“ANYONE GOT MY TIME?”

A cross-section autobiography
By Deke Talbot
I must start off this shameless self-promotion with a question. Simply put, why would anyone want to hear my story? The first criterion for interest should be to have actually done something. I have nowhere near the racing credentials of Bill Pike or Bruce Bridgham, two Washington County-raised athletes whose times on the Perry to Eastport 7-mile race are two minutes faster than my best. I don’t have any coaching or organizational credentials like Sunrise County Roadrunners founder Dale Lincoln. Instead, my qualifications have a Forrest Gump spin; I have rubbed shoulders with the greats. I graduated from the same prep school that produced Frank Shorter, the same college that produced Joan Benoit. It should be acknowledged that I was not a teammate of either Olympic marathon champion. Frank Shorter graduated from Mount Hermon two years before I enrolled; Joan Benoit entered Bowdoin two years after I graduated. Still, I took the opportunity to become well acquainted with both of them. There remains a small problem. Fame takes more than being on speaking terms with the gods. The ordinary person needs to know you exist. Over the past several years, on a diet of 15-mile weeks and only a few local races, I have done little to promote my existence. It is only fitting that I take inventory of this unfinished life, to study the shape it is taking, and to clarify the direction, to make it solid and whole.

One must put down a stake on one’s talents, and on that score, I am a writer. Whether I am a good writer is for others to judge, but I cannot escape the criticism by protesting I am really better at something else. It is, after all, how I have crafted a living as a lawyer; not with the oratory or forensic skills of a litigator, but by distilling the hopes and concerns of my clients onto paper. It is not the pure creative muse, to be sure, but even the novelist cannot escape duplicating the experiences and insights of others. All we can do is capture insights for a short while, show them to a smaller or larger audience according to our talent and our circumstance, and then let them pass back into the river. This catch-and-release technique, in the running community, was best practiced by George Sheehan. George never claimed to be totally original. He always gave credit to the giants who had traveled the road before. It cannot be denied, though, that his readers would never have become acquainted with the writings of Emerson, or Santayana, or William James, had not George Sheehan connected with the eternal present while pounding along the roads, and somehow retained enough to put his thoughts onto the page. His readers were allowed to realize the nobility of their seemingly humble efforts.

If my gift lies there, I have much to do. There is, however, some work which has been done, and it is time to inspect the scaffolding, if I have the courage. The best discipline is to take a chronological approach, from the start, and inspect even the mundane for clues, because it is not easy to know when value has been added. I will begin with my junior year at Washington Academy in East Machias, in the fall of 1965, when I first began a formal running program.

1965

I was sixteen years old, had never even heard of cross-country until the previous fall, and had never run a step in competition; running was training for basketball. I never had a conscious feeling of being talented at it. I could barely keep up with my muscular but heavy older brother. Still, when coach Dick Gardner was looking for recruits, I signed up, with two vague objectives in mind. First, Mr. Gardner was also the basketball coach, and maybe I could pick up some brownie points, not being able to earn them with raw talent on the court. Second, here was a sport where you spent no time on the bench. Possessed of a body which had shot upward but left its coordination behind, I was becoming well acquainted with the bench.

Even with a strong effort, my position on the team was not secure. Washington Academy was the defending Class S State champion, and favored to defend its title. Bobby Guptill was short and skinny, and Vic Berry was built like a linebacker, but they were both ferociously gritty and tenacious, winning the local races and breaking up the packs of bigger schools in the State meets.
The rest of the team took after their example, running on heart when training technique was either unknown, or for sissies. If this was a rough introduction to running, it gave this bookish, shy youngster some confidence that he could hold his own. Gradually I moved up on the team until one race I finished sixth overall, fifth for the team. Unfortunately, I had run the race in red socks, and a small blister on my heel became infected. For the next week, I was left soaking my foot in a tub of green soap, missing the County meet. I made a desperate time-trial effort to make the team for the State meet, falling just short of the seventh team slot. The State meet only allowed seven runners per team, and I traveled as an alternate. As the teams warmed up I half-hoped that a teammate would pull up lame or sick, so I could step into the breach...but please, God, not one of our better runners! I needn’t have worried. Everyone stayed healthy, and our team won the States again. Irony of ironies, I was back on the bench.

1966

I was finally becoming at least a middle-sized fish in a small pond. I was starting to gain some upper-body strength, and when I went to Katahdin basketball camp in the summer, I was good enough to make All-Stars as a center. Had I stayed at Washington Academy, the prospects were good for me to be on the starting five for both basketball and cross-country. It was, however, not to be. My parents had convinced me that I needed a stronger background in math and science than the local school could provide, so I was heading to Mount Hermon, in western Massachusetts.

Athletically, I had no idea what to expect, but for the first time in my running career, I trained before the season. I used the family Jeep to measure out a mile on a long, straight stretch, and timed myself in five minutes, 35 seconds. In one or two mile bursts, I did my first solo workouts. By the time I had packed my bags, I had about twenty-five miles logged in. Come what may, that would simply have to do.

It was merciful that I came to Mount Hermon without preconceptions. With my 17-year old bravado, I was not prepared to be homesick, especially on the quiet Sunday afternoons when a respite from the regimented schedule allowed those feelings to creep in. I wasn’t homesick for people so much as for a familiar feeling in the air in my hometown; a friendly acceptance of the ordinary, of just plain folks. For Mount Hermon, in the style of other New England Prep Schools of the day, reeked of ambition and class distinction. It was impressed upon us that we were privileged to be there; and to those to whom much is given, much is asked. Everyone participated in athletics, took in weekly chapel, and daily work duty. The work duty was a key part of the education. Whether in the mess hall, in the stables, or on the grounds crew, we were placed at the disposal of gruff, burly laborers who would never dream of the education we were getting, but given liberty to chaff at us for the quality of our work. Of course, we were supposed to be humbled by this, and to appreciate the value of honest manual labor all through our comfortable, professional lives. However, 17-year old boys are not so stupid as to fall for this. It made us more arrogant, quietly bearing the slings and arrows of our supposed misfortune.

The running, at least, provided a respite from this social-Darwinism-in-a-bottle. For the first time, I had a coach who had been a college runner, and had been exposed to scientific training methods. The woods trails were also a new experience. Our competition course, just over 2 ½ miles long, featured a steep, grassy uphill at the start, followed by a steeper, narrow downhill pitch and a longer series of hills nicknamed Jacob’s Ladder, finishing with a downhill stretch onto the campus with a finish on the track. For the first time I had a measuring stick on this crucible of a course, measuring my improvement, and my pain, against the landmarks along the way. The bulletin board had a list of the top ten times registered on the course, led by:

Julian Nichols  13:34
Frank Shorter  13:40

We all dreamed someday of making The List. In the meantime, we could vicariously follow the
career of Frank Shorter, a recent alumnus and now a sophomore at Yale, checking the clippings of the results of the Ivy League Heptagonalns.

Some days we would have short, hard runs through the lower fields, with one runner, then another, taking the lead. Other days we enjoyed long, easy runs through the countryside, relishing the ability to leave campus without even asking for a pass. Almost without noticing, I was learning that cross country was really a team sport, and that the pack was a key strategic component. I didn’t notice this until the first race. We were racing Phillips Andover on our home course when on that first steep downhill one of our better runners, Jim Archibald, took a bad fall and was out of the race. We didn’t panic, but stuck together and dominated though the hills. At the finish we took five of the top seven places, with our top five runners placing within 35 seconds of each other. I was our fourth finisher, which turned out to be my best placing of the year.

The rest of the season wasn’t really anticlimactic; I continued to improve modestly but some others improved more, to the point where I was number seven on the team. Then, in the race just before the New England Prep championships, our number eight runner made an heroic effort and earned the number seven slot. Once again, I was demoted to alternate status for the championship meet. The New Englands were run on a two-lap course, and at the end of the first lap I cheered on our top runner, Dave Crimmin, as he led the way, followed ominously by four runners from Phillips Exeter. The story played out as one would expect; the Exeter runners blew by Dave in a group and finished uncontested.

The final race of the season, just before Thanksgiving, was the Deerfield meet. The school rivalry was played to the hilt, and on the morning of the race we were fed steak, an unheard of luxury in the midst of our fare of uncertain lineage. We were, after all, gladiators challenging the forces of evil, and our peers were paying us homage before we were sent to our deaths. The race itself was a blur, which we won in close hand to hand combat, but the aftermath was not. I was passing through the finish chute when the steak, having suffered the indignity of being jostled about for over fourteen minutes, decided to leave the way it had come. Finally, at the end of the season, I realized the humility that had escaped me during the work detail.

1967

My basketball career, up to this point, was roughly parallel to my running. Basketball tryouts at Mount Hermon quickly changed that. About thirty candidates collectively had less than thirty minutes to draw the attention of the coaches. My basketball-camp skills went unnoticed among the scholarship players, whom the coaches knew they were picking for the varsity anyway. The ringers were there to beat Deerfield, no questions asked, and the rest of us could take our bruised egos elsewhere.

At least I made the junior varsity squad, and avoided the humiliation of the intramural teams. Even there, I wasn’t a starter, but I did have a role. I was on a special team designed to break a full-court press, to enter the game fresh in the second half and to run the court. Some of my cross-country teammates shared this role. For a brief moment the two sports blended, but then the season was over, and my interest in basketball withered. Spring track was on its way.

There was no running track near my hometown, and no track program at Washington Academy, so I was entering a new world. There was a quarter-mile cinder track where I could measure my prowess against anyone, anywhere in the world. Without any gauge of my talents, I decided that my personal record for the mile would be 4:07.5. Of course, my training times, with some room for improvement, should reflect that. Over March break, I carried a stopwatch with a 15-minute sweep with me on a 6-mile run. At the end, I clicked off the watch shortly after it had finished completing a cycle. Naturally that meant I had run the course in about 31 minutes. I couldn’t imagine being so slow as to take over 45 minutes.

On the track for the first time, we were immersed in a cycle of intervals; 440s, 660s, 880s and ladders. An early time trial was coming up. I was selected to run the two-mile, where an 11:24
performance, disappointing though it may have been to one with such high expectations, did gain me a slot on the varsity.

There was a problem, though. I was suffering abdominal cramps and diarrhea, sometimes with blood. I vomited after workouts that were easy a week before. I was sent to the infirmary in the care of an old doctor who dispensed a few pills, chuckled and shook his head, not a recipe for confidence. I resumed my classes, determined not to be left behind. The symptoms grew more severe, leaving me exhausted. A last-place 6:05 mile, my only spring competition, convinced me that my season was a lost cause.

Academically I made it through, actually doing quite well on the SATs, but had to be hospitalized immediately upon my return home. Fortunately, my doctor had the authority of an Old Testament patriarch, and he knew I was going to recover. My disorder now had a name; ulcerative colitis. The knowledge then available was not encouraging. An appallingly large percentage of patients, although not dying of the disease, became virtual invalids, confined to milk diets, inactivity, psychotherapy and disabling pain. My doctor did not present me with that possibility. I was young, had shown I had grit, and a positive attitude. Beating the illness became its own competition. Some medicines were known to help suppress the symptoms, but nobody knew why. Nobody knew that the immune system was attacking the bowel lining. Because no bacteria or virus could be identified, it was assumed that the disease was psychosomatic, caused perhaps by a domineering mother. Whatever was true about the causes, I knew that the work of healing was mine alone.

After a month I was out of the hospital, twenty pounds lighter but with the symptoms under control. I ate ravenously, gained the weight back, but the strength took far longer to return. By the fall, when I returned to Mount Hermon, there was no prospect of making varsity cross-country. I tried a couple of junior varsity races and DNF’d. I was able to finish a time trial on our home course, but 2 ½ minutes slower than the previous fall. The bad, slow running still had a dividend. There is something very challenging about doing some-

thing badly that once was done well. The habit of attempting to recover prowess awakens the nerves and muscles to first the possibility, then the certainty, of fulfilling their design. Another dividend was this; I could inflict pain on my body voluntarily, instead of waiting helplessly for an outside agency. The hackneyed reason for running, “It feels good when you stop”, has genuine merit for someone recovering from serious illness or injury. At no other time are endorphins so precious.

1968

On March 31, 1968, my roommate burst into the room, shouting gleefully,

“Johnson’s not going to run!”

I looked at him stupidly. Why would he care whether or not Bill Johnson would run the half mile for our track team, and does he need to be so happy about it? My mind was not on the retirement of a President, the dawn of the Age of Aquarius, or the birth of the Woodstock Nation. Why bother with Peace and Love, with track season coming up and a body healthy enough to face the test?

Our assistant cross-country coach had organized a winter track program, and I had my first experience with winter running, in wool warm-ups and a towel around the neck. There was a suspended track around the old section of the gym, “about” 16 laps to the mile, and I self-timed a 4:43 “mile”, which at least gave me a more realistic assessment of my potential. My only formal race during the winter season was a 2-mile on a real track, where I led for two laps before being devoured by the winner (who ran 9:59) and the rest of the field. I never knew my time.

Now in the spring, I would run the mile, and I would always know my time. In the first race, at Governor Dummer, I finished second behind a teammate, in 5:02. I was in a close pack near the finish and when I cut in a bit close to a runner on the other team, he pushed me over the finishing line. In the second race, a home meet against Choate, I broke through with a 4:54. My best time of the season was a 4:44, run at home in the New England meet. There was not a place for pride, however. The winner ran 4:24, followed by a close
pack. I was in the distant, trailing second pack. On the backstretch of the final lap, I heard an Andover coach call to a runner just behind me,

“C’mon, you don’t belong with these guys!”

At season’s end, for fun, we had a school decathlon. My results were spotty at best. A 59.3 quarter mile was acceptable, but my lumbering 12.9 in the 100-yard (not meter) dash earned me the sobriquet “Night Train” in college years later. Long jump 14’11” and high jump 4’4” were testimony of my not-so-fast twitch muscles. 12-pound shot was 30’9”, discus 60’6” (ditto). I would have hit the pole vault bar if it had been lying on the ground (no height). The last event was the mile, where I ran 4:55 and still earned fewer points than I did with my 100. Here I learned that this last event of the decathlon was not about the points. The event winner has already been decided. It is a show trial for mesomorphs, struggling in their last agonies to be done with it. At this summer’s Olympics, undoubtedly some Slovenian, 1,200 points behind in the decathlon, will win the 1,500 by about 30 seconds and no one will be looking. The camera will be on the other side of the track.

As I graduated from Mount Hermon, I was proud of what I had done, but realized that I was still living a sheltered life. I hadn’t even kissed a girl until that spring. I had no illusions about being a top college athlete. I was going to Bowdoin, and I’d better brush up on the social scene. I read Desmond Morris’ The Naked Ape, and practiced saying four-letter words without blushing. The fraternities were sending out their invitation cards, and I wanted to fit in. But I didn’t forget to run, and before the summer was out, I received an invitation to Coach Frank Sabasteanski’s cottage in Harpswell, just outside Brunswick.

In some ways Coach Sabe was a throwback. This was no fresh-out-of-college whippet with new scientific training techniques. He was rumpled and fiftyish, a devout Catholic, whose only vice was his foul stogies. He had graduated from Bowdoin in 1941, the first of his family to go to college, arriving with nothing but a cardboard suitcase full of hopes and an old-world work ethic. Over the years he had become one of the country’s top authorities in the hammer throw. Somehow he was able to take the raw slabs of beef that arrived each September and convince them that it was far easier to make All-American than the NFL, and he came through with his promises. Every element of the throw was broken down; the footwork, the weight shift, the release. His throwers knew they had better technique than anyone else, and that was all that counted.

He had no such elegant finesse to offer us runners. Instead, he offered to be our family away from home. His invitation to the runners was not some group picnic for us to meet each other. It was an invitation for each of us to come individually, with our families, to meet his family. His wife Barbara was a nurse at the school infirmary. He offered to serve as godfather to any of our children receiving Catholic baptism. There was nothing narrow-minded about the Catholic limitation. He simply knew that he was so grounded in his faith that he could not, in good conscience, offer to guide and counsel children in any other.

There was a saying offered by the upperclassmen to the new arrivals:

“Bowdoin athletes wilt like snowballs under a hot sun.”

Not exactly encouraging stuff, but a fair warning. Many good athletes arrived full of high-school honors but lost motivation and direction amidst the new freedoms, the parties, and the heavy academic load. I was shocked to find that I was the second-fastest freshman, in the days when freshmen could not run varsity, based on the reasonable notion that freshmen need a year away from top competition while they adjust to a new life. Even this decompression chamber could not attract runners who, I was sure, were better than I.

The freshman cross-county course, unlike the brutal “Jacob’s Ladder” course at Mount Hermon, was a flat 1 ¼ mile loop around Pickard Field which we ran twice in a race. The definition of a joke workout would be called “one loop Pickard”. Sabe was a benevolent, laissez-faire presence, being polite enough not to mention that the Class of 1972 wasn’t exactly a mother lode of talent. At the end of the season, when the top freshman runner
began to suffer the “snowball” syndrome, I was suddenly, for the first time, on the top of our very small heap. At the time, I didn’t think much about winning by attrition. Having seen the top so seldom since, I now realize that for me, there would be no other way, and I had better not despise it.

1969

For the first time, I was to enter the life of the Cage.

The Cage was an ancient fieldhouse with white-painted brick walls and a dirt 140-yard track at the end of a long corridor. At the entrance of the corridor was a series of plaques recording the school recordholders in all track and field events. I noted with some pride that the mile recordholder in 1887 was one F.L. Talbot (Francis Loring Talbot of East Machias, a distant relative) who ran a 5:03.1. Down the corridor were countless sport team pictures from ages past. I was reminded of these pictures by Robin Williams’ plea in Dead Poets Society,

“Look at those boys... so young, so confident... and now they’re nothing but dust and mold in the ground... listen closely... do you hear them say it? Carpe diem...”

At the end of the corridor, on the right, just beside the fieldhouse, was Sabe’s office. A new gymnasium had recently been built next to the fieldhouse, and Sabe’s name was on one of the new office rooms there, but he never used it. He wanted to be next to his boys, although the feeling was not always mutual. Sabe’s smoking policy was thus: if he was in the Cage, he smoked his stogies. We learned, while running our intervals, that there were two obstacles to face. The 35-pound weight circle (the indoor track equivalent of the hammer throw) was situated in the far corner of the track, and especially in the early winter, the throwers did not have their technique down. As we ran though the near corner, just before the finish line, we would speed up through the toxic fumes emanating from Sabe’s twisters. Down the near straight and entering the far turn, we watched carefully for activity in the weight circle. The weightmen loved to time their spin just as we committed to make a run for it. There was no slacking in the far straight. It was a wonderful incentive to hear the flat thump of a 35-pound cannonball on the track just behind one’s feet.

Freshman year was a year for experimentation, helped along by the fact that there were so few of us to go around. Everyone was expected to run at least two, and sometimes as many as four, events. I found myself running the mile and the 1,000, a particularly cruel event for anyone to do well. Since my best time was only 2:31, I rather enjoyed it. Still, that wasn’t enough. During the season some of us began fooling around the high-jump pit. I found that by twisting around into a modified Fosbury Flop I could throw my long legs out of the way, and was the best of the group. In my best performance of the season, I finished second in the mile and 2-mile, and won the high jump with a 5’11”.

In the spring season, the multitasking continued. Sometimes I would run the mile, sometimes the 2-mile, even the half-mile, and once even took part in a mile relay. I kept up the high jump, although never improving my height, until I spiked myself beside my left knee on one attempt, just missing the hamstring. Sabe didn’t say a word, but I wasn’t asked to do the high jump again.

Curiously, as fuzzy as I would become about knowing my times, I didn’t keep track of my fastest times that spring. I never really knew whether I improved on my 4:44 from Mount Hermon. Once I was well on pace to do so, and ran out of gas down the last straight, passed by three opposing runners, and it didn’t seem polite to ask what the time was, as bad as I screwed up. The truth was, I was getting some partying out of my system, and my improvement would have to wait.

The partying was putting a speed bump on my grades, as well. In the egalitarian spirit of the day, Bowdoin had inaugurated a pass-fail system, although Honors and High Honors grades still lurked for the few and the proud. I had set out a fairly demanding schedule in preparation for a physics major, and my Pass grades were as many as the Honors. Not exactly a disaster, but a hard pill to swallow, being an average academic.
The previous fall, my parents had purchased a camp near the seacoast, in Cutler, and that summer I began training on some new roads. There were steep uphills and down in quick succession, and I wanted to test myself. I calculated, at the moment, that I was the number three man, behind the Cuneo brothers, Ken and Mark. I purchased my first pair of true running shoes, Onitsuka Tigers, leaving the school-issue Riddell flats behind. There were other new challenges; I was moving from the dormitories to the fraternity house, and we would be doing two-a-days. The coddling was over.

I figured that the fraternity-house adjustment would be a snap, the academic would be challenging, the two-a-days a nightmare. The reality, come September, turned everything on its head. I had never run before at 7 a.m. but found, to my shock, that I liked it. The easy morning runs cleared the head, while the quicker afternoon runs sparked the soul. Sae said my improvement was the best of us all. But the rest of my world was getting a little slippery.

I and my roommates, John Bradford and Jon Rhodes, had the second floor penthouse in our fraternity, Psi Upsilon, affectionately named the “Green Latrine”. We had lived separately in the dorms, where one could keep one’s personal habits confidential. In the hurly-burly of fraternity living there was bound to be a contretemps, and I found myself in the middle of a Felix Unger-Oscar Madison standoff, with Oscar’s (a/k/a Jon Rhodes’) dog Ginger thrown in for good measure. It was a merciful thing to have the workouts to escape to.

But the academics proved my undoing. The sophomore physics course was laced through with integral and differential calculus. My freshman calculus professor had been, according to an underground student evaluation,

“a beneficiary of the Federal anti-lynching statutes.”

Now, to my horror, I realized that I had slept through all his classes. The new professor was more engaging and entertaining, which I could figure out because the other students were laughing, not because I understood anything he was saying.

I approached a Swedish exchange student who looked as if he, too, was a little bewildered. He was having a little difficulty with the English, that was all, the math was just fine. I was on my own.

Somebody else might have scrambled to add and drop some courses, but we were near four weeks in, and awfully late for that. I had another solution. I got sick.

On the night before the first varsity meet, I felt as if one of the 35-pound weights we had dodged the previous winter had lodged in my stomach. I sat on the toilet and couldn’t do anything. I had a 102 degree fever. I went to the infirmary and went to the bathroom 20 times overnight with nothing to show for it. There was no thought of getting up in the morning. Sae and the team showed up at the meet and asked “Where is Deke?” and nobody knew. There was only one way to go, and it was retreat. I was going home.

Along the way, I would have another month’s stopover at the hospital in Bangor. My doctor from two years ago was still there to coach me back to health. It was a return of my old nemesis, ulcerative colitis, with a slightly different spin, what I called “constipated diarrhea”. I had time to reflect on what had happened the previous month, and I realized that I had never really dreamed of being a scientist, and I could leave the physics program behind without regret; but whatever I did for a living, I could not leave behind the athletics.

With my bowels under control I was able to go home in November, but a high dose of prednisone had left me an insomniac. I would sometimes stay up until five in the morning, writing in an improvised journal. At Mount Hermon I had taken some Bible classes, mandated by the school’s Evangelist founder, but these were really stealth philosophy courses, designed to make us look at dogma sideways and test our assumptions. And now, in the still of the November nights, I had a few moments to live an examined life.

But not a sedentary one. Once again, I was severely underweight. It would be many months, nearly a year, before I would be able to compete again. This time, I didn’t start off running. In the upstairs of an old barn next to my parents’ house was a set of weights my brother had left behind.
There was no weight bench, but I improvised with piled-on mattresses, and began increasing the weights and repetitions. With no spotter, no coach, and no place to rest the weight, I would do three sets of bench presses, ten reps each with 150 pounds. The stringy muscles, having lost their memory of a past life, now began a new one. And while the outside world raged through its own transformations, I would quietly build my own.

1970

Through the spring of 1970 I continued my weight program and was working in my father's law office. I enjoyed the work and considered the possibility of a legal career, but also enjoyed the realization that I didn't have to choose just yet. I would redirect my academics to the liberal arts; to religion, philosophy, economics and government, to continue the self-examination just now begun. My self-examination in the crude, improvised weight room was already paying dividends. I had gained considerable muscle mass, especially in a deepening chest, and was the equal in strength to my older brother Jim; but my arm and leg muscles remained long and slender. The weight work had revealed that I was truly a runner, not a linebacker in disguise.

In June I turned 21. I was, after a fashion, supporting myself, if one did not count that I was living rent-free, and the season had come to start thinking about women. In my freshman year the only women I could talk to were my fraternity brothers' girlfriends, with whom I could banter without the stress of expectations. That would no longer do, but my first overtures were a bit awkward. I visited my aunt in Pennsylvania for a week, time enough to develop a crush on one of my cousin's friends while another of her friends had a crush on me. Back home, I had somewhat better luck making the acquaintance of the daughter of the local supermarket owner while she worked the checkout line. Geri was tall, pretty and had great teeth. Before the summer was out we had agreed to write and I promised to invite her to Homecoming. She was going to school in Orono, a long stretch in my underpowered car, but I would have a girlfriend, sort of.

When I began running again, I could feel the speed and the power, but the joints and tendons were not ready for the pace that I wanted to go. I quickly developed a case of Achilles tendonitis. The local doctor had no cure, not even a treatment, except rest. As it turned out, anything else would have been my undoing. It cleared up in scarcely a week. I was more careful after that. My body was restored, and was quick to heal, but I would need the discipline of the structured school workouts.

The Bowdoin I returned to was not the one I had left a year before. As an elderly, mature sophomore, I could view the changes with curious detachment, but they were startling nonetheless. There were no more Saturday classes. A select few women were attending classes for the year. The fraternity system was dissolving before our eyes. Freshmen could now compete in varsity sports. But through the shifting sands Sabe was there, and some familiar teammates. I could start orienting myself in our little neighborhood.

There were four returning seniors: Mark Cuneo, Brian Sheridan, Bill Seekins, and my fraternity big brother Toby Coverdale. Curiously, there were no runners from the next two classes except for me. There was a good freshman class, though, with Wayne Gardiner and Bob Bardwell among others. At last I could test my prowess on the five-mile varsity course at the Brunswick Country Club golf course. We also returned to Pickard Field, but for testing 1000-yard pickups, not for fluff work. As we sorted ourselves out, I was number two man on the team behind Mark.

We started the season thinking we were pretty good. At the opening meet, against Merrimack and St. Anselm's we formed a tight pack and on cue, about a mile into the race, we moved, while the other runners cried, "Here comes Bowdoin!" Mark won, I took second, and we easily dominated. But in the second race, at home against Amherst, the pack strategy was turned against us, and although Mark won again, I finished sixth.

The rest of the cross-country season, as I remember it, was something of a slow-motion decline. It was as if I personally, and the team collectively, had peaked and gone stale. Finally in
November our last meet was coming up, and it was not a pleasure to behold. We were in a tri-meet with Bates and Vermont, two of the best small-college teams in New England. Before the race, Sabe came into our locker, doing a soft-shoe dance, and offered the strangest pep talk I had ever heard. “When rape is inevitable, relax and enjoy it,” he said.

“Do you best, but whatever you do, don’t screw up the meet.”

The course wound around the Bates campus, with the William Tell Overture blaring out a dorm window. Mark went out too fast to try to keep up with the top Bates and Vermont runners, and didn’t finish. For the first and only time, I was the first team finisher, but once again, it was a humble “victory.” I finished fifteenth overall.

But it turned out that we had not gone stale. We were just off our timing. We had finished our cross-county season before the schedule said so. I wanted to get on the track. Underneath the famous Bowdoin Pines the track now had a beautiful, brick-red all weather surface. The dimpled composite rubberized surface would grip the smallest of spikes. No more would we wield the ½ inch daggers on our shoes that we had needed on the old, sloppy cinders. Months would pass before I could race there, but we could start our interval work for winter track now. Mark, Toby, Wayne and I began there with 10 repeats of 65-second quarters before the cold and darkness drove us into the Cage.

