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It is natural in life to want to return to one's beginnings, and in my thoughts I often go back to the scenes of my Southern boyhood. I now live in the Berkshires, on a mountainside in Cummington, Massachusetts, but it was a bit farther north in the Green Mountains, in Vermont, that my life in New England began some forty years ago. For personal and professional reasons, I had to leave Vermont in the early sixties, but I have been visiting it ever since. The state has a special hold on me, for at one time I helped to make its laws. Through a peculiar set of circumstances, I became a member of its House of Representatives, and as one of its former legislators, I still have a special concern for its future.

As a cousin of Woodrow Wilson, and as one born in central Louisiana next door to Huey Long, I have always taken an interest in politics, but it had never occurred to me early in life that I might one day run for any political office. But in Vermont strange things happen. My former wife had been a student at Bennington College and had developed a fondness for the Vermont countryside. With a friend she had purchased a fifty-acre farm on the lower slope of Mount Anthony in Pownal, the first town over the Vermont border from Williamstown, Massachusetts. We had spent the first three years of our marriage in Europe, first at Oxford and later in Florence, and when we returned, we bought out the friend and decided to make Pownal our permanent, year-round residence. Chartered in 1761, the town was named for the governor of the Massachusetts colony, Thomas Pownall (the final *l* had got dropped along the way). Situated in one of the most beautiful green valleys in all Vermont, it was in 1960, after we had lived there for ten years, still a sleepy, largely rural town. The population was then approximately 1500 and the two small businesses, the Warren Wire Plant (later General Cable) and the Pownal Tanning Company, both in North Pownal, each employing approximately 150 townspeople, had done little to alter the quiet community.

In good weather our dirt road had a series of ever enlarging potholes; in the spring mud season it often became impassable. I used to say that I had been born on the edge of a swamp in Louisiana and had moved to the edge of a swamp in Pownal, Vermont, otherwise known as the Mount Anthony Road. In winter the town's snowplow made a valiant effort to keep the road open, but in severe snowstorms we were snowed in for days. I taught part-time in the English Department of Williams College, and I can remember

William Jay Smith, former Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, is the author of The Traveler's Tree: New and Selected Poems *and* Army Brat: A Memoir.

wading home through snowdrifts, holding up a briefcase filled with students' papers to keep them dry. It was a hard life but we loved it. Looking out on the valley, which in every season revealed its spectacular beauty, we felt privileged to live in such a fine spot and could not think of living anywhere else.

We were both writers and a writer's life is a lonely one; we were not bothered in the slightest by our isolation. Indeed, we relished it. We got to know our neighbors and a few townspeople, but in general we kept to ourselves. We respected the way of life of the old Vermonters, and, as outsiders, did not wish to intrude upon them. I was astonished when one day early in 1960 James Lounsbury, the owner of a small grocery store in Pownal Center, where we frequently shopped, came to call on us. He had come, he said, on behalf of several townspeople to ask if I would be willing to run for selectman. They were aware that I spent only a few days a week at Williams (I was its poet-in-residence); the position of selectman would take little of my time. I was moved by his plea that I might help solve the town's problems and, eager to know more about the place for which I had such affection, I agreed to run. (My colleagues at Williams immediately accused me of running for the sole purpose of getting my road repaired.) Realizing that I could not ask people to vote for me if they did not know me at all, I got in my jeep with its four-wheel drive and began to make the rounds of the houses tucked away on Pownal's snow-packed roads. I trudged through the snow to the mud-rooms at the back of farmhouses, introduced myself, and asked people to support me. In house after house, I was ushered in, seated beside the stove, and made to feel warm and welcome. Everyone seemed delighted that I was taking the trouble to run, and I had the distinct impression that a good many of those on whom I called were going to vote for me. But I was less encouraged when I discovered that my opponent, a member of one of Pownal's oldest families who also delivered milk to most of the town, had been everywhere first. In the final tally on election day, I lost by forty votes. Although I had lost the election, I had won something more important—the friendship and respect of many townspeople. I had loved Vermont for its physical beauty, but now I felt that I was getting to know its people and to appreciate their qualities of toughness, independence, and integrity, and, previous reports to the contrary, their considerable warmth.

