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"Happiness"  
Tree Talk 8/10/07  
Camp Pasquaney

In less than 48 hours, the Camp season will end. What then begins?

Real clothes? Riding in cars? Talking on a cell phone? Going on line? Listening to whatever music you want? Watching TV or playing video games?

You have lived without those things for seven weeks. Ask yourself, has their absence made you happy or unhappy?

Think about your life beginning Sunday afternoon. Everyday you will have to decide what to put on, how you will get around, who you need to call or IM, what you will listen to, what show you will watch or what game you will play.

In comparison to your life at camp, I think it is fair to observe that life at home has more choices. Your life here has had more simplicity. In the morning you basically have to decide, "Tank top, or sleeves?" Simple. Has that simplicity made you happy or unhappy?

Perhaps we could better answer these questions if we had a common understanding of what *happiness* is. How do you define happiness? At first this seems a very simple question. Everybody's been happy at some point, we all know how that feels.

Maybe happiness is a feeling, the opposite of sadness, which is also a feeling. Anger is a feeling, hunger is a feeling, excitement is a feeling, sleepiness is a feeling.

Yet happiness is somehow different from these things, because it is something we seek. Most feelings just happen to us whether we like it or not; you hike around, you don't want to get tired, but you do. We don't seek after feelings the way we seek after happiness. Fairy tales don't end, "And they both lived hungrily ever after."

So happiness appears to be something we are looking for, but though we may *feel it*, it is not exactly a feeling.

Many people believe that happiness comes from possession. That it comes from having things, so therefore, the more things you have, and the better those things are, the happier you will be. So our pursuit of happiness becomes a pursuit of things. That's why many people think they are in school; you go to school and get good grades so you can get into a good college; you go to a good college so you can get a good job; you get a good job so you get paid well; you get paid well, so you can possess the best things, and a lot of them and finally be happy just before you die. The people with the giant house, the amazing cars and yachts, and a new suit for every day of the year; man, they must be happy.

Yet something seems to be wrong with this definition as well. We have few possessions at Camp, and many of them would not qualify as luxurious beyond the hillside. Dana is no Beverly Hills mansion, Stanwood doesn't even have four walls. If you've driven in the blue whale you

know it doesn't have FM radio, and in the white whale the gas gauge is more of a suggestion than an actual measurement. Not exactly top of the line.

And yet we have had experienced happiness here.

A third definition that many people base their lives on is that happiness equals pleasure. When you eat good food it is pleasing, when you relax into a comfortable chair it is pleasing, when you hear a good song it is pleasing, when you play a good video game it is exciting and that excitement is pleasing. So, the pursuit of happiness becomes a pursuit of pleasure and something we seek immediately, everywhere, and seek in large quantities. Another way of looking at it is that happiness becomes the absence of any inconvenience, suffering or pain. If something is difficult or slow it is to be avoided, because it won't yield any pleasure, so why bother? Taken to the extreme, the happiest person on earth would be relaxing on a lazy boy, getting a foot massage, eating a double cheese burger with one hand, playing Halo with the other, listening to a constant mix of tunes from their iPod and being fed Airhead Extremes intravenously.

Pleasure, however, doesn't last. It is like a small candle that burns itself out quickly after it is lit leaving the room dark again. Pleasure, is a short-term phenomenon; it is here, and gone.

Happiness is something deeper. Something you are truly happy about today will bring you happiness years from now. Think of the Long Walk or a long hike you completed during your expedition this summer. At the time it might not have felt that pleasurable to be grunting up a mountain. But the feeling at the top, or at the bus, there is happiness there, and if you search your heart you can still sense some of that happiness now – it might have lessened, but it has not vanished. Happiness is not the beautiful flowers that bloom in the spring and die in the winter; it is something deeper in the nurturing earth itself.

Perhaps happiness is popularity. If you can get everyone to like you, then you can feel good about yourself and be happy. If everyone didn't like you then you would be sad, not happy, right? So happiness becomes a pursuit of trying to please others and gain their approbation, placing the source of our happiness in other people's hands. However, this idea seems impossible. We can't make everyone like us all the time, nor would we want to. If Mr. Vinnie told me he would like me more if I stole Dooger's Mary Lamb and I did it, I might get a raise, but I wouldn't be happy. Sorry, Vin.

One last thing people often mistake happiness for is power. If I am in charge, they say, if I am giving the orders, if I could have everything my way and under my control, if those people would just listen to me, I would be happy. But is that really the case?

This summer what were you really in charge of? Whether new boy, sixteen-year-old, counsellor, or Director – could you control other people? I think inspection results tell us otherwise. If Mr. Vinnie could control all of us there would be no need for inspection. What then were we in charge of other than ourselves, our thoughts, and our actions. Each of us has influence, but none of us has power over others.

And yet we have experienced happiness here.

So if happiness is not a feeling, does not derive from possession, is not the product of pleasure, is not generated by popularity, and has no basis in power, what then is it?

I am convinced that if Aristotle were alive today, he would send his sons to Camp to learn about happiness, which he defined as, “Activity of the soul in accordance with virtue throughout a complete life.”

Activity of the soul in accordance with virtue throughout a complete life. I would suggest you have experienced that type of activity this summer, and that it is the source of the deeper happiness you feel now as the season closes.

We have been just, trying to view people based on what they do and how they treat others, not by the clothes they wear or how much wealth they have. We have been moderate, avoiding excess in any one thing, except perhaps sugar during the sixteen-year-old breakfast. We have been living an active, not sedentary life, swimming, diving, rowing, paddling, sailing, hitting, serving, building, exploring, sweeping, washing, weeding, waxing and on. We have been courageous in trying new things, taking on challenging hikes or a daring role on stage. We have been practicing wisdom in the exercise of good judgment, stopping and thinking before acting. We have been honest and trusting with one another and ourselves, leaving what we have unlocked and open. We have made loyal friends by being friendly and loyal. We have been happy.

Yet what has made us happy here can be easy to forget starting Sunday afternoon. Happiness as feeling, possession, pleasure, popularity or power is how many people live their whole lives, what they build businesses on and advertise in your face 24 hours a day. How do you stand a chance against such distracting odds? How can you remember something so simple, that the active life is the one most happy, when everywhere you feel surrounded by confusion? The tide and current is against you.

Consider this image from C. S. Lewis:

Imagine a fleet of sailboats on a vast sea with no land in sight. Those boats have three primary things to think about. First, each boat must keep itself in good shape or it will sink, like the tubs this afternoon. Sails need to be trimmed, leaks patched, hulls waxed. In the same way, each of us is responsible for our individual selves; whether we tell the hard truth or lie, whether we put good food into our bodies or junk, whether we exercise or sit on the couch.

Second, each boat must coordinate with the other boats so they don't crash into each other. If one boat is struggling, the others come to its aid. In the same way, we are responsible for how we treat others; are we understanding and compassionate or judgmental and exclusive? Do we think of others first, or ourselves?

Lastly, each boat must choose a course to follow and stick to it. Ask yourself, what is my life pointed toward? Where am I going? If I am seeking happiness as my goal, which definition am I really seeking? It need not be anything we talked about here, but I suggest you at least stop and think about the question.

Stop and think, if you have experienced happiness here, what it really came from and what it can come from at home. There is opportunity everywhere; Camp is no unique paradise and our lives

outside it are what we make of them. Remember the image of the boats on the ocean. Keep yourself ship shape, play nicely with the other boats, and most importantly, don't drift in whatever direction the tide or current will take you; rather, choose your heading and stay on course.

Thank you.