

Be the Bee

by Jake Matthai

You first hear it as a distant hum. As you step closer, the vibrations build. The fluctuation of concentrated energy is constant. This is the hive. If you were to lift up the lid and gaze into their nucleus, you would find 50,000 bees fast at work to preserve and protect their way of life. To the human eye it looks like chaos – to them it is harmony. Predominately consisting of worker bees, the hive is filled with the air of purpose and intentionality. The worker bee begins its duty as a cell keeper, a simple and modest task. Then it becomes a food storer, more responsibility yet fundamentally simple. Finally it finishes its life cycle as a forager, traveling up to five miles to acquire pollen, nectar, and water for the hive.

Bees are altruistic. This means that the bee performs its duties solely for the welfare of its brothers and sisters, promoting the appropriate growth for that of the hive. The primary cause of death for the bee is burnout; this is when it reaches the point where its wings can't flap hard and fast enough to keep itself aloft. After just 30 days of non-stop service to the hive, an equally dedicated member of the colony supersedes the declining bee by picking up where the other has left off, not a moment wasted, taking care of the little things for the queen and for the hive. I wonder if a bee has ever felt sorry for itself or perhaps if the bee knew how much the rest of the world depended on it? But how could they, they are just too busy being excellent at what they do. So how is it that something the size of a thumbtack with such a short life span has the world depending on it?

While the bees preserve their own hive, they simultaneously preserve the environment by pollinating and cross-pollinating the flora of their region. Thus, one third of the human food supply relies on pollination services provided by the bee. All the apples, blueberries, cantaloupes, cucumbers, and watermelon consumed here at Pasquaney have been progressed by the bee. Sunflowers! Which, through transitive properties means SunButter, is made possible by the bee. And fellas, what would camp Pasquaney do without its beloved SunButter? 75% of the world's crops benefit to some degree from animal pollination. And I am sure it comes to you as no surprise that we aren't the only animals relying on the bees. Birds, plants, and other mammals are alive today quite simply because the existence of the bee is maintained. This is because the bee is a keystone species, meaning that other species in their ecosystem largely depend on the bee, such that if it were removed the ecosystem would drastically change. Thus, the bee is undoubtedly an integral component to the welfare and preservation of mankind.

One can't help but ask the question...how can I be a bit more like the bee? This is not a simple thing to do—translating the nature of a bee and applying it to

our own life is a challenge. Therefore, it is pertinent to make an example of those who came before us by cross-pollinating their experiences and that of the bee. This became evident to me when reading the book *Ghost Soldiers* by Hampton Sides. In this book he recalls the interaction between two prisoners of war in the Cabanatuan POW Camp in the Philippines during WWII. Both men had contracted diphtheria, just one of the dozens of diseases that plagued the ranks of the inmates at Cabanatuan. Diphtheria is a deadly virus that attacks the respiratory system and slowly suffocates the infected person. Without the antitoxin, the chances of the patient living are significantly low. By a stroke of luck and a lot of pleading, the American doctors of the POW camp were able to procure the antitoxin for their patients. The serum was delivered to all the patients with Diphtheria, and soon there was one serum left and to the horror of all those present, two patients in need.

Without hesitation, the patient named Thomas asked a critical question, "Which one of us is worse off?"

The doctor replied, "Armando is."

Thomas followed this remark by saying, "Then give it to him."

"Give it to him." This sort of mentality parallels with a message that Mr. Vinnie delivered to us last weekend: his need is greater than mine. This mentality is altruism at its finest. Fortunately, both men survived the night, and an extra serum was delivered to Thomas the next day.

6,800 miles west of the Philippines and a year and half prior, on the 6th of June, a day most commonly known as D-day, thousands of American, British, and Canadian soldiers stormed the beaches of Normandy while their brothers dropped from the sky, marking the beginning of the allied offensive against Nazi Germany. Having missed their drop zones by miles, allied paratroopers were scattered throughout the marshlands of Normandy—forced to accept their situation and take up arms against the cells of organized German forces. Battles to gain a strategic advantage over the opposition waged for months and it eventually led to the withdrawal of German forces from Paris and ultimately the end of the war.

I had the distinct pleasure of visiting Normandy with my family back in 2012. We hired a tour guide to help color in the sites with war stories and various nuances of the first few days of the European offensive. There was no shortage of incredible stories brought to life for us that day, yet one such story is etched in my brain with vivid purity. During the first few days of the American offensive a group of US soldiers found themselves locked in battle with German infantry. The ground they were fighting over was a small village, with a fittingly small church. The battle waged and soon the American line was forced to retreat and relinquish their hold on the town. As the German forces claimed the village, a pair of officers made ready to enter the church, which had been used as a surrogate field hospital. The officers brandished their lugers with the intent to kill those who had been left behind in the

church. They burst through the wooden doors to find a hive of activity with two American surgeons fast at work. The patients in this case were an indiscriminate mixture of both American and German soldiers alike. Upon seeing this, the officers holstered their weapons and left the way they came.

Take a moment to go into the mind of these field surgeons. Do you think these men gave much thought to their personal safety while their fellow soldiers retreated into the marshlands? Better yet, what inclination compelled them to dutifully serve both American and German men alike? His need is greater than mine. These soldiers took on the ambition of the bee by performing their duties solely for the welfare of their brothers and sisters.

I was fortunate enough to have stepped foot in this quaint one room church. Everything in this holy place felt authentic, particularly the goose bumps that riddled my skin. The pews were a rich umber color, many of them still visibly stained by the blood of the soldiers who once lay there. In the heart of the church, directly beneath the lone steeple, their lay a stone, split three ways. It is here that an artillery round had thudded to a stop having just burst through the steeple above it. Miraculously, this lethal shell failed to discharge, preserving the lives of the wounded soldiers and surgeons in the church. When I was looking around the church, it all seemed to make sense in some strange ethereal way.

The Roman statesman Lucius Seneca once said: "luck is a matter of preparation meeting opportunity." By focusing on their duty, the surgeons let preparation meet opportunity. Preservation was the outcome.

Our final stop in Normandy was to the American cemetery where 9,387 US soldiers are buried. An additional 1,557 grave stones are there to commemorate those soldiers who were declared missing in action. Rows upon rows of pearly white crosses serve as a stark contrast against the plush green landscape. These men were like the bee, pressing forward with courage and altruism in their hearts. Their legs, like wings, willed themselves to beat on against showers of lead. They were never to be denied and always working for the betterment of their people. Their homeland was their hive. Like the bee, the sacrifice made by the soldiers of WWII has had a lasting effect on the generations that have followed them.

Take a moment to come into the present. What is it that you are doing for your hive? Where is there work to be done? We are all capable of channeling our inner bee, of putting the needs of our brothers and sisters before our own. President Theodore Roosevelt once said, "We are face to face with our destiny and we must meet it with a high and resolute courage. For us is the life of action, of strenuous performance of duty; let us live in the harness, striving mightily; let us rather run the risk of wearing out than rusting out." It certainly seems there are higher implications at work that are out of our control, and perhaps the best thing for us to do is simple. Be the bee.

