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EDITORIAL

(Tree Talk delivered by Robert D. Bulkeley on August 23, 1981)

Boys, adolescence is an often exciting, sometimes troublesome, and necessarily painful time of growth and change. This period of maturation bridges dependent childhood and independent adulthood. It is a time of the emergence of the real man; the development of the potential that will serve us throughout adulthood and that will shape our lives and destinies. Within this period of growth and change lie the many thrills of discovery, the joys for accomplishment, the pains of developing relationships with others, the attainment of a sense of who we are and with that a painful changing of identity, the learning of skills necessary for accomplishment and success later the acquisition of meaningful values and beliefs, and with that, the shedding of old values and beliefs. With every loss and shedding, there is a gain and acquisition. With every gain, there must be pain. This difficult time can be exciting and challenging, or if you let it, it can be overwhelming and depressing. I hope in the next few minutes to discuss some of the areas of change, some of the ways the change can take place, some of the aids that can accompany you on this path to adulthood, and some of the things that can inhibit, thwart, and arrest this necessary, and sometimes painful period of growth.

In adolescence, everything in your makeup and the world about you changes. Most obviously, you all change physically. Those who have been compact become tall and lose their coordination; some who dreamed of being gigantic learn they will be small. Some feel nature has taken too long to accomplish its task while their peers have already grown physically. Our sexual natures develop as our sex drive reaches its peak at the very time society says it should not be satisfied. We become strong and ready to do a man's job physically and our new size brings on expectations we are often not mature enough to meet fully. Or our lack of size hides real growth inside. One way or another we change physically; it can be frustrating, troublesome, exciting, joyful, rewarding, or baffling. A lot depends on what we think of it. Our attitude will govern the nature of this change as much as anything, and we must learn to accept the lot given us by God.

Relations with others also change. Your sense of yourselves changes. These changes, and we hope, growth are often the most painful and necessary of all. During adolescence, relations with parents have to change

dramatically and often quite painfully. They want to hang on; you want to let go. You want freedom; they want the security of the protection that inhibits the necessary exploration and discovery of emerging adult lives. An inevitable, often disruptive and sometimes destructive, tension and strife accompany this growth from childhood to adulthood. The adult relation with a parent is one based on an independence the offspring wants and partially needs years before most parents are willing to let go. Parents often think they have too much at stake to let you go through the necessary trials and errors of learning by failure, of learning independently of their experience and good judgment. In adolescence, you need to have the freedom to make mistakes, but at the same time, you need to take advantage of your parents' experience, judgment, and wisdom.

You will outgrow old friends and gain new ones as your interests mature and change. You will enter a period of questioning authority, at the very time you are trying to establish your own authority and develop beliefs and values of your own. You will be developing friendships with girls, and the whole realm of relations with the opposite sex will be full of change with powerful sexual and social forces at work—forces that can be both troublesome and exciting, frustrating and rewarding. You will be expanding your tastes and accepting differences in others. Your relationships with your brothers and sisters will change as you shed youthful affections and dislikes and develop more mature, supportive relationships. Competition, strife and jealousy will be replaced by joy in each other's fulfillment. Social and living environments will change. You will go off to school and college; families will move with jobs, separations, deaths and marriages. What it does to you and for you largely depends on your attitude towards it. Your lifestyles will also undergo change. What you become interested in will radically change your circle of acquaintances and will likely lead to new friends. You will have many choice.

You will be developing, I hope, the necessary skills for a productive adult life. Along the way, you will be building the skills for accomplishment and the success that is essential to building self-confidence and a sense of self-worth. Academic skills, physical and athletic skills, extra-curricular talents, personal relations, and many other abilities are the building blocks of successful adulthood and the very stuff of a happy, productive adolescence. Your bodies, your minds, and your characters are being built as all the changes of adolescence work on you. As you acquire what you will need to start your adult lives and as you cope with the many changes that are occurring in yourselves, in those about you, your environment and your family, there are many valuable aids that you can take with you to make sure that your growth is as positive as possible and that you will profit from, rather than be destroyed by, the inevitable pain of maturation. First, remember that maturation will not occur without pain and coping with difficulty; anything that takes away the pain of coping will arrest or retard the process of maturation. Second, you will need good friends who can be tough and supportive, realistic and encouraging, stabilizing and consoling—someone to share our growth and to help point the way. A non-peer friend is often best as peer friends are changing also and your relations with them are changing accordingly. Remember, a faithful friend is a strong defense; a faithful friend is the medicine of life." Third, the values you have been exposed to and are learning here will be a stabilizing factor and will give proper shape to your goals. Fourth, goals themselves and a sensible working attitude to see the best in what comes your way—to see a helpful lesson in failure, to see strengthening from suffering, to turn a loss into a gain, a gloomy day into a useful one, a disappointment into a steeling of the soul to cope better with future disappointments so they will harm less and so we can profit from them more. Profit from what your parents have learned and know and try to separate their wisdom and assistance from what you—in your striving for independence—see as

