

Mike Hanrahan  
'Confidence'  
Tree Talk 08/08/08  
Camp Pasquaney

I have had the privilege of knowing many of you since you were twelve, or at least very young; I wish I could return the favor. Imagine the quietest camper you know, and then ghost him – that's about right. A practical lad, I found changing my clothes not only impractical, but downright unnecessary. So I not only wore the same navy sweatpants and collared shirt everyday, but slept in them so I wouldn't have to waste time getting dressed before school in the morning. You might be asking yourself, "When would he shower?" To which, my reply is: about as often as I got a report card or the seasons changed. Instead, my mother would attack me at random times of day with a wet facecloth to at least wipe away the visible dirt from my face. (That's true!).

Needless to say, Camp would have been good for me in many fundamental ways if I had arrived in 1990 rather than ten years later. Mr. Vinnie might have been my Jackson counsellor, Bubbles could have taught me how to swim, and our cold shower routine would have enforced a minimum threshold of hygiene into my world.

Sometimes people ask me, "Mike, what's it like being here without ever having been a camper?" The answer is complex; if you discover a goldmine in your life, can you really complain that you found it a little late? After all, you still have the goldmine.

However there are some things I missed, small and large. I've never turned my tag for soak; I've never gone for the song with my club; I've never been to a Camp meeting; never unjustly been G'Ued to Southern Dana the day I had Lamps. Maybe that last one's not so bad.

But when I really look back at that twelve-year-old boy, what I most wish he could have gotten from Camp a little earlier is simple: Confidence.

Confidence. That word entered the English language in the fourteenth century through French from the original Latin, *confidere*, which means "together" and "to trust," or more simply, "with trust."

I didn't trust very much back then, not other people, and certainly not myself. Instead of trying to make friends, I kept to myself and tried to be socially invisible; instead of believing I could do things, I limited my dreams to just surviving. People who study animals talk about a fight or flight reflex, where, when faced with a challenge an animal will either attack or flee. There's also a third option: freezing up and playing dead. I spent a lot of years that last way, frozen and stuck like a car in neutral, idling away time hoping no one would notice I was there.

This final Tree Talk is traditionally about taking Pasquaney home with us. I believe one of the most important fruits of the summer for you to carry into the winter and nurture is confidence.

That prelude begs the question: what is the source of your own confidence? What gives you trust in other people and most importantly, in yourself?

Perhaps it comes from achievement, something you can do, or have done. Winning a race, a match, or a ballgame, completing a project, putting on a performance, executing a dive where you rip through the water with no splash, getting through a grueling hike; all of these accomplishments make us feel good. But are they a source of confidence, or the result of it?

Perhaps confidence comes from some form of social comparison. “I fit in with this group, I have a lot of friends, I can make people laugh and that guy doesn’t, so I must be good.” Or, “I have better stuff than you, I have a better education, come from a better family, and I have or will have a better job so, naturally, I should feel good.” Or, “I look like most of the people here, I act like most of the people here, those people who are different must feel awful.” Basing our self-worth, our trust in ourselves, on comparison with others seems to lead in two wrong directions. First, there will always be someone who looks better on paper than us, and second, we will exclude and judge a lot of people to our own detriment that way.

Perhaps confidence comes from public recognition? Do you believe in yourself more if you are a naturalist, a craftsman, a Green-Room Cup winning-actor, a baseball captain, a tennis phenom, a champion swimmer, a Senior Sailor, a Diving acrobat, a Solo Canoer, or a model stroke? If you live in Dana, are a Camp Officer, a COI, a counsellor, a senior counsellor, a senior citizen counsellor? When I look at the council this summer, when I look at the new boys, at the old boys, and particularly at you sixteen-year-olds in Dana, your example answers those questions. I do not see people looking for titles to build their confidence; I see confident people looking to do what is right because it is right. So confidence cannot come from some award.

All of these misleading sources of confidence – achievement, comparison, recognition – if it makes sense to you that they don’t make sense, that they are neither the source nor measurement of your self-trust, then listen very carefully: why would you waste a second of your life letting them take your confidence away? Why, if we don’t achieve something do we sometimes feel bad about it? Why, if we aren’t like others does it sometimes bother us? Why, if we don’t feel recognized does it sometimes matter?

Why? Because we let it. We allow it.

That sounds like bad news, but really it’s wonderful because at root I believe confidence boils down to a decision you make about you. It begins inward and spreads outward, not the other way around. Friendship, art and life can hold a mirror up to you, but only you really see the reflection, and only your honest opinion really matters.

We give out awards tonight and tomorrow. They're wonderful, and I love these nights; but they are meant as a celebration of the internal springing up of confidence into the outside world like a geyser spits up water from some underground river. The geyser is pretty, but the river is powerful. The boy who walks up to Mr. Vinnie after his name is called thinking, "Wow, this must mean I'm great!" and the boy sitting in the audience thinking, "Man, I didn't win that, I must not be as good as him," each make the same mistake; they let someone else tell them who they are.

You must tell yourself. Trust yourself. Trust and enjoy others, be they friends or not.

When I look at this community, each of you right now at this moment, I am overcome with happiness and an overflowing sense of confidence in each of you. What a joy you all are! Every single one of you.

My father was once in a taxi in Jakarta when the driver turned around and said, "I don't understand you Westerners!" My Dad replied, "What do you mean?" The driver said back, "You spend your whole lives trying to get better, trying to be good people, trying to make progress from Point A to Point B before you die." My father asked back, "How do you see things?" The driver responded, "Over here we believe we are already perfect, and only get in our own way from time to time." What a lovely thought, and talk about confident.

I used to study chess to study myself. Sitting at those sixty-four squares it is just you, your pieces, and constant problems. Where will you move next? What is your big plan, and should you change it? How will you respond when something inevitably attacks you? How will you handle a big mistake? How will you respond to pressure in complexity?

These are life questions as much as they are chess questions. A few years ago I heard Josh Waitzkin, an international chessmaster and subject of the book and film *Searching for Bobby Fischer*, dissect one of his games. Waitzkin was in a tough position midway through the game, his queenside crumbling, the center disputed, and with inadequate resources for a clear response. Waitzkin can calculate like a computer, but just as in life, that only takes you so far. Here is what he said,

"I made up my mind about a plan and made the move with resolve. You have to trust yourself in chess, after all, you're all you've got."

You have to trust yourself. Fortunately, unlike chess, in life we also have each other.

I hope this summer each of you has developed more trust and confidence here, in your heart, about yourself. By living in this small community I hope your trust and belief in others has grown, your amazement at what can be done with honesty, courage, and friendship. I hope leaving to the world on Sunday you are taking this part of Pasquaney home with you.

Don't forget it on your hook at the bath house. Don't leave it under your bunk by that stray sock from your laundry bag. Phil will take points off, and Mr. Vinnie won't send it to you by UPS.

Onward we go.

Thank you.