

# LOVING AS CHRIST LOVES . . . AT TEEN LEADERSHIP CAMP

**Caution:** This issue of the *DIARY* is not intended for those younger than 14.

**Note from Connie Hutchinson, TLC director:** This morning we leave for our 11<sup>th</sup> Royal Family Kids' Camp at Green Oak Ranch, where we will be working all week with 60 children in the foster care system, ages 7–12. Seeing the wonderful results in so many young lives, four years ago we expanded our ministry to include teens in the foster care system in a weekend camp called TLC: Teen Leadership Camp. Many of the same dedicated men and women serve in both TLC and Royal Family. Here are some excerpted quotes from TLC staff. Please use these to pray over!

**Kyndra Steinmeyer:** As I sat late at night with one of the 16 year old girls at this camp, I realized just how terrible some of their lives had been thus far. This young girl opened up to me about something I never saw coming . . . how her mother had allowed men to come into their home when she was younger and sexually abuse her numerous times. Then she was moved to her dad's place, hoping things would get better. Unfortunately, they only got worse as her own dad sexually abused her and actually got her pregnant. She didn't feel right aborting the baby so she had the baby and gave it up for adoption. Thankfully, she had found a relationship with Christ just one year prior to camp and was out to show the world that she was more than the wounds of her past. This camp was able to constantly remind her of how special and treasured she is in God's eyes and the eyes of the counselors/staff, as well as how courageous she is for conquering her past bit by bit. I really feel like we were God's hands and feet that weekend to reach a hurting and lost generation for Him.



**Paul LeDay:** As we listened to our speaker, Donna Mroz, Saturday afternoon, I don't think anyone in camp could have possibly dreamed of the chain of events about to take place. As one brave young boy shared his story, it opened up the heart of another camper. He shared the following story: "My stepfather shot me. With a shot gun he walked into my room and shot me in my bed. He turned and shot his five year old son. He then went into another room where he shot his two daughters. He then killed my mom and killed himself." The young man shared more details later in the evening with me. He explained that his stepfather beat him as well. As he was being beaten, if he cried, his stepfather would beat him harder. I will never forget his exact words, "Paul, he beat me so hard, I can't cry. He beat it out of me."

If the weekend ended after the words I had just heard I would be in despair. Jump forward to Sunday morning. God was working and He was not finished. I was the counselor for the young man who had been shot. God put it on my heart to ask the young man if he would be interested in a mentor. Would he be interested in getting together at least once a month? He looked at me and said, "You and me?" "Yes!" I don't know what God has planned for me and this young man. But I do believe this weekend was part of his healing. God is good!

**Melodie Stanford:** The TLC camp was one of the most significant weekends of my life. After 10 years of RFKC, I decided to step out of my comfort zone and risk the teen camp. I was overwhelmed by the difference love and trust can make in one weekend. On Sunday morning the campers and counselors started sharing their "giants" and instead of campers/counselors, we were all one big family sharing our fears, brokenness, and past hurts.



I sat at a table with some boys and a smiling 13 year old said, "I have never felt so much love." I had noticed that he was one of the boys who offered his jacket and friendship to a camper that had some developmental delays and frankly, a loner and no fun to be around. This same boy was very open about his faith and said he wanted to go into the ministry. Another 16 year old boy at the table had never been to a Christian camp. I later found out that this boy had seen his father kill his mother and his brothers and sisters. I thought, if I can show the love of Christ and point them to the Heavenly Father, it is worth doing this camp every year.

**Walt Williams:** This year we asked Donna Mroz of The Grapevine outreach to share her story. I must tell you God used her in a way that took the camp to a whole new level. I was in with the boys and Donna had only gotten through about a third of her story before boys started sharing their stories on a very deep level, some of them for the first time. It was a powerful thing to experience. That night in the boys' cabin I told them that anyone who wanted to talk further could meet in the common area of the cabin. Almost all of them came and we watched the Spirit of God move in the lives of these boys as well as the counselors until after 1 o'clock in the morning. Connie Hutchinson, our camp director, said the same thing happened in the girls' cabin.



**Debra Vaughn:** Before we left the church on Friday I'd been talking with Amber, who mentioned she'd wanted to learn to play guitar. I told her I was leading the music this weekend and would love to set aside a few minutes to teach her a couple of chords. After our Friday night movie I was praying and asking the Lord to guide my thoughts and words for the next day, when I remembered our conversation. Knowing how many of the kids had grown up with broken promises, I wanted to be certain I had integrity with them and not be another promise breaker.

When I saw her and her counselor the next morning and made arrangements for the lesson time, Amber's face glowed, like she felt she had value or was important. She learned her two chords well and even picked up a strum as she changed back and forth between chords. I gave her my favorite guitar pick: bright pink with the words "Pick Jesus" on it, as a token to remember that time.

**Don Norman:** I had not experienced God the Holy Spirit working as He did this past weekend. He worked in the selection of the theme for the camp, and the activities to develop trust; and through the movie, and through the decision to have Donna [Mroz] telling her story which allowed God to touch four young men who trusted us and allowed God to touch their lives. What a privilege it was to see God at work in so many lives. We were blessed by being allowed to be there.

**Connie Jones:** One young man that I had a conversation with about his future, interests and passions, came up to me at the end of camp and wanted to hug me and thank me and tell me that he appreciated my talking with him. These kids just soaked up our love and attention as we were JESUS WITH SKIN ON to their hurting spirits. This is Kingdom work, I like to call it, since we can't do any of this [in our own strength] and we knew that very well.

**Robert Brown:** Rudy was "my" camper. Many people were apprehensive about him because of his behaviors and heavy medication. Also, his overall look could be a little intimidating, however he was such a sweet boy. After Donna's talk, I felt the need to be bolder in ministering to him. Once I did, he opened up about his faith and what he would like me to pray about for him. When he got picked up by the group home staff back at church, I told him that I would not forget him and would pray for him. He got a big smile (for him, no easy feat because of all that medication), and offered what felt like a genuine hug and heartfelt thank you.

**Katie Junyk:** These kids come from a world where they have to grow up quick if they are going to survive so there is no time to stop and just be a kid. So when I'm there, to a certain extent, I try to play like a kid, talk like a kid, think like a kid, love like a kid, eat like a kid—whatever it takes to remind them that it's okay to be a kid! And even though so much was taken away from them, TLC is about giving a little bit of it back.

**Ben Pence:** I really didn't know what I was getting into when I signed up for the weekend—and I *knew* that I didn't know. From the outset, it was in God's hands to orchestrate the weekend because in my own power I could not reach out to, teach, or even relate to these kids. While Donna was describing forgiveness, my camper spoke up. "It's not that easy," he began, and proceeded to open to us his story . . . the terrible injustices that had stolen his childhood and caused him to wrestle with deep anger and distrust for authority. From there, God just worked in incredible ways . . . After just two and a half days, he was singing "Voice of Truth" onstage and promising to come to TLC every year he could—and asking me to do the same.

None of us understand how God orchestrated this event in the hearts and minds of our staff and campers, but it is so clear that He has and He will continue to do His mighty redemptive work in the lives of these young men and women.