

ECW 2012 Reflection

When Mary Ellen and Colleen asked me to speak on behalf of girls division I was honored and excited, but mostly just down right terrified. I was immediately overwhelmed with how seemingly impossible it was to capture the experience of Camp Fatima EC Week into words. But as I sat outside my cabin last night listening to the sounds of campers settling in to bed, condo's girls dolling up for 80's night, and a steady beat of classic rock tunes drifting down from the dining hall I realized that everything we do at EC Week is a seemingly impossible task. If you think about it, the fact that 300 or so people from all walks of life can come together for one amazing week with no official training and a mere packet of information on a camper is truly incredible. Campers are out of the routines and many of them have never been away from home before. There are campers with feeding tubes, severe medical needs, and who can never communicate their wants. Never mind the fact here we are in the middle of the woods maneuvering down dirt paths, over tree roots, and this year through lots of puddles of liquid sunshine and storm cells. Sounds seemingly impossible, doesn't it?

So I began to wonder, how does something that seems so seemingly impossible become so incredibly possible? I believe it begins at the top of Camp road. It begins with that feeling you get driving down that old dirt path trying your best not to just floor it the entire way. That feeling of pure joy and excitement. That feeling that time has stopped. That feeling that you have come home.

For a long time I wondered what it was that created that feeling. And if you forgive my perpetual tendency to be a nerd I think I can describe it via a Harry Potter spell. In Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows as our heroes don costumes of other characters in an attempt to get into Belatrix LaStrange's vault. As they travel into the depths of Gringots bank they pass under a waterfall. After they emerge from the waterfall all the spells they used to create their disguises' were washed away. We learn this is known as the Thief's Downfall and is an enchantment to wash away any concealment or enchantments being used to disguise people. In other words, the person that passes through the waterfall emerges in their purest form.

I believe JK Rowling must have known someone who has traveled down Camp road. As we travel down camp road we are washed away of all the things that weigh us down for the other 51 weeks of the year. Instead of a waterfall we are cleansed by the holy spirit as we enter this sacred holy ground where heaven meets the earth. By the time we reach the check in tent all that is left of us are the person God intended us all to be. We become our real honest and true selves, stripped of judgment and here only to serve God's exceptional citizens. For it is only when you are only here to serve others can you finally find your true self.

This is just the first step in accomplishing the seemingly impossible task of EC week. The rest happens when the campers finally arrive. As you anxiously await your camper on Sunday morning you are flooded with fears and anxieties of how this will all work. Will they like camp? Will they be too difficult for you to handle?

Will you be able to give them the best week of their lives? Then, "So and So....your camper has arrived." From that moment on the magic of camp takes over. All those fears and anxieties are pushed aside and the only thing that ever matters for 24 hours a day for 7 consecutive days is that you are doing what is best for your camper.

When I had a camper I chalked up the success of EC Week to camp magic. I figured there was a higher power watching over all of us making sure our campers had the best week ever. Then I became a relief counselor and it all made sense. Yes, there is still the ever present holy spirit blessing all of us as we live each day at camp, but only when I did not have my own camper could I see what actually see what makes the seemingly impossible task of EC week so incredibly possible. And the simple answer is, it's each and every one of you that makes the impossible so very possible.

At Dicky Sexton's happy hour this morning I was talking to a counselor who said that it was her favorite event at camp because it was when she could finally sit down, look around, and take it all in. This is how I feel each and everyday as a relief counselor. I am able to look around and constantly see how every person plays a part in the success of camp. It's the kitchen crew preparing every meal and providing us with a constant stream of entertainment. It's the waiters working so hard to serve each of us while covered in campers, and let's be honest, sometimes counselors' art projects. Its waterfront carrying campers in and out of the water and missing camp events to set up or break down various things all over camp. It's the guys is woodcraft who at a moments notice can build shower shelves or hang a curtain rod in a cabin to help provide a camper some privacy. It's the stables getting every camper that wants to on to a horse no matter their physical limitations. It's the laundry ladies who without a fuss make sure our campers have clean clothes and sheets each morning. It's the arts and crafts ladies digging around until the camper has found that one bead that they need to complete the perfect bracelet. Its wood working making sure each camper has the feeling of success after creating a project. Its that guy in special program shaving his mustache he has had for 42 years so that campers could really believe it was Woody up on that stage and all the other members of special program that spend all day preparing for the magical show the campers will be entertained by each night. It's the rifle range that makes sure each camper has the feeling of being number one and wearing a badge of honor for all to see. Its rec hall getting a crash course in sensory integration so that they can help those campers in the sensory tent. It's my other relief counselors who finally figure out the best way to shower campers by Friday morning and who are always available to say, "yes I can do that." It's DJ Scottie and the untouchables providing us with music and direction throughout the day. It's the priests and deacon bringing us the holy mass each day all over camp. Its head staff, running, well more like driving or biking, around all day solving problems before the rest of us even know there is a problem. I see all of you making the impossible, possible.

And then there are the counselors. When I stop and look at you all I see are the little things. And I think sometimes you might miss how important these little

things are to the campers. I see the smiles on your campers' face when you lift them out of their chair and carry them into the water. I see the excitement of the camper when they are presented an award for simply being so incredibly tall. I see the private joke that never fails to make your camper smile. I see the relief on the camper's face when you finally figure out what a certain sign or sound means. I see the pure joy on the camper's face-painted face as they dance at happy hour. I see the gentle touches or quiet hand holding that demonstrates an abundance of love.

I am constantly in awe of you counselors. Whenever I see that incredible smile coming from a camper I know that their counselor has done just a little thing to make them so unbelievably happy. Because in the end, that is all that matters: that your camper has got to experience the absolute best week of their lives. We are all aware that beyond camp road there are people that will never understand our campers. But here, on this holy ground, for one whole week, they are loved unconditionally and with no judgment. Outside of camp road people are afraid to touch our campers. Here at EC week, I see more hugs than I ever thought possible. For the other 51 weeks of the year our campers may be called hurtful names and be taunted. But at camp their names are chanted and cheered for constantly. In the real world campers are told that there are things that are impossible for them to do. At EC week we say, anything is possible.

And so we get up each morning, perhaps a little dehydrated and with a slight headache, but we push all that to the side and focus on the only thing that really matters here: the campers. And through the little things we make the seemingly impossible absolutely, without question possible. It may take a few tries, and there might need to be some adaptations but it will happen. If your camper wants to be an alien, sure! Just see Beth. Your camper needs to have Ken sing them a song before bed? Why not! Just go talk to Mary. Your camper wants to help out at mass? Of course! Go check in with Betty. Your wheel chair camper needs help in the shower? No problem! Just head on down to wheel chair showers, we'll take care of it. Your camper wants to perform an original rap? Wonderful! Sign them up for the talent show. The list of possibilities at Camp Fatima is endless. Because at Camp, if there is something a camper wants to do it is never impossible.

And so, as you pack up tomorrow and send your camper back down camp road please know you have done everything you could have to give them the best week of your lives. They might not be able to tell you but I've seen the smiles, the laughter, and the joy to know it's true. I have witnessed the seemingly impossible become a very possible place. A very amazing place. A very holy place. A very loving place. I have seen the impossible become possible at Exceptional Citizens' Week 2012.

Julia Concannon
ECW Girls Division
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