

PACIFIC CURRENTS

Fresno camp counselor Michelle Krenz remembers Charles Betts

Editor's note: Michelle Krenz, youth leader at First, Fresno, who had been one of Charles Betts' counselors at camp, gave one of the many tributes at his memorial service.

"I first met Charles at Camp Tamarack. I don't know if it is the awesome beauty or just the fact that we are all so dirty, but there is a safety at camp that allows you to truly be yourself and be accepted for who you are, even if you don't quite know who that is yet.

"You can see God working through each other. Being given the chance to know someone like that is so special, to look into someone's eyes and know that we are meeting each other with open minds and hearts.

"Charles was so much fun at camp. I know almost every girl at camp has been smitten with his smile and sparkling eyes. It was fun watching them try to get him to dance. I kept thinking, 'What a cool guy.' Always there with a



Charles Betts and his many friends at Camp Tamarack. Photo by Frank Saxton.

smile and a little shy by the attention, but kind of loving it too.

"I got to know Charles a lot

better over the years. He and the whole group from Murphys and the youth from Fresno formed

such a special friendship, a bond that has continued to grow.

"Even though I didn't get to see Charles enough, I kept up to date on what was happening in his life through friends. Dave Fowler let me know and understand what was happening with his health, and Charles was always close to my heart.

"His senior year at Tam was one that I will forever remember. He wasn't able to spend the entire week with us, but he joined us for our day at Huntington Lake and for communion on Lookout Point, an amazing spot that overlooks the lakes and beyond. Watching that sparkle in his eye every time he smiled, laughing, joking, appreciating the beauty of the amazing place we were in, a place that only God could have created. I marveled at how much fun he was having.

"In the circle prayer we had at the end of that day we all said one thing we were thankful to God for.

When it came to Charles, he said in such a proud, confident voice one word 'Life.' Even though this wasn't the way anyone imagined his life to be, he was still thankful to be alive and was going to live that life to the fullest, and rely on God to show the way.

"Charles' life wasn't in vain. It had such a profound purpose that we are just beginning to understand. All I know is that I am a much better person and have learned so much from this young man. He was wise beyond his years and never faltered. He showed so much dignity and love at times when anyone else might have been full of anger and hate. In the end he was able to say that he fought the good fight and was ready to be with his God.

"He will be truly missed by everyone who knew him. The lives he has touched are forever blessed."

Church summer camp provides a place and time for faith to grow

By Rev. Gene Nelson

I was the chaplain in July for our fifth/sixth grade church camp, located in the hills above the town of Cazadero. I had never served at a camp with children this young, so it proved to be quite a learning experience.

For example, I learned that there are a variety of ways that peas can be taken off a plate and turned into speeding projectiles! At fifth/sixth grade camp, it is important to serve vegetables that cannot be launched!

I also quickly learned that these kids were not tuned in to my particular brand of humor. For example, I asked one boy what he would be doing when he returned home after camp. He said that he was going to spend some time with his godfather.

To which I replied, "Oh, did he make you an offer you couldn't refuse?"

The young man just stared at me, with what I believe was pity in his eyes.

I was on a fast learning curve, and I think — I hope — I learned a lot.

It was a privilege to enter into their world, if even for just a week.

And yes, we had it all: high drama in a girls' cabin as feelings were hurt, mended, then hurt again, seemingly every hour; early chaos in one of the boys' cabins as rules were challenged and confrontation became the order of the day; stirrings of girls being interested in boys and boys pretending

not to be interested right back!

We had loneliness and homesickness; we had laughter and hugs.

But what was particularly fascinating was how different the world of camp was from the daily world of these kids. Cell phones don't work at our camp (who says there's no God!), there are no video games, no computers, no mall, no busy-every-minute-of-the-day schedule.

At camp, we worked intentionally to offer community, relationships, listening, caring, faith. We offered the gift of time as we sought to slow down the frantic pace at which so many of our kids live. For these kids, camp was another universe, a step through the looking glass.

I recall watching one of our counselors, 19 years old, sit under a tree and listen patiently to the concerns of a fifth-grade boy. I thought to myself — when, if ever, does that young boy experience such caring from an older teen, especially an older teen-aged boy?

Later that week I thanked our directors and counselors and asked them if they understood what a radical, counter-cultural thing they were doing. If only for a week, they had invited these boys and girls into a different world, a world where consumption and frantic activity and competition and media stimulation did not have the last word, a world where time is taken to gaze at the stars, learn a new song, talk out a problem, and



Summer campers enjoying a game at Camp Tamarack.

yes, even to pause and worship.

Remember that chaotic boys' cabin? We discovered that one boy was creating many of the problems. So one of the directors and I took him aside for a little chat. She suggested that if he was

having trouble getting along with his cabin mates, perhaps he should be moved to another cabin.

At that point, he began to sob and pleaded with us not to take him out of his cabin. Five minutes earlier he hated the other boys and his

counselors.

Now he did not want to leave them. So we let him stay — on a trial basis — and for the remainder of the week, life was smoother in that cabin. Not perfect, but nothing the counselors couldn't handle.

I had to wonder when was the last time anyone sat down and really listened to that troubled boy? Relationships, listening, caring, time . . . what radical concepts in a world where so many of our kids are breathless with activity, or are spending their time with a video game or shopping.

And they know this. As one girl said to me on the final day, "Why can't camp be all summer?"

Gene Nelson is senior pastor at Community, Sebastapol. This piece was published in the local newspaper.

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