

Back at Harvard for the 35th: The 2015 Reunion in My Head

Preparations (mental and otherwise):

We all know that a reunion is a time of Reckoning.... And Reckonings do not necessarily go in your favor. For example, I went back to my 10th year high school reunion. Whereas I had always thought of myself as tall or at least average in height among the girls, can you believe that I found Everyone in the meantime had become taller than me? What the heck happened here? Did the other girls all have some kind of growth spurt freshman year of college that I missed out on at Harvard? Or did I simply have an over-inflated view of myself back then in high school? A top-of-the-world, looking-down-on-everyone type of thing? Did my time at Harvard shrink me back to regular size? I became certain that my Harvard reunion would bring more of the same: I would find myself coming up shorter than my peers, in more ways than one. At 55 years old, I could say "But it's okay". Of course, I would be lying. Who wouldn't want to be leading This pack, or at least running with it? I ask you. I had to resolve early to be the short one among the mighty. Perhaps a bitter pill, but what is the alternative? Calcium tablets? Surely there is a vitamin to solve this problem!

The reunion of course starts way before the Actual reunion, with the written assignment for each class member to update everyone on their career, family, etc. Then, prior to the reunion, these updates arrive at our doorstep in the form of a Red Book that we can read before seeing each other. My own life had not changed that much since the last submission: the same private psychology practice, the same husband, the same two children, some sculpting. So my submission went more to the discrepancy that I feel between how things have turned out in our world and how I thought things would turn out by now. But how overwhelming to read the pages and pages of accomplishments by others in this one book—truly people who are awesome, awesomer, and awesomest. All manner of giants are my classmates....

The only people I ever saved are my siblings, from our family becoming too too dysfunctional. Me being the oldest, they don't even know it. And if they did know it, either they wouldn't care, or they would disagree. After all, what is My memory against Theirs? I'm sure I have also helped some people in my work as a clinical psychologist, and hopefully helped more people than not. Unfortunately, this still doesn't put me in league with the giants. I am not racing to the top of anything, or even near the top of anything. Indeed, mine is more of a "Race to the Bottom". My level of multi-tasking is more like: being able to bring in groceries and get rid of dog poop at the same time, without either one contaminating the other. An important skill, yes. But not one to write home or Harvard about....

My Race to the Bottom perhaps deserves elaboration. Among other things, it involves vying for the title of "1980 Harvard Graduate Who Made the Least Money". If I get this, I will be eligible to compete for: "Harvard Graduate Who Made the Least Money in the Entire History of the University". I'm banking (maybe not) on the idea that there will not be excessive competition for this dubious niche status amongst my peers. I "go hard" at my Race to the Bottom, but if I would slow down to think about it, I would probably realize that I really don't need to. I'm competing against Harvard grads, for Pete's sake! Note that in this topsy-turvy world of mine, I know I'm winning when I'm losing. Try to top that!

I find that there are many things working in my favor in this Race to the Bottom. Are you familiar with Linda Babcock's research indicating that the salary a woman negotiates on her First job

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has huge impact for the rest of her earning life? I knew I never should have taken that Burger King job the summer after I graduated from high school! Just didn't know what Doom it spelled for my future! If only I could have found something else! And since I was not yet 18, the salary I 'negotiated' was sub-minimum wage....

Many additional things have helped me in My Race: Working part-time to chase after our girls and clear the decks for sculpting only helps me in my endeavor. Caring about things that are super labor-intensive and often not that remunerative, like writing, sculpting and even conducting therapy sessions also helps. Then, too, I read research every week indicating that my gym membership is the most platinum health insurance policy that I have ever purchased. But the deductible and co-pays are extremely high not just in Dollars but also in Time (which obviously could otherwise be used to make more dollars, and be used to generally function as a Productive Member of Society. For example, I could find a way to replenish the 14 trees that each of our daughter's paper diapers used up....). My political ineptitude in institutional settings certainly helps in My Race. Also helpful are my many miscalculations. Although I did believe and still do believe that a woman can be and should be as successful as a man in her career, there were many factors that I didn't put into the equation. So lo and behold, my equation did not compute! As my computer-guy father liked to say, "Garbage in, garbage out." In my own equation, I neglected to consider (!) not only gender, but also race, economic tides, political fall-out, or even birthing the children, let alone attending to them. My success trajectory was simply not going to involve such complexities.

