

Pemigewassett Newsletter

Summer 2008 Number Eight

The relentless pace of Pemi Week and closing have kept us from the keyboard for a spell now; but as the reddening maples along the soccer field declare more emphatically every day the approach of autumn, we finally have a moment to bid adieu to the wonderful Pemi season of 2008. Despite some challenges on the weather front, it's been a banner year, and your parting words last Saturday and many e-mails and notes that have followed suggest that most of the boys went home with a solid sense of accomplishment and time well spent. One of the hallmarks of the sense of community and open affection that exists at Pemi is always evident as the Darien/New York bus fills with its passengers in front of the Senior Lodge and the stoic lads of Pemigewassett embrace each other –many with tears welling in their eyes – and say good bye for the winter or who knows how long. This year, the scene was as moving as ever, and the clouds had the good grace to stay clear of our valley in tribute.

Pemi Week had started the Saturday before, heralded in by Brad Jones Day and the unique sleep-in which commemorates one our 1930s alums and his great appreciation for the merits of a good night's sleep. The afternoon brought Games Day, as cabins erupted from their cabins after Rest Hour in festive outfits and raced down to the soccer field for the various event – and for a complimentary cold soda and candy bar each. As always, Cold Water Musical Chairs kicked off the event as a huge crowd favorite. One representative from each cabin circled warily as Jack Stratton provided the tunes, scuttling wildly for a seat when the music stopped. He who couldn't find a chair was obliged to seat himself in a tub of icy water, much to the delight of everyone else. From the smiles on their faces, we'd judge they were none the worse for wear. All-camp victor Daniel Traver, dry as a desert stone, was positively beaming. Sack and Crab-Walk Races, a Spoon-and-Egg Relay, and an Egg-Toss followed. Climactically, the Jello-Eating Contest of years past gave way to a less digestively-challenging Skittle-Eating competition, with the quantity of sugar consumed vastly reduced but the intake complicated by the use of chopsticks. It was quickly apparent who was a frequenter of Chinese restaurants and who was not, and David Neustadt emerged from the fray like

someone who had spent most of his fourteen years in Beijing. Evening brought the Feature Movie, this year the hilarious *School Of Rock*, which went down especially well in a year when Pemi's Music Program has perhaps never been stronger. Making the event all the more memorable was a supply of candied popcorn sent most generously by Lori Sandler, Adam's mom and founder of Divvies.

Following days featured a Pentathlon for all divisions, a Triathlon, a Cabin Soccer Tournament, a very successful and urbane opening of the 2008 Arts Exhibition, and Sailing, Archery, Kayaking and Swimming Championships. Despite the soggy courts, Jeff Greene managed to bring the Divisional Tennis Tournaments to a conclusion, featuring many matches of a particularly high quality, both for skilled play and for sportsmanship. The sizeable crowd watching the finals of the Senior competition between Matt Billet and Sam Ubersax was treated to a remarkable display of talent and determination, as Matt ultimately prevailed over the top-ranked player on the 15's team. Always a fine sportsman, Sam gave his all both to the contest and to his congratulations at its end.

Tuesday evening marked the opening night of this year's Gilbert and Sullivan production, *The Mikado*. Betsy Reed, the force behind our shows from their inception in 1951, was still very much present in the wings, lending her support and expertise here and there in indispensable ways. But the 2008 production team of Ian Axness, Charlie Houmard, and Penelope Reed Doob took the formal hand-off from Betsy in ways that suggest that the vigor and quality of the company is unquestionably in fine hands. Dan Willard and Ben Chaimberg were exceptional as the romantic leads Nanki-Poo and Yum-Yum, Dan's performance being all the more historic for the fact that he'd himself played Yum-Yum in 2005. Oba Bonner brought professional poise and vocal polish to the role of Pish-Tush, while Larry Davis once again excelled in the role for which he seems to have been born – Pooh-Bah. Amongst the other players, Dorin Dehls displayed her bona fide operatic chops as Peep-Bo (in acting and singing alike), and Pete Smith forcefully announced his potential for a career in comic drag roles. Long-time G&S lead Jamie Andrews delivered a masterful comedic performance as Ko-Ko, the scheming and shamelessly resourceful Lost High Executioner. But other sure Oscar nods must go to the Mikado and his

bloodthirsty side-kick Katisha, played by the normally affable Rob Follansbee and the gentle Welshman Cai Parry-Jones. Rob's gymnastically-threatening antics during his signature song about letting "the punishment fit the crime" sent Juniors in the front row diving for cover, while Cai's extraordinarily powerful falsetto filled the hall with "her" anger and anguish alike, all in the service of an hilarious characterization that brought the house down two nights in a row. Aply backed by excellent male and "female" choruses, the principals delivered two performances that many in the audience (and cast!) felt ranked with the very best in Pemi history! Kudos to all!

Thursday's highlight was the Final Banquet – turkey and all the fixin's (including impossibly succulent fresh corn on the cob from Farmer Hodge's just across the river in Vermont) followed by recognition and awards for everything from cabin inspection to season-long achievement and camp citizenship. Many of the real rewards and recognitions for the 2008 season will come in the form of the confidence and subtle satisfaction gained by the boys as a result of their time here and may become richer over time as recollections of the fun of the summer give way to a wise sense of other good things that happened here. But the sense of communal unity and appreciation that prevailed as Jay McChesney was singled out for the Founders' Citizenship Trophy as the boy who has given the most to Pemi "beyond the line of duty" was sublime. It's at times like these that even the youngest camper can, we hope, feel the strength of our mission not only to build character but also to encourage a dedication to others. As always, we concluded the evening with a hearty rendition of Doc Reed's *Marching Song*. But the sights and sounds of the waiters cleaning up afterwards, hard at work but happily discussing the virtues of the award choices, wrapped things up with their own propriety.

