

OUR VISIT TO SMITH COLLEGE

I told Nicky and Garrick, “I’m going to Smith to find my future wife.” That was Friday night, after I drove down from Maine, where I live. On Saturday, I was off to pick up my Aunt Robin. We would drive to Smith College, which was giving her an alumnae award that evening.

“Are you in the market for a wife?” Garrick, my brother-in-law, responded.

“Not really,” I said. At that point, and for the preceding year, I’d told anyone I asked that I was definitely not ready for a long-term relationship, especially one involving living in the same quarters with a woman. I envied Garrick and Nicky: they have a close relationship after 37 years of marriage. ‘Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be,’ would apply to them. But the thought of living most of my hours in the same house with another person scares me. And someone with whom I am intimate? It gives me the creeps.

Saturday at one I picked up Robin. She had forgotten I was coming at one PM, and was still at table with friends in the dining room of her retirement place, Cambridge Homes. But one of her friends said it would only take two to two and half hours to Smith, and we did not need to arrive until 5PM. He was right. Even driving at 55 miles an hour, we got to Northampton by 345PM.

I told my siblings I was taking our Aunt Robin to the Clarion Hotel for a Smith College alumnae function where she would get an award. My brother Andrew pointed out, “You’ll be surrounded by attractive, intelligent, women. Some will may even be single.”

Now before you get the wrong idea, neither Andrew nor I intended that I visit myself on actual Smithies. You know, the girls really attending the college. The ones 18-22 years old. Many girls that age turn my head, but I’m not pursuing that thought. Me, a 63-old white male, running after girls who could be my granddaughters? I know, it’s been done. Bertrand Russell, the old goat, did it. Not me, not that young. Older, yet not necessarily “our age,” as my friends and I say.

At what age am I looking? I’m definitely not confining myself to “our age.” My last lover, Elaine, was a year younger than me at 62. That was fine, but this time I am not listening to the voices of society in my head.

“Men!” those voices say. “They go out with woman much younger than they are! They rob the cradle! What are we, we older women. Chopped liver?”

No, my dear, of course not, dear, I would say to the voice in my head. You older woman are attractive, experienced, very worth-while. When I started searching on match.com—but let me back up a bit. I got married when I was 42. I know, that’s already late. And I married a woman who was 40. Both first-time marriages. It certainly did not begin well. We both now admit we planned to change the other. But, we wanted to be married, we wanted children, as Zorba the Greek say, “Yes, I’ve done it all, marriage, children, the whole disaster.”

My ex and I split—her initiative—when I was approaching 59. We then took four years to get divorced, so I’ve been legally free about 14 months. And emotionally free only about a year. Elaine and I broke up November 2007. Since then, I’ve been thinking about another love life. Have done nothing about it.

That’s why the trip to Smith had an allure. I need only accompany Robin to this function. I don’t need to pin on a button: ‘eligible male looking for eligible female.’ But I’ll be there, they’ll be there, we’ll see what happens.

So there we were, me driving, Robin riding shotgun, facing the two and half-hour drive. What would we talk about? Turns out we had enough to talk about. First up, we went over several topics more than once. Three or four times, as a matter of fact, because of her Alzheimer’s.

“What are we going to do when we get there?”

“Robin,” I would respond, “we have a reception, a cocktail hour, at 5pm and then dinner at 6pm. That’s where you’ll get your award.”

Half an hour later: “What will we do when we get there?”

“Robin, we are going to first go to the reception, and then to dinner. You’ll get your award there.”

We nephews and nieces are fortunate that Robin knows her memory is failing, and she is quite jolly about it: “I know my mind is going, but what can you do?”

About half an hour into the trip, and even knowing that she will forget this assignment, I tell her: “Robin, your job at the cocktail hour is to find me a new wife.” Then I tell her my specification: “I want a woman with a PhD.”

You may think I sound like an intellectual snob, or I aim too high. What would a PhD do with me? I’m only the publisher of a newsletter about an industry with a distinct lack of PhDs: railroads. Not many guys—and we are mostly guys, white, fat males—in railroading have advanced degrees, and very few have PhDs. And look, I admit, that writing the newsletter does not require the most acute brain.

That said, I do have master of science, and I do have a law degree. So I’m not that much of a slouch.