But guess what? Despite my plans for pure, clean and simple success, my life did turn out to involve these and other complexities. Big Oops.... My experience has been one of "you really can't have it all". However, this is not what you want your cheerleader psychologist to be saying to you, and it is such a downer message (and not even true for many people) that I am not holding my breath for book offers that won't be coming my way. So no worries about soaring out of My Race to the Bottom here!

There are some downsides to My Race. I fear that I disappoint our President, and I feel bad about that. I admire Barak Obama, and find myself agreeing with him on so many things, but I cannot agree with him on his "Race to the Top". I am afraid that a Race to the Top would involve More test-taking. After the Ph. D., licensure, continuing ed, constant re-credentialing, constant background checks, etc. I feel so done with that. In fact, I can hardly stand to consider my children's test-taking, even though I want them to do well and even though homework these days seems to be a 'family affair'.... And I'm sure Barak isn't the only one who I disappoint with My Race. My husband Larry would have been happy for me to out-earn him, by any amount.... Indeed, despite being a "Bulldog", I'll bet he would have been willing to be one of those House Husband Pioneers I've read about, if things had worked out differently! Well, knowing him, maybe not. But I am pretty sure he would have worked less hours to have more hours with the girls.

Needless to say, sometime in the spring, I find it Majorly necessary to start "preparing" for my 35th Harvard reunion coming up fast at the end of May. This is an involved process: after all, I am going to meet all the scary-impressive multi-tasking leaner-inners who only sleep 3 1/2 hours a night.... Preparation involves my haircut, exercise routine, new reading glasses, and so on. Well, three cold viruses later, my exercise regimen is pretty much sabotaged, and I am

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looking to my French friend, a hairdresser, to make up the difference. But she and I, as is often the case, get so involved in talking that I walk out with the worst haircut she has ever given me. She has gouged out a swathe on one side—my “good side,” mind you.... This seems like it could be fatal at the reunion because I have noticed that I tend to first try to recognize people by their hair, only after that moving to study their facial features. I go to my PC nail salon and the young woman tries very hard but misses her timing, so two nails look goofy. I can understand the difficulty with time: I have a hard time fitting my patients into a 50 minute hour rather than a real hour. But now I’m wearing her mistake, and don’t even have time to get out the polish remover! I also run out of time to take pictures to share at the reunion, and burn my wrist (twice) on the oven because I am in way too big a hurry. Not to mention the bug bite that I got several years ago that left my face permanently slightly asymmetrical—a Picasso portrait, minus the monetary value.... Clearly, Preparing for the reunion is not happening. But since I have already paid good money for a plane ticket, I start to resign myself to not only being a shorty among giants (bad enough), but also to being a slightly crazy-looking shorty among giants. I consider that youth has its own beauty, under-appreciated in the moment, and unreproducible. I am hoping to be the one to imminently discover that there is some middle-aged equivalent of that beauty, but also I am hoping to Enjoy it this time around.

Snapshots:

I am happy to find that it is still easy to take the T from the airport to Harvard Square. Some things need not change. I have arrived early for registration, and so I head straight to the COOP, of course. As I walk around, I’m thinking that this time I won’t miss Harvard Square quite as much after I leave: the chain stores have predictably moved in to this expensive real estate. Gone is the Golden Temple Shoe Store that I worked at during my “year off”. Gone is the Harvard Square Theater! The Square seems to belong to other people, a different time now.... But the Ben and Jerry’s ad on the round kiosk is pretty cool: it has a picture of the earth (and their ice cream), and it reads, “If it’s Melted, it’s Ruined”!

