



THE OCONTO ECHO

Winter 2022

Blueberry Blurb

Thank you to the entire Oconto community for an incredible, fun filled 2022 season!

There is so much about this summer that we are so proud of:

Whether it's the amazing food that Chef Leslie and her team prepared for us in the Dining Hall each meal (guacamole for taco Tuesday anyone?), the fantastic monther plays that we were treated to in July and August to go along with the equally well performed two weeker plays, the magic of Semi banquets Nickelodeon in July and Stranger Things in August with their special detail and costumes that left us dancing to "Running Up That Hill", to the enthusiasm and dedication that campers showed at activities day in and day out.

At the heart of every Oconto summer is the talented Oconto camp staff. This amazing group of young people returned this summer to deliver the promise of camp and bring back traditions that had been modified because of the restrictions of the past two years. Their spirit, optimism, and unbreakable friendships with one another are the light that keeps Oconto so bright. For us, one of the great joys of being camp directors is getting to bear witness to the wealth of camp friendships that flourish at Oconto.

We also want to take this opportunity to thank Emily Pepper who has been Oconto's Assistant Director for the past 2 summers and would have been for 2020 as well if camp had been allowed to open in summer 2020. Emily's leadership, caring attitude and love for camp combined with her attention to detail have been instrumental contributions in the smooth operations of camp. Although Emily is moving on to an exciting career as a midwife, her legacy at camp will be felt and missed. "We love you Emily, oh yes we do!..."

Nothing can stand in the way of a community of people who are all pulling in the same direction. Thank you for being part of this very special Oconto family.

We hate to part, but in our hearts, we'll return there once again!

Bronwyn & Ted

The View from Misty Cove

To see and hear the campers and staff at Oconto over the Summer was magical! There were still some Covid protocols in place, but not nearly as restrictive as the Summer of 2021. The reunion celebrating 98 years was very heart warming! About 190 alumnae gathered for chatting, activities, and fun. To hear the dining hall on Friday night full of such enthusiasm was wonderful. Both nights I went to bed only because I could not speak any more – I was hoarse. So many hugs and stories were shared. It was interesting to see how different generations sing the same song, and how stories have changed over the years. However, the warmth and friendships started, and re-kindled were obvious everywhere. Thank you to everyone who attended to celebrate 98 years of Oconto! We hope to see you at the 100th in 2024!

Lisa & Bruce



MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

DATE FOR THE 100th Alumnae Reunion
Friday September 20th to Sunday September 22nd, 2024

REUNION HIGHLIGHTS:

Mother and Daughter

By Rebecca Cutler (1980-1992)

Thirty years have passed since spending my summers on the shores of Eagle Lake, but the familiar words of the Oconto song got it right, I did, "return there once again" for the Alumnae weekend this September, and it was amazing! Bunking with some of my dearest camp friends (and a racoon- food in cabin really is a bad idea), connecting with former Alum, including favourite counsellors, reciting Salutation to the Dawn at flag raising, belting out "Fish Gotta Swim", performing "The Rose" to an enraptured audience and reflecting at Chapel (with some tears) were a few of the highlights from the weekend.

To add to the magic, my daughter, Maddy Fisher (2010-present), current staff and longtime camper was asked to work at the alumnae weekend. Maddy and I share a special bond when it comes to camp, but admittedly I thought it might be a bit strange having her there. It turned out I did not see much of her over the weekend, she was kept busy leading sing songs, lifeguarding and washing dishes (shout out to all of the amazing staff!). When I did catch sneak peaks or the occasional hug, she was in her element, enveloped by friends and laughter. I quickly realized how lucky I was to have caught these little glimpses

of her in her happy place. After all of these years and all that has changed in the outside world, Oconto has remained a little pocket of paradise preserving all that is good. Being surrounded by so many generations of Oconto Alum that share the love for this paradise was magical. Needless to say I am giddy with excitement for our next Alumnae weekend! And just a head's up - start your training now - can you say "Decathlon"?!



A Sisterly Love for Camp

By Catherine Mann (1984-1994) & Heather (Mann) Haigh (1984-1993)

Heather: I couldn't wait to go to camp. My parents finally let me go when I turned 8 years old. Camp for two whole weeks! My parents told me they cried after I got on the bus in Toronto, worried I didn't know anyone. I was making friends before the bus left the Jolly Miller parking lot. As my two weeks neared to a close, I called home begging to stay for the rest of the month. I was hooked!

Catherine: My older sister started going to Oconto when we were little, she was something called a Tadpole. I didn't quite understand. Then she went back the next summer, and the next one too, and by then, I wanted to go too. I honestly don't remember my first year at camp very well, but I knew my sister was there, which meant I would be FINE. Kid logic, right?

Heather: Camp was my home away from home. It was the place where I truly felt I could be myself. I knew early on how fortunate I was to be able to go to camp every summer for a month. A gift my parents gave me. And soon, my sister joined me on the adventure. While we often fought at home, at camp our bond grew stronger, and I was happy we shared camp together.

