In one sense I never really left Harvard. In another sense, I am now in an antipodal place. For me Harvard was primarily an intellectual experience. Aside from a few friends, my one claim to a social life was playing in the Harvard University Band. But my girlfriend (now my dear wife) accompanied me to every game, I spent every weekend with her, and during the week, except for classes and band rehearsals, I studied. The musty odor of the book stacks at Widener Library has never left my nostrils.

My life is still bound up in books. I’m a professor of mathematics and I write. Two books that I have recently completed (a novel and a research-level math book) are sitting in my PC while the author searches for publishers, and my office is so crammed with books and magazines that my family and friends have occasionally refused to enter for fear of injury.

So what brought me to the antipodal place? Graduating in 1969 during the Vietnam War; coping with the draft and changing my plans in a way that I now realize was life-altering; completing a Ph.D. in mathematics at New York University in three years while avoiding the draft; being blessed with a beautiful wife and two beautiful children; teaching for three years at Northwestern University followed by a move to the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, where I now live amidst cows and trees and creative people and an incredibly lively cultural milieu where I can dress the way I want (no three-piece suits—I don’t even own a two-piece suit—well, twice I broke down and bought a jacket and matching pants—after all, it was for my daughter’s, then for my son’s bar mitzvah) and drive my 1980 Chevy Malibu Classic and feel comfortable; loving my work; living in Israel during three separate six-month periods (1982, 1986, 1989), which opened up a vast realm of Jewish experiences; publishing a research-level math book in 1985 (Entropy, Large Deviations, and Statistical Mechanics), which opened up a vast realm of scientific and spiritual experiences; writing a novel (The Aftermath of King David Salem); mourning the recent death of my beloved father-in-law; completing a second research-level math book (A Weak Convergence Approach to the Theory of Large Deviations); and on and on. It’s been an amazing quarter century.

In recent years our lives have changed dramatically. My wife Alison, after having stayed home to raise our children, has embarked on a career of her own, her first love, which is teaching. She is an elementary school teacher in a nearby town and is a natural. She is also on the verge of completing her Master’s Degree in Education. Rather than come home to a hot meal every night, I now have to cook the hot meal myself. Whoops—my son Michael, age 13, is reading this and is objecting vigorously. So here’s the truth: he does most of the cooking and I clean up. Since Alison has started working full-time, Michael and I have grown very close. We cook together, bike together, and play tennis together. He is the resident expert on computers and machines—the kid can figure out anything mechanical (without the directions), a gift he definitely did not inherit from my wife and me, who hate machines and are all thumbs. Of our friends, we were the last to get a VCR and still do not have a microwave.
Our daughter Melissa has just completed her first year at Yale, where she will major in biology. It was difficult to say good-bye to her in the fall, but Yale is only an hour and a half away (much closer and easier to reach than Harvard). Melissa is spending the summer here working in a lab at UMass, and she has matured into a beautiful young woman while Michael, five years behind, is in the middle of his maturation, a patient, sensitive person with a quick mind and a heart the size of my wife’s. It is that—the growth of my kids, not the books and the traveling and the gray hair creeping up from the sideburns to the bald spot crowning my head—that tells me that twenty-five years have passed.