

# Finding excitement—and a refuge

Weeklong camp offers a welcome respite for kids with Tourette's

By Jason George  
TRIBUNE REPORTER

At 6, Scott Loeff developed a speech impediment that no doctor could explain.

Seven years and a slew of specialists later, a team of Chicago physicians shared a diagnosis with Loeff and his parents: Tourette's syndrome, a neurological disorder that's characterized by tics, such as his stutter.

It has no cure or confirmed cause. It affects boys nearly four times as often as girls. Though throat clearing and eye blinking are two of the most common tics, the syndrome presents a plethora of indicators. (The best-known tic of uncontrollable cursing appears in only about 15 percent of cases, according to the syndrome's national association.)

In fact, the lone universal attribute to living with Tourette's might just be the societal shunning that often accompanies it.

"Kids can be cruel. It was difficult," said Loeff, now 45, who often daydreamed of finding a refuge from the teasing. "I wanted a place where those with Tourette's could get away from that and just be themselves."

Enter Tourette Syndrome Camp USA.

For the last 16 summers, children from around the world with Tourette's have retreated to a Lake County YMCA camp to enjoy seven days of sun and fun, and to experience a rare reprieve. For many adolescents and teens it's the most-anticipated week of their year, a chance to socialize and relax as well as learn a bit about living with Tourette's from the camp's founder and director, Loeff.

"I, like lots of people with Tourette's, suffer from OCD [obsessive compulsive disorder]," he said as a grin spread across his face. "It's perfect: Camp is my OCD."

Last week, the camp held its winter session at the YMCA Camp Duncan cabins. Despite a smaller group than



Alex Shariff (from left), 18, of Manitowoc, Wis., counselor Peter Tarnoff, 23, and Ryan Leary, 14, of Hoover, Ala., enjoy a video of Ryan tossing snow onto himself during a Lake County YMCA camp in Ingleside. CANDICE C. CUSIC/TRIBUNE PHOTOS



Winter session campers (left photo) take part in a team-building exercise in the YMCA Camp Duncan cabins. Dalia Bonilla of Elgin (above) plays a game. Tourette's syndrome, which has no cure or confirmed cause, affects boys nearly four times as often as girls.

the 50-or-so youths the camp hosts in the summer, the crew didn't cut back on activities. They played in the snow, ate cookies and watched a magic show.

"When I go on stage I don't have tics for two hours," said

Brian Woodbridge of Columbus, Ind., the 20-year-old magician.

"I can be on stage, walk off and then"—Woodbridge ticked, making a popping sound with his mouth—"And then, OK, yeah, I have Tou-

rette's."

Ryan Leary, 14, of Hoover, Ala., whose head jerked through much of the show, excitedly agreed.

"I know what you're saying. When I'm wrestling I don't have tics either!"

Unfortunately, such tic-free stretches often convince outsiders that Tourette's syndrome can be consciously controlled.

"Their friends and teachers will often say, 'Just stop,'" said Mary Kay Maloney,

whose son J.P. D'Amico, 18, has Tourette's and volunteers with her at the retreat.

"They can't, of course," she added. "Truly, there are some days—we call them high-tic times—when I can't believe he has the courage to walk into his school, but he does."

J.P. said he finds strength in his Tourette's: "You can take insult after insult every day, and you can still go to school with a smile," he said.

Given how little is known about the syndrome—doctors diagnose Tourette's only by observation—it should come as little surprise that the treatment methods vary widely.

Some of the campers take no medication, while others ingest daily drug cocktails, often aimed at the associated obsessive-compulsive and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorders.

Their education paths vary too. Some, like J.P., attend large public schools, while many are home-schooled like Aidan Keeble.

"That's one reason I love Tourette's camp," said Aidan, a bright-eyed 13-year-old who wears braces.

After the magic show, the 15 or so children circled up for a game while Loeff hung back and chatted with Tina Shteyn, a social worker who helps him take care of Robert, Loeff's special-needs, adopted teenage son.

"Tina doesn't have Tourette's, but we hang out with her anyway," joked Loeff, who works for Chicago's Department of Buildings.

A musical-chairs-like game began as a time filler to keep the children's attention. As it stretched on, the campers grew more animated, laughing and joking as their shoes squeaked across the tile floor. They shouted one another's now-familiar names, exchanged high-fives and cracked jokes. Most share sharp senses of humor—honed, perhaps, out of necessity.

"Be careful, guys," Loeff said. "Be careful."

Loeff's admonition seemed halfhearted, at best. The campers were simply behaving like rambunctious, care-free kids.

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## SHAPING CHICAGO: BLACK HISTORY MONTH

# Medical pioneer is also a mentor

Doctor helps others follow his path

By Lolly Bowean  
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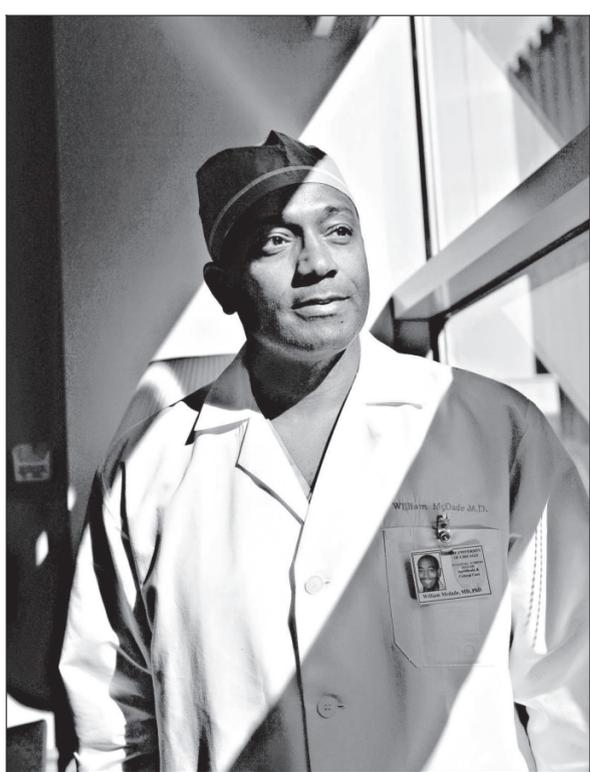
Dr. William McDade was one of the youngest students at the University of Chicago Pritzker School of Medicine in the 1980s, and the first African-American in the school to pursue both medical and doctoral degrees. His PhD was in biophysics and theoretical biology.

