

Chapel Talk
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November 4, 2009

Unlike several members of my family, I never made the National Ski Team. Unlike the other three men in my family, I did not go to Dartmouth. Unlike my two brothers, I did not marry a collegiate cross-country skier; I did not settle in New Hampshire or Vermont, and I did not coach my kids how to be competitive cross-country skiers.

Although as a teenager I was about the same size and shape that I am now, when I was growing up, I was affectionately teased by my older brothers for being chunky, for not working to my full potential, and for always picking the easiest chores around the house. Unlike my uncomplaining brothers, I hated strawberry season because it meant hours bent over picking, and I resented that during my spring break from college when all my friends headed for warm sunny beaches, I went home to help with the heavy labor of sugaring which entailed lugging heavy buckets of sap through hip-high snow. It may sound as though I was a real slug as a teenager, and I don't think I was, but relative to my family members, I was the husky, lazy one.

Later in life I broke away from the ski world, I married a woman who had never done the national cross country ski circuit, and I moved south of the Mason Dixon Line where some winters there is no snow at all. My family could not believe it.

However, when I was a young man, my aspirations revolved around skiing, and when I was twenty-one, I tried to make the Olympic ski team. I did not make it.

All of our larger dreams are shaped in some ways by the families in which we grow up. You will note Mr. Speers' prowess as a chapel speaker, having grown up in a family of ministers; you will note Mr. Roach's diplomacy and sense of justice, having grown up in a family of lawyers. And you may note my interest in athletics and training, having grown up in a family of skiers. My father competed in the 1950 Olympics as a ski jumper and cross-country skier, and he coached the 1972 and 1976 Olympic teams.

Likewise, my oldest brother competed in four Olympics, his first as a senior in high school, and both this brother, Tim, and my sister, Jennifer, were on the National Ski Team over an extended period of time. My other brother, Sverre, although never a highly successful college skier, is now a nationally recognized coach. His daughter, my niece and Cinda's cousin, Sophie Caldwell, is trying out for the 2010 Olympic team.

In contrast to my family members, I did not reach my goal of participating in the Olympics. After a successful collegiate skiing career at Bowdoin College, I trained for two years, devoting every aspect of my existence to making the national team. So I guess one could say I failed, and that the two years were an utter waste of my time. Here is that story.

Once I decided to devote the two years following college to skiing competitively and training to make the national ski team, I enjoyed my senior spring. Interestingly, "enjoying" my senior spring did not necessarily entail not working. During my senior spring I had the most intense academic experience of my four years in college, taking courses that I loved, pursuing an honors thesis in music, and taking a seminar with three other men, boys really, with the President of the College. I finished my four years of Bowdoin with a flourish, and this might have been partly because I knew I was looking ahead to life without this kind of intense academia, and I wanted to get all I could out of my classes. I worked hard right up until graduation, and somehow the hard work was a lot of fun even though my senior spring entailed much more hard work than I expected.

My oldest brother had earned enough money through the Olympic Committee to buy a log cabin in Putney, Vermont, so I moved in with him. He did not charge me any rent, but I was expected to contribute to the food bill, heating costs, and of course, I had to finance a car, car insurance and day-to-day living expenses. I looked around for jobs that allowed for at least three hours a day of hard physical training and that paid me enough to sustain me as I pursued my goal.

During my first fall away from academic life, I took on three jobs. I was hired to coach a first-year club soccer team at the Bellows Falls Public School. I went into a wood cutting

business with my brother and a friend who was also taking time off to ski, and I was hired by my alma mater, the Putney School, to teach 'cello and chamber music. This last job I could do at night, so it did not interfere with my day jobs or my training.

My first unanticipated challenge was when I started training full time after graduation. I discovered that I did not have a large enough base to train the hours that were necessary to become a world-class athlete. As you may know, cross-country skiing is a very demanding sport, with races ranging from 10 kilometers to 50 kilometers over very hilly terrain. Training for skiing requires hours and hours of cardiovascular conditioning. I began to realize that coming out of a modest college ski program was going to be harder than I thought.

My second challenge was earning money to sustain me as I trained. While I had landed three jobs, they were not high paying, and they were labor intensive. For my wood cutting job, I bought a locally revered Jonesered chain saw with a 20" blade. On my first day on the job, with my headphones blocking out the sound, I inadvertently felled a tree on the power line. Proudly cutting away, I was not aware of my faux pas until a neighbor came down from his house to see what the heck was going on. We sheepishly called the Power Company and watched as they deftly released the tree from the power line something that we could not do because of the danger of getting electrocuted.

