

# Giggles and Snores

By Keri Lynn McHale

Giggles and snores interrupted the crickets. After a sleepless night at Good Counsel Camp in Floral City, I headed to the showers at the crack of dawn to beat the morning rush. I lent deodorant to a Hernando Elementary School teacher; she was roughing it, too.

Shortly after 6 a.m., girls poured into the bathroom in droves, the we-stayed-up-all-night campers dragged behind the we-actually-went-to-sleep campers. I brushed my teeth alongside my fourth-grade girls before we trekked up the hill for the flag-raising ceremony. Children ages 6 through 12 gathered around the flagpole Oct. 11 to kick off the second day of activities at Hospice of Citrus County's camp for children who have experienced the loss of a family member or friend — Camp Good Hope. At Camp Good Hope there's all the timeless activities, canoeing, arts and crafts, hiking. It was a beautiful day; the wind was light but my heart was heavy. I was on my way to help lead a support session. One by one the children stood to share their stories and their pictures. They showed photos of loved ones who died. They drew pictures using crayons to pour out their pain. They were so brave as they held out the shattered pieces of their hearts for all to see and then took steps toward understanding their losses.

After a few support sessions, the children began the healing process as they released the pain that has suffocated their happiness; the pain that inhibited them from remembering the happy moments they shared with their loves ones that restrained them from continuing their lives. At one of the last sessions, they headed to a dock on the lake and tossed flowers into the water in memory of their parents, grandparents, relatives and friends. Together, we watched them float away.

I came to Camp Good Hope to give anything I could to ease the children's hurt, a shoulder, a hug, a smile. I thought I would take their hands and lead them out of the darkness. I didn't realize that the children would lead me, too; that their bravery to face sorrow would help me face mine. The children of Camp Good Hope are carved in my heart as deep as the names of old campers forever etched in the wood of the cabins.