



Jeff Kaplan's Saturday Sermon

Saturday, July 15th, 2023

Good morning, my name is Jeff Kaplan and this is my 17th summer at Kawaga. My first summer at camp was in 1998 as an 11 year old. I spent 6 years as a camper, 7 years as a counselor, and two as an assistant director during my first stretch at camp. During that time I made countless friends and memories, and even met a smart, funny, caring, and beautiful camp nurse named Bridget. Ten years ago in 2013 Bridget and I got to host all of our friends and family at Kawaga for our wedding reception right down there on Diamond I. To this day, our friends and family talk about our wedding and the fun-filled weekend they had enjoying camp activities, staying in cabins, and even doing morning Polar Bears.

In addition to introducing my wife and me, camp was also instrumental in my decision to choose a career in education. Becoming a teacher let me pursue my passion of working with children, which I fostered at camp. And, as a bonus, it allowed me to continue returning to Kawaga each summer. I spent 5 years as a first grade teacher at Jane Stenson Elementary School in Skokie, IL. Then, I transitioned into the role of instructional coach where I continue to work collaboratively with faculty and administrators to improve classroom instruction and student learning.

After an 8 year hiatus from Kawaga, I'm in my second year of my second stint back at camp. I am joined here by that same beautiful wife who now does a phenomenal job of keeping our Kawaga community healthy and safe as Director of Health and Wellness, along with our fantastic nurses Steph and Taylor. My two wonderful kids are here with us- Audrey is 5, and Teddy, is 7 and spending his first summer in a cabin this year. I now find myself in a similar role at Kawaga as I have during the school year as an instructional coach, I get to work with staff and campers to maximize their summer experience, and help them grow as individuals.

Just like the majority of our staff who were campers before they were counselors, Kawaga was instrumental in my growth and development as a human being. Our philosophies and programming at Kawaga have always pushed individuals to improve not only their physical health, but also their social and emotional health while helping them to become more

Continued on Page 15

Continued from Page 14

independent and mature as they learn to live away from home. In the past few years Kawaga has doubled down on the mission of character building that Ben spoke about a few minutes ago. We're also emphasizing skill building. To that end, we've added four fantastic professional specialists to our staff. Denise Murphy is our director of racket sports, Phil Beans is our sports performance specialist, Andy Freeman is our director of aquatics, and Josh Schottenstein is our pottery specialist.

In addition to our investment in outstanding personnel, we have dedicated time in the offseason to improving proficiencies and clubs. We now have proficiency levels in more than 15 areas around camp where campers can earn points towards Mawanda and Sachem by practicing and mastering skills and concepts in different sports and activities. Over the offseason, several staff were involved in creating proficiencies in additional areas and refining the ones that we've had in past summers. We also have built robust lesson plans for our club periods to ensure that campers receive the best instruction possible, and acquire skills that will help them to achieve higher levels of confidence in those areas. I encourage parents to ask their sons about any proficiencies that they have been working on, or have achieved this summer. These investments that we have made, both in personnel and time spent throughout the summer, are crucial to operating Kawaga at the incredibly high standard that we have set.

Most importantly, we teach life skills at Kawaga. Our programming puts our campers into situations several times each day to better themselves. Whether it's learning about a sport in their chosen club, competing against their friends in leagues, making their bed and sweeping the floor during inspection, or clearing the table in the mess hall, campers are living in a safe environment, free from so many of the pressures and distractions that children face at home, so they can focus on becoming a better person. Throughout the summer we also devote time away from the playing fields for deeper thought and reflection. Campers are empowered to share and reflect on how to maximize their individual and collective opportunities for growth during their time at camp. There is nowhere else that I have seen young men let down their guard and embrace the opportunity to be vulnerable in the interest of not only their own growth, but also the growth of their age group, and the Kawaga community as a whole.

Returning parents can attest that the growth their son experiences each summer at camp is off the charts. When asked about his camp experience, your son may describe all the fun activities and memories he made- an unforgettable evening program, skiing the bay, the Kawaga spectacular, or a league game buzzer beater. But we know that woven within these fun experiences are critical lessons learned and life skills developed. And growth at Kawaga doesn't stop when our campers graduate to staff. I fully believe that being a counselor at Kawaga is the absolute best experience that young adults can have. Being a counselor not only allows our staff to give back to campers and provide them with the same fantastic experiences that their counselors gave them, but it also helps them build countless skills that they will use for the rest of their lives. The level of responsibility and leadership that our

Continued on Page 16

Continued from Page 15

counselors experience is second to none and in my opinion provides them with more real world skills than any internship possibly could. I learned about responsibility, work ethic, collaboration, patience, and was trained in my future role as a father during my time on staff. We also put our staff through an intense training program each summer. Beginning in pre-camp where they learn about many topics from how to interact with children, setting boundaries, dealing with homesickness and much more. In addition each staff member participates in a weekly staff meeting, a weekly huddle with their age group counselors, and meets three times a summer with a designated coach- either myself, or one of our wonderful unit heads Sean and Tucker, to receive feedback on their performance as a counselor, discuss the goals that they have set for the summer, and have an opportunity to discuss any challenges they may be facing. Our staff's maturity and dedication to their job is not only a testament to those individuals, but also the development that they have experienced as campers.

