



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

At Birch Rock Camp, we have no shortage of inspiring stories. Storytelling is one of the most powerful ways to connect that we employ here on the Hillside. Through shared personal narratives, campers and staff learn about empathy, resilience and the remarkable things we have to teach each other. Birch Rock is the perfect place to connect — human to human, eyeball to eyeball — without the distraction of TikTok or computer games. It's always moving to see young campers lock eyes with their counselors as they look for guidance.

And there are so many uproarious stories, from Birch Rock's lore of yesteryear to sublimely silly skits! For instance, improv stories in the Grove at lunchtime involve a cast of hilarious camp characters and a wildly appreciative audience roaring their approval.

We all want to be heard. We all want to belong. Listening to shared camp experiences deepens our sense of community every summer, and our sense of being part of ninety-nine years of Birch Rock. Storytelling benefits the community and it is a powerful tool for self-reflection and personal growth. Being able to perform at Campfire, participate at Tree Talk or stand up at meal time to share one's success gives any Birch Rocker a strong push to get in front of a crowd, speak out and contribute.

In this edition of *The Birch Bark*, we pay tribute to two men whose stories are an inspiration to us all: Don Miguel Apicelli and Harry Cleaves. We also have an up-and-coming story about the leadership of fourth generation Birch Rocker Ben Brewster.

As ever, we ask that you help Camp by recommending boys to sign up and make Birch Rock part of their stories. Let's keep Camp going strong and full of fine young gentlemen!

Rich

BEN BREWSTER DIVES IN

By Francie Campbell, P '00s, T '00s

Fourth generation Birch Rocker Ben Brewster is the latest family member to join Camp's Board of Trustees (along with his cousin Eli Brewster). Ben, 32, is the son of Seth Brewster, Chair of the Board, and great-grandson of founders Chief and Onie Brewster. A camper for seven years (starting as an 8-year-old in 2000) Ben said it was time to give back to Camp that has given him so much. "Working alongside people who care so much about Camp's success is really fun!" Ben added.

From the time he was a baby, Ben loved to play ball. According to his dad, his first word wasn't mama or dada, it was BALL. As a young camper, Ben dazzled everyone with his athletic abilities up on the Hilltop fields. Camp Director Mike



Mattson quipped: "Ben was the star of the show." Former Field Director Matt Downes enthused, "Ben was always on the camp athletic fields, even in the blistering heat... He was superbly gifted." Ben loved competing at it all — soccer, basketball, volleyball, lacrosse, baseball. Former Field Director Lenza Latendresse said, "The kid could hit the baseball so far I was afraid he'd hit my grandmother (Janice Walker, Birch Rock's Camp Lady) on her mower."

While Ben was utterly at home on the playing fields, Lake McWain was not exactly his element. Ben wasn't nervous about swimming — he just didn't have natural buoyancy and easy swim strokes. But Ben was determined to conquer the water and he had many an extra lesson with Rich Deering (Alumni & Community Director) who's always loved teaching swimming.

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BEN BREWSTER...

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The ultimate test lay ahead for young Ben at Birch Rock — learning to dive into the lake. As Rich recounted that fateful summer: “Time and time again, Ben and I would sit at the end of the dock, methodically practicing the perfect entry into McWain. We would then stand together at the edge of the dock, his feet shoulder width apart, arms extended straight above his head, head tucked into his chin slightly, ready to lean forward and spring with a slight push from his feet... and then he would belly flop.” Rich said young Ben belly flopped over and over, day after day.

Ben’s stomach took the punishment until the day he “set up, took a good deep breath and finally mastered the perfect plunge, surfacing with a winning smile,” remembered Rich. “It was one of my best teaching moments ever, to see an allstar athlete learn that one cannot easily conquer every sport with immediate ease and mastery but with intentional practice and sheer determination.”

While Ben excelled at so many field sports, soccer became his true passion in school. Recruited to play soccer at Bowdoin College, Ben served as team captain his junior and senior years, and was named a NCSAA First-Team AllAmerican in 2013, his senior year — along with earning a bunch of Bowdoin awards through his collegiate career.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in History, Ben played soccer semiprofessionally with the Seacoast United Phantoms of the Premier Development League (PDL). He went on to play professionally for the Tulsa Roughnecks of the United Soccer League, and then San Francisco FC in the PDL. Ben started his coaching career while in San Francisco, as head coach at The Bay School.

Ben joined Bates College last year as head men’s soccer coach. “His impressive soccer acumen and his ability to inspire and lead make him the perfect person to take Bates men’s soccer into the future,” declared the college’s athletic director Jason Fein. Before Bates, Ben was associate men’s soccer coach at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Fran O’Leary, head soccer coach at UMass, called Ben “one of the top young coaches in the country.” While coaching at UMass, Ben earned his Master’s in Sport Management from the UMass Isenberg School of Management. He also holds a National B coaching license from the United States Soccer Federation.

