

## Jesse's camp diaries 2018

Dear Ones:

Without sounding too much like a cliché, this year's camps were THE BEST EVER!!!! and I'm sure you'll agree as you read through this journal. First, though, I want to acknowledge Tallahassee's Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs (PRNA) because "Jesse's camps" wouldn't exist or grow as they have without Ashley Edwards (PRNA's executive director), Bobby Sparks (coordinator), and the directors and staff of each community center: Aeshah MacQueen (Walker Ford), Robin McKay (LeVerne Payne), and John Doherty (Jack McLean). Their enthusiasm and love of community make all the difference in the world. My gratitude to each for all the work that goes into coordinating this beautiful project.

Before camp began, dear friend Donna and I went shopping for organic apples, oranges, bananas, carrots and snacks for all the locations. We filled the back of my husband, Greg's, truck with our many treasures. On day one, Greg and I delivered some to each site. Several anonymous donors shared our enthusiasm for offering fresh fruits and veggies this year to supplement the great breakfasts, lunches and snacks prepared by the staff. Huge thanks to them.



From day one, all camps were filled with lots of activity! Organized sports included kickball, soccer, flag football, dodge ball and tee ball. There were local field trips to the Sue McCollum Art Center at Lafayette Park for art classes. There were nature walks. TPD visited with our LeVerne Payne center for basketball. Jack McLean group had small "cooking classes" to teach our youngsters how to make their snacks. There was an afternoon when all three groups met for movies. Throughout the week, our youngsters were busy all day long.

In addition, there were special field trips. The Walker Ford group went to Panacea to visit the Gulf Specimen Marine Lab. What an amazing place! A bit of their history from their website:

Gulf Specimen Marine Laboratory was founded in 1963 to support marine research and education at universities by supplying live marine animals to academic scientists. Founder Jack Rudloe worked on shrimp boats, lending a hand in return for keeping species that were of no value to the fishermen. Commercial fishermen have remained important collaborators for many years.

The author John Steinbeck, an avid amateur marine biologist, encouraged the creation of Gulf Specimen and assisted Mr. Rudloe with extensive support and advice. Steinbeck's support was based on the parallel of Jack Rudloe and Gulf Specimen to Steinbeck's friend and collaborator Ed Ricketts who operated Pacific Biological Laboratories in Monterey, California – (Doc and Western Biological in Steinbeck's classic novel Cannery Row). Steinbeck donated the original art from his and Rickett's book "Log of the Sea of Cortez" to Rudloe.

Everyone came back excitedly talking about sharks and all the marine life they saw. Aeshah McQueen offers thanks to their field trip sponsors: Inspire Group ~ Avery Curry and the International Free Acceptance Modern Masons and Order of Eastern Star.

The LeVerne Payne group visited The Grove, a local Tallahassee treasure. From their website:

Few historic sites in Florida have witnessed as much history as The Grove. For nearly two centuries, the people connected with this place have figured prominently in the moments that defined Tallahassee and Florida history.

Their collective story speaks directly to the American experience. As public servants, preservationists, and entrepreneurs, the many notable residents of The Grove have left an indelible mark on Florida and our nation's history.

In addition to touring the museum, our youngsters were treated to an outdoors scavenger hunt.

The Challenger Learning Center (CLC) came to the Jack McLean center and provided an afternoon of science experiments. The topic was air pressure. The CLC staff asked our youngsters to consider what would happen if they blew too much air into a balloon. "It would bust the balloon!" they replied to which the CLC staff said, "That is a hypothesis. We must conduct an experiment to determine if that is true." And so the afternoon went with several hypotheses to be tested by experiments with the able and fun assistance of our youngsters.



John Doherty extends a big thank you to the Challenger Learning Center for an educational and fun afternoon.

Tom Taylor has been a champion of “Jesse’s camps” in offering cooperative games to our youngsters since our first year. Some of the objectives of these games: to share the joy of playing together, to get to know and appreciate each other, to enhance self-confidence and self-awareness, and to build a sense of cooperation and community. This year, Tom taught the staff of Jack McLean how to lead the games and we are hopeful these games will become part of their regular activities. Our huge thanks to Tom.



A wonderful new addition this year was offered by math wizard Cece Shaw who has thirty years experience as a math instructor and several years coaching math teachers. She taught “math/mind games” everyday at both Walker Ford and LeVerne Payne. These games were to help youngsters begin to recognize patterns in math and to help them improve their math skills. There was a lot of laughter and even some art as part of her instruction. We are so pleased to have Cece join us and are grateful for all the time and energy she dedicated to Jesse’s camps.



Katya Taylor returned to Walker Ford this year teaching “Creating a Happiness Journal”. Katya first asked the group to write 5 things that make you happy. Then, we went around the room with each person reading what they wrote. Some things that made them happy were “going on an adventure, spending time with cousins, playing soccer, cooking with

my grandma” and more. We were then asked to write about imagining what will make you happy in the future. Katya talked about how creating this journal is magic in that once you start looking for things that make you happy, you find more! We can all benefit from that message.



At week's end, all 3 groups met at Walker Ford for their carnival. Walking the perimeter of the gym, was like being at the North Florida Fair for all the games and treats. Aeshah was even making s'mores!

Another exciting addition this year was the old time square dance at Walker Ford. Old time dance sessions are held regularly at the Senior Center. They are a hidden treasure in our community. Mary Allgire, one of the board members of the Tallahassee Community Friends of Old-Time Dance (see their website at [www.tallydancer.com](http://www.tallydancer.com)), met with the staff at Walker Ford to teach several dances ranging from easier to more complex. All week long, those incredible staff members taught old time dances to our campers each day. On the last day of camp, we had live music by The Long Forgotten String Band whose members are Don Shrum, Frank Lindamood, Fred Slade, Jerry McFarland, and Ken Skipper. The dances were tremendous fun for everyone! One special surprise was that assistant director at Walker Ford Chiezda Ponder called one of the dances. It is something that will long be remembered by everyone there. Big shout out to Mary Allgire and The Long Forgotten String Band for making the time to provide such an incredible experience. Thank you also to dancers Rita Weinstein, Norma Skaggs, and Larry Teich for joining and helping. Looking at the pictures below will make you smile and maybe even make you want to go to the next Old Time dance!



We all know it is community that supports all we do. Our thanks to: Firehouse Subs, Little Caesars, and Sams Club which helped with donations for LeVerne Payne. Thanks also to those helping with food at Walker Ford: Sisters with a Purpose, International Free Acceptance Modern Masons and Order of Eastern Star, Inspire Group, Second Harvest and Kaysena Coker (parent). We couldn't do this without you!

And so, we wrap up another year. You may consider this my "Happiness Journal" entry. I am filled with joy by how much we have grown. The love and support you have each given bless this project, and I am truly grateful.

As always, feel free to share this with your community. Tax deductible donations are welcome throughout the year. At times, we provide funding to aspiring young gymnasts who need an assist with event fees. We are happy to offer that. Checks can be made to FOOP/Jesse's fund, and mailed to Friends of Our Parks, c/o Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Affairs, 912 Myers Park Drive, Tallahassee, FL 32301.

Thank you so much for helping me honor my precious son's life in this wonderful way. With a heart filled with love and gratitude,  
Martha Weinstein  
Jesse's mom

