

Suki Brassler

When did you first come to Tall Turf? What was going on in the world and your life?

In 1967, there was racial unrest in many cities in the United States. My dad was a pastor in downtown Detroit, and I was a sophomore in high school. I saw firsthand what was happening during the riots, and that affected me deeply.

My dad was part of the group of people that started Camp Tall Turf, so that's how I first got involved. I worked full summers in 1970, '71, '72, and '74, first as part of the kitchen staff and then as a counselor. The staff was intentionally diverse from the very beginning. In the 70s, a diverse staff was hard to find. There was a spirit of unity and teamwork at Tall Turf, though. Part of that was just survival. We had to work together to make camp happen for 128 kids or else it would fall apart. And we grew naturally together—we worked together, we played together, and we lived together, all in the name of Christ. By the end of the summer we really felt like brothers and sisters. Tall Turf was doing the work of racial reconciliation before it was verbalized in their mission statement.

Last summer we had a 50 year reunion, and some of the people I worked with back in 1970 were there. When we got back together it was like we hadn't missed a beat.

Talk about leaders that empowered you at Tall Turf.

While I was part of the kitchen staff, the head cook was an African American woman named Mrs. Tyson. She was a huge influence on all of the staff, but especially the kitchen staff. She lived out her faith in not only words, but actions. Everyday she would stop at the entrance to camp and pray for the camp that day. We had staff devotions and time for reflection, but I would say that Mrs. Tyson was the most influential for me in terms of spiritual development. She modeled what it looks like to walk with God.

How did you become a leader at Tall Turf?

Because my dad was a church planter, I had to step into leadership roles at church at a young age. But being responsible for eight kids for two weeks when you're a sophomore in college is a different story. I remember walking down the road outside of camp because one of the girls was going home, so we had to follow her!

I also learned leadership skills as second cook. I was in charge of the kitchen when Mrs. Tyson wasn't there, so I learned communication skills just by working with people.

How has your experience at Tall Turf shaped the rest of your life?



My experience at Tall Turf shaped where my family went to church. We intentionally chose diverse churches so we could worship with all of God's children. It shaped who we had in our home. It shaped my decision to work at a diverse Christian school. I can see the mission of Tall Turf in our kids, too. Our son, David, works at Tall Turf now. Our daughters are both teachers who have a heart for working with a diverse group of people.

What are some of your favorite Tall Turf traditions?

After an especially good meal, everyone would start chanting for the cooks to come out in a parade. The food was amazing. Mrs. Tyson cooked for 170 people like she cooked at home. We weighed kids at the start of camp and the end of camp, and they regularly gained weight.

Another tradition was the honors campfire. Every camper was recognized for something special on the last night of camp. Part of the honors campfire was the passion play, and that was always memorable.