

Station WINS  
May 12, 1934  
1:15

## YOUTH IN THE WOODS

L. B. Sharp, Ph.D.

If we are to understand better young people and improve our methods in education and child development, it is essential to share experiences with these young people in as many new and different situations as possible. Too often our child development programs are based upon contacts with children in too few situations. Parents know their children chiefly from what goes on in the home - teachers know their students chiefly from what goes on in the classroom, and Sunday school teachers from what goes on in church. The real personality of the child comes to the surface in significant ways in various other types of situations. It is important that parents, teachers and leaders of young people should increase the scope of their contacts with children.

My purpose here is to suggest a few kinds of opportunities which afford desirable situations for knowing young people better. It is well known to us all that we learn more about children, or I might better say they learn more about us, when we do things with them as pals or partners - jointly sharing achievement, fun, work, and hardships. Especially do the woods furnish splendid opportunities for these joint experiences in different and important ways.

What is it that causes young people to want to go to the woods? It is something very natural and almost instinctive that calls them to the hills and trees and streams. There are, of course, conditions in city life which cause those young people to want to get away, but there is something basic romantic and appealing in the woods. It is perhaps this often spoken of "bond" between life and nature. It appeals to young people more because they have not been conditioned excessively by the artificial ways of living. Adults have been confined too much to artificiality of life and have lost the spark and the thrill of romance and discovery.



Something of what I have said must have been in the mind of a city 14-year old boy who ran away recently from home and school. On a certain morning he left home an hour earlier. He had made preliminary plans for his departure on the previous day and left his hiking clothes in his school locker. When he arrived at the school, he went to his biology teacher's desk and hurriedly wrote a note in which he said: "Dear Mr. Smith: I am running away from home and school for three reasons:

1. I want to go out in nature and live in nature.
2. I am tired of the drab city life.
3. I want to be on my own for awhile."

Would it not have been a revelation to the teacher and parents if they could have shared this experience with the young lad? It was a very natural thing on his part - something within him needed to be released, but evidently neither the parents nor the teacher had discovered it. They were too far from the "real" boy. It was a terrible thing from the standpoint of the teacher and parents. They condemned him - uncontrollable, foolish, wild and bad, and he must never do it again. It is true that his contemplated three months sojourn living in nature lasted only two days, but he was satisfied. It would have meant a good deal to the parents and teacher if they could have lived through the experience with the boy. Yes, I really advocate parents and children running away together. The chances are, however, that the boy would not choose to have both parents and a teacher on such an expedition.

#### OUTDOOR EDUCATION

~~Hiking and camping~~ activities in the woods afford splendid opportunities for kinds of education which cannot be provided in any other way. In the first place, the woods, streams and hills with a background of sky and clouds in all weather conditions present an atmosphere of beauty which cannot be equalled. Much appreciation of the beauty of nature can be gotten through



through books and pictures, but its true beauty comes first hand. Do I hear you say that a child does not see or feel beauty? Try him out. He may not exclaim with traditional terminology, but his actions and expressions will speak louder than words.

At every turn and at every step, some phenomena of nature register upon the mind of the child. He travels and plays in the woods in awe and wonder of the various treasures which are unfolded before him. Everything is in its natural setting - the squirrel, the rabbit, the snake, the chipmunk, the woodchuck, the birds and other moving objects are living at home ready to receive kind visitors. They are all moving. They are not lifeless and grouped alphabetically behind glass doors. They do not have labels on them. Things are quite different. Everything is real. Nothing artificial. Everything is designed and placed there by nature itself. There is nothing mechanical. Man's work is no place to be seen. In a situation of this sort negativeness in the child is gone. He is in a state of readiness for companionship and learning. All this makes a lasting and deep impression on the camper. Adults cannot understand what this state of readiness is unless they have shared these experiences. Strangely the adult reacts in about the same fashion, except perhaps with a bit more reserve.

Hiking and playing in the woods furnish splendid opportunities for young people to collect things. The desire to collect is strong. On trips to the woods with young people it has been my difficulty to keep them from bringing back the entire forest. There is no better time for teaching conservation of wild life, flowers and trees. Collecting merely to get possession is not to be encouraged, but to collect under guidance and for a planned purpose is quite another thing. When son unloads his pockets full of precious stones, there is usually misunderstanding at home, but not so if the parent brought back a collection also.



