

In Balance Times

Sunday, February 28th, 2010

“YOU SEE THE BEAST THAT MADE ME TURN ASIDE;
HELP ME, O FAMOUS SAGE, TO STAND AGAINST HER,
FOR SHE HAS MADE MY BLOOD AND PULSES
SHUDDER.

IT IS ANOTHER PATH YOU MUST TAKE,
HE ANSWERED WHEN HE SAW MY TEARFULNESS,
IF YOU WOULD LEAVE THIS SAVAGE WILDERNESS;
THE BEAST THAT IS THE CAUSE OF YOUR OUTCRY
ALLOWS NO MAN TO PASS ALONG HER TRACK,
BUT BLOCKS HIM EVEN TO THE POINT OF DEATH;

HER NATURE IS SO SQUALID, SO MALICIOUS
THAT SHE CAN NEVER SATE HER GREEDY WILL;
WHEN SHE HAS FED, SHE'S HUNGRIER THAN EVER
SHE MATES WITH MANY LIVING SOULS AND SHALL
YET MATE WITH MANY MORE...”

Written in the early 1300s, Dante's words stay with us, carefully preserved by those who cherish quality letters. Many advances have been made since Dante set pen to paper, both technologically and scientifically. Electricity is preferred over candles. The model universe has gone from geocentric to heliocentric. Plate tectonics explains earthquakes. In short, the average worldview is as different from Dante's as a teenager's from an adult's.

That said, the inspired words from his famous epic speak of an internal disposition much the same. It seems change in the human condition has not kept pace with technology. For what else could the “beast” be but addiction? With her appetite that can never be filled, blocking the path to move forward. No, to leave the “savage wilderness” and spiritual wasteland haunted by this beast, “it is another path you must take.” The path of recovery

It is easy to view addiction as a disease. It is perhaps helpful to frame it as a life-threatening cancer. For all those left in the wake of its devastation and theft of all that is good in life, it seems no stretch to label it a beast.

Addiction affects the entire family, and to fully heal the sufferer, the familial scars must be addressed. Hence, the In Balance Ranch Family Weekends a three-day weekend workshop aims to do just that.

Each of our four milieus has their own family weekend, so it has taken the better part of a month to complete this latest round. The ranch schedule is greatly affected, but our fearless milieu manager Chris Gallego has seamlessly handled the situation and kept things running smoothly. The altered schedule has afforded many off-campus opportunities to the students. This month's newsletter highlights those trips.

SWEAT LODGE



Patrick A.

Anyone interested in getting in touch, or even discovering, their spiritual side should try the Sweat lodge was experience. It is an experience

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that helped cleanse my thoughts, my body, and my soul.

The first day we set up a teepee like the Natives used to do. Sweat lodges are different all across the world, depending on tribal affiliation. The morning of the sweat lodge, a mandatory spirit run took place. The previous night, a spirit stick was made for the group that symbolized the dynamic of our group. We would later take it into the lodge, and it enhanced the spiritual aspect of the experience.



The spirit stick was made out of everything that had some sort of importance to any one of the members of the group. Before we started running, everyone held the spirit stick to the sky (acknowledging father sky). It helped one to reach his spiritual center before entering the sweat lodge.

It was time to enter the sweat lodge, one of the coolest and most relieving things that I have ever done in my life. It was necessary to walk around a circle before entering the lodge; sage was burned and fanned with bird feathers over participants' bodies to cleanse pores.



In the middle of the circle resides the fire tender, an honorable position whose job is to fuel the fire with big grandfather rocks (rocks about the size of a human head and really heavy) under the burning hot coals.

We all went into the sweat lodge in order, walking around the cozy, underground room in a clock-wise fashion. The complete darkness was interrupted by a startling, "Ah-Ho", a yell signaling the fire tender to bring in more rocks. Pouring water onto the rocks, the leader infused the room with steam, creating a stifling heat that caused all to sweat.



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Four rounds of the ritual occurred, with each subsequent round getting hotter and hotter. My group and I were in the lodge for a total of one hour and twenty-eight minutes. It got really hot towards the end, but we all pulled through just fine.

When the time came to leave, everyone left with different feelings toward their spirituality. It truly is a purifying ritual and great for teenagers like me going through rough times.

Symbolically and literally, the ritual helped rid my body and soul of all the negativity festering in and blocking my future. The sweat lodge was truly one of the best experiences of my life.

SNOWBOARDING TRIP



James I. and Dan P.

