

Karter Duff

## Summer Camp

July 17th, 1972. That was the day I died.

I arrived at summer camp back in June upon my parents' request. They thought it would be good for me. A summer full of camp activities, cabins, camp counselors, and other guys my age. It was a not-so-local Christian camp that was about a six hour drive away from my hometown, Dickson, Tennessee. There were plenty of other camps that were a lot closer to home that I easily could have gone to, but Camp Morrison was equipped to handle people with my condition.

I had recently been diagnosed with an unusual illness, so we tried everything to get me feeling better. I had been to a couple of doctors and even more therapists, but it all ended the same way: There's no known cure for my disease. One of the therapists referred us to this camp though. They believed a summer of fun under the supervision of camp counselors would help clear my head of things. My parents were willing to try anything at this point and so was I.

My father had taken the day off at the police station to drive me to camp. My mother said she was only tagging along for support, but I knew why she was coming with. She was worried about how my father would treat me on the ride up to Camp Morrison if we were alone. He had been bugging out since my diagnosis. He hadn't looked me in the eyes since. Neither of them knew how to deal with anything that was going on with me. That's why they were sending me to camp, so someone else could deal with it.

None of us really spoke during the entire trip. In fact, it was almost dead silent the entire time. My mother would occasionally turn on the radio—the only song I really remember playing was Bill Wither's *Lean On Me*. My mother loved singing along to the radio, and my father rarely let her get away with anything, but he knew not to turn off her music when she was in a moment.

However, after more than 20 years of marriage, he knew how to handle her. He would turn the radio off whenever a song ended (and more importantly when she stopped singing). Aside from the singing, there was the occasional sneeze or nervous cough, but it remained silent for pretty much the rest of the trip.

One uncomfortable car ride later, and we were finally at Camp Morrison. My mother got out of the car to help me with my one bag because my father wasn't budging (he didn't even turn off the car). She didn't really help me as much as she thought she was. She only held the trunk open as I removed the bag and placed it on the gravel road. I didn't need much because the brochure said that clothing would be provided.

"Alright, sweetie, we'll see you in two months," she closed the trunk. "Call us if you need anything at all. And remember," she hugged me, "if you're feeling really sick, you let one of the nice counselors know." She let go of me and we stared at each other. If I didn't know any better, she actually felt bad for dumping me in the middle of nowhere.

"Come on, Margaret, we need to get back on the road if we're going to make it back in time for Johnny Carson," my father called to her from the front seat.

She smiled at me, "you get better, okay?" She quickly turned around and got back in the car. I could see her in the car's side mirror. It looked like she was wiping away a tear as she watched me. They drove away without another word, and I watched until the car disappeared in the distance. That was the last time I'd ever see my parents.

After meeting with a camp counselor, I was shown the cabin that I'd be spending the next couple months in. The natural light from outside lit the place up, which made everything look brand new. There were six sets of bunk beds in each cabin, and we were assigned a bunkmate.

The camp counselor showed me the bed I'd be sleeping in all summer. I got the bottom bunk. Bogus.

The guy above my bed jumped down and greeted me, "Hey, you must be my bunk buddy." He reached out to shake my hand, "I'm Nathan Bennett, and you are?" Nathan had slick, brown hair that was combed off to the side. He had dark, brown eyes and was wearing what looked like a uniform.

As I went to shake his hand and introduce myself, the counselor intervened and informed us that no physical contact was allowed between campers. It was one of the many rules we were going to familiarize ourselves with before this summer was up. The counselor explained that we were meeting in the mess hall for an early dinner and an introduction to the other campers, so I was instructed to put on the Camp Morrison uniform, which was only a plain white shirt that had the camp logo embedded on it, a pair of black slacks and some black dress shoes. It was the same outfit that Nathan was wearing. I was required to change behind a curtain, so no one would see me getting undressed.

Afterwards, Nathan and I left our luggage next to the bunkbed and were shown where the mess hall was. Upon leaving the cabin, I was able to look at the camp thoroughly for the first time. It was a very stereotypical camp—the grass was a vivid green, the thriving trees were blowing in the wind, the sun shined brightly on the deep, blue lake. I suddenly grew excited to spend an entire summer here.

