



A nonprofit corporation

# THE BIRCH BARK

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Rich Deering '73, Alumni & Community Director • Michael Mattson '83, Camp Director

## THE ALUMNI NEWSLETTER OF BIRCH ROCK CAMP

### REFLECTIONS FROM THE ROCK

By Rich Deering

Alumni & Community Director '73

Dear BRC Community –

By now we're all facing the hardship and pain that COVID-19 is spreading throughout the world. The illness is threatening the lives of family members and friends. Layoffs, furloughs and shuttered businesses are causing grave financial harm to us and our society. Not knowing if or when we can get back to normal means we simply have to do our best, taking each day as it comes.

In spite of the challenges ahead, I'm confident that Birch Rock will be okay weathering this storm. The youth camping

industry has endured many crises over the past century, and Birch Rock Camp for Boys is no exception. Yet our 94-year-old camp community keeps moving forward with a can-do attitude, summer after summer. As Birch Rockers, we will always cherish our traditions, values and camp friendships. Although the corona virus pandemic is testing us individually and collectively, our community knows what it means to *lead by example*.

From his very first summer at camp, a Birch Rocker learns vital lessons about personal responsibility and mutual support. Each of us has what it takes to maintain self-discipline and civic duty as we follow directives and orders from government officials and public health leaders. Because we live by *Help the Other Fellow*, even

the youngest Birch Rockers can understand that they have a critical role to play in preventing the spread of the virus.

This spring, I hope we can make physical health and emotional well-being a priority. The great outdoors is guaranteed to provide relaxation and fitness in trying times. We'll practice social distancing for as long as it takes, but stay connected to our Birch Rock buddies with Zoom and Instagram and all the rest.

I will let you know as soon as possible about decisions regarding our programs this summer. The American Camp Association and the Association of Maine Summer Camps will carefully consider the best way to protect the health of campers and staff, and we will make our own decision for BRC. Stay healthy and strong!

### LEAD BY EXAMPLE

By Francie Campbell, P'00, T'10

**R**oughly 350 miles south of Birch Rock Camp, the hardscrabble South Bronx stands in stark contrast to Waterford, Maine. Children growing up in this part of New York City likely experience severe hardship: family income below the federal poverty line, failing schools, and neighborhoods crippled by neglect and violence.



Mike Herzig, in 1983

This is the story of one promising South Bronx boy and the Birch Rock alumnus who took him under his wing a decade ago. It's the story of how a bold idea, and a big jump in campership donations, helped forge an enduring connection between BRC and a remarkable source of outstanding campers.

It was Mike Herzig — camper, staff, parent and trustee extraordinaire — who dreamt up the plan. Mike and his wife Jojo had become enthusiastic benefactors of a small Jesuit middle school in Hunts Point (home of the 41st police precinct depicted in *Fort Apache*, *The Bronx* for film buffs). Why not bring a group of St. Ignatius School boys up to the Hillside? In 2008 Mike took *Help the Other Fellow* to new heights: after outfitting the St. Ignatius campers with boots, rain jackets, trunks, and other gear, he drove the cohort up to Birch Rock for Opening Day. Not once, but summer after summer.



Louis Hurtado, in 2010

In 2009, a new St. Ignatius student named Louis Hurtado heard tales of Birch Rock, and decided he needed to give the Maine wilderness a try. That summer Mike filled his car with the St. Ignatius campers, including 11-year-old Louis, for the six hour trip north

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*Lead By Example...*

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for second session. After the traditional big greetings at arrival, Louis and his trunk were ushered over to Chipmunk Hole, he shyly introduced himself to his cabin mates, and he started settling in where “everything was extremely new.”

Louis took to camp like a loon to Lake McWain. He impressed the Birch Rock community with his quiet confidence, sense of responsibility, and all-in attitude. Every summer for six years, Mike got Louis up to Birch Rock, and in the process they developed a strong friendship.

From the get-go, Mike and young Louis must have recognized in each other shared qualities and values. Mike started as a Birch Rock camper in 1976. Rich Deering was a counselor in 1979, teaching Mike *American Red Cross* Basic Rescue and Water Safety; Rich recalls that Mike was always focused on perfecting his skills and being the best in the class; the first to help others out; the *Mannermeister*; the winner of many Best Beds. Mike, a lifelong New Yorker, lived for his eight summers at Birch Rock.

