

# Pasquaney *archives*

---



All of you are old enough to know that life is unpredictable. That stories don't always have happy endings. That the bad guys seem to win as often, or even more often, than the good guys in real life. That we, ourselves, are capable of being the bad guys. There are things that hurt us, scare us, and challenge us that we cannot explain, understand or seek justice to resolve.

Think of a time when you have felt weighed down by some burden. Perhaps by the death of someone you care for. Perhaps by the fear of something unknown. Perhaps by a decision where the right choice is unclear, and you don't know what to do.

In those times, whom do you turn to? Stop and think. Whom do you turn to?

I hope each of you is able to name at least one friend. We traditionally quote the verse from Ecclesiasticus, "A faithful friend is the medicine of life, and he that hath found such a one hath found a treasure." The medicine of life.

Think: Why do friends matter, why would they be the medicine of life?

Henry Ford, the inventor of the model-T automobile, once said, "My best friend brings out the best in me." Friendships elevate us, they make us more than ourselves.

Francis Bacon, who wrote a wonderful essay on friendship nearly 400 years ago in 1612, described three fruits, or benefits of friendship. The first is that friendship creates "Peace in the affections." When our emotions overwhelm us, friendship allows for "the ease and discharge of the fullness and swellings of the heart ... no receipt openeth the heart, but a true friend; to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes, suspicions, counsels, or whatsoever lieth upon the heart to oppress it." You can tell a friend anything. Talking with a friend might not magically solve your problem, but it alleviates what Bacon calls "the suffocation of the heart." Friendship "redoubleth joys and cutteth griefs in half."

Bacon's second fruit of friendship is "Support of the judgment." How many times have you had a problem and had a friend help you think it through? Friends help reorient our moral compass; they are not afraid to tell us when we are wrong. As Bacon says, "There is no such flatterer as is a man's self; and there is no such remedy against flattery of a man's self, as the liberty of a friend." I think that is what Oscar Wilde meant when he said, "A true friend stabs you in the front." If friends think we are doing something wrong, or have some flaw, they do not gossip about it behind our backs to others; they tell us.

It takes courage to tell our friends the truth. To be a friend, and to lead, we must be responsible for more than just ourselves. It does not matter if you are a quiet person who leads with a whisper, or a more charismatic person who enjoys the spotlight, or somewhere in between. If a friend needs to hear your voice of reason, it is not your opportunity, it is your responsibility, to speak up. If a community needs direction, it is your responsibility to lead it.

Bacon's lastly calls friendship an "Aid and bearing in all occasions." Friends do for us what we cannot do for

ourselves. A true friend is “a second self,” or as Aristotle put it “a single soul living in two bodies.”

Think: If friends are so important, how do we make them?

Emerson said, “The only reward of virtue is virtue; the only way to have a friend is to be one.”

To have a friend, be one. That does not mean if you are friendly toward everyone, that everyone will be friendly toward you. However kindness, as Mr. Vinnie discussed last week, casts a wide net for friendship. From the many acquaintances you make through kindness, deep friendships can be distilled.

Dale Carnegie, whose book *How to Win Friends and Influence People* I recommend, said “You can make more friends in two weeks by being interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to make other people interested in you.” [repeat]

Mr. Vinnie is a master of this technique. Listen to his conversations with people he is meeting for the first time, or with people he is enjoying lunch with at his table. He does not talk about himself much; instead he asks other people about themselves. He listens carefully to what they say, then he asks them more follow-up questions. And he remembers what they say later on because he is genuinely interested. This skill of talking with others may not come naturally to you. So what. At one point in all of your lives you were pretty bad at walking upright and you all seem to have learned that skill pretty well by now. If you want to get better at something, remember the answer to the old New York City joke: “How do you get to Carnegie Hall? Practice.” Practice talking to other people about themselves and you will find it very enjoyable and a gateway to making friends.

What can get in the way of our making friends? What drives friends from us?

