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At Tapawingo, traditions run in the family

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PARRY SOUND — Some things about Camp Tapawingo are hard to explain to outsiders.

Nobody can say exactly why juice is called "grunge" here, why white stripes are painted on the canoes, or why campers shout "Yip de ninigo!" when boaters arrive at the docks.

Even director Liz Greenway, who's been at the camp since 1979, doesn't know. Many of the camp's traditions predate even the memories of elderly camp alumni who gathered for a re-union this year, Greenway said.

"So much of it is always the same, it's scary."

Not that there's any need for change. Run by the YWCA of Greater Toronto and located just south of Parry Sound, Tapawingo has been delighting girls for 70 years. More than 300 campers aged 7 to 15 come each summer to swim, sail, and sing.

Many, like Mallory Lipton, 9, do the same activities and sing the same songs their mothers did. "My mother and my grandmother came, too," said Mallory, who already knew most of Tapawingo's lore when she arrived last year.

Counsellor Crystal Lang, 17, said she has trouble describing the camp experience when she returns home.

"It's really weird. They don't get it unless they're camp people."

Tapawingo is among 94 programs supported by The Star's Fresh Air Fund. The fund's administrative costs are absorbed by The Star, so every cent donated goes toward sending children to camp.

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