

Mooseheart Convention Speech 2008 “Everyone is Called”



Our kids at Mooseheart love to know what is coming next. They want to wrap their minds around every detail, to be fully aware of the days schedule and know if anything out of the ordinary is on the horizon. The questions come at a faster pace the younger the child. “What are we doing after breakfast?” “What are we doing when we get home from school?” or “Are we singing karaoke at the Berwyn Lodge tonight?” These questions are focused on the short-term and generally never venture farther than a day or two down the road. The harder questions are often kept deep down inside and only surface in the quietness of the night. “Why am I here God?” “Will I live with my Mom again?”, “What am I going to do when I leave Mooseheart?” These questions only grow stronger as the children age and grow towards a greater level of independence.

I had the privilege of traveling with a number of our kids a short time ago and as we were going down the road laughing and joking with one another the subject slowly changed to the reasons why they had come to be at Mooseheart. Talk of abandonment by their parents; death of their primary caregiver and illness of a loved one filled the vehicle. The conversation

ended abruptly when James questioned out loud what is hidden in most every heart, “I wonder what life would be like to live with a real Mom and Dad?” Silence immediately enveloped the van, as those words hung in the air. It was a great opportunity for me to share my life experiences and to encourage them in their walk thru life. I reassured them that God placed them in our care for a very special purpose, that He has a great plan for their life and that they are being prepared and called for something incredible. Just as our kids are being called to do great things, we as a fraternal brotherhood have been called to something greater than ourselves. Together with our children at Mooseheart we are being called to be an encouragement to others, called to share the story of the Moose and called to serve our fellow man.

During this past year you have been an encouragement to the children through your generous giving toward needed projects at Mooseheart. Your gifts provide the firm foundation for our children to be inspired to do great things and live a life filled with purpose. The Iowa/Eastern Nebraska, Kansas, Missouri and Oklahoma Moose Associations are literally keeping the lights on at Mooseheart by funding the Electric Cable Replacement Project. In three months time, the Michigan Moose Association raised funds for a 15-passenger van for the boys in Michigan Home and the Moose Legion provided for the necessary repairs on two engines in the Powerhouse to ensure emergency power and load reduction capabilities for the campus. New carpet, tile and wood flooring and new furniture now graces Virginia Home thanks to the love of the Virginia Moose Association and a wonderful gift of new flooring throughout the beautiful New York Home plus some new furniture were all provided by the New York Moose Association. And in May our kids were blessed to be part of an educational rocket research

and team build program called, Rockets for Schools, sponsored by Sheboygan, Wisconsin Lodge No. 438. Special thanks also goes out to the Moose Associations of New Jersey, Virginia, Tennessee, Pennsylvania and North Carolina for hosting our kids for a week or more during summer. The children truly love to spend time with you in your Lodge homes.

Well, what do the children and teens think of your ability to see the potential in each of them? To make Mooseheart a place where affirmation, love and hope are freely given. Here is what they said in response to your encouraging work –

“I thank God everyday for the support that you show for Mooseheart and for what Mooseheart does for kids. I take pride in knowing that I have a family among the Moose, who are willing to believe in me and want to see me succeed. Without your help, I don’t think I would be as far as I am today. I believe I can do anything because you have helped me build that confidence.” – Krystal Ellsworth, class of 2009 and NJROTC Company Commander, sponsored by Medina Valley, Texas Lodge No. 2196.

“We all like the way you are there for us. We want you to know that your generosity means a lot to all of us kids. Thank you for standing up and making a difference in our lives. I no longer have to worry about where I have to sleep, what I am going to eat, how I am going to get to school and I don’t have to worry about being safe. Because of you I can look forward to college. Thank you so much for helping us.” - Dakota Stevenson, Class of 2012, sponsored by Dunnellon, Florida Lodge No. 2308.

“I am 10 years old and have been living at Mooseheart for six years. I am grateful to be here with my brothers and sister. I’ am involved in 4-H, Girl Scouts and school plays. In the future I plan to be a school nurse. That is something I have planned on for a long time. Mooseheart can help me a

lot, because there is a vocational class I can take in high school that will prepare me for this field. Thank you for the support you have already given Mooseheart and please help my future to be awesome by your continued giving. I appreciate all of your generous care and support.” – Jordan Stone, Class of 2015, sponsored by Kankakee, Illinois Lodge No. 802.

“Thank you for giving to Mooseheart so we can stay here. We really like this place. Kids at Mooseheart are counting on you.” – Manuel, Angel and Angelo Melendez, Class of 2017 and 2019, sponsored by Quakertown, Pennsylvania Lodge No. 1622.

Your love planted the seeds of success early on in the life of Chris Morones, 17 ½ years ago to be exact. Chris, Salutatorian of the class of 2008 mentioned in his graduation welcoming address on May 24th your incredible influence in his life, “My whole life I have called Mooseheart home....from the changing of my diaper to now graduating with a scholarship to go to college.” Chris thrived at Mooseheart enjoying success in the classroom as well as on the athletic field. Starting at quarterback for three consecutive years, Chris led the Red Ramblers to back-to-back playoff appearances. In July of 2007 Mooseheart was approached by John Keilman, a feature reporter for the Chicago Tribune about following the Red Ramblers throughout the 2007 football season. The commitment by Mooseheart to allow Keilman an insider’s view of Mooseheart resulted in three days of front-page coverage in the Chicago Tribune in late November 2007. A follow up on the nine senior football players was recently completed by Keilman and ran again on the front page of the Tribune on graduation day, May 24th. As a part of the coverage, a short interview was shot with Chris and aired on chicagotribune.com. Here is that interview.

