

THE BEELINE

“Girl Power”: A Special Report

Empowerment:

A simple word with a not so simple meaning

by Avery Dermer

Empowerment, according to Merriam-Webster, means, “to give authority or power to.” That definition, though, does not begin to capture the personal meanings the word holds for many people.

Camp Danbee, a seven-week sleep-away summer retreat for girls in the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts has a long history of encouraging empowerment. At Danbee it’s called “girl power.” This means that it is okay to be who you are. Campers are reminded of this at each meal as they walk into the mess hall and see the bright metal sign that proclaims, “Dance like no one is watching.” At Camp Danbee there is no “glass ceiling” to hit when trying new things. Danbee is a judge-free zone. Because of this, girls have numerous opportunities to go outside their comfort zone, to push themselves and cheer and dance, the spirit is catching.

Jay Toporoff, Director of Camp Danbee, has witnessed and nurtured the evolution of Danbee’s philosophy of girl power, dating to when he became director in 1990.

“I want to teach girls how to communicate, collaborate, and compromise because I believe these are skills they will use for the rest of their lives,” he said.

He says he wants girls to leave Danbee feeling they can do infinite things they never dreamed would become a reality. Not only does he want them to do that for themselves, but to make a difference through community service.

“I want girls to learn how to problem solve and to be able to gain a real sense of empathy that allows them to be kind toward others,” he said.

Jay is clear about the message he gives to parents.

“I want parents to work with us to believe in their children,” he said, “and to continue allowing them to see life in a way that makes them self-confident, kind and big participants in many activities.”

This is Danbee’s version of empowerment and its reputation has reached beyond its home on the shore of Lake Ashmere. Danbee came to the attention of Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, now the Democratic presidential nominee, because of its work for ten years hosting America’s Camp that was created after 9/11 for kids – boys and girls – who had lost a parent in that tragic event.

“Camp Danbee up in the Berkshires, which hosted America’s Camp,” Secretary Clinton said in a speech a little more than a year ago, “is a real gem devoted to helping girls and young women find their voices and reach their potential.”

Such is the essence of Camp Danbee’s philosophy, but do we take the word empowerment for granted? Do we say this word so casually that it’s lost its initial meaning? *The Beeline* decided to explore this question by talking to people who embody the meaning of empowerment. Within these pages you will meet four accomplished women in their respective areas on what the word means to them

and the role it played in their lives. There are some common themes in each of their stories – the supportive role of their parents, life changing experiences and the influence of the natural world.

Jay said that from *The Beeline* speaking to these important women it hopefully will show girls that they can do anything they put their mind to and that they can be their best selves.

Camp Danbee has counselors that come from other countries to work with the young girls here. They and others share a common interest in helping these girls be independent. Many return year-after-year and bring with them their own perspective on empowerment of women. You will read what they have to say.

Danbee’s program directors bring with them years of experience and expertise in such areas as theater, or gymnastics. With the former that includes off-Broadway. With the latter, that includes coaching top female athletes at the Division II level. They, too, have views on empowerment.

Campers also return to Danbee year-after-year at the rate of 90 percent. The oldest are tenth graders and that is their final year. It’s Danbee’s age ceiling. Many have been at Danbee eight or nine years and during that time these girls became young women with views on what empowerment means. These oldest girls will share those views.

We begin this report on empowerment by introducing you to four remarkable women.



Four women who embody the essence of empowerment. Top left: Mariana Santos, Top right: Kit DesLauriers, Bottom left: Lisa Aire, Bottom right: Sy Montgomery

Mariana Santos photo courtesy of Chicas Ponderosas; Kit DesLauriers photo by Jimmy Chirn; Lisa Aire photo courtesy of Vista Caballo; Sy Montgomery photo by Nic Bishop

Kit DesLauriers

You will meet Kit DesLauriers, a ski mountaineer who was the

first person to not only climb to the summits of the highest peaks on the seven continents, but to also ski from those summits. *The Beeline* interviewed her from her home in Jackson Wyoming where she lives with her husband, Rob, and their two daughters, Grace and Tia.

Kit grew up loving the outdoors and was an athletic kid who participated in many sports, from softball, to soccer, to track. Her life’s journey included becoming trained as a helicopter crew chief. She has been the first one called to organize backcountry rescues that included dead avalanche recoveries and swift water rescues. She has hung underneath a helicopter to reach someone trapped on the side of a cliff. Kit now is an elite athlete competing at a very high level, not to win events, but to explore new vistas among the mountains of the world. She also is a North Face athlete working with the company to improve products that help all people push their limits.

Kit has learned much about herself and empowerment by being in the natural world. Perhaps one of her best teachers was a wolf

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she raised from a very young cub. She lived near Telluride, Colorado at the time and the wolf lived with her, but roamed free and was true to itself. She learned much from that wolf.

Throughout her life she has looked back on her mother's words telling her to never let anyone tell her that she can't do something, especially because she was a girl, or a woman. When asked about empowerment and who empowers her, she simply states, "You need to empower yourself."

Kit said that once she searches out what it is she wants to do, then she empowers herself.

"There's nobody else out there that is going to empower you," she says.

Sy Montgomery

We will introduce you to Sy Montgomery, a naturalist who has written twenty books and has been described by *The New York Times* as "equal parts poet and adventurer." Sy dreamed of being a naturalist and followed that dream, even quitting "a great job" as a medical and science writer and people said she was crazy. A summary of her biography is filled with exploit after exploit involving wild creatures large and small as she conducted scientific field research and wrote about her work and adventures with the animals she studied.

When she was asked for her thoughts on empowerment she said it was, "Being able to give to the world what you know you have in your heart."

For Sy there are teachers to empower us everywhere. She refers to a saying "when a student is ready a teacher will appear." Sy explains that it is important to be alert and aware and "what it really means is that we have to recognize our teachers."

Sy speaks about how she drew inspiration from her father, who survived the Bataan Death March in World War II and became a general. She speaks about her mother who grew up poor in Arkansas and went on to be class valedictorian in college, learned to fly a plane and joined the FBI. She speaks about being empowered by a high school journalism teacher, her first dog Molly, and all of the animals she has worked with. Sy feels that she has had life changing experiences getting to work with all of the animals and how they taught her to handle difficulty and hardship. Each and every one of them, she says, changed her perspective and view of the way she saw the earth and natural world around her.

Mariana Santos

With Mariana Santos, you will meet a woman who saw unfairness in the world and took action to change it. She felt the need to make a change about how men are dominant and superior when put next to women in her chosen profession of journalism. To change attitudes and empower women, Marina founded "Chicas Poderosas," or "Powerful Girls."

It all began with Mariana's childhood in the South of Portugal. In the culture there, she says, it was expected that girls would marry young, have babies and become mothers. Marina strongly disagreed. Growing up she loved to swim, and she gained inspiration from her swim coach who taught her to fight for her dreams and never give up. Her parents, she said, valued a strong education and encouraged her and her sister to be strong and independent and to fight for what they want in life. Mariana soon realized that she wanted to pursue that independent life and not be hindered by restrictions she saw as unfair.

During her travels from Lisbon to Sweden to London, Mariana discovered her passion for journalism. She wanted to be a storyteller. At the time she had been working in advertising telling stories just to sell certain products, but she soon realized that these weren't the kind of stories she wanted to tell. Marina wanted to tell real stories about real people. Mariana took a job with the Guardian Newspaper in London where she learned the digital skills necessary for the twenty-first century.

She landed a fellowship with International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), which sent her to Latin America to teach those same digital skills. It was then she saw the disparity between men and women with men having access to the technology housed in one building and women writing the stories working in another building, but having no access to the technology or an opportunity to learn new skills. Mariana knew she had to do something and created Chicas Poderosas to empower women to become leaders on the front lines of journalism in the digital world.

She followed what her parents had repeatedly told her as a child, "Don't wait for things to happen." There now are Chicas Poderosas chapters throughout Latin America.

Lisa Aire

In Lisa Aire you will be meeting someone who went through a very hard time; who created two independent ad businesses; who was responsible for one of the most iconic and successful advertising campaigns that helped make Motel 6 a widely recognized brand with the line "This is Tom Bodett, and we'll leave a light on for you."

Despite all her success, she felt empty and unfulfilled. She was lost. At the same time she wanted to learn to ride horses. So, living in New York she went to the one place that would offer that – Central Park. When she arrived, the man who worked there told her that what she wanted to do was more serious than just riding around on a horse. He gave her a name of a guy in Colorado. "He's the best," he told her. At that moment Lisa knew what she had to do and where she had to go. And so began a life-changing experience during which she met a horse named Miss Hakomi Banks who showed her how to feel free.

"She plugged me in and turned me on," Lisa said describing her horse.

After that experience, she walked away from her successful career and the high-energy world of New York advertising and bought 160 acres in the small community of Dove Creek, Colorado and along with her husband, Jess, settled in with Miss Hakomi Banks.

She and Jess founded Vista Caballo Innovation Ranch. Vista Caballo loosely translated implies "from a horse's view." The ranch's mission, according to the website is, "Here you learn to rid yourself of non-essentials, so you can live in the present as a simpler, more powerful you." Horses are very intuitive animals and pick up on human emotions, which is their role at Vista Caballo. By connecting with the horses, people who come to the ranch learn to connect with themselves.

"Vista Caballo," Lisa explains, "is an experience of taking yourself to a place that is not known and seeing how you show up. Knowing that you no longer are afraid of that part of yourself and no longer afraid of the unknown."

When asked who in her life inspired her, she talks about her parents. Her father worked for Time Magazine and early in his career was given the choice of being stationed domestically or internationally. Her father chose international.

