

The Pasquaney Spirit

by Stewart Denious

This final Tree Talk takes place a mere 48 hours from the end of camp. Forty-eight hours from now we will return to our so-called normal lives with cell phones, Facebook, Instagram, and instant satisfaction. We will regain the ability to communicate at light speed, to have most of the world's knowledge available with a Google search, and to listen to whatever music we want whenever we want. Many non-camp people would look at the trade and think that Sunday would be a singularly happy day. But it's not, is it? Instead our final day at camp, from the cannon that wakes us up, to singing the camp song in Mem Hall, to the final chapel, is a powerfully emotional day. There will be plenty of tears shed and I will be right there too, shedding my fair share.

Why is this? While Pasquaney, at its simplest, is a summer camp, by now I hope all of us have realized that Pasquaney is more than just that. As Mr. Vinnie always says, camp's activities, and its competitions, are not ends in themselves; they merely serve as a means to an end—to Pasquaney's end, which is the development of your characters. Twice a week we have gathered as a camp, on beautiful Tree Talk Ridge or in our majestic chapel, to talk about camp's greater purpose and the values we teach. Honesty, friendship, leadership, kindness the list goes on. Here we have learned what it is to live a good life, to be supported by perfect friends and mentors. We have pushed ourselves; we have been comfortably uncomfortable and grown tremendously as a result.

During the past seven weeks I think we have all felt that Pasquaney is different from other communities that we have been a part of. The Pasquaney spirit is a unique and powerful thing. There are few if any other places I have seen that can rival Pasquaney in

regards to our sense of community. But after my first few summers as a camper, that incredible camp spirit was a double-edged sword. For young Stewart Denious, returning home after camper years at Pasquaney was an unhappy experience. I would quickly become discouraged or even depressed at the prospect of ten months away from camp. My life at school over the long winter simply couldn't compare to the incredible community and friends I had at camp. Instead of seeking to bring camp home with me, I simply relented to the variety of social pressures that made camp values difficult to uphold in the outside world.

In hindsight this was an incredibly self-centered perspective to take after being at camp. All of us have been privileged these past seven weeks to live in this community and to experience the growth that followed in turn. Now we must now carry Pasquaney back with us into the world. We are here not to simply enjoy the basic benefits of camp life but instead to learn values that we shall carry with us throughout our lives. Though it may seem contradictory, we are at camp to leave it and to take Pasquaney with us when we do. Without question, this is difficult task, as I found out during my camper years. It will consistently challenge us, whether we are leaving camp for ten months or for ten years. But if we are truly loyal to this place, which has given us so much over our time here, we must be fierce protectors of its values.

Pasquaney has always simultaneously challenged and prepared us to take her into the world. You have been surrounded by role models these past seven weeks and have seen what it is to live by a set of values and the incredible happiness that can ensue. Every one of you, has been influenced by that spirit. As the great poet Alfred Lord Tennyson said, "I am a part of all that I have met." You all are both a part of camp, but

even more importantly camp is a part of you. Perhaps without even realizing it, over the last seven weeks we have laid within ourselves the foundation of loyalty to Pasquaney. “Since,” as Mr. Charlie said, “loyalty invokes sacrifice, the pursuit of ideals, and the faithful following of definite standards, we may be sure that Pasquaney demands these things of us.”

Away from camp, at many times it will be far easier to compromise on your values than it has been here. Pressures from school, peers, and even parents can feel overwhelming and make standing up for what you believe incredibly hard. But if you believe in the good life we have experienced here, you must stand fast and hold true to the Pasquaney spirit. Instead of meekly accepting that life outside of camp will never be as good as the life we have here, be the change you seek in the world. Find opportunities to live as we have here. As Mr. Vinnie will probably say on Sunday, the values we teach here are not unique to Pasquaney, they are values shared by people all over the world. There are organizations, schools, teams, and businesses that are desperately seeking people who live as Pasquaney men do. Seek them out, find the people who will bring out your best and seek to bring out the best in people. This may feel like a tall order, but I know that each of you is up to the task. Here at camp, you have sowed the seeds that will reap strong characters. You have learned to be men of action, and as you go forth it is your actions that will draw people who share our values to you. During the off seasons around my camper years, I fell into the easy trap of simply talking about Pasquaney values rather than trying to live and spread them. Instead of attracting people to the values I loved, they were turned off by my negative attitude and loud complaints. Mr. Charlie would have said that my actions thundered so loudly that he couldn't hear a word

I was saying. Instead of simply talking about issues you see, be the change you want in the world and seek to spread Pasquaney at home. Hold true to the values you have been taught here and that have given you such a powerful summer at camp. In our last 48 hours here, think about how strongly you believe in the Pasquaney spirit. If you have felt its power as I know all of us have, do your best to bring it to others. We must carry Pasquaney back into the world. Only by doing this can we show our loyalty to camp. Again to paraphrase Mr. Charlie, "Seven weeks can conquer ten months," but only if we seek it out and only if we chose to follow what we know is right. You have the tools to change the communities that you will return to for the better and to bring some Pasquaney back to them but only if you remain committed and act on the values we teach here. It is easy to simply claim loyalty to camp but not act on it; but it is the truly loyal Pasquaney man that acts on our values in good times and bad. These values mean very little if you only live by them here where it is easy. Instead of becoming discouraged by the state of your communities at home, be the change you would like to see in them. If a friend needs to hear your voice of reason, it is not your opportunity but your duty to speak up. If a community needs direction, it is your responsibility to lead it. That kind of action is how we express our loyalty to camp and to each other. Though that loyalty will not always be the easiest path, it will be the most rewarding and the path that when looked back upon you will be the most proud of. It has been true for me and it will be true for you. I would like to close with passage from the novel *Brothers Karamazov*. The passage comes from a schoolteacher's speech to his pupils after the funeral of one their classmates but conveys a spirit very similar to how the council and I feel about you all at the end of our season.

Boys, we shall soon part, perhaps for a long time, so let us make a compact here, at Ilyusha's stone, that we will never forget Ilyusha and one another. And whatever happens to us later in life, if we don't meet for twenty years afterwards, let us always remember how good it was once here, when we were all together, united by a good and kind feeling which made us, better perhaps than we are. My dear children, perhaps you won't understand what I am saying to you, but you must know that there is nothing higher and stronger and more wholesome and good for life in the future than some good memory, especially a memory of childhood, of home. People talk to you a great deal about your education, but some good, sacred memory, preserved from childhood, is perhaps the best education. If a man carries many such memories with him into life, he is safe to the end of his days, and if one has only one good memory left in one's heart, even that may sometime be the means of saving us. What's more, perhaps, that one memory may keep him from evil and he will reflect and say, 'Yes, I was good and brave and honest then!' Therefore let us be first and above all, kind, then honest and then let us never forget each other! I say that again. I give you my word that I'll never forget all of you. Every face looking at me now I shall remember even for thirty years. You are all dear to me, boys; from this day forth, I have a place in my heart for you all, and I beg you to keep a place in your hearts for me! Ah, children, ah, dear friends, don't be afraid of life! How good life is when one does something good and just! Now we will finish talking and go to dinner. Well, let us go! And so we go hand in hand. And always so, all our lives hand in hand.