

WHY CEDAR CREST?

Amy Gray, parent of two long-time Cedar Crest campers (and now one staff member!) shares her “Why Cedar Crest” story for her family.

Tell us about yourself and your family.

Our family consists of Dad (John), Mom (Amy), Ava (17) and Ella (15). We moved to Clarksville in 2015 and started attending Hilldale UMC. Our girls have been active in youth activities at church throughout those years, and that is how we first learned about camp. I did not go to church camp as a kid, but I was a church youth group leader as a single adult and attended a different camp in Kentucky as a volunteer counselor for several years. I learned through that experience how impactful church camp can be, and I always wanted that experience for my children.



How long has your family attended Cedar Crest?

Ava first attended Cedar Crest at age 9 in 2016. We decided to send her after Russell, the Executive Director of Cedar Crest, came to speak to parents at our church to encourage kids to come to camp. Ella also started attending at age 9 in 2018. They have attended camp every year since (except 2020 with the COVID shutdown). This has included regular camp, 2-week camp, adventure camp, environmental camp, and retreats. Ava transitioned to working as a counselor for the last 3 summers. In 2022 and 2023, she did several weeks as a Counselor in Training. In 2024, she was officially on staff and had the best summer of her life. Ava even chose to have her Senior pictures made at Cedar Crest last summer. Both of my daughters are counting the days to get back to camp for 2025.

**“AS A PARENT, WHAT I LOVE MOST IS
HOW HAPPY AND EXCITED MY KIDS GET
ABOUT GOING TO CAMP.”**

What are some of your family’s favorite Cedar Crest memories?

As a parent, what I love most is how happy and excited my kids get about going to camp. The buzz at home around getting ready for camp is fun. I love helping them move in and meeting their counselors. I love looking for them in the pictures that are posted during camp weeks and seeing how happy they are. I love the tired, sweaty hugs at pickup, but I also love the fact that they would really rather stay at camp.

For the girls, I know some of their favorite moments have been talent shows. Some of Ava’s favorite memories are her adventure camp backpacking trips. Ella said her favorite memory was her first trip down the zip line. Both of them love the camp traditions that I don’t even fully know about - the certain meals that Mrs Becky fixes, the songs, cookout, and epic games like Capture the Flag.

What about Cedar Crest keeps your family coming back to camp?

As a parent, I have continually chosen it, most importantly, because it makes my children so happy. They can be their absolute true and authentic selves at camp, and that is so valuable in a world where that is not always appreciated. Ella is actually choosing to go to camp this summer rather than come on our family vacation to Puerto Rico - it is her happy place. My kids can be quirky, hyper, silly, quiet, loud, sometimes even sad - they have always felt like it is a safe space to let their guard down. After their first years of camp, each of them has always wanted to attend multiple weeks of camp each summer.

I have also chosen to send them back because I know they are safe. I have sent multiple medications with complex instructions that have always been followed to the letter. My kids each have different diagnoses that sometimes require special care and attention, and I have never worried that their needs would not be met. They have been in all kinds of situations over the years - hikes, on the lake, swimming, high ropes, white water rafting, heat warnings, tornado warnings - but I have always known they were safe, and they barely ever had more than a few bug bites.

I know now from being the parent of a counselor that their training is intense, and they take their responsibilities very seriously. The fact that Cedar Crest is accredited by the American Camp Association- which I know is difficult to attain and maintain - and there are very few camps in the area that have that certification is also a reason to continue going back. I truly know without a doubt that my children are loved and well taken care of when they are at Cedar Crest.

Lastly, I know that camp has been instrumental in their spiritual growth and has instilled values that I share. They have learned to love God, the Earth, and ALL of the creatures and humans God created.

**“I TRULY KNOW WITHOUT A DOUBT THAT
MY CHILDREN ARE LOVED AND WELL
TAKEN CARE OF WHEN THEY ARE AT
CEDAR CREST.”**



Anything else to add?

It might sound dramatic to say, but I believe repeatedly choosing to send our kids to Cedar Crest Camp has been one of the most important choices that we have made in raising them. My children are VERY different from each other, but one thing they have in common is that Cedar Crest is their favorite place on the planet. I know without a doubt that the weeks spent at camp have helped to shape them into people who are able to live in community with those around them, be accepting of differences, and appreciate the beauty of God’s creation. You can’t ask for much more than that.

Learn more about our programming at cedarcrestcamp.org.