Everyone, of course, does quarter intervals. These are usually intense enough to bring on the stress-recovery cycle without breaking down the body. But now Sabe had a present for us. Since we were so eager to start the winter season and forget cross-country, he would share some new training theories with us. Art Dulong of Holy Cross, the top New England 2-miler at the time, had experimented with mile repeats. We were duly horrified. Nobody runs the mile in practice, we thought. You do intervals in practice so you can run a mile in competition, but the mile tears a man apart. We would have to do four of them, with an 8-minute rest in between, all under five minutes.

As we ran the first repeat, we ran 4:55 and felt under control. In the second mile the goal was to stay as close as possible to 5 minutes without going over, and our pace gave us a little room to ease off at the end. But the third and fourth miles were pure survival. We would slip one second, then two, behind pace, and be forced to make a desperate dash to the finish. There was no time to celebrate. That night, I came down with an intestinal bug and vomited so severely that it brought up blood. A quick trip to the infirmary proved that I was OK, but had vomited so forcefully that I had slightly torn my esophagus.

A week later, Mark greeted me with the news that it was mile repeat day again. I whimpered and stuck my shoes in my mouth. But somehow, the second session was less painful than the first. In the first session, Mark had literally dragged us through the last two miles. Now it was my turn. I took charge of the last mile and ran a 4:51, the fastest of the series.

Traditionally, before the winter track season we would have an intrasquad meet to check our conditioning. This year there would be something special. Mark, Wayne and I would be running the 2-mile. Without Sabe’s knowledge, we were plotting out a record. The school 2-mile record at the time was 9:41, emblazoned on one of the plaques leading to the Cage, and Mark knew it was soft, that he should have it. Wayne would lead us out with a 2:20 half mile. I would then take us through the mile in 4:50. Mark would then be on his own, but miles at that pace were a snap.

The race unfolded perfectly, according to script. As we passed the mile in 4:50 and Mark took the lead I focused on his back. The cheers disappeared into a void of my own making. There was only the pull of the corners, the faint smell of cigar, as the 25 laps reeled under us. And then it was over. Mark had his school record, in 9:35. I had run 9:49.2, Wayne 10:02. I couldn’t tell if it was easy, but it seemed natural. Achievement, for me, now had a real number.

I have no idea what my previous best was in the 2-mile. It is possible that it was the 11:24 time trial I had run as my first track event at Mount Hermon. When I was ill in 1969, watching the Mira-
icle Mets beat the Baltimore Orioles in the World Series and hearing the playing of The Impossible Dream, I fondly imagined that I would one day run the 2-mile in 9:31. At the time, it seemed as distant as the silly, unrun 4:07.5 mile. Now, it seemed very much in reach.

The 9:49.2 would forever remain the best 2-mile I would ever run. Neither would Mark or Wayne ever again repeat what happened on that magic day. I cannot regret that it took place when there were no points to be won for the school. Excellence can be fickle, to be captured when it presents itself. It is wisdom to realize that one will never know the moment until it is past. But excellence had started me on a journey that continues to this day. I had begun recording my workouts and counting the miles. Excellence could not be summoned on demand, perhaps, but there might be clues on how it came here, on how it could be coaxed back. And once quantitative excellence could no longer be reached, there would at least be the proof that it had once happened. Thus came the end of my beginning.

1971

Bowdoin was a small school of about 950, and in theory everyone was supposed to know everyone else, but of course that was not true. One developed friendships in small clusters, like an archipelago in an immense ocean. Each cluster of friends knew nothing of the others. On the one hand, I had academic and philosophical friends such as John Bradford, John and Tim Woodcock, and Kevin Stitham, all from landmark middle-class families in their towns. Then there were my track friends, from a more diverse background. Wayne was from a working-class family in Kittery; Mark’s father was a prominent doctor in Kennebunk; Toby’s father was a self-made millionaire in Long Island. What connected us was the pain and effort we shared. And at this moment, in the bitter winter of 1971, all the action was with my track friends, if not in athletics, at least in love.

I was, after all, going through a mini-crisis. I had asked Geri to see me at Witter’s Weekend, the second leg of the Bowdoin Party Triple Crown. She had turned me down flat. I had competition, and he was at Maine. She called to say she had just been pinned.

I needed support, and I knew just where to go. Toby Coverdale, at his most peaceful, was a roiling pit of conflicting passions whom I knew would make me feel totally at peace by comparison. Yet somehow he had won the heart of a Lewiston girl, Pauline Grondin, who was as sunny and sweet-tempered as Toby was dyspeptic. She was becoming a mother hen to all of us, soothing troubled waters. Mark and his girlfriend, who was pushing him hard to give her a ring, would have given her full-time counseling work if she had wanted. To make things more interesting, Toby and one of his roommates, a 1000-yard man named Bob Legere, had decided to hate each other during our winter confinement. In this state of affairs I prepared for a 2-mile in the Colby meet.

My training had not gone badly. I had not had time to benefit from the uptick in training that so often accompanies stormy relationships, but I had just run a personal-record 4:38 mile. Mark wasn’t running the 2-mile that day; my competition would be Lew Pacquin, a talented Colby distance man, but he would have to spread his talents that day, running also the mile and the 1,000. I would be rested, so I rated my chances as good.

As I entered the cage, I realized something was amiss. The ancient hissing radiators had been working overtime, and the place was a sauna. One could only guess what the effect would be. I warmed up outdoors as long as possible. Still, everyone would be in the same conditions, so what’s the difference?

I went through the mile comfortably in 4:55. I knew I wouldn’t have to match my personal best to win, so I made sure to stay within myself. With a quarter-mile to go, I still felt comfortable, although the lap reader mistook the number and said I had two laps to go instead of three. There was a slight twinge in my back, but nothing to worry about. Then, with less than two laps to go, I felt a strong tug, like someone in the overhead balcony had hooked my tailbone and was yanking upward. Around the far turn I stumbled, my arms uselessly flailing, and on the back straight I fell helplessly on the track. After what seemed an eternity first
Pacquin, then Wayne, passed me.

It is funny how we can romanticize failure. It was the Opportunity forever lost, as if I would never again win a race at any level. In fact, that spring I would win my only varsity track race, but it was a lackluster 10:17 and hardly worth remembering. Under the cloud of my sorry love life, and the emotional roller-coaster ride of my teammates, I could never have remembered the race had I won it. How well would we remember the Titanic if she had survived her maiden voyage and ended up on a scrap heap twenty-five years later like her sister ship, Olympic?

In any case, Toby, Pauline, Mark, Wayne and the rest of our sorry group commiserated with a four-pack champagne sampler which I no longer had any use for, went down to concert to find there were no seats, and laughed about our pathetic state. Besides, the world was not at an end. Our athletic season still had a focus: the Bassetti Cup Table Hockey Championships.

The Bassetti Cup was named after one Bob Bassett, a middling half-miler of apparently harmless disposition who had earned Toby’s eternal, passionate hatred. The previous year, Toby had been in line to win the James Bowdoin Cup, an award for the varsity letter-winner with the highest grade-point average. Toby was a good quarter miler who had earned his letter the hard way, and his grades were superb; but Bob, a classic grind, had slightly higher grades and had “earned” a cheap varsity letter on a cross-country team decimated by illness and injury. Toby’s rage was sharpened by the fact that Bob, instead of returning his hatred, took no notice of it. For much of the winter, then, we took out our passions on a 2-foot by 3 ½ foot plastic game board with lever-driven men, all of whom had names and biographies. I have always had a tendency to be sucked into small, interior worlds, and this was a classic example. My team was the California Golden Seals, owned by Charlie Finley, who with his eye for crossover talent had convinced Reggie Jackson to play defenseman/goon. Reggie gave a very entertaining interview in Playboy magazine, displayed prominently in the common area of Mark and Toby’s quarters. We played a full season, and we well underway in the playoffs, when disaster struck.

Mark’s Vancouver Canucks were playing Toby’s Pittsburgh Penguins in the semifinals when the Canucks went on a scoring tear. The Canuck center, Francois, picking up loose pucks left and right, made several faifongs (fooling around in front of net goals), and the Canucks were leading 8-0 when Toby could bear no more. Suddenly the poor spectators were treated to an earthquake measuring 2.5 on the Richter scale. Toby had flung the hockey set the length of the common room. By common agreement, all the league’s players (who shared the same plastic figurines and now-bent rods and levers) declined to continue, and the Bassetti Cup went unawarded.

My muscle pull in the Colby race took me off the track for two weeks, so I spent some time trying to get back on Geri’s sweet side, having found out that she had returned the pin to my rival. I traveled to Orono and strutted about with my new letter sweater to uncertain effect, but at least I was enjoying being back in the game. This seemed to improve my running considerably, and almost immediately upon my return I ran a 10:02 2-mile at Vermont, with a negative-split second mile.

Sabe always paid attention to our romantic attachments. He knew, especially at our age, how disruptive it was to one’s running career to have a conflicted love life. The previous fall, at the end of the meeting where I was elected captain of the next year’s cross country squad, Sabe came out with, “Hey, Deke, are you going to marry that bimbo?” I didn’t say he was subtle.

When April came, the beautiful new track, so tempting the previous fall, still had ten inches of snow; we had just been through the harshest winter in 20 years. Several hours of shoveling the track clear had a dampening effect on my desire to run there. I didn’t come close to breaking 10 minutes all season; my best was 10:07 in the last 2-mile of the schedule, and by that time I was being trounced by a new entry on the running scene. Fred Davis was a walk-on, who to my knowledge had never run competitively before. In the first race, my 10:17 win, he finished five seconds back. After the next race, he came up and asked why I was breathing so hard, and was I doing it wrong?
He had been told you should only breathe through your nose. Nobody, before or since, has ever pulled such a good psych job on me. In the race after that, I couldn’t finish, literally falling beside the track after a mile and a half. Fred finished the season with a 9:56 and presumably breathed, at least a little, through his mouth.

The State track meet that year featured a 3-mile instead of the 2. I finished in the middle of the pack in 15:39, which turned out to equal my best time at the distance, at least on the track, but it was just a warmup to something new. At the end of May, I drove to Fort Williams in South Portland to run a 7-mile road race sponsored by Southern Maine Vocational Technical Institute. I had no idea of pace, or how the competition was, or how water stops worked. The race was won by Larry Greer, then a local high schooler, and that is all I remember. It is only in retrospect that I surmise that Dale Lincoln, then an instructor at SMVTI, had organized the race. I had been startled to hear, two weeks earlier, about the tragic accident that killed Roland Dyer only two miles from the Bowdoin campus. I had known Rollie Dyer mostly by reputation, as the godfather of Maine road racing, and I wanted to pay my respects in some fashion.

The seeds of my road racing career had been planted, and Dale Lincoln would soon be watering them. That very year he was moving from the Portland area back to the downeast town of Perry, where he would nurture the sport for the next thirty years. In some way, the torch had been passed from Rollie Dyer to Dale Lincoln and others like him. There is a saying that the graveyard is full of indispensable people. That can be taken cynically; that we are not as important as we think. However, it holds truth at a higher level. Those that labor heroically truly cannot be replaced. They can, however, be emulated by those inspired by their passion. In an endless relay, one replaceable soul takes the baton from another, and runs a critical leg when no one else can. Fortunately, we don’t have to be ready to take the baton all the time, but we had better be ready once.

By the end of my sophomore year, my grades had improved dramatically. I was taking a liking to my religion and philosophy courses, earning all honors grades, full of terms like Weltanshaaung and mysterium tremendum ut fascinans. With a long summer reading list and no racing, my conditioning began to slip. When I returned to campus in September, Bowdoin’s new cross-county captain had quite a wakeup call. The team now featured Billy Wilson, a former Morse high star; a steadily improving Fred Davis; Charlie Hayward, a cross-country skier ready to be a force; and a much-improved Wayne, now beating me in many of the races. My zeal for cross-county would be on simmer for the time being. Instead, my zeal focused on inventing a new religion.

My head was full of comparative religious studies, especially far Eastern religions, and it amused me that the divine Elephant should reveal himself by possessing my body during a run on Mackeen Street one early October afternoon and then dispensing his wisdom to his disciples. The Elephant adhered strongly to an old Taoist saying, “The Tao is in the piss and the dung.” This saying is generally interpreted as showing the universality of the divine, but the Elephant claimed that this saying was literal and exclusive, which suited him because he made so much of the stuff. Except for a few bizarre rules (no using of spoons; greetings by fellow disciples were a shrill yelp), the Elephant mostly left us to our own devices, and he did not proselytize among my running mates, but he did get an honorable mention when I was interviewed for the Bowdoin Orient, the school newspaper:

“If Deke Talbot doesn’t make a mark with his running, perhaps he will with the Elephant cult.”

Memory is a marker of what we find important, and I cannot recall what running I did during this period. I did win reelection as cross-county captain, since I was the only returning senior, but no races stand out, good or bad. Perhaps the Elephant intruded on my thoughts too much; perhaps there was truly a terra incognita of dragons and sea-monsters; but more likely, the vivid events of the next year erased what came before.

I was about to tread, unworthy as I was, on the slopes of Olympus.
1972

It was the fourth of July, and I was lined up at the start of the Perry-to-Eastport 7.2 mile race. It had been a long time since I had trained for distance. During the late winter, I had managed to set personal records with a 2:28:4 1,000 yard run and a 4:37.6 mile in some low-key events, but with Billy Wilson running 9:18 and Fred Davis running 9:40, my appetite for the 2-mile wasn’t there for the spring season. Now I was going to pay the price. For only my second road race, the conditions would be torrid, a rare event for the long causeways running through Passamaquoddy Bay to the finish. Dale Lincoln was hard at work, not only organizing and running local races, but making up and distributing an AAU schedule of all road races in the State. The were precious few; the Portland Boy’s Club 5-miler, the Bangor Labor Day 5-miler, and some grim, unimaginable ordeals like the Lake Maranacook 14-miler, and Dale was determined to fill out the list. I appreciated the chance to keep some race sharpening in the summer, perhaps to avoid a repeat of the previous year’s debacle. The start of the Perry-to-Eastport is a pancake-flat, straight stretch of nearly a mile, and as the young kids burst out I still wasn’t sure whether they were foolish or really good. Fortunately, there was one really good runner there whom I knew, Neil Miner from Bates, and he wasn’t being suckered out. Slowly he moved out ahead, and I tried to go with him. This was futile, but it did separate me from the rest of the field. I finished second, nearly four minutes behind Neil, but I had a real trophy, when that meant something to me.

I wanted to be sharp for something besides a cross-country season. Sabe had pulled some strings to get the U.S. Olympic team to train at Bowdoin for a week, after the trials, before they headed to Europe in preparation for the Munich Olympics. I made such arrangements as I needed, which weren’t much. My father just had to spare me out of the office for the week. I would burn out in the chapter room of my fraternity house, and use the kitchen if I ever cared for a hot meal, although I never remember having one. There was too much going on to eat.

On an evening in late July I arrived on campus, practically dizzy with the thought I might see somebody famous. Sabe told me to show up at the infirmary at 8:00 the next morning, when the athletes would be having quick checkups. For once in my life, I was early. Then they started filtering in; Jeff Galloway, Jack Batchelder (easily identified because he was 6’6”), Steve Prefontaine, and Frank Shorter. As Sabe introduced me, I said to Frank, “I don’t know about the others, but you’re my favorite.” I had been a fan of his because of the Mount Hermon connection and I had closely followed his career, and as luck would have it, he was the most accessible of the group. To my amazement and surprise, he invited me on his next run.

Had I approached Kenny Moore, he might have invited me on one of his runs, but that would have been 30 miles to the end of Bailey’s Island and back. Steve Prefontaine knew better than to invite anyone on his runs, full of brutal, gut-busting 600-yard sprints along the grassy mall, reproducing his famous long finishing drive. But Frank Shorter’s morning runs were amazingly sane, social events, not exceeding a 6:30 mile pace, and he attracted not only teammates Galloway, Batchelder and Len Hilton, but a large contingent of Portland-area runners, none of whom I had met before. As a total newcomer to the road-racing scene, I had scarcely heard of Ken Flanders, let alone Ziggy Gillespie or Jerry Crommett. We were all out there, among high schoolers and fortysomthing doctors, in a dense pack among some of the best runners in the world. It was a pleasant and harmless conceit to imagine ourselves in the lead pack of the Olympic marathon, trying to decide when to make our move.

With one exception, none of us tried to make such a move. These men pleasantly chatting next to us had been running 170 miles a week at altitude, for Pete’s sake, and they were not to be provoked. Then, at the end of one long pleasant run on Maine Street, a green-shirted runner pulled out ahead of our pack of 20 and established about a 60-yard lead. Frank and Jeff exchanged glances and muttered comments about the “green weenie”. I would find out years later that Jerry Crommett always trained at speed; he was not trying to show off, just trying to feel comfortable.
But Frank and Jeff were looking to give the rest of us some entertainment. Mr. Green Shirt stretched the lead out to about 100 yards when Frank and Jeff, taking the pack with them, abruptly turned right onto a side street, heading toward Pickard Field. Jerry quickly retraced his steps and weaved through the pack toward the lead. On cue as to what was about to happen, I tapped Ken Flanders on the shoulder and asked if he was ready to play with the big kids. Jerry took one stride too far into the lead, and suddenly Frank and Jeff Galloway were off, at 4:20 pace, with Ken in close pursuit. As we turned into Pickard Field I kicked it up long enough to see the fast disappearing trio head into the woods and then slowed down, laughing. Later Frank and Jeff would ask me, “Who is that guy? He’s good.”

My acquaintance with the Immortals began to make me a little brazen. I comfortably strolled around their locker room, inviting myself to the cooler full of free Cokes. I saw Dan Moynihan, a superb Tufts runner (who two years later would beat Bill Rodgers in the Boston Marathon the year before Rodgers won) sitting around goggle-eyed at the sight of his heroes. I casually asked his if he would like to meet them, and his eyes grew even wider as he said “Really? Do you mean it?”

My hubris, of course, would lead me too far, and one afternoon, I joined the group as they went to the Whittier Field track for a workout. Frank and his group were doing 330s, and I was curious, too curious, to find out what their speed was like. As I entered the stadium area, we were immediately swarmed by groups of kids seeking autographs. There was no running away, so I signed like the others. Somewhere, among the scraps of memorabilia filling dusty storage rooms, rests my name along with the other greats. But this fact is a small return on the embarrassment to follow. I was wearing a painter’s hat, but soon no one would mistake me for Dave Wottle. I firmly held onto last place during the first 330, barely keeping contact. At the end of the second, I was 15 yards behind the next runner. The grandstands were infested with witnesses to my undoing. One of my fraternity brothers heard a voice “The one with the hat, he’d better catch up.” The one with the hat slinked under the grandstand after the third repeat.

I wasn’t so embarrassed as to stay away as the week came to a close, but ventured out during one of Frank’s tempo workouts, not able to keep up but turning over at 5:45 pace, having a mini-duel with Ziggy Gillespie as we made our acquaintance. And I knew, come what may in the fall season, that for once I would be sharp, in as good a shape as I had ever been. The early word was that the team would be the best ever, strengthened by a great freshman recruiting class, and I might be out-talented, but not out-psyched.

My conditioning had an immediate dividend before the season even started. One of Dale Lincoln’s late-summer races was a 4 ½ mile loop which ran thorough Calais, Maine and St. Stephen, New Brunswick, finishing at the top of a long hill on the St. Stephen side. For the first 3 miles I trailed a high schooler, Steve Carle, finally catching him on the long hill and coasting to victory. As I savored my first road race win (in an international race, no less), I had no notion how few and precious they would be.

The rumors about the team were no mistake. In reality, I was not the captain of a good team; I was an also-ran on a great one. Billy Wilson and Fred Davis were back, of course, and were joined by stellar freshmen Jeff Sanborn and Mike Allan. Sophomore Peter Benoit was solidly in the fifth slot. (Since Bowdoin was now fully a coed school, his younger sister Joan was already planning to come). I would have my hands full just making the top seven, to earn a letter. There would be no embarrassment at the hands of Bates, or any other local school, that year. At the State meet Billy, Fred, Jeff and Mike decided to finish together and coasted in well ahead of the field. At the end of the season, Sabe dangled a plum in front of us; we were entered in the IC4A’s, which were run at the legendary Van Courtland Park course in New York City. Seven runners would go. I had memories of my near misses to compete at championship meets. Not this time; this was my last chance. In the final regular meet at Bates, I nabbed the seventh spot and we were on our way.

Van Courtland Park does not have the appearance of a truly intimidating course. Much of the course simply rings a huge, flat field, with long,
open views. But like other great courses, it keeps its secrets, and its dead, to itself. The long, panoramic views tease one into a suicidal pace. The first corner pole after the start is a tall, brightly colored landmark nearly a half mile distant, but clearly visible from the start, and it draws the speed demons out like a magnet. There is only one place where the trail narrows down, where the runner can have apparent relief from the discouraging view of the pack stringing far ahead. This place is not meant for quiet contemplation and recovery. Rather, it is the nasty, winding goatpath up Cemetery Hill, nearly invisible from the rest of the course. The five-mile course takes two laps, so the first trip up Cemetery Hill comes completely by surprise, but dominates the thoughts of the runner through the flat section of the second loop. Finally, after the second climb, there is a gut-wrenching 300-yard sprint to the finish. Two members of our Fantastic Four were claimed by the course and didn’t finish. My effort was at least workmanlike, and with a 29:36 I had finished fifth for the team.

Thus, for all practical purposes, ended my career in a Bowdoin uniform. There seemed no place on the track for a man of my talents, not with Billy and Fred in the 2-mile, and Jeff and Mike, both 4:15 in the mile. Frank Shorter’s dramatic win at Munich had hit me as it did so many others; I was taking to the roads.

1973

I had no concept what long distance was like until I met Dick Henderson. Dick never tried out for track and cross-country, for his was a bigger stage. For him, a run of less than 10 miles was hardly worth doing.

I had done some ten mile runs, of course. One of our cross-country training courses, called the “Big Loop” (the antithesis to “one loop Pickard”), was a hilly 11-miler. One ran that course, twice, maybe three times, a season, and spent days recovering. I had been on another 10-mile course with Jeff and Mike one rainy fall afternoon, which I ran in 63 minutes and they still left me behind. The concept of LSD (long slow distance) hadn’t yet entered our minds.

Now there was no choice but to learn LSD, because I wanted to run the Boston Marathon. Wayne Gardiner, who had also been displaced from the track by the new talent, along with Dick Henderson, also wanted to sign up. For the first time, I was running 10 miles or more on a regular basis, going to Mere Point, Harpswell, out on the Freeport road, and other untravelled places. As much for mental as for physical endurance, Wayne and I did 201 laps of the Cage track (16 miles). We wrote to Jock Semple (there was no way to Boston but through Jock), and got information on how to qualify.

In those days, one didn’t need to run a qualifying marathon, but there were qualifying standards in other races from 20 kilometers on up. The problem was, it was early March, and where were the races? Wayne, Dick and I scouted around and found a 30-kilometer race in New Bedford, Massachusetts.

New Bedford, in those days, was a somewhat long-in-the-tooth, immigrant, working-class fishing town, looking especially bleak on a gray March day. It took some time to find the Fraternal Order of Eagles Lodge where the signup was. When we asked directions, a good Samaritan tried to hustle us with a good deal on some furnace ducts. When we finally arrived, there was one common changing room; any women could please change in a toilet. It was clear that everyone there but us knew everyone else. The competitors seemed to range from the grizzled veteran to the ancient mariner.

We had no way to gauge splits, which was just as well because there weren’t any. We just ran as we felt. At one point, we amused ourselves by running in the slipstream of a young runner with a prominent Afro, and then saying, “Wanna pass the Bush?” Near the end, along the flat waterfront, I felt strong, but on the finishing straight a woman sped past me. I was happy, though, to have run 1:54:54, not far off six-minute pace, easily qualifying for Boston.

Dick and Wayne had qualified as well, but Wayne had developed a stress fracture in his foot that sidelined him, and our trio was down to two. This would turn out to be a divine intervention, because Wayne would still go to Boston and be our minder. We would desperately need minding.
My training was now nearly at 100 miles a week and I was looking for one more long run to top it off. At home over March break, I read about something called “Super Joggers Day.” Dale Lincoln had organized a run from Calais to Eastport, advertised at 29 miles. It made good sense to me to try the marathon distance beforehand. Besides, my parents would drive alongside, so I could stop anywhere I wanted. But “Super Joggers Day” turned out to be one of those perfect, mild spring days with almost no wind, and by 10 miles I was well in the lead. Winning the thing became as good an idea as the distance was. At 26 miles on the odometer my father called out 2:55, and now not even Boston mattered, I had to finish strong. At the end I was passed by a four man relay team, but my 3:14:30 was more than I could have hoped for. It was, of course, the race I should have run two weeks later.

I still had two weeks to build my excitement back up. At least I tapered off on the workouts, allowing my body to repair some of the damage I had wrought. There was still plenty of time to screw things up, of course, but we didn’t really make any tactical mistakes until the night before the race.

Of course we had no money, and wanted to travel on the cheap, so Wayne had made arrangements to stay in the dorm room of one of his former Traip Academy classmates at MIT. We would have been wiser to stay on campus and head for Boston at 4 the next morning. When we arrived, our host told us there was a fine restaurant a short walk away, and as eager as we were to fuel up, we agreed to join him. He turned out to be one of the William Blake types for whom a four-hour walk is a pleasant diversion. After 45 minutes at a brisk pace we reached our destination, and of course, had to face the return trip. Dick and I were both too cheap, and too proud, to call for a cab. The evening itself was pleasant and warm, far too warm for the close dorm quarters and the hissing radiator. Our lack of sleep that night was not all because of excitement.

Patriot’s Day dawned warm and clear. It was still possible in those days to drive out to the starting line, but as we went, I could scarcely look at the course. I was busy checking my gear, including my new pair of fire-engine red Karhu racing flats. The only break-in for these shoes was a six-mile easy shakedown two days before. I was as ready as a fool could be.

Ready, that is, for anything but Hopkinton on marathon morning. In a little village no larger than my home town there were bands, balloons, helicopters, confetti, preachers, snake-oil salesmen, endless lines of runners waiting for their cursory medical checkups, and endless lines of others waiting for the port-a-potties. I skipped this latter line in favor of the woods behind the Junior High School. I was not alone. It was warm enough so that everyone was in full racing regalia, and the colors were intense, pressing into the skin. Here I was, without five road races under my belt, in the most famous race in the world! We were lined up on a two-lane side street called Hayden Rowe, and finally, the dull thump of a cannon. To this day, I envy any runner their first trip to Hopkinton.

But no one is to be envied their trip out of Hopkinton, on such a fine day. It is a heady experience to be in a river of 1,500 runners when one’s biggest race to that point had 100. In the flowing surge, it was impossible for me to know the downhill plunge I was on through the first four miles into Ashland. It seemed so easy to keep the pace through the flats of Framingham, then Natick. 10 miles flew by in 59 minutes. Every rooftop seemed to have revelers and pumping stereos, every block was, well, a block party.

After the halfway point in Wellesley, though, the partygoers were forgotten, the cheers lost, as the reality of the heat pressed in. My shoulders were cast in salt, and my big toe began to throb under my new Karhus. Heartbreak Hill, strangely, was a bit of relief to my feet, but the drop into Cleveland Circle was pure torture. I had to summon all my will to move over the subway tracks littering the course. Anyone who has run Boston can insert their own memories of the last painful miles into the city, for in truth, I don’t remember mine. Somehow, I shuffled over the finish in 3:03:15, with a certificate showing my 282nd place.

I had willed myself to the finish because Wayne would never find me anyplace else. I was blistered,
chafed, cramped, sunburned, black-toed and bewildered. The beef stew did not bring me back to full health. It seemed forever before he found us. Finally, at about five o’clock, the streets began to open up enough for him to pick us up. Then, the challenge was to get into the car, and bear the horrid cramps on the trip back to campus. I had come face to face with an experience so many other runners have had; Boston tears you up worse than any other marathon. Mercifully, I would have the rest of the season to recover.

With my new Bowdoin degree I was now set for law school, at the University of Maine in Portland. The year off, and the summers working for my father, had convinced me to choose a legal career, despite the universal warnings of new lawyers and law students that the three years of law school would successively scare, work and bore me to death. I prepared for the possibility that this slam-dunk into reality might kill my running career, but I still had my summer, and some conditioning, so I would use it up.

