

Reflective Practice Narrative

It is hard to know where to begin. Every day I had a moment at camp that touched me, made me think, made me laugh, or made me cry. I grew in as many ways as one can: emotionally, spiritually, professionally, personally... all in a positive direction. Appropriately, one of my most intense moments was during the graduation ceremony during week five, the final week.

As I listened to the graduates make speeches about what camp did for them I realized that however important camp was to me this summer, it means infinitely more to them, more than I could ever fathom. They grew up going to camp every summer. They dream about it, wait for it, and think about it all year. At camp they are accepted for who they are, completely and unconditionally. They are encouraged, supported, celebrated and let be. They are not seen as their disability nor do they really care about it. Their mandate during camp is to play, sing, laugh, pull pranks, eat, push counsellors into the lake, make friends, paint and so much more.

While I observed this dining hall full of people I reflected on how I was daily surprised by what I learned. Each person at camp filled me with wonder. Be it a unique talent, a hidden skill, an unexpected depth of character or profound wisdom, I could feel nothing but gratitude and joy for having opened myself to the opportunity of knowing these people.

As the graduates spoke of everlasting friendships forged at camp, or self-confidence gained, my thoughts turned morose. I was assaulted with an overwhelming sense of fear and sadness. All I could visualize in my mind's eye was these amazing people walking the streets of the real world where strangers only see a disability. People that do not take the time to know the vibrancy, uniqueness, or depth of their souls. Where an amazing smile and friendliness is viewed as strange. Where disgusting words such as 'retard', or 'cripple' are used and laughed at.

My heart ached, my eyes stung and my throat closed at these thoughts. To imagine the coldness of the world touching the warm hearts of my campers. I could not hold the tears back as the pressure of my thoughts overwhelmed me.

I stood in the back of the dining hall silently shaking, lost in a spiral of negative thoughts. Suddenly, one of my campers came up to me and saw my red, teary eyes. This boy was sixteen, a good six inches taller than me, and dressed in a too-small monkey costume. Without words he stared into my eyes, and wrapped his long arms around me, pulling me into an embrace so genuine and tight that my heart almost broke. After several seconds he pulled away and said, “I know you are sad about us leaving, but we are going to live perfect lives... well almost perfect because nothing is really perfect, but as perfect as can be.” And with that he bounded out of the dining hall, leaving me wide-eyed and in awe.

My experience at camp as both a nurse and a person has changed me. I have a new worldview and am filled with child-like optimism and hope. Camp is unleashing enlightened people upon the world, both with the campers and staff who have had the grace and fortune to be a part of it. The person I was before I came here is not who I am now. I LOVE CAMP!