Walking into the COOP, I find myself almost in tears to be among 3 large floors of books, and not just the last 6 months “best sellers”. Pittsburgh, PA, where I have been living for a long time now, has lost most of that. But I have a sinking suspicion that the Coop has gone Barnes & Noble. Barnes & Noble was once a noble bookstore (this sounds like the beginning of a child’s book but is only a middle-aged adult tragedy), but now seems to have morphed into the Bed Bath & Beyond of books and college insignia clothing. Gone is the department store part of the COOP. Certainly I do not need posters for my walls anymore, but I would have liked to get for my husband one of those nifty no-iron cotton button-down shirts that they used to sell. Moreover, when I discover that the toothpaste that I packed is a solid rock(!) and that I brought only 2 1/2 inches of dental floss, I have to go search for a CVS....

All over the COOP are copies of J.K. Rowling’s 2008 Harvard Commencement address published in a small hardback book. Ever the Harvard student, I feel compelled to read it, almost as prep for the next day’s commencement exercises. She says many useful things, but one thing does irk me. She says that we need to forgive our parents, take responsibility for our own lives, and move on. She is not the first to say this, and it sounds so logical, so appealing and so intuitively correct. At some point, we need to ‘grow up,’ don’t we? Yet here I sit, middle-aged, a psychotherapist no less, knowing that I have not gotten there. :-)

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I can and have forgiven my parents for some things, sort of. For example, I guess I can forgive my father for gambling away my Harvard tuition money in the stock market, especially after reading about Sendhil Mullainathan's research on the "toll of scarcity," and how being poor can lead to making bad (i.e., excessively risky) decisions. Perhaps there is an important larger context for his 'poor' decisions. I can maybe forgive my parents for being stupid: When the money was gone, they should have gone to Financial Aid to explain what had happened. That they didn't go, I forgive. That they blamed me (for changing from pre-med to pre-psych) and did not let on what was Really going on when they "disowned" me, I guess I don't really forgive. I eventually pieced together the truth through my own sleuthing efforts in the years after graduation. Time at Harvard had been taken away that will never be returned. I envy Richard who formed a 'posse' at the 35th to return to Widener a book that was due in 1978! I wish there was similarly a way for me to write the Senior Thesis that I did not write back then, and thus to stop having bad dreams about it.

When my parents resumed speaking to me, our relationship was "ok" even though my heart was no longer in it. At first, I hung in with the family get-togethers and even visits to the nursing home when my father needed to go there for the sake of my younger sibs, so that things wouldn't get too dysfunctional. Later, I hung in with my parents for the sake of our girls: Knowing your family origins is an important legacy to stand on. Michelle Norris (of NPR) did come to Pittsburgh last year to give a lecture on her Race Card Project, and her message is worth repeating. She implied that your inheritance is what you have been able to withstand. The legacy you pass on is what you've been through.... And my parents had themselves withstood some things worth remembering—my mother as a Latvian World War II refugee, and my father as a product of British Colonial and Great Partition India.

So the upshot, after due consideration, is that I wish I could be J.K.Rowling in the Forgiving sense, and so many others. But that appears to be unlikely. Anyway, the downside of being J.K. is that it would catapult me out of contention in My Race. So perhaps where I'm at is really best.

More snapshots:

Commencement Day is sunny, hot, a mood of celebration all about. Despite my bad haircut, I find that people recognize me, or if they do not, they are still willing to talk with me! I find myself to feel a bit rusty: at home I do much more listening than talking about myself, whether with the children or in a therapy hour. Several commencement speakers urge us to reach out to others and not be quarantined, even by our talents and achievements.... Though we may have been anxiously competitive at times as undergrads, this does not seem to be an obstacle at the 35th. I find so many classmates have gotten nicer and nicer, more expressive. Perhaps as a psychologist I should have predicted this kind of 'developmental change,' but as a person it is simply a delightful surprise.