Differences: We can close the door to some of our best friendships if we don’t get beyond our differences. We wear uniforms here and don’t bring many possessions with us, but that doesn’t hide that we are all different people from different backgrounds, with different preferences and different beliefs. “If you judge people, you have no time to love them,” wrote Mother Teresa. As you grow up, it is tempting to develop your identity with narrow labels and categories. “I am an athlete,” one person might say, “I’m no good at math.” “I am an intellectual,” another, “I am not a good hiker.” It is also tempting to exclude people based on those labels and have the football team sit at one table during lunch and the math club sit at another. Beware that you do not categorize yourself out of a true friend.

Impatience: Sometimes we are impatient, and don’t let friendships develop. George Washington wrote, “True friendship is a plant of slow growth, and must undergo and withstand the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to the appellation.”

When I first met Owen Fink, who today is one of my best friends, and who brought me to Pasquaney, I did not like him at all. I thought he was snobbish and mean and had no outside jump shot until I really got to know him. I now know he is kind, thoughtful, inclusive and the most brilliant mind I know. (For the record I was right about the outside jump shot, though).

Being controlling: This trait will make people flee from you. In his book *The Friendship Factor*, Alan McGinnis has a test for ourselves to see if we fall into that behavior pattern: • Do we usually end up going to the movie or restaurant that I prefer? • Do I enjoy correcting the factual errors in other people’s

conversations? • Do I use humor to put down my friends? • Do I have to know more about a topic than others to feel comfortable discussing it? Mr. Vinnie usually adds: • Am I always talking about myself? • Do I mock others for doing what they believe to be right? • Do I dominate and control the conversation? • Does a duty or activity have to be run my way?

Oftentimes we feel the need to control things when we are scared. Sometimes being afraid that you won't make a friend can lead to controlling behavior, which drives friends away – a vicious circle. The more you try, the more you push people away. Instead, strive to acknowledge your fears, but don't let them control you, or make you want to control others.

Not staying in touch: As Samuel Johnson said, "The most fatal disease of friendship is gradual decay." Friendship takes work to maintain. It is like a garden; you have to make sure to water it and pull out the weeds now and again. The older I get, the less I value the objects in my life and the more I value the people in it.

Mr. Vinnie spoke about the opportunities we have this summer in his first chapel talk. Think of the opportunity you have here to make friends. Not acquaintances, not people you only know in passing, but deep, life-long friendships. Most philosophers will tell you that you are lucky to find one good friend in a lifetime; that we can enjoy the fellowship of many, but the friendship of only a few. Pasquaney improves our odds tremendously, both here, and away from camp.

Often friendships are nurtured by shared experiences. Think back on the last week's expeditions and the unique journey of your group. Did you get to know someone a little better by sharing a tent with him? By hiking or paddling alongside him? You still have five weeks in front of you to share a world of experience with a friend – whether on a day hike, out in a sailboat, shagging fly balls on Hobbs, sitting around the dorm talking, or on the transformative Long or Short Walk.

More so than any place I know, Pasquaney encourages and fosters friendships across ages. Away from the distractions of the world we have the chance to see a person's essence - their inner nature - and to connect with it. In school, nearly all of my friends were in the same grade as I was. At Pasquaney, my friendships range over seven decades. Seven decades. My older friends advise me through each new phase of my life; my younger friends keep me inspired with their dreams and potential. Do not miss this rare and wonderful chance you have to make these friends here; it is a gift you will treasure always.

Christopher McCandless, whose story some of you may know from the book *Into the Wild*, hiked into the Alaskan wilderness in 1992 with little food and almost no equipment, looking to live in solitude. He found an old abandoned bus to call home, and for 112 days he tried to live off the land. Losing weight from a lack of food, he tried to return to civilization, but found the river he needed to cross too swollen. He continued to starve, and perhaps became ill from eating toxic seeds. Only twenty-four years old, he died in his sleeping bag, alone, weighing only 67 pounds. In one of his final journal entries he wrote, "Happiness is only real when shared." Happiness is only real when shared.

No man is an island.

Let us share happiness with one another this summer through the medicine of friendship. To have a friend, be one. Help thy brother's boat across and lo, thine own has reached the shore.

Let us rise and sing hymn number 126.