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### Why Summer Camp Matters: The Benefits of Working at Summer Camp on Future Employment

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## **Abstract**

After the school year ends, many students have the freedom to choose how they would like to spend their summer. Internships have become an increasingly popular option for students who seek to improve their resumes and boost their chances of landing a job out of college. This project, however, takes a look at one of the major alternatives to an internship, the summer camp counselor job, in order to demonstrate what it is exactly that camp counselors do and why this job has been critical to the success of so many individuals. Although this project does attempt to place value on the camp counselor position and persuade students to at least consider this as a viable summer option, the purpose of this project is not to bash the internship experience. Rather, through six first-person interview stories of individuals who either work or have worked at Camp Seneca Lake, this project concludes that both an internship and a camp counselor job are highly valuable, albeit in their own ways, and that students should consider both when thinking about summer goals and what they hope to accomplish. Though some of the first-person narratives place emphasis on the importance of the internship experience in terms of gaining credentials and landing a job, all of the stories clearly show the value of working at summer camp and how a camp counselor job can translate to so-called “real world” success. As such, this project hopes to complicate the often times far too simple decision for students to seek summer internships, and it encourages students to truly think about how the camp counselor job may benefit them in their search for future employment.

## Executive Summary

*Why Summer Camp Matters: The Benefits of Working at Summer Camp on Future Employment* takes a look at how the camp counselor job facilitates the development of critical life skills and personal qualities that can ultimately lead to greater success in a future career. In an effort to show the value of a summer camp job and the new skills that ultimately come with such an experience, this paper investigates two main questions, those being, “Why should students seriously consider working at a summer camp as a legitimate summer job?” and, “How does the camp counselor position benefit and prepare students for future work?” Though this paper does, to a certain extent, pit the summer camp counselor job up against the internship experience, it is important to note that the purpose of this paper is not to diminish the value of internships. It is widely known that internship experiences can be valuable, and, as this paper mentions, often times necessary to land a job. That being said, the overarching purpose of this project is to finally bring to light the camp counselor job and demonstrate just how important this work can be on people’s lives while simultaneously delving into the inner delimita that students are often confronted with when trying to figure out plans for the summer.

The introduction to this paper begins with a creative nonfiction narrative detailing my first bus ride to the overnight Camp Seneca Lake (CSL) as an eight-year-old camper and the role that Camp eventually came to have on my life as I transitioned from a camper to a staff member there. After an analysis of five texts that were recently written about the camp counselor job and an analysis of how these texts have influenced the discourse surrounding summer employment, I then move into the body of the project consisting of primary, qualitative research in the form of interviews. For this section of the paper, I interviewed six individuals who either currently or previously worked at Camp Seneca Lake, asking them to describe to me a specific moment of

their time at Camp that they felt might demonstrate the value of the summer camp counselor job. I then translated each interview into a first-person creative nonfiction narrative, and it is in these stories that the reader can discern the life skills and personal qualities that these individuals obtained from working at summer camp. Each narrative consists of a brief introduction to the interviewee, including where he or she currently works or goes to school along with an outline of his or her time at Camp Seneca Lake. The specific story of the individual is then told in first-person, and to conclude, I return back to my own voice to analyze the narrative, looking at the skills and qualities the person gained from the described experience while also including other relevant information from our interview. Though the stories are largely meant to show how working at Camp better prepared them for their future careers, they also demonstrate the value of the camp counselor experience and the interviewees' love and passion for the campgrounds.

To conclude this project, I explain why I was inspired to tell these stories and give a voice to the summer camp employees that so rarely get heard. My passion for this topic, to begin, largely stems from the sheer amount of time I have spent at Camp Seneca Lake. From 2002 until the present, I have attended Camp Seneca Lake every summer, going from a one-month camper to a two-month senior camper to a Counselor in Training to a counselor to a Unit Head, a position I held in 2014 and will yet again be holding for one month in 2015 before heading off to medical school in August.

My passion, however, also stems from what working at Camp has provided me. When I was a senior camper in 2008, I was shy, reserved, and I lacked confidence in my capabilities and myself as a whole. Beginning in 2009, however, when I returned to Camp as a Counselor in Training, that all changed. I had mentors that guided me and worked with me to become a more confident version of myself. I was immediately placed in a leadership role as a counselor in

charge of a group of kids, and as a result of these new responsibilities, I realized that I was good at what I was doing and I had people supporting me in the process. Working at Camp gave me the invaluable confidence in myself that I carried throughout college and will ultimately carry with me in my future career as a physician.

Stories such as my own, however, of learning to lead and growing confident in oneself are hardly unique among individuals that work at Camp Seneca Lake. Through the six stories composing the bulk of this project, I am hoping to show precisely this, that I am not an anomaly and that the camp counselor job truly can impact everyone that has the privilege of working with kids in this capacity.

I also felt somewhat of an obligation to produce this piece as someone who has never had an internship and was still able to achieve my main goal of getting accepted into medical school. For the past thirteen summers, I have been attending or working at Camp Seneca Lake, and never once did I hesitate about returning the next summer to continue having an impact on my campers. This continuous track record at Camp, however, as seen in some of the stories, is somewhat of an anomaly. Several of the interviewees discussed with me how they took time off from working at Camp in order to pursue internships or other jobs more directly related to their future careers. These internships, according to the interviewees, were necessary in their specific fields in order to gain credentials and ultimately land a job, and as such, it is no wonder why these individuals decided to leave the campgrounds. Today, it is commonplace for an internship or other career-related experience to be a pre-requisite for landing a job, and this is completely understandable. However, what I hope to show in this paper is that students can have both the internship experience and the summer camp counselor experience. The two do not need to be mutually exclusive or pitted against one another in a camp counselor versus internship debate. It

is clear that internships can and often times do lead to jobs, and the technical skills obtained from internship experiences are often times invaluable. I also argue, however, that a summer camp counselor job is equally as valuable an experience, albeit a very different one, and an option that should never be brushed aside when students contemplate what they want to do with their summers. As seen in the stories, working at summer camp has changed the interviewees' lives and given them skills and qualities that they likely would not have obtained elsewhere.

The main issue here is that in the undergraduate education environment, the internship experience is highly touted and it commands respect while the summer camp counselor job is largely seen as a joke, an opportunity to soak in the sun and play with kids all day. While many camp counselors are lucky enough to be outside all day with their campers, this depiction of the camp counselor job couldn't be farther from the truth. What people don't see from the outside are the homesick campers, the kids who wake up their counselors in the middle of the night because they just wet the bed, and the campers who need to be monitored for eating disorders and body image issues. What people don't see is the camp counselor helping the kid with depression finally feel comfortable speaking about his problems, the camp counselor helping kids feel confident in themselves as they step up to a soccer goal post acting as a pull-up bar, the camp counselor planning a five-day trip for forty-seven teenage campers in three different states, the camp counselor being rewarded as the best first-year staff member for truly impacting the Camp community as just a seventeen-year old, the camp counselor giving his camper a chance to lead a sail racing lesson in front of her peers, and the camp counselor constructing a brand new community space in the woods for the entire Camp to use during Saturday morning Shabbat services. These previous six moments are told in far greater detail and excitement in the six stories that form the body of this project. Camp, to the interviewees and to me, is far more than

just a workplace; it is home to our fondest relationships, memories, and experiences that have molded us into who we are today.

This project is meant for the students, parents, advisors, and employers that may not see the true value of a summer camp counselor job. Though the bulk of this piece references solely the summer camp at which I grew up, Camp Seneca Lake, the interview stories are suggestive and may point to similar experiences from counselors at other camps around the world. The work here is a testament to what I believe is the best job I have ever had and I will ever have in my life.



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## Preface

Prior to reading *Why Summer Camp Matters: The Benefits of Working at Summer Camp on Future Employment*, it is important to note the research methodology of this project. The paper, to begin, relies heavily on interviews with current and former employees of Camp Seneca Lake. Before conducting my interviews, I sought and received approval for this project from the Institutional Review Board at Syracuse University in case number 14-324. These interviews were all conducted by telephone within a ten-day span in January of 2015, and the conversations were recorded on my computer using QuickTime Player software. All of the interviewees were aware that they were being recorded, and I also transcribed the interviews to the best of my ability in Microsoft Word. The interviews ranged in length from twenty-nine minutes to fifty-three minutes.

After each interview, I then began the process of transforming it into a story and cohesive narrative. Though I tried my best to obtain the details of the stories and ask for more specifics as needed from the interviewees, I still found myself asking most of the interviewees a question or two after their formal interviews were completed in order to best complete their pieces. As someone who has been attending and working at Camp Seneca Lake since 2002, I was also lucky in that I knew the places and grounds on which these stories took place. As such, I was able to rely on my first-hand experience and knowledge of Camp when necessary to add more depth and better describe the surroundings. That being said, I stuck almost entirely to the information given to me in the interviews when crafting the stories in order for them to remain as factually accurate as possible.

Following the completion of each story, I emailed a draft to the interviewee in order to receive feedback and ensure that his or her story was accurate. Barring a few minor edits, all of the interviewees stated that their stories were factually correct, and a few of the interviewees were amazed to see their moments at Camp Seneca Lake turned into words on a page. One individual wrote to me, "This is an incredible work of art. A really beautiful rendition. Sitting in my Friday morning 10:10 class and it actually almost brought a tear to my eye thinking about our time in 2013." Another responded, "...I can't even describe how much it means to me to be able to read my own story. I think it's probably similar for all of the people you're writing about. It's easy to just think you're another counselor at camp, but having the ability to read about your own impact in such an incredibly crafted story is truly unique and an amazing experience." It is little comments like these that, to me, solidify the importance of telling the stories of camp counselors that so often go unheard.

At its core, this multimodal piece was constructed through primary, qualitative research as seen in the interview stories that comprise the bulk of this work. Some secondary research about summer camps and internships is used in the introduction, but overall, the written product here is largely creative nonfiction in genre.

Lastly, this project is presented with endnotes and a bibliography in *Chicago*-style. Notes and works cited pages are included at the end of the text to provide further information on the secondary sources referenced and the interviews I conducted.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would first off like to thank the faculty of the Writing Program that I have had the privilege of learning under in my four years at Syracuse University. Specifically, I would like to thank my advisor, Rebecca Howard, and reader, Eileen Schell, for their help and guidance with this project. I would also like to thank Joshua Sham, Jon Broder, Andrew Powers, Madeline Heilbronner, Jake Massa, and Rachel Rosenbaum for letting me interview them and tell their stories. Thank you for your unbelievable work and your dedication to the campers that come down 200 Camp Road in Penn Yan, New York every summer. These stories are for you, but even more so, for the rest of the world to hear so that your invaluable work and that of countless other summer camp counselors can finally be recognized.

## Advice to Future Honors Students

Dear Future Honors Students,

The task before you is a daunting one, to come up with an idea for a two-year-long project and write seventy-some pages about it, all the while resuming a standard course load and trying to enjoy your junior and senior years of college. Though this project can be more than overwhelming at times, the first thing you should know is that it is worth it. I am nearing the end, with just under a month left until this project is due, and I can confidently say that working on this Capstone has helped me not only learn to manage such a massive task, but it has also given me the opportunity to focus on something so important to me.

My project is about summer camp counselors and the life skills and personal qualities camp counselors gain from this type of work with kids. However, this was not my topic from the start. When I first began planning my Capstone project, I thought I wanted to write about the rhetoric of concussions in youth football, a topic that combined two of my main interests of sports and medicine. As a future medical student, I imagined that this project would have immense value as I prepared for medical school and began to get excited about this new graduate-level undertaking. This topic though, as interesting as it was, simply didn't captivate me. I didn't feel as though I had a real stake in the project, and my motivation, as a result, suffered. I eventually came to the conclusion that I needed to change my topic to something more closely related to my passions, something that would drive me to become invested in this long-term project. As someone who has been working at summer camp since 2009 and someone who has been attending summer camp since 2002, I decided to write about the camp counselor position and the inner dilemma that students often face when deciding whether they should work at a summer camp or get a summer internship. My project became devoted to showing what exactly camp counselors do and why so many individuals have been moved by the summer camp experience. Through research, interviews, and first-hand accounts, I was able to craft a piece that was powerful to me and the countless others that had also stepped foot on the campgrounds. I found that I had a stake in this project as someone so passionate about the work I do at summer camp, and I wanted to show people that the work I do there matters. As a result, I found myself greatly enjoying the Capstone experience, and because I found a topic that I loved, the writing process actually became fun for me. The biggest piece of advice I have for you is to choose a topic closely related to your passions and in which you are truly invested.

Next, I would encourage you to meet and talk regularly with your advisor. He or she will often times be your best support system and the best source of advice as you make progress on your project and try to manage the countless questions that arise throughout the process. It is easy to go weeks, even months, without speaking to your advisor, but try your best not to let that happen. When the end of the project nears and you need more and more feedback, it is important that you have already established a rapport with your advisor. It is also fun to form a bond with a faculty member and truly get to know him or her on a deeper level through such a continuous, two-year-long dialogue.

Finally, enjoy the process. Though this project can be unbelievably stressful at times, and though there will be moments where you question why you are doing this, just know that it is worth it. Know that you are making a wise decision to tackle such a massive undertaking, and know that you are capable of completing this task. I hope you all enjoy this experience and craft some incredible pieces.

## Introduction

In August of 2002, I boarded a different yellow school bus for the first time outside of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Rochester. A heavy blue backpack loaded with sour gummy worms sat on my back, and an old man made the final boarding call for the buses that would soon be departing. I hugged my parents goodbye, holding onto each of them tightly before making my way up the school bus steps and into my maroon, ripped leather seat. The bus roared to life as Ian, my best friend at the time, sat down beside me, and brief cheers erupted as the bus began to move. As my parents waved goodbye and blew kisses at me, I gazed out the window at them until my head could turn no more. We were off.

The bus made its way out of Rochester and onto the thruway, eventually taking exit forty-two for Geneva, merely a site to pass through before arriving at our final destination. Rural countryside began to pass us on both sides, and my attention shifted from the candy in my backpack to the landscape outside; I was mesmerized by the fruit stands and crops and cows that were all so foreign to me. The sun glistened off of the massive lake that sat beyond the farmland to my left, and beyond that sat even more land tended to by farmers and animals alike. Seneca Lake was beautiful.

The bus began to slow, and as I continued to gaze out the window, a long dirt road slowly became visible up ahead. A newfound tension filled the air as the fellow campers beside me stood up in their seats to see if we had arrived. The silence steadily turned into chatter that transformed into yells as they all saw the intersection of Route 14 and Camp Road in front of us. We had arrived.

