

UNC-C Retreat "Happens"

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was). Friday finally came. We were supposed to assemble in the Union parking lot at 2:00, but group activities have a tendency to run behind schedule, and, this being a group activity, it was closer to 3:00 than to 2:00 when we all finally tromped into the parking lot laden with suitcases, coats, and those omnipresent books. (Yes, Dr. McCall, Wordsworth was there, and I spent several valuable volleyball-playing hours getting to know him better.)

People tend to arrive at these things in groups, and as each group arrived there was always the same reaction—laughing and talking, and the sudden realization that our means of conveyance was a city bus. (Have you ever tried to store the luggage and assorted paraphernalia for 43 people on a bus which doesn't come equipped with storage space?)

The first thing we noticed after we had finally gotten everyone assembled and the four boys sitting closest to the driven had given him conflicting directions as to how to get off University property, was that the bus was segregated. All the faculty and staff were in the back of the bus. Soon, just as they've done on every bus trip I've been on since I went to MYF summer camp in the sixth grade, someone started singing. In a matter of a few minutes, the whole front of the bus was in full disharmony, and the back played bridge, talked and wished we would be quiet.

The two and a half hours to the Betsy-Jeff Penn 4-H Center

were over in almost no time, or so it seemed. We really weren't expecting the accommodations to be very good, so everyone was really surprised when we pulled through the gates and saw the camp. It is lovely. The buildings of grey, rough board are new and modern looking but blend with the trees which cover everything. The camp sits on a rise which overlooks a small lake. Even amidst all our noise the thing that you noticed first was the calmness and peacefulness of the place.

We got off the bus, found out cottages, picked up our linen (either some nice person had already made up my bed, or I slept on dirty sheets), and went to supper. After supper we got down to serious business. That business being the discussion of the topics "Implications of Residence Halls on Campus—The Commuter, WHAT?" "Student Organizations," "Student, Faculty, and Administrator Relations and Communications," "Student Opinion on University Policy," "Social and Academic Discipline," "Relevancy of Athletics at the University," "The Community and the University: Their Relationship," and "The Black Crisis." The discussion groups were really good, although it is a sort of funny feeling to be disagreeing violently with a doctor under whom you happen to be taking a course. But they were very good, they listened to what the students

had to say; they were really interested in exchanging ideas with us. The discussion groups were scheduled to last for an hour and a half, but they generally lasted much longer—unless they recessed to watch those basketball games on tv.

The most popular group activity was volleyball. Every night at 10:00, a group would head to the recreation building and play for a couple of hours (Friday until 1:00). Have you ever seen a dignified professor fall all over a court? Canoeing is fun too, especially if you're three girls in one canoe with four canoes full of boys surrounding you who take pity on you because you've rowed to one end—the far end—of the lake and are too tired to row back home and let you hold on to their rope on the end and tow you home.

We had a lot of fun, but we learned a lot too. I think some channels for communication were opened that will be of great benefit to the University in the future. There are plans to make it an annual event, and I hope the funds are found to make it possible. If you ever get the chance to go, don't be like the seventeen who turned down the invitation this time, do it.

The deadline for paying for your space in the yearbook is April 1, 1969. Failure to do this will mean exclusion from the organization section of the yearbook.

One Step Forward, Two Steps Back Scissors of Death

It has been said that man is the only animal who knows that he must die. This is misleading. We know it, but we choose to ignore the fact. We suppress it - drive it to the furthestest point from our consciousness - try to forget it. How is it that man, recognizing his limits, his finitude, can conduct himself in a manner that implies eternal strife towards some goal that will be reached at the moment before the end of the world? Case in point: A man enters local politics in order to solve a problem with which he is presently concerned. He is a success. He goes on to run for state governor, and from there he enters national politics. He is traveling in ever-increasing concentric circles, working hard, getting nowhere. He does not act as if he knows that his death will mark the end of all of his efforts. Sure, improvements that he has made will continue to be in effect, but the work that he has put into it will be viewed from an ignorant perspective. If history were the basis for determining the longevity of accomplishment, then the only men whose life-works could be considered worthwhile would be the man whose efforts were recognized as the culmination or peak of a movement or struggle.

Death is an ultimate; it ends all endeavors of the subject, whether they are finished or inconclusive. It does not matter. A man's life is like a string (and a very short one at that) that is fastened at one end and stretches toward another object. When he dies, the string is cut. It is left to dangle in the capricious breeze.

Now, if a man's life is structured in such a way as to imply a specific direction for the string to be extended in until it is cut, then the life is suddenly reduced to an absurd incongruity at the moment of death (as in our hypothetical politician). If, on the other hand, the man keeps that dangling string right at the most handy level of consciousness, then he, and he alone, can laugh as the scissors of time close on the thread of existence. And why can he laugh? Because he has fooled the system, and isn't that, after all, what it's all about?

Is the answer, then, to this paradoxical dilemma of absurdity (ie. why strive for meaning if there is none & why live if not to strive) a belief in immortality? Positively not. The man who bases his actions and choices on an obtainable Valhalla is living under the thickest veil of maya that man can be subject to. Many men must posit this existent nirvana in order to face the terror and anguish of life without wilting under the strain. These men are not the courageous beings that we imagine them to be. We are proud of them that put off their own happiness for an afterlife. We consider them to be brave, self-sacrificing individuals. They are not. This deferred gratification is based on ignorance and a lack of will. The individuals whose existence hinges on this misbelief are the sheep referred to by Neitzche. They are hiding behind a lie.

These believers in an afterlife are akin to the Grail questor of old. They endure many hardships and trials with a future reward in mind. Imagine the virtuous knight who travels for weeks without food or company in the deserted wasteland. He comes to the halls of the Fisher King and battles an army of antagonists there. He journeys across arid and frigid desert and arrives at the Chapel Perilous, where he nearly is killed in a duel with the unknown black hand. A storm rages throughout the night, but the questor finally goes to sleep. Now suppose that he awoke the following morning to find himself in an unknown location, without reward of grace. His journey and quest would seem pretty ridiculous, pretty absurd. Such is the fate of the believer in immortality, with one exception - he will not awake.

Death defines a man. Only after he has died can his earthly accomplishments be summed up and evaluated. As long as a man lives, he is free to make an about face. Heredity and environment do not have the restraining effect on a creative man that they are fabled to have. So how may a man give his life meaning before he dies. How may he defeat the absurdity of sociological existence and metaphysical speculation? This is the most important eschatological question that a man can ask himself. (An answer next week?)

A.A.C.T.E.

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