As we got closer to the lodge, I had assumed we were the first ones to arrive because it was completely silent inside; however, upon entering, I realized that we were actually running late. The mess hall was a much bigger looking cabin filled with white folding tables and metal chairs. The "kitchen" was just two tables pushed together with trays of food on top of them.

The lodge was full of guys around my age who were all sitting down for dinner, but none of them were talking to one another nor were they eating. Nathan and I got in line for food with the camp counselor who was appointed to guide us around for the first day. He explained that no one eats until everyone had arrived for dinner and a prayer was said. He then told us that there was no talking allowed during meals either. If we wanted someone to talk to, we had to speak to God. After grabbing our tray of food, Nathan and I sat down in some of the final couple seats available. We were indeed the last people to arrive because as soon as we sat down, a man stood up and started saying grace.

“Give us grateful hearts, O Father, for all thy mercies, and make us mindful of the needs of others; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.” This was a man we would all get to know rather well over the course of the entire program: It was Pastor Morrison. He was a tall man with green eyes and short brown hair who ran the entire camp. According to the brochure that my parents got from my therapist, not only did he run it, but he also funded it completely out of pocket, and by “out of pocket,” I assumed that meant he funded it entirely with money donated by Christians who truly believed in the bible’s teachings.

He sat down at a table with all the camp counselors. Most of the staff here were men in their forties and fifties who were going bald, wore glasses or both. I noticed that they were all eating something different than us; it smelled like fresh chicken and baked potatoes. All we had was a stale ham sandwich, some carrots and a glass of water.

After dinner, we had to clean off the tables and push them off to the side. We then took the chairs and formed a big circle—I sat next to Nathan. One of the camp counselors stood in the middle and gave us an introduction before jumping into things.

“Welcome to Camp Morrison. We’ll all be spending the next couple of months together, so let’s be sure we’re all on the same page,” he walked around the circle making eye contact with each of us. “By the time you all leave here, you will have accepted God into your hearts. You will have begun the journey to living a stronger, healthier life completely void of sin,” he looked directly at me. “In order to do that, though, you have to believe in the process. You have to believe that we’re here to help you get better.” He continued walking around the circle.

He then began to list each and every rule we had to abide by during our visit, “Rule number one: Absolutely no physical contact between campers.” I didn’t really understand the reasoning behind most of the rules to be honest. There were so many of them, “Rule number five: You must pray every morning when you wake and every night before you sleep.” Most of them didn’t make sense, but they weren’t willing to explain because we had to believe in the process, “Rule number nine: No swimming in the lake without a pair of swim trunks and a shirt on.”

All of the rules had the same consequence regardless of its silliness, “If you break any of the aforementioned rules, you will be subjected to solitary confinement until Pastor Morrison has decided you have been forgiven. This camp only works if you believe in the process and follow all of the rules! If you witness anyone break any of the rules, you must report the perpetrator to the nearest counselor immediately! Honesty is our number one value here at Camp Morrison, so we expect you’ll honor it as much as we do. Do you all understand?” Each of us begrudgingly nodded our heads. We were finally ready for the introductions.

Another camp counselor joined in, “you there,” and pointed at a random guy in the circle, “tell us about yourself.”

The guy he pointed to looked around the room and nervously gave his name, “My name is Duke, sir. Duke Crawford.” Duke had a baby-face with blue eyes and blonde hair. He looked as if he were no older than fifteen.

“Stand up, boy,” the counselor demanded. Duke stood up from his chair as the counselor continued to address him, “Duke Crawford, I didn’t ask for your name. I asked you to tell us about yourself. Why are you here?”

Duke didn’t respond right away. He looked as if he either didn’t have an answer or didn’t want to answer, “I’d rather not say, sir.”

The counselor had a smug look on his face and walked around the room, “Did you hear that, boys? Duke Crawford doesn’t want to open up to all of us. He isn’t believing in the process. Why don’t you believe in the process, Duke Crawford?”

Duke was staring at the ground and didn’t say anything. Another counselor came up behind him and shoved him inside the circle towards the counselor speaking to him.