I continued to sit as eighteen-wheelers flew past our school bus signaling to turn left onto Camp Road. The bus made the turn, and we bounced up and down in our seats from the

turbulence of the rocks and dirt over which the tires plowed. After stopping at the railroad tracks halfway down the road, the bus continued its rocky and winding trek toward the campgrounds.

Cheers erupted on the bus, the two counselors sitting up front taking the lead, and a white building with an “Office” sign passed us on the left. The bus slowed as it eyed its parking spot on a massive grass field at the base of the road. Counselors with painted chests, welcome signs, and boom boxes blaring music jumped up and down in the field, yelling for the campers to finally join them on the campgrounds. As the bus doors opened, campers sprinted off and into the arms of their beloved counselors and best friends that they had been waiting to see for the past year. I hesitantly picked up my backpack from the dirty bus floor, placed it on my back, and walked off the bus, eyeing a mass of people unlike any I had ever seen before. As I stepped foot in the grass field, a counselor with a painted chest and clipboard in his hand hurried over to me, holding out his hand for a high five.

“Welcome to Camp Seneca Lake.”

For the next seven summers, I repeated this process of hugging my parents, stepping onto the bus, staring out the window, and turning from Route 14 onto Camp Road, the time of my stay eventually increasing from three weeks to seven weeks as I grew to love the campgrounds. And for the succeeding five summers, I yet again turned off of Route 14 onto Camp Road, this time as a staff member behind the wheel of my black Mazda 3, packed to the roof with duffel bags and trunks and backpacks and laundry bags and a tiny ukulele.

Each time I approach it, I feel the power of that intersection of Route 14 and Camp Road in rural Penn Yan, New York. Each summer that my bus or car hangs a left onto that dust-spewing, unpaved road, the memories come flooding back, memories of late nights talking in platform tents, of days spent on the narrow docks that extend out onto Seneca Lake, of banging

on the tables and cheering in the dining hall while simultaneously chowing down on chicken nuggets, of leading the red team to victory in staff basketball during Camp's seventh Color War, of putting on a button down and khakis for the Friday night Sabbath, of hugging my sister after completing her triathlon around the campgrounds, and of shedding more than just a tear as I watch my campers board the bus that dreaded, late August day.

That turn onto Camp Road always seems to transport me from one world to another. My heart races and my stomach drops each summer that I turn the steering wheel counterclockwise to make my way onto that dirt road. My pupils dilate as the nearly mile-long Camp Road extends out in front of me, Seneca Lake resting on the horizon. My arm hairs flail upwards as nerves tingle my entire body, and my mouth hangs open from the unimaginable beauty.

With one simple left turn, I am moved, both physically in the literal sense and emotionally in the truly meaningful one. Route 14 is civilization; Camp Road is beautiful isolation. Route 14 is widely public; Camp Road is wondrous confinement. Route 14 is massive lakeside wineries; Camp Road is the spine-tingling intoxication of love and friendship.

It is hard for me, however, to express these sentiments to outsiders, people that have never walked the campgrounds or experienced Camp Seneca Lake for themselves. How can I possibly describe that feeling you get upon turning down Camp Road at the beginning of each summer? How can I possibly put the intensity of a two and a half day Color War into words? How can I possibly explain what it is like to say goodbye to a camper that has grown so much in your two months together? I can't, and that in itself is one of the major problems with working at Camp Seneca Lake year after year. I simply cannot narrate the power and meaning of my experiences on the campgrounds, leaving my friends and family confused as to why I decide to

return to Camp every summer, particularly when other, more esteemed summer jobs and internships remain available.

A senior at Syracuse University, I have been accepted to medical school at SUNY Upstate Medical University, and I will be beginning there this coming August of 2015. For the past five summers, I have worked at Camp Seneca Lake as a counselor and Unit Head, and I never once considered taking an internship that could have, on paper, seriously boosted my chances of an acceptance to medical school. That is not to say, however, that I was never pressured to take an internship and seek an alternative to working at Camp. While my family was more than supportive of me in my decision making process, I was constantly asked by friends and advisors why I continued to go back to summer camp.

“Isn’t it time to grow up?” they would say.

“Don’t you think the real world is calling?” they uttered.

“I’ll just never get it,” they finally realized.

And while that much may be true, why was I constantly under pressure to give up my job at Camp Seneca Lake and work somewhere seemingly more prestigious to include on my resume? Why did it seem so unacceptable to continue to work at Camp and spend time with kids and fellow staff members with whom I shared such deep bonds? I didn’t get it, and while I understand that many people have never experienced life on the campgrounds for themselves, I want to change the public perception of summer camps, particularly for the students that have committed to camp year after year and stood strong against the heavy forces trying to get them to join the mass of college kids seeking internships.

This public perception of summer camps, however, may not necessarily be as negative as I imagine in my head. Over the past five years, major news sources such as *The New York Times*,



*USA Today*, and *Huffington Post* have all posted articles praising summer camps and the work of camp counselors. In “This One Time at Summer Camp: Why I’ve Never Had a Summer Internship” by Ethan Miller of *Huffington Post*, we see an author analyzing the profound importance of his work at summer camp. Miller, a former camper, counselor, and current technical director at Habonim Dror Camp Moshava, looks at summer employment opportunities from an honest and real, albeit biased towards the camp counselor, perspective. While he does discuss the value of his summer camp experiences, he is also sure to acknowledge that summer camps may not be realistic options for those needing to make substantial amounts of money over the summer; it is clear to him, and to me, that people do not work at summer camps for the salary. Miller encourages the reader to not merely get an internship because it seems as though that is what everyone else is doing; rather, he wants us to do what we think will hold value for us, whether that is an internship or a job as a camp counselor. Clearly, for Miller, that value came from working at summer camp, ultimately leading to him calling his summers at “Mosh” the “single most defining part of my life.” Miller perhaps puts it best when he writes, “At camp, I have the satisfaction of having an impact on the individual self-confidence, happiness and critical thinking ability of more than two hundred kids each summer, as well as the greater societal impact of producing socially conscious, progressive young adults who are ready to address today’s many social ills.”<sup>1</sup> I think it is safe to assume that this type of experience is not the norm for the everyday intern.

This sentiment is seconded in Darryl Brown’s *USA Today* article, “Viewpoint: Skip the Internship, Go to Camp.” He opens the piece quite brazenly with, “Internship (n.) – A scheme that would make Bernie Madoff proud,” and though he clearly does not attempt to hide his strong negative opinion towards internships, he does have some valid claims regarding the camp

counselor position. Brown writes that at his summer camp, Four Winds Westward Ho, he learned how to be mentally tough and coexist with people unlike him, both of which are major skills that I similarly took away from my summers at Camp Seneca Lake. This piece, however, often caused me to scratch my head and note the narrow-mindedness of his pro-camp argument. Brown, in his text, writes that internship experiences do not help students land future jobs,<sup>2</sup> a point that I struggle to believe given the sheer number of college students that seek internships and the first-hand accounts seen later in this project. Martha C. White, in fact, directly refutes Brown's point in her 2013 article for *Time*, "The Real Reason New College Grads Can't Get Hired." In her piece, White writes that according to Harris Interactive, "more than 80% of employers want new grads they hire to have completed a formal internship." She then notes that only 44% of students that have not interned think they are ready for the job market. That number jumps to 58% when considering students with unpaid internships, and it rises even higher to 70% when looking at students with paid internships.<sup>3</sup>

The overarching point of this *Time* piece, however, extends beyond these numbers favoring internships. White notes that college grads aren't finding jobs because they lack what she describes as "the fundamentals of office life." She also references a survey from the Workforce Solutions Group at St. Louis Community College stating, "60% of employers say applicants lack 'communication and interpersonal skills.'" According to White, we should focus less on technical skills and worry more about what she calls the "soft skills" like communication, collaboration, organization, and motivation.<sup>4</sup> Summer camps are a hotbed for the often overlooked and ever important "soft skills" that can seem to be the difference maker in an employee's success or lack thereof.

Dan Fleshler's article from *The New York Times*, "The Camp Counselor vs. the Intern," represents another piece attempting to shed some light on the camp counselor position and the inner debate students often have when attempting to figure out their plans for the summer. Fleshler, whose daughter works at a sleep-away summer camp, tries to come to terms with his daughter's decision to continue returning to this site of summer employment. At the beginning of the piece, Fleshler expresses his initial pro-internship viewpoint, stating of his daughter, "Anyone can be a camp counselor... and in this economy, she can't afford to be just anyone." After listening to his daughter, however, Fleshler's understanding of her work at summer camp begins to change. His daughter talks about "helping a camper cope with her mother's debilitating depression... about aiding 11- and 12-year olds who were coming to terms with their sexuality, battling anorexia, confronting body fear." Even more powerful, to me, is when his daughter states, "What I do there matters."<sup>5</sup> That sentiment, that the work of camp counselors matters, is something I have been trying to convey for years to people who do not understand why I return to Camp Seneca Lake summer after summer.

In Fleshler's article, however, we see information that seems to yet again contradict with the aforementioned data. According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers, "unpaid internships offer no advantage to the job-seeking student."<sup>6</sup> So maybe Brown was right in his pro-camp article, but even then, when the data from White's article is taken into account, there is clearly some contradictory information at play regarding the correlation between internships and jobs. The camp counselor position, however, is almost always considered a positive one, and while it is fair to point to the low salary of the job that unfortunately does not permit everyone to experience this type of work, it is hard to contradict the statement that there is

value to being a camp counselor, both in terms of the bonds formed and also the life skills and personal qualities gained through such an experience.

Alli Shea's piece from *USA Today*, however, a rebuttal to Darryl Brown's piece mentioned above, seems to do just that and state that there is, in fact, little value to the camp counselor experience. In "Viewpoint: Camp Counselor Can't Compete with an Internship," she writes, "Camp counselors learn a few real job skills. Maybe there's some micro-management here and there, and delegation to some of the lower-rank counselors-in-training or volunteers. But for the most part, a summer spent chasing around middle schoolers in the blistering heat isn't going to impress an interviewer much." Shea then goes on to discuss why students should get internships and how they can land internships that are more than simply fetching coffee.<sup>7</sup> While I see value in the latter half of Shea's piece that looks at finding the right internship, I can't help but cringe at Shea's claims about summer camp. She is one of the countless individuals that don't see why Dan Fleshler's daughter's work as a camp counselor matters, but that is understandable given the lack of press devoted to the work of summer camp employees. Though there are some mainstream articles like Fleshler's and Miller's and Brown's that analyze the inherent value of a camp counselor job, this information is simply being overpowered, not only by the other texts and information available on the Internet, but also, and more importantly, by student advisors, professors, peers, parents, and the businesses themselves that can so easily sway students to forgo the camp counselor experience for an internship.

My hope for this paper is not to bash the internship experience. Interning, for many, is far more than simply retrieving coffee or filing papers, and I am sure that an internship might be the missing piece on certain resumes to provide credentials and land the coveted job right out of college. In fact, as seen later in this paper, internships do often times lead directly to jobs, a point

that simply cannot go unnoticed. That being said, it is time that students do some thinking for themselves and quit mindlessly relying on the popular route towards “success.” While the internship may be right for some students, I argue here that working at a summer camp is far more than simply “chasing around middle schoolers in the blistering heat,” as Shea put it.<sup>8</sup> No experience in my life has been more profoundly eye opening and valuable to me than my time at summer camp, and I can only wish that every student would get this same opportunity for employment as me. It is time that summer camps get a little bit of recognition for being home to more than just watersports on the lake and teenagers’ first kisses.

For individuals that have never experienced summer camp or the camp counselor position for themselves, I understand that it can be difficult to simply take someone’s word on this topic. Particularly for those that have had successful internships that led to jobs, it may be even more difficult to see why we should even begin to consider the camp counselor position as a viable summer employment alternative for students. As such, I sought out six individuals that all either work or previously worked at Camp Seneca Lake, and I asked them to tell me a story of their time at Camp that has stuck with them and that they felt might demonstrate the power and value behind the summer camp experience. I then turned each of these stories into first-person narratives in order to best capture the moment in which these stories took place.

In the second part of each interview, the individuals were asked about how Camp prepared them for the so-called “real world” in order to answer the two main questions of this paper, “Why should students seriously consider working at a summer camp as a legitimate summer job?” and, “How does the camp counselor position benefit and prepare students for future work?” As such, there were two parts to each interview, the story telling component, as well as a more formal question and answer section regarding their personal experiences at Camp

and how they decided whether working at Camp or working as an intern was right for them in terms of future employment. The two sections of each interview, however, were then melded into one narrative for each individual.

By telling the stories of other staff members over the years at Camp Seneca Lake, I hope to show that this love and commitment to Camp is hardly unique. Those that have stepped foot on the campgrounds at 200 Camp Road in Penn Yan, New York understand the power of the camp counselor job through their first hand experiences. Through these six stories and interviews, I hope to not only put the daunting task of talking about summer camp to rest, but I also hope to show that our work as camp counselors is some of the most powerful work we may ever do, leading to immensely valuable and applicable life skills and personal qualities for future employment.

Finally, it is important to note that all of the narratives below are from Camp Seneca Lake employees, a summer camp tied to Judaism through the Jewish Community Center of Greater Rochester. As such, there is another aspect of Camp Seneca Lake that is not necessarily experienced by camp counselors at other summer camps, that being the element of spirituality. Though Camp Seneca Lake does have a handful of non-Jewish campers and counselors, the Jewish practices of Camp such as Shabbat services on Friday night and Saturday morning and Tikkun Olam Day, as featured in Rachel Rosenbaum's story, are one of the reasons why staff members find this camp counselor experience to be so meaningful. This religious affiliation of Camp Seneca Lake should not go unnoted as it undoubtedly adds an extra dimension to the summer camp experience for those that venture down 200 Camp Road. That being said, the narratives below are suggestive and may point to what counselors have experienced at other summer camps. The same heartbreak, satisfaction, devastation, exhilaration, frustration, and pure

bliss expressed in the stories and commentary below are hardly unique to the counselors of Camp Seneca Lake.

### **Joshua Sham**

Joshua Sham attended the University at Buffalo for his undergraduate education, majoring in biomedical science before going on to Syracuse University to receive a Master of Science degree in science education with a concentration in biology.<sup>9</sup> He has been attending Camp Seneca Lake since 1999, and after his senior camper summer in 2003, Joshua then worked at CSL as a Counselor in Training in 2004, a Mohawk counselor from 2005 to 2007, and a Tuscarora counselor in 2008 and 2010. Joshua worked as the Tuscarora Unit Head in 2012 and 2013, and in 2014, he assumed the role of Staff Director, a position he will hold again this coming summer of 2015. Joshua is currently a science teacher, dorm supervisor, and soccer and tennis coach at Peddie School, a college preparatory school in Hightstown, New Jersey.