"I know what it feels like to be the first person to do something in an academic environment that may not be very welcoming," he said.

So for nearly 29 years, McDade has worked to increase the number of minority physicians produced by the Pritzker School—now as associate dean of the Office of Multicultural Affairs.

After recruiting the students, he helps groom them for careers and serves as a mentor. He also pushes faculty and staff to better understand cultural differences and how they affect patients and students. In addition, McDade, 48, is a working physician and conducts research on sickle cell disease.

McDade is passionate about his work because he believes that medical professionals who can relate to



Dr. William McDade has worked to increase minority enrollment at the U. of C.'s Pritzker School of Medicine. ALEX GARCIA/TRIBUNE

their patients provide better health care and bring better outcomes.

"There is a health crisis," he said. "There are too few physicians for minority patients. . . . Who takes care of minority patients? It's minority physicians."

Under McDade's leadership, Pritzker has increased its African-American enrollment from 10 percent in 2004 to 13 percent in 2008. During the same time, the number of students of Asian heritage has grown from 19 percent to 27 percent.

McDade grew up on the South Side and graduated from Thornwood High School. He studied at DePaul University and in 1980 entered the University of Chicago.

During his career, McDade

has served as chairman of the Governing Council of the American Medical Association Minority Affairs Consortium and president of the Cook County Physicians Association. He is the first recipient of the AMA's Recognition of Excellence in Eliminating Health Disparities Award and is president of the Chicago Medical Society.

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# 2 soldiers are killed in blast

Servicemen with Illinois roots die in Afghanistan

By Erika Slife  
TRIBUNE REPORTER

Master Sgt. David Hurt joined the military to fulfill a lifelong dream. Army Staff Sgt. Jeremy Bessa joined out of a sense of duty after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Both men, who have Illinois roots, were killed Friday in combat near Khordi in the Oruzgan province in Afghanistan when their vehicle struck an improvised explosive device, according to the Department of Defense.

Bessa, 26, a 2000 Downers Grove South High School graduate, died at the scene. Hurt, 36, a native of Oak Park, died after he was medically evacuated to Kandahar Airfield for treatment.

Both were assigned to Company B of the 1st Battalion, 3rd Special Forces Group (Airborne), in Ft. Bragg, N.C. Bessa was a Special Forces communications sergeant, and Hurt was a Special Forces operations sergeant, according to the U.S. Army Special Operations Command News Service.

The men's families, who mostly live in North Carolina now, spent the weekend grappling with their sudden losses.

Hurt, 36, was born in West Suburban Hospital in Oak Park. He moved to Tucson when he was 3, where he was raised, said his mother, Bonnie Hurt, who now lives in Hope Mills, N.C. As a child,

she said, her son would play with toy military soldiers and chuckled that today the military uses similar toy soldiers to plot strategies.

"I was very proud of him," she said, choking back tears. "He loved the military."

It was Hurt's fifth deployment in the government's war on terror. He enlisted in the Army in 1992 before becoming a Green Beret in 2000. His many awards include the Bronze Star with two oak-leaf clusters.

He was sent to Afghanistan in January, his mother said. Before he left, he had put a flagpole and flag in front of her home, she said.

"When they showed up, the four soldiers Friday night, they said they knew which house it was because of that flag," she said.

Hurt also is survived by his wife, Kelly, 11-year-old daughter, Avery, and 5-year-old son, Wyatt, all of Grays Creek, N.C. He has a sister, Deborah, who lives with their mother. Their father, Joe Hurt, was a longtime resident of Franklin Park before recently moving to Memphis.

Bessa was born at the Tripler Army Medical Center in Honolulu. His father, Ted, is a sergeant major in the U.S. Army. He also is survived by a brother, Christopher.

Bessa lived with his grandmother while he went to Downers Grove South for his junior and senior years. He wanted to finish high school in the United States, said his father, who was stationed in Italy at the time. He also was able to graduate from the same high school that his mother had graduated from, he said.



Army Staff Sgt. Jeremy E. Bessa, 26, (left) and Master Sgt. David Hurt, 36, were killed Friday in combat near Khordi in the Oruzgan province in Afghanistan.

*'He was a wonderful little child and grew into a very wonderful man.'*

—Julie Bessa, on her son, Staff Sgt. Jeremy E. Bessa

Bessa spent one semester at Southern Illinois University before being inspired to join the military after the Sept. 11 attacks, his parents said. He joined the Army in April 2002 and became a Green Beret in 2007.

"He was a wonderful little child and grew into a very wonderful man," his mother, Julie, said.

Bessa recently became a dad. He was home when his son, Carson, was born on Dec. 4.

"He was so touched with his child, his boy, and the prospect of being a father," his father said.

Bessa is also survived by his wife, Lindsey, who lives with their son in Fayetteville, N.C. He also has an 18-year-old sister, Bryana, and a 16-year-old brother, Joel.

His mother said he used to love sitting on the deck, entertaining the family with his guitar playing and made-up songs.

"He's going to be greatly missed because he had such a big heart," his mother said.

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