Catherine: I would frequently leave Tads and go visit my sister in Chips, not realizing that I probably almost started an EP after I couldn't be found in my section. I was in my own world. Returning to Oconto year after year, and going through the sections as a camper, I felt like I was at home and had my sister with me. She was my go-to if I had a conflict in my tent. I remember sitting with her during morning Assembly, then we parted ways for activities, and I wouldn't see her again until lunch. She gave me silent strength.

Catherine: Then one year, my sister didn't come back to camp that summer. By then, I was a Semi and she would have been a first year full Staff. I felt noticeably alone without her, but still had strength to stand on my own. I now treasure these summers that we shared at Oconto together growing up, and very enthusiastically return for the Alumni reunions.

Heather: After 10 years at Oconto, I remember how hard it was to miss my first summer at camp. I came up on Visitor's Day to see Catherine, and a flood of emotions hit me as we drove up the camp road. I feel the very same thing every time I return.

In September, we drove to Oconto together for the camp reunion. On the drive, we listened to camp songs, reminisced about camp, and talked about Mom. Our Mom passed away in April this year, and her passing has brought us closer together. Returning to camp was healing for both of us, and we are so grateful to Oconto and gift Mom gave us by sending us to camp.



(Heather, Lisa and Catherine)

On Time, A Chapel presentation delivered at the Reunion

By Michelle Kelly (1987-1996)

There's something—I can't imagine what—about the last few years that has made me feel old. Sure, age is all relative, but I'm certainly relating to it more these days. Those endless zoom calls have me noticing the grey in my hair, the lines on my forehead, the pouches under my eyes.

I am not the first woman to say this, of course. It's not even the first time I've said this! I felt old when I was 16 and sitting on that big rock at the back, watching all the eagles file out of chapel the way I did my first summer at camp. Compared to them I felt old.

I felt old the summer I was 18 and I went on the all-staff day off in Kingston with all my pals who were students at Queen's. This was when I was on the precipice of all the amazing things that adulthood would certainly offer. Time was my pal in 1994, when all I wanted to do was to speed it up! That was old in a good way, I guess, but old all the same.

I felt old when I was 29 and got sick with cancer—the little c kind, don't worry—and it became crystal clear that my body wasn't indestructible, regardless of how many late-night party sessions I indulged in over the years since I myself graduated from Queen's.

Or when I was pregnant at age 38 and was called, with abandon and absolutely without irony, over and over, a geriatric mother. GERIATRIC?!?!? Sweet Jesus. Well, small price to pay for my beautiful daughter, Mary, a girl with an old-timey name that's belonged to at least one woman in every generation of my big Irish family. She is herself now a camper at Oconto. Maybe she'll even be an Eagle next summer.

Time is a circle I guess.

Now I'm almost 47—NOT OLD exactly but, there is no denying it, OLDER, and downright ancient to any eagle camper you might encounter. I definitely feel my age more acutely. And I can see it passing all around me in such significant ways. Friends who are sending their children to university. Friends who are ending their marriages. Or friends who are saying goodbye to their parents—and nothing makes you feel the passing of time quite like letting your parents go. Just a few weeks ago, two treasured Oconto pals, sisters, lost their father quite suddenly. Our hearts broke for them. It made me think of my own father's sudden passing—something I learned about while right here at Oconto, 26 years ago. That feels so long ago now. I want to share with those pals the truest fact: How time really does heal. If not everything, it certainly dulls the sharp bits enough in order to feel the good stuff again.

It's starting to feel like some sort of crossroads. A place where I may be giving up the fight against time and trying instead to just accept it. Like a serenity prayer for fortysomethings. To put it in camp terms, it's like we have all paddled our canoes to a spot in the middle of the lake before pitching our paddles overboard, and have started to let the breeze take each one of us where it pleases. All we have to do is make sure we don't capsize. And enjoy the ride, too.

My friend Emma said to me so poignantly in the early days of the pandemic: Time travels in one direction—forward all we march. I wrote those words on a post-it note and stuck it to my computer where I looked at it frequently over those excruciating months that followed. It helped, somehow, to understand that we didn't have to decide what to do, really, because everything was out of our control anyway. Time was taking care of us.

It was around then that I did something I never thought I would: I got Botox. Here, and here. It made me sad that I gave into it I guess. But it made me feel so good to get it! Fuck you, time! I can have my way with you. But then my eyelids started to droop instead of lift (which is a thing that can happen) and I looked even more tired than I already was. Which is saying something because it was around then that menopause collided with homeschooling and, WHOA. Anyone fly in the last few months and still looking for their bags??? Not a worry, I've got 'em, right under my eyes! I mean, at least my forehead was smooth, right? Time, you win again.