This is his story.

“Walk with me, Josh.”

Ryan and I sat next to each other on a bench beside the Mohawk fire circle. He patted my red buzzed hair and stood up, offering a hand to help me do the same.

He walked in front of me, and I trailed behind him, reluctant to follow my counselor down the Mohawk stairs towards the waterfront. Ryan towered at least seven inches above me, but I kept my head pointed at the ground, scuffing my feet on the dirt trail and kicking any small rocks that stood in my way.

“Up here,” Ryan said, slowing his pace until we were walking side by side. We passed the Mohawk Unit Head’s cabin on our right, and the two of us stood atop the long flight of stairs leading down to the fire circle beside Seneca Lake. Ryan stepped down first, and I followed.



“Beautiful day, huh?”

I nodded as I stepped down, continuing to keep my head planted on the aged wooden steps.

“You have a good lunch today?”

I nodded again, but was forced to speak when Ryan asked what I ate.

“Pizza,” I said, barely opening my mouth to let the word out.

Ryan continued to ask me questions, all small talk about my day and food and the weather until we reached the base of the steps and crossed the bridge that led us to the shore of Seneca Lake. I responded to his prodding, giving him more and more answers of increasing length each time he asked another question.

Ryan now led me over to the huge Hobie sailboats, and he bent down, picking up one of the countless rocks that lined the shore.

“Pick up a rock, Josh.”

“Why?” I retorted back.

“Just trust me,” Ryan said.

I bent my knees and squatted in catcher’s position, moving my hands over the rocks until I found one that nestled nicely into the grooves of my hand. I looked back up at Ryan who smiled down at me, a rock similarly in his right hand.

“See the ski dock out there?”

I nodded, staring into the distance at the green, square dock that floated just beyond the end of the T-dock to my left.

“I want you to hit it.”

Ryan pulled his arm back and slung the rock as far as he could. It flew through the air in a beautiful arch, splashing into the water well shy of the square, floating mass. Small droplets of water rose up into the air where the rock landed, falling quickly back into the shimmering lake.

“Give it a go, bud.”

I stared at the rock in my hand, a relatively round one that would fly nicely. Running forward towards the lake, I let it go, the motion all too familiar to me as a Little League baseball player. The rock arched upward like Ryan’s, but fell a bit short of the spot where his greeted the water. Ryan had already picked up another rock, throwing it even farther this time but still short of the ski dock. I did the same, letting another fly out of my hand as I tried to beat my previous distance.

“Bet you can’t get it farther than me,” Ryan mentioned, smiling down at me.

“Let’s do it,” I said, letting out a brief smile now.

Ryan continued to throw the small stones that coated the waterfront, and I reciprocated, trying desperately to outdo the work of my stronger and older counselor.

“You’ve been a bit down lately, kid. What’s going on?”

I picked up another rock, threw it towards the ski dock, and began to speak.

“I went on a Shabbat walk with Lily and it was so fun and I really like her, but now she’s dating David.”

Ryan looked down at me, quiet as he hurled another rock at the floating dock.

“So you’re pretty bummed about that?”

I nodded, picking up yet another stone that I tossed in the air. It landed even farther this time.

We repeated the cycle of bending down, picking up a rock, and throwing it into the lake, but with each throw, I spoke and continued to talk with my counselor. He wanted to hear more about what was bugging me, so I told him, each sentence followed by a rock that soared through the sky and fell short of our target.

For thirty minutes, I threw rocks into the lake, Ryan coming within feet of the ski dock while my tosses had yet to even come close. As I attempted to keep up with his powerful tosses, we chatted about Camp and relationships, those involving both boys and girls and the importance of such bonds. A girl was at stake here, but so was my friendship with David, my bunkmate and best friend. With each rock, I trusted Ryan more and more until I spoke to him without any sort of reservation. He was my counselor, but even more so right now, a friend.

We spoke until the kid sulking at the top of the M-stairs had become excited about Camp again, excited about rejoining his bunkmates and enjoying the remaining few weeks of the summer. Ryan had taken the time out of his rest hour to help me, seemingly without me even realizing it. My mindset had shifted from sadness to that of excitement about the friendly competition at hand.

Ryan let another rock loose, and I yelled as Ryan's stone fell just short of the ski dock. I held out my hand for a high five and smiled, amazed at the distance he was putting on these rocks. My counselor slapped my hand, and the two of us continued to pick up stones and throw them at the small, square box floating in Seneca Lake.

I walked down to the waterfront on the rocky road, Ethan trailing just a few paces behind me. He was unsure as to why he was missing general swim, a time to hang out with his friends at the pool and athletics area, but I told him to trust me. As we walked, I asked him how his day

was going, and he told me about his lunch and the Judaica period he had before which wasn't terribly riveting. I looked back at my small fifteen-year-old camper and motioned for him to walk beside me. He kicked the rocks that lined the road and kept his face aimed at the ground.

Just hours ago, a friend of Ethan's had asked to speak with me, the Tuscarora Unit Head, and he told me that he was worried about Ethan. He understood that Ethan had been battling with depression, but something seemed off lately with his friend. I thanked the camper for the heads up, not really surprised by what he had told me. I knew that Ethan was depressed, and ever since he stepped foot on the campgrounds as a senior camper, I was concerned with Ethan's inability to express his thoughts to his friends and his staff members. Ethan worried me too.

We continued to glide down the steep Infirmary Hill until we could make out the massive lake in front of us. After reaching the bottom of the hill, I turned left, Ethan following closely behind me, and I made my way towards the trail that led up to the Tuscarora village. The two of us made small talk until I stopped in between the two long docks and bent down to scope out the rocks.

"Pick up a rock, bud."

He stared at me, a look of puzzlement across his face, but he bent his knees and picked up one rock from the massive collection before him.

"Think you can hit the ski dock with that rock?" I asked.

Ethan gazed out at the ski dock, attempting to determine how far away it actually was from us, and he shrugged, unsure if it was possible or not.

"Give it a go," I said, and as I let out the final word, I wound my arm back and let my small, round rock fly. It landed short of the dock, but it was a far better distance than when I last

stood out here with Ryan over ten years ago. I had impressed even myself, and Ethan's eyebrows rose as if he was hardly expecting my rock to go so far.

Ethan now pulled his arm back, stepped forward towards the water, and threw his stone at the floating dock. It arched high in the air and fell well before mine did.

"Not bad," I said, picking up another rock and throwing it into the lake.

Ethan let another one rip, this time using a smaller and rounder stone that hit the water farther from shore.

As we continued to toss stones and aim for the ski dock, I asked Ethan how he's been feeling lately.

"All right," he said.

"Why just all right?" I responded.

He was quiet, throwing another stone into the lake, before he began to tell me about how his girlfriend in Tuscarora had cheated on him.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I've been there before, and that's tough, bud."

Ethan nodded, continuing to pick up stones and let them fly. He gazed out at the lake, never taking his eyes off the ski dock that sat far in front of him.

I was quiet. My camper felt betrayed, and it was clear that his depression had escalated as a result of this situation. Ethan was battling with real demons in his mind, but I knew deep down that he was a caring friend, a good camper, and a kid with potential.

We continued to throw rocks, and as we tossed them, I changed the topic to his time at Camp, what he was enjoying and with what he was struggling. Ethan began a conversation with me, not even paying attention to the words that were coming out of his mouth as he carefully searched the ground for the perfect rock and tossed it as far as his arm permitted.

He was finally verbalizing his feelings, verbalizing the negative thoughts that had been floating around in his head and were contributing to his seemingly catatonic state. Ethan talked to me about his favorite periods at Camp and his best friends here and his family before moving onto his parents' divorce and ultimately, his very own depression. There was far more going on with my camper than I ever realized, and for the first time, I felt as though Ethan and I had begun to develop a bond.

"Let's move closer to the ski dock," I said to Ethan, and he nodded back at me.

The two of us reached down to pick up a pile of stones, and I led Ethan out onto one of the long docks that hung over Seneca Lake.

"Let it rip, kid."

Ethan tossed one of his stones into the lake, and it splashed down, farther this time but still not close to the ski dock. I stepped up and let mine fly, the rock coming within just feet of our target.

"Whoa," Ethan said, once again impressed by the distance I had achieved.

I smiled down at him, and Ethan smiled back, placing another stone in his throwing hand before reaching his arm back and seeing the rock fly high through the air.

As we repeated this cycle, our conversation shifted from the things he was struggling with to the things he loved in life and what made him happy. We talked about sports and Camp and his friends and his sister and this space right here in front of him. I finally got a glimpse of the talkative kid that loved Camp, the good friend that was seemingly well liked by everyone on the campgrounds. Ethan was goofy, and I loved it.

For the rest of the general swim period, Ethan and I stood on the long dock and slung seemingly meaningless rocks in the water, never once experiencing the gratification of hitting the

green floating box. But, at the end of that period, I could tell that Ethan now felt comfortable enough to talk with me and express what he was feeling. We were hardly out of the woods, but we had established a rapport with one another, one that made me feel far more confident as his Unit Head and supervisor this summer.

As I watched Ethan throw stones, I couldn't help but see a bit of myself in Ethan, and, perhaps more importantly, a bit of Ryan in myself. This strategy that once worked so well with me had succeeded yet again, twelve years later this time, in order to better the life of one of my own campers. I smiled at the thought before looking down at Ethan to see that he, too, was smiling.

Ethan was smiling.

*Thank you, Ryan.*

Where else can you so visibly watch yourself transition from the mentee to the mentor? Where else can you pick and choose from the ways in which you were once guided in order to better the lives of others and positively influence those that mean so much to you? Where else can you help a kid battling with depression finally smile and begin to see the beauty of life again?

I'll tell you this much. Camp Seneca Lake is special. And the lessons I've learned there are ones I will never, ever forget.

Joshua's story here acts as a testimonial to how working at Camp encourages individuals to learn from their past experiences and become mentors for those in need. In a moment of

despair, Ryan found a way to distract Joshua in order to get him to talk about his frustrations and other issues on his mind. Joshua, to this day, remembers Ryan's strategy that worked so well with him, and he went on to apply it twelve years later when he was the Tuscarora Unit Head in 2012. After hearing of and observing Ethan's depression, Joshua was able to look back on his past experience with Ryan and apply it to the present situation. He went down to the waterfront with Ethan, and, like Ryan, threw rocks with him in order to distract him, release his negative energy, and make him feel comfortable while discussing tough topics. The story here provides excellent insight as to how Joshua was able to adopt the same role as Ryan and become the mentor in a time when a camper needed him most. He created a repertoire to guide young people based on what he was once taught, ultimately leading to Ethan speaking with his mom and getting professional help after Camp. By attending and working at summer camp, Joshua was able to develop the crucial life skill of being able to understand one's past experiences and apply them to a present situation.

This skill, while important on the campgrounds, has also aided in Joshua's success as a teacher at Peddie School. Through his experiences as an employee at Camp Seneca Lake, Joshua has been able to develop a successful approach to working with kids and a sense of trust with his students. He noted in our interview that he is strict and firm with high expectations for his students, but at the same time, he supports them. This methodology came to be through his work at Camp, and he utilized his past experiences as a camp counselor and Unit Head in order to perfect and master this approach that he now uses today in his teaching.

In his acceptance letter for a teaching position, Peddie wrote, "due to extensive experience at summer camp, we would like to offer you a position at our school." Though it is likely rare for an employer to directly point to summer camp experience as the major factor that



lead to a job, and though there are more direct similarities between being a camp counselor and a teacher than most other jobs, this note in the acceptance letter hopefully points to a greater understanding of the importance of the camp counselor job. It also, to Joshua, gave him concrete evidence that his work at Camp Seneca Lake over all these years has been worth it.

Even though Joshua admitted, and rightfully so, that an internship may look great on a resume, he believes it is potentially problematic if it gives you nothing to talk about in an interview. Working at Camp as a counselor, Josh said, gives you interpersonal skills, the ability to communicate with others, a chance to push yourself physically, mentally, and emotionally, and, perhaps most importantly, something to talk about with confidence in front of a potential employer. I know that Josh would confidently state that his work at Camp changed his life, going from a pre-medical student in college to one interested in teaching after discovering his passion for working with teenagers. Camp drastically altered his career, and it, perhaps more importantly, gave him skills to succeed at his new workplace, Peddie School, where he can continue to impact kids and guide them as their mentor.

### Jon Broder

Jon Broder attended Cornell University for his undergraduate education, studying business management and marketing before going on to the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine.<sup>10</sup> Though he never went to Camp Seneca Lake as a camper, Jon worked there as a Mohawk counselor in 1987, a Cayuga counselor in 1988, and a Mohawk counselor and Assistant Unit Head in 1989. In 1990, Jon was the Mohawk Unit Head, and in 1991, he became the director of the Counselor in Training program. After skipping a summer at Camp to pursue a research opportunity at the University of Pittsburgh, Jon returned in 1993 again as the Mohawk Unit Head. Jon and his wife have two kids that will be senior campers this coming summer of 2015, and he currently works as a radiologist in Rochester, New York.

This is his story.

*No.*

A blue foam mat covered half of the wooden basketball court inside Hendy Avenue School in Elmira, New York. *Please no.* Doomsday was finally here.

A huge, braided rope hung from the ceiling and rested just above the center of the mat. I stared up at the ceiling, and I swear that rope was as tall as the Eiffel Tower. *Why today? Why do I need to do this? Why me?*

I could already see how this story would unfold. And how could I not? The series of events had already played out millions of times in my head. I would step on the fat knot at the base of the rope and pull upwards with all my might. The rope, however, would not budge. I

would slowly spin in a circle just inches off the ground, my face as red as an apple, while the other kids in my gym class stared and laughed at me. *Boy does this suck.*

I was a fine athlete for a chubby kid, always middle of the pack as compared to my peers. I was certainly never the last pick in the gym class draft, but when it came to physical fitness tests, my draft stock plummeted. I couldn't even squeeze out one pull-up, nonetheless climb a rope the size of the Eifel Tower. So when I saw that rope, I wanted nothing other than to climb into a hole as deep as the length of the braided nylon itself.

After watching the other kids climb high and look down at their friends, the gym teacher called my name.

“Alright, Jon. You're up buddy.”

