



Summer Camp: A Gift to Your Grandchild and Yourself

Robbie Tarpley Rafrfish

Carol Evans never got to go to summer camp. One of five children raised in Delaware, Evans remembers that while it was something she wanted to do, “camp was not something my family could afford. It’s one of the main reasons I sent my kids and now help to send my grandkids. It’s an experience I could not have that I really want them to have.”

Evans, 66, is not alone. Grandparents are a quiet but mighty force when it comes to summer camp attendance. With her help, Evans’ granddaughter, Katerina, who lives in Annapolis, has been attending Camp Odyssey at The Salisbury School, a traditional day camp, since she was five years old. Last summer, at age 14, she became a CIT (counselor in training) and she will continue her second year as staff this summer.

“Camp is important, and Camp Odyssey has been a wonderful place for Katerina and her younger sister, Michaela,” said Evans. “It’s been a real growth opportunity. They get to meet kids from different backgrounds and ethnic groups and learn to work together with others. Camp offers an accepting, nurturing environment that provides some balance from the day-to-day.”

A 150 Year American Tradition

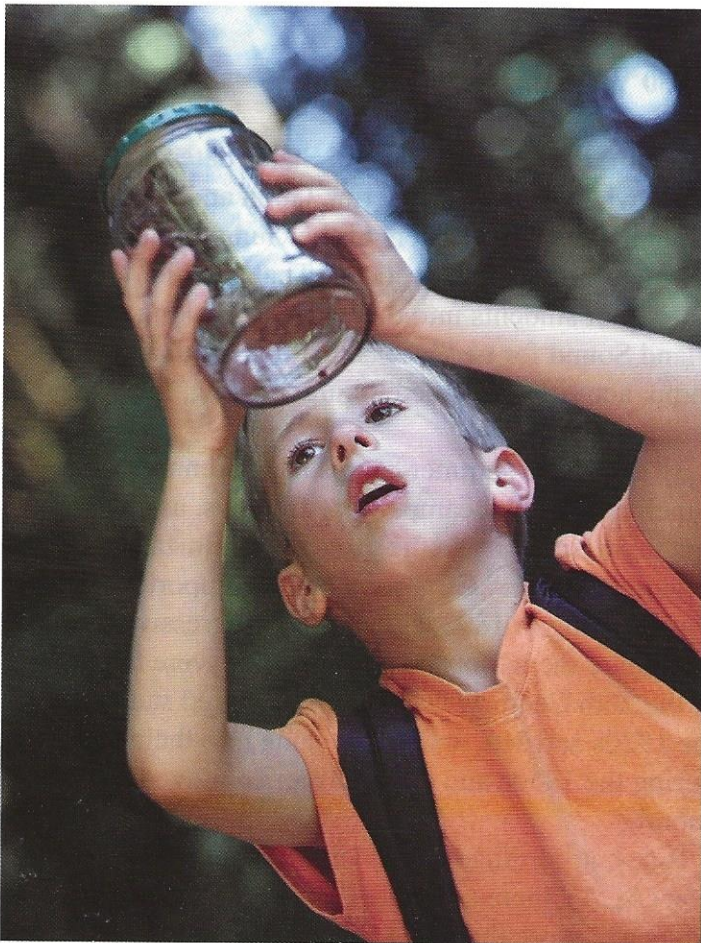
Summer camp in the United States dates back to 1861, when William Frederick Gunn and his wife Abigail were headmasters of the Gunnery School, a private school in Connecticut. That summer they took a group of students into the wilderness along Long Island Sound for two weeks. At this original summer camp, activities included hiking, boating, fishing, and sailing.

By the 1880s summer camps had taken root in America. The first camps were for boys, as a way to “retain masculinity in the growing feminization of the American home.” Girls soon had the opportunity as well, starting in 1892, as a way to progressive attempt to prepare them “for the place women were to occupy” in the 20th Century. Day camps followed starting in the 1920s and 30s, and really came into their own during the 1950s and 60s as America moved to the suburbs.

Today, according to The American Camp Association (ACA), there are more than 12,000 camps nationwide, and more than 11 million children (and adults) attend camp each summer.



A Camp Odyssey annual tradition, "Mud Madness," a day of sheer fun never to be forgotten!



