

Michael Beam

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Good morning. I consider it the highest privilege to be speaking to you today, and I thank everyone who made it possible. This might feel a little strange, but I'm going to ask you to do something. It's an exercise in presentness. Look at your hands. Now your legs and feet. Look at the people sitting next to you. How old are you? Say the number out loud. You're eight, or fifteen, or twenty-one. Maybe you'd rather people don't know. You're in the woods of Maine at Camp Timanous. You will never be this old, in this seat, with these people, on this day, ever again. This is just for now.

Song: Blowin' In the Wind

“All grown-ups were once children...but only few of them remember it.” – Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *The Little Prince*

I was once in grey in the front row of this group. I was eight years old, and adorable in my oversized chapel shorts. Now I stand before you a head counselor in green, and to be honest, I'm a little fuzzy as to what happened in between. I remember, as a Mallard, watching through my screen window as the bonfire embers glowed orange in the dark. I remember how nervous I was as a Falcon to dive off Main Dock, and the awe I felt listening to Sandy's story when I was a Crow. And even though these moments happened across decades, it feels as if they all took place in one unbroken summer. And this is because, from Mallards through Crows and on into my counseling career, I've always felt like a boy. That, to me, is the most valuable gift that Timanous has to give. Here, you can stay a boy forever. And the world needs more Timanous boys.

I'm not talking about eternal youth, or trying to compare camp to Neverland. Of course you will age. Your eyesight will weaken, and body parts won't work like they used to. You might lose to your cousin in Casco. I'm talking about the very real way in which you can carry the values and lessons you've learned at Timanous well beyond your childhood. Growing old doesn't mean you have to forget the boy you once were. If you can protect your memories of camp, if you can start every day like you're waking up on the bunkline — in essence, if you can remain a boy at heart — then your whole life will be one long summer.

What is it about a Timanous boy that's so essential for a life well lived? Everything. He is capable of anything. He can be brave, like Marco Palazzi singing an original song in front of the whole camp. He can be selfless, like Evren Nelson giving up his last Twilite League at bat for a younger camper. He can be curious, like Griffin Walsh exploring every inch of nature around him. He can be wise, like Kessler Bowman learning to overcome failure through self-forgiveness. He can be goofy, like Fritz Eastman grunt-squealing with joy as his counselors push him off Crows dock. He can be patient, like Jack Glassie smiling as a hundred pounds of Mallards hang around his neck. He can be clever like Mark Figge, mischievous like the Lansing brothers, thoughtful like David Koestler, humble like Charlie Dietel. I'm sure you could all name a hundred more qualities in a hundred more campers. But the point is this: these commendable qualities are present in boys eight to fifteen. At such a young age, you've already encountered trials which help you to know yourself, you appreciate the joy of fellowship and the

beauty of your surroundings. Some adults spend their entire lives never having experienced and learned what you did in only seven weeks. You've built the foundation for a joyful and fulfilling life. The hard part is maintaining it for the future.

I've just given examples of Timanous boys as boys. But how can you tell a Timanous boy when he's all grown up? What does it look like to be a boy at heart? Look at your counselors. Evan and Tommy are boys; you can see it in their passion for Twilight League. Pat and Aidan are boys; they love acting silly and couldn't care less what others think about it. PJ is a boy; every day is full of wonder for him. Dustin is a boy; you can see his playful smile as he repeats the same. exact. speech. every. Sunday. Brooks is a boy; he's as eager to learn as he is to teach. Nick is a boy; you can hear it in his laugh. Sandy is a boy; telling stories means the world to him. Dave is a boy...enough said. Counselors are living proof that you can grow up while staying young at heart.

I know how tempting it is to look forward. Mallards can't wait to be Crows, Crows can't wait to be Aides, Aides can't wait to be Heads and so forth. This obsession with the future isn't unique to camp, either: you can't wait to be in the next grade, or in middle school, high school, or college. Because we think older means taller, smarter, handsomer — better. But that's not always the case. I've kept a journal since I was a Hawk, so I have a neat record of my development over the last thirteen years. To be honest it's still mostly about girls, but I also write about the same personal struggles and the same mistakes year after year after year. I've taken steps forward, then stumbled backward, then moved sideways. Growing up is about as graceful as returning from a fifty without a flashlight. In some ways, I'm still very much the little boy in Hawks; in others, I'm proud of the difference between us.

