

## Gillian Allen's wilderness adventure as a Matt Climb's Scholarship recipient

That was one of the best experiences of my life. It made me remember how much I love to be outside, under the stars, in the fresh air.

I left my house June 24th. I had a week of vacation with my family, up north in Oregon and Washington. Without ever going home, I went to the bus stop in Redding. It didn't hit me that I was about to be left with no one I knew for over week until my mom and sister were driving away from the McDonald's parking lot. Before I knew it, I was on a bus, watching *The Goonies*, later *Holes*.

There was this girl, Silvia, who had gotten picked up at the same time as me, so I sat with her. I was hoping to make a friend, and I did. The funny thing about us was that we looked a lot alike. We had hair about the same color and length, we both wore sun hats (of similar styles), and we were about the same height. And so I endured a two hour bus ride to the drop-off point.

When we got there, Silvia and I ended up in different tribes, but we still did stuff together during the week. The hike up to base camp was really quite nice, even through the occasional cloudburst. After a few hours of mild hiking, the dinner of spaghetti and tofu was much appreciated. I began to learn my counselor's and fellow camper's names. Beth and Bryce, and Lydia, Jiashuen, Sean, Zeke, Elise, and Will. We had the best tribe in the whole camp!

The first couple of days, we learned the routine and found our way around camp. We experimented with sleeping arrangements and took our swim tests. The lake is so cold! There was snow nearby, none on Lakeside but some icy patches Creekside. I went to lots of activities, at the Craft Shack carving spoons, kayaking on the lake, or going on epic scavenger hunts. I had a really fun afternoon, one day when none of the activities seemed appealing, leaping from rock to rock all the way across camp from the middle of Creekside, past the Craft Shack, and up to my tribesite at Lake 4. I never touched the ground!

The day before the big hike was 'Special Day'. We got woken up by farmhands singing about how wonderful corn was, and went to a breakfast of "corn": processed cereals and 'cow processed corn juice'. At the morning meeting the counselors were cursed by the 'Phantom of the Valley' and had to sing a different genre of music all day, until we had found the conductor's baton and a special song to lift the curse. That night, after the curse had been lifted, we had a hoe-down and do-si-doed for a good long time. Unfortunately, in all that dancing I managed to twist my ankle, and it hurt to go up anything.

Then it was time for the 3-day Choice Hike. I was so nervous. I'd never been backpacking before, and I had my twisted ankle to worry about. I hadn't gotten to sign up for the one that my counselors were leading, and that my whole tribe apart from me and Will were going on. That was a relief in a way, because it was the hardest hike and had a lot of cross-country, while the one to Virginia Lake that I was going on was mostly on the Pacific Crest Trail and therefore much flatter and better for my ankle. But it also meant that I missed an intense bonding experience with my tribemates, intenser than normal as I will explain later.

So morning came and I packed up and we left. I was at the back the whole time because of my ankle, but I wasn't horrendously far behind. Several hours of hiking later, we reached the point where we were to get off the PCT and do a little cross-country. Or so we thought. Neither of the counselors leading us had ever actually been there. Bird, who has a good sense of direction, was carefully studying the map. He was so excited to do the cross-country that we got off early and ended up back on the PCT. But we eventually got down there.

There was snow at the other end of the lake, and I was really cold at night, but it was beautiful. I didn't jump in because, as I told Bird, that lake was pure snowmelt. The second night we were halfway to base camp at an abandoned mine site, and we were told a creepy horror story about it, luckily *after* we got back to camp.

When we got back, I learned about the crazy adventure that had been had by the rest of my tribe.

They had met a guy at the site they were going to stay at, and so they had to move a little farther from their lake. Later, they came back and he had broken his leg, so Bryce and Beth used the radio to get the camp to use the satellite phone to call in a CHP helicopter to evac him. Elise got the descent on her camera, so I saw the repeated attempts of the pilot to land the helicopter on a tiny stretch of flat rock. Once they had gotten the 'copter down, the copilot Tony Stanley started to get out before the rotor had completely stopped turning, and it struck him in the head!

He was knocked immediately unconscious, and I think the back of his head came off. Luckily for him, the hiker, Jeremy Kilburn, was an ICU doctor on leave, from Afghanistan I think, so he hobbled down the hill he was waiting on and started treating Tony, with the help of Bryce and Beth. Eventually Tony was stabilized and they unloaded the copter to make room for all of the necessary people to get him to a hospital. My tribemates loaded up the 'copter equipment into their packs and ran down the mountain to the emergency evac truck that had come to pick them up, minus Beth, who was helping in the helicopter.

So after I got back from my thoroughly enjoyable but comparatively uneventful hike, I found my tribe bonded by trauma without me. The last few days passed quickly, slipped away too fast, and suddenly it was the last day and we were waking up at 5:00 AM and hiking back down the mountain.

Then a six hour bus ride, with *Percy Jackson*, *The Princess Bride*, and *National Treasure* to fill the empty time slot. At last we reached the Palo Alto stop, and I was tumbling off the bus and into our car, off to a *month long* summer program at UCSC, without going home.

I had quite a summer, and going to Camp Unalayee was my favorite part of it. It was so amazing. Thank you so much for your assistance in this endeavor. I felt so good while I was there, and I wish I could have stayed all summer. I wish I could do it again, and I hope I will do something like this again in the future. Maybe I'll go back next year!