

In the beginning...

Sunday morning. Most of my things were packed the night before, so I thought I would make it on time without a problem. Big mistake. The few things left still occupied enough time to make me about 20 minutes late. There were no worries of course about missing the bus as leaders were scheduled to be there before dropoff time, so instead I got there in the midst of things. Good thing I was only assigned to help load gear onto the bus. At about 9AM everyone was checked in and we were off on our four-hour bus ride to Michigan. The kids watched videos all the way there, but I later learned that our friends from Iowa only got to watch one video- on the way home. In case you missed it, they are from Iowa and therefore had a trip time over double ours. That means a lot of time remained for social activities, to put it mildly. Anyway, we arrived at about 1PM (time zone change, you know) and were welcomed by big banners held by a cheering staff. After unloading and moving into our cabins- I had a group of six plus a junior leader- we headed to the swim front for swimming tests and a fort-building competition. Note the non-mention of lunch. The kids brought their own lunches, and I even remembered my own this year (it was last year or the year before that I had left it sitting on the freezer at home). This year I was a representative for the army team, moving out of the air force from the last two military themes prior two and four years ago.

Starting a new paragraph just because I can, the fort contest began while various cabins two-by-two (or one by one in the case of a few very large girl cabins) took their swim tests. The sand forts (remember- this is a swim front so there was a beach) generally had moats around them because digging in the sand was probably the easiest thing for the kids, but there were buckets for making buildings like garages for tanks and

whatnot. No air strip this year, though I suppose they could have done a helipad had one of us had thought of it. The Iowa team, the marines once again, was not present for much of this but they did arrive in time to take 2nd place. Army ended up 3rd, the highest we would ever get this week outside of the upfront games. As for the swim tests, just about every cabin has its non-swimmer. Mine had three, half the kids. Well, it doesn't mean quite as much for this age group as water activities are limited anyway.

Since this along with cabin check-in and welcome/rules took up most of the afternoon, we can move on to after dinner. Throughout the week post-dinner would mean the daily game competition, but for Sunday we just moved on to the teaching time. It was here the theme for the week, the armor of God in Ephesians 6, was introduced. Each day would focus on a different part of the armor but not until Monday. the format was typical of a weekend service, but longer. Game activity time (the competition game in the case of this week, gym or crafts in the case of weekends) followed by worship, teaching, and small groups. Mornings would replace the field game with an up front game- unfortunately I missed most of these as I took this time to put in my contact lenses while the Nico, my junior leader, stayed with the kids. This first small group time was a great way to really start to know the kids, most of whom I already knew through small group time over the weekends. This year they tried to keep small groups from the weekend when possible- a matter simplified by there being three service times plus Iowa to make the four teams, each team then being divided into 4th/5th grades and boys/girls. four cabins per team. Since I stuck with my 4th-graders from last year, my cabin was all 5th grade.

Finally, there was free time on the courts where kids could

play tetherball, nuke-em (played on a volleyball court where any number can play catch with the ball- dropping or missing causes an "explosion" so someone is out), four-square, trampoline basketball, regular basketball, or just hang around and talk or play in the sand. They also had the opportunity to buy treats at the canteen. I was disappointed to see that they doubled the price on pop this year, though I think they also lowered ice cream a bit though I didn't buy any. They told me that the higher price on drinks balances with the loss they take on ice cream, and keeping most things at \$1 just makes managing the accounts that much easier. I can't argue with that, but I did make sure to stick with the one 20-oz offering all week- Dr. Pepper. Everything else was in cans. Of course, being right before bed, many kids chose Mt. Dew... Speaking of bed, it was a little difficult getting my six to sleep that night. I could blame the Dew, but it was really mostly the excitement of being there. Unfortunately Steve, the man in charge and two cabins away, had to visit our cabin not once but twice that evening. Oops...

more to come.