

In the beginning...

Sunday morning. Most of my things were packed the night before, so I thought I would make it on time without a problem. Big mistake. The few things left still occupied enough time to make me about 20 minutes late. There were no worries of course about missing the bus as leaders were scheduled to be there before dropoff time, so instead I got there in the midst of things. Good thing I was only assigned to help load gear onto the bus. At about 9AM everyone was checked in and we were off on our four-hour bus ride to Michigan. The kids watched videos all the way there, but I later learned that our friends from Iowa only got to watch one video- on the way home. In case you missed it, they are from Iowa and therefore had a trip time over double ours. That means a lot of time remained for social activities, to put it mildly. Anyway, we arrived at about 1PM (time zone change, you know) and were welcomed by big banners held by a cheering staff. After unloading and moving into our cabins- I had a group of six plus a junior leader- we headed to the swim front for swimming tests and a fort-building competition. Note the non-mention of lunch. The kids brought their own lunches, and I even remembered my own this year (it was last year or the year before that I had left it sitting on the freezer at home). This year I was a representative for the army team, moving out of the air force from the last two military themes prior two and four years ago.

Starting a new paragraph just because I can, the fort contest began while various cabins two-by-two (or one by one in the case of a few very large girl cabins) took their swim tests. The sand forts (remember- this is a swim front so there was a beach) generally had moats around them because digging in the sand was probably the easiest thing for the kids, but there were buckets for making buildings like garages for tanks and

whatnot. No air strip this year, though I suppose they could have done a helipad had one of us had thought of it. The Iowa team, the marines once again, was not present for much of this but they did arrive in time to take 2nd place. Army ended up 3rd, the highest we would ever get this week outside of the upfront games. As for the swim tests, just about every cabin has its non-swimmer. Mine had three, half the kids. Well, it doesn't mean quite as much for this age group as water activities are limited anyway.

Since this along with cabin check-in and welcome/rules took up most of the afternoon, we can move on to after dinner. Throughout the week post-dinner would mean the daily game competition, but for Sunday we just moved on to the teaching time. It was here the theme for the week, the armor of God in Ephesians 6, was introduced. Each day would focus on a different part of the armor but not until Monday. the format was typical of a weekend service, but longer. Game activity time (the competition game in the case of this week, gym or crafts in the case of weekends) followed by worship, teaching, and small groups. Mornings would replace the field game with an up front game- unfortunately I missed most of these as I took this time to put in my contact lenses while the Nico, my junior leader, stayed with the kids. This first small group time was a great way to really start to know the kids, most of whom I already knew through small group time over the weekends. This year they tried to keep small groups from the weekend when possible- a matter simplified by there being three service times plus Iowa to make the four teams, each team then being divided into 4th/5th grades and boys/girls. four cabins per team. Since I stuck with my 4th-graders from last year, my cabin was all 5th grade.

Finally, there was free time on the courts where kids could

play tetherball, nuke-em (played on a volleyball court where any number can play catch with the ball- dropping or missing causes an "explosion" so someone is out), four-square, trampoline basketball, regular basketball, or just hang around and talk or play in the sand. They also had the opportunity to buy treats at the canteen. I was disappointed to see that they doubled the price on pop this year, though I think they also lowered ice cream a bit though I didn't buy any. They told me that the higher price on drinks balances with the loss they take on ice cream, and keeping most things at \$1 just makes managing the accounts that much easier. I can't argue with that, but I did make sure to stick with the one 20-oz offering all week- Dr. Pepper. Everything else was in cans. Of course, being right before bed, many kids chose Mt. Dew... Speaking of bed, it was a little difficult getting my six to sleep that night. I could blame the Dew, but it was really mostly the excitement of being there. Unfortunately Steve, the man in charge and two cabins away, had to visit our cabin not once but twice that evening. Oops...

more to come.

Camp 2009: Day 1

Days -2, -1, and 0 were getting ready days of course. Day one however is where it begins. Past years have had a check-in time of 10:00AM. Not so this year. With a brand new 8:00AM check-in time I dragged myself out of bed early and got a ride over to the bank lot across from the church. While I didn't really care much for the early call time, it did give us a couple extra hours once we got to camp. The chaos of checking

