

11/5/2020 – CHRIS HILDEBRAND

KG – Kayt Gochenaur

CH – Chris Hildebrand

CH - ...to be part of it and I'm glad that Eagle Island is going to be part of it. Will you... just let me ask you this? Will you be doing other interviews about Eagle Island or am I going to be the main source?

KG – You'll probably be the main source unless you can recommend other people to me.

CH – Well, of course I can but sure. We actually have one person still that is lucid that was a camper during the first 8 years of the camp being open so we do have one person. She is a very famous woman. She actually discovered – not discovered, she invented – the whole system, the switching system, that AT&T used when they first mechanized switching so that people didn't have to be plugging in, you know, operators didn't have to be plugging in the cords anymore with the whole electronic computerized switching system. She invented it. She has a patent. She is one of the earliest women that has a patent for anything. She was at Eagle Island the first 8 years. She is still brilliant. She might be good for the really early years. We'll see what the interview says, you know, what we gain but I'm sure she would talk with you.

KG – After the interview I have a note here and I'll check back with you about that and see if you think it's good.

CH – Because, you know, I know everything from 1955 during the time I was there. There is also a big gap during the time that I was there and during the years that we were trying to save the camp. You know, during the late 90s and all the rest of the time since then so there is a gap there for me. But we'll see. We'll see what you have to ask about.

KG – Well let's see. I've got the recording on and the sound all looks good to me. Can you just state your name and age for the record and we'll get going.

CH – Ok. My name is Chris Hildebrand and my age is 77.

KG – Fantastic. And this is Kayt Gochenaur and we're interviewing... this is a socially-distanced interview and we're interviewing each other over the phone. Today is Thursday, November 5, 2020. So, Chris, can you give me a quick recap of how you got involved with Eagle Island?

CH – Well, I mean I was a camper for 5 years in the 50s from 1955 to '59 and I was a counselor from '61 through '63. I was a sailing counselor. Then I had no connection really other than to maybe donate a little bit of money to the Girl Scouts (at that time of course it was a Girl Scout camp) over the years but then I started going to women's weekend in the late 90s. Then there was a gap again until 2006 when actually during the summers I was up in the area of Upper

Saranac doing a little canoeing and a little vacationing but not visiting the island. But then in 2006 I was in Saranac Lake eating at Morgan's (I don't know if you remember that restaurant) and the owner told me that Eagle Island was going to be sold. I was probably wearing an Eagle Island sweatshirt or something, or somehow he found out I was connected. So when that happened we were very worried. I called my sister when I got home from vacation and told her. She lives in Pittsburgh. She went to camp also for years. She said we've got to find out about this and so we called the Girl Scout council and met with the CEO and she said: "Well it's not on the market or anything but the Girl Scout councils are going to be merging all over the country. In fact there is a process now and Eagle Island council will be merged in 2008. When these mergers occur there is always a chance that properties are abandoned or sold." She said: "Well what we can do between now (this is 2006) and 2008 we can try to raise money and raise awareness from the alumni to help restore some of the infrastructure so when the merger comes they will be less likely to want to get rid of the camp."

So that's what we did. My sister and I worked for a couple of years. We just reached out and tried to finagle our old friends. It's very hard to find women because of their names being changed in many cases when they were married or going through divorces and then their names changed over and over again. You don't usually find that on the internet. We knew a few people. We had had some mini reunions with a few of our old friends. Other people knew somebody so somebody knew somebody and so forth. There was a website of former alumni that we found and we just started trying to raise awareness. We did raise quite a bit of money. We put a couple of new roofs on buildings and we fixed up the service dock and so forth. Then when 2008 came... and we also visited the island during that time on official business too, official Girl Scout business for the camp because we were now involved.

Then in 2008 when the merger came we continued to try to reach out and try to help but it was a new CEO then that had been hired. She had very little interest in the camp but anyway we worked at it and worked at it and then when June came in 2009, the next summer, they didn't open the camp. We had been in contact and raising money and doing all kinds of things to try to protect the camp like putting ads on Paul Smiths to try to find somebody that could come and look into the camp, a caretaker and so forth because nothing was happening on the island. Everybody was either laid off or gone. Anyway, that's how we got involved. Then when the camp closed we just continued to fight until... and build an organization, the Friends of Eagle Island, until long story short until 2015 when we were able to acquire the camp. I mean I can go through any of the details you want to know but then in 2015 and this is the 5<sup>th</sup> year and actually on Friday evening we are having our 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration remotely online. You should definitely go on that because there will be history. You probably would enjoy it. It's only an hour 7-8 on Friday. I can send you the link.

KG – Yeah. Well tell me about your experience as a camper there in the 50s. What it was like and what that experience meant to you.

CH – Well. I just have to say first of all that the fact that we found all these people that we went to camp with who went to camp over the years and then have stuck with this thing. This was a long time to stick with something to try to save it with all the obstacles that were put up in the

way of actually saving it. It's a tribute to how much people loved that camp. Absolutely adored it and adored their memories and were happy to find their old friends. But anyway, when I was a camper it was quite rustic. We really learned to live in the woods and respect the land. We were taught that this land originally belonged to the indigenous people and that they respected the land and that it had been stolen from them by the colonists and that we were so lucky to have it. We respected the history. Since then actually we have reached out to the Mohawks and the Six Nations Museum and the reservation and so forth and we're establishing a real friendship with them. We will be providing camperships for Mohawk girls from the reservation to come to Eagle Island once we can open it as a sleepaway. With the virus we couldn't open this year. We would have had some this year.