Use it up I did. First, back to the Perry-to-Eastport race. Dale Lincoln had drawn down three good runners from the Waterville area; Rick Krause, Steven Dubord and Alton Stieves, who turned out to be close to my level, not dominantly better like Neil Miner the year before. This year, the weather was classic Downeast pea-soup fog. A young schoolboy, Bill Pike, jumped into the lead and it took us nearly two miles to shed him. The four of us drove on through the muck until a final hill spread us out. Finally, Rick started to look a little blurry ahead of me, and slipped into the fog, but I heard the seductive sound of the police siren as the winner took the last downhill into the village. I was determined that one day that siren would be for me. Rick ran 39:09, I was 39:45, my first sub-40 on a course where this was my standard of proficiency.

Then, curiously, I took back to the track. There was a series of “Olympic development” races going on, and I found to my surprise that my leg speed was still pretty good. A 10:06 2-mile felt easy. Then, on the U-Maine Orono track, I got pulled along in a good, steady pack and pulled out a 9:52, my best-ever outdoor 2-mile. At the end of the season I went back and won the Calais-St. Stephen 4 ½ miler, the first and only time I ever successfully defended a road-race title.

That could have been the end of my running career, or at least the start of a long hiatus, but for one thing. I had rented an apartment unit in a house on the Gorham road, about eight miles from the center of Portland, and it was close by some beautiful country roads that needed exploring. Before I could be convinced by the pompous professors and arrogant third-years that my law studies should consume every waking moment, I was out on those roads, keeping my head clear and sane. One late September weekend I went up to Bowdoin and ran my old varsity cross-country course at close to the best I had ever done, and Dick Henderson convinced me, despite a night of partying, to run the Portland midi-marathon the next day.

By my later reckoning, the Portland midi-marathon was about 20 kilometers, but it was not about the distance, it was purely about the competition. I was soon to learn about the keen rivalries between runners who might match up against each other 20 times a year and never tire of it. This first “Midi” was all about getting over my stiffness and hangover condition to actually enjoy the thing, and checking out the names at the finish; Ralph Thomas, Chris Chambers, Mike and George Towle, and others whom I might challenge with better preparation.

The hook was baited, and Ziggy Gillespie set it. He had plotted out a tough but entertaining cross-country course on the Gorham campus of the University of Southern Maine, less than 2 miles from my apartment door. He was willing to organize a race there on any pretense, at any time. Part of the challenge of the course was simply finding one’s way around. The first time I ran it I was in a good pack and finished a respectable tenth, but the second race there I got lost, wandering aimlessly until I entered the finishing stretch ahead of Ralph Thomas, but not for long. Now there was one more benchmark for improvement. Running now was an essential part of my education.
1974

Over the winter I took a break, indulging in some basketball competition. I was a member of our first-year law school team in an intramural league. We had some good players, notably Bill Burney, who had scored a school-record 63 points in a game for Cony High; but the talent didn’t run deep, and we lost most of our games. I scored only occasionally, usually a meaningless moon-shot (in the days before the 3-point shot had left the old American Basketball Association), and one of my teammates remarked that was when he knew that the game was over, that we had lost.

In March came the increasing afternoon daylight, and another incentive to get out onto the roads. I had just received my first copy of Runner’s World magazine. I discovered not only some training tips and news, but that with Joe Henderson and George Sheehan, creative writing was part of the mix. Duly fortified, I entered a 10-K race in Westbrook after about three weeks of training. The race was out-and back toward Gorham, turning just before my apartment house. On the outward leg we plowed through a stiff headwind, and near the turn I saw the small field spread out discouragingly ahead. The leg back, however, was a scream. Only the all-winter runners had shown up, and I finished 12th in a field of 19. Still, I got a trophy, because Ziggy Gillespie never skimped on trophies.

The next race was the Portland Boy’s Club race, on Patriot’s Day. This 5-miler was billed in the schedule as a “baby marathon”, and that fit my notion that Portland was a pint-size version of Boston. The race itself, though, was respectable, drawing a field bigger than any I had encountered outside of Boston the year before. The field, of course, was filled out by recreational runners on their first spring outing, so I figured not to finish in the middle of the pack. I surprised myself by finishing ninth, in 27:27, and heard my name in front of a good crowd at the awards ceremony. I was needing some distinction about then. My midterm grades had revealed an average law student. This, in itself, was not a cause for despair. The standing joke was that after law school, “A” students became professors, “B” students became judges, “C” students made $100,000.00 a year. But a touch of excellence was a great tonic. Some of my classmates, much brighter than I, didn’t have such an outlet, and I was starting to notice some empty seats as first year plodded along.

For that entire spring and summer, there were races whenever I wanted, so many that I could sample when I felt like it and not run them all. Ziggy had a fast, flat loop in Falmouth just short of 6 miles that I tried out, and a partly off-road 6-miler on Memorial Day in Gorham, and I regularly raced every other weekend. To my surprise, I could keep that up when I got home, thanks to Dale Lincoln. There was the Perry-to-Eastport, of course. This year Dale had drawn a ringer. Joe Browder, a collegian in a Duke racing singlet, took out the leaders at a nasty pace. Rick Krause, trying to defend his title, went out with him, but I had the good sense to hold back, breaking 40 minutes again and finishing third. At the time, I was probably a little trouble to run with, because I was experimenting with a face relaxation technique that involved fluttering my lips on every exhale. I sounded like a horse. I dropped the technique after a few dirty looks.

In the vacuum that used to exist between the fourth of July and Labor Day, Dale had peppered in several races as the opportunity presented itself, some even on weekdays. I was far from dominating them. Dale was actively coaching some of the competition, such as Roger Young and Billy Pike, and there was no slacking off. I did win one race that summer, a 3-mile on an old half-mile horse track in Pembroke. There was a small country fair going on at the time. While I was having my time of glory, the small crowd in the grandstand was not watching. They were calling out bids at a pig auction.

When I returned to school in the fall, there was no thought of slacking off. I still had my apartment in the country. I was getting better at sizing up the local competition. Ralph Thomas and Gene Coffin were out of reach, but I was swapping places with Jerry Crommett and Ziggy Gillespie (when he wasn’t directing the races). Everyone was getting faster, but so was I. In October I slipped under 31 minutes at the Falmouth loop,
which car-measured at 5.7 miles. At the Cape Elizabeth Turkey Trot 5.8 miler, I beat out Jerry with a 31:02. Dick Goodie had called the Turkey Trot the ‘score settling’ final race of the year, but this year there was one more. North of Portland there was a 5-kilometer loop called Riverside, and in early December everything seemed to click together as I chased Gene Coffin around the course. Gene won in 15:38, and I finished second in 15:44, close enough to make the finish-line video in the 6 o’clock sports report on Channel 6. It was one thing to get my name in a sports-page writeup in the daily paper; quite another to sneak onto television, where there is space and time only for the seemingly important. There was no mistake; this was too good to drop. I would run through the winter, indoor track or not.

1975

Starting in the fall and continuing in the winter, I was doing most of my running and downtown Portland. With the increasing darkness it didn’t make sense to drive back out to my apartment after classes just to run alone. I happened across a group of teachers at King Junior High only a quarter mile from the law school, and began running regularly with Tom Keating, Neal Glazier and Bill Chard when their classes let out. There was plenty of variety, including a fiendish hill climb up Fox and Walnut Streets to Eastern Promenade, or long fartlek work on the flat stretch on Commercial Street. There was no question that I needed the company to keep up my conditioning. In early March I traveled up to Bowdoin to run a 2-mile at an AAU meet in the Cage, and on memory was able to run a 10:01, chasing Ralph Thomas. A short time later I ran a 33:15 in a 10-K at Riverside, which has to stand as my best even though it was before the days of course certification. It would be seven years before I would run a certified course, and by then 35 minutes was the best I could do.

I was primed for the Portland Boy’s Club race, and the weather was too. It was cool, dry and breezy, with a dose of oxygen-uptake enhancing pixie dust in the air. Ken Flanders ran under 25 minutes for the win. While not contending for the lead, I was close enough to feel like a player, and finished sixth in 26:06. It seemed that everyone had their best-ever times on the course, mirroring what was happening at Boston the same day. Fortunately, I did not know that the course was a bit short. Certification several years later revealed that the 5-mile times should have been about a minute slower.

Later that day, my perceived competence as a 26-minute 5-miler would be my salvation. We second-year law students were in the midst of a project to prepare for a simulated trial. Our group was responsible for preparing a bit of arcana known as a Rule 16 pretrial list. We had no idea what this was, and it was not the role of the professors to guide us. A common-sense person would have gone to a local law office and asked one of the legal secretaries to help us. Our teachers had been spending two years ridding us of any common sense we might have had. Accordingly, we made the thing up, ex nihlo. Having one of our teachers critiquing us would have been bad enough; but in this case, we were being evaluated by Harry Glassman, the premier trial judge in the State, who had taken time away from his busy caseload on a holiday to instruct us. Vince Lombardi, General Patton, and Simon from American Idol, acting in concert, could not have given us a more thorough dressing-down. I had to acknowledge that Judge Glassman was right, that we were nincompoops, but I stayed calm and impassive. After all, nobody died, and this was the right place to make mistakes. There was time enough to get it right.

I already had the running right. In Portland, the field was too good for me to grab a win, but maybe this would be the year at the Perry-to-Eastport race. As luck would have it, nobody great showed up. My competition would be Darrell Seikins, brother of my former teammate, Bill Seikins. We ran together for five miles, and then I pulled ahead on Antone’s Hill, and finally had the experience of the siren calling out for me on the steep downhill leading to the finish. My 39:16 was far from the record set the previous year, but at least it was in the respectable range of winning times. Even I didn’t want a win in a slow time which would show off my relative incompetence.

It was time to run another marathon. The
Bangor Daily News had sponsored the inaugural Paul Bunyan marathon from Orono to Bangor and back. I had a good mix of racing under my belt and some fairly long runs, and judged that I could break 3 hours. The race began on the U-Maine campus at 8:00 on a brutally hot July morning. It was over 85 at the start and getting hotter. Fortunately, my racing speed made the 6:15 early miles feel like a stroll, and I took plenty of water. By mile 15 I was slowing down, but it was a controlled crash, and I finished in 2:51:51. Under the conditions, and my lack of experience, it has to be one of my best ever marathons, though I would one day run 10 minutes faster.

In September, right after my return to law school, I ran the Maine AAU one-hour run on Bowdoin’s Whittier field track. I had tried it the previous two years, going just over 10 miles each time. With that experience, and a good speed and distance portfolio over the year, I knew I would improve. I didn’t figure on having any chance of winning. This sentiment was reinforced when I saw Bob Hillgrove and Jeff Sanborn warming up. Bob, I knew, was one of the great standouts since the early 1960’s. Occasionally he would disappear from the scene, only to come roaring back, and he never jogged a race. Jeff took off at a blistering pace, and I let him go, but I found myself with Hillgrove, skimming along with his classic choppy stride. By mile 4 Jeff was a half-lap in the lead when he suddenly stepped off the track; he was only looking for a quick tempo workout. Suddenly I was sharing the lead. 5 miles went by in 27:07, 10 miles in 55:08. Amazingly, after 43 laps with only one minute to go, I was still head-to-head with Bob, but then I found out that I still didn’t have a chance at winning. Bob’s tempo didn’t increase (that would have been nearly impossible) but his stride did. By adding about 2 inches to every step in his finishing kick he was untouchable. When the whistle blew he was a good 70 yards ahead, nearly at mile 11.

This boasting of my achievements during the year is, admittedly, a little tiresome. My string of best-evers wasn’t quite done, but as usual, there would be some humbling to be had. In the Portland midi-marathon in early October I ran 1:12:43, my best on that course, but was thoroughly whipped by Jerry Crommett, who ran in the low 1:11’s. As usual, the Cape Elizabeth Turkey Trot was coming, the score-settling race, and I had to get mine back. About 4 miles in I was in a close pack, including Jerry, when I had a desperate nature call. There were only a few seconds to decide that no, I wasn’t going off into the bushes, there wasn’t time to make up any ground. I went to the bathroom literally at mid-stride. My churning legs doubled as manure spreaders. Suddenly there wasn’t a pack any more. I finished strong, then ran even better to get away from the finish-line crowd before they knew why they were smelling a malfunctioning sewer system.

In retrospect, the string of high-intensity races had left me fit but not truly healthy. Throughout the winter I would have stubborn cramps and running-induced diarrhea, a likely light flareup of colitis. I wouldn’t end up in the hospital, or be driven to anemia or exhaustion, but there would always be that warning when I was overraced. To each his own limitations.

1976

As third year dragged on, I was more and more ready for it to be over. The end, though, would be long in coming. We knew that following graduation there would be a grinding, six-week review in preparation for the bar exam. I was living in an apartment near the law school now, saving on commute time but giving no break from city life. The running was still a release, but less of a social outlet because my irritable bowel deflected me from seeking running partners. With the break in the racing, the condition slowly improved, and by Patriot’s Day I was mostly back to normal. The Boy’s Club race produced a top-10 finish again, although my time was off a minute from the previous year. Although 1976 was an “inferno” year at Boston, the heat didn’t make its way up to Portland and didn’t provide an excuse. It was as if I and my racing rivals each knew his place, and everyone just decided to go a little easier.

I was very sparing of the races that spring. The fuel would have to go into the brain instead of the legs for a change. In May I did a farewell race on the Falmouth loop on a hot day, joined by a couple
of classmates including Judd Esty-Kendall, blowing out the mental cobwebs, but racing wasn’t on my mind. Graduation wasn’t either, because that was almost a meaningless occasion. The Bar Exam was the only 800-pound gorilla in town. In June I wouldn’t be returning to the cool Downeast coast. Instead, there was a hot, sticky apartment, a hot, sticky classroom, and an unending videotape session on the intricacies of the multistate exam.

The running on those hot evenings was almost unconscious, just part of the warp of the stressful existence I was living, the third lap of the mile that simply had to be run. I knew that not only the preparation, but the exam itself, was an endurance event. Two days long, the exam featured seven hours of essay questions the first day and the seven-hour multistate the second day. I may have missed many group-study sessions with my running, but now I could pull out my trump card.

Eventually we all needed a break, for the exam wasn’t until late July. I headed home for the Fourth of July holiday. I wanted to run the Perry-to-Eastport, after all, to defend my title, or at least show up. It turned out that the break from racing had left my legs full of run. Billy Pike and a summer transplant from Oregon quickly separated themselves from the pack, but I stayed close, even thinking I could catch them until Antone’s hill. They were still abreast heading into Eastport village, but then Billy kicked down the hill to the win. I was a minute back, but satisfied that my 38:24 was the best I could have done. It would be my best-ever run there in 15 tries.

There would be no more races before the exam, although in Portland a week before the big day I ran onto the track behind the Portland Expo and was joined by a Boston area runner, Ron Drogin, for what was an exceedingly “refreshing” 10 miles. The more intense the studying, the more I needed to move about, both during and after. My most productive thoughts occurred when I was alone and pacing, not a good recipe for a study group.

Finally the exam came, and the first day, as we expected, was draining. Each of the seven Bar examiners had chosen an essay question from their own field of expertise, and we would be hit by four in the morning, three in the afternoon. It was small comfort that I knew two of the examiners, “Pappy” Bradford in Taxation and Francis Brown in Ethics. The rumor was that one of the examiners would pose the Unanswerable Question, to rattle our cages and trim down our test scores. This year the High Executioner was the Constitutional Law examiner, who plunked his McGuffin down upon us just before lunchtime. Over the lunch break we sat on the outside steps, glassy-eyed and despairing, scarcely daring to talk to each other for fear that the other person Got It. The afternoon session went a little better, aided by the fact that the questions had a point, but we knew we had been through a wringer.

I would not have the second day be a repeat of the first. For one thing, the multistate was multiple choice, good news for an old SAT veteran. For another, I was wearing my running shorts and shoes to the exam room. As the morning session broke up for an hour lunch break, I pulled off my shirt and took off for a quick 3 miles down at the Expo track. It had the desired effect; I was relaxed and protected from the chatter which always reveals the foolish mistakes one has made. It also had the side effect of leaving my classmates awestruck, although I suspect the act would not raise an eyebrow now.

When the exam was over, I sighed not from relief but from resignation to fate. I would not find out the results for nearly two months. But what to do in the meantime? In Runner’s World I had read about a running camp in southwestern Utah being run by college coach Rich Heywood, meeting in August near Cedar Breaks National Monument. At first I hesitated; why not wait until I knew I was admitted to the bar, when I could really celebrate? But the camp would not be open in late September. Finally I decided that after such an ordeal as the Bar Exam, success and failure are both imposters; life is to be celebrated, when it presents itself. As soon as I moved home, I was on a plane to Salt Lake City, to catch a bus to the town of Parowan, Utah, where Rich would pick me up.

The flight from Boston to Salt Lake was a bit testy because I got stuck in the smoking section, and I had some breathing to catch up on as I boarded the bus. Fortunately, Utah was already a
Mormon-induced non-smoking area. As the bus traveled through smaller cities, towns and hamlets, people got off the bus until finally, near the end, only the bus driver and I remained aboard. Suddenly he said that he was hearing a funny sound, he was going out to check the tires for a minute. I peeked out the window to see him crouching by the front right tire, stealing a smoke. He hadn’t even dared to ask me if he could.

Parowan was already 5,500 feet above sea level, and the drive to the camp headquarters was another 7 miles of nearly continuous uphill. Base camp was a group of condominiums at 9,600 feet, in the Brian Head ski area. Outside the door was another climb of 800 feet to a plateau at 10,400 feet, with a nearby summit trail that crested at over 11,000 feet. If I couldn’t breathe now, smoking would not be to blame.

Whether through luck or plain ignorance, I never suffered from any form of altitude sickness. There was no doubt that the running was slower. After breakfast and an easy stretching/yoga session, we would usually chug our way up to the plateau and ignore our watches along the way. On the plateau there was a measured 3-mile course called the ‘blue line’ which I time-trialed exactly once during my stay (18 minutes flat), but everything else was done on perceived effort. Even without a watch, some of the effort was impressive. One day we were driven down to Parowan to run what was called “Parowan to Summit”. I found out, fortunately, that Summit was a town, not the peak of Brian Head, and the course was mostly flat. The altitude-seasoned veterans, including a marathoner, John Freemuth, and a Marine, Bruce Gove, reveling in the rich oxygen 5,000 feet below their accustomed trails, took off at a blistering pace. Bruce said he never raced. He didn’t have to, with his training pace. 14 miles later I was ready to return to the stratosphere where I could slow down.

At such altitude, I found I could increase the training volume without fatigue. My oxygen-uptake system was put to the test, but at a pace where the muscles and joints were not stressed. The first week I ran 80 miles; the second week, 90. On one slow, timeless run I made it to the summit of Brian Head, over 11,000 feet, and drank in the red, tawny vistas of the true West, feeling like a sourdough.

Near the end of my stay, Hal Higdon and his son came in from Indiana. Kevin Higdon was a 9:23 2-miler, under his dad’s protective wing while he took in some serious training. Somehow, for reasons lost to memory, Hal irritated Freemuth and some of the other locals, most likely for being a little too goal-oriented and citified for the time and place. I decided to offer my services to Hal by volunteering to teach him the local customs, to tell him about the locals’ complaints. In my mellow state of mind, it didn’t occur that such meddling wouldn’t be appreciated. In any case, Hal Higdon is the only runner known to the outside world that I vexed, all to satisfy my urge to belong to the inner club.

On my first week back in Maine I ran my first 100-mile week since the spring before my first Boston Marathon. The air was rich, heavy and soupy. I had lined up another marathon, in Shelburne, Nova Scotia. The race itself was small and intimate, with perhaps 40 runners. Despite the lack of company, I did hook up for several miles with a gray-haired man who, when he found out I had just taken the bar exam, pumped me for a bit of advice about his impending divorce. Finding out that I couldn’t be of much use, especially in a foreign country, he easily moved on, but he reinforced my idea that people in the midst of relationship upheavals are dangerous competitors in a race. I managed a sixth-place finish in 2:48, a personal best.

In late September I finally found out I had passed the Bar exam. At the end of the month I would officially become a lawyer, theoretically capable of solving any problem in the mind of man. The years would finally cure me of that notion, but at that time, sitting down with my first clients, being entrusted with their future, I was terrified. I had one last race effort that fall, a 1:13:28 at the Portland Midi-marathon, but once again the overracing bug, aggravated by my new responsibilities, caused my colitis to flare up. For nearly the entire month of October, I took a break from running.

On one cool, crisp early November morning,
I rose early enough to run 4 miles. There was no solemn resolution for me to be a morning runner; first it was one day, then another. The afternoons at the office were crowded and quickly dark, but since my night life was nonexistent, it was a simple matter to go to bed early enough for the sunrise runs. I never considered myself a morning person, and didn’t even drink coffee for a boost, nor did I have any companions to prod me out the door. What attracted me out the most was the chance to gather treasure. If a man’s wealth is measured by the number of sunrises he has seen, when the earth is new and the day is all opportunity and no regret, I was well on my way to my first million.

1977

Many years earlier, Coach Sabe had said, “A real runner runs alone.”

Despite the peace and beauty of the morning runs, I was finding out why he said that. Through prep school, college and law school, I always had a group to run with. I had never considered how much easier it is to let others choose the time and place for a run, but also the pace. The easy groupthink of the past was now replaced by constant, stark binary decisionmaking... fast or slow... sweat or shorts... hills or flats? At least in the lonely downeast winter, I didn’t have to make decisions about the surface. I could have any surface I wanted, as long as it was pavement. In the years to come I would eagerly embrace any running companion I could find, but for this early homecoming, before the running boom had even faintly echoed east of Ellsworth, I would toughen my mind along with the body.

My first marker of my conditioning was a traveling opportunity. I traveled to Washington, D.C. to visit an acquaintance I had met at the Nova Scotia Marathon and ran a respectable 57:04 at the Cherry Blossom 10-miler. Next came the Boys’ Club race on Patriot’s Day in Portland. My time this year was 26:33, not my fastest, but good enough for a fifth place finish. Still, I was going to be smart enough not to go on a racing tear. Two races a month maximum, I decided, and if only one was available, that was fine. No sense stressing out, I thought. Then I got a call.

Dick Goodie from Portland was on the line. He was organizing a 24-hour relay at the Portland Stadium for late May, to raise pledges for the American Cancer Society, and I was invited to be one of the ten runners in the event. Each runner would run a mile at a time and keep the baton going continuously. I took the bait without even considering how different this would be from any effort I had ever done.

Even though there was only one team on the track, it would be semi-serious, an attempt to set the Maine 24-hour relay record, which figured not to be too difficult since no one knew what the old record was. Our team was a mixture of the old, the untested young, with a few hotshots. One of the hotshots was Jim Doane, a recent winner of the Boys’ Club race. Dick Goodie would run it, and Robin Emery, but I soon found my attention totally focused on two of the relay runners, the runner passing to me and the runner I was passing to. I would take the baton from a Bowdoin sophomore, Joan Benoit, and pass it to Dr. Bob Scholl of Kennebunkport.

First of all, I had to judge what pace to run. I guessed that with nearly an hour’s rest between each mile, I should be able to maintain a pace I had just done for 10 miles straight, about 5:40 to 5:45 a mile. The relay began in the morning, with high clouds and fairly pleasant temperatures, and the first few miles passed pleasantly enough. Doane was knocking off sub-5 minute miles, and would do so until the wee hours of the next morning, but I was paying more attention to the fact that Joan Benoit was matching my times. If she was calling my bet and raising a nickel, I would have to ratchet the pace down to 5:35. As the clouds thickened and dusk fell, I was getting more annoyed at the little snippet who was making me hurt so much. The personal dynamics were predictable; each recipient of the baton was becoming more annoyed at the passer, who in turn was becoming more grateful to the person who was their temporary salvation. During the night it began to rain, and after our miles we would crawl into our sleeping bags under a canopy tent and withdraw into our cramped, shivering private worlds. After a moment of fitful sleep, we would be awakened by the relay organizers, who were
becoming more circumspect, more apologetic as time passed. I wasn't comparing times any more, just heaving myself around the track by the faint light of lanterns on the inside rail.

By the time dawn broke the rain had stopped but I was developing cramps of a different kind, requiring a bathroom trip under the grandstand before taking the baton. Then, by tacit agreement, after everyone had completed 23 legs and there was a little less than an hour to go, we called it quits. It just didn't seem fair to make some go the extra mile while others, because of the relay sequence, would get a pass. Since I was fifth in order, and certain to have to run again, I had no argument with that.

I was pretty much wiped out for the next month. At Perry to Eastport I finished in over 41 minutes, but still hung onto third place. A month later I found out there was going to be a race in Machias, a 5-miler held in connection with a new “Arts and Crafts Festival” held in mid-August. The race director was a zealous, if not knowledgeable, running convert named Ernie Hutchinson who the previous year had organized a “5-mile” race that I finished in just over 23 minutes. A new course had been chosen, and the distance would be legitimate, with brutal hills. The morning of the race I was still dithering whether to run it. What if there were no water stops, or my Eastport race was a sign of my return to staleness? I finally went because it was just too close, and I would have people to run with. As luck would have it, I was pushed just hard enough to win the first Machias Blueberry Run in 27:45. Two weeks later I was able to run the Bangor Labor Day race in 27:43. At the finish around the Bass Park oval, I saw the torch passing to a new generation. Bob Hillgrove was running about 75 yards in front of me on the backstretch when he disgustedly walked off the track. As I approached the finish, a Bucksport High sophomore named Jerry Clapper blew by in the last second.

In Runner’s World magazine I noticed a promotion from a San Francisco travel agency to go to the Athens Marathon in October. As if by design, I also received a letter from a Bowdoin fraternity brother, Steve Kern, now an Army dentist based in Heidelberg, saying he was running the race. While I was not exactly at the pivot point of entering a life of servitude, I knew that I would never again be as free to run this race when I was still capable of doing it. So I put my scarce monetary resources into a deposit for the trip, trusting that my memory bank, at least, would be full.

For a tuneup I ran the Portland Midi-marathon, where I finished fourth in 1:15 in oppressive heat. To my surprise, I then received a telephone call from Vern Putney, sports editor of the Portland Press Herald, requesting an interview and approval for an article about my running in Athens. Certainly, I said. I have decided that I cannot hold the public’s attention for my allotted 15 minutes of fame, but I can dole it out a minute at a time.

So it was that I was at JFK Airport one October afternoon, with hours to kill before the flight to Athens. There was nothing to do but take a run, and no place on the planet, save a war zone, less conducive for it. I had assumed that there would be lockers to stow my carry-on bag and clothes, but all the lockers had been removed; the authorities were afraid of bombs, in the days when terrorists carried the Marxist label. Okay, what could I afford to have stolen? Carrying my ID’s, tickets, passport, money and traveler’s checks, I left everything else stuffed behind a chair in a remote corridor and was out the door.

That was less than half the battle. Airports, after all, are cattle-pens not designed for anyone to go against the flow. There are travel lanes for cars, and then there are concrete barriers, with nothing between. Every inch of asphalt not taken by cars was the territory of shuttle-buses and service vehicles, ever jealous of this interloper. After 3 ½ miles of trying to march by a different drummer, but being interrupted by occasional New York welcomes and in fear of being picked up by Transit Authority cops, enough was enough. I slipped back into the terminal.

After a change of clothes (yes, luck favors the stupid and my stuff was still there), I headed to the gate and soon met up with a short, muscular, tattooed old man who was heading my way. He was none other than Walt Stack, patriarch of the Dolphin South End Road Runners in San Franci-
co, a product of the tough-end Depression-era city docks, a hod-carrier turned union enforcer who wasn’t satisfied with becoming an IWW socialist; he became a full-blooded communist. After a lifetime of facing up to authority he was now reveling in his dotage, continuing to mouth off at an age when that was considered acceptable, telling wild stories of his youth, and ogling unashamedly at women of all ages. With no bricks to carry he now spent his energies on triathlon workouts of prodigious length and time, “starting slow and tapering off” to use his motto, swimming though the cold currents of San Francisco Bay. He was now the magnet for the small band of runners gathering for the odyssey of a lifetime.

