



Sugaring on March Break

By Nat Herz '05



Gotcha! The author (standing, idle) jeopardizing good sap karma by watching his colleagues gather more wood to stoke the evaporator's fire box.

On March 6th, instead of packing my bags and hopping a jet to Florida to sunbathe, I packed a small backpack with approximately one change of clothes and walked down the hill from Gray House to the Putney hostel to get set up. I was going to work on the farm for the first week of March break, “sugaring.” Our mission was to keep the cows in the barn happy and make a little maple syrup on the side.

I'd done the same thing last year with two other boys (instead of the crowd of eight boys and girls this time). Our laziness that week had been of biblical proportions; we'd earned the nickname “the three stooges.” The weather had been too cold for sap to run, so all we did was morning and afternoon barn chores, eat bacon (from Putney pigs, at least), and watch movies in the hostel.

This year, I was determined to renovate my image. I was more familiar with the barn and properly rested—not to mention three inches taller (size matters when you're carrying heavy things). Thus, my major goals were to be helpful and useful at all times, and to make some syrup.

The former goal was easier to achieve than the latter. Maple sap is evaporated to make maple syrup and it only runs if the temperature during the night has been below freezing, and if the



temperature during the day is above freezing. Since the sap didn't run during the first week last year, I assumed that my accumulation of good karma would automatically make the sap run while I was still at school.

During the first three days of the week, it was too cold. No sap ran. The crew (Young-Jae Chung '04, Jareka Dellenbaugh-Dempsey '06, Juan Grafton '05, Sang Mok Lee '04, Young-Seok Lee '05, Caroline Silver '05, Gesa Pries '05 and her visiting friend, and myself) did the normal chores as well as the occasional odd task, such as dragging a dead cow out of the barn. We also managed to finish tapping all of the Putney maples—300 on buckets, 500 on pipeline. The movie-watching tradition also continued with *Return of the Pink Panther*, *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, and *Finding Nemo*.

Finally, the fourth morning dawned with frozen ground. By ten o'clock, the sun was up and the sap was running. Pete Stickney (farm manager) and Margie Levine (gardener) came down to the hostel after chores on the tractor, pulling a six-hundred gallon tank behind them. Starting behind the hostel, we rode all over campus and emptied all of the buckets on the trees into larger buckets. We then, in turn, carried them to the tank and dumped them in. We finished at the sugarhouse where the sap in the tank was pumped into an even bigger holding tank.

The forecast called for great sap weather the next few days, which came true. Each morning for the rest of the week, at around ten o'clock, the entire sugaring crew rode around on the back of the tractor emptying buckets. The new evaporator (the device used to evaporate the water out of the sap, leaving the syrup behind) worked marvelously and, by the end of the week, we'd made eighty gallons of syrup. This means, since it takes forty gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup, that our crew had collected 3,200 gallons of sap between buckets and pipelines. We'd also made some of the highest grade of syrup: Vermont Grade A Fancy.

I'd obviously done something right during the last year, because my karma sure was riding a big sugar high this time. Maybe it was from all the syrup I'd been drinking. Regardless, sugaring was a great way to spend a week of break: making syrup, milking cows, and yes, watching movies. 🐻

(Far Left) Despite the gauges, Pete knows when it's syrup.

(Left) Hey! A watched pot does boil. Some tuckered-out sap gatherers witness the process by which 40 gallons of sap become a gallon of syrup. The new evaporator has a blower that makes it more fuel efficient than the old one. That leaves more time for gazing into the mist between stokings.

(Below) "Sweet!" says the kids. "Yup," says Pete.

