



A Tree Talk by John Gemmill in 1987

“I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.” When we as a group first said those words, we thought about setting goals, about lifting our sights, about raising our vision from the immediate to the distant. And just as this summer we stood at the base of Cardigan, Moosilauke, the Franconias, or Mt. Washington and wondered if we could make the climb to the top, so, on that first Sunday together, I suspect all of us were curious about the metaphorical climb that was ahead of us. Would we be able to achieve the specific goals that we had set for the summer? Would we pass the sailing test? Would we improve our tennis? Would the new shop building get constructed? How would we grow as individuals? Would we learn to improve our sportsmanship? Would we develop the leadership qualities that were beginning to emerge in us? And how would this particular group function? How would it work as a community, as a collection of 100 individuals?

Today we have a different perspective, for today we have reached the peak of this particular climb. And from the peak one has a different perspective than one has when one is at the base of the mountain looking up. We can look back at the climb and we can also see the peaks that lie ahead. On the first climb of the third and fourth walks when we got to the top of Cardigan we were able to look down and see where we started because we could see the yellow school bus and then we looked out and saw Moosilauke, Osceola, the Franconias — all the mountains we were going to climb in the coming weeks. Today we have the same perspective.

As we review the climb we have just completed I think we can agree that it has been a good one. The weather has been almost perfect; the facilities, the activities, the achievements, have been first-rate in almost every area. The companions on our journey have been terrific. And from just those specific things we will all take home wonderful memories, growth, and self-confidence that has been gained during the journey. But I hope that we will also take home something more, and what is that something more? What is it that happens at Pasquaney that it takes the experience special? What are the essential goals of our community? If we can focus on and answer these questions, it seems to me we will all be stronger and better prepared for climbing the peaks that are to come.

It seems to me that what has happened is a special combination of means and of ends, of goals and of methods of getting to these goals. Let me clear at the start and say that I don't think the goals are necessarily unique to Pasquaney. Our value system is in the great Judeo-Christian system that Bob Bulkeley talked about two weeks ago. That is an ethic that has challenged men and women to be their best for centuries. It is at once simple and complex. It seems to me there are four chief ends toward which all that has been done this summer has aimed and if we take these four chief ends to heart, if we take them home with us, we will be better able to make the next climb.

The first of these is a sense of honor, of trust, and of good faith among ourselves in daily life: From the simple things like respecting the property of other people's bunks to keeping our word, to the more difficult matter of being honest with ourselves, of avoiding rationalizations, of being quite clear with ourselves about what we are doing and what our motives are. And about the inner good feeling that comes from an unburdened conscience. When we make mistakes in this area of honor and trust we get them

cleared up right away so that our conscience and the sense of honor and good faith within the community are restored.

The second end is influence through kindness, thoughtfulness, consideration, sensitivity to others, trying to understand the other's point of view, as Win Freeman described in his Tree Talk. And there are various manifestations of this: civility, kindness in daily life, sportsmanship, as outlined by Tommy Sutro in his Tree Talk. Influence through kindness also involves tolerance: Loving the sinner and at the same time working hard to correct the sin, as Vin Broderick discussed in his sermon several weeks ago. We need to remember that there are boundaries on competition. There are places where competition is fine, but in human relations, in the cooperative climb of the mountain together, competition does not belong.

The third end, I submit, is service: Service to other people and to the community. And setting service as a yardstick by which we judge and measure other people — not power, not position, but service — an outward-looking concern, an outward-thrusting altruism towards other people and towards the community. Part of this service is leadership, not by noise but by example, by one-on-one working with other people, and, as we are reminded each Sunday, service is perfect freedom.

After honor, after influence through kindness, and after service, the fourth great end is freedom. Now this may seem ironic in an organization which requires us to get up at 7:00 in the morning and start each day with a cold shower. And yet I suggest that freedom comes by internalizing the structure that we have at Pasquaney. This internalizing of the structure leads to the self-discipline which can be of tremendous value to us. It can make us free so that if we are on a diet, for example, we have the freedom, we have the self-discipline, to say no to food.