But anyway that's part of what we learned when we learned about the woods and we learned about nature. We learned how to live. When I was.... My 3<sup>rd</sup> year there and my 4<sup>th</sup> year there we took a 10-day canoe trip. We took the Fulton Chain all the way from Old Forge to Saranac. Ten days mostly of rain and freezing cold. It was a very bad stretch in July of '59. You can probably look it up and see what the temperatures were. No '58 excuse me, July of '58. We did that. We learned how to survive. Then when I became a Mariner at the end of '58 – the second half of '58 and all of '59 – I became in the Mariner unit and I learned to sail. That really changed my life. Learning to sail and to sail well and to skipper boats and to take care and to teach other girls and to race. In Saranac Inn.... I think Mark gave you some pictures of some of the sailboat races during that time at Saranac Inn. We were fortunate that Eagle Island acquired Captain Aussie which was given to us by Austin Colgate so that we could participate in the races. I guess he was associated with Colgate camp of course. They were in the races and they gave us a sailboat so we could be in the races and we did very well. Then we got a second Blue Jay. After that my mother donated a second Blue Jay to the camp. Anyway that really enhanced my life tremendously to have acquired a knowledge and a skill of something that came easily to me. I was fortunate in that I have to say that it was the one thing in my life that I could do better than most other of my peers. I can't say that was the case with scholastics or anything else but that was definitely the case with sailing. I came back as a sailing counselor for three years.

KG – How old were you when you attended?

CH – The first year I guess I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade so what would that make me? I don't know. I went for 5 years as a camper so 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> and that's the age, whatever that age is, we can figure that out. I was born in 1943. Anyway, the next year I didn't go to Eagle Island because I wanted to go someplace where I could teach sailing and get a lot of experience because I was too young to be a counselor at Eagle Island and I thought I was too old to be a camper. I went to Cape Cod to a sailing camp so for one summer I taught sailing and had a cabin full of kids that I was responsible for. So then when I applied the next year for Eagle Island, I was able to get the job there. I stayed there for my senior year of high school and my first two years of college as a counselor. I know I was 18-19-20 during those summers, I'll tell you that I know for absolutely sure. I saw the picture in the paper the other day or somewhere a picture from Historic Saranac Lake of the Dew Drop Inn. Did you see that beautiful picture of the Dew Drop Inn somewhere?

KG – Mm-hmm.

CH – Yesterday or the day before and I wrote that's where I had my first legal drink at 18 because back then you could drink legally at 18 so I had my first legal drink at the Dew Drop Inn that summer of my senior year of high school.

KG – Now where did you grow up?

CH – I grew up in Maplewood, New Jersey, which is part of the Oranges – Maplewood and the Oranges – and that was our council that owned Eagle Island. I was in Brownies, and Girl Scouts, and Mariners in Maplewood. That's how I went to Eagle Island. It was a New Jersey camp because the Graves family who donated the island to the Girl Scouts, they were from New Jersey. In 1937 they decided to sell the camp and instead they were persuaded to give it to the Girl Scouts so in 1937 the Girl Scouts got it in August. Then the next summer, in '38, they opened the camp.

KG – Now was it for troops and girls from across New Jersey?

CH – Ok, the way it was – first of all, it never was a troop camp. They never encouraged entire troops to come as far as I know, although my mother brought as many from her Mariner troop as she could one summer to learn to sail. It wasn't a troop camp but it was open first to girls from the council that owned the camp at the time, which was the council of the Oranges and Maplewood. Over the years there were mergers and it became the council of Essex County and then it became Essex and Hudson County and that is what it was in the end. It was a very large council. So it was first open to girls within that county and they got in first and then it was available to anyone. You didn't have to be a Girl Scout and you didn't have to be in that geographic footprint but they were not allowed to publicize it outside of that geographic footprint. Because the Girl Scouts had rules because each council had their own camp and they didn't want.... Of course Eagle Island is like the crown jewel of Girl Scout camps really. The things they could offer – the wilderness, the high peaks, the sailing, and living on an island which is the most exciting thing of all. To live on an island and to learn to live in the wilderness on an island, you know.

Anyway, they weren't allowed to publicize it so the only people that came from outside our council were word-of-mouth. But of course word-of-mouth spread. People have friends everywhere, and families and parents let people know so we had a lot of kids that came from like Long Island or other parts of New Jersey. Occasionally from Saranac and Tupper area but very occasionally because they really were not allowed to publicize it up there because they had their own camp. They have a camp at Lake Clear and so forth. So we weren't allowed to publicize it there which is very sad so now we are making... we are not on to the Girl Scout rules anymore so now we can publicize it everywhere. We will be. We will be offering it very so much so. When we had the first summer when we re-opened in 2019 we had day camp so that could only be for kids in the area. We had kids from Tupper and mostly Saranac and Lake Placid and Rainbow, a couple from Long Lake. It would have increased the second year because a lot of

those kids wanted to come back for sleepaway camp and they would have but we couldn't open because of the virus, because of covid.