By the time we reached Athens all our blood had settled to our hips from sitting so long. Before the flight even began, we had to wait two hours while the airline hunted down 110 kosher meals for its Orthodox passengers. The flight was long, but the night was short as we met the rising sun as we made landfall over Spain. When we finally landed, our small, sore, jetlagged group headed for a nearby track to loosen up. One of the group, Fritz Zimmerman, claimed to have run a 3:57 mile. Well, that beats even my dream PR mile all to hell, I thought, but why hadn’t I heard of him?

At least the race would come upon us quickly, before the jetlag caught up, and what little training we did was only to adjust to the time zone. There wasn’t even time before the race to do most of the touristy stuff, although we did visit the Acropolis. On the morning of the third day we had our group photo, boarded the bus, and headed to the village of Marathon.

I met Steve Kern at the starting line. In a field of about 850 runners, it seemed that half of them were Army types. In the hubbub I saw a Volkswagen pull up and three Ethiopian runners climb out. The organizers handed us olive branches and told us the tradition of casting them upon the earthen mound about two kilometers up the road where the Athenian casualties of the battle of Marathon were buried.

The weather, for mid-October, was ideal, clear and cool, with a light tailwind. We were told to expect heat and smog, but it amused the local gods to give us a break. I found myself moving up through the pack, even passing Fritz just after passing the tomb-site. At the water stops I focused on taking only water, not the suspicious-looking orange Kool-Aid offered as the alternative. As often happens when a race is run well, I have little memory of the critical middle stages, although there was a gradual uphill near 30 kilometers which only increased my confidence because nobody was passing me.

The final six miles was a gradual downhill along a major thoroughfare to the center of the city and the Olympic Stadium built for the 1896 games. I was, amazingly, still full of run. With a mile to go I passed another American, Kim Nutter, who had been sucked in, and then spat out, by the lead pack. I found out later that at the 1976 Boston he had beaten the man who had led the race the first 20 miles. Through this chain I was pretty good; I had danced with a girl who had danced with the Prince of Wales. Or something like that.

There was no cheering crowd at the finish, just the satisfaction of a race run well, and a 2:41:37 PR for 22nd place, and first American finisher, the perfect combination of a fine effort and plain dumb luck. That night our little group had a celebration dinner at the hotel. Walt Stack, who had plugged through to a 4-hour finish, well fortified with his usual Canadian Club and an assortment of table wines, was the master of ceremonies. At first there was the usual sharing of stories and fables of our races, but paradise cannot last forever, and somehow politics entered the conversation. One did not trade political views lightly with Walt. Suddenly we found ourselves in the crossfire of a bitter exchange between Walt and Ed Barvick, a 2:57 finisher who would have preferred a mellower subject, over the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Our merry little band broke up in confusion, but hurt feeling would have to await another day, we were too damn tired.

The next day I met up with Steve Kern, beaming with pride that my name (in Cyrillic text) had made the evening paper among the finishing results, and we booked passage on a ship to Mykonos. In my post-race fog I would preserve only fragments of my time there; Steve, who ran
a much saner race, sampled the night life among the locals whose only English was, "Good people, Mykonos!" I was put to the limit merely to find our inn through the narrow, twisting, blind alley. Eventually I recovered enough to run up the barren, rocky hillside through the strong winds, and then restore myself with hot, fresh anise bread, made of wheat that had been milled by the same winds that had just milled me.

Steve had to return to his base in Heidelberg, but I still had more vacation time, so I took a flight to Zurich, and a train to Heidelberg where Steve picked me up in his BMW motorcycle. We went to his apartment in the tiny hamlet of Gauangeloch, midway between the cities of Heidelberg and Manheim. Steve had to work so my options were limited, set as I was by no transportation or language skills. My only way around was on foot, but I found that there was still much to see. In a loop of ten miles I could pass through a beech forest, through fields, past vineyards and pasture, and through four fair-sized towns, gaining a sense of the compactness of the European countryside. The compactness was also revealed in the living quarters; there were four apartment units, and shared bathrooms, in a building the size of an average American home.

On my final weekend Steve was finally free to show me around, and he decided to take me to a local vineyard where some friends were conducting the harvest. All the grapes were clipped by hand and dumped into buckets. A sturdy worker with a large basket strapped to his back would then pass down the rows, and the pickers would toss in their buckets of grapes. When the back-basket was full (with nearly 200 pounds), he would dump the load in a trailer behind a tractor which took the grapes to the hopper where the grapes were crushed and the juice analyzed for sugar content. One session with the backpack was enough for me; I could walk with it, but was unable to dump the load without losing my balance. After a hearty midday meal, I went for a run, if for no other reason than to show my hosts that I wasn’t really a wuss after all.

When I returned from vacation, it seemed that there had been enough adventure in it to share, so I decided to write about it. I wrote a piece about the Athens race and sent it to Rick Bayko of Yankee Runner magazine, and a longer travelogue article which I sent to Rick Krause at Maine Running. As the year came to an end I had the pleasure of seeing my writing published and I realized that here was something I would gladly do for free, a good thing indeed because I was doing it for free.

1978

In her Christmas message at the end of a tumultuous year in the House of Windsor, Queen Elizabeth described it as annus horriblis. It seems fitting to offer this as the description for this year. And yet, it gave me a glimpse of the finest that humanity has to offer.

In February, I traveled to Hampden to run in one of Skip Howard’s alfresco races he had set up to keep the Bangor-area runners sharp in the off-season. Near the end of the 5-mile race, I felt a twinge in my back, which started to radiate into my leg. Driving home, I stopped at a convenience store to pick up a drink and found I could barely walk. For the next two weeks I was laid up with sciatica. My training dropped off even as I returned to the roads, since I was fearful that it would return. When it did, after a long spell, it would never again be as bad.

I was recovered enough to run Boys’ Club, but I had an off day, finishing over 28 minutes. I could see Ralph Thomas ahead of me, having an off day himself, but not so far off as to let me pass. I remembered the saying of another Portland runner, Denny Morrill, who said, “In my dreams, I have beaten Deke Talbot, but not even in my dreams have I beaten Ralph Thomas.” Rick Krause ran an article on me in his magazine, expressing incredibility that I trained at 7:20 mile pace (maybe up Cadillac Mountain, he commented), because I always finished so close to him at the Boys’ Club race. This year, he acknowledged, I was a little off; maybe now he would understand that my 7:20’s were, if anything, an exaggeration.

I returned to form at the Perry-to-Eastport race, finishing third in 39:26, and ran a 2:48 Paul Bunyan marathon. The next race of any conse-
sequence would be the Machias Blueberry run, especially where I was the defending champion. Mike Worcester, the Machias town recreation director (who was starting to train with me, the first local to do so), was sending out race entry blanks, so we figured to have more than the 20 competitors who had run with me the previous year. One of them would be my brother Jim, and I gave him running tips as we toured the course on a cool evening three days before the race.

Race day was bright and warm, and to my surprise, 80 runners showed up. As a morning runner, I knew I was not terribly well acclimated, so I ran conservatively, finishing second in 29:09 behind Harold Hatch. Seeing that Mike was a bit overwhelmed with the number of finishers, I offered to help at the finish line with the race tabulation. I did not pay attention at first when word spread that a runner had collapsed on the course.

Unknown to me, my brother Jim, a heavyset 230-pounder, had taken salt tablets that morning and paid no attention to his water intake. He had never had any experience running in heat, or in the excitement of a race. A little less than a mile from the finish, he had collapsed from heat stroke. He was now at the local hospital, fighting for his life. After visiting him at the hospital, I was told to go home, there was nothing more for me to do.

At the time, I had a little cottage of my own in Cutler, not far from my parents’ summer place, and I went there and stood in the cold waters of Little Machias Bay, as if the chill could counteract the heat which was ravaging my brother’s brain. Jim was being transferred to Bangor, and my parents went with him, but fortunately I was not left alone. Geri, my on-again off-again girlfriend, was on vacation and came to be with me. This was not a romantic interlude; it was friendship, and survival. In my heart, I knew that Geri, although fond of me, really loved my father, who was everything her own father had failed to be, but she was there to protect our family in its time of need.

Jim was taken off life support on the early afternoon the next day. During the next week, in the time of shiva, my parent’s house was full of visitors, and soap-operatic interludes, but I was mercifully allowed to escape the madness and stay at our little cottage at Hadley Lake, where I could run, and swim, and think. Curiously, though, not to cry. It was not a matter of holding back tears. I would cry, on the tenth anniversary of that day, after an acquaintance dropped off an unexpected bag of early corn. The crying then was deep, and primal, totally unstoppable. And that was all. Ultimately, it is silly to treat crying as a social convention which should be done at certain times.

I never was sure how far the news had traveled in the running community that there had been a heat-related death, and that it was my brother. In my town, many people thought that I had died; after all, I was the runner. That fall, though, I composed a piece in Rick Krause’s magazine about Jim, about the need to give immediate first aid to runners in distress, and to educate them about the dangers of heat. Having done all I could do for him, I returned to the races.

In the fall, Geri invited me to Ithaca, New York, where she was running an extension program at Cornell, where I ran a 2:51 hilly marathon and a curious estimate-your-time race where stopwatches were not allowed. It was a crapshoot, since it was partly cross-country and on the hillsides overlooking Lake Cayuga. Although I took a wrong turn and had to retrace my steps, my estimate was conservative and I finished only a second off, “winning” the thing.

Dan Rankin of Boothbay Harbor had once owned an island in Cutler, within sight of my parent’s cottage, and now he had set up a low key series of races called the Snowball series, and that December he hosted an 8-miler. I went down with nothing particular in mind, just to continue the therapy that running offered. After a few easy miles in a pack I found myself picking up the pace with Ralph Thomas. As we approached the finish Ralph eased up almost imperceptibly, letting me go through first. It was as though he wanted me to believe that I had beaten him straight up. Yes, Denny, in my dreams I have beaten Ralph Thomas.

1979

For the past two years, I had run in the colors of the Central Maine Striders, simply because it
was the only organized club within reasonable traveling distance. Rick Krause had started the club with a group from Waterville, and now it had branched out to Bangor, counting among its members Fred Judkins, now the hottest runner in eastern Maine. There was now a merry Bangor band that included Skip Howard, Bob Booker and Larry and Gary Allen. Part of my salvation, the realization that running was not the cause of my tragedy but my means of coming to terms with it, lay in the fellowship that they provided.

Not only did the people provide me shelter, but there was a place too. The ex-Olympian I remembered from my Bowdoin days, Jeff Gallo-way, had founded a chain of running stores named Phidippides, and Bob Booker and the Allens were managing one of the stores in downtown Bangor, near the intersection of State and Central Streets. In retrospect, they all acknowledged that it was a good way to lose money and have fun doing it. I undoubtedly contributed my share of wasted time and good-natured gossip to the overall effort. I would on occasion buy some piece of gear and even a pair of running shoes there, but that was not the point. I could count on Maine Running to give upcoming race information, but if I wanted to know about a group run and potluck dinner at Skip Howard’s camp at Toddy Pond, Phidippides was the place to go.

This was to be my year of socializing, not competition. The races, with one exception, were forgettable. I decided that when the Blueberry race came around in August, I would not hide from it; I ran the race, but more importantly, hosted a lobster-and-clam feed immediately afterwards that I called the Bash, at my little camp at Little Machias Bay in Cutler. I invited all the attendees at the Bash to tent out on my lawn and go for an easy run over the Cutler hills the next day. A surprising number of them gave me the gift of staying over and keeping me company, and without any fanfare I passed over a hard anniversary in relative comfort.

The race not to be forgotten was coming up, and it would involve fellowship of a different kind. After a 2:56 marathon on relatively modest training at Casco Bay, I was drawn into a salty, roughcut band who were organizing a 50-mile race in Brunswick for that November. This band of misfits, led by John Noyes, had taken part in a 50-mile race at Lake Waramaug, Connecticut, in May. Cheerleader of the merry band was Phil Soule, who coached football, wrestling and track at Bowdoin, the classic hyperactive mesomorph whose favorite saying was, “we blew their doors off!” There was also Bill Gayton, a USM professor a world apart from the professorial stereotype, a tough, tobacco-chewing old codpiece. In such a group the personalities were too crowded to have one of one’s own.

I had purchased and broken in a pair of Nike Tailwinds especially for this race, and slogged through a pair of 20-milers, not really with preparation in mind...how could one prepare?...but to settle my mind. Very clearly it was an adventure, not a race.

The night before the event, there was a potluck supper and a meet-and-greet session at Bill Gayton’s place in Topsham. It was not billed as an initiation ceremony, but it quickly took on the character. One of the first-timers, Rock E. Green, was a standout runner to go along with his standout name, and he became the pledge that the veterans rode the hardest. Phil Soule led the razz patrol. He chided Rock, and the rest of us, with,

“You want to show off, go ahead, but then you’re gonna have a LONG DAY CHARLES!”

The race itself consisted of 12 ¼ loops of a 4-mile course on the outskirts of Brunswick. At the finish line we parked our cars and laid everything out as if in preparation for a Polar expedition; extra shoes and socks, drinks, snacks, bandages, Vaseline, aspirin, an occasional Bible open to an inspirational passage. We newcomers, of course, overpacked, and our cars would be a wild clutter before the thing was done.

The veterans looked on with weary resignation as we newcomers pretended to settle into our starting blocks at the start of the race; that joke was old. There was no start command, just a mutual agreement to get on with the thing.

At the end of the year I would write another
article for Maine Running about the race, once again because I thought there was a story to tell, but much of what I wrote is lost to my memory. The danger in any written history is that once we record it, we don’t think we have to remember it. I do remember changing out of my Tailwinds after only 10 miles, feeling a slight discomfort in my toes and realizing how much worse things would get if I ignored any signs. Fortunately, there were no acute distress signals, just a slowly accumulating marrow-deep weariness as the grayness of the day slowly worked into our innards. There was one inspiration to help me along, a proverb coined by Olympian Don Kardong during his first 50-miler: It never always gets worse. The endorphins would kick in from time to time, temporarily taking us out of the bleak of our existence. And occasionally, when the endorphins weren’t there, the landmarks were: the marathon, and 40 miles....blessed 40 miles, like cresting Heartbreak Hill, knowing that there was only a garden-variety workout left to go, and no way to stop me now! At the end of this grim event the finishers would receive a Maine Rowdies Popeye tank-top, and I lusted after that article of clothing as I never did for any race award before or since.

On the final loop I cleared the last patch of woods, thinking to myself that I was really out of the woods, and saw the precious line of cars waiting at the finish. There was no rush to get there, just the pleasure of seeing the end approach. My finish of 7 hours and 3 minutes was supposedly the equivalent of a three-hour marathon, but in truth it could not be equated with anything else, because nothing else would have earned the Popeye shirt.

Anyone who says he runs only for its own sake, and not for external reward, is either a fool or a liar.

1980

With the new decade, a recovered psyche, and the confidence that only running a 50-miler can give, I was ready for something new. My training partner, Mike Worcester, fresh off a mistaken marriage, was predictably ready for some good training. I was ready to do some traveling, and Mike was ready for his first marathon, so we decided to go to the Bermuda Marathon at the end of January. After some bone-chilling 16-milers (I didn’t see fit to run any 20’s this time), I figured that my ultra experience would carry me through, and pronounced myself ready. This wasn’t an extended vacation, just a four-day out-and-back junket, and I would travel light, not only in luggage but in expectations.

As we disembarked in Bermuda, Mike and I were greeted by dazzling, 70-degree sunshine, the best weather of the trip. We went to the Elbow Beach Hotel, which was also race headquarters, and that night went to a dinner which featured George Sheehan, giving his pep talk calling on us to go a little berserk in the thick of the race, a pep talk I am sure he had delivered innumerable times, but with the desired effect. I wasn’t at a peak, but I would get my money’s worth.

Race weekend was actually two races, a 10-K on Saturday followed by the marathon the next day. We rented scooters, a risky proposition since traffic went in the left-hand lane. I discovered this was not a huge problem on the straightaways, but I sweated the intersections because I couldn’t keep straight where the traffic would be coming from. Still, my only mishap came at a parking space. I let go of the handlebars while the back wheel was still spinning, and the scooter fell sideways, the back wheel skinning my shins on its way by.

The race was a creditable 2:50 effort, where I found myself beaten by several women. I had not noticed this happening to me since that long-ago race at New Bedford before the 1973 Boston. Even at Boston that year I had beaten out Jackie Hansen, the first woman. I had of course heard of the spectacular trajectory of women’s running over the years, especially with Joan Benoit’s win at Boston the previous year, and here was the proof. Also, at about mile 17 I was passed by the familiar bearded figure of Amby Burfoot. At the time I figured he was just out for a jog, he was so much better than I, but over the years I realized that it still takes some respectable effort for anyone to run well under 3 hours. Mike ran a 3:31 and had nothing but awe for the difficulty of it.
The “so much better than I” comparison, though, was certainly true.

As spring broke, I picked up a new training partner from my home town, Phil Stuart, a former all-sports athlete at Machias High who had put on considerable weight but had always remained an active fat man, playing and refereeing countless baseball and basketball games, and now he had shed the excess poundage and sported a 32-inch waist. During his weight-shedding phase he had been a middle-of-the-pack runner, but suddenly at the Goldsmith’s 14-miler in Old Town he blew by me at 4 miles and there was nothing I could do. I reminded myself that I had been sucked into the world of the Maine Rowdies again, and that I was preparing for another 50-miler. I had even run another marathon in early March, the Iceberg Marathon in Bangor, purely as a training exercise.

I was footloose and taking full advantage of it, and would be traveling to the granddaddy of ultras, the Lake Waramaug 50-mile and 100-K races at New Preston, Connecticut, near the New York border. This race would not be pure survival; there was even a time goal, to beat seven hours. In early May our dissolute band climbed into a van in Brunswick and began a seven-hour trek (on top of the 3 1/2 hours I had already spent traveling to join the group). During the trip down I was mesmerized by the foam coffee cup, which served as spittoon for the tobacco-dippers in our midst. I had a horrifying fear of being gripped by an uncontrollable urge to pick up the cup and swallow its contents. My stomach stayed on alert throughout the trip.

Home base for the race was the Inn at Lake Waramaug, one of the dowager-empress Grand Hotels which had sprung up late the previous century, catering to wealthy businessmen who would drop their families off for the summer and visit on the weekends. The summerlong visitors were gone, and at this time before gentrified baby boomers gave new life to the big hotels, they were struggling, reduced to catering to such a disreputable crowd as we were. One can imagine the pain of an elderly concierge, remembering the fine tips he had received from the captains of industry and possibly even a former President, seeing runners urinating in the hedges.

Despite a warm night before the race, the day itself was cool and pleasant, and I met my goal and then some, running a 6:37 and finishing second among our group only to Bill Gayton, who ran a 6:33 and then happily announced that our group would patronize the Casino Bar and Grill, a biker establishment that we had passed during the race six times (the course being nearly an 8-mile loop). First we watched the finish of the 100-K, which Max White won with a surge that carried him under 7 hours (making my own goal seem rather humble, to break that mark in a race more than 12 miles shorter). The Casino turned out to be much more appropriate for us than the Inn. Sadly, the Casino would burn to the ground before our next trip to Lake Waramaug two years later.

I was now making regular contributions to Maine Running, which now was being edited by Bob Booker, with help from the rest of the Phidippides gang in Bangor. I no longer needed some extraterrestrial story to convince me that my stories were worth telling. The only point was my enjoyment in writing them. I wrote about Bermuda, and Lake Waramaug, becoming an aerobic travel correspondent.

In mid-May I went to Boston to visit Geri. I was in a paradoxical situation; fully enjoying my freedom, but aware that the pleasures of such freedom would not last for long. I was almost ready to settle down, and I needed to scout the territory, to see if she and I had a future. In the terms of Soviet newspeak, we had a “frank and comradely discussion”. I allowed that the next time we met, I might be married, and she said the same, but it certainly wouldn’t be to each other. Now I was truly free, and ready to enjoy the side effect of a breakup for myself.

The training runs were now steady and hard, 10 miles a whack, through the summer. The fall season was now the goal. Phil Stuart joined right in, giving no quarter, and regularly blasting the hills. The summer season would have to take second billing, I was gunning for the fall. After the Tour du Lac 10-miler at Bucksport, I somehow gained election as President of the Central Maine Striders. From my distant perspective I cannot tell why.
The core runners were from either Waterville or Bangor; why pick a representative from the outpost of Machias, which could hardly be called the Central of anything? And as later events would prove, I was no Abe Lincoln, and could not hold the union together.

This was not my concern at the time. My objective was to get the maximum benefit out of the 65 to 70 miles a week I calculated I could handle without breaking down. I've often wondered why my running was so good during this time of upheaval, and the answer is provided during periods of contentment, when the conditioning drops off. A breakup is clearly a time of pain, but not the pain of a real calamity. Instead of causing despair, it increases the threshold of discomfort, making endorphin-generating pain a genuine pleasure. Since there is no pleasure, but only gloomy reflection, in indolence, one does not indulge in it. I was prodded to action; there was no other place to go.

I began recording my workouts in greater detail than ever before. Before the previous Christmas I had found the Jim Fixx Running Logbook and Calendar, and hinted heavily until it landed in my stocking. I recorded the places and the pacing, and the names of the courses. Phil Stuart gave a name to everyone and everything, and the courses took on names of certain bodily functions which were brought on by the long runs. Phil also intensified our anaerobic workouts by cracking jokes on the steepest of hills. One day, as we traveled up Nashville Canyon (so named for a local country-western singer who lived there), Phil quipped, "There goes Mutt Hatt, looking like someone set his face on fire and then beat it out with a shovel."

When the time came to travel again, Phil and I had hooked up with Bob Booker, Steve Dexter and Kevin Dyer to form a State of Maine team to compete in the P.E.I. Roadrunners marathon in mid-September. The race began near the Anne-of-Green-Gables house at Cavendish on the North Shore of Prince Edward Island, and crossed over the island to downtown Charlottetown. Phil turned out to be a great companion for anyone traveling on a budget. For one thing, he always camped; there was no point spending good money on a motel. For another, he thought nothing of driving 500 miles at a stretch. We easily made the trip inside of a day and pitched our tents a day early to rest up.

The first five miles of that race were perfectly flat, following the red beaches along the North Shore, before turning inland at Brackley Beach and heading for the village of Rustico. Very quickly we were on a roller-coaster of hills and valleys as we fought against the inland contours instead of following them. The eventual winner, a slow starter, didn't pass me until mile 8, not that I was anywhere near the front, and proceeded to chew up everyone else on the hills. Still, I maintained well enough to finish sixth in 2:43, second only to Steve Dexter in our Maine group. Almost before I caught my breath, Phil was finishing his first marathon in 2:45. Our Maine team won the provincial award for the best team placement, and we won a plaque which, if anyone is interested, still adorns my little trophy collection in my office.

In early October the Autumn Gold 20-kilometer race in Ellsworth was the site of the Maine Club Championship, and there were actually about four teams there to contest for it. My 1:12 time was good for 12th place, good enough for me but not good enough to score for the team. I was after bigger game; a crack at my marathon PR at Casco Bay.

I had not done particularly well there the year before but had been able to break three hours with a lackluster effort, and the course seemed quite manageable. Phil wasn't running there, so I hitched up with Bob Booker for the trip down. I gave Bob my latest article on the P.E.I. marathon (he could use it as filler if nothing else), and at the motel we rather insensitively joked about the life expectancy of the clerk, a red-faced man with a grating smoker's cough.

The weather for the race was perfect; sunny, cool, with a light wind. The course itself was not flat, but the uphills were short and steep while the downhill were more gradual. At mile 10 I saw Phil Soule cheering me on, an act of rare sportsmanship given that I had referred to him as "slow but ebullient" in my article on the 50-miler the previous fall. I maintained a 6-minute mile pace until mile 15, and wasn't falling behind it much
after that. At mile 22 I passed Ken Flanders, realizing that he was a casualty of the early lead pace, but encouraging him to pick up with me and help me break 2:40. No response. Oh well, take your scalps as you find them. In the last mile, running through Deering Oaks Park, I passed Mike Westphal, and in Portland Stadium at the very end I passed Conrad Walton; and if God ever hand-crafted a runner, it was Connie Walton. I now had a 2:40:08 PR, and three scalps I had never taken before or would since. The Rowdy Ultra 50-mile was three weeks away, and I needed to pack my bluster and bravado along with my shoes.

Since the 1980 version of the Rowdy Ultra stands out as my personal best achievement, the shoes deserve an honorable mention; the ideal conditioning, the glorious weather, the perfect competition would have been all to naught without them. For my money, the New Balance 620 was the best production-line shoe ever made; durable, stable, light and comfortable, and its passing from the scene left me wandering in the wilderness for 10 years trying to find its equal. The 620’s were my partners in this great endeavor.

My lead-up to the race is not what I would recommend to anyone; a 20-mile run, followed the next day by a 36-minute 10K and a session in a human-performance lab to check my oxygen uptake and body-fat percentage. My numbers were not that impressive. A 59-plus VO2 max could be explained by the post-race fatigue…but a 15.2% body fat measurement in the water tank? Over 10 years later in much poorer shape my fat index was just over 9%. But at that earlier time the energy stored in my muscles was half glycogen, half bullshit, and the gas-bubbles in the latter material must have thrown off the measurement.

The final ingredient to the perfect race is the competition, which can never be planned or predicted. In a 50-mile one does not expect anything more than passing acquaintance with one’s competitors. Even close competitors rally and fade at different points along the course; it is sheer folly to hope for anything else. Yet on this day the defending champion, John a/k/a Lawson Noyes and I were so evenly matched that we ran in near perfect lockstep for over 40 miles. We were still head-to-head at 46 miles when I began my finishing kick, a surge that gave me a 40-yard lead and a feeling of terror that pushed me to a 6:04:58 finish, with Noyes less than 20 seconds back. I hadn’t won the race; Rock Green had run a 5:55; but somehow I felt that Lawson and I were the race. Hobbling back to the Bowdoin campus nearby, I entered the same showers where 10 years earlier Mark, Wayne and I had celebrated our heroic 2-mile, and now as then, my second-place finish was far more satisfying than any win I have ever had.

My year was now properly crowned, and it was time to celebrate. The Central Maine Striders had a year-end banquet, and as President I would sit back and enjoy the fruits. There was even a belly-dancer for entertainment to make me feel like an Oriental potentate. But while this modern-day Belshazzar was wining and dining, a palace coup was erupting in another room; the Bangor contingent of the Striders was plotting a secession, and before I even knew there was a grievance, the Downeast Striders were being formed. Far from resisting the move, I would join them once my term of office was up.

Reduced to commoner status once again, I started to grow a beard to prepare for winter. In that humble state, I didn’t know what to think when a friend of my mother told me that her daughter was home from Ohio State for Christmas and maybe we could get together. Someone else would have met for coffee at the local luncheonette, as a non-threatening first meeting. My idea was to run 4 miles to Machias, go for an easy jog around town, and then run back home. I wouldn’t have to worry about an awkward parting. It comes as no surprise that Nancy Manchester’s first sight of me didn’t set off fireworks. Still, we talked amiably enough, and coming up a steep pitch near her home she hung gamely on, refusing to walk in my presence, determined to meet me on my terms. It would be a long time before I would realize this was my future wife, and she would run more than a mile in my shoes until I saw it.

1981

Phil Stuart was now in the time of his glory, and I was along for the ride. I now had an apart-
ment in Machias within short driving distance of his, and every morning we would meet for a brisk ten, longer on weekends, on one occasion running a 22-miler to the Point of Maine, an absolute dead-end in Machiasport and back. After our workouts he would sometimes run at noon and he always had a couple of basketball games to referee at night. In this year of excesses, when I would average over 10 miles a day, he would pile on 500 miles more, and considered that a paltry feat because Bill Rodgers ran 7,200 miles that year.

