

One of the most thoughtful people in the world.  
You made a place cheerful.  
-- Ned Carson

Mr. Birch always said "Fun with a Purpose" and I had fun in shop. My purpose was to learn to build and make things out of wood. All of the Polar Bear swims led Mr. Birch to a ripe old age . . . "I have a wonderful feeling. Everything is going my way." This really was true for Mr. Birch!  
-- Gregor Hoffman

Mr. Birch was a great man and accomplished many things. What I remember about Mr. Birch is how he would always help you and not all people are like that.  
-- Trevor Branch

After reflecting on my time spent with Mr. Birch, I realize how fortunate I am and how proud I am to say that I knew Mr. Birch. He was an essential figure at Kawanhee who has always shown everyone how to be responsible, thoughtful, and to always remember the Golden Rule. He was always there to give of himself to others not only in the shop and on the polar bear dock, but anywhere in camp. Mr. Birch was the glue that helped hold this fantastic place together, and in my 8 years he was one of the many influential people in Kawanhee who helped me during my childhood. I will always remember Mr. Birch teaching me the big "R" when my sailboat had to go away for ten moons. I looked up to Mr. Birch when I was just a little camper and I still and always will look up to him. Mr. Birch, I would like to thank you for everything you have taught me. You will forever be in my heart.  
--Thomas Papa

I had the pleasure of knowing Herb Birch for only two seasons. During that time I was inspired and amazed by the fullness and quality of his life. The idea that life can be lived fully regardless of age was exemplified by Herb. I'm sure he has been an example to thousands of people and I feel very proud to have known him.  
--Kate Branch, Camp Nurse

Herb Birch was the embodiment of what we teach boys here at Camp Kawanhee. He demonstrated

such a joy of life and had amazing energy. Mr. Birch made others feel like they were an important part of his life, and he set a marvelous Christian example. He was extremely articulate and always humble despite his many accomplishments. Herb Birch was always giving of his time and talents and was a true "Gem of Kawanhee."  
--Chuck and Barbara Compher

I will always remember Herb for the many positive things he brought to Camp Kawanhee. I will mainly remember his enthusiasm for life and for Kawanhee. It affected everyone he touched.

Herb was like the sun with many different rays going in many different directions. There was the ray of hard work. This was embodied by Herb's countless hours of work in directing the shop program at Kawanhee and the almost fifty years of great projects turned out by Kawanhee campers under the direction of Herb. There was the ray of great faith -- an important part of every Kawanhean's life -- embodied in his great prayers at meals and directing Kawanhee's church services for many years. There was the ray of boundless energy for life embodied in his Polar Bear dip each morning and the running of The Polar bear Club. And there was the ray of Kawanhee tradition embodied in Herb's role as Chief Sachem and the Coming and Going of the Chief ceremonies—probably the two most memorable evenings of a Kawanhee summer.

Yes, Herb was like the sun. Perhaps not all of Herb's rays touched you but some did, and we were all covered in Herb's sunshine.  
--Michael Altmaier

"What we leave behind is forever" are the words that could have been written exclusively for Herb Birch. Even though his wisdom and knowledge were so remarkable, doing for others was the fuel that motivated his body and now keeps his spirit alive. It's no wonder he enjoyed such a long, healthy, happy life.

Now that camp has started and I miss that great smile, the sparkle of his blue eyes, his spry walk and unbelievable thought process, his memory brings a smile to my face. How blessed I feel to have spent so many summers with such a great person. He will always be the spirit of Kawanhee.  
--Lucy Ramsey, Camp Nurse



We met Herb as we started our Kawanhee summers in 1994. Ted had just celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday as Herb was celebrating his 50<sup>th</sup> season at Kawanhee. It has been wonderful to spend these years with such a warm, caring and dedicated individual who always managed to put everyone else ahead of himself. What a marvelous six years of camaraderie and friendship. We will never forget him!

--Ted and Betty Simanek

My feelings of our great sachem, Herb Birch, are quite simple. He was one of a kind for many reasons. Of course he was amazing because he led Kawanhee for 52 summers, he lived to be nearly 100, and still was the hardest worker in camp. But more so because Mr. Birch seemed to care for all boys like a son, and in later years like a grandfather, I suppose. He would wake up at six in the morning to help me put paint on a sailboat, or stay up well into the night carving polar bears for those participating in his elite Polar Bear Club each day. He cared this way for all boys.