KG – Now tell me about some of your favorite memories from your days as a camper or as a counselor.

CH – Well I guess my favorite memory would be sailing in the races at Saranac Inn and sometimes you are winning or coming in close to the top. There was nothing like that to me. Other memories were living for 5 years on the Mariner boathouse. Have you ever gone past the island or been to the island? Have you ever seen the Mariner boathouse with the porch? It's almost on the shore of lake.

KG – Mm-hmm.

CH – It's very noticeable. It's the only major building that you can actually see from the water. The rest of them are sort of behind trees. So anyway, I lived on that porch for 5 summers. That is the greatest experience of my life. Living there and living there with such wonderful friends, some of which have remained friends for my whole life. Some of which I found again when we were trying to save Eagle Island. That was great. I can't say that 10-day canoe trip was so wonderful because it was so cold and so rainy that I have a lot of you know miserable memories of that 10-day. It was great for the part of the time that sunny – the first day and the last day. It's an experience that shouldn't be missed but I don't know whether they was ever a 10-day period for anybody else that was as miserable in the weather as ours was. I've read some of the logs of some of the writings of other people and nobody mentions that. Let's see.... Well, just different events that they had at camp like the rededication ceremony which was given the last night of camp and has been given ever since the first summer when the camp was first dedicated. The camp was dedicated in July of 1938 and for every year after that it was reenacted. It's absolutely beautiful. It's like an epic poem really which tells the whole history beginning with the Ice Age. Beginning with the Ice Age and the indigenous people that lived in the Adirondacks – the Iroquois and the Algonquins – and some of it becomes a legend like the legend of Chief Eagle who supposedly ended his days on Eagle Island before he was moved, sent away to the reservation. That's probably a legend because we've never been able to confirm anything about that. But it's all so beautiful and it's acted out and re-enacted every single year and was for 70 years as long as the camp was open. That's a beautiful memory. I don't know how many you want.

KG – About how many campers were there each summer?

CH – I don't know about each summer but the camp could accommodate like 150 campers at a time. Not all of them stayed all summer. It was an 8-week summer so there were 4 sessions of two weeks each, when I was there anyway. I think in later years it was only 6 weeks because I think the colleges started opening earlier and it was really hard to get staff who could stay all the way till the beginning of September so I think they were 6 weeks. But we were 8 weeks. But not everybody stayed all summer so I can't tell you how many campers came through there

every summer but at one time there could be like 130 campers and about 50 staff. It's about 200 people.

KG – Were there any local staff members?

CH – Oh yes. Over the years, sure. There were. Definitely. We found some of them. One woman who lives in Plattsburgh. There is a woman who lives in Saranac Lake, Carol Jackman. She was a staff member. And as far as campers go – I don't think we found any campers. There were very few, like I said, very few from the North Country because we weren't allowed to publicize it up there.

KG – Tell me about in those early days – do you know what happened in the off-season? Was there a caretaker who stayed on the camp?

CH – No, not during the seasons when the camp... when it was a camp. Before that I think when the Graves family owned it there was somebody who lived there all winter. In fact there is supporters of ours and friends of ours whose parents had some of their siblings... while they were living on the island the siblings were born. During the Girl Scout years as far as I know nobody ever lived on the island during the winter but we did always have a caretaker who would check in on it. That would come across the ice and swoop the snow off of the roofs and just check in and make sure that everything was ok. We always had a caretaker.

KG – None of the buildings were ever winterized were they?

CH – I believe only what used to be the guide's cottage in the Graves days, which we – the Girl Scouts – converted to be the infirmary, the health center. I believe that does have a certain amount of heat. Some of the guides I think lived there all winter because they probably had people coming up there to ice fish and hunt so forth back in the day when it was a private camp, under private ownership. But it was not used in the winter when the Girls Scouts had it. None of the other buildings are winterized. And when I say the infirmary was winterized I don't know to what extent it was winterized. I know there was asbestos that had to be removed when we were working on trying to get the Girl Scouts to reopen it. That was 'Oh we have all this asbestos we've got to get it out of there.' So I guess the asbestos that was used for insulation right? That had to be taken out. How much is it insulated now? I don't suppose it is very insulated now but there is a stove in there or a fireplace. Most of the buildings have fireplaces you know so you could take the chill off the air in the summers and of course the summers aren't as cold as they used to be. The summers are pretty warm now I think unfortunately.

KG – When you started getting involved with the camp again after being a camper and a counselor did you see when you came back (I think you said in the late 90s and in 2006) did you see many changes?

CH – Ok. Like when I went to women’s weekends in the 90s and then I started getting involved? I was very fortunate that I got to go twice during the time that we were still helping the Girl Scouts, when our council still owned the camp. I went up there twice on what I called official business because we were doing things up there. I got to see the camp when it was session. I got to see the kids. I got to see what it was like. Now changes... I found that there were a lot of changes but that the spirit, the foundation, was still exactly the same. The spirit was there, the kids loved the camp, the activities, many of the activities were still the same. Some of them were more condensed because they didn’t have that many kids that would go for the whole summer anymore. It became much more expensive to go to camp. Even though it was a Girl Scout camp it was still a lot of money for people to send their kid for the whole summer. Plus there were so many other camps that kids go to now – sports camps and things like that. Back in the 50s and 60s there was nothing else for girls to do.