There was nothing to distract me from my one-dimensional focus. Nancy wasn't yet a romantic attachment; in any case, she was out in Columbus grinding through a foreign-language education doctoral program, and I was sure she wasn't thinking of me. In any case, Phil met all my social needs. His work carried him throughout the county, he knew everyone, and retained every morsel of gossip that passed his ears, and he was more than happy to share it. Sometimes it was a challenge to decipher the nicknames he gave to people in order to figure out who he was talking about, but once the code was broken, the names would make perfect sense. The tangled affairs and romances that he told about made me more comfortable in my monklike state.

There was, as well, the Bangor crowd, including Mike Gaige, Bob Booker, Skip Howard, and Larry and Gary Allen, and the new Downeast Striders, with fancy maroon uniforms; and although Phidippides was no more, the Bangor group had established a new hangout at 24 Parkview Avenue. It wasn't long before Booker had convinced ten of us to rent a van and travel to the Shamrock Marathon, to be held in March in Virginia Beach. Besides the Bangor crew and one game woman, Barbara Hamaluk, there were three of us from the true Down East; Phil, me, and Steve Carle, who had suddenly reappeared at the Paul Bunyan Marathon the previous summer. I had hunted Steve down to earn my first road race win back in 1972, but never could seem to challenge him again. He would periodically disappear, show up at a race to joke around the rear of the pack, and suddenly go on an untouchable tear. He was on one now.

Our plan was simple. There was no need to spend more than one night in a motel room; that would be the night before the race. We would drive night and day, taking turns, dozing, joking and farting in each other's faces. We were suitably relaxed when we arrived.

The race itself was nearly pancake-flat, winding through the beachfront and some nearby military installations, but the challenge was provided by a ferocious wind. At mile 15, rounding a corner in the lee of a hotel, I was hit broadside and knocked to the ground, earning a fine road rash. Steve led our band with a fine 2:29; Phil ran 2:40 and actually looked a little tired at the end. I finished in 2:45, just ahead of Larry Allen. We proceeded back to the hotel and ate like Tartars, faced with the certain knowledge that we had a 1,300 mile trip ahead of us with no beds, or proper meals, until we were home. Somehow we survived, after one nervous episode. The van had a double gastank; when the gas gauge read empty, it was a comforting act to flip the switch, opening the other tank, and watch the gas gauge move to full. In the dark of the night I had the privilege of flipping the switch to see this happen. After a long stretch, I turned the wheel over to Booker, in my stupor not telling him about tapping the second tank. So it was that at 5 in the morning, on a remote stretch on Interstate 84, Bob flipped the switch and nothing happened. Not only we, but our conveyance, was running on fumes for an anxious hour until we found a station.

After returning home, and recording our Virginia adventures for Maine Running, I was ready to head out again for Boston, and this time Phil was coming with me. Not only would I have the benefit of his driving, but his sister had an apartment near Boston; we would have not only a place to sleep, but a home-cooked meal that we wouldn't have to walk for two miles to eat. I hadn't forgotten the misadventures of my first Boston trip, and felt far better prepared.

Phil and I would have to walk the two extra miles anyway, the morning of the race, simply to get to Hopkinton. All roads to the start were now effectively shut off to all but the approved buses. The morning was cool and raw, about 45 degrees, threatening rain. To stay warm, we had to wear an
extra layer which we could dispose of during the race, and garbage bags with head-holes were the fashion of the day. The crowd at the start was now so immense that the start had to be changed, from charming little Hayden Rowe to Route 133, but even with runners 50 abreast, it seemed an eternity before the mass ahead of us began to move.

In the swarming mass of 9,000 runners, I encountered an illusion not experienced before or since; the running swarm was bobbing up and down, but standing still, while the crowds on either side, as if on conveyor belts, were being moved backwards. The queerness of this sensation helped me hold back the pace a little, but I still went through 10 miles in just under 60 minutes. The heat, at least this day, would not be a factor, and the inevitable slowdown would not be spectacular. In Wellesley I had to endure the glass-shattering screams of the fresh-faced coeds, made much worse by the fact that there were several women runners near me. Approaching the finish, I saw Larry Allen leaning off a lamppost on Commonwealth Avenue, cheering me on, saying I looked good, and lying about it. Later he told the truth about our running form.

“When the leaders went by,” he said, “I thought that is how I would look. But when you guys come in, I realized how pitiful our form is.”

My 2:45:17 would have to stand as my best Boston effort, and once again I suffered the post-race retribution that only Boston can deliver. Later I heard the roars as Johnny Kelley finished his 50th Boston Marathon, and wondered if he would still hear the cheers as he endured his 50th recuperation.

Another article went out to Maine Running, trying to tie together my experiences in my two Boston races, and I even tried to wax a little philosophical. Surely by now, I thought, people must be tiring of the ways I described my pains, and the only thing more boring would be to describe my triumphs. This self-directed complaining was a subtle clue that perhaps marathoning was no longer as interesting to me, that I had passed that particular apogee. When I next picked up the pen, it would be for a work of fiction.

If I was slightly off my peak, I could appreciate others enjoying theirs. Gary Cochrane had run a 2:35 Boston, and that fall would establish the new Rowdy Ultra 50-mile record with a 5:47. Phil was on a tear, culminating with a 2:32 marathon in Oromocto, New Brunswick, in October. And nobody was doing any better than Mike Gaige. Whether through envy or innocent mistake, I nearly derailed him once. The night before the Machias Blueberry Run, he stopped by my place and I fed him one of my homemade pizzas, fashioned with my hand-rolled whole wheat dough, liberally sprinkled with bran. The next day he won the race in a course-record 25:11, and promptly, in his own words, “*** my brains out.” The cramps had undoubtedly kept him from breaking 25 minutes. The next year he would rectify that, avoiding my food and running 24:45, a record which has never been approached since.

As fall approached I realized that Nancy would be going back to Ohio State soon, and I ought to explore the possibilities by asking her on a date. Instead of going out to eat, I would invite her to try one of my pizzas, although this time I had sense enough to hold the bran. We enjoyed ourselves, but I had the nagging sense that with the 70-plus miles a week I was putting on the roads, there was not a great deal left for social interaction, and I wasn’t much of a prize. After running Boston, I had mercifully shaved off my beard, and thrown away the winter cap with the two eye-holes that had made me such a ridiculous specter the previous winter, but I still had a shambler manner which was only exaggerated by my training-induced fatigue. I did not see myself among many of my contemporaries with growing families who somehow maintained heavy training and racing schedules, with their loyal spouses and obedient children playing along, seeming to enjoy the weekends centered on the races. I was attracted to strong-minded, independent women who might have a contrary idea about how to spend their free time. As my mind played with the idea of settling down, I knew I was not ready, and decided to play out the “running-is-life” string. The Rowdies were happy to take me in.
1982

Barney Beal may have been a figment of my imagination, but he was a fine companion, at least for a while.

I had begun what I thought would be a short story in Maine Running, told in the first person by Ephraim Faulkingham, a 1930’s-era Beals islander who had crafted a pair of shoes with deerskin tops and replaceable soles for his best friend, Barney Beal, who had shown a particular talent for running. The friend had quite a name to live up to. “Long Barney” Beal is a part-historical, part-mythological figure of Downeast lore through whom every present-day Beals islander claims descent. “Long Barney” was nearly 7 feet tall and over 250 pounds of brawn, but the Barney of my story was a small, slender man, struggling with the weight of his name. He played sports with abandon, becoming Ephraim’s friend after breaking his leg sliding into second base to prevent a double-play. As the story unfolded, Barney would rub shoulders with the legends of the day, such as Andrew Sockalexis, Clarence Demar, Johnny Kelley and Tarzan Brown. I even brought in Ralph Thomas as an impressionable nine-year old watching Barney and his shoes undergoing a curing ceremony at the Penobscot reservation on Indian Island. At first, the story flowed, and I took to asking Barney where he was going next. The story would appear in installments in successive months in the magazine, and I had it on good authority that Amby Burfoot, now at Runner’s World, had read it and loved it.

But I wasn’t ready to assume the mantle of the Joe Henderson of the East. I had some sort of ending in mind, where Barney would retire from running because of some world-changing event. In the opening installment Ephraim had told us that Barney’s shoes were somewhere far out on the mud-tide. I had in mind that perhaps Barney would end up witnessing the first A-bomb test out in the New Mexico desert while out on a running-induced trance with some members of the Tarahumara tribe, but how would he get out there? Shortly after Barney’s third-place finish at the 1944 Boston Marathon, where he had made a remarkable comeback, either I or my narrator lost track of him and didn’t pick up the trail again. I might as well blame the Rowdies.

In fact, the Rowdies had two events planned for me. First, we would visit Lake Waramaug again. Unfortunately, this turned out to be a bit of a bust, personally. This time the weather stayed hot, and I quickly lost my trim after 50 kilometers, finally giving up the ghost at mile 38. Bill Flahive also DNF’d, and Gary Cochrane picked up a DNS (did not start). Gary did, however, contribute to the one bright light of the trip, pacing Kim Beaulieu through the last 20 miles of a fine 6:44 effort.

The second leg of the Rowdy biathlon was running a 20-mile leg as part of a pledge run from Fort Kent to Kittery, a 400-mile relay which would cover two days. 20 runners were selected, and the elect among them would travel to the County Headquarters was at the University of Maine at Presque Isle for the first night of the relay. The Rowdies had checked out the local watering-holes, and quickly found that Keddy’s Motor Inn was within short walking distance of the campus.

However, I was unable to partake, because my leg of the relay would begin north of Caribou in the middle of the night, after starting in Fort Kent at 6 the previous evening. Bill Flahive, the organizer of the relay, took the first leg from Fort Kent and passed off to Bill Gayton, who had the brutal section through Guerrette and Cross Lake on Route 161. I would have the fourth leg, starting south of New Sweden and crossing from Route 161 onto Route 1 south through Caribou, Mars Hill and Presque Isle. Starting at about 1 in the morning I was a bit apprehensive about keeping up the 7-minute mile pace required, but it turned out not to be bad; I was followed by a chase vehicle with headlights marking the road, and went through enough quiet towns to have a change of scenery.

As I made my way back to campus, Phil Soule was merrily chanting the old Dick Curless ballad, A Tombstone Every Mile, as he eagerly prepared for his leg down Route 1A through the legendary Haynesville woods, which would come at early light that morning. Maybe another year I would have the privilege of running that section, but I had honor enough for now. I now had the titles of U.R. (Ultra Rowdy) and C.R. (County Rowdy) to add to my curriculum vitae, if I ever became...
pompous enough to call it that.

As somewhat of an afterthought, I decided to run the Maine Coast Marathon from Kennebunk to Biddeford, and to drop by my 10th reunion at Bowdoin the same weekend. I should have known better than to divide my loyalties so, and the result was lackluster on both accounts. The night before the race I tented out on the University of New England campus in Biddeford, in a pouring rain, on a site that turned out to be far from level. Fitful sleep or not, I boarded the bus to the start, and ran an uninspired race. At the halfway point Kim Beaulieu caught me and asked if I was OK, and I had to excuse myself to go into the woods. After about mile 20, Carlton Mendell caught up and I pulled in with him, watching his smooth, efficient stride. He explained that 30 years of running had convinced him to keep his feet close to the ground, but they never stayed there long. At least I was there to hear the cheers as Carlton and I finished in 3:07, as the loudspeaker called out that he was 63. From my vantage point now, with nearly a decade to go before reaching that age, I am more impressed with a marathon at any speed, let alone a 3:07.

Despite my Rowdy affiliations, Nancy and I had stayed in touch, and I agreed to fly out to Columbus to help her pack and drive home for the summer. On the way home, we took a detour to visit the Knoxville, Tennessee “World’s Fair”, which turned out to be an oversized carnival put together by some local businessmen/hucksters, but at least some of the carnival rides were fun, including a tilt-a-whirl called the Enterprise with a deejay calling to us to clap our hands. As the fair shut down for the night, though, Nancy and I could run to a nearby stadium less than two miles away to watch the TAC national championships, and we caught the finish of the women’s 10,000 meters in the humid night.

Throughout the summer, Nancy and I were still leading parallel lives; she staying at her parents’ secluded lake cottage studying for her general examinations in her graduate program, I dividing time between the Rowdies and the Downeast Striders in Bangor. For a short while, the Bangor crowd had the upper hand; Bangor was closer, they had the run of the house at 24 Parkview Avenue where I could crash, and Benjamin’s, the local watering-hole, was also the sponsor of a major 10-K race planned for the fall. I was certainly not acting like a prize catch. Whatever good intentions I had towards Nancy in my own mind, I still had some acting-out to do, in the fashion of so many in our generation who lacked war, famine or other intervening crises to shed us of our late adolescence. The Rowdies would take me on this last hurrah.

In October, after giving it my best shot at the Benjamin’s 10-K (a 35:00.7), I placed myself in the care of the Rowdies once again, and showed up at the Rowdy Ultra with indifferent distance training and a conflicted soul, but knowing I had to finish the thing. Through injury, fatigue, schedule conflicts or plain bad luck, everyone but Gary Cochrane and I had failed to finish at least one of the first three Rowdy races. In the rain of the previous year Gary had sparkled in his prime and I had slogged, but still managed to dip under 6:40. This year there was no prospect of maintaining an 8-minute pace, but Gary was recovering from injury and I might be the only human able to keep the streak going for the fourth consecutive year. My preparations going in were sartorial in nature. I borrowed a black Bowdoin singlet to accompany my black running-shorts and hand crafted my own race number, a number 4 with the phrase, “The Black Jack Attack.” The race itself was predictably humbling, made even more so by the presence of Bernd Heinrich, naturalist, author and ultrarunner supreme, who blistered a 5:22 and lapped me not once, but twice, on the four-mile loop. I still took heart, late in the run, with the news that Mr. Cochrane was no longer on the course, and plugged through to a 7:03 finish, matching my maiden effort in the race.

But the Rowdies were not through with me. In the post-race celebration I realized that I had not truly given the race its due, because of my caution in making sure I finished. Surely I should have broken seven hours. Bill Gayton convinced me, over a Rolling Rock, that I should join the crew for another 50-miler to be held in North Adams, Massachusetts, in only three weeks. So it was that I found myself pathetically limping, shuffling and
cursing 48 miles into the North Adams race, refusing rides from well-meaning motorists, finally finishing, to my eternal relief, in 6:52. We stayed the night at a Holiday Inn which was the host site of the race, but even its indoor pool and hot tub gave no relief to the aches. The next morning, partly for pain relief and partly just to say I had done it, I drank a Haffenreffer before first light.

When I returned home, the ultras were truly out of my system but so was everything else; I was a burned-out shell. Nancy had to confront the fact that she had one sorry-ass boyfriend. She commiserated with her close college friend who herself was closing the door on a long-term but revealingly dead-end relationship. But whether Nancy knew it or not, there was still hope, and the chance for growth, in me. I was, literally and figuratively, coming home from the far reaches of the Rowdy domain. On my way back, I would stop at the Parkview house in Bangor, and Nancy would have a chance to meet me there.

1983

Most people have had the experience; they go to a party which turns out to be The Party. The biorhythms, the mix of people, the surroundings, the time of day, conspire to create a memorable scene. The proof of The Party comes with the futile attempts in the future to reproduce it.

The fact that Nancy and I went to the New Year's party at Parkview at all was an accident of schedule. She was finishing Christmas break and wanted to head back to Columbus on New Year's to pick up her teacher's assistant duties. She probably would have felt more comfortable at the time having her parents drive her to the airport in Bangor, but I was available, and just insistent enough, for her to go with me. If worst came to worst, she could call me an insufferable jerk to my face and be done with me for good. Since the flight was early the next day, it made sense to go up the night before, and for something to do, we could go check out my friends at Parkview.

No sooner had we entered the door before Larry and Gary Allen took us aside and sprayed blue dye in our hair. They had extra makeshift costumes to get us quickly in the mood. After the stroke of midnight we all disrobed to the extent that law and nature would allow, and went running through the neighborhood. There was nothing particularly madcap about our activities, but for once I could be relaxed, unguarded, and social. Apparently Nancy decided that there was something redeemable about my personality. She took away one other reminder of the party; the blue dye did not wash out with the first shampoo, but left her hair with a slightly sickly green tinge for the next several days back at Ohio State.

I wasn't ready to disavow the Rowdies yet—when I tried to break away, they pulled me back in—but in the flush of first romance I decided to reduce my time with them. No more long weekends to Lake Waramaug, but this was not the Rowdies' fault. I just decided that the 50-milers had beaten me up enough. The Rowdies had now moved on to the Rowdy Ultimate, a 24-hour run on the Bowdoin track, and they sent me an entry blank, which I ignored, because I was moving in the opposite direction. From now on, and for a short time at that, marathons would be long enough. I went back to the Maine Coast marathon in May and ran a 2:52, far down the finish list and no match for Phil Stuart's 2:37, but at least some redemption for the previous year. At a party at Lawson Noyes' house after the race, I received an honorary Rowdies racing shirt, in respect for my two 50-milers the previous fall. The irony would be that I would only wear the Rowdies shirt in candy-ass short races that they disdained.

I rejoined the County Rowdy relay team the next month, running a 20-mile leg south of Presque Isle through rolling farmland, under orders to greet the cows in the first light of the new day. The highlight of the trip, though, was Phil Soule's leg. Instead of doing Haynesville Woods this year, Phil had a leg along the banks of the Penobscot through Passadumkeag and Milford. He had gotten word that the water was high, and brought along a two-man canoe. The Penobscot obediently overflowed its banks and Phil, to his glee, paddled the entire leg, in many places directly over the roads he was supposed to run.

The Downeast running scene was beginning to get a little crowded. By now there were about
a dozen residents of Washington County who were capable of running six-minute miles for five miles and up. Phil Stuart and Mike Worcester were there, of course, and were joined by Craig Maker, a former pitcher who had trimmed off a few pounds and seemed to run like a metronome, forever. There were others from Cutler, Jonesport, Calais and Columbia Falls who could buddy up and keep each other fast. The running boom and the baby boom had merged, creating a large pool of thirtysomething athletes feeding off each other, and everyone, from the elites to the age-groupers, were fast, from Greg Meyer, Alberto Salazar and Joanie, to Clive Davies running sub 3-hour marathons at age 70. This peak didn’t last, of course, and I would lead the way down. At least it was a happy decline for me; love gives off its own endorphins, reducing the need for the training effect.

One of the many Bangor-area runners enjoying a surge was Peter Millard, who was good enough to have a shot at qualifying for the Olympic Trials, but first he took a shot at the Blueberry run. He couldn’t match Mike Gage’s stellar effort, but he did run a fine 25:37. I wasn’t running that year, responding to Mike Worcester’s call for volunteers. I was helping with the timing at the finish line when Peter came in. Two of the volunteers, one of whom was Nancy’s sister, were instructed to hold out a ribbon for Peter at the finish, but hadn’t spooked it out enough when he charged downhill to the line. Unable to stop, Peter crashed into her and they fell in a heap, making for a less than flattering finish photo. Mike dispensed with the finish tape after that.

My own racing in the fall was in the Midwest, and Phil Stuart started calling me the “Columbus express”. In October I ran the Columbus Bank One Marathon, finishing in a lackluster 3:03, but since I could stay the whole week after the race with Nancy, my recovery was much easier than usual; I was able to run a 29:30 5-mile in Circleville, Ohio, within the week. Still, I haven’t run a marathon since. Like so many decisions, there was no solemn vow. Life was just giving me other opportunities.

For all the earnestness that I had put into marathoning, there were no consequences for failure beyond the soreness of my own muscles. The larger significance of running would have to be woven into the warp and weft of my life, and now my life mattered to someone else, someone who could shed tears at our parting and to whom running was but a pleasant diversion, never an obsession. Over the years, slowly (first figuratively and then literally) it would come to pass for me as well.

1984

I may not have felt the oppression of George Orwell’s year of reckoning, but Nancy was to be liberated from her private police-state in June, having completed her thesis for her doctoral program. Actually, she noted, the writing of the thesis was far from being the hardest part. There were two brutal challenges which came before: the General examination, two years earlier, testing one’s mastery of the foundations of one’s field; and the proposal, the previous year, when one had to convince the academic advisor that the particular inquiry for one’s thesis was both original and worthwhile. To draw rough parallels, the “General” was long-distance “bottom work”, the proposal was a set of sharpening intervals. The thesis was the race, made easier by the hard preparation. And then you can throw up.

Before Nancy’s graduation I had a stopover in the County with the Rowdies, for another running of the State relay. My leg this time was the next leg south of the previous year, leading into Houlton, and now I had covered sixty miles of County roads without once retracing my steps. If all went well, the next year I would be in line for the leg along Route 2A from Reed Plantation….the famous Haynesville Woods.

First, though, I went to Columbus to celebrate Nancy’s graduation. Naturally, I fit in two races while I was there, both 10-K’s; a hot run at the Troy Strawberry Festival and a somewhat more pleasant race at Zanesville, both in the mid-35 minute range. At this level, I wasn’t winning many age-group awards (although at the time many races were age-grouping the 30 to 39 year olds), but it didn’t matter; even then, I realized that handicapping any adult under age 40 was absurd. The only thing that handicaps a person under 40 is work.
or family commitments, not the limits of muscle, bone, tendons or oxygen uptake. I knew perfectly well that my lack of competitive edge was entirely my own choice.

Nancy was in, for her, a competitive running mode, willingly going out with me for five-mile workouts and once doing 10 with me, but not entirely as an attempt to impress me. Her reasons were entirely practical; she desperately wanted to beat some self-centered woman from a graduate program who on raw talent alone had broken 40 minutes for 5 miles. Nancy disliked the woman so much she never said her name, only her initials, S.C.H. Nancy didn’t get the opportunity to beat her, but the irritation had two beneficial side effects. First, Nancy had the conditioning that a more mellow approach could not have delivered. Second, if I was acting in a boneheaded way, she only had to mention S.C.H. to bring me back into line.

As Nancy and I made the long trek from Columbus to Machias, I had no notion that this was end, or at least a long hiatus, of my life as a traveling runner. I would of course pack my running shoes when I traveled, but no more would I plan my travels around the races. The world would simply have to endure the loss of its aerobic journalist; my interests were simply too close to home now. I realized that making goo-goo eyes at Nancy and a bunch of sweet-talk wouldn’t keep her in Machias. She had just earned a Ph.D. at great personal cost, and the local high schools and the University of Maine at Machias wouldn’t allow for her professional growth. Before she packed her bags for points south and west, I would need to find the courage to bring the M-word up from my heart to my tongue, and the good graces to make sure she said yes.

Of course the running didn’t disappear, but the races were much more local; that year there were three races in Machias alone. One of them was on the fourth of July, where Nancy and I decided to run together. The winner of the race was a virtual unknown to me, Bruce Bridgham from Jonesboro. I had seen him on a few occasions running at a blistering pace on remote roads before I knew who he was. He ran the 4 miles in slightly over 21 minutes, and I now realized that we had a local talent who was running faster than I had at my absolute best. But Phil Stuart, who was now the sports columnist for the Machias Weekly Observer, didn’t feature Bruce’s win. He put in a picture of Nancy and me, the “Columbus Express”, finishing well back in the pack.

After years of 10-mile morning runs, I was scaling back to 7 or 8. Sometimes in the evening I would run a few miles with Nancy, but she also had to see me as a real grownup from time to time, so I couldn’t be in a fog all the time. She signed up to teach French at Washington Academy for the time being, but we both knew this was temporary; it was the position she had held before starting on her doctoral program four years earlier. This was no time for procrastination. Nancy is an early person, punctual to a fault, but I am not. She always marveled at how I always got to the starting line of my races on time, since I was late for everything else. On Christmas Day, as I was struggling to find the right moment to pop the question, Nancy was getting ready to go over to her parents’ house; we had said we would be there by nine o’clock, and that meant not a minute later. Finally with less than five minutes to spare I asked her, and she said yes, promising herself a lifetime of trying to figure out this paradoxical person who could run so fast and move so slowly.

1985

Once Nancy and I decided to marry, we decided not to wait around for warm weather. We decided on a March date, and a small, simple ceremony. Except for my best man, John Woodcock, and Nancy’s maid of honor, Cindy Brady, we had only immediate family present. This was very agreeable from my runner’s perspective. If the point was to get married, we were not going to exhaust ourselves with an overly elaborate warm-up. As for the venue, we stayed inside and didn’t tempt the weather gods. (This may seem logical for March, but Nancy recently presided at a wedding of a friend who insisted on an outdoor wedding in December). Maine weather and elaborate hairdos, no surprise, don’t mix. Although my attitude toward weddings may tend toward the practical, it didn’t descend to the curmudgeonly comment of
Toby Coverdale’s on one such occasion:

“Wedding or wake. Take your pick.”

We spent our honeymoon at Disney World, and that deserves a sidebar of its own. There are two types of people in the world: those who divide people into two categories, and those who don’t. Since I belong in the former category, I divide humankind into the camps of those who insist on the authentic experience, and those who will accept some kitsch. Anyone who goes to Disney World must happily accept the fake, however realistically presented, as the tradeoff for a variety of experiences. In some ways, I was making up for my singleness of the past. Nothing could be more authentic than the pain 48 miles into a 50-miler. The intense preparation and labor needed for an authentic, primal experience ensures that such moments come but rarely, and at great cost. Life, of course, is not long enough to suck the marrow out of everything. But Disney allows one to skim the surface, without preparation, from a space trip one minute to a jungle raft ride the next, packing nothing except a sense of humor. It also teases with the thought that maybe I would do the real thing, one day...

The weather was unseasonably cool during our week in Orlando, staying in the 60’s more often than not, but the running was fine, especially with the many golf courses to run on. For the first time, though, I was vacationing without a race in mind, and since I saw no race signups outside the hotel front door, I didn’t find any to run. And frankly it didn’t matter.

Returning home, I naturally found the races to be of secondary importance. The only race I ran during this period was the Athletic Attic 5-mile in Bangor, where I ran in the middle 28’s, and the only reason I remember it at all was seeing Steve Carle there, newly married himself. Steve was happy at the time, but as the case of Mike Worcester, his first marriage didn’t take. Fortunately, both had much better success the second time around, and now Steve is chasing around four kids who inherited his speed, but one could never predict how things would turn out.

Since my racing was down, so was my mileage, but I wasn’t ready to give up on variety. Phil Stuart obliged by taking me out on some woods trails and roads surprisingly close to Machias, which I had never seen. In the Rand-McNally mental map inside his head he had named them all; Highway to Heaven, Barbery Coast, Hayward Trail, Conception Avenue: the list was endless. Scarcely would there be a new skidder trail before he smelled it out. Now, my road-weary bones could get a rest, but the challenge was still there; the woods trails didn’t skirt the hills, but charged over them.

One example was a hill near Hadley Lake which began at the lake cottage of one Herman Barbery, a retired minister (whose name was affixed to the Barbery Coast), and immediately gained about 200 feet in elevation in less than a quarter-mile. Bruce Bridgham, on the rare occasions when he joined us, could handle it; another was Glen Holyoke, a newcomer to Machias, working at the Key Bank branch in town. The rest of us could simply endure it.

During the summer, Nancy and I spent time at her parents’ cottage at Bog Lake and I had no appetite to run the Blueberry race, or even go to town for the festival. That decision was helped along by the fact that it was pouring rain. Still, we were curious enough to drive down to a vantage-point about a mile and a half from the finish, where we saw Bruce Bridgham rocket by, and then...nothing. Finally, over two minutes later, a tightly bunched pack came by, six runners who could have been covered by a blanket. Later I heard that Bruce had run 25:40, and Mike Worcester had emerged from the mob to grab second place. I could appreciate Mike’s feeling that his second place, under these circumstances, was as good as a win.

In the fall, I heard about a 15-K run being organized in Gardiner, Ralph Thomas’ home town, in his honor. From my Portland days I had carried the indelible image of starting each race with the nagging thought, “Where’s Ralph?” About a half-mile in, I would feel a pressing force behind me, and Ralph would cruise by, now at full speed. I hadn’t forgotten his graciousness either, when he didn’t show that speed at the end of the Boothbay Harbor run. As I mingled in the registration area
on the morning of the race, I experienced another act of graciousness. In the crowd I recognized Joan Samuelson, fresh off her American-record marathon run in Chicago, and Nancy and I moved closer to say hello, when Joan brightened, came over and gave me a hug. Maybe she remembered me as the sap who always was there to take the baton at that infamous 24-hour relay, and associated me with good news, but Nancy was duly impressed.

