HALL OF FAME INDUCTEES

CARL & MARIE HESS

By 1968 Carl and Marie Hess had come of age, had met and married, had raised a child, and had developed a local reputation for stalwart good work—in the Pine Barrens of South Jersey, a region whose traditions of unpretentious striving they embodied and to which they felt deep devotion. But that year they made a big unlikely decision—to move to and live at a camp in New York State, where, at that point, only one other family resided year round (for even the Executive Director who hired them, D. Halbe Brown, spent most of the year in New Jersey where he ran the camp's business office). The move to this unproven place, where everything needed at least a little improvement, was very much like pioneering. Carl and Marie did indeed work like pioneers. The many hundreds with whom they worked in the coming years and decades, and the tens of thousands who as weekend guests, teachers and schoolchildren, and summertime camper and counselors, were awed by their relentless effort, their integrity, and their capacity for helping others without the need ever of sermonizing about which core Frost Valley value they were demonstrating. Carl and Marie Hess proved the worth of these values every time they acted.

Their complete honesty, enormous sense of responsibility, great respect for others (especially those who, no matter how different from them, were willing to work hard for the children), and intense feeling for stewardship of the beautiful property they had come to call home: these were the traits evinced by Carl and Marie, as they helped to establish a real belief at Frost Valley, shared by the entire staff, that (as John Giannotti once put it) "we weren't going to be part of any ordinary camp"—that we need only follow the way "these two people just knew instinctively how and when to apply their magical, unrelenting support" and thus could learn for ourselves how to accomplish what often in those days seemed an impossible task.

Indeed, their first decade here—until Carl's untimely death by cancer in the late 1970s—was an epoch of extraordinary, unanticipated growth. Somehow Carl and Marie kept pace, and thrived. Summer camp added 8 Sequoia tents, a large new Adventure Trip program, three new villages for teens, increased seasonal staff to more than 200, and sometimes fed nearly 900 people at a time in two dining halls. Busy conference weekends (with the addition of cross-country skiers) and the new and growing Environmental Education program brought annual totals of guests and campers served from a few thousand to 25,000 annually. Thousands of acres were added to the site. There were more fields to mow, more meals to prepare, more dishes to wash, more garbage bins to empty, more vehicles to repair, more laundry to clean, more cheeseburgers and root beer floats at Staff Lounge to serve late into the night. Carl worked six and sometimes seven days each week as director of the camp's small maintenance crew. Marie worked in the kitchen between September and April, then both kitchen and housekeeping (with just one other person) in May and June, and then in the summers directed the perpetual cycle of camper laundry by day and the Staff Lounge in Pigeon Lodge until after 11 PM at night.

To this expansion they brought their continued commitment to the abiding values they loved: no matter the increasing numbers, every one at Frost Valley deserved their attention; if they could fix your problem, they would, no matter how far out of their way they had to go. Our inductees ever and always—be it weekday or weekend, dawn or midnight—went the extra mile, and, remarkably, this was often the literal fact: to jump a guest's car that had broken down in a blizzard halfway to Liberty; to deliver a laundered beloved teddy bear personally in the dining hall to calm the nerves of a 10-year-old camper who had never slept a night without it.

"They had a heart for mentoring young people and creating a team effort," wrote Jeff and Wendy Brown. "Hessie and Carl played a big part in my life," remembers Peggy Hope. "There was nothing they couldn't do. They were the great pioneers of Frost Valley, instrumental in creating a unique, nurturing, accepting and educational place where anyone, through effort, could experience it as home." "Marie and Carl promised to watch out for me," Kathy King Steinwedel recalls of her first summer on staff at 14, "and I always knew it. I learned that summer to work hard always. To be kind and generous. To be a little silly. To fold mounds of laundry as fast as possible!"

After losing Carl, Marie redoubled her work ethic, as if she were now and forever going to do enough good for Frost Valley for the both of them. She remained on the staff for many years, and then, after retirement, returned each summer for at least a month—still, as Rhonda McNamara put it at the time of Marie's death this past year, "the hardest working woman I have ever met and a role model to us all." Maureen Heath Kosa speaks for many when she describes them as offering an example of principled adulthood: "I know that Hessie was the rock for so many of us at our home away from home. Her strength was an inspiration for me as a shaky adolescent, during a tumultuous era, who was trying to become independent and didn't know how. I hear her voice in my head, and smile."

Today we posthumously induct Carl & Marie Hess into the Frost Valley Hall of Fame, for their willingness and capacity to go the generous extra mile to help colleagues, friends and strangers alike; for their unyielding belief that no job in support of children and families was too small or too messy; for their 24/7/365 faith that Frost Valley's vision would always be discerned in the details.