

Pasquaney *archives*



“I have learned that doing good for others is actually the most selfish thing you could possibly do because, I promise you, it will make you happy.”

Those words aren't mine. They belong to NBC journalist Ann Curry, as quoted from her commencement address at my college graduation this past May. Doing good for others is actually the most selfish thing you could possibly do because, I promise you, it will make you happy. It wasn't the first time I had heard something more or less along these lines, however, given the time and place, the eloquent spin that Ms. Curry put on the value of selfless behavior, of service for others, made an immediate impression on me.

No sooner had she spoken these words I have shared with you did I think of Pasquaney. For good reason: think of the countless opportunities we have to do good for others in this community, and think of the value that we all put on such actions. Duties. Inspection. The various demands of an expedition. And our various ways of helping one another through careful, thoughtful instruction: Returning campers teaching new ones, older campers teaching younger boys, counsellors teaching campers, counsellors teaching counsellors.

Pasquaney is a community that endorses this ethos of selfless service for others, service for the community in general. This practically goes without saying. But, just to remind us all, we do in fact have some sayings. Take two classic Pasquaney-isms: His need is greater than mine. In humble tasks we serve her best.

Doing good for others is actually the most selfish thing you could possibly do because, I promise you, it will make you happy. What makes Ann Curry's claim so interesting, of course, is her branding doing good for others – selflessness – as a selfish thing, in that such actions are something that will make you happy.

So it follows then that the common perception is that doing good for others does not make one happy. If we are all individuals seeking happiness in some form or another, this common perception suggests that doing good for others is going against the grain, it's running against the wind, it's flat out doing something weird in contemporary American society. When so much in our lives is about the individual, how foreign does it sound to sing the praises of working for a collective, of being part of something bigger than yourself? How strange is it to say that doing good for others is something that will make you happy?

But this is exactly the opportunity we have at camp. We all have a chance to be part of a fabulously caring community that you can trust. Trust is the foundation of everything we do here. And as for the specific focus of this tree talk – doing good for others and its resulting personal happiness – trust is what allows each and every one of us to act selflessly with such strong faith that these actions will not be sneered at or rejected. We are all individuals in this community, it is a small community, but it is a community that is nonetheless bigger than any one of us as individuals. We all have the opportunity to benefit from the power of the Pasquaney community by contributing to it and taking joy from it.

All right. So I've talked about the value of camp's strong community and the importance and opportunity we have through the trust we have in one another. But you may very well still be skeptical about the concept I'm trying to endorse here. I'll say it again: Doing good for others is actually the most selfish thing you could possibly do because, I promise you, it will make you happy. I'm sure at least one of you out there is thinking something along the following lines: All this doing good for others stuff is supposed to make me happy? I'm

being selfish by doing good for others? Are you kidding me? You might be able to acknowledge that doing good for others is a valued trait that can be considered a good in and of itself, but happiness? Doing good for others is really supposed to make me happy? Isn't that what Mary Lamb is for? Isn't that what fast food, technology, and playing sports are for?

The happiness I'm selling here is a different brand of happiness than the happiness you get from those previous things. Don't get me wrong; I'm a big fan of McDonalds' Angus burgers, iPods, the Internet, and double features at drive-in movie theaters. All those things are pretty sweet too, and they do provide a certain level of happiness, there is no denying that. But the happiness that Ann Curry is talking about, the happiness that I'm talking about – it is a more natural and satisfying sort of happiness.

For me, this happiness comes from the opportunity to work with you guys on a shop project, to share your company and conversation at the lovely Table 9, to take a hike together in these beautiful mountains, to help my guys in Cardigan through things like inspection and circles, by getting out in a sailboat with any of the vast majority of you who are far better at the helm than myself, or even to simply share a summer with each other and with so many chances to laugh, learn, and live together in this community. Come to think of it, these are really some of the big reasons why I love Pasquaney.

I love Pasquaney because we all give our best for one another. We all do so much good for one another. The handshakes, the pats on the back, the congratulatory words, the shared struggles on lake or on diamond, we all share so much genuine and deserved appreciation of doing good for one another over the course of the summer. This community allows us all to continually grow and learn from one another as we all do good for one another. It takes considerable energy for us all to get this giving of goodness, this Pasquaney spirit going, but that's part of what makes this happiness so awesome. Happiness through doing good for others does not come easily. We all, as individuals, are required to put in an honest effort at doing these good things for others if we ever want a chance to fully revel in the quality happiness that is a result of doing good for others. And this isn't always fun.

The Pasquaney community abounds with opportunities to do good for others. Thus Pasquaney abounds with happiness. Each and everyone of us, whether we are a camper, a counsellor, or some other member of the camp community, we all have countless opportunities this summer to provide a service to this community, to do good for one another. I think we are all aware of such opportunities to do good for others. But what perhaps you do not know is how such selflessness, such service for others, for Pasquaney as a whole will make you, as an individual, genuinely, truly happy.

Doing good others, in all the various forms this comes in at Pasquaney, will fill you with a happiness that is more than a momentary flicker of pleasure or a cheap hedonistic thrill. To weave the theme of this tree talk into another Pasquaney saying, sowing small acts of doing good for others will reap a destiny of self-generated happiness. So I encourage you, if you haven't already, do not be afraid to give your best to this community. In duties, on hikes, on the lake, on the stage, during inspection, at activities, and all of the moments in between. If we all give our best for one another, we will all be happier for it. It will do good for yourself as an individual and every happy individual makes Pasquaney stronger as a whole. So give it a shot. Be selfish: do good for others. Have faith. Take the plunge. Thank you.