Ben is a native of Cape Elizabeth, Maine and his wife Becky

Stoneman hails from Faribault, Minnesota. Ben and Becky (a former member of the Bowdoin women’s soccer team) met in college and started dating senior year. They are thrilled to live once again in their college town, Brunswick, in a home they recently purchased. The nursery is getting a fresh coat of pale blue paint in anticipation of their first baby, due in April. Becky works remotely for Pinterest as Director of Product Management, Trust & Safety Team. Her parents relocated to Maine recently so the young family will have lots of help from grandparents.

The learning-to-dive tale is pure Ben Brewster: ready from a tender age to go out of his comfort zone, work hard to achieve something difficult, and stay cool and determined in the face of a challenge. This is also a quintessentially Birch Rock story. Boys come to Camp to conquer tough things, like homesickness, cabin cleanups, unfamiliar food, demanding activities and wilderness trips. In the process, Birch Rockers grow in self-confidence and sheer grit. Many, like Ben, go on to teach and mentor young people as their life’s work, paying it forward. And the extraordinary connection between the Brewster Family and Birch Rock continues to serve campers, nearly one hundred years on.



GRAND CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION WEEKEND

Save the Dates

**Friday, August 14, 2026
through
Sunday, August 16, 2026**

Registration

Begins in January 2026

MIKE “DON MIGUEL” APICELLI

7/21/1943 - 1/3/2025

By his friend Dave Weeks, S '70s, T '80s, P '00s

One of the greatest benefits of Birch Rock Camp is lifelong friendships. I was very fortunate to have enjoyed a close friendship with Michael “Don Miguel” Apicelli; for decades we were always looking after and giving to each other. Don Miguel and I came back to Camp together to volunteer for two weeks every summer from the mid 1990s until 2019, the last season before the pandemic. Before he and I started our volunteering gig, he was known as Mike; from the mid-90s on, he had adopted the honorific “Don Miguel” given by a Latino friend. At nickname-wild Birch Rock, it stuck.

Don Miguel and I always shared Pat’s Cabin down at the lakefront. If he got there before I arrived, he’d make my bed for me and leave a note of welcome by my pillow. I would return the favor should I get to camp before him. As a Birch Rocker I learned that true friendship comes from caring and empathic hearts. During rest periods, we enjoyed listening together to NPR, Prairie Home Companion and a variety of music, jazz being a particular favorite in Pat’s Cabin.

Don Miguel was born in 1943 in New London, Connecticut and was given the name Michael Devine. As a young boy he learned about Birch Rock when he came with his parents to visit Dr. Howe (Camp’s naturalist) and his family at their home in Waterford, Maine. Young Michael was introduced to Chief and Onie Brewster and in the 1950’s became a camper at Birch Rock. He loved baseball and I remember him telling me about the highlight of his BRC camper experience — Michael was brought back to camp on the shoulders of campers and counselors after his stellar pitching performance in his winning baseball game against Waganaki Camp. He came to Birch Rock at the same time as Dick Penley (’50s, P’90s, T’90s) with whom he rekindled his friendship when he returned to the Hillside in the summer of 1974 as a counselor. Dick and his wife Wendy (P’90s, T’90s) became dear friends he enjoyed visiting every summer that he came to BRC as an adult.

After Michael’s mom Bunny married Charles “Apie” Apicelli in the early 1960s, Michael changed his last name to Apicelli because of the great influence his stepdad had on him. He was nineteen at the time of his name change. As a young adult, this Connecticut Yankee moved to San Francisco, where he

adopted a bohemian lifestyle. In 1975, while working at the restaurant Liverpool Lil’s, he met his beloved Nancy Sullivan and they married in 1981.

In 1973 when Michael was thirty, he learned that Chief Brewster, the Director of Birch Rock, died at Camp in the summer. Michael reached out to Onie Brewster, Chief’s widow, and offered to come to Birch Rock as a counselor in the summer of 1974. That season he assisted my cousin, Nat Weeks, with campcraft and the trips program. For us staff members many a relaxing and fun night was spent at

Dave’s Sauna in South Paris, Twin Bridges in Harrison and other watering holes featuring local bands in the years from 1974 to 1979.

One of Michael’s best trip stories featured a campsite he set up with Frank Cooke, a British counselor who spent a summer at Birch Rock. Michael liked to sleep in a hammock on these trips. One night a black bear came into the campsite and

decided to sleep under Michael while he was in his hammock. In the morning Michael whispered to Frank to get a frying pan and beat it gently with increasing intensity so that the bear could be scared away. Finally, the bear lumbered off and the incident made for a lasting tale of the perils of sleeping in a hammock in the Maine wilderness.