Probably the better question is: Why do you care about the PhD? I answer, I really want a woman who is intelligent. She could discuss with me the various topics I love to think about. My ex-wife, Margaret, she has a good heart but did not provide much intellectual curiosity. We did not engage in much intellectual discussion. Elaine did like discussions, and we did talk, even set aside an hour a day. But, to put in bluntly, I was leading the discussion. She was following along.

Is intellect linked to games? I’m talking scrabble, bridge, hearts, chess. I love playing games. Board games, parlor games. I grew up playing games. Margaret never enjoyed games. Elaine did not like games. Maybe all I want is a companion to play games with me.

I used to have a voice inside my head saying, “You should want someone who helps your heart blossom, who expands your spiritual awareness, who helps you grow.” I tried that. Margaret is and was a great candidate for all that, and indeed I did grow. But now I am back to what I wanted when I was in graduate school, another person with brains.

Of course if Robin does not find me a PhD, I have no backup plan. I feel that if my bearing shows I am looking for a partner, the women (well, some women) will approach me. I am still too chicken to approach women at the cocktail party or the dinner.

Smith, because Robin is getting the award, has paid for two rooms at the Clarion. Robin goes to hers, we plan to meet at 5PM to go to the reception. That gave me enough time for a swim. And to dress.

My daughter Chloe, my sister-in-law Gail, my niece Sage, and others who love me will tell you that I don’t dress well. I have to agree. I dress comfortably, simply, quickly, and cheaply. I neither take the time to shop for good clothes, nor show any inclination to spend money on clothes nor want to spend 15 minutes getting dressed every day. I marvel at the time and care Chloe will take with her appearance. Baggy pants, unpressed shirts, worn-out shoes. These make up much of my wardrobe.

This time, however, I wanted to defy these harpies. Ok, that’s too harsh. They know that when I get dressed up in a suit and tie, my attire can look as good as the next guy. Not the next clothes horse, but at least as good as the average joe. And, they tell me, “You’re so handsome.”

Robin was kind enough to repeat that every hour or so this weekend. I was wearing nice clothes: thin black wool slacks, a cast-off of Garricks. An oxfordcloth blue shirt, a cast-off of my brother Andrew. You get the idea. Me? Spend money on clothes?

In the car, I had carefully hung a nice wool suit. Another cast-off, by the way. And I

brought a nice white shirt. I don't think I bought that, maybe I did. This time, I told myself, I am taking the time to look as good as I can. Light grey, striped suit. Bow tie. That's my signature, the bow tie. I actually looked in the mirror for about five minutes, adjusting everything.

I wanted to make a good impression. I was not really joking about my future wife. I just had to find the PhD who was single. Perhaps a widow, I told myself. Definitely someone beyond child-bearing. I wouldn't mind children, but not ones I had to raise from the beginning. Preferably a woman whose children had already left home. I was not expecting to find her; only, I wanted to be ready.

So out my room, #144, and up to the main floor to Robin's, #256. I knock. No response. Sure, I am five minutes late. Arriving five minutes late at the reception would let Robin make a grander appearance, I had figured. I knock again. Then I go back to my room to fetch the second key to #256. I had kept one, thinking that Robin might well lose or forget hers.

With that second key, I open the door. She's gone to the reception already. Past the hotel desk, I enter a nearby function room, decked out with a bar and food. There she is, engaged with Merrilee, the—I read on her name tag—director of donor services. Nice enough, but not a PhD.

The room fills quickly. I learn from one of the alumna that the group consists of the elected officials of each class: president, treasurer, fundraising volunteer. Total 170. I can but look around. I'm not good at looking at ring fingers, I don't do it at all.

Here's what I do notice. The attractive women have a range of ages. I see a Class of '65 (a year older than me, therefore) short woman with black hair who looks young and alive. For the most part the women are trim—very few chunks in the room. (I can hear some readers gasping. "You can't say that." Yes, uttering unkind words about fat people is not politically correct, I know. Hey, some of my best friends are overweight. My brother Andrew is overweight.)

But they are all engaged in intense conversation. No one stands around looking like a wallflower. And no one is making eye-contact with me. How the hell do I approach them? I don't. I'm too chicken.

The hour passes quickly. I talk with the women admiring Robin, and engaged with her. No PhDs there. Then we are called into the dining room, the 'Grand Ballroom.' Where will we sit, I wonder. It's my second chance to meet someone, at the table.