"He and my mother gave my brother and sister and I the most extraordinary life," Lisa said, "that to this day there is not a day that goes by that I don't recognize just how extraordinary it was."

Lisa said they got to live with many different cultures and many different environments and had so many different life experiences.

"So, because of that, I think," she said, "I always have the courage to see what life has to offer."

That, she said, is empowering.

"If every single one of us can recognize our gifts, our strengths, our needs, our beauty and who we are as women we don't need empowerment, we would just be empowered."

The four remarkable and successful women featured in this report have shared with us not only their personal views on empowerment, but have shown us that the meaning of empowerment could be different for each person. The views of counselors and program directors and the oldest campers reinforce that point.

For the reader, you will find the one lesson that really stands out is that you cannot be empowered without empowering yourself first. In the end it comes down to the amount of faith you put in yourself.

Reader Note:

Meet our Reporters

The Journalism and Media program at Camp Danbee began three years ago in 2014 as part of a strategy to incorporate twenty-first century skills into the overall Danbee philosophy. This includes such things as communication, cooperation, collaboration and compromise. The Journalism program focuses on interview techniques, question development, note taking, story structure and development and writing. The program is open to girls of all ages. Many of the campers who sign up for the program return each summer and each summer their skills get better and their confidence grows.

The mantra in the Journalism program is "Tell me a story," a phrase we borrowed from Don Hewitt of "60 Minutes." The girls write about any number of topics, the choices are theirs. They might choose a news article, a feature, or a profile. They might prefer poetry, or a photo essay. However they decide to tell their stories, the goal is to give them the opportunity to be a storyteller.

When the idea of this project on women empowerment was presented to the girls in the Journalism program, four stepped up immediately and said they wanted to be part of it. Each will be in the eighth grade in the fall of 2016. Each is talented and naturally curious. Each, as you will see by their brief bios, loves to write. We believe you will find this report, which is the result of a summer-long endeavor, insightful and informative.

Happy Reading!

Gary M. Hook, Director Journalism and Media
 Jay Toporoff, Director, Camp Danbee



PEYTON ADLER: Hi! This is my sixth summer at camp. I loved the Journalism program from the beginning and I still do. It is my favorite activity at camp because I love to write and find out some new history about how camp started and how everything has become how it is today.



AVERY DERNER: Hi, this is my sixth summer at Camp Danbee. I love writing at home, so I am so happy that writing is offered at camp, as well! Journalism is by far my favorite activity! You have the chance to write about a variety of different things that you are personally curious about.



STELLA FOX: Hi! This is my sixth summer at camp! I've done Journalism from the beginning and I love it! Newspaper is my favorite activity at camp! I love interviewing and writing!



ZOE SWIFT: Hi! This is my third summer at Danbee. I enjoy all of the activities here but Journalism is by far my favorite. This is my second summer writing for the Beeline and I very much appreciate it.

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Kit DesLauriers:

"Do what makes your heart sing!"

by Stella Fox



Kit with her husband, Rob, and their two daughters, Grace and Tia.

Kit DesLauriers is a woman of many talents. She also is a woman who dreams big and never gives up. While she has done much in her life, perhaps her biggest accomplishment is being the first person to climb to and ski from the peaks of the highest mountains on the seven continents. Kit has had a lifetime of experiences that led to her sense of self-empowerment.

"I feel like I kind of empower myself," she says. "There's nobody else out there that's going to empower you." And that's just what she did. Kit doesn't rely on other people to give her courage and empowerment. She's independent.

Kit was interviewed over Skype from her home in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. After a long layover in Salt Lake City the previous day, she had arrived home late the night before from California where she had attended a board meeting for North Face. As she settled in for the interview, her two young daughters – Grace and Tia – joined her briefly.

Kit says her sense of self-empowerment is something that has built over time, but she gives a lot of credit to her mother as she was growing up.

"In my childhood years, my mom would say 'don't ever let anyone tell you there's something you can't do,'" she said. "And then she would add 'especially because you're a girl, or a woman.'"

Kit's mom had wanted to be a television sports broadcaster, but in those days it wasn't accepted for a woman to do that.

"Now women are really crushing it in that field," she said. "The generational progression is really interesting, I think, and I feel I'm another step in the rung."

Her confidence to do what she does, including skiing from the tallest mountains, also is something that has grown over time, Kit says, the by-product of a life-long lifestyle choice.

"It comes from an experienced skill set," she explains. "When I went to do the seven summits it's important to realize this was not a one-off. This is not something I started with and this is not something I finished with. It's taken many years of living this lifestyle. This is not a new endeavor. This is a higher-end version of a lifestyle choice. So, experience is really the answer. It's the combination of experience and my own personal commitment. You can't have confidence if you don't know what you're getting into. Then that's like blind ignorance."

At the time she did not talk much about the seven summits

project.

"I think that's where I also got some of my power, some of my personal confidence," she said, "because I feel when you talk about things too much some of that energy dissipates and whether you want to call that confidence, or commitment, for me some of it just drains away in all the talking. So that's where I got some of my confidence by keeping my project my own."

Holding her seven summits project close to her heart was self-empowering for her, but what are her views on women empowerment?

"Empowerment can come from within and it can come from without," she said, "and probably the best combination is to have both. Neither one is probably going to be enough to achieve big things. So, for women, and probably anyone, empowerment doesn't need to be exactly from one-on-one. It can come from historical situations such that I would hope my skiing the seven summits would empower someone to do their version of something great. But that is never going to be enough. That person needs to feel that they empower themselves, also."

She went on to say that she sees that as gender neutral, that it applies across the board.

"Except that in our culture there are vast, frankly infinite historical sources of that empowerment for the male gender," she said, "and I think we still are just building them for women."

Kit has always been active and loved to be outdoors. Growing up she played many competitive sports. That set the stage for the training discipline that she follows to get ready for her expeditions.

"I've always been an athlete," she said. Her sports were more traditional – soccer, softball, volleyball, swimming, cross-country. She would play whatever she could.

"When I started to get into more organized sports and to be really good at them," Kit said, "then I got into training for them from an early age. When I was your age I remember running competitive track and training for it and thinking about food as fuel. So it's been a long process for me and I'm always thinking about training and what I want to train for."

"For the seven summits in particular," she said, "I train at a certain level that for me I really need three months to get ready. Long days in the mountains with little food and fuel and a lot of core training in the gym."

Her backyard in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, includes the Teton Mountain range, with the tallest peak being Grand Teton at 13,775 feet. This is rugged mountain territory where Kit does much of her training getting up at 3:00 a.m. in the morning and getting used to the discomfort of the cold and the challenges the mountains have to offer and getting back home at nine at night.

Even though her family has a history with the ski industry – her grandfather built the first chairlift at Stowe, Vermont – skiing for Kit came later during her early teenage years. Growing up she did cross country skiing walking around in farmer's fields near her New England home on her Nordic skis. She wasn't a competitive skier and just enjoyed being outside in nature.

"I was 14 the first time I went skiing at a ski area," she said. "I really loved it, but we didn't live near it and it was really expensive for us to do it often and we would only do it one or two weeks a year. So, it took me a really long time. Even though I'm a gifted athlete, that isn't much skiing. I quickly became an intermediate and an advanced intermediate and that is a really hard level to advance out of. I didn't become an expert skier until I moved to Telluride and set that as my focus when I graduated from college. But it took several years of 100-plus days a year. It takes a really long time to be dedicated to a sport like that."

That dedication led to success in the competitive world of big mountain free skiing. She is the 2004 and 2005 Freeskiing World Tour Women’s Champion, and the only woman to win back-to-back championships. Her first championship was at age 35, nearly twice the age of some of the women she competed against. Kit also is the 2011 Intermountain Ski Hall of Fame Inductee. She is a member of the North Face Athlete Team, the first company to have such a team.

During our interview with Kit, it did not take long to see how thoughtful and reflective she is. She did not respond quickly to questions, instead thinking through her answers and choosing her words carefully. That calm steady approach is reflected in her spiritual beliefs, too.

“I feel a calm mind, an ability to have an awareness of your emotions and to practice compassion for others,” she said, “those at the moment comprise my spiritual beliefs. To do what I do in the mountains at this level it is very important to be calm and clear and to believe that anything is possible and to be aware of all situations, including your own emotions and anything changing around you.”

Kit’s reputation is widespread. National Geographic notes that she is widely regarded as one of the best – man or woman – ski mountaineers in the world. It was just such skills that led to her working with Dr. Matt Nolan, a glaciologist from the University of Alaska.

Dr. Nolan’s work involved using new mapping technology in the remote Artic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) where he wanted to determine which mountain in the area actually was the highest. Because of the area’s remoteness maps are subject to error, especially with elevation variations, a concern for aircraft. To test the validity of his research and the accuracy of his equipment, he needed someone to climb to the peaks of the mountains in the refuge using a sensitive GPS device. Kit organized and led a team to the remote areas. She carried the GPS device to the top of the peaks, and through the data that she and Dr. Nolan gathered, were able to determine that Mt. Isto is the highest peak in the Artic refuge. Dr. Nolan and Kit co-authored a scientific paper outlining their findings and research that were published on June 23 of this year in a peer-reviewed journal.

Kit’s journey to this point in her life had many stops along the way and all involved the natural world, something she always cared very deeply about. In college at the University of Arizona she stud-

ied environmental political science and ecology.

“It wouldn’t be a reach to say I was, at times, an 18-, 19-year-old young woman who wanted to save the world,” she said. When coupled with the work she does in some of the earth’s remotest places, it just adds to her desire to do what she can to protect the natural world, she said.

