

Tom's Rowing "Career": 1946-2006

1942: Born Severna Park, Maryland; home is 250 yards from Sullivan's Cove, about 6 miles upstream from Annapolis on the Severn River.

1946 (or so): Probably rowing in some form or other by the age of 4 or 5. Family & friends go to the beach virtually every day in the Summer—effectively live on the water.

1950 (or so): Family didn't have 25 extra cents, so we were the ones without an outboard motor; rowing was it; routinely went fishing and crabbing with both parents in a genuine wooden rowboat; rowed all over solo from, doubtless, an unsafe age.

1955: Lonely only child; rowing solo was favorite & obsessive form of therapy (obviously I didn't call it that at age 13); more or less routinely rowed to Annapolis and back in a heavy-as-lead 14(?) -foot skiff.

1958: Best high school friend (Severn School, Severna Park) is Philip Welch from Oxford; we get it in our heads to build a sort of sea kayak, Indian-style, to paddle around the Chesapeake in; abject failure—what the hell.

1960: As I recall, several of my Severn classmates went Chestertown way upon finishing H.S. My Dad loved the Eastern Shore, and a lot of my Mom's relatives were from Salisbury area. I've got nothing but good things to say about Washington College.

1960: Matriculate Cornell, home to championship crews and legendary Coach Stork Stanford (Sanford?); assumed I'd go out for crew, brilliant home-trained oarsman that I was; Stork looking for body type—whoops; Cornell crew hopes dashed by midway through freshman registration day. (As a good MD boy, I settle for lacrosse instead—not exactly a painful choice. Lest it sound impressive, we were among the last of the mediocre teams, before Cornell LAX became a national powerhouse—ye gads, I was stunned that 47,000 showed up in Philly in June for the Div 1 LAX championship!)

1962-5: Roomed with the Demarest boys, Gary, a year older than me, Lee, a year or so younger than me; I believe both were strokes on the Eight; both went into the Navy, but Lee went directly to Philadelphia/Vesper(?) club (as a Naval Officer) to try out for the Olympics (alas, not sure what the result was). **1966-1999:** Following 4 years in the Navy in Vietnam and D.C. (land branch, Navy Seabees—I had a Civil Engineering degree), I settled in Northern California for the next 30+ years; lots of Pacific, ZERO rowing.

2000: Buy house on Martha's Vineyard, waaaaaay out on Cape Pogue Bay. Desperate to row! (Flatly refuse to buy a power boat.) My wife/Susan takes up casual kayaking, I buy a lovely Steve Kaulback Adirondack Guide Boat—39 pound, 12.5 foot Kevlar rowboat (correct descriptor) with sleek, gorgeous crew-like oars; it flies, I covet the oars, and my

rowing gene is re-connected with a vengeance—e.g., to the point of Atlantic and Nantucket Sound offshore rowing in a 12+ foot boat. Buy second Kaulback boat for Lake St Catherine, 5 miles from Vermont farm where I now live. My old guy's exercise, all 12 months, is Power Walking—in the late Spring (when the ice melts in VT), Summer and Fall I also row about 1.5 hours a day, 3 or 4 times a week when not on the road. (Speed limit on constricted parts of the lake is 5mph, no wake; I yearn as a rower for a moving violation ticket from the state marine cops who occasionally patrol; so far all I've gotten is a citation and a \$40 ticket for no life preserver—I “sprint” regularly and begged them for a speeding ticket even though the points would go on my regular driving record.)

(Sidebar: Susan has a couple of 50-yr-old English-Oxfordian cousins who were Henley-level champions in Pairs.)

2006/14 July: The day your book arrives, on a 7 or 8 mile row, for the first time in 55+ years of rowing, I snap an oar, a new one—got caught in nasty “milfoil” (horrid lake weed); use busted oar to paddle home 3 miles—discover unused-for-63-years “canoers’ muscles”! Ouch!

Given all the above, I guess you can see how delighted I was to get your book—even though a Kaulback guide boat requires little in the way of rigging Excellence.

Cheers ...

Whoops!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Bloody damned engineers! (I am one.) I just looked at what I wrote. All of it is true ... or is it? “It” gets “everything right” ... except what’s important. I just finished a 2-hour row in the driving rain on our Lake St Catherine ...

There is ... VIRTUALLY NOTHING ... that is as ... SUBLIME* ... as a Great Row. It begins as I put the oars into the car for the 6-mile ride to the lake. They are pieces of art, to be as cherished as an expensive sculpture by a well-known artist. I glory in their look and feel; as I touch them my transformation begins. Soon thereafter, as I launch and then pull away from the dock, I am transported to Another World ... Rowing World. My boat and I are joyously joined and gliding down the lake, at one with the water and our surroundings. Fully “in the moment” as the Zen practitioners would have it. The entire Row is a Meditation.

At one point I stop and drift for 10 minutes watching a Great Blue heron hard at work with his day’s fishing. What a magnificent creature. (He’s smart enough to exit skyward as I paparazzi toward him for a Blog picture—good for him!) At one point I accompany mama duck for 50 yards or so as she and her brood engage in a practice paddle. I row around and through dense fields of blooming lily pads. I exchange gentle pleasantries with kayakers I come upon. (Okay, less sublime, majesty broken—I swear, under my breath, at the woman in the passing power boat who is on her cell phone. It’s not the Middle East conflagration—but it is immoral, or at least a desecration.)

Though it was raining, the water is still. When the water is still there is little that is as ... GLORIOUS ... as the Perfect Stroke. Not the hint of an extraneous splash. Clean entry into the water, clean stroke, clean exit out of the water. Repeat. Repeat. When I hold the perfect rhythm for a few moments, well, it’s, well it’s ... SUBLIME. And then there’s the anaerobic sprint of 100 strokes, repeated every 20 minutes or so. Can I sprint and keep the strokes as clean as is the case when not sprinting? Sometimes. The sweat from a sprint is ever so ... SWEET.

Row complete, I sit by the dock, reflecting for five or so minutes, before carefully hoisting my sweet, sweet oars on my shoulder and heading for the car ...

The prior two pages are the chronology ... but they have virtually nothing to do with “my rowing ‘career.’” My rowing “career” is all about the halting effort immediately above to capture the Meaning of The Perfect Row—like the one I just finished.

***SUBLIME, according to my *Rodale’s Synonym Finder*: awe-inspiring, soul-subduing, humbling, breathtaking, heavenly, divine, splendrous, beautiful, dazzling ...**