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Camp Pasquaney

Three meters above the wind-born chop of Lake Newfound, I stood stiff and shivering—a scrawny, bug-eyed twelve-year-old with a degree of spastic athleticism and an irritating propensity for hyper activity. Diving. We all know the feeling of standing in a high place, of being perched on the brink of flight, of falling free through the air for just a moment. We are simultaneously frightened and exhilarated, and suddenly find ourselves amidst a battle of two competing urges: to jump or not to jump. We are clear in our task, understand what is needed to succeed, but the high-voltage nature of the situation may often leave us weak in our resolve. Our minds churn, weighing the risks at hand, and a sense of caution floods our consciousness. We second-guess our competence and consequently resign without even trying. Though I had throughout the summer cultivated a confidence in diving, worked on my technique and control in the air, this day proved a disappointment. On that breezy July afternoon in 2004, I was without poise. I hesitated, resigned. I was paralyzed by the idea failure.

Though I stood only feet away from Kirk, one of the most tactful and empowering teachers I know, I felt alone and unable to shake the overwhelming dread of failing, of looking like a fool. Calls of encouragement rang from the raft, but they glanced off of me, as could do nothing but imagine the dive's intended one and a half rotations ending abruptly with a cold, hard slap of dark water on my exposed belly. I could not jump, and I stepped down, dejected, to watch another boy dive thoughtlessly and effortlessly off the platform.

While trying to galvanize the strength to leap, I had tried to recall the instructions Kirk had given me, but an insecure and fearful voice had echoed relentlessly in my ears. In just a few seconds, my summer's recently fostered self-assurance had crumbled under the weight of inhibition, and eight years later that small spec of a memory remains fixed clearly in my mind. It was an instance in which I had let my fear of failure over power not only my desire to succeed, but also my faith in my own ability and my trust in the net of supportive friends and counsellors that lay beneath me.

Today, at twenty years old, I am naturally larger, more mature and more secure in my identity than I was in my first year at Camp, but regardless of how much I have grown, I still experience (on a consistent basis) that rushing, shrinking sensation of standing on the board, readying for a dive I have yet to attempt. With only two years left of college, I sit within a hazy gradient between adolescence and adulthood; my imminent and swiftly approaching plunge into the “real world” constantly on my mind. The future is always a daunting notion, and right now, as I think to what the next few years may hold, I am that 80 pound kid again, standing on a much higher platform overlooking water less clear and less forgiving than that of our pristine lake.

I feel young, naïve, and frankly not ready to leave behind my teenage years. I am perpetually indecisive and unsure about the direction I wish to travel in life, and I am afraid. Afraid to take a step, afraid make a poor decision, afraid that I will make the wrong first move into my life as an independent person. Fear of the future is not a novel sensation and is certainly not exclusive to

me. It manifests itself differently in each of us, and we therefore must conquer it in our own time and in our own way.

As a studio art and history double major, I can claim with certainty that my courses of study will not provide the most lucrative job opportunities for a young man in search of first-time employment. Though my future's possible job-insecurity had never before bothered me, last fall, a seed of self-doubt began to gnaw at my more rational side.

Throughout the year I watched as my friends sifted through internship applications and juggled interviews, and I grew nervous—nervous that I was not approaching our pending induction into the job-market with the right priorities or the same hunger for success that those around me. That nervousness developed into anxiety, and I began to question myself. *“Are these art classes really worth my time and energy? Am I talented enough to take it seriousl as a major? Should I be even loosely considering the possibility of an art-based career, or should I pursue a safer, more marketable path?”* These questions plagued me for some time. I felt as though I was spinning aimlessly, going nowhere, and I flirted with the idea of dropping my major entirely. When Mike called me to confirm my spot on the Pasquaney council of 2012, however, I started to regain a grasp on what it is I want to do, how I want to live.

For a moment I considered spending this summer away from the hillside, of assimilating into the massive flow of my résumé boosting student brethren, but the thought lasted for an instant. I found the choice to be a no brainer. Pasquaney has been one of the most positive and pivotal influences in my life, so I knew right then that only two years on the council was not enough time for me to fully commit myself to its service. There was no other option; I was coming back.

The ease in my decision, the conviction with which I felt I had made the right choice was empowering. For the first time in months I was sure, certain, and a sweeping sense of relief came over me. I had once again found a secure foundation upon which to stand, and I was able to turn without apprehension back to those interests of mine that had been, like Pasquaney, a constant and constructive fixture in my youth: art and music. I bought several new sketchbooks, a handful of novels I had been wanting to read, found some friends willing to jam with a still novice guitarist and joined one of Colby's a cappella groups. These actions were small and may likely lead to nothing of a future, but I felt a small sense of victory. I was making choices, paving a road for myself. I was finding a direction.

In retrospect, I am convinced that none of this year's small triumphs would have occurred had I not attended Pasquaney as a camper. In middle school, neither my peers nor my teachers encouraged artistic aspirations. Art and music were something for the less socially successful, the alternative crowd. I was thus convinced that I should invest my time and energy in improving my athletic ability, and I sidelined all else. In my first year as a camper, however, I saw that my love of art and music was not something from which I should recoil. It was something to be worn proudly. I met talented musicians and charismatic actors, incredible woodworkers and gifted writers. I could not help but be inspired—inspired to pursue a creative path that my insecure, pubescent self had deemed socially weak.

That realization, that initial point of assurance happened eight years ago, but every year I return to the hillside, I witness more incredible talent; am able to participate in both moving and hilarious performances, and I become a part of an unbelievably supportive audience. I am fueled with encouragement in a community that genuinely celebrates all kinds of people and all kinds of interests. Each year I am driven to try something that stretches me from my area of comfort. I want to do something different, something that challenges me, something that is new.

Looking out on this wonderful group of people, I wish I could return to that July afternoon in 2004. I wish I could be there to encourage my twelve-year-old self to jump, to take the chance, but I cannot. So I turn to you. At some point in the past weeks each one of us has been daunted, each one of us has hesitated and decided to let an opportunity for growth pass. This is an understandable struggle, but with only a week left on the hillside, with only eight days left in the 2012 Pasquaney season, the time for hesitation is over. It is easy to become complacent, to squander the finite remainder rather than savor it, but this attitude is one that will lead to only regret. If you have an idea of something you want to do, something you want to try, act. Make that idea a reality. Do not fall victim to fear's static influence and conquer the intimidating threat of failure. Have confidence in yourself and those around you; be resilient. Then, when you realize that you have the potential succeed:

Act,

Jump,

Dive in;

The water is nice this time of year.