I also find that I am meeting wonderful people that I wanted to meet 39 years ago! As there wasn't enough time then, luckily there is this time now.... We discuss 3 of the 4 R's: what to read, how to write, Race. (Not too much discussion of 'Rithmetic, given My Race to the Bottom. Although, one Milton Friedmanite does try to convince me that Keynes had it all wrong!) We

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discuss bad professors, bad therapy, what we are doing, worries, losses, Latvija, children, parents....

It is amazing the things that we can laugh at together now, including bad grades! I recall a freshman composition paper that represented my first and last all-nighter: At 3 AM it seemed brilliant enough, but in the cold hard light of day it clearly deserved the 'C' that it earned! Good to learn early that what worked for many a Harvard student was not going to be My modus operandi. (Indeed, seeing how poorly I perform with sleep deprivation, how did my father envision me completing a medical education? I wondered then, and still have no answer.)

As I talk with people, I think back. My memory is of how gingerly we embraced one another, as if there was something to be afraid of. Really we probably didn't know ourselves well enough to be able to reach out. In my own case I remember wondering: Can I sit at the "black table"? That didn't seem to fly. Do I sit at the white tables? I guess. Do I sit at the art & literary magazine table? Not anymore, after my unsuccessful comp. Do I sit at the Room 13 table? I guess. The pre-med table? Maybe not. Pre-psych? Maybe. Things kept re-sorting this way, and then suddenly the confusion of graduation seemed to disrupt this grand social experiment called "college". At least temporarily, we all retreated back to our separate tribes....

Commencement Day heats up as it goes on. Out of solidarity with the drought-stricken Californians (and Coloradans and Brasilians and Puerto Ricans....), there is no drinking water to be found—anywhere. (Where is that 6 feet of snow when you need it?) Of course I exaggerate for the purpose of emphasis. But proving again that necessity is the mother of invention, my parched condition leads me to come up with 2 brilliant ideas. First, the next reunion should be in Pittsburgh since (a) we have plenty of rain, and (b) if we don't do this, no one else (besides Michelle Norris) will ever come to Pittsburgh. My second brilliant idea is to build a Keystone Pipeline OF WATER from PA to CA, and then charge for something we Pennsylvanians have in over-abundance.... It's never too late to come up with an idea that (finally) makes you a millionaire or billionaire or even trillionaire (let's go all the way). Right?

Thus, by our 50th reunion I will have of Necessity removed myself from the competition for "Harvard Grad Who Made the Least Money," and will have become someone that Harvard can be proud of. Then I will be able to pay the \$5,000 donation to see the FDR room in 'my' Adams House without blinking. And, best of all, I will be able to retrieve my jaw from where I dropped it on the floor in Leverett Dining Hall at the 35th. (After all, in 4th grade I did share class presidency and vice-presidency with FDR's grandson, Del! I ruefully report, however, that that was the pinnacle of My political career....)

The night of Commencement, dinner is held in the Harvard Museum of Natural History. This is another spectacular part of Harvard that I ran out of time to appreciate as an undergrad. The dinosaurs are magnificent company. I am talking real dinosaurs. The thing that surprises me most, however, is a gi-normous clam shell. It appears to be almost 3 feet across, oscillating sculptural beauty. The signage indicates that it weighs about 200 lbs, but does not indicate its age. How many decades, even centuries would it have taken for a clam to grow so large? How peaceful and fertile would its watery home have to have been? How free of mercury and others poisons that we blithely introduce into our oceans? Will such a magnificent creature grow again, or exist only in a museum?

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Friday is as much notable for what I don't do as for what I do. Ruth Bader Ginsburg receives the Radcliffe Medal and a distinguished panel speaks about "the Roberts Court". I don't know anyone who was able to get a ticket, and it sounds like there is not even space to view the jumbotron, whether for security or for other reasons. So we all make dates with the internet. I would have loved to see in-person this woman who rose so spectacularly above the inevitable career impediments. This tiny giant who gave us the legal gender equality that we now so take for granted that we feel no need to call ourselves "feminists"! Who 'continues at her post' despite physical hardships as Obama can get almost none of his appointees through the senate.

