



Eli Rodgers' Saturday Sermon

Saturday, July 22nd, 2023

Good morning,

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Eli Rodgers. This is my seventh summer at camp and first on staff. Some of you second-year campers may find this a bit confusing. After all, I'm not a familiar face from last summer, so how can this be my seventh? Simply put, that is because I took a year off.

Last summer, I made the difficult decision to take a hiatus from camp to focus on my college application. I did all sorts of things, from college summer programs to volunteer work. While the other things I did were great experiences and important for my college application process, I couldn't help but wonder what I would have been doing at camp.

Having to turn down the position of counselor last year, a job I would've been doing in the most incredible place on earth with some of my best friends, I realized something difficult; life happens. No matter how much I would love to return to this place every year, it's not something I can say with certainty will happen.

Some of you might know my brother Moses. This summer, he would be a CIT. Unfortunately, he couldn't make it to camp this year. Now, nothing especially tragic happened; he simply needed to spend this summer focusing on his college application and hockey. While he would love nothing more than to be up here for eight weeks with his brothers, both literal and figurative, it simply wasn't in the cards. Once again, life happens.

My favorite quote from any Kawaga sermon was in Sean Gooze's Visitor's Weekend sermon in 2021, my CIT summer. Though I do not remember the exact wording, he said something along the lines of "If Heaven is so great, then how can it be forever?" In his sermon, he presented the idea that part of what makes camp so special is that it's only for eight weeks each summer. The impermanence, and the certainty that we will eventually have to leave at the end of the summer, makes each day so meaningful.

Continued on Page 12

Continued from Page 11

I first came to camp in 2015 after being introduced by a friend named Sam Wolkstein. Though I returned year after year, I didn't love camp that much. I had friends from home who I came here with, and we mostly kept to ourselves, not engaging with the others in our age group too much or enjoying the camp experience.

All of that changed during my Group Two summer. For various reasons, all three of my friends from home would not be back on the shores for the summer. That meant it would just be me and a bunch of other guys I didn't know that well for four weeks. Though it was tricky at first, those four weeks changed the trajectory of my time at Kawaga. I went from this quiet, standoff-ish kid to someone trying to get my table to start cheering in the mess hall. If you had told me in 2018, my Mohawk A summer, about the person I would be by the time I was a CIT in 2021, I would never have believed it. I can say without a shadow of a doubt that camp, my counselors, and my fellow campers all played an instrumental role in making me the person I am today.

All of this is to say, in a long-winded way, that I love camp. Even still, no one in this room can say with one hundred percent certainty, myself included, that they will be back next year. Most of us can say that we will definitely be back given the opportunity, but none of us can predict the future. What can I say? Life happens.

If you asked me where I would be in the summer of 2022 during my CIT summer, I almost certainly would have told you back here. Moses certainly didn't think he would be looking at Menominee and Speccy updates on Instagram, checking scores for games he would've been playing in.

Camp is not forever. That's what makes it so great. We all have limited time here, so we need to make the most of it. It's always just a leagues game until suddenly, it's your last leagues game. Another Speccy block until you're the one around the fire, singing iPod shuffle to signal the end of your final Spectacular. Another typical day until there are no more days left, and we're all back home, scattered far and wide.

Today marks the final day of week five. As the cliché but ever-true saying goes, the days are long, but the weeks are short. So to close, I will leave you with a question and a challenge. How will you make the most of these last twenty days? How will you ensure that when you look back on the summer of 2023, you can genuinely say that you lived it with no regrets? I challenge you to give your all in every endeavor from this point forward. Be the loudest voice in the mess hall. Spend your Open A's doing things you can't do at home with your friends. Play that leagues game like it's your last. After all, life happens, and before long, it really will be. Thank you.

Week 5 Special Feature: Excerpt From Chip/Sioux Unit Head Sean Gooze

An Unlikely, But Not Entirely Unexpected, Friendship

By: Sean Gooze

For many parents, Kawaga is an opportunity for their children to grow without the natural comfort of a parent beside them. This includes a growing sense of independence, competency, and arguably the most important skill, the ability for their child to connect with new people and make new friends. Lou Ehrenreight, the son of Camp Kawaga's founder and long-time director would often say, "The best way to have a friend is to be one." Many of my greatest friends today were people that I was not close with during my time as a young camper. Simply the act of being in a confined space with people that are different than you helps you come to appreciate their differences as well as appreciate the similarities that all of those at Kawaga share. But, this principle does not only apply to campers.

In the summer of 2018, my first summer on staff, I was lucky enough to have my uncle, Marc Appell working as the Assistant Director. Having family at Kawaga is a remarkable experience and one that I'll never forget. For about two weeks during the summer, I was able to share this special place with another member of my family, my grandma, Bubbi Sybil. To this day, my Bubbi will tell you that being the "Camp Grandma" was one of the greatest experiences of her life. Despite being able to share her grandson and son's happy place with them, she will tell you that one of her favorite parts about her time here was spent conversing on the porch of her cabin with a Junior Counselor she had never met before.

For evening programs (EP's), the special programming that takes place after dinner, there are often counselors assigned to border patrol. Counselors are stationed on docks, shorelines, and backwoods areas where their job is to make sure campers don't wander past them into areas of camp that are not open. This is a relatively boring job for staff as they sit for about an hour and a half in one area. During the summer of 2018, a fellow 2017 CIT of mine named Ben Gordon, better known as BG, was assigned to the Southwest Woods border patrol. This was right next to my Uncle and his family's home for the summer. Every evening, my grandma would enjoy the beautiful sunset off the lake from her porch. On this particular night, BG was stationed right outside her cabin. While I couldn't tell you the exact contents of an hour-long conversation between a 17-year-old and a 70-year-old, what I can tell you is that this most unexpected conversation has grown into a friendship between one of my best friends and my grandma. Throughout the rest of her 2-week stint on the Shores, my Bubbi continuously requested for BG to be assigned to SW Woods Border Patrol and BG requested the same.

Continued on Page 3

Continued from Page 2

To this day, one of BG's first questions he asks me when we see each other is "How is Sybil doing?" and one of my Bubbi's first questions she asks me is "How is BG doing?" In the few times they have seen each other over the last few years they always meet in a warm embrace. While this relationship is certainly a unique one, at a place like Kawaga relationships such as this one are not entirely unexpected. I have found that Kawaga has this special ability to streamline connections. In my 13 summers at Kawaga, I have experienced countless incredible moments and experiences, but I continue to be surprised by this place's ability to push people towards a deeper connection with everything that surrounds them. Everything from the way our typical day is structured to the geographic layout, to cabin dynamics promotes connection. Connection to our cabinmates, to our counselors, to the Kawaga alumni who have come before us, to the nature around us, to Kawaga itself, and to the 70-year-old grandma of one of your best friends. It is our staff's amazing ability to connect with campers that makes Kawaga so great, but evidently, this ability goes beyond campers.

The truth is that you never know when you'll meet a new friend, it could be someone halfway across the world or triple your age, but if we never open ourselves up to the possibility of connecting with others we'll never know what could be. Every day I am reminded of the power of connection, why it's so important to appreciate it, and how easy it is to connect with another. I have learned many things at Kawaga, perhaps one of the most profound lessons I have learned is that every interaction is an opportunity for connection. And once every interaction becomes an opportunity, no friendship becomes too unlikely or too unexpected.



Sean Gooze is a 2017 CIT, and the Unit Head for the Chip and Sioux tribes. This is his thirteenth year at Kawaga, and sixth on staff.