

Last night, we had Vespers after Torchlight. At Vespers on the girls' side, the ladies of 7-11 (outgoing 9th graders) wrote letters about their camp experience that they read to all the other girl campers. Susie Ma'am reports that the letters were heartfelt and lovely. She is endeavoring to get copies so that I can share some of them with you.

On the boys' side, we had the gentlemen of 007 answer questions about their camp experience. I was really impressed with how they answered the questions about the best parts of camp. About one-half talked about their friends and the ability to be completely themselves within the group. About a quarter discussed the fact that they feel like camp challenges them to grow in a supportive environment. The final group raved about celebrating the atmosphere of camp.

Not a typical recipe for 9th grader joy. Yet, they really took to the experience and celebrated it as a high point.

After moments like last night, Susie Ma'am and I go to sleep with smiles on our faces.

Rookie Exhibitionism

Last night at Torchlight, all the Rookies coordinated their role calls. The first of 5 cabins said "no shoes, Paul Sir" and they threw their shoes into the center of the arena. The second, "no shirt, Paul Sir" - down came their shirts. The third, "No shorts, Paul Sir" - cascade of shorts follows. (Worry not, all had clean and non-skimpy underwear on. Also, please remember that the girls have an entirely separate torchlight ceremony on Sundays.) The fourth declared "No problems, Paul Sir" - shoes, shirts and shorts rain down. The final group (the youngest campers - affectionately deemed the "Real Men") then yelled with great glee "No clothes Torchlight Paul Sir" to another rain of clothing. Happily, it was not a true "no clothes torchlight" as everyone remained in their undershorts. But they really enjoyed the worried look on the faces of leadership team after they yelled "no clothes!"

I must say, it was pretty funny seeing the glee with which 6-9 years olds played this prank. They were so proud of themselves. A few kept their shirts so that they could waive them over their heads like lassos. They were giggling and preening - absolutely sure they had just bamboozled the entire camp. It was impossible not to share their joy.

After a brief "reclotting" period, we moved down to the boys sail point for our Vespers ceremony. I was pretty happy that we did not have to have

Vespers at the same location, as it would have been impossible to have a serious talk after this display. Our change of location, however, enabled us to have a great laugh AND a great Vespers.

Our Inner Battle

We covered one other topic at Vespers last night. Since last night was the eve of the Lake Swim, I chose to share some thoughts about embracing challenges.

The swim entails swimming across the lake and back (roughly 700 meters). We basically take over the lake, lining it with 26-30 kayaks with 3 boats providing additional help. It is one of the longest standing camp traditions and a true challenge to our oldest campers (the oldest gals go Tuesday morning).

As we talked about the Lake Swim, I offered a view of human nature.

In the cartoons, people are often shown with an angel on one shoulder and a devil on the other. Each is dispensing opposite advice to the main character. I think this cartoon has it wrong.

We do not have an angel and a devil, but we do have a Warrior and a Worrier. The Warrior faces adversity, tries new things and accepts challenges. The Worrier is rapt in fear and finds reasons to avoid new things or challenging situations. The Warrior says "I want to learn to snow ski. I want to try out for the play. I want to meet those new people." The Worrier answers back "Skiing is too cold. Theater is stupid. Why do I need new friends?" Note that the Worrier is clever - rather than say "I am scared", it instead finds excuses not to try.

The Warrior looks at a challenge and sees opportunity. The Worrier sees limitation and fear.

For parents and youth development professionals, we should look for ways to feed the Warrior and starve the Worrier. Let me be clear, I still believe that we should focus on Reasonable Risks (one of our "4 Rs"), not dangerous ones. In my examples, I am discussing challenges that are trying, difficult, out of our comfort zone, but safely attainable.

This week, each camper will have some Warrior/Worrier moments. It is my

hope that we create an environment sufficiently supportive and loving to encourage each camper to listen to the Warrior!

I ended by sharing 2 stories from 4 years ago. In the first, a camper had decided that he did not want to swim. As a result, he jumped in the lake, swam 3 or 4 strokes, came back and declared that it was too far. He never even tried.

Later that summer, we had a 7th grader who, although well developed (he was 6'2"), really struggled athletically. I will call him Richard. Richard was a very poor swimmer. He, nevertheless, wanted to try the Lake Swim. In addition to the kayaks and lifeguards, we assigned a leadership team member swim with him.

During the swim, the next to last camper completed the swim in 35 minutes or so. This camper, along with the rest of the Aquanauts, went to the cabin, changed, ate breakfast and returned to the dock to root Richard on.

Richard's time? One hour and 25 minutes. Without question, it was the slowest time I have ever seen by at least a half an hour.

Yet I remember Richard and his determination. I do not remember the winner of the race, but I can see Richard's face as he touched the dock: exhausted, worn and proud.

Like Richard, this morning every boy in the Aquanaut division channeled his inner Warrior and completed the swim.

Not a bad day!

Tomorrow, the Maxis will swim it. Over the next two days, the younger campers will swim a kilometer: Minis and Rookies in the pool with Midis and Lettermen in the boys swim bay.

We should have a lot of deep sleep over the next few days!

Steve Sir