

Sixty Summers

Sixty years ago the gates opened
and the Virginia pines whispered,
enter here to wander,
to be,
and to find a friend.

One wooden cabin became
five villages, stitched together by running feet on dirt paths.
An open field became hundreds of
capture the flag rivalries at dusk,
and a lake took shape,
where the first brave paddles
cut the water each morning.

In sixty years, much has changed in the world—
station wagons to electric cars,
paper maps to google maps,
post cards to iPhones.

But here, some things have remained constant.
The river still flows past the soccer field peacefully,
campers scatter into the dining hall at dawn,
and palomino horses pluck sweet grass from the pastures.

A friendship bracelet is still knotted tight
by the fingers of a lifelong friend.
An arrow still flies from a shaking arm
into its first bullseye,
met by cheers of victory and a proud smile.

And since the gates opened sixty years ago,
each person who has walked through them has carried something out-
a spark,
a story,
a newfound strength that does not fade in September.

Summers may end,
but what is built here does not.

It lives on within us—
as constant as the river,
as bright as the fire,

as steadfast as the pines—
and it will for sixty more.
Singing,
friendship camp, you will never know what you mean to me.

Poem written by Nika Ackenbom