



POSTCARDS

Hamilton Jordan 1944 ~ 2008

On May 20th, Camp Sunshine lost a dear friend with the passing of Hamilton Jordan, beloved husband of Founder Dorothy Jordan and father of Hamilton, Jr., Kathleen and Alexander. Jordan served as President Jimmy Carter's Chief of Staff, and in later years was an impassioned advocate for cancer research, having waged his own battles with multiple cancers. To many campers, he will always be remembered as the much-loved MC of the talent show and a caring friend. "Camp Sunshine has lost one of its dearest sons," noted longtime Camp Sunshine volunteer Duncan Dobie, "and I have lost a brother."

Hamilton was an ordinary man who did extraordinary things.

You would think he could be a person who was so full of himself. After all, he was the White House Chief of Staff for President Carter! I met Hamilton the first year of camp. There were 42 campers and a handful of staff. I must admit that I felt a bit intimidated by his presence initially. But it didn't take long to feel that you were his buddy. I dare say that I have never laughed so much or so hard in my life as those nights on the tennis courts with Hamilton, Mo (Trash) and Dan Garrett. He was genuinely interested in the campers' lives. He loved them and they loved him. Practical jokes, cheating at the camper-counselor football game, and oh, the talent show! I can't see

a navy windbreaker without thinking of him.

Hamilton was one of the smartest people I ever knew. I used to imagine being on "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" and having Hamilton as my "lifeline." He surely would know the answer to anything or convince you to tell him the answer. He was so analytical. A critical thinker, an educator, a storyteller.

How sadly ironic that Hamilton would immerse himself into the world of childhood cancer and then become a cancer patient, warrior, survivor and advocate. He meant so much to so many and leaves such a legacy. I will never forget him.

– **Becky Lavender, Longtime volunteer & social worker at Aflac Cancer Center**

I have so many warm memories of Hamilton Jordan. One of the first and fondest is when he took us to the Michael Jackson concert in Knoxville, TN. I was a teenager and had never been to a concert, nor had I been that far away from home without my parents. I remember Hamilton's kind eyes and warm smile when I climbed into the van. He teased me just like my brothers did and made me feel comfortable and safe. When we got to the concert, he made us all feel like VIPs and that everyone wanted to be us for just that one day. I've never forgotten how special Hamilton made me feel not just on that occasion but every time I saw him.

As I grew up and returned to Camp Sunshine as a volunteer,

I always looked forward to seeing Hamilton in the newspaper room, where we would plot and scheme a newsworthy story for the day. Sometimes he would come in and read the paper, and we would just sit and chat for a few minutes. No matter how busy he was, he always had time to sit and catch up with me every day he was at camp.

As I told my family, it is difficult to put into words, describing Hamilton and the emotional attachment we shared. It was special to me and something I shared with no one else – love, comfort, unity and hope for a cure.

– **Molly Casey, Former camper & current volunteer**

Prior to Camp Sunshine's first summer camp in 1983, Hamilton had recently returned from Washington and at the time he was literally a world-famous figure. After all of the stories that had come out of Washington, everyone at camp wondered what kind of person he really was. Would he be arrogant and stuck up? Would he be hard to approach and too important to talk to anyone? From Day 1, Hamilton was the biggest camper in camp! He was clearly there for the kids and he was always in the thick of things, always starting a food fight in the dining hall and always the life of the party. It was plain to see that he was totally in his element at Camp Sunshine. My first meeting with him involved a peanut butter fight in which several campers got the worst end of the deal.

Hamilton had that little-boy sense of wonder and mischief, and it was contagious. He was fun-loving, witty, full of energy and he was always up to something with the kids. The kids loved him! My 15-year-old daughter Katherine, who was a camper that first year, came up to me and said, "Daddy, I just love Hamilton. He is so genuine and he really cares about the kids!" Another young camper, Steve Davol, told me the same thing.

