

White Birch

CAMP PASQUANEY

WINTER 2009



Above: Opening Day, 2008. Mr. Vinnie and several older boys meet with the new campers to discuss their first impressions of camp after an older-camper-led tour. Below: Counsellor Rob Denious (right) greets new camper Max Russakoff.

On Being a New Camper

by Jacob Potash

[Editor's note: Jacob was a new camper last season, and though only twelve, is remarkably articulate. Other than a handful of grammatical edits, the following words are entirely his own.]

I had the good fortune last summer of being assigned to Jeremy Bertsche's camper-led circle, and in one of our discussions he remarked how difficult Pasquaney's allure is to explain. Not until I returned home and attempted this feat, though, did I fully appreciate the truth of his comment.

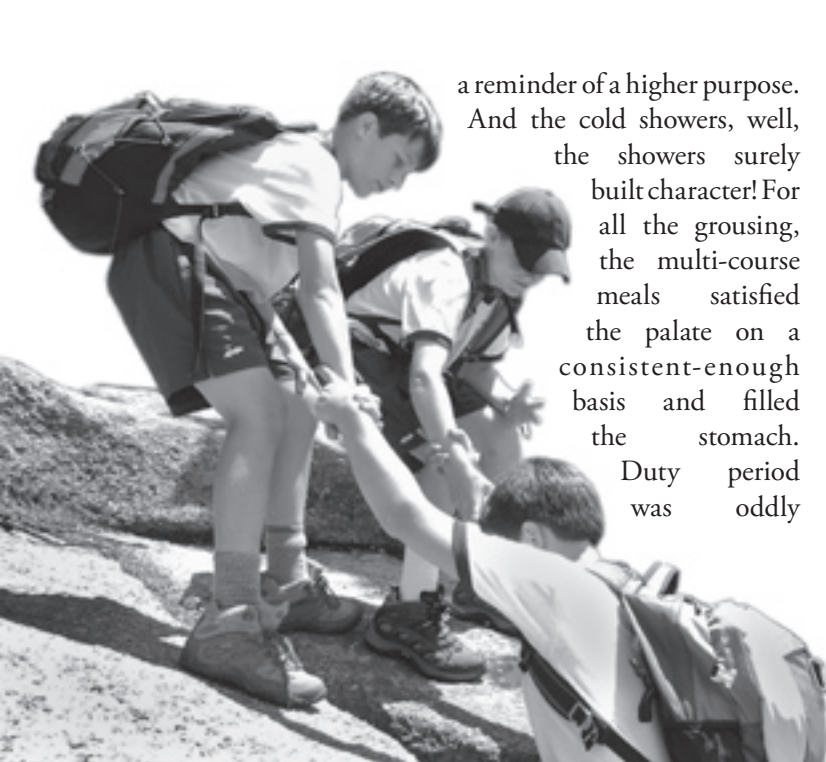
Seeing as one my ancestors was a camper at the inception of Camp Pasquaney in 1895, I had a fifteen-year-old brother in his fourth year attending as well, and many of the men in my family are alumni or have been trustees of the camp, upon the commencement of my first summer I certainly did not feel like a newcomer or an outsider. I would soon realize, though, that what I knew of Pasquaney was rather superficial, that at the core of the camp was a unique sense of community that one must experience to understand.

The abundance of warmth and

openness was apparent from the first day; nearly every counselor and older boy shook my hand and introduced himself. Whatever activity I wanted to try, I knew that I was surrounded by people more than willing to point me in the right direction. Whichever table I was seated at, I knew that if I forgot the age-old Memorial Hall etiquette I could count on someone to politely remind me of it. And whatever duty to which I had been condemned (as I sometimes felt) the sages would be glad to impart to me their ancient nuggets of insight and wisdom on how to, say, finish the cracks in Northern Dana. I was taken aback, and, at the same time, overjoyed at the remarkable supportiveness of the community. To my further surprise, even my fellow new boys asked to help with my bags after they had dealt with their own, that "unique sense of community" having rubbed off faster than seems possible.

