



Christian Encounter

NEWSLETTER

STUDENT PROFILE

Levi

Levi's first day at Christian Encounter was the last day of a family trip with his parents and sister, Lily. They had flown from Georgia and had some time to explore the area together before dropping Levi off. Just the day before, Levi and Lily had the opportunity to meet their paternal grandparents for the first time. Their biological father had passed away in 2013. Making this connection would hopefully give Levi and Lily an opportunity to ask hard questions.

As a child, Levi struggled to integrate into the social and academic environment of public school. A heavier kid, he was often targeted on the playground. As he moved into middle school, things didn't get easier, and he began to take an offensive stance, initiating fights on the blacktop. To gain acceptance, he would starve himself to try to lose weight.

As he transitioned into high school, Levi was introduced to vaping and began dabbling in other forms of drugs and

alcohol. Levi would meet up with friends to skate near a vape and smoke shop where things quickly escalated.

Levi's choices began to impact his siblings, as much as he tried to hide his addictions from his family. He had dropped out of school and had been asked to keep his distance from his church community for a time. He had broken trust with his own family and his spiritual family. He was in counseling, but he needed more support. Levi had been living with his maternal grandparents when his dad set up a time for Levi to meet near his home in Atlanta with two former students from Christian Encounter. They shared about the opportunity the Ranch had given them.

When Levi arrived, he felt the weight and sadness of the separation from his family. He felt like the bad apple that was being thrown out. But this time he was hundreds of miles away from home, where he couldn't cause any more damage. *(cont. on pg. 2)*



DIRECTOR'S VIEW

What can be shaken

As a Christian leader, my heart breaks when I encounter a young person who has been harmed by a Christian leader. If someone tells you God loves you, but then harms you, what do you come to believe about God? He is not trustworthy or good. He is dangerous, and his love is an epithet.

It's common, and in some ways even good, to develop anger against "God" in a situation like this. But this anger is really toward a false image—not the true God.

The path to the true God requires first dismantling wrong beliefs. This dismantling can be lonely and disorienting, and it takes time. Reality is shaking; in some sense you are broken loose from your foundation.

But, if this is happening to you or someone you love, have hope! God understands, He has not abandoned you, and



He is at work. Hebrews 12:26-27 gives us a glimpse of what He is accomplishing: "At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, 'Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.' The words 'once more' indicate the

removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain."

A day is coming when God will, once and for all, remove all that is impermanent so that only the eternal remains. But until that day, God continually does this on a smaller scale in our lives—not just in those who've been

traumatized, but in every one of us.

We often build on sand instead of rock. Sometimes this even happens when we think we are building on His Word! *(cont. on back page)*

Levi (cont. from pg. 1)

Levi had an initial honeymoon phase at the Ranch that ended quickly when he started to feel walled in by the rules and structure. He saw the interns as rulekeepers and gatekeepers, and everywhere he turned he was boxed in. Consequently, Levi's behavior resulted in him being suspended from the program twice in his first five months.

In between these disciplinary measures Levi experienced the Agony Ride. He got to serve with the staff and interns and help those who were there to help him. He was able to give back, to serve. He felt alive that weekend. At the end of the summer, he embarked on the annual 15-day backpacking trip. Upon his return, there was a noticeable shift in his attitude and demeanor. Out on the trails and on top of mountains, Levi's heart and mind roamed free. His relationships deepened, and for the first time he realized that the interns weren't the bad guys.

"I've been given this chance to fix the things I've done. I've grown in ways I wouldn't have been able to outside of here because of the environment I was in.

"When I got here I didn't want anything to do with God because I was mad at Him. (Interns) Alec and David were great examples of God's love and showed me a lot of who God is."

As Levi began to bring things to God in prayer, he began witnessing little things that were undeniably the work of His hand. He saw the Lord provide for him through a Ranch church member buying flights for his sister Lily to come visit him for Thanksgiving - something he had longed for but thought was impossible.

Levi has continued to build on the

newfound relationship with his paternal grandparents, grateful to have the support of family nearby. He is on track to graduate high school here in June and



James and interns David and Alec with Levi on the backpacking trip.

complete the program.

"Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9

Zoya Lee



Igloo trips

How many people can say they've built and slept in an igloo? Kudos to our guys and girls for braving the cold and doing just that!



