## **Camp HOPE Volunteer Wins Educator of the Year**

By: Vicky Wittman, Camp HOPE Director and Elliot Van Dyke, Camp HOPE Volunteer

One of the main reasons Camp HOPE has become such a caring and healing place is because of the amazing volunteer staff. At Camp HOPE, we know that creating a safe, welcoming environment is all about the people who are there to greet our campers upon arrival, guide and support them through the weekend and to provide encouragement as they head home. We work hard to ensure every staff member has a clean background check, is properly trained in areas of equity, inclusion and diversity, possesses the same core values of Camp HOPE and also has a deep, personal understanding of the grieving process. Elliot Van Dyke is just one of many special Camp HOPE volunteers.

#### Here is Elliot's Story ...

"Grief has shaped my life in so many ways. I often imagine how my life would be different without it. What choices would I have made differently? How would my relationships with family members be affected? I was seven when my younger sister, Abby (5), passed away after a short battle with Leukemia. I was in second grade learning to perfect my cursive. I don't remember what day I went back to school after Abby's funeral. I don't remember any activities we did that day or what my teacher said to me. I do remember how scared I was to go back. More importantly, I remember that my teacher, Mrs. Calmes, made me feel safe and loved once I was there. Going to school didn't get easier in 3rd grade. Or 4th grade. Or 5th grade. Or in middle school. Going to school without my sister never got any easier, but every step along the way was a supportive teacher who I knew I could trust. When I imagine my life without grief, I'm not a teacher. Grief has created a lot of obstacles in my life, but has without a doubt, provided some positives as well. Grief led me down the path to becoming a teacher.



Elliot with his sister

After high school, I was able to attend Cardinal Stritch University where I immediately declared an education major. Four years of college flew by, and before I knew it, I was a student teacher. My experiences quickly confirmed my reasoning of why I had chosen to be a teacher in the first place. I was lucky enough to find an opening in the Science Department at Kettle Moraine High School. I have now worked at KM for six years.

At the end of summer 2022 with just a few weeks left before professional development days began, my cell phone rang. It was Superintendent Steve Plum letting me know I had won the "6-12 Educator of the Year Award." I was surprised and absolutely honored and humbled to receive this award from the district. The Educator of the Year Award "is awarded to one staff member from each level who



Elliot Van Dyke

demonstrates high-level teaching skills, student engagement, and achievement in student growth and development."

In addition to the educator of the year award, I was nominated to apply for the Herb Kohl Teacher Fellowship Program. What continues to be important is remembering how and why I got here, and the impact I can make in kids' lives every day. School will always remind me of the time I missed with my sister Abby, but I keep giving back because I know there is always something positive that comes from a supportive, safe, loving, teacher; I may never know who I impact or how, but it makes it all worth it."

Elliot is an active, long term volunteer at Camp HOPE and also co-facilitates a required annual Equity and Inclusion training for all of our volunteer staff.



**Camp HOPE** PO Box 84 Amherst, WI 54406 (715) 341-0076

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

Website: www.camphopeforkids.org

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# SPRING 2023

Please help us to continue providing free services to grieving children and their families. Remember Camp HOPE with your giving. We are a non-profit, 501(c)3 organization.



When you tell people you are excited to go to grief camp for the weekend, you often get some pretty weird looks. But THIS moment is what camp is all about.

I was out for a walk with three of the girls from my group and we decided to sit and watch the most beautiful sunset over the lake. All of us lost our Dads so we took some time to share our favorite memories!

One of the little girls turned to me and said, "We lost our Dads, but we found each other."

Spending the weekend with these brave, resilient, and energetic little girls filled my heart right up. Losing my Dad was one of the hardest things I have ever gone through, but it also brought my camp family into my life. My camp ended with one of my girls saying "Bye Corie. Thanks for being my friend."

Camp HOPE welcomes all people as they are. We are an LGBTQ+ Ally.

Thank you to Spectra Print, Stevens Point, for the donation of the design and printing of this newsletter. Thank you to JHL Marketing, Stevens Point, for assisting with mailing.



