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What I learned on my summer vacation.

Sometime in the spring I announced that I would be taking August off this year. That's right. The whole month. Moreover, I didn't have specific plans. We weren't taking a trip or renting a cottage. I would just be at home, doing things around the house, maybe some gardening, certainly some golf, and hanging out with the family. Four weeks of not much to do.

But as August drew near, I realized that one can't have nothing important to do. So, probably in an effort to justify my seemingly selfish plans, and perhaps even appear creative I announced that during the final week I would be working on my second book, a project I started more than a year ago and was overdue to complete. So four weeks suddenly became three and I was sure that most people would see the first three as necessary for some deep creative reflection. And I had a goal. Complete the first draft.

This started me thinking about what else I might accomplish in August. I needed more goals. So, in concert with goal number one, I decided to regularly spend time in deep reflection. Make it a habit. Perhaps, sitting out in the garden, I might discover ways to simplify my life. Or maybe I would have a "eureka" moment and take my business and my life in a new and exciting direction. August was starting to shape up nicely. But this wasn't enough.

It was time to read some novels. I love to read, but most of what I read is non-fiction. August would be my chance to read for fun. I could easily set a specific goal. 4 novels. Seemed easy enough.

I was on a roll. Better not leave out the family. This was my chance for "quality" time. You know, the kind that is unbounded. No agenda. No schedule. No preplanned activities. Hard to set a specific goal, but I'd know this when it

happened.

Alright, let's not forget golf. I planned to golf often, and more importantly, get my game back in shape. I had essentially been absent from the game for 3 summers. This was my chance to hone that swing and lower those scores. Goal: handicap down to 12. (When I last kept track in 1998 it was 14). No problem.

So there we go. As July burned its way into August I headed into my month long vacation as a man on a mission. Now it's mid-September. August has been relegated to memory. And looking back I might easily be disappointed. With respect to the above-mentioned goals, I went 0 for 5.

It took about two days to realize I wasn't going to spend week number four writing my book. That was work. I was on vacation. By the first Friday I finally corrected Ellen who for the umpteenth time was explaining to a friend my vacation timelines, emphasizing that I would be working during the last week, which made it seem so much more reasonable. "In fact," I interrupted, "I was taking that week off as well." I got no response.

I did spend some quiet time in the backyard, but deep reflection always felt like too much work. And unless you count the idea I had to move the birdfeeder to a much better location, eureka moments eluded me completely out there.

I did buy a couple of novels. That's a start. And I did actually read one of them. But I had to finish it in September. Strangely, I always found during the day that there was something else to do. And in the evening I found myself reading a page and then wondering what it said.

I most certainly spent a lot of time with Ellen and the girls, though rarely all together. I realize now how presumptuous it was of me to assume

that my free time would translate to free time for all. Between overnight camp, friends (including a boyfriend), and work, I found it hard to "schedule" time to be with the girls. And even when I was with them, usually distractions (did I mention a boyfriend?) made it difficult to connect with them in the way I had imagined.

Well, I did play golf. A lot in fact. I should have set a goal for number of rounds. But I didn't just want to play, I wanted to improve. Instead, I got steadily worse. My handicap went up, and the number of balls per round that found themselves lost in the woods or drowned in a pond reached epidemic proportions.

So, it wasn't the summer I had imagined. But, I'll tell you something, it was darn good. I won't tell you of all the wonderful things that happened in August, but I will tell you that I did in fact have a "eureka" moment while sitting with my good friend, Glen Reid, on the last Thursday of August. I was lamenting about my golf game. He listened, smiled and said, "You are too worried about the results. You need to have intention, without attachment to the outcome. Let go. Enjoy. Then the results you seek will find you." (For the record he doesn't look or sound like Yoda at all).

With this new, healthier perspective I looked back on the summer. Lots of great things had happened in August, just not the things I felt needed to happen. But there was no need. There never is.

Expect great things. That's the key to greatness. But accept what comes along. That's the key to happiness. This is what I learned this summer. That, and slow down the backswing.

Bill

Kayaking for Dummies

"Anyone who takes up sea kayaking should make a commitment to being a serious student. Far too many paddlers sign up for a guided trip or two, or spend a half-dozen afternoons practicing on a lake, then assume they have the sport mastered and head for Alaska. Wrong. Oh, to be sure, thousands of such people accomplish major trips with no trouble, but when the unexpected happens, they're helpless."

-- Jonathan Hanson, Essential Sea Kayaking.

I don't know about you, but I always squirmed when I watched those T.V. specials featuring professional escape artists attempting to extricate themselves from dangerous situations of their own making. Of course, I needn't have worried as these stunts were almost always meticulously planned and rehearsed. And if something did go wrong, someone in the wings would be on hand to pluck them from the jaws of death. These "daredevils" were, in reality, highly skilled athletes performing under carefully controlled conditions.

