



# THE OCONTO ECHO

**Summer 2020**

## **The View from the Bung**

This year has not been what any of us expected or planned for or hoped for. However, if any group of young women can make lemonade from lemons, it's a bunch of Oconto campers and staff! Here are some highlights from Summer 2020:

- The QC Program occurred virtually via Zoom! The Head of QCs, Emma Zacharias, led 3 sessions per week for 4 weeks (the program ran once in July and once in August). We had 32 QCs complete the program this summer! QCs were awarded a Leadership Certificate upon completion of the course. They were also thrilled to receive their QC t-shirts "purples" as a surprise in the mail! To quote Emma: *"I had such a great time running Virtual QCs this summer. I was so thankful to still get a chance to run sessions for the QCs and to see all of them throughout their respective months. I really wanted to give them as much of a QC experience as possible. The QCs were super enthusiastic and their dedication to the program really helped to create a safe and positive atmosphere, similar to one we would have seen if we were doing sessions in Plus One. It was so much fun sharing the "staff secrets" and super interesting to hear the girls' perspectives on why they want to be a counsellor and how camp has impacted them, it again, reminded me of how special Oconto is."*
- The Semi Program occurred virtually! The Head of Semis, Lauren Jackson, led weekly sessions for 9 weeks. Oconto staff volunteered to be "virtually paired" with the Semis to offer mentorship, guidance, and friendship! The Semis of 2020 didn't want to miss out on having an "S" name or a banner... they are the "Stay-At-Home Semis of 2020!" and their banner will be unveiled next summer. The Semis made a fantastic video introducing themselves which you can watch on Oconto's YouTube channel [HERE](#). We had 25 Semis complete the program this summer! In Lauren's words: *"It has been so incredible to watch this wonderful group of girls come together each week to talk and bond about everything from their new jobs in the city to what sections they want to be in next summer. The resilience of these girls has astounded me over and over again these past nine weeks, and I know that they will arrive at camp next summer as stronger, more compassionate Full-Staff who are ready to take on any challenge they face!"*
- Camp Oconto's 6 weeks of Virtual Camp Programming for Campers was so much fun! A team of 62 Oconto volunteer staff and Semis led virtual activities 3-4 times per week for campers (this program was free for camper families). Some of the virtual activities included: morning assembly, a sailing knot tying workshop, "Camp Fonts and the Art of the Warm Fuzzy", yoga, horseback riding theory, nature scavenger hunt, a painting session, embroidery workshops, kayaking theory, a photography workshop, all camp campfire, windsurfing theory, a reverse scavenger hunt evening program... the list goes on! Oconto's current Assistant Director, Emily Pepper, led the virtual programming for campers. To quote Emily: *"For me, camp has always been about empowering girls through skill building and promoting supportive, strong relationships. Even though we couldn't be together on Eagle Lake this summer, it was wonderful to see our campers experience these aspects of camp virtually."*

It was truly amazing to watch a group of young people, who were understandably disappointed about not being able to be in person at camp this summer, come together to offer a little bit of Oconto magic virtually!

We hope you enjoy reading this edition of the Oconto Echo and we wish you health and happiness as we approach the fall season!

**Bronwyn & Ted**

## The View from Misty Cove

Yes, Bruce and Lisa now live in the cottage at Misty Cove, the cottage that Lisa's parents, June and Cliff Labbett, enjoyed for many golden years! This is now our full-time address.

What a year this has been for all of us, including those of us at Oconto!

Camp Oconto carried on as best as it possibly could this summer. Bronwyn and Ted did a great job of "Camping through Covid". With virtual programming for campers, the QC and Semi programs, Canoe School at camp, cabin rentals and day visits by current campers and staff, they accomplished so much.

We are extremely proud of how the Oconto staff came together to be as supportive and creative as possible, with the leadership of Bronwyn and Ted.

*Lisa & Bruce*

**Erika Siren** is part of an exciting global project to treat COVID-19! Following the completion of her Ph.D. in 2018, Erika began working as a scientific consultant where she helps Physicians and Scientists develop therapies for rare genetic diseases. She specializes in immunodeficiencies, an umbrella term for disorders that can make it difficult for an individual's immune system to fight off infections. When COVID-19 emerged in late 2019, the company Erika works for initiated a global clinical trial that seeks to repurpose an approach traditionally used to treat immunodeficiencies (immunoglobulin replacement therapy) to also help high-risk COVID-19 patients fight off SARS-CoV-2 infections.

