

Camper Speech – Final Banquet 2011 – Arch Fraser

First off I'd like to thank you all for honoring me with the camper speech for the 2011 Banquet. When I was asking around about what exactly the camper speech was I was told it was a reflection on how special camp is and what camp has imparted to you.

The original reason I wanted to come up to camp was primarily to escape the Texas heat, which often resembles binary code. But that initial reason has been forever changed after I went on my first canoe trip. It was a 3-day war canoe trip with Jacques B on Opeongo. I had so much fun on that one trip and it's kept getting better ever since. And once one good memory was created more just kept piling up.

I was thinking earlier today about how just walking back from breakfast to my tent at Sunnyvale [the summer's name for the newest Skid Row tents] brings back a whole slew of memories from the past 6 years: the time I almost got a death wrap on the Cree row tetherball pole; the first time I dared to climb the 20; my first tent on Skid row, tent 22; the Longhouse where we tried to stop people from using it as a highway because it was our "home".

However when it comes down to it camp is not about tetherball or tents, it's about the bonds you forge with the people you meet at camp and how those bonds hold up when you are out on a trip together, whether it's 3 days or 25. The closest friends I could ever ask for are the ones I've made out on the trail sharing hardships and joys and doing our best to support each other to the best of our abilities. That's what makes tripping special in my book.

On the Attawapiskat River it got to the point where I had the best 25 days of my life and most likely some of the strongest bonds I will ever have with other people were started on that trip. On the Attawapiskat River I learned just how tight the bonds formed by tripping could grow. One night on the Skat' Jake Kennedy was in charge of making the night's meal of spinach, at the same time we were having a very important game of Euchre, so he was making dinner unsupervised. When he told us that dinner was ready we looked up and noticed only half a big bucket of pasta with the consistency of peanut butter and Jake smiling and telling us "I hope you like it thick". He had dumped all the water after the pasta

finished cooking and turned what normally would have been two buckets of pasta into half a big bucket. When we turned that bucket over in the air it just stuck there. That's how tight bonds on trip can get. They can get as tight as spinach cooked by Jake Kennedy clinging to the sides of the big bucket.

Later this summer, on the car ride back from my CITIT trip in Temagami, I was thinking about how different friends at camp are from friends at home. This summer I've become better friends with people at camp that I just met at the beginning of the 98th season than people I have known since first grade. At camp you don't have to speak the same language, go to the same country, or take the same kinds of classes. You have to know what it's like to paddle and to feel a tumpline pressing into your head. And these qualifications result in a much more real and raw friendship than any I have ever experienced, because these requirements strip away the outside layers of a person and really show you what they are like on the inside.

I know that sounds sappy but it is the truth. When people keep pushing themselves for you, when they wallop your pannakin because you have foot rot or comfort you when you screwed up and forgot a white gold, that show of caring and empathy really changes you and makes you a better person. Without camp I wouldn't have access to those experiences and I would be a much worse person. And no matter how long you have gone to camp or how short, that knowledge to be a better person and a better friend -- that you somehow unlock by going into the woods with a bunch of other dudes -- will never leave you.

Thank you all.