

# THE DIARY OF NURSE AMBER

(Loosely based on Facebook post from the real Nurse Amber)

And...it begins!!! I can't believe they talked me into being camp nurse again. The whining and the crying and the temper tantrums are hard to take—and that's from the counselors. Campers are nearly as immature.

## Day 1 at Burnt Cabin Youth Camp!

We start with torrential rain, add 90 degrees, and it equals perfect weather—for a sauna! Unloading supplies, checking kids for lice, asking about medications, reading cryptic maternal instructions, and...learning about allergies.

One kid writes, "My allergies make my eyes itchy but they don't make me die."

Not really sure how to manage the kiddo whose camp application states they are allergic to: "Outside Air."

Another first-year junior camper wearing long pants in this steam bath says, "I think I'm allergic to peanuts."

Me, "You think?"

The camper timidly nods, "I don't like peanut butter, so I must be allergic."

What kind of kid doesn't like peanut butter? I think to myself. What I say with an exaggerated sigh, "That's not an allergy, but thanks for sharing, kid."

The boy then hands me a note from his mother with detailed instructions for his care—no peanut allergy listed.

A junior camper, "Nurse Amber, I have a headache."

Me, "You homesick already?"

Junior camper nods, "Uh-huh."

Me, "We have been here LESS THAN 3 HOURS! Go, drink some water, and find a friend!"

Camper hands me his medications.

Me, "What do you take this for?"

Junior boy, "I'm not sure but if I don't take it I could die!"

I guess that one's important.

The power of Zyrtec, Miralax, and every ADHD medication the FDA has ever approved is essential to my sanity. I've already witnessed a couple of campers who need a higher dosage than prescribed.

While checking kids in for the week, I discover three "camper babies" this year. You see, parents can send their offspring to camp when they are nine years old. A "camper baby" has a March birthday

and an older brother or sister in the senior cabin who is eighteen. Do the math. Mom and dad shipped the older kid to camp for a little rest and relaxation, and presto! They have another kid to send to camp nine years later.

Several lifesaving Band-Aids have already been applied, one loose tooth removed, two headaches diagnosed (one was a headache a camper had, and the other will be a headache for the counselors), more bug bites than I care to keep track of, and two cases of extreme home-sick-I-need-my-mommy syndrome!

Now to create organization out of chaos! I have two hours of work before lights out. Then another two hours after that dealing with any faux-illness and hypochondriac condition known to mankind. It's going to be a long week!

NURSE AMBER-OUT!

### **Day 2 at Burnt Cabin Youth Camp.** (The exclamation point from Day 1 is purposefully left off.)

What did I do to deserve this? Bug bites are dominating these kids. Two more teeth lost and given to me—several bouts of swimmers' ear.

Camper tells me, "I need you to know that I have an eating disorder, I really can't eat if I'm hot or sweaty." Me thinks this kid may not survive the week!

Down at the ballfield. Camper complains in all seriousness, "I don't think my mom would want me to be this sweaty."

Junior boy tells me, "I don't know why we don't just play this on the Wii. I'm really good at that!"

Intermediate camper, "Nurse Amber? Did you have to go to college to learn how to put Band-Aids on good?"

The power of Band-Aids. I used to think they were just a bandage to cover a wound and help keep it clean. At camp, Band-Aids are essential and life-sustaining. They have a healing power for all kinds of physical, emotional, and psychological ailments. I'm thinking of putting one on my head.

If anyone knows how to take out a splinter without touching the splinter or the toe that it is in, please let me know. It's a skill they didn't teach me in nursing school nor one that I've acquired in 20 years of experience!

Speaking of experience, today was a first. The "I think I have a peanut butter allergy kid," with extensive instructions from his mom comes hopping up (literally) to say, "My foot came off." I have learned to be skeptical and sigh heavily until I notice the kid is holding a foot in his hand! I go into full panic mode, but the little camper is taking it all in stride—while literally holding his foot in his hand! (I know I repeated myself, but the camper is HOLDING—HIS—FOOT—IN—HIS—HAND!)

Come to find out, the kid had an accident when he was younger and has a prosthetic lower leg. Mom forgot to mention this in her extensive instructions, and the kid has learned to deal with it. I should have known something was up when he was wearing blue jeans in the middle of summer. Joe the handyman has a wrench. We bolt the foot back on. Nothing to see here!

