



Lydia Verstrate

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“Tall Turf is a special sort of family – one that exemplifies the beauties, complexities, and diversity in God’s creation—where I’ve worked at as a counselor for two years. My Tall Turf family has taught and challenged me in ways that my own family and schools do not. At Tall Turf, I’m in the presence of people who are wonderfully different from myself. Many of the friends I have at Tall Turf have a story distinct from mine, and a perspective that gives my own more to think about and grow from.

Experiences with my campers and coworkers prove reconciliation and restoration in God’s world possible –not easy or complete, but possible and active. As a counselor, part of my summer goal is to share as much love with my campers as I can in the short time I have with them. I want them to learn about God’s love through each other, for them to experience God’s love and joy in our differences. In their learning, I discover my own learning. My campers have taught and given me so much. They give me sparks of joy and show me the overwhelming power of God’s love, His love that trumps all.

So when my campers call another an absolutely offensive name, I can take that little hand and press it into mine, talk with her about what reconciliation means in that moment—what that long, complex word means for both of us right then. How those words push people apart, not me because I’m white and her because she’s black, but push *people* apart. And after a while of talking, she nods softly and her eyes shine with tears about to spill. She shares with me about her life. Now, she and I are understanding together. This little girl is teaching me the power of God’s love. We get up to go back in and join the group. She starts walking ahead of me, pauses, turns around, and gives me a quick, tight hug. In that moment, this little girl teaches me and shares the beauty I missed until Tall Turf. It causes me to pause and wonder how much more my perspective and understanding would have been enlarged and stretched had I come to Tall Turf as a little girl.

These shining beacons in a world of hurt prove Tall Turf’s mission and share God’s love with me. God’s love and grace far exceeds any issue we have with race. Each week Tall Turf plants seeds of tremendous progress. This past Sunday, my pastor’s sermon talked about the need to release pain for healing to happen. I can tell you, a lot of pain has been released in Hemlock cabin. Tall Turf provides a place where campers, as well as staff, share stories, experiences, pieces of their lives with each other. What a special place, that this release of pain can happen, and healing can follow. These stories are hard to tell and listen to. So we learn how to listen. This is where reconciliation begins.

Tall Turf has reshaped my thought process, taught me to take a step back, understand that we plant seeds that one day will grow, and to humbly walk with Him, all for the glory of God.