Not long after my defeat, James Lounsbury came to congratulate me on my remarkable showing. It was incredible, he said, that an outsider, a nonnative, and a Southerner at that, could have run against a member of one of Pownal's oldest families and come so close to defeating him. Would I, he wondered, be willing to run for the House of Representatives. That body met for only about three months each year and never on Monday, which happened to be the only day I taught at Williams. He stressed that service as a legislator would take little of my time and would benefit the town considerably. But I pointed out to him that I was a registered Democrat and as such would probably not stand a chance in a largely Republican town. One's party affiliation, he countered, made no difference in this race, and there would probably not be any opposition anyway. Other people who had welcomed me to their homes telephoned to ask me to run. With my background and qualifications, I would be of far greater service in Montpelier than I would have been as selectman. I decided to give it a try. President Baxter at Williams, delighted to hear that I was willing to enter the political arena, immediately gave me his blessing. The primary election made me the candidate of both the Democratic and Republican parties. There was indeed no opposition; I wouldn't have to exert myself in any way; I would be a shoo-in. But that is not how it worked out.

I soon discovered that most of the townspeople had little interest in who would represent

them in Montpelier; they were far more concerned about whether the referendum to allow pari-mutuel betting in the state would pass and, if it did pass, whether the first racetrack would be built in Pownal. Located on the borders of New York and Massachusetts and only one hour from Albany, Pownal was thought to be perfectly situated to support a track. I had never in my life been to the races, and pari-mutuel betting held no attraction whatever for me. My father, an enlisted man in the regular army, had been a compulsive gambler, and payday, when he often lost his entire month's pay at the poker table, had been one of the nightmares of my childhood. One of my uncles in East St. Louis regularly bet on the races and as a result had nearly lost not only almost all his money but his job and his wife as well. When Lounsbury came to ask me to run for selectman and later for state legislator, he mentioned the possibility of a racetrack in Pownal. At the time I could see nothing against it. If Vermont wanted racing and Pownal wanted a track, why shouldn't they have them? What Lounsbury did not tell me and what I discovered later was that he was allied with one of the leading farmers in town, Robert Rudd, Sr., in the Catamount Group, which would, if granted a license once pari-mutuel betting was voted in, open a track just over the New York border on Rudd's land, on Route 346. Their nondisclosure seemed to me to indicate that they and others in town had wanted to put me in place, as one who did not oppose racing, first as selectman and then as town representative. They saw me, a former city-dweller, as clearly someone who would not oppose development even if it brought in racing. They saw me also, I thought, as a professor, a writer, and, of all things, a poet, whose mind would be on higher things and who would certainly not want to interfere with the operation of a racetrack. I felt that I had been maneuvered into an impossible position. Everywhere I went in town, people asked me what I thought of racing and of the possibility of a town track. I had not thought about it at all, but I soon began to think of nothing else. I talked to friends about the track then operating in Hancock, Massachusetts, some fifty miles to the south, and the effect it had had on the community there. I investigated tracks in other parts of New England. I weighed all the arguments pro and con. The Pownal track might well bring more jobs and more income to the town, which was to receive $200 per day whenever the track was open, but it would also bring problems, a seasonal population, people in trailers with children who would have to be educated. It would mean an added burden on the town's limited services and on its roads. And it would undoubtedly bring, as it had around other tracks, crime and prostitution. It would attract more tourists but it would all but destroy the town's greatest irreplaceable asset, the green valley itself. I decided to set forth my opposition to the track in an advertisement in the *Bennington Banner* and in the *North Adams Transcript*. I informed Lounsbury of my plan, and he made it clear that he would do everything possible to defeat me.

