



November 16, 2021

Dear Members of the Keewaydin Community,

With a legacy of service, commitment and leadership spanning her five-decade career with Keewaydin in place, Ellen Flight will be retiring as Director of Songadeewin after the summer of 2022. Beloved and revered by hundreds of campers and staff, Ellen has been Songa's only Director since the camp reopened in 1999. It is impossible to overstate Ellen's impact on Songadeewin. Her vision, energy and leadership molded and nurtured the camp to become what it is today: one of the most respected and successful girls' camps in the country.

Ellen's relationship with Keewaydin dates back to 1958 and 1959, when she spent the first two summers of her life on Dunmore, where her father, David, was Waramaug Director. When she was old enough, she attended Songadeewin on Lake Willoughby, where she spent every summer from 1967-1974, progressing from Mattagami to CIT. She joined the Songadeewin staff in 1975, but was heartbroken after that summer when it was announced the camp was closing. An offer from Abby Fenn to be the camp babysitter brought her back to Keewaydin Dunmore in 1977. Displaying an unusual level of responsibility, she was offered the job of running the Wangan Room, a position she held from 1978-1986. When Dan Patch decided to step down as Annwi Director after the summer of 1988, Waboos asked Ellen to take on the challenge of running the youngest age group at camp. She became only the second woman director at Keewaydin (the first being Mrs. Duke, who ran Annwi from 1944-1956). For the next ten years, from 1989-1998, she stewarded Annwi through some of its most successful summers.

But a bigger role was still awaiting Ellen! In 1995 the Keewaydin Foundation purchased the Camp Dunmore property on the west shore of Lake Dunmore with the goal of eventually making it a girls' camp. In 1998, Executive Director Jim Wacker and the Foundation board asked Ellen if she would lead this new camp. Eager for the opportunity and undaunted by the challenges, she enthusiastically accepted! She spent one full year preparing, including researching many other girls' camps in the Northeast. By the time the new Songadeewin of Keewaydin opened in the summer of 1999, Ellen had a vision for the camp that combined the best of the old Songa, the tripping program of Dunmore, and ideas she learned from other camps.

From that first summer, when 40+ brave girls and 15 staff enjoyed the inaugural season, Songadeewin has done nothing but flourish. Within a few years, its enrollment grew to 125 (per month). Campers were experiencing the adventure of tripping from the Green Mountains to the Saranacs to the Rangeley Lakes, with the first group of senior girls going to Verendrye in 2003. Old traditions like the Carnival and Old Timers' Day were revived. New ones like Halloween, Valentine's Day, and the Songathon were started. The physical plant has been transformed since 1999. Of the many new or renovated structures, the signature buildings have been the Fraser Dining Hall, the Harter Lodge, the Arts Village, and "The Lolly" (a.k.a. the Wangan Room). Ellen was intimately involved in all of these projects, from the earliest design planning to the selection of hardware and

wood stain tints. The camp is wildly popular—its retention rate, frequently above 90%, has been the highest of the three Foundation camps!

Ellen's love for Songadeewin—its mission, its campers and its staff—is self-evident to all who know her. Her dedication has been total. Hundreds of campers and staff have grown up under Ellen and see her as one of the most important role models and mentors in their lives. Everyone associated with Songadeewin and Keewaydin—campers, staff, and parents—owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Ellen for what she has created and accomplished as Director of Songadeewin.

The search for a new Director for Songadeewin will begin immediately. Our goal is to have a new director selected by the spring who will work side by side with Ellen this coming summer. If you know of anyone who might be interested in the position, please have them contact [pete@keewaydin.org](mailto:pete@keewaydin.org).

Below, please find Ellen's letter to the Keewaydin and Songadeewin community.

Keewaydinly,



Pete Hare  
Executive Director



Dark green canoes upon a Vermont lake,  
Girls becoming Strong of Heart, what does it take?  
Friendships so deep and loving guidance, do,  
Trips, the arts, activities and nature, too.  
(Tune: *White Coral Bells*)

Dear Songa Community,

I wrote the words to the short round above for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Songadeewin on Lake Dunmore hoping to capture those aspects of camp which make Songa so special to campers and staff. It certainly says to me ways in which Songa has made a difference in my life and that of so many others. After several years of contemplating when it will be right to retire I have decided that 2022 will be my last summer as Director of Songadeewin. 2022 will be my 24<sup>th</sup> as Songa director and 43<sup>rd</sup> season working for Keewaydin. I turn 65 in September 2022 and the time for me to move into the next phase of life and for Songadeewin to move into a new era is now.

Starting Songadeewin on Lake Dunmore in 1999 was something I wrote on a list I created in 1995 of 100 things I wanted to do with the rest of my life. Little did I know, nor could I imagine, all that it would take to create a summer camp even with the full backing of the Keewaydin Board, my 19 years of working in various positions at Keewaydin Dunmore, and my nine summers as a child at Songadeewin on Lake Willoughby. Perhaps it was not knowing all that would be involved, but feeling deeply that this was important work for the girls and women who would come through our gates to experience a camp with the best of Keewaydin and Songadeewin combined. Having grown up at an all girls' camp and knowing the way it helped develop me as a person and taught me to feel capable, I wanted to create similar experiences for more modern times after the 24 years that had elapsed since the closing of my beloved camp on Lake Willoughby.

From the earliest years of Songa on Dunmore to last summer, I feel proudest when I hear campers and staff talk about how much they love Songadeewin, when they write songs and sing lustily about the values I have hoped to inspire within them, and when I see the deep life-long friendships they have made at Songa. These things come from their time on Lake Dunmore, out on trips and through participating in the ceremonies and traditions of our camp.

Now, having successfully shepherded the camp I love for more than 20 years, through the world-wide pandemic of the last two years and seen from my friends outside of camp the joys of retirement, while bittersweet, it is time for me to step into the next phase of my life and for Songa to move forward with new leadership. This next transition, the change of leadership, is an important next step for the long-term resilience of Songa. As author and activist Arundhati Roy said in a different context, but that rings true to me in the moment: "Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing."

With Songa Spirit and love,