

## Forever Changed

This summer I came to Barefoot Camp expecting a week of “capture the flag” and campfires. Little did I know I’d leave the week’s events with a brand new outlook.

My friends Krista, Delaney, Ashley and I had a unique and strange experience during one of our walks. Ashley’s dad had passed away in January, so she was experiencing a tidal wave of emotion.

As the four of us walked Ashley felt someone holding her hand, inviting her to hang back. At first she thought of her dad. Then she realized it was God holding her hand. She believes He was trying to tell her everything would be okay because He would care for her; He would be her dad now. Krista felt raindrops on her head as if God was weeping with us and those were His teardrops. But it was dry outside. I felt it was like the Bible describes when the earth mourned over Jesus’ death.

The walk’s short distance was nothing compared to its measure of influence. Ashley, who was usually very strong, felt fragile from the emotional weight on her shoulders. She cried easily when she was reminded of her dad. We wound up sobbing in each other’s arms. It was beautiful to feel true empathy.

That night Ashley had a dream which foretold a wondrous future. She and her father reunited in the sky. They engulfed each other in huge bear hugs as they floated high above the camp soccer field, surrounded by glowing lights that looked like stars. When it was time to go,

her dad said, "I love you, baby girl! I'll see you again soon!" Then she felt like gravity pulled her back down to earth where her family and friends waited to catch her in the grass.

After reading Ashley's dream scrawled on wrinkled, tearstained notebook paper, we found a note from Delaney's mom tucked inside an envelope. The note was heart-shaped with the Bible verse Psalm 73:23, "Yet I am always with You; You hold me by my right hand." We were all amazed, because it was extraordinarily relevant to God having held Ashley's hand.

The last night of camp we let loose lit lanterns with handwritten messages to God on them. What happened next was like a crimson cherry perfectly placed on top of an ice cream sundae. Krista, Delaney, Ashley and I shared a lantern and set it free over the soccer field. It looked magical as it flew off like a carrier pigeon with precious letters. Then Ashley exclaimed, "Oh my goodness! It looks just like the lights I saw in my dream!" Soon after she pointed out her vision, the lanterns miraculously moved into a "g" formation. "G" is the first letter of her father's name. The familiar glowing lights on our final night of camp symbolized how phenomenal the week had been.

Barefoot has perhaps been one of the best things that has ever happened to me; the crowning jewel of my short life's timeline. Barefoot inspired me to look more into a life focused on loving God. At camp, I was engulfed in his unconditional love, and I would even say my camp experience is a reflection of His kingdom here on earth. At camp, stereotypes and social status were put aside, and we all became part of God's gigantic, colorful family. I hope to pursue a career at camp one day, because amazing things happen at Barefoot.