Unfortunately, while kayaking with family in Killarney this past August, I found myself in a predicament that was fraught with peril, mainly because of an appalling lack of personal planning, rehearsal or skill. In a nutshell, I was helpless and I had placed my life in danger. The only reason that I'm writing about this, and not being written about on the back pages of some newspaper under the heading "He Was Too Stupid to Live", is due to a combination of luck and some level-headed thinking by my brother.

Allow me to set the scene: My wife Elizabeth and my brother's wife Elaine had spent five days each of the past two summers on guided kayaking tours on Georgian Bay in Killarney Park, which is situated about two hours north-west of Parry Sound. On both occasions they returned home with stories of incredible beauty and tranquility, the perfect escape from the demands and stresses of the big city. They had often talked about one day sharing this experience with their husbands, and this past spring Nathan and I were formally invited.

Although I love wilderness getaways, they usually have taken place on dry land. I admit, I was at first hesitant to participate in a kayaking holiday as I have always experienced some anxiety about open water, and Georgian Bay certainly qualified. In addition, I am by nature a cautious person who would not ordinarily hop into a kayak and paddle into the sunset without a great deal of prior practice (I was also concerned about looking like a novice - it's a male ego thing). However, after much discussion and encouragement from the women, I agreed to give it a go.

As our holiday drew nearer, I realized that I was not going to be in a position to actually practice in a kayak (not that I made any effort to find instruction, which in hindsight was readily available and would have been invaluable). So I did what I thought was the next best thing: I bought a book. I settled on Essential Sea Kayaking, written by Jonathan

Hanson, which offered the neophyte basic information on a wide variety of topics, from basic strokes to equipment to recoveries and rescues. The latter chapter heading was not especially comforting as it conjured up images of boats with searchlights piercing the blackness, searching in vain for signs of life. In fact, it turned out to be a fairly informative section dealing with the various ways in which paddlers can get into, and hopefully out of, trouble. The book certainly made it seem that, with the help of the techniques covered, one could deal with most any mishap or misadventure. As I was to discover, however, there's no substitute for experience.

We arrived in Killarney on a warm Thursday afternoon. After locating our bed & breakfast accommodations (we had decided against camping on the rocks, choosing instead a soft mattress and a cooked breakfast, a decision that unwittingly exacerbated our predicament on the water the following day), we headed off to the outfitters, where we collected the various pieces of equipment that we would require for our adventure. Soon after supper we retired to our rooms, determined to get a good night's rest before starting out bright and early the next morning. Before turning out the lights, however, I again reached for my kayaking book, and re-read the section on recoveries and rescues. Elizabeth attempted to reassure me, reminding me that on her two previous paddling holidays she and Elaine had never once found themselves in any serious difficulty. Besides, we'd be taking it slow the first day so that Nathan and I could get the hang of it.

Anyone who has spent much time on the water would tell you that the one thing that can turn a benign body of water into a swelling, pounding force faster than anything else is wind. As we pushed off shore Friday morning and made our way through a sheltered tributary, the going was easy. I marvelled at the way the kayak glided effortlessly across the still water. The boat was responsive to the slightest inclination of the paddle. Within minutes I was able to negotiate my way through narrow passages; stopping, reversing and turning at will.

When the narrow river emptied us into the edge of the bay, however, everything changed. The wind had picked up noticeably since we left the B & B less than an hour earlier. About 100 meters from the shoreline, whitecaps were beginning to form. I had to constantly correct and over-correct my paddling in order to keep up with the others. Every time I eased up, the current took me off course, making me work that much harder to point the kayak in the right direction. Eventually I muscled my way forward and together we headed across choppy water in search of some secluded coves where we could relax and enjoy the breathtaking scenery all around us.

Fortunately, our map led us to a sheltered inlet, and after some relatively easy paddling (my confidence, shaken earlier, was beginning to return), we landed among some



rocky outcroppings and enjoyed a leisurely lunch and a swim. All the while, not too far off in the distance, we noticed that the waves in the bay had grown disturbingly large. We agreed that it might be wise not to prolong our stay as we would have to negotiate our way through those waves if we were to make it back to town for dinner, so we hastily packed up and shoved off (as I mentioned earlier, in choosing not to camp, we had created the need to return to the B & B. We now realize that, although less comfortable, the ability to pitch a tent wherever we wanted, or needed, would have offered us the option to stay put and not have to attempt to cross a body of water that was becoming increasingly treacherous).

By the time we had reached open water, the waves had become swells that easily reached four feet over the more difficult stretches. No book could have prepared me, or any of us, for the ride we were about to take. No matter how hard we tried to keep the bow of the boat pointed into the waves, we eventually would be pushed towards shore (and the rocks), all the while growing more frustrated and fatigued. I felt a first wave of panic wash over me, recognizing that we were all in over our heads. I wanted to stop, to regroup, to discuss the situation rationally, but the wind muffled my voice as I attempted to call to Elizabeth. Just then, as if our thoughts were interconnected, we allowed ourselves, one by one, to be swept into a small inlet, where we could go ashore and collect our thoughts.

