THERE ARE STORIES TOLD OF A SPECIAL PLACE WHERE CHILDREN AND TEENS WITH CANCER CAN ESCAPE SOME OF THE CARES AND BURDENS OF THEIR DISEASE. THEY PLAY GAMES, SWIM, AND SOCIALIZE WITH FRIENDS WHO KNOW AND SHARE THEIR BATTLES, AND FOR A WEEK, THEY MAY FEEL A LITTLE MORE LIKE THE SELF THEY WERE BEFORE CANCER. THAT PLACE IS CAMP SUNRISE.
What began in 1986 with seven campers has grown into the Kimmel Cancer Center-managed and operated Camp Sunrise. The camp is entirely volunteer run, with more than 120 campers, 80 trained volunteers and more than 50 medical staff members. Most of the volunteers, including camp directors Marilyn Scalf and Steve Mitchell, were former campers, and many of them have been associated with Camp Sunrise for more than 20 years.

Among them are Annapolis stained glass artist Bobbie Burnett, who has made sun catchers with campers for the past 30 years, and Alex Johnston, who cooks meals for campers. Each year, volunteer Jaclyn Young helps campers make bracelets with special beads that commemorate the year. Some campers boast multiple bracelets, signifying their many visits to Camp Sunrise.

For one very special week each summer, campers and volunteers come together at Elks Camp Barrett in Crownsville, Maryland, for hiking, archery, swimming, rock wall climbing, dancing, crafts, games, sports, campfires and reunions with friends. “It really makes your heart warm. It’s the best feeling inside to see these kids so happy,” says Scalf.

A PLACE LIKE NO OTHER

Camp Sunrise may be the only place where cancer takes a backseat to childhood and teenage fun. For this one week, cancer is not their primary focus. “Our goal is to give campers the best week of their lives,” says Jordan May, a former camper turned volunteer. Beyond the fun, campers treasure the direct connection to other kids who understand and share their unique experience.

“I’ve been going to camp for nine years, and the reason I keep coming back is the relationships, the family I have with these people. I’ve known them almost my entire life. We’ve been through so much together. It just means so much to me. I have to come back to see them,” says Billy.

Almost every year, there are a few campers who are in hospice care. Camp Sunrise is one of their last experiences, and that realization is not lost on the campers or volunteers. At the end of camp each year, the entire group gathers to plant a tree and decorate it with handmade ornaments that honor campers who lost their cancer battle. As campers return year after year, they see these trees and remember their friends.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

At Camp Sunrise, there is something for everyone. Unlike other camps, no camper is too young, old or sick for Camp Sunrise. Younger campers, 4 and 5 years old, participate in a day camp, and campers 6 to 16 come for a traditional residential sleepover camp, complete with rustic cabins and plenty of outdoor activities.
adventures. The older 17 and 18-year-old campers take part in a leadership training program so, if they choose, they may join the ranks of the Camp Sunrise volunteers as camp counselors.

For patients who can’t leave the hospital to go to Camp Sunrise, there is “Camp at Hopkins.” Camp volunteers devote some time to go to the hospital and work with the Child Life teachers to make sure inpatients also have a camp experience with art projects and other activities. The highlight is a special robot that allows the campers at “Camp at Hopkins” to connect with campers at Camp Sunrise.

THE FUNNY FARM
About one-quarter of patients who attend Camp Sunrise are actively being treated for cancer. They rely on the more than 50 Kimmel Cancer Center physicians, nurses and physician assistants who care for them in the medical room campers have dubbed the “Funny Farm.” The medical staff members leave the cancer center and volunteer their time to make sure caregivers are on hand 24 hours a day to administer chemotherapy, draw blood for lab work and provide any other care needed. Campers also come to the Funny Farm for care of camp-related bumps, scrapes, and bruises.

Donald Small, Director of Pediatric Oncology, is among the physicians providing care to campers.

“When I see these kids in the Cancer Center, often they are sick, and we’re administering very complicated therapies,” says Small. “Then I see them at camp each year playing and having such a great time. It’s a wonderful thing for me and for all of the medical staff to see.”