“I’m going to ask you one more time, Duke Crawford. Why don’t you tell us a little bit about yourself?”

We all watched as Duke struggled to come up with an answer but to no avail. I could see him shaking as he stood in front of the counselor who was twice his size. The counselor stared at him out of annoyance, raising his left eyebrow—his face turning slightly red. I noticed one of the other counselors give the big guy a nod.

“Okay, Duke Crawford, take your seat.”

Duke dejectedly turned around and started walking back towards his chair.

“Oh, Duke, wait a moment,” the counselor called him back. Duke slowly turned around and the counselor slugged him right in the face, knocking him to the ground. Some guys in the

room gasped as he whimpered on the floor, covering his face in embarrassment. Some of them swore they saw a tooth slide across the room, but I didn't see anything.

The counselor cracked the muscles in his neck and turned back towards the group, "If you aren't willing to believe in everything that we ask you to do, there's no point in you even being here!" His voice echoed throughout the lodge, "Upon leaving the camp, you are not to tell anyone of our methods. You're only setting yourself back and sabotaging the camp's mission if you do." He pointed at Duke, "This sorry excuse for a man is weak!" He snapped his fingers at two other counselors and pointed back at Duke. "And for that, he's spending his first night here in confinement, so we can begin to toughen him up!" The two counselors picked Duke up off the ground and escorted him out of the lodge. "Now," he stared back at the group, "who's next?"

For the rest of the night, things didn't get as nearly as heated as they did with Duke, but it wasn't exactly what I was expecting for the first night. We spent the rest of the evening talking about ourselves one-by-one. We just spoke about anything we thought wouldn't get us punched in the face by some man on a power trip. Some of the guys spoke about their hobbies. Others spoke about their friends. Most of us, though, spoke about our families. It seemed as if the point of the entire exercise was to pinpoint a messed up moment in our life that may explain why we were here in the first place. For those of us who couldn't come up with anything, the staff would try spinning a happy moment into something that it wasn't.

Nathan went right before me and spoke about his father. His father was a middle school teacher and taught physical education. Apparently this was enough material for the counselors to work with because they jumped on the opportunity to skew things almost immediately.

"Your father taught P.E. because he felt the need to toughen up young men. He felt the need to atone for letting his boy be a sissy," one of them hovered over Nathan.

“Was being a physical education teacher his way of saying you were weak?” Their reasoning was really out there sometimes, but it seemed to make sense to them.

“He failed his own son in that area, so he did whatever he thought he needed to in order to ask God for forgiveness,” their reasoning was sometimes in a different ballpark (in an entirely different sport) and usually involved God.

“You’re here because your father failed you,” the first one chimed in again. “He failed you,” he repeated once more. I couldn’t really tell how Nathan was taking all of this. He remained silent for the rest of the evening, but I didn’t blame him. From the looks of it, the less attention we drew here the better off we were going to be.

They then moved on to me, but I was able to keep it brief. I noticed that they were really digging the father material, so I told a fake story about how my father would rather silently read the newspaper every morning at breakfast than ever speak to me. They were able to spin that into something about my father not paying me any attention. Something about how he was more interested in the newspaper than he was me. Honestly, my father hated the newspaper. He hated reading it. As a police officer, he said he saw enough of the world’s crazy shenanigans on a daily basis, so he didn’t want it intruding on his breakfast.

After everyone had finish sharing, we were ushered back to our cabins for bed. It was pitch black outside, but it was a humid summer night. I couldn’t wait to get out of this stuffy uniform. Back in the cabin, the twelve of us took turns behind the changing curtain to get out of our uniforms. For bed, we had to wear a pair of shorts and a different white t-shirt. When I made it back to my bunk, I noticed my suitcase was missing. Everything I brought with me was gone. I never found out what happened to my stuff, but I always assumed either Pastor Morrison or some of his lackeys took them away while we were all getting to know each other.

The following few weeks were the same thing day in and day out. We started our days with our morning prayer, got changed, made our bunk, and had some breakfast, which was usually just some microwaved scrambled eggs, a burnt piece of toast, a moldy apple, and a glass of milk that was at room-temperature. As the days progressed, campers began scarfing down the food as quickly as possible because the meals were pretty sporadic. After breakfast, our activity for the day was randomly assigned. Some of these activities included chopping wood, helping construct new cabins, having a one-sided discussion with the counselors similar to our first night, or having a private meeting with Pastor Morrison. Nathan and I were often placed in the same group, so we grew rather close as time passed.

