

In Memory of Jack Frost

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As I was letting people know of Jack's passing this week, one person stopped, turned towards me and said "Jack, he was a legend around Camp wasn't he?" Until then, I had not thought of that word to describe Jack but the more I did, the more I realized how apt it was. He most certainly was and still is a legend at Camp Kawartha.

In 1985 a building (now known as the Jack Frost Centre) was having an addition put on the west side. A group of men (many of whom were and still are, members of our Board of Directors) were eyeing a tree leaning precariously over where the extension was about to be built. It seemed like a nasty operation and there was a lot of collective humming and hawing over how best to go about removing that tree. And then there stood Jack, chainsaw at his feet. Although he was not known to the camp at this time, he volunteered his services. Even though he was in his mid fifties, Jack scampered up the tree, chainsaw dangling from one hand while he pulled himself up with the other. Without missing a beat, he clamped onto the tree with his legs, yanked on the pull cord and with some deft sawing, made short work of the tree. A legend was born at Camp Kawartha.

It was not long after this display of initiative that Jack was hired on as our maintenance man.

Over the 17 years that Jack worked at the Camp, he put far more energy, time and heart into his job than he was ever paid for. He cared deeply for the camp and became its' self appointed protector. There are stories of Jack chasing snowmobiles out of our property in his pick up truck or yelling at fishermen who had ventured too close to our swimming area.

Jack was not afraid to explain how the camp ought to be run to me or to my predecessor Rudy and he often did so, using colourful language to emphasize his point. He knew dozens of less than tasteful limericks, he could tell a marvelous story and he loved nothing better than a well told joke. He was also known for his quick wit and his priceless expressions, none of which I can repeat here though I would dearly love to do so.

Jack could fix just about anything from a broken water pipe under the dining hall to rewiring a cabin. Every building at our camp has been worked on and reworked by Jack and represents a thousand problems solved along with just about as many swear words.

He could have a gruff exterior but it covered a generous and kind heart. If you were in trouble Jack was always there to help. There are dozens of people here today who bear witness to his caring, though he would be the last one to admit it.

Many of our summer staff, even though they may have been a little frightened of Jack, admired him greatly. If a staff member ever borrowed one of Jack's tools but had the misfortune to lose it, then they were treated to a few choice expressions and several interesting words, perhaps some they had never even heard before. I want to read a letter from a past staff who e-mailed me not long ago which may give an idea of the kind of impact Jack had on those he worked with:

If this isn't the stuff of legends I don't know what is.

Last year, after Jack was diagnosed with cancer, he looked at me and said "Frosty is on his way out." When I look around the camp at all his efforts, when I hear people talk about Jack and when I think about the tremendous impact he had, I realize he is not "out" at all. He is in so many things and most of all, he is in our hearts.