



## **A Story From Our Founder**

In what seemed a bold move in 1996, I hung up my corporate hat, mortgaged my house, and sought out a beautifully tranquil piece of property in the Santa Monica Mountains to hatch a summer day camp in an attempt to return to nature, creativity, and a youthful curiosity that had slowly drained my system since college, since my own days as counselor, camper, child. I knew I needed to put food on the table, but more importantly, I needed a job that got me home in time to enjoy those table-talk dinners with my family. As I stood among Agoura's vastness, with its decades-old Oaks and masses of shady Sycamores, its natural creeks inhabited by tadpoles starting their own life-swims, I found myself in the middle of nowhere. And in the middle of nowhere, I found my self, and what would become so much more.

My newfound camp plan needed a name. Something that encompassed the whole of its mission: a place for children to thrive and explore, to grow and learn, to soak up and retain for life the joy and innocence of childhood. As I was brainstorming names, Happy Camp, Camp Wilderness, Kiddie Camp, all fell short of the breadth of my vision. Until I came across Keystone! In architectural terms, keystone is the central stone at the summit of an arch, locking the whole together. With enthusiasm and prescience, I translated its definition into life-terms. Camp Keystone would be the apex, a linchpin with the potential to hold steady a child's life, the balancing feature between school, family, friends, spirituality, socialization, community, autonomy and confidence. Camp Keystone would be the heart and core, a nurturing and necessary foundation for children, including my own, to become at once wholly individual and completely belonging.

Summer camps, back in the day, were made to teach survival skills, self-reliance, and independence. Without compromising the traditions of old-timey campfires, horseback rides, fishing, guidance and instruction, I was determined to reinvent camp in the biggest, best, wettest way in the west. Really, I desperately wanted my kids to think I was the coolest dad around! Enter: 274 foot raging water slides, foam cannons, roller racers, zip lines and more. As my children grew, so did Camp Keystone. Our campers became counselors, our counselors directors. Our return rate multiplied annually. Generations followed, and together we grew camp from its uninhabited, majestic blues and greens, to a magical summer home, an extended family. My business became a life. Camp hosted my kids' birthday parties, class parties, friends' parties, staff weddings. With each birthday and event came age-appropriate and wildly creative additions: bounce houses, mini-golf, drama, karate when my kids turned five. Pottery, mountain climbing, batting cages at nine. Adventure and exploration flourished, without losing the snug intimacy and educative environment for our youngest tots, separate from the frenetic energy of the rest of camp. In this organic and very personal way, I grew Camp Keystone from seedling to staggering. And I'm proud to say, I'm the only camp founder in our area still operating, from inception to present day.

Our Keystone philosophy remains constant, even as camp evolves. Our conviction is not to teach children to excel at one thing, this is not golf camp or theater camp, but rather, to expose them to the widest variety of activities so their own budding talents and palates may bend and adhere to their strengths, savvy and skills. Camp Keystone is a real life choose-your-own-adventure, where activities are the journey, and resulting ingenuities are for keeps.

And while our campers find and define themselves, cultivate lifelong friendships, translate summer days into narratives and memories, our parents get a reprieve from running kids to school and soccer, to daycare and dance, from packing lunches and driving carpools, some time to recharge for the coming school year. Knowing and assured that their children are safe and stimulated, nestled by our breathtaking woodlands, by the hearts and experience of our dedicated directors, educators and staff, by our captivating and inspiring activities. Knowing that Camp Keystone lives up to its name year after year, remaining steady as the seed that spawned it, yet growing and widening its arch with the quality and force of every camper who comes through.

Larry Klein

Founder and Director