

From fear to friendship: A new perspective

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For most students, the last bell of the school year signifies an end — an end to homework, an end to tests and an end to anxiety. This is why I was annoyed when my mother woke me at 6:30 a.m. July 1, 2005, to go to Boost Camp.

I did not know then that volunteering at Boost Camp would be the achievement of which I am most proud.

The morning glare impaired my vision as a black Jeep pulled into the Doyle Park Elementary School parking lot. The car door opened, revealing a boy I assumed was around the age of 9. The boy's mother, Sarah Hamilton, lifted him into a wheelchair and headed in my direction.

To this day, I regret my initial reaction to Bodi. He scared me. I knew little about cerebral palsy. Bodi sat limply in his wheelchair. As I mulled over the daunting task I was about to face, Bodi approached me with a crooked smile and flashed some unfamiliar hand signals.

"He wants to know if you play video games," said his mother.

I spent the next four weeks with Bodi, aiding him in his stretches and exercises. Although I was unsure about my guidance, I was able to provide motivation

and encouragement, which enabled him to stay on task. We would play games such as Army ranger or police officer, which made physical training fun and helped him take his mind off of the constant pain.

One year later, I was reunited with Bodi. To my amazement, he stepped out of his mother's Jeep with a pair of lime green walking canes. His wheelchair was gone. The same crooked smile spread across his face as he slowly crossed the parking lot. It seemed to take forever, yet he was walking.



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Once again, Bodi and I spent the summer talking about video games, sports and motorcycles. However, this time I was more confident as I provided him with the physical and verbal guidance he needed to attain motor skills that I had mastered by the age of 2. Occasionally, after a long day, I would throw him on my back and carry him around the hallways. We had progressed from being merely partners to good friends.

The last time I saw Bodi Hamilton was July 27, 2007, the day my third year at Boost Camp ended. Instead of giving a final goodbye hug to each other, we exchanged a casual fist pound; according to the 11-year-old, hugging was not cool.

Beaming with pride, I watched Bodi walk unassist-

ed toward his mother. "I'll call you," I promised. Reacting to my comment, he turned around, bobbing his head and holding up a hand signal that was not as foreign as the first time I met him: a simple thumbs up.

Bodi has taught me perseverance, strength and focus. For most of his life, he was constrained to a wheelchair or hobbled around on crutches and walking canes. He cannot put on his clothes, brush his teeth, or use the restroom by himself. These are the challenges he has grown accustomed to facing every day, yet is determined to master.

My experience at Boost Camp encouraged me to get involved with the students at my high school who are physically and intellectually challenged. For two years, I have been involved with the Best Buddies program at Casa Grande. The program's mission is to provide one-on-one friendships to students with disabilities. As the vice president of Best Buddies, I organize activities and events that enable the buddies to participate and interact with other students on campus.

I am proud that I have had a positive impact on Bodi and the other kids that I have embraced, who are physically and intellectually disabled. However, I believe I have gained far more from them. Through these community service programs, I have gained a better perspective on life and learned that the simple gesture of a thumbs up can show friendship.