

Camp Henry by Katherine H.

It's hard to pick out one or two things about Camp Henry to talk about because all of it still lives and breathes in me every day. That's true of many people who shared the In the Oaks Camp Henry experience with me as fellow campers, counselors, lifeguards, staff and clergy. It hasn't left any of us. It continues to make us who we are.

I've been thinking about posting a question to the Camp Henry Alumni Facebook page, to ask people to share one thing from their Camp Henry experience that they actively live out every day. I know the answer for myself. It's a life lesson I learned playing Drop the Trashcan Lid. Not kidding!

This opening night tradition at Camp Henry was very important when I was a camper and a counselor! I hope it's still part of the ritual. There is no simpler, more seemingly silly game in the world but it's a hugely powerful teacher.

After our arrival back at camp – always a joyous and exciting day – we'd all gather in the gym with our chairs in a big circle. I recall Pat Patton (lifeguard in my youth) starting the game and all of us dutifully sticking out our left hands in anticipation of someone running by and picking us up. As a rule, you desperately wanted to be picked by your best friend, the guy you secretly liked last summer and hoped would notice you this summer, the counselor you had a crush on. You did NOT want to be picked by a boy who liked you but you didn't like back or the camper that was new or just didn't fit in somehow. (We were kids – we didn't know better!)

I usually got picked, though not by the guy I secretly liked last summer and hoped would finally notice me! I was usually picked up by my best friends, by my counselor favorites (you know who you are) and sometimes by that one kid who didn't quite fit in - I survived – and later by the wonderful campers in my cabin.

As each camp week progressed, the identities I tagged on people began to disappear. As we learned, captured the flag, grew, sang, danced, created, played, shared, worshiped, cleaned cabins, climbed walls, walked across ropes and really talked to each other, it didn't matter anymore.

I know that looking back on life years down the road often endows memories with meaning that wasn't there at the time. That's not true with Camp Henry. Every second of every precious day of those weeks was a sacred gift. With the "wisdom of age," it's easy to see that the things we thought, said and did at Camp Henry draw direct lines to the adults we've become.

Just look at Trash Can Lid! I participated in that game year after year as a kid, a teen and then as a college-age counselor, I began to see beyond the camper in the chair. I saw best friend chose best friend, cementing ties that hold today. I watched puppy love in action. I saw the hope on the face of that kid who didn't quite fit in as the person holding the lid came close. And I saw the disappointed and sad face that replaced the look of hope when they were passed by. It began to hurt me to see it. Camp Henry taught me that I could seek out and pick up those people who were on the popular fringe, were new or didn't fit in. I could show them some of God's love.

Today, I intentionally seek out those people every day of my life because reaching out and sharing a smile and kind words makes ALL the difference. A big lesson from a simple game but one I would not have learned in the same powerful way. That's just one small example from a multitude of experiences. I thank God every day that Camp Henry is part of my life journey.

