

A Home with Heart

During a routine ultrasound, expecting parents Donna and Tim learned that their unborn son, Jonathon, might have some problems with his heart. More tests confirmed that pulmonary veins were bringing blood from his little lungs to the right side of his heart, rather than to the left as in a normal heart. Their bundle of joy arrived in September 2002 and, with expert medical care all along the way, Jonathan has continued to thrive.



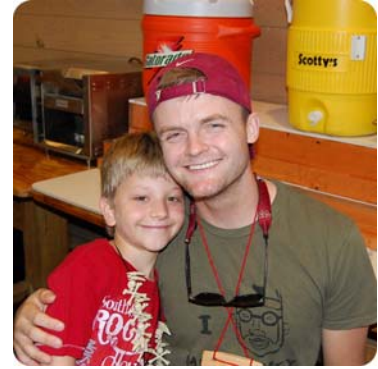
Like all parents of seriously ill children, Donna and Tim educated themselves in detail on Jonathon's medical condition, *partial anomalous pulmonary venous return*, a rare congenital heart disease. But, it was during one of his treatments at All Children's Hospital in St. Petersburg that they first learned about Camp Boggy Creek. At first Donna and Tim weren't sure about sending their son to camp, but after learning more about Boggy Creek, they realized that they had found a home away from home that would be beneficial for Jonathon and their family.

In 2009, when he turned 7 years old, Jonathon and his family attended their first Heart Family Retreat program. Donna shares, "Everyone, including the volunteers and staff, just opened up their hearts to all the families and embraced each of us with unconditional love. It was so comforting to learn that we weren't alone and others were going through the same things as us." Jonathon also discovered friends like him and he would soon reunite with them during Heart Summer Camp.

Surgery would be necessary to correct a defect with Jonathon's enlarged heart, but the procedure would have to wait until he was a little older. However, while attending a Family Retreat, his parents spoke with volunteer pediatric cardiologist, Dr. Gul Dadlani, who encouraged Donna and Tim to schedule his surgery in August of 2010 so he could attend his first Heart Camp at Boggy Creek that summer. A longtime medical volunteer for Heart Camp, Dr. Dadlani knew the benefits that the summer program would have for Jonathon and his prescription was exactly the right medicine, too. Jonathon's experience was as memorable as it was exciting. He enjoyed all the activities, including woodshop, archery and swimming; and, he doesn't mind admitting that he was a little, at first, "grossed out" by some of the Silly Olympics' activities that have become a tradition at Boggy Creek.



When Jonathon went home from camp that summer, his mom asked him if any of the other children had scars on their chests. She knew that his surgery was necessary, but it would also leave him with a scar and she hoped his experience at camp would be helpful. Jonathon replied (almost disappointed) that “he and one other boy were the only kids *without* scars!” Donna and Tim knew immediately that they had made the right choice and that Camp Boggy Creek was “the best medicine” for Jonathon and their family.



During this year’s Heart Camp, Jonathon proudly shared his scar (his “battle wound” as he calls it) with all the other campers and nobody felt different or left out and everyone felt safe, respected, and loved. He made new friends and reunited with others he met during family retreats, including his Family Pal, Matt (pictured above with Jonathon). His mom adds, “This place has truly been a blessing for our family. Jonathon may be home now, but Boggy Creek will always be his home away from home.”

