



"My lovely daughter, Maggie completed her MS from UNC in May and is working as a hospice Social Worker in Raleigh, and loving it. Your remarkable Camp HOPE had a magic influence on her. Thank you."

Mary

"Dear Becky, I'm sure you've heard this a thousand times, but Camp HOPE really did change my childhood. When my grandpa died, I was in 5th grade. I was never really that close to him. It was weird but I really wasn't that sad. Christmas was his favorite time of year and that's a fairly standard thing to like, but this man was crazy about Christmas. He dressed up as Santa in his front yard and gave away hundreds of stuffed animals and candy canes to kids every year. The whole town knew about him and people would drive miles to come see the McFarland Santa. I had made it through Christmas alright, but a few months later is when it really hit me. My dad and I were driving to school and we were passing all of the lights and decorations still up and by the time I got to school, I was bawling.

I spent hours in the counseling office talking about my grandpa with the school counselor who also volunteered at Camp HOPE and recommended I come that May. Camp HOPE provided me with the closure that I needed and prepared me for the world of suffering that we live in as I continued to experience death throughout middle and high school. Thanks again for all the laughs and tears."

Tommy

"Dear Becky, My father died when I was eight. I found a report card of mine and I missed 52 days of school around that time. I know if I had a Camp HOPE to go to, it would have really helped me. The work you do is very important and I am grateful for the help you've given the children."

Love, Marianne

"Hi all you wonderful folks at Camp HOPE! I'm sending a gift in memory of our precious grandson who shot himself at age 17. Camp HOPE people saved the lives of his brother and his cousins. With thanks and love,"

Joe & Bev



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Stevens Point, WI 54482
715-341-0076

*A camp experience for
children and their
families after the death
of a loved one*

Website:
www.camphopeforkids.org

Email:
camphope@charter.net

WINTER 2017

*Please help us to continue
providing free services
to grieving children and
their families. Remember
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My First Year as Director

By Mariah Singer-Brown

Becky to Mariah: "So, for the newsletter, why don't you think about writing an article about your first year as director?"

Mariah to Becky: "Ok...Sure...Yes!" quickly followed by panic. Uh oh, what would I say?



My first year as director was...well, it was hard. To be tasked with taking over for an amazing person who has created one of the most heartfelt organizations you've ever come across, it's not easy to pick right up and keep that going. When I think about everyone else involved in making Camp HOPE the amazing organization that it is, I realize that it's hard for everyone. Camp HOPE is filled with "hard stuff", as we say. For our volunteers, dedicated to Camp when life is throwing them their own personal challenges, to take an entire weekend to be there for children who are hurting and listen to stories of heartbreak, is hard. For our campers, who have had their lives ripped apart to now come to a strange place and put their trust in us, THAT is hard. Why do we do it then? We do it because by facing some of that hard stuff together, we are able to cut right through to the good. It's better than good. It is so worth it that it's unimaginable to think of the alternative. My journey with Camp HOPE started as an adult camper, then as a counselor, then a public speaker for Camp and now as director for 4 camps so far. I have learned



so much about myself and others...and I don't plan to stop learning anytime soon. Here is a bit of how it's gone for about a year and a half now...

Fall 2015

My first Camp! I was excited, nervous and a little bit terrified. What stuck with me the most was that one of our campers had to be taken to the hospital for a twisted ankle late on Saturday night, the food we served was a little too sophisticated for kids needing "comfort" and I made a few mistakes in the schedule. The rest went alright but I didn't feel confident with what I had done and thought I had failed. But the 36 kid and 16 adult campers who scaled the climbing wall, played silly games together, snuggled with their Project Linus blankets, and shared their stories with an arm around their neighbor probably didn't even notice these imperfections.

Winter Reunion 2016

This Camp was rough for me. Quite unaware during that weekend, I was still reeling from my brother's suicide three months earlier. And after getting remarried in November, my family was working through the emotions and logistics of what it now meant to be 3-½ hours away from half of our children. By February, I wasn't quite "all there" and it showed. I made some additions that didn't necessarily fit the personality of Camp, I chose some crafts that were a flop, I took away the much-loved balloon release and I put extra pressure on our volunteers by making one of the cabin groups way too big. And then I didn't voice my appreciation for our volunteers. I received some constructive criticism and was absolutely sure I had failed. But the 37 kid and 12 adult campers who came to the reunion to have fun with new friends to go sledding, have snowball fights, eat warm chocolate chip cookies and make their own memorial candles probably didn't even notice my failings.

A camp experience for children and their families after the death of a loved one.

