



# From The Heart

News for the Strong of Heart

Spring 2024

## From the Director

### Greetings from Songadeewin and Lake Dunmore!

Spring has arrived here on Lake Dunmore and the Songadeewin campus is beginning to awaken. If we are really paying attention in early spring time, we can sense the change coming — surroundings which have become familiar, from the lake to the Manor House to Fraser Dining Hall and the spaces in between which form the heart of our campus, are at work leaving behind their wintry blues and greys. And suddenly, before our eyes burst lime green sprouts and all of the newness and hope of spring.

Fifth grade students from Vermont elementary schools are arriving with their teachers as part of the Keewaydin Environmental Education Center (KEEC). KEEC's staff of outdoor educators will lead investigations in ecology and natural sciences using the outdoor classroom of Songa's 60 acre campus. Then, as KEEC's season comes to a close in late May, the very first of Songa's staff arrive to prepare for our summer, to begin training our new Songa staff and prepare to welcome our campers for our 26th summer on Lake Dunmore.

Looking ahead to summer, enrollment is robust; the first month  
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(L to R) Eloise Van Alen, Miranda Gluck, Addie Dunakin, Charlotte Derman, Maddie Widener, Lilly Mangham, Sina Adams, Chloe Long

### Reflections on Songa Wilderness 2023

*In July of 2023, eight intrepid Songa Wilderness trippers ventured north into Labrador and Quebec for 28 days, led by Annika McGraw and HJ Wilson. The following are two pieces written by Wilderness trippers, Maddy Widener and Charlotte Derman, reflecting on the group's journey and the lessons they carry with them now, 9 months after their return.*

#### Wilderness 2023 by Maddy Widener '17

Looking back at Songa Wild months later, I'm amazed at how much I learned and grew during the trip. During this experience, I learned to live each day through a routine of paddling and portaging as our crew would adventure through the remote

wilderness. Living in nature, away from the distractions of daily life, allowed me to truly connect with my surroundings.

Spending all my time with the same small group of people, relying on and working together to navigate challenges, forged unbreakable bonds between us. Being isolated from the real world allowed me to build special connections as we have seen each other at our weakest and strongest,

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of camp is full and second month has just a few spaces left in our Wabasso, Mattagami, and Nawaiwan groves. For staffing updates, I am thrilled to share that we will welcome back Gabby Ramseyer as our Program Director during the second month of camp and Mandy Paulsen during the first month of camp to lead activities and drama. Both Gabby and Mandy are bringing their two children to camp who will participate in the Saplings program. We are happy to welcome their families and husbands, both of whom were on staff at Keewaydin Dunmore, back to Songa and Keewaydin this summer.

As we begin the crescendo toward summer, I hope you will take time to go outside, to explore the natural world around you, to notice and wonder, whether alone or perhaps with a friend.

Spending time in nature and making time to connect with friends and family offers us an easy-to-practice antidote to some of life's stressors. So this spring, remember Songa! Go outside, take a bike ride, knock on a friend's door, and make time to do what makes you feel alive. Then share your stories and adventures with us!

In the meantime, those of us who are lucky enough to be preparing to spend another summer on Lake Dunmore are hard at work creating and cultivating a magical and essential space where today's Songa girls can play, use their bodies, build skills, step out of their comfort zones, and discover a newfound confidence.

I hope to see you on  
Lake Dunmore soon!

With Songa Spirit,



## Open Houses and Recruitment

During the fall and winter, a Camp Director's job is anything but 'quiet!' Let me share with you some of the happenings from the off season and our recruiting season. Beginning last fall, our recruiting efforts took me to Washington D.C, Philadelphia, New York, and beyond. Pete Hare and I were graciously hosted by several Songadeewin and Keewaydin families where we caught up with campers and parents alike and shared stories from camp with prospective families.

The Thiede Family opened their Alexandria, Virginia home together with their four children, J.D., Lucy, Ellie, and Freddie. It was a crisp fall day and the many kids in attendance were thrilled to learn an outdoor fire pit was ready and waiting to bring back camp memories, complete with roasting marshmallows and s'more-making! Next, we headed north to New York City and Mamaroneck where Ele Esposito and her family held a lively gathering with incredible homemade Mexican food. Here, we caught up with Anyi and Zoe Chen and had the opportunity to meet several girls and boys who are excited to come to camp for the first time this summer.

