

A Journey of Hope: Inspiring Stories of Courage and Unconditional Love

Neil Willenson

Kurt Chandler, Editor

Katja Heinemann, Photographer

Camp Heartland Project (August 2005)

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Courageous Campers: “[b] “My lifelong ambition is to rid the world of prejudice,” writes Joshua, age ten. “It makes me sad that I can’t tell all my friends I have HIV.” Joshua found a place where he could be himself: Camp Heartland Center, “a community of support for young people affected by HIV.” The center, founded in 1993 by AIDS activist Neil Willenson, provides outdoor experiences, counseling, and a sense of belonging for children who have HIV and AIDS, or whose family members do. The week-long program, once held on leased space, grew into a year-round charity dedicated to helping these children, and educating the world about AIDS.

Willenson gathered essays, poems, interviews, and drawings by Camp Heartland children, creating a gut-wrenching but uplifting volume: *A Journey of Hope: Inspiring Stories of Courage and Unconditional Love* (Camp Heartland Project, Inc.; Kurt Chandler, editor; Katja Heinemann, photographer; 112 color and b/w photographs; 132 pages; softcover; \$22.95; 0-9767169-3-3).

The children’s reflections are accompanied by artful, intimate photographs, and Willenson contributes several poignant essays himself. Although the title seems sentimental, the content is substantial. Willenson’s writing is strong and moving, and the children’s works are varied, yet all are both sorrowful and hopeful. The book ends with a section titled “Call to Action,” in which camp counselors tell their stories and Willenson quotes celebrities who have supported the organization; a question-and-answer section offers detailed facts about HIV and Camp Heartland.

An inspirational and significant contribution to the fight against AIDS.

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