The situation became at once heated and intense. My statement apparently unleashed sinister forces that I thought existed only far removed from such a quiet town. My telephone rang in the middle of the night: rough, thick, foreign voices threatened me and my family. My barn would be burned down; my house would follow. My children would not be safe. I decided then that I absolutely had to win, and my wife, a proper Bostonian, ordinarily more reticent than the most reticent Vermonter, shared my determination. We both took to the back roads and asked people, whatever their sentiments with respect to the pari-mutuel referendum, to vote for me. We developed a closely knit Democratic organization of a sort that did not exist in many much larger towns. People, young and old, met and plotted, spending hours on the telephone, and on election day transported voters to the polls. A group of arch-conservative Republicans, angered not so much by my

views on the racetrack as by my being a Democrat, found an old resident to oppose me. And Robert Rudd, Sr., himself decided to run as a write-in candidate.

In the three-way race that developed, I won by forty votes. Pownal, along with other Vermont towns, voted to allow pari-mutuel betting. It would have its racetrack but it would send to Montpelier a Democratic representative who had opposed it.

I had much wonderful support during my heated campaign but none that pleased me more than that of one of Vermont's most revered citizens, Robert Frost. Although he came regularly to Amherst, Frost had not been to Williams College in thirty-five years. The Williams lecture committee asked me to invite him, and when I did, to everyone's astonishment, he agreed to come. I told him the morning after his reading that he had drawn the largest audience in the history of the college.

"More than for Mrs. Roosevelt?" he asked.

"More than for Mrs. Roosevelt," I replied.

At the start of his reading, he led me out on the platform and said, "Vote for this man, he is a good poet."

I didn't tell him that his endorsement, which, of course, I valued highly, would have little effect because few Pownal residents had crossed the border to hear it.

When Robert Frost was made the official Poet Laureate of Vermont by a unanimous joint resolution of the 1961 session of the legislature, I attended the ceremony at which Governor F. Ray Keyser, Jr., presented him with a plaque.

He took me aside at the time and said, "You hold down the southern part of the state, I'll hold down the northern part, and we'll try to find someone for the middle."

It might have been interesting to have poets control the state, but it was quite otherwise. Being a member of the 1961 session of the Vermont General Assembly was like traveling back to the eighteenth century, since it had changed little since then. The State House, with its gilded dome topped by a statue of Ceres and its red plush interior, had the elegance of a more graceful, if less democratic, age. A Russian visitor is said to have remarked that Catherine the Great would have felt at home there. Vermont at the time had the third largest legislative body in the world. According to the state constitution, every town had its representative; thus there were 246 towns and 246 representatives. The population of the state was then approximately 390,000, somewhat less than that of the city of Rochester, New York. Coming from a town of 1500 people, I thought that mine would be a meager constituency. But then I discovered that 60 percent of the towns represented had a population of less than a thousand. Next to me in the House sat Philip Hoff, representing Burlington, Vermont's largest city, which then had a population of 35,000. Behind us, slightly to the right, sat Miss Eddy of Stratton, representing 24 people. Each of us had one vote. The Senate, the membership of which was based on population, had 30 members. The 1961 session of the General Assembly was the longest on record: it met for seven months, from January 4, 1961, to August 1, 1961; it was called back for a special session the following year, from Wednesday, July 24, 1962, to Thursday, August 9, 1962. It was also the youngest in history; the average age of the members of the House was fifty-nine. Of the 246 members, more than half, 132, were over sixty; 65 were between the ages of fifty and sixty; 32 between the ages of forty and fifty; 15 between the ages of thirty and forty; 2 under the age of thirty. The youngest was the member from Shaftsbury, who was twenty-four, affectionately known to his colleagues as Cornwallis because he frequently appeared on the floor wearing a defiant red blazer.