CANCER DOESN’T CALL THE SHOTS
For most kids, a cancer diagnosis makes summer camp an impossibility. It becomes one more thing that makes them different from others their age. At Camp Sunrise, cancer doesn’t call the shots. Prostheses are hung behind doors on coat hooks, wigs and scarves are often put aside in favor of bald heads, and no explanations are necessary. Everyone fits in, and everyone there—campers, counselors and volunteers—understands.

Cancer, particularly in children and teens, is more than its physical manifestations. As it disrupts the normal, day-to-day activities and relationships, it also takes an emotional toll. The clinicians and scientists at the Kimmel Cancer Center provide the research, discovery and care that heal the body, and places like Camp Sunrise heal the soul.
“It really makes your heart warm. It’s the best feeling inside to see these kids so happy.”

—CAMP DIRECTOR MARILYN SCALF
AMANDA’S CAMP STORY

Childhood is supposed to be marked by sweet and simple memories, like losing a first tooth, learning how to ride a bicycle and going off to summer camp for the first time. Amanda Endres’ childhood was not so typical. When she was just 8 years old, she faced the frightening diagnosis of an aggressive blood cancer, acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). Then, at 11, her cancer came back, and again at 16. Despite the fear, uncertainty and physical challenges that overshadowed so much of Amanda’s youth, there was a clear and certain bright spot that gave her back some of what cancer had stolen—if only for one week each year.

That bright spot is Camp Sunrise.

Just months after being diagnosed with ALL, Amanda boarded a bus for her first trip to Camp Sunrise. It’s a memory etched firmly in the minds of both Amanda and her mother, Jenni Endres.

FIRST-TIME JITTERS

“I was really excited to go, but when it came time to get on the bus, I was clinging to my mom. I didn’t want to go at all,” Amanda recalls.

Although first-time camp jitters and homesickness are completely normal for young children, cancer is not. It punctuates the worries of parent and child. As Jenni watched Amanda ride away on that bus, she was consumed by fear and doubt. Ever since Amanda had been diagnosed and started an intensive treatment with potent anticancer drugs, Jenni had rarely left her side. Now they’d be apart and have no contact for a week.

On the bus, Amanda’s tears subsided as an older, experienced camper sat down next to her and assured her that their time ahead would be filled with fun and friendships. By the following morning, Amanda says her worries—mostly about making new friends—had completely subsided. The rest of the week was devoted to traditional camp fun and friendships.
“She happened to be bald, but everybody else was too,” says Jenni. “There are no cliques at Camp Sunrise. No one identifies as popular or unpopular.”

As Amanda was busy enjoying skating, dances and other fun activities at Camp Sunrise with her new friends, her mom took the opportunity to play catch-up at home. “It gave me a chance to reconnect with my other three girls,” Jenni says.

QUELLING PARENTS’ ANXieties

Like Amanda, her mother soon relaxed, reassured by the knowledge that Camp Sunrise always had a full-time physician and specially trained nurses on-site to provide care, give treatments and medications, and respond to any medical needs that arose during the week.

If that wasn’t enough, Jenni, whose catering company provides food for Camp Sunrise, also had another source of comfort. Although Jenni could not deliver the meals in person—Camp Sunrise is a parent-free zone—she received glowing reports from her employees who took the meals to camp.

Now that Amanda is no longer a camper, she has visited Camp Sunrise and witnessed firsthand what a special place it is.

“It’s a learning experience for me as a mom to see how the kids help each other and are comfortable with each other. It’s a good place. It’s a happy place,” says Jenni.

“Now it’s my turn to comfort a scared or shy child on their first bus ride to Camp Sunrise. It’s a lot of fun to give back.”

It’s not surprising that most campers choose to return to Camp Sunrise every summer. Amanda has only missed one summer since that first trip in 2008. It was the year of her first relapse, and the more intense therapy used against the resistant cancer cells that had caused her cancer to come back led to side effects and hospital stays that kept Amanda from camp that year. “I was really bummed, but I went back next year,” Amanda says.

SPECIAL BONDS

Camp Sunrise offers more than the traditional summer camp experience. Amanda says it’s the friendships she’d forged that stand out the most. As time went on and she suffered not one but two relapses with ALL, the distance between her and most of her former friends widened.

