

## What Brings Us Back A Fireside Chat by Colin Cohan

There's a good reason you see so many former campers and counselors come back here to visit each summer. It's a reason that unites all those who spend time here. The same reason Justin Calfo will be joining us tomorrow. The same reason we saw Harry and Beau last week, and Riley last night. It's the same reason you'll see me next year, or even next session for some. This place we find ourselves in each and every summer is more than just a camp. Though to you younger campers it may seem like just a place to have fun and get away from your parents for a few weeks out the year, this place is truly so much more than that. Lots of camps have canoeing, sailing, archery, basketball, and tennis. Lots of camps do silly things like dorm skits or plays. And lots of camps go on camping expeditions or canoe trips. Yet for some reason, no camp can really compare to this place. There's something about this place that just sticks with you. Something that no one ever seems to lose or let go of. Something that brings us back year after year to this little log cabin in the woods.

I guess the only real place to start in trying to explain why this place is so wonderful is from the beginning. As most of you probably know, Huger, our fearless leader, went to camp just down the road from us at Pasquaney. Yeah, we all love to make fun of Pasquaney and imagine beating them in all contests of manliness and strength, but what you guys may not realize is that Masquebec is founded on the same principles as that camp down road. In making this camp, Huger used his memory of Pasquaney as the blueprint and foundation. Much as they do, we focus on character building through group activity and really striving to find our best selves. Many of our traditions are taken straight from Pasquaney, such as Chapel, Tub, Duties, and Solo. Despite these similarities and parallels, however, Masquebec still has an edge over Pasquaney, and that edge comes from our size.

With a max of 16 campers, and a usual session of around 10 these days, we have one of the smallest camps in existence, definitely the smallest I've ever heard of. I'm sure many of you have had that weird moment when you try to explain camp to one of your friends from home for the first time. Reactions usually range from, "only 10 campers? How can that be fun?" to, "what a weird camp." Then you spend the next few minutes trying to explain to them what makes camp so amazing, but nothing you say can really capture what truly makes it so special. So eventually you just kind of give up and accept that no one can really understand it without experiencing it firsthand. And that's exactly what makes this camp so amazing: that inexplicable factor that keeps us all together, united as one big family summer after summer. A big, mostly male family, ever changing with new campers joining and old campers moving on. And that is the beauty of Masquebec Hill.

Because of our small size, we have a level of intimacy that no place else in the world can match. I've made some of the best friends I've ever had up here, friendships that will last forever, with memories that still put me in stitches to think about. There's something about spending three weeks of every summer with the same 10 or 12 kids that brings everyone so much closer to each other than anywhere else. I think it's that, because of the size, there really are no secrets that we keep from each other. Everyone is so perfectly free to be themselves. That's always been one of my favorite parts of camp: the total freedom from all the pressures and troubles of school and home; just a time when you can really be exactly who you are, without fear of being judged or made fun of. And the greatest part of being yourself is that only you can be yourself. Everyone is different. It's those differences that set us apart and make us who we are. And, in such a closely knit environment we learn from each other's differences and, a lot of the time, we even tend to pick up those differences and they become engrained as part of

ourselves as well. Looking at the old greats and legends like Harry, Beau, Rick, and Mikey, I see some of the most well-rounded, adaptable, friendly, and genuine people I've ever encountered. And all of them will credit this place greatly for transforming them into the men they are today. I know I sure do. I would say without hesitation that, besides my home and parents, no place or people has affected my character and the way I view the world the way camp has. Camp has given me the greatest 10 summers of my life. It's given me a chance every summer to forget about the stresses of normal life and just be a kid and goof around with some of my best friends for three weeks every summer. But even more, Camp has given me my sense of humor, my values, my love of nature, my confidence, and memories that I couldn't ever forget.

As I come to the end of my camp career, it's real sad, to be honest. This place has had such a huge influence on me and I don't know "what I'm gonna do" without it. But at the same time, I know that I will never really be 'without camp'. The memories I've made, the friends I've come to love, and lessons I've learned will always be with me, and, to me, that's really what camp is. Camp is sitting by the ping pong table for hours on end, talking about life and problems and girls. Camp is lying on the raft, trying to find the most elaborate shapes in the clouds. Camp is telling stupid stories around the fire on Belle Island. Camp is growing up, learning from each other, and finding out who we really are, all under the disguise of having fun with friends. And that's truly what makes this place so special, what makes all those old counselors visit each summer, what unites us all as one big family, what brings us back, year after year, to this little log cabin in the woods.

– Colin Cohan (Camper & Counselor 2004-2013)