

Andrew

WR 13300

Professor Clauss

November 9, 2014

Naz Farm

Situation: As a former weeklong volunteer at Nazareth Farm, I am writing to an old teammate of mine, John Hawkins, who is a junior in high school, urging him to attend the Nazareth Farm service trip that my high school offers. John probably thinks that Nazareth Farm is a service trip only the really “holy” and super involved kids go on, but I’m arguing that he would have an amazing experience if he were to go. I felt a similar way when I went on the trip, and know now how it is not true and that the week I was there was one of the best of my entire life. I hope to convince John to reconsider his predetermined perception of Nazareth Farm and to apply and go on the trip.

Dear John,

How’s it going, man? It was awesome seeing the old Crimson and Gold soccer team play when I was home for midterm break. Believe me; enjoy these years at Chaminade on the team because they go awfully fast. While I was at the game Coach Rose was telling me about how Brother Peter and Brother Pat have already started making announcements about the application for Nazareth Farm! As you know all too well, I had an amazing time on that service trip down in West Virginia. Have you thought at all about applying to go on the trip? Because if you have, I don’t think you could possibly make a better decision. That one week I spent in Salem, West Virginia at Naz Farm was the best of my life, and I know you’d feel the same way if you got the opportunity to go.

Now I already know the first concern that you have because it was mine also. Yes, in order to go to Naz Farm, you’re going to have to miss the first week of Varsity Soccer tryouts. I too was concerned if going on the trip would affect me starting, or even making the team all together. This is a very valid concern of yours. However, all you need to do is talk with Coach

Oswald. As you know after playing this past season under him, even though he may curse and scream and get angry to no end during practices and games, there is no doubt that Coach Oswald is a devout Catholic. When I spoke with Coach Oswald about missing the first week of tryouts he gave me a very straightforward answer. He told me “In all likelihood, if you made the team this year as a junior, odds are you’ll make it again as a senior. And more importantly, what are you going to remember more 10 years from now, the first week of preseason or that week in West Virginia?” Coach Oswald understands the importance of service work and your duty as a Catholic, so you shouldn’t have many concerns about missing that first week of tryouts. Likewise, missing that first week of preseason was not an issue for me in being a starter my senior year. I came back from Naz Farm revitalized, both physically and spiritually. The second I stepped out onto the field I made sure I worked harder than every other player, and the coaches saw that and thus rewarded me. I know, being the hard worker you are, that this will be a nonissue for you to be a starter. And as an extra bonus to all of this, you won’t have to run that deathly two-mile on the first day of tryouts.

I realize that another one of your concerns is that the kids who typically go to Naz Farm are not the kids you usually hang out with or talk to. I know they just seem like the “holiest” and most involved kids in the school, but they are so much more than that. When I left for Naz Farm with my group of nine, I had only ever spoken to two of them before then, and there were three or four kids whose name I had never even heard before! To say the least, I felt out of place, and I won’t deny the fact that you’d most likely feel the same way in the beginning too. Nonetheless, if you give those kids a chance, you’ll learn like I did that they are the most genuine people you will ever meet in your four years going through Chaminade. This is not by mistake. Brother Peter and Brother Pat choose these kids because they are the best students for the trip, much in the

same way that Coach Oswald picks the best players for the soccer team. I know that becoming friends with these near-strangers could be an intimidating task, but all you have to do is be yourself. I'm sure you hear this all of the time and don't think twice about it, but I truly mean what I say. Just be yourself. For me, I started off the trip in my own bus seat all by myself, but when I heard *Harry Potter* brought up (those books you know I love so much), I casually chimed into the conversation, and there was no looking back from there. They welcomed me as if I were an old friend and assimilated me completely into the group faster than I could have ever hoped. Within a matter of days I had bonded with one of my newfound friends, Sean, so well that I was telling him things in my life that only two other people have ever known. When I off-handedly mentioned to my work group one day that Sean and I had never spoken before the trip, they were absolutely dumbfounded. They told us that they were under the impression that we had been friends for years and years. The combination of the people themselves, so friendly and genuine, and the environment of Naz Farm, a tightly knit community, is what develops these special types of relationships so perfectly. I have no doubt that someone as personable and outgoing as you will have no trouble creating the same types of relationships that I did during my week in West Virginia.