Louis was also exceptionally mature and focused from the beginning. A cabin was always a better place with Louis bunking there. Former Head Counselor Bob Donahue was Louis’ cabin counselor three times and described him this way: “When the cabin had *Setup* for meals, he would be the one to make sure that everybody was awake on time and made it down to the Lodge. He always led the group and make sure everything was done correctly, even if no counselors were around.” Trevor McLaughlin, who lived with him in Pete’s Palace their senior camper year, had this to say: “Louis has a heart of gold. He’s a Class A citizen.” When he was not at Birch Rock, Louis excelled in middle school, where his teacher Richard Darrell (now Principal of St. Ignatius) recalls, “He absolutely typified *Lead by Example*.”

Mike’s connection to Louis extended far beyond camp. In the spring of 2018, Louis was asked to deliver the keynote speech at St. Ignatius’ annual fundraising dinner. Louis, by then a rising senior at The College of the Holy Cross, said this about Mike: “Every year, Mike faithfully brought me up to Birch Rock... Maine was definitely a new world to me where I learned so much and was able to step out of my comfort zone. Mike has also supported me through high school and through the college process, whether it was a flight to visit a school or an opportunity to network with people from different institutions. He has definitely become a mentor of mine who I use for advice regarding whatever phase I am going through in life.”

Louis made a name for himself as a prominent student leader in high school at Fordham Prep and at Holy Cross; he felt particularly inspired to help his community of low-income first generation Latino students. He reminds us of how vital this activism is, “...to give underprivileged students access to these opportunities at a young age so they can tap into their full potential when they are older.”

We in the Birch Rock community are grateful to Mike Herzig, who shows us how to live fully our motto *Help the Other Fellow*. And we can take pride in our Lt. Peter B. Haas Campership Fund, which continues to offer boys like Louis the best summers of their lives at the Rock.



*Louis Hurtado*

**Life After Birch Rock**

*Louis graduated from The College of the Holy Cross in 2019 with a Mathematics major and a concentration in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Each year the President of Holy Cross asks one graduating student to serve for two years as an alumni representative on the*

*Board of Trustees — Louis was honored to accept the position. After interning for two college summers for General Electric Company, Louis was offered a job with GE in their Financial Management training program. He’s currently doing a six-month stint in Schenectady, New York where GE was founded (and this writer spent her early childhood), having first worked at their Atlanta offices. Louis will move again at the end of this summer for his next six-month training phase. Along with the frequent relocations the job demands long hours, but he said, “I love the people I work with and I love the work I do.”*

*Louis was proud to report that he still makes his bed every morning.*



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## CARPE DIEM

By Sam Rotman



On the three-hour trek across Mount Katahdin's treacherous Knife's Edge, a few of our group of 12 were struggling. It was 3 p.m.; we had yet to start our descent and were beginning to stress. The bugs had come out; the sun was slowly going down, and the group was tired after eight hours of hiking.

Contemplating darkness made us all uneasy. Trying to boost our confidence, our trip leader said, "This is a classic example of Type 2 fun."

I had never heard of categorizing fun before. My trip leader explained Type 1 is actual fun in the moment. Type 2 is both mentally and physically tough on the body and mind; in the moment one rarely perceives the activity as fun. But, when looking back, one views the experience as rewarding and, therefore, fun. The third category, Type 3 fun, is not fun at all. Many use the example of Ernest Shackleton's horrifying Antarctic expedition to describe Type 3 because of its disastrous consequences.

After hearing about this fun scale, I thought about my own approach to fun. I consider myself a "Carpe Diem" kind of person. To me, Type 1 fun means adrenaline-pumping adventures like jumping off a thirty-foot cliff into a water hole or skiing a bump-run in Jackson Hole.

But I was equally drawn to Type 2. As a ten-year-old camper, I learned of an incredibly daunting challenge called The Whale. This 5.5-mile swim required both mental and physical fitness. I looked up to the senior campers who had trained all summer to complete this feat and realized I wanted to see my name carved on the Whale plaques in the Lodge. From mid-June to mid-August, I swam two hours each day, working on my technique and stamina. Spending early mornings swimming in 60-degree water was not pleasant but necessary to complete my goal.

When the day finally arrived, I entered the water at approximately 6 a.m. The first 90 minutes was more mentally than physically taxing. With no landmarks to monitor my progress - just a long, two-mile stretch of a forest - I kept plodding along, waiting for the last third of the journey where houses, boats, and camp would help mark my way. I was fine until two-thirds of the way when I stopped to drink water. Barely able to tread, I felt extreme fatigue and was concerned I might not make it. But when I saw how close I was, the exhaustion disappeared and I was energized to finish.

