

Looking Back, Moving Forward

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The 2012 SPS 70 Reunion was a real treat that combined friendship, fun, and an exploration of how we can leverage our ties to SPS to give back, alas, to make the world (ours and beyond) a better place. As someone who has more or less watched from the sidelines I am honored to be part of the Form and in awe of these initiatives. Many classmates have provided various types of support and leadership over the years. We owe them a great deal of thanks for helping keep us together and stimulating an ongoing discussion of what our legacy might be.

One could hardly have asked for a more serene setting and better weather. Although we were close enough to “civilization,” supermarkets, and big-box hardware stores, it felt like we had gone back in time. More than a few of us missed the main entrance to Great Mountain Forest, and the narrow unpaved road seemed like a tunnel into the past. You could actually see the stars at night, a rare sight from where I live near Boston. The wilderness was an ideal place to unwind, relax, and reflect.

In addition to rekindling old relationships and friendships, the weekend combined fun (Steve Moorhead’s Midnight Golf was a huge hit – thank God no one had a concussion!) with a seriousness that we don’t often get to engage in. Being busy in one’s everyday pursuits doesn’t allow for much reflection on Self-Actualization, contributing to SPS, and making the world a better place. At the Brookline lunch last year, someone said, what are all these old (?) men doing on a beautiful day sitting inside talking about volunteer work? Maybe it’s the SPS spirit of community and giving in action.

Each of the weekend’s formal presentations – Self-Actualization, Unfinished Business, Mentorship, Multigenerational Stewardship, and Alumni Relations at SPS – had its own surprises and opportunities for learning. And Craig McColl’s Sunday morning service, which brought back memories of Chapel, helped keep us grounded and thankful as each of us continues to find our place in this vast and ever-changing world. (I am currently engaged in an effort to expose the intellectual deficiencies of Richard Dawkins, the world’s self-proclaimed Number 1 atheist, and I know what he would say of such a gathering – weak-minded people who need a crutch for their delusions.)

The Self-Actualization Workshop, led by Sims Wyeth ’69, was a wonderful eye-opener and an opportunity for self-reflection. I haven’t studied Maslow in years, but I find his hierarchy useful as a way into the subject. During the debrief of our Form’s survey responses, someone mentioned wanting to know more about the work of Douglas H. Heath, Professor Emeritus of the Psychology Department of Haverford College. I think the comment had to do with Heath’s work on happiness, a subject that has gotten a lot more attention lately. Sims mentioned Daniel Gilbert of Harvard and a few others who study the subject (and maybe even live it). I have been in contact with a Berkeley professor named Christine Carter, who has a blog called

RaisingHappiness.com. A few months ago, I wrote to her that the Harvard Business Review had a cover story on happiness in the workplace and that a decade ago, they wouldn't have touched that story with a ten-foot pole. The Boston Globe recently had a section called Health, Wealth, and Happiness – a few years back, the section was just about Health and Wealth. The idea of being happy has perhaps come into vogue, and the workshop allowed each of us to reflect on what is preventing us from doing what we want and how we can break through these barriers.

Each of the presentations is going to be covered by an assigned writer, so I am not going to go through them in depth. A common thread was that despite our “advanced” age and levels of achievement, many of us want to give back beyond our immediate families and communities. I don't know if I heard us using the word “purpose” very much, but that's something that is certainly on our minds. Stewardship, mentorship, and helping the SPS and larger communities were constant themes.

The idea of a “Day of Service” really hit home with me, and I volunteered to be part of Del's Rhode Island day when it takes place. My daughter spent a week in Pennsylvania with Habitat for Humanity, and she had a great experience. Having gone to SPS has its privileges (like being an American Express cardholder), and one privilege is to be able to help others. I personally would like to spend a Day of Service outside the confines of SPS, which probably has an endowment that rivals the GDP of some small countries.

Bob Rettew mentioned that the years 1962-1972 were a turning point at SPS, with the early Forms coming into the Kennedy years and Vietnam, and the later years seeing the school become coeducational, change Chapel requirements, etc. An article in the current School paper mentioned the Sixties and the changes that the decade brought to the school. We were right in the middle of it, although at the time we had no idea of how big a cultural change the Sixties would represent. Although the legacy of that decade is still being debated, the idea of making a world a better place was a major theme. I was watching a documentary called “The Hippies” the other day, and it mentioned that America was partly an experiment in finding utopia. This exploration was being played out over the weekend, and I look forward to next steps.

Thanks to several of our formmates for underwriting the cost of the retreat at Great Mountain Forest (GMF). Here is the contact information for anyone who wants to make a donation to GMF, which will help carry on the great work of the Childs family.

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