

July 15th, 2022

Having the Ball in Our Sticks

— *Ollie Longo*

How freeing, to admit that we do not yet know ourselves.

My freshman year of high school I took up the sport of lacrosse. I had learned a little about the Creator's Game from my older brother Nicky whom many of you know, and had watched a few quarters here and there, but at the time sports in general were never really my thing.

After a few weeks I found myself starting to get the hang of playing, but being out of shape and lacking self confidence held me back. During game days I would come off the bench terrified. Not because of the idea of getting checked or hurt, but because of what would happen when I got the ball in my stick. Would I drop the ball when it came to me, would I make a bad pass and turn the ball over? The seemingly endless possibilities of what could go wrong when I was in control left me frozen on the field.

In 2020, like many things, our junior season was canceled, and naturally, my senior year I was fired up to finally play again. Beyond the excitement of just being able to be back with friends and the team, I had a new confidence on the field. Instead of waving off passes or frantically trying to get rid of the ball, I started to dodge from X, draw doubles and make a pass to a goal, and create opportunities. I had a shift in mentality. I wanted to get the ball.

I'm not here today to talk about getting better at lacrosse, rather I want to talk about having the ball in our sticks. About agency and self potential energy.

How many of you have heard someone talk about "finding yourself" in life?

While in many ways this is kind of the purpose of our lives, I believe that you don't just find yourself. You create yourself. What makes us human is our control over our lives. We are all full of a potential energy to be what we are. This potential is our essence, what defines us. We have our lives in front of us and thus we are made of inherent infinite possibility. I always visualize this idea in my mind as the image of an arrow in a bow, drawn back just before it's fired. In it, we are the arrow. We are simmering with the possibility of what could be. There's

anticipation, excitement even, while waiting to release this self potential energy. And we all have the incredible human capacity to act on it.

One way of thinking about this is through the analogy of a tree. Over the course of their lives, trees, like this one here on Tree Talk Ridge, solidify their roots and grow their branches out in all directions, moving higher and higher up into the air towards the sun. Unlike trees we have the gift of being able to determine our sun, what we grow towards. In the short term, this can be the goals we want to accomplish; in the long term, it is who we become, reaping a character and destiny. Maintain your roots, and allow the branches to grow towards whatever sun you decide.

Maintaining your roots. I began today with the phrase “how freeing to admit that we do not yet know ourselves”. What I mean by this isn’t that we aren’t in touch with our character, or don’t know our own personality and interests, rather that we can find freedom and empowerment in our absolute control over our own lives. Once we realize this, we are free to satisfy the potential we hold in any way we choose. When making self changes, it’s incredibly important to maintain our roots, our past and our foundation of who we are. No matter the growth and changes we go through, we still are who we are at our core. It is essential to remember this.

I sometimes feel a disconnect between who I am now and my younger self. I no longer align with the quirks and characteristics that defined me then in the same way that I used to. Between my earlier years at Camp and my 16 year old summer, I had the realization of the possibility to make self changes. I came back more physically fit, more open minded and content and confident with myself, all because I wanted to, and could. And it was my best summer yet. I saw the tangible results of acting on the control that we have over our lives.

However, younger me is still me. I still love food, my sleep, and taking time to myself, to name a few things. I often ask myself: “What acceptance is needed of the past that will not contain me there?” We are constantly in a place between who we were is, and who we are yet to be is waiting for us. Similarly, a lot of us can feel like our summers at Camp are defined by singular actions or events, that we are trapped by our past. Acknowledge past experiences and build on them, they are a part of our roots just as much as our character is. If you want a visual of how substantial and beautifully complex the roots of a tree are, you can take a look at the tree that was uprooted behind the mines during the storm the other day. Learn from mistakes, continue positives. No matter what, we still hold the same potential, always.

Another way of thinking of all this is with the analogy of palimpsests. For those who don't know, palimpsests are manuscripts or old pieces of writing that have been erased to make room for new writings and content, yet still show traces of previous inscriptions. I first heard of this from Archivist of Historical Collections at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Meg Winslow. In other words, my mom. Behold the capacity of potentiality and new writings, and preserve the old.

In last Sunday's Chapel, one of Mr. Michael's special prayers was from Marianne Williamson. She said "our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us." In the same way that I became paralyzed with the ball in my lacrosse stick, faced with the idea of being in control and presented with opportunity, we are often hesitant to act on the process of self-creation due to the immense freedom and vast potential. Marianne Williamson addresses this "deepest fear of ours" by continuing to say "as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others". Embrace the fear of change, because creating our own lives doesn't just inspire our own future, it inspires and allows others to do the same.

My aforementioned older brother Nicky gave a tree talk in 2019 on being in control. In it, he said "In order to truly live we must take advantage of every moment and fully commit to action. We've got to stop putting things off and waiting around for things to happen to us, because they won't. In order to discover [and I'll add "to create"] who we are, in order to love, in order to appreciate our numerous blessings, it is imperative to exist in the moment". "Wherever you go, there you are" (-Pip Carr). All this to say, it's up to us.

My new year's resolution for this year was to capitalize on opportunity. I realized a few weeks later that the first step to this is creating opportunity. Recognize the capacity that we have to make changes in our own lives, and the incredible power that gives us. We all have the ball in our sticks. We all are the arrow, waiting to establish our bullseyes choosing where to aim. And how lucky are we to be holding the bow?