Hopefully your two biggest concerns about going to Naz Farm have been dismissed, and I can now begin to tell you why the sojourn to Appalachia would be the best decision of your four years in high school. One of the most remarkable parts of Naz Farm is witnessing the appreciation and gratitude of the amazing people we helped. For example, my last day on a work site (you'll go to a new one each day doing different projects) was helping a married couple, Christine and Eric. We worked all day to finish the tin roof on their permanent trailer home. After just a few days living in rural West Virginia, we all quickly learned to appreciate the little

things, which is what made the meatball hoagies that Christine made for lunch so much better. The people we were helping were by no means required to do anything for us, but they were all so grateful that they wanted to show us that gratitude in any way possibly, even if all that meant was making a delicious meatball hoagie. Likewise, the biggest moment of gratitude that I saw from Christine was at the end of the workday when we all joined hands to pray. Typically, the Naz Farm staff members who were overseeing the project led the final prayer, but Christine spoke up and asked if she could lead it. I remember so vividly her saying how she has never been good at leading prayers, but the words of the most sincere gratitude that she spoke were so moving that not a single person in the prayer circle had a dry eye after she finished. The humility in her voice and in her words struck me on the deepest level, reminding me of what I'm not and what I should strive to be like. Living on Long Island where we have so many privileges, you and I John take so many things for granted. These people of West Virginia really taught me a lot on how to be grateful for all the wonderful things in my life, and I hope you get the opportunity to realize this firsthand.

Speaking of all the privileges and luxuries we have on Long Island, the shocking simplicity of Nazareth Farm was one of my absolute favorite aspects of the week. I must say that I was very uneasy about handing over my phone at the beginning of the week, but this was the first important step to living a simple life. Simplicity is one of the cornerstones of Nazareth Farm. From never eating meat, to never leaving lights on when they weren't in use, to even never knowing the time, the simplistic lifestyle was ever-present. My favorite example of this cornerstone during my week stay dealt with the shower situation. For starters, for our seven days spent on the farm, in order to conserve water, we were only allotted three showers. Yes, you read that right. Three. But wait, it gets better. Not only were we limited to a mere three showers, but

these showers were “bucket” showers. What that entails is going to the water pump on the side of the house, filling up a five gallon bucket of water, and proceeding to go to the outdoor shower, and slowly pouring the water over your head. Quite a stark contrast from the 15-minute showers that we take at home, right? You would think that we would all savor those few showers we had and maybe even sneak an extra one when no one was watching. Much to the surprise of even myself, I only took two of my three showers the entire week, and I was by no means the outlier! Because we were all so enveloped in the simplicity of the week, none of us missed those luxuries of home, including taking showers. Every one of us at Naz Farm completely embraced the lifestyle we were supposed to live. The ecological awareness we obtained at the farm even translated to many of our lives back home, making conscious efforts to conserve energy and water whenever possible.

Naz Farm is a place where you can truly be yourself in the purest sense of yourself. You remember Rob Monser, don't you? He won the Chaminade Man Award at my graduation, a.k.a the “best all-around person” award. I don't know if you ever realized, but he went on the trip with me, and we were speaking on the phone just the other day about one experience in particular he had at Naz Farm. He told me about his first night at the farm, and how although he's quite an outgoing person, he's typically hesitant to open up about his personal life too quickly. He was sitting on the porch-swing, simply pondering the week ahead, when one of the staff members, Kayla, sat down next to him. She merely sat down and asked him, “What makes you happy?” Not a question you and I hear too often nowadays. Too often we hear questions like, “What college are you going to?” “What major are you choosing?” “What job can you get with that?” and so many more like them. However, the question Kayla imposed is far more important. All those questions we typically hear, we are asked for the wrong reasons. Every one

of those questions just leads to the question, “How much money are you going to make?” What Kayla asked has an intrinsic importance that is far more significant than any amount of money. Rob told me that he was not able to put into exact word what he felt, but that Kayla and the farm gave off an immediate sense of “trust, growth, and non-judgment” (Monser). Kayla asked this question for two reasons. The first was because she was genuinely curious as to what makes him happy. The second was because being imposed that question forced Rob to think about the real answer to it. He and Kayla spoke for an hour after that, and Rob felt as if he spoke as his truest self. Being able to be our true selves is a tough task back at home, but at the farm, accomplishing that sense of worth was effortless. I had similar experiences to Rob’s that week, and I know you would appreciate them as well, in a way that not everybody does.

I don’t blame you for having your reservations about going to Naz Farm, John. I was exactly in your shoes, and I see a lot of myself in you. But it’s because I see a lot of myself in you that I want you to go on this service trip so badly. I know you have never done much service up to this point, but that doesn’t matter because there is no better place to start than down in Salem, West Virginia. Don’t worry about Coach Oswald; he’ll understand. Don’t worry about being with kids that you don’t know; they’ll leave you with memories that will last a lifetime. And I don’t mean this as a cliché; it is the truth. You will meet a “Christine” like I did, and she will force you to realize, like me, how many things you take for granted. If you choose not to go, I understand your uncertainties, but I cannot say with any more certainty that you will never regret your decision if you do decide to make the sojourn to Nazareth Farm.

Your old teammate,

Andrew

Works Cited

Oswald, Michael. E-mail correspondence. November 17, 2014. moswald@nasec.com.

Monser, Robert. Telephone interview. November 13, 2014. 516-510-6673.