

Discomfort Zones
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Camp Pasquaney
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On a chilly morning last March, I found myself in a hotel lobby with Ian Munsick. It was a happy, chance encounter; I was traveling with my lacrosse team and had a game that night near Nashville. Ian was preparing for a gig with his band in town.

Over Styrofoam cups of coffee, we laughed and joked and caught up in the special way that people who have shared summers at Pasquaney can. Quickly, our conversation turned to our looming performances. At first look, we were about to engage in two very different activities – mine: a wintry college athletic competition, his: a musical performance in a sweaty bar in Nashville. But as our conversation got more specific about the challenges we would face later that day, it became clear to me that we were feeling the same sort of nerves. Charging our conversation was the deep nervous anticipation that comes with the threat of performance.

I'm always a little tense leading up to games. My nerves might begin to surface a few days before in practice, ramping up the intensity, sharpening my focus. The night before a game, I often don't settle easy, preoccupied with the challenge to come. The day of, I'm on edge, with damp armpits, a flushed face, and periodical butterflies in my stomach. I don't really enjoy it. Not really. But after hundreds of competitions over the years, I don't hate it either. In fact, it's in those moments – the ones leading up to a performance, and the ones that occur between whistles – that I feel most alive. Those moments, when something is on the line, when your hours of preparation might pay off, when your craft is judged, those are some of the most vivid moments we can experience. The threat of performance heightens our awareness of self and imprints vivid sounds and smells upon our memories. A rich life will be full of such moments. When I asked Ian about how he feels as a performer, he told me, "The thrill when you're up there is like nothing else. I know that that's why I'm here. Time doesn't even apply to you when you're up there."

And thank goodness that lacrosse games and country music concerts aren't the only way we can get that thrill. At Pasquaney, I get that sort of essential human kick before a windy day at sailing, before leaving for expeditions, and as a COD in Mem Hall. I'm definitely getting it right now.

Interestingly, my first memories of the threat of performance are actually Camp memories, specifically, crew races, theater plays, and sailing regattas. It was here that I began to see the value of those pre-performance nerves, to embrace what was uncomfortable, and compete at a high level.

I invite you now to think back over your summer at camp. Think about a time when faced that threat of performance, and hold it in your mind for a minute.

Performance is built into what we do, every single day. We are performing on the water in obstacle and canoe races. We strive to perfect the dive of the week or execute a beautiful and controlled gybe in a 420. Each of us graces the stage of the Watson Theater a few times. We head out on Long Walk, stomachs tight with anticipation of the challenging week to come. Tonight, at the Awards Ceremony, 44 medals will be handed out for competitive excellence. That's a lot of performance for just 94 boys.

But let's think larger. Think of the whole Pasquaney summer as one big performance. Here, there's always something on the line. We're competing to be ready for morning inspection, in Mem Hall we're striving to serve, clear, and set up tables the fastest. We compete on stage, performing as dorms and as clubs. Most of our free time activities are competitive, low stakes games that train us to perform when the stakes are raised. Think for a minute about the nature of the club competition. The way it's scored – by awarding you points for your interest, ability, and improvement in each activity you go to, means that no matter what you do, you are competing here. All day long you're competing; all day long you're performing.

And it can be uncomfortable. It's unavoidable, and it's relentless. One of the toughest aspects of a summer here is the relentless routine we keep for 7 weeks. The simple acts of waking up, shuffling into Dana to kneel and pray on a cold wood floor, and then strip naked under a stream of colder water are uncomfortable, unavoidable, and relentless. It's hard for me to even compare the first 15 minutes of being awake here to the first 15 minutes being awake back home. Here, there is no snooze button. You must perform from 7 am to 9 pm every day, and it's uncomfortable. But in coming here, you were asking for that discomfort. You invited it into your life. And no matter how many summers you've spent here, Pasquaney finds a new way to get a great performance out of you.

