

YOUTH LEADERSHIP CAMP – MEGEVE FRANCE 2008

One can only imagine how happy I was after hours of my flight, transferring from planes to buses to cars to finally dismount the last car and be welcomed by Megeve's breath taking scenery. In the bus I immediately connected with a candidate from Hong Kong and he turned out to be one of my strong associates. I knew this camp was going to be a great experience. Everything in Megeve is stunning. The only way to describe it is by calling it a fairytale small town. We met the two women who organized the camp Marie-Aude and Corinne and they helped us settle in. My room was one of the most diverse rooms with me, Charlotte from France, Siuan from Ireland, Sonja from Finland, Camilla from Mexico and a camp peer counselor Jorien from the Netherlands. These are the girls I lived with and ended up loving them as my sisters. As the first few days passed we learned that the camp would not be the same without each individual contributing and giving the best of themselves to the camp activities.

We started to get to know each other, there were challenges at first. We all became a close knit community in which every person counted and mattered. There were 35 of us, 16 different nationalities and we all came from totally diverse backgrounds. Coming from South Africa it was not so much of a challenge for me, although living with everybody very close day in and day out was new to me. Our differences didn't get in the way of us becoming a team. In the camp we all stayed on one floor and there was always someone in your space so I had to learn to interact with people on all levels whether it was in the classroom or as roommates. So I quickly became skilled with how to contribute effectively and have influence to the people around me. Camp was a great learning curve. I found that as we got to know each other we forgot about our distinctive cultures, religions and beliefs, but we were just 35 diverse personalities in a community with a common goal and faced the same problems.

Everyday was filled with exciting events, leadership workshops and activities. I grew and learned so much about myself as an individual and as a leader within those two weeks. We were mostly trained on how to be efficient as leaders and ambassadors for our countries and all that it comes with. The activities impacted our cultural sensitivity. The workshops made us all realize that no matter where we come from, when living or working in an international environment you have to develop a sense of compassion, acceptance and tolerance for others. Care enough to connect with others at their level, be open, understanding and considerate. As I practiced that, I earned their respect.

Another daunting workshop was about poor countries versus rich countries. Unfortunately I became a leader of a poor country. It was unbelievably frustrating for leaders of poor countries to get the leaders of rich countries to listen to us. It also proved a challenge to go back to our poor countries and face angry states men who were not convinced that you tried your best. This made me understand that money plays a big role in defining powerful nations and it takes a great leader to get them to pay attention to the needs of the underprivileged. This exercise was one of the emotionally challenging for me coming from a developing country.

The opportunity of going to this camp gave me a chance of a life time. I visited two provinces in Germany. I went to Munich and Köln. By this time the camp had prepared me to face anything. My confidence and self esteem have grown from strength to strength, and the empathy towards those different to me had become one of my strong qualities. It took me seven hours by train with a stop over in Zurich to travel from Geneva across Switzerland to Bavaria in Germany. The schools were still opened and I went to school everyday for two weeks and experienced being a learner in what I would say was a private school in Munich. Another five and a half hours in a train landed me in Köln. For the next week I attended another school in Bornheim, where amongst other classes I really enjoyed the art class and made friends. I found myself at home in the two schools, as if I had been there forever and I thank the camp for that. Upon my return to Munich I went to the country side where I enjoyed a week's holiday and I was fortunate to tour as far as Austria. I was fascinated by incredible buildings and scenery before I returned home back to school.

In conclusion YLC camp is the definite highlight of my year and I encourage all to go to this camp and represent our country with the pride and honor that I believe I carried it, South Africa, with. I know so because we received certificates at the end of the camp and written on mine was:

Dear Tike (Tk)

Do you know how powerful you are, how appealing, attractive and magnetic? It has been a wonderful privilege to meet you; you have represented your country with energy, with dignity and with honor.

I want to see you continue your track – open to the world, keen to learn and share, full of positive energy and driven by a sincere concern for others that far out rides personal ambition or gain.

With best wishes Corinne.

I hope my country is as proud of me as I was to represent it. Thank you so much to the South African UWC committee for giving me the opportunity to go on the camp. After this experience I can say with certainty that I can handle studying anywhere in the world. I hope I did you proud and made a good name for South Africa.

Takatso Mohlakoana