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ACCEPTED 10/2/12
SIGNED CONTRACT RECEIVED 10/16/12

#95 Arizona Redo, June 2013, Camp jitters

*Dear Arizona,
I'm supposed to leave for sleep-away camp in two weeks, and I'm really, really nervous.
Help!
Nervous in Nebraska*

Dear Nervous,

I've gone to sleep-away camp three times, and I can absolutely, positively, without a doubt-ly say – they were three of the best times of my entire life. But thinking back to when I was younger, when I was getting ready to go for my first ever time, I remember being really, really nervous just like you.

“How come you keep opening and closing your suitcase?” Asked my mom.

“I’m just checking to make sure I have everything on the list,” I told her.

“Do you have Sleepy Bear?” She asked.

“I can’t bring Sleepy Bear!” I said. “Everyone will make fun of me!”

“Oh come on,” she said. I’m sure other kids will be bringing their special pillows and stuffed animals to help them sleep.”

“Well, I’m sure they won’t!” I remember saying. “In fact, I’m sure everything about camp will be terrible!”

“Oh Zona,” my mom said with a big hug. “You just have cold feet. Everything will be fine. You’ll see.”

Back then, I hadn’t learned the expression about having cold feet meant that you’re nervous about something. So I was wondering how in the world my mom could possibly know the temperature of my feet without even touching them, *and* what in the world cold feet could possibly have to do with being worried about leaving home for a week anyway. At the very last minute, I snuck Sleepy Bear into my suitcase, and crossed my fingers.

Now, Dear Nervous, I’m going to tell you the thing everyone told me, but that you really can’t understand until you experience it for yourself. It turns out that the number one greatest thing about camp is the people in charge of taking care of the campers. They’re called camp counselors, and I’m pretty sure they’re the nicest people

on the face of the earth. As soon as I arrived, the counselors greeted me with the friendliest smiles and explained how they'd all picked camp nicknames based on their favorite foods.

"I'm Chocolate Chip," "I'm Strawberry Shortcake," "I'm PBJ," "I'm Mac n Cheese."

"And I'm pickles, your Cabin Leader," said the one with a great big flower in her braid. "Come with me and I'll show you around!"

Even though I was feeling shy and uncertain in this brand new place, there was something about Pickles that made me feel right at home.

"Are pickles really your very favorite food?" I asked.

"Yes! They really and truly are!" She said. "Sweet n tangy baby gerkins, crunchy, garlicky dills – I know it's a little strange, but I just love pickles! Plus, it's fun to be a little bit strange – don't you think?"

"I guess," I said. "Unless that little bit strange thing is something people make fun of you for."

"You don't have to worry about people making fun of you at camp," said Pickles. "Being mean isn't aloud around here."

"Cool!" I remember thinking to myself. "I hope, hope, *hope* that's true!" The little bit strange thing about me was I could never fall asleep without Sleepy Bear, and if it turned out that I was the only kid who'd brought a stuffed animal to sleep with, I'd be laughed out of my cabin for sure.

The rest of that first day was so great- I totally forgot about my bedtime worries. When nighttime came, we roasted marshmallows around the campfire, and learned the most ridiculously crazy songs where you had to do these funny hand motions every time you sang certain words. By the end of the week, every one of us knew those songs and motions so totally by heart that now they're one hundred percent stuck in our memories forever.

The other thing I'll never forget is what happened that same first night when it was time to go to sleep. I reached into my suitcase, super secretively wrapped Sleepy Bear in a t-shirt, then stuffed him all the way down to the very bottom of my sleeping bag.

“Happy dreams my little campers!” Said Pickles.

She made sure we were all tucked in, then turned off the light and snuggled in to her own bed.

That’s when I heard somebody crying.

“It’s okay sweetie,” Pickles said, putting a comforting hand on Shannon’s shoulder. “Can you tell me what’s making you sad?”

“I left Ellie the elephant at home,” said Shannon. “And now I can’t fall asleep.”

“No worries,” Pickles smiled. “You can borrow Pickletta. I know she can’t exactly replace Ellie, but she’s super soft and squishy, and always helps me sleep.”

Shannon giggled when she saw Pickletta, who was a fuzzy, green, pickle person with great big eyelashes and a ruffley dress.

“Did anyone else forget to bring a friend to sleep with?” Pickles asked holding up two more stuffed pickle people, cause Pickelini and Pickelwickle Pie are feeling a little lonely.”

That’s when almost everybody, including yours truly, reached into their sleeping bags and pulled out their special animals, dolls, pillows – you name it!

So Dear Nervous, I guess what I’m trying to say is, you really don’t need to worry. Even though camps are all really different, they all have two extremely important things in common - a bunch of different fun activities to do, and really nice, friendly counselors to help you laugh and make you feel better if you ever need cheering up.

Ciao for Now,

Arizona

And Sleepy Bear

