

Camp Pemigewassett Celebrates 100th Years As a Summer Camp for Boys

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boys, and he wanted to get kids out of their family settings for eight weeks and just let them be boys," Reed recently said, reminiscing about his grandfather's vision for Pemi. "He had an incredible appreciation for the kinds of fun and goodness and mischief that boys could get into."

The camp's managing director for the past 19 years has been Hanover resident Rob Grabill, who is also in his second year as head coach of Hanover High's soccer team. Grabill, 56, also a graduate of Oberlin College, came to Pemi in 1970 as a cabin counselor, and has been on the staff for 37 years. Today, he is the man who works hardest for Pemi year-round: He recruits campers and hires staff in the off-season, and during the summer works with other camp leaders to make sure each day unfolds smoothly.

On a recent rainy day, speaking from the rustic living room of his house in the junior camp, Grabill explained the enduring vision behind Pemi. "Camp is a good place to come into yourself," he said. "Camp is a good place to learn how to get along with others. Camp is a good place to be independent. Camp is a good place to learn how to learn."

"It's something that completes a child in ways that school and home cannot," he added.

What unites those who have been around Pemi the longest is simple: love for the place and its people and traditions. Tom Reed Jr. cited the importance of Pemi personally in his life, mentioning that recently he showed a university colleague of his — a man who didn't have an equivalent place in his life — around camp. "He made me see how sustaining it is to have a hunk of country that you come back to that doesn't really change, where you can really get in touch with your memories just by looking at something."

Jon Fauver summed up the importance of camp this way: "I think the most important thing to me about camp is seeing the kids and what they get out of it. It's maybe a bit of a vicarious pleasure in that respect, in terms of seeing them grow up, seeing them learn new things, try things they hadn't tried before.

"I think it's more sort of like a spawning ground," he added, describing the centrality of the place to him throughout his life, "the way you know birds have special nesting places they go to in a certain part of the year, or salmon go back to the

same river, and that also provides a richness that you wouldn't get in your other life."

Indeed, it is Pemi's location on Lower Baker Pond and the fact that the camp owns the only structures on the lake that gives it its isolated, timeless feel. Most of those who spend time here quickly begin to feel a connection to the landscape, and that relationship is part of the place's history. In camp's early days ice was cut from the pond during the winter and then packed in sawdust so that there would be cold storage during the summer. Some of the food was grown in its fields, and horses pulled the wagons and plows. Today, despite the modernization of the facilities, the campus still has a pastoral feel. There

is no cellular phone reception. The Appalachian Trail cuts through a corner of the property, and thru-hikers occasionally wander into camp, looking for a hot meal. On most days here, sailboats heel over as they tack up the lake, and the sounds of a baseball or soccer game carry across the fields, as might the sounds of a camper playing the piano in the lodge.

Some elements of the past century of history of the country can be seen reflected in the history of Pemi, too. During both World Wars counselors who might otherwise have been at Pemi went off to fight. Camper enrollment suffered in the midst of the Great Depression, and during World War II fuel and rubber rationing limited the number and dis-

tance of trips out of camp. A victory garden was planted.

To walk the grounds of Pemi is to feel a connection with that history. It's not unusual during the season to bump into Al Fauver, the son of founder Edgar Fauver. At 92, he is still the camp's treasurer. He first came to camp in 1915 as a 2-week-old, and except for two summers off after high school when he worked for the Appalachian Mountain Club, a summer when he was at Oberlin, and several summers off when he was serving in the Coast Guard during World War II, has been involved with Pemi for every summer of his life. He credits Pemi with sparking his interest in hiking in the White Mountains. "I knew no other place," he said.

According to the American Camp Association New England, today there are 175 summer camps in this state. More than 50 years ago, that number was roughly half what it is today; there were 78 camps in New Hampshire in 1954. There was something of a slump in the camping industry in the '80s, and in the past 20 years the number of overnight camps has declined slightly. But as their number has decreased, the number of day camps has risen.

As summer camps have come and gone, Pemi has remained remarkably consistent, due in part to the continuity of ownership and management as well as the endurance of many of its traditions — and the evolution of others. But what draws people back to

Pemi year and year again is intangible. Tom Reed, Sr., who is 91 years old and the son of founder Dudley Reed, came to camp in 1916. This summer has been his 89th, and until just last summer, he led the singing in the Mess Hall at nearly every afternoon and evening meal (many of the songs sung at camp were written by his father). He summed up what pulls people back to Pemi year and year again perhaps the most succinctly: "Of all the places that I've lived, Pemi is the place where there is the most love." □

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