Going to Eagle Island - that was the important thing that I want to tell you about for us because girls were so restricted back in our day. We couldn’t even wear jeans. You couldn’t wear slacks to schools or shorts or anything even in the winter. You couldn’t play sports. We didn’t have any sports in my high school that were interscholastic sports or anything like that. You weren’t encouraged to do anything so going to Eagle Island was like freedom. It was such freedom. You could develop your skills, your leadership, your athletic skills, living in the woods, all those things. You could wear whatever you wanted to wear. It was just so different so that going home was really a culture shock if you lived there all summer and then you went home. But anyway it was very different in 2007-2008 when I was there because the kids they weren’t feeling the kinds of restrictions that girls felt back in my day.

Also it was diversified in a much different way. When I went to camp it was very diversified in terms of religion. There were lots and lots – maybe half the kids who went there were Jewish girls and we learned about their religion. We had services on the island every Friday night. We went and they came to Chapel Isle with us. It was very diversified in that way. It wasn’t racially very diversified, a little bit, but when I went back in 2007 and 2008 it was very, very racially diversified. I thought that was wonderful. I think it was almost an island within the Adirondacks which is like 98-99% White up in Saranac and Placid. It was like at least 50%. It was like a rainbow of kids, of every color and all different kids and everybody seemed to get along. Of course I was only there as a visitor. I thought that was so special. It was different than... we were diverse in the way we could be diverse back then. We were very diverse and we were totally tolerant and appreciated the differences. It was different and over the years it really changed. So that’s one of the reasons that we’ve been so upset with all the stuff that’s going on up there but also now we’re happy that it seems to be turning around a bit. Seeing all the articles – the letters – in the newspaper and everything against diversity and driving the director out of Saranac Lake. That’s very upsetting.

KG – Just for clarity on the recording. The Adirondack Diversity Initiative director is the one you are referring to and I think (was it in July?) there was an incident that was reported in the Adirondack Daily Enterprise and kind of continued. Just for the record clarity.

CH – Yes, she had to move. She moved her residence out of Saranac to a secret location because she felt very threatened but I believe that her office is still in Saranac. I think she still works in Saranac, although with the virus maybe she is working mostly from home. I don't really know.

KG – Yes.

CH – I do know that we are partnering with the Adirondack Diversity Initiative and we are very much anxious to be a part of helping the Adirondacks to become more welcoming, and safe. We want our camp to be that way too and we certainly intend to bring a very diversified camper population including indigenous peoples and African American, Black peoples, to the camp.

KG – Tell me a little bit about as far as the physical camp in the 2000s. Were buildings more run down? Was there a lot of maintenance needs or did everything seem pretty well taken care of when you were there?

CH – I missed a little bit of the beginning. Are you talking about when we finally acquired the camp did we have to do a lot to restore it or are you talking about during the time we were campers? I know when we got it from the Graves the camp was already about 35 years old and the buildings I'm sure were in very, very good condition because they were able to open the camp right away the next summer.

KG – So then in the 2000s what types of repairs needed to be done?

CH – Oh. A lot. We had already started by putting some new roofs on buildings and repairing some of the dock work at the service dock and the Mariner boathouse and so forth but during the time that the Girl Scouts had closed the camp from 2009 until we acquired it in 2015, nothing was done. So it lay in really basically disrepair for quite a few years. Let's say they didn't do anything in 2009 so let's say 2008 to 2015, nothing was done. In 2015 – we got it in the Fall – so let's say until 2016 we couldn't start very much work until the ice was out. So that's about 8 or 9 years that the camp was closed that virtually nothing was done. There was a lot of stuff to be done. Those buildings are very historic. I think there are 12 or 13 structures on the islands that are part of the National Historic Landmark that was established in 2004 I believe. We were registered as a National Historic Landmark site by the Department of the Interior of the United States. Mary Hotaling from your organization is the one that really worked on that and got us registered and wrote up all of the stuff that had to go into us being accepted. We have a big plaque in our lodge that says that we are part of that and because of that we've been able to get some grants to restore some of those particular historic structures. A lot is being done. Everything from roofs to things that support the buildings, the foundations, the pilings that support the buildings, the fireplaces, all those kinds of things. We have an architect and we have a contractor that does historic restorations. We got a big grant from the state of New York that was all reported in the newspaper and we just got a second grant from them. But we can only use those grants for the historic buildings so we've done a lot of fundraising and a lot of volunteer work backing up what's being done to the historic buildings. I mean there are a lot of



other things that are not historic: the beach, the swimming dock, the tent platforms, some of the buildings that are not part of... the shower house for instance was not there then. It was not part of the historic landmark. We're still raising money from all the people we found and the supporters the people that love the island, even people on the lake that have come to visit and see it finally. They never got to come during the Girl Scout years and now they've seen this magical secret island that they never were able to visit before. We've tried to have open island every summer since we acquired it to get people to be able to come.

