

After expeditions I'm always struck with this profound sense of completion. It's this feeling of struggling so hard and then conquering something truly difficult with people that make you enjoy chasing it. And, it's a sense of relief at having finished this journey and knowing that you've grown physically and mentally because of it. But even more powerful than all of that is a feeling of intense, gastrointestinal distress. After expeditions my stomach never fails to feel just absolutely awful. It turns out, as it were, that living for a week on a diet of foot-long sausage, cheese, and oatmeal does about what you might expect to your digestion. And by the last day, I always manage to convince myself, naively mind you, that I can make it back to camp before my digestive situation becomes a real emergency. So it was with this sense of both euphoric relief and alarming urgency that I waddled off the bus into camp last year.

I ran into a critical wrinkle in my plan. When I got off the bus, I had forgotten how frustratingly considerate everyone is at Pasquaney. I couldn't walk more than twenty feet at a time without being assaulted by a hug, stopped by some helpful camper trying to carry my things, or intercepted by another counsellor probing me for more details of my week. And frankly, the mines are not close to where the bus drops you off.

So, it is with a little shame and a little pride that I admit something to you all that I haven't told anyone before. The Pasquaney spirit made me poop my pants last year.

I tell this fun anecdote because we go to a camp where it's not practical to keep your head up if you're in a hurry because someone's bound to start a conversation with you. And, that means something. That doesn't happen to me when I'm at Colorado College or at home, but it does happen here. One of my favorite parts of Pasquaney is that here we learn to take an interest in everyone else. And I was thinking about that this spring at school out in Colorado.

Spring was hard for me because I knew I was coming back to camp, and I couldn't wrap my head around why. After seven or eight months away from camp, it's easy to forget what made you want to be here. Much like last year, I would hear people talking about their internships at so and so or going to concerts or working at the beach. Then these conversations would turn to me and I'd say, "Oh I'm going back to this all boys summer camp in New Hampshire." And I would get all kinds of responses to this, but the one that stuck was when someone said, "Ugh, I wish I could be a counsellor. I used to do that, but I realized that at some point I just had to grow up and stop wasting my time."

When I heard that I became really frustrated because I knew that when I was at camp I was always full of this energy, but it was hard to translate what I loved about camp to school. Over a long semester of concentrating on academics and really just being around a few close friends most of the time, I sort of lost what was one of my favorite parts of camp: the interest in other people that camp fosters. At school it's not easy to be curious about other people's lives. Here we spend every waking minute with one another. We eat together, and we sleep together, we all wake up to the same awful noise (No offense Spencer it sounds lovely.), so being interested in someone who you see several times a day is not terribly hard.

At home on the other hand, you run into people who you might see once a day or once every week or people that you might not ever see again, so it's tough to sacrifice time and energy for these people. A lot of times it seems like people don't want to be bothered. They want to mind their own business and aren't really concerned with getting to know anyone new. At home there's this unspoken sense that everyone fits into a box, and that's just the way it is. You're defined by what you do. You become what sport you play or what you wear or who you

associate yourself with, and there are so many people in your life who think that way that it starts to become all that there is to you. Here part of what makes it easy to be interested in people is that we do away with all that. Here we all wear the same clothes, do the same activities, sit at the same tables, so you can't look at someone and say, "He plays lacrosse. I already know what lacrosse players act like, so I don't need to get to know him." Being at camp makes it much harder to identify yourself with one group, so we're forced to see people in a way that you never would outside of camp. We strip away all the identifiers people have, and we're left with just a group of 100 or something guys who understand that we're all very different, but they also understand that in as many ways as we're different we're also very similar. We spend so much time with people who we wouldn't ordinarily that we're forced to see our humanity and that everyone deserves as much respect as everyone else.

It's not like that at home.

