

Being Your Best Self

by Paul Davies

“You are your best self at Pasquaney.” I’ve heard people say this many times, but why are you your best self at camp? Why can’t you be your best self away from camp as well? One answer to the first question is you are your best self at camp because the community and your friends expect your best and support you in being your best. If being your best self is affected by your friends, then think about the type of friends we have at Pasquaney.

There are several quotes about friendship at camp such as the one from *Ecclesiasticus*, “A faithful friend is the medicine of life.” Medicine is meant to heal you by bringing you back to full strength. When you are at full strength, you are able to be your best self. Another common quote is “To have a friend be one.” This simple advice tells you to be your best self because you want others to be their best for you. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle talks about perfect friendships. He says, “The perfect form of friendship is that between good men who are alike in excellence or virtue. Those who wish for their friends’ good for their friends’ sake are friends in the truest sense, since their attitude is determined by what their friends are and not by incidental considerations.” These incidental considerations, such as similar interests or being in the same socio-economic class, are not necessary for making friends at camp. At Pasquaney, you have friends of all ages and backgrounds who are interested in different things than you. Aristotle continues to explain that perfect friendship is not something that is easy to come by but that it is the most durable. At camp, you are forming perfect friendships. You form friendships based in virtue because you are isolated from the distractions of the

world. You are only seeing people as who they are. These perfect friends are the ones leading you to be your best self. They bring out the best qualities in you, help you when you're down, and redirect you when you're not being your best self. Being your best self is about surrounding yourself with perfect friends who value you for your virtues and expect the best from you. At camp, perfect friends already surround you, allowing you to be your best self here. Perfect friends can certainly exist outside of camp as well, but they are more difficult to find because here. You don't have to worry about many of the things that often distract people, such as grades, popularity, and money. You must set aside these distractions and differences outside of camp to form perfect friendships.

Being your best self also requires self-knowledge. Knowing yourself comes about through self-reflection. Camp allows plenty of time for self-reflection: every night during prayers in Dana, after taps before you fall asleep, or even on hikes. These quiet times are perfect for looking back at your day or week and thinking about what you did well, what could have done better, and what you're going to do differently tomorrow. Self-reflection can be spurred by reading as well. Paragraph 2339 from *The Catechism* helps me to self-reflect. It reads:

Man's dignity therefore requires him to act out of conscious and free choice, as moved and drawn in a personal way from within, and not by blind impulses in himself or by mere external constraint. Man gains such dignity when, ridding himself of all slavery to the passions, he presses forward to his goal by freely choosing what is good and, by his diligence and skill, effectively secures for himself the means suited to this end.

This passage always makes me think about my actions in terms of the motivations behind them. Am I doing something only out of external pressure from others or because I believe that it is the right thing to do? Doing good for good's sake is the goal and is just like the perfect friend who does the best for their friends for their friend's sake.

Too often I let my emotions control my actions rather than thinking through what

I should do. Avoiding blind emotions or impulses is difficult but is necessary to be your best self. It takes a lot of self-control and practice not to get angry when people or situations upset you, but controlling your emotions will help you act thoughtfully rather than acting out of anger or excitement. You don't have to detach yourself from your emotions, but you do have to know yourself and your reactions to control them. This self-control is extremely beneficial in setting aside those differences to form perfect friendships as well.

The passage I read touched on "ridding yourself of all slavery." It is easy outside of camp to become a slave to your phone, Facebook, and even your emotions. Getting rid of these attachments gives you freedom and the chance to be your best self because you will have the time to live the virtues you are striving to achieve. Self-reflection involves thinking about what you are going to do differently tomorrow. This reflection includes setting goals for yourself. This part of self knowledge and reflection is not just about knowing who you are, but also what you are working to become.

Whenever I think about what I want to become, I am always reminded of a Tree Talk given by Owen Fink that I never actually heard but have heard it quoted a few times, most recently by Rich in his tree talk my sixteen-year-old summer. Owen asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up? A doctor, a lawyer, a banker?" I'm sure you are all thinking about the various careers you could go into now, but Owen answered the question by saying, "I want to be a good friend. I want to be honest with myself and with others. I want to smile more than I frown. I want to be someone who people turn to when they need help." Think about what you want to be now. How you answer that question will decide how you act now to reach what you want to be. If you want to be a good

friend start being one now. Think about how to be a good friend, reflect during those quiet times to see if you are being a good friend. Once you've thought about being a good friend then let that lead you to acting like a good friend and eventually you'll make being a good friend part of your character and destiny. Think about each one of your personal goals and work towards them in the same way. After self-knowledge and having support from perfect friends, it is important to know what best you are working towards. Everyone's best will be different. You have to set and define your best with your goals.

Your best self is who you are striving to become. It takes a lifetime; you cannot successfully say that at any given moment in your life that you are your best self. There is always room for improvement. It is not something that can be reached because each time you think you are being your best, you can always think of something that you could do better. Stop and think often to make sure you are heading in the right direction to being who you want to become. Owen Fink had the goals to be all those things. You must set your own goals for yourself to figure out who you want to become and what you can become when you're being you're best self. Decide what steps you must take to get there. Develop perfect friends along the way to guide you, and remember to leave time for self-reflection. Start doing both of these things to be your best self now. Then, being your best self will be easier away from camp because you will have made them habits.