Before she became the skier and mountaineer she is today, she also was very skilled in mountain rescue. Kit has been trained as a helicopter crew chief and as a Wilderness Emergency Medical Technician; has organized backcountry rescues, including dead avalanche recoveries; and has hung beneath a helicopter on a long line to get somebody trapped on a cliff.

It was that training that was an important part of one of the most remarkable experiences of her life. It took place near Telluride, Colorado where she lived at the time and began when she was called to help rescue a woman who had been injured while hiking.

The rescue helicopter was out on another call and it wasn’t expected back for three hours, or so. Kit, a trained wilderness first responder, followed the man who hiked down to make the call, as he lead the way back up the mountain. At one point along the way, Kit took the red T-shirt off the man and tied it to a tree as a signal to the helicopter. When she got to the site of the accident, Kit saw a woman lying on the ground. She had been struck by a rock between her eyes on her forehead and it split her head open.

“I came upon this woman who looked like she basically was lying there dead,” she said. “When I got to this woman her eyes were swollen shut the size of golf balls, she had cerebral spinal fluid coming out of her

ears. As I held her and did my head-to-toe analysis and put pressure to stop the bleeding on her forehead, I was able to figure out from my medical training that it was the head injury and not her (broken) neck, that was going to kill her.”

She applied pressure to stop the bleeding and was holding the woman tight because she was experiencing inter-cranial trauma that was causing her to become combative. It was really intense, Kit said.

“Then in this quiet moment as I was holding her,” she said, “I was keeping a hand on her radial pulse (near the wrist) because when that goes away the next thing that is going to go is your carotid (neck) pulse and you’re dead.

“So, I was holding her radial pulse and I felt it go away,” she said. “I looked at the other two people there and asked them if they knew CPR and they said no. I literally just focused that this woman was not going to die. I am not going to have this situation where I am laying here on this alpine mountain hillside holding a dying woman in my arms. On a very non-verbal level I pleaded with her to come back. I just held her and I was like you’ve got to come back, come back, come back, come back.”

Kit had been with the woman several hours high up on the mountain before she heard the helicopter approach. She looked up and circled her hands and gestured downward signaling that the helicopter should land now. It flew off and began staging for the technical rescue that would be needed.

“I went back to holding her and asking her and pleading with her,” Kit said. “It was really as if she was dead already, and then I felt her radial pulse come back. It’s one of the most remarkable things in my life, ever.”



Photo by Jimmy Chin

Kit and husband Rob at the summit of Mt. Everest.



Photo by Andy Barton

Kit works her way up Grand Teton Mountain.

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Photo by Chris Figenshau

Kit skis down Mt. Isto in the Artic National Wildlife Refuge where she collaborated on scientific research.

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They were able to rescue the woman, who spent two weeks in intensive care. The rock severed her left optic nerve, so she is blind in one eye. She made a full recovery, moved from Telluride and now lives in Chicago.

Her name is Cathy Goralka and each year on the date of the rescue, she sends Kit a card thanking her for saving her.

That and other similar experiences are among the reasons why Kit believes strongly that we all are connected.

“I think it is really important for me to continue to believe that we are all connected,” she said. That we are all powerful connected beings and to not give

that power away to another entity. I believe that there definitely, absolutely is greater power in the universe than just us, but I think it is really important to realize that we are all connected and with love and compassion that we can really, really do good in the world.”

One of her best teachers about connectedness and the importance of being yourself was a wolf named Alta that she raised from a pup, bottle nursing it, cleaning up after it, being there with it night and day. But a wolf is a wild animal, she said, and she did not want to raise it as a pet. Wolves by instinct have a sense of hierarchy in side their packs that is established when they are three to five weeks old. She knew she would have to establish herself as the alpha in this wolf’s life.

“So, I would give him a bone and then take it away,” she said. “Give him a bone and take it away. It was really, really, really a scary experience because he would bite me, not because he wanted to bite me, but because that was his instinct.

She learned that she had to go in and take the bone away knowing that this was how it was going to be and then she was successful.

“At that point he would just sort of sit there and say okay, I get it, that’s how it is going to be. It was non-verbal and that was really cool. I also learned, and this is just as important, or more important, and that is to be just who I am.”

Alta roamed free in that small valley near Telluride. He would return to Kit and stay in her house, or sit in the front yard for hours at a time, but she was determined not to change

Photo by Andy Bardon



Kit skis down Grand Teton Mountain.

who he was.

“There was no doubt in my mind,” Kit wrote in her book *Higher Love: Skiing the Seven Summits*, “that I would succeed in allowing Alta to lead a wolf’s life, even though he lived in a human’s world.”

Alta lived with Kit for nine years until he died of a tumor on his adrenal gland that was producing excess cortisol in his body.

“So,” she said in the interview, “be who you are because anything else is not truthful.”

That belief carries over to her two daughters, Grace and Tia, and the choices they will make as they get older.

“I want my kids to be who they are,” she said. “I’ll support them in what ever they want to do. It doesn’t matter as long as they do what makes them happy.”

Of all the things she has done from her rescue missions, to skiing the seven summits to her arctic wilderness work, was fear ever a factor, was she ever scared?

“Oh, sure,” she said, “but you just touched on two important words for me – fear and being scared. I have found that fear for me is paralyzing. And I really try to cultivate an awareness of when I have fear. I go through these mental processes to try and dissolve that fear. Now to say that I’m scared, absolutely. But scared is a level of fear I can work with, where with fear, I really can’t do anything until I am no longer fearful.”

Kit’s sense of self-empowerment in many ways is what here at Camp Danbee is called “girl power” and is very important. Danbee is an all-girls camp and one of the goals is to teach girls to empower themselves and try new things. So, what advice would she give to girls or anyone who really hasn’t started their life, yet?

“If you’re doing what makes your heart sing, then you are doing the right thing,” she said. “It’s different for everybody and what we’ve been talking about are physical sports or accomplishments and confidence. I just don’t want it to be all about that. Life is not all about that. It’s like when I’m dedicating myself to raising children. You just have to do what makes your heart sing and that’s what’s right for you in the moment.

“A second part to that would be to allow yourself the time and space to contemplate what it is that makes your heart sing because it will be constantly changing. And that’s okay. That’s good. Change is good.

“And the third one would be to dream big,” she said. “Don’t shy away from the big stuff.”

(For more information on kit visit kitdski.com)

Mariana Santos:

"If you don't try nothing will happen."

by Zoe Swift

Many women in some professions in Latin America are struggling to have their voices heard. They don't feel empowered; therefore they cannot rise up in a male-dominated environment. That is exactly why Chicas Poderosas exists. Chicas Poderosas - translating to "Powerful Girls" - is an organization founded by Mariana Santos that brings Latina women to the front row of journalism and digital media in the twenty-first century.

But where would Chicas Poderosas be without Mariana Santos? That's the thing. It wouldn't. Chicas Poderosas exists because of Mariana and her experiences.

As part of the project examining empowerment of women, *The BeeLine* spoke with Mariana about that subject and her experiences with it in other countries. Mariana was interviewed over Skype from her office in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil where she is working with the International Olympic Committee. She spoke at length about her exposure to and familiarity with journalism, as well as gender discrimination in Latin America. Everywhere she has gone in her life has led to her founding Chicas Poderosas. Even in childhood, she grew up in a household that embodied empowerment. Her view of empowerment of women is succinct.

"I believe the goal is to be united and not one against the other," she says.

Mariana was born on March 3, 1983 and was raised in the South of Portugal until she was seventeen. Growing up, she lived in a place where the women were told to marry early and bear children. They were told to stay at home and be a full-time mom. Mariana - from a very early age - disagreed with that principle. When Mariana was younger, she was a swimmer and from the age of six she grew up in an environment where "you get a lot of discipline and you learn to fight for your goals and that you have the power to live your life the way that you want." Her swim coach had significant influence on her at an impressionable age.

"My inspiration was my swimming coach who taught me to fight for my dreams and never give up," she said. "If people tell you you can't do it, you just do not believe it because you can prove to yourself that you do it."

Mariana's mother and father also influenced her views on empowerment.

"Of course, my mother and my father both have a very big fighting spirit," she said, "They really fought for what they wanted to achieve."

Her parents also were avid believers in women independence and empowerment. She was taught to be her own person, and not to care what the bullies or pessimists had to say.

Mariana spoke of her mother who was independent minded and who empowered her and her sister in education and to always believe in themselves, to always do their best and to never be touched by the judgments of others.

"At school I used to be very fat when I was young," she said, "and at school people would bully me, but my parents always said not to pay attention to that because those were the voices of reaction that wouldn't contribute anything to my development, so I should be strong and not be affected by it, rather keep my life and my vision and my goals."

Education is something that makes someone the person that they will become, she believes, and that includes not only the education you get at home, but also the education you get externally.



Photo by Mariandrea Eaea

Mariana Santos at an event sponsored by the International Center for Journalists and the Knight Foundation

Those influences encouraged her to study abroad where she could satisfy her curiosity about other cultures.

At the age of seventeen, Mariana moved to Lisbon to study arts, but later switched to communication design. She always has liked telling stories. Her journey into the world of journalism, from founding Chicas Poderosas, to starting her own company is one of vision, determination and a sense of self-empowerment.

It began when she was doing a masters study in Stockholm, Sweden on communications design and advertising. She ended up telling stories that were not her stories, but were stories about selling a product. She decided to go to London, England to interview the heads of technology at various ad agencies because she wanted to know about the future of technology and the Internet.

In the process of contacting people and scheduling those interviews, it never crossed her mind to question whether she could talk with these high-ranking executives.

"I never doubted," Mariana said, "because I don't judge (myself). I just try and if it works, it works and if it doesn't work, it doesn't."

