

Witness to Reconciliation

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Last summer, I was finishing my shift at the restaurant I worked at, when I started getting multiple frantic text messages. Apparently, my cousin Audrey, who was a Senior counselor at camp sunshine, saw my name on the counselor list. I was supposed to be there at 7 the next morning, and I had completely forgotten about it (for those of you who know me, this shouldn't come as a surprise). I rushed home, packed my bags, and got some rest for the 2 hour car ride in the morning. I was excited, but I really had no idea what to expect. I figured I would just be there to help out, and I didn't realize that this experience was about to have such an amazing impact on my life

I was paired with a 7th grader named Jake. At camp sunshine, A counselor is paired one on one with a camper. You literally spend the entire week with your camper. You share meals together, do activities, and spend the night in cabins. When I was there, there were probably close to 40 or so campers. Me and Jake quickly became known throughout camp as Jake Squared. When he first got there, Jake was extremely shy, but after some basketball, we became fast friends.

I learned a lot when I got to know Jake. One of the first things I learned is how easy happiness came to him. I thought that was really beautiful. He taught me to just be happy. After spending a week there, more often than not you realize there is more to be happy about than there is to be sad about. There is happiness in sinking a basketball into a net. There is happiness in dancing, and not caring whether you're any good or not. There's happiness in a good friends smile. And happiness is usually a whole lot easier than anger and sadness. Happiness feels good.

Happiness, however, was not all that was on Jake's mind. As a 7th grader, Jake was smitten by an older female counselor. Unfortunately, Jake came to realize this relationship would not be able to happen. This was kind of hard for him. He seemed to think that girls wouldn't like him because of his disabilities. This sadness proved to get the best of a young man, who up until that point, had only showed happiness and excitement. During this experience, I learned what it felt like to truly be there for another person. It took a lot of conversation with him to help him to realize that he was a fantastic person, and that even though this lone, 25 year old camp counselor wouldn't return his affection, he still had a lot of time left on this planet, and a whole lot more fish in the sea. I learned that when you take your mind off of the things that are hurting you, you can still have a great time at camp sunshine.

Through late night Dance sessions, more basketball, A few flawless talent show performances, and time with people who really care about you, broken hearts and sad memories can be mended. They stay with you, but you tend to eventually overcome and learn from them. Deciding to be a camp Sunshine counselor opened up a chance for me to see that in Jake's life and to see that for myself too. Reconciliation often means understanding our flaws, learning to live with them, and eventually coming to appreciate our blessings, rather than focusing on our imperfections. Just have fun, be happy, and don't dwell on things you can't change.