

# Camp Eyabsut: A Family Beyond Fire

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Photo by Kate Baldwin

If there's one word that defines Camp Eyabsut (EE-yab-soot), it's family. You feel it the moment you arrive—woven into laughter, tears, and stories shared by campers, counselors, and firefighters.



Grasshopper campers dressed up for "Twin Day." Photo by Jen Pennington

## Arrival at Camp

Our first glimpse of camp was breakfast under a big picnic shelter. Grasshoppers, jellyfish, cowboys, minions, and superheroes filled the tables—it was twin day, and the energy was contagious. Counselors paired with kids in costume, laughter erupting all around.

We were there with the WSCFF Burn Foundation to film interviews and activities with campers, counselors, and Burn Foundation Chair Matt Ricks. From the start, it was clear: Camp Eyabsut isn't just a camp—it's a family reunion.

## From Strangers to Family

Our first interviews were with campers Radicha, Emma, and Connor. Most noticeable was Radhika's prosthetic after losing part of her leg as a result of her burn injury. She described camp as "fun" because she could make friends without having to answer questions. Connor liked that the camp was "calm and safe" because everyone had burns of their own.

Emma put it best: "I would describe Burn Camp as a family because from the very moment you get off that bus or out of the car or off the plane or wherever you're coming from... they act like they've known you your whole life when they haven't even met you once. And they're basically strangers, but you're family within minutes."



Jellyfish triplets on Twin Day. Photo by Jen Pennington

**“That sense of belonging was echoed  
in every conversation.”**

## Lifelong Leaders

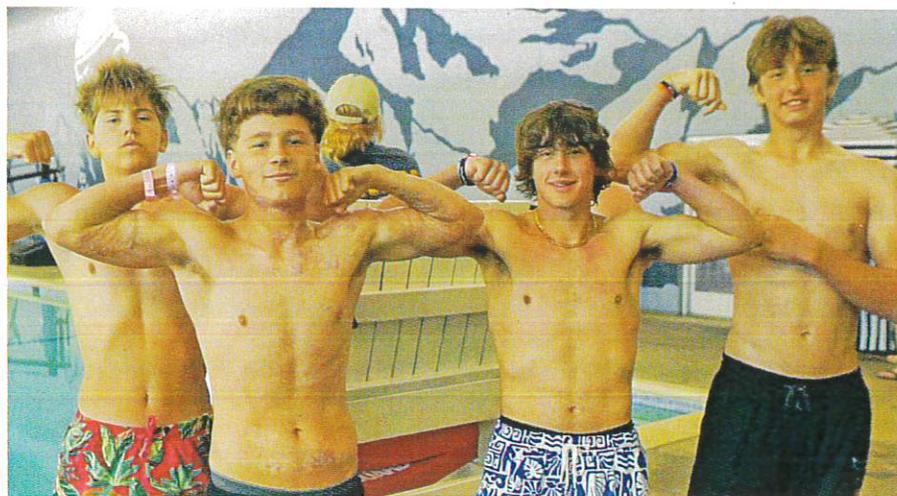
Some counselors grew up at camp, like Carrie Kinan, who was burned as an infant and began attending at nine. For her, Camp Eyabsut has always been home. “I think the thing that makes Camp Eyabsut so powerful is that we are a family, a chosen family. These kids get to come here and have a week with people, other kids, and adults who show them unconditional love.”



*From left to right: Co-counselor Carrie Kinan, Activities Coordinator Chris Torrey, and Director and Co-counselor Troy Smith. Photo by Jen Pennington*

Others, like Troy Smith—known around camp as “Yogi”—came later in life after being burned in a cooking accident. “I think what makes this camp so powerful is the family aspect of it, the support, the friendship. To see these young adults go through the program for 10-11 years and then take the time out of their new life... to come back and support the program, to spread what they’ve learned to the next generation. How can you not love that?”

At Eyabsut, children grow into leaders who return as adults to guide the next generation.



