

*Excerpts from Closing Remarks by Director Ben Swan at the Farewell Picnic, Campfire Circle, Pine Island Camp, August 10, 2008*

Welcome to the closing ceremonies of Pine Island Camp's 106th season here on this beautiful island. As always, I have many people to thank for making this season we are celebrating such a great one...

...I also want to thank all of you parents sitting here today. I want to thank you all for making the effort to join us (and many of you have traveled a great distance to be here) to celebrate this great Pine Island summer and the many and varied accomplishments of your boys. I want to thank you for having the wisdom and courage to allow your boys to spend six weeks here as part of Pine Island Camp. Knowing your boys as I do, I know how difficult it is to let them go, especially for the first time, knowing that your communication with them will probably be infrequent and perhaps frustratingly brief.

During this summer two different newspaper articles were sent to me, one from the *Boston Globe*, and the other from the *New York Times*. Both articles described, with some dismay, how many, if not most, summer camps have changed the ways in which they communicate with parents and the way in which parents communicate with both the camp and their children who are away at camp. You may be surprised to hear that at most camps campers receive emails and faxes and have unlimited access to phones so they can call their parents any time. There are websites that are updated by the hour with hundreds of photos posted every day. Parents make multiple visits to camp to check on their children. And, incredibly enough, there are webcams...

Both articles were essentially about how summer camps have been changing their communications policies to respond to the increasing difficulty parents are having in letting their children go, or perhaps more accurately *letting go* of their children. Both articles also quickly pointed out the irony of how this increase in the types and frequency of communication with children who are away at camp undermines the very purpose, and in my experience, the single most important element of going away to camp... And that, of course, is...going *AWAY* to camp. It sounds so obvious and so simple, but of course it is not.

The parents described in the *Times* article who sent two cell phones with their son to camp (in case one was confiscated or didn't work) did so with the best of intentions, but of course were working against the very reason their son went to camp to begin with. The parents described in the *Globe* article who checked the web a dozen times a day, and then called if they saw their son in a photo and he wasn't smiling, did so for two reasons: they could, and they cared deeply about their son's happiness.

At the risk of sounding smug, or perhaps even out of touch, I just want to say that I am very happy with, and proud of, the way in which Pine Island Camp has faithfully preserved the crucial *going away* aspect of going away to camp. And we have done so not because we don't want to go to the trouble to install a web cam at the Pumphouse or up in Honk Hall, or to field emails and faxes daily and to respond to them, but because we believe that your sons' experience here is vastly more valuable for the *lack* of those things.

I wish we, and you, could have our cake and eat it too, that you could have been a fly on the canvas walls here this summer and observed your boys' every moment, because during the past six weeks your boys have done and seen the most wonderful things. Some of the things they have done and seen were and are extraordinary. One of your sons, an eleven-year-old, returned from a mountain trip and said to Emily at the dinner table, "If my mother could have seen where I was, she would have cried."

And some of these things they did and saw were not easy. In fact, many of them were hard, or confusing, or even scary. I remember not too long ago walking past the dory docks at the end of the morning activity period and seeing one of your sons sitting in the stern of a rowboat, his head in his hands, in tears of frustration while the rowing counselor gently tried to encourage him. (He *did* pass that docking and mooring requirement a few days later.)

But most of the things your boys saw and did were quite small and perhaps could even be described as ordinary: participating in, or running, a campfire game; helping cook a meal on the trail; discovering the variety of life in a tide pool; taking a skinny dip before bed; hitting a bull's eye in riflery or archery; learning to tie a sheet bend.

One small but memorable moment comes to mind. I was helping with Activity Sign-up one morning. This is a particularly busy and sometimes confusing exercise. I am not usually involved and found myself a little over my head as one of your sons toward the end of the line was trying to figure out his two activities for the day. Things got muddled as I was suggesting one thing and then another, trying to put together a day that he would enjoy. After a considerable amount of messing around on my part, suggesting things that wouldn't work, he asked, "Ben, what would be easiest for *you*?"

Whether they were big or small or spectacular or ordinary, all of the myriad things your boys did this summer are wonderful...and made more wonderful because *you* have allowed your sons to do and to see these things on their *own*. I believe this is the great gift that you have given them by letting them go and being content with those hastily written letters that I know from my own experience you have already put somewhere very safe.

And take heart, especially you new parents. You will learn much more about your son's summer this coming year. At the most unexpected times he will suddenly be telling a story, and you will be a fly on that canvas wall.

All of these wonderful experiences - big, small, amazing and ordinary - have added up to what I sincerely hope, and sincerely believe, has been a summer of growth, learning, and a huge amount of fun. So I want to thank you parents, and I want to thank you *boys* for being the wonderful, brave, ingenious, imaginative, funny, thoughtful and kind people who have made this summer another truly great one in a long, long line of great Pine Island summers...