

# Finding Your Better Self

by Tom Valk

Forty-eight years ago this month, I stood here on this ridge and had the privilege of giving the summer's first Tree Talk: "Finding Your Better Self." I convinced Mr. Vinnie that I should give it again because one's better self will serve each of us well through our lives.

There are only two ways I know to find and nurture your better self. The first is a twostep process with the steps taken at the same time. To begin with, we all have what I would call our immediate selves: that part of us that clamors for immediate satisfaction often of physical desires or wants: taking a rest when all around you are working, a cold drink on the Desolation Trail, or shade and water during a hot day on the ball field. You can immerse yourself in these wants – a good way to be absolutely miserable. And, you can talk about them and make everyone else miserable, too. These wants aren't always physical. Superficial popularity is an example: popularity based upon the latest fad or, worse, putting some else down with the latest slam. So, the first step is to put these immediate wants aside. This task can take some self-discipline, but little is ever accomplished without that quality.

But, you might ask, put this clamoring immediate self aside for what? This is the second step: working towards a cause or goal that is greater than you, that is outside of yourself. Here at Pasquaney we are given countless opportunities to take this very step every day: work towards the morale and spirit of a hike by helping and encouraging others who may be struggling, or the same process on the ball field, in a war canoe or crew shell; helping others in your dorm for inspection, using that seeing eye to find what needs to be done and doing it, or at table duty, helping others with their tables when you have finished yours, to name just a few. On a broader scale, one can work towards a banner season this summer, one of which all can be proud and share.

The examples are many, and I suspect you can think of quite a few on your own. If you have any trouble doing so, there is the second way of moving towards your better self: look around you at the most respected leaders in camp, among the campers and among the council. I can guarantee you that these leaders will be giving you examples every day of their better selves in action. And, of course, you can go to any one of these people and simply ask: what can I do to set off down this worthy road? They can give you many ideas. Try it!

Now, this process I have described bears repeating as it is in repetition in matters small and eventually large that we find our better selves and make it our second nature. Remember

the saying that I know you have heard: *Sow a thought* (and I hope some thoughts have been sown here today!) *and reap an act; sow and act and reap a habit; sow a habit and reap a character; sow a character and reap a destiny.*

So, what do you get from finding and nurturing your better self? ...a genuine sense of accomplishment and self-worth, true respect from others, the comradery of working with like-minded others toward a common goal and, when we have reached the point of character, a bulwark within ourselves against the hard times we all will have at some point or another.

One further point, albeit theoretical in nature: there are causes and goals that are truly destructive of people, valued institutions, of values themselves. ISIS comes to mind as do the historical examples of Hitler's and Stalin's dictatorships. The good news is you will never find such a cause at Pasquaney. It is a very safe place to develop your better self. Why? The answer is the timeless values upon which camp is built and to which it has been dedicated since 1895. You have already heard of some of these: opportunity and the responsibility and courage to seize it this summer; encouraging others; kindness and thoughtfulness based upon the quality of empathy; adherence to and the search for truth; honesty – one of the most important threads in our fabric of civilization – and the value of real friendship. You will hear of more this coming Sunday, I am sure. These values can be the touchstones of our lives here and beyond. Adhering to them assures us of the value of the causes to which we may dedicate ourselves.

So here is the opportunity, this very summer, right now, to build your better selves. Seize it! It will be worth it, always.