

Pshhh, Pshhh, Pshhh-Pshhh, Pshhhhhhhhh.

Here it is. This is the rain that announces its presence plunk by plunk for a few seconds: the first drops slapping the leaves overhead, then the plunks resounding more and more frequently, and a moment later, the rush of the water's collective descent. Raindrops on your coat, raindrops on your backpack, raindrops on your forehead, rain with every step. Right now, nothing is dry, because everything is wet when you feel the rain. This isn't the weather that you see out the window; this is the water falling on your back.

Each summer I find that each of Pasquaney's seven weeks has a different feeling. Maybe you know what I mean if you've spent a summer on the hillside before, or maybe you will if this is your first. Some weeks seem to go quickly while others go more slowly, and some seem busy while others are more relaxed. Some are wet and grey while others are dry and bright. We spend some weeks struggling, other weeks gathering ourselves, and others still thriving. Sometimes I strive during week five or six of camp. I often struggle during week two, expeditions week. Expeditions week is hard, and it is certainly not my favorite week of the Camp season.

But I value Expeditions week as much as any of the fifty-two weeks of the year. I value the struggle.

One week of camp I remember particularly well is the second week of my first summer. That week began with a difficult walk from upper camp to the Favor Farm campsite with several of my new friends. Favor Farm was hard. One afternoon towards the middle of the week really challenged me. It began after a couple hours of wet hiking and trail work, when my peers and I returned to our tents to rest and let the rain pass. Sitting in my tent with the drops falling overhead, I struggled with a feeling that I was too far from home, from my family, from my familiar surroundings. I cried because I felt too far away. Eventually my struggle had run its course and my tent partner, Josh Potash, helped me gather myself as I began to wipe away the tears. A couple hours later we all emerged from our tents and stood in a circle, passing around crackers and giant pepperoni sticks. I was thriving.

That struggle helped me to develop a new skill: finding peace far away from home and family. That skill has allowed me to enjoy spending multiple summers at Pasquaney, going to high school in a different state, and other opportunities away from home and family.

Value the Struggle.

Several summers later I thrived in the views and challenging hikes afforded by the Pemigewasset Wilderness Expedition until the last evening of the trip, when David Cromwell and I got stuck in the rain. I'd like to share my experience during that particular struggle with you all.

Our group ascended our final peak this morning with a sunny sense of accomplishment, but how different the scene is now, well below tree line. David and I, having elected to let a light drizzle die out before assembling our tent, stand in place while the water falls so as not to absorb the gloomy puddles resting on our shoulders. Behind us our friends sleep and play cards in their cozy tents. Instead of subsiding, the shower has escalated. This is the rain falling on our backs. Here it is, and here we are, standing in the rain.

I don't know about David, but I was really struggling. It was taking everything I had to hold in the tears that had burst out that first summer, but I was, barely. With the strength I could muster and the support David could offer, I began to gather myself very slowly. We stood on the bank by our campsite and sang camp songs while the rain fell overhead and the water rushed through the river below us. Song after song after song kept us going while our friends played cards and slept. Eventually the rain passed and we could set up our tent. We had made it through the deluge. We had gathered ourselves and given ourselves a chance to thrive.

Value the struggle.

My most recent struggle has been with my grades. Last summer I was stunned when Henry Valk stood where I'm standing now and shared with us his challenges at school because they were strikingly similar to my own in the school year that had just passed. After a year of enjoying many of the college experiences that take place outside of the classroom, my grades had plummeted, and I had to leave school early in order to avoid suspension.

Henry's depiction of his own story helped me to recognize mine. I hadn't valued the extent of my struggle until Henry shared his. Here on Tree Talk Ridge, I began to understand that I had been struggling for an entire school year.

So I began to gather myself. In this past school year, my second of college, I've begun to value my first-year struggles and gather myself. My grades have improved, and I've

struck a better balance between the various elements of college life. I hope that I've set myself up to thrive when I return to school for my third year in the fall.

Value the struggle.

Value the struggle because it's inevitable, common to us all. We come from different homes, contrasting backgrounds, and unique challenges, but all of us struggle. And all of our challenges are real and significant. Even the simplest ones, like feeling too far from home, in a wet tent a mile or two up the hill from camp, or holding back tears while an unexpected shower continues overhead.

Value the struggle because it's part of a cycle that is varied and whole. We struggle, we gather ourselves, we thrive. There are a number of ways to say this. No pain, no gain. When you are most confused is when you are about to learn something.

Value the struggle because it produces strength. I can keep my composure in the rain and thrive away from home because of my experiences at Pasquaney. My friendships with the guys I've spent summer after summer at camp with are strong because we've struggled together.

Here it is. It isn't the rain that passes through the frame of our bedroom windows just before it falls to the earth, which we often can't quite be certain is still falling until we find a spot where the drops splatter off the pavement. Nor is it the rain that chases us as we slam the car door shut and make a run for it but is forgotten once we reach the awning or kick our shoes off and hurry inside the house. Not even the rain that hosts practice in a shivery chill from time to time, often holding its ground for the full two hours, or maybe longer, but by that point we're just about finished, waiting for the water to heat up, and stepping into the hot shower that takes only a few seconds longer than usual to return us to a familiar warmth. No, it's the rain that makes its way through the White Mountains of New Hampshire in the middle of your expedition, the rain that soaks everything in your pack with two days left before you reach the bus.

Here it is. Struggle, gather yourself, and thrive. Value the struggle.