KG – Tell me about what it was like when you were trying to track down some of the alumni of the camp. What was your response when you were able to make those connections with people? How did they respond?

CH – Well, the people from my generation that I found. I have letters from every one of those - not letters but emails – if I would find them and somebody knew somebody and said I know that person's email address. You know that type of thing. I saved every one of them, you know, the responses I got. Everybody was so happy to be found and to be included in trying to save the camp. As far as younger people who went from all those years - from the 50s and 60s on to the 80s and 90s and 2000s – those people... a lot of them we found because a lot of them we found because we established a Facebook group. People look on Facebook. They look for Eagle Island just because they love the camp and every once in a while they might check on their camp online. Of course back in our day there was no way to stay in touch with people unless you wrote letters. There was no way to stay in touch with large numbers of people but now the kids can. The young people can do that so people found us. They found us and they would contact us and say they wanted to be on the Facebook group or wanted to know what's going on. We established different communication systems during the different periods of time when the Girl Scouts still owned the campus. At first we communicated through the Girl Scouts and that was allowed and so forth but then it came to a time when the new merger had happened and they were no longer willing to cooperate with us at all so we had to fend for ourselves. Fortunately we had found a lot of people by then.

KG – Tell me about...

CH – So now we have two Facebook groups – we have an official Facebook group from Eagle Island and then we have the original one which is now we call it the Eagle Island Community so that anybody can write to and anybody can write on and so forth. So we have that and then there was one other thing that was very, very important. There was somebody who was an alumni and had established something called Friends of Eagle Island and made a website of it where people could write in their memories or write in about the camp because it was still open. This is I'm talking about maybe during the 80s – 90s, you know, 2000s. So I found out about that website and I went on it and a lot of people put their email addresses on the website because they wanted people to contact them. So I was able to.... I went through years and years and years, like maybe twenty years, of this website and got every email I could get off of it and contacted everybody and let them know we're trying to save the camp, it's going to be sold.

Depending on what exactly what historical event was happening. Whether we were still trying to help the Girl Scouts or was it the head cut us loose or whether the camp was closed and whether we were trying to acquire it. We also had a lawsuit. You know about our lawsuit, right?

KG – Mmm-hmm.

CH – So we had the lawsuits from 2012 to 2015 trying to save the camp.

KG – Now tell me about your plan and what type of camp you wanted to open up and kind of that early vision for the camp.

CH – Well, on our website you can see what our vision and mission is, there is no point in repeating that. I can read it to you if you want. We want a camp that's embedded in the Adirondacks, that is part of the Adirondacks, which is why we started.... Well it's one of the reasons that we started out with day camps because that would bring Adirondack children to the camp to a camp they had even never known about really before. They could come and that would be a start. We've done everything possible to involve ourselves in all the activities of the community up there. The Winter Carnival – we've participated in the parades. As Eagle Island we have our director move to Saranac on the day she was hired and she lives there and she is active with different children's organizations in Saranac. All those kinds of things. So we want very much for it to be embedded within the Adirondacks. We also want it to be available to children all over the United States like it never was before, to come to an environmentally responsible diversified camp where they can learn to appreciate the unbelievable environment that are lucky enough to be part of and learn to be conservationists.

KG – Now as far as the camp experience, how is it similar and how is it different from the camp experience when it was under the Girl Scouts?

CH – Well, we have a wonderful sailboat fleet, most of which was donated by the family of our first vice president who passed away suddenly. We have a wonderful sailboat fleet. A few are left over from before and most of them have been donated. That it will be a big part of our problem – it will be sailing. It even was for the day camp. Even for the kids. Even the young kids who came to day camp they went sailing every day even though they weren't ready to take out a sailboat by themselves but they went. We had volunteers from the old days, from the old sailing programs that came and donated a week or two of their time to take the kids sailing and teach them as much as they could. They picked - from what I hear - they picked up everything quite quickly. So we have a fleet of kayaks, funyaks, that were donated so we have that. It will be primarily a water camp and a high peaks hiking camp just like it always was. Because it's on an island and of course water is going to be the main thing – swimming, boating, sailing, canoeing, trips around the lakes and streams in the area, and then the hiking in the high peaks. That will be the main thing but we'll also have the typical things like arts and crafts, teaching kids how to cookout, having cookouts. Each tent unit has its own fire circle where they can cook out and things like that. Mostly it will be those two things that I said.

KG – Tell me about how covid 19 has impacted the camp and its function.