But Nancy is a smart woman, and that wouldn’t impress her for long. Marital fitness and physical fitness have about the same shelf-life. The work, and the fun of it, stop at the side of the grave.

1986

When I look back through my running logs, trying to recall the events of the time, I am amazed by how little information they contain. There are the distances, interval and overall times, the pair of shoes I wore, and a curt “steady pace” or “good pickup.” In other words, all the information except what would make me want to run in the first place.

The entry of January 1, 1986, says only

“Some good pacing with good crowd, even on icy woods rd.”

I need my memory to break the code, made more difficult because in these days of early married bliss, running was not the only thing on my mind. The term “good crowd” in Machias means that somebody put some effort into organizing a run, and in this case it was Phil Stuart, putting an article in the local paper for a group run and organizational meeting for a revival of the Sunrise County Roadrunners. Dale Lincoln’s club had gone into hibernation over the past few years, and Phil thought it would be nice to get out uniforms and get together occasionally for a run. He thought we could leave it at that. He didn’t count on Michael Carter entering the scene.

Michael Edward “Hurricane” Carter lives by one rule that will also serve as his epitaph: Anything worth doing is worth overdoing. As a 5’6”, 130-pound student at Morse High, he threw himself into football and wrestling with furious abandon, gritting through injury, challenging all comers, doing stunts like snapping off 100 pushups to put some cock-of-the-walk new kid in his place. He was stubborn, persistent, and ferociously loyal to any team, union, or organization that he committed to. When he turned 30 and started noticing a little flab, he made running his beat, immediately training for a marathon. If he was going to join a running club, it was going to mean something; not only uniforms but dues, meetings, picnics, officers, race sponsorships, a bank account, member biographies, even a scholarship account for graduating high school students. Phil shrugged. Mike took over. From that point, Mike also put his mark on every race in the Machias area. He learned all there was to learn about race organization and directing, so that before long it was clearly evident which local races had his help and which did not. He studied the techniques of race certification, got a local surveyor to plot out a half-mile benchmark, and calibrated a Jones counter to certify the distance of every race in the area, painstakingly recording the data and submitting the results. Before long, every race-director-in-name-only who secured Mike’s help was overusing him. I beg not guilty, only because I wasn’t doing any directing.

In fact, as my own world was slowly changing, this would be the last year that I assumed that every day was for running. In the 1986 log I made an entry every day; if I didn’t run, I explained why. The following year, I would make no entry at all. There are no excuses, but there are reasons.

In the summer, I broke ground for my new house in East Machias. Until then, Nancy and I were living in an apartment in Machias next door to Phil’s house. Nothing could be easier, or more predictable, than waking up every morning, going out the door and knowing that Phil would be ready to go. After I moved, I lost this certainty, and besides, I was dealing with the stress of moving into a new, scary situation, dealing with carpenters, electricians, plumbers, masons, bankers, the whole lot. In the end of the 1986 log there is a revealing page where I had hurriedly scribbled notes...pressure treated pole?...cement blocks in cellar or can we go with stovepipe?...get temporary elec. service. Life would intrude even in the space rightfully reserved for running.
The process of paring down my running-space would take time, though, and in the summer and fall I was still benefiting from the quality workouts which had come before. At the Perry-to-Eastport race in 1987 I ran a respectable 41:10, although this was only good enough for seventh place. At Phil’s Cystic Fibrosis race in September I ran 16:59 for 5-K for the newly certified course, while Mike Worcester pulled out the win 13 seconds ahead. At the Benjamin’s 10-K in Bangor I got Mike back, with a 35:21 to his 35:37, but there were increasing signs that my running glory-days were doomed. After the race, instead of partying, I spoke to another runner, Jim Pendergist, who also happened to be an insurance agent who was selling me a disability policy. It was a stretch for me to picture a situation when I’d be too disabled even to practice law-no heavy lifting there-but my mind was reaching out to picture it, instead of thinking of 20-milers.

Benjamin’s was the last race I ran that year. The framing of the house didn’t even start until the end of September, and we were obsessed with the goal of getting closed in before winter came. On occasion I ran not only with Phil but also with Mike Carter, from his house on Bog Lake, on a 10-mile course that he called “turn and burn.” True to form, if Mike ran, he raced, at least part of every workout. The “burn” part would be a nearly 30-minute 5 miler. Why would I need any races after that?

1987

For our new year’s run we had another big group taking off for Machias for the woods trails on Marshfield Ridge, the so-called “Highway to Heaven”, but my log records that we had a “long break” at the midway point. We ran up a woods road and turned left off the road to a little hilltop to regroup, but Bion McFadden, a fine but very nearsighted Master’s runner, didn’t see us turn and went on and on, like the Energizer Bunny. We went back to the main trail, waited for him to retrace his steps, and sent scouts unsuccessfully out to look for him, but finally headed back, hoping that he would find his way out. Apparently he did, running anywhere from 8 to 20 miles, but we never found how far he went.

Since the end of my marathoning days, I had cut back somewhat on my winter running. It made sense to reduce the risk of slips and falls in the icy darkness, now that there was no judgment waiting to find me out at 20 miles, exacting a penalty for every morning spent in bed. There was an unusual amount of snow, and I tried cross-country skiing a few times, but mostly satisfied myself with 20 to 30 miles a week, waiting for better weather. When the better weather came, though, I was on a different tack. In late March, after a week of intermittent heavy, wet snow, part of the roof of our office building collapsed. Fortunately, it did not impact upon the office space itself, but a file storage room was seriously damaged. Now, in addition to the building of our house, Nancy and I faced the prospect of removing tons of debris, settling with the insurance company, and building a new office building. My father and I had also taken on a partner in our law practice, and the new demands pressed heavily on the mental space I needed to take the first running step. Instead of progressing naturally to 45 or 50 miles a week, I would spend weeks at 20 to 25 miles, rallying occasionally to a 40-mile week, and following that up with 15 miles the next.

It was the races which suffered the most. The previous year I had run eight races, far from being a staple on the race scene, but at least showing some interest. This year I ran only two. Since a race on the fourth-of-July weekend was obligatory, I showed up at a race in Jonesport, a low-key 3.3 mile affair where I was over 19 minutes, showing my lack of conditioning. This may have been my only race of the year had it not been for the Warren Bishop Memorial 5-K in Hampden in late November; he was a distant cousin of Nancy’s, and his family encouraged us to race. Despite the fact that my mileage had not really picked up all year, I found my tempo picking up, thanks to the runs with Mike Carter. I managed a 5:22 first mile before oxygen debt caught up, and hung on to a 17:52 finish.

As the year wound down, thanks to Nancy, the plans for our new law office took shape as we were comfortably settling into our new home. With the subsiding of the mental chaos, I found the workouts more fun, even the 10-mile runs with
Mike Carter along a remote stretch from Wesley to Northfield, with an elevation drop from 330 to 170 feet, which we ran in a little over 66 minutes before a satisfying brunch and a turn in the hot tub at Mike and Cathy Carter’s lakeside home.

The 1,260 miles I ran that year represented about half the mileage I had done in years before. In years to come I would not build back up to the mileage that formed the base of a fairly impressive lifetime total. But with Carter’s example, the tempo of my workouts has stayed remarkably similar, at age 55, to what I was doing at age 35. For this phase of my life, this was the way for me not to go quietly into the dark night.

1988

On New Year’s morning, following a run at Carter’s Bog Lake home, a group of us stood around a square hole in the ice, as Glen Holyoke waited at the top of a ladder to descend into the cold, dark water. Stillness reigned as the video cameras ran. Suddenly a jump, an explosion of water like a bass hitting a lure, and Glen leaped out of the water again. Somebody had to be first. Our host, Michael, took things a little slower, descending into the water as if entering his hot tub. They were the only two to go in the water that year, but the next year many of us would follow.

The Carter residence was fast establishing itself as the running center of Washington County. About ten of us had congregated to run the “turn and burn” course, and we hung around for a potluck brunch after the run. Cathy Carter had been indoctrinated by her mother to go to Mass every Sunday and to be a gracious hostess; the churchgoing didn’t take, but the hosting did. She always kept extra food in reserve for the extra people who didn’t bring anything. I was lucky to have Nancy around, to put a check on my inclination to eat more than I brought. Throughout the winter I would occasionally travel to Northfield with Nancy, and Mike and I would charge through a 75-minute 10-miler while Nancy and Cathy plugged their way through a 7 or 8-miler, and we would take a dip in the hot tub and then have bagel sandwiches for Sunday brunch. Almost unconsciously, I was getting interested in racing again.

My first attempt, in March, was Loren Ritchie’s Katahdin Snow Run in early February. The distance was a bit uncertain; Loren promised only icy roads and wind, and no wimps or excuses were allowed. Phil Stuart, newly turned 40, won it; I ran 28:18 for something under 5 miles, but the apparent stinginess of the course was more than compensated for by the generous raffle prizes afterwards. Everyone went up to the awards-table at least twice to pick from the multitude of merchandise. Phil won a fly rod, and both of us took home big sacks of potatoes, which gave handy traction over the rear wheels for the trip home.

For Patriot’s Day Michael, Cathy, Nancy and I all traveled to Portland for the Boys’ Club race. I hadn’t been back there for 10 years, and knew that I was no longer top-10 material. Bruce Bridgham, who had traveled down separately for one of his rare forays out of Jonesboro, was. He chased Bruce Ellis around Back Bay and finished second, in 24:34. I finished 39th in 28:32 and pronounced the race “satisfying”.

I was now running at least one race a month, and staying fairly sharp with Carter’s workouts, but in the midst of this I also had a vicarious experience when Michael gained entry in the Mount Washington Hill Climb. I had sent in an application as well, but not quickly enough to gain admission. As a result, I decided to be Mike’s minder for the latter stages of the race. The only way to do this was to drive the auto road to the summit before the road was closed off, and jog down until I met him. The day before I had sampled the experience by running from village of Jackson up the Thorn Hill Road, forming one of the ramparts on the east side of Mount Washington Valley, slogging through about a thousand feet of vertical until I could see some clouds below me and decided this was enough. In the race I was able to jog down about a mile and a half, passing Dave Dunham and his ilk going the same pace the other way, until I greeted Mike and headed back up. In memory at least, the last sections of Mount Washington are quite pleasant. It was a rare clear day at the top, the ski-trails on nearby Wildcat clearly visible and Maine, Vermont and New York spread-
ing out in the blue-gray haze. Near the summit, the unrelenting pitches give way to a more gradual plateau, broken up only by one quick, steep pitch at the very finish, which I gracefully avoided so as not to be counted among the finishers. The next day my muscles gave me a post-race complaint when I followed Mike around on an 8-miler around the valley.

In previous years, for the fourth of July, I had been a regular at the Perry-to-Eastport race, but this year I decided to try a 5-K race in Cutler. Some of the most enthusiastic runners during these mini-boom times came out of Cutler, a picture-postcard fishing village nestled among some nasty hills. Two of these hills featured prominently in the race, just after 1 and 2 miles, but there was a screaming downhill finish. Phil Stuart had won the race in the inaugural event three years earlier, in a little over 16 minutes, but he was off camping this year, and the field was open. When I got there I saw that my only major competitor was Mike Carter, hardly a pushover considering the hill he had just run. I soon found myself in a somewhat nervous lead, with eyes in the back of my head, enduring the pressure through the hills, but feeling the relief when I crested the last hill en route to the finish. I won in 17:51, 11 seconds ahead of Carter, my first race victory since 1982. Two days later I had recovered enough from the soreness to finish second at a race in Jonesport, stirring the competitive juices in an admittedly small pool.

Throughout the summer, with Carter’s and Phil Stuart’s encouragement, my explorations went deeper into the woods-trails and hills. Sometimes my sense of direction was put to the test as we passed by fork after fork in the trails, diminishing our chances of retracing our steps; but Phil had an uncanny ability to find a loop in any direction, and we would finally end up in a familiar place. Usually this would happen at near the breaking-point of despair, when I couldn't imagine that we were within 7 miles of our starting place; we would suddenly emerge on a highway less that a mile from our destination. Not only my lungs, but my confidence, had a good workout.

After a break in the races (feeling a bias in favor of races I had a chance of winning), I showed up at a 5-miler in Lubec in early September. The race started inside the gates of the West Quoddy Head Lighthouse station, and in a minor snafu the race organizers could only unlock one side of the gate, leaving a bottleneck at the very start of the race. Within 50 yards we would have to funnel through, not more than two at a time. Although I never was particularly swift out of the blocks, I managed to come out the gate in third place, and won in 28:25. Now I wasn’t just a player, I was a damned hometown hero.

I signed up for the Legend’s 10-K in October, figuring not for a high placing but a fast time. It turned out to be perfect, if one didn’t ask too many questions. At mile 5 I was timed in 28:20, but the next mile was a scintillating 4:34. I hit the finish clock in 33:58, satisfied with my effort but knowing better. I immediately figured that the race was a 6-miler, learning later that it was only 5.8 miles due to a compounded measuring error. The Legend’s race was not repeated, probably because the sponsoring establishment didn’t last either, but this seemed a shame. If overgrown boys will pay princely sums to go to a fantasy baseball camp, why not have carefully-doctored fantasy races where, for a modest entry fee, the world’s wannabees can indulge in some fake PR’s?

I was allowed to indulge in one more fantasy before the season was over. Nancy and I were visiting friends in South Paris when we heard about a Thanksgiving race in Bethel, a flat 4 miles out-and-back in the valley below Sunday River ski area. The field was small and cooperative, and I soon established a lead. Fortunately I knew where the turnaround was, because the organizers had not arrived when I got there. After the turn we had the choice of keeping on the main road or taking a short detour across a covered bridge, and at the risk of losing my lead, I took the road less traveled by. There was some crusty snow to hop through, but I kept my lead and increased it once I returned to the main road, winning in 22:56.

Through some luck and judicious choice of races, I had won three times in a single year, a never-equaled feat, and received Phil Stuart’s election as “Sunrise County Roadrunner of the Year” in his “Running Madness” annual report newspaper
column. Well, I thought, Ralph Thomas had a great year when he was 39, too. No wonder Jack Benny never wanted to leave it.

You can envy me now if you want.

1989

It was New Year’s Day at Bog Lake again, and now the hole in the ice was for us. I donned my flag shorts, a fish-shaped hat, some balloons, and Nancy and I, along with a dozen others, after a five-mile run, walked out to the hole to take on the second event of the Carter Cove New Year’s Challenge Triathlon (the third event was stuffing our faces at a potluck dinner). We lined up, numbly waiting as for the guillotine. Mike Carter did the honors in his slow, stately manner; when my turn came, I decided to enter the water slowly as he did, climbing down the ladder instead of jumping off. A burning sensation overtook me as I stepped to the lake bottom, ducked down, and emerged. Once out of the water, having stripped to my shorts, I felt much warmer than before I had gone in. Nancy and Cathy went in and out in a hurry, in full running gear, and rushed inside the house to change, their dripping clothing being ill-suited to the brisk air I was enjoying.

Two weeks later Nancy and I, along with Mike and Cathy Carter, were heading to Los Angeles to visit a friend, Tom Field, who owned the camp next to the Carter’s house. Michael had been out to California less than two months before to visit his brother, dying of AIDS, and start settling his affairs. Losing a brother made me feel close to Mike, although we never discussed it. We would be in California nearly two weeks, my first real traveling vacation since our honeymoon. The first week we stayed in L.A. at Tom’s house in Pasadena, scouting out runs near the Rose Bowl, and running a 10-K race downtown called the Hunger Buster Run on nearly empty streets. Whoever said of Los Angeles, “There’s no there there...” was visiting on a Sunday morning.

The following week Tom drove us up the coast to San Francisco. Along the way we stopped at Malibu, Pismo Beach, Carmel, Monterey, San Simeon...all the fabulous, unaffordable places that create a patchwork tension between public and private ownership. No one can live in a place so extravagantly endowed by nature, without going crazy trying to figure what to do with it, and California had good reason to be the land of Fruits and Nuts. Mike and I ran along a silent highway in Big Sur on the morning before going to San Francisco, muffling our footsteps as if we were running down the aisle at St. Patrick’s Cathedral.

Two days later we entered a 5-miler in the city of Los Altos, part of Silicon Valley before it acquired the name, but already a running hotbed, near the Runner’s World headquarters at Mountain View. It seemed as if everyone there was hungry, fast, unknown and trying to attract a Nike sponsorship with a win in the 23-minute range. The course was a two-loop pancake, and I ran 29:41, far back in the pack. This would be my last 5-mile at under 6-minute pace, though I had no notion at the time.

After Mike met some of his brother’s friends and settled what he could, we traveled east, across the Sierra Nevadas to Reno and Lake Tahoe, to do some skiing and checking out the casinos. There was no mistaking the border; there was Calneva Lodge, the joint once part-owned by Frank Sinatra with its rooms on the California side and the casino on the Nevada side. Before going to a casino in Reno, Tom briefed us on the rules of blackjack and told us to stay on a $20 budget, “for entertainment”. He needn’t have worried about me. My only other gambling experience was back when I was visiting my aunt in Pennsylvania and we went to Brandywine Raceway. I went to the $2 window for each of the 10 races on the card, putting down a show bet each time on the horse that was skipped by Herve Filion, then the best sulky driver in the Northeast. I converted my $20 investment into $30, and promptly put my $10 winnings in a savings account when I got home. My luck at the casino wasn’t so good; I was somewhat taken aback by a surly dealer who was put off by my inexperience, especially when I yelled “Blackjack!” when I was holding twenty.

I could forget the casinos, but the skiing was wonderful. In this altitude I was leaving behind the frozen crud which could so easily take over the slopes at home, and the open-bowl skiing was a
wonder. There were times to come when I wasn’t sure I could still call myself a runner, but other sports, like skiing, would beckon, and give me hope of keeping my sanity.

In June I turned 40, and decided to celebrate by entering Jerry Levine’s big 4 on the 4th race in Bridgton. There was little or no chance for me to break into the age-group awards, but there would be plenty of other chances, and this would certainly be a fast crowd to get a good time. I donned my American-flag shorts for the occasion, the same shorts that helped me win “most patriotic runner” at Jonesport the previous year, but as I was warming up, I got a decidedly different reception. A man drove beside me and started screaming at me about the disrespect I was showing the flag. I scarcely got out, “I mean no disrespect...” when he drove away. In my mind, I was saying, 

“Get over yourself, you damned old fossil. The flag isn’t the body and blood of Christ. Got a problem with the metal plate in your head?”

Still, I didn’t race in the shorts again.

The incident got my juices flowing and I ran 23:27, a fair effort for a warm day, placing me as the 5th master, although a good minute out of the awards. I expected the awards to fall into my lap at the smaller races back home, but there was one problem. The whole damned baby-boom generation had turned 40 along with me.

In August I ran a 5-miler in Calais, on a course which took in much of the loop course across to Canada where I had my only back-to-back wins in the early 70’s. This time, though, I goofed up, misreading the announcement in the paper of the race start. Thinking the race started at 10:00 Eastern time (instead of Atlantic time as posted in the paper), I showed up a little before 9:00 on to see the runners starting to line up. Adrenalin is an interesting substitute for a warmup; not effective, just interesting. The first mile went painfully fast and used up two miles’ worth of energy to overcome the stiffness; by the time I reached the Milltown hills on the New Brunswick side, I was loose but done in. I finished in 30:12, beaten out by two seconds on a long final stretch by another master, and the awards only went one deep. At Phil Stuart’s Cystic Fibrosis 5-K in September, I arrived in plenty of time, warmed up well, and ran a fairly respectable 17:42, but Mike Worcester had turned 40 a month before I did, and he had my number. If I was going to pick up any hardware in a Washington County race I would have to win the age group and no mistake.

There would be another chance that season to earn an award, but not on the roads. In October Nancy and I were visiting our friends Dan and Cindy Mingle in South Paris for a get-together called the Harvest Moon Festival, when we signed up for the Mahoosic Arts Hill Climb at the Sunday River resort. Phil Stuart had been the first of our local band to try mountain racing, at the Sugarloaf Hill Climb the day after the Kingfield 10-K in the mid-80s, and of course there was Carter’s example at Mount Washington the year before. It was pleasant at the base lodge when we started up. Even the pace was gentle, the footing forgiving. A pleasant diversion, that is, until 12 minutes into the thing when suddenly I discovered I was in white-hot agony, able only to focus about 5 feet in front of me, and the footfalls of the nearest runner ahead. A funny thing, though; I didn’t worry about anyone passing me. Anyone behind me was downhill, and downhill didn’t exist; there was only uphill, and the trail. Finally, near the top, everything flattened out, and I was clocked in 26:46 for God-only-knows what distance, probably shy of 3 miles. I waited a bit for Nancy, who was hiking up, but it began to snow at the summit and I was unprotected, so I took the chairlift down. Back at the lodge I discovered that I was second Master to finish, behind Gene Roy, and just ahead of the first woman. I’d never have known whether I finished first or last unless somebody had told me.

Sometimes, after years of eyeing the competition, awards, splits and certified distances, we need to move into a place where no one is telling us how we are doing, where we have only our own pain to tell us if we have filled that minute with sixty seconds of distance run. But can we be forgiven if we still steal a peek at the clock?
1990

I began the year with 49,391 1/2 miles in my log, looking forward to hitting the 50,000 milestone sometime in the summer. It is best, though, not to make plans too far ahead. A down cycle can strike, and usually quietly, and run its course as it damn well pleases.

The Carter Cove Triathlon went off without a hitch, notable only for the sparks of attraction that flew between Chuck Morris and Serena Pottle, two of the guests from Bangor. For most of the month of January, I kept up the mileage, pulled along not only by Mike Carter, but also Tom McKinney, the recreation director at Cutler Navy Base who lived in Machias and was starting to factor into the races. Then an entry in my log on an 8-mile run in late January: “Some bowel discomfort...” and for weeks thereafter, the log is blank. My persistent old crewmate, colitis, had reminded me it was still there, leaving me enough energy to make a living but not to play.

During this enforced hiatus Nancy and I went for a week to visit her parents who had rented a house for three months in Englewood, on Florida’s Gulf Coast. We had already signed up for the Gasparilla 15-K, held in Tampa just after Valentine’s Day. But now, three weeks after having done regular 7- to 8-mile training runs, I couldn’t run a single block. Nancy would have to run it alone; she would have had to do so anyway, because the men and women had different starting zones and didn’t blend together until after a half mile. The day was hot and hazy, but at least the course was flat, and Nancy gritted through it in an hour and a half. I could only envy her honest sweat and fatigue.

This bout with colitis cleared fairly quickly but took down my red blood cell count a few notches, and I could only guess when I’d have enough energy to return to the roads. In early March I tentatively started again with some 3-milers with Nancy, and within about two weeks had proclaimed myself cured. The return to racing, however, laid bare the conditioning I had lost. I returned to the Boys’ Club race on Patriot’s Day and ran 32:02, quite humbling at the time, and two weeks later ran a 19-minute 5-K at the Terry Fox run in Bangor.

I could take off the first mile in close to 5:30, and then the wheels would fall off.

At the end of June I suffered another setback. My left ankle began to turn tender, swollen and painful. At first I associated the swelling with tendonitis, but the local doctor couldn’t pinpoint the problem. Icepacks would temporarily alleviate it, but the running would aggravate it again. I went on a 6-miler with Carter and Dave Alley (a Jonesport fisherman who would win Sunrise County Roadrunner of the year honors), was already falling back when I reached the turnaround in 23 minutes, then took 28 minutes to hobble to the finish. By the end of July the swelling was so severe that I spent a full week flat on my back. Six doctors looked at my condition without ever giving an official diagnosis, but the last doctor finally incised the area and irrigated the mess, and the swelling went down. Apparently my body had gone through an autoimmune reaction which had run its course. The racing season was blown to hell.

On August 1st I wrote in my log, “walking lightly”. How impressive is that, unless you can do nothing else? By mid-August I found I could bike without discomfort; there was no impact, and the aerobic effect seemed the same as running. The week after I started, I biked 113 miles. The need for cross-training had forced me out on roads that I never had time to visit on foot. I even tried a bike race, the 24-mile Tour d’Acadia, in late September, in a rented mountain bike. I finished in the latter section of the pack after taking up in a mini-group with two other older cyclists who easily outdistanced me in the finishing sprint.

I didn’t start running again until early October, and I still kept in a generous mix of bike workouts for variety. I was on the threshold of the 50,000 mile mark, and since there were no races to aim for, I could pick the day for it to happen. Phil Stuart had a writeup in the local paper announcing a run and party on December 2 to mark the big event. A large group turned up, including my Bowdoin friends John Woodcock and John Bradford (who had taken up running for fitness), and we were able to put down 5 miles at 7-minute pace before I broke the ribbon at my driveway.
(after a little steep pitch at the end which I always face in my daily runs).

It was a year best booked in and shut to a close. I had biked about 100 miles further than I had run, and this was not triathlon training. I had logged it in, but not forgotten. There remains a dark bruise above the left ankle which remains to this day, a reminder of what can happen when the body subjects itself to friendly fire.

**1991**

As I went in for my annual dunk through the ice at Bog Lake, I was mulling the possibility that I might become a daddy. Nancy’s doctor soon confirmed it. How radically would my life change? Every damn fool, including me, thinks that they are cutting a new path through the wilderness with a child on the way. At least I wouldn’t have to cut back radically on my training.

Nancy’s parents had rented the house in Florida again this winter, so Nancy and I headed back down in February for another week. After a junket in Key West we headed back to the Gasparilla 15-K run in Tampa again. This time I was healthy enough to run the race, while Nancy, in light of her condition, would walk the 5-K. Before the race, we went to a running expo where I had my body fat measured. It still mystifies me that on my indifferent training I had 9% body fat, as opposed to the 15% I was carrying around when I was in the best shape of my life over ten years earlier.

Race day was cooler and less humid than the previous year. The crowds were noticeably smaller, with 4,500 entrants, down from 8,000 the previous year. The Gulf War had come home; a huge chunk of the field was stationed at McDill Air Force Base, and they had been deployed in Desert Shield. In the race itself I did a workman-like 60:58, a far cry from my 54:02 PR at the distance. But then again, 15-K seems a bit of an odd distance, the neglected stepchild of the nice, round 10-miler.

After Gasparilla I took a long break from racing, skipping over Patriot’s Day entirely, not thinking about it until I got a call from Dale Lincoln. Dale would have something different up his sleeve. He had measured out a 5-miler from the Pleasant Point reservation in Perry into Eastport, a shortened version of the fourth of July race, to be run at night. It was called the Lunar run, and although the moon was full, it was cloudy, leaving only the faintest milky haze to light the way. The one good thing about running in darkness is the illusion of speed, with nothing but the watch (which I couldn’t see) to expose the lie. At the end I was exposed with a 32:50 time, but a run like that is not to be compared to sighted running.

At the end of the winter I had purchased a new mountain bike and now I was preparing to enter one last adventure before my great adventure into fatherhood. I had signed up for the Trek across Maine, a three-day, 185-mile bicycle tour from Bethel to Rockport, scheduled for June. With stalwart training partners Terry Rowden and Andy Patterson, I began putting in 40-mile rides a couple of times a week, mixed with the 7-mile runs.

In the Trek itself, I learned that while running can teach you about terrain, bicycle touring teaches you about geography. The distances traveled on a bike are on a road-map scale. The first day of the ride was the longest mileage-wise, but the most forgiving; first was the long descent from the Sunday River ski area, followed by long flat stretches along the river valleys nearly all the way to Farmington. There were some rolling stretches the next day in the central foothills leading into Waterville, but the distance was only 55 miles. On the third day, a 65-mile leg, we faced the Camden Hills, which left me screaming in frustration, though Alpe d’Huez it was not. I had an up-close and personal view of what a relief map of Maine felt like.

I still had a bad relationship with hills over two weeks later when I entered the Cutler Harbor 5-K on the fourth of July. I hadn’t forgotten the two big hills, but they ambushed me just the same, made worse by the fact that I was in a head-to-head battle for second place. My rival, Bob Abrams, was in his thirties, so I would finally grab my first Master’s win two years after I became eligible; but to let him go would be a copout.

