

Being Enough

by Rich DeSalvo

The term *ethos* has popped up a number of times in the last week. Mr. Vinnie spoke of ethos in his sermon last Sunday, and Thruston Morton shared that it was one of his father, Ballard's, favorite words.

It is a wonderful little word, ethos, which means the characteristic spirit of a culture.

Mr. Charlie captures Pasquaney's ethos eloquently in the *Portrait of Pasquaney* with the following words:

For most of us, Pasquaney remains the spot where we felt we came fully alive ... where away from the distractions of mercenary competition and superficial worldly values, we've been able to make deep and lasting friendships; where we've been moved to emulate the best qualities of boys and men whom we admired and with whom we shared experiences; and finally, where we've learned (to our relief!) that emphasis on traditional moral standards is in no way incompatible with fun, humor, wit, athletic excellence, ambition.

"For most of us, Pasquaney remains the spot where we felt we came fully alive." To be fully alive is to be in touch with our authentic selves, to connect with others, and to seek ways to wholeheartedly experience everything life has to offer. We are able to live this way at camp because we live a deliberately simple life. We live fully because we live a life without.

At home we often allow our lives to be defined by the pursuit of material possessions and achievements, and the approval of others. We gear up with latest fads in fashion, and the coolest gadgets and video games. We neglect the things we love doing in order to pursue activities that will look good to others on a resume, and we often ignore our better judgement and inner conscience hoping to be accepted by certain individuals or groups.

A number of years ago I was speaking with a former teacher of mine from high school, and I got caught up in comparing my personal and professional achievements with those of my classmates. In response, my teacher shared with me a line from the movie *Cool Runnings* that hit home with me immediately.

"If you are not enough without it, you'll never be enough with it," she said.

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Camp gives us the refreshing opportunity to step off the tracks of the exhausting, endless, and self-defeating rat race, to discover if we are enough just as we are.

In his poem "Sweet Darkness" the poet David Whyte urges us to "*Give up all the other worlds/ except the one to which you belong. /...anything or anyone/ that does not bring you alive/ is too small for you.*"

If you have felt proud, content, appreciated, and loved this summer, then I hope you will return home more at home with yourself than you were seven weeks ago, so that you can put more of your energy towards growing your inner self, and focus less on anything or anyone that does not bring you alive.

At camp we live a life without any sort of all-important destination looming ahead on the horizon. What a relief it is that as we live here and pursue things that we love, and we do not have to worry about how neatly our achievements fit strategically into our life's plan. No one here, for example, is strategizing to get into the next best summer camp. Rather, we are living fully because we are so uniquely free to live in the present.

Instead of a journey, the philosopher Alan Watts prefers thinking of life as attending a great symphony that we can sing along and dance to:

In music one doesn't make the end of a composition the point of the composition. If that were so the best conductors would be those who played fastest, and there would be composers who wrote only finales. People would go to concerts just to hear one crashing chord; because that's the end!

We thought of life by analogy with a journey, with a pilgrimage which had a serious purpose at the end and the thing was to get to that end. Success or whatever it is, or maybe heaven after you're dead.

But we missed the point the whole way along. It was a musical thing and we were supposed to sing or to dance while the music was being played.

We have been singing together all summer long, without concern for where it will get us, and what a nice reprieve it has been.

Part of the reason we are able to sing and dance and feel a genuine sense of joy at camp is because we live a life without technology. As artificial intelligence continues to improve and appear more real, we must consider to what degree advances in the digital world allow us to overcome our human limits and enhance our lives and to what degree they distance us from our rich and fully-realized selves and our potential to grow smarter and wiser and braver.

Consider hikes and expeditions where we advance on foot without GPS navigation systems telling us which way to go at every turn and how far we are from the next trail. Personally, when I am traveling to an unfamiliar place outside of camp, I lack confidence with directions, and I'm often caught telling people I don't even know how I got somewhere – I just followed my GPS. The problem is that when I am not enough without technology, I am also nothing when I am with it and it isn't working. Relying too much on technology for information and guidance not only makes us feel helpless, but in fact deactivates parts of the brain involved in memory and spatial mapping as well as planning and decision making.

When we stop and think and make decisions, we are likely to make mistakes, but to be fully alive comes with an awareness that we are all by nature imperfect no matter how hard we try not to be. Perfect artificial intelligence masks the reality that deep down we are all, to use author David Brook's term, "stumblers."

Says Brooks, "The stumbler scuffs through life, a little off balance. But the stumbler faces her imperfect nature with unvarnished honesty, with the opposite of squeamishness. Recognizing her limitations, the stumbler at least has a serious foe to overcome and transcend."

One such foe is the Long Walk. Leading the Long Walk the last two summers I spent weeks pouring over maps, and I felt alive and empowered because of the knowledge that was entrenched in my brain as a result. Perhaps you felt this way calculating mileage on Expeditions, studying to be a Master Naturalist, or when designing and following through on your shop project. We literally grow our brain like a muscle when we learn something, and then recall and use that knowledge again and again.

A life without technology also allows for a life that better balances rich activity with fully explored solitude. At camp we live both a life full of entertaining activity and one that is without the constant need to be entertained.

When we are without incessant entertainment, we may at times feel alone or bored, but we are enough because we've seen here that it is okay to be bored, okay to fully inhabit stillness and silence, whether it is alone or with a friend. Solitude is not something we should fear. It is only when we stop and listen to ourselves thinking that we can become more familiar and comfortable with ourselves. Outside of camp there is that all too powerful tug to check a phone during every free moment, dozens if not hundreds of times a day, even in the short pauses in the midst of a conversation. Going to a phone in the middle of a meal or chat with a friend is not only a statement that potentially says what you have to say is not important to me, it also eliminates the potential for pondering and contemplation to spring forth a funny story or a troubling thought.

We do sing and play music, laugh and joke, and share stories with one another, but often it is in both the thinking and then the thinking out loud that new games and ideas bubble to the surface. Think of the way that rules on the Wall Ball court are constantly evolving. Think of the laughter and conversation we have enjoyed this summer. Try to replicate that at home by encouraging friends to put away phones during meals, sleepovers, or bus rides with teammates. Show your friends that companionship can be enough without a device.

Finally, as Mr. Vinnie shared earlier today, Pasquaney is a life without walls, where we are ready to help others and to be helped in turn. The opposite of being fully alive is being guarded and sheltered from our deepest fears and insecurities. We often don't want to seem weak, so we hide our true feelings and concerns from others; think of the way we turn away when we get hurt so that no one can see the look on our face. On the contrary, during Circles, in the light of a lantern, we look each other in the eyes and talk openly about our own shared human frailty when we discuss our struggles, make apologies, or share what we need or would like to work on.

When we lose a close match or we're feeling down, when we make a mistake or grow angry with someone without putting up walls, we allow for others to take notice – not to keep score and tear you down but to offer comfort and to pick you up. A conversation or even just a pat on the back says, *I know you're not feeling your best and that is okay. I'm here for you anyways*. In this serene environment we are fortunate enough to live without our guard up, ready to assert and accept the power of goodness.

In 48 hours the 2017 season will be a dear memory, and the hillside will be still. As you think back on this season and on all the things you came here without, I hope you realize that you are enough just as you are and that to live fully you do not need nearly as much as you thought you did.

And just as you came here without anything other than yourself, you leave here just the same. The truth is you can't take Pasquaney home with you. You cannot fit a summer camp inside of a suitcase and Mr. Vinnie, as incredible as he is, is not Santa Claus.

Your very best amounts to an invincible summer, and it resides within you – at all times and in all places.