Then we headed downtown to the Mustin Family's Manhattan home where we ate delicious NY pizza, chatted with camp friends, and experienced a standing-room-only viewing experience for our camp slideshow and video! Eileen Angelo and her family hosted a Los Angeles area open house and the Bellino-Johnston Family hosted us in Manchester, Vermont, where



Pete Hare represented Songa in my absence. Many thanks to our hosts!

Not only are our open houses an incredible way to reconnect with Songa and Keewaydin families during the off season, but they are an essential way that we can share what is special about our camp and spread the word to new campers. I look forward to hitting the road again next fall and winter to reconnect and talk about camp! If your family would like to host a gathering, please let us know.

## Songa Campus Updates

### Basketball Court

The Songadeewin basketball court will be getting an upgrade this spring! In addition to the installation of new 'standards', including poles, backboards, and basketball hoops at each end of the court this spring, with support from the York House and Songa's Work Crew, we will undertake a deep cleaning of the court's blacktop itself, as well as pruning and clearing low lying brush which had grown in around the western side of the court. Our new hoops will be adjustable, enabling our younger girls to practice and play with a lower hoop for learning and skill acquisition. We can't wait to inspire the next generation of basketball players as we were all wowed by Caitlin Clark, Paige Butler, and other talented women athletes and role models at this year's NCAA tournament! Looking ahead to Summer 2025, plans are in place to remove the current basketball court surface and



L to R: Penelope Katz, Tess Jones (Staff), Francie Garner, Daniela Morales (Staff), Bay Miles

replace it with an upgraded, sealed, and painted asphalt surface.

### Saplings Program Update

In Summer 2022, Ellen Flight launched the Saplings program for children of Songadeewin staff who are living at camp. Now in its third summer, the Saplings Program is an age appropriate outdoor program designed for children ages 3 to 6 which takes place on Songa's campus alongside camp. Daniela Morales, a bilingual educator from Mexico, will be back on staff for



her third summer where she will spend much of her time combining her greatest interests — children and nature!

### New Wooded Play Yard on West Side

This year, Daniela will arrive early to work with a Montessori school early childhood educator from Southern Vermont and their work will focus on honing the Saplings daily schedule and activities. They will also set up the Saplings' new lodge, which will be based in a cabin on the West Side of campus. In addition to relocating the Saplings indoor space used for rest hour and inclement weather, we have identified a small grove of trees and a grassy open space on the West Side where we will create a fenced in play yard. The play yard will form the heart of the Saplings program where children can engage with the natural world, learn, build, practice free play as well as take part in structured activities led by Saplings staff.

A Saplings Beach will be sited on the West Side of campus, with the welcome addition of some sand for playing and a small, roped in swimming area along the rocky shoreline. Saplings kids will have many opportunities to practice and get comfortable in the water and work on beginning swimming skills. Saplings staff will be certified in lifeguarding and one staff is a Water Safety Instructor. I look forward to welcoming six new Saplings to camp this summer and recognize that this program is making it possible for talented educators in the Songadeewin and Keewaydin communities to envision a return to camp with their young families.

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and experienced tears and laughter together, which has brought us all so much closer. Although it was challenging at times, we always came out stronger on the other side.

This experience has left a permanent mark on me. I'm more grounded, resilient, and connected to nature. I have a greater appreciation for simplicity, community, and self-reflection. I find myself constantly reflecting on lessons I learned about leadership, perseverance, and adaptability. These lessons will guide me as I prepare for college and navigate future challenges.

If I could give advice to future Wilderness trippers, it would be to fully embrace the uncertainty, be open to growth

and transformation, and soak up every moment, because it will be over before you know it. I'll be forever grateful to Songa Wild for providing me with such a life-changing opportunity where I was able to challenge myself and create long-lasting friendships with my best friends through such amazing, unique experiences.

## Wilderness 2023

by *Charlotte Derman '16*

This past summer I lived an isolated, nomadic lifestyle in the Canadian wilderness that changed my life. Nine girls and women joined me as we canoed through the white water rivers of the arctic

watershed for approximately 500 miles. After seven years of shorter trips I thought I was ready for the isolation, but the only other people we saw were the man that flew a sea plane to drop off a resupply of food for us on day 18, and the crew of train workers who picked us up on day 29, none of whom spoke English. We paddled for days through mountains devastated by wildfires and under an orange sun from smoke and haze. We existed in, and relied on, nature for safe travels every day.

