

ADVENTURE AMPUTEE CAMP 2006

(formerly ACT Kids Camp)

OFF TO A GREAT NEW START!

The 12th amputee kids' camp has just ended, and it was, as usual, a wonderful success. Though the name has changed - the faces, activities, and fun are very familiar to all those who have been involved with the development and organization of the camp over the last 12 years. We are now based out of Virginia; but it is the same folks you have come to know and love, working behind and on the scene, to create a great adventure experience for children with amputations.

We had sunshine, a tiny bit of rain, a few clouds to keep us from frying on the lake, and a whole lot of fun from July 5-9, 2006. As usual, 30 campers and a group of volunteers met at the Nantahala Outdoor Center (NOC) in Bryson City, NC to begin the five-day adventure with thrilling white water rafting on the Nantahala River and the Little Tennessee. Who knew just how thrilling it would be for lucky boat 31! Now we know that swimming below the rapids is not only fun, but social, because the other boaters who pick you up, are really nice folks. By the time we got off the river, new friends had been made and there were lots of stories to tell. And this was just the first day! Movie night concluded with a really big, but brief rainstorm, which sent everyone to bed a bit early; and that was a good thing because a full day of fun was ahead.

We began with one of Ron and Phyllis's amazing meals. They kept us well fed, (and fattened up a few of us) over the course of camp. We all went down to the ropes challenge course where the NOC staff shined again. Every camper who wanted to climb, either the Alpine Tower or the High Ropes course was able to do so with the expert assistance of the NOC staff. Their ingenuity, patience, and skill helped each camper achieve as much as, or more than, he/she thought possible. They make our Mission (*To allow children with limb differences to experience activities that stretch their imagination of what is possible*), a reality. No obstacle seemed too great for our campers as they climbed up ladders, over swinging bridges, across the slim wire, or up the rat trap to the BIG SWING. The variety of screams, hoots, whistles and yells on the descent of the swing is quite something to hear, and we know that Mr. (Where's Waldo) Ed got them on his video recorder. Many of you will be able to relive those exciting moments and sounds. While this was going on, the ever-ready fearless Atlanta trip leader, Miss Colleen, drove campers back and forth to the gem mines to look for their fortune in the North Carolina soil. Some very pretty gems were uncovered. The day sped by and we had another wonderful dinner at the NOC restaurant, Relia's (who said you had to rough-it while camping?). Then we were treated to one of the camp highlights, a presentation by Para Olympian, Josh Sundquisk, on his rise to becoming a "famous" skier, and all around nice guy. The older campers had an extended chat that was moderated by Josh, where we hear, all kinds of important and humorous stories were shared about life with an amputation. Oh - to have been a fly on the wall! The feedback on this new camp activity was absolutely positive, so before Josh gets to old to be cool/sweet, we hope to have him back for a few years, and include a group sharing activity each year.

Friday was new all the way around. The campers experienced a horseback trail ride in the lovely Blue Ridge Mountains. The guides for this trip were the folks of the Nantahala Village Stables. They could not have been more welcoming to our group. With the help of our ever-willing counselors, who had the pleasure of walking the trail beside some of the campers, we discovered that some campers have a bit of cowboy/girl in them. We returned to NOC for the ever-popular shopping, and this year managed to put in quite a bit of time for that favored activity. Campers purchased NOC memorabilia, like postcards, posters, bandanas and ice cream (?). After another fine lunch, directed by the ever capable volunteer kitchen people, we went into Bryson City for an afternoon at the county pool. As this was the first time for this activity, we were not sure what to expect, and boy were we overwhelmed by the facilities and the folks who work there! The huge pool, the slides, the shallow pool, the volleyball court, the basketball court— there was something for everyone, and we did it all. One volunteer was treated to an ice bath and this may be the beginning of a yearly running retaliation on the perpetrator. Stay tuned. The pizza dinner hit the spot and held us over until we got back to camp to do some more damage to the desserts baked by volunteers and TGIF of Maryville, TN. Did Miss Colleen share any of that very chocolate brownie with campers on the trip back to Atlanta?