in seemed less this year for whatever reason. I know numbers were down due to the you-know-what, but even considering it seemed pretty tame. Parents checked in the kids, picked up tags, saw the nurse, carried the bags to the appropriate bus, waited for departure. During this time I had the chance to say hi to three of the kids in my cabin and their parents. Another one I found out would meet us at camp while the fifth I didn't know at all, leaving it a total surprise when I finally did. Around the final prayer and departure time, I finally met him as he was pointing to some bags that hadn't yet been loaded on. I looked at the tag and saw the bags were for someone in my cabin. I turned to him and saw he was the fifth boy- Diego. I later found out that the bags were for his stepfather who was coming with him. This was no ordinary boy either- he was in two leg casts (to straighten his legs- they weren't broken) and was... small. Ever watch [Little People, Big World](#)? Yes, he has that condition. After a prayer with the parents and campers we hopped onto the buses and we were off. We gave them about a half-hour of chat time and then the first movie went in. All the movies were Disney of course- rated G animated features. Ratatouille was first and it engaged at least 95% of the kids. Wall-E followed. Too bad the bus DVD player had no remote as Wall-E had a couple of nice shorts in the extras. Halfway through the bus ride we stopped at a rest-stop so the drivers could take a quick pit-stop. Yeah, leaders too. ☐ () Kids were stuck on the bus, but the movie was kept playing so most didn't mind I'm sure. Having forgotten my lunch (it's always something, right?) I scrambled here to get overprice vending machine offerings while still trying to pick up something extra for the kids in the same boat as me. Other leaders chipped in too.

So 3½ hours later, or 4½ when you take the time change from CDT to EDT into consideration, we arrived- about ten minutes after Wall-E ended. We got to the usual drop off point- and kept going. Yes! No walking a half-mile to the camp, partly

down a 40° incline (or back up that same incline at the end of the week for that matter!). We were greeted with large welcome signs from the staff, waiting for us on the game field. While the bus was unloaded and the luggage carried to the cabins we were given an introduction speech. The week at camp was officially underway! We split for the cabins so the kids could get ready for their swim tests, then headed for the swim front. For one of only two times during the week the gate was swung open so we could enter without checking in. At all other times the kids were required to check in to the swim front to keep track of who was there in case something happened. I had told Diego's stepdad that we would start out with a sandcastle/fort competition when others were doing their swim tests, two cabins at a time. Wrong! Just because we had the previous four years didn't mean this would be year five- oops. Instead, we played a friendly game of nuke 'em, a volleyball variation where instead of hitting the ball it is thrown up in the air. If it isn't caught by the other team, the person on that team who last touched the ball trying to catch it, or the one who it fell closest to otherwise is out. The game is over when one team is out. At the end of our swim test during this time, three of my kids had red bracelets for non-swimmers. Diego was one of course as he did not even take the test because of his casts. This was definitely different for me with more than half my cabin wearing red bands; in the past I have always had only one or two.

So with that done, we changed out of the swimming gear, went to the court on top of the hill by the girls' cabins for more instructions for the week, then hit the lodge for dinner. It looked like this year they turned the tables 90 degrees from previous years, but other than that it was the same as previous years. Following dinner was the first lesson. This week's theme was Code Blue: Having a Heart for God, so all the lessons were based on this theme. The main passage of scripture was the parable of the seeds and the soils they landed on or in. We broke out for small group, and what was

another first we never broke into smaller groups. In the past I have had 7-10 kids in my cabin so the kids could be split into two groups since every cabin had at least two leaders, but with only five kids we just stayed together with all three of us leaders taking turns leading discussion. My five kids this year all had been raised in strong Christian homes, and they all had stories to tell of accepting Jesus. I have had others in the past that had not and have even been able to lead such kids to Christ, but this year it was all about living the Christian life with all these kids which I will be the first to say is a struggle.

As the last part of the night the kids had some "free time" which for this age group is staying in one area free to play whatever games they wished in that area. This was their first opportunity to hid the canteen, a short bus painted like a bee where they could buy candy and pop (Gatorade and water as well). This first night was also where I received my first scars which still populate my arms to an extent of mosquito bites as I was eaten alive. After this I would remember to put on bug spray...

The students were given a choice on whether or not to take a shower- the only night I gave that option since they didn't do much activity that day- and then we prayed, turned out the lights, and this post finally ended. □

Transitions

This is a time of transitions. Of course, as you know this is the time school days transition to long vacation time for the kids. They will be transitioning to the next grade, moreso of course these days than yesteryear. Once upon a time schools

believed that holding back a child who wasn't ready for the next grade was the right thing to do. Parents had to fight the schools to keep their children from this fate. Nowadays, schools have done a 180 and advance just about anyone believing it does more harm than good to hold that child back. This means that a child can do pretty much whatever he or she wants during the year without fear of having to repeat the grade. Parents who actually believe they might help their child by holding him/her back now must fight for this end instead. Is being held back such a bad thing? I don't know- I just know things have really changed in schooling.

