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From the editor: Lessons on longevity

This time a year I'm often asked if I have any plans for the summer.

Mostly my vacations revolve around shuttling my son hither and yon to soccer tournaments. But I did take my one and only true break last week.

It involved a single overnight, a birthday present to my wife.

We made our pilgrimage to the Inn at Little Washington.

Like a lot of folks, we've often wondered if the place was really as good as its reputation.

Well, we got our answer. The food, the service is simply to ... die ... for.

This column is much too short to do our stay justice. We found pleasures in the simplest of gestures, the tiniest of tastes. We ordered the inn's tasting menu and before the first of our seven courses arrived came a variety of treats. One was a small cube of barbecue pork belly. I'm the kind of guy who prides myself on working a grill. I like to measure my cooking times in hours, not minutes. My meat in pounds, not ounces. But after that one bite, I'm ready to throw away my recipes.

Throughout the visit, I couldn't help thinking how our whole stay had been shaped by years of trial and error. Chef Patrick O'Connell started the restaurant in a garage (shades of the dot-com boom!) and opened the inn in 1978. The guest house is now part of a little village of cottages, gardens, a gift shop and more. There's talk of adding a spa one day.

That lesson in longevity was one reinforced before we arrived at the central Virginia inn. We started the day with a stop at Monticello, the home of Thomas Jefferson near Charlottesville. We've made many trips to the historic site and its

gardens over the years, and as I grow older I have come to appreciate just what a labor of love creating that place on the top of a little mountain was to the nation's third president. Jefferson spent 40 years designing, building and remodeling the estate.

These days so many businesspeople are in such a hurry to establish something new and exciting and then look for a hasty exit -- as if they don't really trust their creation. My vacation this year let me reflect on the power of building a business bit by bit by bit, until it becomes part of the DNA of a place.

Our stay at the inn might have been brief, but it left a lasting and happy memory.

-- Dan Beyers