

Morry Stein – A True Hero

All people have the capabilities and motives to fulfill their aspirations. This quality is what defines human beings. There are many people that, after much dedicated effort, are able to actualize their dreams. However, heroes are not considered to be those who simply achieve their dreams, rather the individuals that reach this self-actualization and further their efforts. A hero is someone who has a great sense of courage and selflessness and that performs tasks in order to benefit others. Rather than looking out for the interest of themselves, heroes do so for people in need of help with a great sense of passion for what they do. Morry Stein, upon his introduction to the camping industry, immediately became devoted to providing memorable summers for each of his campers. Throughout his years in this field and after gaining an especially positive reputation, Morry was able to prove to his colleagues that he was a dedicated and passionate member of the camp world. Additionally, his leadership skills made him a camping icon for years to come, as well as a true role model for those who would continue his legacy and the overall success of the camping industry. His involvement in summer camps resulted in a dream that would, in future years, aid the development of all types of children. Morry Stein is remembered as a hero because his passion for the gift of summer camp extended past those who could afford it, which led to the establishment of multiple programs that benefit the growth and development of children.

Maurice B. Stein was born in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania in 1936. He grew up in a Jewish family in this small town alongside his older brother, who had a birth defect, and under the protection and care of his parents, George and Rose. Bloomsburg was not the most affluent of communities and, additionally, had an extremely low population of Jewish people, twenty families, the Steins being one of them. Along with the finest of Jewish family traditions, George imposed the importance of sports upon Morry. The father-son duo could often be seen playing sports, such as baseball and basketball, but especially football. With not much financial support, Morry knew that he would only be able to attend college through scholarships and worked himself all through high school in order to gain those grants. In total, sixty-eight colleges offered Morry full scholarships. His final choice was Brandeis, a school that valued many of the same elements of

life that his family valued, Judaism and football. In his years while attending, Morry met the woman who, in later years would become his wife, Amy Medine (Leventhal 4-6).

Morry Stein was a true businessman. He graduated from Brandeis University in 1958, and soon after, attended the University of Chicago in order to earn his M.B.A. (1960). With an education under his belt, he then entered the business world for short while before his involvement in camps (Gelder). Having the experience that he did in business, Morry was later able to see not only the recreational parts of camp for campers and staff, but also the business aspects. He was aware of what steps needed to be taken to improve the camp experience, such as a higher tuition in order to allow the purchase of better materials to be used around the camp. Morry also knew what appealed to prospective campers and their families and could alter certain factors accordingly. He did this with the end-all goal of growing camp experiences.

Morry's true welcoming to the camp community occurred in the year 1964. After being exposed to the wonders that camp provided through his wife, Amy, he purchased Camp Echo Lake from his in-laws, who had founded it in 1946. Under his leadership, "the camp expanded to 150 acres and its enrollment grew from 80 campers to about 450, boys and girls ages 8 to 17" (Gelder). At a mere twenty-eight years old, it is unfathomable to think that a single person would take such a leap of faith with such a determined mindset; however, this is the reason why Morry truly stood out from all other camp directors in years to come. Although camp was rapidly growing, a key value that was upheld throughout this time was the value of each individual camper and his or her contribution to the camp community. His efforts in innovating the camp experience, along with the support of Amy, were truly remarkable and left a lasting impression on Camp Echo Lake as a whole.

After his purchase of Camp Echo Lake, Morry's passion for camp strengthened year after year. He became increasingly involved in camp on a state as well as national level by being a "former president of the American Camping Association and its New York section as well as a former president of the New York State Camp Directors Association" (Gelder). Morry was an extremely philanthropic man. This quality of his prompted his goal to make camp experiences available to all children. As a result, Morry invited the first inner-city children to attend the Echo Lake Idea in 1970, the week after the Echo Lake

camp season ended (Nicodemus). By reaching out to these communities and opening Echo Lake to the less fortunate, Morry was able to impact a multitude of people. His idea of charity was far different from any other. Morry was able to provide experiences and memories that would last a lifetime. In this simple, one week program, both campers and counselors would learn the value of camp that was so well reflected with the morals that Morry set forward. At the time of its establishment, the Echo Lake Idea was the only one of its kind. Instead of taking control, as most camp owners would, Morry simply drove the camp bus and allowed staff to enhance their leadership skills and take charge of camp activities (Leventhal 54). Morry took control in an incredibly subtle way. He found pleasure in the most simple of activities and preferred to sit back and watch the campers and staff grow and develop as individuals. The children were given the incredible opportunity to experience the wonders of camp and, as a result of this, their most positive personal qualities were enhanced. The environment that he created was welcoming of all ages, sizes, genders, and so many other differences, that the Idea was a true home to creativity and uniqueness. In August of 1973, Morry, Jerry Herman, who was an active staff member of the Idea for a number of years, and the Idea campers, were at a drop-off location at the end of the summer, and Jerry describes Morry by saying, "His warmth, his charm, his presence, his energy and his genuine concern for all children came through... it was all so easy for him because he was living one of his dreams – using the power of outstanding residential camping to make a better world for its participants – be they Idea or our eight-week CEL campers" (Leventhal 39). The Echo Lake Idea was a place where an individual had opportunities to grow as a person, and Morry's efforts, while physically small, contributed to the lives of each and every camper that completed the program.

