

I Love These Horrible Kids

Ugh! This was the only sound I could make after another 8-hour straight shift at the YMCA summer camp with the ankle biters I've been asked to watch over. It's been a long summer, and it was finally about to end. Forty hours every week, every week a new group of energetic children to look after and teach, and I've been doing this for three months. Needless to say, I was at my mental, emotional, and physical limit.

I sit under the outside pavilion where all the kids are gathered playing. I have less than 15 minutes left and I look over each kid and think about my time with them throughout the summer. That kid was the one who threw a ball at my head just because I asked him to stop chasing the girls with his booger. That one threw out her lunch everyday despite my constant protest. That's the girl I had to sit with for over an hour because she was crying about her friends wanting to play a different game. Then her friend was crying because she lost her water bottle. That one over there got a hit with a hockey stick so hard you could see a bleeding gash on his head. Oh! And there next to him is the boy who hit him. I had to sit with both for hours calling parents, writing up forms, and trying to play detective about how this even happened as they sat in stubborn silence or hysterical tears. I let out an inaudible sigh as I shuffled through all the memories of bad behaviors and exhausting incidents I've had to deal with just this summer.

Finally, I look at my watch and sigh again, this time in relief because I'm free to go for the last time. Just as I get up, I feel a tiny hand grab mine, and a small voice say, "Wanna play cards?" I look down to see a 7-year-old girl I've had in my group consistently throughout the summer. She was smiling as I said, "I'm sorry sweetie, but it's time for me to leave." She started to question how long, and when I would see her again. I was too tired to think so I told her this is my last day, and her eyes instantly looked heartbroken. It was then I remember my time with her. She was very shy at first, but I asked her to color with me and she started to really open up. We played cards, told jokes, and in time she started to go out and play tag with the other kids. Remembering her grow so much during the summer from a shy loner, to a smiling, laughing, girl who played with the others really warmed the deepest part of my heart.

I decided to take another look around. That kid lost his shoe, and when we found it together he hugged me so tight I couldn't breathe. That one asked me to draw a new picture every day, and then one day surprised me by making one of us holding hands. That's the group of girls I taught a dance routine to; they were so excited to perform it in front of everyone at the talent show, and after they did they all smiled and waved at me like they'd just won a Grammy. Yeah I had a lot of struggles, but I also saw so many inspiring and touching things that I instantly forgot about those hard times and all my fatigue.

Finally I look back down at her and smile as I said "I can stay a little longer." I played cards with her for a good hour after that, and when I left she cried, and I hugged her as I teared up a bit too at the loss. This was the moment I knew nothing meant more to me than being with children and helping them grow. I love these horrible, yet amazing kids.