When I touched the dock, finishing my Whale in 3:00:51, I was euphoric. Camp tradition dictates only a camper or counselor who has swum their Whale may stand on the dock to greet an incoming

swimmer. Being congratulated by the seven swimmers who had swum the Whale before me was deeply satisfying.

I have been fortunate that many things come easily to me, but I prefer a challenge. I've attempted to summit Mount Washington twice. The first year, torrential rains canceled the trip. Last July, I was a mere half-mile from the summit when pelting hail forced us to abort the climb. Of course, next summer I expect to summit.

In school, I now also apply the fun scale. While reading and discussing history is fun in the moment, math presents a higher challenge. Junior year, I moved up to Honors PreCalculus; the first two quarters were incredibly demanding. I had two options; drop down to an easier class or prove to myself that I could do it - take the hard way and complete the class. Even though earning a B was no longer possible, I am proud that I persevered. I would rather face adversity than take the easy road.

Even though Type 1 and 2 fun represent totally different concepts, both have enriched my life. I hope my adventurous spirit will allow me to continue benefiting from both types in college and beyond.

## SEVEN BIRCH ROCK CAMP SUMMERS

By Eli Protas

I still remember arriving at Birch Rock Camp in western Maine seven years ago, turning right at the hand-carved sign flanked by patches of red geraniums. We drove down the steep hill towards the lodge, where I spotted a line of counselors in white, waiting to welcome me as if I was already home.



In my first week, I found the camp community to be uniquely kind. Our motto is "Help the Other Fellow" — a creed that campers and staff alike embody. Every time I swim in Lake McWain, I remember the unfortunate relay race that left me hyperventilating on the dock with the waterfront director at my side. But I also remember the incomparable feeling of shuffling through the canopy of outstretched arms after circumnavigating the lake for my Whale. In each case, the community bolstered my courage and propelled me forward.

Every Sunday, the entire camp — just over 100 boys — gathers by a roaring campfire for "Tree Talk" to discuss what it means to be a Birch Rocker. In an environment of complete openness, I was able to listen at first and eventually share that my mom had just survived breast cancer. Their words of consolation buoyed me.

Last summer, when the cars trickled down the driveway, I was among the staff in white shirts waiting. I witnessed the familiar cautious enthusiasm on new campers' faces. Giving back to the community to which I am so indebted, I remember "Help the Other Fellow" and live by it each day.

## FATHER TO SON

By Noah Birch



“What if I lose my stuffy, daddy?”  
“You’ll be fine buddy, you’re not gonna lose your stuffy...” I said as I hoisted his overpacked trunk into the cabin.

It was my son Thatcher’s first day up at Birch Rock, a boys sleepaway camp I had gone to for nearly 20 years. Located in the heart of the Maine woods, Birch Rock had provided ample

opportunity for me to develop and grow as a young man.

My mind surged with blissful memories as I entered the cabin, the fondness I have for the smell of the cabin and Maine’s crisp breeze never ceased to exist.

“But daddy...” Thatcher said hesitantly, sitting quietly on his bed located in the corner.

“Yes, love...?” I replied softly.

“What if I don’t make any friends here...?”

My muscles tensed up and I froze, standing at the bottom of his bed with a blank expression.

“Well...um...” I said, still baffled as I tried to find a response quickly.

I knew what Thatcher was going through, as I had gone through the same thing when I first arrived at camp. As a kid, I was hesitant about engaging in conversations. I often held back, as I passively observed social cues and the numerous ways people behaved while talking to someone. The insecurities and doubts I had about myself penetrated through the social barrier, preventing me from being confident, and overall, being myself.

I sat down on the stiff bed, the frame croaking as the springs stretched out.

“Don’t be anxious about the thought of talking to new people. Many times you and the other person are experiencing the same emotions as each other...” I pictured Ryno saying. Ryno was my old camp director. A humble old fellow, Ryno was in his fifties, around five-four and with a scruffy grey beard. Ryno didn’t appear any different from a stereotypical old man but was set apart by his way with words. “Look the person in the eyes, and shake a hand to make a friend. A handshake is an unbreakable connection between two people: physicality is one of life’s purest forms of trust bonding,” Rhino preached with a soft voice. The control in his breath and pronunciation projected an almost god-like sense of power, as he articulated with ease and fluidity.

