim's son James had been married. She'd learned this from a mutual acquaintance who also said that "we would have been welcome to attend the ceremony if we wanted to," though obviously not by invitation. So that was the last of it. It's always bothered me. I wanted to know my brother's boys.



While it's true that Jim and I were sometimes in different camps, we were always standing by to help one another. I've already mentioned his generosity in painting our first apartment. There were numerous occasions when each of us made gestures like this – both large and small. Like the time I financed one of his horses and spent the weekend cleaning out its barn and repairing the two-seated surreys.

Point is, we were there for each other and I wish we still were.

It's when I left for Jim's funeral in New York that Pk suffered her first asthma attack. Until that point, she'd been in perfect health. And though the agency had mentioned the slight possibility of Pk having a heart murmur, we felt as qualified as any new parents could be to take care of her should something arise. It never did, but now suddenly with me out of town, Ria and Verda Basili were rushing Pk to the hospital in the middle of the night to be placed in an oxygen tent!



From that time forward, remaining sensitive to the quality of Pk's breathing was an everyday concern. It soon became obvious that Pk's most significant asthma attacks took place when I was away. Her doctors at The Hospital for Sick Children told us

that the onset of asthma is often triggered by emotional stress even if other factors (pollen, etc.) play a role later. And as I'd mentioned, Pk was particularly in tune with my whereabouts.

Pk proved to be a star patient and took her hospital visits in stride. She knew all her nurses and doctors and they knew her.

Christmas was special that year.



Pk was old enough to be excited about gifts and Santa and songs and decorations and we did all of it! It wasn't lost on me how fortunate we were to be able to provide everything she'd wished for.