Standing up now, I trudged over to the rope hanging in the center of the blue mat. I stood up on the thick knot, and with all the strength I could muster, I pulled myself up on the rope. But, as predicted, I didn't move. My face reddened, and I began my slow and steady spin, floating above the ground in the least glamorous manner possible. A few kids laughed, and I hopped back onto the safe blue mat. It was over. *It was over.*

“Circle up.”

As we entered the M-field from the Mohawk village, the campers formed a circle around the soccer goal and awaited further instruction. The older boys, thirteen years of age, clumped together on one side of the goal while the younger and middle Mohican boys, eleven and twelve years old, completed the opposite side of the circle. Excitement filled the eyes of these boys who knew that the next component of the Mohawk Athletic Challenge was upon them.

Typically, the Mohawk campers play in a softball league in the July and August sessions at Camp Seneca Lake. This August, however, we drew far smaller camper numbers, making the possibility of a fun and well-run softball league nearly impossible. As the Mohawk Unit Head, I knew I had to create a league of some sort to hold true to Mohawk tradition, and I eventually settled on the Mohawk Athletic Challenge, a month-long competition among the campers that included athletic events across the spectrum, from swimming to running to fitness challenges and various sporting events. There had always been an emphasis at Camp on athletics, and many of the kids looked forward to competing with their peers over the summer in the positive and supportive environment of the campgrounds. The campers now awaited the next event of the Mohawk Athletic Challenge, a pull-up competition.

*No. Please no.*

I flashed back to my days at Hendy Avenue as I struggled to climb the rope that hung from the ceiling.

I walked into the middle of the circle, the campers all staring inwards at their Unit Head before them, and I explained the competition at hand. It was simple. More pull-ups translated into more points for an individual and his Mohawk Athletic Challenge team. Walking around the inside of the circle, I finished the brief explanation of the event and paused.

“It doesn’t matter who can do the most pull-ups right here. We are a village, boys. We are brothers.”

I peered around the circle to ensure that all of the camper eyes were trained on me.

“Everyone that goes up to this goal post to do their pull-ups is going to get the biggest ovation. It doesn’t matter if they do zero pull-ups or one hundred. It doesn’t matter.”

I paused again, giving some time to let these words sink in.

“You are going to go crazy for each of your brothers that step up here, like it’s the most important thing on the planet at this moment in time. The Mohawk village is a brotherhood. Let’s see it right now.”

I walked out of the circle and stood beside the rest of the Mohawk counselors.

“Zach. You’re up, bud.”

The roar was overpowering. Zach, one of the taller, more muscular oldest Mohicans walked into the middle of the circle towards the soccer goal post.

“Let’s go, Zach!”

Be strong, bro!”

“You can do it!”

“You’re a beast!”

The campers shouted these phrases amidst heavy applause and yelling. Zach smiled as he stepped below the goal post. He grabbed the bar above him and cranked out pull-up after pull-up, reaching double digits in no time. As he pulled his head above the bar on nearly his fifteenth upwards motion, he fell back to the grassy M-field.

It grew quiet as he completed his set, and then the roar came back. Shouts of, “Good work, brother,” and “Atta boy” filled the air alongside loud cheering. Zach, smiling ear to ear, walked back to his spot in the circle, and I called another camper up to the goal post.

The campers went up, one by one, and the overwhelming cheering continued. They all received massive ovations as they stepped up to the goal post and perhaps an even larger one as they finished their set of pull-ups, no matter how many they were able to complete. They would then return back to their spot in the circle, a new camper would step up, and the cycle would continue.

“Nathan. Let’s see it, buddy.”

Nathan stepped into the circle from his spot beside the youngest Mohicans. His shoulders hunched, and he stared at the ground as he walked to the goal post to complete his pull-ups.

*No. Please no.*

Nathan was built just like me when I was his age. Average height. Chubby. Lacking any semblance of muscle.

*Why do I need to do this? Why me?*

The Mohicans fell quiet as he walked, unsure of how Nathan would approach the clearly daunting task at hand. I watched Nathan struggle to make his way up to the goal post. He continued to stare at the ground, his shoulders hunched near the top of his head, when a camper began to clap.

“Here you go, Nathan. Come on now, kid,” the camper uttered.

And with that, the other Mohicans gathered in and began to clap. They cheered Nathan on as he stepped up to the makeshift pull-up bar.

I stared at the scene before me. Nathan stood below the goal post and jumped upwards to reach it. He hung there, and I already knew his fate. He would hang just inches off the ground, his face as red as an apple, and after pulling with all his might, Nathan would fall to the grass of the M-field.

*Please no. Why me?*

Nathan hung and pulled, his body slowly making its way upwards before hitting the ground, his face beat red and shoulders hunched as before.

The previous silence returned, and I stared around the circle as the campers looked at Nathan, their Mohican brother who had failed to complete even a single pull-up, surely an

embarrassing performance in front of the peers he will spend twenty-four hours a day with for three more weeks.

Nathan began to step towards his initial spot in the circle, head staring at the high grass brushing up against his ankles.

*It was over. It was over.* His inner dialogue was all too relatable.

It was Zach who then clapped his hands, the oldest Mohican cheering on the kid two years his junior.

“That’s a great effort, kid. Way to go out there!”

And just as before, the rest of the village began to cheer and root for Nathan as he strutted to his spot in the circle.

“Good work, Nathan!”

I couldn’t help but get in on the camaraderie, smiling as my camper returned to the circle. Nathan finally had affirmation that he was part of this brotherhood. He was a Mohican, and not just now, but forever.

Where else can you reflect on your past experiences and turn them into actions that can help others? Where else can you boost teenagers’ self-esteem and preach the ideals of support, confidence, and brotherhood? Where else can you help kids finally feel good in their often times uncomfortable and foreign skin?

I’ll tell you this much. Camp Seneca Lake is special. And the lessons I’ve learned there are ones I will never, ever forget.

Jon's story here acts as a testimonial to how Camp creates a comfortable environment where individuals can learn to grow confident in themselves. Though Jon, in this story, had self-confidence as the Mohawk Unit Head, it was clear to him that many of his campers were not comfortable in their own skin. As such, he sought to change that, through an activity that easily could have further put his campers down. Instead, Jon utilized his past struggles, and he decided to put his own spin on an activity that caused him so much angst as a kid lacking self-confidence. Though many of his campers that day likely feared stepping up to the pull-up bar in front of all of their peers, Jon established a comfortable environment for the kids where they were all cheered on and supported. He encouraged his campers to treat the moment like it mattered more than anything else, and they ran with the idea, getting rowdy and excited as each camper stepped up to the goal post. The campers no longer felt scared partaking in this leg of the Mohawk Athletic Challenge, and, as seen in the story, campers like Nathan finally experienced a sense of confidence and belonging. Jon was the mastermind behind this exercise, and though this was just one moment in these campers' long lives, he helped develop a new, self-assured generation of campers and future employees.

In this story, Jon was able to reflect on his past and turn it into an idea that could help others and, more specifically, raise campers' self esteem. "Where else can you do that?" Jon noted in his interview with me, and I agree with him that such an opportunity likely would not present itself at an internship.

When asked about how else Camp prepared Jon for future employment as a doctor, he noted that no matter what field you plan to enter, the advantage of a summer camp job is that you have real responsibility and accountability at a young age. He went on to state that as just a teenager, he was responsible for the welfare of kids, and that was huge in preparing him for the



responsibility that came with being a professional, particularly in medicine where a great deal of accountability came down on him. At Camp, no matter what your role is, you are always in a leadership position, and Jon noted that this really helped him feel confident as a leader in the medical profession.

A father of two, Jon said that he and his wife love that their kids are similarly passionate about Camp. Camp has provided their family something to bond over, and it is fun for them to share similar memories, albeit in far different generations, on the same campgrounds. One thing still gives Jon mixed emotions, however, that being returning to CSL to visit his kids. He said he's unbelievably happy his kids are at Camp and that they're having fun, but he can't help but wonder where the years went. To Jon, it feels like he was just working there, writing programs for his campers, playing sports in the O-field, singing prayers on Friday night in the fire circle, and watching his campers step up to that goal post in the M-field. Though it may never get easier returning to the campgrounds, I hope he can take solace in knowing that his campers, and now his patients, are better because of his dedication, passion, and care for them that will never be forgotten.

### Andrew Powers

Andrew Powers is currently a senior at Cornell University studying applied economics and management with a focus in finance.<sup>11</sup> He has been attending Camp Seneca Lake since 2002, and after his senior camper summer in 2008, he worked at CSL as a Counselor in Training in 2009, a Mohawk counselor from 2010 to 2012, and a Tuscarora counselor in 2013. In 2014, Andrew interned at Ernst and Young in June and July before returning to Camp in August as a Mohawk counselor. This coming summer of 2015, Andrew will be the Mohawk Unit Head, and in the fall, he will be working at Ernst and Young in New York City as a financial consultant.

This is his story.

I felt like a kid again. My legs could barely fit beneath the low table in front me that was covered in a plastic tablecloth, white paper, markers, and colored pencils. The clean room in this basement felt eerily familiar, like I was back at the Art Barn sitting at the base of 200 Camp Road in Penn Yan, New York. But I knew I was far from the intimate red shack stationed beside the Staff Lounge. Half of my fourteen and fifteen-year-old campers stood in a line beside me, white t-shirts in hand, as an instructor helped them screen print an image of a Tuscarora tent onto their white tops. The other half of my campers roamed upstairs in the upper levels of the Andy Warhol Museum, marveling at the exhibitions from the man that helped give rise to pop art. Here I was in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, screen printing shirts and enjoying the wondrous works of one of the greatest artists of all time, accompanied by seven other staff members and forty-seven of my teenage Tuscarora campers. *Am I dreaming?*

One month prior, I sat on a swinging bench on the office porch of Camp Seneca Lake beside my fellow Tuscarora counselor, Emily. Our computers sat on our laps, and together, we stared at our newly created checklist that divided up the remaining tasks between the two of us. The campers wouldn't be rolling down Camp Road for two more days, but the logistical planning for the Tuscarora trip had begun long ago.

Every summer, the Tuscarorans, or senior campers at Camp Seneca Lake, leave the campgrounds during the five or so day gap between the July and August sessions. The Tusc trip, as it has come to be known, is what many Tuscarora campers look forward to most, a chance for them to continue bonding and developing relationships with their coed peers as they travel to a major city by coach bus from rural upstate New York. During my Tuscarora summer, I traveled to Cleveland where we saw an Indians game, the Dark Knight movie, a Dave Matthews Band concert, the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, as well the Cedar Point amusement park. The trip was nothing shy of unbelievable, and to this day, the memories from my time in Cleveland five years ago are as clear as ever. Now, as I swung on the office porch, I got to see the Tusc trip from the other side, the perspective of a staff member. Emily and I were in the late stages of planning our trip for the forty-seven campers of Tuscarora 2013 that would be going to Pittsburgh and, fittingly enough, Cleveland.

*Who have we called so far? Who do we still need to contact? Have we booked with Progressive Field? Where will we pick up the tickets for the concert at Blossom Music Center? What is the price for the Andy Warhol museum? Who can we talk to in order to get discounts for all of these places?*

Thoughts scurried through my head, and I verbalized them to Emily to see what she was thinking. Together, we looked at the checklist and made phone call after phone call, hoping to further establish the finalized itinerary for this trip.

In between our concern for the actual sites we would see and events in which we would partake on the trip, we also had to worry about campsites and the bus that would be taking us from destination to destination.

*Is this campsite nice? Can we stay at a lower quality campsite for a night? Will we be able to walk with our bags to this campsite if the bus can't squeeze through the narrow roads of the campgrounds? Who will be our contact person at this site when we arrive? What is the mileage limit for our bus each day? How can we maximize our bus's allotted mileage without going over? What is the hour limit for our bus? How can we maximize that to give these kids the best possible experience?*

Questions swirled in our heads, but for each question, we seemed to find an answer, either by a simple Google search or a phone call across state lines. So, we swung back and forth on the office porch, creating a thorough Google Doc that contained our itinerary with specific times and mileage for our Greyhound bus driver that stayed within the legal boundaries. We continued to make phone calls, even after the campers had rolled down Camp Road, until the itinerary was complete. Then, that early morning at the end of July, fifty-five of us boarded a bus and headed southwest for Pittsburgh.

The crowd erupted as the country star on stage tried to rap to the familiar beat of “Yeah” by Usher at the Blossom Music Center in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. For the first time all night, I recognized a song, and it was nothing against Blake Shelton; I actually kind of enjoyed the

country music tonight. I simply had never taken the time to get into Blake and explore the country genre. But here I was, standing on the grass of the lawn that felt like miles from the stage while this country superstar transitioned from “Yeah” into “Hillbilly Bone” and the campers to my left went crazy.

The eight Tuscarora staff members, including myself, had formed a boundary around our campers on the lawn, ensuring that none of the kids could escape from the pack and venture into the vast abyss of music and drugs and alcohol. My worst nightmare was losing a kid at this destination we had selected on the office porch. *Please don't let us lose anyone.*

Blake Shelton jammed on stage, and the kids beside me danced and tried to sing along, an extremely difficult task given that most had never heard his songs before. But, nonetheless, they were enjoying themselves, and a wave of relief washed over me. I knew that few of the kids, particularly the boys, would have ever heard Blake's music, nonetheless ever heard of Blake Shelton himself. And, based on years past, the Tuscarora campers had grown accustomed to seeing a major concert on their Tusc trip. In 2008, I saw Dave Matthews Band as a Tuscarora camper, Tuscarora 2009 saw Coldplay in Saratoga, and Tuscarora 2010 saw John Mayer in New Jersey. Tuscarora 2011 then continued the trend by seeing Weezer and The Flaming Lips while Tuscarora 2012 saw O.A.R., a slightly less popular band than the aforementioned artists, but it was still a major show that undoubtedly appealed to the fourteen and fifteen-year-old campers.

Now, here we were, sitting on the same lawn where I saw Dave Matthews Band in 2008, this time with Blake Shelton on the stage, his low country voice emanating into the crowd. For most of the campers, “Yeah” was the first song they recognized as well, but to them, that was irrelevant. They had just come off visits to the Pittsburgh Zoo and Aquarium, a bowling alley, the Andy Warhol Museum, the Phipps Conservatory, and the new *Man of Steel* movie, all in

Pittsburgh. Now, they had ventured to Ohio, hiking at Nelson-Kennedy Ledges State Park, seeing a Cleveland Indians game, volunteering at the Football Hall of Fame festival in Canton, and sampling delicacies at the Harry London Chocolate Factory before arriving at Blossom Music Center, an eventful and memorable trip to say the least. The kids were on a high, and not from the smoke that filled the air of the venue. What more could you possibly want than a rare escape from the campgrounds and a trip with forty-six of your closest friends in the world?

