



April 2024

The Story of Sandy Strong Weekend

Sandy Strong Weekend is a new Sandy Island Camp event for 2024. It will take place June 7-9, 2024. We are extremely excited about it, and hope that you'll read a little about it below, learn more, and become as excited about it as we are. The idea for Sandy Strong Weekend evolved from a special event that took place in June of last year, Shades-On-Stay-Strong Weekend. This is the story of how that weekend came to be, and how it evolved into the 2024 Sandy Strong event.

Some Sandy-ites may know that our current Director, Angelo Firenze, met his late wife, Cassie Firenze (nee Wickes) at Sandy in 1982 when they were both Week-1 campers with their families. They were respectively 10 and 8 years old at the time, and to be perfectly frank, at that point in their relationship they were more antagonistic with one another than friendly. Let's just say the Junior program counselors had their hands full with the two of them. Over the years their initial antagonism transformed into friendship and by the early 90s they were on staff together. Cassie a "salad girl" working under the tutelage of then chef Donnie Migliaro, and Angelo in a variety of roles. First as Carol Carlsten's assistant on the tennis court, later as a lifeguard on Joe Tenczar's waterfront, and later still on the service crew working for Wayne "Griff" Griffin.

In those staff years, Angelo and Cassie developed the circle of friends that would become their closest life-long friends. In adulthood, this group went on to become largely week-3 campers. By 2006, Angelo and Cassie's long friendship had blossomed into love. They got married in June of that year and a few weeks later became Week-3 campers themselves for the first time.

In November 2009, their son Nico was born. Angelo & Cassie were happily married, living in Belmont, MA and virtually their entire annual calendar revolved around their week-3 friend-group, and that cherished week of vacation each July. In the week before Christmas 2017 sad news struck. Cassie was diagnosed with a particularly ferocious form of breast cancer. Friends from every corner of Cassie's life rallied around, but the core of that support group were Cassie and Angelo's week-3 circle. The rallying cry in support of Cassie, coined by the week-3 friends was: Shades On Stay Strong. Cassie embraced this ethos and with the support of her cherished circle, she faced her diagnosis with a grace courage and gratitude that was nothing short of extraordinary.

The cancer eventually took Cassie from us in 2019, just a few weeks after her final week 3 on the Island. In the years that followed, a primary driving mission for Angelo was to make sure that the example that Cassie set, of grace and gratitude in the face of adversity never be forgotten or lost. He wanted this for himself, but most importantly for their son Nico. Living life with intention became all important, and when the opportunity came in 2021 to be a part of the Sandy staff and be on the island all summer as members of the community that had been so supportive



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of them, both, Nico and Angelo jumped at the chance. The healing that has come from the Sandy Island community has been nothing short of magical for both of them.

2023 was a watershed year for the Firenze family and for Sandy Island. It was clear as the year began that this would be the first truly post-pandemic summer. At Sandy, all pandemic related protocols could finally be lifted. At the same time, by what felt to him like a circumstance of divine intervention, Angelo was newly engaged to Rosie, who came into Angelo and Nico's life with a sort of empathy, understanding and love that has left Angelo wondering more than once if the meeting was inspired from beyond. It was against this backdrop that Shades On Stay Strong Weekend came to be in 2023. The idea for the weekend was simply to celebrate the idea of grace and gratitude in the face of adversity and to celebrate this in the place and with the community that lent its strength to let those ideas flourish.

As serendipity would have it, another Sandy Island family was at that particular weekend in 2023. They didn't know Cassie, but that didn't really matter. They had their own Sandy Island Story of love, healing and somber remembrance. The extended Britton family of week-5 was there in June to participate in a pre-season opportunity to lend their carpentry skills to the camp, and simultaneously remember a son that had left this earth far too soon. Their story was different, but not all that different. The first kernel of an idea for Sandy Strong 2024 took shape following a discussion between Angelo and the Britton brothers.

We need a weekend to honor the past, to honor all those that have been part of our Sandy Island family and who are no longer with us in this realm. Their names are many, and what they have meant to us and our beloved island over the years is simply too much to try and put into words.

Taking advantage of this 125th Anniversary year to pause and honor the past and the people that got us here, seems like an opportunity not to be missed. Simultaneously it is noteworthy however, that two different Sandy families, coming from different circumstances, landed on the island one pre-season weekend, drawn there to offer stewardship as a specific way to honor a dearly departed soul. It is noteworthy that healing at Sandy is a direct consequence of the act of giving to the Island. Looking to the future is how we honor the past.

Looking to the future, while we honor the past is precisely what Sandy Strong Weekend will be all about. Sandy Island is truly a gem set in a sea of blue. How we will preserve that gem, protect it and enhance its brilliance for generations to come: This shall be the work of Sandy Strong weekend. If the work of Sandypalooza weekend is to prepare the island for the next season, then the work of Sandy Strong weekend will be to prepare Sandy for the next 125 seasons. And to do it as our specific token of remembrance to the people of the past 125 years.

The program of events for Sandy Strong Weekend will include a chapel service of remembrance, but it will also include workshops to discuss the long-term vision for Sandy. Topics will include items like Facilities, Program and Culture. We will discuss what the island infrastructure is, and what we hope it can be. We will gather information on the programming offered, and the



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programming we want to offer. We will talk about what the culture has been, and how to preserve the best of it in the rapidly changing face of modernity. Finally, we will have fun. We will enjoy Sandy for Sandy's sake. We will laugh. We will dance. We will break bread in the dining hall. We will gather around a campfire and eat s'mores.

If this sounds like something that interest you, if you want to give back, by sharing what matters about Sandy to you, then this weekend is for you. [Here is a link to the Sandy Strong Weekend Registration Page](#). We truly hope to see you there.