interference and aggravation in your lives. Be willing to accept change. Enjoy the new. See life as an exciting adventure—even in the toughest and most discouraging of times. Enthusiasm, courage, common sense, and positive thinking will carry you far. What is maturity? Here are some definitions: Maturity is the ability to handle frustration, control anger, and settle differences. Maturity is patience. It is the willingness to postpone gratification, to pass up the immediate pleasure or profit in favor of the long-term gain. Maturity is perseverance, sweating out a project or a situation in spite of opposition and discouraging setbacks. Maturity is unselfishness, responding to the needs of others. Maturity is the capacity to face unpleasantness and disappointment without becoming bitter. Maturity is the gift of remaining calm in the face of chaos. This means peace, not only for ourselves, but for those with whom we live and for those whose lives touch ours. Maturity is the ability to disagree without being disagreeable. Maturity is humility. A mature person is able to say, “I was wrong.” He is also able to say “I am sorry,” and when his is proven right, he does not have to say, “I told you so.” Maturity is the ability to make a decision, to act on that decision, and to accept full responsibility for the outcome. Maturity means dependability, integrity, keeping one’s word. Maturity is the ability to live in peace with that we cannot change. Maturity is acceptance. A number of things can inhibit your gaining maturity. First, there is your own attitude which, if negative, can destroy your hopes for achievement, can confuse and warp your emotions and mental set, and can make the good seem indifferent and the bad much worse. It can let adversity overwhelm you, destroy relationships, and give you a poor sense of yourself. Second is poor judgment and lack of common sense that can let peer pressure overtake you and cause you to make poor choices in the many important decisions that shape your life. Cultivate common sense and strive for good judgment.

One of the major areas in which good judgment and common sense can play a key role—a life-making or -breaking role—is that of drugs, particularly alcohol and marijuana which are an integral part of our culture. Let me pause on these two powerful psychogenic drugs—psychogenic meaning that they create emotions and mental states of being on their own— emotions and mental states that would otherwise be foreign to you and absent from your life. Regular and/or heavy use— abuse if you will—of both alcohol and marijuana will arrest and retard growth—will put a halt to the maturation process at the very time it should progress unfettered. When you need growth the most, alcohol and marijuana will take it from you — perhaps, unless you are fortunate, forever. Alcohol has its obvious effects; marijuana is much more insidious and it is the same as alcohol in what it does to your mind and emotions; and it stays in your body tissue for days, weeks, months, and perhaps years. At the very time one should feel the excitement of life and growth and should be making distinctions and becoming discriminating, marijuana creates an incredible blanding—all seems the same. Along with indifference, lack of motivation and caring, and avoidance rather than coping, marijuana creates fear, anxiety, anger, psychological dependence, loss of self-esteem, and loss of accomplishment. Both alcohol and marijuana create dependence when independence is desired in adolescence; lethargy at a time energy is needed most and sometimes sapped anyway by growth; sleeplessness and restlessness when the mending of rest and sleep is essential; physical deterioration when physical growth is desired; sexual and hormonal inadequacies at a time one’s sexual development should be at its height, and so on. Alcohol, marijuana and other drugs must not be taken lightly. Common sense, a selfish interest in good health and good development, and listening to the best voices and not peer pressure at its worst should all be kept in mind. Develop the ability to say “No.”

Remember that any problem or challenge avoided or escaped through drugs or any other means including sub-cultures and the automobile is a problem that is not solved and will come back to haunt a weaker and older person. Without pain, there is not growth. Escape will lead back towards childhood rather than

forward to adulthood.

Remember that in adolescence you will have to make choices. You will have to learn to be discriminating and caring. It is a time of waiting, planning, and preparing. Adulthood is the time for arrival; adolescence is a transition away from childhood towards true independence and inner well-being. At Pasquaney, you have been shown the tools for this necessary growth and have been given the opportunity to develop those tools and espouse the best values. Be selfish—let nothing stand in the way of this growth so that you can become warm, caring, fulfilled, and productive adults. Is this a dull challenge? I think not. Is it impossible? No, it is God's design for each one of us. Accept the pain of adolescence with all its changes and difficulties as necessary to growth, success, and happiness. Do not throw it away. The period you are in is as precious as life itself. Enjoy these years.