



# Michael John Franklin

## **How long have you been part of the Tall Turf family?**

I was one of those kids who started going to Camp Tall Turf when I was six, even though you're supposed to be eight. If people asked me how old I was, I would say, "My mama told me to tell you I was eight."

I became a counselor at nineteen, and then I came back as a health officer a few years later. I was the youth camp director, and then I did explorer camp and staff devotions after that.

## **Talk about a challenging, but rewarding experience you had as a counselor.**

Tall Turf's mission is about reconciliation. When I was a counselor, I had eight guys in my cabin from all different backgrounds. I had white kids who had ideas of what black people are like and black kids who had ideas of what white people are like. I had kids from Detroit who didn't like kids from Chicago because the Pistons don't like the Bulls. There was tension. Sometimes I was in the middle of a conflict and I had to sit back and ask God to step in.

Camp is only about a week long. But the blessing is you're with everybody twenty-four seven. For that week, those are your guys. I wouldn't let them get on the bus to go somewhere until they could remember each others' names. When you call somebody by their name, that's an opportunity to grow. And at Camp Tall Turf, you have to lean on each other, because there will be tough days. After a few days, you'll be looking crazy because you haven't shaved. You'll be smelling funny because the shower in the cabin stopped working. You'll be itchy from mosquito bites. At the end of the day, we all heal and look out for each other. There was a natural growth as a community, but when we added God into it there was a speed growth. At the end of the ten days I saw guys exchanging phone numbers, and that was awesome for me.

## **What role did Tall Turf play in leading you to the work you do now?**

I always wanted to go to medical school—that was my goal. And God is good. He'll give you the desires of your heart, but he'll also lead you where *he* wants you to go. I ended up going to medical school, and I realized that I really like being around people and working with kids. I love working with kids who may not have had the mental health advantages that other kids have had. My passion for being in the trenches with people came from Camp Tall Turf.

So I became a licensed counselor. I use Tall Turf's focus on reconciliation in my counseling. Nine out of ten times, people with mental health issues say they don't hear from God, and that's why the mental health issue becomes the louder noise. So I help



them deal with the mental health issue first, and then I give them the opportunity to reconcile with God. That's been so successful in my practice.

### **From your experience at Tall Turf, what do you think makes a good leader?**

When I was the program director, the staff read a book about servant leadership together. We looked at Jesus' example of servant leadership and tried to put it into practice. The staff washed each others' feet. We cooked a big meal for the counselors after their training and served them. I tried to play with every kid so they would know I could have fun with them even though I was the director. Camp Tall Turf has instilled in me that I'm not above anybody.

### **What's your favorite camp tradition?**

It's not exactly a tradition, but I'm partial to PHAT man. I used to wear blue goggles, this t-shirt with the letters P.H.A.T., blue scrubs, and a cape. P.H.A.T. stands for "pray hard and trust." When I wasn't in costume, kids would always ask me, "aren't you PHAT man?" I would say, "no, I'm a mild-mannered version of him..." I would be there in costume for memory verses, and then I would sprint out the door as fast as I could.

My other favorite memory is when B. Campbell would come up on Sundays to talk to the kids. B would scream at the top of his lungs, "I love Jesus yes I do, I love Jesus how 'bout you?" He would get the camp so loud. B was an important part of Camp Tall Turf for me because he was around when I was a camper at age six, so it all came full-circle.