Counselors are a problem all to themselves. We've got one guy who must dream of being a drill sergeant. He yells at kids constantly. I just call him "Yelling Guy," since what I'd really like to name him seems inappropriate at church camp. He's somewhat out of shape and comes to see me complaining of muscle soreness and joint pain—also known as old age. I sneak him an 800 mg ibuprofen. He gobbles it up and looks guilty like he's getting his opium fix from a drug dealer. He'll be looking me up every day for the rest of the week. The other extreme is "Kumbaya Girl" who appears to be a misplaced hippie from the '60s that is filled with so much love and peace and happiness that it makes me ill. She's barely twenty, but seems to have all the answers to life's important questions already. Oh well. People and counselors come in all kinds.

Most of the work of a camp nurse is explaining to campers and counselors that things are going to be all right, and your condition is not really a big deal—until today. Besides the camper holding his foot in his hand, another boy complains of belly pain. It really is a problem. We make a mad dash to the ER, a helicopter ride to Tulsa, emergency surgery for something serious, and (deep sigh) now all is well.

Until...I come back to my cabin to a note written on a paper towel on the toilet seat in my bathroom saying, "I violated your toilet. I didn't have time to fix it. You wouldn't want me to be late to Bible class."

If they had signed it, I would have killed them...and then treated them. Hand me a plunger and show me the shower. I've had enough for the day!

NURSE AMBER-OUT! (With a strong exclamation point!!!)

### **Day 3 of Burnt Cabin Youth Camp (too tired for any punctuation)**

Woke up with little pieces of circa 1960 popcorn ceiling falling on my face/hair—and barely noticed. I'm so tired.

Started off with a little ingrown toenail surgery this morning, complete with pus and white knuckles, and of course a crowd of the camper's homies making obnoxious observations! One passed out, though. That causes me to smirk.

Yelling Guy is starting to get on my nerves. I may need to give him a healthy dose of something to chill him out along with his ibuprofen fix. I'm thinking Benadryl might do the trick. That would be better for him than a softball bat to the head. Never fear, Kumbaya Girl is playing the guitar and singing to the kids. Oh, if only I had a medication for her.

Overheard a conversation that went like this:

“Why didn’t Cloe come back this year?”

“I don’t know.”

“Didn’t she have a good time?”

“She had the time of her life.”

Another camper interrupts (a camp tradition), “Her mom said she came back home last year with too many tick bites.”

I’ve lost count of how many ticks I’ve pulled off these kids and how many bug bites I’ve treated!

What could be cuter than a sweet little junior boy camper with a red Gatorade mustache? Until he adds a milk mustache to the preexisting mustache, and it loses its charm!

If I had a dollar for every lifesaving Band-Aid I have applied today, I could pay off my mortgage! The rules are simple. It must be bleeding to warrant a Band-Aid. If actually bleeding, it will require washing with soap and water. Those are the rules. Do you want a Band-Aid or not?

Chiggers are the ailment of the day. I’ve had a dozen sheepish faces come see me, whispering, “Nurse Amber...I have some little bites. They are really itchy. No, I don’t want you to look at them. They are “down there.”

Me to a camper, “I can’t explain why chiggers like your private parts like they do, they just do!!! Here’s some anti-itch medicine, and remember, you can’t shower or swim too much.”

One senior boy quarantined for possible strep. Temperature of 102.4 and chills. Heading to urgent care in the morning—again. Now, praying for limited exposure!

I’m whipped!

I’m tired, but still fighting the good fight.

NURSE AMBER-OUT!

#### **Day 4 of Burnt Cabin Youth Camp! (Exclamation point is back!)**

I’m starting to get Yelling Guy. These kids do need to be screamed at—and often. I’m even noticing a slight frown on Kumbaya Girl. Reality hurts, don’t it girl.

Wednesday’s the WORST day of camp! Lunch today—some kind of recycled hotdog matter, red punch (because it looks so good on the lips of campers), rubbery Rice Crispy bars, and my favorite, the brown glob of something. Wednesday is the worst because it’s been three days away from home, three days of eating strange food that I pray people don’t typically eat! And, three days until I feel my bed at home. Three days can seem like eternity on Wednesday at camp.

I’ve had a version of this conversation multiple times today, “Nurse Amber, I don’t feel good, my belly hurts.”

Me, “What’s going on? Do you need to vomit?”

