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ANNUAL EDITORIAL — 1984

(The following editorial is an excerpt from
John Gemmill's summer newsletter to alumni and friends)

As Pasquaney celebrates its 90th season, there is considerable ferment in American education, and this seems an appropriate time to reflect upon our camp's mission.

Since the time campers and counsellors last gathered on this hillside, much has been written about what is wrong with American schooling and what should be done to improve it. While reports such as *A Nation At Risk* offer many insightful analyses and constructive suggestions, they seem to me to be one-dimensional. It is only a slight over-simplification, I think, to conclude that the recent examinations dwell almost exclusively on pedagogical techniques needed to improve learning. They do not look beyond the obvious need for greater focus on academic excellence to ask the more fundamental questions of what young people are being educated for and in what ethical framework this education takes place.

To put the matter in a slightly different context, the reports emphasize what might be termed the Germanic or scientific influences on modern education — the “value-neutral,” “non-judgmental” technical approach which seeks to produce scholars. In contrast, an effective case can be made that our goal should be to educate responsible citizens. This was the classical objective of Greek and British education which stressed a broad preparation for service to society rather than immediate vocational or scholarly ends.

In fact, the loss of over-riding purpose has contributed to the very decline of scholarship which the reports discuss, for without a broad and purposeful framework, schooling becomes, as students often allege, “irrelevant.” Lacking the constancy of a value system to provide unifying beliefs and concepts, education is doomed to the constant shifts, crises, and fads that have beset it in recent years, confusing students, parents, and teachers alike.

A citizen who is going to be of service to society shouldn't be a mathematical or verbal illiterate. But in the long run, a person who makes a genuine contribution is going to find other attributes mere important. A

capacity to continue growing and learning is essential, for instance. So are traits such as empathy, thoughtfulness, and consideration for others; the ability to form and nurture friendships; honesty in dealing with one's self and others; self-discipline; self-esteem; and appreciation of the value of hard work and the sense of accomplishment which accompanies it; sportsmanship; an ability to lead effectively; and the capacity to take an unpopular but well thought-out position — to name just a few.

Without a religious and philosophical base from which to teach and demonstrate these values, education is, indeed, irrelevant to the idealism, hope and optimism inherent in young people. By having a purpose beyond the immediate concerns of test taking or job-hunting, learning acquires greater meaning and fullness, just as our own lives do when we extend them to other people and causes. For me (and I hope for all who know and cherish Pasquaney), the Camp's traditional goals of educating for service to society and of providing an ethical framework have never been more important. Pasquaney is important far beyond its limited size; it is the Camp's mission of educating "beyond the academic" which I think substantiates this statement. For here, free from academic and social pressures, boys and young men can "choose something like a star" to guide their lives and can learn the fulfillment of service to others and the community. They can, in Mr. Ned's words, lead a life which will make them "self-reliant, efficient, and able to think and do for others as well as themselves."

If our democracy is to survive, basic scholarship must, as the recent reports suggest, improve. But much more important, education must extend beyond the academic to produce leaders, in all areas of society, who possess an ethical awareness which informs their own lives and which enriches the communities of which they are a part.