



## HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

# JOHN KETCHAM

Bev Gross (now Bev Gross Sutton, legendary Girls' Camp personage in her own right) met Johnny Ketcham at Wawayanda when they were teenagers. They grew up there and worked as waterfront counselors together for several summers, after which remained close friends for a lifetime. Soon after John's death—cancer took him far, far too young—Bev decided to describe her experiences with and feelings about John in a long letter to Casey, John and Jody Davies Ketcham's daughter. "What I remember most vividly about working on the waterfront with your dad," Bev told Casey,

"was that Lake Cole in June felt like swimming in glacial waters. It took your breath away; it paralyzed your limbs. Every counselor struggled to seduce the children to swim, but every camper balked at every suggestion....every camper except, of course, the campers in Johnny's group. He and his kids would be in the water, splashing happily and practicing their strokes. When his children emerged from their lessons, their toes and fingers were purple, their teeth were chattering and they were covered with goose bumps the size of jelly beans. Yet a radiant smile always framed their blue lips. John knew how to inspire people to reach beyond their grasp."

Everyone who encountered John Ketcham felt this particular kind of inspiration—the kind that shows you how to live rather than tells you; the kind that creates confidence with a smile and modest show of physical and emotional strength; the kind that made everyone around him "reach beyond their grasp." Today we honor John Ketcham with induction into the Frost Valley Hall of Fame—and with sorrow we must do it posthumously—in the realization that no one who has graced this Valley ever better embodied the values of caring, respect, and responsibility together in one soul. He was unfailingly kind to everyone; he loved Wawayanda and Frost Valley and did everything he could, always, to make it a better place for kids; he accepted far more than his share of commitments and complex burdens and never diminished his capacity for love in doing so.

He'd been a baby when first being taken to Wawayanda in 1948. He attended camp at the temporary Wawayanda site at Stevens Institute in the 1950s, and by 15, now at Frost Valley, he was a young CIT (normally 16). Then, at 16, a very young counselor, his superstar capacities as leader of children and colleagues became fully apparent, and he was appointed to be a Village Chief—of Hemlock (his campers thus being just two years younger than he): the youngest Village Chief in the long history of our camp. Soon he was Frost Valley's Waterfront Director, not just accepting and fulfilling responsibility for safety at an area of camp entailing special risks but going much further: John helped re-introduce YMCA-style swimming instruction and, as Bev Gross noted for Casey, managed to make it the most fun place to be in camp. He'd been a champion swimmer at Westfield High School, and then at Wesleyan University, where he won fourth place in the 100-yard backstroke as a Collegiate All-American in Division 1 of the NCAA—an astonishing feat considering that Wesleyan, a tiny college, is a Division 3 school.

Starting in 1975 he worked with his father Frank in the accounting firm, Ketcham & Ketcham. He was writing early computer programs to aid accounting practices, and Frost Valley was a beta testing site. As he worked on this with Halbe Brown—by this point the Brown and Ketcham families were very close—he was persuaded by Halbe of the value of another seemingly crazy Frost Valley innovation: a specialty camp for kids focusing on computers. John developed the program and for at least one two-week session taught the children himself. There he re-met another family friend from their Westfield days, Jody Davies, then Frost Valley's Director of Development. They became one of several Ketcham marriages that began at Frost Valley, and they were wed, at the Straus Estate, in 1986. John's children, Bill, Steve, and Suzie, all attended camp and came of age here, in the Ketcham tradition. John and Jody's daughters, Casey and Molly, were born in 1991; their ashes rest, with John's, on Memorial Island at Reflection Pond. Casey loved her many visits to Frost Valley—family reunion weekends, family camp, visits for meetings and staff reunions and memorials—and John loved that Casey loved his beloved Wawayanda, home to his sense of leadership and his belief in the power of children's imagination and hope.

John's death was a great blow to that hope. But, as Bev wrote Casey, "Every one who knew Johnny, every one who ministered to him during his illness, every one who attended his service, has been changed for the better. We have each been summoned, in his name, to follow his example. I hope you can find solace in knowing that you are the child of a truly great man." If there were just one reason for Frost Valley's Hall of Fame, it would surely be this: to remind ourselves of such powerful examples of our Frost Valley predecessors; to accept their loss as a challenge to make something better here for children and families; to take solace as friends and family and colleagues of a truly great man; to dive into the frigid water in that same hopeful spirit and "splash happily"—inspiring people always and forever to reach beyond their grasp.