

Graham E. Pearson
'Lean on your Community'
Tree Talk 06/27/08
Camp Pasquaney

One of the biggest contributions that camp has made to my life is competitive rowing. I began to row my second year of camp, when I was twelve years old, and kept with it until my last year as a sixteen year old. During my last summer as camper I began to dedicate every bit of time and energy I had to the sport. I was obsessed. During my free time I would find Scott Kennedy, the rowing counselor, and constantly ask him about technique and workouts that I could do on and off the water. As trustees weekend drew closer I realized that this would be the last year rowing at Pasquaney, and I would need to find another boathouse near my home. Since then, I rowed out of a club in New York City during high school, and then moved on to row for Bates College where I am currently.

I hope at this point, I have conveyed how important rowing is in my life. It has served as an outlet, a source of friendship, and rock solid base on which I can stand at any time. I can't even dream of doing anything else. This past season, my team at Bates had very high expectations. But despite our best efforts, we did not even come close to what we had planned or expected this spring season.

Due to an injury, I could not participate in the fall season. So when winter season came I was ready to work hard for the spring. I hit the erg every day, twice on some days, and began a rigorous lifting routine. When spring finally rolled around we were very excited. Maine had gotten a lot of snow that winter, but it was not that cold, so the river was open pretty quickly compared to most years. But the season would not play out as we had planned.

When we began our water workouts, we realized that things were not going to run as smoothly as they had seemed to during the fall season. Right from the start several problems were clearly noticeable. One of the most prominent was the organization. Emails would be sent very last minute while lineup changes were made sporadically without any sort of method. Another was practices seemed to be wasted on a nearly a daily basis. Some days our coach wouldn't show up for forty – five minutes, and then once he got there, he would do miscellaneous projects for another half – hour until we finally were allowed on the water.

The largest frustration for me was probably his lack of dedication to the men's team. Last year, our temporary women's coach had taken the women to the national championships and won the bronze medal in the Varsity Eight event and in team points. It was clear that out the head coach coming back felt pressure to perform. He began to dedicate all the time he spent on the team completely on the women. There were days where the women would have off, and he would not even show up for the practices.

This put a lot of stress on me. This was the sport I loved, I could not dream of really spending my time any other way. I would call my parents on a regular basis, asking for advice of how to handle the situation. It was on my mind every day, every minute. One day I was sitting in the boat during practice, coach was having another moment of switching the plan right on the water,

which no doubt would take a long time to sort out. Sitting behind me was one of my best friends. He and I had talked about these problems, trying to figure out ways to solve them. But at this moment I could not see a way out of the aggravation. I turned around and said, “Jimbo, what am I even pulling for?” He looked at me and very deliberately told me, “Man, you’re pulling for me.”

At that moment I looked all the way down the boat and saw each person. Every man, Brad, James, Glenn, Dylan, Matt, Brian, and Charlie were all people I trusted and admired. They were my friends. This was when I figured out why I really rowed. I didn’t row for the gear, or the success, or for speed. I rowed because of the guys on my team. These were guys who I knew I could go to for anything, and they would do everything in their ability to help me, or try to find help.

But there was also the flip side that James meant by his statement. Why should I pull? Because these guys needed me. None of us can row an eight by ourselves, not even seven people. Each person needs to contribute one – hundred percent, and then in the last five hundred meters, they need to give a little more. I couldn’t let these guys down, they were behind me, and I was behind them.

I find a similar sort of companionship and purpose here at Pasquaney. When I was a camper I listened to Mike Hanrahan give one of the most important pieces of advice that I can remember. He told us that we are not here at Pasquaney to just play baseball, or tennis. We are not here to just sail, or to just try to house the competition at the swims, canoe races, or any other tournaments we have. These activities, while they are fun, are a means to an end.

We use these activities to teach ourselves and utilize ideals like respect, honesty, trust, but most importantly to me friendship. On the tennis courts and baseball field, we are courteous to our opponent, and if we lose or win, we are still friends. On the water, we use each other as sources of information, as reference points, and as another set of eyes for safety. Above all we are there for each other. Each person is open and behind everyone else. If one person drags, we see an incredible response in the camp community to try to help that person, getting him involved, talking to him, just being his friend. We are all together in this effort for an extraordinary community.

In a few days you will be on expeditions. For some of you this is your fifth and last expedition and you are very prepared. For others, this is your first time doing anything like this, and you are not sure what to expect. These trips, no matter what your age is, will no doubt put some strain on some, if not most of you. I remember hiking up the Liberty Falls trail for the first day of backpacking my 16 year old summer and thinking that I will never put myself through something like this again. Pain was all I could think about, and the end is all I wanted. Looking back though, the part that defines the trip for me are the people who were on it. Despite my lacking ability to hike, it was the best trip I was ever on.

When you hit the hardships, which you undoubtedly will on your expedition, when you feel yourself becoming negative or having thoughts of giving up, look behind you, and look each person in the face. You are not a lone. Each person is there with you and for you. You are

forging new paths in you character, and believe it or not, you are forging new paths in other peoples character too.

Camp is not the only place where you will face challenges. The outside world can be difficult, even harsh at times. There will be times in school where the work seems to be impossible, times when your home life seems unreal, and times where you just seem to not be able to do anything right. These are the times to remember this community. Think about the friends you have made here at camp this summer, or summers past. Then call them. Camp does not just exist in these seven weeks we are physically brought together. It lasts our entire lives. The camp community will be there for good and bad times. So I implore you, keep up your friendships and community out of camp. Call or e-mail friends when you're having a tough time, and make the effort to get in contact with someone who is having a rough time themselves. One of my favorite songs growing up was Bill Withers *Lean on Me*. It simply says "Lean on me when you're not strong...It won't be long until I need someone to lean on." It's good advice. Remember, no matter what is going on at anytime anywhere in the world, there is always a community that you can lean on.