I turned around as Blake continued to mesmerize the crowd, and I stared at the scene before me. Seven of my fellow Tuscarora staff members had formed an imaginary force field around our campers, and they all stared at the stage, dancing to the music with expressions of bliss across each of their faces. I looked back at Blake and began to bob my head up and down to the rhythm of “Hillbilly Bone.”

The bus began to rumble as it turned off of Route 14 and the wheels struck the rocky, unpaved Camp Road. With that one simple right turn, an audible roar began to fill the hot bus that had departed Cleveland some five and a half hours ago. With that one simple right turn, we were home.

Session two had already begun at Camp. The senior campers missed almost three full days of the August session for this trip, and as a camper and staff member who had been at Camp forever, it was apparent when the Tuscarorans weren’t present on the campgrounds. The dining hall felt eerily quiet without their rowdy cheering and banging on the tables, and even more so, Camp as a whole felt empty. Forty-seven campers and eight staff members were missing, riding on a bus for five days until they finally made this return down the unpaved road to rejoin and lead Camp as the senior campers.

The campers behind me were yelling now and packing up their belongings. They stared out at the familiar cornfields that lined the road, the corn just a bit taller than when they saw it five days ago at the start of their trip. The bus stopped before the railroad tracks, and after looking both ways, the driver began his final descent down the road. Two water tanks stood up ahead, and our bus curved to the left to follow along with the trajectory of the road. After swinging back to the right and then to the left again, the office appeared in front of us. The bus continued to follow the road past the office, past the maintenance shed, and past the garden until it pulled into the same spot that the buses drop off the campers and ultimately pick them up on the final day of the summer. That moment was far from these kids' minds though. The moment they had been anticipating for days was upon them.

Standing up now, I looked out the window to my right and peered out at the entire Camp in the flagpole area, chatting and mingling before the Friday night Shabbat meal. They were dressed up, the boys wearing button downs and khaki shorts while the girls sported makeup and summer style dresses. I peered down at myself, wearing white high-top Nike shoes, red gym shorts, and a t-shirt. I was terribly underdressed, but fifty-four others on this bus were as well, nearly all of us not having showered for the entirety of the five-day trip. My body reeked, but that didn't matter now that we were home.

The doors of the bus flew open. Campers pulled their backpacks on and stormed outside, a refuge from the hot bus and also a blissful reconciliation with the campgrounds they had left for five days. The Tuscarorans hugged their fellow campers that they had yet to see this summer, and quite literally ran in circles around the flagpole. Cayugans and Onondagans looked at the senior campers, mostly confused at the commotion before them. Mohicans and Senecans

similarly stared, yet they all dreamt of the day when they would get to storm off the bus from their Tusc trip with countless stories and memories from their adventure.

Then, in a tradition set well before my time at Camp, the senior campers huddled in a pack and began to cheer, banging on their knees two times with their hands before clapping and repeating in order to set the rhythm. The staff and I, while the campers ran around Camp, helped remove the campers' bags from the bus's undercarriage. As the cheering began, however, we all began to walk over to the pack, not only to yell the staff section of the cheers, but even more so to be with our campers in this culminating tradition.

Five days earlier, we had left the campgrounds for a trip with forty-seven campers and eight staff members, including myself. Everything had gone according to plan, and whether that was due to our staff's hard work, our campers' willingness to go along with the plan, the itinerary Emily and I created nearly a month ago, or sheer luck was up in the air. But I had done it. *We had done it.*

The trip was over, and we were finally back home.

Where else do you have the opportunity to plan and develop a five-day trip in two completely foreign states for a group of teenagers? Where else can you learn to behave in high stress situations and adapt as necessary while forty-seven young adults watch your every move? Where else do you get the opportunity to go on such a trip and watch your campers explore not only new cities, but also themselves as they develop into mature young adults?

I'll tell you this much. Camp Seneca Lake is special. And the lessons I've learned there are ones I will never, ever forget.



Andrew's story here acts as a testimonial to how working at Camp taught him the valuable life-skills of planning, organization, and team management. In 2013, Andrew was tasked with planning this massive trip that led forty-seven campers from the campgrounds to Pittsburgh, Cleveland, and ultimately back to Penn Yan, New York. This task required an unbelievable amount of planning on his behalf, as seen in the story with endless phone calls, research, and discussions with his fellow counselor, Emily, and Unit Head, Joshua. Andrew needed to craft a trip that would not only be fun, but also informative for the kids and unique from trips in the past. It simply wasn't enough to copy past Tusc trips; rather, Andrew created a trip that fit the goals of Tuscarora 2013 through countless hours of planning and dedication to these five days outside of the campgrounds.

The planning process, as well, required Andrew to be unbelievably organized. He created a complete itinerary with an hour-by-hour breakdown of each day, the mileage to each site, contact information, and a to-do list for each activity. The document was highly organized, allowing him to show it to Joshua, the Unit Head, and the Camp Director for approval. This finalized itinerary was also utilized directly on the trip so that Andrew could ensure the group was on time for events and he could contact the sites as needed.

Perhaps most importantly, planning this trip allowed Andrew to master his team management skills. On the trip, he was working directly with seven other Tuscarora staff members that needed to be in the loop as to what was happening next and how they could best ensure the campers' safety at each site. Andrew, along with Joshua, assigned the staff tasks throughout the trip, and he needed to trust that these tasks would be completed in order for the trip to run smoothly. He also was constantly working with the forty-seven campers on this trip,

managing their happiness, health, and above all, safety. Andrew was a leader not only for these five days, but also the entirety of the summer, effectively working with and managing the Tuscarora team.

In my interview with Andrew, when asked about how working at Camp has prepared him for future employment elsewhere in the world, he noted that Camp has taught him how to interact with people. He thinks that if you are truly good at understanding and communicating with others, then you will excel at your job. As a camp counselor, Andrew learned how to work with people, particularly those that were different from him, and he mentions in all of his job interviews that Camp gave him the people skills that will allow him to succeed in his work.

Andrew took a brief step away from Camp last summer when he missed the July session for an internship at Ernst and Young. Though he found a way to come to Camp in August, Andrew, in his interview, noted that it is becoming more and more necessary in the world of finance to have an internship experience in order to land a job out of college. He said that an undergraduate business degree from Cornell holds quite a bit of value, but he questions whether companies would have taken a serious look at his application without direct experience at a financial institution. The internship, in his mind, was necessary, giving him not only the ever so important credentials and line on his resume, but also technical skills such as how to compile documents and how to utilize Microsoft PowerPoint and Excel for professional purposes.

Most importantly, Andrew received a job offer the day that his internship ended. This experience directly led to him landing a job, but in Andrew's mind, it was his work at Camp that gave him real, tangible skills that he could take to his internship and that he can now take to New York City when the next phase of his life begins. Prior to this next phase beginning, however, Andrew has one final summer on the campgrounds, one final summer as the Mohawk Unit Head

where he can continue to grow and continue to impact the campers and staff members that mean so much to him.

### **Madeline Heilbronner**

Madeline Heilbronner is currently a senior at Brighton High School in Rochester, New York, and she will be attending John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City next year with the goal of one day working for the Federal Bureau of Investigation.<sup>12</sup> She has been attending Camp Seneca Lake since 2008, and after her senior camper summer in 2012, Madeline was a part of the CSL in Israel program in 2013. She became a first-year staff member, also known as a Hachshara, in the village of Onondaga in 2014, and she plans on returning to CSL this coming summer of 2015.

This is her story.

I licked my teeth, the sensation feeling equally foreign and blissful each time I repeated the action. The clunky metal that previously sat on my enamel was finally gone. My tongue rolled over my white teeth again just to make sure the feeling was real. They were gone. *Finally.*

Aaron smiled at me from across the table, and Leah and Owen sat beside both of us, talking to each other in their final night together on the campgrounds. Beside them, six campers sat on the wooden benches of our table near the dirty dish retrieval at the front of the dining hall.

A bead of sweat fell down my forehead. I swear the dining hall felt like a sauna with the entire Camp crammed inside of it. The ice sculptures at the front and back entrances of the dining hall were beginning to melt, but that was fine now that we were nearing the end of the final banquet ceremony. The sports league awards for each of the respective villages had concluded, and a select group of staff members began to line up at the front of the dining hall, signaling the commencement of the 2015 Camp Seneca Lake staff awards.

Adam, underdressed for the final banquet in a green tank top and a long string necklace, spoke into the microphone and requested the entire Camp's attention for this notable award ceremony. After reading a short introduction to the awards and the process by which the awards were given out, the staff members by the entranceway, as past award winners, went up to the microphone in pairs to read the prompt for their individual award. They then announced the winner, and the winner received a rectangular wooden plaque with the award and their name laser-engraved into the wood.

Amy, the first staff award winner, came up to the front to receive her wooden plaque and pose for a picture with the two award presenters. Smiling ear to ear, Amy returned to her seat, and the process continued, with staff pairs presenting the awards and the winner coming to the front of the dining hall to receive his or her award.

Though we were staff members, Aaron and I lacked interest in the award ceremony. We grabbed two of the crayons at the center of our table and began to play Hangman on the white paper tablecloth that coated our table.

A rare lapse in the loud words of the presenters or applause from the rest of Camp pulled me back to the ceremony. Carter, sporting a black Speedball t-shirt, and Michael, in his blue and white striped American Eagle button down, now stepped up to the microphone at the front of the dining hall. They began to introduce the award for best Hachshara, or first-year staff member.

"I think you're going to win this one," Aaron said to me from across the table now lined with surprisingly tasty desserts.

"No way," I uttered back.

I smiled at his kind words, but realistically I knew that I stood no shot. In my head, I listed at least four other peers my age that were worthy of this award. I knew that I was a

nominee for best Hachshara, but that would ultimately be meaningless when someone else went up to the front to retrieve the award. I had never received any sort of formal recognition like this in my life. *Why would tonight be any different?*

I returned back to the game of Hangman, attempting to guess the next letter that would finally reveal Aaron's word. Carter and Michael had reached the end of the prompt for the award, and silence fell over the dining hall.

"This year's award goes to..."

I looked up and Aaron stared back at me, the ends of his mouth curving upwards as if he knew what was to come.

"Madeline Heilbronner."

My heart dropped, and the silence in my ears persisted even though I could see people shouting and applauding throughout the dining hall. *How? Why?*

*Silence.*

Placing my hands on my black, flowery dress, I maneuvered my legs out from under the table and over the wooden seat bench. Only one thought ran through my head as I gazed out at the entire Camp applauding and looking right back at me.

*Please don't trip, Madeline. Please don't trip.*

I could feel my face redden, and the temperature from the already hot dining hall seemed to intensify. Placing one foot in front of the other, I began to make my way out from the side of the dining hall to the front where Carter and Michael stood with the award. I gazed out at the Camp community, nearly everyone smiling as I slowly strutted to the entranceway.

And that's when I saw it. A wave was rushing towards me, a wave consisting of nearly thirty young campers that were sprinting my way. Spencer, a nine-year-old boy and one of my

favorite campers here, led the way, and the other campers followed. As I squeezed out of the narrow aisle between two tables and headed to the dance floor by the entranceway, they engulfed me, their hands spread out wide for a massive embrace.

My legs froze as the wave of campers hit me.

“Congrats, Madeline!” the campers yelled in a complete circle around me.

Boys and girls from the younger villages of Cayuga and Onondaga, plus a few from the older villages of Mohawk and Seneca, had swarmed me, and for the first time since my name was announced, I exhaled.

I smiled and attempted to hug the kids back, but they just continued to flock to me from the tables spread throughout the dining hall. Looking around now, I gazed at the campers beside me, and my mind began to race.

Two months ago, I drove down Camp Road for the first time in a year, unsure of what my first summer no longer as a camper would entail. *Would I enjoy being a staff member? Would I miss being a camper? Will these kids drive me crazy?* And now, two months later, I stood near the entranceway at the front of the dining hall, campers of all ages huddled around me as I received this unbelievable honor.

For the first time since the summer started, I began to reflect on my experiences as a first-year counselor. I flashed back to eating my first meal with Spencer, a French fry eating contest that led to him fighting to sit with me at meals for the rest of July and August. I flashed back to my kayak period with the oldest Mohicans, the boys crying real tears of laughter as they tried to flip my kayak and get me to fall into the chilly Seneca Lake. I flashed back to Adam telling me the younger boys liked me so much that I should be a Cayuga counselor. I flashed back to the dance party in the dining hall that I held with my bunk. I flashed back to helping one of my

Onondaga campers cope with homesickness while the rest of her peers danced inside the dining hall. I flashed back to the very first day of the July session, dressed in sleepwear alongside the rest of the Onondaga staff members as the campers stormed off the buses and into our arms. I flashed back to sitting with my sister at the waterfront, staring out at the land that sat on the opposite side of the lake we both loved so dearly. And finally, I flashed forward to tomorrow, the dreaded day when all of my campers would board the buses, tears pouring down their faces as they left the campgrounds and left their best friends for another whole year.

The campers of Camp Seneca Lake huddled around me, and I couldn't help but smile. I couldn't help but feel accomplished in my first year as a staff member. *Maybe I did deserve this.*

Staff members stood up now to peel the campers off of me, and I continued to strut towards Carter and Michael who held my award and smiled widely.

After hugging both of them, they handed me the wooden plaque, and I stared at my name engraved at the bottom. *Wow.*

Adam pushed us together for a picture, Michael to my left and Carter on my right. Smiling proudly, showing off my new pearly whites sans metal, I gazed into the lens of the camera.

*Flash.*

Where else can you learn the monumental importance of recognizing others for their hard work? Where else can you have such a big impact on a community as just a seventeen-year old and a first-year employee? Where else is a group of swarming eight to thirteen-year-old boys and girls such a positive sign of love and affection?



I'll tell you this much. Camp Seneca Lake is special. And the lessons I've learned there are ones I will never, ever forget.

Madeline's story here acts as a testimonial to how Camp recognizes its employees to show value and increase staff motivation and retention. Though Madeline knew she had done a great job in her first summer as a staff member, receiving the award for best Hachshara solidified in her mind that all of her hard work was not only worth it, but it was also valued by the staff members of Camp Seneca Lake, many of whom she admired and learned from as a new counselor. It was a surreal moment for Madeline to win the award and ultimately be surrounded by all of the campers that she impacted through her love and passion for them. In this moment, as well, it became clear to Madeline that she made a real difference as just a seventeen-year old, something that would likely be impossible if she had an internship, albeit unlikely due to her young age. The camp counselor job allowed Madeline to contribute and become one of the finest counselors on the campgrounds, not only instilling in her a sense of value, but also a sense of confidence that she will carry with her as she attends college next year.

