

From: jderusso [<mailto:jderusso@earthlink.net>]
Sent: Sunday, February 20, 2011 8:27 PM
To: james@seasirvine.org
Subject: amazing

James, I am not a Facebook guy but don't send a lot of stamped mail anymore either. I hope an email expressing my thoughts will be viewed as sincerely as any handwritten note. I should probably take the time to construct a well-written email that flows properly and is grammatically correct (you certainly deserve that)but my fear is if I take that approach, you will never receive my sentiment. So please pardon what may be a stream of consciousness approach.

First, this weekend was wonderful for Cassie. I dropped her off at her mom's right after the retreat on Sunday so we didn't spend a lot of time discussing every aspect, but then again, we didn't need to for me to understand how she felt. I could see it in her face from mid-morning Saturday throughout the rest of the weekend. You and your team did an amazing job establishing an immediate connection with her. As I think about her experience as I am typing, I am surprisingly getting welled-up. I truly feel badly for any parent who doesn't have the opportunity to see their child experience these things first hand. I can't imagine a greater gift from God. I fully understand that pretty quickly the high she has will mostly evaporate because of life's trying complexities, but knowing Cassie as I do, she will often reflect upon this weekend with a smile in her heart and that, my friend, will last forever!

As to my experience this weekend, well, it was nothing less than magical. In effort to avoid a 5-page email, I will be as succinct as possible but really do not want to risk accurately expressing the sincerity of my feelings by being too brief.

Probably like most parents, while I am with kids all the time (outside of work), this type of weekend certainly was a little out of my element. Frankly, as I was driving to the Retreat, I was nervous and a little intimidated.....did I over-commit and was going to be less than I was needed to be for a successful weekend for the kids? was my recurring thought. Well, my fears we quickly allayed. When I arrived, some of the team was already there and their energy and enthusiasm pulled me in like some sort of vortex. I wasn't sure where the weekend would take me but I knew I had made the right decision and that I was in the right place.

To some degree, the whole weekend is blurred together and yet to another degree, I remember each and every aspect. Friday night was so wonderfully odd..... small group sessions, sharing of personal thoughts with people who barely knew each other beforehand, dancing, and singing (which initially seemed awfully often, and toward the middle seemed right, and toward the end, well, ...I was pining for it!!) Saturday was a long day for most but as I look back, I realize I wouldn't and we shouldn't sacrifice any part of it. The interactive games that at first seemed like things to keep the kids busy, I soon realized was the means(as intended)of the children learning more about themselves, their relationships and reliance upon others and God's presence in all that they do.

Sunday brought beautiful sunshine and it was appreciated but it was not needed. The brightness of everyone's spirit carried the day. Ending the retreat with a beautiful mass for all to praise God in a formal assembly, with parents looking upon their children in awe, well, that was more emotional to me than I can express.

James, you have thanked me many times for my participation and I appreciate your gratitude. The reality is, however, it is I who "owes" (I know that word bugs you :) you a debt of gratitude. As I think about young Will Miner who stepped up as our team leaderand a leader he was, and how he supported our team emotionally and physically, how young girls like Alexa brightened our discussions with their light-heartedness and good nature, how our first year members, like Katie Mitchell made us laugh and smile throughout the weekend, or Tim Shaw who broke out of his shell and became our skit leader for the countdown, or how experienced members like R.J. courageously opened up during reconciliation with some personal life challenges.....my high too may evaporate like Cassie's but I will never forget my special connection with these kids.

This weekend was magical, James, and I thank God, literally everyday as part of my daily prayers, that God has brought you into the lives of my children and me. He has chosen his messenger well. You are a guiding light to many and while I know you are a humble man, I hope you often have the chance to reflect upon your decision of years ago to give more, for you have given to many, which like the seeds we sowed this weekend, have multiplied 30x, 60x, 100x and many more times.

Thank you, Jay V. De Russo