Every day, Pastor Morrison went down the roster of campers and met with one camper each day for a session. The session usually took the better part of the day, and the camper from that day was excused from all activities until the following morning for making such great progress. When Nathan met with him, he felt horribly sick afterwards. I could hear him getting up to vomit outside all throughout the following night. Those who had already met with him weren't permitted to speak about what happened with the other campers.

About a month into the program, I had finally been selected to meet with Pastor Morrison. We had spent the first half of the day talking about why I was here, but unlike when the counselors asked, he seemed genuinely interested. I told him all about my illness and when I first started feeling sick. I told him about the rift it caused between me and my parents. I even told him about the incident with my father after I told him about my diagnosis—how he started beating me senselessly out of rage. I confessed it often felt like everyone hated me.

Instead of trying to justify my getting sick, he just listened. It was the first time in a long time that someone just listened to me instead of making me feel bad about myself. He would just

sit there, nod his head and take notes. After I finished speaking, he reassured me that I would get better. I would live a healthy life. He said that he saw real promise in me. He told me about this procedure that he believed would get me on the path to true happiness, but it would require my parent's consent and would take some time to get all of the equipment; I hastily agreed. After a few hours, he let me leave with approval to skip camp activities for the rest of the day, and since I wasn't feeling sick like the other campers, I spent the rest of the day swimming in the lake (with a dirty shirt and a pair of shorts that I slept in the night before in lieu of an actual swimsuit). It finally felt like a real summer.

A few weeks later, I was called back into Pastor Morrison's cabin. I was told the equipment had arrived and my parents had mailed in the consent form. I was taken to his cabin first thing in the morning—I wasn't even allowed to eat breakfast. Upon arriving, I noticed that all of the windows had been covered by black drapes. It was extremely dark inside. Standing next to Pastor Morrison's desk were two counselors. Behind them, Pastor Morrison and a man in a lab coat were examining a machine.

Pastor Morrison walked to the front of the cabin to greet me, "Come in! Come in!" He seemed like a giddy schoolboy with a brand new action figure. I sat in the same chair across the desk from him. He sat down at his desk, "The doctor still needs some time to prepare the machine."

I looked up at the two counselors standing in front of him.

He noticed me staring at them, "Don't worry about these two! They're just here to support you like we all are. How have you been, son?"

I made some small talk with him before we all grew bored. He nervously began tapping his pen against his desk. I scanned the room. I couldn't really remember what was in here before,

but it seemed as if there were some new additions. Along with the machine and the drapes, there was a gurney that was reclining upwards, a table with a container on it, and a television with a projector and some film on top of a cart. It seemed as if we had waited for hours. Pastor Morrison tried anything to spark conversation.

“When was the last time you confessed?” He blurted out. I felt like the session with him a couple weeks ago was a confession, but I was guessing by his tone that it wasn’t. “It may be worth our time to have you confess your sins.”

I sat in silence as I considered what he said. I didn’t really have anything else to say after our last session.

“You never know when you’ll get another chance.” He stared at me intently. “You may never get a second chance.”

I slowly nodded my head. I just started talking about anything that came to mind—something I grew accustomed to with the staff members around here. I spoke about anything he may have considered a sin. I told him that I held a grudge against those who turned on me after falling ill, including my parents. I told him that I had lied on the first night about my father. I even grasped at straws and told him about how I was horrible at keeping promises. He just nodded his head. He didn’t seem as nearly as interested in what I had to say today as he did before.

“Pastor,” the doctor called to him, “we’re ready.”

Pastor Morrison banged his desk gaily and jumped out of his chair, “Come, boy! Come!” He motioned for me to come around his desk towards the gurney. “Sit! Sit! Sit!” He couldn’t contain himself as he patted the bed. He was treating me like a dog.

