BEVERLY GROSS SUTTON

HALL OF FAME INDUCTEE

By inducting Beverly Gross Sutton into Frost Valley's Hall of Fame, we honor a legendary leader among the community of girls and women who in the early 1960s, after eight decades of camping exclusively for boys, pioneered the culture and values of "Camp Wawayanda for Girls" (as it was first called) and then "Camp Henry Hird." She was admired and known by everyone, across boys' and girls' camps both, as "Bev Gross"—or just "Bev," a counselor quickly famed for her enormous store of empathy, a colleague whose passion for and faith in people's deep goodness could be counted on to get everyone through the rough times and to celebrate the glory of the happy ones. Bev did as much as anyone in those crucial early years to shape the spirit and sensibility of camping for girls at Frost Valley, and by her very manner of daily being persistently conveyed to all of us the idea—then **new** to this oldest camp in the U.S.—that girls not only had the basic equal right to the summer camp experience but would learn and thrive and "rough it" in this remote valley as well as, and perhaps sometimes better than, the boys.

In eight influential summers at Frost Valley (1962-68), Beverly held the roles of Junior Counselor, Counselor-in-Training (CIT) Director, and Village Chief. Whenever she worked in one of the original four girls' villages, hers was always—devotedly—Susquehanna (or "Susky"). She was a JC during the very first Susky summer and so they had to improvise their cheering and chants and screamed their presence everywhere they went around camp: **The sun comes up on Susquehanna / The moon goes down on 6 through 10 / `Cause we're the best and we're the greatest / Sing hallelujah, shout Amen!**

One rainy afternoon she led Susky cabins on a hike to a campsite for a night of camping. The downpour intensified. Should they remain under their hastily arranged tarps, or quit and return to camp? She recalled the assumption on the part of some of the Boys' Camp staff that girls might not have the grit to do overnight camping the Wawayanda way. They decided to stay. In the morning, they hiked back into camp, soaking wet but proud, and walked directly through where the boys were gathered for their Flag Raising—the girls now chanting **The sun comes up on Susquehanna...** As it turned out, all the boys' overnights had returned. The response at Flag Raising to the presence of these soaked, persistent girls was...a loud, sustained applause. "My campers were very proud," she recently recalled, "I never felt condescended to by the guys, and we felt accepted. But, still, it took real work to prove that girls were here at camp, and here to stay, and that we could do anything that the boys could do."

So the famed Bev Gross was loud, and helped make the presence of girls and women at Frost Valley known. Yet she also helped establish the

idea of the importance of silence and quiet at such an otherwise noisy, boisterous place—the idea of counseling as a matter, often, of just listening. Everyone from that era can recall a moment when Bev made this point, and its effect on later decades of Camp Hird is incalculable. She had been honored to be invited to give a talk at one mid-session Sunday Morning Reflection ("Chapel"). She chose as her theme the idea that even in the midst of difficult circumstances one "can always return to a place of gratitude." She meant **place** as a stance or disposition about living, yes, but she also meant geographically, naturally, **this place**—the sheer beauty of Frost Valley, so often taken for granted in the high-speed intensity of summer camp. As she concluded her talk, to the entire camp as they were gathered, sitting on logs set in a small clearing among the tall beech and birch trees, she uttered these words: "Now listen to the birds. They are not singing because they have an answer. They are singing because they have a song." And then she just stopped talking. There was a little confusion but everyone remained silent. Then after a moment birds began to sing, and everyone remained in that place for the longest time, just listening. (Later several Susky campers asked her, How ever did you get the birds to sing at that moment?!" "At Wawayanda," she told them, "the birds are always singing.")

Bev had always had the idea of becoming a teacher, but she came from a socially and economically homogenous community and assumed she would find a job teaching in a segregated school. It was at Frost Valley in 1967 and 1968—her final seasons and the first summers in which financial aid, or "camperships," were awarded to children from nearby New Jersey cities she didn't know—that she decided to devote herself to a career of inclusive teaching. A camper she met and loved—this child could not read or write—inspired her to see her world of collegiate teacher training and her Frost Valley world as merged. She would become a classroom teacher who behaved more like a counselor at Camp Wawayanda for Girls.

Eight years in the course of a long life might seem a small phase, with its memories here and there. But for Beverly Gross Sutton—as for many others who have come of age in this valley where caring is a core value and where empathetic listening is a way of life—those summers were utterly transformative. "My lasting memory," she says now, "was the consciousness of joy."