

Life changer

Business



At 3 a. m., when the stars are out and hours before it is even considered “early in the morning,” the alarm goes off. I roll out of bed and into the passenger seat of the car in what feels like one fluid motion.

As my mom drives along the deserted highway, I stare out of the fogged up window. This drive lasts three hours, but when we get to our destination- the parking lot of a rundown motel- I immediately get into a huge van to continue the drive for ten more hours. Although this may not seem like an ideal summer morning for most teenagers, it was the best in my life. The van was on its way back to my camp. Thirty-six hours earlier, that same van had dropped me off, after the first session of camp had ended. I had been home for less than twenty-four hours when I realized that I wanted to return for the rest of the summer.

Figuring this out for myself, approaching my parents, and taking the necessary steps to make this happen were actions that changed my opinion and perception of myself and what I am capable of. This past year was my fourth summer at Stone Mountain Adventures, or SMA, a summer camp located on a small farm in Huntingdon, Pennsylvania. Because of its small size, everyone quickly becomes close friends. Our director and his family are an essential part of camp life. They often participate in activities, including wakeboarding, rock-climbing, canoeing, and basketball games.

Even more, the director and his wife encourage each camper to be his or her best self, and with this kind of leadership present, it is easy for everyone to live up to this ideal. My first summer at SMA, I was a shy, quiet, twelve-year-old; the youngest person at camp. But within days of being in this

environment, I had tried new activities that I previously feared (white-water rafting), dressed up in wild clothes, sang at the top of my lungs, and made some very close friends. Last summer, I had decided to stay only one session - one final hoorah. Initially, after those two weeks, I was happy to be home and glad to see my family.

But very quickly, I realized that I would be infinitely happier if I could return. SMA creates a community in which each person wants to have a great time, as well as ensure that everyone around them is having a great time, too. I missed the late-night talks, the weekly community service projects, and the long runs in the morning. When I realized that I had made a mistake in coming home after two weeks, instead of moping around my house and wishing I were still at camp, I recognized that I could be. After I came to this realization, I discussed with my parents the possibility of returning.

I did not complain, or beg to be taken back. Conversely, I outlined my thoughts in a mature conversation. I told them how I felt; how even though I was happy to be home, I could be even happier back at camp. I offered to help pay for the additional cost, and apologized for the disruption to everyone else's schedules. Mostly, though, I explained that if there is even a possibility, especially if it is attainable, to be in a place that one feels better about him or herself, and where one has the potential to be challenged and grow, then one should strive to take it.

At SMA I could fly, whereas at home I could only coast. This situation was the first time I talked to my parents like this. I was not impolite, I merely advocated for what I thought was the best opportunity for myself. Before I

did this, I always believed that my parents knew what was best. I believed that they knew me almost better than I knew myself. When I had been in situations I did not like- if a soccer coach humiliated more than coached, or if a friend spread rumors more than truth- I always thought I just had to grin and bear it.

And in some situations one does have to do that. However, in this instance, I realized that I could make a change. Realizing what I wanted and approaching my parents about how to achieve it was a huge step for me, and it subsequently affected many aspects of my life. I learned that I am capable of much more than I previously thought, and that I have a duty to myself to realize what I want and need in order to be happier and successful. Not only can I now understand these feelings, but I can act appropriately on them; I learned that if I summarize my ideas and make an achievable plan on how to attain my goals, I actually can accomplish them.

This realization is part of the reason I became interested in switching schools. Similar to my experience over the summer, even though I am happy at my current high school, I believe that I could be even happier elsewhere. Over the past two years, I have been on in intense crew team. Every practice is an opportunity for me to push myself beyond my original limits, and reach my own personal goals. However, I am able to do this through the motivation and support of my teammates.

Similarly, your institution challenges and supports each student, yet also brings a group of students together. Everyone works hard and strives to do his or her best, as well as help all of those around them do the same.

Certainly, school is not camp, however, much of what I love about SMA is encompassed in your institution. I want to be in a place where I can thrive as a student, as a person, and as part of a group, and I believe that your institution gives me that opportunity.