Well, no assigned seating except right up front, where the president has a placecard. So we go back to the second row of round tables; here three woman already stand beside places. I look quickly at their faces. Hmm, none strike me. But, as we are waiting for the rest of the crowd to file in, I circle around and introduce myself to one. As we chat about why I am there, the woman next to her joins in. Ann.

"Where did you go to school?"

"You name it, I went there," I give my cutesy reply. "I started off at Colby College, then went to Berkeley, then I got a master of science at the University of Toronto in astronomy, then a law degree from Northeastern University."

Ann absorbs this. After more banter, she asks, "Did you ever combine your studies?"

Sort of, I say. "In my newsletter I write about the law of railroads, and railroads do involve physics."

"I meant more in the sense of the law of outer space," Ann said.

I smiled, missing the significance of this insight, immersed in the heady atmosphere of talking to new women in an exciting place. (This happens to me a lot. Much of the meaning of what was said or done escapes me in the moment. Only upon reflection, as we'll see later, does the light dawn.) Ann went on to relate that in the early part of her career, she worked for Intelsat, which was at first, she explained, a public international entity, the International Satellite Organization. She handled some technical duties in radio communications. I was impressed. But I

was not physically attracted to Ann. This was probably a PhD, and without a ring, she was single. But not my future wife.

Just as I was reaching that conclusion, one of the Smith alumae staff came to tell Robin and me that Robin had a reserved place of honor at another table. After eschewing the president's table, we hadn't looked at other tables for reserved places.

"The question," I responded, "is do I also? Or am I relegated to the peanut gallery here?" She smiled, and said, "No, you have a place there also."

We were led to a table in the front row, but to one side. Robin sat with her back to the speaker, I was disappointed to note. At our first table, we'd made a special effort to get chairs which looked at the speaker. But, since my assigned seat, across the table from Robin, did look at the speaker, I didn't raise a fuss. I wanted to know who would sit next to me.

A few seconds later, one of the other honorees, Elaine Barkin, Class of '33, rolled over in her walker, led by a striking woman. Trisha, her name turned out to be. Elaine's card put her to my right, but Elaine couldn't seem to hear what Trisha was saying and gathered herself into my assigned chair. I quickly switched the place cards. Trisha smiled at me.

Elaine was trailed by Patricia, who was to Elaine what I was to Robin. We were both interlopers. One look at Patricia, and I told myself that's not my future wife either. But Trisha did sit at our table, directly across from me. Tall, black wavy hair, flower-like scarf at her throat, angular face. Definitely my type. But, alas, one of the alumnae staff, director of class gifts.

To round out the table, we had Carrie, the executive director of the alumae association. She had an advanced degree, master's in education, but again no PhD. Plus, like Trisha, she was married. I had struck out in terms of my future wife at this table, but not in terms of enjoyable women.

I introduced myself to Elaine, expecting from a member of the Class of '33 not much response. On the drive here, Robin had said, "I expect I'll be the oldest one there."

"Not so," I told her. "Someone from the Class of 1933 is also getting an award." She and I reckoned that since Robin is Class of '44, and age 86, that Elaine must be 97. So I did not expect much alertness from Elaine. I was wrong.

"How was the reception," she asked me after I introduced myself. "I missed it."

"It was disappointing," I told her. "I went there to meet my next wife, and I didn't find her."

Elaine smiled. "You say 'next' wife, does that mean you have been married?" See what I mean? Here she is, 97 years old, and sharp. She got an award for planned giving, when the time came.

Around the table we continued the conversation through dinner. Trisha asked me why I wore a bow tie. You'd think I would have answered that question many times, but I haven't. Again, I was impressed that the Smith women were reaching out to me and asking intriguing questions.

Oh, yes, people tell me they like my bow tie. But they don't query why. To answer the question: "My father wore one," I told Trishia. "But I started off with four-in-hands. After college, I would guess, I started with bow ties. I think to be different, to make a statement."

At the end of the meal, Smith President Carol Christ got up to give a brief speech. She did rouse the audience, yes, but not in a rah-rah kind of way. Major applause for the new engineering building: "We are the only women's institution in the country offering an engineering degree."

A fact helpful to me in my PhD search: more than 60% of Smith graduates go on for a higher degree, far above most other institutions.