Madeline also noted that Camp has helped prepare her for college and future employment by teaching her how to work with other people. In her interview with me, Madeline stated that as a camp counselor, she was constantly working and communicating with others, whether it be her campers, her co-counselors, other staff members, or the directors of Camp. Working at Camp taught her how to get along with people in difficult scenarios, a skill that will undoubtedly come into play in college with roommates, professors, friends, and fellow students.

Camp also instilled in Madeline a sense of responsibility. As a counselor, Madeline was constantly ensuring that all of her campers were present, happy, healthy, safe, and enjoying themselves, an unbelievably stressful job for a seventeen-year old. Madeline understands that this job as a counselor taught her how to juggle many things at once, all the while remaining calm and grounded. These are simply more skills and qualities that Madeline will carry with her to college and her future place of employment.

Though Madeline obtained countless life skills from working at Camp this past summer, this place is more to her than just a site of employment. Madeline's mother passed away in the summer of 2010 while Madeline was a Seneca camper. She remembers eating macaroni and cheese under the big tree outside of the dining hall after the horrific news was broken to her. It was at this moment that the entire village of Seneca came rushing out to her, crying even harder than she was. She was enveloped by the love and care of her fellow Seneca campers who were there to support her in an impossibly difficult moment. Madeline ultimately decided not to leave Camp after her mother's passing, noting in our interview that she didn't want to be anywhere else other than on the campgrounds. "No way," Madeline said when given the option to go home. At Camp she had distractions, and she had people there that made her happy.

So no, Camp isn't just a place where Madeline grew up and now works. Camp, to her, is a place of growth, a place of long-lasting friendship, and a place of responsibility. It is a place of confidence, a place of unimaginable support, and a place of immense value. Camp, to Madeline, is home.

### **Jake Massa**

Jake Massa is currently a junior at Rutgers University studying chemical engineering.<sup>13</sup> He attended Camp Seneca Lake for thirteen summers, eight of which were spent as a camper. A senior camper in 2009, Jake worked as a Cayuga counselor in 2011, but his interest in programming led to him becoming a programming specialist in 2012 and the Assistant Programming Director in 2013. In 2014, Jake worked at the University of Houston in a chemical engineering lab doing research in computational chemistry before returning to Camp in August as a Cayuga counselor. This summer, Jake will not be working at Camp due to an internship with Colgate.

This is his story.

Noah and I sat at the end of a table near the entranceway to the dining hall while the rest of Camp dipped their grilled cheeses in tomato soup and danced to “Can’t Hold Us” by Macklemore playing on the speakers. A camper, fourteen years old, sat across from us with a U.S. Sail Racing official booklet spread out in front of her. The small three-by-five booklet outlined the rules for competitive sailing, and Sarah, at the moment, pored over the section on right-of-way, following the text with her pointer figure that glided to the right as she moved through the words. Noah and I tilted our heads to try and read along with her from across the table.

Just prior to the meal, I went up to Sarah and told her to sit with me and Noah at the staff overflow table for lunch in order to develop the lesson plan for the sail racing hobby session later that afternoon. She smiled at the thought of getting to sit with two staff members, picturing the

jealousy on her friends' faces when they found out that she would get to sit at the staff table up front.

"There's five basic rules," Sarah uttered.

Noah and I stared at Sarah as she began to describe what she had learned.

"So, how about I teach the class with an acronym?"

"That sounds like a great idea," I said.

Sarah read the acronym aloud, defining each letter and describing what each part of the acronym meant in terms of sailing right-of-way.

"This is awesome, Sarah. How do you want to lead the lesson on the water afterwards?"

She thought and then began to describe her plan.

We would set up two buoys in the lake and have the rest of the campers get on their own sailboats. We would all then tack back and forth between the two of them, practicing the right-of-way rules that were previously taught.

"Sounds great. How do you feel about leading the class today?" I said, glancing over at Sarah who now closed up the sailing booklet.

"I'm excited, but also nervous," she responded.

"You'll be great," Noah chimed in.

"And if you need us for anything," I said, "we'll be right there with you."

Sarah stood directly under the big tree, her back to the shimmering Seneca Lake, while the six campers in our hobby group plus Noah and I sat in front of her. A tall whiteboard stood on the ground beside Sarah, and we looked at the acronym Sarah had written out in large letters, all of us thankfully guarded from the sun by the tree's expansive leaves and branches.

Two weeks ago, just prior to the start of the August session, Adam, the Programming Director, told me that I would be co-leading sail racing hobby group along with one of my best friends and fellow member of Tuscarora 2009, Noah. As a member of the programming team, Adam had me lead a programming hobby group in July where, for twenty hours spread throughout the session, I taught ten fourteen-year-old girls about my job and how to craft a solid Camp program. My job as a programmer, however, wasn't sexy, and there was simply no way I could glamorize the programming process to appeal to my teenage audience seeking excitement and, for lack of a better word, fun. Those twenty hours of July crept by, and I told Adam, my boss, that I needed to be placed elsewhere for August. I had to be with kids in something exciting for them, and also, perhaps selfishly so, myself. Given my prior experience and skills on the waterfront, he placed me in sail racing hobby group, a needed and welcome change.

Noah and I sat behind the rest of our campers, and we faced the lake while Sarah continued to fill in the acronym. She wrote the acronym vertically in large capital letters before finishing off each word in smaller, lowercase letters that flowed horizontally to the right edge of the whiteboard.

Sarah's peers stared up at her as she finished writing and looked back at her audience. Though the massive lake sat behind her, she commanded attention with her tall stature and surprising aura of confidence. Sarah had been quiet in the previous hobby sessions, but we were now seeing a new side of this girl, a side few people other than her closest friends had likely seen.

“Who here has heard the term right-of-way before?”

A few campers raised their hands, but they explained that they had heard the term in reference to driving as opposed to on the water.

Sarah smiled and stated that today they would learn about this term as it related to sail racing.

Turning now to the whiteboard, Sarah read the five letters of the vertical acronym aloud before explaining each facet of the acronym in a more in depth manner. Right-of-way was complex, she said, but nonetheless, easy to understand with a basic grasp of the acronym at hand.

For fifteen minutes, we sat under that big, lakeside tree until each of the campers finally comprehended right-of-way rules on the water. Sarah asked her peers questions and had them explain the acronym in their own words to ensure a proper and thorough understanding of the topic, all the while Noah and I sat in the back and watched our camper lead in a way many staff members might envy.

Before the August session began, Noah and I sat at a table in the dining hall and pondered how we could make our hobby unique. The campers in our group had already made their way through beginning and advanced sailing hobby groups, so there was hardly any information that these kids didn't already know.

*Why not have the campers, themselves, lead the meetings?* We pondered the idea, ultimately deciding to give it a go. Before each hobby session, Noah and I would meet with one camper at breakfast or lunch and teach that camper about a topic using the U.S. Sail Racing booklet as a reference, giving him or her the knowledge necessary to teach the lesson without a staff member. The campers, as they met with us throughout the August session, would describe how they wanted to teach the class, and the three of us would craft a lesson plan that the campers could use as they stood by the big tree and the whiteboard rested on the thick wooden tree trunk.

Sarah looked back at me and Noah, the lesson appearing to have drawn to a close. We smiled and nodded, non-verbally telling Sarah that she could take us over to the water now.

Sarah motioned for us all to stand, and we headed to the Hobie sailboats that rested where the water softly spilled onto shore.

“Let’s practice now,” she said to the group, and the campers made their way to their individual boats. Participating in Sarah’s lesson too, I headed over to my own Hobie and began to let out the wound up sail. Noah headed over to the Crash motorboat with Sarah that he would drive while Sarah continued to lead and facilitate the lesson.

As Sarah hopped in the Crash boat resting off the T-dock, I pushed my Hobie into the water, and the campers to my left and right did the same. It felt weird to be a camper again for the afternoon, but that was my role today, a role I hadn’t assumed since 2009 when I was a senior camper. I now stood beside my boat, the Seneca Lake water up to my lower thigh, while Sarah stood in the center of the Crash and yelled out the lesson plan through a megaphone.

Two buoys sat in the lake that Noah and I set up during the rest hour after lunch, and we all would be tacking back and forth between the two of them. Sarah explained that as we tacked, we would be practicing the right-of-way rules, shouting when you had right-of-way and allowing others to pass first when you didn’t.

After Sarah was done explaining, I pushed off the firm lake bottom and hopped into my Hobie. The campers beside me reciprocated, and we were off.

Sarah sat in the front of the Crash, Noah steering in the back, and she ensured that the lesson was running according to her plan. She alerted campers when they broke right-of-way rules and kindly explained to them what they did wrong. Megaphone in hand, Sarah directed people, never getting too involved so as to let the campers figure some things out for themselves and never getting too mad when a camper continued to violate the rules of the exercise. She was quiet yet commanding, calm yet stern, with high expectations for all of her peers. The campers

and I tacked between the buoys with right-of-way rules in mind until we all had mastered the exercise.

As we weaved our way through the water, navigating smoothly and quickly in between the buoys, Sarah stood and monitored, quiet but smiling now. And in that moment, it hit me that we were looking at a future staff member of Camp Seneca Lake, a future waterfront specialist and perhaps even a future director of this space. I had given this girl a chance to lead, a chance she hadn't been afforded in her five prior years at Camp. All she needed was an opportunity to show off her skill set, a tremendously diverse and impressive one for just a fourteen-year-old girl. She understood the complexities of the water, the ins and outs of this lake that few staff members were able to grasp. She spoke loudly and clearly, and her peers trusted her in this leadership role. With Sarah on the Crash, Camp would be in good hands for years to come.

I smiled at Sarah as she watched us, and she smiled back, perhaps realizing likewise that this lake would be a place of future employment, a place of growth and skill development for her. This lake would be a place to speak publically, a place to teach others about the wondrous freedom of taking a Hobie out on the water. This lake belonged to all of us at Camp Seneca Lake, but in this moment, it belonged to Sarah. This lake was hers.

Where else can you discover firsthand the importance of how information is delivered? Where else can you be so sure that what you teach kids will stick and make them see the beauty of learning? Where else can you give kids the chance to lead in front of their peers, a chance for kids to finally feel proud of themselves in such a welcoming and beautiful setting?

I'll tell you this much. Camp Seneca Lake is special. And the lessons I've learned there are ones I will never, ever forget.



Jake's story here acts as a testimonial to how working at Camp encouraged him to become a better teacher. In his sail racing hobby group, Jake essentially allowed the campers to run each session, and though this may have made his life easier, he ultimately created a far more effective method of teaching and far more effective method of relaying information to his campers. In my interview with Jake, he pointed out that there was so much more excitement among the campers when they were able to teach their own lessons. The campers truly enjoyed sitting with him and Noah at meals, learning the material, and developing a lesson plan that they would get to utilize later that day in front of their peers.

Jake also learned about the importance of being relatable when teaching others. He noted, in my interview with him, that the campers actually felt motivated to listen and learn from their peers that were all around the same age. Rather than having an older counselor like himself talk to these kids about sailing, a camper was talking with them about the topic at hand. In Jake's mind, his campers didn't want to hear a college kid talk about sailing. They wanted to hear their friends teach, and this created a far more friendly and comfortable learning environment. Jake, perceptively so, understood this and developed a plan to foster a method of learning for his campers that was not only fun, but also extremely effective.

Jake, by teaching his "class" this way, also helped train the next generation of staff members at Camp Seneca Lake, well before any formal training actually takes place for them. The job of a waterfront staff member consists of giving lessons to kids, directing kids out on the water, speaking publically, and helping campers move along the lake, whether it be by sailboat, kayak, paddle board, waterskies or wakeboard. This is precisely what the campers did that led

each hobby session; they were, without really knowing it, training to become waterfront staff members at the age of fourteen. So, not only did Jake develop a curriculum and method of teaching that was effective, but he also helped ensure the long-term success of Camp Seneca Lake.

Lastly, Jake fostered a better sense of community in his hobby group by permitting the kids to lead each session. He noted that he was able to intermingle with the group because he was essentially just another student in the class, taking out a sailboat and taking part in the lesson on the water. Everyone was on the same level, and this equivalent community, in Jake's mind, led to a far better environment to teach and learn.

Jake, through his work at Camp, became passionate about teaching and understanding how different students learn. At Rutgers, Jake was a teaching assistant for a twenty-four-person chemistry course that ultimately went quite well due to his teaching experience at Camp. He was able to help different types of students at different skill levels, and he found that he could relate to his students because he previously taught in a far smaller and more informal setting. Jake, in his interview with me, stated that teaching at Camp has made him more empathetic towards people with different learning styles, a personal quality that he will undoubtedly carry with him to future jobs.

For the first time since 2002, Jake will not be returning to Camp Seneca Lake this summer due to his internship with Colgate. Jake, however, noted that it was a surprisingly easy decision for him to accept the internship offer. He understands that he had to think more formally about his career, and he went on to state that in the field of chemical engineering, direct experience in a lab or other chemical engineering related workplace is one hundred percent necessary to land a job out of college. As such, it is not surprising that this decision was so easy,

and though Jake already worked at the University of Houston in 2014, he is still in the process of figuring out what type of career in chemical engineering he would like to pursue.

So yes, Jake will be missed at Camp this coming summer of 2015. But, he can certainly be confident that the skills and qualities he obtained through his work on the campgrounds will make him as competitive a job applicant as anyone when he graduates from Rutgers next May.

### **Rachel Rosenbaum**

Rachel Rosenbaum went to Cornell University for her undergraduate education, majoring in design environmental analysis.<sup>14</sup> She attended Camp Seneca Lake for thirteen years, and after her senior camper and Counselor in Training summers of 2007 and 2008, respectively, Rachel stepped away from CSL in 2009 in order to attend a leadership camp in Colorado and work at Camp Good Days and Special Times. She then returned to Camp in 2010 and 2011 as an Onondaga counselor, and in 2012, she worked as a counselor in the Tuscarora village. In 2013, Rachel worked as the Associate Programming Director, and she then became the Tuscarora Unit Head in 2014. Rachel currently works at General Motors as part of Challenge Detroit, a yearlong fellowship program that brings thirty-five young professionals to the city in hopes of leading a movement to build a stronger, better Detroit. Rachel will not be returning to Camp Seneca Lake this coming summer of 2015 due to her current fellowship with Challenge Detroit.

