

It was a full year later before the world stopped shaking from everything that had preceded.

By now, Mr. Loudon had retired, and I was the New York buyer for scores of products in millions of Canadian homes. In some cases, we just led our Canadian counterparts to the gold and they 'bought,' but we were the eyes and ears in the dominant market.

Were we 'tastemakers?' Sort of. It was a complex and sometimes mysterious process which balanced trends with profits. Understanding that our customers expected and wanted the leading edge in fashion was important to the equation. Though providing a fair price with durable quality was also a big part of the winning formula at Eaton's.

Anyway, I was now feeling a security and stability in my job and in my life that I had never previously felt.

Ria and I decided to take our first real vacation. Miami Beach!

This time we did all the things that people with a little extra money do. We could finally afford it.

We flew first class.
We rented a convertible.
We stayed at the brand-new Americana Hotel.



I grew a mustache for the first and last time.



Most likely a holiday indulgence, I honestly don't remember. But had I – quite subconsciously – been experimenting with an altered identity, it would have been only natural. You see, two months earlier I had applied to legally change my name.

It's something I had already thought about for a number of years. I just never knew what to change it to. And I suppose that, in the handling of my mother's affairs, I came across the name McNamee so many times that it seemed to make sense. It was a legitimate family name. I certainly wouldn't be faking anything.

from: Bernard Edward Menendez

to: Edward Bernard McNamee



(military I.D photo)

It's not even that I disliked Menendez. I just didn't feel it. It was confusing to people and therefore unhelpful. I always thought that someone's name should announce them, like a good brand, or the title of a movie. And Menendez, at least for me, seemed to do the opposite of that.

Marge Kessler (from Fairchild Camera) had remained a good friend and it was at our engagement party that she recounted the story of our first meeting: the one about the skinny Irish boy with the Spanish last name.

Harmless enough, and it all worked out. But what if it hadn't?

What if Mr. Bores hadn't called me back, one last time, to meet Len Vincent? Or Pepe hadn't salvaged me from the back kitchen at Jones Beach? I don't know. If I was surviving (or at least skating passed) these instances of unconscious bias, the way Joe Greene had, what did it really matter?

I was proud of our Spanish heritage. And I was especially proud of my grandfather Ramon's determination to make a new start in America. But of course, I could say the same of my mother's father too.

For both men, to uproot from everything they knew in pursuit of an ideal took enviable courage, particularly in that time before phones and planes when distances must have seemed so much greater and more permanent.

My point is the growing instinct to change my branding was not a rejection of anything but rather a correction. More of a savvy merchandising decision. Like how it wouldn't be terribly advantageous – for buyer or seller – to have the word Ketchup on a jar of Mustard. It had just become time to remove that confusion from the marketplace.

We checked into the Americana Hotel as Menendez and checked out as McNamee.



The person that I'd expected to say something, one way or the other, was my father. I could definitely see where there was ample room for him to feel insulted but in fact, nobody even questioned it, and nobody objected. And he went right on calling me Barney anyway.

I had certainly never discussed it with him or anybody in my family. I just announced it, as I had with all of the big, important things: going to public school, renting a room at the beach at 16.

I think the first notice my parents received about the bathroom I was building in their basement was when they heard the sound of my hammer breaking apart their floor!

Of course, by now I had realized how important it was to consider the feelings of all the other stakeholders.

And if Ria and I wanted to break apart a house, we could break apart our own!

For, as the expression goes, “We bought a little place out on the island.”



2415 Maple Avenue, Seaford, Long Island



It was on the South Shore, very near Jones Beach. About an hour out of Penn Station on the Long Island Railroad.

Mr. Renna spotted the house for us. He liked how it was sited. As he always told us, “It’s all about the approach!”

I enjoyed Mitch Miller's new series of "Sing Along with Mitch" records and the latest from Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass!



Ria loved Guy Lombardo and His Royal Canadians, and Jerry Vale!



Our 1960 Grundig Majestic Console with reel-to-reel and broadband!

And of course we both loved the Mills Brothers!



Were we aware of Rock & Roll? Of course. And I enjoyed Elvis Presley and Little Richard whenever I saw them on television, but we were decidedly a part of the previous generation. If you had grown up with the big band arrangements of Tommy Dorsey and Frank Sinatra (when that was truly cool) then the pared down, often frantic sounds of Bill Haley and Chuck Berry could sound like a novelty and were – I thought – best sampled one or two songs at a time.

But then, I had never been an overly involved “fan” of any particular musician or matinee star. I wasn’t the sort to put up a poster or send away for an autograph, or even know about their personal biographies. I was equally happy in a piano lounge or out on the lawn, listening to the pipes and drums but I rarely, if ever, knew the name of any song unless it became a craze.

Well, in 1961, The Sound of Music was everywhere! The songs were being heavily featured on every TV variety show and of course our home stereo. Ria and her sister Pat (and her mother and Aunt Tess) all decided that a pilgrimage should be made to visit the real Maria von Trapp at her family-run guest lodge in Stowe, Vermont.



(#1 for 16 weeks!)



Baroness von Trapp pours tea for Ria’s mom. Mission accomplished!

For my part, I was just happy to play chauffer and to give the two sets of sisters some quality time together.

In life (especially while on vacation) it's essential that one learns to enjoy their own company.



Riding the lift alone. An early selfie.

I was also pleased to find Ria as eager as I was to visit Jerry and Joan on the way home. Jerry had bought those acres up in Groton, Massachusetts, and more! And a year earlier, he and Joan had started their own landscaping company which specialized in creating those picturesque fieldstone walls which everyone always point out. They eventually opened a stone yard, providing granite and supplies to builders and architects.

Ria and Joan were cut from the same cloth and formed a lifelong bond of mutual respect.

That we both married women of strong character and generous spirits was a great source of pride for Jerry and me.

Here they are with the first of what would be their six children, Gerald Jr., John, and Mark.



It became clear to me on this trip that Ria was long past ready for us to start a family of our own.

We were 29. Almost 30.



And let's face it, Sylvester and Frances had found us that house in Seaford to be near them – almost certainly with grandchildren in mind.

And we were trying our hardest. Ria was even considering a leave of absence from work to see if it could help her to get pregnant.

All gathered at our house for Patricia's 21st Birthday Party!



This was February of 1962.

By that July, Sylvester was dead. It was his heart.
He passed away just one day before Ria's 30th birthday.

I was there for her as she was for me.
For a second time in four years, we would need to go forward
where it seemed there was no way.

I learned a lot from Mr. Renna. He always had such a nice way
of handling everything, which I felt was worth emulating. It was
a diplomacy which could make potential problems evaporate.

By the time I'd met him, he
had long since downshifted
his law practice into simpler
matters. Ria used to say, "he
was never himself again after
the loss of Ralphie," his son
who'd died from Hodgkin's
Disease at the age of five.

Ria's mother always felt that
her husband had suffered a
bit of a nervous breakdown.



Sylvester grew up here, on
Mulberry Street at the turn
of the century. He could
very well be one of the
faces in this photograph.
His own father died while
loading chicken cages
onto a truck. He graduated
Fordham Law School, but
he never forgot where he

came from. And he never let Ria forget where she was going.