

Meet Camper Peggy!

by Lion Andrea Yenter

Peggy is a camper in our blind and visually impaired youth sessions and has been attending since 2008. She and her mom Mary live in West Bend, in 27-A2. I am deeply touched by Mary and Peggy's words – we are fortunate to have such a wonderful team of people at Camp, the Foundation and you that make Camp happen. Thank you!

Why did you decide to send Peggy to Lions Camp?

The decision to send Peggy to Lions Camp was a very difficult choice for me. Now when I look back, it almost seems silly that I didn't embrace the opportunity immediately. In order to understand this, one would have to know a little history on my daughter. Six years ago when Peggy was six years old, she was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She lost 50% of her vision in one necessary stroke of the surgeon's knife. Needless to say, risk taking was no longer an element up for discussion with me and sending Peggy to Camp was a huge risk...I was afraid to let her go.

Lions from all over the West Bend area were encouraging me to send Peggy to Lions Camp because she would have a wonderful time and the camp staff would take great care of her. I still struggled with letting go, so another year passed. Finally I realized that I had to let go; I had to trust the staff and allow my daughter this opportunity. Sending Peggy to Lions Camp has been one of the best decisions I have made on her behalf. I can't

lie; I cried hard as I drove away that first year, but I've never looked back.

Peggy can't easily attend other camps and I couldn't possibly trust another camp to embrace her medical and vision conditions the way Lions Camp does. Lions Camp allows Peggy to be a champ for one week out of every year. It's a beautiful blessing to give to anyone, especially a child.

What is Peggy's favorite activity at Lions Camp?

Peggy loves kayaking, swimming, crafts, the huge bonfire on Monday and the skits that go with them (especially the spoof skits), archery, fishing, hikes around the lake, and singing songs (especially the monkey song). She also likes rest hour when she can rest, nap, read a book or write a letter to Mom.

What has made her return now for four summers as a camper?

As for me, I send Peggy back to Camp every year because I know that my daughter is taken



exhausted and grinning from ear to ear. She can't wait until she is old enough to climb the rock wall and fly down the zip line!! I hear stories about the kitchen band and the counselors getting soaked with water balloons by triumphant campers. Everyone shows me that my child is welcomed and ensures that she has fun.

As for Peggy, she says, "I like the fact that I can just be me

and normal for a change. I get to be who I am and since I'm always the visually impaired person everywhere else I go, at Camp I am like everyone else. When I go places with Mom and nearly run into things, people stare at me like I'm not paying attention, but I am...I just can't see. So this week, we are all in the same boat!! I'm like everyone else and no one stares!! I also get to see my friends from Camp and make new ones. I love to see Andrea because she makes me laugh and makes me feel loved. It's like a home away from home."

I send Peggy back to Lions Camp because she absolutely loves it. She comes home

care of as I would take care of her. Having a clinic right at the Camp is incredibly reassuring. I appreciate the intake procedure. It's a lengthy procedure, but only because the nurses sit down with me personally and talk about current medical conditions that need attention. Peggy's medical condition has changed a lot since last year and I know that the staff will take the time to learn her new protocol without rushing me or making me feel like Peggy is a burden to them.

Rider

If you could tell the Lions one thing that they should know about Peggy, what is it?

Peggy is an amazing girl. She has overcome some big hurdles in her short life and keeps chugging along. In addition to Lions Camp, Peggy also goes downhill skiing with BOLD (Blind Outdoor Leisure Development), which is also a Lions funded program for the blind and visually impaired. She never skied prior to joining this group and now she is an avid and talented downhill skier.

Any other comments or stories to share about your Lions Camp experience?

I can't say enough good things about Lions Camp. I don't have the words to explain the thrill I get when Peggy confidently says that she is like everyone else; there are no barriers during the week of Lions Camp. This Camp gives my daughter something I can't give her; a reprieve from a judgmental and harsh world. It gives her a week of unconditional acceptance and friendship. Andrea's commitment and love for her campers is amazing. She is completely devoted to the campers and their families. The first year Peggy attended Lions Camp, Andrea was totally understanding of my fears. She welcomed Peggy and squelched my fears. The activities at Lions Camp are a bonus, but the real reason I send Peggy to Camp is for these less observable triumphs. Thank you to all who make this possible and for giving Peggy what I can't give her!

Guido Maier