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It is fitting that I find myself writing this on an airplane at 35,000 feet. A great deal of my life since Yale has been spent up here.

On our graduation day twenty-five years ago I had never been far enough away from home to require changing a wristwatch. In 1992, for the thirteenth consecutive year, I flew 100,000 miles. On June 9, 1969, I had been in an airplane four times. Now, I have ten flights in an average month.

Like most of us (I guess) when we graduated, I couldn’t visualize being twenty-five years old, much less living twenty-five years beyond that June day, and returning to New Haven, wife and two fascinating, perplexing teenaged daughters with me. But so little has turned out the way I expected during rare and idle moments spent thinking about the future in 1969.

I am a lawyer, and I am in the small minority of lawyers proud to say that this tells you who—as well as what—I am. Though the thought never crossed my mind at Yale and would have been immediately rejected as preposterous for a thousand reasons, I know of no one today, among all my friends and colleagues, so well matched with a means of earning an income as I am.

An international litigator, I have created and run the pro bono program at my firm, and some of my greatest personal successes have been in pro bono cases. But the thrill derives not only from the opportunity to serve the client or the cause, but as much from the quality of the argument, the logic, the esthetics, the creativity, and the drama of the practice of law.

So for me the trilogy is law, logic, and language. My travels have brought me into contact with a variety of languages, and 1 have tried to strike up an intimate relationship with each of them. Sometimes that effort at intimacy is fleeting, and sometimes it is unrequited. But it is nevertheless always intense, rewarding, and difficult.

I do not fantasize about a happier life driving buses or digging ditches. As one of the younger members of our class, I can truthfully say that I became a man at Yale, and I am painfully aware of ways in which that process could have gone wrong. And it still can: Karen, Megan, Rachel, friends, and collaborators bear witness to the fragility with which I, at least, and perhaps we all, cling to the idea that the balance has been correctly struck.

The lighted sign has, prophetically and providentially, just told me to fasten my seat belt.