There were many great people at camp that first year, and everyone contributed in a special way, but Hamilton really set

the example for the great fun and unforgettable antics that would later become a Camp Sunshine trademark. That first camp was magical in many ways, and Hamilton was largely responsible for making it so. Because it was a small group of less than 40 campers, Hamilton formed lasting bonds and friendships with a number of the children. Some were not doing well and I have vivid pictures in my mind of Hamilton sitting in the infirmary cracking jokes and making sure that their week at camp was special. He gave everything he had to those amazing children.

After camp was over, he freely gave his phone number to several of the kids and they called him at home regularly. Steve Davol often bragged about the fact that he could "get Hamilton Jordan on the phone any time he wanted to!" And he could! Hamilton always made time for his special camp friends. He listened to what they had to say, he gave advice, and he was always there for them when they needed that extra-special ray of sunshine in their lives. He was a friend and a mentor to those children, and he had a significant impact on their lives.

At Hamilton's memorial service, President Carter ended his beautiful tribute by saying he had lost a son. Camp Sunshine has also lost one of its dearest sons, and I have lost a brother.

– **Duncan Dobie, Longtime volunteer**

As the female act ahead of me began her dance routine at the 1990 camp talent show, Hamilton Jordan, our MC, briskly closed the backstage curtain, bringing darkness to the stage area where a cowering 10-year-old boy stood, quivering with anxiety and nearing tears, his sausage-like arms not able to stay crossed against his prednisone-pudgy torso.

Hamilton crouched down to be eye-to-eye with the boy, putting that big, steady left hand on the boy's right shoulder, and compassionately appealed, "What seems to be the problem here?" This was my first and probably most vivid memory of Hamilton Jordan.

On the heels of the blockbuster movie, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, I had started that camp week determined to lip-sync the film's theme song for the talent show. From the moment I registered my act on Sunday to the Thursday night event, somehow the determination and confidence that helped glide my pen across the sign-up sheet had completely vaporized. I vaguely recall babbling an explanation through chattering teeth, but Hamilton still insisted, "You can do this. You would not have signed up if you didn't believe you could do it."

CLICK! There it was. Whether his overwhelming logic and reason spoke to me or the warmth of that big hand on my

shoulder physically calmed my nerves, who knows? I just know that an awesome sense came over me that this man believed I had it in me to do what I set out to do.

That confidence has helped me through the years. It helped me become the teenage "show boat" that I grew into and, luckily, out of! If not for Hamilton's encouragement and inspiration, I believe I would have grown up regretting many things.

For example, I would be living with regret from my teenage years that I didn't play that song on my guitar for that cute girl, Kelly Schwalen, in Cabin #9, later convincing her to become my steady girlfriend. As a Camp Sunshine counselor in 2005, I would be living with regret if I had not taken the chance of proposing to Kelly at the Camp Sunshine flag pole where we met 10 summers earlier – and then marrying her. I even credit Hamilton's brand of inspired confidence for the development of college survival tactics, including thesis speech preparation as well as job interview skills and general public speaking abilities.

I am firm in my conviction that had Hamilton Jordan not believed in me – in that one fleeting, traumatizing moment of childhood – that I would not have taken the risks I've taken and, in turn, I would not have received many of the rewards and blessings that have enriched my life

– **Vinnie Skelly, Former camper & current volunteer**

My memories of Hamilton go back to the talent show during “little kids” week. It was either my first or second year at camp, and my cabin decided to play a prank on Tricia (Benson). When Hamilton called us up for our skit, we gathered our sleeping bags and blankets, and draped them over us so that we transformed into a giant caterpillar. On stage, we became the amazing caterpillar that could jump, turn circles and even walk backwards. No one knew that we also were hiding water bottles!

Somehow Hamilton convinced Tricia to come up on stage

and lie down in front of the caterpillar. Then the caterpillar began the final trick – stepping over Tricia. Half-way through, we let loose with our water bottles and got her soaking wet. Oops, the caterpillar had an accident! I remember walking off that stage and seeing Hamilton smiling and clapping along with the rest of the audience. He made us feel so clever that day...that our skit was the best ever. He made us feel so proud of ourselves, for something as silly as a caterpillar skit. Hamilton was the best MC I have ever known...hands down.

