

#RidgecrestCampsChangedMe

by Rachel Bergin Smith



Smith

After my junior year of college and convincing my parents I would be fine, I drove from my Louisiana home to a place I had never laid eyes on to serve as a camp counselor at Camp Crestridge for Girls, a girls' Christian camp near Asheville, North Carolina.

Relieved, I survived staff week! I remember lying in bed the night before the first campers arrived, and praying to God for help. What had I gotten myself into? I fell asleep with an overwhelming fear of my ability to lead campers as a Christian role model, and mostly of leading campers in a nightly devotion.

Opening Day was packed with exciting activities, but that evening it was time for me to lead my very first devotion. With campers sitting comfortably, I managed to open my Bible, read the verses, tell the story, and actually get a small bit of discussion from my mostly first-time campers. I closed with a prayer in time to hear the final ringing of the bell signaling lights out.

Lying in bed once again, I realized something was very different. I decided to say one last quiet prayer thanking God for a great first day with campers. Then as I was talking to God, I realized I was living out the verse my pastor used to close out most of his sermons, Matthew 28:19 & 20.

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you

always, even to the end of the age.”

Wait! Wow! God was with me! He indeed was with me! I got chills! I was warm at the same time. I wanted to “Shout it from the Mountain Top!” I felt God’s presence with me! Soft tears rolled down my face. I knew I was in the right place, at the right time, and He loved me!

He pushed me to convince my parents to allow me to take this job. He helped me through a very difficult staff week as “the new kid on the block.” He helped me have an awesome first opening day. He helped me with successfully completing my very first devotion.

He had put each step in motion over the last few months to get me to this moment, this very second, just to realize I am His, and He called me to spread His word.

With each nightly devotion I led, my confidence grew. I was learning to let God guide my thoughts and words to reach the spiritual hearts of the sweet campers.

That first summer at Crestridge in 1990 completely changed my life. I had accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior years earlier, but for the first time all aspects of my life were finally focused on Him!

Through my story, I have shared how God moved me to go, learn, teach, and share. I am one of thousands who have incredible stories of how God changed their lives through Camp Ridgecrest for Boys, Camp Crestridge for Girls, and the Ridgecrest Conference Center, all nestled in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

In late April, the longtime owner of all three properties, LifeWay Christian Resources, announced their desire to transfer the camps and the conference center to another owner. Please pray for the mission of the camps, “Impacting lives for God’s glory through discipleship and adventure,” to

continue as thousands of people just like me will experience God's love through these amazing summer camps.

Smith and her family attend Midway Church, Meridian. Edited for style.