I sat back on the gurney, which was reclining at an angle. I rested my head on the pillow and placed my arms on the armrest. The doctor opened up the container on the table, revealing medical bottles, tongue depressors, syringes and other smaller containers. He picked up a tongue depressor and a smaller container that was full of gel. He then began smearing the gel on my temples.

“Remember, you have to believe in the process,” Pastor Morrison looked me in the eyes with a smile. He looked back at the two counselors and nodded his head. He stepped back as they approached me. They tied me down to the gurney with some rope and removed my shoes. They then held me down by my shoulders themselves—I couldn’t budge. “You want to get better, right?”

The doctor smeared some more gel on the other side of my head and grabbed a mouth guard from the table. They shoved it into my mouth and promised it was for my own protection. The doctor then walked over to the machine and grabbed a pair of tong-like headphones.

“Are you ready?” The doctor asked. I nodded my head only to realize he wasn’t speaking to me. Pastor Morrison walked behind me, grabbed ahold of the tongs and placed them against my temples where the gel was smeared.

I could hear the doctor hitting some switches on the machine, but I wasn’t entirely sure what was going on. Before too long, I felt a jolt of pain going all throughout my body. I shook violently as I gasped for air. It felt as if someone were choking me as I held a fork in an electric outlet. Images began flashing in my head. The moment I first met Nathan. My mother offering to join my father and me on the trip up here. My father nearly beating me to death. I continued to gasp for air as I tried to focus my breathing through the mouth guard, but it was all too much for

me. I don't think any of the people in the room knew what they were doing because sooner or later, I passed out from all the pain.

When I awoke, I could smell freshly cooked eggs, sizzling bacon and toast that wasn't burnt. It felt like I was in the comfort and safety of my own home. At any moment, my mother would come in and tell me to get ready for school. I'd get ready in clothes that I wanted to wear and walk downstairs to join my parents for a hearty breakfast. My father would be eating while complaining about newspapers, and my mother would pour me a tall glass of refreshing orange juice. My friends would show up, so we could all walk to school together, but my mother would say something embarrassing in front of my friends, and I'd rush out of the door before they could figure out what she said.

"He's awake." This, however, was not the case. I had a pounding headache, and I was still constrained to the gurney. "Drink this," I couldn't tell what time it was because of all the drapes. It was a glass full of warm and chunky milk. I coughed as I tried drinking it. My whole body was in pain. As I focused my eyes, Pastor Morrison came into view.

"Are you okay?" He asked me, but I couldn't respond. He grabbed a plate of fresh food—the food I could smell just moments before—and offered to feed me. I turned my head away from him and closed my eyes. "You're going to need your strength."

I moaned in pain.

"Trust me, you're going to need this." I could hear him picking up some food with his fork, but I couldn't even think about food. None of this is what I asked for. "Fine," he responded agitatedly. "It didn't work. It's time to go back to our original plan."

What was their original plan, I thought to myself. I opened my eyes again and looked around the room. The two counselors were still here, but the doctor had left. I tried to loosen up

my restraints, but I could hardly move. The two counselors moved the cart with the projector in front of me and loaded it with a reel as Pastor Morrison rummaged through the container of bottles. He picked one up along with a syringe. He opened the bottle and sucked up whatever liquid was inside with the needle.

“What is that, Pastor?” One of the counselors finally asked.

He didn’t take his eyes off the syringe, “it’s only an enhancer for our procedures. It’ll help the poor soul out.” He placed the bottle on the counter and walked towards me with the needle. He began moving his fingers up and down my arm, looking for a vein, and injected me with the syringe. When he walked away from the gurney, I looked over at the bottle he placed on the counter and read the label: Ipecac.

The counselors started running the projector and videos of men performing graphic and explicit things to each other began to play. After a few moments of watching the videos of these men enjoying each other’s company, I began to feel sick. I started to heave and gag. I turned my head and closed my eyes, but I could still hear the video. One of the counselors came up behind me and forced me to stare at the screen.

“If you don’t open your eyes, we’ll have to ask God to strike you down with that machine again,” Pastor Morrison threatened me. I reluctantly opened my eyes because I wasn’t sure I’d be able to handle another round of the electric conductor.

