

## **In Memory of Kim Vardy**

**Written by Adam Strasberg**

Sadly, on Tues. Oct. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 we lost a member of our Camp Kawartha Team.

When I hired Francis Kim Vardy in the pre-summer of 2014 on the recommendation of my busing consultant and mentor Eldon McCoy, I quickly discovered 2 similarities - we both referred to ourselves by our middle name and that we shared the same birthday.

Over the past 5 years, I got the privilege of learning so much more about Kim, including how we were similar in so many other ways including wearing our “hearts on our sleeve,” and regarding the welfare of children, campers and staff as our outmost professional responsibility.

Kim drove our camp buses over the past 5 years which included hauling up to 24 campers and staff followed by a trailer with up to 7-8 canoes as far away as the northern reaches of Algonquin and Killarney Provincial Parks. These journeys were 8-hour round trips and on many occasions, up to 12-14 hours. Based on my own experiences of driving our campers to canoe destinations, these drives are surprisingly exhausting so by the time you return, both you and the gas tank are, literally, at empty.

It was never got past Kim to go into the last hour of the journey and stop for Kawartha Dairy ice cream for the campers and staff – a camper’s reward for the personal growth and group achievement in making it through their 5-day or 11-day canoe trip.

Kim kept the trip schedule moving, getting our campers from Point A to Point B. These are journeys that could be anywhere from 50 km to 1000 km round trips. Kim drove all the roads – wet, dry, windy, dark, wide, narrow, asphalt and gravel. She drove trips when they were scheduled and when they were unscheduled. She picked up trips, staff or campers that needed to be evacuated at a moment’s notice because of minor emergencies and didn’t think twice about driving 850 km to drop off toothbrushes for a trip that had left them in the bus.

...and trips to the wilderness weren’t the only service she provided for Camp Kawartha. She used her personal car, the “Camp Kawartha Limo Service,” to pick up and drop off campers at Pearson airport right from the gate, making sure they were well fed after a long journey and delivering them to their camper cabin and bed to recover from jet lag and to begin their camp experience. She has dropped off campers and staff at a host of Ontario towns and cities to homes, bus and train stations. She even drove to Camp Kandalore twice at the end of this summer, to pick up and return a ropes specialist replacement to ensure our programs ran smoothly through our last camp session.

Our camper safety is of utmost importance and as a professional bus driver, this was always foremost on Kim's mind. There was great peace of mind as the Summer Camp Director, knowing that Kim was always available in this capacity to protect our campers in an activity (transporting campers) that potentially has a high impact of risk, but due to her experience, concern and professionalism, kept that probability of risk very low.

Kim was our "workhorse." She also spent a summer working in our kitchen protecting our campers and staff in another way, by giving them healthy and hearty meals, but it was the driving that she returned to and the closer connection it gave her with campers and staff that she loved.

On the evening of our annual Board Meeting at the camp in late August, Kim was pulling-in from a 400 km drive transporting our Challenge and Adventure program campers (from a mountain biking site to a Kayaking site) and getting ready to go home for a few hours sleep before returning to camp for 5am to pick-up our Wilderness Leadership program in Killarney from their 11-day canoe trip, an 850km round-trip that no doubt would include a stop for ice cream.

With our programming and counseling staff running around ensuring that campers are safe, looked after and provided maximum fun and growth. The heroics and abilities of Kim to a camper's summer camp experience can be easily overlooked, but the impact she has made on camp has been enormous as was her loss last week. We at the camp will be impacted not only by losing a great staff member, but that of a great person that brought joy to our campers and staff with her good cheer and her love for all things Camp Kawartha.

Her final night at camp, at our staff banquet, she was on such a high and felt so appreciated by the staff. Eldon says he will never forget seeing her so happy. A thank you goes out to the staff and campers who have welcomed Kim into our Camp Kawartha family over the past 6 summers.

To learn more about Kim's life, go to:

<https://hendrenfuneralhome.com/tribute/details/4641/Kim-Vardy/obituary.html#tribute-start>