

family matters

Summer's Promise

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“Human experiences are often echoed in nature. Ironically, after the devastation of forest fires, the first regrowth in the meadows created by the loss of trees is often a spectacular display of wildflowers. Children have tremendous resilience and often not only recover, but develop very promising and fulfilling lives after the loss of a loved one.”

—Cyndi Jones, Wildflower Camp Foundation Founder



There are certain sensations in life that can instantaneously bring one back to their childhood. The freshness in the air after a thunderstorm, the feeling of crushed pine needles under the toes, scorched marshmallows over a wood fire, and the sight of fireflies in the night sky all remind me of one thing: summer. And more specifically, they remind me of summer camp. Like many children, I had the good fortune of going to camp from the age of eight through high school. The ritualistic journey to day camp soon evolved into two weeks at overnight camp and, by the time I was thirteen, I was spending a full month away from home. The summers of my youth were some of the best times of my life. Camp played an important role in my development for a number of reasons. Beyond the amazing activities, it was the place I first learned to make friends, to become independent, and to enjoy my newfound sense of creativity. Yet my fondness for camp was somewhat unique. More than anything else, camp was a place to soften the stress in my life, a place where I could truly be free.

At the young age of 40, my father died from a sudden heart attack. My mother was left behind to raise me (age eight) and my younger brother Matt (age five) and sister Kayla (three months). Raising three children as a single parent was a daunting task. As my mother once described it, “life was chaotic at best.” Being the oldest child, I took on additional responsibilities and explored different ways to handle my grief. For many years I was angry - angry that my father died, angry that I was different than other children, and angry that I did not have two parents in my life. From what I can remember and what I have been told, my father was a remarkable man. He, his siblings, and cousins grew up going to a Wel-Met Camp in the Catskills of New York. A city boy by birth, it was at camp that he first learned to love nature, a characteristic that he passed on to me.

With my father's passing, my mother believed that camp would be a great place for me and my siblings to take a break. Due to certain constraints she was unsure if it would be financially feasible to send us. Because of the generosity of several camp directors and my mother's determination, my brother, sister, and I were all able to attend summer camp - in most cases with scholarships. My mother saw firsthand how our camp experiences provided an incredible healing opportunity for each of us, and for her family as a whole. Through this experience, she envisioned a foundation that would create a way for other families to receive the same opportunity that we did.

My mother Cyndi Jones founded Wildflower Camp Foundation (WCF) in Wellesley in 2004. The goal of the organization was to provide summer experiences that benefit children ages 18 and younger in the Greater Boston area who have experienced the death of a parent. WCF scholarships cover partial or full tuition and other camp-related expenses, including transportation, equipment, and supplies. In addition to having experienced a loss, Cyndi brought to the foundation over 25 years of experience as a psychotherapist with a specialty in bereavement. This background made it easy to recruit a group of dedicated human service professionals to work closely with applicant families to evaluate their needs. Other members of the local community offered their help and expertise as founding members of the Board, Advisory Board, and as volunteers. In addition to scholarships, WCF family liaisons provide support and referrals to the families to ensure an effective camp placement and for other services as necessary.

“I am so grateful for what Wildflower does. There are so many things that have changed for my children since they lost their dad, but the promise of summer is one I cannot easily take from them.”

- WCF mother of three

“Current bereavement theory stresses the importance of both addressing the loss and all of the feelings, thoughts, and changes around that, and also of moving forward. Doing something fun and carefree, like going to camp, is really a part of that restoration process. A child is able to become a different person for a time, while still moving forward in life and not being stuck in sadness or anger over the loss,” says Donna Sharff, Program Director for the Children’s Room in Arlington. Early loss can put children at risk for emotional and behavioral problems. Camp, however, can provide children a myriad of opportunities that are hard to capture at home: mentoring from counselors, wonderful role models, the soothing qualities of nature and play, and increased self-esteem through mastery in sports and the arts. In addition, camp provides a respite for grieving single parents, and a place to fortify themselves to meet the major life challenges they face. It can be a catalyst for a powerful healing process for entire families, directly changing the lives of children.

The foundation is committed to providing ongoing support to their recipient families. WCF provides assistance to participating families as long as their need exists, while including additional families each year as the organization grows. “This distinctive aspect of our program honors the emotional well-being of our recipients throughout their childhood. WCF is not just about awarding camp scholarships, however; it is much more. It is about working closely with children of bereaved families, helping them through a traumatic time in their lives by providing them with a positive summer experience,” states WCF founder Cyndi Jones.



This year, the Wildflower Camp Foundation is celebrating its sixth year of providing rewarding summer experiences to bereaved children. With support from foundations and individual donors, WCF has grown more than six-fold from five “camperships” in 2005 to over thirty camperships this summer. Many camps in the area such as Beaver Summer Programs, Meadowbrook, and Belmont Day Camps, as well as many overnight programs, have joined with Wildflower in a collaborative effort—doubling the financial assistance provided to Wildflower campers. The American Camp Association of New England has described Wildflower as being on the “cutting edge of camp philanthropy.” My mother’s long-term vision as ongoing President of the foundation is to send a “busload of children” to summer camp each year, while fine-tuning a model that can easily be followed by others.

I often think that my father would have enjoyed knowing how much camp meant to me, but it makes me proud to know that because of his legacy, our family is passing on the promise of summer, and of camp and its memories, to generations of others.