

Something About a Time Alone

If there ever was something you could count on for the neighbourhoods on the eastern ends of Long Island, on both the North Fork, and the South Fork, and the coastal neighborhoods on the Massachusetts coast, obviously excluding the Boston area, is that everyone only was here in the summer. Like the ebb, and flow back of the tides that frequent the Atlantic coasts of both places, everyone began to leave after labour day, for the warmth of more inland towns, most often metro NYC, or metro Boston, respective of which state the aforementioned neighbourhoods were in. Then Memorial Day came about, and then, for the next few days, droves of the residents came back, back to their summer homes, for the whole summer.

I didn't mind being the only resident for the next good few houses during the winter time. Sometimes, I would catch myself staring at the empty adjacent houses. They say loneliness will shorten your life, but I add on, only if you like association, because likewise, then social deprivation will make you unhappy, thus abating your life. I consider myself the good exception because I'm happier alone. I've never felt more alive than in solitude, when I got the best things in life from good old solitude. I'm no anti-social hideaway either. I lean towards introvert, but am extroverted enough to be able to truthfully enjoy social interaction. Tolerating small talk, I also have no qualms not adding to a full-on conversation, but just get me involved about something I like/am merely interested in, and I can spend the rest of my life talking, and when I do talk, I always love being the conversation's ringleader.

It was because of this such similarity in the town's inhabitants' habits that made it tantalising to move to this coastal Massachusetts town, in the quietest corner in Cape Cod, after leaving Greenport on the North Fork of Long Island, to which I moved to after leaving NYC for good. I always loved the ocean, and was all too happy to be able to see it practically at my doorstep. I had the beach all to myself, and the cold air was refreshing, probably because cold air has more oxygen in it (think why hot summer air feels hard-to-breathe). Couple it to the calming crash of waves, and the grey sky that was not dreary, but a drab that was so calming, so soothing that it made you pensive, and you could understand why you can't go wrong with a coastline like that. Sometimes, I would go to the coast in the winter, just to see if I can catch anything from its waters from ashore, or from a boat slightly offshore. Other times, I just wander about the coast, just basking in the essence of life that seemed to emanate from the sea.

Today saw me driving into town in my 1969 Mercury Cyclone Spoiler II for some snacks, and then basking at home in my living room light to bask in front of my living room light lamp. Quietly digesting the tuna, and yellowtail amberjack nigiri I ate in

Boston for lunch towards noon before returning home afterwards to then go out to town later to buy said snacks, I contemplated what I was going to do in the late afternoon. I took my clam rake, and went outside to the shoreline to begin digging for clams, while taking in the cold early-mid December air. After catching a good small basketful of them, I went home, and placed them inside various spare containers, first the glass jars, then the Pyrex glass lunch containers, and finally spare empty plastic, and cardboard tubs. I filled them with seawater, and placed the clams in. In a few days, the clams will spit out any sand inside of them, with me changing the seawater like an aquarium to ensure the clams were getting the micro-organisms they feed on.

I put the clam containers in the refrigerator, and sat down on the sofa again. It was then I saw a message that my friend Absalom Smithson had sent to me on my Xperia. The message read, “Hey Yi LuQuiao (he was the only of my foreign friends that called me by that name instead of my English name Carson Yi). I plan on coming to your place in Massachusetts, was it? It’ll be next Thursday. Take me on that three engined plane of yours”. I replied, “Monday is the beginning of the week, Tuesday is the day before the middle, which is Wednesday, which speaks for itself, being the middle of the week. Friday is when we kick off hyped for the weekend, and the weekend, Saturday, and Sunday speaks for itself. Therefore, Thursday has nothing to offer, but a mad bland, stale day waiting for the weekend. You’ve given me something to do that day, so I’m down. I suppose I’ll pick you up in that L-1011-250 of mine at Birmingham International, or as they now call it, Birmingham Airport”.

Next Thursday, as planned, saw me land in Birmingham, England on my L-1011-250 Tristar. Most people fly a Cessna, Piper, and/or Pilatus aircraft recreationally – I fly a Lockheed aircraft recreationally. The day before saw me drive up to Boston Logan International Airport, bemoaning the fact that Cape Cod’s municipal airport’s runway was too short for an L-1011 like mine to safely land, and take off, otherwise I’d have a hangar there to store it closer to home. I had asked Absalom to wait at the Maintenance spot I was parking at to have the aircraft refuelled. As expected, that fetching caracal was there, waiting for me, expecting me.

Upon deplaning, I walked up to him to meet him. “Nice of you to join me, although, I was hopelessly, joyfully addicted to loneliness where I was”. “Well, glad to see the good old maned wolf like you around here, man”. “Let’s rest” I replied, staring at the Rolls-Royce RB211-524B4I turbofan that made up engine #1, “I flew almost 14 damn hours, and I’m beat from all that”. “Sure” he replied. We went into the aircraft, and I reclined the middle seat (it was arranged in a 5-abreast arrangement – as Eastern Air Lines did 8-abreast, and Trans World Airlines did 9-abreast, I did 7-abreast so the seats could be wider, and more comfortable economy for any passengers looking to

rent/charter my aircraft, with 4 abreast front section as a first/business class) in the first row as back as I could; I then collapsed in the seat, and fell asleep for 4 hours.

