

Robert D. Bulkeley
"Mr. Charlie"
Tree Talk – 08/10/12
Camp Pasquaney

As we go forward carrying Pasquaney with us into the lives we lead away from here, let us do so joyfully and celebrate all we have gained this summer and celebrate those who have gone before us and given us this great gift, this way of life embodied in this wonderful camp. I would like to celebrate in particular, Mr. Charlie, the third director and the one who is undoubtedly responsible for Mr. Vinnie, Dave Ryder, Kirk Phelps and my being here today and for inspiring in us a love of education in general and in this institution in particular.

In 1923 my father came to Pasquaney. In his years, Mr. Ned was Director, Mr. Teddy was his assistant and Mr. Charlie was a camper. Pop Watson was a seasoned veteran of the council. Gil Bovaird started his career of 52 years at the office. Expeditions were called camping parties and were on Belle and Cliffe Island across the lake. In 1926 the Watson Theatre was built and the theatre was turned into a dormitory called Tradition.

In 1953 when I came to Pasquaney, Mr. Charlie was director; Gil Bovaird and Pop Watson were senior members of the Council. Mr. Gem-John was a new boy also, sleeping in Birch where the youngest campers were. I slept in Upper Tradition, the old theatre stage next to Northern Stanwood Porches. We still went to the islands for camping and Notchpost and the Short Walk were visions yet to come. We had a rest period before lunch as well as after; the boathouse and shell houses were around the picnic area. The ball field, which had been leveled since my father's day, had deep center field where the ball house is today.

In 1959 when I came on the council, we were in the midst of dramatic physical changes. The Boathouse had been built and opened in 1956, and in 1959 the current infirmary was dedicated and the old one became the Alumni House. By 1960 Tradition had been torn down and Wilson and Jackson were built and Adams replaced the much larger Tradition. In 1964 the Rosemary Stanwood Library was built in her memory. Bathhouse expansion, the Shower House, the Shop labyrinth and Centennial, the historical museum and the Gemmill lodge came in the decades after 1976. In 1958, the Short Walk began with Mr. Charlie leading it and I had the privilege of being an alumnus guest hiker on it, and in 1960, Notchpost emerged as the jewel in the camping crown, building the Nancy Pond Trail and initiating a slow process of change culminating in our present day expeditions.

So much change, and yet Camp has grown much more than it has changed. Mr. Ned would recognize camp today and smile warmly looking at what has come of his vision 118 years ago. Mr. Charlie with his vibrant intellect, charismatic personality and deep moral fiber made this preservation and transformation possible. He was courtly and mannered, courteous and respectful but demanding that we all try our hardest and be our best. With his marvelous grin, eyes that both probed and sparkled, he drew us all into the compass of his ideas and values. It was hard to say “no” if Mr. Charlie asked something of anyone. We were taught the pride in a job well-done. Hard work was expected and our loyalty to Camp and Mr. Charlie made it happen.

As the Chapel is the heart of Camp, rightly its spiritual home, it is fitting that Mr. Charlie’s voice and words echo to this day in the minds of those that heard them. His sermons were spellbinding and reached the depths of our souls and invested in our minds a vision of what should and could be in our future lives. His story of the New Zealand runner and later physician Jack Lovelock’s caring all night long for a sick fellow runner before his own most important mile run taught us compassion and selflessness. Or Sir Philip Sydney’s waving away a desperately needed flagon of water, giving it to a foot soldier, saying, “His need is greater than mine.” Mr. Charlie’s sweeping hand gestures and his notes held in one hand were mechanics that brought grace and ease to his delivery.

Mr. Charlie seemed bigger than life and in many respects he was. He was sought out wherever he was: at Choate where he was assistant headmaster, dean of students, English teacher and track coach and when approached for headmasterships at Andover, Holderness and Woodberry Forest, he turned them down to stay at Pasquaney. John Wayne sought him out for breakfast at Lake Louise in the Canadian Rockies; Louis Armstrong teamed up with him in a jazz troupe that toured England. He was invited to dine with Pink Panther star, Peter Sellers on a trip to England in the mid-1960s. At Oxford, he had C.S. Lewis as a harsh tutor, whose words “Stanwood, you cannot write” moved him to becoming a writer extraordinaire, a gifted poet writing a modern Canterbury Tales prologue of Yale and Harvard alumni travelling on the train to the Y-H game in Cambridge, epithalamiums before weddings, and of course, the Portrait of Pasquaney.

Mr. Charlie celebrated the English language and we grew appreciative of its beauty, its poetry, and its power. Among his favorite lines were:

But at my back I always hear
Time's winged chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of vast eternity.

-Andrew Marvell's urging us to make time run, lest we waste our lives. Mr. Charlie loved words and imparted that love through a quirky set of expressions: "Gentle stillicide"—a light rain, or "Ucalygon"—someone whose neighbor's house was on fire. At morning inspection, he would ask "How are your symptoms segashuating, this fine morning?" to which we were supposed to reply, "I ain't saying nothin'" and he then tried to unbalance campers at attention with slight fake pushes of his hand, making it a humorous moment in the day's routine. Or repeatedly calling out "Don't forget your raincoats" as camp left Mem Hall. Or urging us to avoid the "gray mist" of aimless forgetfulness as we emerged from two weeks of camp fragmentation during the camping parties.

The poet and translator Dudley Fitts and Mr. Charlie wrote a verbal aptitude test that was widely used by the military during the Second World War. When he joined the Navy, he took a test that seemed very familiar and had the highest score ever—much celebrated by his superiors. Mr. Charlie, always honest to a tee, said of course he did well, he had written the test.

