

# Fresh Air Fund's Friendly Towns Program Creates Opportunities

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I vividly remember waiting impatiently for my “Fresh Air Fund Sister” to arrive that first summer. It was the summer of 1973. As a young child, it was impossible for me to imagine the girl who would be spending two weeks with us at our home in suburban New Jersey. We were told that she lived in Manhattan, and her name was Judy. She was three years older than I. Would she be taller than I was? Since she was a city girl, I was sure she would be wiser. I recall being more than a bit apprehensive, with butterflies in my stomach. I also couldn't imagine that she wanted to spend two weeks out of her own magical city. My town was a place where the mundane such as eating ice cream, seeing fireworks for the 4th of July and catching fireflies were the most memorable highlights of my suburban summers.

It turns out, she wanted that too. During that summer, and many summers after that, she joined my family. Our families kept in touch during the school year, we got to know Judy's mother, and eventually Judy began spending winter break with us as well. Judy became a member of my family, and the experience of having an older sister from a different background and with a nearly opposite world view was one of the most impactful experiences of my life. It kindled within me a desire to learn about people. It taught me that a generous spirit is a gift to the giver even more than the receiver, and that no matter what our differences are, it is possible to take a deep dive and find a commonality that was hard to imagine could exist.

Judy's placement with our family was thanks to the [Fresh Air Fund](#) Friendly Towns program, whose mission is to provide a summer adventure to inner city NYC children. When I learned that Proskauer's "For Good" programming included the opportunity to spend a morning at the Port Authority supporting the send-off for the participants in the Fresh Air Fund Friendly Towns program, I knew I had to go and meet these children. As the send-off team, our job was to entertain the kids while they waited to board their buses which would lead them to their summer adventures. This included playing card games, supervising coloring book projects, applying temporary tattoos, and generally chatting up the travelers and helping them feel comfortable. I chose to be a roving temporary tattoo artist, so I could meet as many children as possible and learn their stories. Some were veterans of the program, returning to the same families; others were leaving home for the first time. Some were apprehensive, most were excited. All were bright and open and reminded me that programs like the Friendly Towns program open a world full of possibilities for those who are able to take advantage of these opportunities.

I felt so lucky to be able to be a part of the program again, albeit for a very short morning. I witnessed the generosity of spirit of the experienced summer veterans as they helped the first time travelers, telling them what to expect. I shared my own story as a nervous host child, which got more than a couple of laughs from some young travelers. I made new friends from the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan. And I left feeling that I received more than I gave.

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