

ENG 100: First Place

BFC Pathfinders

By Judson Henry

Four years ago, I was fortunate enough to be a part of a group called BFC Pathfinders. BFC stands for Bethlehem French Church. It's a youth group at my church that focuses on teaching young people about life skills such as respect, honesty, and how to be a friend to man. More importantly, their goal is to help the youth of the church maintain a strong and personal relationship with God. I was introduced to this group at a boot camp meeting. At first, I didn't want anything to do with them because I considered myself to be a very anti-social person. However, witnessing how friendly they were, and being exposed to their acts of kindness toward one another and other individuals, fascinated me. What fascinated me the most was the sort of language we use to communicate with each other, the type of friendship we developed that gave us the ability to joke around with one another thus making our time together memorable, and the wise individuals that served as guidance to the youth of Bethlehem.

Whenever we have meetings, which take place every Sunday morning, the moment that everyone walks through the front door of the church, all profanity and inappropriate thoughts are left at the door. Around these grownups, we children felt not only respect, but admiration as well. This led to us respecting our leaders so much that during meetings we only mean business. Compared to the clean respectful way we speak during meetings, one may mistake our conversation for an episode of *South Park* when it's just us talking to each other. For example, whenever one of us did something wrong or said some nonsense, one of us in the group would

say; “you’re for real a dipshit and a shithead; I thought I was the only one, but I guess I finally found my other half,” and that person would respond, “one of these day imma beat your ass for always talking shit.” We hold nothing back in how we swear or how vulgar the ideas that we portray are. So much so that cursing runs smoothly from our lips without hesitation. I believe if it wasn’t for Pathfinders, there would not be any differences between the type of language we use around adults and the one we use around each other. Being in Pathfinders showed me that the respect I had for grownups correlates to how I conduct myself around them. While we would never swear in front of an adult, we’re not opposed to saying something while they’re not looking. Respecting leaders leads to integrity that is not there with children whom otherwise do not respect their elders.

Even though Pathfinders is a strict, uniform club that builds character and respect in each member, it also is a place that brings common interests together so that lifelong, casual friendships can be brought to life. For example, we would joke about my no sunshine, charcoal skin, my friend's large forehead, or my other friend's weight. We ultimately decided to give each other the nicknames of “Charcoal,” “Fat Forehead,” and “Fatty.” While individually they are physical characteristics that bother us, when used by each other we are able to overcome them and embrace them in making us unique. From an outsider’s point of view, these jokes or nicknames might sound harsh and disrespectful, but in reality, it is just our way of playfully making fun of each other.

While Pathfinders was a place that gave us the ability to develop long lasting friendships with others, it also gave us guidance in the form of dependable, capable leaders, Jacelin and Natalie, who served as an example for the youth. These two individuals were our second parents

and teachers to us. When I said they were leaders that guide or serve as an example, I don't mean a person that tells you what to do or how to live your life. I mean a person that leads by example and teaches you common morality; that's what they did for us. For instance, they taught us to always communicate/interact with others in a respectful manner, such as make eye contact, nod our head to show agreement, always greet our elderly, and never talk back to any adult. They cleared the pathway for us by showing us how to be leaders. More importantly, they made the group understand to always put our differences aside and learn how to work with other individuals.

After studying or being a member of BFC Pathfinders, I can conclude that our connection and relationships are very unique, and one that I wouldn't trade for anything. To us, Pathfinder is a safe haven. We listen to each other's trouble and give advice to one another. How we interact with each other is something that's beyond anyone's understanding because every time we come together, it's without a doubt that our time together would be unforgettable. One of the things I like, no scratch that out, I love about Pathfinders was that no matter how upset we are with each other, at the end of the day, we're still a family because that's what important to us the most. Pathfinders showed me that audience determines diction. It gave me brothers that I never thought I would have and wise leaders to model myself after. Coming to America, I was uncomfortable around others and felt out of place, but when I joined my Pathfinder club, I became a part of something bigger than just me. We as a group grew as people together. To me, they are not just a group of people I socialized or joked around with; they are like family to me, a place that I can relax and find comfort. I know what it feels like to be an individual person, but being in this group I feel whole and like I matter because I know they'll not judge me and will

always support me.