For us the snowboarding trip was a fun and enjoyable experience, not only to hang out with friends and make new ones, but to also learn more about ourselves and the people around us.

James-

My milieu, the Rincons, was the first milieu to go on this trip on January 23rd to the 25th. Things

did not go exactly as planned: the recent snow storm prevented us from snowboarding, and we came home a day early.

Our weekend started off with a long drive up to Patrick Barrasso's cabin in the mountains.

When we got there, we went out to pizza and watched "Walk the Line." In the later hours of the first day we all engaged in mindless games with Nerf guns in our abodes. The day after consisted of sledding and snowball fights. That night we also saw one of my favorite movies, "Avatar" in 3D. The next day we packed our things and sat through the never ending car ride back to the ranch, disappointed that our weekend of bliss was over.



Dan-

The milieu I'm a part of attended the snowboarding trip February 12th through the 15th. The first thing we had to do was sit through the unbearable car ride, anxious to see what the weekend was going to entail. Once the five hours in the car had ended, we all took the first hour of arrival (at Patrick Barrasso's cabin) to unpack our things and get situated in our rooms.

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The next day started with a good breakfast, followed by renting our ski and snowboard gear. After a good 4 to 5 hours of carving up the slopes, we were headed back to the cabin. Shortly after dinner, some went to wind down in the hot tub, and others took the opportunity to watch a movie. We ended each day with a check in group, which helped us stay focused on our therapy and individual goals.

After another day of wiping out many times (because it was my first time snowboarding), we were once again headed back to the cabin. Back at the cabin, we all just sat back and relaxed by watching movies, eating dinner, and participating in group.

James

My favorite part of this trip was all of the new people I met. I also appreciated all of the friendships both in and out of my milieu that grew stronger.

The external thing I enjoyed the most was sledding, because it was like skateboarding. Only, unlike skateboarding, you can go as fast and fall as hard as you want, because it doesn't hurt when you fall.



Dan-

The part of this trip that brought most of the enjoyment was snowboarding. This was my first time snowboarding, and to my surprise what people told me ended up being true: it's really hard the first couple of days. Even though I ended up extremely tired and sore, it was ultimately worth it. I believe this is a hobby that I will continue to hang on to when I go back home.



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James

Through this trip I learned more about my milieu and the problems they deal with on a day to day basis. I also learned how open my milieu is to me and how they all support me in one way or another. I also learned more about Transitional Living, where I will be going after In Balance

Dan

Snowboarding was both fun and a huge learning experience, not only in the sense of how to gain speed and control of my board but also of myself. This taught me how much patience I really have and also how hard I was willing to work to achieve a new skill.

Through this, I learned that I can attain anything that I put my mind to.

FAMILY WEEKEND: A STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE

Gabe C.

For the past six years, the In Balance Ranch Academy students have been participating in possibly the most useful and important component of the process of recovery here at the Ranch: Family Weekend.

I have just completed my first family weekend with my milieu, the Dragoons, who took part in various workshops with their families.

For family weekend there are three categories in which families are placed: First Time Families, Second Time Families, and Third Time Families. My family and I were in the first time

family workshops, and we all agreed that "List work" was the center of our family weekend.

List work is packet work in which all participating members of the family fill out a packet. Included in the work are actions you would like to confront your son or his siblings about, actions you would like to inform your son or his siblings you appreciate, and commitments to your son or his siblings. An opportunity is given to set boundaries. In return, your student enrolled does the same for you.

Other components of my family weekend included Art Therapy, Disease Model/Twelve Step Efficacy, a Big Book Study for students, Academic Conferences, Family Therapy Sessions, Equine, and a Process Group.

In Art Therapy, we discussed our family dynamics, and drew and constructed a family "Mandela". On Sunday, in the Disease Model/Twelve Step Efficacy, all participants in the Family Weekend got together with, Shannon talked about the disease of addiction and the benefits of a Twelve Step program and a PPC (Positive Peer Culture) based environment.

On Monday, Lynda, Mr. Dorman, Mr. Black, and Mr. Rounds came to campus in order to discuss personal academics with my parents and me. During Equine Therapy, Denise, Tabby, and Tommy explained the instinctual nature of horses before proceeding to a complex obstacle course the students were to ride their horses through.

Throughout the process group, the students and their siblings discussed their highs and lows of the weekend. Following the process group, we gathered into the school building for a closing ceremony. I hope your family weekend is as memorable and helpful as mine!