The constitution gives no age requirement for representatives; it says only that they

shall be the persons in each town "most noted for wisdom and virtue." The towns apparently gave the widest interpretation to the word *wisdom.* The standard procedure over the years had been for the town to take one of its older citizens who had been on town relief, buy him a suit of clothes, and send him up to Montpelier, where the state could look after him and keep him warm. My fellow legislators swore that in the 1959 session there was one elderly gentleman who appeared daily wearing an antiquated sailor outfit until several members decided that the dignity of the chamber required them to chip in and buy him a proper suit.

With this kind of representational body, it is understandable that when the Supreme Court of the United States made its decision on reapportionment a few months after our session, the Vermont General Assembly was cited as a glaring example of how far legislatures could move from one man, one vote. In the Vermont General Assembly, 11 percent of the population could have complete control. Vermont then had a kind of rural aristocracy that dictated how laws were made. When a roll-call vote was taken, certain key legislators would show the others how to vote, and they would fall into place like dominoes. I once moved that the roll-call vote be taken in reverse alphabetical order: chaos ensued and the bill under consideration was defeated.

I know how it feels to be in a minority. My notes tell me that I was one of 46 Democrats out of 246 members. (If there were 50 Democrats, as the *Legislative Manual* for 1961 indicates, then there were four people who were very quiet about their party affiliation.) One of those Democrats swears that he ended up being seated in what had become known as Sleepy Hollow, where elderly members were said to have dozed undisturbed through entire sessions.

The Vermonters in the General Assembly were anything but tight-lipped, as they are usually said to be. I described at the time the nature of the oratory to which I listened. My description bears repeating here because it applies to the other legislatures I have observed since.

Like many another novice in politics, I soon discovered that it is extremely important to know how to begin a speech. Conclusions are not so important, because, if people know you at all, they probably know what you are going to say anyway; but it is important to startle them into attention. Certain openings have the approval of seasoned politicians. One is simply: "I *will* say this," followed by a long pause. If you open in this manner, you can go on to say absolutely anything because you have made it clear that you are a person of great importance and that you have something of great importance to say. You yourself may not be at all sure what is coming next, and in your heart of hearts you may be willing to admit that it is not very much; but in any case you have prepared your listener: "I *will* say this."

Another opening is the self-abnegating one that, if properly used, can be completely disarming. In the Vermont House we often heard the classical beginning: "I haven't very much to say, but . . ." One of the prominent women members, a robust sandy-haired young lady, who was introduced to us early in the session by the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee as unaccountably "the raven-haired beauty of Waitsfield," had a political philosophy somewhat to the right of that of Mr. Welch of the John Birch Society. The member from Waitsfield—and, according to the rules, we referred to every member in this fashion, never by his or her name—began a number of her speeches by saying: "I don't want to be a stinker, but . . ."

Another effective way of getting a point across is to say two different things at once, and say them emphatically. One legislator, for example, frequently answered interrogation

by: "Actually it is, and actually it isn't . . ." This tends to trap your hearer into a mood of total acquiescence and then you can get away with murder.

You can also make your point by not saying anything at all, giving the impression that you know better than to open your mouth, or, if you do, that you are your own best listener. Once on the floor, one member was interrogating another. A third member rose to request that the member answering the interrogation speak a little louder because he wasn't being heard. The Speaker pointed out that the member could not possibly speak any louder because he wasn't speaking at all. He was maintaining a respectful and awe-inspiring silence that suggested he knew better than to be trapped into any answer. This reticence is in the tradition of Calvin Coolidge, who never used one word if he could convey his meaning with fewer; and there were many young Cal Coolidges—or "callow Coolidges," as one Montpelier reporter termed them—intent on perpetuating this tradition.

Mumbling, which is a middle ground, can also be effective. In this case, in reporting a bill you do not allow any words other than an occasional preposition to be heard, and this only to remind your listeners you are still talking. Occasionally some member will, in exasperation, or just because he is tired of sitting, get up and request that you use the microphone. But the important thing to remember when you come down into the well of the House to use the mike is that you continue to mumble into it. The House will then take to private conversation, correspondence, reading of newspapers, exchange of racing tips; and an hour later, when the Speaker puts the question to a vote, the members, under the impression that they are voting for adjournment, will all shout a resounding "Aye!"

