

Generosity from Generation to Generation

How young alumni are redeeming the time

By: Trisha Vaughn

How should you live in your 20s? How do you redeem the time you've been given in a decade that many would describe as the prime of your life?

In 2016, Huffpost.com contributor Sophie Davis offered an answer symptomatic of the times in which we live. Davis' article, titled "12 Things You Should Do in Your 20s," captures the essence of our culture's postmodern focus on the self in her first line: "Your 20s are your selfish years... ensure you are selfish with your time, look after yourself, pay attention to your mental health, and love the people who are important to you."

In an act that could easily be described as countercultural given the context of that article and the prevailing culture of the day, four young WKYC alumni and their spouses took a radically different approach to redeeming the time they've been given by supporting Western Kentucky Youth Camp in a remarkable way: sponsoring a cabin in memory of their grandparents, Murrell and Carolyn Fitzgerald.

For Collin and Audreanna Fitzgerald, Torie Fitzgerald, Cody and Kirsten Payne, and Sid Herndon, it's a delight to support WKYC – a place that played a major role in shaping who they are as Christians – and a most fitting way to commemorate the lives of their grandparents, who embodied a selfless love for the church and for children.

"Murrell wouldn't have been able to afford going to camp," remembered Kirsten. "He came from nothing and had nothing. Once he got older, had a business and could donate, camp was one of the first places he supported. He saw a need and had a desire to strengthen the camp and get more kids there. Him doing that and how it affected my time there shows me that my small donations can have an impact over time. Who knows what kid I am touching? If I am bettering their time and enjoyment at camp, why would I not want to be involved?"

Although Murrell didn't grow up in the church, he came to know Christ through his wife Carolyn, and he realized the positive impact that places like church camp could have on someone's life. "Even though he didn't make it on his own, he saw what it did for others," remarked Kirsten. "If it was important enough for him to give his money to WKYC and not ever go there, then it was important enough for us to give as people who went there."

Murrell and Carolyn Fitzgerald's legacy should not be understated. He and his wife launched Arrowhead Camper Sales in the 70s, and grew their business into an enterprise with family at its heart. Today, their children – Jason and Tracy Fitzgerald and Andrew and Teresa Herndon – own and operate the business, while their grandchildren, Collin Fitzgerald, Torie Fitzgerald, and Kirsten Payne, all work together as major contributors to its success. Perhaps just as strong as the business Murrell and Carolyn founded are the other legacies they left their children and

grandchildren: the emphasis on family, church, and example of giving back to community organizations like WKYC. It's a pattern that has continued.

In terms of WKYC's value, Board Treasurer Collin Fitzgerald emphasized, "I think it's the best mission field most of us will have the opportunity to participate in. It's extremely rich what we can do. Personally, it's my spiritual anchor. Each year I look to it for rejuvenation and as a reset point."

WKYC's mission of *building strong Christians* resonates with Torie as well: "It's easy to build lukewarm Christians, but building stronger Christians is harder – especially in today's world and society, and what people are pressured into doing and attending. I see it in kids growing up. It's a trend to fall away, not grow stronger. High school is really where it gets hard. It's easy to fall away and into the temptations... but then you come to WKYC, and it's so encouraging to be around 100+ kids your age. You build that community and when you have that community behind you, you can build stronger Christians."

For campers like Torie, this community formation begins at a young age. Her mom, Tracy, was always willing to go with her to Pee Wee Weekend. That introduction was enough to make her excited for the next step: 8, 9, and 10-Year-Old Week: "I remember the water balloon fights and feeling so welcomed! The girls I was in the cabin with weren't people I went to school or church with – just random girls I happened to meet. We became really good friends." They went on to attend other weeks together, and even made special trips to see each other during school.

Alumni like Audreanna Fitzgerald came to camp a little later in life, but the friendships she strengthened while there and the network she gained still impact her today: "Before Tyler and Nancy [Wunderlich] came to Northside, I didn't go to camp at all. Tyler and Nancy came and were so about it that I figured I would give it a shot." After attending Teen Week, she remembered that "I didn't realize how important camp was and how church is not just something I had to go to – it was something I enjoyed going to because it was a group of friends and family." That summer, Audreanna decided to get baptized, and WKYC changed her entire perspective of what church was and what it could be in her life.

In addition to the relationships built, WKYC's strong emphasis on children having a biblical foundation in a place that's fun resonated with everyone. Sid Herndon elaborated: "What WKYC does for the kids is awesome!" When asked what his favorite memory was at camp, he said, "Trying to win the belly flop competition – Tyler started this when he was a lifeguard." WKYC's core values of faith, family, and fun help bring a well-rounded experience to all of its campers in a setting where kids can have shared experiences with their peers and with mentors who genuinely care about their faith.

All of the grandkids are focused on making an impact as early as possible. "We read about giving until it hurts, and I truly think that Granddad did without so he could give. As a Christian it's important to do that. I want to make him proud and part of that is donating money to places," noted Kirsten. She hopes that her children will see names like Murrell and Carolyn

Fitzgerald on the cabins, and that they will think, “man, they were this giving and loved God this much! This is the impact they had, and they’re being remembered for it.”

“I hope that in the future more and more people – alums included – will see that you’re never too young to give back.”

To learn more about WKYC’s Stronger Together Campaign and how you can support its mission of building strong Christians, visit wkyc.org/stronger-together.