

Facing Forward



A B O U T F A C E

We All Have A Story To Tell

by Kariym Joachim

...continued from front page

After I was born with Treacher Collins Syndrome, my parents became walking encyclopaedias of medical information. Yet, they had no idea what having a facial difference would mean for me as a child, or for them as parents. Through AboutFace, they found reassurance that despite the challenges that lay ahead – with love and dedication, we could navigate a world that often forgets that each person is worth so much more than their appearance alone.

AboutFace taught me that I was not alone in having a facial difference, and that I shouldn't be ashamed. I learned how to advocate for myself, how to teach others about facial differences, and how to express what mine means to me. Eager to give back, I have been an avid AboutFace volunteer for the past 14 years. I'm always happy to speak publically on medical or family panels, and to discuss my experiences with Treacher Collins with kids and teens with TCS, and their parents. I know that each moment that I spend helping AboutFace to reach their goals, I am making a difference in our community and our nation.



Thus, when I was invited to become a camp counselor during a gap year between degrees, I was excited. I was also nervous, however, as I hadn't attended the camp as a teenager. I simply did not know what to expect – I wasn't sure what role I needed to fill for the campers, or how to ensure that they got the best camp experience possible. What was certain, though, was that I wanted to show campers that a facial difference should never hold them back from reaching their fullest potential!

In my time as counselor, I realized that many individuals have unique facial differences, and that all of us have a story to tell. Our campers continually demonstrate remarkable strengths of character and aptitude. I learned a little about food, electrical engineering, camp flora, and even some new jokes. But I also learned that campers have concerns about bullying, relationships, and even their careers. Together, we share our experiences and help

each other grow. Like me, campers get to realize that they aren't alone. We do this all while forging new friendships and helping to prepare ourselves to face our daily challenges.

It is this sense of community that makes Camp Trailblazers so wonderful. As children and adults with facial differences, we have to mature more quickly as a result of our day-to-day experiences. Camp Trailblazers is a place for campers to be who they really are, be their own age, and remember that they are all young people with heart, passion, hopes and dreams. Trailblazers leave camp knowing that they are unique individuals living *with* a facial difference – not defined exclusively by their face. That gives me hope that one day, each camper will reach their true potential – something I'm proud to help them achieve.

Kariym has been a dedicated AboutFace volunteer for many years. He has spoken at various conferences, played piano for several AboutFace events, and of course has been a wonderful Camp Trailblazers counselor. We are so proud to have him in our AboutFace family! Thank you Kariym for all that you do!