

Maria Baker
ACE Internship: Episcopal Diocese of West Texas,
Mustang Island Family Camp
Summer 2016

When I introduced myself on the first day of my internship in Port Aransas, Texas, I was met with quite a few responses from my new coworkers. Many were surprised that I had chosen to move to a new state for 3 months, a state that I had only flown over once before. Some wondered what brought me to the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas, and, to be honest, I wondered the same exact thing. I read over the description of Mustang Island Family Camp on TigerNet that same afternoon, looking for the words that brought me halfway across the country for a summer. Luckily, it wasn't hard to find them. With an emphasis on family time away from the distractions of modern-day life, Mustang Island Family Camp has been the perfect place to get my feet wet in the field of environmental education. From environmentally conscious crafts and beach activities to my involvement with the Wetlands Education Center at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute, this summer was chock full of experiences that invigorated my passion for environmental education. At each session of Family Camp, the staff prepared for a barrage of 15-20 families of all ages. I was tasked with many jobs throughout the summer, but sought to focus each one on the environment as much as possible. All staff took turns working in the kitchen, on the beach, and in the arts and crafts room. Although these were not exactly advertised in the description of the internship, each job was fulfilling and made my summer a well-rounded one. On my days off, I had the chance to work at the University of Texas Marine Science Institute as a summer intern. On Mondays, I volunteered at the Animal Rehabilitation Keep, or the

ARK. At the ARK, I assisted in caring for animals that were in the process of being rehabilitated by various ARK staff members. From baby birds to sea turtles to fully-grown pelicans and a feisty duck, I was able to learn how to care for all of them. On Tuesdays, I worked at the Wetlands Education Center to guide groups on tours of the manmade loop that showcases the natural environment of the Texas Gulf Coast. Prior to moving to Texas, I had no idea what jetties were, why oysters like to grow up in clumps, or how long a railroad vine can grow every day given the right conditions, but given a packet of information and a night to prepare, I learned about all of these topics and so much more. The camp itself was an exercise in patience, servant leadership, and teamwork. It wasn't always pretty, but each week my fellow staff members and I welcomed families from across the state to a well-oiled machine of a camp. In those first few weeks, I found myself discouraged that camp was not what I anticipated. It involved hard, physical work and long hours. Work that, at times, demanded all of my energy and attention. It was not always easy, but it was always rewarding. While I know this kind of work is not for everyone, I know it was the best place for me. There is no other job I could have taken that would have shaped my life the way Mustang Island Family Camp did this summer. I have had the chance to meet hundreds of individuals, to hear thousands of stories, and to foster my own story with each and every session.