“No.”

“Have you pooped since you came to camp?”

Silence.

“I think you need to eat some fruit, drink more water, and take a trip to the salad bar. Then you need to spend some time sitting on the pot. We’ve had this conversation before!”

Camper replies, “I can't poop at camp. They're too many people in my cabin. It's so embarrassing.”

“I have no doubt you can hold your bathroom essentials until school is out when you are home, but buddy we're here for the whole week so that won't fly. Go poop!”

“Can I use your bathroom?”

Me with a sigh of defeat, “Yes. I'll walk to the mess hall and back.”

My bathroom has been blown up four times today!

I've been doing this church camp nurse gig for a while. This is my 11<sup>th</sup>, I don't know, maybe 12<sup>th</sup> year. I have established some camp/life rules along the way. The older campers know them well. The younger ones will figure them out!

1. If there is NO VISIBLE blood you do NOT get/need a Band-Aid.
2. If the Band-Aid criteria is met, then there will be washing with soap and water PRIOR to the application of said Band-Aid (This practice greatly reduces the need for Band-Aids and probably hurts the company's stock price!)
3. If you complain to me about a bellyache we will talk about the water you have not had enough of, and we will talk about POOP and the last time you produced any! It's a nurse thing.
4. When it's HOT outside—and it's ALWAYS hot at summer camp—you will need to drink more water. You cannot SWEAT DR. PEPPER!! I say this every year.
5. At camp, and in life, you ALWAYS have a choice! You can do what I say and be HAPPY, or you can do what I say and be SAD!

Not one of the five rules, but still an observation. The general bug bites, ticks, chiggers, and sand fleas must build character in some way. There can be no other purpose for them, I am sure!

P.S. Why do kids keep giving me teeth? I have had three more junior boys give me teeth they have wiggled out of their tiny heads! I'm NOT the Tooth Fairy, but close to having a complete set of teeth for the week.

NURSE AMBER-OUT

### **DAY 5 at Burnt Cabin Youth Camp**

In addition to Church Camp this week here at Burnt Cabin on beautiful Lake Tenkiller, we are also hosting a tick and chigger festival! These kids are eaten up! I gave my bug spray speech this

morning, so I hope more bug spray has been applied! I have purchased EVERY bottle of Tec NU Itch and pain relief spray that can be found in Cherokee county!

We started this day with a couple of trips to urgent care and two positive cases of strep throat. Hopefully we are all done with that!

Okay, I've trampled over most of this camp and seen no poison ivy, but today, a senior boy comes in covered with the rash up to his knees. I thought we had enough with chiggers and ticks, but this kid must have gone into the deep woods to find yet another discomfort. I covered him in cortisone cream and calamine lotion, while firmly reminding him to not scratch it, touch it, or think about it—or it will spread.

Camper, "Nurse Amber, I have a tick in my armpit!"

I'm thinking: Where's your counselor. They magically disappear at these times every year. Yelling Guy should be able to shout the tick into submission.

Me, "Well, let me see it."

Camper, "You can look at it but don't touch it or pull on it or do anything that will make it hurt."

Me, "Oh, honey. Hurt is what I do. How do you think I'm going to get that out without touching it at all?"

Camper, "I'm not really sure, maybe you should take me to the hospital, or I'll just wait until Saturday, and my mom can take it out when I get home."

"Trust me," I say. "Your mom's not going to want to do that."

Camper, "My momma loves me."

I'm thinking that's hard to believe.

Me, "Do you think any girl is gonna want to go to the big social with a guy that has a bug living in his armpit?"

Camper, "I guess I'll let you get it out or—maybe I should find out if she hates bugs, first!"

Lyme disease or love? The struggle is real!

Watched two intermediates whacking each other with ping-pong paddles. Would like to slap some rear ends with those paddles. Fortunately, Yelling Guy is there. Go get'em, Yelling Guy!

Oh no! I think to myself. A second camper with poison ivy—a senior girl this time. Again, I've seen no poison ivy except from the senior boy that confessed he went into the woods. Time to have a talk about the birds and the bees—and the ticks and the fleas. Both rashes below the knees, so I can only hope we were just holding hands in the woods. Time will tell, but I'm praying hard.

