
Chapter Forty Three

Ben Morgan's Graduation

**University of Miami, Coral Gables, Florida
December 18, 2008**

It's been nearly thirty years since the twin headaches* (Greg and Wes Morgan) completed their undergraduate degrees at the University of Miami. I'm sure my father (now 90 years young) was full of relief on that day. Today, I'm a proud Dad and full of joy, returning to Coral Gables to witness my son's college commencement.

When it was time for Ben to shop for colleges, he had a lot of options. He applied to UM. His early admission letter and the assurance that Chairman of the Board/Grandma Toby had the funds available to send him to Miami made the decision a no-brainer. He's a lucky boy. Miami is a place with lots of distractions, but if you are a good student and can apply yourself, like Ben, you might find yourself in a commencement ceremony, like this one, at the on-campus arena, The BankUnited Center, trying to sing the alma mater with your fellow graduates:

Southern sun and sky blue water

Smile upon you Alma Mater

Mistress of this fruitful land

With all knowledge at your hand

Always just, to honor true

All our love we pledge to you

Alma Mater

Stand forever

On Biscayne's wondrous shore.

It was a great day. We were front row, section 113: My mother-in-law Toby (Ben's maternal Grandmother), my wife Lynn (Ben's Mom), my daughter Lindsey (Ben's sister – she'll be 26 in a few months), Allison (Ben's girlfriend) and me. We didn't need Pomp and Circumstance to clue us to the fact that John Benjamin Morgan is an extraordinary human being. Lynn is all smiles. Toby is gracious and happy to be a part of this special occasion. Lindsey knows this family group's dynamic all too well. Allison says he's awesome. (Yeah, we know.)

Ben is poised and businesslike. He's tall (6'1"), trim and still sporting the poets' beard on his chin that he's had since High School. His hair is closely cropped and his eyes are the same color blue that I noticed in a picture I took of before he was born. (Four generations of women: Toby's mom Edith, Toby, Lynn and baby Lindsey). No goofy mortar board hat adornments or funny shoes. He respectfully has a tie on - just visible at the top of his graduation gown.

Commencement is defined as An act or instance of commencing: beginning or the ceremony of conferring degrees or granting diplomas at the end of academic year and/or The day on which this ceremony takes place. I've always liked the notion of commencement being a beginning.

"In and out in two hours," says University President, Donna E. Shalala of the day's proceedings. Ben seems to share the sense of efficiency. He accepts his degree in Finance, Summa Cum Laude in just three and a half years. (This gives him a jump on an MBA, of which he'll begin studying for next semester. You see today is a beginning for Ben and he knows it's a great start. But he takes nothing for granted. I love that about him.)

The trip to Miami in December is welcome for us. We used Expedia-dot-com to keep the costs manageable. As a consequence, Lynn and I flew from St. Louis to Chicago and scrambled from one terminal to the end of another terminal at O'Hare Airport to catch the connecting flight to Miami. Our suite at the Mutiny Hotel in Coconut Grove is adequate. We're

only staying three nights. With all the excitement, we didn't even notice all the crazy creeks and sounds of the place until Friday night. (Our return flight on Saturday departs at 8:25 a.m. and connects in Washington D.C. Dulles Airport. We'll miss the snowstorm in Chicago but the pilot will fight a bit of a headwind flying west. We'll be home before dark.)

We all know why we are here. Ben's graduation on Thursday morning from 10 a.m. to Noon. But we'll have a variety of meal occasions on Thursday and Friday: Breakfast at the Mutiny (in the Grove). Lunch at Monty's (overlooking the yachts on the bay). Reservations at the Chart House at 7:00 p.m. (in the Grove) - a table for seven outside (Skye, Lynn, Toby, Lindsey, Allison, Ben and me.) Friday: Lunch on South Beach at the News Café allows for a rendezvous with Randazzle (Lynn's sister Randy) and her remarkable daughter Erica on holiday after her first semester at Princeton. And finally, a meal at Houston's in Coral Gables (on the Miracle Mile). .

I'm no food critic but if you are in Miami, I recommend:

The oatmeal at the Mutiny Hotel.

The brick of onion rings at Monty's.

The Lobster Bisque and Crab Cakes at the Chart House.

The Tuna Salad at the News Café (the spinach egg white omelet can't be very good – Randy ate less than half of it).

The Mojito and the Cuban coffee at Houston's (both traditional Cuban drinks).

Toby isn't going to let me have any of the cheese off of her Veggie-burger because it might clog my arteries and she disapproves of Lindsey ordering the Key Lime Pie for dessert. But she is the Chairman of the Board and we're lucky to have her with us. Without her, none of this is possible. God bless her.

Activities are not restricted to meal occasions. We have series of important missions. Ben needs a couch for his new pad in the Grove (Kumquat, Loquat, Irvington – turn right and follow the road through palm trees and tropical plants). Toby needs replace her luggage before she returns to New Jersey. Lindsey and I team up on a couple of missions involving digital photography

and instant gratification photographic prints. (Home Depot, Macy's and CVS pharmacy).

Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers* is on top of the New York Times Best Seller list. I can't help thinking this trip to Miami is similar to the sets of circumstances he writes about. "Outlier" is a scientific term to describe things or phenomena that lie outside normal experience. The book suggests to me that people do have advantages and some amount of luck involved in their individual success. The book also suggests that dedication and hard work are minimum requirements.

Speaking of success: landscape photographer and gallery owner Peter Lik, modern artist Romero Britto of Brazil, and Rockefeller Foundation President commencement speaker Judith Rodin and the 6' 5" 300+ lb. rap artist who sold me his CD on South Beach are a few of the individuals who stand out in my mind this weekend. They are all great inspirations.

Friday Night, Lynn and I are completely relaxed (exhausted). The steady stream of sound affects seems like a plot for a situation comedy or cartoon. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. It sounds as if a neighbor is hanging pictures - but it can't be. This periodic tapping has been going on for hours. The sound of a police car or emergency rescue vehicle siren outside our hotel. The sound of water flowing from a shower or toilets somewhere in the building. The sounds of sliding glass doors. The sounds of people talking outside (maybe on one of the small balconied porches). Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. To catch our flight we need to be up and out by 6 a.m. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap. We're tired but the situation is just too funny. We laugh. We know we're only going to get a few hours of sleep before that wake up call. Tap. Tap. Tap. Tap.

It seems like a dream sequence. Wednesday afternoon and evening – travel from St. Louis through Chicago by air, Thursday's activities and graduation, Friday on South Beach and the tap, tap, tap, tap and Saturday's rental car return (Dollar), Miami airport, Dulles Airport, Lambert Airport and finally Home. We are blest, safe and sound.

** Twin headaches is the term affectionately assigned to my brother and me by our parents. Although not actually twin brothers, we both went to college for undergraduate degrees at the same time. With the exceptions of just a few breaks in housing and tuition, Dad bankrolled the whole thing. I think Greg would agree: We're sorry about the headaches but we wouldn't trade a minute of the experiences at the University of Miami. I met Lynn there. I completed an MBA there. (Lynn and I have four degrees from the University of Miami: B. Ed 77, BA 78, M.S. Ed. 79 and MBA 82. Needless to say – we are huge Hurricane fans.)*