The COVID-19 therapy is centred on proteins called immunoglobulin antibodies which are naturally generated in the blood plasma of patients to help the immune system target and clear the SARS-Cov-2 virus. Once someone has recovered from COVID-19, they can then donate these antibodies through plasma donation which is a similar process to blood donation. Transferring this antibody-filled plasma to patients that are still struggling to fight off SARS-CoV-2 infections could serve as a way to boost that person's immune system, help them respond to the infection, and increase their chance of recovery. You can read more about this project [here](#). Canadian Blood Services is running a similar clinical trial in Canada which you can read more about [here](#).



Outside of work, Erika is involved in patient advocacy and policy efforts which promote equitable access to transformative medicines for all Canadians affected by rare diseases. Erika credits her time at Camp Oconto and Camp Awakening for reinforcing the importance of listening to the needs of the affected community when carrying out her work. As Lisa Wilson always said: "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak" (an impressive accomplishment for anyone who knows Erika)!



**Emma (Plaskacz) Struthers** and her husband welcomed a little girl named Reese on May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020. Her older sister Quinn is settling into the big sister role well!



**Christine (Harbinson) MacDonald** and her husband welcomed our third child, and first daughter Elizabeth MacDonald into the world on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020! Hopefully she will be a little Camp Oconto camper herself one day!



**Jennifer Caputo** and her husband Anthony welcomed their baby girl Emma Marie Grace Conte on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020, weighing 7.1 lbs. and is growing fast! Emma and her puppy Joe love to cuddle and are best friends already. Emma can't wait to go to camp, we are already counting down the summers!



**Stacy Campbell** and her husband welcomed their first child, Mia Grace Loree, on July 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020 at 11:23pm, weighing 7lbs 7oz.



**Morgan Brown** and her husband Jeff Stott were very excited to welcome their daughter, Claire Airlie Brown Stott, on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020. She looks forward to being a fourth generation Oconto girl one day!

**Alexa Ironside** and her husband, Greg welcomed Levi Ironside Choo on May 15<sup>th</sup> at the Ottawa Birthing Centre. Camp traditions have quickly become a part of Levi's routine as Alexa sings TAPS to him every night before bed! He may never be an Oconto girl, but he'll know all the songs!



Five Camp Oconto counsellors spent July on a road trip across Canada together! They took about 10 days to get to the west coast, spent a week there, then headed back to Ontario. Caroline Allen, Lauren Chisholm, Amanda Chiu, Tara Kindra, and Ri Valvasori are tight knit friends, thanks to their years at Oconto together!

### From alumna Sam Shirreff

Dearest Oconto Campers, QCs, Semis, and Staff,

As an Oconto alumna, I share in your disappointment that you won't make it to Camp this year, my heart dropped into my stomach too. I was waiting, as I know you all were too, to see if it would be possible for everyone to return for another glorious Summer on Eagle Lake.

It may not seem fair right now. You "stayed home to come home" after all. Please know, you get to be sad and disappointed, this wasn't the plan, and I know every alumnae wishes it to be different for you too.

I do know that you all will be able to "come home" again: to your zebos, your cabins, to tie-dye, camper counsellor, jumping off tower, tripping, rolling your kayaks, polar bear dips, banquet, all camp campfire, trips down the Nile and beyond.

This reality may feel really far away right now but it's waiting for you next year, this I know for sure. In the meantime, I would encourage you to reach out to your Camp friends and talk about how this feels. With the uncertainty of the last months, maybe you lost touch with some friends since last Summer, but this could be a great chance to send a warm fuzzy, a text, email, jump on one of many video platforms or make a simple call to reconnect with your people, those you looked forward to seeing oh so soon. I know it won't be the same but it may in a way feed your soul and give you a great chance to catch up.

You aren't alone and if anyone will understand it's your Camp community. Lean on them.

Just remember, the sun always rises on Eagle Lake and it will continue to do so wherever you are, tomorrow and all the days ahead. Please always look out for those rainbows too.

Thinking of you all,

Sam Shirreff  
Seniors 2000

## From alumna Beth O'Donnell

There are so many interesting paths to follow in life yet most of the time I did not have enough foresight or knowledge to figure out the plan beforehand. So, my philosophy in life has been when an opportunity presents itself and it feels right, better grab it as you don't know when or if it will pass by again. That is how I ended up working at a most interesting organization called the Aga Khan Development Network based in Geneva. As Head of Human Resources for 2 of the agencies in the Network, Aga Khan Agency for Habitat and Aga Khan Health Services I have had the privilege of working with some amazing people in some very tough environments in Afghanistan, Tajikistan, India, Pakistan, Kenya and Tanzania. These agencies deliver primary healthcare services through a network of 250 clinics and emergency response and preparedness following earthquakes, floods, or manmade conflicts. I thought I would share a few people stories with you.