CH – Well we weren't able to open this year. When we had started registering kids for camp, for both day camp and... this past summer was going to be our first summer of sleepaway camp. Oh before, when I told you that we could only have day camp last year when we opened in 2019 it wasn't only because we wanted to have local kids but it was also because we couldn't have any kids living on the island because we hadn't finished restoring the water and septic system. Both of those had to be completely redone. We spent a lot of extra money and time drilling for water because DEC wanted us to try to get a well but we could never get enough water to run a camp. It was a tremendous expense and drilling equipment brought out to that island and everything. That held us up. Now we'll have a water system like we always had a water system from the lake but it's an entirely new system, totally new filtration and chlorination and all that stuff. Everything is brand new in terms of that. So that would have been ready for this year so we could have sleepaway camp. We could have kids sleeping there. But then the virus hit in March and for a couple of months we waited to see what was going to happen as everybody else did. We're in touch with all the other camps and part of the National Camping Associations. Our director is very active with all of that and eventually I think it was about I want to say I think it was about the first of May perhaps that we decided we couldn't do it. I'm not... you'd better not quote me on that. I don't know exactly what the date was when we decided we couldn't safely run the camp. It was too risky and it was the right decision because some of the camps that opened had to close because they had a lot of cases. So it was a bad impact because we weren't able to do what we planned to do which was the first year to have day camp, the second year to have day camp and sleepaway camp combined. We were also going to have women's weekends. We were going to have a women's health retreat. We were going to have family camping for two weeks. We were going to have a lot of things and we couldn't have any of them. That was a big setback but on the other hand as we always have done we turned negatives into positives so at least we could spend the entire summer continuing with our contractors with finishing out our first big grant, finishing all the buildings that were in that grant. We could have volunteers continuing all the volunteer work. Just so much stuff – building staircases, building decking around buildings, extending decking so that it would be safer.

Even if we still have the virus next summer we are in process of making the camp as safe as possible so that maybe we can have some kids on the island with social distancing and so forth. We're doing some renovations that would make that more possible so that they could safely sleep six feet apart or whatever it would be and all those kinds of things. We were able to do that all summer long with very small groups of volunteers each few days or each weeks. We had to do social distancing for everybody included the contractors and including the volunteers. We had to follow all the rules of safety. Our nurse was there all summer to make sure that everything was followed and of course we had no positive cases. Everything was very, very safe and, you know, of course everything was mostly outdoors. They moved the dining hall outside. We have all these covered porches that are completely open air so people could eat out there. Very little was done inside the buildings in terms of eating. Of course sleeping was inside but like only a couple of people to a building. We have enough buildings so that if we didn't have

too many volunteers at one time everybody could be in different buildings. They finished the water and septic. That's all ready. They are working... now they are starting to work on running it out to the more remote parts of the island. We have units where kids are going to live in other parts of the island, which we weren't planning on opening this year because they weren't ready. Everybody was going to live in the main camp area but now we're in the process of planning to run the water, the electric, the septic out to the more remote parts of the island. Soon – I don't know what year – but soon we'll be able to open all those areas also.

KG – While you created this network of alumni and were getting in touch and staying in touch with people who really cared about the camp, I'm curious if you discovered some bits of the camp's history that you didn't know about or found out, if you started collecting any type of photographs or anything like that to kind of help preserve the history of the camp?

CH – Oh I would say most definitely. I think on our different websites there is many, many pictures. In fact you should join the Facebook group or at least the official one because every week or so they post other pictures, different historical pictures and stuff. We found somebody who lived in Malone that was a photographer and she had all kinds of pictures from the early 1950s. They are all available on our website.

KG – I'm looking at some now. I saw these photos before the interview so I was kind of curious about how you got them.

CH – Ok. She just passed away. She was a very elderly person. She was in a nursing home. She found us and she was there for the first few years 2006-7-8 sending me stuff. I got to spend a good bit of time with some of the what we call legacy alums, somebody that went to the camp the first year. When we first started we had about 4 that we knew and now there is only one left. The one I told you about. Even my generation we've lost people over the course of this. People who were helping us out tremendously. Two of them... we have sailboats named after them now because their families donated sailboats just so they could put their name on the sailboats. You know people that helped us from 2007-8-9 that passed away - really, really dear friends. We have lots of pictures and I've learned a lot just talking to people like the legacy alums about what camp was like the first few years.

KG – Tell me some of what you learned.

CH – Well, let's see. I learned what building that they lived in the first years. There was no sailing the first years because they didn't have any sailboats but they did have the Mariner unit and they lived in the boathouse. The Mariner boathouse that I was talking about (that I slept on for all those summers) it was built out over the lake. It originally was a real boathouse but they had to move it back on to the land because it was being destroyed by the ice. There is no longer a dock in front of there. Our dock is the service dock which was the dock from the time of the Graves where the servants and where all the supplies were brought across. That's our main transportation dock where are boats are for transportation. So anyway I learned that they

moved the boathouse back onto the land. I learned when they first got their sailboats and I learned a lot about the different friends that they had on the lake that helped us. Like the Stanley family that donated a boat from Stanley Tools. They live down near Bartlett Carry. The Colgates – what they did for us. I learned about that. Let's see... Oh I was actually there when Chapel Isle burned down. I was there. That was 1956.

KG – Were you.

CH – There was a chapel that was like a white building – like white and gray – it was sort of like a New England-style church. That burned down in 1956 and how they have a different type of a building there that is more like an Adirondack-style building. That year that it burned down they had the services still outdoors and when it rained they had the services at Eagle Island in our main lodge. I learned that there was a famous opera singer that lived on the lake. I always forget his name but anyway he lived on the lake. He came over to the island – we had some kind of an event where the kids put on. No, it wasn't an opera singer. He was a Shakespearean actor. They put on *Midsummer Night's Dream* and he came over and watched the performance. I'm going way back now. I'm talking about the first few years of the camp. Those were the kinds of things I learned from the legacy alum that I talked to.