The point is, aging doesn't always equal progress. I've seen adults who throw temper tantrums like babies. I've seen Mallards with Buddha-like composure. It's not as simple as: first you're a boy with all your little toys and games, and then you're a young man starting to have your first serious thoughts about existence and shaving, and finally you become a man who knows how to fix household appliances and travel great distances without asking for directions. So don't look too far toward the future at the expense of the present. That's part of the reason I began chapel with that little exercise to awaken you to the fact that *you are here now*, nowhere else and nowhen else. You're a boy, and that's a blessing.

Song: You've Got A Friend

“Never say goodbye because goodbye means going away and going away means forgetting.” J.M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*

Dragons live forever, but not so little boys. After that final bell rings, after you've received your awards at Banquet and said goodbye to your friends, you'll go home. You'll no longer be at a summer camp for boys; you'll be thrown into a world that wants you to forget your boyhood and grow up as quickly as possible. You'll take tests so you can get into a good school so you can land impressive internships that will get you a prestigious job. You'll return to your screens and fall down the rabbit hole of narcissism and cynicism, gathering followers instead of friends, connected to the entire world and yet completely detached. You'll be gobbled up by the world machine whose fuel is fear and contempt and frustration and craving and the worship of self.

But you can choose to resist these forces. You can *choose*, in spite of all the pressure to the contrary, to retain the values and virtues you had as a boy. Choose to remember. Remember the intensity with which you feel things here, whether it's a love of pulled pork, or the joy of winning C-flag, or the disappointment of scratching an archery round, or the butterflies of a summer crush, or the paralyzing fear you have of getting in the water at instructional swim. Remember your capacity for wonder, for selflessness, for hope, for love.

There are so many ways to remember. Stay in contact. Visit one another. The friends who knew you as a boy will always occupy a special place in your heart, because they grew up alongside you and share the same Timanous values. They will fly across the world to see you. They'll feel your loss and pain as if it were their own. They'll keep you young. But the best way to remember is do it all again next summer. Keep coming back. Come back to the place that taught you leadership, compassion, sincerity, brotherhood. Come back to the place where you're loved for just being yourself. Where it's okay to be weird and vulnerable and goofy and homesick and excited and scared all at once. Come back to the place where you made your best friends. Come back to where you were a boy. Come back home.

Timanous Prayer

We thank thee, O Lord for the joy of fellowship
 For the beauty of our surroundings:
 The tall pine trees, and sparking lake,
 The life which teems around us in the woods.
 The skies and clear waters.
 We thank thee for the love of doing things,
 For active bodies and minds alert.
 For the excitement of something new
 And the comfort of things which are old.
 For all these we give thanks;
 For the cool and quiet of evening,
 The restfulness of night,
 The glory of starry skies,
 The new life which comes with showers,
 For our mothers and fathers who have given us our homes,
 And for the trials which help us to know ourselves.
 For all these, we give thanks.

Valedictory

Twilight is a magical time here. The crackling energy that filled the day settles into a gentle hum. Fireflies blink in the fading light. The sunset stains the sky a tie-dye orange, red, pink, and purple. The day is ended, but the night is just beginning. Campers and counselors talk excitedly about what the night has in store—laughter, tears, mischief, adventure. There are stories to be told, stories to be made, a chance to wring the last drop from *this* day — the very life of life. It's that excitement when the sun has set, that drive to live deeply and fully and intensely until the very end, that is the essence of being

a Timanous boy. May you be forever young, and may you always be the boy who stays up after dark.

Song: Wooded Path

Salutation of the Dawn

Look to *this* day!

For it is life, the very life of life.

In its brief course lie all the verities and realities of your existence:

The bliss of growth; the glory of action; the splendor of beauty,

For yesterday is already a dream, and tomorrow is only a vision.

But today well lived makes every yesterday

A dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Look well, therefore, to *this* day!

Such is the salutation of the dawn.