One of my trips to the Karakorum Mountains in Pakistan we were talking with the community about the impact the water and sanitation program had on its 250 inhabitants. Water was pumped half a kilometer uphill to reach the village and had transformed the way people lived. A spunky older woman in the village came up to me with her hot pink dupatta scarf and said, "Now please give me a sewing machine so we can sew for the community". With some personal donations we were able to get her closer to her goal.

There is a lot of appetite in these countries for new ideas and learning so one of the very interesting initiatives I have led has been the design and implementation of Safeguarding policies and training where there previously had been nothing. Harassment and abuse of power is not well understood in some of these communities and women and men are absolutely afraid to raise these issues out of fear. So here I am in Afghanistan working in English with Dari translation to guide 40 people through a sensitization training on this topic. At one point a former military head in the Afghan army put his hand up and said, "I am very proud I have 2 wives". He was thinking I might be shocked or give him a sign of disapproval but instead I said, "Lucky you- every culture has its advantages".

I never could have imagined after graduation that I might end up in a job like this where I get to help people in developing countries to think differently, see the vision of another possible world and to jump start their thinking in a new direction. So glad I moved from the corporate world into the developing world in my career and can't wait to see what's next.



## From alumna Barb Candlish

Hey Oconto Alumnae!

Recently I have had the pleasure of a resurgence of Camp Oconto in my life and it feels like I have come home. As I reflect on all the adventures, opportunities and communities I have been fortunate to be a part of, my time at Camp Oconto shines through.

The friendships, community and mindset that Camp Oconto fosters is invaluable. Campers and staff are encouraged and supported to be themselves and take pride in who they are. The person I am proud to be today was influenced from those 10 incredible summers I had on the shores of Eagle Lake.

In 2017 I left my tech world job and joined Toronto based fitness company, [All Day Fit](#). I was craving that community feeling. I needed to find somewhere I could grow and flourish with others.

All Day Fit is a 360° approach to health and wellness that delivers strength training, nutrition, recovery and mindset education to a connected community, eager to get the best out of life. Our mission is to cheer you on at every step, encouraging you to discover the strength you have within yourself.

Our motivation is driven by a sense of purpose and growth. We know that everybody is different and every body is different. We bring awareness to who you are, how you feel and what your body can do.





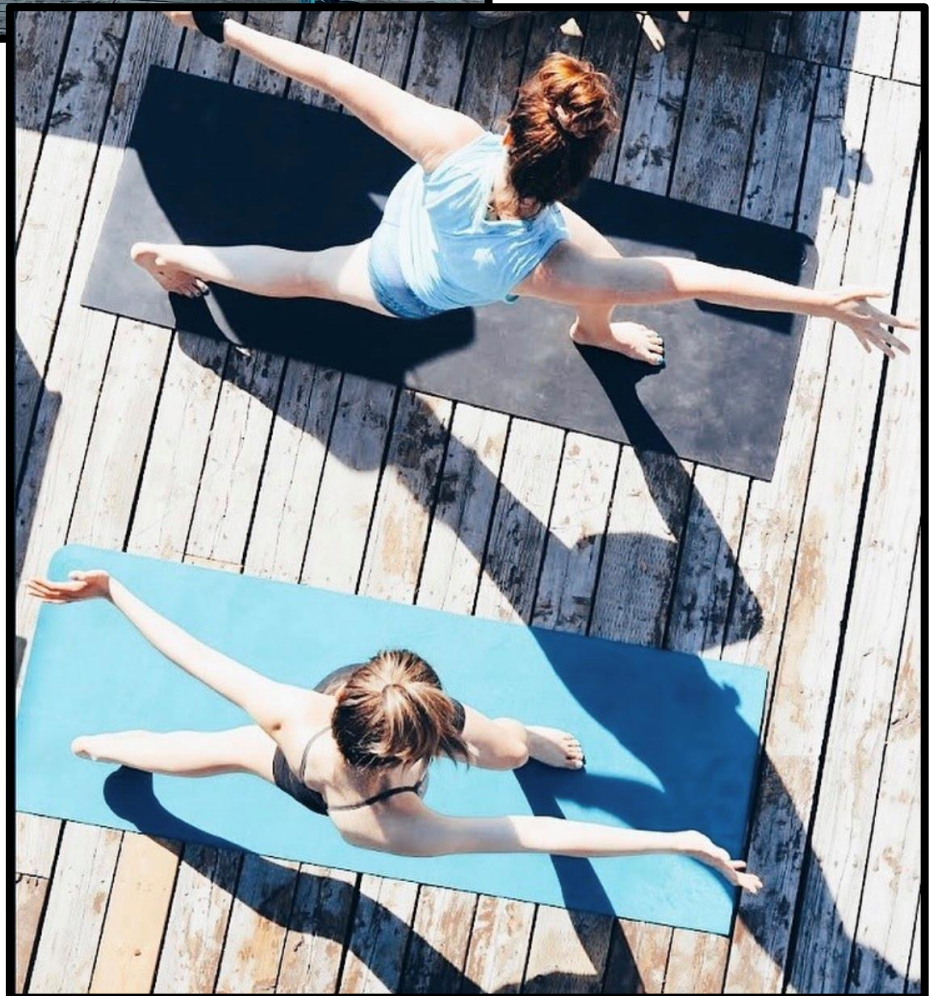
The heartbeat of All Day Fit is community. Humans are social beings – we thrive in social interactions. Whether an introvert, or extrovert, or somewhere in the middle, we all possess a need to belong to some kind of community.