Classmates who have died are eulogized today. I didn't know them, but the length of the list of names is sobering. I feel like a lucky one, to be here, able to attend....

I go for a jog on the Charles to clear my head and 'for old time's sake'. I'm probably not supposed to do this because of the torn cartilage that was removed from my knee, and I promise I will not do this again. If I make it to the 50th, I will race-walk (or more likely, just walk) This jog is not simply nostalgia, however. It is also an experiment: I want to determine whether there is any generalization from all of my hours on the elliptical and arc machines to the real world. If confronted with Danger, would I be able to run away—run away fast and run away far? Or, do the machines simply 'exercise' two teeny useless muscles Somewhere in my leg, with no translation to the Real World? I have a sneaking suspicion that I am just a rat on a wheel.... And the astronomic calorie use that the machine reports back to me? Is this in any way real, or is this just a Skinnerian reinforcer designed to get me to love the machine (and the gym and all its fees)??

Well, jogging by the river is truly lovely. Fortunately there is some translation from "cardio room" to Real World. But even better, I get that old feeling of expanse, time, escape, freedom. No comparison here to the the rubber track that I tried to substitute during grad school down at UNC-Chapel Hill, or to the cardio room. It is calming here—except when I run up against Mamma and her goslings. One of the babies is at most a foot away from my ankle. Mamma is hissing at me, but this is the Sidewalk that we are on. I feel that sidewalks were built by and for People; she is not conceding it.... Even more unusual is the presence of herons (2 kinds). Not so back in the day. And Jonathan saw a large fish in the Charles. So perhaps the river is cleaner now? Improving? Indeed, back then I never saw a dozen fit new graduates jump off of Weeks Memorial Bridge, over and over. These young men don't seem worried that the water will harm them. They look joyful.

Conversations:

Bethesda friends describe to me that back home they've watched ordinary black crows take down a red-tailed hawk! The crows surround the hawk as a pack, they do not let it eat, they weary it till it is overcome.... I didn't know that hawks are vulnerable. I didn't know that birds can behave like hyenas. Life is a far harsher enterprise than I care to admit.... and it is only by dint of the tremendous efforts of years that we become civilized toward one another, allowing something like this amazing reunion to take place. Perhaps this Civility, this Grace is the untouted beauty of our middle-age.

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More conversations. I begin to feel that the reunion is more about the Trickiness of Memory than it is a time of Reckoning. Having once been admitted to Harvard, we all have good memory capacities, right? But it is interesting to find people reminding me of things that I had forgotten, or even things that I couldn't remember at all. Everyone seems to have a slightly different color of highlighter pen for the past.... My former roommate reminds me of how hard I worked as an undergrad. I sort of remember this in the sense that it is consistent with how I think of myself back then. But I don't Actually remember it, and this surprises me because I would think the long hours of work would have created some kind of indelible mark on my mind. But no!

I am hoping that I at least remember all the Stupid things I did back then, but again No! Another friend reminds me of a letter I wrote. While I remember myself as a letter-writer (because I still am), I did not recall what I wrote. Why did I ever criticize that he brought a book to our tennis game? I myself loved books and have always considered myself a nerd in this regard. Indeed, one of the things so terrific about Harvard was to be with a gazillion other nerds, of all sizes, colors and persuasions. All I can say is that it is lucky that we mature in the years at Harvard and even afterwards.... Yet even these memories that I had forgotten or couldn't recall or didn't want to recall are valuable: I realize that yes, I was really there. Probably wrong as often as I was right, but really there. My current life seems so far away from Harvard in so many ways that often those years feel unreal.

