

I was going to pay for the Honeymoon, that I decided. So, it was a good thing I couldn't be away from school for more than four nights because three nights at the Williamsburg Inn was all I could afford. (On our recommendation, the Queen of England stayed there a few months later.)



Colonial Williamsburg in Virginia was billed as a living-history museum.

Like Niagara Falls, it was very popular in those days for young Honeymooners.

On our way back, we stopped at Monticello, the home that Thomas Jefferson designed at the age of 26 and built three years later in 1772.



We traveled in style, in Ria's brand new '56 Chevy Bel Air!

A classic '50s honeymoon in a classic '50s car. Perfect and memorable for those (and all sorts of other) reasons!

A few months before the wedding, Ria and I had rented a little one-bedroom apartment in Hollis, a neighborhood barely north of Cambria Heights. My brother Jim had given it all a fresh coat of paint and put down the broadloom for us. I think we even had it mostly furnished before we returned from our honeymoon.



And though most of the wedding gifts were given in envelopes, between our engagement party and Ria's bridal shower, we were all set up! We didn't need to shop for anything. It had all been so thoughtfully orchestrated by Ria's cadre of Lupo women. How fortunate we both felt since all of our immediate goals involved the saving of money.

Our rent was \$100 a month, in accordance with that old rule of thumb that rent should equal one week's salary. In this case my salary, since we were trying to invest as much of Ria's as we could into her Bell Telephone stocks. (And she was making three times what I was at that point!) In other words, we could have easily afforded that slightly nicer apartment right near the subway for \$125 a month, but Ria really liked that guideline.

And I suppose, had we gotten pregnant right away, she would have been right. As it turned out, we commuted to the subway every day, but we sure saved a lot!

These were cheerful days of seeing friends, hosting small dinner parties, and very much focusing on our work in-between.

And in the case of Nick, all of the above, as he soon came to work at Eaton's with me – thanks to another notable serendipity.

Nick's mother had pulled me aside one afternoon as I was exiting Teddy's Sweet Shop, saying, "Eddie, couldn't you find something for Nick where he could wear a suit and tie to work?"

See, Nick's father had recently convinced him that he could earn as much working at Teddy's as he did from the entry level job he currently had. But Nick's mother saw it very differently.

"Eddie, we have no life here! We work Easters, Christmas Eve, birthdays! See what you can do for him. Would ya?"

I thought, geez what do I know? I didn't know anybody!

That Friday, Homer Loudon pulled me aside (in a very similar manner to Nick's mother) to inform me that they'd be terminating our Section Manager (a CPA) for unsatisfactory work. Knowing that I attended Pace College, with its slew of accounting majors, Mr. Loudon asked if I knew anybody who might fit the bill. Well, Nick had graduated from Pace, even before going into the military. And he was terrific with figures and people. "This would be perfect for Nick!"

On the morning of his interview, I met him at the 169th Street station for a little pep talk. I said, "Nick! Where is your hat?" I tried to lend him my fedora, but it came down over his ears. "Look," I said, "just carry it into each of your meetings and remember not to put it on."

Of course, he got the job! He'd be supervising two shipping clerks, several women in the typing pool, and a Teletype operator. He also processed payroll for our office of thirty-three people and handled petty cash. Nick was great at all of that.

But the assignment that he liked the best, and so clearly thrived at, was meeting the visiting executives who came into town via air, rail or boat. This was a very British sort of courtesy which – being a Canadian firm – we kept up. Nick was made for this!

And Nick's mother was ecstatic; her son was "a professional!"

That next summer,
Nick married Marlene.

Their fathers
were both Greek.

Their mothers
were both German.

Both of their families
owned small restaurants.

It was a match!

And together,
Nick and Marlene were
as lively and entertaining as
Jackie Gleason and Audrey Meadows ever were!



They found an apartment nearby
and, since Marlene and Ria were fast friends,
we began a tradition of double dates which would
endure for hundreds of dinners over the next fifty years!



Then, barely a month
after Nick's wedding,
Ria's original wing-woman,
cousin Theresa was marrying
her perfect match too!



