Letters From Camp

Since I was ten, I’ve been going to the same sleepaway camp every summer. Leaving my phone and parents behind for two weeks to relax under the pines, sail off the shores of Lake Ossipee, sing songs, laugh until my stomach hurts, and have strangers become sisters in just 14 days, has been something I have cherished as the kick-off to my summers. Going to an all girls camp, I am free to live without the judgment from the other gender. Living without showering for days on end with just the cool lake waters to wash away the dirt acquired from wandering on the soft pine needles is accepted by all, as is abbreviating your makeup routine to just a slather of sunscreen every few hours to keep off the sun’s rays. Every summer I am inspired by the sense of acceptance and empowerment we bring to each other. It is here, under the roofs of the white and green cabins, that I feel most comfortable with myself. In the aptly named town of Freedom, NH, I have the independence to be myself and encourage others to do the same.

One of the greatest appreciations I have for my parents is for sending me to this haven for seven years. Although I’m sure they are grateful for a little bit of quiet time around the house, I know they miss me by the smiles that stretch across their faces and their tight, enveloping hugs when they pick me up. In return for two weeks in paradise, my parents receive only a few brief notes I quickly scrawl across postcards to send home in the free moments I have amidst my adventure-filled days. In the time I have, I try to tell them everything I have been up to: from scoring a point in all-camp capture the flag to canoeing under a sunset so vivid in color and texture the cotton candy clouds look edible, in hopes of letting them know how much I appreciate this gift they have given me. But even if I could fit everything I am doing into an envelope and send it back home, they would not get to experience the daily joys camp gives me in the state whose motto is “live free or die”. They will never know the thrill of Sundae Sunday, or the sound of the reveille bugle in the early hours of the morning as the sun creeps through the screened windows, creating a criss-cross pattern on my bunk. They will never know the immense amount of love that seems almost palpable as we blow out our candles in unison on the last night before leaving, or the taste of the salty tears that flood down our faces as we give each other our final hugs goodbye.

I can only hope my parents understand behind these short messages I send home is their daughter living every moment to the fullest, soaking up every ray of New Hampshire sun, and drinking every last drop of life.

Camp has given me the opportunity to become best friends with people from all over the country. It has given me a place where I have seen the power of women, and the strength we have when we work together and build each other up. From the Nature Hut, I have gained an awareness of our effects on the environment, and the necessity of caring for the earth. From the Craft Shop, I have honed my creativity and imagination. From the Sportsfield, I have gained the grit to persevere through a challenge, but also the playfulness that brings joy to life. Dance and Drama has given me the opportunity to express myself through the carefree feeling of dancing like nobody's watching. On the Waterfront, I have learned the responsibility and self-awareness swimming requires, and the thrill of taking risks like jumping off the tower into the depths of the lake below. The Small Crafts Beach has given me the opportunity to learn teamwork skills through sailing and paddling as a unit, while also gaining the appreciation of relaxation, found in bobbing in a boat while waves lap against the sides.

Most of all, I have experienced and gained an understanding of the feeling of having unconditional love for everyone around me.

My parents have given me more than I could ever hope for through camp, and although I will never be able to repay them, I know that both of my parents see how important camp is in my life. In return for this generosity, I will pass the love and lessons I have gained from camp to my friends, family, and children as well. As one of my camp Candlelight songs goes:

“It only takes a spark / To get a fire going / And soon all those around / Can warm up in its glowing / That’s how it is with Huckins love / Once you experience it / You spread this love to everyone / You want to pass it on.”

I will forever pass this love I have for life, for other people, for camp, and for new experiences onto others because of the gratitude I feel both towards my parents and towards my summer home.

And maybe some day I will receive those letters addressed from 17 Camp Huckins Road just as my parents did, and even from a short blurb about getting up on water skis or making banana boats, these letters will let me know how much I am appreciated.