But Memory isn't all fuzziness. Discussion flashes me back to one of the points where I turned away from a career in medicine. I shadowed a cardiologist at Mass General one afternoon. I was ok with a quick walk-through of an open heart surgery, as this looked more like an anatomy textbook to me than anything else. I was not ok with a subsequent interview of a different patient in his hospital room, and I found myself beginning to faint. Now I have since learned that it is common for people to have a fainting reaction when first entering medical training. It takes practice to become inoculated to seeing a human body ravaged. But significantly, rather than getting that feeling of "oh I want to do what this helpful doctor is doing", I had the reaction that all of these ministrations were coming Too Late. The doctor's clinical interview of the patient seemed to be the impetus for feeling faint, as the patient was endorsing all the Wrong Answers: Yes he was a smoker. How much? 2-3 packs a day. Yes he was a drinker. How often? Every day. How much? A lot. Yes he was a good bit overweight, and so on. The more questions that the patient answered 'incorrectly', the more faint I felt. Most pressing to me was the question of prevention: Why did this patient form such bad habits? Why, too, was he unable to change them once it was clear that they are life-threatening? What is the difference between him and people who do change their habits? Between him and people who never form such harmful habits? Between him and people who form healthy habits?

I also remember sitting in a microbiology class first semester of freshman year. Back then, we focussed on proofs of the various cell organelles(!), and some proofs that had been proven erroneous and replaced by better proofs of different realities. While I loved the logic of these proofs, I stumbled upon my own logic: If the science of Medicine is this uncertain, why not go into the uncertainty that is Psychology? Either way, there are questions needing more proximate answers....

Discussion at the reunion also pushes me to recall a 'promise' I made to myself long ago: as I entered the field of psychology I told myself to work toward the goal of Writing in my mid-50s.

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Of course I believed strongly in the enterprise of psychotherapy itself. But I also needed to be in a career that would help me understand people more completely. For example, I didn't want to naively misconstrue somebody's psychosis for a spiritual possession à la Carlos Castaneda, when it was more accurately a question of genetic bad luck (of which we all have some) and of consequent serotonin and dopamine dysregulation. Although I had turned away from medicine, I did not turn away from scientific research, which I feel we ignore at our own peril.... But I am rather risk-averse and not out for too much adventure. The potential for things to go awry seems vast, for things to go well rather small. Thus it seemed more realistic for me to come to an understanding of people via professional training rather than some type of unplanned, random life experience.

But it is so like scaredy-cat me to come up with some bold plan like this Writing plan and then promptly 'forget' it, until the 11th hour! Thank goodness for the 35th, which reminds me of this goal at a time when my psychology career presents certain mid-life frustrations—the paperwork, the one-person-at-a-time approach, the isolation, and other issues with the field. Reunion discussions push me to accept that I am not as dull as I feared I had become. Not as dull as my inescapable paperwork. Not as dull as the tedious repetitive tasks of my day would have me believe. Not as dull as the laundry, the chauffeuring, the yard work, the buying/preparing/cleaning up of meals and then starting over. The buying and wrapping of presents, and then the putting away of presents and disposing of wrappings. The endless straightening-up and putting away. "All the works and days of hands".... The ordinariness of getting through the week, the school year, the summer, then another school year. The continual careful attention necessary to ensure that a marriage/family (mostly) works.

I do note that lately I have become obsessed and consumed by my creative projects, whether sculptural or written. I joke with Peter and Dominique that I could forget to pay my bills, but I really could forget to pay my bills! Is this ramped-up level of obsession the result of our girls being older now—i.e., I am able to Permit myself Some obsession at this point? Or does urgency come as I watch parents age, and so feel my own time becoming tightly finite? Or is this some strange mid-life mental phenomenon that I have never read about (but could write about as a Newly-Discovered Stage of Life, and thus could enter the talk-show circuit, and thus could finally make my fortune. I think Mid-life Obsession sounds different enough from Mid-life Crisis for me to be able to write a book about it, don't you? Surely I can link Mid-life Obsession and Mid-life Beauty, and then I will have a winning combination. Are you starting to notice that I do have a lot of million-dollar ideas? Success is probably a mere matter of Choosing the best one to run with!)

Saturday begins with the Class Survey, but of course I have been 'taking my own survey' the whole time I've been here. I am so relieved to find that a lot of other classmates also still have teenagers. I am puzzled by how much this matters to me for I already know the complex reasons that led me to have kids "late". Eventually it dawns on me that although I may be 'behind the curve' and Racing to the Bottom, I do not want to be so behind the curve that I am not even on it!

