

A few years ago, Susie Ma'am and I decided we did not want to be Firemen.

"What, pray tell, do you mean by that, Steve Sir?"

When do we encounter firemen? At fires and car accidents. When we have a cat caught in a tree. [Note, one camper told me that "you call a fireman if your sister is caught in a tree" - I wish I had followed up on that story.]

You do see firemen when you go to Disneyworld or get a perfect report card? No, firemen show up when there is trouble. We are all so lucky to have people that are committed to being there whenever bad stuff happens.

If you are not careful, a camp director can become a fireman. If a boat is broken, you know. If a counselor needs to leave camp for a funeral, you make arrangements to cover for her. If a camper gets in a pushing match, you help adjudicate. All the difficulties of Camp come to you. But the joyful moments generally do not. We do not see the camper conquer his fear of heights and reach the top of the wall. We do not learn the silly inside jokes. We can miss the magic of camp.

Last year, Susie Ma'am and I both tried different ways to fix this. I tried to join in activities with campers while Susie invited each cabin to the house for an hour of "Friendship Games".

Friendship games involve getting the campers together in a circle in our living room, letting them have a few treats and a soda (we are focusing on healthy options, but the trip to the house is a special occasion) and talk. She has some fun questions that help get the campers talking:

"If you could make any counselor into a camper your age to be in your cabin, who would it be and why?"

"What do you like most (least) about camp?"

"What activity do you think camp should add?"

She found that the girls loved it. She got to know them and laugh with them. They were delighted to come into the Director's House and felt special.

I, on the other hand, learned a slightly different lesson. While I am in good shape for a 45 year-old, I have less energy than the average camper. Several days of playing tennis, swimming and tossing lacrosse balls started to wear me out.

Those Friendship Games were looking like a pretty clever idea. Once again, Susie Ma'am had the wiser approach.

I, however, had 2 problems. First, I could not completely copy her. I am willing to admit that she was right, but I need to salvage some modicum of creativity. Second, the boys would laugh me out of the corps if I offered "friendship games".

I needed a solution. I put the problem to our team. After much discussion, the answer came simply, "Do the exact same thing and call it the Man Cave."

Genius.

So we sit on the same blankets, eat the same food, drink the same drinks and talk. But it is completely different.

Man Cave.

Steve Sir