

## **The Importance of Tough-Mindedness**

—*Sam Dilley*

Last year, on expeditions, on Kilkenny, I was accompanied by Peter Denious. On several nights, we did not know that there were streams near the campsite. We thought the nearest source of water was several miles away. On at least two distinct occasions, Pete woke up at 5 o'clock, filled up his backpack with our empty bottles, and came back to the campsite with full water bottles before the campers even woke up. He spontaneously offered to do it, and he did not flinch at the prospect of this additional exertion. This act of physical strength and determination impressed me.

Today, with the example of this story, I would like to talk about the topic of tough mindedness. Before delving into this talk, I'd like to clarify the scope of the words tough mindedness and resilience. In the words of Ernest Hemingway, I define it as "grace under pressure," as the ability to persevere, even in difficult situations. The projects can be relatively trivial in the grand scope of things (for example, getting a good grade at school), or much more complex and central to our lives (for example, having a successful relationship with our family). Whatever the project is, and the circumstances at hand, we should always strive for this type of endurance.

After these preliminary remarks, I would like to present various aspects of resilience.

Firstly, developing this tough-mindedness is a perpetual process. We can always develop a more resilient temperament. We all face moments of discouragement, when we perceive our own vulnerabilities and mistakes, and wish we were more tough-minded. Once we are aware that there is always progress to be made, we are able to better strengthen our resilience. I even feel slightly hypocritical talking about this subject, as I know that, myself, I often fall short of this standard of tough-mindedness. Whether it is in academic studies or in other endeavors, for instance here at camp, I can get easily distracted. I realize that I frequently have trouble focusing on a single task, to be able to finish it properly. Nonetheless, while being aware of these shortcomings, developing this ideal of tough-mindedness is one of the central objectives of my life. I saw this Tree Talk as an opportunity to reflect about this fundamental principle. I'm also aware that it is one of the central lessons I learned during my summers here at Pasquaney, especially during my time on the Council last year. For instance, last summer, leading Kilkenny or preparing the Glade Play, both times accompanied by Peter Denious' tough-minded influence, were wonderful opportunities to develop perseverance.

Secondly, an immediate community, like school or family, or the one we have here at camp, can be a powerful tool for tough-mindedness. When we see the direct effects of our behavior on people we care about, and we want to directly impact them in a positive way, it is a

strong incentive to persevere through new projects to help our friends. For instance, at the end of a long day of hiking during expeditions, one still should have enough resilience to finish clearing the dishes and other parts to the campsite. In this case, the impact on the community, notably on the other members of the expedition, should be a strong encouragement to maintain this tough-mindedness until the end of our collective duties during expeditions, notwithstanding our physical tiredness.

Thirdly, we also need to be aware that opportunity plays a large role. The first step of tough mindedness is making the necessary decision, even if it might be difficult. One of Camp's favorite hymns, which we sang yesterday in Chapel, is 519. The first verse asserts that "Once to every man and nation / Comes the moment to decide, / In the strife of truth with falsehood, / For the good or evil side [...]. Then it is the brave man chooses / While the coward stands aside [...]." On a very practical level, as a common example for most of you, tough-mindedness might express itself when you need to choose your various electives. Resilience might encourage you to choose the course that might require more time and effort, but that will bring you higher intellectual satisfaction.

Then, once we have made this choice to undertake a certain difficult task, we have to be able to commit to the newly offered opportunity. Although the road might be arduous, it is only by pursuing our objective that we demonstrate our resilience. As we say in the words of Drake's Prayer in Chapel on Sundays, "it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory." To return to my class analogy, it is not only because you signed up for a difficult course that you have become tough-minded: it is by performing well throughout the semester. As another, more consequential example of the effect of tough-mindedness, I recognised Drake's prayer four years ago, while I was reading, for leisure, the Memoirs of British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, who was one of the most important generals on the Allied side during the Second World War. He played a pivotal role in leading the offensive against the Nazis throughout Europe and Africa. He mentions Drake's prayer as inspiration while he was preparing for the Battle of Alamein in Egypt against the Nazi general Rommel, in October 1942. At this occasion, through this prayer, he wanted to emphasise to his troops the importance of having a fighting spirit not only at the beginning, but throughout the battle. It eventually became a strategic Allied victory in the area, perhaps in part due to Montgomery's perseverance. The entire book, whether it was describing his leadership during the Africa campaign or the Normandy battles after D-Day, focused in big part on his tough-minded approach to military strategy and leading his soldiers. Even at times when the British troops were outnumbered or were fighting in very difficult desert conditions, this resilience allowed a strong series of victories of the soldiers under his command on the Allied side against fascism. These two examples, whether it is a trivial academic choice or Montgomery's leadership philosophy, show that having a determined temperament can be applied in many different situations, including in major historical events.

Now that I've presented these various aspects of tough-mindedness, I would like to mention that Pasquaney is a wonderful place to develop this resilience. Question to the audience: Can some of you give me examples of how we develop this principle here? Recap:

- a) we have the community I mentioned earlier on
- b) We purposefully put ourselves in difficult situations, which allow us to expand our comfort zone [expeditions, Long & Short Walks, hikes, cold showers, etc.]

Along the same lines, about the positive environment that camp offers, I would like to finish with another anecdote that happened to me here as a camper. When I was 16 years old, on our first evening on the Long Walk in 2018, when we arrived at the Nancy Brook campsite after a long day in the rain, we had trouble putting up our tents. We also learned the weather forecast for the rest of the week seemed consistently rainy. When I expressed my doubts about my physical abilities for the rest of the week, one of the counsellors, Conway Stanton, encouraged me and told me "This will shape us as men", before walking away to continue organising the campsite. This simple sentence showed his belief that we could use this experience on the Long Walk to grow stronger and more resilient. Although I did not immediately fully comprehend the meaning of this statement, I've regularly thought about this specific statement over the past 4 years. It helped me on the Long Walk, as well as during numerous times of self-doubt since then. I thought it was a very concise expression of a self-reliant mindset we try to create here at camp.

To conclude my message, I would like you to remember the most direct expression of tough mindedness through Mr. Vinnie's expression, "Nothing rattles us."