I am surprised to learn how many, like me, had "taken a year off" for one reason or another. These days my wealthy friends' children call it a "gap year" (not GAP year) and it is well-funded, educational, and in an interesting foreign country. Back then, we scrambled to come up with anything that could afford the time to sort things out.

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This Survey item jumped out at me: 20% of our class became physicians. Bless each and every one of them for their vital work and arduous travails. Still arguing with my father's ghost, I point out that I was not meant to be among these fine people. Among the many reasons is my personal taboo against physically entering someone else's personal space. Although a hug hello or good-bye works for me now, the laying on of hands would come with huge difficulty. And just forget about gynecology—the specialty my dad had picked out just for me. Another idea that was Great—in theory only.... I am a squeamish person, for goodness' sake! I recall that I recently angered an old woman at the JCC because I wouldn't take off her socks for her. In fact, she was so angry that she sent over another old woman the next day with the same request! What they don't understand is that I generally won't even remove my kids' dirty socks for them. Luckily the girls have a dad who helped them out here. Hurray for relying on the other parent's differing sensibilities!

In fact, my father's ghost is the uninvited reunion guest who doesn't want to leave. So I argue with him some more. I admit to him that if I had put my mind to it, I probably could have completed a medical training, assuming that the sleepless nights of residency didn't kill me first. I admit to him that medicine inarguably creates Social Good, and that this matters. Many other careers, including psychology and certainly art, have fuzzy credentials in the realm of Social Good. (The credentials are especially fuzzy to someone who comes from a country with the poverty levels that India has.) I admit I have no arguments to present to him on the issue of Remuneration for your work. Indeed, while I was recently preparing some clay pieces for a sale in which I knew I would be underpaid, a definition of "art" came to me: The imbuing of Value beyond what is necessary. By definition, this process will often mean that compensation does not reflect the effort and time involved, because in the marketplace you do also compete against the merely functional thing.... But what I cannot articulate to my father's ghost even now is the issue of Being. Each of us is so different with regard to what permits us to feel Real, what matters in our heart of hearts, what work we can stand to go to each and every morning, all day. The best moment of my 10th year high school reunion came when someone that I had never known made a point of telling me how much one of my poems had mattered to her. I too have known a written piece, a work of art, a song to save me, in a very different sense than that in which medicine saves....

But back to the Survey: levels of sexual interest are graphed, but there is no mention of the 'M' word. This despite Andrea's and Debbie's allusions to It in the Red Book. It takes someone braver, from a competing Ivy, to bring this up for discussion later. It is terrific when she does because then I get to indulge my favorite hobby—complaining. Even though you surely already know what I am about to say, don't deprive me of this rant: For women, the drop in estrogen is like falling off a cliff, whereas for men the drop in testosterone is at the rate of about 1% per year. How is that fair? Where is Real Gender Equality when you need it??

In the end, the Survey attempts to quantify our relative levels of Happiness. In the midst of the jocular Survey atmosphere, Dave questions whether happiness is really what life is all about. At first his very question seems funny. But then he elaborates that he might be less "happy" than 10 years ago in part because of being more aware. This parallels Duval Patrick's Commencement Day urgings for us to keep a bit of "unease" about us, to keep an awareness of things that should not be, what might be done about them. Me being in the "You Can't Have it All" camp, I find myself agreeing with Dave, Duval.

