



Evan Gold's Saturday Sermon

Saturday, July 8th, 2023

Shabbat shalom. My name is Evan Gold. This is my 7th year on the shores and first on staff. Every single year since 2016, I have eagerly told my parents that I wanted to spend my following summer at Camp Kawaga. For me, the answer has always been simple; I love the place, and I love the people. However, in recent years, there have been two life changing events that have allowed me to truly understand how much camp means to me.

In 2020, I was ecstatic that Kawaga was one of the only camps open while others shut down because of covid, and that I was going to be a group 2. However, just one month before I was supposed to leave for camp, I was diagnosed with a pheochromocytoma, which is a kind of tumor that affects adrenaline. Doctors and surgeons said that even though they only see my tumor once every few years, I was the first person they had ever seen to never show a sign or a symptom that I had my tumor; I was unique, different from everybody else. My 7 hour surgery took place the day before the buses left for camp. While some of my best friends were having the time of their lives at the place they love most, I was fighting as hard as I could to stand up from the bed I spent a week in, and take 3 steps to the door and back. Never in my life have I felt more weak than I did in those 7 days. While I am more than happy to say that I am 3 years tumor free, the physical and mental pain I felt in that month of surgery and recovery is unforgettable. Something that I will never forget is the feeling that I had when I was sitting in my family room, looking at Kawaga's instagram page as they were giving updates and pictures from the spectacular. At that moment, I started to cry. I knew that I had to be back at camp.

As sad as I was that I couldn't go to Kawaga that year, I'm glad that I was able to realize how much I truly love camp, and that my time here is very limited. I realized how much I love Kawaga because I couldn't be there when I most wanted to, and that no matter what I did, I had to alternate between laying in a bed or sitting on a couch for 4 of the most miserable weeks of my life in order to recover. I had an awesome year in my group 1 summer, and everything in my life was getting back on track; until it wasn't.

For those who don't know, I am a 3rd generation camper; my grandfather and two of my uncles came to Kawaga and loved it as much as I do. When I returned home from camp that year, I was told that my grandfather was getting sick, and that doctors didn't know what his sickness was.

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Three weeks later, he was in critical condition at a nursing home with a brain eating disease called CJD. It has no treatment, and no cure. At both his bedside and at his funeral, I said the Kawaga ideal- the same ideal that you will hear after my sermon. I was asked if I needed to see the words on paper, but I said I didn't, because Kawaga teaches you to memorize the ideal. I was able to connect my experiences with people who had no understanding of the significance that camp has had on myself and my grandfather. After sharing the ideal at my grandpa's funeral, I was able to fully understand how much camp means to me. Kawaga means so much to me because it brings out who I truly am.

At home, I often feel emotionless, empty and without a purpose. I struggle with understanding myself, and frequently feel stressed about too many things to the point where I have no clue what's going on in my life. At camp, I can feel true happiness. This is because Kawaga is where I want to spend my summers, and there is no place in this world that I would rather be. I have come to the realization that at Kawaga, time stops. There's never anything to worry about, and there are only things to look forward to. It doesn't matter what happened the day before, because the next day, you can do whatever it is that you want to do. Once we all return to our normal lives, each day is going to be different from the next, and trust me, you never know what is going to happen on the following day.

For a very long time, I have felt like something was always off, like there was a missing part of me. Kawaga completes me. At camp, life is feeling the way it should be, and I feel like I have a purpose; to teach kids things that I have learned through my experiences, both at and away from Kawaga. My surgery left a lasting mark on my stomach. While that scar reminds me of my darkest times, it also reminds me of how hard I fought to recover, and that while it took quite some time, everything was okay again. At one point or another, everything will be okay.

Kawaga doesn't leave a lasting mark on all of us, but it does leave a lasting effect. That effect is everything a camper needs to become a man. Kawaga made me a better person, brought out who I truly am, and also showed me who I want to be. But for me, the most important thing Kawaga has ever given me is mental strength. Whether it be the strength to move on from a tough loss in a leagues game, or the strength for me to talk about all of my experiences, Kawaga showed me that true strength is in the mind. I can confidently say that my love for Kawaga and the lessons it has taught me have helped me get through some of my toughest times. I say that for one reason; you can always take the brave out of kawaga, but you can never take kawaga out of the brave. Thank you.