

June, 2008

Dear Friends,

Every year, I am more excited about Camp Siberia and what it does for both the young orphaned and abandoned children in Novosibirsk and for our own Bainbridge Island teenagers. I am grateful to have been led to this adventure and even more grateful for your loyal, ongoing support.

And I am truly proud of the BHS kids who work so hard to raise the money needed to go to Russia and who then do such a splendid job to make their campers happy and secure. Now, we know that they are already terrific kids even before they join us, but we also see the impact their Camp Siberia year has on their leadership skills and overall maturity and generosity. In the 2007-2008 school year, every single person on the BHS Student Council was a Camp Siberia alum! And in October, the whole group was awarded the Compassionate Action Award from Bainbridge Youth Services.

My own exciting news is that I am a doubly blessed grandmother! Jenny and Jeb's daughter, Maren Eleanor, was born on April 28, and Allison and Luka's son, Niko Alexander, was born on June 3. How lucky is that?

### The 2008 Camp Program

The 2008 Counselor cadre, an outstanding group of Bainbridge High leaders (see the list at the end of this letter), is ready to go. We leave on July 7 and return on July 26. Allison obviously won't be going with us this year, which is a big loss, but we will be well cared-for. Sveta, our guide from the earliest days of Camp Siberia, will show us Moscow, and my son-in-law Luka's cousin, Natasha Balyasnikova, is taking us around St. Petersburg. An old and amazingly creative friend, Mari Jalbing, Tom White and Omie Kerr, both board members, and Peter O'Connor, whom all the kids adored on the 2007 trip, will be our chaperons.

### The Selection Process

One of the hardest things we do is to choose the counselors. This year we received 50 applications for 18 slots, and truthfully, almost every single one of those 50 would have made an excellent counselor, so making objective, fair decisions about whom to choose is both difficult and painful.

In our ongoing efforts to devise the best possible procedures, we consulted with Donna Zajonc, a political leadership coach, to design a process which permitted us to consider and weigh all the selection components (written application, interview, recommendations, peer review and board review) so as to bring about the fairest possible results. The system is careful and thoughtful; I know that it doesn't satisfy everyone, but I do want you to know that, given the almost impossible task of deciding which of these remarkable applicants will go to Russia, we're doing the best we can, and we'll keep working on it! I would welcome your suggestions and observations.

## AUCTION

The Camp Siberia Auction, which was held on March 15 at the Wing Point Golf Club, was attended by 186 generous guests; after costs, we ended up with \$60,000, all of which will go directly to supporting scholarships and educational projects for the Russian orphans. I couldn't even begin to thank everyone who worked on this, but I do want to single out Pam Gidari, who has spearheaded the auction for years;, Margaret Powers, our indispensable organizational guru; and Katie Goldsberry at Wing Point, who devoted herself to ensuring that every detail was perfect!

## SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

We set up the Scholarship Program four years ago when we realized that when these children "age-out" of the orphanage at 17, they have absolutely no support system at all. We have tried to maintain a flexible program that would underwrite basic costs for appropriate education (from cosmetology to university education) for those who are interested and able to go on with their studies.

Since May, 2007, we have used some of our contributed income to hire Natasha Syrykh, my partner in Camp Siberia from the very first day, to coordinate the Scholarship Program and provide advice and emotional support to the those very young people who are starting their independent lives.

- Our first scholarship recipient, Olga, somehow managed to survive a very difficult childhood – both her parents had been in prison and her mother had died there. When her father was released, she and her brother were expected to return to live with him in his badly-cared-for home (not much more than a shack), among his often disreputable friends. The father died recently and the Russian government tore down the shack and gave Olga and her brother a new, nice apartment. In the meantime, she has been studying to be an elementary school teacher at the Novosibirsk Pedagogical University, and she'll graduate from there next year.
- Valodia had lived at the orphanage for some years. He wanted to go to a sports training institute. His public education hadn't prepared him well enough to get accepted, however, so we paid for some tutoring. He put his mind to the task, was accepted at – and finished – the program at the Institute, and now he's BACK at the orphanage, this time as a full-time paid sports instructor!

## CAMP SIBERIA ALUMNI

In future newsletters, I would love to be able to use some of this space to pass on news from U.S. and Russian alumni of Camp Siberia, but you'll need to let me know what you're doing for this to work. When I was in Moscow in February, I spent a terrific evening with Jack Coombs who was in Russia for nine months, perfecting his Russian and doing an internship for a an investment firm there. Just recently he, Jessica Poole and David Kroman met with the new counselors to talk about their semesters abroad in Russia – Jessica and David studied in St. Petersburg, and David had gone on to do some volunteer work at Kitedj, a Russian community project to take care of orphans and each other.

## SPECIAL THANKS

Cynthia Sears has been a loving and generous friend to the children of Camp Siberia for many years, most recently helping us make much needed repairs to both the orphanages. Thank you so much.

Robin Callahan has earned a very special place in the Camp Siberia supporters list; responding to her son Colton's concern for an especially talented camper, she committed to a full scholarship to ensure that young woman's education.

And we are especially grateful to Donna Zajonc for the many hours she donated to help us improve our selection process.

I would so much like to hear from any of you – what are you doing, alumni? what part of your Camp Siberia experience made a real difference in your (or your child's) life? what advice do you have for future Camp Siberians? and what advice do you have for me and the Board?

I promise, I'll really listen and I'll do everything I can to be sure I share your news and ideas with the people who need to hear them.

A big Russian bear hug,

Janie

#### 2008 Counselors

Haley Allen

Emily Barreca

Maddy Brachvogel

Chloe Dale

Lauren Greenawalt

Neil Griffey

Chelsea Loken

Jake Mallove

Sam McAllister

Kate McKenzie

Kyle Schneider

Lizzie Scott

Jack Seidl

Madeline Sheldon

Eliza Silverman

Gordon Taylor

Hannah Trageser

Josefine Wallace