

Lynne Hinton has led our Special Days Event for the past 17 years. She is also a Guest Columnist for the Charlotte Observer. I wanted to share this article she wrote in the July 6, 2016 edition. It explains perfectly why this camp is so important, and why your donation is so invaluable to us.

Dean is a quiet young man and for a decade has attended the camp at which I volunteer every summer.

Special Days is a three-day event in June in Blowing Rock for adults with special needs and Dean seems to enjoy all aspects of the offerings provided. He participates in the crafts and recreation. He comes to devotions, listens to the stories, sings the silly songs. He shares his talent of singing at the talent show and has lots of partners to dance with at the Friday night dance. He is kind and polite and loving. But he is also alone.

His mother died last year and although he lives in a group home he is like so many of the campers in that there is no one left in his family who visits or invites him to come with them to stay. Still, Dean is always happy at camp.

Friday night after dinner and on the way to the dance, I overheard a conversation Dean was having with another camper, a young woman who has also been at camp many years. "Do you like it here?" she asked. "Oh yes," he answered, "very much." They walked on and I heard him add, "My family is here."

This surprised the woman walking with him, someone from another part of the state but someone who knew Dean from past camp experiences. "You have family here?" she wanted to know.

He glanced up at one of the volunteers walking in his direction. "He's my family," Dean replied. He turned back to see me following them. "She's my family," he said referring to me. "Everybody up here is my family." And the young woman nodded. She understood exactly what Dean was saying. And so did I.

Like so much of what happens at camp every year, Dean's words touched me. What he said is part of the reason I keep coming back. It is part of the reason I traveled from my home in Albuquerque when I lived there and from my home near Spokane, Washington when I was there. It is part of the reason I explained I would be away from my new job only three weeks after starting.

I go to camp because I know I will find my family there. I know that I will be welcomed and received and accepted there. I will be held in high regard there, not because of

anything I've done but because of who I am to the others gathered, a sister, a beloved.

I tell people that for the week I am at camp I am the person I want to be all year, kind, patient, joyous; and I know it is because at camp I am loved unconditionally. And every year I leave the mountain hoping I can stay that person for more than just a few days.

What's great about family, of course, is that even if I don't, even if I'm not kind or patient or joyous, they will still receive me. Next summer on the mountain, they will still welcome me home.