She believes that when someone judges themselves they are stopping themselves from doing something that could eventually take them further.

"By judging (yourself)," she says, "you think maybe I shouldn't do this and then you end up not doing something that could actually help. You should always try because maybe you get a yes sometimes."

While in London she ended up talking to the CTO, or chief technology officer, for the Guardian newspaper. Mariana said she gained a lot of insight from him into the future of journalism and the role of the Internet. He eventually said that if she liked the Guardian why not come and study there. Her reaction - "When can I start?" So, that summer she was an intern at one of England's most prestigious, innovative and influential newspapers.

"I learned that real stories were the ones I wanted to tell and not made up ones to sell a product," she said.

After three years working for the Guardian Mariana received a fellowship from the International Center for Journalists (ICFJ), which is why she left the Guardian. She was invited by ICFJ to go to Latin America to teach the digital skills she had learned at the Guard-

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Mariana Santos, second from right, at an event in Columbia.

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ian. It was there she saw that reporters, who were mostly women, were in one building writing stories and the technology people, who were men, were in another building converting them into online stories. It was a huge disconnect.

“The women didn’t have the knowledge to report online,” she said. “To build their own stories to create their own pages because it still was a very print dominated world and this was just three years ago.”

While she was in Latin America she saw a lot of events designed to empower people to become more digital savvy, but those events were dominated by men. Ninety-five percent of attendance would be men because women didn’t have the confidence and wouldn’t show up.

“So,” Mariana said, “I decided to create the same kind of events that bring technology and journalism together with design for women and by calling them Chicas Poderosas it’s a woman, female name and it’s targeting women, but it is not exclusive. It is just (a way) for more women to (attend) and at the first event we had 150% more women show up than at a normal ‘Hacks and Hackers’ event that are the kind of events that bring together journalists and developers.”

That experience demonstrated to her that those events were needed to create common spaces where women could feel confident to talk about their doubts and questions and not have to excel necessarily.

Although she carried most of the weight in creating Chicas Poderosas, she couldn’t have done it alone. ICFJ located in Washington D.C. played a big role, along with three other people. Mariano Blejman from Argentina, Miguel Paz from Chile, and Gustavo Faleiros from Brazil. She noted that this was three men and one woman, but along with ICFJ they joined forces and worked together collaboratively to make it happen.

“I think collaboration is the key to success in most of these scenarios,” she said. Mariana also states emphatically that she did not encounter any male negativity in the

creation of Chicas Poderosas. She recruited the men who were keen to work with the women, to help develop women.

“Chicas Poderosas,” according to their website, “are trying to improve the situation of data journalism in Latin America by empowering more women to be involved in technology in their newsrooms, we are improving our events every time we deliver a new one.”

There was criticism, though, aimed at the makeup of her team when she moved to Miami to start an interactive team. There were those who felt that calling the group Chicas Poderosas, but having an all-male team made her a hypocrite. What these people don’t know, she said, is the back-story. Mariana tried to recruit women from within her network who had the skills she believed were necessary, but for various reasons, they turned her down. She said one woman was pregnant and others either the women weren’t ready to move to where she was, or they weren’t interested in working on those types of projects.

“I was told by many people to just hire women and train them to have the skills as the rest of the team,” she said. “I tried, but

it didn’t work. It was totally wrong. I tried, but I failed and I think it is good to fail fast so that you learn.

“What I learned,” she said, “is that I am not going to give more power to the external voices than I do to my own inner voice and gut feeling. I believe that hiring in regards to gender is wrong, the same way it is wrong to hire people for their skin color or religious choice. We should hire the people that have the talent we need and who at the same time are good persons and want to play for the team and not for themselves. That’s why I did Chicas Poderosas, to contribute to a hiring qualification for women working in media and digital.”

For Mariana, even in the face of criticism, or tough times, or when she is feeling down, her biggest source of confidence to build herself up is herself, but when that fails, she turns to family and friends. For professional support she has a cohort of women who



Mariana Santos with women at an event in El Salvador

Photo courtesy of Chicas Poderosas

Photo courtesy of Chicas Poderosas

are at the same level as she and who are facing the same issues. They discuss those issues and try to find a better way to solve them.

It is the process of collaboration that she loves. Working with a team motivates her. She says she does not like working solo and would rather work with professional people to produce stories that will have an impact.

With Chicas Poderosas she was able to see a different kind of impact.

“Working with Chicas Poderosas inspired me to see that you can change so many people’s lives just by telling them they can do it,” she said, “and giving them the tools and they just go and do it.”

“You know,” she continued, “with every event we do at Chicas Poderosas and a girl comes and hugs you at the end and says you changed my life, thank you, then you know it is all worth it.”

Even with the rewards that come from her involvement with Chicas Poderosas, Mariana says she recently has recognized that she has been very focused on work at the expense of family and friends. She is striving to find that balance that everyone seeks. Wind down time is very important when you work hard, she says. It is another life lesson to be learned.

“I am an innovator in life,” she says. “I make plans, but I am not obsessed with the future. And I don’t take myself too seriously. I try to live the moments and enjoy the moments right now. When you are 90 and you look back, you are not going to remember the amaz-

ing projects you’ve done, you’re going to remember the moments with your family and friends, and the trips you took. Those are the memories you take with you. That’s what I’ve learned.”

Mariana has lived a life of female empowerment, encouraged in part by her parents, her swim coach and others she has encountered. Yet, so much of her sense of empowerment comes from within. She knows who she is and what motivates her. So, what advice would she give to girls and young women who are struggling to find their own identity, who might be afraid to follow their own dreams?

“Look,” she says, “if you don’t try nothing will happen. If you sit and wait things are not going to fall in your lap. You just have to fight for it. Don’t take yourself too seriously, allow yourself to fail, allow yourself to make mistakes and try again. Have fun along the way.”

“Really, don’t take yourself too seriously I think is the most important one,” she says. “When you let go, when you improvise, when you are spontaneous, I think is when the best things come.”

“The comparison I make,” she continued, “is imagine you like a boy and he likes certain types of girls that are different from your type. You like baggy clothes and he likes skinny jeans, for instance. You start wearing skinny jeans to make the boy like you. You stop being yourself. You start changing to please someone and you go outside of being natural. I think

we should be ourselves. If you like baggy clothes, that’s awesome. It’s being natural and that’s the important thing.”

Mariana loves helping women and she loves journalism, so together, it is the perfect match for her. Those are the root ideas for Chicas Poderosas. Mariana not only helped women feel empowered in the world of journalism, she also founded an organization to go with it. Mariana saw unfairness in the world and she helped change it because she believed in herself and felt empowered.

(For more information on Chicas Poderosas, visit their website at chicaspoderosas.org.)

“If you don’t try nothing will happen. If you sit and wait things are not going to fall in your lap. You just have to fight for it.”
— Mariana Santos.

Photo courtesy of Chicas Poderosas



Mariana Santos, far left, with Elisa Tinsley of the International Center for Journalists, far right, participate in an event in Costa Rica.



Photo courtesy of Chicas Poderosas

Mariana top left with students and journalists who attended a conference at Florida International University sponsored by the Knight Foundation.

Lisa Aire: Knowing yourself is empowering

by Zoe Swift and Avery Dermer



Photo Courtesy of Vista Caballo

Lisa and husband, Jess, with horses Miss Hakomi and Mikey on their ranch in Dove Creek Colorado.

Lisa Aire's journey from being a CEO in the high pressure world of advertising in New York City to the founder of an innovative ranch near the small, laid-back town of Dove Creek, Colorado (population 721) is one of personal battles and hard-learned lessons.

Lisa grew up, she said, with two amazing parents, a brother and a sister, who continue to inspire her to this day. She spoke of her father - who recently passed - as one of the enormous influences in her life.

"He was such a champion of young people finding and fulfilling their dreams," she said. "He and my mother gave my brother and sister and I the most extraordinary life that to this day there is not day that goes by that that I don't recognize just how extraordinary it was." Lisa said.

Not only did her parents give her many experiences, they taught her several lessons that would last her a lifetime.

"It was interesting because they never said no, which sometimes was hard," she said. "Because I didn't always trust myself to make accurate decisions, but I think they knew that was part of the learning. Sometimes you have to fall in a hole every now and again. My father as I said loved young people. And he loved us as women as well. He just thought women were amazing."

The Beeline interviewed Lisa over Skype from her ranch in Dove Creek. Internet for their remote location is by satellite, which can be interrupted by bad weather. The day we interviewed her, the weather was clear.

After a long career in advertising working for other agencies, during which she created the iconic Motel 6 ad campaign "This is Tom Bodett and we'll leave a light on for you," she started two successful ad businesses of her own. As the company grew, it needed a CEO. The company wanted Lisa to be the CEO. Lisa wasn't sure she was right for the position.

"I just didn't think I had the qualifications for it," she said. "I had the ideas for sure. But being a CEO takes remarkable skills, and I wasn't sure that I had those skills."

So, Lisa went to go speak with some other "very qualified CEO's." She said she was fortunate to know someone who knew the former CEO of Federal Express, who gave Lisa a phone interview. He began by asking her questions about her job and what she does.

"At the end of his questions he said, 'Well, that's exactly what

a CEO does. You're doing it.' And he said, 'What's really the problem here?' He said, 'Are you looking for a stamp on a piece of paper?' And I said, 'Yes, I do believe I'm looking for a stamp on a piece of paper.' And he said, 'Well, let me just go ahead and give you that stamp now. You are a CEO.' That's what happened"

Lisa became the CEO for these two companies until she began noticing a nagging feeling of being unfulfilled. She started to find various ways of distracting herself, but she couldn't turn away from what her heart was trying to tell her.