In the off-season Michael enjoyed traveling and collecting all sorts of memorabilia. In Kansas City, Missouri he purchased his signature Stetson (cowboy) hat. Michael sported either this Stetson or his San Francisco Giants baseball cap at camp. He was also frequently seen wearing a bandana, especially when he was at campcraft working with the campers in the carving of their fuzz sticks. He enjoyed showing campers at Saturday Night Campfire the myriad uses of an ordinary bandana.

I loved hearing about his travels. One of his most harrowing adventures took him in a 2-seater Cessna across the Pacific Ocean from San Francisco to Pago Pago, with his pilot and mailcarrier friend, Eric Carlson. Arriving at night, Eric couldn’t find the unlighted Pago Pago airport and in circling around ran out of fuel and had to bring the plane down on the ocean. In order to bail out of the plane from its side door, Michael’s job was to keep the door open when they landed in the water to make sure they could escape. Eric



HARRY J. CLEAVES

11/30/1963 - 10/17/2024

By his friend Fred Howard, '70s, T '90s, P '00s

I knew Harry Cleaves for just about his whole life. We met when we were both three. I considered him to be my best friend but that was Harry — he made everyone who loved him feel like he was their best friend, and a better one there never was.

If you got to know Harry, you remembered him, and he remembered you. I saw him many times with people he hadn't come across in years, picking up where they left off as if no time had passed. He had a gift for recalling people and everything about them because he genuinely listened and cared. Harry would do anything to help a friend. There were helping hands when you were in need. There were surprise visits when times were tough. There were calls when you least expected them. He always knew the right things to say and do to cheer you up. He was extraordinarily kind and empathetic. If you had the good fortune to know Harry, then you basked in his kindness.



From a very early age, Harry loved life and he bonded with those who shared his passion for it. Harry saw rules as things to be challenged; he would lean into the limits of life to see what could happen, and if you were lucky enough to be part of one of his adventures, you never forgot it.

Harry's first season at Birch Rock camp was in 1971. His stories about Birch Rock are what convinced me to convince my parents to sign me up. For the next five years, I spent a month each summer on the Hillside. I loved the experience, but it truly supercharged Harry who spent his whole summer at Camp. He loved the Birch Rock community and everything Birch Rock stood for. Birch Rock was his second home, and the community was his family.

Stories, or some would say legends, of Harry and his exploits on the Hillside from those early years are too numerous to convey. If you ask Birch Rockers who were there with Harry, most will have a favorite story or two, and I'll leave it to them to tell as I'm sure they'll bring a good laugh.

When Harry's time as a camper ended, Birch Rock needed a cook; Harry filled the role ably, drawing on Albert's recipes and indomitable spirit. Harry loved to see the smiling faces of the campers at dinner after a rewarding day on the Hillside. It made his day, being part of something greater than himself.

When the future of Birch Rock was in jeopardy in the 1980s, Harry was one of a small, committed group of BRC benefactors who stepped up to see the camp through its

toughest hour. He would do whatever he could to save it. He would not let Chief's vision of a rustic haven for young gentlemen to grow, learn and flourish fall to pieces.

He worked tirelessly during this time with a focus on upgrading the facilities to support the future. He often drove 10 hours from Watertown, NY to Waterford, ME and back while running his own business to directly oversee work being done at Camp. While there were many upgrades to the Hillside that he oversaw, his greatest contribution and achievement during this time was to orchestrate the complete restoration of the Lodge. Harry was instrumental in saving this centerpiece of life and history at Camp, an enduring roll call of every camper who ever graced the Hillside.

He spent more than a decade as a trustee of the camp during this crucial renaissance period, lending his wisdom and guidance in true Harry style, pushing the bounds at every opportunity. When he was sure the future of the Hillside was

safely on track, he stepped back and let the next generation take the helm. But he was never far. He was always interested in what the campers were doing and how things were going. As time passed, like other Birch Rock legends, he traveled back to the Hillside to rejuvenate his spirit and share his stories.

It had been a while since my friend was last able to travel to East Waterford, but I know that he often recalled and reflected on his happy times and beloved friends at Camp. The Hillside was where he truly felt at home and at peace.

As for so many Birch Rock luminaries before him: Chief, Onie, Jean, Ben, Pete, Albert, Pat, Mike, Phyllis and many others, the last bell has rung. It is time for Harry to put his head down and get some rest. Safe travels, my friend. May you always be in the company of your beloved Birch Rockers.