## Alice By: Becky Lov

When Camp HOPE was born after my daughter, her granddaughter died, my mother-in-law cried. She loved her granddaughter Sara and her heartache was raw. Alice Loy was a tiny woman with a tough exterior but with an even softer inside. She immediately came up with the idea that the children of Camp HOPE should have cookies when they arrived, frightened and overwhelmed. She knew those feelings deeply after seeing so many loved ones die, including three husbands. Cookies make people, especially children, feel welcomed. So, she set about making cookies, all flavors and varieties, for each Camp weekend. She made sure to put a note on each batch as to what could cause an allergic reaction like nuts. She made cookies with faces on them, or with candies and fancy icing. She wouldn't take any compensation for these gems. She and her sisters drove the cookies up to Camp, hugging me and wishing me the best experience for the campers. For over 20 years, she made cookies, thousands of them. Alice loved those kids, those campers. And she loved them the only way she knew how. By baking cookies. Alice made Camp HOPE a better place. She is deeply missed.





SPRING 2023

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### **My Camp Experience**

By: Brooklyn Miller, Camp HOPE Camper

My name is Brooklyn, I'm 17 years old, and it was my first time attending Camp HOPE in October of 2022.

I read the description for Camp HOPE and wanted to sign up immediately. After my dad died, I developed a lot of irrational

fears, one of them being codependency toward my mom. Of course my mom worried about how I would handle being away from her, but she was excited for me to have this opportunity to learn and grow. She always says grief is similar to a child. It needs consolation, to be fed and nurtured, it can be background noise that's always there, or it can go away for the day or night, but it always comes back and it's always with you. It belongs to you.

I enjoyed that not every activity through the weekend directly pertained to the grieving process, but we still talked a lot about our grief and loved ones who died, which brought us all closer together. One of the best parts about Camp HOPE are the meals!

I'm a picky eater, and it made me so happy that there were a few different options for everyone to eat, a great salad bar with every meal, treats, juice, and hot cocoa! All of our food was fresh and tasty, which gave me a sense of home

Camp HOPE is offered at no cost to camper families. Losing a loved one is extremely difficult and grief knows no boundaries, especially in terms of finances. Had Camp HOPE cost my family anything, I likely would not have been

I was so excited for Camp HOPE, but as the days got closer, I began to panic. I was so nervous to leave my mom and even more nervous to be around people that despite sharing similar experiences as me, I didn't know.

We pulled into the camp parking lot and I was still nervous, but as soon as I saw Josie, an emotional support dog at the entrance, I knew everything was going to be okay. When we were greeted at the door, I could just feel the support in the air. There was a room full of kids who were just like me, yet all with a different story. It was so cool to me how every table had a different age group with different decorations, which was so welcoming. I sat down at our table and yet again I could feel all kinds of support coming from my peers and counselors. I even forgot to pack a couple things and was assured by a few staff members not to worry-they had extra of everything.

able to attend. Because of all the donors and supporters of Camp HOPE, I and so many other children are able to go and feel the love and support that is so needed. It is so, so heartwarming that this incredible opportunity is available to everyone for no cost.

Camp HOPE was such a memorable experience and I was so sad when I had to go home! I became so close with so many peers and counselors in just a day and a half. I had nothing to be scared of before going to camp. I loved how Camp HOPE was facilitated by adults who have walked similar journeys as I have. I was worried that Camp HOPE might be really sad, but they were able to turn this into such an uplifting opportunity. Camp HOPE was one of the most amazing places I've ever had the opportunity to go. When I was younger, I would have never imagined coming this far in my grief journey. I'm turning 18 in spring. I would love to come back as a counselor. I cannot thank Camp HOPE enough and everyone who has donated to and supported it. Thank you.

## We Found Each Other

By: Corie Zelazoski, Camp HOPE Volunteer



## Happy To Be Back

By: Vicky Wittman, Camp HOPE Director



We're so glad to be back! After two years of not being able to host our inperson camps (due to the pandemic), we were able to welcome new families

and volunteers to Camp HOPE for our Spring and Fall camps.