"I started feeling empty and I didn't understand it," she said, "so I tried to fill myself up with more work and more tasks and I tried to soothe myself by telling myself that it was all okay by shopping or traveling or having these big huge experiences, but ultimately that wouldn't last.

"I think we have to be brave to let ourselves feel unfulfilled," she said. "And that is how you find the truth."

Tragically, later she was diagnosed with a degenerative disease, which disrupts the brain and the way it works.

"This particular disease affects your neurological system. So basically your whole system shuts down around you. It's pretty scary. So I just decided that I understood that I had to die sometime, but I just wasn't going to die that way. And I feel very fortunate and very blessed."

When Lisa was asked what her disease was called, she referred to a book titled *The Little Prince* in which the main character stated that, "When you name something, you own it." Lisa said she did not want to own the disease she had. "I want nothing to do with this," she said.

In Lisa's book called *Crossing the Silly Bridge*, she describes how during a dark time in her life the internal pain she felt had built to such a point that she broke down and cried uncontrollably.

"I don't know how much time passed," she wrote in her book. "When I came to, the tears had stopped leaving dry, crusted trails on my cheeks and my eyes swollen shut. It was a good thing. I was not ready to see where I had landed.

"In the dark, and in the quiet, I realized the noise had subsided. I heard a voice: 'Go to the horses.' In my exhaustion I was unable to move or react. I heard it again: "Go to the horses.

"I had wanted to run away many times, but I never knew where to go. Now I did. When our hearts speak, and we listen, we find ourselves. It's just that simple. I did as my heart asked. I went to find the horses. Here, then, is my story. It's a



Photo Courtesy of Vista Caballo

Lisa with Miss Hakomi Banks

journey, really.”

One day in New York City, she went to Central Park to ride horses. Lisa was put on a very “cranky” horse, among other small children riding other cranky horses. At this point, Lisa realized that she didn’t like the way the horses were being treated. Lisa then went to another teacher and when she arrived the man told her that she should go to an instructor in Colorado to really learn how to horseback ride, because he’s “the best”.

“I was set on going to the best person out there,” she said. “I was a very high achiever and maybe still am, so I was set on going to the best, and that’s what he was, the best.”

In Colorado, she met a horse that she knew would be hers. Lisa named her Miss Hakomi Banks, who quickly became Lisa’s best friend.

“I think I had unplugged from my heart,” she said. “I think what she did was turn it back on. She plugged me in and turned me on. She actually showed me that I was going in the wrong direction. I had to go inside of myself to find home. And now no matter where I go in the world I feel at home.”

As Lisa approached Colorado and adjusted to her new and improved life, she began learning new things and having new experiences.

“When I came to Colorado and I started learning about the horses, I felt fulfilled, I felt full.” She said. “Everyday, it didn’t matter how long the days were, they weren’t long enough.”

Lisa could not just leave behind the two businesses she had created, so Lisa handed her sister (who was also her business partner) the keys to the business and said, “Here, you can have the company, I’m going to go back to the horses.” Her sister said “No”, but Lisa was not going to give up that quickly. She spent the next few years searching for someone to succeed her. Although she failed in her succession plan, Lisa ultimately decided to sell the companies.

“I had to just let all of that go, and learn how to be myself. And then I had to learn a new way of being,” she told us.

Once Lisa finally arrived in Colorado, she could not wait to begin the experience that was in front of her. Lisa dove head first into this amazing opportunity, and she loved it.

“I felt fulfilled and honest with myself, because something about it made me recognize that this is where I wanted to be and what I was meant to be doing.”

There was another aspect to this experience, as well. Lisa was cured of her illness. But how? she was asked. One word: horses.

“Those were just my angels,” she said. “Everybody’s angels look different.”

Lisa believes she was cured by working with the horses and being around the horses. She talked about studies that discovered being around horses produces a restorative brain wave that normally is only produced in deep sleep. Lisa believes that a change of scenery helped, as well.

“First, I changed my lifestyle and that definitely helped,” she said. “Two, I made a decision for myself and I wasn’t focused on dying, I was focused on living. “I was focused on no matter how much time I had left, I was going to live it. And I think that definitely helped.”

Lisa spoke of how she has changed since becoming diagnosed and overcoming her disease.

“I think how I’ve changed as a person is that I’m a lot calmer and I’m calmer because I’m more confident and I’m happier in the moment,” she explained. “I’m not scared to be here, present in this moment. I used to be at a point in my life where I would’ve been afraid to die. Now I’m not saying that I’m looking forward to it happening anytime soon, but if it had to, I wouldn’t be afraid of it. I



Photo Courtesy of Vista Caballo

The Cowboy Cabin is a rustic and comfortable guest house.

would just take that in stride as part of it.”

While she is calmer now and no longer afraid of being in the moment, were there other curves that life threw at her, other obstacles?

“I don’t think life really threw curves at me,” she said. “I think the biggest curves were in my mind. The biggest curve I kept tripping over was my own fear. Those were some of the big curves, but ultimately what caused them to be big or small was what my mind chose to do with them, or what I believed or perceived. Life just serves things up so that I could finally learn how to finally put down my fear because I was so exhausted from being afraid and I just said, ‘Okay, I’m not going to be afraid anymore.’”

She is more aware and present; as a result Lisa is happier every day. Lisa is able to wake up every day with a smile on her face, and her mind set and ready for the day ahead.

“I get to wake up and say ‘How many people can I help?’” she said. “And ‘How can I be present to them?’ It has made life a lot richer. I thought richer meant how much money I had in my bank account and that helps, for sure, but it’s really got very little to do with it.”

Now, Lisa, along with her husband, Jess, has founded Vista Caballo Innovation Ranch. They now own 10 horses, including “a baby stallion, what they call a colt. We just had him last year. He’s just a year old. We have a little miniature horse. We have a couple of quarter horses, a thoroughbred, a palomino. We have a mustang that was wild a couple years ago. It’s pretty great.

“The best way to explain it (the innovation ranch) is first of all the actual environment of Vista Caballo,” Lisa said. “We’re fortunate to have Wi-Fi out here today. It’s not a guarantee. We’re in nature out here. We’re immersed in nature. There is no light pollution. There is very little noise pollution. That’s very different for most people. And what happens when you get here, and you get in an environment that is not 100 percent familiar, you start to show up differently. The people who come out here are leaders ... and as leaders we owe it not only to ourselves, but to everybody we are leading to be our best. So, Vista Caballo is an experience of taking yourself to a place that is not known and seeing how you show up. When you know that, you’re no longer afraid of that part of yourself. And then you’re also not afraid of the unknown.”

Lisa spoke of how, now, in the twenty-first century, our generation is growing up with electronics and Apple products, and how without them, we honestly don’t know what to do with ourselves. She spoke of how without them, it even causes anxiety.

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“(Your generation might say) being able to just be connected to myself would be stressful,” she said. “And wouldn’t it be so much fun and so exciting if in that moment when you hold your breath and you think it might be scary, instead you were with this horse and instead of feeling anything you thought you were feeling, you felt something really different, you felt really connected and you felt so connected you never thought about WiFi for hours. All the things we thought might happen don’t, and all new things do happen. We start to trust ourselves in a completely different way. We start to connect with different things we never considered before.”

She also has a very interesting take on empowerment.

“If every single one of us can recognize our gifts, our strengths, our needs, our beauty and who we are as women we wouldn’t need empowerment, we would just be empowered,” she said.

Lisa believes in the next generation of women to take our world and society to the next level, and to create a base for gender equality. As she spoke, three other eighth grade girls in the Journalism and Media program who had been listening to the interview moved

into the view of the laptop camera.

“You are our future,” she said. “I look at every single one of your faces. You are my future. So, I’m here to help you in any way I can. And it doesn’t matter that we technically don’t know each other, we know each other. We are women. We know each other. So, here’s the women’s code, as you know, we help each other. We don’t tell each other a dress looks good on us if it doesn’t. We don’t let each other go out with guys who are not worthy of us. But more important than that, we stand up for each other. And we help each other recognize those gifts. So, please be there for each other.”

As this story comes to a close, Lisa had one last piece of advice she wanted us to know on our journey through life.

“It’s not about perfection,” she said. “It’s about ownership of who you are. Everything about you is fantastic. Even your nuances. They are what make you unique. And that to me was empowerment. You feel that. When you feel true in yourself and whole in yourself then no one

can take you down. That’s a feeling and a sense of power, that’s empowerment.”

(For more information about Lisa, visit vistacaballo.com)



Miss Hakomi Banks, the horse that found Lisa and changed her life.

Photo Courtesy of Vista Caballo



A view of Vista Caballo Innovation Ranch

Sy Montgomery:

Give to the world what is in your heart

by Peyton Adler

Sy Montgomery is most well known for her scientific work with animals and her 20 books. Her bio reads like that of a female Indiana Jones. In fact, the Boston Globe describes her as "part Indiana Jones and part Emily Dickinson." Similarly, the New York Times describes her as "equal parts poet and adventurer."

"Sy," her bio states, "... has been chased by an angry silverback gorilla in Zaire and bitten by a vampire bat in Costa Rica, worked in a pit crawling with 18,000 snakes in Manitoba and handled a wild tarantula in French Guiana.

"She has been deftly undressed by an orangutan in Borneo, hunted by a tiger in India and swam with piranhas, electric eels and dolphins in the Amazon. She has searched the Altai Mountains of Mongolia's Gobi for snow leopards, hiked into the trackless cloud forest of Papua New Guinea to radio collar tree kangaroos, and learned to SCUBA dive in order to commune with octopuses."