Thank you to Spectra Print, Stevens Point, for the donation of the design and printing of this newsletter.
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Spring 2016

Spring camp felt a little better. We included the addition of a new and wonderful lead cook who we hope stays with us for many years! It was the first time I led the candlelight ceremony because I had previously thought "I would be horrible at that part of the job". I lit my candle in memory of my husband and my brother and shared a silly story about braiding my brother's long hair. When I started telling the story, the words barely emerged from the sobs that probably surprised me more than anyone else. As the flame was passed around the room, every single child not only shared the name of the person they were lighting a candle for, but shared a memory or a story as well. By trusting in those kids and sharing my own grief, I helped to show them that they were safe to do so as well. I finally began to feel I was doing okay in this role. And maybe I wasn't completely failing. But the 30 kid and 15 adults campers who shot archery, snapped pictures and words to create a memory collage, snuggled up to a movie with new friends and fished to their heart's content, probably didn't even notice my personal improvements.

Fall 2106

This last camp was a real eye opener for me. Thing went smoothly in my mind, because my attitude was different. In reality, there were STILL bumps in the road. It had taken me this long (slow learner here!) to accept that even though things may not go as planned, there is never going to be a perfect camp. And for that matter, there shouldn't be. OKAY, I was FINALLY getting it! But the 33 kid and 16 adult campers who paddled around the lake, shot hoops with each other, told their counselor with tears in their eyes how glad they were to be at Camp, probably didn't notice any of my newfound confidence.

The last year and a half working with Becky has been humbling and has helped to cut right into my own ego. The biggest thing I've learned in this last year is that no matter how I perceive the success of each camp weekend or how much of my self-image I wrap into it all, the healing STILL HAPPENS. I still witness kids and parents heading home just a little bit lighter, with smiles and tears, grateful for how much they/their families needed this time and this space. We get feedback and read stories shared on social media by parents who feel like they have their lives AND their kids back. I am slowly and stubbornly learning that it's not about me at all, because the healing and overwhelming appreciation of being a part of the Camp family, the feeling of being together with others who understand similar pain has nothing to do with me. And good thing too, because it happens whether I believe I have succeeded or failed as the director.

It's also important to understand how much effort is put into creating this space for our campers because there is a foundation and a roadmap that Becky has put into place over

the years of Camp HOPE's existence. She has worked so hard to make Camp HOPE a place of tolerance, acceptance and healing. Yes, there are the logistics of each weekend but more importantly is an energy brought to camp, of non-judgement, gratitude and openness. It starts when the cook volunteers show up on Friday afternoon to prep the food with smiles on their faces, when our counselor volunteers arrive on Friday evening, hugging new volunteers and sharing little bits of their hearts at our staff training. Our counselors create a safe space first for each other, and then put those superhero skills into decorating their cabins, reading about the kids they get to meet the next day and transforming the entire camp into a safe space for the kids and the weekend ahead. And on Saturday morning, when we are bursting with excitement to meet our campers and their families (careful not to scare anyone away with our enthusiasm!), I see looks of nervous yet curious wonder coming from the kids. As our campers and their families walk up to our registration table, we acknowledge their bravery of being welcomed with love by strangers and their trust in us that the next 30 hours of their family's lives will be worth it when their broken hearts may feel like they can't handle much more.



I want to thank Becky for putting her trust in me and having faith in me. I want to thank all of our donors, our volunteers and our advocates. We cannot make any of this happen without your support and we thank you from the bottom of our hearts. We're looking forward to another wonderful year at Camp HOPE and (despite anything this director does to mess it up!) continuing to be here for grieving children and families, to keep opening those doors, for as long as we possibly can, to happiness and healing.

Thank you.



Jensine Peterson is a young woman about to embark on pursuing her Masters Degree in Social Work. When she is a counselor at Camp HOPE, she is present and open to her campers with a special kind of acceptance. Here is her story:

My father passed away after a long battle with AIDS when I was five years old and in kindergarten. Returning to school after he died was difficult because I felt like my life had drastically changed overnight while everyone else's stayed the same. It was hard for me to relate to my peers in the same way I did before because not many of them knew what to say or how to support me.

I first attended Camp HOPE in 1997 after being referred by a family friend. I was nervous to be away from my mom, but I immediately felt at ease once I learned that my fellow campers and counselors had also endured the loss of a loved one. We spent the weekend sharing memories and grieving the person we had lost while also just being kids and having fun together. We laughed, we cried, we sang, we danced, we did arts and crafts and we healed together. For the first time, I felt understood and accepted and knew there were other kids like me. It was nothing short of a magical weekend.

The peace I found at Camp HOPE that weekend is something I took home with me and something I still carry with me today. It is the reason why I returned as a camp counselor in 2008 and will continue to do so for as long as I can. It is truly amazing to see the campers and counselors come in as strangers and leave as family. As a counselor, I think the campers teach me more than I teach them. They inspire me with their resilience, their strength, their love and their hope for the future. At the end of every session of Camp HOPE, I am left feeling fulfilled, grateful and looking forward to the next session.



Thank You!

Many of the gifts received were given in tribute and recognition of special individuals. All gift tributes are noted by the *italicized names* after the donor's name.

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