



Clockwise from top: Casey at the bat for her first Camp Fantastic in 1993 (we had a baseball theme that year); with camp friends Jeff and Jeremy in '98; with Special Love founder Tom "Elvis" Baker in '93.

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30 Years & 30 Heroes

Hero #20 of 30

Camp is chaotic enough, so imagine going a month after being diagnosed with leukemia, two weeks before you start middle school, and right at the height of your All-Star softball season. No wonder **Casey** felt overwhelmed! She had lost over 10 lbs and most of her hair, she was in the most intensive phase of her new chemotherapy protocol at the National Cancer Institute, and she felt depressed. She also didn't know she was going to camp until her parents told her just about the time she got on the bus. She recalls being "surrounded by far too happy people. They were singing the strangest songs—quite loudly—and they kept hugging everyone, including me." Upon arrival at camp, she immediately developed a fever and spent the first two days in the infirmary. It would all make any 12-year-old head for home. But Casey stuck it out, because even though she was surrounded by people she barely knew, they somehow understood what she was going through:

"I can unequivocally say that it was that understanding that changed my life. There was no judgment. There was no frustration. There was only infinite patience... joy and laughter and *life* beyond the confines of my diagnosis. Camp Fantastic took in a desperate, lost girl who was overwhelmed by her sudden fragility and, a few years later, released her as a blossoming woman with an enduring comprehension of human compassion."

Casey is now married to her childhood sweetheart, recently finished grad school, and hopes to teach at a local school. She says, "I'm all grown up, but I still like singing those silly camp songs."