As I slowly came back into reality, I sat next to Thatcher, putting my hand on his lap.

“When I was your age, buddy, I was in the same shoes you’re in right now. I was worried about meeting friends, and the thought of talking to new people scared me. But Thatcher, the people you meet here aren’t really new people at all.”

“Really?” Thatcher said with a confused look on his face.

“The people at Birch Rock are your family, Thatcher, your brothers,

your role models, everything. But they can’t be unless you introduce yourself to them first. Your introduction is the wall between you being strangers with someone, and you being family. And guess what, they are just as nervous as you are! They just want friends as you do, and probably wish someone would come up to them to say hi.”

Thatcher smiled. His eyes widened as they filled with hope and positivity.

“I guess you’re right, Dad! I don’t even really feel that nervous anymore!”

It had worked...I had done it.

Birch Rock made me who I am today—confident and expressive. Birch Rock’s fundamental morals gave me the skills I needed to overcome past fears about myself. Looking forward in Thatcher’s life, I pictured the connections we would share, as Thatcher represented who I was in the past, and would come to be the person I am today. Looking forward, the things I learned at the Rock will always be applied to my daily life. Birch Rock has changed me as a person and will continue to do so until I leave this earth.

## COLLEGE ESSAY

By David Colasin

For the past seven years, I have gone to Birch Rock, a boys camp located in Waterford, Maine. Carved into the walls of the lodge is Birch Rock’s motto, “Help the Other Fellow,” which exemplifies everything we do at camp and has shaped me as a leader.



This past summer, I became a full counselor and had direct responsibility for the well-being of four ten-year-olds with whom I shared a small cabin. It was up to me to help these young campers cope with homesickness and the disagreements that arise in close quarters. Through this experience, I’ve gained patience, compassion, and the ability to teach kids to respect each other — which is key to resolving disputes and building teams.

I also teach wilderness skills to the young campers and get a lot of happiness when I see campers develop their skills and their appreciation for nature. As a wilderness instructor, I also lead groups of campers on multi-day hikes where they pitch tents in the woods. These hikes present challenges for the campers as well as the leader.

During one memorable hike, some of the young campers began to complain of “mosquitoes.” But when my fellow counselor and I realized that the mosquitoes were actually ticks, we both panicked and the campers picked up on this. As soon as I calmed down, so did the campers. We literally taught the kids what it means to “Help the Other Fellow” as we all inspected our partners for ticks. Ultimately, I realized the effect my attitude and actions had on them, and the experience taught me the value of keeping calm in stressful situations.

“Help the Other Fellow” is not a simple tag line for a boys camp. It is a guiding principle I live by now as I see first-hand how the community benefits when we help each other. During my time at Birch Rock, I’ve gone from learning about the motto to living it and teaching it as a leader. I’ve embodied the motto both at camp and at home which has enabled me to help build stronger, more inclusive communities.

## FORMULA 1

By Jack Flynn

I have an addiction. It's 3:30 AM. Sunday morning. I have been up for an hour. On the screen in front of me: the worldwide feed of this week's Formula 1 Race. To my right, another screen with the onboard camera from my favorite driver, Nico Hulkenberg. On my laptop, the timing screens and a GPS map of the circuit showing where all of the drivers on track are located. My phone, hosting a live chat of other Formula 1 fans watching around the globe. In the dead of night not a mouse is stirring, only the voice of an enthusiastic commentator is piping through my headphones, with only the music of highly tuned race engines revving to almost 15,000 rpms as company. Outside, the wind could be rustling the leaves, but I would not know. My pulse quickens. Tense. My focus, shifting in every direction from all the information being shoved in my face. In my room, alone. My thrilling island of Gran Prix racing. I could not ask for anything else.



It all started in 2014 when I saw my brother watching Formula 1 both on the TV and his computer at the same time. I thought, that is a little excessive. That is until I began to watch myself. At the start of the 2015 season, I decided to follow as much of it as I could. Ever since then I find the time to wake up when others are going to bed. I cram in as much Formula 1 in as possible. I have watched the live-timing of a qualifying session before a cross country race. The longer I watched the more invested I became; it became a game. What lap would a driver stop to change tires? What type of tire will they change to? When will the next overtake happen? Now I am consuming as much data is publicly available, such as gaps to the following driver, percent of tire life, speed, and gear, but I still want more. Every two weeks when the F1 circus of ten teams, hundreds of mechanics, engineers and equipment worth as much as a fortune 500 company has packed up and moved to a different corner of the world I will get up at some odd hour of the night to watch. Unless of course, it's one of the few and far between races in the Americas.