When you talk to Sy, though, you encounter someone who does not fit the movie image of a do-or-die adventurer. She comes across as gentle, thoughtful, modest and immensely curious.

Sy was interviewed by *The Beeline* over FaceTime as she sat in her office at her home in Hancock, New Hampshire. Keeping her company during the interview was Thurber, her year-old Border collie she's had since he was eight weeks old. He is blind in one eye, which is how he came to be with her, and that fact alone offers insight into this woman who has yet to meet an obstacle she couldn't overcome.

She is a woman who is the very definition of empowerment. Sy knew from the start what she wanted to do with her life and never gave up on her dream. She left one of the best jobs she ever had as a medical and science writer to do the things she loves.

That attitude and approach to life reflect Camp Danbee's basic philosophy and *The Beeline* explored the concept of empowerment as we spoke with Sy and what empowerment means to her.

"It means," she said, "giving to the world what you know you have in your heart. And sometimes that might take courage. And sometimes it might take believing in yourself."

Sometimes that is not easy, she said, and when she has trouble believing in herself she believes in her teachers, the animals she has gotten to know, her editors who have worked closely with her, the people she's met around the world, some of whom live in grass houses, some in mud huts.

"They are wise people and wise animals," she said, "and when I can't

believe in myself, I get my empowerment from my teachers."

When asked to speak more about those in her life who have inspired or empowered her, she immediately mentions her mother and father who head a long list of people and animals.

"Oh, my gosh, lots of people," she said. "My father was a general in the Army. He survived the Bataan death march. (During World War II U.S. and Filipino prisoners of war were forced by Japanese troops to march many miles under grueling conditions and many hundreds died.) I'm made of that DNA. My mother, who grew up poor in Arkansas, went to college, was valedictorian of her class, learned to fly a plane, landed a job with the FBI and married a Bird Colonel who later became a brigadier general. So, at birth I started out lucky."

She then cited others, like her first dog, Molly, a Scottish terrier, and a parakeet named Jerry that threw up on her finger, a clear sign of courtship by that species. There was a fabulous high school teacher named Mr. Walt Clarkson and especially her husband, Howard Mansfield, "who is a better writer than I am. We went to college together, but we didn't date. We were on the editorial staff of the school newspaper at college and I learned a helluva lot from him."

Sy goes on to say that there are teachers all around us. "The thing is," she said, "there's this saying 'when a student is ready a teacher will appear. That sounds like we sit in a classroom and in comes a teacher. But what it really means is we have to recognize our teachers.'"

Sy said one of the most influential teachers in her life was named Christopher. He came home with her one day in a shoebox on her lap. She said he was a very sick pig, the runtiest of the runts on a

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Sy poses comfortably with a cheetah.



A great white shark swims past the shark cage with Sy and photographer inside.

Photo by Nic Bishop

Photo by Keith Eilenbogen

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pig farm and nobody thought he would live through the night. She was not looking for a pig to raise, but at that time her dad was dying from cancer and while she knew she couldn't save him, she knew she could save this little sick pig. It turned into a 14-year love affair and Christopher became the subject of her first national best selling book. That pig, she said, “Grew to be this 750-pound beloved character in our town” and had an impact on many lives. People would save food for him as he walked around town. He'd get write-in votes in every town election. At the time there was only one police officer in their town and he would keep apples in his cruiser to lure Christopher back home when he would get out.

Sy recalls a 14-year-old girl named Kelly who was undergoing cancer treatments and Christopher was her best friend during that grueling time. Sy said this 750-pound animal with sharp tusks treated Kelly so tenderly and had special grunts just for her. In her room Kelly had a large poster of Christopher, so even when he wasn't there he still made her feel better. The cancer treatments were not successful, though, and she died. At her service there were pig figurines all around the room because of Christopher. She said the day she brought him home he changed her life and the lives of others. It was a graduate course in living a meaningful life.

Following her dream of being a naturalist required sacrifices. She had to quit a job that paid well with many benefits; had to leave the town she had been in for five years; had to leave all her friends, and especially she had to leave the man she loved. Was it hard, she was asked?

“People thought I was crazy,” she said, “but I didn't think it was crazy or difficult at all, because I knew I would make it work.”

It was a fantastic opportunity, she said. It was what she wanted – to do science herself and to write books – and being a journalist prepared her to do that.

Sy spoke about the lessons she learned on the job early in her career. She had been working for *The Courier-News* in New Jersey for a month when she was sent to Wyoming to cover the disappearance of small plane carrying a prominent and beloved pharmacist from the nearby town of Clinton, New Jersey. She was too young to rent a car and had to have the pharmacist's brother sign for her. She had gotten lost in the Teton Mountains trying to get back to the hotel and her deadline was approaching. With the story in hand that

she had written in the car, Sy went knocking on doors until she found someone who would let her use their phone to call the paper to dictate her story.

Another time she was sent to cover a tornado, but on the way back her 1966 Oldsmobile Delta 88 convertible started smoking. There were no cell phones back then and she left her car smoldering on the side of the road while she went in search of a pay phone so she could file her story.

In 1980 she was sent to cover the Democratic Political Convention in New York, but got caught

up in reporting her story and missed the last bus back to New Jersey. She resorted to calling someone she had met on the bus going to the city. Her first question was “Do you have a typewriter?” Her second question was “May I stay at your place tonight?” He was a perfect gentleman, she said, and she filed her story.

Such is the life of a reporter in the field. “That's what you do,” she said, “you're constantly MacGyvering these ways to make it work. That's exactly what you do in field research, too.”

When interviewed by *The BeeLine* Sy had just returned from Tanzania where she had been doing research. The vehicle they were in drove over a rock and damaged the drive shaft and springs. It was four o'clock in the afternoon “in the middle of nowhere in the Serengeti where no tourists were, where no rangers were, no campers were out there, nothing was out there, no cell phone reception and at 6:30 the sun drops like stone.”

While there were none of those things, she said, there were plenty of lions and leopards and hyenas and Cape buffalo, which will kill you. There were fires on the horizon and they were sitting there with a dead Land Cruiser with flammable gasoline. Two of the experts in their party had been discussing whether the roar they heard was actually a lion or an ostrich because they make similar sounds.

“This was really bad,” she said, “but the guys we were with managed to fix the car using the tow rope and electrical tape, MacGyvering it with a tow rope and electrical tape.”

She loves to watch animals do what they do naturally and can say that she has really experienced it.

It began when her father gave her the gift of a lifetime, a trip to Australia, which she has always wanted to see. So, she went into the Outback and when she got there she joined Earth Watch, a worldwide organization engaging in scientific field research and education to promote a better under-



Photo by Sam Marshall

A pink toe tarantula walks up Sy's arm and shoulder at Sam Marshall's lab in Ohio.



Photo by David Scheel

Sy snorkeling off Moorea, a French Polynesian island northwest of Tahiti, with a wild octopus in the foreground that reached out and touched her.

standing of the natural world. That is when she fell in love with field research. She wasn't offered a job at the end, which is what she wanted, but the woman in charge of the Earth Watch expedition, Dr. Pamela Parker, saw how much she was interested in field work and offered to share her food with her and let her keep her tent within their research compound.

She seized the opportunity and was paid nothing, but all day she got to follow emus, a flightless bird native to Australia, to see what they did. And that she did, which is something nobody had ever done. Everybody knew what emus were, but nobody knew what they did all day.

“And I found that out,” she said. “But who was I? I was nobody. I was just a person observing stuff. Something anybody else could do. I wanted to do more of that and I wanted to write more about that.”

Sy has been to every continent except Antarctica and there are “tons of places” she still wants to go.

“I have a great life,” she says. “I’m having a blast. I’ve never regretted for a second any of those decisions I made as a young person. So, I really encourage young people to believe in themselves. Believe in what your heart tells you to do and make it happen.

“I think what stops a lot of people from following their dreams,” she continued, “is that they get hooked on thinking they need a whole lot of stuff. But you don’t need that stuff. What you need is to have meaningful work that you love. You don’t need X amount of money for clothes. And you don’t need a fancy car. All you need is a car that moves. And you don’t need a fancy house. All you need is that it doesn’t rain on you at night. And that other stuff will come.”

She has a perfectly good car, she says, and lives in a 100-year-old farmhouse with the man of her dreams on eight acres of beautiful land.

“I never dreamed I’d have this great a life,” she said. “But I do and the animals gave me all of it. And it all came out of writing about them.”

Sy has been around all sorts of creatures from poisonous snakes, to sharks, to tigers, but the biggest, potentially life-ending experience was being bitten by a tiny mosquito that gave her dengue fever, a disease that can result in mild symptoms or with more severe cases, in death. Sy was with another woman who had hepatitis. They had made it out of Borneo to Singapore before it was “a big clean metropolis.” They had no money, so they checked into a flophouse. They agreed that if one woke up and the other was dead then she would call the other’s husband. But they both woke up alive and “we went to a Denny’s and had a milkshake, and we were fine.”

The feeling she gets when she is with an animal varies from animal to animal.

“It is thrilling to be with a wild animal,” she said, “but it also gives you a kind of tranquility. I’ll tell you about my newest book, which is about great white sharks. I was very interested to see how I would feel diving with great white sharks. I was in a shark cage

and I was a fairly new diver. You know, people are very afraid of sharks. I didn’t think I would be afraid, but when you put yourself in a cage behind a diving mask breathing through a tube, what are you going to feel? I was interested. This was Guadalupe Island off Mexico. When I first saw the shark it was as though the ocean had gathered itself into the shape of a shark. It was like the ocean itself was swimming toward me. I was thrilled about it, but I was not scared. In fact, I felt very tranquil, because here was somebody who knew what they were doing coming toward me in the ocean and there was no malice at all in his glance, not a bit.

