

Profile: Janine Caples

Hometown:

Auckland, New Zealand

Program:

Summer Camp USA

Tell us in a few hundred words which Camp you were at and what you got up to at camp?

I spent my summer at Camp Nashoba North which is up in Raymond, Maine. It was a co-ed camp with 7-15 year olds. During my first session I lived with eight 14 year old girls and the second session with seven 15 year old girls. I spent my days teaching waterskiing to the kids and lifeguarding free swim. I was very lucky as I practically lived on the gorgeous lake in the sunshine all day. Camp was like what I like to describe as living in a bubble; it was different to the real world, we woke up to reveille where we raised and lowered the flag before breakfast and dinner, we sung before every meal, had candy time after lunch and then rest hour before the last two periods. It was pretty full on and there was never a dull moment. Everyone at camp felt like family and everyone was always there for one another.

Top 3 memories of Summer Camp?

1. At our weekly staff meeting one of our head staff was dealing with his Mum battling breast cancer. One of the co-head girls organised everyone to buy a black shirt throughout the week and then wrote on everyone's in pink puffy paint. The front said 'fight' and the back said 'like a girl'. During the next staff meeting we all wore our t-shirts under our sweatshirts and then she gave a little talk which included how we are all like family and are there to support each other. We then took off our sweatshirts to reveal our t-shirts. It was so moving and we all wore our t-shirts the following day and asked the kids to wear pink, so together as a camp we raised awareness for breast cancer.

2. I still remember coming back after my first night day and as soon as my 8 girls saw me they just started running full speed towards me because they had missed me so much and wanted to give me massive hugs. It wasn't until that moment that I realised how much I meant to them, and the influence I could have on their summer and how much I was like a Mum, a big sister and a best friend all rolled into one for them.



3. Getting to have a 'second' birthday at camp as the Americans write the date around the other way to us. So one day over dinner my girls asked 'why didn't you tell us it was your birthday tomorrow' I told them it wasn't and but they didn't believe me. It clicked right away and tried to explain to them but they didn't believe me. I then told my head of girls, but she didn't believe me either. In the end I had to pull out my passport to prove it. The cake had already been made and my name got called out as if I was having a birthday so I had to wear the birthday hat and stand on the stool while the whole camp sung the birthday song to me.

Was there a camper that stands out in your mind? If so why?

There was more than a few that stood out and for different reasons, but I guess there was one girl in particular. We got along with really well, I could tell she looked up to me and that she would always come to me when she needed advice or just someone to talk too. She was also going for what we call your northstar in waterskiing which meant I spent a lot of time with her on the lake as well. (A Northstar is an achievement that campers can obtain which means that one day in the near future we believe that they could be a counsellor and teach that particular activity). She was always really willing to learn, to help others including younger campers and really got into the camp spirit.

What are some of the experiences that you had which made an impact on you?

I think overall the whole camp experience made an impact on me. I feel like camp gave me another outlook on life and how different life can be on the other side of the world. It also helped me become more confident because it forced me to come out of my shell and put myself out there. I mean it's not everyday that you dress up in funny outfits and perform skits that your kids have made up for you in front of the rest of the camp or get up on stage and perform a dance which you learnt only hours earlier.



Were there any times that were hard?

I'm not going to lie, it's not all easy. There were a lot of hard times and challenges but it was so worth it. There were times when you were just so exhausted that you didn't know how you were going to get through the next hour let alone the rest of the day. It was hard when my cabin wasn't all getting along with each other and I had to deal with multiple dramas at once. It was hard when my co-counsellor wasn't very helpful and left pretty much everything up to me. It was hard when I knocked my head on the ceiling fan and had blood gushing everywhere (long story). But truth be told when you needed help for any reason in particular there was always someone there to help. It was like living amongst one massive family.

What was camp food and your accommodation like?

I'd actually heard some dreaded stories about camp food but I guess I was really lucky with the camp I ended up at because our food was actually pretty good. It was family style dining with a massive salad bar also. There was always plenty of options to choose from for all three meals of the day.

We all lived in cabins which consisted of bunk beds, draws, closets for clothes, two showers, two toilets and sinks. I was even lucky enough in my second cabin to have a separate area which had a couple of couches and a table and chairs along with ceiling fans (This was because it was the oldest girl's cabin).

What is something unexpected/different/strange about USA compared to home?

To start with it was all different and full of the unknown and still to this day I can't pin point what exactly was different about most of it but I know it was different. It was definitely hard to start with when it came to understanding their accent but by the end of the summer I couldn't even hear that they had an accent. I guess it's just a different culture and camp is a different culture all together as I said before it's like living in a bubble.

Did you have a good experience going on Summer Camp with IEP?

Definitely, I know I made the right choice about choosing to go with IEP and I'm glad that I chose them.

What did you value about going to Summer Camp with IEP?

They helped you organise everything even when I only had 14 days notice until I had to be there. They helped me sort my visa and everything else which would not have been possible if I was just doing it myself.

Would you do it again?

In a heartbeat.

Did you gain anything from Camp that will benefit you in what you do next?

I guess it helped me to realise that I can do anything I put my mind to. It may be scary and full of the unknown, but you never know until you try something. It also gave me a lot more confidence.

What is next for you?

I was lucky enough to be able to take 3 ½ months leave from both my jobs. So I am now back working full time as a duty manager in a restaurant and instructing group fitness classes at the gym. Until next year anyway, when I will hopefully return to camp for another summer.

