

This summer I worked for the Episcopal Diocese of West Texas at the Mustang Island Conference Center in Port Aransas, Texas, on the Gulf of Mexico. During the summer, Mustang Island Conference Center offers sessions of Family Camp every weekend. Family Camp allows families to enjoy one of God's beautiful creations together, the beach, and to depart from the stresses of their normal, everyday lives by being surrounded by a Christian environment to simply enjoy each other's company. Gabrielle Fignar, C'17, and I were the Environmental Educators for Summer 2015. As well as planning, implementing, and leading environmental education activities, I was involved with other aspects of the conference center such as beach set up, kitchen cleaning and cooking, room cleaning, and other operational activities.

As the environmental educators, one of the projects Gabrielle and I led during the summer were trash pick ups on the beach. The seemingly endless amounts of plastic bottles, rope, tar, cigarette butts, trash bags, plastic bags, and beer cans cluttering the coast within our tiny stretch of beach at the camp was sickening. One morning during beach setup, I found a brilliantly blue and yellow sunfish trapped inside of a plastic container. Luckily, I was able to free the fish and it was able to survive; however, this is not the fate for all sea organisms affected by the immense amounts of trash infecting the coast.

In order to create a message about the importance of personal stewardship of taking care of the precious environment and the difference one can make by picking up even just one piece of trash, we created a mural of the trash. The image of the mural is a

landscape of the dunes and the wooden cross at the Mustang Island Conference. With the help of the children attending the camp, we painted the trash, we constructed the mural, and we witnessed the transformation of beach litter into something beautiful now serving as a reminder to take care of God's gift of nature.

Another project that we undertook was the facilitation of a touch tank for all the sea creatures, shells, and marine organisms found in the water or on the beach. We would set up the tank each morning and using a seine and hand nets, the children, parents, Gabrielle, and I would catch small shiners, pompanos, other minnow species as well as the occasional seahorse to place into the tank. Hermit crabs, sand dollars, and coquinas were also commonly collected in the touch tanks. By helping create and facilitate this intimate interaction with the creatures of the sea, I could tell that these five-, six-, and seven-year-old children were already starting to develop a deep appreciation of nature. I believe this was one of the greatest impacts that Gabrielle and I made as the Environmental Educators—inspiring a sense of wonder to young children to want to learn more about the world around them and the want to protect and to conserve it as well.

Gabrielle and I also undertook smaller projects such as creating a weather and forecast board for each day of camp and helped plan future landscaping around the conference center. For example, we researched and helped choose native flowers and grasses to be planted around the conference center that would be most appropriate for the coastal environment. We were also able to learn about the surrounding environment by visiting the Padre Island National Seashore, one of the largest protected seashores of

barrier island in the world, and by attending turtle hatchling and turtle releases.

Throughout the summer, I learned to be flexible and to be adaptable. Before the internship began, I had envisioned a completely different summer. For example, I was unsure of how the environmental activities would operate. After the first family camp session, I had to adjust my plans and previous ideas of how the educational activities would unfold. As well as learning to be flexible towards unplanned events and to be adaptable to unexpected changes, the greatest lesson I learned was the power of being intentional in my actions and my words with my coworkers and with the families that attended each session. Each good morning greeting and every invitation to join in on the touch tank does make a positive impact and leave a memorable impression on individuals. As I head back to Sewanee for my senior year, I will strive to be more intentional with my conversations and actions towards my friends, professors, and greater Sewanee community

This experience taught me that I enjoy meeting new people constantly, interacting with people regularly, and that my future job must allow me to interact with people on a daily basis. Before the summer began, I enjoyed working on projects alone; however, this summer taught me that I like working in groups to accomplish goals. Although group projects can be difficult, especially when not all members of the group agree or have the same set of standards, the power of working with others brings refreshing and important perspective to the project or event that is being worked on.