

Our First Sleep-Away Camp

By Sophie Braccini

Would you send your eight year old child to an overnight co-ed camp? When I looked for a fun overnight camp for my girls in the vicinity I found the co-ed, all sports over-night camp at Saint Mary's College. Close enough to feel safe, yet still an overnight camp to give them the thrill of being on their own and to us, the parents, a little time to ourselves.

The girls shared a room complete with a microwave, a fridge and shared bathroom.

It would be an understatement to say they were a little bit excited as they put their clothes away, set up their sleeping bags and prepared to send us on our way. We lingered as long as we could to be sure everything was in order but we were running out of time. One last "put all your sports equipment in this drawer, are you sure you have everything you need and how does the bathroom shower work?" "Yes, Mom, yes, Dad, now it's time for you to go." How could they be so ready to see us go?

The girls didn't take their cell phones with them. We regretted it almost immediately when we realized they might not call us for a



Happy Campers!

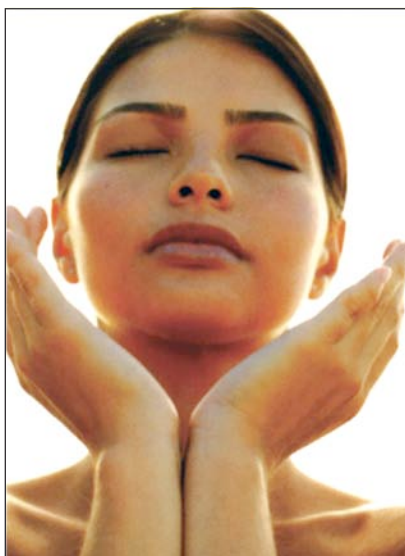
week! Luckily, they found a way, and called us 3 times during their stay.

At the end of the session, parents were invited to share a barbecue and attend their last game. The final ceremony was the opportunity for us to meet Randy Farris, the Camp Manager, who has run the camp for 30 years. We got to meet our girls' favorite counselors, Randy and Allie, two Saint Mary's students who coached and supervised them through their days at camp.

The all-sports camp is a very intensive camp. From 7:30 AM to 8 PM the day is packed with games and activities. The girls practiced tennis, swimming, handball, soccer, dodge ball and hockey. Campers range from 8 to 14 years

old and they're separated by age for activities. Counselor Allie says, "It can get a little rowdy but those are good kids, we never have serious problems." Free time comes after 8PM and that's when new friendships are formed. The campers come from all over the East Bay and beyond; one of my daughters made friends with a girl from Seattle.

After the final goodbyes were said and the bags were safely stored in the car, the stories started gushing. The final word went to the girls: to the question would you do it again, we got an enthusiastic "Yes!" I went online and registered them for another overnight camp, this time a soccer and a volleyball camp. They'll be ready for college by the time summer is over.



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