

**SPS Class of 1970 Retreat
Yale Forestry Camp, Great Mountain Forest, Norfolk, CT
June 8-10, 2012**

Summary of “Self-Actualization” Discussion with Sims Wyeth, Sat. June 9

Sims Wyeth, Class of 1969, led the group in a discussion, based on the concept of self-actualization, as developed by Abraham Maslow. The initial part of the discussion centered on the on-line survey completed by many classmates. The survey asked people to reflect on their personal and professional lives and to indicate to what extent they had achieved their goals or reached their potential in life. Sims used graphs to summarize the survey results and to provide a profile of “self-actualization” for our class.

Responses to the survey results focused on the question of how we, as a class, currently define “happiness.” During this part of the discussion George Host shared the story of how his father has been living intentionally with terminal cancer and how his father’s attitude and actions in response to his condition have impacted others. George’s reflections on his father’s response to cancer brought about a “reframing” of the standard definitions of “happiness.” There seemed to be an emerging consensus that becoming self-actualized might have more to do with transcending standard definitions of “happiness” as financial or professional success, emotional fulfillment or stability in life. This discussion raised the question for many of us about how our attitudes (e.g. mental, physical, emotional, spiritual) about or responses to life events may be a determining factor in becoming self-actualized. [Editorial observation: One thinks of Victor Frankl’s groundbreaking book, *Man’s Search For Meaning* (Frankl’s first-person account of how he survived the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz)].

Sims then invited people to break up into groups of three and, for several minutes, to discuss the question, “What are you not doing that you really want to do?” Here is a summary of the responses (without names in order to protect the innocent):

- I would like to have more discipline in my life – self-discipline, spiritual discipline, discipline in my relationship with others, and discipline in finding self-expression through art. I tend to avoid conflict and confrontation with people and I would also like to be more disciplined in dealing with these situations.
- I would like to experience more autonomy in my life. That is to say, I would like to exercise more control in the choices I make and not spend so much of my life dealing with “shoulds.” I feel a sense of urgency to take advantage of opportunities to live up to my potential. It’s scary to say that choices are “my choices.”
- Recently, I have been addressing the things we don’t tend to talk about in families. Specifically, I have been talking with my children about my will and estate plans.
- I spend most of my time solving other people’s problems, but I feel that I’m not getting the answers I need. I would like to manage my time better to explore this.
- I struggle with the challenge of connecting with people who aren’t happy. It’s frustrating to me that many people I know aren’t happy and I’d like to be able to help them to have a more positive outlook on life.

- I want to write a book of historical fiction about my father's life.
- I want to do a better job of making choices based on intentional living.
- I'd like to have a better balance between financial resources and my personal life.
- I want to give myself permission to be more "selfish." That is, I'd like to escape from the "shoulds" and feed myself so that I can help others. Specifically, I want to devote more time to painting and the art world.
- I want to spend more time with my family.
- Several years ago, my brother and two of my cousins were killed in a canoeing accident and I want to do something to preserve my brother's legacy. Specifically, I want to devote time to open-space preservation.
- I want to spend more time connecting with my children. I have been a bad "self-sustainer" in an economic sense and need to work on that.
- I want to spend more time "wondering" and making sense of life. I believe that, with privilege comes responsibility.
- I want to focus my energies more and build strong male relationship on a local level.
- In my life I have learned that I need a lot of affirmation and validation in order for me to be effective. I'd like to spend more time developing a network of peers (like this group) and professional colleagues. I also want to be able to challenge people to grow personally and spiritually.

In wrapping up the discussion, Sims left us with the additional questions, "What might be holding you back? And "What can you start doing now?"

Sims concluded by comparing the process of self-actualization to a swan who waddles on land but gets graceful once on the water. He asked us, "What's the water for you? What is the work that you love to do? What enables you to move into gracefulness? Who are the people who enable you to do this? How will you discover the faith to know that that's where you belong?"

Filename: SPS 1970 Retreat – Sel-Actualization Discussion.doc