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A week ago I ran the number-seven leg of the 185-mile Cabot Trail Relay Race. My leg was just under nine miles, and I finished with a respectable time. I had only been running for six weeks, without much of a training program. This race has become a major Memorial Day weekend event with seventeen runners on a team.

Running into the sunset backgrounded by the magnificent Cape Breton Highlands, I thought about what I might write about for our twenty-fifth Yale reunion. In 1969 1 had ridden out of New Haven on my 1967 Triumph Bonneville and headed for Maine, forsaking graduation and a diploma in hand.

Since my time at Yale I have been lucky to pursue a life of travel, self- employment, and a measure of financial stability. To fill in the gaps over the last twenty-five years is a cerebral exercise that focuses on family, almost grown-up children, and an impulsive decision to purchase an eighty-acre parcel of land on the edge of the Bras D’or Lake. This body of water is a gem, near pristine, that splits the island of Cape Breton right down the middle.

After spending 1969-70 in Brazil as the first Yale recipient of the John Courtney Murray Fellowship, I married Judith, and we headed to London, where I was a graduate student in the social anthropology department of the London School of Economics. There we met wonderful people and cemented a lifelong interest in anthropology. After one year at L.S.E. we moved to St. John’s, Newfoundland, where I did more graduate work at Memorial University. I spent five months aboard one of the last Portuguese dory fishing motorsailers, on its annual pilgrimage to the Grand Banks. Equipped with Portuguese from my year in Brazil, I was able to fully appreciate a dying fishing tradition that no longer exists today.

In 1973 Judith and I, with our newly born daughter Susanna, moved to Cape Breton to pursue an unplanned life in rural Nova Scotia. Our first task was to make habitable a one-hundred-year-old farmhouse that had no plumbing. At first glance the house looked as though it might fall down! We fixed it up, made it through the first winter as snow blew under the front door, and still are in the process of restoration. The view from the house is spectacular, and the gardens created by my wife have an Eden-like splendor at this time of year (I write this in June).

My first real job was as a casual laborer for a nascent oyster-farming program. A new word entered my vocabulary: aquaculture. A few years ago I invested in a small Atlantic salmon farm which no longer exists. I worked for a paving company as a raker of asphalt, something akin to a “tiller of rocks.”

In 1974 I went to work for Pinaud’s Yacht Yard, a small storage and maintenance boatyard located in Baddeck, Nova Scotia. I worked there for two years as a yard hand, painting boats, learning the art of greasing skidways, and the many intricacies of working and living in a small rural community.

In 1976 I screwed up my courage and purchased Pinaud’s. This was the birth of Cape Breton Boatyard Ltd. The yard was in need of a major restoration. It was difficult to know where to begin. Buildings needed new roofs, the main dock was short on its pilings, the marine railway was in reasonable shape, but the haul-out car was a risky piece of gear to haul sophisticated sailboats.

Now, eighteen years later, the yard has had a complete face lift. From the water with our new wharves, the view is one of seeming prosperity even though marinas and boatyards operate on profit margins comparable to current savings account interest rates. The challenge of rejuvenating a small labor-intensive business has been a labor of love. The life style has been the major reward.

Our children are in college now. My wife has just completed three years as the Hospice coordinator and has recently become the Director of Nursing in our local hospital. I am chagrined at the high cost of a Yale education and find the “exclusivity” uninspiring. We are thankful that both our children were accepted by the university of their first choice. Both our children have a sense of self that I never had at their age. They are independent and sensitive and have already had a taste of the world through sailing and other experiences. At times I shudder at the uncertainties they face, but with a high head of self-esteem, they should prosper as individuals in a world of growing uncertainty.

As for Yale, I have had minimal contact with classmates and the college since my departure in 1969. I have maintained contact with a few friends. Some of my customers are Yale graduates, so there’s discussion of Yale-related issues. I like to think of my four years at Yale as the beginning of a lifelong learning process which has yet to hit full stride.

As I crossed the finish line of my segment of the Cabot Trail Relay Race, it was invigorating to see my wife of twenty-three years there with a big smile on her face. My son looked pleased that I had finished. The high point came the next day when our son, Michael, finished seventh in the final leg with thirty-two runners behind him. The only missing ingredient was our daughter, who had participated in two previous races. She had wanted to run this year, but had deferred to a job planting trees in northern Ontario.

Next year we may field a complete family team. Hopefully, the event will not coincide with the Yale twenty-fifth reunion.

In sum, looking back, I have no regrets. To own your own business, be your own boss, and live in a majestic and clean part of the world is luxury enough. My gut tells me that the next twenty-five years are the ones to make accountable on a daily basis. Each day should be regarded as a new adventure. The possibility is real, as I still have my 1967 Triumph Bonneville in road condition!