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### Hello GrandMuddah, Hello GrandFaddah

[Summer Camp](#): The pursuit of spontaneous fun

by Beryl Shereshewsky

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Anyone who has ever been to camp remembers the intricacies of packing a trunk and anticipating a summer of excitement.

While much of that prep work has remained the same, summer camps these days may surprise you. Upholding the same objective — to have a great summer — there are certain facets of camp life that have undergone a face-lift in recent years.

"We have maintained our traditional activities, but we have also added new ones, like improv classes, podcasting, photography," says David Schreiber, director of Camp Timber Tops, in Greeley, Pa. "In the past five years, we have done so much, but when you walk in, you feel the same spirit that has been here since our start in 1963."

And certainly that old spirit — sitting around a campfire, singing songs, playing games, and making friends — is still important to the kids. But according to Ari Ackerman, founder and chief executive officer of [Bunk1](#), camp isn't just for them any longer.

"In 1999, I asked myself, 'How could summer camps be helped by the Internet?'" he says. "How could I use technology to bring parents and grandparents into their kid's world, without interfering with the camp experience?"

The answer became Bunk1, an online [registry](#) of sleepover camps across the country. Helping to bring the camp world home, Bunk1 allows parents and grandparents to log in and see pictures of the goings-on at the child's camp and send direct emails to the camp, which are, in turn, printed out and given to the camper.

Perhaps the biggest area of growth is in specialty camps. If your little one has an interest in soccer, there's a camp for that. The stars? There are camps for budding astronomers as well as Hollywood wannabes.

Further still, traditional camps are offering do-what-you-want programs as well. Todd Rothman, director of Deerkill Day Camp, in Suffern, N.Y., is excited about celebrating the camp's 50th anniversary this year.

"Camps today give kids more freedom of choice," says Rothman. "In the past, camps would have set schedules. Today, I think you'll find them to be much more elective-based, giving kids the power to decide what they want to do and not do."

But the original goal of camp is still there.

"We focus on youth development, helping kids gain the social, emotional, and intellectual skills they need to become successful adults," says Heather Kiley, director of the American Youth [Foundation's](#) Merrowvista Camp, in Tuftonboro, N.H., and Miniwanca Camp in Shelby, Mich. "We are going to include all the fun of roasting marshmallows and swimming and telling stories, but as a camp, we are here to help the kids learn and grow."

Although sleepover camps encourage independence, there is something to be said about the support and love kids get from home. Care packages, in particular, are a great way for grandparents to stay close to the grandchildren while they are away.

"Care packages are always welcome," said Devri Byrom, assistant director at Camp Betsy Cox, in Pittsford, Vt. "We encourage families to send at least one care package per session. Books, Mad Libs, clean clothes, little games — kids love getting these treats in the mail."

As for Grandma's homemade cookies, while enticing, they are no longer the best packages to send. "Campers used to receive cookies, brownies, or candy, but we have disallowed food care packages altogether," explains Kiley. "When packages arrive, we open them with the camper, and if there is food, we dispose of it, partly because of animals, but also because of increasing [food allergies](#)."

So what's the best way to send a care package? "We encourage grandparents and parents to send gifts through companies that create care packages," says Byrom. [Fussbudget](#) and [Just 4 Camp](#) are companies that offer a wide range of products for young and older campers.

Beyond the internet look-see, camps reserve a special day for families to come by and check out what's going on: Visiting day, the day kids make sure to clean behind their ears and put on a clean shirt. It's also a day when parents and grandparents get the complete tour (and learn who the best [counselors](#) are!). These days, visiting day is not just for parents. Grandparents are not only welcome but encouraged to be part of the camp family, which makes sense as recent trends show that grandparents are going well beyond the care package when contributing to their grandchildren's summer experience.

"We make sure to send grandparents... camp information because more and more grandparents are paying for their grandchildren's summer with us," explains Byrom.

"My fondest memories are being at camp," adds Rothman. "I believe camp is about the experience, and I believe that parents and grandparents believe in that experience."

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