

Basic Detail Report

Title Interview with Hilary Axtmayer

Date 11 October 2024

Primary Maker Hilary Axtmayer

Medium born digital audio file

Description (a) Audio file of interview with Hilary Axtmayer. She was interviewed by Erica Dewey on October 11, 2024 online over Zoom. (b) Video file of interview with Hilary Axtmayer. She was interviewed as part of the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History's Community History Project discussing moments of change in her life. Hilary is 42 years old, a resident of Madison, Connecticut, and the current chief program officer at the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp. The Hole in the Wall Gang Camp provides free programs centered around fun, friendship, and the spirit of childhood for children with serious illnesses. She described a significant moment of personal change as having her children because they motivated her to make the world a better place. Another important moment of change was working as a summer camp counselor at the Hole in the Wall Gang Camp. While working there, she discovered the program's positive impact on children with serious illnesses and their families and wanted to pursue it as a career. She further explained that working in psychosocial support programs at the Hole in the Wall Gang and Southern Africa helped her pursue an education in public health and social work. One specific moment that greatly impacted her was a session with 125 kids with HIV and AIDS. The children were visibly happy and celebrating despite having a disease, and that is when Hilary realized the

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“power of our camp” and the hope it instilled. Another eye-opening moment was during a family weekend at the camp. Hilary was helping children complete the climbing tower, and a young girl with leukemia told her parents she wanted to get to the top. Despite the worried parents and staff and the girl’s weakened physical condition, she reached the top of the tower. Hilary explained that the girl reaching the top made everyone believe she would “conquer” cancer, and eventually, she did. The organization has such a powerful impact by fostering “a sense of community” not only for children but also for parents by hosting various programs, like bereavement sessions and parent caregiver retreats. By witnessing the strength of children and parents through these activities, Hilary recognized that she could overcome challenges in her own life, including being diagnosed with breast cancer. Also, Hilary realized she would take things for granted, so she taught her children to be kind and understand that other kids face different challenges. She highlighted feeling lucky and proud to have such a meaningful job and to share it with her kids. In addition, it changed her outlook on life, including how life is short, and you must prioritize the people you love. The biggest lesson Hilary learned was that the “human spirit” allows people to see the positive in the most difficult challenges and persevere through them, and the importance of helping people who are less fortunate.

Dimensions Duration: 40 Minutes, 1 Second