It's hard to say what I know and what I knew because I read so much. When I was in Mariners – the sailing group – and we lived in the boathouse, we ran that boathouse like a ship. We called the bathrooms the head, we called the two main rooms the ward room and the crew room. The counselors had the ward room and the kids had the crew room where we stored all our stuff but everybody slept on the porch. We had jobs like every day. Well, all the units did. You know sweep up or clean up, scrub the decks, bail the sailboats. Every day the sailboats had to be bailed because they always leaked a little bit, especially the wooden boats. Or if it rained there were lots and lots of water in the boats. But anyway, those types of jobs. One of the jobs every day was writing a log like on a ship. You keep a log every day of what happens on the boat during that day on the ship so every day a different girl had to write what happened that day. At the end of each two-week session we would read them. Those were saved over the years and when I first started going up there like to women's weekends and stuff, and even in 2007-8, those logs were still stored on the island. I got mine from all my years in Mariners.

KG – Really?

CH – I got my sister's from her years and asked them if I could take them and copy them. Let me take them and copy them so I have copies of everything that happened during those years.

KG – Wow.

CH – I would love to read all the things that happened in the 40s and stuff. This is interesting: like camp was in session the day World War II ended. How about this? Camp was in session all during the time of World War II when there was rationing of everything. They had to get like government surplus food and stuff because you couldn't just go buy stuff because everything

was rationed. Also when you think about it the Depression was still on when the camp opened in '38. Then TB had not been cured yet. Think about that. The counselors – did they go into town on their days off and possibly expose themselves to TB patients walking around town? Now everybody is so careful but what about then? I really want to know about what that was like and I don't know. TB was cured in the early 50s and then comes the polio epidemic. When I was a kid that was the really scary thing. Parents were so scared of kids catching polio. There was a kid on our street that got it, a friend of mine that I had played with that very day that she came down with it. She never walked again. She was in an iron lung for six months. I played with her that very day. All those things were happening but I don't know about what camp was like during then because nobody talked about it. It wasn't a big deal. Maybe they were so isolated and secure on that island that they felt safe, sort of immune from all these things that were going on in the world you know.

But we do know about things like the first time that somebody walked on the moon, they brought some kind of an old tv in so everybody could try and watch it in the dining hall through a snowy, snowy tv with rabbit ears. They watched that. Then there was the Vietnam War and that was more like after my time also but my sister remembers that and other people that we found remember what it was like during those days. Then the protest songs came. That was one of the things that really changed.

This is interesting maybe: singing was a huge part of camp. So many kids brought songs from other camps. The Girl Scouts had songs from their original camp that they moved to Eagle Island once they got to camp. There were all kinds of.... The old folk songs from the 30s and 40s, like World War II songs, and songs from the Depression and things like that. Those were the songs that we sang at camp and spirituals, Negro spirituals a lot when I was there. But then in the 60s all that began to change because of the civil rights movement and the protest songs that came into being. The kids of course heard them on the radio and they brought them to camp. The songs started really, really changing. The songs have really evolved very much over the years. Nobody knows our songs, our old songs from the old days that were mostly like I told you like either folk songs from the old, old days of folk songs or just beautiful songs that people brought from other camps or that were as we called them love songs to Eagle Island. They are different. That's a very interesting thing. Now I suppose the kids that go to camp now probably don't even know the songs from the 60s and 70s. Those songs from the folk songs – they don't probably know those. I don't know what kind of songs they know frankly.

KG – Wow. Well that's all of my questions. Is there anything I didn't ask you about that you want to share or anything else while we have the recorder still on?

CH – Well, we've had a lot of reunions all during this time of trying to save the camp and restore the camp. We always made sure we had a reunion every year you know to get more people involved. This thing on Friday night will be like a celebration of all that work that went into saving the camp. I think that... do you know how to find it or shall I just send you an email if you want to register? It's only an hour. I'm sure you would get useful information.

KG – Send me an email.

CH – I'm not the only source of information. I might be a good source and I'm sure Mark thought so. I am a good source but there are other sources, especially younger kids. The younger girls that are taking over now of really running the organization are quite a bit younger than me. They have the years of like the 70s and 80s and 90s and even some from the 2000s so they know a lot of different stuff about camp than what I know.

KG – Do you know where those original logs ended up?

CH – Well here is the sad thing. I returned all mine of course but I have copies. I made copies and sent them to a lot of my friends. Some of them are saved and I don't know where they are. You'll have to ask her. But all of them were not saved. We couldn't get them. When the Girl Scouts wanted to put the camp on the market we asked for them because we knew how precious they were and I know that the camp at Blue Mountain Lake wanted them also. Every single day of camp from 1938 to the present there is a log about it! There is something written about it.

KG – Wow.

CH – They are tremendously valuable but they are mostly gone. I don't know. The Girl Scouts said they gave them to us finally when we got the camp but they didn't give us all of them. I know because I saw them on when I was on the island and I knew exactly where they were stored and everything and so... they didn't give them all to us. I don't know what they did with them but they were there. They considered them their property. Well, I guess they really were. Anyway, I don't know how many are saved or how many there are. I can't even... I haven't laid eyes on them since the Girl Scouts finally let us have them. But Paula has them. Paula Michaelson our executive director – she either has them or she knows where they are. But she says they are not all there anymore, not even close to all there.