By no means was the schedule typical, either. There certainly wasn't much time to be groggy in the morning. Even if they were not the Jewish ones with which I was familiar, I found it enjoyable and gratifying to open and close the day with prayers - a display of humility,

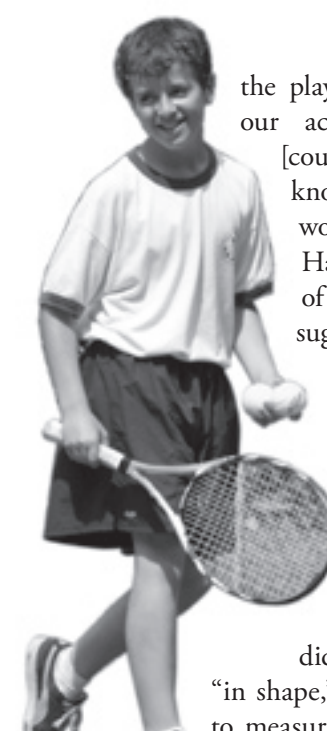




a reminder of a higher purpose. And the cold showers, well, the showers surely built character! For all the grousing, the multi-course meals satisfied the palate on a consistent-enough basis and filled the stomach. Duty period was oddly

shards of water, confirmation of my sentience. I have no regrets, however; I am a better man because of it. Inspection was another necessary evil, more tolerable, though, because its purpose was more tangible. I can only imagine the condition of my bunk or how many belongings I would have lost had it not been for inspection. (If you are a prospective camper who has been sent this, I assure you I'm merely poking fun at Pasquaney's many traditions). I'm not the strongest hiker, and I would rather have been at camp than on a hike any day had I been given the option. But it was important that I wasn't given the option, because after each hike I felt accomplished and that the hike was well worth it. One realizes, examining the schedule, how Pasquaney weaves together freedom to make choices and mandatory activities. It balances the cultivation of the individual, the leader, with the development of the responsible, considerate member of the community. And one realizes how immaculately its system, refined for 114 years and counting, works.

I very nearly did not attend Pasquaney. I "knew" that I would despise hikes and embarrass myself playing baseball,



the play's success was, I had to attribute our accomplishment predominantly to [counsellor] Harrison [Hill]. I'll never know just what he did, but it sure worked. I never dreaded rehearsals. Harrison never imposed his vision of a character or a scene upon us; he suggested directions in which we could take our character but always gave us the appropriate amount of liberty to experiment and act however we thought realistic.

Before I knew it, it was time for expeditions. During some of Favor Farm, rain confined us to our tents, but the backpacking we did set a new standard for the phrase "in shape," one to which I didn't come close to measuring up. And while the expedition

comforting (when I didn't have table duty). I felt as if I was doing something that needed doing – contributing rather than simply benefiting. I always enjoyed the great expanse of time in an activity period during which to work, uninterrupted, in the shop, or to play tennis until I was spent. Mornings were so full that during my first week I would confuse lunch for dinner. Campfire was usually relaxing, almost like a decompression period preparing us for Taps.

I never really looked forward to Wednesdays (hikes days) or Sundays, but each had its place and purpose. When Friedrich Nietzsche wrote "What does not kill me, makes me stronger," he very well may have been referring to Tub on Sundays. Tub was the time during the week when we all were required to take showers.

"Why would you dread taking a shower?" you might ask. The catch was the water was glacial. There were times when I was sure I had gone under, another helpless victim of the "laser" (a shower with a particularly concentrated stream of water), but the next moment would shower my back with more piercing

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that expeditions would be miserable, and that I wasn't much of a waterman. However, my mom was convinced, and convinced me, that Pasquaney would be a wonderful fit. I quickly discovered that, among the diverse range of activities, several were right up my alley and many of the activities that initially nudged me out of my comfort zone proved to be equally as enjoyable as those that I thought were "right up my alley."

The activity that I gravitated toward most naturally was tennis, having played for several years in Baltimore. The combination of open T.I.'s instructional value [open Tennis Instruction] and the fun of being with so many other kids was a winning one, and, for the first time ever, I was playing with people my own age. Tennis was the activity that dominated my first week, during which I primarily stuck to the familiar.

Being twelve, I had been prepared to play a female role in one of the theater productions, but I was pleasantly surprised to learn that the theater play was *12 Angry Men*. After an extensive auditioning process, I was thrilled to be cast as the Eighth Juror, although at the time I didn't know the first thing about the character.

Nor did I know at the outset what an incredible experience I was in for. Later, when people asked me what the "secret ingredient" of

wasn't always thrilling, it let us become comfortable with each other. As I mentioned in a letter home, much of our time was spent laughing. There was often no obvious reason for our laughter, but we didn't see that as a good reason not to laugh. The lack of inhibition that expeditions fostered allowed for a closeness between us that probably wouldn't have been achieved any other place.

As the summer progressed, I found myself more and more often in the woodshop, creating my Pasquaney Chest. I realized this box was not a story that could be rewritten or a picture that could be retaken. Most alterations to the wood could not be reversed. At points, I became caught up in detail, somehow spending five activity periods on sanding alone. With the appropriate care, I generally had fun with the box: inlaying a clock, staining it, creating special handles.