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Perhaps we should not be surprised to find that a Harvard education is more likely to yield Awareness than a state of simple Bliss.... We are supposed to be the 25% in the Asch Conformity Experiments that can see and vouch for the true relative length of a line, even while the rest of the group tells us that it is shorter than it is. In fact, I now remember our very first Harvard assignment: to read several books over the summer before matriculation. Only one of the books stands out in my memory, and that is because it was *So Bad*. I felt that it was very poorly argued and lacked evidence. As I recall, the book concerned the globe, population issues, and the like. I was incredulous: I had accepted Harvard's acceptance of me in order to have Great Books showered upon me, not this crap! I had turned down other nice offers like a scholarship that included graduate school money and a 7 year med program *For This!* I was so appalled by this reading assignment that I marched myself to the Freshman Week lecture on it to see how the professor could possibly justify it. Wouldn't you know that this was the very reason he had assigned it to us! He wanted us to learn to proceed cautiously and critically in building our truths, even if a "fact" is PRINTED IN A BOOK. He could equally have been cautioning us about internet information, various news outlets, etc etc. A light bulb lit up for me. (In a way, my Harvard education was probably complete right then and there, Freshman Week!) But alas, Critical Thinking and Bliss turn out to be orthogonal entities; the former does not necessarily lead to the latter, even if the process of Critical Thinking itself feels blissful at times....

Saturday afternoon is as serious as the morning was funny, starting with a panel of classmates speaking on their own efforts to "Fire Back from Adversity". My classmates had looked accomplished anyway, but look down-right Heroic when I learn what they have been through to stand there—making it all look easy. Natural disaster, a terrorist attack, medical illness, loss of an immediate family member. So much Grace in these classmates. It just goes to show that you never really know where someone is from until they tell you their story.... The photographs alone are enough to stop you in your tracks: photos I had not seen before of Katrina's devastation, 9/11, Antarctica,....

I know that sooner or later we are all called to Pay the Piper. I have worried about this since high school, around when I was reading the Existentialists (who of course saw no Solution here, but only The Problem). I am not even coping with our doggie's impairment very well: Sadness and paralysis about her lame leg are not good signs of coping, although to be fair, there are no clearly good options for her torn 'ACL'. Thus, I have little optimism that I will be as successful as these classmates when it comes time for me to really fire back from adversity. An important part of coping seems to be Community, suggesting that 'it takes a village' not just to raise a child, but also to cope with what the world can throw at you in adulthood. In my own case, when things start to really go South, I just hope that some community—brown people, white people, artists, mental health practitioners, neighbors—in any combination will step up to claim me if my immediate family cannot....

After these serious considerations, thank goodness for a fantastic band Saturday night. Who can hold back from dancing to Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Prince,....? And dancing with Liz is the best, because she is All In. In this moment, for me, the Existentialists' question is answered. We all die in the end, so what is the point (of anything)? We all die in the end, so tonight We Must Dance!

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Sunday morning is all good-byes. Once again I find myself frustrated that the people that I like can't all live in one circle with a 100 mile radius.... But in fact one thing that draws me to these people is the very same thing that pulls us to all parts of the U.S. and beyond. Just as my two teenage daughters will soon be pulled.... On the positive side is the fact that I am sitting chatting and saying good-bye at the black table, as are many others. In fact, suddenly it doesn't even look like the black table anymore. Just a table full of people talking. I am glad to be sitting here not because I am black or even properly brown, but because there is something to be learned and shared here that cannot be learned and shared anywhere else. And hopefully, some of our conversations newly begun can continue, with the help of and despite all of our new technologies.... Thank goodness we have come at least this far. Civility and Grace. Qualities that I never stopped to consider when I was an undergraduate at Harvard, but which mean everything now.

I leave Leverett Dining Hall still hearing the music from last night, still bopping. Who needs an iPhone and ear buds?

And do you know what? During the entire reunion no one called me "Shorty" (even though one person seemed to want to)! Indeed, Harvard seemed to have shrunk a tiny bit, even as it has grown in my estimation. The circuit that I used to jog doesn't seem so much anymore. And the distance from Adams to the "River Houses " seemed unfathomable back then, but in fact is only a few short blocks! HOWEVER the university did recently send me a survey to determine **My Impact on the World!!!** I responded to the survey, as it might conceivably help me in My Contention, My Race to the Bottom. But also I answered it because Someone has to represent the tail end of the curve, lest a skewed image of Harvard graduates develop. It might as well be me.

July 15, 2015