There would be no honorable win without a fight, so I held on over the hills and broke away on the finishing downhill. I took home 5 pounds of lob-
sters and that was my ticket to come back to Cut-
tler in future years, picking up a total of 5 Master’s
wins there. There wasn’t as much motivation to do
well elsewhere.

In August, as Nancy’s time of waiting was
nearly over, I ran my final race, a 5-K on the
Cutler Tower fields. On a large peninsula on Little
Machias Bay lie 26 transmitting towers, each near-
ly 1,000 feet high, in an area denuded of
vegetation, but the gravel road through this
strange metal forest was flat, and fast. The first
downhill mile flew by in 5:36 but I ran out of
steam after that, finishing in 18:56, easily beaten
by Mike Worcester. It didn’t matter.

During the next week it was clear that Nancy
was the true athlete. First, she had the upswing
in energy which can overtake full-term women
as their ordeal is about to begin. She cleaned the
house from top to bottom, then insisted on going
to Bog Lake for a swim. That night it became
clear that neither of us was going to sleep. By 3 in
the morning Nancy was calling her doctor, a laid-
back soul who knew that women generally know
when their time had come, and we were loaded
for the two-hour trip to Blue Hill. Later that day, I
wrote in my log,

“Allison Elizabeth Talbot-
7 lb. 6 oz. Born 8:21 A.M. . . .
A different kind of runner’s high!”

Nancy had an “easy” labor; 8 centimeters di-
lated by the time we reached the hospital, delivery
less than three hours later. In that vein, I could
imagine that a 2:10 marathon is “easy” because it
is over so quickly. The look on her face told me all
I was capable of knowing: the explosive bursts of
effort, the focus on recovery between the unsus-
tainable intervals. How could I know a situation
when the infernal intervals would go on . . . with no
opportunity to quit them . . . until God said it was
quitting time?

At the end of the year, recovering from running
the vacuum cleaner or pacing with little Ally at 3
in the morning, I picked up the training enough to
log exactly 1,000 miles for the year. Big whoop.

In about five hours on the morning of August 30,
1991, Nancy had put my physical accomplish-
ments to shame.

1992

Sooner or later everyone has the bad patch. For
those new to running, in the midst of that six-year
trajectory of improvement from beginnings to true
competitiveness, staleness comes and goes; but the
bad patch I’m talking about is the unending drag
of a lifetime runner in a funk, with no competitive
juices, cringing slightly whenever an acquaintance,
accustomed to the longtime running routes, com-
ments that he hasn’t seen you lately.

True bad patches come without reason. If I
stalled out because of a flareup of colitis, that was
no cause for discouragement, because I would
bounce back when my system settled down. In-
stead, I was faced with a thousand little reasons,
lame excuses really, which couldn’t be shed off
at once.

Most of these pseudo-reasons are long forgot-
ten, except for two. First, there was the shock
of a new family. We were elderly parents; I was
42, Nancy 39. If we were 15 years younger we
would have lobbed the kid off on our parents for
stretches of time and continued our jolly routine,
but old parents don’t take children for granted,
and we kept Ally for ourselves. After her heroic
efforts bringing Ally into the world, Nancy was
very human again, and tired, and needed my help.
Any time spent running was time and energy away
from my primary mission. With guilt motivat-
ing me, I summoned the willpower not to rise at
five-thirty in the morning to hit the roads.

Another reason was my feet. After years of
inattention and rubbing the insoles of countless
shoes, the balls of my feet began callusing. If the
calluses had been uniform, this might have been
a plus, but they developed along predicable hot
spots, feeling like little rocks embedded in my feet.
Walking wasn’t an issue, but the footstrikes after
running about two miles would start a quarrel
inside my shoes.

Still, as summer approached, my tempo picked
up and I had what I would now call good work-
outs, including one day when I ran 7 miles in the
morning and 5 in the afternoon, spurred on by a big running group (if I did 12 miles in a day, it would be two workouts). I had purchased a 3-wheel baby jogger and took out Ally occasionally. This didn’t work out quite as conveniently as I had hoped; Ally wouldn’t doze off or zone out with a toy; she wanted attention, and talking to her wasn’t enough. At the Jonesport 5-K on the 4th of July, I pushed Ally to a 22:35 finish; she complained mightily the first mile, but did settle down; she won the award for first girl under 10. I suppose I should have admitted assisting her, but there was nobody else in her age category.

Right after the fourth my training tailed off again, with no reason given. I had forgotten the reason for having a log was not just to crunch numbers; or maybe I just didn’t have the energy to fill anything else in. There was a clue, though; at the end of a goose-egg week in late July appears the comment, “lots of ladder work, sanding, painting.” My house had barged in on my life again.

When our house was first built, we had colorless bleaching oil put on our tongue-and-groove cedar siding, to keep a natural finish. Unfortunately, the nails used on the siding had started to bleed rust. We called the carpenters back to put gray caulk over the nail-holes, in preparation for covering with gray stain. They didn’t countersink the nails, and left big gobs of caulk around the nail-holes. Oh well, maybe the stain would cover everything. Wrong. After our painter had applied a coat of the gray stain on one side of the house, the caulk patches shone through, making a sickly, mottled appearance. Now our house had a case of scabies.

I might have temporized, but Nancy would have none of it. She stopped the painter and we threw ourselves into a mindless, boring job that only homeowners would do, sanding down the entire stained side of the house, as well as sanding off the surplus caulk, countersinking all the nails, and reapplying the caulk in every hole. There was one good side to the whole enterprise; after having labored over every square inch of the house, we truly owned it. The bad side was that now I had to reclaim ownership of my body.

This would take longer than I could imagine. I wasn’t ready, by any means, to confront my conditioning in a race. I went to a 5-miler in Jonesport in October, running 34:16 as a “condition check.” I had no problem admitting that I wasn’t a racer. At what point, though, when the yearly tally is only 537 miles, do I consider that I may not even be a runner?

1993

On New Year’s Day, our intrepid little band had our farewell Carter Cove Triathlon at Mike’s house of Bog Lake. He was under contract to sell it, and had plans to build a place on the coast, at Bucks Harbor. The previous year Nancy had missed the dunk in the ice, but she came this year to join the fun. She dived in while I watched Ally, and vice versa.

But the ennui was still there. I had forgotten the importance of bad races.

When the conditioning is off, there are two choices; either to run bad races or none at all. I had, for the time, chosen the latter. In the short term, avoiding races may be bodily wisdom; in the long term, it is mental stupidity. Bad races can be unparalleled chances to break out of a funk, because there can be no disappointments, no shattered expectations. Sooner or later, simply banging around with a little pain, there comes a race where one’s nonexistent expectations are exceeded, and then there is hope. Hope gives marvelous impetus to training. Upswings, even from the deepest of troughs, remind us that it never always gets worse.

But where can the upswing come from with only two races a year? It certainly would not come in my first attempt. Business partners Tom Saturley and Hymie Gulak had set up a lakefront subdivision between Bog Lake and Fulton Lake in Northfield, which I nicknamed the “Gulak Archipelago”, and they had constructed five miles of new gravel roads throughout the development. They were now sponsoring a 5-mile race along these roads, and since they were clients of mine, I signed up. Carter advised us to wear trainers in the race to keep from getting stone bruises. I never have had sense enough to wear anything but racing flats; I’m carrying around 175 pounds as it is, so why would I want an extra ounce or two?
Fortunately, the flats didn’t hurt, but they didn’t help either. The first mile was barely under 6:30, and I just slowed down, finishing in over 35 minutes. Toward the end I was passed by Kris Larson, an East Machias native who was known to do a lot of walking, but not running. He was about my age, so I wasn’t even the best age-group runner in my own small village.

There is a strange justice in the process of, on the one hand, losing to a lesser runner, and on the other hand, beating a better one. It is a food chain in reverse: Kris Larson beats me on my bad day, I beat Ken Flanders when he’s down, Ken beats Bill Rodgers on his off day; the possibilities are endless. All of us are less than six degrees separated from Olympic gold. And the fact is, in these unexpected losses, we are trying, we just can’t get the body to respond. Our own bad races serve as another runner’s lifeline, their own link to the chain of greatness. The crappy race just doesn’t help us very much.

I didn’t feel ready to tackle the Cutler hills on the fourth of July, so I ran the Jonesport 5-K instead, in 20:39, and then stopped racing altogether. Had I retired? I didn’t know. It had been ten years since my last marathon and now I was wondering if I would ever run another, but that realization had only slowly crept up on me. When I ran my last marathon I had no idea it might be my last. Had racing itself ceased to be fun?

The workouts, though, were still enjoyable. Phil Stuart and Tom McKinney were there for the weekday runs, and occasionally Mike Carter and I would go on the woods trails up in Northfield, even though Mike no longer had his Bog Lake house. He had rented a house between Machias and Whitneyville, waiting for his new home in Bucks Harbor to be built; with all the planning, it would take well over a year. Glen Holyoke would occasionally join me, and one day on the Whitneyville road we surprised two moose less than forty feet away. They ambled into a thick patch of woods, tearing through the heavy growth like bulldozers. One cannot comprehend the power of a couple of 800-pound animals until one hears a sound like that.

Even with no races, there were complaints.

You can always find complaints if you look for them. The calluses were building up on the ball of my right foot again, and I developed some lower back spasms that, along with a groin pull, had me out of action for nearly four weeks. But whether I noticed it or not, the mileage was creeping back up, I was climbing out of the pit. 833 miles for the year was nothing to shout about, but if I was improving in some fashion, I could call myself a runner, however humble.

1994

I was trying every production shoe on the market to make my workouts more comfortable, but the buildup of calluses on the balls of my feet continued; the constant feel of rocks in the shoes, the mental fatigue and the breaking of the stride that it caused. I remembered how, at age 22, I could wear a pair of trainers until the tongues tore off, and I would stick the dismembered tongues in the heel of the shoe and keep going. Well damn, I wasn’t 22 anymore.

My salvation was closer at hand than I realized. Runner’s World, in their annual shoe survey, was suddenly giving high marks to something called the Hersey Custom Shoe, and the company head, Bart Hersey, was a Mainer. The only deterrent was the price; nearly $200.00. However, once the mold and the last were formed to my foot, the shoe could be restored and resoled at a modest expense. Tightfisted as I am, I resisted. Nancy persisted until I relented; she didn’t want to hear my complaints about my feet any more. Besides, I didn’t have boats, snowmobiles or other expensive toys, so why not spend a little? I finally took the trip to the outskirts of Farmington to meet Bart Hersey for a fitting.

Bart Hersey wanted a full impression of my feet, not a mere tracing. A tracing would be interesting enough. My right foot is straight, with a long big toe, about a size 12A; my left foot is wider, shorter, with the big toe angled inward toward the other toes, about a size 10D. But the real problem wasn’t the sizing, it was the calluses, and this is where Bart’s expertise came in handy. After drawing out the shape of the calluses on the mold, he designed a cookie in the shoe, just behind the
ball of the foot, which relieved the pressure on the calluses and reduced the rubbing which was causing them. Then the only agony was the waiting; ten weeks from the fitting to delivery of the shoes. For Bart Hersey was the company, his factory was a small workshed piled high with molds and lasts designed for runners throughout the country.

Bart Hersey was obviously successful, with all the work he wanted, but with a determination not to expand and have the business consume his life. His example is taken up manifold by other cottage-industry artisans who have developed a devoted and loyal clientele, who with their skills have the ultimate job security of having a hundred bosses instead of one. Most of these artisans had begun their craft at the assembly-line; Bart himself had worked for New Balance; but when the factories closed they had the talent and the derring-do to go out on their own. The factories, generations before, had destroyed the old cottage-industries; now, as the factories died, the artisans would rise again from the bones. It would be sweet revenge, except that most of the factory workers wouldn’t have the skills, or the courage, to develop their own businesses. Only those who were following a calling, a vocation for which they were designed, were motivated to keep at it until they could establish their own businesses. Ultimately, the only job security is enjoying what you do. Everything else is vote-pandering, political hot air.

My life was not consumed with waiting for the shoes, for Nancy was nearing the end of her second pregnancy. If Ally’s birth was any indication, things would happen quickly. On a Monday morning in April, we headed to Blue Hill hospital at the first sign of serious contractions, and it was a lucky thing. From the start, Matthew William Talbot wanted to do things faster than his sister. If Ally took five hours of labor to be born, Matt would take three.

Matt was born just before nine in the morning. It did not escape my notice that this was not just a Monday, it was Patriot’s day, Boston Marathon Monday. Later that day there was a perfect, fast race; Cosmas Ndeti set a course record in just over 2:07, and all the following times were impressive. Was this a day-sign for Matt’s future? Fools that we are, it is hard not to place such burdens on our children. Ten years later, Matt enjoys running, sometimes, and is signed up for grammar school cross-country. He won’t likely win any races this year. If the mark of greatness is upon him, it has not begun to show.

I first tried out my new Hersey Customs on July 14. Up to that point, my mileage for the year was significantly down. Symbolically I didn’t run on New Year’s Day, not having any Polar Dip, or other occasion, to draw me out. I had only logged 267 miles to that point of the year. Within a week, I was running in the Herseys exclusively. They were fairly heavy, and it wasn’t as if I was running on clouds, but the little differences they made in my stride pattern started to pay dividends. I wasn’t about to tackle 70-mile weeks, but I could now run over 20 a week easily, and stay up with the local regulars, even Bruce Bridgham when he joined us. In late September, on a flat stretch near my home during a 7-miler, I timed a 5:54 mile, my fastest mile, under any conditions, for about two years. A week later, I ran the Cystic Fibrosis 5-K in Machias, unsuccessfully chasing Tom McKinney but running a very satisfying 19-minute race, staying very close to 6-minute pace the whole way. So I did have some racing left in me, after all.

The local races had dried up, though, with one exception. Mike Carter had measured a mile course in Machias, which would be run on Veteran’s Day. For some reason, I wouldn’t be able to run the actual race, but I would have the opportunity to test myself anyway. Carter, Bruce Bridgham, Tom McKinney and I would race the course early that morning. Mike was renting a house only 150 yards from the starting line; I put on my racing flats, we warmed up for two miles, then took off. The first section of the course was a gradual uphill, but the last half was a screaming downhill, giving notice to muscles which hadn’t been awakened in a decade. Tom and Bruce finished together in 5:21, I finished in 5:28. Sufficiently loosened up, we jogged back uphill to the start-point of morning. Mike was renting a house only 150 yards from the starting line; I put on my racing flats, we warmed up for two miles, then took off. The first section of the course was a gradual uphill, but the last half was a screaming
downhill, giving notice to muscles which hadn’t been awakened in a decade. Tom and Bruce finished together in 5:21, I finished in 5:28. Sufficiently loosened up, we jogged back uphill to the start-point of another measured mile (all downhill) which I ran in 5:49. Speed, lungs afire, exhilaration!

At the end of the year, I was training with Carter again, facing pickups to stir the soul. Every landmark was an opportunity for a challenge. On the road between Machias and Whitneyville, through the darkness, there were two streetlights which Mike said we should be able to cover under two minutes. We never did, but that wasn’t the point. Carter’s reach was always beyond his grasp, but wasn’t it the attempt, and not the goal, that we were really searching for?

1995

I had run over 600 miles in the last half of the previous year, and with Carter and Tom McKinney in town, at least two fast training partners on a regular basis. Certainly I would run over 1,000 miles this year, much of it good quality. But when would I put it on the line?

There are always reasons not to race. Some even make a little sense. With an infant and a 3-year old come all the baggage which make travel such a logistical challenge, so I didn’t want to haul the family out every other weekend just to put on a uniform and plunk down some money. Phil Stuart, when in my situation, had never hesitated to travel, but I didn’t have the same wandering spirit. Besides, Carter was finding mini-races everywhere, in the midst of his workouts. One of them was on one of the courses I had run for years; Mike picked out a flat mile stretch and turned it into the “Master’s mile” which had to be run under six minutes.

He was also coming up with other challenges which didn’t require an entry fee. One of Mike’s toys was a Polar stopwatch which also was a pulse monitor. How high could I crank it up? Curiously, I found that when I wasn’t in particularly good shape, when I had the stroke volume of a lemming, the rpm’s shot right up. By mid-January, running a series of four short, quick hills in the Kennebec district of Machias, I topped out at 176. Even Carter didn’t match that.

With all the training partners I could want, and the encouragement of newfound speed from the previous fall, why wasn’t I racing? In April, I came down with a short-lived complaint which nonetheless stayed in my memory. I came down with a strange tightness in my chest. In the middle of the night I awoke with the feeling that my heart was pounding inside an echo-chamber. I was concerned enough to drive myself to the nearest emergency room, where the doctor diagnosed pleuritis, an inflammation of the chest wall, and recommended Advil. I didn’t really think I was having a heart attack, not with low cholesterol, low body fat and no family history, but there is something about having two young children that makes one postpone taking chances. Training can be safe, but what is a race if it is not taking chances?

Finally I decided to test myself at the Cutler fourth of July 5-K. After all, it did harbor some fond memories, being one of my rare victories in the 1988 race and my 1991 Master's win. Although I had several challenges during the race, with Mike Worcester and Tom McKinney pressing me on the hills, I won the 40-and-over in 19:38. This gave a good boost through the summer. Although I suffered from a pulled gluteus maximus, a few days of ice, heat and bike riding brought me back. By the time Phil Stuart’s Cystic Fibrosis run came along at the end of September, I was ready to give another race effort, but my 19:16 was no match for Mike Worcester, and we informally agreed that this was his race, while Cutler was mine. If only we could keep these races away from everyone else.

I wasn’t looking for any more races. Carter had time trials everywhere. Now he had found a course in Machiasport, near his new home, two laps of an oversize cul-de-sac which he measured out to a 5-K. In the half-light of a chilly November morning I chased Mike around in 19:45. He would never be beaten in these deadly-serious but informal tests. I coasted past 1,000 miles for the year, a mark I wondered if I would ever see again, and promptly broke down with a groin pull.

The human brain forces a certain economy
to our actions, a combination of efficiency and laziness. We tend to do what is necessary, and no more. With a very few races and several of Mike Carter's pop quizzes, I had my quota of speed; I had topped off my only realistic mileage goal for the year; I needed something to fail so I could engage in purposeful rest rather than senseless running. The brain knows when to turn on the pain receptors in an untraceable blob of soft tissue when the time is right for it, and the neighboring muscles form a stiff, unyielding wall until the brain signals the "all clear". My dream races would have to wait. Would they wait forever?

1996

Even when we face the elements season in, season out, it can take a long time for us to realize what the Maine climate is really like.

The wisdom of age is not simply an accumulation of experience; I think it has something to do with the skin getting thinner. Some of the senses dull, but not the sense of heat or cold. Young people tend to look at the calendar to decide what the weather should be and then promptly ignore it, underdressing in winter because thick, elastic skin and strong circulation allow it. Thin skin allows their elders to absorb the truth, however painful, about life's foibles.

In earlier days, especially with Phil Stuart, we would dress light for a winter run and do a "Park Barner". Park Banner was a noted ultramarathoner of the 1970's who once decided to go on an extended run during a Pennsylvania winter (in subzero conditions) in a short and T-shirt. He was disgusted with himself because he had to stop after 68 miles. Phil and I were not so ambitious, but anything over 20 degrees was bare-leg weather, and sometimes I could watch the frost build up on the hair of Phil's legs. These times were long gone; now I would need at least a pair of tights, if not full Gore-Tex, in such weather. But the real dirty secret, that only the thin skin of age could reveal, was that summer could be cold, too.

The young person thinks that if it is June or July, it must be warm. I had fallen victim to that mindset once; on a squally, 45-degree early June day, I ran a 10-miler and was nearly hypothermic when I finished. But I was 26 then, too young to have that experience sink in. Now I was realizing that the long days of early summer didn't bring the warmth, that all the sun's energy was being sucked into the vast, cold North Atlantic at my doorstep, and cranking up the giant fog machine that is July.

I was at Cutler, on the fourth of July, watching the flag near the starting line rip in heavy wind and cold drizzle. Of course, it was a direct headwind on the point-to-point course. The knowledge that such weather could happen was a strange sort of comfort; I didn't have to waste energy in outrage at our misfortune. Besides, the nasty hills would provide some shelter from the blast. Comforted by the knowledge that we were all facing the same conditions, I finished second in 19:51, winning the 40-and-over again. The only true pain was waiting around for the race awards, in the lee of a building, where my thin, old skin was of no use whatsoever.

As the summer went on and temperature moderated, I was, with Carter's help, finding more spring in my step, putting in occasional sub-6 minute mile into the training. In late July I ran a supposed 5-miler at Milbridge in 32:54, finishing in second. It actually measured out to about 5.2 miles, or maybe 5 "Phil Stuart miles". Phil loved to underestimate our training distances; a hard hour run might go into the log as a "good seven". He is one good reason that I credit my lifetime mileage as being honest.

As September came, I was as close to being on a training schedule as I had been since school; not in training volume, but in relative quality and predictability. One of the regular runs was a 7-miler between Machias and Whitneyville. After 2 1/2 miles of warmup, Carter and I would cruise a downhill mile in just over 6 minutes. After turning and coming back uphill for a mile, we would push hard another 6-minute mile (in the middle of the Cystic Fibrosis race course), and after a half-mile recovery, blast another 6-minute mile downhill to the finish of our run.

Finally, at the Cystic Fibrosis run, I was going to put it together, maybe even beat Mike Worcester for the master's prize. And indeed, the race went
about as well as I could have hoped, with a 6:05 opening mile up a long hill, and 6:01 and 5:56 following splits en route to an 18:30 finish, just barely over 6-minute pace. Yes, I did beat Worcester, but it wasn’t enough. Steve Carles was coming into form, he had just turned 40, and he beat me by a minute. That was fair, and I didn’t mind being beaten, but the awards ceremony showed the odd demographics of the running movement. The age-group awards went only one deep, so I didn’t win anything. But the man who had won the 30-39 age group award had finished nearly four minutes behind me.

Even after the races were done for the season, I kept up the speed miles for awhile. Mike Carter was still doing them, and he would anyway. As late as December 10th I managed a 5:55 downhill mile on the roads which were staying dry and clear. For a little moment I was enjoying the speed for its own sake, barging on to a symmetrical yearly total of 1,111 miles, until my thin skin would remind me to bundle up, watch for ice patches, and slow down.

1997

After a few years on the upswing, it was time for a few things to go awry. At first, it was the gluteus muscle. When the muscles straightened out, I would get a stubborn cold. To top things off, I realized I had become a political conservative.

With my thinning skin, I was much more alert to the possibility of falling on the dark, icy pavement. The ice mostly held back until February, but when it came it was influencing my running more than ever. On slippery days I stayed off the roads altogether; when I did go, I was both apprehensive and still trying to be fast, not a good prescription for muscle health. A sudden, jerking motion might cause the tiny popping sound that said,

“There’s a week lost, chump.”

The colds took on a new dimension. In my youth, colds started and stayed in the head. The second day in I might feel down, but once the cold left the nose it was over. Now the damn thing would make an entire circuit; sore throat, rising to the nasal passages, sinking down into the chest, gurgling back out in phlegmy coughs until it slowly dissipated. The fluids and humors that had once kept the skin smooth and supple had not gone away, but had seeped down into the body. Dry skin, wet guts, Lhude sing goddamn. Sometimes I could run through part of the symptoms, but the trouble would return whenever I tried to sleep. 5:30 a.m. came slowly, but passed quickly without a run, whenever I fitfully slept in a chair to keep the coughing at bay.

Ideology, I suppose, should have had nothing to do with it. So what, if during my speedy years, I was a left-leaning rogue Republican who voted to shut down Maine Yankee and spurned Ronald Reagan? It seemed, at the time, that the running ethic was contrary to the stereotypical conservative; red-faced, beefy, lover of stock cars and motors of all kinds, contempt at any form of self-powered movement. My personal shift to the right was actually associated with some events in my personal life which were making me slower, and not just increasing age. First of all, there was marriage and family. Having so much at stake, and being held hostage to the future, I realized that I was far more concerned with conserving than liberating. Secondly, family had forced me to focus my resources on that slice of humanity that I felt I had a real chance of saving. I could tolerate fairly high taxes as my gesture to the social contract, but I no longer believed that higher taxes would generate a greater common good. This same family was putting demands on my time which would have made the 70-mile training week impractical even if my muscles and tendons could have tolerated it.

Running, and especially racing, can certainly be viewed through an ideological lens. From the liberal viewpoint, running is a fair, democratic sport. Nobody is denied access to training because a privileged class has hogged up all the court time. Everyone starts from the same starting line, at the same time. There should be equality of opportunity, but the conservative knows this is not true. Determination and hard work simply do not overcome the disadvantages of genetics and body structure; life is unfair, and no mandate for equality will make it otherwise. This leads to a slight, but perceptible difference on the race course. The sky’s-the-limit of human possibility gives the liber-
al runner a chance at personal excellence because he has not learned that it is not possible. Because the conservative knows the limits and flaws of humanity, his reach does not exceed his grasp.

I stayed well within my reach at the Cutler Harbor 5-K, finishing in 20 minutes flat on “not a maximal effort”, but the field was thin, and I finished 21d overall and first master for the third straight year. Once again, my entire racing season came to an end at the Cystic Fibrosis run, a steady-paced 19:22, and out of the prizes again.

Somewhere out there, stalwarts like Robin Emery and Bill Pinkham were racing every weekend throughout eastern Maine, greeting and hobnobbing with the other regulars, and by now surely forgetting that I was once part of the regular crowd. Of course, they had seen many runners blow onto the scene and disappear just as quickly, but I had been around for quite a while before I disappeared; so had something awful happened? Phil Stuart still traveled widely to races, but they probably had long since forgotten to ask him.

The truth was that I had just become a congenial curmudgeon.

1998

In Tom Derderian’s book to commemorate the centennial of the Boston Marathon, he made an interesting observation about the beginning of recreational running. Essentially, he said, it began with the advent of indoor plumbing. Only with the availability of daily baths would the average citizen truly let the sweat-pores open up. Even hard manual labor would be done at a pace that stayed slightly below the sweat stage. With running, there was no avoiding it.

On the morning of January 4th I ran in a light, cold mist, somewhat cautiously because the roads felt a little greasy. As the day progressed, the rain picked up, a soft, steady freezing rain that didn't stop that day, or the next, or the day after that. With scarcely a breath of wind the ice storm raged until the tree limbs snapped, the transformers sparked, and we were in darkness. For the next four days, with no showers, running was not even a concept. Exercise of any kind seemed futile. The modern, labor-saving inconveniences, now cold and unresponsive, were barriers to the use of muscle power to do anything useful. How I would have appreciated a hand pump to get some water! The woodstove was the only tool that gave me some sense that I was providing for my family. When the lights came back on, it took me a few days to trust them. Would I dare go for a run, and return to a still house, unable to wash off the clamminess?

Eventually our trust in electricity returned, and I took my showers for granted again, but I could never appreciate any shower again unless it came after a period of cold clamminess. A shower taken while the body was still throwing off its post-run heat was a purely functional exercise, a time-saving dash en route to something else. For the most part, the only bathing that was fun for itself was the occasional lake dip in the middle of, or end of, a run. If Phil Stuart, a dedicated hiker, was the go-to man to find woods trails, Tom McKinney, a fine swimmer, was the one to sniff out the swimming holes. One of the best spots he found was a short walk from a cul-de-sac at a place called High Head on Gardner’s Lake in East Machias. The steep slope down to the shore came to a flat rock at the water’s edge, but the slope continued underwater, giving a perfect diving spot in a bright, sunny but remote spot. On weekends, when there was time, we would stop mid-run to dive in, braving the chill as early as May 9th one year and as late as October 3rd on another. For years there was a broker's sign on the lot, but then ominously one day the broker's sign was gone and there was gravel fill coming in. Soon there was a trailer there, and we no longer visited the swimming hole that had once belonged to us alone.