The play let me become closer with certain older campers than I would have had the opportunity to otherwise. In addition, I learned a tremendous amount about theater – about becoming a character, how to memorize lines, the potential of theater to inspire and affect, even set design – but also about working with a group. In the final stretch before its first showing,

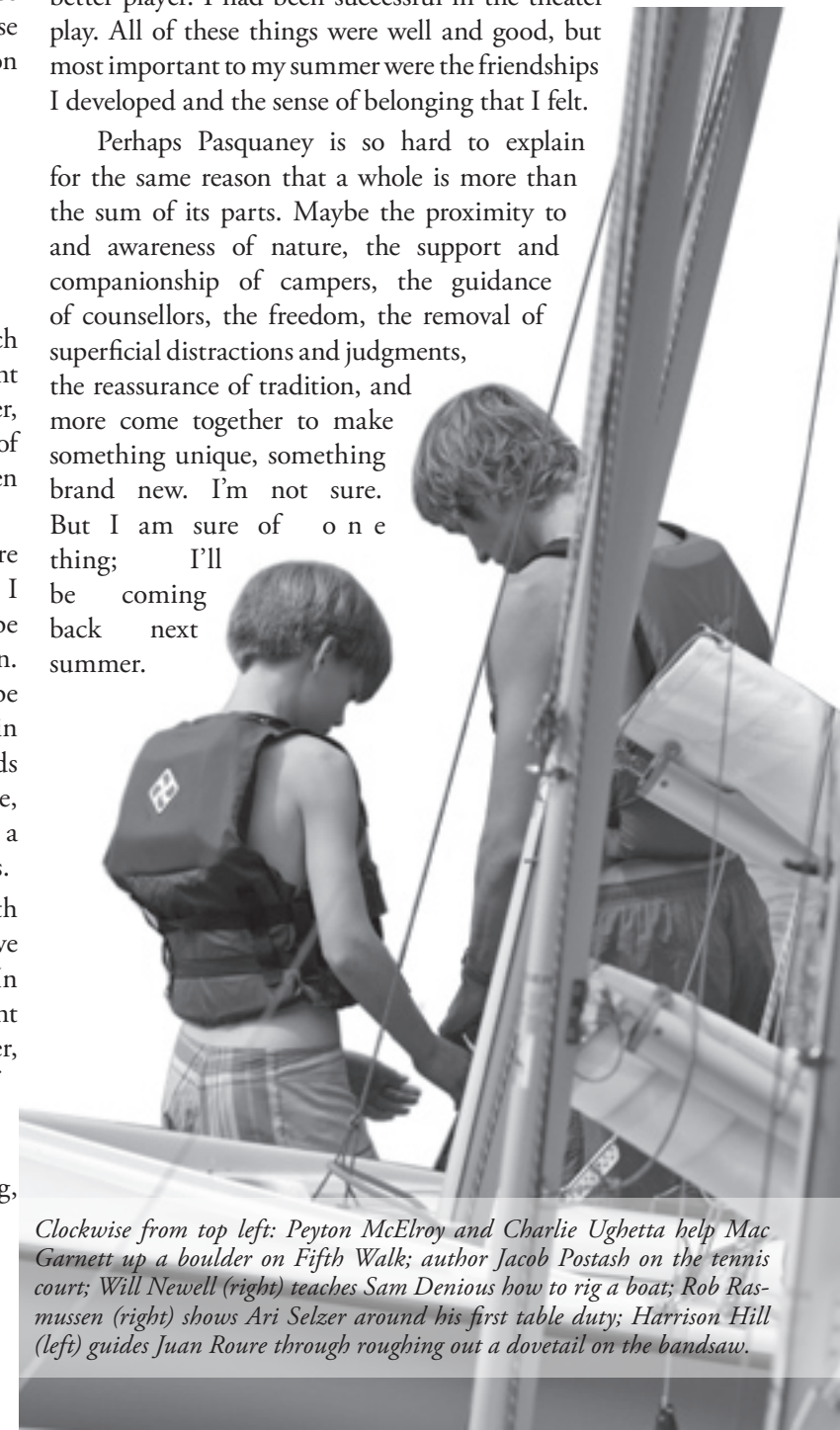
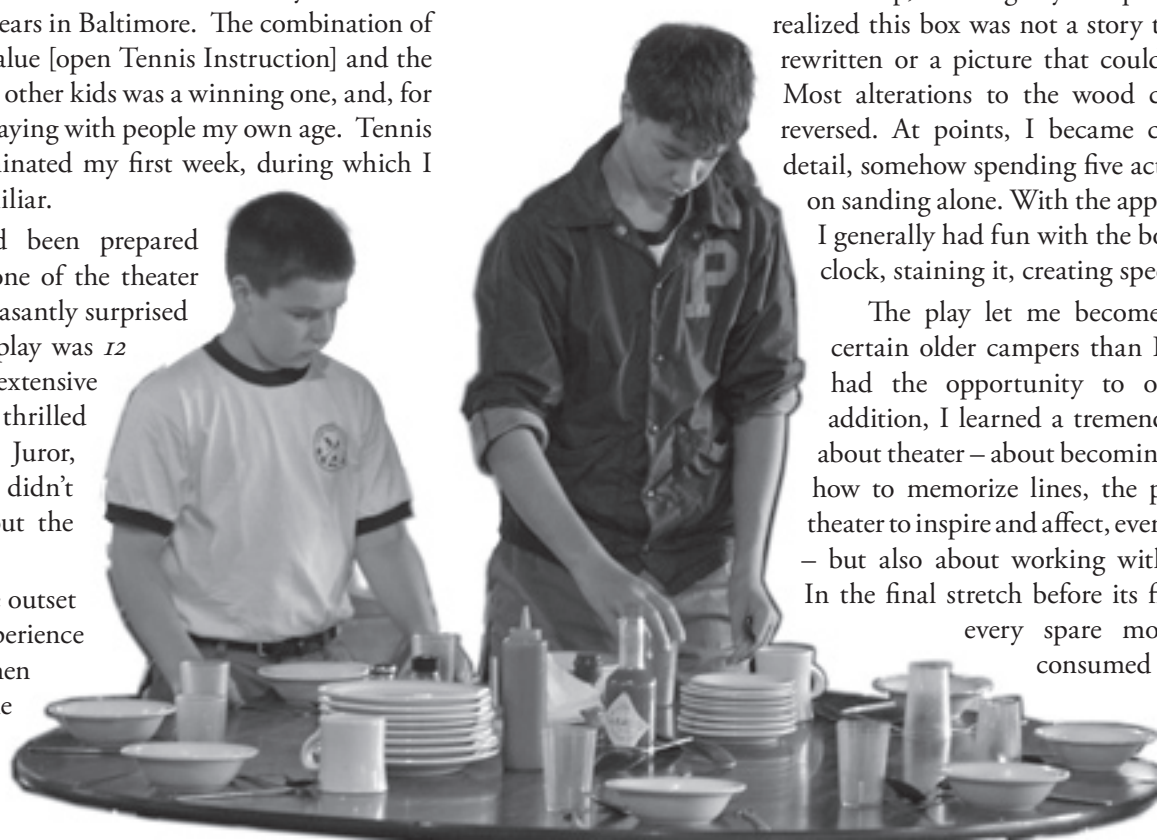
every spare moment was consumed by the