Besides Formula 1, I go to a local drag strip to watch cars drag race. It has none of the multi million dollar sponsorships, celebrity guests and scores of engineers, however with a little money it's possible to build a car to do the quarter mile in less than 10 seconds - at well over 130 miles per hour. Not to mention I have met some interesting people there. For example, I once ran into someone who was also into Audis. He modified the subcompact Audi RS3 to act as a sleeper, or a car that looks slow or normal but is deceptively fast. It's been interesting seeing him come back to the track with more modifications and a faster car every couple weeks.

My love for cars goes outside racing. For as long as I can remember I have been reading car magazines, watching automotive TV shows and going to car shows. When I am driving, I always keep an eye out for an interesting, fast, or rare car. But, when I got my drivers license I was stuck in a Subaru Outback (that I had been driving around in longer than my memory). After a long time of petitioning my parents, and because of high depreciation I was finally able to get an... old Audi! No worries, I abide by the speed limit.

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## BIRCH ROCK PROGRAMS

Which exciting Birch Rock program might work for your son and his friends? Also, please let us know of a potential Birch Rocker in your area...

### BOYS Residential Camp 2020

<i>Session</i>	<i>Tuition</i>	<i>Start Date</i>	<i>End Date</i>	<i>Length of Stay</i>
Full Session	\$9,000	June 28	August 15	49 days
First Session	\$7,100	June 23	July 25	28 days
Second Session	\$5,900	July 26	August 15	21 days
MWA (age 14 older)	\$5,900	July 26	August 15	21 days
C.I.T. (age 16)	\$3,000	June 24	August 15	53 days

### Cubs Camp Programs for NEW campers ages 7-12

Cubs Camp I	\$4,000	June 28	July 11	14 days
Cubs Camp II	\$4,000	July 12	July 25	14 days
Cubs Camp III	\$4,000	July 26	August 8	14 days



### FAMILY CAMP 2020

Birch Rock's Family Camp gives busy families the chance to have fun in the Maine woods on McWain Pond. This program can be a first exposure for a boy to Birch Rock, in preparation for attending the Boys Camp the following summer. It's also a time for parents to relive their fond experiences as campers, and rediscover their enthusiasm for lifelong learning. Most of all, Birch Rock Family Camp is a time to relax and enjoy!

Family Camp is perfect for all ages to enjoy old-fashioned camp life in group activities or just do one's own thing! Each family member may sign up for daily activities which are facilitated by Birch Rock's talented staff. This program is offered **August 20 – 24th**, with flexible days of attendance.



*For more information on these programs, please visit our website:  
[www.birchrock.org](http://www.birchrock.org) or contact the winter office @ (207) 741-2930.*

## 2019 Birch Rock Fund Donors

### THANK YOU! THANK YOU!! THANK YOU!!!

Your generous contribution and support have helped us to sustain and enhance Birch Rock's incomparable summer camp experience. We gratefully acknowledge the following 2019 Capital, Endowment, Scholarship and In Kind gifts to the Birch Rock Camp Community.

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## Mark Your Calendars for 2020!



Clean & Pick Up Saturday	May 16
BRC Summer Office Opens	June 1
BRC Staff Orientation	June 19
C.I.T. Orientation	June 24
Opening - First Session / Cubs I	June 28
Cubs Camp I - End	July 11
Cubs Camp II	July 12
First Session & Cubs II - End	July 25
Opening 2nd Session	July 26
Maine Wilderness Adventure	
Cubs Camp III	
Cubs Camp III - End	August 8
BRC for Boys & MWA - End	August 15
BRC Family Camp	August 20
BRC Family Camp - End	August 24

## It's Easy to Help BRC

- Send a tax-deductible donation to BRC.
- Promote BRC among friends, neighbors, family and colleagues.
- Refer a prospective camper to BRC by phone or email.
- Host a gathering of BRC alumni/prospects with Directors Deering and Mattson.
- Send us news to include in The Birch Bark's Alumni News Column.
- Ask us about our 'Wish List' before you have your spring yard sales.
- Update your contact information via [www.birchrock.org](http://www.birchrock.org).