The same day that this terribly considerate person had told me that my summer was a waste of time, I saw this girl who looked like she'd been crying. She actually lived in the same building as I did, but we never had a class together, and I didn't know any of her friends, so we had never really talked. I was completely in the back-home mindset, thinking that she was some sorority girl that didn't really care about anyone else. I assumed she was selfish and shallow. I was still stinging from this person saying I was wasting my time at Pasquaney when this girl walked by, and I remember thinking, "If I've learned anything at all from camp, I should at least ask if she's okay." So I asked, "What is going on? Why are you crying?"

She kind of just shrugged it off and said, "Don't worry about it. I'm fine. Just having a bad day. Got a bad grade on this thing, and I don't know what I'm going to do."

Trying to keep this up, I said, "I'd been having a tough time, too." Then we got talking about her classes and how her year was going and then about the new school logo.

Nothing of any significance at all came up, and in ten or fifteen minutes she kind of said, "I gotta go," and she went on her way.

Honestly, I felt like I completely blew it. I thought, "That was nosy, and it was weird, and kind of creepy. I had no business talking to her. She really didn't care what I had to say." I really wished I hadn't said anything and that I'd just left her alone. More than ever I was thinking that it was impossible to take that sense of selflessness at camp outside of camp. People who don't know Pasquaney just want to be left alone and go about their business. She doesn't care about me, so why should I care about her.

I was embarrassed about talking to that girl. So when I saw her in the hall a day or two later, I put my head down and started quickly walking toward my room, but, before I got there, I felt a hand on my shoulder. I turned around and it was her. I was ready to apologize for grilling her about her problems, but she said, "Hi it's Thomas, right?"

"Yeah."

And she said, "I don't want to scare you or freak you out or anything, but I want you to know that you saved me the other day. I wasn't just upset about my class. I was actually in a pretty bad place." She told me that when I stopped her she had been walking back to her room with every intention of taking her own life and that our conversation was the reason she did not.

I've thought about that first conversation a lot since then. I've replayed it over and over in my head, and I've talked to her since then as well. She told me she didn't think anyone cared what happened to her. She said she hated sorority life and that everyone treated her like a cookie-cutter version of what they imagined a sorority girl to be. She had been really focused on school and her social life, and it wasn't going well. She thought that if that was all she was then what was the point of continuing.

I was in the right place at the right time. It was an extreme situation, and I was lucky to be there. But what if 1 in 50, or 1 in 100, or 1 in 1,000 of those interactions resulted in really turning someone's day around for the better. Wouldn't that be enough? If 1 in 1,000 times that you stopped to check in with someone that maybe you'd only met once or had a passing conversation with, if just one of those times you said something to let them know they're not just their sports team or they're not just their clothes or their grades or their physique – that would mean something.

Here we don't have extra layers to try and look through. We don't try to change how people behave or how they dress. We just learn to love the people we're around. Age is not important at Pasquaney. Here you look around at people who come from all different grades, people who are academics and athletes. You see people who come from families who are well-off or families who are not. You see people from all different parts of the world that have wildly different backgrounds away from camp. Coming back here and seeing this, you can't help but ask, "What was the big deal when I was back home?"

I never realized the mistake I was making by the way I interacted with and thought about other people until I got back here and remembered what I was missing.

Pasquaney teaches us that the best people, some of our most valuable friends, are the ones that don't settle for being who people think they are. They're the ones that show us that people are too different to be put in a box. Some people take most of their lives to figure out what comes so easily to us here, and plenty of them never quite get it at all.

Maybe I am wasting my time at Pasquaney. If spending time wisely means spending the summer at home with people my same age, doing what I've been doing for the other ten months of the year, I think I'd like to waste this summer. If spending time wisely means keeping my face glued to a computer or a smartphone instead of going out and challenging myself by hiking with friends, I'd like to waste this summer. If it means I won't get to teach and continue to learn here, that sacrificing your time for somebody else is the most valuable way to spend it, then I would be happy to waste this summer. If spending time wisely means thinking about how I can get ahead, how I can help myself, how I can set myself up to make more money, have more popular friends, have the best grades, then I hope you all will join me in wasting these last two weeks of the summer in a community where we put other people before ourselves and end up being our best because of that.