

The first wedding that I planned was in no way a traditional wedding. Ten eager little girls decorated the printed invitations with sequins, buttons, and markers. The same energetic hands prepared the wedding feast, consisting of bagged lunches, blintz soufflé, and of course a layer cake. On the big day I looked around with excitement. Again, I noticed something odd about this wedding. All the participants and guests appeared about four feet high. The "groom" had long hair pinned up with brown lines on her face (was that supposed to be a beard?) The wedding location, a back yard with a swing set and a wading pool, seemed far from romantic. This wedding however was not supposed to be one of those types of weddings. As I pressed the "PLAY" button on the tape recorder I knew that ten 4-6-year-old girls cared deeply about this wedding. Despite the absence of a reason for celebration, I pulled all the girls into the circle and we started dancing and clapping to the music. The energy that went into the preparation on previous days could finally be appreciated. My campers and I not only celebrated the accomplishment of the mock wedding, we celebrated the fun and excitement we experienced for the first three weeks in Camp Glitter Girls. I had begun preparing for Camp Glitter Girls over four months before by budgeting, sending out fliers, confirming registration and finally making sure that every camper would have the time of her life. As I danced, I celebrated the times I almost lost my patience but didn't, the times that I planned activities late into the night because I knew that only an organized schedule would ensure the success of my camp.

The lessons I had learned from previous summer camps contributed greatly to this camp's success. At the age of thirteen, I first ran a camp for eight children. The next year a friend and I co-managed a camp for twenty children at a small school campus. Finally at the age of fifteen I created my most challenging summer camp with thirty-five children. In just three years the size of my camp tripled and so did the life lessons. I not only carried the responsibility for my own "bunk," but with my co-manager I hired other counselors, arranged busing to and from field trips, managed a \$15,000 budget, and ensured that thirty-five children had a fun summer. The overnight to San Diego, water fun, cheers, a carnival to end the summer and many other events definitely ensured that my campers had a great summer. However, at the end of those six weeks, new ideas floated in my mind about how I would manage a camp next time.

The camp's increased size added new dimensions to management. On one occasion I firmly reminded a mother of her financial obligations to the camp when she started bargaining. When counselors failed to perform as expected I was required to separate friendships and business. With a much wider variety of campers, I dealt with behavioral problems among the campers. This even included involving the parents in the case of two unusually unruly boys. While a troubled girl with attention deficit disorder in my "bunk" needed special attention, I had to make sure that none of my other campers felt slighted in any way. As the summer progressed I learned how sometimes I just have to put my foot down and say "no." Sometimes extra attention is not always best for a difficult child. Most importantly, I had an experience in the real world of business that taught me how to stand up for myself and address interpersonal and administrative problems.

This past summer as I looked around the yard at the beaming faces flushed from dancing, I realized that Camp Glitter Girls was the culmination of all the experiences and lessons in which I partook since my first camp four years earlier. I learned how to make a camp with ten campers far more fun and even more profitable than a camp for thirty-five children. Instead of marketing to a broad range of ages, I marketed Camp Glitter Girls to a specific age group of girls. The smaller group facilitated a close and familiar atmosphere, not to mention a decrease in problems. Instead of focusing on the quantity of campers, I focused on the quality of my campers' experience, and we all reaped the benefits. The mock wedding at my previous camps never exuded the energy and spirit of the one at Camp Glitter Girls. As the dancing subsided and I heard oohs and aahs over the cake, I looked at every single girl in the room. I did not just see cute adorable faces; rather I saw how each girl challenged me in her own way and unconsciously taught me her own special lesson.

As I turn towards my future and make life-defining decisions, I look back upon my experiences with my campers for inspiration and direction. I view my upcoming years at university as an opportunity to further use the skills I acquired in running summer camps. The diversity, academic excellence, and broad array of classes and extracurricular activities at UCLA will provide an environment that will challenge me to use the leadership, initiative, creativity and interpersonal abilities that I used at Camp Glitter Girls.