

Sahale Summer Camp 2009

by Joan Valles
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16 campers (12 girls, 4 boys)
4 junior staff (3 girls, 1 boy)
1 camp director (Irene Perler)
12 adult friends and helpers

These make up our camp family at Sahale Learning Center, June 28-July 3. Under the direction of Irene Perler and the guidance and training of John and Colette Hoff this is the fourth summer camp for youth ages 9-13 at Sahale. And it's the first where I've been more than a drop-in guest.

Camp started Sunday afternoon and by now, we're into the routine of it: breakfast at 8:30; followed by

meetings for staff and helpers, and for campers, putting the camp in order and maybe a game or project (today, picking cherries for dessert); at 10 a.m. morning circle of ritual, meditation, and learning (each day we've a theme, yesterday was *responsibility*; today it's *problem-solving*); followed by arts, crafts, or archery; lunch; quiet time; in mid-afternoon, an hour of work followed by water play in the river (probably the most popular activity); an hour to prepare for dinner, dinner, and then the evening's highlight, the campfire (singing, stories, ritual), followed by bed at 10.

Campers are divided into three clans—older girls, younger girls, and boys—each with a junior counselor or two. Together they engage in work and craft projects appropriate to their ages; meals, morning circle, river play, campfire, are big group activities.

The week seems to have a rhythm to it. Monday, the first full day, we are testing the waters. Tuesday, we are mellow. Wednesday, seems like a kind of a hump day. Some of the junior



staff are feeling a bit under the weather; the campers, familiar with the routine, are maybe wondering what's new. Nevertheless, we are in high spirits by dinner time. Thursday, we complete our "work time" chores—the older girls have helped mulch and weed a patio; the younger girls have painted and planted flower boxes for the playhouse, and the boys have hauled and stacked wood—it's hot, and we look forward to the "web foot Olympics" in the river. Each group constructs a small boat with materials scavenged from the recycling and duct tape. The junior staff launches the boats up stream and their teams guide them down the river without touching. The older girls team wins, and everyone jumps, swims, and splashes in the river. The day ends with songs and appreciations around the camp fire.

As an participating observer, I feel good to be with these "kids." They're smart, creative, imaginative (occasionally wily, of course), good to each other, and pretty darn respectful. The special talents and gifts of each shows through.

The staff is mindful of the needs of each and guides them with compassion, humor, and firmness as required. This is a Human Relations Lab junior style. I love John's teaching stories and how he is with kids and Colette's goodwill, good food, good leadership. I am appreciative of Irene's skill and energy as camp director—keeping so many balls in the air at once with finesse. I'm enjoying meeting new people.



This year, Eddie Williams has joined the staff as counselor for the boys and he's adding a lot to our camp. Noah Glassman, a visitor, has offered art lessons. And I've had so much fun, I'm looking forward to next year ... *Joan Valles*