

One Stand Can Change a Life

Early on that cool, crystal-clear morning, I rose up in my bed. It was the morning that had finally come. After countless days, I was returning to summer camp. I hadn't seen my friends from camp in over eleven months, and I was impatient to get there. After getting dressed, I raced downstairs to breakfast and found my parents waiting at the table. They checked for the hundredth time if everything was ready, and before I knew it, we were off -- into the wild blue yonder!

We departed San Antonio and were soon driving through the stunning Texas Hill Country. I marveled at the beauty of the hills, streams, and meadows along the way. Excitedly, I asked my parents, "When will we get there?" My father replied, "Soon, son. I want to be there as much as you do. I felt the same way when I went to this camp, excited and nervous." As the sun rose above the hills, it cast golden rays of sunlight through the car. It was a wonderful feeling.

I woke up with a start, having no idea I had fallen asleep. I started to shake all over and get impatient since I knew that camp was just down the road. Finally, after what seemed like forever, we had made it! As we rolled in through the gates, the counselors and staff were cheering us.

We walked to the cabin that I would be staying in. As soon as I came in, I was greeted by my two counselors. One by one, the boys strode in. We were all happy to see each other after nearly a whole school year. All of a sudden, one of my fellow cabinmates pointed at the roster and announced, "Look! There's a new kid with us!" We were a little uneasy, since we had all been together for the last two years.

It had been nearly an hour since the last parents had left, and we were waiting on this newcomer. Immediately, the screen door opened and a boy and his father walked in. The boy's facial expression was a mix of sadness, fright, and shyness. His father helped get settled, and they hugged farewell. Climbing into his bunk, he buried his face in his pillow.

On the way to lunch, our new cabinmate, Collin, was all alone, looking as if he wanted a friend. I selfishly thought to myself, "Oh, he'll find a friend sooner or later." I had no intention of becoming friends with him. I wanted to stay with my group from years past.

That afternoon, Collin looked sad and shy. He sobbed in his pillow. The counselors talked to him about homesickness, but it didn't do him much good. My friends and I played a few games, and caught up on past stories, but Collin didn't join in. For the next week, the same routine happened. At meals, he sat next to the counselor. During camp activities, he rarely participated because he was afraid of trying something new. As a result, he longed for a companion even more.

After about a week and a half of fun, I started to feel strange. It wasn't that I was sick; I was bothered about Collin. I began to think about how he must have been feeling. I then became very compassionate towards him. One morning when I woke up, I saw that he and his possessions were not on his bunk. Soon, I found that Collin was at the office because he was lonely and homesick. He was on the verge of leaving camp, because we had been uninviting to him. Collin was going to stay for one more day, hoping that things would work out.

This was when the light came on for me. I realized I had been a terrible friend. I had seen his troubles and had not been kind to him. After lunch, he returned and looked the saddest I'd

ever seen him. Without thinking, I invited him over to the table to play cards with a group of us. Everyone looked at me as if I were crazy. With a look of relief, he slowly walked over and sat down gingerly. After awhile, he looked a bit more comfortable.

For the first time at camp, Collin was loving it! He was progressing at his activities and actually got really good at swimming. In the cabin, he was fun to have around, and everyone began to enjoy him. By the third week, he was so good at swimming that he had made the swim team, which meant he would compete against the girls' camp. He was feeling very proud about himself.

I felt sad to be leaving camp, since there was only a week and a half left. It was almost like a bittersweet feeling; sad to leave but wonderful to see my family. Little by little, the days passed on, and it was the second-to-last night. We were camping out on top of the bluff and sitting by the fire. Collin was sitting in the middle of us and talking about how much he had enjoyed camp this year.

On the last night, there is an important tradition to which all of the boys look forward. That evening, a ceremony is held to honor a few campers with the most spirit, character, kindness, and loyalty. Each year, I had secretly idolized this award. As the names were called out, I waited patiently. All of a sudden, my name was called out to come to the front! It was a very memorable moment for me. My heart was racing as I gripped my award and floated back.

Walter Winchell, a newspaper columnist once commented, "A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out." That was my exact feeling. Through this experience, I learned the true meaning of the word integrity. To me, integrity means being

honest, unselfish, and living out my values. I knew that Collin didn't want to be at camp and was homesick. My conscience urged me to do the right thing and help him enjoy camp.

The next morning, we walked to breakfast as usual, and afterwards we sorrowfully walked back to clean up. While stacking my possessions, Collin walked up to me and expressed, "Caleb, I want to thank you for being the one person in my life who stood up and helped me. You're one-in-a-million." I told him thank you and bid a sad farewell to everybody. I waved one final good-bye to everyone, and we rolled out of camp. That was my most favorite summer ever.

Integrity is not like most values. We can't just have it; we must live it. Integrity builds us up, and benefits not just one person but everyone around us. It is a value that can stay with us for the rest of our lives, with just one stand for one person. Integrity can change the world.