The following passage I took from a few speeches delivered in the course of an hour. Most of it was spoken by a member known by the name given him by the president pro tem of the Senate—Diogenes. Diogenes was a tall, imposing figure, a basso profundo, and when he spoke, the chamber shook to the deep rumble of his inanities. Diogenes, though, had courage, and he sometimes came out with things that a man of less imagination would have shied away from. He once even dared use the word *socialism* without its attendant epithet of *creeping*. Here is the passage from the debate; remember that it must be read with the proper bass and inflection: "Vermont farmers, let us not bury our head in the sand, and cut our throat. . . . This bill is a punch in the nose to every business on the Connecticut River. . . . We must stand on our own feet and paddle our own canoe. . . . The member from Glover has spoken the correct truth." To appreciate the atmosphere that engendered such oratorical flourish, one must remember that the temperature of the Vermont House ranged in the winter months between eighty-five and one hundred degrees; there was never a shortage of hot air.

I drove up every Tuesday morning from the southern part of the state, which I found was known in Montpelier as the Banana Belt—the 135 miles from Pownal to Montpelier—and was in my seat for the opening of the session at ten o'clock. I stayed, as did many of the other legislators, at the Pavilion Hotel, next to the State House. Although I was a member of the Democratic minority, I was not without friends in both parties who felt as I did that certain changes had to be made in Vermont and who were willing to try to make them. I became a charter member of what Montpelier reporters called the Young Turks.

There were eleven of us, and we were a varied group. Eight Republicans and three Democrats, we represented the entire state, from the far south to the far north. We came from very small towns and from Vermont's largest cities. Along with representatives of some of the state's oldest families, there were others who had been in the state for only ten years or less. All university graduates, we were united in opposing the direction that the

state seemed to be taking under the administration of Governor F. Ray Keyser, Jr.

The average age of our group was thirty-five. With the exception of Daulton Mann, Jr., of Peru, who had been a member of the 1959 session, we were all serving our first term as state legislator. There were four lawyers: two graduates of the Harvard Law School, Ernest Willard Gibson III of Brattleboro and John Henry Downs of St. Johnsbury; Franklin S. Billings, Jr., of Woodstock, who had a Harvard B.A. and who was a graduate of the University of Virginia Law School; and Philip H. Hoff of Burlington, a graduate of Cornell University Law School. Sanborn Partridge of Proctor, a geologist and educator, had a degree from Yale University Law School but did not practice law. There were three farmers: Anthony B. Farrell, Jr., of Norwich; Richard W. Mallary of Fairlee; and Byron C. Hathorn of Hartford. There was one department store manager, Stanton S. Lazarus of Middlebury, and one businessman, Daulton Mann, Jr., of Peru.

None of us were in positions of power. Only two were chairmen of committees. Franklin "Bill" Billings, who had been secretary of the Senate and knew his way around Montpelier, was made chairman of the Judiciary Committee, and Daulton Mann was chairman of the Committee on Banking and Corporations. We met regularly on Tuesday evening for dinner. Over drinks we studied the bills that were coming up the following week and mapped out our strategy to help put them through or to kill them.

As one reviews the journal of the 1961 session, it does not look at first as if we Young Turks accomplished very much, but we did pave the way for important legislation that was passed in later sessions. We voted to limit outdoor advertising, thus laying the groundwork for Vermont's Act 250, the state land use and development statute that was passed in 1970—one of the strongest environmental control laws in the country. We voted to do away with certain poll tax requirements, all of which were subsequently eliminated. We voted also for fair-employment-practices legislation. I introduced a bill to abolish the death penalty, and although it went down to defeat, it was not forgotten in future sessions. In the seventies, the legislature voted to limit the death penalty to only two instances: to one who killed an officer on duty or one who committed a second unrelated murder in the first degree. Although attempts are regularly made to bring back the death penalty in full force, they have all failed. I am told that the electric chair, which used to be lent to neighboring states, is now in the Vermont Historical Museum.