daunting task of memorizing all my lines.

The thrill of performing *12 Angry Men* was incredible. The fruit of our labors was a show that was powerful both on the character level and in its message about the American judicial system. I would be very lucky to have a theatrical experience like that again in my life.

Inspired by tree talks and chapel talks to "seize the moment," I had begun pursuing my Basic Sailor within the last two weeks of camp. In a dramatic turn of events, a storm presented itself during the last activity period of the summer, denying me my hope of becoming a Basic Sailor – or so I thought. The generous sailing council presented a few others and me with the title at the awards ceremony that night. I had added the finishing touches to my box, which I was very proud of and loved like a child. Charlie Ughetta's baseball team, on which I had played, had won the championship. I had done respectably in the tennis tournament and become a better player. I had been successful in the theater play. All of these things were well and good, but most important to my summer were the friendships I developed and the sense of belonging that I felt.

Perhaps Pasquaney is so hard to explain for the same reason that a whole is more than the sum of its parts. Maybe the proximity to and awareness of nature, the support and companionship of campers, the guidance of counsellors, the freedom, the removal of superficial distractions and judgments, the reassurance of tradition, and more come together to make something unique, something brand new. I'm not sure. But I am sure of one thing; I'll be coming back next summer.



Clockwise from top left: Peyton McElroy and Charlie Ughetta help Mac Garnett up a boulder on Fifth Walk; author Jacob Postash on the tennis court; Will Newell (right) teaches Sam Denious how to rig a boat; Rob Rasmussen (right) shows Ari Selzer around his first table duty; Harrison Hill (left) guides Juan Roure through roughing out a dovetail on the bandsaw.