



## **The Gautreau Family**

*By Grace Horner*

"It's amazing! Like everyone needs to go," Jayne Gautreau expressed last week when we sat down to discuss what Camp Attitude has meant to her family via our Zoom video conference.

The Gautreau family lives in Sutherlin, Oregon and includes her husband, Sabin, and three sons: Ethan (17), Micah (14), and Zakiah (8). Ethan, the camper at Camp Attitude, has autism. He is verbal and fairly high functioning but struggles with social cues and needs prompting to the extent that he could not be sent off to just any camp. It is hard for him to connect with others and this makes it challenging for the family to connect with others also.

The Gautreau's first experience at Camp Attitude was in July 2018.

"A friend told us about it and said it was like Disneyland," Jayne explained.

She was skeptical.

"How could it be *that* great? Those of us in the special needs community learn quickly to manage expectations to avoid disappointment," she added.

Doubts aside, Jayne applied to Camp Attitude and signed them up. On the way to camp, her husband asked, "So what is this camp about?"

They soon found out. Upon pulling into Camp Attitude, Jayne was overcome by emotion and slightly overwhelmed by the buddies, volunteers that support each camper and younger siblings, and the CORE, volunteer staff, greeting them. They helped the Gautreau family with their bags and made the process of settling in effortless.

"Honestly, it was a little unusual to just be handing my kids over to others. But, it was undeniable. There was someone taking care of us! Refreshing! There aren't words to express it really," Jayne said.

One of the Gautreau's fondest memories from Camp Attitude involved the highly anticipated "Lake Day." Ethan was expecting to go fast and get knocked off the inflatable during his turn at tubing behind the boat. Ethan sometimes struggles to express his needs verbally in a way that's understood well by others but as a family we often know because of body language and we know him but for a stranger this may be harder for them to understand. The experience provided was slow and careful, not exactly what Ethan had in mind. The result was a meltdown.

The next year Jayne and Sabin felt the need to prep Ethan to avoid unrealistic expectations. But this time, they explained to the boat driver what Ethan wanted.

"It's ok, he can handle it!" At Camp Attitude, they aim to please and the boat driver did not disappoint! Ethan was all smiles. "The joy on his face!" Jayne reflected.

Camp Attitude offered the Gautreau family much needed rest and connection with people who were on similar journeys. Jayne and Sabin worked out some hard things by talking with others. Ethan's buddy was gracious and had a great time with him providing both some independence for Ethan and a refreshing break for his parents.

Jayne offered these thoughts to anyone considering Camp Attitude. "Some are hesitant to apply. People in the special needs community struggle with trusting that their kid won't be left out or that it will actually be a good experience, but just go give it a chance because it might be something really amazing"