A good few hours later saw me landing back in Boston again, and driving the Cyclone Spoiler II Dan Gurney Special back down to Cape Cod. Entering the beachfront house, I told him to relax, and make himself at home in the spare room that I had, but never used. I had, on Wednesday, taken a spare ottoman, a spare armchair, and a spare mattress that was gathering dust in my supply closet, and put them into that said room. I then proceeded to prepare dinner.

“I’m saving my clams for either tomorrow, or the day after that. So Chinese or Malaysian?” I asked curtly

He thought hard for a few seconds, and said “Malaysian, I guess?”

“Ok” I replied

I then went to prepare dinner, and soon dinner was finished. He engrossedly looked at the fish curry laksa that I prepared. He knew I had a “take-it-or-leave-it” policy with my cooking. If I made something spicy, I wouldn’t tone it down for my less familiar western friends, as such spiciness was so mild to me - props to growing up Asian, I suppose. Really, though, the food didn’t matter much at the end of the day anyways.

“This looks Chinese, with all the noodles in it” he said.

“Well, to be fair, it’s Peranakan food” I replied.

“What’s that?” he said.

“Peranakan is a term used to refer to descendants of Chinese people who settled in British Malaysia, and by extension, Dutch Indonesia (Dutch East Indies). There are also some descendants of them Peranakans as well, who settled in places like Myanmar (Burma), but it’s mostly used to refer to them Malaysian, and Indonesian Chinese” I explained.

“Ah. I see” he replied.

We quietly ate the dinner, while it started to rain outside, and I retired to my room for the night, While Absalom watched my TV in the living room. I spent the evening in said room on my PC, doing random gaming stuff on it. Hours later, at 01:00

(1:00 a.m.), I suddenly awoke from my sleep. After using the bathroom, I peeked into the spare room to see Absalom asleep on the mattress. I drank some water, and went back into my room, splurging on some potato crisps I bought earlier last week as part of the said snacks I bought in town, watching the rain turn into snow as the weather forecast had said. I then went back to sleep.

The next morning, I went to the living room to greet Absalom. 45 minutes after finishing breakfast, I told him I was driving south back to NYC to see an old friend Charles Sanderson, then Long Island to see another, Francis James Tyler. He agreed to tag along with me, and so off we drove, back to the concrete jungle I was all too glad to leave.

I took the Whitestone Bridge from the Bronx to get into Queens while bypassing the crowded streets of Manhattan. Sure, going through Manhattan via the Bridge, and then to Queens from there via the Queensboro Bridge meant a toll-free route, but I felt it was worth paying to not get stuck in crowded Manhattan streets going to where I was going. The triborough bridge (Robert F. Kennedy Bridge) was also a direct link to Queens that cost tolls as well, but it was not as close to the section of Queens I was going to. I reached my friend's home in Rego Park, and went to his front door. When no one answered, I suspected he wasn't at home, and so I called him.

"Hey Charles" I said

"Hey" he replied

"Not at home?" I said

"Nope. Decided to outside. Got off the train at Fulton Street, and walked down to Battery Park, where I am now. Say, can you pick me up? That way, I don't have to take the train at Bowling Green. The subway's long gone to shit, you know that" he said.

I groaned/sighed. "My Cyclone Spoiler II is a two-seater, and my friend who tagged along will die of boredom waiting for us. I suppose you two bozos can squeeze in".

"Sounds like a plan" he replied

"Wait for me at the Staten Island Ferry terminal, ok?" I said

"Sure" he replied

I crossed the Queensboro bridge into downtown Manhattan, and picked him up next to the terminal as agreed, squeezing them two into the passenger seat (neither were even in the slightest experiencing discomfort). On my way back, I took the Brooklyn Bridge because no way in hell was I gonna deal with afternoon rush hour traffic up in Midtown that I had to deal with going downtown. I went into Brooklyn Heights, then Williamsburg, east into Greenpoint, up into Maspeth, crossing into Queens via Forest Hills, and finally to Rego Park, where we got off at his home.

Absalom and I crashed on Charles's couch, and that coyote crashed with us a few minutes later. We had small talk (again, I tolerate small talk. We have little-no shared interests), and shared a few beers.

