

# SPECIAL MOMENTS



Erika Rios first attended Camp Asbury for a weekend family camp program when her boys, Randy and Erik, were about 4 and 5 years old. Sheila, a close family friend, encouraged them to join her for a weekend of exploring the outdoors and growing closer to God, but Erika was skeptical. She was nervous that Randy and Erik would be disruptive and that the jump from city living to the 450 acres of wooded camp property would be too much for them to handle.

After the weekend was over, Erika wasn't convinced that she would be back. But the next year, when Sheila invited them again, Erika found herself saying yes. She continued to say yes every August when family camp rolled around again. After several years of attending, Erika started to feel comfortable at Camp Asbury. She worried less and less about how her children would be viewed by other families, which is something she was constantly anxious about in other social settings.

During an earlier summer, Erika was just standing at the edge of the water talking with another parent, and watching their children play together. She felt totally at ease, and she could feel something drawing her back to Asbury, even though it was an uncomfortable experience at first.

Once Erika accepted Camp Asbury as a home away from home, she started to feel her connection with God grow. "Camp is place of peace, joy, relaxation, and connecting with my creator," she said. "I am used to the hustle and bustle of city life, but as soon as I step foot on Camp Asbury's property, I feel a release of tension, and a wave of peace wash over me. I feel accepted the way I am and loved the way I am."

Erika values sharing meals together at camp. "That doesn't happen at home. We didn't have a dinner table at our apartment so camp was the only place that we could do that. Sharing that moment around the table was priceless. Camp provided those opportunities to have those special moments that I haven't been able to get anywhere else."

After years of attending family camp, Erik and Randy began asking if they could attend a week-long summer camp. While the boys were excited to attend camp, they were a little apprehensive about being away from mom for 6 whole days. "I hoped they would make new friends and grow more comfortable in the natural world-- something they don't get much exposure to in their everyday lives. It was the best feeling coming to pick them up on Friday and seeing how excited they were to tell stories about the week. It meant a lot to see them just sitting in the grass!"

Randy came home from camp and started to pray before mealtimes, something that he never did before. He still practices daily. Erik learned to fish at camp and fell in love with it! The boys continue to tell stories about their experiences at camp, both the good ones of new friendships, campfires and smores, and the not so good ones of flipping canoes!

"I want to provide experiences for my kids that they will remember and can talk about their whole lives. And things that they will grow and learn from going forward. Camp Asbury is a foundation for them, and if it's God-centered, it's even better."