“My Camp Sunrise friends were the only ones who would text me every day because they knew exactly what I was going through,” she says.

Though Amanda may have drifted apart from her friends outside of Camp Sunrise, her three sisters remained incredibly supportive. In 2013, when Amanda suffered her second relapse, her younger sister Madison was the bone marrow donor for a unique, Kimmel Cancer Center-developed therapy called a haploidentical bone marrow transplant. Typically, a bone marrow transplant requires a bone marrow donor who is an identical immune match to the patient. Haploidentical transplants expand the donor pool, making it possible to use half-matched donors. The treatment has proven as safe and effective as traditional bone marrow transplants, successfully curing many patients of cancer and other bone marrow and immune diseases. Amanda may be one of them.

A NEW ROLE

At 19, she has come a long way from the little girl who took a bumpy bus ride to Camp Sunrise for the first time. She is busy taking coursework as she prepares for her new goal—to become a pediatric oncology nurse.

This summer, Amanda will also take on a new role at Camp Sunrise. It will be her first year as a counselor. She has spent the past two years in training.

“Now it’s my turn to comfort a scared or shy child on their first bus ride to Camp Sunrise,” says Amanda. “It’s a lot of fun to give back.”
“Camp Sunrise is cool because the other campers know what you’ve been through with hospital stays and surgeries. It’s easy to talk because they understand what you’re talking about.”
—Amir
Camp Sunrise camper

“I want to be a veterinarian.”
—Faith
Camp Sunrise camper

“Kids with cancer don’t really get to do a lot of fun things. They have to be in a hospital, and that’s not fair for them. They made this camp because they want kids like me to be able to do all of the fun stuff that other kids get to do every day of their lives.”
—Liesl
Camp Sunrise camper

“When I see these kids in the Cancer Center, often they are sick, and we’re administering very complicated therapies. Then I see them at camp each year playing and having such a great time. It’s a wonderful thing for me and for all of the medical staff to see.”
—Donald Small
Director of Pediatric Oncology
“I’ve been going to camp for nine years, and the reason I keep coming back is the relationships, the family I have with these people. I’ve known them almost my entire life. We’ve been through so much together. It just means so much to me. I have to come back to see them.”
   —Billy
   Camp Sunrise camper

“When I first came to Camp Sunrise, I was 5 years old and bald. I didn’t know what it was going to be like. I went to campfires, and ate s’mores. I felt like a kid again.”
   —Jordan
   Camp Sunrise camper

“These kids have been through one of the most difficult things we could imagine. They deserve the best.”
   —Alex Johnston
   Camp Sunrise staff member

“I want to be a designer for Lego.”
   —Connor
   Camp Sunrise camper

“Just suppose we all worked together to help children with cancer. You come to camp thinking you are giving back, but in reality, the kids are giving us so much more than we give them.”
   —Christina Venanzi
   Camp Sunrise staff member

WEB EXCLUSIVE: Watch a video at hopkinscancer.org/kidscancer
WAYS YOU CAN HELP

Your support guarantees the future of Camp Sunrise for children and teens like Serena, a current camper who dreams of one day being director of Camp Sunrise.

Camp Sunrise is run by volunteers and relies entirely on donations to cover the $150,000 in annual operating expenses and $1,000 cost per camper. The Camp Sunrise Gala is the primary fundraiser.

• Sponsor Camp Sunrise by becoming a benefactor.
• Sponsor a theme day or week at Camp Sunrise.
• Sponsor a camper.
• Attend the Camp Sunrise Gala.
• Have a fund raising event to benefit Camp Sunrise.
• Donate activities, food or supplies.

There aren’t many bright spots for children battling cancer. When you sponsor a camper like Serena, future director of Camp Sunrise, you ensure that she and every Kimmel Cancer Center pediatric cancer patient has the chance to put cancer aside for one week.

hopkinsmedicine.org/campsunrise

For more information, contact:
Stephanie Davis
Johns Hopkins Kimmel Cancer Center Development Office
750 E. Pratt St., Suite 1700
Baltimore, MD 21202
Sdavis9@jhu.edu
410-361-6184

hopkinscancer.org/kidscancer