Last summer, we brought 25 guests and 5 coaches to Camp Oconto for what we called ‘Summer Camp.’ Summer Camp was a weekend filled with workouts, workshops, evening programs, activities and of course, campfires. I was SO excited to show my community Camp Oconto and let me tell you, everyone was blown away.

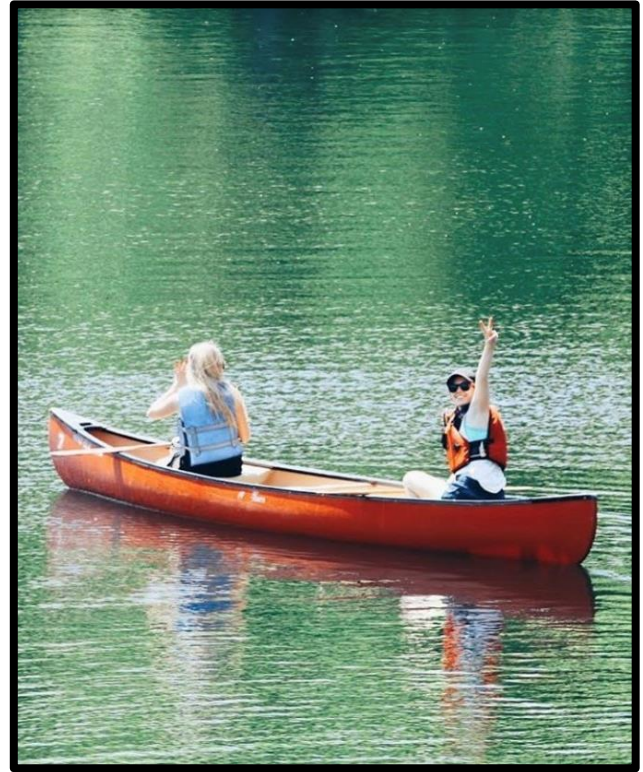
The group was amazed by the sheer beauty of camp, the welcomeness of the staff and the magic that is Oconto. They got to experience what being a camper was like for one weekend and are STILL talking about it.

When COVID hit we had to cancel our Summer Camp plans for 2020. We did however, take all of our workouts and classes online in what we call the [All Day Everyday Online Hub](#). During these weird times, we have been able to maintain and grow our kickass community. We even had the pleasure of ten Oconto 2020 staff joining us in the Online Hub for some workouts!

I would LOVE for anyone that is looking for that sense of community again or wants to try







a workout with All Day Fit to reach out ([barbara@alldayfit.com](mailto:barbara@alldayfit.com)). All Day Fit leaves room for reflection and draws in the connection of your training, nourishment, sleep, ability to manage stress and energy levels. We empower you with education, autonomy and a new perspective on how to approach your fitness for years to come.

All Day Fit isn't a workout, it's a way of living, in our bodies, proud and present every day. It's real connections, support and friendships. Our ethos is to look inwards, grow our minds, be strong and enjoy life.

Camp Oconto celebrated its 97<sup>th</sup> season this year.  
While 2020 has been like no other, 2021 is going to rock!  
Camp is going to be needed by young people, more than ever – for many reasons.  
We want to give a special thank you, high five, and shout out to all alumnae who have been so supportive of Oconto through this very difficult year.  
Your letters and words of encouragement mean so much.  
***"We hate to part, but in our hearts, we WILL return there once again."***



Want to stay caught up with Camp Oconto through social media?  
Follow us on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube!

