

Camp Letter from Executive Director, Anne McDonnell

2017 marked the 30th anniversary of the first time I came to Camp Bruce McCoy and I've been in a reflective sort of mood. As hard as running the program is, for me there's really something very sad about camp ending and returning to a "normal" life. Yet despite that sadness, my heart is full of love and gratitude for so many people that have made, and who continue to make, camp the special place that it is.

I'm thankful to Elizabeth Horn for introducing me to the program and to Harry Weinstock for encouraging my ongoing participation in it. This program changed me personally and professionally and I am a better person because of it.

I'm grateful to Lauren Smith, Martha Butler, Megan Murphey, and Dana Larson, who have kept, and are continuing to keep, the program going. From the hours they spend before camp to the days they spend there, the job is a difficult one, and when things go smoothly, it's often an unrecognized one. A special thanks go to Cory, Brett, Chris and Patty, who support them behind the scenes and put up with the things that demand their time and attention away from their families and home lives. And I'm grateful for their employers and co-workers, who cover their absences and thereby facilitate joy.

I'm thankful for Hugh LaBree, our volunteer camp nurse, who first came to Camp as an attendant 20 years ago and who makes sure the staff understands any medical conditions or allergies and that medications are properly given and documented. I'm thankful for his daughter Hannah, who's been coming to camp since she was five (more than half her life...she's now 14) and who requested and got permission from her school to come volunteer for a week. I'm also grateful to his wife, Colleen, for helping with check-in and supporting Hugh's love of the program.

I'm thankful for the counselors and attendants, who are the backbone of the program while we are at the Triple R. Most of them are in college, pursuing careers in human services; some are now professionals, working at hospitals and clinics, who remember what camp taught them when they were students. This year Brandon Mullholand and Kailee Bodecker were our head male and female counselors, going way above and beyond that job description to support the program staff and activities. In 30 years of being involved in this program, I have been blessed to meet some of the most amazing people, who give of themselves in ways most others don't. Without them, the smiles and happy memories wouldn't be possible.

I'm thankful for Dr. Nathan Zasler, who for at least 25 years, has volunteered to be our medical consultant; in fact, he may be the longest running volunteer BIAV has ever had. He takes calls of all kinds, every hour of the day or night and he does so with good humor, compassion, firm direction, and with the best interests of the campers, families, and staff paramount in his actions.

I'm thankful to the good folks at the Triple R Ranch, where camp is held. When we showed up there 25 years ago, they didn't really know what to think and were a little worried about what might happen. But we promised them we'd figure out a way to make things work and we'd respect their facility and hospitality. Since then, the Triple R has grown and built a covered riding stable and an accessible lodge. They've welcomed us back warmly each and every year. Duane, Bob, Jeanette, Marilyn, Mike, Samson, and countless others have become like family to us and we to them. It was there we met Kyle Sloan, who decided that working with people with brain injury was what he wanted to do with his life and who now works in a brain injury clubhouse in Virginia

Beach. He volunteers for the program before it starts and continues after it ends and he comes out every night and on the weekends, just to help do whatever he can.

I'm grateful to the campers and their families, who have made my life and my work more meaningful than they will ever know. They have made me laugh until I cried, cry until I laughed, and shown me what resiliency really is. They have faced their situations with grace and dignity and made me a more compassionate person and a more committed advocate.

I'm grateful to the sponsors and donors who have helped thousands of people benefit from Camp Bruce McCoy. Without their support, persons with brain injury would not be able to experience the program and make new friends and families and other caregivers wouldn't get a break from those responsibilities. I wish I could package the smiles and laughter that happens each day at Camp and send each donor a little bottle of happiness. You have no idea how much of a difference you've made in people's lives and this program is possible because of your generosity.

And finally, I'm grateful to the people who have supported my continued involvement in the program. BIAV staff promote the program, assure worried parents of first time campers, keep all the paperwork straight, arrange the porta-johns and the golf carts; they are all so outstanding at their jobs that I never worry, not for a minute, while I'm consumed with Camp. And to my husband Patrick, who knew when he married me that he was marrying camp and who has honored those vows for 22 years.

Of course, over 30 years, there are too many people to mention singularly and I'm sure I've neglected to thank someone important, and if so, I hope you'll accept my apologies.

Anne McDonnell
Executive Director

