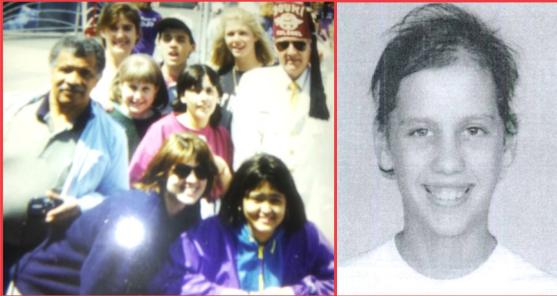




30 Years & 30 Heroes

Hero #23 of 30



Clockwise from top: Camp was a family affair for the McGowan clan, including Colleen (in orange), her twin brother J.J. (far left), sisters Katie (in red) and Annie (lower right), and parents Rose and John (center); her first camp portrait; with camp friends (center) at a night with the Baltimore Orioles.

Most people wouldn't ask for a brain tumor for their birthday, but that's what **Colleen** was diagnosed with on the day before she turned six. She had cranial surgery to remove an astrocytoma, which kept her cancer at bay for four years before she relapsed and had to start chemotherapy and radiation. It was while her mother, Rose, was sitting in the hospital waiting room that she noticed a Special Love flyer lying on the floor—it was for the 1990 edition of Octoberfest Family Weekend. Through that event, her family was introduced to Special Love “and that changed all of our lives forever,” Rose says, adding:

“We walked away with names, phone numbers and a new family that has remained a large part of our life for the last 22 years. Special Love taught us how to cope, how to laugh and how to find acceptance while struggling with the life and death decisions that needed to be made. Colleen's been blessed with many good things in her life, but nothing will ever compare to Special Love and Camp Fantastic.”

Colleen attended Camp Fantastic for many years and her siblings — JJ, Katie, and Annie — attended BRASS Camp, as both campers and staff. Rose was so committed to Special Love, she joined the board of directors in 1993, serving as president from 1998 to 2000. She sums up Colleen's experience:

“Colleen was given six months to survive at the age of six. She's now 32 and works as an analyst with the government. She is a living miracle and some would credit that to good medicine, but we all believe that the Special Love experience was there at the right time for her. She loves the organization, the people and the campers and shares her experience with others going through the same struggles. And to think it all started with a flyer on the floor....”

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