On October 31, 1994, American Eagle Flight 4184 crashed in Roselawn, Indiana, and Morry was one of many to pass in this tragic happening. He was flying home to Hartsdale, New York from the board meeting taking place at the American Camping Foundation's headquarters in Martinsville, Indiana (Singer). Morry's death was devastating for so many people. Throughout his time in the camping industry, he had affected so many children as well as adults with his giving personality and extensive outreach programs and organizations. Morry's vision was always to extend the privilege of camp to children that

may be less fortunate. Being chairman of the American Camping Foundation, he was able to raise over one million dollars that would be given to children to experience the magic of summer camp. Morry's legacy would live on through the memories of those people that he touched and the work that would be done to continue to live out his dream for so many others to come in future years.

After his death, those who he affected came together in order to create Morry's Camp, which is a camp entirely based off of Morry's vision that was created to further the dream that he presented to campers, counselors, and colleagues. Within the very first year of its establishment, Morry's Camp raised \$500,000 through private donors (Singer). "In 1995, inspired by his dream and to ensure that his vision of summer camp for all children became a reality, Morry's friends, colleagues, campers, alumni of Echo Lake and his family created "Morry's Camp". In Fall 2007, the name "Project Morry" was adopted to communicate the full scope of the year-round youth development organization and reflect the comprehensive educational programming" (Leventhal 4). Morry was such an iconic character in the camp community that the ideas that he left behind had to be made a reality. Giving to the underprivileged has extended past charities and has resulted in this dedication to a single person and his or her success. Project Morry does not just simply live up to the expectations that Morry had for his original Echo Lake Idea campers. It has grown past the simple camp experience and has granted campers the opportunity to improve their education and overall lives. Camps around the Adirondacks such as Camp Echo Lake, as well as the country have dedicated parts of their summers for their campers to participate in activities that will benefit Project Morry, and the results of these efforts have left a lasting impact on the prosperity of the organization. Additionally, each camper is invested in for a number of years, but most continue the program through all nine years. As a result of this commitment to each and every child, the participants benefit in all areas of their lives and leave with better social skills, a higher level of confidence, and most importantly, a greater sense of responsibility in their lives. The ambitions that Morry displayed throughout the course of his life allowed for the creation of this incredible organization that gives opportunities to children that will further influence their lives in a positive manner.

Both the Echo Lake Idea and Project Morry exemplify Morry Stein and his zeal for the growth of children and young adults no matter their socioeconomic status. As of today, the Echo Lake Idea has impacted thousands of campers and has carried on Morry's dream for over forty years. Project Morry continues to thrive and currently aids hundreds of children per year, upholding its one hundred percent graduation and overall success rate. Dawn Ewing is the executive director of Morry's Camp and knew Morry well before his tragic death. She describes Morry by saying, "He was a role model. Someone who pushed you so hard but with the idea that he believed you could do it. He gave people opportunities and believed in them. Belief is a powerful thing" (Nicodemus). Morry was a true believer. He exemplified all of the qualities of a great leader and his outreach to neighboring communities made him a hero in the eyes of so many. A remarkable aspect of this however, is that these people came from various social circumstances. Morry was able to overlook the people's differences and create a sense of equality within the Echo Lake community and the Echo Lake Idea community and was the inspiration of this community for Morry's Camp. Echo Lake's Mission Statement is "dedicated to human development," and Morry was an active example of this very phrase. His simple goal was to create experiences that would only benefit the overall growth of society's young people. Heroes, like Morry, take simple goals and use them to create complex ideas and programs that improve the lives of others. They are committed to ensuring that these will be followed through so that they may affect others that are in need of this support. The overall results of these programs may be overlooked, but their impacts have the ability to change the world. One hero can significantly affect hundreds of thousands of people. This is a remarkable concept because it proves that the world can truly flourish and reach new heights based on the simplistic parts of society.

Works Cited

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