As I watched the video, I finally vomited. I threw up all over my chest. I was beginning to realize that I didn’t have much in my stomach. I continued to watch the video, but the smell of the vomit hit me, and I threw up again.

“Believe in the process, son. You will now associate your perversions with pain. You’re making great strides!”

The rest of my time in Pastor Morrison's cabin was spent this way. I was in there for hours, watching tape after tape. After a few videos, I was given another dose of ipecac. I began to lose track of how much I had vomited. After the sixth or so video of these men, I was finally released from the cabin. The two counselors escorted (dragged) me back to my cabin, and I was able to rest at long last. By the time I got back to the cabin, it was dark outside and the other campers were fast asleep. I had spent an entire day with Pastor Morrison and his goons.

I didn't get any sleep that night, and it was a struggle getting somewhere I could throw up. Nathan helped me in and out of my bed all night, violating the no touching rule by holding me up. The next morning, I awoke to the sound of the morning trumpet. I didn't think they expected me to actually get up, but after everyone had left for the mess hall, a counselor came looking for me. He made me get dressed and dragged me to breakfast. I gagged when a tray of food was handed to me, but I fought to keep it down. I couldn't stomach looking at it, and my head continued to pound.

I looked over at the counselor's table and Pastor Morrison was anxiously watching me. He was fidgeting in his seat. We continued to make eye contact until he whispered something to a counselor. He finally stood up from the table and walked over to me.

"We forgive you," he whispered to me. I watched as he left the cabin and looked back down at my food, gagging once more. I didn't even want to think about what he just said.

Nathan looked at my food and whispered quietly so no one would hear, "are you going to eat that?" I shook my head, and he grabbed my tray.

I looked back over at the counselors and saw them whispering to each other. Some of them were looking right at me. I rolled my eyes and looked out the window. I just watched the camp. It was the first time I actually observed it since my first day here, but it was nothing like

before—the grass was dead, the trees were withering, and the lake was swampy green with pieces of waste scattered about it. I was seeing things clearly for the first time. I started heaving once more; my stomach was burning. I needed fresh air, so I got up and started walking towards the exit.

“Where do you think you’re going, boy?” I could hear a counselor calling to me, but I kept walking. Another counselor stood in front of the exit, blocking my only way out. “I asked you a question: Where do you think you’re going, sissy?” I didn’t respond.

“I’m getting really sick of your silent act.” The annoyed counselor who was blocking my way shoved me to the ground, “Gather around, campers! We have something to share with you about our little friend here.” All of the campers slowly stood up and watched as this man looked down on me.

“As it turns out, your silent friend here has been lying to all of you,” another counselor chimed in. I looked up and watched as people started to circle around me. “While you were all being emotionally vulnerable, he’s been treating this entire program as a joke!” I honestly had no idea what they were talking about.

“It’s true. A little bird told us that he lied about his father ignoring him every morning at breakfast. He lied!”

“He doesn’t value honesty like the rest of us do!” Another counselor jumped in.

“He thinks this whole thing is a joke,” a fellow camper joined in.

“He thinks our pain and suffering is a joke,” one more rallied alongside them.

“And then he has the audacity to leave breakfast early!” I was completely surrounded by this point.

“Today’s camp activity,” a counselor shouted, “let’s all help toughen the liar up!”

“Hey, Mr. Silent Treatment,” I looked up, and a camper dumped a glass of milk all over me and threw the plastic cup at me.

“He’s only jealous because of all of our progress,” I heard a familiar voice shouting at me—it was Nathan. I looked over right in time for him to kick me in the ribs. I collapsed on the ground. “It was worth breaking the no touching rule to do that!” He shouted.

The crowd continued screaming and yelling at me as they beat me. Some of them punched me, others were throwing food at me, a few of them were spitting at me and stomping on me, but most were kicking me while I was literally down. I caught glimpses of what was happening, but each time I opened my eyes, all I saw was blood smeared on the floor in front of me. They started to let up, so I jumped up and ran out the mess hall’s door.

I ran straight to my cabin and jumped behind the dressing curtain to hide. I broke down crying. I could feel tears rolling down my cheeks and blood trickling down the side of my mouth. I heard the cabin door open, so I wiped away my tears and covered my mouth in hopes of concealing myself. The curtain swung open, and I flinched. I looked up and saw Nathan looking down at me.

