

Pasquaney *archives*



Ever since I can remember, my self-identity has always been a mystery to me. I have asked what makes me different from everybody else for my entire adolescence but never have I gotten an answer. I know that I am an awkwardly tall, kind of whacky, kind of crazy, occasionally psychotic camp counsellor, but other than that my sense of self has been elusive. I sport no tattoos, have undergone no sweet life-changing experiences, and for a large chunk of my life I assumed this lack of substance made me an uninteresting person.

When I was young, I watched my older sister, Casey, self-destruct as she searched for herself. At one time, she was my best friend and before I knew it, the girl sitting at the dinner table was a stranger to me. She never knew who she was supposed to be, so she decided to let other people decide it for her. For three years, my family life was in shambles and screaming arguments and my mother's tears were commonplace at dinner. In her search to find some sort of identity, she completely lost any sense of who she was. Drugs, alcohol, and depression took my sister away from me and to this day the wounds from that period still live with my family.

My high school career was also mainly characterized by this search for self. My older sister's failures made me terrified to follow down the same path. As other kids went out to seize life and find themselves through their experiences, I spent most of my time observing them and trying to figure out what I was supposed to be. I was an insecure, awkwardly tall, pimply, metal mouthed, teenager and no matter what I tried, there was nothing I could truly cling to that would give me any sense of individuality.

I was on no varsity sports teams, got average grades, and had friends who were fun, but not close. I wasn't particularly proud of myself or the life I was leading, and the extent to which I let that lack of pride show left me without any of the self-confidence necessary to take the sort of risks that lead to self discovery.

Looking back, I suppose the problem stemmed from my assumption that becoming an individual was an effortless process. Growing up, I just assumed that an identity was going to fall into my lap. When it didn't, I was disappointed, and wondered what I had done wrong. I was Mike Morris, but I had no idea what that meant. I was goofy but not hilarious, and I was smart but not a genius. I assumed I would find something to define myself but it never came. What I didn't realize was that it was up to me, Mike Morris, to define who Mike Morris was, but I just never could. I had learned from Casey's mistakes in that I could not let other people decide who I was going to be, but that was all I had really learned. I viewed myself as a nobody, and I was so confused that happiness and any sense of security was impossible.

The lone exception to the massive confusion during my adolescent years was my annual seven weeks on this hillside. At Pasquaney, there is an entire community designed to help you achieve just that: a sense of self. Every summer I was surrounded by friends who embraced me for my eccentricities and wackiness. I was thrust into situations where I learned things about myself that I would never have learned before.

When I was fifteen, Andrew Riley, a former counsellor, half-jokingly put me on a Backpacking expedition that was otherwise entirely sixteen year-olds. On the final day, I sat by myself on top of Mt. Liberty, and I looked back on the week that I had just completed. Every peak that I had summited sat behind me, and I realized that I had reached a completely different level that I had never known I could ever reach. I learned something

about myself that no other institution could ever have taught me. I was capable of more than I had ever given myself credit for.

At camp I was always Mike. It meant something, and that made me feel at home. From age twelve to sixteen this hillside was the best home I had. I had older brothers on the council and some of the best friends in the world as my fellow campers. To say that camp has shaped who I am today is an understatement.

And yet, despite all of camp's influences on me, my identity is still as foggy as ever. But the difference between today, and years ago is that I am content with having an incomplete character. I have my entire life to decide what being Mike Morris really means, and nothing says that it has to be decided today. My advice to all of you is to appreciate camp for all it has to offer. The people, the activities, the buildings, and the entire hillside build the perfect community to find not just yourself, but your best self. Use these seven weeks to figure out who you really are: your favorite activity, your favorite hike, your favorite memory, or your own special happy dance. Take advantage of all of the opportunity you have to develop some of the best friendships you may make in your whole life, friendships that could help you find you.

And the one piece of advice I can give to all of you, is to take what camp teaches home with you. I was always my best self at camp, but that person always dissolved during the school year. Find your best self here on the hillside just as I did every summer, and cling onto him. That person - the thoughtful, giving, selfless individual - is a person you should all be proud of. That person will give you the identity that will make anyone happy.

Today, I stand before you as a sophomore in college, with an undecided major, and a completely blurred future. My career aspirations consist of something between a movie star and winning the lottery, both of which worry my parents very much. I am Mike Morris, and that's all I know. I'm still an awkwardly tall, kind of goofy, kind of whacky, camp counsellor, but I think I'm okay with that. After seven summers at Pasquaney, I am confident that I have the tools to be the best person I can be. I am not perfect, and I still have a lot of growing up to do, but thanks to camp I am entering my mysterious future without fear.

So maybe I don't know what my future holds for me. What I do know is that I am nineteen years old, and I get to spend an entire summer with all of you, and I can use all of you to find out who I am and what makes me happy. I suggest you all do the same.