



CAP Lung Cancer Medical Writers' Circle

Camp Kesem

Emma Patrick

As a child of a parent who was diagnosed with cancer, I never really felt like I had the opportunity to discuss my emotions or fears in any domain. After my mom died when I was nine, the longing for someone who understood me only continued to grow. It wasn't until I met a friend in college, ten years later, who embraced my past and connected with me on a level unlike any before. Being able to talk to someone who shared my experience changed my perspective and I finally felt like I had gained closure. It was this experience that would ultimately connect me with Camp Kesem.

Camp Kesem is a program unlike any other. It specifically serves the children whose lives have been affected by a parent's cancer. This population is often overlooked, with services and support available to parents but none for the children. The special emotional needs of children are not thought about, and kids need the opportunity to simply be kids. It is run entirely by college students, at over fifty universities across the United States. At the University of Oregon, our third year of camp will ensue at YMCA Camp Collins in Gresham, Oregon from August 25th through the 29th, 2014. We have served 61 children, doubling our campers served from the first year to the second, with hopes to find up to 100 campers to attend this August.

Camp Kesem does not provide therapy to kids, rather it functions on the foundation of kids connecting with other kids and having fun. From arts and crafts, to archery, to rock climbing and more, there is a multitude of activities that children can engage in throughout the week. At night before bed, children participate in cabin chats. Cabin chats are intimate conversations that foster connection and allow kids to talk about their experiences with one another. The magic of Camp Kesem is inspiring and brings campers and counselors back every year for more fun!

Our surveys indicate that 98% of parents believe that Camp Kesem has had a positive impact on their families. We also have data that suggests that 99% of families would recommend Camp Kesem to other families experiencing cancer. Parents have also shared that after a week of camp, they are able to see a shift of increasing confidence, self-esteem and their network of support in their children.

We hold two reunions throughout the year, one in winter and one in spring, in order to foster the friendships and support created at camp. Last week, we held our winter reunion for the University of Oregon chapter. We had over half of our campers attend and it was a day filled with fun and bonding!

To observe the magic of Camp Kesem and to be a part of it has been one of the greatest blessings in my life. I have seen children grow, share experiences and actually be able to talk about their deepest fears and darkest secrets. To share my experience with children and let them know that life moves on, as well as overcoming your past has been one of the ultimate joys for me throughout my college years.

We are looking for more campers to attend this summer. If you are interested in speaking with me directly about the camp, feel free to contact me at uoregon.outreach@campkesem.org Our application is available online at campkesem.org !



Emma with some of the campers!

Emma Patrick is a senior at the University of Oregon, double majoring in Spanish and Family & Human Services. She is particularly interested in working with at-risk youth and grief counseling, as well as Spanish-speaking families. Camp Kesem is a cause close to her heart and allows her to combine her passions of working with kids and the outdoors. She is graduating in June and is looking forward to entering the professional world and begin her work in the social work field.

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The Magic of Camp

Jessica Steinberg

“Kesem” is the Hebrew word for MAGIC -- and I can’t think of a better word to explain what happens when my boys attend camp. The University of Oregon program is celebrating its third camp season this summer, and my two have attended from the beginning.

I am a single mom to Nate and Pete, ages 12 and 9. I also have stage 4 cancer. Needless to say, this was not the life I envisioned for my children. I am proud to say that they approach life with spirit and humor, are great students, and are involved in sports and our community. They also have to deal with challenges and fears that none of their peers truly understand. That is, until that last week of August when camp begins – something they now count down for and is easily one of the highlights of their year.

It is so empowering for them to meet other kids that “get it” – and to just spend a week where the focus is on THEM, and not about having a mom with cancer. They can relax, play and have fun (and holy smokes, do they have fun!), while knowing that everyone has something in common with them.

Camp Kesem wouldn’t be what it is without the magic of the counselors, though. I am beyond impressed with these young people and the hard work, heart and dedication they put in all year long to make this one week so precious for everyone involved. That is one of the best things for me – I don’t have a moment’s worry when my boys are away at camp. I know without a doubt that they are being cared for by counselors that are kind and empathic (not to mention extremely energetic and playful!) and absolutely devoted to the kids. We will always consider Camp Kesem staff to be our extended family.

My boys’ current goal is to attend each year as a camper until they can be junior counselors – and then to attend a college that has a Camp Kesem program so that they can keep sharing the joy and hope that Camp Kesem brings!