Harry J. Cleaves of Watertown, New York died on October 17, 2024. He grew up in Cape Elizabeth, Maine, an avid athlete with a passion for freestyle skiing. On his 18th birthday Harry joined the US Marine Corps and served for six years, rising to the rank of Sergeant E5. He joined the family lumber business, first in Portland, ME and then in Watertown, NY where he managed a distribution facility and warehouse. Harry enjoyed his boat, his dogs, his many friends and life in the North Country. He is survived by his mother Helen Cleaves, sister Pam Cleaves Devine and brother Robert Cleaves.

Harry's family ask that gifts in Harry's memory be donated to Birch Rock Camp at <https://birchrock.org/donation-options>.

MIKE "DON MIGUEL" APICELLI...

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deployed a raft and they became castaways in the Pacific until found by the local Coast Guard, transported to Pago Pago and ultimately back to San Francisco. Their adventure was featured on Bay Area news. Their story ended with a successful rescue but later when Eric flew on another flight over the Pacific, his plane crashed on the water and he lost his life.

In the spirit of *Help the Other Fellow*, Don Miguel sent Eric's young son Grant to Birch Rock and gave him the gift of a supportive Camp community while he was coping with the loss of his dad. Since Don Miguel was Grant's godfather, he took a special interest in Grant's welfare and provided him with a fun, supportive and valuable learning experience for years at Birch Rock. Don Miguel and his wife Nancy also gave this summer gift to their son, Daniel.

Don Miguel was an enthusiastic cook and an expert at building fires. On camping trips he loved to surprise Birch Rockers with culinary delights like Bananas Flambé with its dramatic flames over the open fire. His beautifully garnished hors d'oeuvres of cheese and apple slices showcased on a bed of ferns was a throwback to his days of artful food presentation for guests at The Golden Gate Yacht Club and The Dogpatch Saloon. To honor Don Miguel's hospitality and his legendary contributions over decades to Birch Rock, Directors Rich Deering and Mike Mattson renamed Cabin 7 the *Dogpatch* in 2000.

Back East during the summer, Don Miguel enjoyed taking golf trips to the Norway Country Club and fishing on Lake McWain. He and I regularly took Cubs campers on overnight trips, panning for "gold" (mica) in the Crooked River, followed by snacks, a delicious supper, a story or two and S'mores for dessert. He awakened early in the morning to get the boys off to a good start with cocoa and a hearty breakfast of pancakes or scrambled eggs.

Ever generous and appreciative, Don Miguel enjoyed going out for a Maine lobster dinner with me and hosting our friends, the late, great Don Munn and our beloved Camp Lady Janice Walker. Don Miguel and I also made an annual summer visit to enjoy the company of our friends Dick and Wendy Penley in Paris, Maine.

Don Miguel leaves behind his wife of 44 years Nancy Sullivan and son Daniel (who serves in the Navy) and Dan's wife Heather, and extended family. Nancy and Dan have asked family and friends who wish to make contributions in Don Miguel's memory to donate to Birch Rock Camp at <https://birchrock.org/donation-options>.

Condolence notes may be sent to Nancy Sullivan at 1162 DeHaro Street, San Francisco, CA 94107.

ALL HANDS ON DECK!

Birch Rock needs YOU to help us sign up young gentlemen for camp this summer for our 99th great season! You are our BEST ambassador. Please tell families about Birch Rock, direct them to www.birchrock.org and put them in touch with Mike Mattson or Rich Deering. Always in the spirit of *Help the Other Fellow!*



Mark Your Calendars for 2025!



Clean & Pick Up Saturday	May 17
BRC Summer Office Opens	June 2
BRC Staff Orientation	June 11
C.I.T. Orientation	June 15
Opening - First Session / Cubs I	June 22
Cubs Camp I - End	July 5
Cubs Camp II	July 6
First Session & Cubs II - End	July 19
Opening 2nd Session	July 20
Maine Wilderness Adventure	
Cubs Camp III	
Cubs Camp III - End	August 2
BRC for Boys & MWA - End	August 9
BRC Family Camp	August 14
BRC Family Camp - End	August 18

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BIRCH ROCK CAMP

P.O. Box 148
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BIRCH ROCK CAMP - 2025 DATES AND RATES

Session	Tuition	Start Date	End Date	Length of Stay
Full Session	\$12,000	June 22	August 9	48 days
First Session	\$9,900	June 22	July 19	28 days
Second Session	\$7,700	July 20	August 9	21 days
Leadership (age 16-17)	\$6,700	July 15	August 9	53 days

Introductory Cubs Camp Programs for NEW campers ages 7-12 only; or may join regular camp sessions

Cubs Camp I	\$5,200	June 22	July 5	14 days
Cubs Camp II	\$5,200	July 6	July 19	14 days
Cubs Camp III	\$5,200	July 20	August 2	14 days
Family Camp	per person	August 14	August 18	