*Campers at the pool. Photo by Kate Baldwin*



A young camper is warmly greeted by counselor Terry McCarty. Photo by Jen Pennington

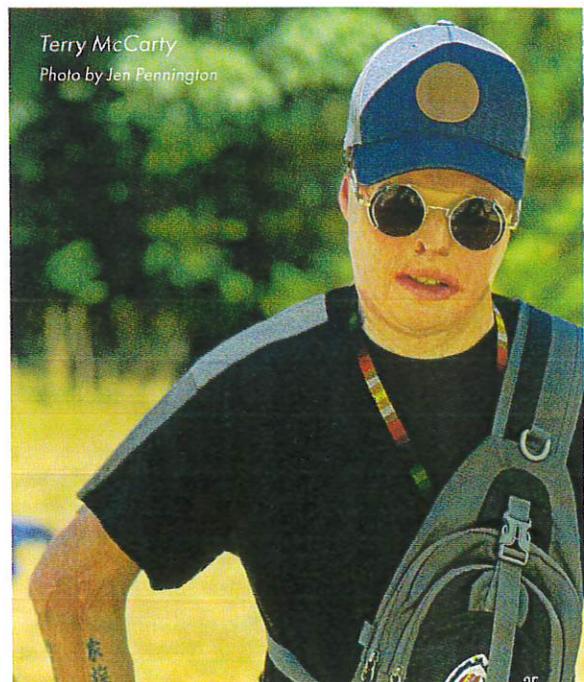
## Terry's Story

Later, we met counselor Terry McCarty. His scars remain evident decades after a childhood accident, and he wears them with equal parts strength, hope, and humor. On his arm is a tattoo that reads *CHAR KING*, a nickname his best friend gave him in high school. It was his way of stealing back the thunder from bullies who tried to shame him for his scars. Then he laughed and told us: "I was burned on my chest, so I don't have nipples, so I have a Batman, Superman logo for my nipples instead. It's just, I figure if I'm going to go out into the public, well, people are going to stare, give them something to look at."

Behind the humor is survival: 58 surgeries, six brushes with death, and countless hours of recovery. At 39, he is a husband, father, and counselor who credits camp for his survival. "This camp is essential for a young survivor, because out in the world, people just don't understand what it is to be a burn survivor, and being here creates lifelong healing."

He added: "I'm just fortunate enough to have it show on the outside, because the way I look on the outside, a lot of people look like on the inside, and you can't see that."

He also reflected on mentorship: "I came here as a counselor, it was that whole thing of, I'm going to be a mentor, I'm going to teach these kids things. And after that first week, I came to the complete realization that these kids taught me... as an adult, they reminded me of where I came from and how far I've come."



Terry McCarty  
Photo by Jen Pennington



South County firefighters bring some good cheer to a young patient at Harborview Medical Center.  
Photo by Kate Baldwin



Firefighters from Mountain Fire and Rescue get ready to cool down campers on a very hot day.  
Photo by Jen Pennington

## Firefighters as Extended Family

The family extends further with firefighters who volunteer at camp. As Burn Foundation President Matt Ricks said: "I always encourage firefighters from across the state to come volunteer here at camp and come see what it's all about. To see the kids that have survived the burn injury that we take to the hospital, we always see the painful side of it and how bad that injury really is, but to come here and see these kids thrive and have a life and see the adult counselors that have come back and have a full life and made lifelong friends, it's amazing. I always encourage firefighters to come up and volunteer and see the better side of Burn Camp and burn survivorship."

## To Rise Above Anything

At the heart of Camp Eyabsut is a powerful reminder that healing is both physical and emotional. As Emma said: "The word Eyabsut... It means to rise above anything, and I think that really speaks to a lot of the people here."

Camp Eyabsut is where scars—visible or not—become bonds, and where everyone is welcomed home as family.



Emma's butterfly wings remind us that healing is a journey of transformation mixed with a little camp magic. Photo by Jen Pennington

Camp Eyabsut is a weeklong summer camp for young burn survivors, ages 5-17 years old, funded by the WSCFF Burn Foundation. Every year, campers come from all over the Northwest at no cost to the child or their family. Camp staff and counselors are 100% volunteers. Many of the counselors are adult burn survivors themselves, returning campers, and firefighters.

The mission of the Washington State Council of Fire Fighters Burn Foundation is to promote the education and prevention of burn injuries and improve the lives of burn survivors. The Burn Foundation is run by professional firefighters who volunteer their time giving back to their communities and is governed by a board elected by WSCFF member firefighters representing each of the Council's 10 districts. The Foundation is funded by WSCFF member per capita payments and contributions. The WSCFF Burn Foundation mailing address is PO Box 6383, Kent, WA 98064.

Interested in volunteering or learning more about the WSCFF Burn Foundation? Contact your local officer.

Scan the code below to watch our video, **Camp Eyabsut: A Family Beyond Fire**