The articles in the Chicago Tribune helped to tell the story of Mooseheart and of your commitment in caring for at-risk children. This past year many articles ran in local newspapers about the accomplishments of our children and teens. From athletics, 4-H, scouting, National Honor Society, band, students giving back, and the Physics Bridge breaking competition, they all shared the hope that is the Mooseheart story. In preparation for Mother's Day on the Mooseheart campus, Director of Communication and Public Affairs, Kurt Wehrmeister, became aware of an Extraordinary Parent Contest through the Nancy Grace Show on CNN Headline News. Within about 48 hours we had shot video in the Michigan Home, featuring Family Teacher, Ta'merria Ross as our extraordinary parent along with her 10 junior high and high school boys. Incredibly, three days later the segment you are about to see was aired on the Nancy Grace show during primetime and was featured on the CNN website under the Extraordinary Parent Competition webpage.

Coming to a television near you later this summer and fall will be a Hugh Downs hosted video segment called the "National Education Report." One four-minute video featuring Mooseheart will air on PBS channels in all 50 states, and another two-minute video will air nationally on CNBC, MSNBC, CNN, FOX News and others during primetime, as well as multiple regional airings. An eight-minute Corporate Identity Documentary was also produced and will be available along with the two-minute video for viewing on mooseintl.org and mooseheart.org as well as Google Video and YouTube. Here now are the two shorter versions of the National Education Report featuring Mooseheart.

Through the generosity of Duane Chapman aka ***Dog the Bounty Hunter***, Mooseheart will be named as the Chapman's charity of choice

during their appearance on Celebrity Family Feud, airing in primetime on NBC beginning July 1st. The winning family will realize a \$50,000 donation from NBC for their charity. Mooseheart will also be featured on A&E during Season 5 of Dog the Bounty Hunter which airs beginning July 16th. Filming took place on April 11th during a two-day concert event at the Mooseheart Fieldhouse featuring Dog the Bounty Hunter, which resulted in a \$30,000 donation to our program. So from newspaper print, to Internet WebPages and television shows Mooseheart's story is being told, being read and being seen, all because of your belief in the greatest good we can do - care for children in need.

At Mooseheart we raise our children in a community that preaches teamwork, teaches humility and selflessness and prepares young girls to be women and little boys to be men. One young man that didn't miss those lessons was Justin Niersbach. Justin arrived at Mooseheart in 1995 with his brothers Morgan and Donald. Because of you Justin learned to value community, learned to stand up for the defenseless and grew in his love for our country. Justin also realized that there are consequences for negative actions. You see, shortly before the 2001 Commencement Exercises at Mooseheart, Justin made a serious mistake, so serious that it resulted in his suspension from Mooseheart and the graduation ceremony. Not having Justin walk with his class was a tough call, but one that had to be made to hopefully teach an important lesson of personal responsibility for ones actions. Justin has made Texas his home since leaving Mooseheart, but returns north to visit when his finances allow. On May 24, 2008 Justin was present to watch his younger brother Donald receive his high school diploma from Mooseheart High School. I am sure as Justin watched Donald accept his diploma; he was reminded of his momentary stumble in life, thankful

that it was a lesson learned in his youth and not as an adult. Justin is a better man today because he was held to a higher standard at Mooseheart seven years ago. Let me tell you why.

Justin, having excelled in NJROTC at Mooseheart and pound for pound among the toughest players to don a Red Rambler football jersey, joined the United States Army late summer 2001. He has completed two tours of duty in Iraq and today is a Sergeant in the 4th Infantry Division, stationed at Fort Hood. Justin is preparing for a third deployment to Iraq in early August, which has been delayed for several months while his three-year-old son, Cameron battles a rare form of cancer, germ cell tumors, which represent only about 3% of all childhood cancers. Cameron is finishing up a long round of chemotherapy and is awaiting a CT scan to hopefully confirm the victory over this deadly disease. Soon Justin, having entrusted his son's life into the hands of God, will go to serve his country with a faith, determination and courage rarely seen today. Because of you Justin is able to provide for his family, serve our country and overcome obstacles that would cripple most of us. Because of the training at Mooseheart, a number of graduates step up to serve our country every year. I know of this morning three other young men that called Mooseheart Home the same time as the Niersbach family - Fernando Brown – Class of 2005, Rocky Philips – Class of 2000 and Robbie Queenan – Class of 2000 who are also serving overseas in the US Military in Kosovo and Iraq and several others, including Dimitri Taylor and Paul Morgan who have returned from active duty overseas within the past year.

It is the testimony of these fine young soldiers that tells us we are on course, that our work is making a difference, that we give with purpose – transforming the lives of our children within the protective cover of the

defending circle. Today I call on each one of you to honor through your commitment to Mooseheart our young men who dug holes in the sandbox on the Mooseheart playground and now dig fox holes in a foreign country, young men who as children painted water-colored pictures in school to carry home and today proudly carry the flag of the United States of America, whose colors don't run. Young men who marched with a rifle as part of the NJROTC Drill Team and now raise a rifle in defense of freedom, young men who because of your love and generosity didn't worry as a child what tomorrow would bring and now carry the weight of the world clearly upon their shoulders. Young men who serve with a purpose because you give with a purpose.

Arthur Ashe is quoted as saying, "From what we get, we can make a living; what we give, however, makes a life." We, the Moose, are all about life; life for our youngsters at Mooseheart, our seniors at Moosehaven and those within our communities. We are called to be more committed than ever to share the vision of hope for our children through the Moose spirit of generosity. We should never grow tired of hearing about the difference we are making in children's lives, that we are a wonderful blessing to those in need. We have heard the call to encourage, to serve and to tell the story. Although much like the Mooseheart children, we would love to know what is coming next, I know if we follow through and commit to doing more today than we did yesterday the result will be that our kids win, our seniors triumph, our communities grow and we become champions! God Bless Mooseheart!