Okay, I have gone way off topic now, so where was I? Ah yes, transitions. I am transitioning from working to looking for work. I will be looking in to a state job possibly, among other things. I mean, besides teaching- there are state jobs in just about every field. There are also transitions in my church as of late. One of the teaching pastors left a couple of months ago after only a short time at my church to head up another college. The new singles group got started a couple of weeks ago. Most kids moved up a grade starting this week (the rest will change over at the end of August). And, there have been some staff rotations. The pastor that had written the curriculum for at least 4th/5th grade, probably the younger grades too, had transitioned to another church campus running both from there, but now he's back and they hired another one to take over at the other campus so now each is dedicated to one campus. However, as duties have changed now a different pastor who previously did mostly the younger grades has officially taken over 4th and 5th grades as well, meaning he is responsible to get out the emails about the weekend to the leaders, such as what we should be doing, who will be teaching, new rules, etc... Yes, with the transitions come new rules. Just a slight change, but since he didn't get an email out being new to this and all- he didn't let us know until Saturday night. One of us two leaders (yes, only two of us this service) had to take over last minute. Since I work

two services, I agreed I would teach Sunday morning so she taught Saturday night. The third service was actually worked out between a couple of the leaders phoning each other when they didn't get an email I found out later, so Sunday went quite smoothly.

This was the first time for the former third-graders, now fourth-graders, so things were completely new to them. They are used to having a drama (which I was part of, of course) but now they have a game time instead. Worship is also different- they have to provide all the singing. Prior to this, they sang to recorded children's songs, with the leader providing motions to do. Now the leader is more like the leader in the main worship service, providing the music via guitar and possibly other instruments depending on who is there. Well, this was how it worked Sunday. We had no worship leader on Saturday night. High school students are a big part of this ministry and we just don't have any serving on Saturday nights (they often provide the music as well as lead). We have had an adult doing worship Saturday nights, but he wasn't there this time for some reason. I hope he didn't transition out, or if so that a replacement takes over quickly.

Anyway, also new to the new kids are small groups divided up by gender. Girls with female leaders, boys with male. The leaders could of course be high-school age, adults, or somewhere in between which is why I don't say "women" or "men." Well, one thing that hasn't changed is my Monday night small group, and I have to do my homework for it, so- later.

(Drama × 2) + Teacher + (Leader × 2) = Full Weekend

Definitely a full weekend this time around. My normal schedule is fairly busy as is, which is one drama and kid's leader for two services (one same service as drama). Then I go to the worship service during the first Sunday service. This weekend was also a teaching weekend for me and I filled in for another drama member as well. What's the difference between teaching and leading? Well, in a given service there are 30-40 kids in 4th/5th grades. That means several leaders are needed, at least one for every ten kids but the lower the ratio the better. These leaders lead discussion during small group time and of course all are on hand to assist whenever needed whether it be to take care of someone injured during game time, redirect wavering attention, whatever. There is only one teacher though who teaches the actual lesson during lesson time. Today that was me- I do it once a month typically. Today was actually probably the shortest lesson I've given in a long time, meaning more time for small groups. If only I could keep it short all the time that would be ideal. Moving through the Old Testament we focused on King Saul, and why he didn't have a true heart for God. Next week will be focused on King David and how his heart **was** for God. King Solomon will follow the week after. Of course today the lesson started with how Israel wrongly wanted a King in the first place so God gave them the type of king they thought they wanted- tall and handsome. Just like the idols thrust before us today. Unfortunately good looks on the outside don't equate to a good heart on the inside. Yes he did lead Israel to some victories, but he showed himself as one who shifted blame to others, was jealous, and was disobedient. Eventually God just removed his right to rule and selected a king for them that they **should have** wanted. I would bet that David would have been completely happy with just being a leader while God remained king, but

since the precedent was set David would inherit the title of king once Saul was finally killed. This last thought is my opinion of course, so if it is wrong then don't blame the Bible please.

The drama was about doing the right thing, in this case my role was typical of my real self- procrastination. My character knew he had to clean up the lab after a failed experiment, but let it sit instead for three days without doing anything about it, so now it's showtime (remember, imaginary TV studio with live audience) and the place still isn't clean! He almost gets fired when the studio owner calls and asks what's up...

Anyway, now I'm home and three hours later writing this up. Now if you'll excuse me I have some of [The Office](#) to watch- it is due today and I am not even finished with half the season! Good show, but it took a few episodes to get into it.