

# staff reflect in writing on their experience of camp augusta, in four minutes and thirty seconds

Below are 9 such reflections.

Camp is a disease. No not a stereotypical, miserable, life ended one. But yes, Augusta is a disease. When someone knows they only have a few months to live they change. They decide what is most important to them. They reflect on what they have done and where they have been. It makes them think endlessly about what really matters in their world. And in that way Camp is a disease. No, I don't only have a few months more to live but similarly I have begun to completely simplify and change my life due to my time at Augusta. I have now contracted something in which can never be cured. And, why? Why would I want to?

What can I possibly say in a few paragraphs to sum up three months at Augusta? Should I run through some highlights, my arrival, the training, the children? I'm sorry; I can not decide where my mind wants to be cast back to. All I can focus on is this sadness; a void which now fills me since coming back home. Home? How can I now call somewhere other than Camp home? My house was Cedar 5 floating in a community of love. I was Peter Pan, I was living in Never Land. A world without jealousy, competition or money, where imagination, peace, and happiness live in abundance. What a perfect place to be.

Spend time there and fill your cup. Extract what you need to take back. Join in and see the wonder, the beauty, the innocence of childhood. Shed a tear when you realize the world is not the same.

There is something magical about a place where the word no is rarely part of the vocabulary. A place where your ideas are heard and taken seriously, given merit and accepted, even when you didn't get the chance to think it over much before offering it to the group. Camp Augusta offers this. What is truly unique and special is that it offers this safe place for wonder, imagination and hope to both campers and staff. It offers a space in time for those who visit or stay for a while where they can learn endless new skills or hobbies which contribute to further inspiration. All of this while encouraging campers and staff to communicate in healthy ways, to challenge themselves, improving on current practices, and ultimately to grow. For campers and staff, camp is a safe place to test their boundaries and re-define who they are. Where else can you be Robin Hood at archery and a ninja in the morning while looking forward to the afternoon where you will find yourself facing your fear of heights and silk screening a t-shirt in the afternoon? This place is so inspiring that many of the staff dream of sharing it with children all year long. We dream of creating new and exciting programs because we want to reach more children than the ones we meet in the summer. We want to invite them to experience this place that we are happy to call a HOME. Each year we work endless hours preparing for the summer, excited to see the camper that we helped as they were frightened to tears on the high ropes course last year, or the one that arrived at camp having packed their own clothes pins so that he could get an early start to ninja skills. We prepare to challenge the 15 year old camper whose parents sent them to camp but they are at a stage where it is cool to want to be there. We prepare to nurture the 8 year old camper who is away from home for a week for the first time or the leadership (CIRCLE) campers who are challenged to reflect more than most of them have ever experienced. We prepare to offer campers tasty and healthy food options at every meal and we prepare for the arrival of new staff, with fresh ideas from around the world. The possibilities truly do feel endless. This is the only place where I have experienced the true meaning of the saying "the sky is the limit." To truly know what Camp Augusta means to those who experience it, you need to see the special sparkle in a camper or counselor's eye as they talk about their experiences. To witness that sparkle over and over is priceless.

Dedication makes Camp Augusta (CA) wonderful. The dedication of the staff working 23 hours a day for 6 days a week for almost 3 months, Randy's commitment to better camp year-round with little to no breaks during the summer, and the over zealousness of the staff who help develop curriculum from their homes in South Africa, England and the US, along with the staff who return year after year show how wonderful CA is. We come back because our needs for fun, love and belonging, safety, food and shelter, autonomy and even power all are met in one location. We are allowed the freedom to teach what we already know, learn skills we didn't previously possess, given the chance to table our disagreements and the freedom to fail, while of course learning from our mistakes.

The transference of skills and knowledge acquired at CA is awesome. After my first summer as a counselor I appreciated camp for being a great birth control method, after the second summer I knew I needed to learn more before moving on and after your third summer I feel prepared and empowered to follow my dream of becoming a midwife and in the future confident that I'll make an

excellent parent, using many of the things I learned including behavior management techniques like how to change minds not just behaviors, as well as simply survive in the world today.

CA is unique not only because we offer fire spinning and T-shirt printing but because the campers informally learn how to make their own decisions, express themselves holistically, ask for help, accomplish goals, and offer support to their peers all while having fun. Their innocence is protected in a dream-like environment where TV and beauty magazines are replaced with meaningful cabin discussions, ceramics, and team building exercises.

Camp is magical because there is a sense of equality from campers to staff and to the camp director. Everyone's voices are heard and their needs met sometimes as if by magic. There is only 24 hours in a day and with 95 kids making bread, dancing, and biking around camp in a seamless display of learning, laughing and sharing you might think all this takes more than 1 or 2 weeks to accomplish with each group. What is most special about camp is the community of not always so likeminded people who learn to live and work more closely together than they previously thought possible. The Yuba river, rock creek, and the amazing food and desire to teach and environmental protection are all delightful elements of the place I called home for the last 3 summers and even one fall season. Thank you Camp Augusta

The fact that making mistakes is not prohibited. Let's say you are a camper and do something that is considered wrong. The cause is not to be interrupted and told what you did wrong and told not to do it again and told to be quiet or stay somewhere or go somewhere. Instead, you are privileged to feel the purifying pain to go through it yourself, so well that there is absolutely no chance of making that mistake again. Vice versa, you learn to understand every side of that mistake realizing that you already knew all the right answers. And you feel good, because there is no fear or guilt or anger in your mind during this - they aren't needed.

