

*"And even if we are occupied with most important things, if we attain to honour or fall into great misfortune—still let us remember how good it was once here, when we were all together, united by a good kind of feeling which made us...better perhaps than we are."*  
--Fyodor Dostoevsky

Although it has been many years since I last spent a summer at Camp Ajawah, there is little about my time there that I don't remember quite vividly. I had ten years at that magical place and still consider it to be among the most formative influences on my development as a child and person.

I think most of us "camp alums" would say that the reasons for Ajawah's profound impact are intangible and spiritual. The "spirit" of the place was real to us then, and I believe continues to affect and move us as adults. We felt close to God at camp, however we chose to define God. We who attended Ajawah know what it means to have been brought together in song beside a campfire; we know what it means to have slept under stars, lulled to sleep by the sound of Taps on a bugle; we know what it means to have woken early to chirping birds and rustling leaves and the promise of a new day. And we know what it means to form deep and lasting friendships with people in times when there was, thankfully, not much to do but sit on the steps of a tent under a tree, stringing bracelets from thread.

At camp, we all escaped the pressures of school life and the commercial intrusion of modern American society. As different as we may have been on the outside, we were united by the essence of our humanity and our desire to be something better than we were as individuals. The beauty of Ajawah lies in its ability to inspire the best in young people in a truly natural, spontaneous fashion. There is nothing forced or phony about Ajawah. The contact with nature and its glory is real. The opportunities to learn real skills and to reach inside ourselves for reserves we never knew we had were real. I have my own children now, ages six and three. We live in Manhattan, far from the shores of Linwood Lake, and my children live with too much structure, social constraints, and even competition already. And for that reason, I hope that someday they may have the same extraordinary kind of camping experience I had as a child and young adult.

-Elizabeth Neimann Porteous