The Bridge

August 14, 2008

I have this recurring nightmare – I’m halfway across the bridge when I stoop down to tie my shoelaces. When I stand up, the bridge is moving and the gap widening. No way can I jump; I’ll just have to wait, but for how long? Fishing boats keep coming and going, up and down without stopping. It gets dark and they are still chugging and I’m hungry for fish and chips. I start to run from end to end and even think of jumping in and swimming ashore, but it’s a long way down and the water looks cold. I see the bridge keepers go home for the night and the boats keep coming and going. And then I wake up; it’s time to get up and meet the other gentlemen of leisure down at the “Y.”

By now the GOLs own that bridge – they have run across it in fair weather and foul. They have waited for the bridge to open and close, but now the friendly bridge keeper waves us through and has those impatient fishing boats learn their rightful place – in line behind these GOLs. Now GOLs are harmless creatures. They run and play honest golf on Fridays. They are old and young, fast and slow, male and female, quiet and talkative, large Kenyan and small cappuccino, patriots and loyalists, fat and thin, founder members and latter day associates, fathers and daughters, and so on and so on.

Much of the conversation among the GOLs has no meaning. Even their discussion of the meaning of life is meaningless. They waffle. They are repetitive. Their jokes have no humor; they tell them wrong anyway. A single story can last at least four city blocks, especially historical diatribes related to a race they would have won had they run fast enough. They are effusive race strategists – start out slowly and then reduce speed; save your breath for the after-race excuses; follow the leader; under no circumstance allow anyone to pass you on the inside as you turn a corner; run the diagonals even when others are trying to run straight; loosely tie your shoelaces to provide excuses for frequent rests; dress fashionably; walk before and after the water stops; avoid cinnamon flavored energy gels; talk to strangers because they may actually listen to your drivel and so on and so on.

“What has this got to do with the bridge?” you may, or may not, ask. Well the bridge is central to all that is good about the world. It represents your adventure beyond the confines of New Bedford into the wild yonder of Fairhaven. It means you are nearly at the end of your run. It is a place to pause and look at the seals and clam boats. It is a metaphor for the link to the unknown. It swings. It connects one side of the river with the other. It is strong and sturdy like the oak tree. It does not discriminate between democrats and republicans or Fords and Chevrolets. It does not complain when it is photographed or painted. The bridge is unselfish – it returns the reactionary force to ones foot without complaint. Nor does it complain about the wind and rain or the snow and ice. It wishes fishermen good luck on their expeditions and welcomes them home whether they had a good catch or not. The bridge is beautiful and knows no malice. And so on and so on.

One day three original GOLs were crossing the bridge with a famous photographer from the Standard Times. Peter Pereira. Now Peter had a story to tell, but with no words. He snapped feet and heads. He took the troubled trio from near and far, from the front, back and both sides and from above and below. He always caught a bridge spar to frame the good, the bad and the ugly. He caught smiles and grimaces. Mouths open and shut. His art communicated silent sound. He took a thousand shots and selected only one to be hung for posterity on the wall of the Y. Peter is brilliant and famous; his pictorial stories inform and offend. He tells it like it is. He paints colors in black and white. He should be President. Peter’s portraits are onomatopoeic. The bridge is his Mecca; it represents the universal link.

The winter holidays brought another famous photographer to the bridge. Later, Steve married my daughter and followed her to the end of the earth – literally. They now live in Igloolik which is way north of the Arctic Circle and where the wind was coming from on that winter’s day. It howled. It cut through the Gortex. It whistled through the bridge’s spars of steel. It was cold. We shivered. We were pushed back one step for each forward step. “Why do we do this?” we said. “Because it is there.” Another meaningless mantra. This run across the bridge into the teeth of the gale was a test of the suitor’s suitability. He passed the bridge test with flying colors. The bridge test in December is the standard for all would be son in laws, but only when the perfect wind is blowing from the North West and there is deep snow on the ground. You can now see polar bears and whales and Arctic fox and Arctic birds and komateks and inushuks and Inuit and flowers and icebergs and the Northern Lights on Steve’s website - [www.foxfirephotography.com](http://www.foxfirephotography.com).

Above all the bridge is about running. It represents the link to the “Greater” in the Greater New Bedford Track Club. It is the link between life and health. It reminds us of our aching legs. It tells us that the Green Bean is not far away. The bridge is alive. It moves, but slowly. It groans, happily, for that’s what bridges do. It is a bridge over troubled water.

***Bridge Over Trouble Water****When you’re weary, feeling small,  
When tears are in your eyes, I will dry them all;  
I’m on your side. When times get rough  
And friends just can’t be found,  
Like a bridge over troubled water  
I will lay me down.  
Like a bridge over troubled water  
I will lay me down.*

*When you’re down and out,  
When you’re on the street,  
When evening falls so hard  
I will comfort you.  
I’ll take your part.  
When darkness comes  
And pain is all around,  
Like a bridge over troubled water   
I will lay me down.  
Like a bridge over troubled water  
I will lay me down.*

*Sail on silvergirl,  
Sail on by.  
Your time has come to shine.  
All your dreams are on their way.  
See how they shine  
If you need a friend  
I’m sailing right behind.*

*Like a bridge over troubled water  
I will ease your mind.  
Like a bridge over troubled water  
I will ease your mind.*

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