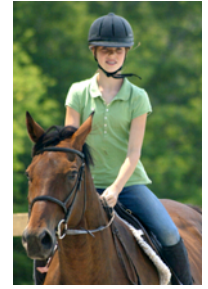


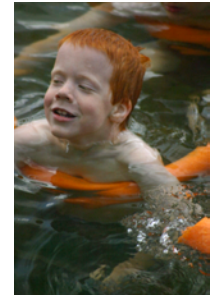
I BELIEVE IN SUMMER CAMP

A SUBMISSION TO NPR'S "THIS I BELIEVE"



I believe in Summer Camp. In the simple joys of sunshine and sports and a spring-fed mountain lake. I believe in kids learning to live together, to play together, and to face challenges together.

I believe that kids learn who they are, and who they want to be, while immersed in intense activities of their choosing – where joy and challenge combine in equal measure to forge, one experience at a time, the responsible and caring adult each will become. I believe that school may be good at filling heads, but that camp is better at filling hearts.



I believe that a few weeks away from home and from parents is a great opportunity to explore who you want to be when it comes time to be on your own; indeed that only by establishing a context away from your familiar home is it possible to see past everyone's expectations and examine who you really are.

I believe that kids are tribal – that they will be irrevocably influenced by their peer groups, and that the only way for this to be a good thing is for the peer groups to have leaders who are both cool enough to inspire and experienced enough to be safe. I believe that kids want and need healthy leadership from someone they can imagine becoming – someone younger than their parents and older than their peers.

I believe that kids need someone in their lives besides their parents, someone who doesn't have to care about them, but does anyway. Someone who can accept them as they are, and convince them that they are already worthy of respect, affection, and dignity. Someone who, while accepting their present, inspires their future.

I believe that the incandescent joy of a happy child transcends every ethnic and economic distinction humankind has invented to keep us apart. I believe that every prejudice, every oppression, every resentment, and every misunderstanding can be cured more quickly by mixing everyone's children together, making two teams, and letting them play than by any form of conflict resolution, court intercession, or legislation we've come up with so far.

Summer camp, it seems, is primarily and originally an American institution, with a few camps, including my own, having histories and traditions that date back more than a hundred years. Many camps attract not only staff from many countries, but also an international contingent of campers from families who want their children to grow up able to speak English and to have American friends. I have, conversely, been able to travel all over the world, connecting with camp friends in Spain, England, Switzerland, Japan, Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands – not bad for spending summers in upstate Pennsylvania.

I believe that every kid would prefer that school lasted for three months, and summer lasted for nine. Not a ringing endorsement for how we run schools, but proof we all could, and should, learn something from summer camp.

about the author

Robert Kent is a 30-year veteran of Camp Susquehannock. He started as a camper and is currently webmaster and Program Director. During the rest of the year he runs the Youth Program at Aikido West in Redwood City, CA, does website design, and designs aerospace equipment. He also teaches a course each January for the Philosophy Department at Williams College called "Aikido and Ethics".



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