At summer camp, learning takes on a whole new dimension.



Themed days, make each day new and exciting!

Day Camp as a Supplement to “Camp Grandma & Grandpa”

Summer can be a time of hard choices for families who need child care. Literally millions of grandparents are asked to step in and help – which can be both a blessing and a challenge, according to Dr. Harlan Eagle, Camp Odyssey’s executive director.

“Grandparents can be a tremendous source of wisdom, support and encouragement for grandchildren,” said Eagle, who holds a doctorate in Education. “Over the years, however, as the economy has tightened, they have been asked to do much, much more.”

Eagle has seen a rise in the percentage of grandparents helping to fund kids at his camp. Like Evans, some want to give their grandchildren the experiences they had or wanted to have as kids, while others see it as a way to make a grandchild’s visit special without having to become the “activities director” themselves.

“In reality, it is a lot to ask a grandparent to entertain a kid 24/7. Camp offers kids a chance to be with other kids while still leaving lots of quality time with their grandparents later in the day and on the weekends.”

Camp is also a little bit of a sweetener, as well. “Grandparents often tell us that their grandchildren ask to come back to stay with them, partially because they make ‘summer friends’ at camp they want to see again,” said Eagle.

This summer, Camp Odyssey will try to meld the two generations in a new program called “Classic Camp Day.” On Wednesday, July 11, grandparents will be invited to share a day of summer camp nostalgia with their grandchildren enrolled at Odyssey. There will be a camp sing along, scavenger hunt, games and more. For more information, visit www.campodyssey.org or call 410-742-4464, ext. 320. **GLM**

Robbie Tarpley Raffish is the second of a three-generation family of summer camp enthusiasts. Her dad, Norm, raised in New York City, went to “sleep-away” camp from the time he was six – and never wanted to come home. He loved the “world of kids, by kids” – especially when the camp broke up into teams for days-long Color War. He passed this love to his daughter, Robbie, who attended day and sleep-away camps and then worked as staff. In turn, she has made campers of her own kids, Faith and Jason, both of whom attended Camp Odyssey and sleep-away camps. Faith spent last summer on a six-week bus trip across America called “USY on Wheels” while Jason went to Moorpark College to study exotic animal training. This summer both plan to return to Odyssey as staff. They fully intend to send their kids to camp ... a loooong time from now, according to their mother, who is sure she will help pay for it when the time comes.

Choosing a Summer Camp – A Primer

If it has been a while since you sent a kid to summer camp, some things sure have changed – but one thing that has not, according to Harlan Eagle, is that “summer camp is all about the kids – what inspires them and makes them happy.” Want to choose a camp sure to deliver? Eagle, executive director of Camp Odyssey, who has a Ph.D. in Elementary Education, offers this five-step process:

1. **Start now:** Coordinate your grandchildren’s childcare dates or visits with your adult children. Camps fill up quickly, so looking for a camp early in spring will keep options open. Planning early will also allow time to research individual camps and develop a budget.
2. **Get your grandkids involved:** A child who is involved from the start of the process will be much more excited when camp time comes and get more out of the experience.

TIP: Look through websites and brochures together (in person or on Skype) and discuss the kinds of activities your grandchild enjoys or would like to try.

3. **Find a fit:** Do the camp policies and philosophies coincide with those of your own (and your adult child’s) household? Will your grandchild be able to adapt to the rules of the camp? Ask about group size, supervision and staff training (including CPR and Lifesaving.)

TIP: Is the camp accredited by the American Camp Association or another organization? Find out who inspects the location.

4. **Do your homework:** What activities are included in the price of the camp? Do kids take off-site field trips and if so, how are they transported? Are there health and safety regulations imposed on the camp? Ask to speak with some references – other grand/parents of children at the camp.

5. **Cost and Location:** How expensive is each camp you are considering? How much money can you spend? If a camp is slightly more expensive, but closer to home and more convenient, is it more cost effective? In case of an emergency, how fast could you get to the camp site from work or from your house? Is transportation available?

TIP: Don’t be too shy to ask if scholarships are available. Eagle said that many camps offer some level of financial assistance – but demand is high, so ask about the process early on.

Eagle also recommends visiting the website www.acacamps.com. The site offers even more help and a list of American Camp Association accredited camps by location.