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## Summer Camp

Summer camps are special, especially this one! Camp Inner Light is nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains, overlooking a large freshwater lake in Virginia.

Kids, ages 7 to 11, spend a fun-filled week enjoying typical camp activities like swimming in the cool lake, fishing from the wooden dock, roasting hotdogs and marshmallows over an open campfire, and hiking in the lush natural woods.

This is not your typical summer camp, though. It's a magical empowerment camp where kids learn how to build self-esteem and confidence, manage their emotions, and practice mindfulness and gratitude.

The camp is owned and operated by Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, who started the camp after they retired. Mr. Wilson, a former naval officer known as Mr. Fixit, takes care of the property and cabins. Mrs. Wilson was a leadership instructor for adults and runs the day-to-day camp activities. Her vision is to move from empowering leaders to empowering children.

The kids call her Mimi. She is a tall, middle-aged woman with salt and pepper curly hair that gently lays on her shoulders. She puts the kids at ease with her kind and caring presence.

On the last day of camp, Mimi gathers the children for a closing ceremony in the large open field in the middle of the cabins. As they sit cross-legged on the lawn and feel the warmth of the sun, she says, “Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths to settle down and get centered.” Then, she asks them to share something they love about themselves and something they are grateful for.

Grace, a shy 9-year-old, timidly raises her hand and says, “I like my long blonde hair, and I am glad my tangles are finally gone. I am...um, grateful for making new friends this week at camp.”

Cal, an energetic 10-year-old, bolts his hand upward and shouts, “I like my friendly personality. I am grateful for catching a five-pound bass and Mr. Wilson helping me take it off the hook!” He stretches his arms wide to show everyone the size of his big fish.

After all the children share, Mimi instructs them to stand in a circle facing each other, and she mysteriously reveals a glowing ball of light between her hands. The children gasp in amazement!

“What the heck is that?” Luisa asks, in her Hispanic accent. The ball of light glows bright white with tiny yellow flecks and is larger than a softball but smaller than a basketball. Mimi rotates her hands around the floating ball of light until it starts to swirl and says, “I invite you to take this ball of light and place it in your heart.”

She passes the ball of light to Reid, a funny 7-year-old boy with sandy brown hair. Reid carefully balances the ball of light between his hands and then pushes it into his chest. He smiles and says, “That was epic,” and passes the ball to Grace.

She balances it between her small hands and exclaims, “Wow, it is light as a feather!” This continues around the circle until everyone receives the ball of light.

Jake asks, “Hey, Mimi, what is the ball of light?”

Mimi smiles lovingly and says, “The light contains everything you learned at the summer camp - self-love, courage, honesty, managing feelings, positive thinking, energy, and gratitude.” She reminds them they can access the light anytime by closing their eyes, taking a few deep breaths, and placing their hands over their hearts.

Krystal, a girl with dark braids who loves to sing, reaches for Mimi’s hand, tilts her head upward, and says, “I’m going to miss you, Mimi,” as a few tears form in the corners of her eyes. The other children nod in agreement and rush over for a group hug.

Mimi brushes away a tear and reminds them they will be together again during the winter holiday camp. Krystal begins to sing, “This little light of mine. I’m gonna let it shine,” and the kids cheerfully join her, lifting their spirits.

Together, arm in arm, they walk towards the main lodge to meet their parents and families, wave goodbye, and promise to stay in touch until they meet again.

As Mimi watched the last of the children leave, she couldn't help but wonder how each of the children would use the light in their lives?