

## The Value of a Child

For years, Susie Ma'am and I have strived to do a highly difficult task: explain to counselors what it feels like to be a parent and how much we, as parents cherish our children.

I think we have found an effective combination of tactics and would like to share them with you. I do so with two specific goals in mind. First, we want you to know the lengths we go to communicate the value of a child to our staff. Second, we would love to hear any suggestions or stories you might have that could help us do this even better.

## Your Heart

Susie Ma'am starts by simply quoting one of her favorites sayings: "Having a child is like watching your heart walking around outside your body". "I have four hearts and I worry about them and love them and have dreams for them."

Please remember that your cabin will be full of other people's hearts.

## The Bungee Jump

We will show them a DVD of one of us bungee jumping in New Zealand. The video shows the 150-foot fall toward the frigid Kawarau River. It shows us hopping the length of a plank from the prep area to the jumping zone. We are hopping because our legs are tied together and connected to the bungee cord. It is like walking a plank, hobbled, 150 feet up.

We describe the feeling of standing on the edge of that plank - staring down - looking at the water far below. The distance and the perspective make the water look fake. At this point, our brains rebelled. You see, we are both descended from ancestors who understood that falling 150 feet was a bad idea. How do I know this? Think about the adventurers thousands of years ago who thought jumping was a good idea. To put it bluntly, they jumped and were eliminated from the ancestral line.

Back to the plank. The hands sweat and the mind starts to freeze. Maybe the main part of the brain understands that thousands of people have done

this - it might also point out that the safety record is perfect - it also noted that the equipment looks great. It does not matter to your brain stem. It just says, "No thank you. I will pass."

Despite the huge "NO!!!" from within, we each jumped.

After sharing the story, we look at them and ask one question - "What is even more unnatural than jumping 150 feet into empty space?" Some guess skydiving. "No, even more unnatural." Eventually they give up and we answer:

"Sharing your child with someone you have not met."

We then ask them if they ever loan their car or computer or iPhone to someone that they met only for a few minutes. "Of course not."

Yet our parents share their children with us. They do so not because it is easy or convenient. In fact, few things could be farther from the truth. They do it because they love their children and they understand the potential for fun and growth at camp. They have decided that the benefits to their children (their hearts walking around) are worth the discomfort to them. But never forget that this is hard!

### Linda's story

Susie Ma'am describes her friend (we will call Linda - as this is a true story) who married soon after college. She and her husband both came from large families and wanted a large family of their own. After 2-3 years of not trying, they tried unsuccessfully for 3 more years.

They then went to a fertility specialist. After many tests and initial efforts, they realized that their only real chance of a pregnancy was invitro-fertilization. Susie Ma'am explains the procedure - from the physical demands to the meaningful expense. Their initial efforts failed, as did the next 4. On their sixth attempt, Linda became pregnant. They had taken out a second mortgage and spent their savings, but they would later have a precious little girl: Mandy. This would be the only child they would ever have together, and they knew it. The home was filled with pictures of Mandy and the parents talked about her constantly.

She is their life.

Susie then tells them "And this summer, she will be in one of your cabins. When you are make your parent phone call, realize that you might be talking to Linda."

### A Profound Sacrifice

Last summer, the mom (who we will call Melinda - as this is another true story) of a 2-year camper called to tell us three things. First, she had been diagnosed with cancer and was given less than 6 months to live. According to the doctor, she would not see Christmas. She woke each day knowing that her time with her precious child was one day shorter.

Second, she told us all the reasons that her child loves camp: the counselors, the friends, the beauty and the fun.

Finally, Melinda informed us that she was planning to send her daughter to camp. She wanted her daughter to have a place to return to summer after summer, even after Melinda was no longer here.

"Imagine knowing the time of your ending. How precious would every sunset be? Every laugh? Each moment with family? Now imagine the love required to give your child the gift of camp . . . and deny yourself time together."

"When you greet your parents, you might be meeting Melinda. Even if not, you will be meeting people who love their children just as much."

Steve Sir