– Kelly Ross, Former camper

Although Hamilton Jordan’s health made his extended attendance at Camp Sunshine difficult in the past few years, old-time campers and counselors will remember him being there from day one.

Though Hamilton’s direct contributions to camp were hard to define, there was no doubt about the impact he had on the campers with whom he had contact. Hamilton did not have casual contacts or communication. He found out what type of cancer the campers had and talked to them about their progress and treatment in a focused way. His encouragement was direct and ongoing year after year. He would ask the nurses detailed medical questions about new campers as well as old. His creative ideas about having fun helped to form the atmosphere of exuberance around Camp Sunshine. The camper/counselor challenges and playful confrontations came from him.

Many will remember him as the irreverent MC of the talent

programs. On the stage, mic in hand, Hamilton used his humor and timing to keep everyone entertained while nervous campers prepared backstage. And his banter with Mo (Thrash) and his many family members...Modine, Modonna, and the like...was an audience favorite.

But his focus was always on the kids. To loosen them up, he’d squat down close to them as if it were a one-on-one conversation between two friends and ask, “Where are you from? What grade are you in? What’s your favorite thing at Camp Sunshine? How many children do you have?” His magician’s act after the talent show has become a camp tradition.

What a blessing for all of us to have known Hamilton and to have his sunshine brighten our lives. For as many years as Camp Sunshine has existed and will continue to exist, one of the rays of the sunshine logo – coming from the sun and heading toward the sky – will be his.

– Jay Beck, Founding Board Member & childhood friend

Hamilton was a man who dedicated his life to the service of others and to the greater good. Whether it was in the public sector, in his fight against his own cancers, in the world’s battle against cancer, or in support of Dorothy in her creation of Camp Sunshine, Hamilton saw things that others couldn’t see, thought things others did not grasp, and dreamed beyond what most

could imagine. And with all that he accomplished, still his greatest legacy is his children, who each in their own way, have taken the lessons of their father and accomplished so much. For us at Camp Sunshine, the sun shines a little less brightly after the loss of our dear friend.

– Michael Siegel, Chair, Board of Directors

Hamilton Jordan...better known to me as “Hambone.” A friend since high school days in South Georgia, Hambone grew up in Albany and I was in Valdosta. Then on to University of Georgia together. After that, Hambone became a B-I-G name person serving as Chief of Staff to the President of the United States! That high political office never changed Hambone, not one bit. He was always the same ol’ boy no matter what. He was the most Intelligent person I have ever know, the Wittiest Person I have

ever known and the most Caring person I have ever known...with a capital I, capital W and a capital C. Hambone Jordan will always be remembered not because of his political achievements, but for what he did for other people – not only those with cancer but those with other challenges, too. He will always be remembered by me as a Good Ol’ Boy and it doesn’t get any better than that.

– Mo Thrash, Founding Board Member & longtime camp volunteer

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My initial thought about Hamilton Jordan is this... I have had two or three friends in my life who were not only my best friends, but

also my heroes. Hamilton was my friend and a hero of mine. He would tease me unmercifully for saying that, but it is true.

– **Tom Beard, Founding Board member & personal friend**

I have Hamilton Jordan, my brother Steve and my mom to thank for my first concert experience, the Michael Jackson “Thriller” concert. Soon after Steve was diagnosed with Ewing’s Sarcoma, Hamilton Jordan orchestrated a group together to attend the concert. They had an extra ticket and asked Steve if he would like to bring a friend. Despite his efforts, Steve was not able to

get anyone to go. According to my mother, my eyes were filled with hope that Steve would offer to take me, his little sister. Steve, being 13 years old, was not really interested in taking his 10-year-old sister. But, my mom told him he should be ashamed of himself for not asking me to go. Today, I still proudly tell friends that my first concert was Michael Jackson’s “Thriller.”

– **Lisa Davol, Volunteer & sister of camper, the late Steve Davol**