Camp HOPE provides a type of space that immediately feels safe and welcoming. I heard from multiple families that as they were driving to the Wisconsin Lions Camp, a sense of anxiety flooded over them. They weren't sure if they were ready to attend a bereavement camp, a place where they may end up sharing their story or let their emotions show. One mother said, "I honestly considered telling my kids we got lost and we would have to turn around and go home." She continued with tears in her eyes, "I don't know what pushed me to keep driving, but I am so glad we're here. It's been absolutely life changing. This is where we needed to be."

As we connected, I took a moment of mindfulness and noted the tree leaves swaying in the warm breeze, an oriole singing in the tree above our heads, the smell of campfire, the sound of laughing children coming from paddle boats on the crystal blue water and a small group of adult campers hugging each other with yoga mats at hand. This was a very good moment to take in, discerning every moment at Camp HOPE is just as magical for all who attend.

At Camp HOPE, there is an immediate sense of safety, community, support and healing. And those feelings continue to grow stronger throughout the weekend. Campers who were anxious to attend, depart asking when they can come back again.

Two years was a long time to wait. We're so very glad to be back, welcoming more families, building memories and changing lives.

### Dan Hebert Camp Hope By: Jim Hebert, Camp HOPE Donor

There is a grief camp in Northern California the doctor "How come the doctors couldn't that is modeled after Camp HOPE in Wisconsin. My younger brother, Dan Hebert died at age 36 in November 2000. He left behind his 32-year-old wife, Lynn and two sons, Tanner 5 and Jackson 2.

Dan grew up in Mosinee, Wisconsin, as the voungest of six children. He played football, basketball, and baseball for Mosinee High and then went to UW Eau Claire, where he graduated with a business degree. Just before his senior year in college, Dan worked a summer job in California and lived with me. He was hooked on the warm weather and sunshine and decided to move to California once he graduated in 1986.

Dan started dating Lynn Frame at a family wedding in 1991 and they were married two years later. They were very happily raising two little boys, when Dan, in February 2000, experienced some chest pain, while making a sales call at a hospital in Southern California. Dan told his sales representative to proceed with the sales call, while he went to the ER to "check out this pain". He thought he might be having a heart attack. The doctor did a blood draw and noticed Dan's white blood cell count was very high. That initial visit began a medical journey to fight a rare form of blood cancer. No one wants to hear a doctor say those two words in the same sentence: rare and cancer. Dan went through chemotherapy, radiation, and a stem cell transplant, before he died in November 2000.

Lynn and Tanner were struggling with the sudden loss of Dan, with Jackson being too young to remember his dad. My brother Fred had been a counselor at Camp HOPE and suggested Lynn and Tanner would benefit by attending. Lynn and Tanner flew back to Wisconsin and had a wonderful experience at a winter camp. Tanner was able to ask

fix my daddy's sick blood?" Answers to this question and much more really helped Tanner deal with the loss of his father.

Lynn told me that she wanted to start a Camp HOPE in California and help her boys and other children in the area, experiencing the death of a loved one. Lynn and I went as counselors to a spring camp at Camp HOPE Wisconsin and based on the same principles, formed Dan Hebert Camp HOPE in 2004. Lynn coordinated 2-3 weekend grief camps each year through 2019. Tanner and Jackson were campers and counselors at these camps. More than 1,500 children attended Dan Hebert Camp HOPE and many grief stories were shared and memory boxes created. The children learned they were not alone in their grief and it was okay to move forward and have fun. Then, COVID hit and no camps were held in 2000.

COVID was not the only culprit in this story. Lynn was becoming more forgetful... and was diagnosed with early onset Alzheimer's disease in November 2019. Therefore, there will be no more weekend camps for Dan Hebert Camp HOPE.

On the bright side, Dan Hebert Camp HOPE has been very successful, raising money for children's grief camps and has established a sizable cash reserve to contribute to charitable causes in the future; doing so, allows us to honor both Lynn and Dan. A \$25,000 donation was made to Camp HOPE Wisconsin in 2022.

There are many worthy causes, which warrant charitable donations. Most people find charities that match their personal stories and passions. My passions are children and education; those are the causes I support. Camp HOPE Wisconsin is a perfect fit.

— Jim Hebert



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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