



A History of Camp at

Dedicated to Founders: *Jeffrey Robbins and Eileen Salmanson*
Brigham and Women's Hospital, Department of Neurology

And Original Directors: *Camp Program Director: Sarah Bloor*
Activities Director: Ian Moorehouse
Medical Director: Edward Bromfield, MD,
Brigham and Women's Hospital, Department of Neurology



Who can imagine a time when the New England epilepsy community had no place to meet, play, and live with others who also have epilepsy? For those who have been to The Purple Camp, it's difficult. Until the summer of 1998, only a camp for Connecticut residents existed. This is the story of how the rest of us got our own remarkable camp.

One day in 1997, Jeffrey Robbins and Eileen Salmanson – two social workers from Brigham and Women's Hospital Department of Neurology – decided to attend the American Epilepsy Society Conference. There, they learned of Camp Great Rock, an extraordinary one-week program in Virginia for children with epilepsy. The important developmental role it played in many campers' lives was striking, and Robbins and Salmanson were amazed that there was nothing like it for local Massachusetts and Rhode Island children. The two shared thoughts and built a commitment from which was born Camp Wee-Kan-Tu, the forerunner to The Purple Camp.

They travelled to Camp Great Rock, getting a sense of what a successful camp would be like. Starting from scratch, using grants and funds from a few kind benefactors, they began to put plans into action. With the help of Ian Moorehouse, then director of Camp Wing (where the original Camp Wee-Kan-Tu was located), came the camp's successful launch – 50 campers, aged eight through sixteen, and 45 counselors in its first year. Dr. Edward Bromfield, director of the epilepsy program at Brigham and Women's Hospital was the resident epileptologist, ensuring immediate care should the campers or counselors need medical attention. Marie Hennessey and Sarah Bloor from the Epilepsy Foundation of Massachusetts and Rhode Island joined the crew.

Kids with epilepsy now had a camp especially for them. For five days, they slept in cabins, participated in a range of activities, including swimming, boating, and even climbing a 50-foot wall. Most important, the campers learned that they had a community that saw them as no different from others. They made close friends, as many remain so to this day. The camp's ethos – **having epilepsy should never stop you from reaching your goals** – was reinforced at every opportunity.

Working with the Epilepsy Foundation of Massachusetts and Rhode Island (now Epilepsy Foundation New England), Robbins and Salmanson's camp continued to flourish and does so now as Purple Camp, its expanded program. Nonetheless, the core commitment to showing campers that epilepsy should never stand in their way remains as vibrant as that first opening day.

