

Why would a counsellor who has already accomplished Long Walk as a camper volunteer to hike the 80 miles again? Why would a young man with a speech impediment stand up in front of a hundred of his peers and give a speech? Why would a boy who has everything he needs within the four walls of his home ever leave that place of security. He does it for the experience.

The first 13 years of my life were ones in which I took minimal risk. Being the younger brother of a Bareback Bronc rider and an airplane jumping, firefighting, adrenaline junky, I was the cautious child. While my friends would go camping, I would stay home and watch T.V. When my brothers would go riding horses in the evening, I could be found helping my mother cook, or playing basketball in our driveway. Anything that involved me feeling uncomfortable or vulnerable, I would often avoid. I distinctly remember a vacation to my grandma's house in South Carolina, when I was about 10 years old, still riding a little, pink tricycle, while my brothers peddled circles around me on their big boy bicycles. This is not to say I had a hard time learning new things. In fact, I have always been proud of my ability to pick things up relatively fast. The problem for me was always trying it for the first time, whether it was new foods, new music, or even new clothes. I would continuously proceed to cling to what was familiar to me.

After my first two summers at camp, my arsenal began to broaden, but I was still often afraid to take the risks that would help shape my character. When my parents told me I would be attending the Winter Term in Lenk, Switzerland, home of Will, Rob and Bay Harvey, I was resistant, instead of ecstatic. I told my mother that I wanted to stay at Tongue River middle

school for the winter so I could play Basketball. Despite my longing to play the sport I would continue to play throughout all of high school, my parents did me the favor of sending me off overseas for the three best months of my childhood. While attending the Winter Term, I learned how to ski, how to butcher the German language by putting way too much emphasis on hard consonance, and how to get over homesickness with a little help from my heroic dorm counsellor, Jack Reigeluth. I returned back home to Wyoming with new skills, and a new confidence shining in my eyes. However, I was still somehow timid to embrace new challenges the following spring at home and the following summer at camp.

After my 14 year old summer, I left my comforting pastures and towering mountains of Wyoming to attend Fountain Valley School of Colorado, in Colorado Springs. Oblivious to what the future had in store for me, orientation day would change my life with a simple hand shake. I looked into the eyes of a mature and confident dorm mate and after a short argument on the matter of whether Texas or Wyoming claimed rightful ownership over the title "The Cowboy State", I knew I had met my new best friend, and Eric Crevioserat was to be placed on a shadowy shelf. Thomas Nunley was a confident pursuer of the lady folk, master of mischief, always willing to walk that thin line, but above all, a loyal friend. He wore nike basketball shoes, baggy shorts, and his hair was flawlessly combed at any given moment. He gave the word cowboy a whole different meaning. His older brother Taylor was always the first to show up when help was needed, and the last to leave, and was a perfect gentlemen to any stranger he met. While spending both my freshmen and sophomore years close by these two miscreants, I experienced more close calls, and heart sinking moments than I had in the past 14 years of my life. Riding horses bareback through the prairie, dancing with random girls at state fairs, and

annoying seniors three years older than us to the point of painful consequences, are just a blink of the moments in which I gained new experiences with their company. After Taylor graduated from Fountain Valley, Thomas continued his schooling back home in Texas. I continued to visit them every break from school and would use any excuse to migrate down South to their cattle ranch.

While observing them in their natural habitat, I saw an extension of their rowdiness and just how little they cared about making a fool out of themselves. A few nights after the legendary Sabinal Hog Festival, the three of us and a few friends attended a music festival several miles from their home. While dancing and trying not to look like fools, two things that directly contradict each other, Thomas turned to a beautiful girl that he had been talking to for a whole two minutes and leaned in for the kiss. Well, cupid's aim must have been slightly off that night as he was immediately rejected with a swift turn of his cheek, enforced by five feminine fingers and the pretty palm of her hand. Somehow shocked, he moseyed over to me and began to laugh. In awe of such a sight I asked, "Why are *you* laughing? You are officially the most awkward person at this dance right now." He looked at me with a confident smirk and said, "The only thing I regret is not brushing my teeth before I leaned in." Those are the kind of guy's Thomas and Taylor Nunley were. Never afraid to take on challenges and always wanting another shot at victory. On the basketball court, Thomas always guarded the opposing team's star player and would always prove his ability to do so. On the Football field, Taylor was the hardest hitting wide receiver in the state of Texas. They were truly fearless. As I waved goodbye to Thomas and Taylor in the spring of 2012, I was bursting with the feeling that I had

accomplished everything I possibly could have in the few short days spent in the Texas heat. A mind full of memories, and a desire to entwine their daring lifestyle into my own.

Last summer, almost exactly a year ago, I received a phone call from a mutual friend saying that Thomas and Taylor had been killed in a car accident earlier that day on their way back from the hardware store. They were merging onto the highway, when an 18 wheeled grain truck was merging about a mile ahead. Neither of the drivers saw each other, as Thomas's truck crumpled into the rear of the 18 wheeler at 70 miles per hour. I left camp the following day to attend Thomas and Taylor's funeral held at their ranch in Texas. After I played them the song I had written the previous day on the plane ride, all of their family and friends laid the dirt over their handsome caskets and we began to tell stories about the boys. Every memory shared was followed by an outburst of laughter and another story. By the end of the event, I realized that Thomas and Taylor had the same effect on everyone they spent time with. Their confidence was infectious, which directly correlated to their sublime ability to conquer any sort of fear or hesitation to pursue any goal. Talking with my three closest friends from High School, we all agree that the most valuable lesson both Thomas and Taylor taught us is to grab any opportunity that dangles itself in front of you, because it is there for a reason, whether you know it or not.

Since that fateful day, I have tried my best to engage in every new experience that has been presented to me, even if it's something I think I might not enjoy. After a basketball tournament this past spring, my teammates and I limped our way to the glacier-produced, bone-chilling waters of the Tongue River. As we stood in the 50 degree air, wearing nothing but

our throwback, Bill Walton 70's headbands, no one would make the first move. Thinking of the opportunities that Thomas and Taylor would never have the chance to dominate, I jumped into the water. Last week on the Long Walk, I carried the belt buckle I won with the two of them, to the top of every mountain our expedition conquered. Thanks to that decision, the scenery and image of each summit are still clear in my memory. If I had rationalized some reason not to make that plunge, or finish each of those hikes, those events would have faded from my memory moments after giving up on them. Instead, it lives on in full color, and I can now look back on it with no regrets.

16 year olds and returning campers: since your twelve year old summers, counsellors have encouraged you to fill your cup with all Pasquaney has to offer: pursuing every activity, performing on the Watson stage, and engaging with every fellow campers in conversation. Have you? New Campers: your introductory summer is closing before your eyes. Though four more summers may seem unreachable into your misty future, they will come, and they will go. Campers before you and campers after you will be open to every and all challenges that stand before them. Others will use excuses as crutches and will turn their backs on opportunities that could change their lives. Will you?

Each one of us sitting on this ridge is directly influenced by the person to our left and right, whether we realize it or not. I am constantly reminded of Thomas and Taylor's influence on me every time I look down at my wristband with their names on it, and every time I take off my belt buckle that I won with them at the hog festival. Think about just how lucky you are to be sitting here with friends who will support and guide your every move. I want all of you to

close your eyes now, and think of someone who was close to you who is no longer with us. I promise you, that friend, mentor or loved one, is closer to you now than you think. They live on in our decisions, actions and within our character. The next time you are confronted by a new opportunity to challenge yourself, think of that person.