

To Spring Creek Lodge I Go

By the time I arrived at the turn off to Spring Creek at about eight am on August 11, 1999 I had not seen my son Kellen in fourteen months and nine days. It had been a long time and much had taken place. I had graduated Discovery, Focus and Visions. I had made many new friends and cried many tears. I had thought, at times, that this day would never arrive, and now it was here.

When I found out I would soon see Kellen I was hit by a flood of emotions. Fear, excitement, joy, happiness, sadness, fear, excitement, fear, etc. It still seemed like a dream to me even at the point that I was moments away from the actual event. Reality was hard to grasp.

As Gayle and I set out on the long trip to Montana, I decided to create a purpose for my trip. I knew that fear was standing in the wings raising its withered hand saying, "Me me, I will show you the way". Fear wouldn't do this time. I chose for my purpose to be full of joy and to spread it around. My purpose served me well. I would say to myself, often while pounding myself on the chest, Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy.

We drove up to Spring Creek and stopped at the trailer that serves as the first destination for visitors. We went into the trailer and introductions were made and that we were there to visit our son, Kellen. Tears filled the eyes of those in the trailer.

The trailer people sent someone to get Kellen. I looked out the window anxiously. They had told Kellen they wanted to talk to him about an incident that had taken place the night before. He didn't know we were coming.

Several minutes went by and then I saw a tall nicely dressed, head up, eyes bright, shape walking toward me. It was Kellen. I told Gayle, "There he is." I was strangely calm. I started toward the door and said to the in charge trailer shape, without really caring what the answer was, "May I go out there?" I don't remember the answer and I headed out the door and made a right turn down the steps. I don't remember what happened next. What I do remember was hugging my precious son against the trailer, my arms tightly wrapped around him, my face against his face.

Gayle says that Kellen started running the moment he saw me and then we crashed against the trailer, his momentum carrying us several feet until we hit the side of the trailer.

After awhile I was vaguely aware that Gayle was there, and I let her hug Kellen for a moment. But then I hugged again. I touched his face, rubbed his hair and smelled him. Boy, did I miss the smell of him. I became aware that there were several people standing near us, all crying. They stood for awhile and then came over and hugged us all and introduced themselves. Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy.

Kellen introduced us to everyone including Alex K., Rachael R., Carmen N. and Jason. Jason is Kellen's best buddy at Spring Creek. Gayle and I have talked to Jason's parents, who live in California several times. It was great to meet this wonderful young man who means so much to Kellen.

We met staff members, many of whom told us great stories about Kellen and what a great, powerful, awesome person he was. After a while we were allowed to leave. We spent four days with Kellen and every moment was wonderful. The wait was long but the reward was great!

On Friday Kellen wanted us to go back to Spring Creek, after we picked him up and took him to breakfast, and go to his Courage Family group session. Courage was Kellen's family for fourteen months. He had told us how much he had missed them since he made junior staff and was moved to another building and assigned to another family. On the first day several of the Courage family members had given Kellen hugs when they saw him with his parents. They were so happy for him.

At group we sat in a circle with twelve young men, Gayle, me the Family Father and the Family Rep. We introduced ourselves, the boys said their name, their I Am statement, and then, most of them would say what level they were on and the seminars they had graduated. They all ended with how long, to the month and day, they had been in the program. When it was my turn I was proud to say my

I Am statement and add my purpose. I proudly said I was a discovery, Focus and visions graduate. I ended with I had been in the Program three days. They all laughed.

The boys had no trouble sharing and giving feedback. I sat in awe as Kellen gave his best friend feedback, from his heart. I also gave feedback and was reminded of my friend Pat's reference to being a Jedi Knight. Several of the boys cried during the group session. I was sad when the group session was over. I could have sat and listened all day. These kids are powerfully honest.

That night we went to the monthly Spring Creek pep rally. The Families all do a head count and the different shifts of junior staff do skits. The kids are funny, honest, and outrageous. Lots of inside jokes and subtle points. You had to pay attention. I was blown away. I can only say it was a riot.

When they got too loud someone would raise a fist, the signal for quiet, others would follow. Cameron then came to the middle and said, "Let's all remember why you are here. You're here to go home." It got real quiet. He continued, "During this next song I want all of you to get in a circle." Then he played "Lean on Me". When it was over the kids, and us, were in a circle arms entwined. Cameron, who was also in the circle said, "Now I want you to go to bed, and all of you are on silence until noon tomorrow. I want you to think about why you're here, what you want to do with your life, how you are showing up every day, and really take a look at yourself." The kids went out in silence. I slept very well this night.

On our way up to drop Kellen off the last night we made that turn onto the Spring Creek Road. Kellen then gave us a pep talk, about how it wouldn't be that long till we saw each other again, how he was happy, he was going to do whatever it takes to get to PC!, do home visits, and then PC2. "It would be okay, dad," he said.

We came around the last corner and there was a deer with a little one next to her. Kellen said that it was Two Shot. Two Shot had two bullet wounds, you could see them, that had healed, after having been treated by someone at the school. Now Two Shot hung around the school all the time. She seemed very calm as we drove past. Ditto for me.

I hugged Kellen good-bye and cried. Through my tears I said, "I really am happy," and he whispered back, "So am I."

By John Dean (Father)