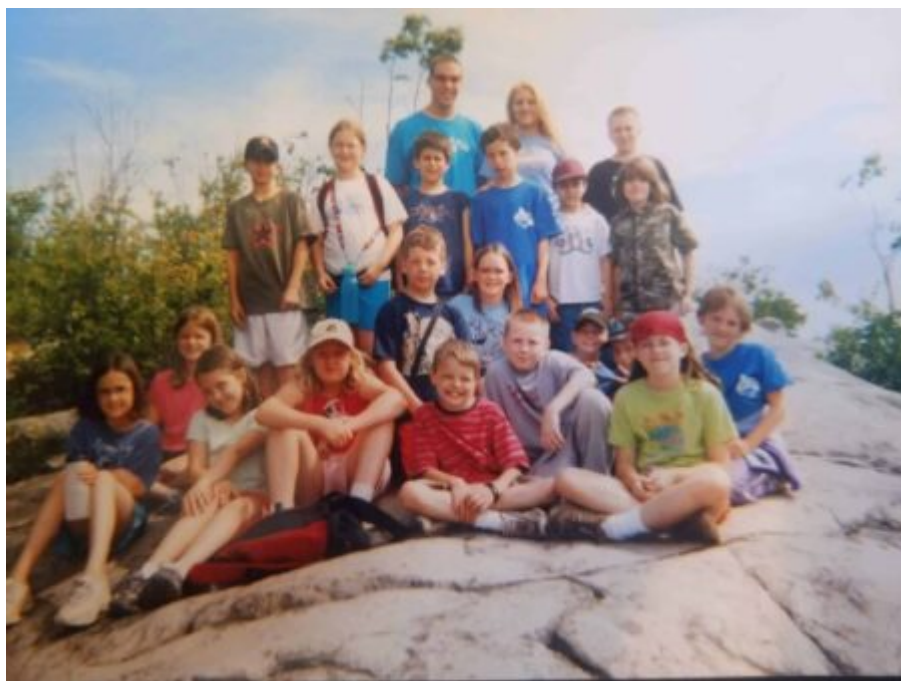


[Volunteering at MS Adventure Camp](#)



When I first attended [MS Adventure Camp](#), I was a painfully shy 9-year-old with no real sense of why my mother was shipping me off to northern Minnesota for a week. At the time, MS was an open secret in our home. We knew she had MS, but she did not want to worry her three kids with the details, nor was she at a place where she could openly discuss it without giving up the power she had over her diagnosis. So, when she saw an advertisement in the National MS Society newsletter about a camp for kids who lived in homes where someone was affected by MS, she signed me and my sister up to help us understand her situation.

The camp was exactly what every great summer camp movie had promised me - hiking, swimming, crafts and bonfires. However, there was also time in the schedule to learn about MS and talk about our experiences with it. At first it was a bit awkward to discuss this with people I had just met, but when you spend so much time with one group, you become fast friends. Within a few days, we were talking about the unique ways in which MS was affecting our homes. At that age the conversations weren't overly complex, but for me it was the first-time people were talking about this openly and the first time I realized other people had homes so similarly affected.



My first time at MS Adventure Camp in 2004

Each year I would see many of the same people, getting to know their stories well. Our responsibilities at home evolved as we got older – we spoke about the ways we supported our loved ones, our fear of relapses and our hope for remission. Throughout camp, I found myself turning to my counselors to ask questions since many of them had also grown up in a home where someone lived with MS. What was so quiet in my home was loud here, and while there weren't always answers, there was always support.

Camp gave me a community, peers and adults who understood my experiences so well. I'd leave camp feeling empowered to talk with my mom about MS, but also to act. In my third year of camp, I asked a counselor how to get more involved and they pointed me to a teen group in my area. From there I started volunteering, fundraising, and bringing awareness to my school. Many of my fellow campers also got involved, all feeling motivated to bring what we learned at camp to the rest of our lives.

As I got older, time didn't always permit for a week in the wilderness, but I stayed involved as best I could. In 2016, I finally had the chance to return to camp as a volunteer counselor, and it felt like going back in time. The major difference was that this time, I had the opportunity to see these remarkable kids shine and grow. In six short days they would go from reserved to spirited in the best possible way.



My most recent time at camp in 2022.

When my first week as a counselor ended, all I could think was that I was so lucky to have had this experience as both a kid and as an adult. There was no doubt that camp would be a significant fixture in my life moving forward. I have gained so much through my time there, and I continue to learn and grow thanks to the exceptional campers, counselors and support staff. I return to camp not only because it's incredibly fun, but because it is deeply meaningful.

I'm lucky enough to work for the Society now, returning to camp last year as staff. I could not be more grateful for my time spent there and the ways it has further tied me to this mission I care so deeply about.

Editor's Note: Get more resources for children and families affected by MS on the [Society website](#).