As we crossed out of the waters of Quebec and into Newfoundland, not only did the time zone change, but so did the weather. We experienced high winds, 40° weather, and freezing rain every day. I will never forget one day in particular. We had paddled for six

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## Amelia

by *Isi Maat '23*

Amelia, she's a great friend.  
She helps and tends and  
tidies your bends.  
She's always there when  
you're in trouble  
and stands up for you and  
makes your heart bubble.  
We are in Aspen together,  
which makes me feel  
we'll be friends forever.

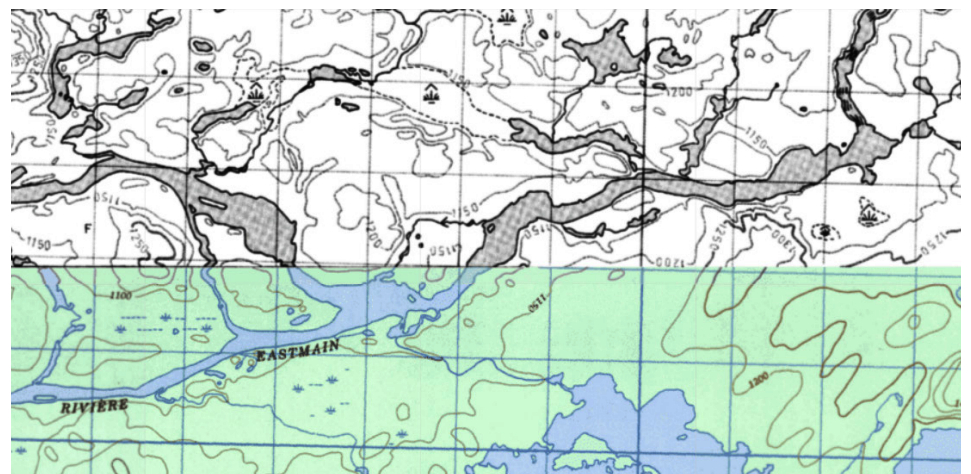


hours when we reached our canoe carry. We crawled out of the boats, almost in tears. We desperately tried to start a fire with wet wood and without the ability to feel our hands. When we finally started a fire, we threw off our wet hiking boots and huddled in front of the fire, taking shifts to brave the cold and collect wood. On the next trail nine of us got lost, including both of the staff members. As I was carrying my 100 pound canoe on my shoulders through the thigh deep mud, I found my best friend laying in the trail. I screamed for help. She had fallen down hard. We were tired and scared, and it was already five o'clock. We had been up for 12 hours, and had a lot more ground to cover. We helped her into a boat and kept going; we had to. As we left the last trail of the day, the sun came out, and with it, a rainbow. We saw four more rainbows that day. The vivid rainbows of the day helped us remember why we were there and why we loved being in nature.

This day was not the first and certainly not the last challenge we faced, but this, along with the other bad days taught me a very important lesson. As we woke up the next morning, that day was behind us, and life moved on. Although the sun was still hiding and the air numbed our noses, the lake was glassy and still. None of us thought we could, but we got back in our boats, and kept going. We realized not every day will be cold, not every day will be painful. We proudly paddled

away from those woods knowing we persisted through daunting challenges and that we were ready to face whatever came our way. We continued on through the rest of our trip with smiles even when it was hard. We saw the rain cross the lake before it froze us to the bone and we still called it beautiful.

As I move through the rest of my life I will take this lesson with me. Not everything is in my control and I have to accept change. I know that bad days end, even when they feel like they won't, and there is always hope right around the bend. The greatest lessons I have ever learned in life were found on rivers and lakes, disconnected from the outside world. The woods taught me so much about myself; despite the fact that living there felt so strange. The lessons I learned this past summer will remain with me. I want to teach others how to love and live in nature just like I do.



*Close-up of a section of the Eastmain River which involves a descent in the second half of the trip.*

## Songa Wild 2024: Trip Itinerary

by Noah Knight '08

This summer, Songa Wild's crew will venture into the largely untouched wilderness of Northwestern Quebec. They will begin their 30 day expedition on the southern shore of Lac Albanel, home to the Cree Nation of Mistissini. From there, the crew will head onto Lac Mistassani, the largest freshwater lake in Quebec. Since the lake is oblong, trippers will be privy to water horizons to the northeast and southwest as they cut across its width to the opening of the Wabissinane River. Paddling upstream, the crew will continue north to Lac Baudeau and eventually reach the southwest running Tichegami River. After spending several days portaging and paddling upstream, they will turn west and enter Rivière Kaachiistiseshich, known to Keewaydin as the Little George River.