KG – Well if you have like a digital copy of the logs that you scanned, is that something you would be willing to email me? I'd love to see those.

CH – Well, I don't have any of them digitalized. What I did was I went to Staples and I just copied them. They are all hand written. Some of them are easy to read and some of them are not easy to read. I could scan a few just so you could see and get an idea. The ones I have are '58, '59, '61, '62, '63, and '64 I think. Those are the years that I have in my possession. I also have... this is something else that has really changed. Do you still have more time because I have a couple of more things to tell you about what camp was like?

KG – Yes.

CH – Ok. We used to put out a camp newspaper. The first issue of the camp newspaper came out in the summer of 1939, the second year of camp. It was called the Eagle Eye. I have the very

first issue that ever came out and a couple of others from that year. Then I have some from my year. (wait a minute, wait till this airplane goes by) The camp newspaper was put out on an old mimeograph machine. You had to type on the stencils you know back in my day. They stopped it in 1962 was the last year that they had it, which is very unfortunate, and of course I don't have every issue but I do have those first two and I have mine, some of mine. So that was really cool. The other thing was we had a camp council. Each unit elected two representatives each two weeks to attend camp council meetings. The camp council worked with the program director and basically ran the camp. Not only ran the camp but published the newspaper every two weeks. The newspaper came out of the end of each two-week session. I think that... I don't know why they stopped having it. It just became too much trouble. If the mimeograph machine broke and they couldn't have the newspaper anymore, I don't know really what happened. But I do know that it would be very difficult to have something like that now. Since most of us went for 8 weeks you didn't mind giving up two weeks of your summer to serve on the camp council and to put out the newspaper but it was a lot of work. If you are only going to camp for two weeks or even a month, you don't want to give up all your time to do that. Then since most of the kids nowadays only went for one week or two weeks (not nowadays but you know later) they couldn't have sustained anything like that. There is no way that you could sustain it with the huge amount of turnover that there would be every two weeks at camp. But anyway it was a very special thing back in those days: to get elected to it, to work on it for two weeks.

Then we elected people to run the reunion in the winter to work with the Girl Scout council so out of that camp council we elected the people to run things over the winter. So we already had experience working with alumni and running reunions. We already had that experience because we did it. Anyway, that is just something that was different. They didn't have those things when I got back involved with the camp. They didn't have any camp newspaper, they didn't have any camp council, they didn't have winter council, they didn't have any of those type of things. But they still had the Mariner logs, they never stopped them. I don't have them and I don't know if anybody does but they still had them because I saw them. I saw them stored when I was up there. When I went to different women's weekends we would pull our different ones and read them so we knew they were there.

KG – Yeah. If you could scan like a page or two. I'd love to just see that... I think it would be really cool to just see a sample log and just have that file attached to this interview so people can kind of see what a day in the life was like.

CH – I could also scan the first issue of the Eagle Eye if you want to see that.

KG – Yeah, that would be great.

CH – The newspaper. Chappie was the director and the first thing she wrote in that newspaper – there was a message from Chappie and it was the importance of a camp newspaper. She was writing about 'this is your first copy of the Eagle Eye and it's very important to have a camp newspaper to record all of everything we do.' Camp newspaper – everybody would write things from their own unit. Like my unit took a trip – a 3-day to Saranac Lake and what happened on it.



Or we climbed Mount Marcy or whatever. And the sailboat races of course were always reported in the camp newspaper. I think I sent Mark some of those actually, some of those reports of the sailboat races. He wanted to have those so he's got those from the Eagle Eyes. You work with him, right?

KG – Ok. Yes. Kind of. He runs our wiki website. He's a volunteer so he does that on his own so I don't really have a lot of contact with him but yes I can email him and ask him to send those along to me.

CH – Those are already scanned so you know he could send you those.

KG – For sure. Well, thank you so much for taking the time to do this interview. I'm so glad that we were able to record some of these stories and this history in this way.

CH – Me too. I enjoyed it. What is your name?

KG – I'm Kayt. Kayt Gochenaur. I actually... my dad was a caretaker at the Young Life camp across the lake from Eagle Island so I actually grew up right across from Eagle Island. I've only ever been there once but it's nice to have that personal connection to it. I saw that Mariner's Lodge quite a bit when I was boating or anything like that.

CH – Well when I was at camp it wasn't Young Life, it was Navarac.

KG – I actually just ran into someone who came into the museum last week who used to go to Camp Navarac and was looking into it.

CH – You're kidding.

KG – Yeah, it was a funny connection.

CH – We have one alumni, a friend of my sisters, who went to Eagle Island first and was friends of my sister and went to high school with my sister too and said she went to Navarac. We got a lot of our old friends to sign this letter, writing a letter to the governor. This was right after Floyd was killed and after some of the other stuff that was going on asking him, congratulating him on saying that the police task force was going to investigate the hate crime when the Adirondack Diversity Director was driven out of Saranac Lake. We wrote a letter and she was going to get a bunch of people from Navarac to write a letter to him also. I don't know if it ever happened.

KG – Well, I'm going to turn this off. Thank you.

END