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# Globe West

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PEOPLE

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## A foundation built on tragedy



Cyndi Jones and her children -- (from left) Kayla, Jenna and Matt Ringelheim -- formed a camp fund for other families that have lost a parent. (BILL POLO/GLOBE STAFF)

As a psychotherapist, **Cyndi Jones** spent years helping clients through crises. But no amount of experience easing the pain of others could prepare her for the shock that Sunday 18 years ago.

Her husband, **Alex Ringelheim**, was picking up their daughter from religious school when he suffered a fatal heart attack. He was only 40.

Now Jones is honoring his memory with the Wildflower Camp Foundation, which helps children who have lost parents pay for summer camp.

Jones recalled sitting at her dining room table in South Natick, surrounded by reams of legal documents demanding her attention. The man she have fallen in love with in college, her husband, the father of her three children was gone, and she faced raising the children — ages 3 months, 5, and 8 — on her own.

"The sheer logistics were monumental — financial concerns, the emotional strain of the grieving itself, and helping the kids deal with the strain of losing their dad," she recalled recently.

Then came the summers, which Jones said she found daunting every year.

"As a working single parent, I always became concerned when the time approached, as I knew it would be more juggling and sorting out."

Jones became particularly concerned as her son, **Matt**, grew older. He didn't really need a baby sitter, but couldn't be home on his own.

When Matt was 10, Jones looked into overnight camps. She was discouraged by the high prices and lack of scholarship options, but a generous director agreed to lower the fee. Matt loved the camp, returning every summer for nearly a decade and eventually becoming a counselor.

Daughters **Jenna** and **Kayla** also enjoyed both day and overnight camps.

She never forgot how much camp helped her family, and often thought about starting a foundation to help other families.

About 10 years after her husband's death, Jones

fell in love with Dr. **Steve Birnbaum**. The psychotherapist and the radiologist met through a personal ad posted on the back of the Appalachian Mountain Club magazine.

After five years together they decided to get married. As they planned their wedding, Birnbaum had an idea that touched Jones to the core: in lieu of gifts, donations to the camp fund.

The wedding three years ago marked not only the start of the Jones-Birnbaum family, but — with \$18,000 in seed money — the Wildflower Camp Foundation.

In its first year, 2005, the foundation sent five children to camp; the second summer, eight. This year Jones hopes to double that.

"People who haven't lost a spouse don't necessarily understand how difficult it can be to get through," said Jones. Camp made a big difference for her family, especially as it provided positive male role models for her son.

Creating the foundation has proved cathartic for Jones and her children, giving them "a feeling of completion," she said.

It has also served as a way to pass on her first husband's legacy. He had enjoyed sharing his own camp experiences with his children.

"I know that he would have wanted his children to go to camp, which is why I worked so hard to make it happen," said Jones. Matt, Jenna and Kayla Ringelheim are all on the Wildflower Camp Foundation's board of directors.

Now that Jones has created a legacy for her own family, she is helping others do so, too.

Last year she held a workshop on legacies at Temple Beth Elohim in Wellesley that was so well received she was asked to teach a series earlier this year.

Participants talked about various ways to make an impact, including passing down values by writing ethical wills, starting a foundation, or capturing family history on video.

This month, Jones will take part in a series, "The

Many Dimensions of Legacy: From Inspiration to Action," sponsored by Discovering What's Next, an organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of people in midlife and beyond based at the Newton Free Library.

Jones will launch the series on March 15 by moderating a panel that features Alan Greenfield of Needham, founder of a Darfur relief campaign; Judy Cockerton, founder of the Treehouse Foundation, a multigenerational community in Western Massachusetts; and Doris Birmingham of Arlington, who will talk about recording family history.

Jones, now 58, still runs a psychotherapy practice as well as Innovations: Creating New Visions of Retirement, a life-planning service that she launched in 2003.

"The baby boomer is facing some major life transitions," said Jones. "Children going off to school, moving, and new careers. Changing your identity or career at 55 or 60 is not necessarily an easy thing to do. I want to help man the ship."

To sign up for "The Many Dimensions of Legacy," visit [discoveringwhatsnext.com](http://discoveringwhatsnext.com) or call 617-796-1419. For more on the Wildflower Camp Foundation, visit [wildflowercampfoundation.org](http://wildflowercampfoundation.org).

**AROUND THE TOWNS:** Wayland residents **Priscilla Gannon**, **Susan Pope**, and **Marcie Tyre Berkley** were elected to serve three-year terms as corporators of Emerson Hospital . . . Easter Seals Massachusetts will honor **Regina Pisa** of Newton, chairwoman and managing partner of Goodwin Proctor LLP, with its Team Hoyt Award for her efforts on behalf of people with disabilities . . . **Candida Brush** and **Patricia Green**, professors at Babson College in Wellesley, are among a group of five women receiving the 2007 FSF-NUTEK Award, a Swedish honor for entrepreneurship. They will receive a \$50,000 grant for their work on the Diana Project, which examines challenges faced by female entrepreneurs.

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