

On Wednesday nights, all of the counselors are on duty for the camp dance and for our counselor meetings afterwards.

I really love these nights.

The counselors all dress up for the dance and crackle with energy. Two weeks ago, we had a counselor who joined us right before the dance. The Rookie counselors (of which he was one) all covered themselves in white paint for the War and Peace dance. They introduced themselves as "Beacons of Hope" and did a brief skit. The new counselor seemed self-conscious and a little bewildered. He looked like someone who had been dropped among aliens.

Last night - two weeks later - he led a group of three counselors who painted themselves solid red, white and green to form the Italian flag. He was high-energy, crazy and joyous.

Seeing this change drove home how camp lets us be ourselves. He started his time at camp worried about looking silly and soon learned that no one cares. In fact, camp embraces fun and uniqueness.

Standing at torchlight, Susie Ma'am and I get the joy of looking out at all the campers and the counselors wearing their costumes and brimming with excitement. When they all chant simultaneously, it echoes down the lake and charges us up.

The dance is really something to see. Cabins dance together, while a few brave souls dance one-on-one. I especially love seeing 8 or 9 year old guys ask counselors to dance.

After the dance, we make sure all the campers are down and have our leadership team and senior campers watch the cabins while the counselors gather at the counselor lounge for our weekly meeting.

We hold it outside under a string of lights. We get a little food, gather in a circle and talk.

The meeting is a celebration of what we do and who we are. After a few announcements, we open the meeting for counselor "shout outs". Counselors compliment each other for extraordinary efforts in their cabins and activities.

By doing this, the counselors create a culture of appreciation and also gather ideas from each other about how to become even better at what we do.

We end by having the directors share some thoughts. Last night, Garcia Ma'am challenged each counselor to think about a niece or nephew who they deeply love. She then asked them to picture the type of role models they would want them to have. "Be that kind of counselor."

Susie Ma'am read letters from first term parents who shared how camp had benefited their children.

At the end, we leave and go back into the star-filled night, ready for a great night's sleep and the chance to attack another day.

Steve Sir