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Looking back over twenty-five years, one clear, moonlit night on Little Diamond Island, three days have shone most brightly and have most shaped my life since Yale.

On August 20, 1977, under a blue Maine sky filled with the sounds of Dvorak’s New World, Patricia Cepeda, Yale ’77, of Barranquilla, Colombia, said “Yes” when Uncle Sid Lovett, Yale ’13, asked if she would marry me. On February 2, 1981, on a wet winter evening when I was scheduled to preside over the Portland City Council, Alejandra Cepeda O’Leary was born. On September 24, 1984, with just the slightest hint of autumn in the air, the three of us celebrated the birth of Gabriela Joyce O’Leary.

Uncle Sid blessed us that summer morning with a prayer for family. It is a blessing I have counted every day of our lives together.

Patricia and I have climbed Macchu Picchu and Delphi. We have trekked with Jandra and Gabita through the rain forests of Costa Rica, the Mayan ruins of the Yucatan, and all the places Pablo Neruda called home in Chile. We have shared ski slopes from Sunday River to Snowmass, we havecaught Bart Giamatti’s beloved game (his image as a sophomore-year guide through Homer’s ancient games as vivid as ever) from Fenway to Candlestick, and we made a clearing into the woods and built our summer cottage on Casco Bay.

We have watched with joy as our daughters have shot hoops, scored goals, snared foul balls, or otherwise danced, skated, or sung their way through their magic years. We have listened with satisfaction and sheer nostalgia as Eleanor Rigby joined Bach on youthful violins.

We have grieved with each other at the loss of a vital brother and caring uncle to cancer, as we each had done on our own when our fathers died in the same October week in 1972.

And, throughout our lives together, we have realized and appreciated that Yale had something, something at the core, to do with it all. It is a feeling you know when playing with your own children on a tire swing in the Branford College courtyard at a class reunion or when hearing them break into Cole Porter verses with a classmate’s kids on their first visit to your home. You find it in the warmth and depth of friendships formed long ago and renewed easily and happily, no matter how many days or months or years have intervened. In the end, I suppose, it is the keener sense of the possibilities of the human spirit Yale leaves with you, whatever your subsequent endeavors in life.

But for me the heart of the matter, looking back, is that Yale is where Patricia and I first met. From the vantage point of forty-something, I see that but for Paul Mellon’s debt to his alma mater, I would not have been privileged to spend two years at Cambridge after leaving Davenport in 1969. If not for the years that followed at Yale Law School, I know my perspective on private practice, and my understanding of the law’s integrity and broader public purposes, would not have been the same. Still, it is those three singular days, with their roots in New Haven, that have made all the difference.