

Suits and Ties to Rods and Reels
Terry Bell: A Profile

Terry Bell hates Toronto.

He used to commute from the suburb of Etobicoke into downtown Toronto, to a building at the corner of Yonge and Bloor – a crossroad of Canada’s business world. The office of his company, Salida Capital, was on the 27th floor, and had a view of Lake Ontario and the city itself. Each day, Bell would sit with seven other guys at the long trading desk, surrounded by multiple screens and sophisticated phone systems. Salida ran several investment funds: they invested the money of wealthy investors in the global mining sector. A fancy large glass wall with water flowing down separated the trading floor from the reception. In the reception, standing proudly on display, was a large-scale model of the Bluenose ship.

But that was then.

Now, just a short drive away from home – my childhood home – my father can be found waist deep in the Credit River, holding a fly rod. The river and the park surrounding it are almost empty; few others are as committed to fishing on a crisp November morning, but that is the way Bell likes it. Fishing gives him an escape into the wilderness — a sanctuary from the hustle of the city.

At this point, almost 30 years after moving to the city, Bell can’t wait to leave Toronto. “I’m leaving the minute Devin graduates grade 12,” says Bell of his youngest child. As his oldest, I have already moved out, and Devin graduates this year. My mom, Caron, is not as convinced about this abrupt departure; she wants to wait a few years. But Bell is ready. Toronto is full of traffic and new condominiums popping up everywhere, and he has enough of city life to last a lifetime.

Instead, he pictures he and Caron living in a small town in B.C. “There are only three things a town needs,” Bell always says, “a good café, a bookstore, and a sporting goods store.” The sporting goods store is key: living near a beautiful river perfect for fishing is a big part of this fantasy.

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Bell has always loved fishing. He often fished with his father while growing up on a farm outside the tiny town of Woodstock, New Brunswick. However, when he

moved away from home, this passion fell by the wayside.

When he moved to Toronto in 1987, he was 25 years old and a recent grad of Mount Allison University. He received his degree in geology and after briefly working in the field and studying abroad in France, he gravitated towards the big city, where he found his first job as a mining analyst at a small firm on Bay Street. Many of his friends from the East Coast had also moved to Toronto, and soon a group of Maritimers took over an apartment in the Junction: a funky neighbourhood west of the business core.

One day in 1988, Bell answered the apartment's phone to an extremely panicked voice. It was Caron, asking for Doug Polak: her brother and Bell's roommate. She had just moved to Toronto from Halifax for work, and she told Bell over the phone, "I don't know where I am but it looks like I'm in China!"

Bell coached her over the phone how to navigate her way out of Chinatown and to their apartment. They started dating in 1989 while her brother was away on a job assignment, and the two married in 1991. Bell has been helping her with directions ever since.

Once married, the couple decided to travel the world for a year. They quit their jobs – which shocked others as they had just started their professional lives – but it was an adventure that profoundly inspired them. When they returned, they promised they would try to stay connected to nature, as they were on their travels.

However, once back at home it was impossible not to plunge right back into Toronto life. Not only was Bell working in a big city, his work as a mining analyst came at a time when Canadian mining companies were just starting to branch out into the world, and an essential part of Bell's job was investigating these new mines. "It was exotic travel," says Bell. "I loved it."

Bell's job, as well as his time travelling with Caron, took him to over 65 countries; he spent a great deal of time in Africa, Asia, and South America. But as much as he loved it, he was missing things at home – specifically, his kids. When my brother and I were young, my father spent a great deal of time in airports, adding more and more stamps to an almost falling apart passport. The flights were long, the time differences grueling, and he was always waiting to finally arrive home and hear us kids shout "Dad's back!" as we ran to the door to hug him.

During his time in the rat race of Toronto's business world, he worked multiple

analyst jobs at investment firms. The good and bad experiences over the years eventually resulted in one major turning point: Bell and six others started Salida Capital.

This was it. The company was a success, and Bell finally found his niche. Yet he managed not to get caught up in the success – and the stress – of the stock markets, unlike many of his business associates around him.

“I wasn’t a junkie,” says Bell, “my whole identity wasn’t being a stock market “master of the universe.””

“I was a cautious Maritimer who grew up not so well-off, so I was always concerned about debt and mortgages,” says Bell.

Bell’s area of work was considered volatile, speculative, and of course, extremely risky. With his 6 feet tall stature and booming laugh, my dad could never been described as meek or timid. But in terms of his personal finances in the business world, Bell stayed conservative.

This conservative streak allowed him to stay afloat despite the stock market crash of 2008. The main funds of Salida Capital were accounts at Lehman Brothers International in London; with the Lehman bankruptcy, Salida’s funds were essentially gone.

With the company’s funds frozen, Bell left Salida. Soon after he decided to work for himself rather than become involved with another company, and essentially retired at 46.

“I thought I was going to pick something that would suit me exactly,” says Bell, “but I also wanted to coach my son’s hockey, take my daughter to figure skating, and be home for dinner every night.”

And that’s what he did. He spent more time with his family, and got back into his favourite pastime. He avoids driving into the city at all cost, and instead, drives further out of town to completely immerse himself in nature – fulfilling the promise he made when he and Caron came back from their travels.

“I realized I could do lots of cool stuff right out of Toronto,” he says. “It’s always nice to be outside, it’s like a sanctuary.”

Caron, and the family dog Coco, occasionally tag along for a day trip by the river. A few times a year, Bell travels with his son to remote communities for weekend getaways at fishing lodges.

Sometimes Bell catches fish – trout, salmon, maybe even bass – and sometimes, nothing. Either way, there's nothing else Bell would rather be doing. He escapes back into the wilderness not far from home.

And he always makes it back in time for dinner.