Friday was for completing a few last activities and for packing. At 4:30, however, we all filed into the Lodge for the final installment of *Bean Soup*. Editors James Finley and Jack Stratton have done a superb job this summer carrying this venerable institution forward, every week filling the chairs with attentive bodies – and in turn filling those bodies with mirth. The final ladling, however, traditionally involves a modification of the weekly "Awards" to directors, counselors, staff members, and campers for achievements of a dubious and laughable sort. Instead, the editors turn serious for

an unwonted moment and say a few perceptive and moving things about people who contributed uniquely to Pemi, though perhaps not in ways that might be recognized in any other forum. The tradition provides a unique look "behind the scenes" at Pemi, and because of that, we'd like to reproduce a portion of James's and Jack's tribute here. So with no further ado, their comments on the *Bean Soup* "Camper of the Year."

Unlike the awards last night, which each has its own inscription, the Camper of the Year award does not. That gives us less latitude than you might think, though, as most of the Pemi community seems to have a fairly established view of the criteria for an awarding of Camper of the Year. Simply, the Camper of the Year has had, as much as is possible, the ideal Pemi season. As such, this award seems to combine and conflate the four major awards from last night: the Courage Award, the Achievement Trophy, and the Divisional and Founders' Citizenship Trophies. The ideal summer would, in theory, see the camper taking full advantage of camp's broad program, bringing joy and self-esteem to others, giving to camp beyond the line of duty, and doing all of this with an underpinning of courage that gives strength to others.

Our winner has done all of this. He has spread himself far across the camp program, from the Junior Lodge as the utility infielder of Silver Cornet Band, to Baxter State Park, encouraging other seniors to join him for another trip to Katahdin. His performance in The Mikado earned rave reviews and he balanced rehearsal commitments with baseball and soccer practices. His attitude in the cabin offers the perfect balance of excited energy and mature self-possession. As the back-up bugler and part-time Sunday Meeting speaker, he has given much time and effort to camp. As the leader of the lodge crew, he has given even more time and effort to Pemi as well as leading a group of his peers with dedication and responsibility. Over the course of the summer, our winner has shown the poise and maturity of a staff-member, while maintaining the excitement and energy of a camper, coming quite close to the ideal Pemi season.

Your camper of the year, Dan Willard

Yet again, an overwhelmingly well-received citation, and one which turned on the central realization that the fabled "Pemi Kid" is as often running to the Music

Room or the Nature Lodge as to the Athletic Field or Messhall.

The evening's penultimate event was the Final Campfire, all the more meaningful for being the first such gathering of the second session that we were actually able to hold outdoors. As always, the quality was high, for musical performance, skits, and stories alike. But the highlight was unquestionably 2008's fifteen-year-olds banding together to sing *Leavin' on a Jet Plane* in apt and moving tribute to their time together, which for many of them stretched back five to seven summers. "Don't know when I'll be back again . . . Oh, babe, I hate to go!" To see them standing there in the glow of the fire, arms around each others' shoulders, was rich beyond description. Then came *The Campfire Song* with its timeless and sincere expression of hope that "good will of the heart may offset mistakes of the head," catered cabin parties, and finally sleep in our still little valley. 2008 has been a very good year.

A few words about the future, near- and longer-term:

Final reports on full-season and second-session campers will be coming to you from Jon and Tom over the next two or three weeks. The envelopes will also contain questionnaires on your sons' (and your own) Pemi experience this summer. We encourage you to fill them out promptly and return them to us in the enclosed stamped and self-addressed envelopes. Your ongoing role in making Pemi as good an institution as it can be is greatly valued. We're always eager to communicate with you by other means as well, so please don't hesitate to e-mail or call.

Applications for the 2009 season will be sent out to veteran families in mid- to late-October, with mailings to new families following in a couple of weeks. The date for next summer are these: Opening Day, June 27th; Changeover Day between First and Second Sessions, July 21st; Closing Day, August 15th.

We'd like to express our thanks to all of the parents who have volunteered to host Pemi Open Houses this Fall and Winter. We look forward to being in touch quite soon in order to firm up the roster for these off-season reunions. Your help in keeping the Pemi family in touch and growing is indispensable, and it's hard to overestimate the extent of our gratitude.

Finally, we're proud to announce the publication this month of *Camp Pemigewasset: The First 100 Years*, a stunning hard-cover review of Pemi's inaugural century written by Tom Reed, Sr. and Rob Grabill – and featuring hundreds of striking photographs of Pemi's past and present. We'll be sending you all an e-mail with instructions for ordering within the next several days. There will also be a link on the website to help you secure your copy of this remarkable volume.

With that, we'll conclude the in-season portion of our correspondence. Thanks to all Pemi parents for entrusting their sons to our care – and to all of the boys for filling what is undeniably a beautiful site with a profound vitality that only they can bring. As we continue to put the camp to bed in preparation for the coming snows, we celebrate the spirited community that they will re-embodiment this coming June.

-Tom Reed, Jr. and Jon Fauver, *Directors*