Smith alumnae participate to a significantly higher degree in the alumnae programs. Merrilee, a graduate of the University of Southern Maine, said USM does nothing compared to Smith.

The awards then began. Christ introduced the first presenter, noting: “She has worked, dare we say it, as a community organizer!” A reference to Sarah Palin’s comment in her nominating speech (I think) putting down Barack Obama because Obama’s experience came as a community organizer, not a Navy flier.

Then Merrilee introduced some award winners. They came up in turn, and received applause. Trisha from our table rose to give the final awards, telling Robin she was going to tell the crowd something Robin had said. She introduced Robin as Class of ‘44, a person who had raised money for Smith “for six decades,” and made an “indelible impression” on the staff of alumnae relations, and on Smith.

“Ruth took note of this rowdy table (Trisha gestured toward the table in front from which had come raucous laughter as we were eating) and told me, ‘They must be from the Quad.’” This drew laughter from the crowd.

Robin took her cane in hand, got up from her chair, and walked across the ballroom floor in front of the cheering crowd. Carrie stood up, applauding, and then the rest of the audience. “Wow,” I thought, “a standing ovation.”

She shook hands with Trisha, and with President Christ, a photographer captured them all together, and then Robin returned to her seat. A few more awards, and a group picture of all the award winners, and we were done. The high point of the trip, for Robin anyway, had passed.

No 25-page speech. During the summer, Robin had wondered what she might say. The Alumnae Office quashed that notion, saying too many people were receiving awards to permit any speeches.

Cutely, Robin told the table she had not really taken in the words Trish had spoken, and wondered how to get a copy. Carrie suggested she contact Trish through the alumnae office: “She probably has what she said on the computer, and will mail it to you.”

After the remaining few awards, the recipients were gathered for a group photo, and the dinner ended. The women began drifting away. It was indeed about 830PM, as my contact with Smith had foretold. We made our way from the front to the back of the ballroom, then to Room 256, Robin’s room. The college was offering a breakfast between 7 and 8AM; we agreed we would attend. Robin closed the door, and I was left standing in the hotel corridor.

What to do? Well, I could go back to Room 144, my room, and watch television. Sports on television. Baseball; the Red Sox were playing. Probably some college football games still going on. That did not feel inspiring. Then I remembered I had left my folder, with notes, of the ceremony agenda, at our table.

Thought I, aha, I will walk back among the remaining women there, maybe something will happen. But it did not. Okay, I told myself, another option is go back to 144 and do some reading. I had with me my journal, and I wanted to read that over. See how I was moving through life in the last month or so.

Nuts to that, I told myself. Be bold! You do want to hang out with some of these women. But how? I’m not prepared, or drunk enough, to accept rejection if I approached some of them individually. But I could sit in the lobby. Perhaps someone would approach me. “That’s it,” I thought, “I will just sit there and make myself available.”

So I took the ceremony folder and the Smith material to the small lobby, and sat on the couch. Flanking it were two overstuffed chairs, the ensemble facing the desk. Through here would pass all the women staying at the hotel, to go to their rooms, or to go to the bar.

As I sat at one corner of the sole couch, facing the hotel desk, I wrote down thoughts about the Smith alumnae group. During the dinner, I was marvelling at how these women were so dedicated to an institution at which they had spent only four years, some time ago. In Robin’s case, 64 years ago!

Why should something from that long ago command this much attention now? I told myself, as I had done many times over the decades (especially when I get a request from an alumni group to come to reunion, or to a sporting event), that to cling to those four years was to get stuck in the past.

I especially felt that way about Colby College. I'd spent 1963-1965 there, made friends, but left for Berkeley and a wider world. I have returned once, for my 25th class reunion. I fell into conversation with my former classmates but felt not of them. They'd spend all four years together, me only two. More, 25 years afterward Colby still felt like the overgrown prep school it was back then.

I made notes about that, in the lobby, then nostalgia came flooding in. Smith. I visited my first love here, Betsy Allard. Autumn 1963. I thought of Betsy and me, in Quogue. Playing golf with Robin. Going out at night with the gang.