“When I am with a wild animal that I’ve been dying to see,” she says, “I feel thrilled, but I also feel whole. It’s not like the feeling you get when you’ve just won a race. It’s not

that kind of excitement, because it’s not my achievement that’s filling me up. It’s the animal’s glory and it’s that feeling of humility that here you are in the presence of somebody really great, really perfect. And here I am this imperfect little person able to be with them.”

So, what is it like knowing that she could do everything that she has done?

“It is so great,” Sy said. “It’s one of the great things with getting older. I’m fifty-eight years old and it’s great being fifty-eight and I’m looking forward to every year I can draw a breath. I wish I could go back and tell my young self that it was going to work out, but instead I can tell you.”

(For more information about Sy visit symontgomery.com)



Photo by Keith Ellenbogen

Sy and Photographer Keith Ellenbogen in a shark cage off Guadalupe Island, Mexico.



Photo by Keith Ellenbogen

Banshee, a peregrine falcon, perches on Sy’s hand.

Empowerment is a worldwide concern

by Stella Fox

Any girl who becomes a camper at Danbee is exposed to the camp's all-encompassing philosophy of "Girl Power." That is something very special here that is reflected in the various activities where girls of all ages are encouraged to try something new, to move beyond what is comfortable. To try and fail and try again is more important than never trying.

At Camp Danbee the counselors and program directors are a diverse group coming from the United States and other countries and each has their own thoughts about girl power and the bigger topic of women empowerment. As part of the empowerment project *The Beeline* interviewed Danbee staff, women and men, several from other countries, to get their thoughts and perspectives. These are people who interact with Danbee campers daily. They have an impact on the girls who come to Danbee.

Alishia McDarris is someone who has traveled extensively. She and her husband, Josh, are Danbee's photographer and videographer. Alisha, who grew up in Ohio, has traveled throughout the world, including China, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Mexico, Ireland and more. "Girl power," she says, "differs from country to country."

In some countries, she says, there is little to no female empowerment because women are seen as less important than men. In others, particularly western countries, there is more male-female equality.

Alisha's definition of empowerment is the feeling of being capable of doing anything or having the knowledge of being capable. Alisha thinks girls can do anything anyone else can do and do it just as well.

"There is no sense in thinking they can't do that," Alisha says.

Alisha sees girl power showcased at Danbee, for sure. Alisha is a very confident person and always has felt she could be successful at anything. She also is a freelance writer and she needs to be self-empowered and confident. Alisha doesn't have one female role model and she thinks for girls it's important to look out into the world and see accomplished woman.

Mike Snodgrass, who is from New Zealand, is the lakefront director at Danbee and has definite thoughts on Girl Power and empowerment. Mike's definition of empowerment is providing someone, or yourself with the resources and help to improve something or themselves.



Rebecca Stavis
Theater director

Mike Snodgrass
Lakefront director

Mike said he has been empowered in his life by good teachers, coaches, family and friends. He works in construction with his dad and he's learned from him.

"He's a teacher, mentor, and father all at the same time," Mike said.

Mike thinks that today's society is providing more and more positive women role models. All of the negative role models aren't getting as much attention as they used to, he says, and young women have positive women role models to look up to.

When people empower you, Mike says, you're always going to learn new things and improve.

"My job down here at the lake is to empower young women to try new things and improve on the things they like doing."

Mike, who has been at Danbee 21 years, sees empowerment every day here. He sees good people trying to make Danbee a better place.

Mike shares Alisha's thoughts on equality of women and men. Women and men are completely equal, he says, and when applying for jobs no one should feel bias by race, religion and especially gender, or anything else.

"Why would they not?" Mike asks.

Ashley Currie is from Ireland and works in pottery. Ashley says girl power reflects single, independent, successful women who are personally empowered.

Like the other counselors, Ashley does believe that girl power is showcased at Danbee. When people go to tournaments at other camps and compete that's girl power and when we dance after meals that is girl power in action, in Ashley's opinion. Also, everyone is nice to each other at Danbee and it's nice to make other people feel better.

Ashley says that girl power and empowerment are hindered on social media because people often edit the photos they post to make them look better. She notes that people also post photos that are inappropriate and they give away their dignity. Girls shouldn't need to post altered photos of themselves to make them feel confident, she says. Girl power is something every girl needs, she believes.

Ashley believes that woman and men are equal, but she also thinks gender equality needs to be developed more and improvement is needed. Men don't always need to be the CEOs of companies, she says.

Perhaps nobody at Danbee has had more experience working with young women who compete at very high athletic levels than Jerry Nelson, the head coach of Southern Connecticut State University's women's gymnastics team. He also is the director of the gymnastics program at Danbee. He works all year with college girls who are top athletes.

Jerry's definition of empowerment is instilling the confidence, pride and the idea that you can achieve anything with hard work and commitment. He has personal experience in that area. He was a member of two men's Division II national championship teams when he was in college. He owned a private gymnastic school for 30 years before becoming head coach in 1994. He also was affiliated with the USA Gymnastics until last year when he stepped down. Understanding what it takes to be successful in that sport at that level helps him in his coaching.

Jerry's job as a coach is to help empower and encourage the girls on his team, he says. He is constantly giving them the tools they need to be confident and become successful, he explains, and when women ask him questions he shows them that they know the answer, or that they can figure out the answer. That, too, is empowering.

Three of the girls that Jerry coached became doctors; another started her own photography business and has people working for her. These girls gained empowerment from Jerry in their gymnastics and had the confidence to be successful in other areas.

"I give them responsibility and hold them accountable for their actions," Jerry says of the college girls he coaches.

"Woman and men equality is much closer to being equal," Jerry says, "but we still have ground to make up."

"If you're given the opportunity to shine," he says, "to pursue excellence, to grow responsibly and positively and you take advantage (of that) then you will become empowered."

Rebecca Stavis is the theater director at Danbee. At home she is a high school special education teacher in the Bronx. Earlier in her life she was an actor in musical theater, including off-Broadway. She understands the importance of empowerment.

"My goals drove me and my inspiration from others." Rebecca said about how she was empowered when she was performing. She thinks a good role model in today's society is Michele Obama. Rebecca says she is an intelligent woman and is in a position of power, she speaks about important things. Michele Obama also cares about the empowerment of women.

Rebecca's definition of empowerment is "finding the strength to achieve any goal." Rebecca says that every day she feels empowered. At Danbee the campers motivate her and empower her in the theater program. When Rebecca was acting, she used her goals and inspiration to drive, motivate and empower her. It came from within, she said, she was self-empowered.

Rebecca also helps many campers feel empowered in theater. She helps campers find the courage to go on stage in front of the whole camp and act and or sing. She also helps girls in all the plays and talent shows by supporting them. Her advice to girls who want to be empowered is to never give up.

"Any goal is achievable if you work hard," she says.

Gender equality, in her opinion, is getting better, but we still don't have 100% equality with men in many ways, she says. Rebecca thinks it's exciting that we finally have a woman presidential candidate.

Hannah Bairner, who is from Scotland, is the director of Culinary Arts. Hannah's personal definition of empowerment is, "the self respect to live the life you chose."

Hannah felt personally empowered during pre-camp where there is no sort of gender differentiation. She proved every day that she could move all the cubbies (storage bins) and beds that were needed. She knew she could do it and she felt empowered to do it.

Hannah's advice mirrors that of others.

"Believe in yourself," she says. "Don't let anyone tell you you can't do it."

Hannah lives in Scotland and she says woman and men are fairly equal. Men are still paid more, she says, but thinks it's a generational thing.

"My dad's generation is very sexist," she says.

Hannah thinks woman and men equality is getting better but is not equal. Along with Rebecca, Hannah looks up to Michele Obama. She also looks up to Harry Potter star Emma Watson and Chicago P.D. star Sophia Bush, both of whom are strong supporters of feminism. They are feminists for the right reasons, Hannah thinks.

"They give feminism a different vibe because a typical feminist, I would say, has a negative connotation attached and this new era of feminist changes that."

Sean Byrne's experience with woman equality is very similar. Sean is the director of pottery at Danbee. At home he is an elementary school teacher at a school where the principal is a woman.

"They're just people." Sean says about woman.

Sean lives in Canada. In his school men and women are equal and gender is not important, he said.

Sean's definition of empowerment is awareness of self-reliance, knowing when you can do things on your own or when you need help. Sean gives an example of when he was empowered earlier in his life. His mom gave him a cookbook and told him to choose a dish to make for dinner. When his mom believed in him, he knew he could do it on his own. He was given the tools to do his own thing. Now one of his favorite things to do is to cook.

Sean's role at Danbee is giving girls the tools and confidence to succeed beyond perceived abilities. Sean thinks some people are

afraid of failure in front of peers.

"There is a big difference between being shy and not being empowered," he said, "and we mix them up."

People get shy about doing things, he said, but lots of people don't have the courage and empowerment to do things and that is a big difference. Sean also says that not everyone will be a rock star.

Several of the people who work in the kitchen and dining hall came to Danbee from their homes in Mexico. We interviewed five of these women and they all are optimistic about the future for women in Mexico. There are programs in Mexico designed to empower women, they said.

When they were interviewed they said they wanted their comments to be presented as a group opinion. They all are in their early 20s. There is Sandra Espinoza, age 20, Diana Torres, 21, Giselle Cazares, 21, Esmeralda Villegas, 22, and Mariana Armenta, 23. This was the first time in the United States for them.

Back home they all are college students, four at The Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP) where they are studying to be engineers. The fifth is studying tourism at another college.