I spent 5 summers with Mr. Birch and every summer I would work with him on something in the shop. The funny thing is, I know he cared about me even though I don't know if he ever called me by name, or for that matter, if he even knew my name. That was okay with me, although I suppose I didn't have a choice in the matter. He was still there for me because I was part of Kawanhee. As much as he cared for me and for others, he cared even more for Kawanhee. And if I was part of Kawanhee, he cared for me. For this love he shared, I will miss him. We will all miss him. Kawanhee will miss him!

--Will Alexander

Although this is only my second year as a camper, I had a chance to meet with Mr. Birch and get to know him. I was always amazed and still am today at how he could get up every morning and jump in the lake at 93 years old. My best experience was when he helped me with my wood project, which made me look at my project and say "I made that."

--Jeff Cavanagh

When I think of Mr. Birch I remember the time when I was having trouble with my paddle in shop last year and was not going to finish it. Mr. Birch voluntarily came during a rest hour to help me finish, which I did. That's the kind of guy Mr. Birch

was—nice, friendly, caring, supporting and many other things.

--Alex Standen

Dear Herb,

I'm not worried about you, since I know you went from this earthly existence straight into the arms of God. I imagine that you have pronounced Heaven "Beautiful" and that you are enjoying being once more with your dear Jean and Bruce, with your buddies the Frank brothers, and with all those members of the Kawanhee clan who entered The Happy Hunting Ground before you.

I want to thank you for all you have added to my life. For the open arms and wide smiles, the cheery morning greetings, "Hello, Dear." For the Polar Bear dips to start each perfect Kawanhee day. For your patience as you helped me carve a loon in the shop. Thank you for all the Sunday services—the prayerful reminders to always do my best to make someone else's day a little brighter. You made our days brighter, Herb. I smile to remember you lining up the camp dogs for treats fished from the plate scrapings, or paddling in one of your crazy hats down to the narrows to watch for loons or moose.

Thank you for your kindness in making Rachel a special Polar Bear plaque. You were always making something. How many awards for how many departments? You were always giving, and leading, and teaching by your good example. We feel your spirit in the lake and the trees—in the very breeze. You will always be in our hearts.

Rest well, Papa Bear!

With much love,

Amy Spencer

Herb had many principles. Even though I barely knew him, I still learned a lot. He always helped me do my best and his sayings I will always remember: "Fun with a purpose" and "If it's worth starting, it's worth finishing."

--Chris Engel

Mr. Birch was a great shop teacher and person. He was close because he taught my dad and uncle shop in high school. I will miss him very much, and I

hope everyone will remember Mr. Birch's many years doing good for all the boys of Kawanhee.  
--Austin Randall

Mr. Birch was a very good person who taught me not only at shop but also at life. He was a great teacher and a good friend to all.  
--Miguel Mayol

I remember that Mr. Birch would always be so helpful to me when I needed help in the shop.  
--Jay Morris

I'll remember Mr. Birch as the stubborn spirit of Kawanhee that relentlessly fought off the evil spirits of selfishness, aiding others in their search for a deepened sense of giving.  
--Peter Kelly

Well, what can I say? He was a great man—always active, enthusiastic, kind, and always helping. If you think of all the people he touched, the number would be incredible. I don't think anyone could even guess close. I know many people will miss him, but I think he is very happy where he is with his family.  
--Matt Duncan

Mr. Birch was always telling us to finish what we start, and if we didn't finish a project when it was supposed to be finished he would take time out of his day to help us finish the project. That was one of the great qualities Mr. Birch had.  
--Max Smith-Marder

What can one say about Mr. Birch except that he was a great man. He was a large part of my Kawanhee experience for the five years that I knew him. I will miss his lectures in shop, as well as his Polar Bear singing. I was always amazed with his patience, especially when he and I got bumped from a flight and I had the privilege to spend some quality time with him. I was always amazed by the fact that he was so active and enthusiastic despite his age, while others his age were in rest homes or at least not as enthused with activities.  
--John Kelly

One day I was incredibly tired and mentioned to Herbert that I was desiring a good nap. Mr. Birch did not accept the idea of being tired and repounded by saying, "Russ, you can sleep when you're dead." This quote sums up Mr. Birch's approach to life and his mentality on day-to-day living. Herb had the energy of 5 men, and the heart of 10 more. I have yet to meet a man that I utterly admired or respected more. He lived his life placing others before himself and in the process touched and inspired those he came in contact with.