Despite the expected challenge of backbreaking labor and the unexpected challenges of navigating power lines, bad weather, woods filled with vines, prickles and poison ivy, we managed to get to work most mornings. We cut wood, split it by hand with splitting mall and wedges, and then in a beat-up old Chevy truck that worked most days, delivered to customers throughout southern Vermont. We had flexible hours, we were outside and we were engaged in strenuous physical activity. My daily routine included cutting wood in the morning, before heading north to Bellows Falls to coach a high school co-ed, club soccer team.

The team that I was hired to coach was a first-year team. A few of the students had played soccer. Some were ex football players who could not make it in the competitive

high school league. Others were students who wanted to learn a new sport. Soccer was not nearly as popular in 1978 as it is today, and this program was definitely a rag-tag group of kids. Football, basketball and baseball were the sports of choice, so we had little funding, which meant that we got the field that no one else wanted, as well as a few old, worn out balls. Some of the players had their own soccer balls, so they were able to supplement our collection.

My first day of coaching soccer to this co-ed group was eye opening. They thought I was very strange. To save on gas and to get in an extra workout, my first day of coaching I roller skied the twenty miles to the field. Although a lot of skiers come from southern Vermont, Bellows Falls was not a town that had an active ski program. Most of the adults in this town worked at the local paper mills and logging companies. When I pulled up on my roller skies, one of my players, a 6'5" boy who looked more like a lineman than a soccer player asked me "Where'd ja get them thangs?" I explained what they were and what I used them for. That was the beginning of our friendship.

The challenge of this part of my day was not physical but mental. I had to figure out how to teach fundamentals in soccer with a field that was sloped and muddy and basically unlined, with 5 balls for 25 kids who had no idea of the rules or the fundamentals or even of how to interact with the opposite gender. Despite these hardships, my team learned quickly and eagerly. We became a close community within the sprawling high school. The fact that it was a first-year team, that it was co-ed and had a coach from outside of the school, made us unique. I can't remember our win-loss record, but I remember individuals on the team -- where they were from, what their home life was like, what made them excited each afternoon.

Two nights a week, I went from the soccer field to the music practice rooms, where I taught cello and chamber music. This was not as easy a transition as it might seem. Although not a professional cellist, I had played a lot in high school, devoting my summers to pretty serious practicing. I continued to play in college and had, by that time, developed a facility on the instrument. I always felt that, although an unusual set of interests, music and sports complemented each other. Training for sports put a great deal

of physical strain on my body, whereas practicing the cello pushed me intellectually and spiritually.

Given that, you would expect that this arrangement of cutting wood, coaching soccer and teaching music was a perfect marriage. In many ways it was, but my fatigue at the end of the day, left me with little energy for my work, which was to train. Nevertheless, I needed to log in the hours of training each day, so I would slog through my daily workouts in an attempt to build up my conditioning. Ironically, as hard as this fall was because I often was too tired to train effectively, it was the best part of my two-year stint pursuing my goal of the Olympics because I was interacting with different groups of people. For the remaining year and a half, I was largely on my own, training alone, without the daily interactions with my soccer team, woodcutters or chamber ensemble groups. My relative isolation from community was another one of the many unexpected challenges during these two years.

My first year of racing, it did not snow in Southern Vermont until January. To compensate for this unusually snow-less winter and in desperation to get on my skies, I traveled to West Yellowstone, Montana over Thanksgiving break so that I could log in the kilometers of skiing that I so vitally needed. In my second season, I competed in the US Nationals, followed two weeks later by the Olympic tryouts. Both sets of races involved racing 10, 15, 30 and 50 kilometers races over the span of a week. Needless to say, at the end of those tryouts, my body was so depleted that during the next month I gave up all formal training. All that I could do for exercise was to walk around in the woods on my skis as I recovered for the spring series.

