

Abyss of Adulthood: Aging Children of Eli Still Get Smashed

BYLINE: Noelle Hancock

Wild Turkey!" My friend Nate-Dog shouts, brandishing a bottle of whiskey and flapping imaginary wings with glee.

It was Nov. 18, and we'd taken the Friday-night train to New Haven--a booze-soaked isthmus carrying us from Manhattan to Yale, where our alma mater would battle Harvard in the next day's football game. Nate-Dog, William, Cooper and I have gone to the Game every year since graduating in 2002 (Nate and Coop from Harvard, Will and I from Yale). But this year, Mother Yale had some new house rules for tailgaters: no drinking games, no standing/sitting on U-Hauls, and tailgating parties would be shut down by the end of halftime. Of course, in the words of Will: "Who cares? I'm blacked out by then anyway!"

Metro-North was lousy with Yale and Harvard alums caravanning to Connecticut. Of my 20 friends, most of us are investment bankers or med students, and all of us are buffoons. We came together in New York after graduation, forming fast friendships and ignoring our commencement speakers' advice to branch out and socialize with people from non-Ivy League schools. That evening, we'd taken over a train car, setting up a temporary government based on substance abuse, inanity and the alienation of those around us.

"Are you packing?" Nate-Dog asked. I nodded, holding up a bottle of Poland Spring filled with Bacardi. At Harvard-Yale two years ago, I woke up Sunday morning on a windowsill in a train station. This year I'd vowed to maintain my dignity--or at least consciousness. It's good to have goals.

Sometimes I think my friends and I are aging backwards, like Jonathan Winters on *Mork and Mindy*. It's amazing that some of us are pulling in \$200,000 annually and managing people's finances, yet we still spend most weekends running around with more alcohol than blood in our veins, photographing each other urinating on parked cars and trying to convince people to sleep with us. My friends in med school administer each other IV's when they're hung over and call themselves the "IV League."

Looking around, however, this year's pilgrimage feels like that "What's different about this picture?" game in newspapers featuring two nearly identical scenes. Circle Cooper, who, instead of perusing *Maxim*, is doing the *Times* crossword puzzle. Circle Nate-Dog, who would normally be throwing things at people, but who is now reading *The Journal*. Hairlines have receded with stunning efficiency. Waistlines have expanded. Circle, circle. We also planned staying one night instead of two this year because it now takes a full 24 hours to feel like human beings again after a day of debauchery. We'd even chartered a limo to take us back to New York after the game. Oh, shit.

We're adults.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Bill Gorton asks Mike Campbell how he went bankrupt. "Gradually, and then suddenly," Mike answers. That's how the arrival of adulthood feels. It's like being on a seesaw in grade school, and having the asshole on the other end get off while you're still up in the air. You totally saw it coming, but it startles the hell out of you.

Maybe that's why the Game felt especially significant, if a little desperate, this year. Maybe deep down, we were hoping that Harvard-Yale would act as a sort of salt lick of youth, as if we could fend off the ravages of time by getting as wasted as possible. How fitting that Yale was telling us to slow down with these new restrictions. "You're getting too old for this," she seemed to be saying.

Coop was regaling the group with a story about a woman who recently ambushed him at a bar. "She was a serious cougar, a *total* coug," he says. A "cougar" is a man-hungry woman in her late 30's or 40's who was hot about 10 years ago but now a little worse for wear. "I had to get out of the situation and didn't want to hurt her feelings, so I took my shirt off! The bouncer threw me out immediately." Everyone laughed and moved on to reminiscing about Harvard-Yale past.

"Remember the Game where William found pizza on the ground and ate it?"

"Remember the year Nate-Dog found pizza in the *garbage* and ate it?"

By the time we arrived in New Haven at 8:30, the wheels had fallen off about an hour before. I'd downed half of my "Poland Spring." Cooper kept shouting, "Hug it out, bitch!" to no one in particular. William was debating writing "If found: Take to the Marriott Hotel, room 119" in black Sharpie across his arm.

We took our coalition to a local bar. I realized in my time away from New Haven, I had forgotten basic street names. Cooper had forgotten his coat, but Jack Daniels made him impervious to the cold. Emboldened by drink, Nate-Dog sprinted toward a parked car. Without breaking pace, he leapt on the back trunk, ran across the roof and down the front hood, leaving dents the entire way. "It seemed like a good idea at the time!" Nate-Dog grinned at our applause. His entire existence is dedicated towards "story value." The kid will do anything for a good anecdote.

At the bar, shots were taken, friends were greeted, and I'm pretty sure people were having sex in the coatroom as I hung up my jacket. I jumped on Nate-Dog's back and rode him around the dance floor. The questions "Where are you living?" and "Where do you work?" were answered again and again. "You know, I always had a crush on you in college," people lied to each other. I lost my friends, but luckily an old acquaintance offered me half of her bed at the Holiday Inn. As blackness closed in at 5 a.m., I prayed that somebody had my purse--a Hail Mary Pass Out.

The next day's tailgate lasted six hours so, in drunk time, it took about two minutes. Despite all the rules, it was pretty much the same as every year: A fat dude in mid-keg-stand was dropped by his friends. U-Hauls filled with gyrating coeds blasted the inevitable Madonna and Kanye West. "There's just something really painful about people

dancing during the day," Will observed. The network of U-Hauls reminded me of the giant hedge maze in *The Shining*. I had an utterly clichéd case of the hiccups when I happened upon Coop lying in a pile of discarded hamburgers.

"I'm so punished," he whimpered. "Can we go home now?"

"The limo's picking us up in 20 minutes," I said.

"No shit?"

"Shit."

It was a stretch limo, but the six of us snuggled together and passed out in a pile, like a litter of puppies huddling in the corner of a large box. The engine vibrated below, taking us back to the city and to work on Monday morning. "*We are* too old for this," I thought before drifting off.

On Monday, I got my pictures back. In them, we were urinating on parked cars.