I know for a fact I am a more giving, tolerant and overall better person because I was BLESSED to have known and been friends with Mr. Herb Birch. He truly lived every day to the fullest. Although he planned to finally get some sleep, I am sure he's running around being as productive as always in a place he'd describe with his timeless grin as "BEE-A-UU-TI-FUL!"  
--Russell Jessen

Dear Herb,

Not many people through the course of their lifetime will strive to have the opportunity to truly leave a legacy, but you most certainly have accomplished this! For all of us that you mentored, taught, and guided, we have sincerely been blessed to enjoy your fellowship. One of the finest honors in my young life is to have been able to call you my friend.

Mark Nelson

It has been our good fortune to have been associated with Herb Birch for the past 30 years. He has become one of our very best friends, and at the same time enriched our lives by providing us the ample guidance, wise counsel, great enthusiasm, and a role model character we seek daily to imitate. It was Herb who suggested to us and motivated us to become involved in our own volunteer hospital work plus Meals-On-Wheels and Ronald McDonald House. No one could ever dream of attaining the degree of unselfishness that Herb revealed in his own marvelous contributions as "Mr. Volunteer" in the Tenafly/Englewood, N.J. area. His example of "giving of self" to Kawanhee, to his church and to his home community rubbed off on countless others of all ages. Our God in Heaven rejoiced at the arrival of Herb Birch!  
--Jane and Walter Estabrook



As a Junior Counselor, I had the good fortune to serve with two Kawanhee legends - Roy Nickerson in Pine Tree and Herb Birch in Deer. To me, both of them were what Kawanhee is all about. Good family men, devoted fathers, and leaders of young boys and young men. Though we can't make the services on July 2, we'll be there in spirit.

— Herb Hedges, Jr.

Our thoughts and prayers are with you as you remember the life of Herb Birch. He was passionate about Kawanhee and he coached thousands of boys in camping and crafts skills. He taught us all about the qualities of camp and life, and about the value of quality workmanship. We will all remember him and his spirit of Kawanhee that he spread to all of us. With sincere regards, sympathy, and pleasant memories.

— Steve and Marion Hall

Our triplet young men, Peter, William, and Jeffrey, all currently living on the west coast, were saddened to learn of Mr. Birch's passing. They recall him well and with fond memories, as they were at camp from 1959 thru 1962. They were delighted that their mother and I were making a contribution in their names to the Camp Kawanhee Foundation. Warm Regards!

— Warren Sullivan (1935-39)

The enclosed contribution is sent in honor and memory of Herb Birch under whose wonderful guidance four of our grandsons had the privilege of spending many happy productive hours during the past ten or more summers. I'll always be grateful.

— Helen Vorys

My friendship with Herb began during my third year at Kawanhee. The year was 1977, and Kawanhee had just weathered a devastating fire which destroyed three lodges and the Dining Hall. At the time, I was the camp baker, and although the Dining Hall had burned, camp was miraculously still in session, and three meals a day were expected. Every Kawanheean, including the kitchen staff was working overtime to make sure camp continued with a more or less normal schedule. At times, we felt discouraged and overwhelmed, but Herb never failed to stop by before every meal to encourage us and to cheer us on. His words of encouragement really lifted our spirits, and enabled us to continue working hard. Soon after the fire, Herb took me more or less by the hand to the shop one afternoon, and helped me begin my first project, a small paddle. He made sure I finished the project and was on hand to watch me swim Bass Rock. Since then, I have made many shop projects, helped with Polar Bear and painted many camper paddles, but I will always treasure my first project made during that traumatic summer and the friendship of the man who encouraged and supported so many of us here at Kawanhee.

— Nancy van den Honert

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