Somewhere during that spring, I decided that I had had enough of skiing and training. The life, although exciting at times, was too narrow and too lonely. Thinking about training hard enough, sleeping long enough and eating nutritionally perfect meals literally consumed me 365 days a year. I was obsessed with my own existence. Over Christmas vacation, I would not want to be around family members who were sick, fearing that I would catch their germs during this critical time of year. Every day, I would gauge my conditioning, taking my resting pulse every morning while still in bed. If I did not get

enough sleep, if I did not eat well, if I became run down, my training would suffer the next day. If I did not log in enough hours on a specific day, I would have to make up for it later in the week, so my weekly hours would not be off the goals that I had set. This type of focus was a constant and was never far from my mind. By the spring of my second year, I had had enough.

Although I failed to make the Olympic team, these two years are some of the fondest memories I have, and maybe by a different measurement, they were not a failure but opportunity because I learned some important lessons.

First, I learned through my failure that it is OK to work very hard for a goal, even though you may have little chance of actually reaching your goal. Hard work that does not seem to pay off, at least in the short term, is OK.

Many of you have submitted college applications recently. Many of you have worked extremely hard over the last four years in hopes of gaining acceptance to your college of choice. In December, some of you will get the news that your college journey is complete while some of you will get news that is disappointing. No matter what news you receive, *never* regret the hard work that you have put in during your career here. No one can take this away from you, and you will not even recognize, until much later, the many benefits that you have garnered from investing yourself fully. The measurement of your hard work does not come in a college acceptance letter.

Some of you have worked hard in the classroom, some on the athletic fields, some in the art building or in the performance hall. Some of you have worked hard on corridor making St. Andrew's a better place for your classmates. The intangible benefits of hard work are, in fact, more important than the college acceptance, the race or game that you won or the grade that you have received on an exhibition. As Mr. Carroll says, "Hard work beats out talent every time." If you have been fortunate enough to have been coached by Mr. Austin, you will have heard the phrase, "I want you to outwork your opponent!" No matter how much talent you may have, there comes a point when hard work is the critical ingredient for your success, however you may measure that success.

Never shy away from a challenge because you are afraid that you might not succeed. If you do not try, for fear of failure, you will miss opportunities in your life.

The other important lesson that I learned was what I truly value about sports. To me, sports provide an unparalleled opportunity to learn life skills. Ultimately, it is what you learn from working on a team, rather than working in isolation, that brings meaning.

I have always enjoyed team sports because I am both contributing to and learning from my team. In college, I played soccer, and was planning to specialize in cross-country skiing having skied all four events in high school-slalom, giant slalom, cross-country and ski jumping. However, when I realized that the Kamikazes - that's what Bowdoin's ski jumpers called themselves - needed me, I joined the team. Although I did not like ski jumping, and although I am scared of heights, I never considered the option of not contributing to Bowdoin's ski team which desperately needed jumpers.

I don't know how many of you know what ski jumping is, since it is a sport that you have probably only seen if you watch the winter Olympics. It involves strapping on long and heavy skis, and hurling yourself down a very steep in-run and then launching yourself over a hill so steep, that you cannot see the landing. For me and my fear of heights, it is a terrifying experience. There were days when it took all of my will power to launch myself down the icy tracks of the in-run. The only way that I could overcome my fear of heights was to focus on the track, rather than look over the side of the in-run, that often rose to dizzying heights above the natural terrain.

We have an example of this type of team commitment in our own Will MacIntosh, who stepped into the lacrosse goal two years ago because the boys' lacrosse team needed a goalie. Now, a lacrosse goalie is not my idea of an easy position. One does not simply step into a six by six-foot space and become a target for 90 mile an hour hard lacrosse balls without being aware of the risk. I imagine that there were games, at least early in his career, when Will was on the nervous side. But Will is a tough kid, and the team needed him so he stepped into the position even though he might have preferred to remain a field player.

To me, sports must be taken in a context that goes beyond Self. Those who pursue sports purely for their own aggrandizement and self-fulfillment, miss one of the primary reasons for participating. The life of an athlete can be introspective, self-centered and narcissistic. Sports can also be a testing ground to learn the skills of communication, collaboration, resilience and teamwork. I have spoken with many men and women who, when they hire someone to work in their firm, business or school, look for men and women who have participated in a sport or have had a significant community service, theatre, or musical experience where their success has been dependent on a group of people. In the end, training for cross-country skiing did not fulfill my need to feel as though I was contributing to something larger than myself.

I would like to conclude with a quote by George Bernard Shaw that helps to explain how my two years of training and skiing have affected my outlook on life today.

“This is the true joy of life, the being used up for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live.

Life is no "brief candle" to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for a moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”

Thank you.