

# 3 LESSONS FROM TECABOCA

By Renée Padilla



**Mountain Home, TX** – The world slows down at Camp Tecaboca, a quiet haven where children and adults develop a relationship with nature, other people, and possibly, God. Without the distraction of technology, those who enter Tecaboca can discover (or rediscover) aspects of their own personalities and create meaningful friendships that may last a lifetime.

While campers and counselors may have drastically different experiences, they can all take away the same lessons from their time at Tecaboca. Here are just three lessons that Tecaboca teaches.

## **Lesson One: Get uncomfortable to have fun.**

Camp is filled with outdoor activities that may be new for many people, especially for anyone from a city. These activities include horseback riding, rock-climbing, fishing, swimming in a river, riflery, archery, and getting muddy during “Mud Gaga,” a game played with a dodgeball.

These activities may seem scary or uncomfortable for people who are more accustomed to indoor fun, but to enjoy Tecaboca, campers and counselors have to step outside their comfort zones and try new things. It might not be easy at first, but after trying something new, a lot of the campers and counselors have fun and feel proud for overcoming their fears.

Some activities are just a little uncomfortable for newcomers. For example, a first-time fisher may feel squeamish while catching and releasing a fish; or getting muddy might freak out someone who prefers to be clean. But certain activities challenge common fears. Many people fear heights to some degree, and the horses, 40-ft rock-climbing wall, and zip line provide campers and counselors with the opportunity to overcome their fears. Even if they never want to do it again, they can say how courageous they were as they rode that horse or climbed that wall.



Many campers and some counselors arrive at Tecaboca having never shot a gun or a bow. Tecaboca's shooting activities provide a chance to try something new that is a little less scary than climbing a 40-ft wall or working with a horse. With constant practice, campers hone their skills can even earn certificates for both riflery and archery. All of these activities teach campers the importance of following directions – misbehaving on the riflery range or around horses can cause someone serious harm. For some kids, sitting still and listening can be just as uncomfortable as touching a fish is for someone else, but if everyone follows all of the instructions and practices safe behavior, everyone can have fun.

No matter the situation, anyone should remember this lesson. Being brave and trying new things are difficult, but worth the effort. Even if the fear never disappears, or person decides to never do that activity



### **Lesson Two: Celebrate small victories.**

Regardless of the outcome, trying something new is a victory of its own. Picking up a rod and casting the line is a victory for those who have never fished, even if they don't catch anything. Likewise, a shy kid asking to join in a game is an important step in making friends, win or lose.

However, campers often feel their achievements aren't as important as someone else's. Counselors remind campers that their accomplishments are a victory, no matter what someone else has accomplished. For example, hitting the target for the first time is a big achievement, even if someone else hits the target every time. At Tecaboca, a fish is celebrated, whether it's a small perch or a catfish.

Celebrating small victories also motivates people to keep trying. Campers who hit the target might be disappointed they didn't get a bull's eye, but a little positive reinforcement might boost their self-esteem enough for them to keep shooting the rifle or bow. For a camper who's afraid of horses, positive reinforcement for petting a horse may encourage that camper to eventually climb on the saddle.

Many adults mock the "participating trophy," but for people who are scared to put themselves out there, a little recognition for trying might push them to try again. Those adults believe kids become complacent with the "participation trophy," instead of working harder; and while that may be the case in some instances, kids – and adults – deserve to celebrate their small victories. Without those small victories, there will never be big victories.

### **Lesson 3: Know when to ask for help.**

Campers often want to figure things out for themselves. They might want to put bait on a hook or put an arrow through the bow, but after struggling, they have to admit they need help. Then the counselor steps in and shows the camper how to handle the bait or arrow. It is obvious to counselors that the campers need help with a lot of activities: pouring water, carrying heavy

plates, unhooking a fish, getting on the saddle, etc.; but it isn't always so obvious that the counselors also need help.

As the weeks drag on, counselors become exhausted, mentally and physically. At this point, the counselors may not recognize they need help right away or feel too proud to ask. That's why it is important for counselors to recognize when the others need help. Offering help usually includes picking up someone else's belongings from the other side of camp when they head that direction, or combining clothes in the washing machine when only one is available. For counselors, small things help the most, such as venting out stress or getting another counselor to act as a lookout while they run to the restroom.

However, when someone gets sick or hurt, they need more help than usual. After the first week of camp, the media coordinator slipped on gravel and sprained her ankle so badly she needed crutches for a few days. Even though she felt humiliated asking for help with basic tasks, like refilling her water bottle, she had to rely on her friends. Someone else took photos the next day and others taught her to walk on the crutches. Like the counselors tell the campers, she learned that no one can do everything alone all the time, even if they try really hard.

Everyone has limitations. At Tecaboca, campers and counselors alike learned there is no shame in asking for help, especially when treading new territory. At the same time, Tecaboca preaches that Community is built by people helping one another without expectation of getting something in return. That means noticing when someone needs help completing a task or reassurance when they feel bad, and then doing something about it. As the liturgical coordinator says, you can't go anywhere without taking the first step. But if you take the first step and don't follow through, you just stand with one leg up but never move. To actually get anywhere, you have to take the first step and follow through.

Camp Tecaboca teaches many lessons to everyone who steps inside the campgrounds. These three lessons emphasize the value of trying something new, taking pride in making progress, and in giving and receiving help. Even if a new activity or asking for help is scary, each step is important and worth validating.

