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A Decade of Chilawee Trails Camp

Camp Instructor Sarah Helmers of Kitchener Ontario tells of her Tenth Year in the back woods of Ontario where she has spent many an adventurous summer. The Chilawee girls camp was started by two Ottawa mothers in 1994 and has grown ever since.

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This summer I was the drama instructor at Camp Chilawee Trails for girls located near the town of Barry's Bay in Southern Ontario. It was a week-long camping experience in the wilds of the province. This year was a special one as the camp celebrated its 10th anniversary. When the week came to a close, the campers and staff were sad to leave.

Shannon Hale, 14, who was a camper this year told me, "I have only attended this camp for two years, but I have made friendships with amazing girls that will last a lifetime."

Madeleine Martin, 15, moved up to the level of Counselor in Training, or CIT. She explains, "During the week at Chilawee Trails, I had the opportunity to meet girls with the same values as me. We became good friends, and stayed in touch during the rest of the year. Through emails

and letters we supported and encouraged each other, while counting the days until we could meet up again at camp.”

When a week at camp Chilawee Trails finishes, the friendships we have made and the personal steps we have achieved always make it hard to say goodbye. We wonder whether we will make it next year, and more than anything we try to figure out how we can make the rest of the year resemble our uplifting experience at camp.

Since it began, this camp has always fostered that fundamental quality we young people need so much: the capacity to nurture real friendship and work on personal improvement. How does this happen? The mission and spirit behind Chilawee Trails is so strong and lasting because it is one that was inspired by a Saint.

It was the message of St. Josemaria that inspired two Ottawa mothers, Kathy Clark and Patty Dupuis, to set up a camp that would provide a setting where girls could relax and have fun together while at the same time going deeper into who they are as persons.

This mission has been realised in the experience of campers like Shannon who told me that camp impacted her life so much because at Chilawee “a girl can be herself, and not worry about being ‘cool’.” Also says Shannon, “the talks that the staff give campers really helped me to enhance my character by putting certain virtues into effect.”

Saint Josemaria Escriva taught people that ordinary life is means to becoming holy, that virtue and human perfection is found in doing ones work well, and in being a good

friend, husband, wife, son or daughter.

His message is for ‘down to earth’ people, who are in the world, and who love the world, and who try to raise all human activity to the highest level so that it can be offered to God.

Of all the literally ‘down to earth’ places to be, Camp Chilawee Trails is probably the most earthy, and it is there where many of the girls have learned how to put this message into practice.

The staff learn a myriad of virtues as they help the campers learn and have fun; Shannon says the main reason why camp is a success is that “the staff are awesome role models for the younger girls.”

Meaghan 16, Shannon’s older sister who was also a CIT says “I just loved having the chapel there”. The Blessed

Sacrament was reserved there during the day, and many of the campers and staff went to pray when they had a few minutes. The atmosphere at camp helps us to grow spiritually in a natural way.

After a few years it was made possible for a priest from the area to celebrate a Catholic Mass every morning of the camp.

In recent years, a priest of the Prelature of Opus Dei drives up every day to say Mass, hear confessions and give spiritual direction to those who want.

Catholics, Christians and non-Christians come every year to the camp and they are equally moved by the spirit of prayer that brings the rest of the day into focus.

Shannon remarked on her counselors that it's the staff that are "living the faith through example"

that inspire her to grow spiritually,
“because these girls have values,
morals, and goals for their lives.”

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