In some instances we were wrong. We voted down the Non-returnable Beer Bottle Bill, which came up regularly. As Mr. Rowden of Ryegate put it in a little verse:

> Once again these walls will rattle
> With the sounds of a most familiar battle.
> Somehow we never seem to throttle
> The voices raised in defense of the bottle.

The voices of the Young Turks were among those raised, because when we were shown pictures of the intestines of cows that had swallowed bottles thrown on the Vermont hillside, we took this to be a prohibitionist bill backed by the Farm Bureau. It was not; it was a sensible measure to improve the environment. Passed in the seventies, it is working well today.

We were all united on a bill to make the Morgan horse the official state animal. This was a nonpartisan measure: members of both parties rushed to sign it and identify themselves to the folks back home as friends of the Morgan. When the bill was in the General Committee, various other animals were proposed—the porcupine, the goat, the catamount, the cow. (The cow has always been prominent in Vermont and milk is the official

state beverage. For many years there were more cows than people.) Since I represented the town that was to have the first racetrack, I was asked to comment on the bill and on this occasion read:

A Minor Ode to the Morgan Horse

I may not incline
To the porcupine,
And I may be averse
To what is much worse:
The bear
That is rare,
The goat
That's remote,
The sheep, from which year after year you must remove the coat,
The catamount
That does not amount to that amount,
The cow
That somehow
We, as a human minority, cannot allow;
And although, as one of the Democratic minority, I should, alas,
Far prefer the jackass,
I must—until a state animal can choose its own state —
Not hesitate
To vote, of course
For the Morgan horse.

When the Senate reapportioned itself and the House was asked to concur, the bill was defeated, although all the Young Turks tried to push it through. But the lawyers in our group, familiar with all the past legislation, were not at all sure how the Supreme Court would rule with respect to the reapportionment issue. I had no such hesitation: common sense told me that the Court would have to move in the direction of one man, one vote. For the first time in my life, I could stand up as a prophet and say that if we did not go along with the Senate's action, we would be back in special session because the courts would force us to be. We were back in the summer of 1962. The House was not fully reapportioned until 1965, when the members voted tearfully to make the changes required by law. The House now consists of 150 members, and in 1987, for the first time, there were more Democrats than Republicans, 76 to 74. The salary of a legislator is now $320 a week and will be raised in January 1988 to $340 a week, plus expenses. In my time the salary was $70 a week, not enough then to cover one's basic expenses.

If the Young Turks did not always get their way in 1961, they clearly triumphed in the end. Most members of the group were back in the 1963 session. Franklin Billings of Woodstock became Speaker of the House, and Philip Hoff of Burlington became the first Democratic governor of Vermont in 109 years. He was reelected for two subsequent terms and Vermont has not been the same since. Blond, charismatic Hoff was an excellent speaker and he developed a considerable following in the legislature. Most of the old members advised him to run for the legislature another time before making a bid for the governorship. But his fellow Young Turks urged him to make the plunge right away, and without their support in towns throughout the state, he would probably not have been

elected. Certainly in Pownal, although I did not run myself, our Democratic organization made an all-out effort and carried the town for him.

When the Green Mountain Track opened in 1963, Governor Hoff invited me to share his box. It was ironic to be there on that festive occasion, since we had both opposed parimutuel betting. Looking out over what had been green fields, I saw just beyond the track a huge billboard (in a few years no such boards would be allowed), reading, in bright red letters, BET ON MILK. I gazed behind the track down on the Hoosic River, and there at a bend in the clear water, a mother bear was bathing her two cubs, symbolic somehow of what Vermont was losing on that day.

