

WHY DO CAMPERS LOVE CAMP & BECOME COUNSELORS?

One story:

It was an all boys camp. Not too far from the highway but far enough that it was a world all its own. We all felt it, we knew it; we were a thousand miles from everything. The bell, its familiar tone was the only thing to carry across the tree tops. The lake, although I am sure there were houses across or around it, was our own. We probably could have even seen them from the beach but we weren't looking. The girls from our sister camp, and their counselors and waterfront staff, that shared our stretch of nirvana-like beach were what I noticed. It wasn't in a lewd or adolescent boy way other than I became slightly self conscious. Mostly I was intrigued by these strange animals, like a monkey with an incomparable device that he finds impossible to understand but is drawn to and turns over in his hand again and again. There weren't any girls in our universe, no women to speak of. I am sure that there were female counselors... actually I am not sure. I can't remember, all the counselors have faded away; except for two.

I remember MY counselors. Yes, MY counselors. They were mine, and ours, in the cabin. I remember our CIT as well. Even though I was there for two summers, well, two mini-sessions during two consecutive summers, all else has melted away. Perhaps it was the continuity of being in the same cabin or seeing some of the same boys but it has become one memory. Except for them, MY counselors. Heck, perhaps there were only two counselors in the whole camp, I don't know. I do know that I swam, so there must have been lifeguards, I shot arrows (lots of arrows), so there must have been at least one archery counselor, I played many games of tennis, so there must have been a tennis counselor, and there were animals and crops on a mini farm, so there must have been a counselor there. Maybe that was it. I remember my cabin, my bunk, the windows, or lack thereof. I remember doing things we shouldn't have like firing AA batteries out of a pipe and sneaking out. I also remember doing things that we should have like singing songs in the dining hall, the ropes course (another counselor), playing frisbee, having campfires, and using the Slip 'n Slide.

I remember some faces and some names but only one face and name. Raphael. Raphael was one of MY counselors. He was cool. He was athletic, tall, good looking, popular with the counselors from the girls camp, taught me archery, was always in a good mood, laughed a lot, joked around with us but didn't make us feel small or stupid. Raphael was cool. I thought, no I knew, that Raphael was the coolest counselor there; he was even cooler than my friends at camp. He didn't yell or "make" us do anything like clean up or set the table. Raphael made me love camp even more than I already did. Raphael paid attention to me. He liked me.

Raphael made me want to come back each year. It was doubly hard not to return as a CiT because I knew that would probably be it. I knew I wouldn't get to hang out with him again. But, Raphael made me want to be a counselor. He was the coolest guy I had ever met and he had what seemed to me to be the best job I could ever have. I loved camp and I saw his job as playing and hanging out and meeting new people like I did as a camper with one important extra perk...he got to go and hang out with the girls from our sister camp at night. What a perfect job! So, when I was approaching graduation from college and was preparing to move on in to some "career" Raphael's memory impelled me to do it. I told myself, "If you are ever going to be a camp counselor you've got to do it now." And I did. I applied to a camp, a different camp than I attended, and became a counselor. I loved it more than I ever loved being a camper. Now I go back every year. I live for camp. I taught for a while, I had jobs during the "off season." I always chose them for their schedule or my commitment so that I would either get the summers off or be okay with quitting at the end of the year. I did this for many years and for many reasons. I did it because it was fun. I did it because it became rewarding. I did it because I loved my fellow counselors. I did it because I felt connected to the kids.

Most of all, I did it because of Raphael.