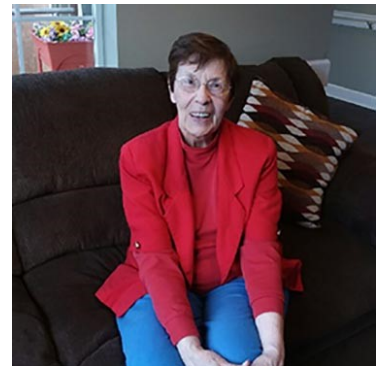


**Dear Campers and Camp Supporters:**

**There is no disputing that this has been a very hard year for most of us. I can hardly wait to see 2020 in my rearview mirror. And I can feel a sense of positive change coming upon us. And I hope you feel it too!**

**Taking a moment to remind myself of my blessings has helped me to catch my breath and start thinking that good things are on the horizon. I have hope now that the vaccine is finally being distributed. I am thankful for the good work of the fire fighters who saved our Camp, and I am hopeful that the forest will soon start to regenerate itself, making it safe to return to camping on the mountain. I am grateful to all the volunteers who have been up to Camp to help fill and place sandbags, their actions and words have reinforced my belief that de Benneville Pines is heart's home for so many. And the board and I are deeply thankful for your continued financial support. We are over halfway to our goal of raising \$850,000—the money that is needed to keep Camp afloat while we experience an extended shut down due to the COVID crisis and now the El Dorado fire crisis. It is likely we will be closed for many months to come.**

**I know many of us have been touched by the pandemic in ways that hurt our hearts deeply—loss of work, loss of home, loss of a loved one. As I write this article today, my mother lies in her hospice bed, struggling for every breath, after 15 days in COVID ICU. I am grateful that she is at home with us, and not in a hospital room, away from loved ones.**



Ardith James

**My brother and sister arrived over a week ago from Texas and Northern California, offering support to bring Mom home to be surrounded by the love of family during her final days of life. Strange how this COVID tragedy has given me the gift of time with my siblings. And the time together has been oddly joyful, as we sit for a meal and recount fun childhood memories and laugh at the ridiculous predicaments of our youth. We all participate in caring for our mother, and together we will be here, with her, until her last breath. I am most grateful that this tragedy has brought us all together for something truly meaningful and important. We are now full circle in the circle-of- life. We are lovingly caring for the one who lovingly cared for us.**

**When I think about my mom and all that she has meant to me, I am reminded that she has been my best friend since I was in college. She had a youthful glow and natural beauty about her in those days, and when she would visit me in the dorms, my friends were surprised to learn she was my mom because she was so vivacious and fun, and just “looked too young for her age” with her wrinkle-free complexion.**

**My mom displays kindness with everyone. She taught us kids to love your neighbor. Be kind to animals. Take care of your belongings. Reuse, recycle, reclaim! Save every penny so you can one day buy your first car. Only use credit cards if you can afford to pay them off at the end of the month. Visit your grandparents and help them with a chore. Make your bed...because a messy bed means a messy head! To this day I can't start my day off right if I leave my bed unmade!**



Janet, Ardith, Bill and Jody family gathering 2019

**My mom lights up a room with an infectious smile. She is happy to spend time talking with anyone, ensuring folks feel at ease. She is a storyteller, a writer, a genealogist, a local history buff. She is popular with everyone**

**because she genuinely cares deeply for people. She keeps a tidy house and actually proclaims she enjoys housekeeping! One of her favorite places on earth is Yosemite National Park where she worked while in college cleaning rooms at the Ahwahnee Hotel. She spent her time off hiking the Sierra trails with her “buddies”, but I am convinced the correct word would be “boyfriends” - they were just drawn to her genuine warmth.**

**She told me once that she married my dad for many good reasons but the most important reason of all was because she knew he would be a loving and attentive father to their children. She was right! She knew since she was a little girl that her highest desire was to be a mother and take care of a family, and it showed too. Just about every kid in the neighborhood grew up at our house. Word on the street was the after-**

school snacks were the best at the James house! And so was the attention my mom paid to each and every one of our friends; so much so that my friends called her “Mama James”. They still call her “mama” when they stop by to visit her.



Jim and Ardith James

As I write this article today, I reflect on the life I have had with my mom, and I feel so lucky to have grown up in the James family with incredible parents and loyal and supportive siblings, which brings me back to thinking of Camp and why we must cherish and support this very special place. Camp is about family ties. It is about connecting with others deeply, so they become a part of our extended family. It is about support and love and uniting to touch one another's lives through meaningful experiences.

For me, Camp is more than a beautiful place on top of the mountain, it is a place that resides within me wherever I go—a feeling of home, a warm spot in my heart. I have met so many campers over the past 25 years, spoken with many, played with many, liked, and loved so many people through my work at Camp. I feel that you all are an extension of my family. And I hope your heart fills with warm memories when thinking of Camp, bringing you closer to those you miss, and keeping you close to those you have lost along the way.

I can't think of a better holiday gift for you than the gift of a beautiful song. I guarantee you will be touched deeply by the words of [Memories](#), performed by the One Voice Children's Choir.

Please trust in knowing that we all feel hurt and sorrow at times, but we will be okay...hold on...2021 is almost here, and so are new beginnings!

With memories of you in my heart, I send you love from the mountain top this holiday season.

Janet James  
Executive Director  
Your Beloved Camp



Janet and Mom 2020