

From the Heart Fund



There have been so many challenges over the last couple of years with this pandemic. So many people have suffered so much heartache and loss. It can be incredibly difficult to find anything positive in the midst of so much negativity. But, one of the silver linings to all of this is that it has given some an opportunity to slow down a bit and connect or reconnect (albeit virtually) with family and friends that we didn't make time for before.

For me, this silver lining came in the form of weekly Zoom "Happy Hours." Every Friday night from 5pm-6pm was an hour with my family. Before the pandemic, I used the excuse of a busy life to only speak briefly with them once or twice a month and sometimes even less. My oldest sister and I at times would only speak once or twice a year. Now we got to connect every week and forge a better and stronger relationship. It has truly been an opportunity to strengthen our family relationship and I am so grateful for that.

After the family zoom at 6pm, came what I call the "Akiba Homies Happy Hour." A group of guys that I've known for more than 40 years. All from Temple Akiba where our friendships were developed at Sunday/Monday Night School, Summer Day Camp, and (most importantly) Akiba sleep away camp. Most of the guys on that call I had lost virtually all communication with. I kept track of their lives on Facebook and such, but hadn't really had an actual conversation with most of them for years. This happy hour gave me the chance to reconnect.

What was most striking to me, is that from the moment I logged on to my first call with them, it was like time had stood still. There was no awkwardness, no strained conversation. It was just like we had been connected the entire time. That has always been a running theme for me with even the most ancillary of relationships made during my time at Camp. If we went to Camp Akiba together, we are family and that is etched in stone. I know that if I was in some random city anywhere in the world and needed help, if there was a Camp Akiba connection I could reach out and get the help I needed. Even if we hadn't spoken in decades.

What an extraordinary, rare, wonderful force to have supporting me as I navigate life! As I sit in our virtual happy hour each week, talking about old man stuff (kids, insurance, politics, some injury one of us got from putting on their socks, etc.), I always spend a few minutes in my head appreciative what being a part of Camp Akiba has given me. I also know that the only way that my parents could afford to give myself and my two sisters the opportunity to go to camp was through financial aid.

So, 30+ years after my time at Camp Akiba has passed, my wife Jessica Wilson and I thought it was time to give back. What better way to honor the help that my parents received that ended up giving me so much in life, than to help a family give their children the same opportunity. Especially during this time when making life long connections so important.

With that, we have started the From the Heart Fund. We are pledging the equivalent of sending one child to camp on a full scholarship and we are hoping that you will join us to send more! Please take a minute or two to think about how going to camp (Akiba or otherwise) as a child has impacted you as an adult. We have no doubt that you will find an innumerable amount of positive impacts. And when you find them, please reach into your heart and help us impact another generation of children and give them the lifetime gift that Camp has given us.

-Alan Valensky & Jessica Wilson