Briefly detouring off the river, the crew will receive their resupply via

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float plane on Lac Lavallette. After returning to the Kaachiistiseshich, the crew will follow the river west, eventually joining with the Eastmain River. This section of the trip will feature regular portaging and whitewater until turning south into Lac de la Maree then west again into the Keewaydin-named Moon River. The trip will end just above Rupert Junction, taking out at the Rupert River Dam.

This route covers hundreds of miles of majestic terrain and historical scenery. Both the Cree people and the Hudson Bay Company have used these rivers and lakes for trapping and trading going back centuries. The route will go into both the Cree Nation of Eastmain and the Cree Nation of Nemiscau.

While the terrain will be challenging, the rewards will be tremendous and beautiful. A large swath of Northwestern Quebec was overrun by forest fires in the summer of 2023, so sections of the route will show fire damage as well as the incredible regrowth process land undergoes after burning.

Untouched sections will be lush with rolling hills spotted with moss and forests of spruce, pine, birch, and fir trees. As with many canoe trips, waking up near dawn will allow trippers to witness fog clinging to the water and dissipating as the sun rises. On the clear nights, the sky will be filled with more stars than any camper typically sees at home. In some lucky instances, they may catch a glimpse of the Aurora Borealis, also known as the Northern Lights.

This incredible itinerary is made possible by decades of Keewaydin Dunmore and Keewaydin Temagami running trips in this region as well as Keewaydin's

## John Watson WORK WEEKEND

May 31 - June 2



**Mark Your Calendars!**

Help open up the campuses for the summer and enjoy some Keewaydin and Songadeewin cheer! John Watson Work Weekend is a great way to help out and reconnect with the camps you love!

**For more information contact:  
info@keewaydin.org**

Wilderness Program Director,  
Sam Brakeley. Many spectacular experiences await the Eastmain River Trippers of Songa Wild 2024. Let the countdown to July begin!

## Alumni Family Weekend on Lake Dunmore

August 22-25, 2024

Introduce your family to Songa and show them your favorite places on the shores of Lake Dunmore; or come alone and spend your weekend meeting new friends.

The event is hosted at Keewaydin Dunmore, but there will be events on the Songa campus too!

**Join us!**

For details and to register: [Keewaydin.org/Dunmore-reunion](https://www.keewaydin.org/Dunmore-reunion)





## Alumni News

Hazel Brewster '06 was appointed by Vermont Governor Phil Scott to serve on the Vermont Commission on Women.



Anna Thorne '22 graduated in November of 2023 and now holds her Masters of Forensic Psychology. She will begin a new job working in Victim Support, helping victims of crime.

Definitely “From the Heart” as Juniper Taylor Vercruyssee (MacCallum) was born on February 22, 2024 weighing 7.5 lbs and 20 inches long. Parents Tara MacCallum '05 and Dan Vercruyssee are in love with their baby girl. and of course Uncle Sean and could not be happier (Sean worked in the Songa kitchen).



Grandmom, Teresa ‘Nana’ MacCallum '91, is overjoyed as well.

Bianca Asma '05 walked the Camino de Santiago with Ashleigh Hogan '15 in the fall of 2023. She also reconnected with Vicky Salter '05 and met up with Kathryn Summers '07 for a few hours at Heathrow Airport (as she flew home to New Zealand and Kathryn flew in from Australia!). Bianca wrote to us, “I thought it would be great to show that friendships from around the globe made possible by Songa are still living on.”

Elena “Laney” McGahey '04 has started a graduate degree in Special Education and will take classes during the camp months so she won't be back at camp. She will miss the familiar routines and cherished moments of camp life, like waking up to the gong, enjoying Chef Theresa's breakfast hash,

learning from the staff on the leadership team, and witnessing campers' growth. Laney is going back to school to become an in-school learning specialist for adolescents with ADHD who struggle academically. Her dream is to empower these students to self-advocate, or “make waves” (last year's theme), so that they can find success in and out of the classroom. This journey has been greatly influenced by the Songa community.

Laney says “In March of 2020, Ellen Flight hired me to be the second month head of Willoughby;



I was three years out of college and I was in the process of making a career pivot. I told her that I had a hunch that working with adolescents was what I wanted to do, and also that my time at Songa had been very powerful for me. Ellen believed in me enough to give me a chance. It's an understatement to say that I'm very grateful to her. Working with the campers in Willoughby, and later across the entire camp, I learned how much I loved teaching young people as well as empowering them to ask for what they need. Without the staff and campers of Songa, I wouldn't know where I want to go, and I wouldn't be able to get there. Thank you, Songa! ‘Til we meet again.’



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