

# Pemigewassett Newsletter

*Summer 2010 Number Seven*

With 2011 applications ready to go on-line in a week, it seems an appropriate time to cast a glance back at the past season – this time in the company of a group of stellar Seniors for whom 2010 was the last of many rich years together as campers. It's become a Pemi Week custom on the last Sunday of the season for a representative sampling of our fifteen-year-olds to speak to the assembled camp family about their time at Pemi. Over the last half-dozen years, we've made substantial efforts to enhance the natural mentoring role of our older boys with various programmatic offerings, like the Senior-Junior campfires or special mountain trips and cook-outs matching our youngest cabins with our oldest. As a nine-year old said just recently, "Pemi is a place where anybody can talk to anybody else," and the Seniors' willingness to reach out to the younger boys plays a crucial role in forging that sort of trusting and caring community.

Hence, on the morning of August 8<sup>th</sup> – at the dawn of yet another of the perfect summer days that seemed especially to grace the 2010 season – we all filed into the Lodge to hear from a group tapped by Charlie Malcolm to speak about their years at camp. Charlie kicked things off by reminiscing about the recent wedding of long-time Pemi camper and staff member James Finley, who proposed to his bride on Rte. 25A between camp and Wentworth and who invited roughly twenty-five members of the Pemi family to the July festivities in York Harbor, Maine. Charlie recalled the entire group serenading Kate Gillen, the bride, with Pemi's own "Bloomer Girl Song," and remarked that many of the closest friendships in his life had been forged at our camp. At a gathering such as James and Kate's, he said, the ease with which those friendships are resumed after years of separation is truly remarkable. He then turned to Nick Barber, Matt Cloutier, Harry Eifler, Alex Fauver, Teddy Gales, Peter Ionno, Nate Kraus, Timmy Ogle, Owen Ritter, and Gus Walsh to answer a few questions. They were simple and direct ones, and the first answers were predictably spare and cautious, as boys unaccustomed to addressing 250 others found their footing.

Charlie: "So, did any of you experience homesickness when you first arrived?" Nick Barber: "I did." (Quiet chuckle around the room as one of the most confident



and accomplished young men at camp admits to this so readily.) "But I was in the Junior Camp, and I got comfortable pretty quickly being part of a little community within the big community."

Charlie: "What's the biggest change you've experienced at Pemi?" Peter Ionno: "I got a lot taller." (A bigger chuckle) "So I guess I get to be part of things like this." (Charlie nods.)

"What advice would you give to the younger guys?" Owen Ritter: "To make the most of every opportunity here. Say, the Nature Program. Every day I see things I should have done and wish I had more years to take advantage of." Matt Cloutier: "Yeah, the Nature Program has been terrific for me – pinning a butterfly – or, even better, helping someone else up there. I learned to step outside my comfort zone here, and maybe to help others do the same." Harry Eifler: "All sorts of things open up here, even if you feel you've done them already. I took four years of classical music lessons, but the chances to do other kinds of music here have been amazing."

"How would you compare athletics here to athletics at home, or at school?" Timmy Ogle: "There are more opportunities here – more sports, more levels. You can prepare for, say, the soccer season at home and broaden yourself in other ways." Matt: "It makes a difference sharing a cabin with your team-mates – different in the cabin, and different on the field."

"If you could start all over at Pemi, what would you do more of?" Teddy Gales: "I absolutely hated hiking until I got to Lower 6." (More chuckles) "Now I love it. Katahdin? The best trip ever, man. And the Allagash? It was just amazing." (Other boys on those trips nod enthusiastically. Younger boys seem to take note, file that away.)

"What do you think about the difference between the half and full seasons?" Alex Fauver: "This is my first full season, and it's just lots more of a good thing. I got to work much harder on soccer, and my water-skiing really improved." Nick laughs: "I had an argument with my Mom. She wanted me to go to a jazz camp too. I

told her that at Pemi you can do everything. Love everything. Try everything – sports, music, shop. It’s so varied, every day can be different.”

“Why do you think this year’s fifteens bought in to Pemi so completely? I mean last year’s Seniors were great, but you guys really leaned into it!” Owen: “For me, the Allagash canoe trip was key. There we were, out in the middle of nowhere. Nobody else around. The interdependence, the togetherness, it was just amazing!” (More nods from Owen’s trip-mates up front. You can begin to feel the atmosphere in the room take on some kind of charge. The words start to summon facial expressions that speak for themselves, the emotions to radiate palpably.) Teddy (an eight-year veteran who will win the Founder’s Citizenship Trophy in just four more days): “I have a family at home. I have a family at Pemi. And this is my last year.” (He looks at all the others sitting there with him) “I just love you guys!” (Shy smiles all around, and more than one forefinger dabs at an eye.) Peter: “The 14s and 15s are much closer this year. I don’t know why. We just are, and it’s great.” (Charlie turns to this year’s 14s in the audience: “You guys got that, right? Next year. You’re the fifteens!”) Nate Kraus: “Like Peter said. I think being positive is infectious!” (Nods all round, in front; in the audience.)



Charlie: “So Pemi’s been going through some transitions for the last several years. What do you think are the enduring Pemi qualities? What do you want to see here in thirty years?” Owen: “Traditions. Whatever. Polar Bears. Singing in the Messhall. The tennis fence.” (Everyone laughs.) “I want to drive in here in thirty years and see the tennis fence right where it is – and kids playing.” Matt: “Everyone can come back in thirty years. You can *always* come back.” Nick: “Pemi has no expectations. You can try new things, just be

who you are. But there *are* expectations.” Charlie: “What are they?” Nick: “To be the Pemi Kid.” (Major laughter throughout the room). “Try new things, like I said. Reach out to the younger campers. Do it all.” Charlie: “Be leaders!” (Nick agrees.)

“So, lots of you guys were Juniors. What Seniors did you look up to then?” Peter: “Teddy was actually my idol in Junior 4.” (Teddy looks shocked, blushes, laughs.) “Seriously!” (Teddy laughs some more.) “I wanted to be that kind of spark for everybody else that Teddy’s always been,” (Everyone at the front of the room nods. Everyone in the messhall will nod when Teddy’s name is read on Thursday night when he is tapped as “The best all-around camp citizen who has given the most to camp beyond the line of duty.”) Nick: “Brian Forster. Brian played the sax. He was so much better than I was, so much older. But he never talked down to me. It was like I was his equal, almost.”

Gus Walsh breaks in spontaneously to ask the other boys if they’re planning to return to Pemi as staff members. Owen: “Definitely! Definitely!” Peter: “Are you kidding? When you can be part of all this . . . and get paid!” (More laughter. But it’s true. Pemi does pay its staff!) Matt: “I don’t think anyone here wants to grow up.” (Matt looks around. The room has gone completely quiet. Perhaps the birds are singing outside, but all eyes are on this remarkable group of young men, and it’s almost like we’re all holding our breaths together. This strong and fearless athlete, this infectious enthusiast of the Nature Program, this wonderful waiter to the boys at Junior Two goes on.) “I couldn’t live without Pemi.” (Teddy nods at Matt and leans over to embrace Harry, for two years his fellow performer in the wonderfully comedic mime group, Geese in the Shadows.) “I want to perform with this kid forever. I want to come back,” says Teddy, the tears flowing from his eyes, “. . . and do this all over again!”

How we wish they could. But the torch must be passed. Who better to be passing it than these boys?

Charlie nods at the group, who hug each other now like the quiet celebrants of a great mystery. “Thanks, guys. Thanks.”

■ Tom Reed, Jr.