

Fresh Air Fund

Girls will be girls at Camp Tapawingo

Fresh Air From A1

in built at this beautiful place. In 1929, the family chose, we do not know why, to gift the cabin and its nearly 120 acres to the YWCA. There is a deed somewhere that indicates a nominal sale price of \$2, and from its very beginnings the camp was known as Tapawingo.

It wasn't much of a cabin, you might say today. But really it was everything. It was a loft for the 12 "business and industrial girls" to escape the city, for young women in their very late teens to escape the dreaded stinking heat of Toronto in the thirties and let all the cares of trying to make one's way in the big city drift away.

This September Tapawingo celebrates her 75th birthday. Since 1937 the *Toronto Star's* Fresh Air Fund has sponsored some campers at Tapawingo, one of 99 day and overnight camps assisted by the fund, which hopes, this summer, to help send 25,000 kids to camp. At Tapawingo as many as 70 campers will be supported this season by the Fresh Air Fund and other donations.

Here is a fragment. In the late July regatta of 1938, Miss Helen Murphy, Miss Elsie Alport, Miss Jean McLaren and Miss Merle Siminoff led in points for canoe racing and gunwaling. Perhaps the heat was blistering that day, and the breeze was high, and these women were poised in their modest bathing suits and snapped-tight bathing caps jouncing their canoes into the bay. Flex and up. And flex and up. Propelling a canoe forward without the aid of a paddle. As the writer John McPhee once said, "If you think that's easy, try it."

In its early days, the off-season social activities of the camp would occasionally be reported in the pages of the *Daily Star*, alongside "Timely Topics for Housewives" and such stop-the-presses headlines as, "First Lady of U.S. Took Dog for Walk." It must have been a trying day for Mrs. Roosevelt.

Time passes, but the essence of the camp experience has not really changed in all these years. Buildings have multiplied, named in the classic camp vernacular. Wa-b-ond was erected in 1941; In-b-tween in 1946. Tapawingo, a name perhaps most famous for its association with the Group of Seven, means "Place of Joy." Yes, there's a camp song.

Tapawingo, Place of Joy shall be thy name.

We who know thee, love thee e'er with hearts aflame

The white cabin still stands, home to the camp's crafts shop now. Expansion of the camp decades ago allowed for young girls to attend the camp too. Today, Tapawingo welcomes girls from the ages of six to 15.

Liz Greenway has been running the camp for 26 years and has not the least interest in doing anything else. As she approaches, in her sneakers and her shorts and her pink golf shirt, you can't help but be reminded of Nancy Kulp as Miss Grunecker in *The Parent Trap*. Suddenly images of tuck shop and airless upper bunks and trying to master a



BILL SANDFORD FOR THE TORONTO STAR

As counsellors watch, weekend campers take part in a headstand contest in the swimming area at Camp Tapawingo near Parry Sound last week. Tapawingo is one of the 99 camps funded by the Star Fresh Air fund.

J-stroke and the incomparable feel of sleekly sliding into an ice-cold lake on a hot summer's day come flooding back.

There was misbehaviour at camp as I recall. But there's another story. I do recall a spring women's weekend at, as it happens, Tapawingo a few years back in which a group of us spent some time in the sauna with a bottle of Sambuca and then bravely jumped into the freaking -ly frigid water. It was fantastic.

Greenway brings her own memories to the experience, of arriving at camp as a young girl. She was, she thinks, nine years of age. "I don't remember what we did but I remember it was raining. I met my counsellor and she had on one of those sou'wester hats and I was absolutely fascinated by that. I don't think I said

anything the whole day. I just watched."

Arrival day was always Friday, which meant the girls had to face the inevitable Friday night dinner of fish sticks. "This wave of homesickness would run through the dining room," she says, "we swore we would not do that at camp."

The first supper at Tapawingo grilled cheese sandwiches and brownies. Comfort foods.

In important ways there have been few changes. Greenway says that as tempting as it is to remark upon how the girls themselves have changed, as so many child experts are wont to do, she believes this is not the case. Take away, the computers and the cell phones and all that and the girls are just girls. "They still want to have friends, they still want to have fun and they still want to have adults listen to them. And they still want to talk, talk, talk, talk."

If anything has changed, it's the role of the counsellor. "We're not passive, we're right in there," says Greenway "This is serious role modelling."

Camp programs have evolved. Sailing and canoeing and all that are still core to the program, but now the girls are

The first supper at camp is grilled cheese and brownies. Comfort food.

scaling the climbing wall and mastering extreme mountain biking. And there's yoga. "If you're looking for a change," says Greenway, "it's physical fitness."

FRESH AIR FUND

Tapawingo still a joy after 75

JENNIFER WELLS
TORONTO STAR

The fragility of history is such that stories may appear in fragments, mere shards, and one has to close one's eyes and drift... A breeze is blowing off Georgian Bay. The *Midland City* - "The Heartbeat of Georgian Bay" — is steaming down the inner harbour and under the railway bridge from Parry Sound. She's not as far as she once was. She is, in fact, in her dotage, but on this day she is valiantly ferrying a group of 12 women toward shore.

That, and taking a day or two to detox from a high-tech city life. "Rolling down the hill in inner tubes, doing somersaults and log rolls and being silly, That's as important a part of the program as introducing mountain biking," says Greenway. Above Greenway's desk hangs a giant black and white photo of a group of Tapawingo girls. It was taken likely in the late 1940s. The details are fuzzy, as no one has documented a thorough history of the camp. There are 10 young women in the shot.

She is too big, too stately, to make the final approach. And so rowboats are lowered over her side and the ladies descend by ladder.

The women laugh — oh surely they must have laughed — as they make the awkward transfer to this final passage, and then to a broad expanse of sandy shore and a single white cabin, their new home for as long as two weeks.

The Eaton family had the cab-

> Please see **Fresh Air, A25 at TOP LEFT**

With your gift, we can build a brighter future for our kids. This summer, The Toronto Star Fresh Air Fund will send 25,000 disabled and special needs children to camp. Their camp experience will create memories that last a lifetime.

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They appear to be 16 or 17. They are wearing those shirred bathing suits with modesty legs and bathing caps and smiles as wide as all outdoors. And you have to think that the experience was one that stayed with them for life. Greenway is up at camp now. The facilities have been readied. Before the first group pulls in Greenway will speak with her counsellors as she always does and share this message of the weeks ahead with the camp girls. She will tell them that some of the campers maybe slightly nervous. She will acknowledge that some of the counsellors may be slightly anxious about doing a good job. And then she will say, "We're going to meet midway and share an adventure." Doesn't that sound grand.

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