The last full day of camp has us out on the lake once again with the Patricia Neal Innovative Recreation Cooperative and Eskimo Escapes volunteers. These kind folks bring their boats, families and love to us each year. The day was just perfect for waterskiing, tubing, jet-ski riding, boat riding, ducky paddling, and just horsing around in the water. We had quite a few firsts – no outriggers for some campers, first time up for others, and out of the tube and skipping across the water for a few more. It was a great day out on the lake thanks to lots of wonderful folks. The delicious Buddy's barbecue dinner, sponsored by the Eskimo Escaped group, was just what we needed at the end of a full and exciting day. And it must have given some folks the creative energy they needed to demonstrate their talents at the first annual (?) camp talent (?) show. Campers and volunteers showed their humorous, creative, poetic and pathetic talents (Does anyone think Philip makes a good Missy?) in various skits. If you have a skit idea, keep it in mind and bring it with you for next year.

How did it get to be Sunday so fast? We just got here! But it was time to clean-up, pack-up, and hold our closing ceremonies. Campers received numerous honors and firsts as listed on the next page, and Miss Missy was serenaded and received the very fashionable "Wild Amputee" coon skin director's cap. It is tucked safely away, awaiting next summer's adventures (including dousing one counselor)!

We know you leave us with tales to tell and dreams of bigger adventures for next year. See you next summer. Make it a great year!

2006 Adventure Amputee Camper Awards

Haley: Outstanding horse-trainer

Ryan: The Hungry Man award

Shay: The most fearless

Gaitley: Best graffiti

Mitchell: Outstanding new swimmer

Jeremy: The Underboss

Kaleigh: Most athletic

Tania: Nature Girl

Anna: Best Bear Hug

Jekwan: Best Rapper

Dylan: WWE award

Tamarra (Molly): Outstanding neatness

Raquel: Most melodramatic

Gabe: Best new monoskier

Kay: Most active

Malik: Most determined

Nathan: Outstanding Mexican Alligator Dancer

Kaitlin: Best tube wipe-out

Jana: Best new skier

Lee: Most aquatic

Darius: The John Wayne award

Corey: The Paul Mitchell award

Tiffany: Outstanding dancing

Jade: Most Poetic

Asher: Mr. Congeniality

Cassie: Best Storyteller

Andre Jovan: River Rat award

Katie: Outstanding new water-skier

Ben: Best Helper

Slaim: Best River runner

Our experience at the Amputee Adventure Camp

I remember in my pre-teen years, waiting all summer for the week that I would go to camp. That one week I was free from my parents; I could hang out with my friends and catch up on the events of the past year. I could be me, or be different. For some reason I didn't realize that everything I expected from my summer camp, these kids expected from this camp, the Amputee Adventure Camp (AAC). To me AAC was a camp for children with amputations. For the kids it was that one week to get away and play!

The camp is organized and directed by one of our faculty, Dr. Missy Wolff-Burke and her husband Bob. It is based at the Nantahala Outdoor Center in Bryson, North Carolina. The children come to camp for a variety of reasons: socializing with and befriending other amputees, challenging their physical and mental capabilities, and having fun. The environment is designed to allow the children to perform adventurous activities as well as facilitate social interaction with other children and adults with amputations. As the name implies, this camp is an adventure camp. A camp where they can go white water rafting, horseback riding, climb a 20-foot ropes course, swim in a beautiful lake, dunking each other in the pool, learn to swim, perform in a talent show, and hang out with 30 other kids. Less strenuous activities include gem-mining, arguing with new friends about who is the best musician, and what game to play. Every day was filled with activity, excitement, and smiles.

I was utterly amazed by the children's positive attitudes, willingness to share their stories and eagerness to help one another. A fond memory is watching a person with bilateral above the knee amputations rush in front of able-bodied people to help his friend in a wheelchair navigate across gravel and rock. One camper wore a long-sleeve shirt in the dead heat of a North Carolina summer to cover the amputation. By the third day, this camper came to dinner in a tank top. It may not seem like a big deal, but it was a clear indication that the camp was helping this person to let go of an insecurity. At the AAC, campers are freed from reservations and insecurities they feel in their every day community. Hopefully, as they mature, they will realize that when they let go of their insecurities, the beauty of who they are shines through and is blinding.

Being a physical therapy student, it was easy for me to get caught up in the components of the prosthesis, types of amputations, and surgeries the campers had endured. When I got past that, I saw the most determined, fun-loving, awe-inspiring, and physically CAPABLE kids I have ever met in my life. Camp made me realize that these campers were capable of anything. By the end of camp, I did not recognize a difference between the campers and me. I hope that I can attack life with half the zeal the AAC campers have. The children were truly inspirational.

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