And, ironically, the love of my life, as people say: Charlotte Kirk of Vassar, another woman's college. Only one year, but that year was 1968. And thus to my favorite lines:

*So we beat on, boats against the current,
Borne back ceaselessly into the past.*

You can see where this led me. *So maybe I've been wrong these forty years. My disdain sure is misplaced now. I'm as bad as they. In fact, I'm worse, because I'm making myself miserable comparing present, lonely life with the 'radiance which was once so bright', in Wordsworth's phrase.* There in the lobby I remembered how the dinner audience looked, all of them smiling, enjoying themselves. *These women, they're not miserable. They're proud of their institution, and proud of their allegiance to it.*

Maybe a link to something solid, rather than to my memories, would help my nostalgia. A present link to Richard Alleman retains my link to Berkeley, where I met him. Ditto for Rosenberg and Mary Anne Delaney (whatever happened to Ed Boyhan? And should I contact Peter Moltu?). They haul the past into to present, they reify it (one of my favorite words).

Now, I could do that institutionally. I could start attending the events of the New England Cal alumni group. Maybe I'd meet my PhD there. Let's face it, though, the institution itself does not feel "dear to my heart." Cal does not have my commitment, as Smith has the commitment of these women.

I made more notes, looking up every now and then. Soon a woman leaned against one of the overstuffed chairs. *Aha, she's good looking, but not waiting for me to make an approach. She's waiting for some one.*

Dark hair, broad angular face, black pant suit, maybe 35? She pulled out her cell and began looking at her messages. A couple of minutes passed. She did not look in my direction, at least from what I could detect out of the corner of my eye, I stole glances at her every now and then. She showed not a flicker that I was there. *Should I approach her? What's a good line? Maybe she thinks I am too old. Probably too young for me.*

Eventually, along came two other women, and the three of them headed out the door, going God knows where. Back to an old college haunt? A poker game? Anyway, out of my life.

I resumed my notes. Then emerged from the neighborhood of the ballroom two women, one of whom was definitely cute. I'd spotted her before. She was smiling, I smiled at her. She turned right, into the lobby area, and asked, "What's your role here?"

Great line. Easy to ask, since I was one of maybe four men at the function. I stood up. "Sit down and I will explain," I responded. Looking around, though, I concluded they'd have to share the overstuffed armchair next to the couch, or split up. It looked awkward.

"Let's go into the bar," said the cute one. I agreed. We three ambled the twenty paces to and through the bar opening. In the center of the bar room was a large circular table. All the seats

around it were occupied by women. Black women. It was Smith's women of color group, having a good time.

Cutey was greeted by one of them. She responded, "I'm here, and I have a date!" I hid my face in mock embarrassment; the black women hooted. "Can we make some room here?" continued Cutey.

The group around the table shuffled chairs, and made enough space for three more. We sat down, and introduced ourselves. Cutey was Ruth Foster, Class of '83; her companion Anne Tierney, also '83'. I explained my role at the awards function. Anne and Ruth listened.

"You know, I can remember every summer, I'd watch Robin (we call her Robin) filling out forms or letters, writing away to Smith classmates, every summer since I was born, it seems."

I did not let on that I was born the year Robin graduated from Smith. The light was dim, I was behaving youthfully, maybe I could get away with Class of '77 instead of really the Class of '67.

"Where was that?" asked Ruth.

"On Long Island."

She pounced on that. "Where on Long Island?"

Now, I have different responses to this question, depending on whom I am talking to. If I'm talking to someone from, say, California, I say, "the ocean side." I can say, "the Hamptons," if I want to be pretentious. I can say, "Quogue," if I'm talking to someone who really knows the area. And I can say, as I did here, "Quogue" if I'm talking to someone who knows the area and I want to impress.

"We have a family house in Quogue."

"Ohhhh, Quogue." Clearly I had impressed here.

"And are you going to invite me out there?"

"Ten bucks a night. You're on."

I switched topics, instinct telling me to impress upon them my excitement. "I'm so impressed with you all. How do I convince my daughter to go to Smith?"

"How old is she?" asked Anne.

"15."

"I'll tell you what happened with my daughter. She'd heard about Smith since birth, of course, and told me she would never go there. Then, September of her senior year, she announces she's applying to Smith early admission. Go figure!"

"What happened?" I asked Anne.

"She's now a sophomore here, and loving it."

I looked at Ruth. "I'm cautiously optimistic," she said. Her daughter's 16, and thinking about college.

Of course, I was thinking about more than Chloe's college. I looked at her ring finger. There it was, a diamond ring. *Oh well, maybe she's just cute and not my type anyway.* The waitress came over, and we each ordered a Sam Adams.

