

## Pasquaney *archives*

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Not too long ago, a good friend of mine, a geography professor at Macalester, sent me an email about his summer's work doing research in Kabul, Afghanistan. I found one passage particularly amusing: "I'm the ONLY foreigner walking around, everybody else is riding in their 4-wheelers because it's 'unsafe' to walk about...People [foreign aid workers] would just look at me and stare when they found out I actually WALKED around the town and actually went into tea shops and actually TALKED to people on the streets. So far I can say that I have never met more cheerful, friendly people...I saw a group of really rough-looking guys with beards and military outfits and more guns than I've seen in the state of Texas. They looked over at me and glared, and then I smiled and put my hand on my chest and told them 'Assalom alaykum' (which I suppose means hello or peace or something in Dari) and wished them good morning and they all broke out in these big grins and insisted on sharing their tea with me. If they're all as 'dangerous' as that, then I'm going to have a great month."

As Professor Rowe likes to say, shyness never got anyone anywhere. He did end up having a great month, adorned with a number of exciting adventures. My point is, however, that he never doubted he could engage common Afghans, even those burly men who were surely veteran fighters. Simply, he grasped that he shares some very universal values with them; namely, an appreciation for friendliness. A straightforward hello, a slight reassurance of common humanity, was enough to break through suspicion.

We ignore such common human tendencies too often. On a basic level, people are very similar, no matter what culture they grow up in. As you all know, we have a few basic desires: we want to be healthy and safe, to have friends, to fall in love, and at some point, to have children or find some other calling to which we can devote our lives. It shouldn't be very hard for us to connect, to recognize these common yearnings and thus be reassured. But as a quick glance at the newspaper will tell you, lots of people overlook what they share. The world is wracked by disagreements that inspire such hate and righteousness in people that they will risk their own lives and kill others.

Freedom, justice, power, and money: these are some of the concepts, some noble, others less so, that cause people to lose their sense of humanity. When we get caught up in a righteous cause, we tend to narrow our viewpoint. If we see people as nuisances, obstacles, or enemies, then we're likely to lose our appreciation for their motivations and emotions, and if we don't care why and how others feel the way they do, then we're unlikely to mind if harm befalls them.

Now, being the Geography major that I am, I could be controversial and talk about how I think this tendency manifests itself in international politics. We have some fine examples right here at camp, however, that will do just as well. When we become overly competitive, our respect for one another suffers because our primary goal is to win. The wall ball court is where this phenomenon seems to occur most frequently. How often have you seen some other camper, or indeed yourself, cheat, lie, or get angry simply to stay in a game? It's no coincidence that a number of scuffles break out every year on that court. As we grow up, we must start to dissolve these emotions, avoid the conflicts that take away from our happiness, and learn to recognize the long-term consequences of anger and meanness as well as those of kindness and charity.

There's another step to a developing a sense of humanity that I think may be the hardest to take because it

requires you to make yourself uncomfortable by going to a new place. Quite by chance, I got a sense of this last winter when I rather casually signed up for a Spanish study abroad program in Ecuador. Though I spent most of my time in Quito, Ecuador's capital, I did get to explore a fair amount of the countryside and meet the people – not simply the rich and worldly, but also some of your average Joes. Despite my difficulty speaking Spanish, it was never hard to make myself understood, because my emotions were so easily recognizable. Folks down there are generally not shy about talking to a Westerner, and I had many conversations, usually pleasant, about what brought me to Ecuador. After a while I noticed a pattern: while most Ecuadorians were quick to express how much they disliked the United States, particularly our president, they never identified me as part of the problem. I am very grateful for their hospitality and eagerness to engage me. Whether or not their resentment of the US was justified, their humanity compelled them to treat me well. I returned inspired.

I think I'm correct in saying a lot of us simply don't share such respect for people from elsewhere in the world. Because of our affluence and might, Americans seem often to replace their sense of humanity with arrogance. If you dismiss this assertion, I think you are proving my point. Ask almost any foreigner. This isn't to say we don't do good things in the world, but we also tend to dismiss anyone we don't see as powerful. I am so sick of hearing jokes told about Canada and Mexicans, without fail told by people who've obviously never visited either place. Is it easier to dismiss the French when conceit allows us to forget that they also share the emotions of love and insecurity, friendship and fear?

What are the qualities that are necessary to a sense of humanity? Those which ease anger and strengthen your love for others. I think patience, mercy, and empathy are some of the most important: I find these characteristics most appealing in those whom I trust and love. I hope you all challenge yourselves by going to new places, geographically and mentally. It's interesting to note how many counsellors use their trips abroad as the basis for their tree talks. I can name Tom Bayliss, Chris Reigeluth, and Chris Cadwell off the top of my head.

That month in Ecuador remains constantly in my thoughts. At one point, I stayed with a rural family for four days, and while I had my own cabin, they slept all eleven, parents and children together, in one room. The eldest daughter couldn't go to university because she had to watch over the seven siblings younger than her; meanwhile, the mother was heavily pregnant with another child. One evening, I was writing when some of the younger kids began to admire my pen. I gave it to them but felt terrible because they were so grateful, yet I could easily have done so much more.

I'm lucky in a lot of respects. I'm safe and have a relatively secure future. Materially, I don't lack for anything. As far as love and friendship go, however, I'm no better off than the family I stayed with - they were certainly a lot friendlier and more open in showing their love than I am. When I returned to my regular host family, I felt a lot humbler, more critical, and much less confident that I deserve all my possessions and comfortable habits. It was a trip that was quite tough at times; self-examination in regard to my humanity was painful. But I have no doubt that I am a better person for going.

I'll finish with the prayer Mr. Vinnie read from chapel last week, which, although I don't believe in God, sums up the way I feel wonderfully.

O God of the great Open Spaces, where beauty and quietness fill our souls, where the meaning of life seems obvious, and the problems of life so simple: quiet the fever in our minds and the fear in our hearts, by the assurance that back of all the chaos that bewilders us is an Orderliness which can be achieved – not merely at

camp, that stronger than all the hatreds which rack humanity is a Love which has no limit, that deeper than all the issues which divide us is the common adventure of our common humanity which unites us, that more compelling to the real heart of man than the throb of the drums of war is the Voice of the better, nobler spirit within us calling us to be set free.