My races this year... would anyone care to guess? What about the Cutler 5-K on the fourth of July, and the Cystic Fibrosis run in September? I was, admittedly, stuck in the comfortable rut where I could keep a bit of racing memory alive but not impose on family time. At Cutler I was able to hold off Mike Carter, Tom McKinney and Mike Worcester for my fourth straight Master's win in 19:56, but I wasn’t in contention for the prize at the CF run and finished in 19:46.

I was, admittedly, looking forward to turning 50, and conceding the forties to a younger crop
of runners who, in any case, were not traveling downeast to dominate the scene. I was likely surrendering ground I need not have given up, but I was thinking further out. If I kept lying low for another few years, and my family became more independent, I might roar back onto the racing scene as a competitive 60-year-old, dumbfounding all my colleagues whose road-weary legs were not ready for the unseen challenge. The risk, of course, was that I would lose sight of the challenge myself.

1999

With a mild winter and an early spring, I was finding my mileage to be respectable, if 20 miles a week could qualify for that, and whether I was ready or not, I would try a longer race. It was my cross-training, if I could call it that, which persuaded me.

In the fall, with Nancy’s encouragement, I had purchased a walk-behind bushhog to clear up the alders and puckerbrush in front of our house. For a few years I had made slow, sporadic progress with a hand-held brush saw, but now the two acres I had cleared needed a rugged mower to keep clear, and if I ever wanted to clear out the whole field of nearly ten acres, I would need a bigger toy. Reclaiming one’s own land is an especially therapeutic form of play, and I would battle away at the tough, matted undergrowth, trying to reverse thirty years of neglect, and three hours of heavy labor would fly by. If I still had that kind of endurance, maybe my running muscles would remember a little of it.

By the time the fourth of July came, I had logged 400 miles and decided to sign up for the Perry-to-Eastport 7-miler. I had not run there for 13 years, since the days when I was passably good. Now I didn’t know if I would even finish. Fresh off my 50th birthday I had even done a few half-mile intervals at close to six-minute mile pace, so I had passable speed for the long straights of this course, and I managed to hang on to a split of 32:37 at five miles. However, the unseasonable heat of the day, and Antone’s hill, found me out, and I struggled home in 48:11. Still, it was a fifth-place finish, maybe a chance for some hardware. I was actually the first 40-and-over, but there was no Master’s prize, just trophies for the top three and ribbons for the rest of us. I was still happy enough just to be able to do it. There was something slightly reassuring in knowing that five miles was my upper limit of decent race pace, that I hadn’t wasted all my years of short races when I could have gone on for three hours at the same speed.

If five miles was my breaking point, then perhaps I could race the Blueberry run, something I hadn’t done since 1980. Mike Carter had taken over the race-director duties and turned it into a first-class race, and I would usually show up at the last minute to help out at the finish line or in the chute, mostly because I had little appetite for the two big hills that crested just after mile 2. When the time came, I found that the race itself wasn’t that appealing to me, but I would run a time trial with Carter the day before. In dry, cool conditions, Mike and I battled each other over the hills. He established a short lead on the downhill and held me off for the “win”, 32:08 to 32:17. The next day in the race, when the over-50 winner ran about 31:45, I felt that I could be competitive in my age group if I wanted to; never mind that race day temperatures were nearly 20 degrees warmer than I had enjoyed.

Perhaps I could be a player at the Cystic Fibrosis run. I kept up my version of adequate mileage, even putting down a couple of 10-milers along the way. Then, on a downhill return on a 5-miler only three days before the race, I felt a slight pop in my back after a small misstep. I finished the run, rested and worried. On race day I found I could run, but my warmup was tentative, with no pickups. In the race I soon found that my speed limit was 7 minutes a mile; any faster, and my back spasms returned. I finished in 21:48, ready to begin my next spell of enforced rest, and to close out that particular millennium of my running career.

There were signs that my running career was entering a new wilderness. Tom McKinney, who had been as regular a training-partner as anyone the previous four years, was relocating to Brunswick, a victim of the downsizing of the Cutler Navy Base. Phil Stuart, after a meteoric series of performances, was returning to his life as an active fat man, still hiking, refereeing and in perpetual
motion, but mixing walks into his running. Carter, in his remote post down in Bucks Harbor, couldn't join me for morning runs in those rare intervals when he wasn't having arthroscopic surgery to his shoulder or his knee. I was facing the prospect of solo running again. As 1999 came to an end I wasn't partying very much.

**2000**

I should explain a little what a congenial curmudgeon does when faced with overrated hype and hullabaloo. The curmudgeon part, of course, downplays the whole ridiculous show. The turnover of dates to January 1, 2000 was a totally artificial "event", based on a miscalculation of dates to begin with; based on connections with historical figures, Jesus of Nazareth was born between four and six years before his era began; the millennium shift had already taken place. The whole significance of the date was the result of the fiddling of a sixth-century monk and the later calculations of a commission hired by Pope Gregory to coordinate the calendar, so why were so many people talking about the four B's: bunkers, beans, bullets and Bibles? Of course there was the whole Y2K thing that sent many people scurrying in circles and hunting down old Cobol and Fortran code writers in their retirement villas, but fortunately the computers didn't suffer the same anxiety as their operators. Lacking any intuition whatsoever, the machines would accept "00" as following "99"; their very stupidity was our salvation.

The congeniality part of me kept my mouth shut when somebody eagerly anticipated the event. If a starry-eyed soul wanted to see the turning of time from the summit of the Temple of the Sun in Teotihuacan, far be it for me to deflate them. I would nod pleasantly and let them waste their money however they saw fit. When they returned from this excursion they would be deflate anyway, and as a bonus they would not despise me for pointing it out beforehand. I prefer not being despised unnecessarily.

I did stay up till midnight (the family was up anyway), but otherwise my only bow to popular demand was to run the Lubec First Light 5-K the next morning. It was far from being the first race of the New Time (countless midnight and dawn races having already been run), but it was local, and I managed a 21:01 on my spare training. I wasn't the first over-50; a Princeton runner, Chuck Murphy, finished just ahead of me. He was one of many a runner, past and future, thrilled by the newness of the sport, putting down 40 miles a week or more and beating me by pure fitness, while I would plug along at 10 or 15 miles a Week, avoiding serious injury, hoping to outlast them. I might outlast that particular runner, but another would come along to take his place in the pack ahead of me.

It didn't take me long for my mileage to trail off nearly to nothing; there were other outlets for my energy. One outlet was a new pool at the University of Maine at Machias. During noon hours I would sometimes drive over and see how many laps I could put in. The effort was satisfying, as long as I didn't pay attention to what was happening in the lane next to me. As long as the lane was occupied by an elderly woman doing a leisurely backstroke, I was OK; but more often there would be a somewhat obese man doing a slow, steady crawl. He, would catch up to me and I would windmill furiously the rest of the pool length until his efficient kick-turn at the end left me far behind. About three laps later he would come up on me again, and the farce would repeat. Finally I would have to exit the pool, shower and change. When I came out of the locker room he would still be going.

If my pride got me out of the pool there would be another outlet. It had been several years since I had done any skiing, with the kids being so young, but Nancy was determined that they would learn skiing early. Ally was 8, Matt nearly 6, and it was time. During my absence the equipment had transformed; the new shaped skis made turning so forgivingly easy, even though we didn't have the soft Sierra Nevada snow to ride on.

Perhaps the best dividend of skiing was not the exercise, or the speed, but the experience of falling without hurting myself. A running-fall on an icy patch always spelled trouble; wrenching muscles and tendons as I desperately tried to recover, the awkward plunge, bone to asphalt, the cruel phys-
ies of sudden deceleration. A skiing fall was a smooth event, the muscles relaxing as they faced the inevitable, the pent-up energy dissipating over a long downhill stretch. But by comparison to the ski-trails, the ice patches on the roads became even more threatening.

From February 4, when I reported a strained hip, to March 9, when flogged a “brisk walk”, the log is blank. I wouldn’t count the walks in my running mileage, but I began to consider them as a form of exercise, a holding pattern until the roads were visible and ice-free. Another was my bicycle, hooked to a wind-trainer, with an odometer attached to the rear wheel so I could calculate distance and speed.

Perhaps the variety of my other pursuits dampened my desire to seek variety in my runs. My competitive season returned to default mode with a 21:08 5-K in Cutler, out of the money again. But as the Blueberry run came around, I remembered my time trial of the year before, and signed up. The race itself was a near disaster; my spotty training was found out by the hills and I finished in 36:16. But one good thing came of it. As I was warming up, I heard a voice cry out, “Deke?” in surprise bordering on shock. I turned to see Robin Emery, who had undoubtedly thought something dreadful had happened to me long before. I had manned the finish line at the Blueberry run many times as she had finished, but not in my racing-singlet and shorts. I must have been invisible to her.

The outside world might find out I was living in exile, but at least I wasn’t dead.

2001

Then again, maybe I was dead, but just hadn’t gotten around to realizing it.

One of the hot new goals of aging is “compression of morbidity”; the process of maintaining a good quality of life until the very end, when all the basic bodily functions undergo catastrophic failure. Don Kardong’s mantra, It never always gets worse, may not work there, but the process of decline is so fast that the sufferer doesn’t have time to dwell upon it. The concept wasn’t really new. Decades before we had been told that running may not add years to your life, but it adds life to your years. But now the concept was sexy because the cost of nursing home care was so horrific. Not only was fitness a personal benefit, but a patriotic necessity. Unfortunately, my father’s morbidity didn’t compress itself. After 80 years of mostly clean but sedentary living, he had suffered a stroke, which left his mind and speech clear but his body imprisoned. For months he struggled with physical therapy, working out as he never had before. As his role model, he used my mother, who had recovered from breast cancer and a radical mastectomy, but he was at a profound disadvantage. My mother was not only 40 years younger at the time; she had two young boys and the world to live for. At the age of 80, the question, “What’s the use?” rings out much louder.

I was realizing that the same question, not as loudly perhaps, can be heard at age 51. Of course I had a young family, and all the world to live for, but I felt that I didn’t have the world to run for. Would everything really end if I closed the logbook?

Without any serious injury or illness I ran exactly 2 miles in the month of January. Throughout February and March, I left my watch behind, not caring to know how slow I was. The occasional ski trip gave me my only speed all winter long. When I first dared to wear a watch in mid-April I was doing 9-minute miles. Muscle memory would help quicken the tempo a little, until I could average a little under 8 minutes a mile, but the fastest tempo mile that year was a paltry 7:06, and even the endorphins felt diffused and watered down. When I tried to run with a group, especially if it included Mike Carter, I couldn’t keep up.

July 4th came and went without comment. When had I ever skipped a race on the fourth unless I was injured? I began biking again to get a sense of speed. In mid July I took a painful tumble off my bike 4 miles into a 19-mile ride, looked at the ugly rash, realized it was numb, and finished the ride. Maybe I could still be tough even if I wasn’t a runner.

To humor my father-in-law I took part in a Rotary blood drive later that month. My hemoglobin count was just enough for me to donate. I expected some slowdown afterwards, but for a few weeks
afterward I actually had a small upward bump, the psyche boosted by my purposeful good works. For a little while at the height of summer I could mix my activities; running and biking on the same day, or taking our canoe out in Bog Lake and working my upper body a bit.

As September came, though, I was feeling the lassitude again; the legs on our familiar Highway to Heaven course on Marshfield ridge had no life whatsoever. Sometimes I would have to stop and sit down, feeling not so much out of breath as out of energy to breathe in the first place. One Tuesday, morning I took an indifferent 2 1/2 mile walk along some abandoned railroad tracks, taking care not to count it toward my running totals. And then, later that morning, our world changed.

September 11th impacted us all differently, but a common thread runs through our reactions to catastrophe: What is my purpose? What am I designed to do?

I try to be a practical man. In my current running-rut I wasn’t going out to gut out a 20-miler. My goals were more sensible. I would be more alert. I would make every minute at work count for something. I would go to the doctor and find out what was wrong with me.

This last resolve was prompted by another blood-drive hastily organized in the wake of the September 11th attacks. It had been just long enough for me to try to donate again, but I was rejected immediately. My hemoglobin level was far below the donation limit.

The next day I still showed up at the starting line of the CF race. I had no hope of being competitive, but I did want to show up at least at one race all year. Scarcely a half- mile in, at the top of the first hill, I packed it in. I was looking for purpose, not in shuffling through a 28-minute 5-K. Recovery would have to be well on its way first.

My doctor was a no-nonsense oncologist who wasted no time taking a sample of my bone-marrow, looking for cancer. Had my marrow virtually shut down? Now that would have been food for thought, putting my life in proper perspective. But the lab results came back negative, my marrow was producing just fine. Thank you, God, I think I have perspective enough. But if my marrow was producing the red blood cells, what was happening to them?

The answer came to me as it did to Pogo: We have met the enemy and he is us. My red blood cells were coated by a protein that my white blood cells recognized as a foreign body, so they were being destroyed. Now my doctor would have to put me back on prednisone, to suppress my immune response.

For two more weeks thy blood count kept going down, bottoming out at scarcely half the normal level. Strangely, though, I was feeling energetic, fully engaged in what I was able to do, even if that did not include running. With the prednisone I was an insomniac again, so I might put in several miles on my bike windtrainer in order to settle down.

Finally, the blood-counts started up again. In the midst of my day, I might take a few running-steps in a parking lot, knowing that the time for running would come again. Of course, winter would come first, so my sweat would be earned in the cellar on my bike, and the 282 running miles for the year gave me an easy bottom to rise up from.

Damn. Not even a mile a day average. But when I got my 2002 running log I didn’t throw it away.

2002

In recent years, even in health, I was running about three, possibly four, days a week. Now I was digging myself out of a hole. So why not work out six days a week?

The difference, of course, was in the intensity. The bike windtrainer in my basement might generate a sweat, but I could drop down the cadence and still work the pedals at an effort which might be mistaken for an afternoon nap. I could close my eyes, imagine drifting away, and bring myself back to consciousness a mile or so later. No preparation was necessary; if I had 20 minutes, I could jump on the bike and turn out a few miles without warm-ups, without dressing for the weather, without deciding where to go.

There was nothing for my mind to hang up on, to distract the body from doing something, however modest.
Even on a downhill, running requires some effort, if only in the checking action of the quadriceps to keep one’s balance. In cycling, however, there are some complete mini-vacations from any effort whatsoever; if this were not so, a three-week ordeal such as the Tour de France would be unbearable. On a windtrainer, I had complete control over my mid-workout breaks. The threshold for starting these workouts was negligible, and the recovery was complete as soon as I stepped off the saddle. During the winter I would put in perhaps 50 miles on the windtrainer, and one 3-mile run on the roads, each week. My new red blood cells were at least being introduced to someone who exercised. By mid April I pronounced that I was almost ready to run with someone.

I picked on Mike Worcester to run with. Among my competitors he would be the least conditioned in the early spring, for various reasons. First of all, he lived in a remote section of Jonesboro, near the blueberry barrens, where the winds would howl and there were no streetlights, as dreadful to run in the winter as it was delightful in the summer. Second, he refereed countless basketball games, using different muscles, and occasionally turned an ankle in the pickup basketball games which were his first love. And last, he was as sensitive to weight gain as anyone I had ever met. During the winter he would gain ten pounds, which would barely show, but he would bemoan the extra burden as if he had joined the morbidly obese. I had the comfort of knowing I could keep up, and even control the pace. By early May I could run a 7-minute tempo mile, faster than I had done the entire previous year.

When I returned to racing I stuck with the familiar. First, I did a few runs with Carter, which always qualified as a race. It was a short step from there to run the Cutler 5-K, which I did in 21:38, winning no prizes but at least slipping just under 7-minute pace.

During the summer I was introduced to another sport, which I so enjoyed that my ratio of thinking-about-it to doing-it is about 50 to 1. Nancy gave me, as a birthday present, a gift certificate to go on a sea-kayaking tour in Machias Bay. One Saturday in late July I went to the embarking site, sweated out the fog, and when it cleared we went about 5 miles on a peaceful ocean swell, sharpening my appetite for more. The paddling could provide an intense upper-body workout, but like cycling there were opportunities for complete relaxation, and there was one dividend which neither running nor cycling could deliver. These other sports required a road or a trail, some evidence of human presence. Travel by water introduced me to areas which gave the illusion of being utterly pristine. Ten minutes after shaving off, I could imagine I was with Lewis and Clark.

This added variety gave me enough zest to try a new race, and I ran the Eastport Salmon Festival 5-K in early September. I ran 21:19, and was passed in the last half-mile by a gray-haired man I hadn’t noticed before. How was I supposed to notice, being out of the races for nearly two years? I was sure my 50-and-over prize had slipped away, but it turned out that “Ozzie” Townsend was only 48, and I had won my age group. This gave me a spark to try for the age-group prize at the Cystic Fibrosis race. For once, I gave it a good shot. Shortly after two miles, Dave Alley came up on my shoulder. I managed to hold him off until mile 3, when he kicked in two seconds ahead of me. I couldn’t be disappointed, though, with my time of 20:48, my best run since 1999.

In October, the year’s races done, we went to Disney World, the first major vacation I had taken with the kids. Running, of course, was a minor element of the trip, but nothing is truly minor to me if I want to do it. Disney, of course, had grown from a theme park into a fair-sized principality. Clusters of resorts were separated from each other, and the parks, by Interstate-like autbahns. The Disney attitude to running was unapologetically two-faced. Within each resort area, running was embraced; there were wide sidewalks, boardwalks and paths, all immaculate and pleasantly lighted. If one decided to venture outside the gated community and run to another resort section, though, one was a pirate, no more welcome than I was trying to run at JFK airport 25 years earlier. In the early morning darkness, the patrols were out, and I was accosted, and gently but firmly directed back to my designated area. Something about me truly doesn’t like a fence, even when I have paid hand-
somely to get within it. I am reminded that there is another name for a gated community; a ghetto.

At least my mind had escaped the trap of looking at my running as a downward spiral. There would always be some other activity to quicken the soul when the running went sour, and the muscle memory to bring me back.

### 2003

Running may still be my first and steadiest athletic love, but I was starting to see some other sports on the side.

Through the winter I kept up the bike windtraining and skiing, to keep the muscles springy and relaxed on those icy-road days that tense up an apprehensive runner. I had dabbled as an assistant coach on Matt’s Little League team. Now I was adding another event to the mix. Early one Friday morning Nancy’s father and I headed out for the Old Town Canoe factory to buy a kayak at their spring used boat sale. It was 4 in the morning when I pulled into Ken Manchester’s driveway, and although he personally had no interest in paddling a kayak, he was a hunter, used to getting up in the wee hours and eager to help. It was a three-day sale, starting at 7 that morning, but we were taking no chances. By the time we arrived at the factory, just after 6, there were already crowds of people milling about, already claiming boats. Ken left me to pick out a kayak while he parked our truck. There were an ominous number of multi-boat racks towed by trucks with out-of-state license plates, a sure sign of sharp dealers planning on making a killing. Hurriedly I looked about, sweeping frost off the boats, looking for major dings and realizing that I would have to pick a boat and stand by it, helplessly watching as the weak sun finally melted the frost and exposed the scratches. I finally picked out a pretty red double-seated number and began my vigil. I was lucky. My chosen boat had no major flaws, but enough scratches so that I wouldn’t worry about adding more. With our fluctuating lake levels and rocky reefs, I would be certain to donate some paint to the lake bottoms.

For racing this year, I stuck to the 5-K’s but did a few more of them. At Cutler I did a fairly respectable 21:03 on the hills, then ran a 20:33 at Eastport Salmon Festival. I was gearing up nicely for the Cystic Fibrosis race. There, unfortunately, I came a cropper, a victim of my own head.

I always have raced in the lightest shoes I can wear, a pair of red-and-white Sauconys that I have had for over 10 years. On race day, I had them neatly laid out in my running bag, which I had stowed in Steve Carle’s car: he was driving up to the starting line. Partway to the start of the point-to-point course, Steve let me out because I wanted to run to the starting line in my trainers. He wanted to watch his kids run the one-mile race, which preceded the 5-K. That day his mind was definitely on his kids, not his own race. When Steve showed up at the start, I found to my horror that he had taken another ride up, and had left his car (and my racing shoes) behind. I even started to ask Mike Carter if I could drive back to the start and bring back my racers, before I realized how ridiculous that sounded. I was stuck in my heavy trainers, much as Ozzie Townsend; only he was loose, laughing and ready to whip me by a minute. I doggedly slogged out a disappointing 21:43, but somehow sneaked in ahead of Mike Worcester to claim the 50 and-over prize.

After that comedown I had to find another race. Fortunately, Lubec was hosting the Red Ribbon 5-K in late October. The finish was at the West Quoddy Head lighthouse, my embarkation point for one of my last winning efforts 15 years before. The day was pleasant, the course was fairly flat, and with a 6:12 first mile I was able to stay ahead of Ozzie until nearly the halfway point. By now I knew that Ozzie wouldn’t turn 50 until the following May, but I wanted to hang as close to him as I could. He beat me by about 20 seconds, but I finished in a satisfying 20:13, leaving me with some hope of breaking 20 minutes again some day. But I wouldn’t win the age group; another over-50 runner unknown to me, John Cook, finished second overall in 19:27.

With the year winding down it was gratifying to have running be fun again. When I was having fun, my sense of exploration picked up, and I had found two new courses, one within two miles of my house. This course followed a dirt road out to
a blueberry field and a sunlit bend in the East Machias River, tangibly quiet and still on a December morning. The other course was on the Jonesboro blueberry barrens, with rolling hills and sweeping vistas, and sunrises reserved for me and my running-mates.

I am a lucky man, to live in the country. The phrase “Running takes you to a peaceful place” should not be mere metaphor.

2004

Will this be the year that I tie all the loose ends of my life together, blending all of my experiences into one great, harmonious “Om”? Don’t count on it. There is a saying, paraphrased to accommodate my sketchy memory, which gives me some comfort:

“Life is absurd, and humanity is absurd, no wonder we go together so well.”

On New Year’s Day I was engaged in absurdity again, compliments of Mike Carter. After running a 5-K measured out-and-back from his house (which I did in an encouraging 21:45), a small group of us were diving into the icy surf in front of Mike’s house. If anyone cares about the comparison, the North Atlantic is slightly warmer than Bog Lake in midwinter, but there is a more problematical exit strategy. Instead of a secure ladder to scramble out of the water, there were the slippery rocks and the waves, pushing me toward shore but knocking me down. When I finally relaxed and let the waves carry me in to where I could crawl ashore on all fours, there was the invigorating sting of salty heat as my body responded to the shock. There on the shore stood Vaughn Holyoke, now 69 and feeling his own post-dip buzz. We then went to Mike’s house to a potluck dinner and the awards. I won a painted rock as the 50-and-over winner.

As spring came, I was running my good (for me) 10-mile a week maintenance schedule when Little League baseball intervened. It could not have interfered with such a modest running schedule, but it did introduce a new concept in my mind: am I a fairly good runner, or a fairly good athlete?

Twenty years earlier, I would have had no hesitation in answering that question. With the heavy mileage, I could run a half-marathon in under six-minute pace, but my muscles were ill-equipped to do anything else. I remember once picking up a basketball on an outdoor court before a race and throwing up pathetic airballs as Ralph Thomas looked on. The upper-body strength, the hand-eye coordination, were gone, presumably forever. I was stuck with my specialty.

Now my son Matt was entering senior Little League, ages 10 to 12, and he had been picked to join a really good team. His coach had been a fine college player, and still, in his late 30’s, had the silky moves and the superb throwing arm of a genuine athlete. There were two other assistant coaches with an obvious love of the game, and a talented group of 12-year olds, who had played together for years, looking to repeat as league champions. Where could I possibly fit in? I had been an assistant coach on Matt’s farm-league team the year before, but there seemed to be no place for me here. Still, I was drawn to the practices, to fill in with drills whenever I could, picking up some nuances in what is, after all, a magical game. I was so persistent that the coach invited me into his already coach-heavy dugout, in exchange for which I worked as baseline umpire for several games. I enjoyed the umpiring, which mirrored the game itself; nothing happens most of the time, but keep attentive; events flower suddenly, and simultaneously.

Occasionally, we would take the field and simulate game conditions while the kids were batting. I certainly could spot my weaknesses here. My throwing arm was predictably weak, and I was seriously out of practice in judging fly balls. I was a little better at fielding grounders, especially at my old first-base position where my limited range and weak throwing were not as obvious. But what about batting? How bad would I be?

Inexplicably, at least against 12-year-old pitchers, I found my niche. My first time up I topped the ball, it squibbed out a few feet, and I legged out an infield single. After that, I found that I could pick up the ball in my left eye and make clean contact. I had been a fairly consistent singles hitter in Little League; was it possible to recover
these skills after over 40 years? No doubt wearing glasses helped. I remembered that as a sophomore at Washington Academy I had stopped playing baseball; was it only the beginning of my nearsightedness which had discouraged me, thinking that I couldn’t hit the faster pitching? Who knows if my weakening sight had nudged me towards running?

I realized, then, that there was an athletic dividend to all those years of running, plus all those other cross-training activities that the strenuous life promoted. I was, to be sure, no match for a talented baseball player who, at age 55, had always stayed active in the game. However, I was definitely better than a former baseball player at that age who had been sedentary for the past 30 years. Muscle-memory of other sports can go into deep storage and can sometimes be revived, if the circulation is kept up.

What kind of muscle-memory would I have for a race longer than 5-K? I was about to find out at the Downcast Hospice 10-K in Pembroke at the beginning of June. Once more, Robin Emery greeted me as if I had returned from the dead.

People who race every weekend just don’t get me, I decided. Ozzie Townsend was there, just turned 50, and I was relieved of the burden of thinking I should push for the age-group prize. Surprisingly, I stayed fairly close to Ozzie through a 5-K split of 21:23, but while he actually picked up the pace a bit, I slowly crumbled. The last mile was a brutal uphill on a gravel road, and I stumbled home in 44:26, still an improvement on the 46 minutes I was expecting.

I’ve complained some about the cool, wet summer we had, but others have complained far more. Once more, my thin skin and decades of outdoor experience had reminded me what summer in downeast Maine is in reality, not imagination. It is temperate, and runner-friendly, and with the good conditions I was able to run a 20:32 5-K at a race in East Machias, starting less than a quarter-mile from my home. And home is where the story stops for now.
Epilogue: October

A snapshot of where I am; it is a rainy night, Columbus Day. Today I ran two miles with Nancy, passing the 500-mile mark for the year. Yesterday I went kayaking, putting in about 10 miles up Hadley Lake into the East Machias River marshes, where my sense of total wilderness was broken only by a small American flag perched atop a beaver lodge. The day before I had run 5 miles by myself, then ran another mile at Matt’s urging, finding that I could barely keep up with him on the downhill last half. In a few years, whether through raw talent or a simple growth spurt, Matt will be leaving me in the dust. And that is how it should be.

Of course I’m growing older, but for once let us focus on the word “growing”. The mind is still restlessly probing for new things, or for old things seen in a new light. My habits of a lifetime tempt me to be comfortable, but the voice within me tells me to keep moving, to check things out over the next hill. For example, I’ve let my spiritual life turn flabby, not attending church. Don’t tell me I can worship just as well in a kayak as in a pew; that is too comfortable a thought for me. Challenge me instead, this shy, quiet loner, to worship in community; now, there’s my test. For each of us, the hills come in different places, but we have to take them.

In Wonderland, Alice had to keep running to stay in the same place; in life, we have to keep running to return to the same place. I can say that literally, from my East Machias home a three-minute walk from where I took my first baby-steps and a half-mile from my first competitive running steps, but psychological space has nothing to do with geography. Instead, the old Donovan lyrics sound in my head: First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is... the Hegelian thesis, antithesis, synthesis; youthful innocence, followed by doubt and deconstruction, finally mature struggle and enlightenment... or maybe failure, for what is victory if not accompanied by risk of failure?

I’ve always enjoyed loop courses, especially the woods-loops where you can get lost, and the distances are uncertain; the kind of course where Phil Stuart would bring me back to a familiar place, near the start, just as my mind was at the breaking-point. Of course, I only enjoyed these excursions after the fact, but they had to be done. It reminded me how we do go home again, we pass the familiar landmarks, we do step into the same river twice. Heraclitus had it backward; the river is the same, it is the traveler who changes. But rest only for a moment. There is another lap to be run.

THE END