

Walter Suskind
“Why Camp...”
Tree Talk 08/01/2011
Camp Pasquaney

With three months left in my freshman year of high school and my grades in Algebra 1 and Conceptual Physics teetering on the edge of collapse, my parents and I met with the freshman Dean of students to discuss options. Looking over possible solutions, this well-meaning lady mentioned that summer school would be a great option to help me keep up with my classmates heading into the next academic year. When her follow up question of, “Do you have any summer plans yet?” was answered with, “Well yes actually, I am going back to summer camp in New Hampshire”, her reaction was not favorable. Although she did not directly say it, the look on her face seemed to say, “Really? Isn’t 15 a little old to be still going to camp for the summer?” Well, it has been seven years since that little chat and I’m still proudly wearing the gray and the blue. And while the people involved in the “Camp...really?” conversation have changed as I have aged, the basic content of the conversation has remained incredibly consistent. Themselves having never stepped foot in Grafton County, much less spent any time here on the hillside, many of these well meaning friends, family, and teachers often can not understand exactly why I keep coming back summer after summer, and why I have decided not to pursue various internships or jobs that would look good on a resume and allow me to keep pace with my peers. As many of you here can attest, this question is not always the easiest to answer. Whether you are thirteen and having to tell a coach why a specialized sports camp is not for you, or you are sixteen and tempted with the prospect of summer classes that could get you ahead, or you are twenty-one and faced with the pressures of doing a potentially beneficial summer internship, the “Why camp?” question can be a harrowing one to try and answer.

As we all know, the experiences we have here at camp and the ways in which we grow from them over the course of our career’s here do not fit so easily into a quick, four-sentence or even four-paragraph response. For each and every one of us, the answer to “Why Camp?” will be unique and special. Because although we may live in a place where we dress identically, eat the same meals, and generally participate in the same activities, all of us are actively shaping our own identities and own experiences over the course of our time here.

So, “Why Camp”? Because every summer brings the promise of fresh challenges to take on. As a 12 year old in Wilson or Jackson, swimming a half-mile or performing on stage for the first time in dorm skits can seem like daunting tasks. As we get older in our camp careers new challenges come our way—the week long test of will that is the Long Walk, learning to skipper a boat in white-capped waters or leading a camper led circle for the first time. No matter where you are in your camp career, these daily tests provide us new experiences and lessons that allow for us to grow. And although the daily challenges we face on the hillside may seem only specific to life at camp, the skills developed along the way provide us with the confidence, capability, and leadership skills that can serve as

assets in situations both here and away from camp. The experiences of struggling through these challenges that can at first seem insurmountable provide some of the defining moments of our camp careers. While Hobbes field was my home for the better part of five summers, there was not one game I can remember that challenged me as much as taking a role in the Glade Play my 14-year-old summer. And although I highly doubt Broadway is in my future, the challenge of working with a text and speaking in front of a large audience are skills that I have and will continue to rely on in the future.

Why Camp? Because the friendships and bonds we make during our summers here are strong as oak and serve as more than just summer-company. The friends we make here on the hillside both young and old bring out the best in us. These lasting friendships do not form overnight. But the shared experiences that we have summer after summer can bring us together in ways that are impossible outside of a community as unique as Pasquaney. The challenges I talked about earlier often would be impossible to surmount if not for the support that our friends provide for us on a daily basis. Whether you are a tired 14-year-old at the end of a long day of backpacking, or a first-year counselor strained by the complexities of a job you never thought could be so draining, having your camp friends there to get your back can give you the strength and reassurance you need to keep on going. And the support of these friends does not end when Watersports Sunday rolls around. Studying abroad in Spain last year, there often days when I was exhausted and feeling like a boat far adrift from home. Without people to talk to over there, it was nighttime Skype calls with Blake, Mike and Lyons that would often give me the lift I needed. Over years together, the friends you make at Pasquaney are there to see you at your highest moments of triumph as well as at some of your most vulnerable times as well. The knowledge that you can count on them at either extreme and everywhere in between is something that can be rare to find. Yet at Pasquaney it is something that we pride ourselves in. Here you find yourself in a community not steeped in the cutthroat competition that so many of us are accustomed in our daily lives, but rather in a community in which you have the opportunity to get to know people and build friendships that can endure long past your last summer on the hillside.

These challenges and relationships that are faced and fostered over our time on the hillside are two of many components that make Pasquaney unique and cause so many of us to eagerly await opening day year after year. They help shape us into the people that we are and provide solid foundations for who we will become. And although the pressures of the outside world may only take a break for the seven weeks we find ourselves on the hillside, it is the summers spent here that equip us with invaluable lessons and resources that give us the confidence to go forward and face tests both large and small that confront us in our daily lives.

While this may not make what Pasquaney means and the impact it has any easier to explain, I can assure you this—the tools gained from summers on this hillside will be there to aid you and assist no matter where you are. “Why Camp?”, because it is Camp.