The 41st Agony Ride

We have 45 riders already committed to ride in the 41st annual Agony Ride! Among them will be four of our staff members, featured below. To sponsor a rider, visit agonyride.org.

Last year's Agony brought in over \$370,000, surpassing the previous record by over \$110,000. We are so grateful for the outpouring of generosity from our riders, sagers, and donors! We hope you join us again this year.

JULY 28-29 | SIERRA VALLEY

Kevin Campbell, Business Office Assistant

Mileage goal: 266 miles

I am riding in the Agony Ride this year to extend and experience the love of God. By no means am I claiming that we must ride hours on a bicycle to encounter God's love, but I have found in my own life, when it gets hard and painful I become more aware of the Lord's peace and comfort. I believe the same to be true for students at Christian Encounter. I believe students all have the opportunity at the Ranch to allow the Lord to meet them in their pain, suffering, and uncertainty and to restore, heal, and give hope. If I can jump on a bike for 24 hours to give students a chance, count me in.



Paxton Fitzpatrick, Assistant Intern Director

Mileage goal: 300 miles

My favorite day of the year at the Ranch is Agony Sunday. Like so many associated with the Ranch, a personal goal of mine has been trying to get people I deeply care about to come participate in the Agony Ride. I've been blessed to have my family and friends get involved. It's important to me because I just know that if they can experience the sacrificial love on display, they will forever be changed. I was forever changed coming as an intern back in 2015. I hope this year that I can be the example to the next set of witnesses to a couple of things: the students are worth it, the Church is at work, and the Kingdom is at hand. In the 300 miles that I plan to ride, pray that suffering/serving leads to real spiritual transformation in me, the students and all the participants this year.



Zach Malech, Outreach Pastor

Mileage goal: 275 miles

As I process with students about their time at Christian Encounter, they all share about the genuine love and care they received here. Love is powerful. Unfortunately, too many people exist unaware of the depths of the relentless love of Jesus Christ. The kind of love that fights for, sacrifices for, and champions His children. The kind of love that says "you matter, you have value, you are worth it." That kind of love is transformational at its core. And when you experience it, you can never be the same. At the Agony, riders and sagers become the physical embodiment of that kind of love, and this year I want to join the riders in the proclamation of that message to those who need to hear it.



Salena Unitt, Executive Assistant

Mileage goal: 202 miles

Recently a former staff member likened the Agony Ride to a story in the Bible. As told in Joshua 6, God collapsed the walls of Jericho after the Israelites marched around it for 7 days. They devoted the city to the Lord and protected those inside that feared Him. Although we (luckily!!) won't be riding for 7 days, I love to imagine that the Agony is a similar special event, circling and destroying the walls in our hearts of hate, trauma, depression, and anxiety. Sometimes God has crazy ideas that I may be hesitant to participate in, but He is pleased by our obedience!



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Run for Hope | April 22
Spring Serve Day | May 20
Graduation | June 3

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Christian Encounter is a non-profit, non-denominational, residential community helping 16- to 24-year-olds by providing love, spiritual guidance, high school education, counseling, and 24-hour supervision. Internships are offered to young adults 21 years and older. We are a member of the Evangelical Council for Financial Accountability, and all gifts are tax deductible.



Shaken (cont. from pg. 1)

Because He loves us, God brings shaking into our lives to remove our impermanent work. Sometimes the impermanent work is in the area of Christian service or ministry. Sometimes it is in the area of a faith we have constructed for ourselves. *I thought God would _____.* All this must be shaken, fall, and be removed so that a new work—something permanent—can be built in its place.

The shaking and falling can be terrifying. But underneath the rubble will be the potential for something far better. Don't run from the shaking! Don't abandon the rubble! Dig deeper and find the true bedrock, and begin to build again. God's love can carry us through, all the way to the final, complete result. May He be glorified.

Nate Boyd, Executive Director

MEMORIALS

In memory of Ray & Marjorie Brown, given by:

Lynda Taylor

In memory of Larry Carmichael, given by:

Linda Carmichael

In memory of Don Delisle, given by:

Carol Delisle

In memory of Pamela Whitley, given by:

Mark & Penelope Gamble

HONORARIUMS

In honor of Rollin Haas, given by:

Frank & Sara Ogilvie

10TH ANNIVERSARY

RUN FOR HOPE 5K

APRIL 22 | 9:30am

Come run alongside our residents and see our newest property developments!
Register by April 7th for a participant t-shirt.