It helps us in decision making because we know that if we reach out and steal candy, God is not going to come down and grab our hand and say no. We have the freedom to make the decision ourselves and so we need self-discipline. We have also had the freedom from gadgets, to lead a simple life where we can look beyond the immediate, beyond the tangible to these more important matters. We have had the freedom from social pressures, which might be symbolized by the wearing of the uniform so that we do not judge people on the basis of clothes. Perhaps we can sum this up by saying that we have the freedom to be our best selves in a world which often appeals to our worst.

Honor, influence through kindness, service and freedom. These are the chief ends, it seems to me, into which all the broad goals we thought about together during the course of the summer can be placed. They are not unique to Pasquaney. The means of achieving these goals, however, are a little more special, especially in the way they happen to be combined in our community.

Here are just a few of them that I hope we will remember and practice. Number one is activity, involvement, and energy; being a participant rather than a spectator. To use Townley Chisholm's analogy, being the mice who are active and are developing their brain cells, not the ones that are passive and letting their minds deteriorate. Along with this activity, energy and involvement comes the vigor of being in good physical condition, of being our physical best.

The second means, I suggest, is a sense of humor. Life in pursuit of these great goals can be fun. We can still pursue these values and at the same time have Long Walk shirt capers, mysterious things appear under cups throughout the summer, council shoes disappearing and then reappearing at the wrong place in Trustees' inspection, various missing items ranging from bunks to automobiles, the arrival, the

departure and the general mystery surrounding Swaveli Walevich. Humor can lift morale and also be a teaching tool.

The third one doesn't really need much elaboration. It is the camp motto: Stop and Think. At this point in the summer if somebody is doing something and another person says "Stop and Think" we know instinctively what that motto means: Take the time to step back, think about our decision, apply common sense to what we are doing.

Another means is emphasizing personal responsibility, the kind of responsibility that Jono and Tommy Babbitt talked to us about in their Tree Talk. We have some control over our destiny. We can't just place the blame on the system or on the school board or on some nebulous thing out there. We are responsible. Nobody else can be blamed. As Tommy Hill said in his Tree Talk on the Pasquaney bottom line, when he makes a business decision, he can't blame the stock market or some other external force if it doesn't work. He has to take the personal responsibility for his decision.

And the fifth means that I hope we will remember is friendship, having good friends, (peer support, to use the current phrase) who will bring out our best. I hope all of us have made those friends this summer and will stay in touch over the winter, using those techniques that Kirk Phelps taught us in his Tree Talk, such as sending a postcard. It takes two minutes but is an effective way of staying in contact.

Two final means are important. One is to remember that there is a lot of life that is preparation and training. We don't automatically arrive. Worthwhile goals often require hard work. They take some struggle. You have to work at that tennis instruction for a while before you are going to really succeed in the tournament.

And finally the great progression: Sow an act, reap a habit. Sow a habit, reap a character. Sow that character and reap our destiny. There is no action in isolation. There is no action without meaning. To turn the popular rationalization on its head, "just this once does matter."

Except for one more thing, I think these are the essential ends and means. Pasquaney is a small community where we can prove to ourselves that these work, that practicing these means, that reaching for these ends can enrich our lives and can enrich the community. They can lead us to happiness, fulfillment, and peace of mind that Jack Boccock talked about in his Tree Talk.

The Final element (which is both an end and a means) is the yardstick by which ultimately the success of this summer will be measured both individually and collectively. And that is...we can think about these ends and means, we can try to understand them, but the final judgment is practicing them. As the lesson this morning concludes, the people who believe in these values are the light of the world. And just as one doesn't light a lamp and then hide it under a bucket, so if we have a light, if we seek these goals, they must shine forth, they must light up the household, light up the area around us. This is the ultimate measure: not only understanding, not only thinking about these ends and means, but practicing them; extending our light to other people, extending our values in quiet, one-on-one, patient work with others.

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good work and glorify your father which is in Heaven."