



Daniel Lapins' Saturday Sermon

Saturday, July 1st, 2023

Shabbat Shalom, if you don't know me my name is Daniel Lapins. This is my 10th summer at camp and 2nd on staff.

A few weeks before I got to camp this summer, I was speaking with a former Kawaga brave. He was astonished at the fact that I'd be returning this summer, and wouldn't be enjoying my last bit of time with my friends at home before I leave for college. I tried to explain to him why I was returning, but didn't have the words to articulate a valid reason.

I think I began to understand the meaning of camp in my group 1 summer. That summer was one that I spent at home. I'd look at all the pictures and media camp would release, to feel some sort of connection. I'd be up late at night thinking about what my friends were doing, during the day I'd imagine what I'd be playing in leagues, and what clubs I'd be taking. All I could think about was camp, and I was miserable. A part of me was missing. I promised myself that upon my return to the shores, I'd make the most of every second.

I returned to the shores for my CIT summer. Day by day, I began regaining that connection with my fellow CITs. I made new memories that I was able to laugh and cry about. I had rekindled all of the bonds that I had lost. I ended up having the best summer of my life and was able to appreciate and relish every moment, even in pods.

There is a saying that goes, "You don't know what you got 'till it's gone." I don't think there is a way to truly understand what we all have at Kawaga. After not having camp for a summer, it helped me grasp what camp was, without even being there. The camaraderie, tradition, activities, and the ability to grow, are all things that only exist here.

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During pre-camp last summer, everyone sat around the council ring and was sharing their goals for the summer. Each person stood up when they felt the time was right and shared their goal. I honestly had no idea what I was going to share with the group. So I looked around the council ring for some inspiration, and saw my good friend Ethan Warrady sitting close by. While I had missed my group 1 summer, at the same time Ethan was missing his CIT summer. I remember talking to him throughout the summer about how much we missed camp, and how we'd do anything to be at camp. I was not alone. So, my goal for last summer was to give my campers that same sort of passion and love for camp that I have. To make it so they would miss camp as much as I do.

This goal that I set for myself was not a very SMART goal meaning specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. I had no idea how I was going to accomplish this goal, or even understand how I would know I'd accomplished my goal.

My first few weeks on staff were tough. I felt as though I was moving on a different wavelength than everyone else. I didn't quite have my campers' respect, I was still figuring out my place on staff, and honestly just wasn't too pleased with where I was assigned. I did not think I would be accomplishing my goal by the end of the summer. As it turns out, all of those things figured their way out, which is a part of the beauty of this place. I remembered that promise I'd made to myself group 1 summer. I took advantage of every opportunity and made the best of each situation.

Last summer, one of my campers was only supposed to go for 6 weeks. He was very emotional about leaving camp early and wanted to stay. Eventually, he was able to convince his parents to let him stay for the final 2 weeks. I'll never forget how happy this camper was telling me he would be able to stay for the rest of the summer, and the emotion he showed. This made me feel like I was doing something right, like I had purpose and meaning at camp, I was making a difference. Looking back on that memory now, I had accomplished my goal.

If you think that going to Lollapalooza, staying home with your friends, or choosing another place to be over Kawaga, you're simply mistaken. This place has made me the man I am today. Do your best, take risks, make mistakes, have fun, and go all out, because there is no better place in the world to do it. That is why I come back each summer. To not only help myself grow but all of you as well.

Remember, you are never alone and you always have your fellow Kawaga braves at your side. Make sure to take advantage of your time here because "You don't know what you got 'till it's gone." Thank you and Shabbat Shalom.