NURSE AMBER-OUT

### **Day 6 at Burnt Cabin Youth Camp!**

It's the last full day at camp! Sunburns, ticks and chiggers are still the theme for the day. Walking through the mess hall at breakfast, I had a large bag of anti-itch wipes. I gave some to several junior

campers, who were all eager. It's like Christmas in June when they get something from Nurse Amber. I pass by a group of very manly senior boy campers.

"Anyone need anti-itch wipes?" I ask. "Anyone?"

Multiple sets of eyes looking down.

One pipes up, "I have a few bites on my leg, I'd like one."

I frown, "Why don't you just admit you ALL have a crotch full of chigger bites. Take a wipe!"

I dispensed 12-13 wipes in less than 30 seconds!

No more "poison ivy" outbreaks from the deep woods and the two that were exposed still only have it below the knees. I wish all young love was restricted to holding hands in the woods—and only getting a rash below the knees. Life would be simpler.

Three junior boys come to my cabin. One of them had a pretty good gash on his knee. The other two were there for moral support. The injured boy may need stitches. He's a country kid and more concerned about getting blood on the new shorts his mom had bought him than the potential stitches he needs. I hate to tell him his mom will probably want to burn everything that makes it back from camp.

How does one child (who is NOT playing softball) manage to get hit with the ball three times during one game!?! It's not the first time I've seen this kid. He is like a conductor of unfortunate mishaps and accidents.

Kumbaya Girl lost it today. She's finally learned that talking kindly to children will only take you so far. Some intermediate boy pushed her buttons. She grabs him, wrestles him to the ground, and sits on him for a moment, while a host of other intermediates watch in disbelief.

"What are you looking at!?" she screams to the bewildered onlookers.

"Nothing to see here," I calmly say, to disperse the mob. When they fail to move fast enough, I add, "Or I'll call Yelling Guy."

They move. I love Yelling Guy. Even the threat of him achieves results. Spend the next half hour with Kumbaya Girl convincing her everything will be all right.

"I don't know if I want children after this week," she weeps.

"Your own kids will be different," I try to affirm by lying blatantly to her. "You'll be a great mom."

Is lying *always* bad? I have a difficult time with this question. I believe in honesty—at least in theory—but, if every potential parent knew their offspring would turn out to be a stinky, snotty, sarcastic, and snarky intermediate there would be no more people on earth. I rationalize that it's okay for her to believe her children might be different. It perpetuates the human race. She'll learn the truth in time. Kumbaya Girl made it through the day. Somehow, Yelling Guy seems almost normal to us by this time of the week.

I can't figure Yelling Guy out. He scolds and shouts at kids all week, yet they seem to really like him by the end of camp. Kumbaya Girl has done everything to endear herself to campers, but they have utterly defeated her.

I removed one wad of gum from a camper's hair.

Camper, "I don't know how it got there."

Me, "I guess we forgot the rule about no food in the bunkhouse or gum at camp?"

"It wasn't me," the camper reflex lies.

What? Do I look like I was born yesterday? I cut out the bubble gum with a judgmental scowl and a lack of any surgical precision. She'll have a few weeks to grow that mess out. Point made.

Me to another camper, "Hey, missy, why are you wearing your coat? It's 94 degrees outside."

Camper whispers, "I have sweat rings on the armpits of my shirt so I put my coat on so nobody can see it!"

Still shaking my head! Can't argue her logic, but feel I should.

We are all tired and sweaty and wearing our cleanest dirty clothes. We're covered in bug bites, but happily filled with the comradery of the week. Ready to go home—but not ready to go home, if you can follow my logic.

I had my bathroom blown up two more times, the second incident required a PLUNGER and a PRAYER!

SO, SO, TIRED! Ready for some sleep! It's been a good week but I'm worn out and sick of being a hot sweaty mess!

NURSE AMBER-OUT

### **Last day at Burnt Cabin Youth Camp**

Been looking forward to this day since day one, but now it's so sad. These whiny, dirty, snot-nosed kids have a place in my heart that's hard to explain. Won't miss the counselors as much—at least until I get home. One final camp tradition. A pile of unclaimed clothes that would outfit a battalion. Any junior underwear is hopelessly lost and will not be claimed even when we show the kid the nametag their mom had carefully sewn into it. Oh well, it wouldn't be camp without surplus clothes. At least we didn't leave any anti-itch medicine unused.

NURSE AMBER-OUT (For good, but will be looking forward to next year soon.)

**THE END**