"Change is slow because Mexico is big," they said, "but it is working. For example in the past you wouldn't see women studying engineering, but now it is common."

Their parents and "that generation" generally support this trend, but some resistance can be found among the older generation who still think there are jobs for men and jobs for women. That resistance, they said, does not exist among men their age. They see men and women as equals.

Some resistance to male-female equality also can be found among some companies who still have women doing the office and clerical jobs, while men do the hard labor. But that, too, is changing.

These five women all believe that women are just as capable of doing the hard work as men. They grew up with this attitude of equality, they said, and the younger girls are even more enthusiastic.

So, what advice do they give to younger girls?

"We are all the same," they said, "so we don't have to feel different from men or each other. It is important to be strong and to learn from experiences. Don't feel as though you are less than men and that women can do the same or better than men."

After listening to the views on women empowerment from this diverse group of people, it seems that the idea of "girl power" is in good shape. Many people agree that more needs to be done before men and women will reach equality, but change is happening. Like the four women featured in this report, girls can do anything.



Alisha McDarris
Photographer

Hannah Bainer
Culinary Arts director

Independence and Confidence are Danbee's legacy.

by Gary Hook

The Wel-B-Yon are the elder stateswomen of Camp Danbee. They have been here the longest coming year-after-year. Some for as many as nine years. Some since they were in the third grade. Some for only three years. Now they are in the tenth grade. It's their last summer at Danbee. They have reached Danbee's age ceiling.

During those years they have experienced a lot. They have come to understand a lot. They understand the complex subject of empowerment for girls and young women. They have become world wise. That wisdom was on display during the opening campfire, an annual tradition that this year marked the beginning of Danbee summer 2016.

Camp Danbee's roots date to 1950 when Dan Bernheim founded this sleep-away retreat for girls. Every year since then girls have traveled from far and wide to take up residence on the shores of Lake Ashmere nestled among the trees in the Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts between the towns of Hinsdale and Peru. It was during those early years of Danbee that to reach the building that housed the oldest girls it was necessary to go beyond the well in front of Bernheim's house. Thus, the moniker Wel-B-Yon came to identify the oldest girls. And so it was on that brisk late June night that the wisdom of youth had its moment. Logs in the fire pit sparked and crackled as 325 campers and another 120-plus counselors and staff gathered near the lake to listen.

Following tradition after he finished speaking, Jay Toporoff, one of a brother duo that make up Danbee's two directors, offered the microphone to any of the Wel-B-Yon who wished to speak. They

rose. Sometimes alone. Sometimes in pairs. Sometimes three at a time. Each time they shared the wisdom they had garnered during their years as campers.

Their message was clear. It was one of selflessness. Embrace this moment, this experience, they said. It is special. Embrace those around you, they said. Say hello to the first-time campers and be their friend. You'll find those friendships will last a lifetime. They know, they said, because these Wel-B-Yon have been friends for years. It's a bond, they said. An unbreakable one. Be supportive of those who feel down or who might be having a tough time. They spoke about what Danbee has meant to them as they began their last summer here. While they spoke the fire faded, the sun slowly set and twilight gradually turned to darkness. It was time to gather in friendship circles as everyone sang Danbee's anthem.

Now, as part of this special *BeeLine* project, the Wel-B-Yon have been asked to share their thoughts on the subject of empowerment. During two separate open discussions held in the common area of the Wel House where they live, these young women once more put their wisdom on display:

"Empowerment relates to taking risks and showing people you're not afraid and learning from mistakes," said Dylan Bell, who was the first to speak. "It's a matter of not giving up. There's a lot of stress in school and I have learned I won't be perfect in everything."

Haley Faust expressed a similar view. "It means holding your ground and standing by your convictions, being confident in yourself," she said.

"Empowerment relates to the people around you, how you make



"Empowerment comes from within," said Kayla Salsburg (Center).

them feel,” said Star Katzman. “It’s important you help them and support them. It’s a sister bond. Being there for each other getting past the bruises.”

For Ilsy Mitchell, “It means proving other people wrong and showing them that you can do something.” For Margo Squire, “Empowerment is a lot about being who you are. Danbee is about being yourself.”

“There is strength in numbers,” said Jazlyn Rowland. “You get more done together than separately. It empowers you to do more.”

Lisa Aire, the entrepreneurial business-woman interviewed by Avery Dermer and Zoe Swift would agree. As would Mariana Santos, also interviewed by Zoe and whose organization is changing attitudes in Latin America.

“We are women, we know each other,” Lisa says. “So, here’s the women’s code, as you know, we help each other ... we stand up for each other.”

“I believe the goal is to be united and not one against the other,” says Mariana.

Empowerment is a broad subject with almost as many perspectives as people. As these young women show it is not easy to wrap the concept or meaning of empowerment up in a neat package and tie it off with a bow. Empowerment is a lot of things.

“Ultimately empowerment comes from within,” said Kayla Salsburg. “You learn to grow your own openness. You learn only you can do some things for yourself.”

What about fear? they were asked. How does empowerment come into play when you are confronting fear?

“The only way to get over fear is to push yourself to new heights,” Lizzie Forman said. “If you don’t push yourself, who will?”

Ariana Resnick agreed. “Fear is what you make of it,” she said. “If you never push yourself, you will never experience new things.”

“The way to get over fear,” said Gelila Assefa, “is to ask yourself ‘do I want to do this, or do I never want to do this because I’m afraid.’”

Those are sage words and apply to people of all ages. So, what



Photo by Alisha McDarris

Empowerment “is being confident in yourself,” said Haley Faust, as Maya Simon (Back) and Dylan Bell listen.

about being scared? Is fear and being scared the same thing? Are they interchangeable? Well, not to the Wel-B-Yon of 2016. They see a clear distinction.

“Fear is more long-term,” said Sammie Klein, “and being scared is temporary.”

“Fear is a long-term thing,” said Abby Danz. “Being scared is something you can overcome. You can always do what you’re scared of doing.”

Their views are not much different from those of Kit DesLauriers, the ski mountaineer interviewed by Stella Fox and Avery Dermer. For Kit fear is paralyzing and she has developed a series of mental processes to melt away layers of fear down to something manageable. Being scared is normal, she says. Being scared is good because it can be managed.

For these Wel-B-Yon their sense of empowerment, along with support of friends, comes into play when dealing with fear. For them having a group such as theirs that will give support and a sense of empowerment makes it easier to get outside their comfort zone.

It is the role of friendships that comes up often in these discussions about empowerment. The dynamics of friendships are intertwined with the whole camp experience and that is true regardless of the age group. It is common to hear the campers speak about the importance of their friends at camp.

Friendships and support are two factors cited by Abby Danz as being keys to her development.

“I wouldn’t be who I am without these friendships,” she says. “Here you learn not to think about what people think of you and you carry that forward in your life.”

Similarly, Margo Squire says, “I have become really close with these girls who have helped me grow up.” She goes on to

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Photo by Alisha McDarris

Proving you can do something is empowerment for Ilsy Mitchell.



(Continued from page 19)

explain that these are really strong bonds that can help you to become your own person completely when around them.

These bonds they speak of come to the fore when conflicts arise. There is a sense of empowerment in the mix, as well.

“We have had real arguments and drama over the years,” Margo said, “but as we’ve gotten older and grew up together, we have learned how to overcome those conflicts better.”

“Even though people get into arguments over silly stuff,” said Abby, “at the end of the day we know how lucky

“There is strength in numbers,” said Jazzlyn Rowland

we are to have each other.”

“It is just natural to fight with each other,” said Maya Simon, “but the way we handle it and get over it is what is important.”

Within every conflict there are lessons to be learned, opportunities to learn something about yourself, about the other person, about conflict resolution. There are opportunities to learn about leadership.

“The lesson is not only how to be the leader,” said Jazzlyn, “but also being part of a team and that is an important part of the puzzle.”

“A big part of solving problems is not having our phones,” said Dylan Bell. “I like to solve problems face-to-face. Here you are forced to look someone in the eyes.”

That certainly reflects leadership. It also reflects maturity and that goes hand-in-hand with empowerment.

Danbee has been a safe place for them over the years. What is clear from these discussions is that these young women are learning life-long lessons. It is easy to forget that within the confines of what is called the Danbee bubble, they still are young teenagers in their formative years. When they leave Danbee for the last time they will disperse to other cities and states. Their lives will continue. They will finish high school and go on to college. Some might break with tradition and travel and get some real-world experiences before tackling college. They will pursue careers of some sort. As they get older, some will marry, perhaps have children. It’s called life.

If they heed the words of Mariana Santos and Kit DesLauriers and Sy Montgomery and Lisa Aire, the highly accomplished women featured in this report, they won’t wait for things to fall into their laps. They will try and fail and try again. They will be in the moment and seize it. They will do what makes their hearts sing. They will give to the world what they know they have in their hearts. They will be empowered. They will carry Danbee’s philosophy of girl power with them.

“If we didn’t come here we wouldn’t be who we are,” Abby said.

This is their final summer at Danbee. It is something that prompts mixed feelings. Their experiences here where they have been encouraged to spread their wings, to find their own voice, have shaped them. Summers at Danbee have made them stronger, they believe. A mantra here at Danbee is “Dance like nobody is watching.” That is taken to heart and for these Wel-B-Yon coming to a place where they can be themselves has been very special. So, what is it they will take with them when they leave camp for the last time?

“Independence and confidence,” Dylan Bell said without hesitation. “It is hard to move on, but life lessons are part of that.”



For Star Katzman (Front), “It’s a sister bond.”

Photo by Alisha McDarris

Photo by Alisha McDarris