"Glad to see you again" He said

"Thanks" I replied

"I notice you seem happier now that you're gone" he said

"You think?" I replied

"Yeah. So anything's up? Apart from your British friend here?" he said

"Nope" I replied curtly

"Oh" he said

Two hours later saw Absalom, and me speeding off to good old Riverhead. "After that, we are heading further east to Greenport to revisit the good old haunting ground". Greenport was quieter at winter, just as I remember. I lived in a very quiet section of the town, where, as I said, I was the only resident for the next few houses during the winter. After stopping at some old spots around town, I drove to the beach, where we got out, and took in the view. As I remember, we had the beach all to ourselves. After a good hangout with Francis, where we drank some tea that I had taught that serval to brew, and chatted a good bit about what we expected from this winter, and how the winter was for us.

Returning to Cape Cod later that late afternoon, I decided we'll have fried clams, the clams now completely sand-free, and crab cakes for dinner. Sitting down for dinner, we quietly began to eat them. The dinner was relatively quiet, peppered with Absalom asking how my alone life came to be. He already knew how it worked for me, hearing

about me feeling alive when alone, and all that. He now wanted to know how I came to this decision.

“It started in around 4th grade” I said slowly, digging up those memories, “I wondered why people chose to become hermits. While mostly religious people I perceived did this, I ultimately decided not out of any religious choice, but I always found inspiration alone. I searched for the thing hermits got from solitude, and it seems I have found it”.

He replied that it was an interesting insight, and we finished our dinners. The next day, he tagged along again on my fishing trip. I caught a few flounder, but wasn't interested in keeping them. The next day after that, he saw me pensively sitting on the sand next to the coastline, the waves crashing up to my hips, staring towards the horizon. He sat behind me (less eager to get wet), and struck a conversation.

“Ah, getting inspired from this solitude?” he asked

“Yup. How you doing?” I replied

“Eh, good. Say, can I joyride your Mercury Cyclone?” he said

“This isn't the first time you've taken it out – go on ahead!” I replied

“Gee, thanks! Heads up, I'm gonna eat outside” he replied

“Ok. I'm staying in today anyways. Here” I said, giving him the ignition key

20 minutes later saw him speeding off in that car, and 10 minutes after that saw me going back inside. I made a char-grilled Bull Dorado (Mahi-Mahi), and Yellowfin Tuna filet, and some potato salad, with half made from Russet potatoes, and the other half with creamer potatoes. I ate the dinner lavishly, and retreated into my room to do more gaming stuff on my PC.

Around 17:50 (5:50 p.m.), almost 5 hours or so after he left, he drove back, the rumble of the 351 Windsor engine roaring into the driveway. He went into my room, handed the key back to me, and went to relax in his room. 10 minutes later, I went outside, took a stroll that was about 40 minutes or so, and returned. I resumed the computer session.

Dinner was clam chowder made from the clams that I dug up. As everyone knows, dinner, and lunch was where the conversation's at.

“So, ever consider moving away?” he asked

“Not in the foreseeable near future. I’ve found my groove in life here. There’s little, if at all reason to leave” I replied

“I guessed so. Looks like this loneliness won’t cause you a premature death at all” he said

“If I do, it’s only because God never wanted me to be old. You know what they say, only the good die young” I said curtly

“Huh. I see” he replied

“And I’m a firm believer in that” I said

“Errr... amen to that, I guess?” he replied

“Yeah, you don’t really, truly give a shit” I chortled back

After dinner was quiet again. The next day, I announced that I was going on another trip, north to The New Hampshire coast. He agreed to tag along with me. The coastline of New Hampshire is only 18 miles, but it was lively nonetheless. We sat on the shore, the oceanic breeze flowing in our hair. I, on a rare occasion, started a conversation that looked like small talk, and could be, but wasn’t for me, because I actually was interested in. It had the feel of a high school small talk.

“So, looking for any girlfriends?” I asked

“Nope. Not for me, at least at this time being. What about you?” he said

“Same here, but I’ll probably never be the one for this. 98% chance I won’t” I replied curtly

“Just you, and your car” he said

“Yup. And you too. Blessed to have you, and some others in my life. Who needs a significant other when I have just as good, if not way better friends in my life. Really, what’s the need? If I ever do love, it will only be genuine, because only love so genuine can make me fall into the 2% chance that I do” I replied curtly.

“So, solitude really does to your soul good things.” He said

“Yup, besides, you know it’s only lonely in the winter, most of the fall, and spring. When everyone moves back, it’s a large social gathering of sorts, or some shit. Even you notice this, but I’m the introvert easily mistaken for an extrovert. Hell, some of them who don’t really know me think I’m one hell of an extroverted people’s person.” I said

“Touché. Amen to that!!” he said

We stayed up there for two days before returning back to Cape Cod.

The day after we returned, Absalom announced that he will be going back to England. “Ok. Come back anytime,” I said, “you’re always welcome back anytime”. “Thanks, although I pretty much know it by now” he replied.

Two days later, Absalom returned to Birmingham in my L-1011 from Boston. After coming back home, almost as if intentionally timed, my Xperia phone rang. Absalom was on the other end, asking me if I was good as I was. I gazed at the rolling waves, smiled faintly, and replied that I was fine.