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ANNUAL EDITORIAL - 1983

(Peter Davies' Tree Talk delivered on August 12, seems to the editors to have best captured the spirit and enthusiasm of the 1983 season)

A long time ago when I was but a little boy I remember often hearing people say to me, "Smile, things could be worse." The first time I actually tried this I was in first grade. I had gotten caught by the teacher for throwing my peanut butter and jelly sandwich at a friend, and she called me up to the front of the classroom and angrily demanded what I had to say for myself. It all seemed pretty straightforward to me: I had thrown my sandwich at the guy and that was that. I couldn't for the life of me figure out what she wanted me to say, and I knew I was in trouble. So I thought about the little saying and how things could be worse and I gave her the old winning smile. Well, as it turned out she thought I was being wise so instead of getting the usual punishment of standing in the corner for the next hour, I had to stand there for the rest of the day. Since then I have learned that the expression, "Smile, things could be worse" doesn't mean that when you smile things will get worse although that's the way it worked in that particular case. I want to speak to you today about the value of lightheartedness –going about things with a cheerful demeanor and a smile on your face. Someone once described lightheartedness as the ability to put on a smile when those around you are frowning. To me lightheartedness is being able to take things in stride, the good as well as the bad, without becoming overanxious. A few things lightheartedness is not – it is not simply joking around and not getting anything done. Lightheartedness is not simply laughing at things that go wrong – it is a positive approach to getting things done right.

Too many times, especially during the school year, we can fall into the pattern of taking things too seriously or letting our anxieties and worries get the better of us. Worries about whether or not we will make it onto the basketball team can make us forget to enjoy the sport. Worries about what the number is for the grade on our test can remove any enjoyment we might get from actually learning what we are studying instead of simply cramming it into our heads. Certainly school pressures can be intense. Trying to do well in the classroom and in sports as well as trying to get along with people can take a tremendous amount of effort but you would do well to remember that strong effort is best accompanied with a winning smile. Don't let

concern for performance prevent you from enjoying what you are doing. The example comes to mind of a tennis player I knew in high school who loved the sport when I met him my first year. But after playing on

the tennis team for three years the sport he had loved became an unwanted duty. Continually worrying about how well he did in practice each day and where he was on the tennis team ladder took away any pleasure he felt in just playing the sport. He had forgotten how well he played when he played tennis just for the fun of it.

Too often people forget that you can be lighthearted and involved in serious activity at the same time. The most helpful example I can think of is here at camp. Pasquaney is not just a place to have fun and freep around at. At the same time it is not just a place where the only thing we do is think about serious topics. Pasquaney is a blend of the two — the serious side combined with a lighthearted and cheerful approach.

When I first came to Pasquaney I remember having no idea what it was all about. I had been to another camp for three years before coming here and I suppose I thought Pasquaney would be like that — a place to spend the summer freeping around. After going through a tree talk and a sermon my first week I was wondering what was going on. I went up to my older brother who had been here the summer before, and said, “What’s all this moral stuff? I came here to have fun, not to be a priest.” After a while it came to me that there really was something to the tree talks and sermons and I took them to heart. I tried my hardest to live up to the ideals talked about in the tree talks and sermons, yet in a way I tried too hard. I worried too much over whether I was making the grade and I thought I had to be hard and serious all the time to live up to those ideals.

A lot of very important things are talked about at camp. Things like friendship, truth and honesty, and consideration for others tend to be presented in a serious light here because they are serious issues. But serious issues are often best approached with a thoughtful mind and a light heart. Being cheerful and lighthearted when dealing with serious issues doesn’t mean you think those issues are any less important. Being cheerful and lighthearted can help you to put these issues in perspective. Those activities undertaken with a smile and a light heart are the most enjoyable of all.

After my first summer at camp I hadn’t learned this lesson – I went back to school full of righteous zeal and it was almost as if I had spent the summer studying to be a priest. I went overboard and was far too grim in applying the Pasquaney ideals to myself and others. Taking advantage of opportunities and being considerate of others became chores that I was working on much too hard without even thinking about enjoying them. At one point during a school day when I had just about killed myself trying to take advantage of every single opportunity the day offered a teacher came up to me and said, “Peter, remember to smile and enjoy yourself sometimes.” As silly as it sounds I think we all need this reminder from time to time. For some reason it is all too easy to let lightheartedness be replaced with a worried mind and a frown. When that teacher told me to remember to smile and enjoy myself he didn’t mean for me to stop what I was doing and pointlessly fool around — he meant for me to smile and enjoy myself while I was going through the day. The way I see it you have two choices whenever you’re doing something – you can do it with a frown or you can be lighthearted and do it with a smile. I figure it’s probably better to do things with a smile because even if it’s something you don’t like doing you might fool some other people into thinking it’s enjoyable and coming to help you. People will be all the more willing to help you when they know you to be a lighthearted and engaging companion.

Think of the times when you’re working with someone else. You and a fellow camper are sweating away trying to move a heavy rock to make a step with. You’re hot and tired and you’ve probably mashed your

fingers a few times while rolling the rock along. So what do you do? You'd probably like to stop trying to move the rock and curse at it at the top of your lungs. It might even make you feel better but it wouldn't get the job done. It would probably be better to lighten the tension of the work with a joke or a story and keep on with the job. You'll find lightheartedness to be quite contagious when you're with a group. Light hearts lighten even the heaviest rocks.

Or think of the example of the 15 minutes before a major history test at school. A friend comes up to you looking like he's been up all night studying and in that pre- test, panic-stricken voice asks whether you've memorized every President in the order they were elected. Maybe you hadn't done so because you thought there was little likelihood of being tested on that. Does this mean you should panic too, let your anxiety get the better of you and try and cram all the Presidents into your head in those last 15 minutes at the risk of cluttering your mind and forgetting more important facts? It would probably be better to smile and tell him in your opinion you won't be required to know that information for the test. The example that stands out most for me of the value of lightheartedness was on Camp 19. Our first night we had backpacked seven miles into our campsite and by the time we got our tents set up it was pouring rain. We were cold, wet, tired, hungry, and to top it off we had to cook our dinner in the rain. Yet we were still able to laugh at ourselves and make light of an otherwise unpleasant situation. I know that in this case lightheartedness helped me to have a great time doing something I normally would not have been too thrilled about doing. Remember that one of the biggest problems we can have is to take ourselves too seriously as well as others. Don't be overly afraid of being laughed at and be able to laugh at yourself from time to time. Time spent sitting around and worrying too much about problems is often wasted time. It is much more productive to actively go out and lightheartedly do something about those problems. Certainly there are those times when you have to sit down and think before acting but it has always been a mystery to me why heavy thought is always associated with a frown. There doesn't seem to be anything wrong with smiling at the same time you're thinking. Think of all the times you wish someone had come up to you with a lighthearted slap on the back or a laughing smile, and try to do the same for others. Remember that things are seldom as bad as they seem and a lighthearted attitude can only make them better. The final thing I'd like to pass on before I end this is a word of advice I heard my senior year in high school. During those times when you find yourself taking things too seriously or when you find your anxieties and worries getting the better of you, remember that the bird only soars which takes itself lightly.