By his personal example and by his extraordinary verbal eloquence, Mr. Charlie imbued in campers and counsellors alike for 35 years a moral compass, a sense of purpose, a dedication to duty and service that became the substance of their characters for lifetimes. Our individual debts to Mr. Charlie are beyond all measure. I doubt Mr. Vinnie or I would be here without his example of what a life as a secondary school educator could mean to us and to others. "To serve them all my days long" seemed both noble and exciting. He literally went from school to camp without a real break. His example of hard work and dedication persists in the present generation. Mr. Charlie imparted these values to generations of us. He taught us honesty, pure honesty, always in all our relations and with ourselves. Mr. Charlie understood the moral aesthetics of nature: Just as we on this hillside today are reminded of the great words of John Keats, "Beauty is truth and truth beauty/ and that is all you need to know."

I am not sure Pasquaney would exist today if Mr. Charlie had not rebuilt enrollment and buildings after the Depression, Second World War and the Korean War. In 1953, we had 10 long tables with two table heads each and with just 15 counsellors, five COIs headed tables and ran the clubs. Dick Thorington as a

camper was the nature counsellor. Ten years later, camp was so overfull, he deferred all the 10 and 11 year olds a year and in one fell swoop camp's average age went from 12 ½ to 13 ½. He worked hard with both Onaway and Mowglis to get them to be non-profit camps, not owned by individuals, a move which I am sure saved both from extinction. And of course, with Owen Lindsay as the prime operative, Mayhew came into being. Mr. Charlie's vision led to the present extraordinary range of diversity in the camp society.

I was fortunate to be with Mr. Charlie at some times outside the Camp season and had the pleasure of knowing him more personally than was possible in the busy days of camp. On delivering the galley proofs of the Annual to him at Choate in October, 1962, we sat in eerie silence listening to the Cuba missile crisis play out, a moment of great fear and apprehension as the US and Russia came as close as ever to a nuclear confrontation. In 1961, after spending a final night at Kef Yali and dying of cancer, Pop Watson stopped by Eastbourne to say good-bye to Mr. Charlie and several of us who were there at the time. It was a touching moment indeed and Mr. Charlie was at his grandest showing his deep affection and gratitude to Pop. Mr. Charlie loved a good party, good food, and elegant living while at the same time appreciating the austere living at camp. He was never drawn into cheap commercialism; he taught us all to be repelled by it. In 1961 after camp, Rosemary Stanwood told how she was introduced to British society before the Queen Mother at the Court of St. James and she wanted their daughter Tessa to go to the cotillion in New Haven. Mr. Charlie stood by principle and said such was merely a commercial ploy for business by the caterers and the like, and he disapproved. I left for college wondering how that argument had played out, and when Tessa asked me to accompany her to the cotillion, I realized that his strong will had met its match in his magnificent wife.

Mr. Charlie had his passions. The clarinet coming from the shack could play a happy jig or sound a plaintive tone; it told us how he felt and struck a sympathetic chord in us all when he was down. He loved trains with the seasoned eye of the most serious train buff, counting the freight cars as they passed by the campsite across from the Inn Unique adjacent to Notchpost. — often it was well over one hundred. He started the Hebron fire department and was rarely happier than when he was training a high-pressure fire hose on the tops of the pine trees above the campfire at Water Sports. That is when the child in him came out and the noise of the pumps ran well into the night as the camp went to sleep. He was passionate in his dislike of jello and that led to the legendary jello episode where he turned the tables on us pranksters on the council and trustee friend Ted Church. On Ted's instructions, the chef Ernie LeBlanc made a bucket of jello, and Ted and I put it in

the wash basin of the shack during breakfast. The council was aware of this prank and gathered around the office to see Mr. Charlie's reaction. He went in and soon came out to talk with no mention of the offending jello. One counsellor offered to help him sweep out the shack hoping, much to the horror of the rest of us, to take care of the despised jello. Soon, Mr. Charlie told the COD he was going for a walk down the chapel path, and snuck in the shack by the window near the sink and rid it of the offending jello. Not able to restrain himself, Charlie Platt, a few minutes later, said, "well Mr. Charlie I insist on helping you" and then discovered the absence of the jello and told Mr. Charlie what had been done. At this time, Mr. Charlie was sitting on the porch with Dr. Bill Mauran and said that the person who did that was "a wonderful, most kind person, what a magnificent person he must be." Bill Mauran knew, but no one else did, that Mr. Charlie was talking about himself. He certainly had the last laugh.

Mr. Charlie, the ultimate Renaissance man—husband and father, educator, athlete, scholar, musician, poet and above all gentleman--, set standards and widened our vision of what a good life could and should be. To a large extent, he had an Elizabeth world view where the courtly gentleman by dint of strong character did noble deeds and brought valor to the community. He lived that life himself and inspired generations to do likewise. To this end, he believed in the once almost universal, ritualized adolescent retreat, a quest for spiritual and moral growth in a simplified environment where such development could flourish. Thus, he had a classical, philosophical foundation for the role Pasquaney plays in the lives of boys and young men. He believed this with a passion, and his words are quoted annually, later this evening included.

As we move forward, home, to school and beyond, live a full life joyfully, celebrate goodness and remember the great words of Tennyson:

Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
Gleams that untravell'd world, whose margin fades
For ever and for ever when I move.
How dull it is pause, to make an end,
To rust unburnish'd not to shine in use!
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

Celebrate joyfully the certainty of the values and ideals that Mr. Charlie embodied and which will guide us through the months to come and beyond.