

Dear Camp Champions Family,

As the school year has progressed, I have realized how deeply last summer has changed me. It was a scary time for me- I was starting a new term and when I came home I would immediately start school without my best friend who had moved to Washington. The day I got home it became clear that I would be starting school without 17 of my friends who I had left behind at camp. The first months of school were hectic and there was really no time to sit and reflect on the summer or on my life at home. Things have started to settle down now and as I look at my actions I realize how much everything has changed. I don't worry about what people think about me anymore, at least in that I do not base my actions on expectations. I have no problem dressing up in a crazy costume in front of 3000 students or getting up and singing a song in front of my class (I know these things because I did them in the last few months)! I also am not looking for acceptance. I have close friends in town and they are all I need here. I feel lucky because I know that my life is not bound to El Paso, I have people who care about me all around the country. I watch what I say and do around younger students because I now know that they do look up to me. I have no problem staying home all weekend with my parents and not going out with my friends. It seems my priorities have changed.

Recently two events in my life have helped me come to all these conclusions. First, a friend of mine came to me with a problem. She had an image problem and more importantly a drug problem. She told me that her life was spinning out of control and she wanted to know how I held myself together, how I could care less what other people said. As I consoled her and helped her through her problems, the words coming from mouth started to sound familiar. Where had I heard all these things before? Camp Champions summer 2007 from the Staff and also my peers. Wow, it was all coming together. Over the last few weeks I have watched her change. It was such a great feeling to be able to witness her pulling her self together. You all must feel so rewarded watching countless children go through this same process every summer. I can understand how it develops into a passion. Secondly, I decided not to go to the homecoming dance. I had been asked, but I just did not want to go. The thought of going to a dance without all my camp friends made me almost sick. Classmates would ask me why I wasn't going. Some probably thought they were torturing me by asking the question and some were probably genuinely concerned. My answer was unfaltering- I just don't want to go. Around five o'clock on the big day a guy friend of mine called and begged me to go with him, he couldn't stand the feeling of walking in alone. I agreed and got ready in one hour. Most of the girls started getting ready at ten in the morning. I got there and had a blast! There was no pressure and I definitely was not trying to impress my date. That is another lesson I learned from camp. The night when we got back from our trip and had about ten minutes to get ready for the dance was the best camp dance I've ever been to...and I've been to quite a few! There is something about that realization that you do not have to be anything more than you already are that is really freeing.

I want to thank you, and the rest of the camp staff for making all this possible. I watch my peers at school and wish that they had the chance to go to a place like Camp Champions. This email only scratches the surface of the influence camp has made on me. I'm not the only one either. I still keep in touch with my cabinmates and we have conversations about all of these issues. They

have seen similar changes in their lives as well. Camp has created a unique community for me. I know that it is a place where I can always go for guidance or just some laughs. I watch my friends and I wonder if I would end up like some of them had I not gone to Champions. But then I just feel blessed because I realize that I don't need to wonder, it is just the way it is meant to be.

Sincerely,