

# Pasquaney *archives*

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Buenos dias.

Instead of going to college directly after graduating high school, I decided to take another route. I entered Middlebury a semester after the majority of my class did. For the first time in my life I felt out of the nest and free. I was making my own money and living without my parents. I was working towards my goal of traveling to Central America. My family had taken a spring vacation to Costa Rica during my sophomore year in high school. It was my first experience in a tropical climate. I had loved it and wanted to return and travel the country on my own two feet.

I worked harder than I have ever worked in my life. I lived with my Uncle Jared and his family and painted the exterior of his house. I woke up early and got to work as soon as I could. I painted all day and on Tuesdays and Thursdays I would go and wash dishes at a restaurant called "The Den" at night. After I finished Jared's house I painted two others. In my mind, I had earned my trip and was excited to get started.

I remember being really anxious before I left. I had spent all of my time earning money and none actually planning my trip. I was going to leave the country in a few days, and I had nothing but a plane ticket and a few travel books. When I finally arrived in San Jose, all of my labors seemed worth it. However, it was apparent that I was in need of a Spanish refresher. I signed up for a week course in Tamorindo, a resort town in north of San Jose.

The lessons were very useful, but I learned more from a home-stay that the school had arranged. The home was in a town called Los Platos just outside the touristy center of Tamorindo. It was a shantytown compared to the fancy hotel strip a few miles away. The second night I was there, I decided to venture out to the town center where I had seen a few young people congregate the night before. I put on my nice shirt and walked out to them. I strolled up to the group thinking to myself, "Man, what a nice guy I am, going out of my way to meet these people. They must want to meet me; I'm an American." I was met by a smile from one of the boys, and I tried to make small talk with him. He was patient with my broken Spanish, and I was having a great time unaware of the atmosphere around. But, soon after I arrived a group of boys confronted me. They were hostile and angry. I was sitting down so they stood over me. They were talking quickly and I couldn't make out most of the words. I could feel the spite that was directed towards me.

They weren't yelling, but the taunting way that they addressed me made me feel like they wanted to start a fight. I didn't know how to react. I wish that I could have been able to understand more of what they were saying to me. I wish that I had been able to tell them how I felt and explain what my intentions were. But, I couldn't. I was flustered, afraid and I couldn't break through the language barrier that stood between us. I don't remember a time that I had been more frustrated with myself. I stood up furious at not being able to communicate. I walked away from them back to my host family's home. It was the only thing I could think to do. As I crawled under my sheets I felt horrible. I couldn't stop thinking about the scene I had just left.

When I woke up the next morning, I woke up in a different world than the one I had fallen asleep in. Although the words that had been used the night before were lost to me, I had been forced to realize what I was in the eyes of many Costa Ricans. I was not a young traveler who was searching for his purpose before he went to

college. The education I had already been given would have been a blessing for most Costa Ricans. I was a tourist. I was a face among many, around for a few days and then... gone.

The majority of people in this town worked in Tamarindo at one of the hotels or resorts and returned to their low standard of living at night. There was nothing to distinguish me from any other tourist. It made no difference whether I was in Costa Rica looking at the natural wonders, surfing or trying to learn Spanish. I was not a friend of the boys who I had encountered the night before; I had just met them. It had been offensive to some of them that I tried to be more. I expected them to make me feel like a long time friend while I made them feel like tools to learn Spanish.

I should have looked to the camp motto: Stop and think.

I argued with myself. It shouldn't matter what my socio-economic background is. It shouldn't matter that I had the opportunity to work for great wages. It shouldn't matter that I had earned enough money to take a tour through their country that they would never be able to take. I should be able to make friends with these boys... Although I still believe that this is true I didn't go about creating the friendship the right way. I should have been more conscious of their situation. I shouldn't have flaunted my nicest shirt. I shouldn't have approached the situation feeling that I was more desirable to meet. After I realized what I had done I was appalled at myself. Suddenly I didn't feel like I had done anything great by painting houses. I hadn't worked very hard at all.

Stop and think.

Are my intentions sound? Will my intentions be understood?

Around camp, there are times when intentions are not understood. In the heat of the moment something is done which is not thought through and hurts people. We are in an environment where we can achieve the altruistic community which we aspire to be. Everyone has a chance to grow here and a place to come out of their shell. We can either encourage growth or we can push people into their shells and make them self-conscious.

I'm a bit spacey sometimes and stumble on my words during prayers and announcements. I know this. I'm lucky that I have a thick skin and not be bothered by having a winning skit based on my brainlessness. But seriously, what if I didn't thrive on attention and was pushed back into my shell thinking that I was inadequate? What if the first time Bubbles had fun poked at him in a skit he was so offended that he didn't return? It could have happened.

But, if it did happen there would have been a crucial step missing. Here at camp we have the blessing to speak the same language. We don't have a language barrier to break through that I was faced with. Conversation is a tool that is too often forgotten about. We can communicate clearly with one another and speak up if we are offended, hurt, or worried. Counsellors have devoted their summer to be here and to listen. We will lend an ear to anything that you have to tell us. Counsellors try not to be intimidating but if we are, confront a peer. And, if confronted by someone about being offensive or hurtful, you are being given the opportunity to apologize and explain your intentions more clearly.

Talking about difficult subjects may not be easy for you, take your time. It is easier to articulate your true thoughts if you have thought about what you want to say. Emotions often run high during difficult discussions

and can be distracting from the true problem. It is best to wait until you have had time to regain your calm before approaching the person who has hurt you.

Stop and think.

And if you skip a step, don't forget to communicate!