“Are you okay,” he asked me. I continued to wipe away the tears. “You’re upset. I get it. I’d be mad too,” he closed the dressing curtain to hide the both of us and sat down next to me.

“Listen, I am really sorry. Something just took over me.”

I didn’t make eye contact with him.

“I know you won’t forgive me, but at least let me explain,” he moved in closer to me. “I have been fighting constantly since arriving here. We’re all fighting the same illness, so I know you get it. They keep telling us that we’re all making great strides, but I don’t feel any different.” He lightly nudged me with his knee to get my attention, but I didn’t look at him. He tried getting

me to open up, “Hey, on the bright side, it’s July 17<sup>th</sup>. We have less than a month left here then we can all return home.” He placed his hand on my knee, and I looked at him, “Look, I’m doing whatever I can to get better, but it isn’t working.” He leaned in and kissed me. After a moment, I pulled away from him. “It was worth breaking the no touching rule to do that,” he smiled at me.

“Get out,” I strongly told him. He looked at me confused, but I looked away from him.

He got up and opened up the curtain, “are you sure?”

I didn’t respond, so he closed the curtain on me and left defeated. I closed my eyes and started crying again. I fell asleep almost immediately.

What felt like only moments but was probably hours later, someone opened the curtain again, waking me up. I looked up and saw Pastor Morrison and his two goons from the day before.

“Grab him,” Pastor Morrison whispered.

The two of them lifted me up off the ground and dragged me out of the cabin—it was now dark outside. I pleaded to know where they were taking me, but they wouldn’t respond. They dragged me off the camp grounds and deep into the woods. About a half hour away from the camp, I finally saw where they were taking me: the confinement cabin. Pastor Morrison unlocked the door, and the two guys threw me inside. Pastor Morrison then locked the door behind me. I asked once more why they were doing this.

“You know the rule,” Pastor Morrison looked at me. “Absolutely no physical contact between campers. You broke that rule when you had that little party in the mess hall this morning and again with your bunkmate in your cabin.” He smiled at me, “That’s right, Nathan Bennett proved once again that you don’t value honesty. He told us that you propositioned him and that he rejected your advances, but don’t worry. We believe our rules should be upheld by

each and every one of our campers, so Nathan will be receiving the same special treatment that you received. Here at Camp Morrison, we believe that anyone can change with the proper equipment and the right techniques. Even you still have hope,” he looked up at the cabin, “so get used to this place. It’ll be your place of redemption for at least a week.” The three of them turned around and walked away. I screamed and banged against the door as I watched them disappear into the dark woods.

I turned around to look at the extremely small cabin. There was a bed in one corner with a dressing curtain right next to it, a sink in another corner, and there was even a lamp on top of a desk with a chair right next to it; however, there wasn’t any sign of a bathroom or even food for that matter. Even with minimal pieces of furnishing, it was still crowded.

I was starving, and my entire body was in pain. I needed to rest, so I lay down on the bed, but I couldn’t sleep, so I positioned myself on my side and looked over at the dressing curtain. I looked up to see what it was connected to. It was hanging by a rod that was firmly hanging from one end of the cabin to the other. I had another moment of clarity. Everything had become clear. I wasn’t going to get better. I was never going to get better. No one needed me. No one cared about me. I could just leave.

I slowly got out of the bed, tore down the dressing curtain from the rod holding it up and tossed it off to the side. I then grabbed the nearby chair and placed it underneath the hanging rod. I proceeded to take off my belt and climbed on top of the chair then tied one end of my belt to the rod and fastened the other end around my neck.

As I stood on the chair, all I could think of was how no one knew anything about me. They wouldn’t know how old I was. They wouldn’t know about any of my hobbies. They wouldn’t know that I had been set up by this entire camp. I was pretty sure none of them even

knew my name. All they would know was that I was sick. I pulled on the belt to make sure everything would hold. While I gathered up the courage to kick the chair from underneath me, all I could hear was my mother singing *Lean On Me*, and a tear rolled down my cheek.

July 17th, 1972. That was the day I died.