

Great Minds Think Alike, and Together  
By Kelly Neufell

Every once in a while, you experience something that you know you will remember for the rest of your life. Something you will look back on and say “this was truly life changing.” Fortunately for me, I had the opportunity to have a week’s worth of mind boggling, emotionally moving, mentally challenging, and most importantly, transformative events. I would argue, even, that this transformation began months before I even stepped on the plane with Nashville, Tennessee as my final destination. It is one thing to have to pay out of pocket to attend a conference, but it is entirely different when a school offers to send you to a “camp” based around one of the most controversial topics in the United States, and even the world, today. Knowing that I was chosen to represent my campus on something that is so close to my heart and life was actually where my inspirational journey began.

Though it didn’t happen until later in the camp, a unique chance to work with the trans slam poet, Kit Yan, arose on two separate occasions, both of which I took advantage of. They weren’t merely workshops run by a schedule with topics that included “How to Emphasize your Words” or “How to Combine Rhythm and Rhyme to Create the Perfect Poem.” They were very camper driven and involved, with portions of writing, listening, and performing for each other. Kit had a way of posing questions and themes that helped someone put into words what it was they were thinking. For me, it solidified that being part of the LGBTQQIA community (or alphabet soup, as we called it) was something that I thought about often and influenced my actions day to day, even dictating my career choice. I realized that this was something that was a very large part of me, even if to others it seemed muted. During that week, there was an open mic night that was run by Kit, and I performed a poem written in five minutes and polished the night of based on an activity the camp participated in. It was probably one of the best pieces I ever wrote and certainly performed, because he provided me with the courage to tap into things I really wanted people to know and talk about instead of perpetuating it by silence.

Another thing that struck me was how fast I was meeting people from all over the country. I didn’t leave the airport without meeting three of them; one from New York state, another from Miami, and one more from South Carolina. I would realize later, as we somehow all met at the airport before parting for our home states, just how broad the scope of the students’ reach was. Flights were being called to California, Georgia, Texas, Michigan and more, and every time we would lose one of our group members. I mention this because being surrounded by so many people from such a variety of backgrounds can really impact someone’s perspective, as it did mine. I learned to look past the rights my state allowed me to see from the eyes of those less fortunate. Actually, being able to provide support to those people through their struggles, rejoice in their victories (a couple of which occurred while they were at camp), and advise to the best of my abilities was one of the most beneficial experiences. I know that as I continue on my adventure of working in this field, I can turn to them, and they to me, in times of need, support, and celebration, just as we did every day at Campus Pride, where our great minds, together, spoke, thought, and fought for the LGBTQQIA (alphabet soup) community.