This is her story.

Adam and I walked side by side past the office and down the rocky incline that would lead us to the woods beside the M-field. The trees lining the road lacked their standard coat of rich, green leaves, but most of all, a silence unlike any other resonated throughout the campgrounds. Voices of campers and staff members normally filled the air here, but these voices would not be present for at least another month. This didn't feel like the Camp I had gone to for the past eleven summers, or at least not the Camp that filled my mind with some of my fondest memories. I looked up at Adam's tall and lanky figure, his eyes scoping out the leafless woods to our left and right. I knew he was excited to return to the campgrounds, the site of his summers

for well over twenty years as a camper, counselor, Unit Head, and now, Programming Director for the entire Camp. We continued to walk along the unpaved road until we were greeted by the vast, grassy M-field.

Right when I was hired as Associate Programming Director, Adam and I began to talk regularly and plan some of the programs that would soon coat our master calendars for July and August. One major topic of discussion between us revolved around Tikkun Olam Day, Camp's day of "repairing the world" where campers and staff members dedicated themselves towards somehow bettering Camp, whether that meant constructing a new garden, painting a new mural, or adding dirt and sand to the M-field in order to create a second baseball diamond for the older boys' softball league. Tikkun Olam Day, however, had become stagnant in Adam's eyes, and I couldn't help but agree with him. He talked of removing this day from the calendar altogether, but I simply couldn't let that happen; the themes of being an active and conscious community member and learning how to give back in a meaningful way had always resonated strongly with me.

Adam and I talked about how we could revamp the Tikkun Olam program, and we eventually settled on creating and constructing a brand new community space, one that everyone at Camp would get a chance to take part in and help build. Too often in the past had campers gone through Tikkun Olam Day without feeling like they had made a real contribution to Camp, and in the aftermath, many campers still didn't understand why it was important to give back to a community important to them. I wanted the campers of every age group to help craft this community space, for everyone to have a stake in its construction and ultimate completion. I had a vision in my head, but I had no idea what that vision looked like. *Where would we build this*

*community space? What purpose would it serve? What if the campers and staff didn't like this idea?* Questions flooded my head, but I trusted my gut and Adam's confidence in me.

We now walked through the M-field and Adam stopped beside the dense woods next to the baseball field.

“What do you say?” Adam uttered, and with that, we entered the woods, peeling away the natural hazards that stood in our way in order to find something that looked like God knows what.

Adam, hardly an outdoorsy person, struggled as we progressed through the woods, and I frequently held branches up for him to crawl under or maneuver around. Ugly, leafless woods surrounded us, and the occasional thought of, “What the hell are we doing out here?” began to linger in my head. I knew we were looking for some sort of land to build a community space, but the prospects looked bleak out here in these dense, poison ivy ridden woods.

As we walked, we noted a few surprising spots that may have had potential, but these hopes were quickly disbanded for a variety of reasons, mainly that it would be next to impossible to make a trail out to this space or it was simply too small to fit the entire, four hundred some person Camp. We continued to trek through the woods, lifting up or pushing down branches as we went, until we looked up and found ourselves somewhere eerily familiar. The zip line of the high ropes course hung directly over us.

“How did we get here?” I said, awestruck that our journey through the woods brought us to this frequently visited location in Camp. And then I saw it. Ahead of us was a huge, open piece of land in the middle of these woods.

*What is this?*

“It’s perfect,” I uttered to Adam. He nodded, seemingly overwhelmed by the space before him.

The entire ground of this space was covered with brush and leaves, and some fallen trees with large branches coming off of them helped coat the floor. The egg-shaped area was big, certainly big enough for the entire Camp, and I noticed that the path to the high ropes course could similarly act as an entrance to this space. As I continued to survey the land, I saw the massive expanse of Seneca Lake to my right. The sun glistened off the water, the view nothing shy of mesmerizing.

I froze. Hours ago, as I drove down Camp Road, I had no idea what our plan was or where we would find the land to build this community space for all of Camp. But this was perfect. This was where the vision could unfold.

Over the next four weeks, the entire Camp Seneca Lake community came rolling down Camp Road, the staff first in their own cars and the campers in the week following in big yellow school buses. For the first time, I would be showing the space that Adam and I discovered, still littered with shrubbery and massive trees and poison ivy, to the others that would all lay stake in the completion and reconstruction of this land. And for the first time, Adam and I developed an understanding of how we wanted to use this new community space. It would be home to Shabbat services on Saturday morning, a pleasant break from the fire circle at the waterfront where the sun and heat beat down relentlessly on the campers and staff, making Saturday morning Shabbat services almost unbearable. Now, we would have a spot nicely lined with trees that sat beside the beautiful, shimmering Seneca Lake.

During general staff orientation, one week prior to the campers storming off the buses, the staff split up for one day to clean up various areas of Camp. Over the course of the day, the staff members assigned to me removed poison ivy in the area surrounding the space, raked leaves off the ground, moved massive tree branches into the surrounding woods, and dug a trail leading from the space to Seneca Lake below. Seven hours of staff labor laid the foundation for what was to come. Adam and I discovered a plot of land that would require unimaginable work to turn around and use as a community space. We now had a massive, vacant area without the shrubbery and trees and rocks and leaves previously coating it. We were ready for the campers to arrive.

Buses plowed down Camp Road and came to rest on the field neighboring the dining hall. Campers sprinted off into the arms of their counselors and best friends that they had been waiting for months to see. Camp was buzzing, filled with the hype that summer 2013 was finally here. This summer would see the construction of Camp's first ever, community built space. It wouldn't be easy, and I knew that. So, we got to work.

With a summer camp-sized budget, materials to spruce up the space were limited. Professional landscapers and carpenters and gardeners would not be gracing us with their presence at Camp Seneca Lake. We had boys and girls ages eight to fifteen, and a group of motivated staff members ages sixteen to twenty-nine. This was my team. But we also had the power of being a not-for-profit summer camp. After various calls around Penn Yan and surrounding towns, we eventually got two hundred tires donated from local auto shops and junk yards and a substantial amount of wood donated from Knapp and Schlappi, a hardware store no more than twenty minutes from the campgrounds. I had a team, and, though limited, some semblance of materials.



Throughout the July session, bunks were assigned to Tikkun Olam periods on the calendar, meaning that each day, I would work with a specific age group in order to clean up part of the space or add something new to it. At the start of each Tikkun Olam period, I, usually along with Ella, another member of the programming team, took the campers back to our land by the high ropes course. I would introduce the campers to the space, tell them about the overarching plan, and finally, describe how their bunk's specific project for the period related to this final vision.

I repeated this process with every age group and gender that Camp had to offer, ultimately being faced with new challenges each period. *How can I motivate eight-year-old girls to help with this community service project? How can I teach thirteen-year-old boys to construct benches out of slabs of wood and tires? How can we perfect the acoustics of this space and ensure that everyone will be able to hear the future Shabbat speeches and prayers? Why did I tell Adam this space would be completed by the final Shabbat of the July session? How much longer can I realistically motivate myself to complete this project?*

These questions lingered before and after each period, but my fears steadily transformed into doubts that transformed into confidence as the projects were completed and the space began to evolve into something far more than vacant plot of dirt.

Boys and girls of all age groups moved raspberry bushes to the space and made birdhouses and painted plaques that represented each of the projects that had been completed. One younger boys group dug a path to the space from the high ropes course and lined it with logs while a girls bunk built small stands to hold candles that lined the outside of the space. Other bunks took on projects such as digging fire pits, painting signs to welcome the community to the

space and commemorate Tikkun Olam 2013, and building a fence at the cliff face that led down to Seneca Lake.

By far the most difficult project, however, was the construction of the benches and the bimah, the main focal point of the space on which future campers and staff members would stand to lead prayers and deliver their speeches on the Sabbath. To complete these tasks, a so-called “culmination day” was put on the calendar where the oldest Mohican boys, oldest Senecan girls, and the Tuscarora campers spent an entire day at the space, building a bimah with planks of wood and benches with the same wooden planks, old tires, hammers, and nails. These campers also finished the stick and twine fence bordering the cliff that led down to the lake, painted the remaining plaques, and touched up the other aspects of the space in order to bring it to completion. By the end of the culmination day, just prior to dinner, the space was ready. It was finally complete.

At the end of that day, I sat alone in the back of the space, what would soon be named “Golden View” in honor of our retiring Camp Director. Campers and staff members that helped on the culmination day came up to me before they left, telling me how cool the space was and how proud they were to be a part of it. I smiled and thanked them for their work, but my mind was blank. I didn’t feel proud, happy, sad, surprised, disappointed, or any possible emotion that could have overcome me at that moment as I stared at the finished product. The raised wooden bimah sat at the front of the space, and I sat on one of the many benches that had been built earlier in the day. Sunrays sprayed magnificently out on the lake to my right, and I stared at the birdhouses and candles that lined the space. It was beautiful. It really was. But right now, I was having trouble acknowledging all that I, all that we, had accomplished in just one short month.

*What is this place? Where am I? Is this real right now?* These thoughts flooded my head, but they were soon replaced by new thoughts regarding the space before me. *For how long will this space last? What impact will this space have on the Camp community?* I had lived through countless moments of kids asking me, “Why are we doing this?” and “What’s the point?” I wanted the kids to get so much out of this experience, and right now, I simply wasn’t sure if that was the case. One month ago, I brought the first group of campers out to the space and introduced the new plan for Tikkun Olam this summer. Now, we had finished, and I simply didn’t know what to think.

That last Saturday morning of the July session, the entire Camp community gathered just before the entranceway into Golden View. Adam organized a ribbon cutting ceremony to commence the opening of the space, and our Camp Director held the scissors over the red ribbon while Adam spoke to the campers and staff members before him. After cutting the ribbon, the space was officially open, and people began to pour into the space, their flow only limited by the bottleneck of the entryway.

I snuck into the space in the middle of the pack, surprisingly terrified for what was to come. *Were the benches going to break? Would everyone be able to hear the speakers on the bimah? Would I need to run and get a microphone? Would people miss sitting at the fire circle this Saturday morning?* I tried not to let these thoughts linger as I made my way to the front of Golden View where the campers that would be speaking this morning were sitting.

For the past week, I had been working with campers from each age group about their experience in the Tikkun Olam program and how they could convey these thoughts into spoken words in front of the entire Camp. Now, I sat next to these campers on the homemade wooden

benches at the front of the space, waiting for everyone to grow quiet before I would open this Shabbat service.

As the campers and staff hushed, I rose from my seat and moved onto the wooden bimah upon which everyone now focused his or her attention. I looked out on the entire Camp in this community space, and I began to speak.

“Around April this past year, the programming staff and I started discussing the future of Tikkun Olam Day at Camp. It was apparent that a structural change to the day was necessary, and it made sense; it is not possible or desirable to repair the world in one day. The process is ongoing, intensive, and larger than any of us can handle.”

I began to describe how we transformed this previously wooded area before wrapping up to commence the rest of the Shabbat service.

“We do a lot of projects at Camp, some that last longer than others. The most important criteria we had for this one was to create a place that could be sustained from generation to generation.

“It’s not just about recycled wood, old tires, and manual labor that will allow our children to thrive for generations. These things certainly help our case, but above all, it is our dedication to one another, the community, and the world that can encourage people to make decisions with the future in mind.

“Our vision for this space was only that, a vision. For months, I rolled ideas over and over in my head, attempting to figure out what this vision meant and how we could accomplish it. You all took that dream and ran with it in a matter of four weeks. It may be one of the most beautiful examples of collaboration I have ever had the honor of being a part of.”

My single voice was now replaced by those of the entire Camp as prayers and songs filled the space, but it became quiet again as the campers beside me rose to the bimah and delivered their speeches about what Tikkun Olam meant to them.

“As an oldest Senecan, I, along with many others, worked six hours with my hands, tools, and surroundings. I learned that day that I wasn’t handy at all. However, I tried to help in other ways. I tied parts of the fence together and carried supplies and wood around. This experience forced me to push myself, and it taught me that intrinsic motivation is key. I didn’t have to be the strongest or most handy person to help; I just had to believe in the cause and be willing to step in. Beyond myself, I wanted to thank you all for contributing to this amazing project and creating a space that we can all enjoy.”

A Cayugan now stepped up to the bimah.

“At Tikkun Olam, we took a tour of Camp and collected bottles and cans. You might think this is boring and also think, ‘What does this have to do with repairing the world?’ We learned about all of the ways we can reduce, reuse, and recycle the materials we use every day. By collecting the recycling and using it as decoration, we learned about our potential to save the planet, one bottle at a time.”

Twelve campers walked up to the bimah to speak that morning, and as they stepped down, proud of their speeches and proud of the space in which they stood, it finally hit me. These kids got it. They understood the importance of Tikkun Olam, the importance of giving back, and the importance of realizing a project to completion. *What more can you really ask for?*

Turning now to my right, I peeked through the trees and spotted the sun shining down on the lake as the song leader strummed his guitar and the Camp community around me took in the immeasurable beauty of this new space.

Where else can you convince a crew of nearly four hundred people to construct a sacred space in the middle of the woods? Where else can you teach eight-year-old kids the importance of community service in order to develop a new, more socially responsible generation? Where else can you get the opportunity to give back to a place you love so dearly with people you hold so close to your heart?

I'll tell you this much. Camp Seneca Lake is special. And the lessons I've learned there are ones I will never, ever forget.

Rachel's story here acts as a testimonial to how working at Camp gives individuals the opportunity to see a vision come to life. Prior to Camp, Rachel, in her discussions with Adam, decided that the Tikkun Olam program needed to be drastically altered. It made sense to her to make Tikkun Olam an ongoing program throughout the July session as opposed to just a one-day event as it had been in the past. Her idea of developing a new community space was just a vision that not even she fully understood in its beginning stages. But, she ran with the idea, going to Camp with Adam that May day in order to find a suitable space and convincing the staff during orientation that the space needed to be cleared of its trees and branches and roots and leaves and poison ivy in order to permit the next stages of the transformation process to take place. When the campers arrived, Rachel then convinced them that this space was important, that they all could have a stake in it in order to positively impact Camp's future generations of campers and staff members. The campers bought in, and for a month, Rachel directed the initiative to decorate the space and turn it into the Saturday morning Shabbat service site.