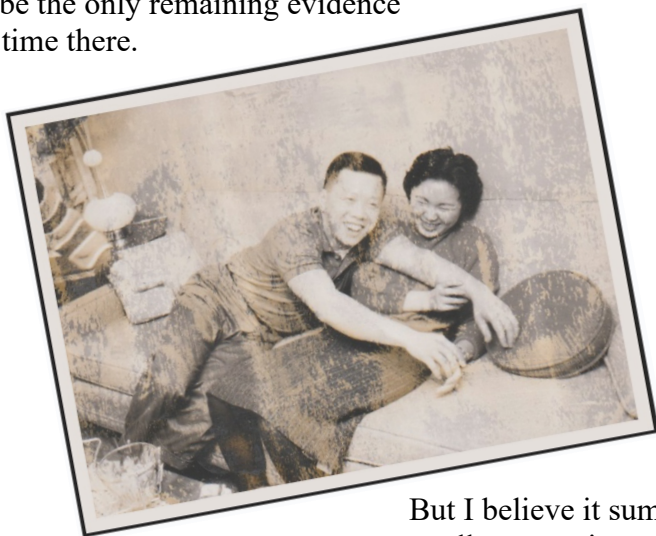
Rocco Macri was a family man and a gentleman who was skilled with every kind of tool, even in the kitchen where he was the happiest.

Theresa had hit the jackpot!

Rocco was the perfect blend of no-nonsense and romantically sentimental.

He and I got on straight away and suddenly our new vacation and party group was taking form!

The one thing we didn't have yet was a good camera so there weren't many photographs taken at our place in Hollis. In fact, this one grainy snapshot of Jon and Irene might be the only remaining evidence of our time there.



But I believe it sums it up as well as any picture could.

Meanwhile, back at work on a Monday morning:

The Queens Divisional Staff
of the New York Telephone Company



and Eaton's New York Buying Office.



Lillian Struse was our saucy switchboard operator. A real pistol! She'd tell everyone, "You can't call me Mrs. because I'm not married. But don't call me Miss either, because I haven't missed as much as people think I have."

June 18th, 1958 started out as a typical Wednesday; my mother went in to work at R.H. Macy's in Herald Square, as usual.

She was 61 and other than a protracted bout with Rheumatic Fever when we were still toddlers, she had always appeared healthy to me. And though her hearing problems from an experimental drug which they'd given her at the time still persisted, we had never seen any signs of the "rheumatic heart" which her doctors had warned of.



Being my mother's new emergency contact, Ria got the call first. My mother had survived a severe heart attack on the sales floor at Macy's and was now in an ambulance on her way to Saint Vincent's Hospital in Greenwich Village.

I called my sister Pat who took the next flight from Washington D.C.

Nick and I arrived from midtown, Ria from Queens. My mother was struggling and weak but alert and insisted on redrafting her Will.

Ria immediately called her father, the lawyer, and Mr. Renna dictated to her the language associated with each of my mother's wishes. Then Ria wrote it all up in longhand. Nick would serve as one of the non-family witnesses, the lady in the next bed would be the other.

As my mother raised the pen to sign, I could see that her wrists were sheer white. She slipped away not more than three minutes later. And my sister Pat arrived only a few minutes after that.

It was devastating. Nothing like that had ever happened before. Nothing that felt, so instantly, like it would separate time into the before and after. Nothing that would be so permanently sad.

Mary
McNamee,
at the
age of 16,
dressed
for the
Edwardian Age
in a
studio portrait
from 1911.



I look at
this picture
and
I wonder
what she had
hoped
for her life.

Her dying wish was “Take care of your father.” It was even in her Will as a condition (though it didn’t have to be). As her Executor, I began tracking the receipts from my father’s expenses, not that any of my siblings were expecting a surplus from her modest yet tidy estate of \$18,000.



She led a simple, happy and hard working life, surrounded – often too closely – by loving family.

Perhaps she *had* gotten what she’d hoped for.