The next hour or so was spent in a pleasant haze. Ruth likes to talk on and on. I had to interrupt her verbal reveries every now and then, when I had tired of gazing at her cute, narrow face, lightly-freckled complexion, and pert nose. I'd take issue with what she said.

We covered early embarrassments: she's a Yankees fan, grew up in Chatham, New Jersey, and lives up the Delaware River from Trenton, where she works.

We talked about her education. "I got a degree in geology from Smith." I saw my chance. "Did you go on? I understand a lot of Smith women go on."

"Oh yes. A master's. And a PhD."

"You're kidding!" I picked up her hand. "I came to look for my next wife. I wanted a PhD. I found one, but look at this!" I pointed to the ring on her finger. She tightened her ring finger around my fingers which were holding her hand. That felt nice.

“Yes,” she said, nodding her head. “Married. I’m a great catch. I have a pension, I have health benefits.”

“Just my luck,” I said.

We covered global warming. The dimwittedness of the American electorate. Living in an exurb and driving a long distance to work. Ruth works at the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. “It’s the state equivalent of the EPA.”

“I knew that,” I responded indignantly. “You must have that answer ready for people you think are not too smart.”

As I said, it was pleasant. We seemed to wind down a bit. I was getting ready to go. I pulled out my wallet to look for the right bills for the beer (I didn’t even think of treating Ruth, shades of my cheapness), when she piped right up: “I’ve got this.”

“Really?” I said. “Thank you, I appreciate that.” I had not found the right bills. I could see only twenties, so that helped.

“You’re welcome,” she said, and took my hand. She squeezed it, and continued. “Now look, my family does like yours, it puts last names in as first names. My middle name is Whitlock, we came over on the Mayflower. I really like you.”

Dear reader, I ask you. Was that a cue? I mean, here we are, attracted to each other, I have a single room, she’s leaving early tomorrow morning. Only late the next morning did I even consider, was Ruth looking for more?

I don’t think so. Even after she gave me a farewell hug, and the parting words, “I’ll e-mail you. I want to spend a night in Quogue for \$10.”

And even if she did want more, do I want that? No. A romp in bed with Ruth would have been more than physical. It would have been romantic. I don’t want a romantic involvement with a married woman. It makes me tired just to think about it. The intrigue, the coverups, the wondering if Ruth would ever leave her husband, and her children. Forget it.

Nope. I think Ruth said and acted exactly as far as she wanted to go, and I was happy enough with that.

More than happy. I was hit between the eyes, not with love, no, with a new lease on life. The people I’d told I was going to look for a PhD heard a jolly tone from me. This was a lark, something fun to do.

But in my soul, the effort to find a mate felt just that, an effort. A task. With a very uncertain end. Maybe I wouldn’t find anyone. Maybe I don’t really want anyone anyway. To put the worst face on it, who would want me?

Will a successful PhD professor want to hang with a newsletter editor? Especially a younger woman? As Nicky said, younger women want someone with money. That ain’t me. I live frugally. I can’t provide security to a woman. Even if I wanted that kind of relationship.

Do I even want a relationship, much less a wife? Suppose I found the match: the attractive PhD who wanted me? I was telling myself, I don’t really want to spend that much of my time with a woman, a constant companion.

I had strewn so many obstacles in the way of enjoying the company of a woman, in the way of romance, I was dead to it. Then came Smith, and Ruth. I put myself forward to engage another human being, and sparks flew. I was awake again to love. At the least, to the search for love. I want that sense again. The adventure. Merely that can suffice.

*To seek love
Is to affirm life.
To give love,
Is to affirm life.*

To finish the trip. The next morning I found Robin for breakfast. We then visited her friend Anne Harmon who lives in a retirement home in Northampton. "Robin," she said when we arrived. "Robin!" said her daughter.

Onward to several freight rail facilities, with Robin saying every ten minutes, "We've been here before, haven't we?" Each time I would say, "No."

Then to lunch with Craig Della Penna, a rail colleague. Carole Bernstein Ferry's daughter met us at Craig's bed and breakfast. She and Robin talked, Craig and I talked, at a local diner. We saw the rail-trail Craig had chosen to site next to, and then headed back to Cambridge, and I went back to Maine.

Quite the trip!