

# CAMP RISING SUN

by  
Slobodan Popovic  
Yugoslavia

## *How a camp with no specific goal can teach kids a world of difference.....*

People from the IDEA debate program are used to national and cultural diversity because it has always been a part of our camps and tournaments. But imagine a camp where the primary purpose is to promote and exercise that very diversity rather than to teach campers a certain set of skills. If you can imagine that, you'll get a fairly good idea of Camp Rising Sun.

Located in the quiet town of Rhinebeck, New York, USA, and operated by a dedicated foundation, Camp Rising Sun is actually two separate camps, a boys' and a girls' camp. Each camp accommodates 60 campers and lasts for eight weeks. Founded by George "Freddie" Jonas, a wealthy businessman, the boys' camp was founded in 1930 and the girls' camp was founded in 1990. A third camp in Denmark will begin next year.

Half of the campers are Americans (and half of the Americans are from New York), and the other half are from all over the world. Literally. The ethnic diversity is as large, if not larger, than that of the IDEA debate program, so you can only imagine!

Camp Rising Sun has no set goals, such as teaching campers to build, hike, or debate. Rather, the 20 staff members and 60 campers are free to offer any kind

of projects or instructions (such as intellectual activities like discussion groups, sharing information about their countries, or debate) they feel like doing. None of these activities are mandatory, so campers are free to choose what they want.

The greatest difference between IDEA camps and this one, however, is the fact that campers actually run the show. Every day, a different camper is proclaimed the daily coordinator or "sachem of the day" (*sachem* is a Native American word for chief). Together with staff members, s/he creates and maintains the daily routine, according to his wishes, but keeping in mind needs of the community.

Campers are directed to ask the *sachem* for anything they need, whether that is asking what time lunch will be served or whether the pool will be open in the afternoon. Staff members (counselors) also follow the *sachem's* decisions, and there is a dedicated "counselor of the day" to help the *sachem* coordinate the staff according to his decisions. With power comes responsibility: the *sachem* has to keep the community running smoothly, making sure everyone is safe and accounted for, and taking care of all the campers' needs.

Coming from a debate com-

munity, one of my goals was to present debate to these campers. We had a few debate workshops, and at the end of their "crash course", we held a practice debate:

*"Resolved: that people's right to know is more important than the political candidate's right to privacy".*

A very hot topic in the United States, since the elections are coming, it proved to be quite motivating for the debaters. I was very satisfied with the outcome of the debates, since it was entirely up to the campers whether or not they were interested. Remember, no activity is mandatory. However, I would have never made it without the generous help of Eric DiMichele and Michael Gately, who came to camp as "guest artists" to help me run the workshops.

Apart from that, I was involved in creating one of camp's three newspapers, took loads of photos as the "unofficial official" camp photographer, created a multimedia CD with articles, photos, songs and a movie clip from the camp, went hiking in the beautiful scenery of New York State, helped build a new sidewalk and generally, had the time of my life.

For more information about Camp Rising Sun you can visit their website at:

[www.risingsun.org](http://www.risingsun.org).