

What do you get when you cross a fisherman, construction worker, security guard with a humanitarian aid volunteer, globe-trotter and favourite uncle? Besides a jack-of-all-trades, one phenomenal camp activity leader.

The majority of parents will never meet the men and women who look after their children at summer camp. Outside of their campers' stories, the lives of staff members are relatively unknown, even to co-workers. Yet in truth, some of Tamakwa's best staff members lead amazing and interesting lives that in turn make them amazing and interesting counsellors. Such is the case of one of Tamakwa's most beloved activity leaders.



Hailing all the way from Stirling, Scotland, Fraser, "Duffy" Duff, returned to Tamakwa for his second summer as the Fishing Activity Leader. Having a thick Scottish accent and occasionally sporting his grandfather's kilt, Duffy has become a favourite staffer among both campers and staff alike.

"Best activity leader in camp," said Junior Counselor and Fishing Assistant Jenna Golden. "He's very patient and great with kids. I love him"

"He was always so funny and he helps you with fishing. It was fun going there to fish and knowing that you could eat whatever you caught," said camper Winona Kellie.

"He'll walk around camp and say 'smile' to anyone who's not smiling. It's clear that he's here to have fun and to create fun. His positivity perpetuates through camp. He makes me feel bad if I'm not smiling," said Pioneer Section Head Stephanie Goel.

So how did Tamakwa get so lucky in finding such a guy? This question first begs for the explanation as to why Duffy is on this side of the Atlantic to begin with. Answer: Duffy is on a world tour and Algonquin Park, Canada is just one of his many stops.

At 25- years of age, Duffy has seen more places on the globe than many people see in a lifetime. He had an early start from his parents. His mother Jean and father Ally took Duffy and his older brother Kenny all over Europe and the U.K., staying in hostels, backpacking, and site- seeing. These modest vacations gave Duffy an appreciation for world cultures and the fervor to explore them.

"I travel to live my life with no regrets. For me it's all about meeting people. I love seeing places. I love history. I love seeing where people came from. It's fascinating. There's a great big world out there and you've got to go out and see it."

One could say that Duffy inherited the travel bug from his parents, but it was not until the tragic death of his long-time, brotherly friend Graeme that actually compelled Duffy to begin his travels. While on a typical fishing trip with Duffy and his friends, Graeme drowned at only 21- years old. Duffy went into shock for four months. He quit his job and decided not to further his studies in traveling and tourism. Instead, Duffy put a backpack on his shoulders and met with a travel agent.

"I sold my car, had money saved and borrowed some from my parents. I thought, if he's dead, what would he want me to do? I always talked about going traveling. My dad told me, 'make a list of the places you want to go, close your eyes and the first place your finger lands is where you should go,'" Duffy said. "I chose New York."

Duffy took flight in May 2007. Among the countries he has passed through since then includes the United States, France, Fiji, Australia, India, Singapore, and New Zealand. The majority of these travels however, were not merely vacations in the traditional meaning. Duffy has worked in almost every country, alongside native citizens and other globetrotters. In the past two years, he has held positions as a security officer, maintenance man, carpenter, personal fisherman, humanitarian volunteer, and children's camp counsellor.

Duffy made his way to Canada in the wake of the 2010 Olympic Games in Vancouver. At this same time, he applied for a job at Camp Tamakwa, where he met with Co-Director Craig Perlmutter. "He had a really simple, down-to-earth feel. It didn't feel like an interview which is the best kind. He had a passion for fishing and really wanted to work with kids," said Perlmutter.

A year after his first summer at Tamakwa, Duffy returned to the 2011 season with bigger goals.

"I enjoy its energy. I enjoy seeing kids do so many things. I knew that I could do better this time. I felt like I had unfinished business. I could teach more fishing techniques, plan more activities, and get more involved."

Indeed, Duffy has done just that, leading two fishing overnight canoe trips to Joe Lake, organizing staff sports, and participating in evening programs.

"To Duffy, no task has a good or bad connotation," said Stephanie Goel.

"Everything is just something to be done. He's always down for something. It shows the kids how to get involved- that everything at camp can and should be fun."

"On visiting day, kids have taken their parents to fish and they loved him. You don't hear too often parents going out of their way to point out an activity leader. Usually you hear about the counselors, but several parents came up to me about him," said Perlmutter.

Duffy is every camper and parent's dream counselor. His gentle, patient manner makes him a natural teacher. His openness and humor help him to relate to all ages. His enthusiasm and dedication inspire campers and staff to have it in themselves and toward everything they do. It may be hard to understand Duffy, a reality he embraces, but his character is never lost in translation.

Next destination on the list of this vagabonding jack-of-all-trades is Costa Rica to see a friend and then to France to work in general maintenance at a ski resort. Asked if he will come back to Tamakwa, Duffy is not sure.

“I don’t think about it. One step at a time.”

Duffy is the kind of camp staff that uses his life experiences to enhance those of everyone he meets. What may have started as a sabbatical from his life in Scotland has transformed into a lifestyle of cross- cultural immersion, discovery, and most of all, a sharing of the joy to live. Wherever Duffy decides to unpack his suitcase, it is certain that all will benefit from his many talents, wisdom, and kindness.