Think of Camp as a sort of "discomfort zone" – the place where we are challenged all day, where we have opportunities to try anything, to fail at anything. We're comfortably *uncomfortable* here. The wonderful part about our routine is that there is always another opportunity to express ourselves. There's another tree to climb, another tennis match, another canoeing specie.

My competitive life really began at the beginning of the 2007 Camp season, when I signed up to try crew for the first time as a 14-year-old in Adams. During windy mornings when I could have been sailing, I was toiling in the swells, struggling to set the boat and work with the 4 other members of my team. It was terribly frustrating, but by that point I was committed. It was the first moment of a journey of athletic commitment that is still present in my life almost a decade later. Under the tutelage of Phil Hooper, I started to be comfortably uncomfortable out on the water. I began to enjoy the workouts, and as we improved and started moving as a team, the boat surged forward and I was clued into the beauty of the sport. At the culmination of the season, when we finally raced over Trustee's Weekend, I felt the deep, nervous anticipation of performance. Something was on the line. Our hours of preparation might finally pay off. Our craft would soon be judged.

But what's the most important moment of a summer at crew? It's not the final race, it's not the pre-race practice. It's the moment when you approach the crew counsellor for the first time and put your name down on the list. It's the moment when you ask to be made uncomfortable, the first step towards making a dream of success your reality. That excellent practice (of working hard to achieve a goal) began at Camp, and it has stayed with me. I apply it each year I go back to school to play another season of lacrosse.

"80 percent of success is just showing up," said Woody Allen. "80 percent of success is just showing up." At some point every year, I find myself at a crossroads. One path is that of a regular Colorado College student, who could go skiing on the weekends, sleep in from time to time, go on exciting road trips around the west. The other path is the more challenging one. It involves discipline, sacrifice, and intense physical and emotional effort. That path is another season of college lacrosse. The really challenging moments of my athletic career don't happen on the field in close games, they happen in the offseason, when I could walk away from the sport for good, as so many of my teammates have done. Colorado has so many great things to offer *other than lacrosse*. But if I can find the strength to go all in, to fully commit myself to the team and coach who brought me to the school in the first place, I give myself a chance to perform once more. If I accept a little more discomfort in my life, then I get a shot at something really special, as Teddy Roosevelt said, that "triumph of high achievement."

The practice of "showing up" can begin at Camp. Here, we begin to sow those first acts towards the eventual reaping of our destinies. Here we are hardened in some ways, softened in others, strengthened in all. Camp has become a comfortable discomfort zone.

And on Sunday, we will leave. Faster than you can say "All In," we'll be out – out on our own, navigating through a much less structured life. A life with a lower total volume of performative moments. There will be no bugle call to rouse us from our slumber. There might not be a crew shell to make go. No table duty, no Glade Play.

Unless. Unless you ask for it. When you leave Camp, if you want to maintain the upward trajectory of your life that has come so organically here, you must ask for more. You must ask to be made uncomfortable. When you lose the support system of Pasquaney, you will be losing a system that has been deliberately built over 121 years to push you out of your comfort zone, into the man you are becoming. So you must ask for more. There are plays for which to audition, teams to join, bands to form, challenging classes to take. And each time you feel the threat of performance that became so familiar to you this summer, the lamplight of Pasquaney will be shining forth from inside you. Each time you reach a crossroads between the path of least resistance, and an uncomfortable path that might reveal that true glory, draw upon the practices you have begun here. Apply them. Sow that first act. Show up.

When you have invested time and energy and enthusiasm into an endeavor, when you feel that elemental human kick, then you will be alive. You can experience discomfort, as David Foster Wallace would say, as "sacred", and "on fire with the same force that lit

the stars.” You can experience discomfort as “sacred, on fire with the same force that lit the stars.”

And no matter how far away you get from the hillside above Lake Pasquaney, your spirit will be here. Camp has pushed you. Now you must be the push. But you don't have to make it all up yourself. There are institutions, teams, and organizations waiting for you all in the long offseason away from here. Good places with good people who will demand your best, and get great performances out of you. All we've got to do is SHOW UP and ask to be included.