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The Most Powerful Thing

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The Most Powerful Thing

By Caitlin Jankiewicz



Anthony Iseuse

▲ Caitlin Jankiewicz

WHEN I SIGNED UP TO WORK AT CAMP WAKONDA,

I couldn't have imagined the experiences I'd have, perhaps fortunately, for if I had, I never in my wildest dreams would have agreed to be a counselor.

In the weeks leading up to kids' camps, I and 18 other counselors were given fair warning: counseling was likely going to be the hardest three weeks of our lives. Already exhausted from a month of staff training and camp meeting,

I began to question whether I could actually do it. However, upon meeting my adorable junior campers, who named our cabin "Caitlin's Cute Kittens" and made paper ears to match, I began to relax. Despite scraped knees and forgotten shoes, unior week passed without calamity. Then arrived the tween campers. Gone were the little girls who refused to take showers. These 11 to 14-year-olds left me, only 19 myself, thinking "ugh, teenagers."

One of my tween campers in particular made a lasting impact on me. I'll refer to her as "D," age 12. D came with the attitude of "everything is boring, I don't want to do anything." From the comments she made, I gathered she had had some pretty rough experiences growing up, leaving her hesitant to get close to me, emotionally or physically. The first time I gave her a hug, her response was an indifferent, ". . . you're touching me." However, I noticed that, for a few seconds here and there, her apathetic attitude would fall away and I could see she was actually having a lot of fun. It was almost as if her tough girl shell hadn't hardened and occasionally cracked. Once I realized this,

I determined I would try to draw out her true self. This was challenging, as her attitude remained the same, despite my efforts to connect with her.

However, halfway through the week, something happened. Our cabin went to camp out overnight at a run-down, bug-infested bungalow in the middle of the woods. When I refused to take the girls back to our cabin, D threw a tantrum. She was sent back to the main part of camp and slept elsewhere.

The next day, I briefly admonished D for the previous night's behavior, and then went back to showing her as much love as I possibly could. It was almost as if she needed to see I would love her regardless of her behavior before she let herself trust me, because from that time on, D's tough girl shell fell away and her spunky, impish, ridiculous personality came out. D became the girl who loved me the most that week, a major change from the beginning. She started hanging back from the rest of the group to walk with me, even putting her arm around my waist and pulling my arm around her shoulders. On my roughest day, she organized the other girls to make cards telling me how amazing I was, even locking me out of our room so it would be a surprise. By the end of the week, D was a completely different person. The only thing I did was to love her, regardless of her behavior.

I think that, as Christians, we often try to reach people by telling them what they need to change. We try so hard to be a light for God that we become a blinding glare, driving people away, rather than a warm glow that draws people to Jesus. Because God is love, the only way to show God is to show love. Love changes people. It changed D, and it changed me. ■

Caitlin Jankiewicz is a sophomore Computer Science and Math major at Andrews University.

Caitlin received a \$100 scholarship for her story. If you're a youth or young adult interested in submitting a story for consideration, please email: herald@lakeunion.org

Passing the Torch

By Malissa Martin



Jean-Irès Michel

▲ Joe'Ona and Jae'Bel Middleton

Sixteen-year-old Chicago-area twins, Jae'O'na and Jae'Bel Middleton, grew up attending camp meetings with their parents, Jeff and Donna, and noticed something striking happen over the years. Each year, they noticed fewer and fewer of their peers attending. "There used to be a time at camp meeting where it wasn't just workers going up [front to minister]," says Jae'Bel who remembers the wide cross-section of people she saw participating. "Now a lot of who are going up are workers or pastors' kids."

However, instead of griping about the lack of youth involvement, the Hyde Park Church members decided to do something. Jae'O'na talked to the Lake Region Conference (LRC) Youth director, Jason North, and asked if she and her sister could host a forum for the youth and LRC leadership team, to which he agreed. "We kind of just started talking about how we as youth felt as though we're left out, but we

understand what's going on and we'd love to be a part of our churches and be more involved," Jae'O'na said.

Youth between 10- to 30-years-old attended the meeting to voice their opinions. That meeting birthed the Youth Council, a 10-member group passionate about giving the LRC youth a voice to ensure that camp meeting reflects their interests.

Most council members are from the Black churches, but a few are from the Hispanic and Ghanaian churches; despite having their own separate camp meetings.

The group started strong, meeting once a month from June to September 2018. They worked on the "Sweet 16 and Elite 8 Super Youth Weekend," as well as youth rallies held this spring in the Chicagoland, Illiana, Michiana, Motor City and the Hispanic FEHJA areas.

In addition to camp meeting speaker recommendations, they also have plans for possible outdoor activities (volleyball courts, basketball courts, swimming pool), and new activities for camp meeting.

Since many of the members are in high school or college (the twins are home-schooled), the group hasn't been able to collectively and consistently meet monthly. Nevertheless, the team remains in contact and all are still trying to make sure they are included when planning youth events for camp meeting.

The Youth Council is accepting new members; youth can be as young as 10. For more information on how to join the council or to contact the Middleton twins, email: youth.contact@lrcsda.com. ■

Detroit-based writer, Malissa Martin is a member of City Temple Church.