The people working there are working with their hearts. It is impossible to stay there if you don't love what you are doing. The campers, especially the ones with several years' experience, will catch you not being fully present or enthused, and so will you - they'll just point it out if you are trying to hide it. The community will teach you to be honest to yourself, because without knowing what you feel there's nothing to communicate to the others about the way you feel.

I have worked on about 15 camps and 20+ schools. Camp Augusta is the only place I have ever seen that makes teenagers so fearless they can just have fun without a second thought. It is also the only place I have ever seen that honestly tries to get rid of social cruelty and negative peer pressure. That is one of the reasons why some campers say they would stay there all year.

What makes Camp Augusta special is its realization of ideals, as well as how it challenges everybody. The community is not perfect, but it strives for something so real, so utopian, with the best faith in humanity, that it cannot help but to inspire all involved to work towards this utopia. Camp Augusta is a special place in the world, where people can feel safe, heard, and understood without fear of judgment. It takes ideals posed by great thinkers and turns them into realities, allowing cooperation in a world set up for competition, and allowing safe self-expression and experimentation in a world set up for conformity.

Yet even with this freedom, nobody can leave here unchallenged. Despite the participants working towards a shared vision, each person brings a unique perspective and attitude that can challenge foundations and encourage conversations. Not everyone is open to these perspectives. But most are, and it is the flux and vibrancy created by the sharing of these perspectives that makes the challenges possible, all moving towards both personal and community growth. I'm not sure if that's clear...it is in my head, but my time is up and I am going to let it sit like that. Not perfect. Because I don't have to be a perfectionist here.

Camp Augusta is incredible in the literal and etymological sense of the word. I know it already sounds like I'm writing from my head, but trust me when I say that this comes from my heart as well as my head for the two are intimately intertwined and the bond has grown all the more stronger for my time at Augusta, but I'm getting a bit ahead of myself already, so let me back up to incredible. Incredible meaning unable to be believed, because THAT is what Augusta truly is. It's a place so magical that even words reduce it to something profane, something that has limits and boundaries. You see, Camp Augusta cannot be believed because it cannot be conceptualized, you cannot, even in the midst of the magic, stood amongst the trees and the waterfalls and the cabins, possibly conceptualize Augusta. Every time you think that you can finally believe it's real, you've lost it again, because something will always

escape you. So when I say that Camp Augusta is a magical place, I'm already doing it a disservice, because it's not just a "place." I'm currently in Manchester, England and I'm still in Camp Augusta, cause it's a state of mind as well, something that holds with you, and changes everything. But that gives Camp Augusta agency of itself, like there is this "Camp" that walks around changing things, which is simply my way of trying to talk about it. Because there is no "Camp" except as a symbol of the unity of time, place, and people that simultaneously create Camp Augusta, and live outside Camp Augusta. The people all bring themselves to this place from different states of being: some are hippies, some are students, some are educators, some are consumers, some are all of these and none of these. The place seems to be the acres and the buildings, but as Randy reminds every camper and every staff member, when it's just the trees and the squirrels, it's not really Augusta. And there are times when I'm sitting in my house in Manchester and feel Augusta, feel inside and around me that magical "place" that has followed me here. And Augusta is a time, a "season" during the summer, but it also stays with all the campers, and with everyone who partakes of it, and so is timeless.

I myself was amazed at the tears I cried over being at camp during the first two weeks. It was a visceral, painful reaction, as if my entire life was under attack. I come from a wealthy family, put stock in buying and consuming, enjoy dressing up for gala dinners, and even have my fair share of prejudices, most notably against the poor, which stems from a republican upbringing (some of the tenants of which I still staunchly believe in). So to come to a place which seemed to be antithetical to my nature, which seemed to tear at my beliefs with one hand and with the other espouse tolerance, was difficult to say the least, and soul-wrenching to say the most. And yet something made me stay, a certain sense that in not "fitting in" I "fit in." I wholeheartedly disagreed with things, and at the end of the day, some people at camp weren't ready to listen to that, but some were. And I found my own ears plugged, and gently and gradually began to open them at Augusta, to hear what others were saying, to listen to them. My world blurred a little, my heart opened a little, and all the sudden, things took on a different dimension. I learned to live in a very unique way. I didn't "change," cause that means that I've conformed, or altered what I believe in simply because of Augusta. But I now understand, and have lived, as a different person, and know that I have more to me than the person whose tears fell upon Augustan ground at the start of the summer. I am more.

