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ANNUAL EDITORIAL 1982

(Townley Chisholm's Tree Talk, delivered on July 30, 1982)

The thing that struck me when I visited Pasquaney last summer, and that astonishes me still, is that so many people here care for the other members of this community, I have been here no longer than the newest camper, but I hope you will forgive me for being presumptuous enough to tell you what I have observed about Pasquaney.

Pasquaney is a camp with a beautiful location, good food, great activities, and an excellent council. I am afraid that to too many campers this description sums up Pasquaney. If you are one of these campers, you are so caught up in yourself and in your daily activities that you neglect the most important potential of Pasquaney and of yourself.

Pasquaney tries to develop the mind and body of each camper, but above all Pasquaney seeks to develop the person of each boy to its highest potential. All of the discussion that we hear about Pasquaney's ideals is aimed at perfecting that person, that inner core, that self within each of us.

The hardest thing that any person does is learning how to deal successfully with his self. Let me give you some examples. It's dessert time on an expedition, and you get less than your fair share, while a bigger camper gets more than his share. What happens? You probably do nothing but get mad at yourself for not standing up for your rights. If you are the bigger camper with more than your fair share, then you probably feel ashamed of yourself for being selfish. These are two silly examples, but if you recall the last time that you were really unfairly treated or were really unfair, then you can recall how powerful and irrational your self's anger or shame was in response.

The self is an incredibly powerful part of our lives, yet we neglect it, and instead of controlling the self, we let the self control us. Worst of all, we never develop the full potential of ourselves, so that we can never reach our highest happiness. Most of us wait years for something to change us into the people that we want to be and that we ought to be. During all of this time, we are never fully happy because we never feel good

about ourselves for very long. The saddest part of our wait is that the event which will perfect us and fulfill us, never, ever happens. Only you can change yourself — not camp, not school, not religion, not love, not death — only you. Outside forces may make it easier for you to change yourself, but only you can do it.

Suppose, then, that I examine myself, see my many faults, and decide to correct them and to be a better person. How do I begin? What should I do? I have two choices. First, I can studiously try to avoid repeating my mistakes. This approach to life is similar to living by the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament — I know what I should not do but I don't really know what I should do. This approach requires me to concentrate on myself and tends to make me self-righteous if I'm successful. A second, better road to self-improvement is to try to care for others as much as, or more than, I care about myself. This philosophy tells me what to do, instead of merely what not to do. And this is exactly the commandment with which Jesus replaced the Ten Commandments.

Caring for other people is a solid base for ideals, because if I truly care about the best interests of the people of my community, then I will live by all the important ideals of honesty, good sportsmanship, tolerance, and generosity. Caring for other people may seem to be a strange way of improving myself, but it is the only way. What is the most important thing to myself? The answer is my happiness. When am I most truly and completely happy? It is when I create and share happiness with others. I cannot be very happy for very long without other people.

My talk has gotten pretty philosophical. Let me make it more concrete. We all know that wonderful, happy feeling which results when we do something good for another person. What happens? We care for that person, accordingly we act to help him, and he shows appreciation or caring in return. I believe that we are happy only if and when we interact with people in ways like this.

Our contacts with other people can be divided into three types: positive, neutral, and negative. Positive contact occurs when we help another person, even if our help is nothing more than cheerful friendliness and acceptance. Positive contact makes all of the people concerned happier. Neutral contact occurs when we meet another person and neither give of ourselves nor receive from him any good. Neutral contacts produce alienation and loneliness in us, even if we are surrounded by a family, a school community, or a city. Negative contact occurs when we willfully act to hurt another person. We want to hurt others because we are tired, impatient, angry, or hurt ourselves. Instead of increasing our happiness and that of others, we increase the misery of others and in so doing we make ourselves more unhappy and hate ourselves a little bit more.

Positive contacts are clearly the best of these three types of interactions. Why don't I make all my contacts positive? There are two main reasons. First, being friendly and tolerant of everybody takes enormous energy, especially if I'm unsure of myself. Second, if I cannot accept myself with my faults then I tend to reject others because their faults remind me of my own. I like to fool myself by pretending that if I reject a person, then I separate his faults from myself. But here I begin to lose myself, for when I reject him, I also reject part of myself. If I am ever to be a whole person, I must learn to accept myself complete with my faults. This acceptance is very hard to do. It is much easier to accept another person with the few faults I see in him than to accept myself with all the faults that I recognize in myself. Herein lies the secret: if I can learn by practice to accept others and their faults, then I can come closer to accepting myself with all my faults. Remember, only when I accept myself am I a whole person who is comfortable with that self.

I waxed philosophical again, but here's the practical point. If you are miserable, lonely, and insecure (and all of us are at some point), then you cannot solve your problems within yourself. When you examine your personality and find nothing there, you can't do anything about the problem by yourself. It is only by caring for other people that you can save yourself.

And the topic of caring brings us back to Pasquaney, a very caring community. None of us here is as happy and complete a person as he could be. But in this community where people already care for us, we have the chance of a lifetime to reach our full potential as people. Pasquaney's uniqueness is that it brings together a group of people who care for each other. Caring for another person is very difficult when he hates your guts. At Pasquaney people care about you. Learn to care about others. It is easy to care here, because so many others care, too. We have three weeks of camp remaining in the season. If camp, your summer, and yourself have been a disappointment to you, don't wait. We have very little time left in this summer and in this world. Go out and learn to like the people around you and to like yourself. Be happy. Be Whole.