After a brief rest, the map was consulted in an attempt to find another way to navigate the crossing. No luck. We did have one small tent and plenty of food with us, so we agreed that if necessary we would spend the night camping. In retrospect, I wish that we had simply packed it in at that point and set up camp but, inexplicably, we didn't do that. Instead, we decided to give the crossing one last try.

Within minutes, I knew that we had made a big mistake. Elizabeth had tried to avoid the big waves by hugging the shoreline; a huge swell picked up her boat and hurtled it against the rocks. Miraculously, she didn't capsize and the kayak absorbed the pounding. As I watched in horror, I was unaware that a swell was heading my way as well. The next thing I knew, my kayak had capsized and I was upside down in the water. I pulled on the spray skirt cord and made what the book calls a "wet exit". My head was now above water and I was clinging to the overturned kayak, but my troubles were just beginning. First, my life jacket was far too loose, which caused it to ride above my head. I began to take in large amounts of water as I couldn't stay afloat (I remember being surprised that the water tasted pretty good, but that thought vanished as soon as I began to choke). Second, no one else had seen me capsize, as they were dealing with their own emergencies. I began to ride the waves towards shore, where the rocks lay waiting. Third, and this is a good one, the straps from the spray skirt (the straps that were supposed to fit over my shoulders like suspenders, except they weren't comfortable, so they were left to dangle about my legs) somehow began to wind around my legs and became entangled with the straps from my sandals. The more I

struggled to free my legs, the tighter the straps became; within seconds I became totally unable to swim. This fact, combined with the ill-fitting life jacket and the water turbulence making it difficult to hold onto the kayak, made it plain that I was in big trouble. I kept thinking, "This can't be happening!"; I was in a total panic.

Just then, Nathan appeared, and attempted to toss me a towrope. I think we connected on the third attempt, and we slowly began to ride the waves back to a small rocky island where, after a clumsy and painful landing (remember that I was bound up like Harry Houdini in a strait-jacket), we were safe at last. Thankfully, Elizabeth and Elaine had also managed to reach shore - a different shore, however - and within thirty minutes had succeeded in flagging down a motor boat and climbing safely aboard. About twenty minutes later, we were all reunited and the ordeal was over.

For the rest of the day and into the evening, we remained together but alone with our thoughts. We knew that we were very lucky to have emerged from our experience relatively unscathed. It was the first time that I had ever feared for my life and for the lives of those I love. I can't say whether I could have made it safely to shore if Nathan hadn't shown up. His ability to keep his head while I had completely lost mine was likely the difference between a happy ending and a tragic one.

The next day we made a half-hearted attempt to return to the water, but packed it in early as the wind once again began to gust. We left Killarney on Sunday morning, eager to see our kids again and to resume our busy schedules. For me, I kept thinking about a phrase to which I had, until now, never given much credence: "That which doesn't kill you makes you stronger". And, I hope, smarter.

"The very few tragedies that occur each year almost invariably involve an inexcusable lack of proper equipment or ignorance of technique. To me, having the right knowledge and equipment, and being prepared to handle any situation that might arise, is part of the adventure."

-- Jonathan Hanson

David Frank.



That 70s Dance

It had a very familiar feel.

When the doors opened at the Bell Financial 70s Dance on September 21st, and the first guests filed in wearing bell bottoms, vests, side burns, afros, and heavy gold jewelry it was as if we were back in 1975. The lights flashed, the music was loud and fast, and the dance floor was full all night. Yep, it's 1975 alright.

We set out to accomplish two things. First, we wanted to raise some money for Big Sisters of York. Second, we believed we could do that and have some fun at the same time. Here's what one guest had to say in an email the next day. *"Can I ever thank you enough for having such a great idea for not only raising money for a good cause but for such an excellent time!!! I just want to thank you ...for putting on such a good dance. I thoroughly enjoyed myself as I'm sure everyone that was there did."* Given that we raised over \$9,000 for Big Sisters (our target was \$5,000), it appears that we score a 10 on both counts.

Thanks to Ellen, the chief organizer and driving force. Thanks to Laurie who brought a bus-load (literally) of guests from Scarborough including "The Village People." Thanks to many individuals at Bell Financial, including Marcia, Tracey, and the staff, to the volunteers from Big Sisters,



and all others who contributed time and energy. Thanks to our DJ, Randy Mullin (who's on board for next year), and who kept the party going all night long. And thanks to all of those who attended and partied like it was 1979. If you did attend, and found it hard to get the song YMCA out of your head for days afterwards, our sincere apologies.

As the evening came to an end, (the last song was Stairway to Heaven of course), the most common sentiment heard was "You have to do this again!" Plans are underway. If you missed out this year stay tuned. You won't want to miss it next year!



Welcome Baby Patrick!

Congratulations to Sonia and Rob, and welcome to Patrick Galdstone Colhoun, born on July 31, 2002.



Great minds, great thoughts.

"One can choose to go back to safety or forward toward growth. Growth must be chosen again and again; fear must be overcome again and again."

Abraham Maslow

"Let him who would move the world, first move himself."

Socrates

"Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway."

John Wayne

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