

When a whim became a passion: my camp story

When you are 16 years old, most things in your life do not get more than a days thought, if that. So when I was asked to be a counselor for Open Camp less than 7 days before the camp would take place, I called my mom, got permission and said sure. I had no idea what I was getting into, but I loved camp, and thought, why not? With little warning, I was no where near ready for the campers I would encounter. I sat on the bus terrified that I had no idea what I was doing and that I would surely get overrun by these campers who seemed so much tougher than I was, yet some of them were 9 years younger. What I quickly realized though was that all the toughness was a front. The campers I met began to change my life and are still changing my life today. I was a counselor for 4 years for Open Camp and loved it more each time I went. As the years went by, I began keeping in touch with my campers outside of camp to check in on them. As I got to college, I realized some of my dreams were changing. Since I was 5 years old, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. There was never a second choice or any uncertainty about it; I would be a teacher when I "grew up". However, I never dreamt that I would have aspirations of teaching in the urban core. As I began to tell family, friends, and professors that inner city teaching is what I had in mind, I received a lot of confused feedback. Why would I want to teach in an area with such troubled kids and absentee parents and typically low test scores? Despite the questions and confusion, I never had to think about my answer. Open camp had made my answer crystal clear. These were the kids that needed me and they were the ones I planned on helping. Many of my campers were fantastic kids if they were ever given the chance to show someone. I realized it was all about giving them opportunities and being there to see them succeed. Would there be more stress in my job? Probably. Would I get frustrated with the kids and the parents? Most likely. Would it be worth it? Without a doubt. For the last two years, I have been going to camp as an intern and have spent more time on the organizational side and the administrative side than the counselor side, but my love for camp has not diminished at all. While I have missed being able to really be with the campers every day of camp, I have gained experience and opportunities that will be crucial in my future. Now as we are looking to expand camp into its own foundation, I am as passionate as ever. I know my job as a teacher is important and will be crucial to many of my students; however, I also know that this camp is life changing for the campers and counselors alike. This is not something I am willing to give up and it is not something I am willing to take away from any of the kids who attend. I do not know where I will end up in a year when I have to get a job, but I do know that I will continue to support and be involved with this camp from wherever I am as much as I can. Some things are just worth fighting for.