Being here this weekend, seeing all of you is perhaps one of the greatest reminders that time is actually our friend, regardless of what it is doing to our foreheads (or our breasts, or our brains or or our parents or our kids or anything else). It is time that gives us wisdom, teaches us our mistakes, and offers solutions if we wait long enough for them to appear. And it can often surprise us. Last year, in lieu of our canceled reunion here on Eagle Lake, my own little Oconto cohort (Shout out to the chatty!) sat on a dock in Muskoka together and one of us tearfully shared her struggles to get pregnant. She had been trying everything, and it was so hard and it just wouldn't happen for her but she just couldn't stop trying. And we cried for her—that's a situation where time an overwhelming enemy. But then, just a few days ago, she emailed to say that she is 5 months along. Elation! Good things happen. In time.

I'm standing here now and seeing all of you Oconto women, the ones who came before me and the ones since, and I'm noticing how your faces are kind of glowing, as if the leaves above us in this sacred spot are like little mirrors reflecting light and strength onto us. Like photosynthesis. As if this place is giving us time back, regenerating us, even if just for one weekend. And, it is. It is here where—to steal a phrase

from Roy MacGregor, one of my favourite Canadians who must have been an Oconto girl in his previous life—we all become our finest selves. Actually, for me, camp is where I BECAME myself, period.

Time. It travels in one direction. Forward all we march.



REUNION PHOTO REEL!







OCONTO WOMEN OUT AND ABOUT!

Raising Funds for the Oconto Campership Fund:

Madi Macdonald and her cousin ran a great event this fall in London, ON to raise money for OCF! They had over 80+ people in attendance and raised over \$1,200! There were alumni from all different generations, some including (Caroline Bartlett and her mom Barbra Weir, Willa Jones, Mary-Helen Adams). They sat in the backyard, with candles lit and twinkle lights hung! Madi made a little tuck shop as a nod to camp and they sipped on hot apple cider. They all had so much fun and remarked that the best part was supporting a place that means so much to all of them.



Oconto Campership Fund (OCF):

There are many unforeseen reasons that a family’s finances would prohibit their daughter from returning to Camp Oconto. The Oconto Campership Fund is available to girls who have been to Oconto previously but for unforeseen reasons, finances prohibit their return to camp. It is also available to children of alumnae who cannot afford to send their daughter to camp but desperately want their child to have the Oconto experience. For more information on how to donate or to apply to use the fund please visit Oconto website and look on the alumnae page. <https://campoconto.com/alumnae-of-camp-oconto/>

Enduring Friendships:

Abbie Jack, Caroline Murray, Lani Macdonald, Emily Lobb, Kiyomi Cobourn and Hales Carter(2007-2018) were excited to meet up with Marusja Gerassimoff all the way from Berlin! It had been about 5 years since we were all together! Marusja came to Canada for the camp reunion and spent the week before catching up in Toronto with camp friends!



Impromptu Reunions:

This Calgary crew didn't make the reunion this time, but they say they'll be there for the 100th!
From left to right, Jenn Locke, Brandy James, Heidi Dinning, Emeline Lamond, Karen Hawitt, Katie Emond



Celebrating the new additions to our Oconto Family:

Chrissi Forte (1996-2005, 2009) and Parker Gilpin are thrilled to announce the birth of Maverick John Forte-Gilpin, 5 pounds, 15 ounces, born November 14, 2022.



Céline (Junke) Daley (1999 - 2009 and 2012) and her husband John Daley are delighted to announce the birth of their son Patrick Theodore James Daley born May 12, 2022 in London, England. Patrick is already giggling along to Down By The Bay and Great Big Moose!



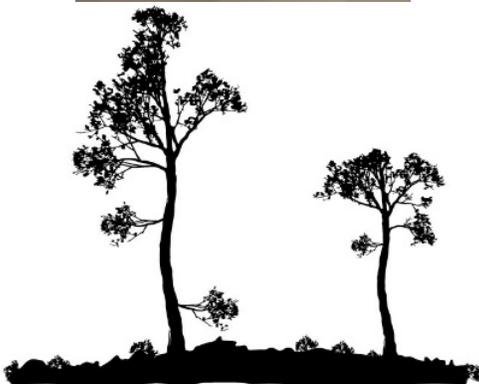
Erika Siren (Oconto 1998-2008, Awakening 2009-2011) and her husband (and honorary camp girl) Geoffrey Law welcomed their first child, Georgia Hai-Tung Siren Law, on Oct 28th 2022. Her favourite camp song is the 'Weenie Man' song ideally, sung loudly and proudly by her parents. We can't wait to find out what kind of Oconto girl she'll turn out to be!



Laurène Tabet (1999-2010) and her husband Antoine-Nicolas Motte welcomed their first son, Antoine-Arthur on September 7th 2021 in Lille, France. The past year with Antoine-Arthur has flown by! He already knows all the camp songs, thanks to Laurene's good friend Erika Siren who sent a song book all the way to France when he was born. His favorites are Ging Gang Gooli, and Magdalena, Hagdalena!



Denym Dupont (1997- 2005) is proud to introduce Jaxon Rhythm Blaze Neil (Dupont). He just hit the one year mark! Born December 7, 2021. His favourite camp songs are "Great Big Moose" and "Christopher Robin" (original version).



Want to stay caught up with Camp Oconto through social media?
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