Spring, and young men’s thoughts turn to...exercise. The New Yorker’s ever-young Roger Angell ’42, acclaimed for his baseball writing, summoned another sport, from his undergraduate days, in a 2011 letter included in his most recent collection, This Old Man (2015):

“I don’t mind passing along the golf shot of my life. This came while I was still at Harvard, and was playing with another hack pal of mine one weekend at a suburban course in Wayland, Mass. There was a party of three just ahead of us on the course, and I waited for them to get a decent distance ahead on some hole before I stepped up and somehow hit the longest drive of my life, which began to fade ominously in their direction....The ball hit a couple of yards behind them and then I saw one of them begin to writhe and jump about oddly. He didn’t go down, but when I’d gotten to within his cursing distance we discovered that the ball had come down inside his collar and had ended up down his back somewhere. I apologized endlessly but couldn’t quite suppress my grin. Wow—greater than a hole in one, any day!”

LESS WHIMSICALLY, David Halberstam ’55 wrote “Death of a Sculler, in Three Acts” (originally titled “Obit on Sculling”) for the Harvard Alumni Bulletin, the then-incarnation of this magazine, in the spring of his senior year. (The essay appears in Everything They Had, a 2008 anthology of his sports writing.) He catalogued the lethal threats to rowers along the Charles: the traditional stone age (boys throwing rocks, or dropping bigger ones into boats, from the bridges); the machine age (wakes from passing power boats); and, dismayingly, the new nuclear age (the discovery of abnormally elevated radioactivity in Cambridge’s water). Taking stock, Halberstam wrote of Cold War threats that, read today, anticipate recently renewed international tensions and anxieties:

“In the spring of 1953 and 1954 people would turn to me and say: ‘Look, if sculling’s that dangerous, if people are always throwing at you and trying to sink you, why not quit? Why do you do it?’
‘Escape,’ I would answer. ‘No problem of coexistence on the river. No Iron Curtain, only the Larz Anderson Bridge....’ That was in the old days. Now atomic fission is everywhere. Nowhere is the conflict between East and West, Communism and Democracy, so clearly outlined as on the Charles River. A nightmare is haunting today’s single sculler: the vision of a motorboat filled with little boys. The little boys are armed with rocks, and they pursue him relentlessly until he is capsized into the nuclear waters of the Charles, Cambridge’s first casualty from radioactivity.”

CERTAIN KINDS OF collecting also lend themselves to clement weather. A Memorial Minute read to the Faculty of Arts and Sciences on February 7, commemorating the late Herbert Walter Levi (a refugee from Nazi Germany who tried to enlist in the U.S. Army, was rejected as an enemy alien, and later came to Harvard as a curator and ultimately became Agassiz professor of zoology), observes that he “documented spiders incessantly until his death. He published more than 200 scientific papers and described 1,254 new spider species, 1,204 of which are still considered valid....” He understandably earned “immense” respect in the “arachnological community,” with “more than 40 species, and two genera, named after him.”

Spring thoughts also turn to sex, and we learn that “Herb’s holistic view of spiders led him to produce detailed species descriptions, beautifully illustrated and incorporating multiple views of their genitalia, a practice that has become standard in descriptions not only of spiders but also of many other arthropods.” Mind you, in the service of science: the spider man’s “superb drawing skills enabled the interpretation of highly complex structures such as the spiders’ copulatory bulb—one of the main characteristics for identifying species of spiders.” ~PRIMUS VI