And everyone who leaves Augusta, leaves it more than they were. Not better, not worse, not changed or more open, but simply more. They understand that they are not fully what they thought themselves to be, that they themselves escape definition, that they themselves have no borders, no definition, they are incredible. They are Augusta, and Augusta is incredible too.

Camp has changed me, but at the same it hasn't. Instead it has helped me grow, and more into the person I have always envisioned for myself. People choose to work at camp because they see something they really believe in. When they choose camp they choose themselves, or a place that fits their ideals about how to better this world.

Yet there is so much to discover! You can arrive and camp and feel so at home, but also as if you're in a wondrous land of insight, adventure, and wisdom for the taking.

If I hadn't found camp and worked with my wonderful family there toward growth and challenge I would not be in Bangkok right now. I would certainly not be about to wander to an orphanage in the middle of nowhere and be the only white guy for miles and miles just to spread the love I feel at camp.

We counselors are vessels of a new and progressive life. Like campers, we work together to build a community in which we can also feed our spirits. And as counselors we are free in the world, spastic and childlike, but surrounded by opportunity that calls for us to be not only a vessel but a conduit for what we've learned. I'll share these things forever, with my family, with my friends, and with kids that eat roasted crickets and play with cobras.

Camp Augusta is a land of creation and discovery. We build friendships, memories, gnome homes, cob benches, imaginative lands, and original art. We discover the wonders of the natural world, the ending of a long story told by torch light, and the secrets behind perfect sourdough bread. Yet, more than any of these things, at camp, we create and discover ourselves. We reflect on what matters most to us and what we are doing to get it. We learn how high we can climb. We choose how we build each day. We wonder what we would do if we could do anything in the world, and consider how to make that a reality. We reflect on our deepest needs and the needs of those around us, and question if anything actually prevents those from living in harmony. If we are lucky, we realize how much choice we have in creating the person we are. This is the simple task of life, and more than another place I have been, camp Augusta has prepared me to do that consciously, powerfully, and compassionately.

What to say about Camp Augusta which can be put into words. What to say which cannot be described in two dimensions. There are the activities we do, the claims of growth and wonder and wish and surprise which we tell all our friends. But that is missing something though, something is lacking which can only be transferred in our body language, the twinkling of our eyes, the jittering of our hands and the visible reaction counselors get when someone starts talking about "camp". When people start questioning me about camp, because I do talk about it a lot, they have come to expect me to get a little crazy and speak of the great highs and positives and

nod respectively when I say “it can also be challenging”. That is one of the bigger considerations I think of when I consider coming back to camp. The pressures to succeed put on by myself, the mission I undertake to make each child’s time there special, the weariness I feel midway through a session and honestly at times I do want to walk away during the middle of it, but I don’t. I can’t. I know this place is making me stronger and at the end of it, no matter how tired or strung out I am, I know I have achieved a mission, that I have succeed in some way when I read the camper feedback, when I talk with the other counselors, when I look around in everyone else’s faces and know that they just went through that same struggle, those same challenges and we are all silly enough to want to do it again in less than 24 hours.

In that sense, camp is a very romantic place, it is driven by passion. Even when a child rips your heart out with sympathy, or a cabin demands so much of you, you are willing to give it because we have chosen to be a counselor. A counselor. One who counsels in a time of need, to play a court jester helping others realize their challenges and shortcomings while at the same time throwing a pie in their face. We have all given a lot, those who have been at camp before, and granted it is not for everyone. Not everyone can go to that length of providing that kind of care, attention, sympathy, understanding and maintain useful communication skills while having fun, because when it comes down to it, we are a summer camp. When it gets broken down to its base components, we are in service to the children because we are a summer camp in its truest form. When people ask me what kind of summer camp we are, I respond “it is a place for a kid to realize their full potential of being a kid”. Where they are separated from all the influences of the outside world except for the pressure to be a kid, to be young and playful and imaginative, creative, willing to get dirty and hurt, willing to go on an adventure simply because you can. The willingness to forgo all of the daily planning of activities at camp and are able to create your own timeline, your own unique experience within that camp session.

And one of my biggest fears and concerns about this place is that no matter how much we do here at camp, no matter how much change and growth and development happens in the woods of Augusta, when the children return back with their everyday friends and family, they will return back to their old behavior and tendencies. I have seen this happen with campers, staff and even myself. One’s environment does an amazing job of shaping one’s identity. It is able to shape the path where you are able to walk and even though I give myself motivational messages “bring the funk into your neighborhood” “Be who you are at camp”, I am not going to lie, it is hard. So instead of judging myself based on how I act everywhere, I do know that the spirit, the essence of camp is with me everywhere. I do watch what words I’m using when I speak with others, I do look for the deeper meanings of “motivating methods” in workplaces, I do hear how others interact with me and how I interact with others. There are lessons from camp which I have never forgotten, there are memories and learnings from camp which will always be with me. No matter what country I’m in, no matter if I am working on a farm, in a toy store, in a restaurant, in an office, in a bank, there are constant traits and attributes which have been developed at CAMP AUGUSTA which will never leave me.