

At the beginning of every summer Mr. Vinnie leads the council in defining our goals for the community and the ways that we can get there. In this discussion we came up with a list of traits that we would expect to see in a man who had had a Pasquaney education. Among this lengthy list were:

1. respect for others,
2. a good friend,
3. empowers others,
4. a Willingness to learn,
5. values community,
6. respectful of different lifestyles and cultures,
7. a steward of whatever institution he is part of,
8. and a good sweeper.

As the council came up with these as well as twenty-seven other meaningful items, I started to let my mind ponder each trait as it came up. I could see in myself the lessons that I had learned at camp as well as the traits that I still struggle with every day. At some point I also started to realize that this list could very accurately describe my closest friends outside of camp. The communities that I became involved in over my four years at Yale fostered very similar traits and I naturally gravitated toward the people that shared and valued an education similar to the one we get at Pasquaney. My junior year I became very close with the group of people I de facto lived with. We dubbed ourselves Idiots & Ewoks. The idea being, that each individual was some part Idiot and some part Ewok (One among us was 100% Idiot and 100% Ewok. Don't ask me how that math works). For us, these terms stood as all-inclusive placeholders for each of our myriad oddities. We reveled in teaching each other about the subjects we were studying. We got to know each other's most personal habits, desires, fears, and insecurities. As a group of men living together Idiots & Ewoks learned unflinching honesty, openness, complete acceptance, and love.

Usually when you have a roommate in college the most you can hope for is tolerance of each other weird habits. You tolerate your roommates alarm going off ten times before he wakes up. You tolerate the fact he only showers once every twenty-three days. You tolerate the loud music he plays at 8AM and the gaggle of raucous friends he brings home at 2AM.

Idiots & Ewoks was not like this. We delved into each other's lives, seeking knowledge and understanding. We wanted to know each other inside and out, to truly accept each other for who we were. Through our acceptance we were able to love each other not only for the things we liked, but also for the things we didn't.

At Pasquaney we talk a lot about tolerance, acceptance, and respect as we build our community on this beautiful hillside. We have a diverse collection of personalities and backgrounds in our community. To have a peaceful camp, we have to tolerate each other's oddities: our smells, our behaviors, our beliefs. But I believe to build a community where the most important lessons are learned, we must accept and love others fully.

As we learn about one another we have to be willing to accept those among us that do not fall into whatever normal categories we think exist. In the world there are light skinned people and dark skinned people and every other variation in between and outside of those categories. There are people that believe and practice myriad religions and belief systems. As Mr. Vinnie says in the first chapel, each one of us has a different sense of what god or a higher power is. There are gay people that seek romantic love and connection with people of the same sex. There are transsexual people born biologically one sex, but psychologically feel another sex. There even transgendered people that are born with some other biological sex than the two we are used to. Variation in humanity is expressed at every level, from biological truths to fundamental psychological identity to belief systems and social structures. As a group of people committed to building a close-knit community we have to be prepared to accept and love all of this variation.

How do we learn to accept and love each other? Tolerance is certainly a first step, but it does not go far enough. We need to get to know each other completely. Take interest in the people around you and learn about them. Learn how they think, feel, and associate. Approach every interaction with sensitivity and open mindedness. We have a diverse camp community that you can learn from this summer and as you get older you will have to opportunity to

meet, accept, and love people of all races, religions, sexualities, genders, and sexes. You will be surprised how much you will learn about the world by taking a genuine interest in every person you meet.

As teenagers, you guys are growing and changing at an accelerated rate. None of you fully know yourself. As a mid-twenty-something I am still learning about myself, my personality, and my emotional needs. I bet that even Mr. Vinnie, Dave, and Bubbles could point out things that they have learned about themselves in the past year. None of us are fully formed. If you surround yourself with people that are different than you, you may learn something about them that is also true for you. You may hear a new philosophy that gels with you in a surprising way. You may discover part of your identity that had been closed off to you before.

At the beginning of last summer, I set an intention for myself. In doing so, I asked the following questions: Who am I now and who do I want to be? How do I get there? Surely the end is less important than the means, for all we have are means and no end. None of us is fully formed. It is important that we set character goals and work to achieve them. Strive to be honest, courageous, trustworthy, an attentive listener, a hard worker, a good friend, and a steward of our community. We have a simple and sound way to work on these aspects in you. Sow an act that is in line with your goal; then sow another. Keep sowing simple acts, and habits, a character, and a destiny will follow. As you grow also keep evaluating your goals. What have you learned about yourself from the people around you? Do you see parts of those people in yourself? Challenge yourself to explore your identity and understand that you will never be done learning and developing. Take what you learn about the world and ask yourself: Who am I now and who do I want to be? How do I get there? The process of setting personal emotional goals, working toward them, and evaluating what you learn about yourself as you go, never ends.

I believe that on a fundamental level the essence of humanity is creating connections through acceptance that blossom into love. Love is what will bring our community together this summer. I implore you to learn about each other, accept each other wholly, and then we can work on creating a community filled with love and respect.