That final Saturday morning of the July session, Rachel was able to see her space come to life as she spoke on the bimah and listened to the campers deliver beautiful speeches that demonstrated their understanding for what they had just accomplished. Her site had gone from a wildly wooded area to a cozy space with benches and aisles and birdhouses and fire pits and signs and a bimah, all directly next to the staggeringly pretty Seneca Lake. Working at Camp gave Rachel the opportunity to head a massive project and see it come to fruition, an experience that likely would not have occurred at an internship.

Rachel, through this experience, also learned to be resourceful. With an extremely small budget, she didn't have the money or resources that would have greatly expedited this process, and though she was working with a huge number of people to complete the project, she could only work with one small group at a time, many of which consisted of boys and girls below the age of ten. Perhaps the best example of Rachel's resourcefulness came from how she built the benches and how she gathered the materials to construct them. After calling around and having two hundred tires donated from local auto shops and junk yards and wood donated from a local hardware store, she then figured out how to not only build benches out of these materials, but she was also able to teach campers and other staff members how to do so in order for them to be mass produced for the space. This experience taught Rachel how to be inventive and create a quality product with minimal resources.

When asked about how her work at Camp has prepared her for future employment, Rachel noted that Camp is the reason she has ever gotten any position for which she has applied. Working at Camp gave Rachel leadership opportunities to discuss in job interviews that she likely would not have had if she pursued internship experiences. Rachel also stated that working

at Camp has taught her how to empathize with people, care for others, be a public speaker, be selfless, and have energy when there is seemingly no energy left in the reserves.

Camp, specifically, also helped Rachel land her current Challenge Detroit fellowship. In my interview with Rachel, she noted that one of the first steps of the Challenge Detroit application was to write a blog post about the way in which she had impacted a community. Rachel wrote about the Tikkun Olam project she got to head at Camp, what it meant to her and the campers, and what it meant to Camp Seneca Lake as a whole. To Rachel, having a story in the first place was huge, and it was this Camp experience that ended up being so valuable in her application process.

Because Rachel's contract with Challenge Detroit goes until August, she will not be returning to Camp this coming summer of 2015. In my frequent conversations with Rachel, I can tell how much it pains her that she cannot come back to spend time in the space and be with those closest to her. Though she won't physically be on the campgrounds this summer, Rachel's legacy at CSL will live on forever, not only through the community space buried in the woods beside Seneca Lake, but also through the love and dedication that she has shown to the campers and staff members that inhabit the campgrounds.



## Conclusions

The stories above demonstrate the power and influence of working at summer camp on six individuals whose ages and careers are widespread. Though it is clear that these people love Camp Seneca Lake, I hope it is even clearer just how much they were able to gain from their experiences on the campgrounds. For Joshua, Jon, Andrew, Madeline, Jake, and Rachel, Camp gave them a chance to learn essential life-skills and gain personal qualities that they will and already do carry with them at their places of employment.

The stories above also, interestingly so, touch on the idea that the summer camp counselor experience and the internship experience can coexist with one another. While it may be provocative to think about which experience is more valuable, a debate between the camp counselor and the internship seems silly when the two summer sites of occupation accomplish completely different goals. The internship, to begin, provides individuals with credentials and direct career experience, and this can often times lead to a job as we saw in Andrew's story with Ernst and Young. Internships give young adults a glance at what life would be like as a full-time employee in the field, a valuable experience for people unsure of precisely what they would like to do and where they would like to work. Jake, for example, worked in a research lab at the University of Houston last summer, and he will now be working at Colgate this coming summer, an industry experience that will drastically differ from his academic job last July and give him some more insight as to the variety of careers available to him as a chemical engineer. Internship experiences, finally, give people valuable technical skills that they can carry with them to their future jobs.

On the other hand, there is something intrinsically valuable to working with and supervising kids for a summer. There is something powerful to guiding children around and

being responsible for the safety and happiness of kids that are not your own. Part of that value in the camp counselor experience comes with the life skills, or what Martha White calls the “soft skills,”<sup>15</sup> that people gain and are so critical to success in the workplace.

The two experiences, camp and the internship, therefore don’t need to face off against one another as we saw in Darryl Brown’s piece, “Viewpoint: Skip the Internship, Go to Camp” and Shea’s rebuttal, “Viewpoint: Camp Counselor Can’t Compete with an Internship.” The results of working as a camp counselor and those that come with an internship are completely different, and as such, it is important for people to think about what they are really looking to get out of summer employment, whether it is the line on the resume and the credentials that can lead to a job, or an opportunity to work with kids and gain skills so valuable not only to a future career, but also to life in general.

This project originally started as an analysis of the camp versus internship debate with the goal of swaying you, the reader, to turn down the internship and work as a camp counselor. But, after conducting my research and interviewing the six current and former Camp Seneca Lake employees, I began to realize that both experiences have value depending on what exactly you desire. Stories from Andrew and Jake have brought me out of this binary methodology where the two experiences are directly opposed to one another. I began this project in an extremely passionate and strong pro-camp counselor position, but I now see true value in both opportunities, albeit a quite different meaning of value from each.

No one, not even the biggest die-hards for summer camp, believe that working at camp is a full-time career, except for a select few people that have the privilege of becoming camp directors. That being said, I would now encourage people to pursue both opportunities, to become a camp counselor to learn to lead and be confident, and to become an intern to pursue

career goals and find the right career path. For the overwhelmingly large proportion of camp employees that do not become full-time camp directors, there is something else, something larger that we are working towards. For Dr. Broder and me, that something else is medicine; for Joshua it is teaching; for Andrew it is finance; for Madeline it is criminal justice; for Jake it is chemical engineering; for Rachel, it is design and social change. Camp played a critical role for us in reaching these goals, but the internship experience, for some, played an equally large role in finding success.

The most important factor here for students contemplating how they want to spend their summers is to not be swayed by the constant pressures and voices trying to tell them what to do and what to become. In the undergraduate education environment, it is clear that the internship experience holds much more weight and commands far more respect than the camp counselor job even though we've seen that the two are drastically different experiences with drastically different outcomes. Parents, friends, advisors, professors, and employers don't seem to fully understand the importance and rewards of being a camp counselor, leading to students being easily swayed and simultaneously leading to students swaying themselves that they should pursue an internship. It is time that students and young adults begin to make informed decisions about the summer opportunities available to them. If students do decide to pursue a camp counselor job, they most certainly will have my support, as well as that of Joshua, Jon, Andrew, Madeline, Jake and Rachel, people who can confidently state that this work is far more than just "chasing around middle schoolers in the blistering heat."<sup>16</sup>

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Each time I turn down the rocky Camp Road from the paved, civilized Route 14 at the start of the summer, a part of me feels drunk. It is an intoxication unlike any other knowing that at the base of the road is a two-hundred-acre plot of land where I grew up, the home to nearly all of my fondest memories. After spending five summers as a counselor and Unit Head, I have come to realize that this unparalleled intoxication revolves around the work we do with the campers at CSL. There is something special about giving an eight-year-old boy the encouragement to climb the rock wall for the first time or helping an eleven-year-old girl overcome her fear of playing sports with boys. There is something worthwhile in listening to the roar of Camp as a fifteen-year-old boy with Asperger's crosses the finish line of his first triathlon. It is special to watch the once immature jock cry knowing that tomorrow he goes back home.

Two summers ago, I was walking back to my tent in Tuscarora when I heard my campers yelling from behind me. The campers pointed inside one of the platform tents on the girls' side of the village, and as I ran over, my stomach dropped, not knowing what awaited me. When I pulled up the leather tent flap, I saw Amanda lying in her bed, convulsing and desperately searching for air. I continued to survey the situation, but I was frozen, struck by a panic I had never experienced before. Sweat fell down my forehead and my heart rate surged, yet when I heard Amanda barely voice the word, "inhaler," I got on my hands and knees and began to throw aside the clothes under her bed, frantically searching for this remedy to my camper's gasps and cries. When the search failed, I pulled out my phone and dialed the nurse, describing the situation and asking her what I could do.

"I'll be right there," she offered, but in the middle of the woods, "I'll be right there" is a good eight minutes away.

Amanda continued to search for air that was nowhere to be found, and she gazed into my eyes fearing the worst. At that moment, I sat on her bed and rubbed her back, praying that the nurse would come faster and more importantly, that my camper would be fine. I was scared, but what more could I do other than reassure Amanda that the nurse was on her way? I felt helpless in a time when my camper needed nothing more than strength from her counselor and friend.

Though Amanda's panic attack ultimately subsided, moments like these are not why counselors, year after year, continue to return to the campgrounds. We come back for the moments of bliss and glory when our campers score a hockey goal for the first time or they sing a song in front of the entire Camp at the annual talent show. We come back for the moments that move us like a camper confiding in us about an eating disorder because we are the only ones that will understand. We come back for the moments that stick with us forever, the moments that continue to rewind and play over in our heads while we think about what else we could have done to help a camper in need.

So no, those eight minutes that I waited while Amanda gasped and cried were not fun. But while I sat there, rubbing my camper's back and telling her it would be okay, I once again felt the power of Camp Road, where an inherently terrifying yet utterly breathtaking moment is commonplace. Each time I enter that intersection between Route 14 and Camp Road, I feel a piece of what Amanda experienced that late August afternoon. I lose my breath and wait for that back rub, that intoxicating sensation of love, that can only be felt down Camp Road.

## Notes

1. Miller, "This One."
2. Brown, "Viewpoint: Skip."
3. White, "The Real."
4. Ibid.
5. Fleshler, "The Camp."
6. Ibid.
7. Shea, "Viewpoint: Camp."
8. Ibid.
9. Sham, *Telephone interview*.
10. Broder, *Telephone interview*.
11. Powers, *Telephone interview*.
12. Heilbrunner, *Telephone interview*.
13. Massa, *Telephone interview*.
14. Rosenbaum, *Telephone interview*.
15. White, "The Real."
16. Shea, "Viewpoint: Camp."

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## Glossary

**Activity Areas:** During the five-period schedule, campers generally rotate between specific, assigned activities at Camp Seneca Lake. These include athletics, pool, waterfront, ropes course, drama, Judaica, Israel, arts and crafts, and music. Activity areas are also sometimes called program areas.

**Activity Counselor:** A counselor that is assigned to a bunk, but works in a specific activity area during the five-period schedule.

**Bunk:** A specific age group in a village that lives together for an entire session. Also, a term for the cabin in which this specific age group resides. In each village, there are youngest, middle, and oldest campers. For example, the youngest Mohawk bunk consists of campers entering grade seven while the oldest Onondaga bunk consists of campers entering grade six.

**Bunk Counselor:** A counselor that stays with his or her bunk's campers throughout the day and takes them to activity areas during the five-period schedule.

**Camp Seneca Lake (CSL):** An American Camp Association accredited, Jewish Community Center sponsored overnight summer camp in Penn Yan, New York. The two-hundred-acre, wooded property neighbors Seneca Lake and is home to campers entering grades three to ten for two, three and a half week sessions each summer.

**Cayuga:** The younger boys village at CSL with campers entering grades three to six. The campers of this village, known as Cayugans, live in cabins with attached bathrooms.

**Counselor:** A staff member that works in a specific village and is in charge of a specific bunk within that village. Counselors can either be bunk counselors or activity counselors. All counselors live in a bunk with their campers and fellow co-counselors.

**Counselor in Training (CIT):** A program for CSL campers entering grade eleven devoted to training them to become staff members. The Counselor in Training program was last in existence at CSL in 2009.

**CSL in Israel:** A program for CSL campers entering grade eleven featuring a five-week trip to Israel. The current CSL in Israel program began in 2013.

**General Swim:** A forty-five minute period in the afternoon where all campers convene at the athletics and pool area for snack and other non-programmed activities.

**Head Specialist:** The leader of a specific activity area. The Athletics Head Specialist, for example, is the direct supervisor of athletics specialists and athletics activity counselors, and he or she must plan and help run all athletics periods for the campers.

**Hobby:** A "prescribed course of study," as stated by the programming team, where campers learn specific skills related to their course or topic of study. Campers, prior to attending Camp, pick a specific hobby group, and for ten, two-hour periods throughout each session, they are assigned to that hobby. At the end of the session, it is the goal that campers leave with a greater skillset in their specific hobby. Examples of hobby groups include tennis, pit cooking, advanced sailing, and ceramics.

**Mohawk:** The older boys village at CSL with campers entering grades seven to nine. The campers of this village, known as Mohicans, live in the oldest cabins at CSL; these cabins do not have attached bathrooms.

**Onondaga:** The younger girls village at CSL with campers entering grades three to six. The campers of this village, known as Onondagans, live in cabins with attached bathrooms.

**Periods:** Blocks of forty-five minutes where campers go to the various activity areas around Camp. There are five-periods in a day at Camp Seneca Lake.



**Programming:** A division of Camp Seneca Lake devoted to planning or assisting with all Camp programs. The programming team, headed by the Programming Director, is in charge of creating the daily schedule for every specialty area and bunk, planning evening and other signature programs, and creating hobby groups. The CSL blog and other social media platforms also fall under the jurisdiction of the programming team.

**Rest Hour:** A time after lunch where campers and counselors return to their villages to rest and spend time together before the afternoon periods begin.

**Seneca:** The older girls village at CSL with campers entering grades seven to nine. The campers of this village, known as Senecans, live in cabins with attached bathrooms.

**Shabbat Walk:** A period of allotted time, generally around thirty minutes, after Friday night Shabbat dinner and before Shabbat services where campers may walk freely around the campgrounds. It is known as a time for campers to walk with their significant others, although many campers choose to walk with friends. Staff members are assigned to various locations around Camp for Shabbat Walk to ensure that the campers are behaving appropriately and not entering the villages.

**Specialist:** A staff member that works in a specific activity area and is not assigned to a bunk or village. A pool specialist, for example, helps plan and run pool periods during the five-period schedule. Specialists do not live in the bunks with campers; rather, they live in specialist tents or specialist cabins.

**Tuscarora:** The senior-camper village at CSL with campers entering grade ten. The campers of this village, known as Tuscarorans or senior campers, live in four-person platform tents with electricity. Tuscarora is the only village at CSL where campers do not sleep in the same, direct living quarters as their staff members. Tuscarora campers bring mountain bikes to Camp due to their living quarters being so far from the dining hall and the activity areas.

**Unit Head:** The leader of a specific village. The Unit Head of Cayuga, for example, is the direct supervisor of the counselors and campers of the Cayuga village.

**Village:** A group of kids of a certain age group and their counselors, or the specific area in which those kids and counselors reside. The villages at Camp Seneca Lake are Cayuga, Mohawk, Onondaga, Seneca, and Tuscarora.