I reminded Governor Hoff of the Green Mountain opening when we met again last year at the twenty-fifth reunion of the Young Turks, at the house of Bill and Polly Billings in Woodstock. After his three terms as governor, Phil Hoff ran unsuccessfully for the United States Senate. He is now back in the Vermont State House that he knows so well, a member of the Vermont Senate.

"Isn't that a bit like being offered jello after having had ice cream?" someone asked. But the change didn't seem to bother him; Vermont politics are in his blood.

After his distinguished legislative career, Bill Billings became a superior judge, then chief justice of the Vermont Supreme Court, and in 1984 was named United States district judge. Ernie Gibson is now a member of the Vermont Supreme Court. John Downs founded the largest law firm in Vermont, in St. Johnsbury and Burlington. After serving one term in Washington as Vermont's representative, Dick Mallary was defeated by Patrick Leahy for the United States Senate and is now president of the Vermont Electric Power Corporation. Sandy Partridge served several terms as a Vermont senator. At our reunion, we all took up conversations that we had broken off a quarter of a century earlier. The Young Turks, like the state they had served, seemed alive and well.

I have been going back to Pownal regularly since I left. My sculptor son has a studio on the slope of Mount Anthony, and when I gaze from his terrace over the valley toward Pownal Center, little seems to have changed. I returned recently on a Friday evening in September to have a closer look at the town I once represented. I had dinner with my friends, Joe and Jan Tornabene, whom I hadn't seen since the sixties. While in high school, Jan had been our regular baby-sitter, and Joe had often come to the house with her; they were like members of our family. Jan's mother, Ann Thompson, who worked at Warren Wire, had been a leading Pownal Democrat and one of my principal supporters during my brief political career. It was wonderful to see Joe and Jan again, both handsome and prosperous and occupying a splendid house near the Massachusetts border, high above the Dugway, where they operate a beer and wine emporium called Next Door, beside the Green Mountain racetrack.

Pownal, they told me, has more than doubled in size since I knew it; the population is now approximately 3300. The roads and the schools are no better than they were in my time. The Warren Wire Plant (General Cable) shut down three years ago. There is regularly talk of another factory coming in to take over, but thus far nothing has materialized. The Pownal Tanning Company, which had been in town for some fifty years, is in bankruptcy. It is still operating but is meeting the new antipollution standards with some difficulty. At least it does not give off the horrible odor that it once did.

And what about the racetrack? I almost hesitated to ask, because I knew that Joe was an avid racing fan, that he had been an early backer of the track, and that he now had his own racehorses, which he raced at other tracks.

Joe had developed a passion for racing as a boy, when on his pony he raced the locomotives along the cinder path beside the railroad between North Pownal and where the southern entrance to the Green Mountain Track is today. Spurred on by the puffing of the steam engine, the pony seemed most to enjoy racing along the rising grade from north to south. The trains always won, but the thrill of racing stayed with Joe throughout his life.

Joe Tornabene is soft-spoken and straightforward in his speech, but in describing what had happened to the Green Mountain Track, he allowed himself a rare bit of metaphorical language.

"At the beginning," he said, "it was a strawberry shortcake with lots of whipped cream; now it's a little cupcake with not much icing."

The Catamount Group had been misled from the beginning, he told me, into thinking that it would be favored by the Racing Commission. Borings had been completed on land belonging to Robert Rudd, Sr., in North Pownal, and the group had been assured of $3 million in backing a full year ahead. The bid in the end had gone to Smith's Taconic Racing and Greyhound Association, the operators of the track in Rockingham, New Hampshire, which the commission thought would bring the state more money. In retrospect, Joe Tornabene said, it might have been wiser to go with the Catamount Group. A smaller track, built on Route 346, would not have spoiled the valley quite as much and might have been able to hold its own better than Green Mountain, which had not been able to maintain the grandiose scale with which it began. Even at its height, Green Mountain had overestimated its attendance, and it was not long before grass had begun to sprout on the asphalt surfaces of some of the vast outer parking lots surrounding it.

