

Work Trip Experience
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John: We've really been looking forward to speaking to you about our Work Trip experiences.

Nelle: Yeah, we both love speaking in front of large audiences.

I think my first introduction to Work Trip was when I was only in 1st grade. My brother John was a freshman, and he and a couple of his buddies decided to take part in the Work Trip talent show here at church. They did a hilarious impression of a Martin Short, Steve Martin, and Chevy Chase musical number from the popular movie, Three Amigos. Thank goodness I was only in grade school at the time....I was too young to be embarrassed by my "freshman brother" singing and dancing. I can't imagine what the upper classmen were thinking.

John: I suppose I was too young to be embarrassed as well, because that's certainly not an act I would reprise today. In any event, my first trip was to Indianapolis, and the group was much smaller then. We only had about 35 or 40 kids on that trip, which seems like a small group compared to the two trips I've been on as an advisor. Like so many people, after that first Work Trip I was hooked, and knew it would be a regular part of my summer routine throughout high school. What I didn't know was that I would have the good fortune of being invited back as an advisor upon my graduation from college.

What made this opportunity even more meaningful was that it would be my sister Nelle's first trip. Of course I jumped at the chance.

Although I had been on four trips in high school, as I was about to embark on our trip to Higgins Lake I felt a little bit like a freshman again, not knowing exactly what to expect. Fortunately there were some familiar faces in JJ and Ted, Art, Jimmy May, Judy and Donna, and I knew I could turn to them for direction as I had on trips past.

Apparently I lucked out or Kristie was trying to take it easy on me, because somehow as a rookie I ended up getting to bunk up with Jim Mynhier and the 15 freshman boys! It was a beautiful cabin on the lake about the size of my college dorm room. I'm sure Nelle probably didn't feel quite as lucky, knowing that I would be living with her friends that week with my pension for occasionally snoring.

Nelle: I took my first work trip to Higgins Lake Michigan as a freshman, 2 years ago. I was nervous and unsure of what to expect. Of course I had heard many stories and experiences from my 2 older brothers and the 4 work trips they had each gone on, but nothing can completely prepare you for your first work trip.

I remember eating breakfast on the first morning in Higgins Lake. I was assigned to be off-site, working on a house about 15 minutes away from our camp. Kristie explained to everyone that morning that if you were off site, you needed to pack a lunch to bring with you. I guess I was too nervous of what to expect that first day, because when lunch time rolled around I realized that I had completely forgotten to pack a lunch. Of course I was the only freshman on the site that day and the only one who had forgotten a lunch. Of course I had also forgotten money that day, so when one of the advisors had to make a run to the hardware store to buy more primer and I went with her to get a sandwich...she had to pay for it. Was it a big deal to her or any one else on the site that day? No, of course not. Or was it as funny as my brother made it out to be when I told him about it later that night? Well maybe, but....that is exactly what work trip is about: everyone coming together and working as a family. After all, those experiences are what make work trip that much more memorable.

John: I'm sure my mom probably thought I was going along to make sure things like that didn't happen, but it's a good story that I can still tease Nelle about nonetheless. Being an advisor on Work Trip has given me a great opportunity to share these special weeks with my sister who is 8 years younger...it's not something many older brothers have the chance to do and I look forward to sharing her last trip with her next summer. I can't wait for Senior Night.

Coming back as an advisor has also given me a very comfortable place to get to know many adults from the congregation that I might not have otherwise connected with. They are not only people that the high schoolers can learn from and look up to, but also individuals that I respect, admire, and am proud to now call friends. The younger advisors, myself, Dave Mayhall, Morgan Finley, Allison Martinat...I don't think Ted Johnson can be considered one anymore...exist in a very unique space in the Work Trip community. Of course our skill, talent and sense of responsibility are on par with even the most seasoned advisors...after all that's why we've been invited back at such a young age...but we are also not so far removed from our own high school work trips that we don't know how the kids are

feeling. Some of my fondest memories and closest friends were made on my high school work trips, and it is special getting to see my sister and 100 of her peers come together every summer to do the very same thing.

Not many of my twenty-something friends can believe that I give up 5 of my 10 vacation days every year to sleep on an air mattress in a gym with 130 people...and if you haven't been on a Work Trip you might not either. But as long as Kristie and the youth group will have me, it is my pleasure to continue to make the journey with them. Perhaps the most important thing that I've learned from my six work trip experiences, is that helping others brings out the best in people. I'm delighted God has blessed me with the opportunity to join this special group for one memorable week every summer in making a difference in the lives of so many.

Nelle: I've loved having my brother with me on my freshman and junior year work trips and wish he could have come with me sophomore year. It was very comforting to know he was always there for me if I ever needed anything. But even when he wasn't there for my sophomore trip, I felt the same way. There always is an advisor available to talk to or someone to help you when you need it. In those 7 or so days of work trip each year, from the minute we meet at the church, airport, or wherever it may be, a family of more than 100 people is made. The sense of community that the work trip spirit seems to create is a very great one.

This past work trip that we took to Ocean Springs really stands out to me as the most memorable work trip I've been on so far. Of course all the places we visit need our help, that is why we are there; but the damage Hurricane Katrina caused is UNREAL. You can literally see destruction everywhere you go, and there is still so much work to be done. As our family of 130 people or so set out each day to work, it became clear to me that the people of the Gulf Coast had created the same sense of family as we had. It seems ironic that such great disasters and such hard times can bring people so close together, but that is exactly what we all witnessed this past June. It amazed me how strong the people we met were. They had lost everything, and yet their spirit remained unbroken. This one work trip served to bring one part of my family together, brought one part of this church family together, and brought one small part God's family together to work towards a common goal and for that I am thankful.