I want to end with some thank yous. First of all a huge thank you to my wife Bridget who switched jobs in order to make our family's return to the shores possible. You are the reason that we can be here, and the entire Kawaga community is so lucky to have your loving presence, but I am most fortunate to benefit from it year round. Teddy and Audrey, it has been such a joy to watch you experience Kawaga, and I look forward to watching you thrive here for many years to come. To Ty, Lauren, and the Fisher and Daube families, thank you for giving me the continued opportunity to make an impact in the most special place in the world. I don't ever take it for granted. To the Kawaga staff, I can't thank you enough for welcoming me back to the Kawaga family. It has been a privilege to get to work with such a talented group of young people. To our campers, make every second that you get to spend here count. Your camping career feels like an eternity as a young camper, but always goes by much too quickly. Finally to our families, thank you for giving your boys the opportunity to go to summer camp. It was the greatest gift that I ever received. We appreciate your trust in us, and promise to continue working tirelessly to ensure the best Kawaga experience for our entire community. Thank you!



Tucker Froelich's Saturday Sermon

Saturday, July 15th, 2023

Good Morning,

My name is Tucker Froelich, and whether this is your first or countless time on the shores, I would like to welcome you all to Camp Kawaga. This is my 16th summer here at Kawaga. I was a camper for 9 summers and a counselor for 7. However, I like to look at these numbers in a different way. I like to look at them based on weeks. And there is a reason for that.

Here at camp we have 52 days to make up the summer and, of course, a million different things can happen in that single day. We have a saying here that reads "Where the days go by like weeks and the weeks go by like days". Every single day, counselors are working alongside their campers to build lasting memories, achievements, and character developments. At the end of the week, all campers and counselors sit around a campfire with their age group to have a period of reflection. The leaders of these age groups guide their campers, through open discussion, to contemplate on what went well in the previous week as well as how to best move forward.

How to be the best version of themselves, how to work together as a unit to be leaders around camp, the ability to recognize mistakes and build plans towards improvement. The safety net created around these fireplaces for anyone to speak their mind is one of my favorite aspects of camp.

Currently, I am in my 126th week at camp.

With the overwhelming amount of natural beauty around us, oftentimes it is easy to overlook the structure, the bones, and the roots of who and what we are here at Kawaga.

Every aspect of Kawaga, the programming, inter-age group relationship building, the timing of the aforementioned reflection periods, the poems you will be hearing today, and our overarching values, are all based on deep-rooted intentionality.

Continued from Page 17

In my opinion, the most important of all is our emphasis on goal setting. At Kawaga the goals most campers are striving for are Mawanda and Sachem, our point-based system that encourages campers to visit areas of camp and try activities they otherwise would not.

You receive points for swimming the bay, keeping the cabin clean (which I hope some of you see how beautiful the cabins are later today), points for creating a shop project, for getting a waterski miracle, and amongst many other things, for improving athletic prowess based on current abilities.

What makes our goal setting system so special to me is the lesson we learn about time management. How can I plan my day so that I can both work on my shop project but also go swimming with my friends? How do I weigh the benefits of each if I don't have time for both? And, of course, with the summer only being 52 days for our 8 week campers and 26 for the four weekers, time management abilities are crucial. And what better way to be taught such a skill than in a fun, controlled, rewarding, environment that doesn't feel like you're learning at all?

It was at Kawaga I learned how to prioritize tasks, how to say yes or no to more work, how to know myself and be confident in my choices.

As I stand in front of you today, a year removed from my college experience, the skill of load management I learned here at Kawaga has played an integral role in my professional life.

Although, my mom may tell you something different based on how I decided whether to do my homework or play outside with my younger brother.

Aside from time management, another desirable outcome from our goal setting system is, and this might sound crazy, failure.

Failure teaches us many things: the ability to cope, the ability to reason with oneself, the ability to draw upon the experience in similar future endeavors. Above all, it teaches us how to pass the most dangerous and difficult task of making the man in the glass our friend.

Failure has a fairly strong negative connotation associated with it, when in reality, all of us fail. And as much as we all dislike coming up short, I am sure we can recognize that oftentimes, failure is our greatest teacher.

During my time as a camper this was never something I could recognize. Failure would eat me alive and I would sulk. Yet as I shifted into my time on staff and I would help guide my campers through their acceptance of failure, I frequently found myself reflecting too.

Continued on Page 19

Continued from Page 18

On staff, everything we thought we had mastered as a camper takes on a whole new form. One summer all of your role models are going out of their way to provide you the best possible experience and the very next you are tasked with doing the same for the next generation.

All of this at the age of 17.

Where else in the world does a 17 year old have the responsibility of managing & merging conflicting personalities into a synergetic unit?

Where else in the world does a 17 year old have the freedom of choice to facilitate instruction in their own way?

Where else in the world does a 17 year old have the opportunity to make an impact on someone's life every single day?

When I would tell my friends that I am going back to camp year over year, they would ask why? How can a sports camp be more important than getting an internship or job to help propel you to the future. And my answer is the same every time.

Kawaga is not a sports camp. Kawaga is a character building camp and a confidence building camp that just so happens to play sports.

Every fall when your son returns from camp and is proud to be who he is - that is our goal. Our purpose. And that is why I love and am so grateful for Camp Kawaga.