The track had gone along fairly well until 1976, when thoroughbred racing had come to an end. The Rooney family of Pittsburgh, the owners of the Pittsburgh Steelers and of successful greyhound tracks in Yonkers and West Palm Beach, then bought the track and opened it to greyhound racing.

Joe Tornabene was so convinced that horses could be successfully brought back that, together with two other horsemen, he offered in the late seventies to buy out the Rooneys. The three men were supported by a group from Springfield, Massachusetts, and just before they put their money down, Joe's attorney warned them off. He was right to do so: a short while later, one of the Springfield group was indicted for insurance fraud but died before he could be tried.

A report on the future of thoroughbred racing, completed in 1975 for the Jockey Club by Pugh-Roberts Associates of Cambridge, Massachusetts, was extremely pessimistic; it predicted, on the basis of computer calculations, that within a decade most small tracks would close. There were simply too many tracks for the amount of money that racing fans were willing to spend and for the quality of racehorses available. Ninety percent of the attendance at Green Mountain came from outside the state, as much as 75 percent from Connecticut. In recent years, with the opening of more tracks in Connecticut and more offtrack betting parlors, the competition for the gambling dollar has become more and more intense and has clearly taken its toll at Green Mountain. Now with greyhound racing the town still receives its $200 a day when the track is open, but fewer people these days benefit from the meets. The payroll at the track has been reduced by several thousand dollars a day. Fewer people come to stay at motels in the area; fewer farmers sell their hay. On the other hand, many new people who came in and rented or bought mobile homes have stayed on but have not increased the town's revenue.

Green Mountain brought in other eyesores besides mobile homes. For the past decade, the first thing one saw when crossing the border into Vermont was a brown, delapidated

shack with a huge sign: ADULT BOOKS. It seemed totally incongruous to have pornography at the gateway to Vermont. This time I was startled to find that the shack had disappeared.

"Have the state censors finally moved in against Pownal's pornographic outlet?" I asked.

Joe explained that an apparently accidental explosion of its kerosene heater had caused the shack, with all its contents, to burn to the ground last spring.

After dinner we went down to the Green Mountain Track to watch the greyhounds race. We drove in the south gate, past a huge dark area where the stables had been, and, just past the kennels, pulled up in a half-empty parking lot. We went up the special stairway where I showed the season pass that Joe had given me.

I had forgotten how large an area the track covered, and now it was made to look all the more vast by reason of the small number of spectators. Perhaps spectators is not the right word; few of those present seemed to be watching anything, even the TV monitors on which one could follow the races. There were only a few hundred people—three or four hundred at most—gathered around tables or seated around the beer stand. There were certainly very few of them lined up at the betting windows.

The walls were freshly painted with stripes of bright green and orange, but even with all the lights there appeared to be dark shadows lurking everywhere: there was an air of boredom that hung over everything.

The female voice that announced the races had a mechanical lilt, as if all humanity had been squeezed from it. Time after time, it urged people to hurry to the windows "and don't be shut out," which was the last thing in this case that could happen. I recalled a similar mechanical female voice in the Moscow subway, admonishing people on the train in station after station not to get caught in the doors.

We walked down to watch the race close up and saw how the old track had been cut down. Everything was now out of proportion in this vast arena—as if giants had been invited to play croquet. The greyhounds were led in by Pownal teenagers, and there was something pathetic about the sight of these slender graceful dogs.

Racetracks are always said to attract prostitutes, but there didn't seem to be any among the spectators that evening. It was the dogs that were the prostitutes. These magnificent creatures, the pride of Romans and Egyptians, were reduced in this plastic setting, degraded to chasing a bit of mechanical fluff for the enjoyment of a crowd too bored even to bet.

I said good-bye to Joe in the parking lot beside the Hoosic River, now hidden by aspens, and made my way back to the Berkshires.