

HBCA Family Camp Out.....A Swan's Story.

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To begin the story of the family camp out, I have to go back a bit.

For the past two weeks I encountered a swan swimming the shoreline at our beach. On the two different days I had gone down with my little girls, Sophia & Olivia, the Swan trailed alongside us as we played in water's edge. We'd walk from the life guard chair all the way to other end of the beach and back, and the swan would follow. Two neighboring beach-goers commented to be careful as swans are not normally friendly creatures. This I knew, but something was different about this Swan. I thought perhaps he was a youngster, abandoned by his parents or perhaps he was just confused that he was NOT a dog. He never hissed or came after us and only gently stood near, seemingly wanting human companionship.

Fast forward to Saturday, September 20th...Family Camp Out day. As I was at the gate welcoming our camping families with another Camping Crew Member, John O'Brian and our President, Jeff Robinson...a local fisherman told us that a swan had a fish hook in it's neck and that he didn't look too good. "Was this the same swan?" I thought. In any event, John remembered that a new resident on McKinley, Dan Laundias, was a Vet and could probably help. So the mission: catch the Swan.

After a few failed attempts to catch him. Campers began pouring in and setting up their tents. Sophia & I went down to see how everyone was doing and low & behold, there he was...the Swan...swimming at shore's edge again. I ran over to the pavilion, grabbed a dragging minnow net that had been sitting on the sand and asked two fellow camping dads who were fishing with their children, Dave Mansbart & Pete Moffitt, to drop their fishing poles to help me with a "better" catch! "Dad, you have to help!" yelled Dana Mansbart. She and her brother Kyle and their friend Nicole Moffitt....along with several other camping children, huddled together near the swan pretending to throw food to lure him out of the water. Once he was within inches of shore, Dave, Pete, & I walked in the water behind him and gently draped the net around him. He didn't fight. He didn't hiss. He just let us do our thing. Once he was secured, Dave & Pete picked him up and carried him towards the Laundias' house. Sophia & I ran ahead to prepare Dr. Dan we were coming with the Swan.

As we walked through the parking lot, word got out. There were now more than 15 camping children marching behind us...excited and concerned. "Is he gonna live?"....Are they gonna operate?....Can we watch?....I have a minnow for him to eat if he's hungry"...

And so, with a small crowd gathered on a grass spot in the parking lot, new HBCA residents Ryan & Lukas, along with their mom Stacey, watched with hope as their dad, Dr. Dan, cut the hook & gently pulled it out from his neck. After careful inspection of his

wound, Dr. Dan said he was ok. So, Dave & Pete picked him up again and began the trek back to the water to set him free.

With now about 25 children towing behind, they laid the Swan on the sand. He just sat there, exhausted. A few children began to chant...."come on Swan...go back in the water". Dr. Dan gently helped him to stand, he rubbed his neck and checked to see how it was. He didn't think the hook went in too deeply to cause any major damage. By now the Swan felt good enough to leave. He slowly hobbled into the water. The children cheered him on and clapped once he made it in. They dubbed him "Freddie". And as Freddie sat at the water's edge looking at us, for the first time probably in weeks, he stretched his neck into the water and took a BIG gulp of water! The children threw him tiny minnows which he happily tried to eat. And, after a few minutes he slowly swam off towards Centerport Beach....back to a crowd of other swans. Everyone else then went happily back to setting up their tents.

As for the "Main" event.....The Family Camp Out was a HUGE success. Everyone had tons of fun and a fantastic night on the beach. Children played volleyball & running tag, others gathered near a huge warm fire thanks to Lori Barrett, John O'Brian & Chris Zethner. We sang songs accompanied by guitarist Jen & Eric Eaton, watched a movie thanks to Lisa Mastrantonio, and finally....saw a magnificent moon rise in the star filled sky with everyone safe & sound at lights out.

The next morning, as I walked to the pavilion for breakfast with Sophia, Olivia and their friend Megan O'Brian, Sophia asked where the Swan was. I explained, he was back with his family. "Oh, that's good, he's probably more happy now", she said. A little boy walking along side us with a donut in one hand and a chocolate smeared face asked, "are you the lady who helped catch the Swan?", yes I said. "COOL!" he replied. Little Alex Coventry came over to ask if I could e-mail him pictures of the Swan...he wanted to share the story with his Kelly. And walking back to my tent with bagels and coffee, I over heard one mom say to another..."I need to move here!".

I am so thankful and amazed by the community in which we live. How often do a bunch of "big & little" campers get together, help an injured swan and the story have such a wonderful lasting impact on our children?

Truly this "Family Camp Out" was far more than I ever expected. For no matter our age or status....we are all here for the same reason.....*a love for our beach and everything it brings us... such as our swans.* Life can't get much better than that!

Thanks to everyone who helped and to everyone who came!
See you all at next year's Family Camp Out!

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