Not long ago, a group of biologists from a well-known museum was on a trip for scientific observation. A little 7-year old girl accompanied her mother and joined this group of specialists. The child had already learned about the care of trees and flowers, as she had been on many exploring trips with her parents. One of the biologists discovered a rare kind of flower and offered the suggestion to the group that these should be taken to the museum to add to their wild flower collection. He, of course, had intended to do it for scientific purposes and in the approved manner, but the little girl interrupted and said, "We never pick the flowers. We leave them in the woods." For the child to have made this remark in the sitting room or in the school room would not have meant so much, but as it happened, it had a most telling effect. A compromise was made and the biologist was permitted to take one flower as a sample.

Adults too often are critical of this collecting desire on the part of children, but we must allow time for this desire of collecting to grow into a more purposeful and scientific activity. It can be done but, of course, children do need to have guidance. The best time to give guidance is not when the exhibit is brought home and put on the table for display, but during the actual collection. With this, there is the element of discovery that plays an important part.

Activities in the woods furnish a splendid opportunity for adventure and discovery. A gully, a path, an unknown trail is far more exciting and venturesome than going down Third Avenue or Broadway. There is no pattern of travel in the woods. It is territory in the minds of the youngsters that has never been discovered, at least as far as they are concerned.

Climbing to the top of the tree to look out - scrambling over the brook to see what is in it - scaling the side of the hill or mountain to see what



is on the other side - upturning the log or rock to see what is underneath, - discovering what is at the end of the path - what lives in this hole - what made this track - how did all this brush and sticks get build up in a nice round pile in the water - what was that noise - I saw a deer - no it was a rabbit - we hiked 40 miles but really it was only 4 - we put out a big forest fire - and we were lost and had to find our way. What an educational tonic it is to live these experiences with young people. You can't get it vicariously.

A counselor of boys was very wise in the method used to discover something about the lives of chipmunks. In talking to a group of boys about these clever little animals, three of them became interested to go on an expedition to get a closer view of the way a chipmunk lives. After many hours and days of searching, a place was found near the roots of a tree where a chipmunk made his appearance at almost regular intervals. The blind was built so that four pair of eyes could peek through without being detected by the little animal. One boy took a pin-hole camera which he had made; another took his note pad and pencil to draw a picture; the third boy took a pair of field glasses to get even a closer look. It was an unusual setting and the chipmunk must have had some idea that he was being watched, as he put on a splendid exhibition. For his breakfast he had selected a sizeable five-inch night crawler. With the trunk of the tree to his back and facing the sun, he held the wiggling worm in his two front paws and bit off dainty portions and all according to approved table manners. With each bite, he quickly adjusted his two front paws on the worm so that the next bite was in readiness. When the worm was all gone he seemed to clap his hands in great satisfaction. This situation was a discovery. It was an adventure. It was highly educational. It was something learned that will never be forgotten. Between adult and child, it was a shared educational experience. The comparing of notes and discussion



of what they saw was of great importance both from the standpoint of education and child development. There are thousands of opportunities in the woods for this kind of education and understanding. The adult and child minds are brought together in a new and significant way.

To live in the woods is not a simple matter. It requires a great deal of training and experience. It is very simple to provide for oneself under home conditions when shelter, food and clothing are at hand, but quite another matter with uncertain weather conditions and lack of facilities. To share these experiences with young people gives one an entirely new insight of their lives.

Not long ago, a father joined his boy on a camping trip to the woods. Strange as it may seem, this was a new experience for the father, but not for the son. This was a case of the son teaching the father how to cook his food under outdoor conditions. The tables were reversed this time, but this particular father was a good sport and apparently was so considered by the son, as evidenced by the remark that, "Gee, Dad, you are doing swell with your bacon. It isn't burned bad at all!" The particular outcome of this trip was that the father had shared the experiences with his son and has now added a new hobby to his list - something more in common at home.

This is the day and age of hobbies. We are now realizing that new hobbies play an important part in the wholesome relationship of children and adults. A father can much better understand the urge of his boy for new fishing tackle when he himself is interested in new fishing tackle. When adults increase the scope of their hobbies, they increase the possibilities for better understanding of their children. The time should rapidly come when the teacher without a wide assortment of hobbies will not be considered a well-qualified teacher. The school curriculum should provide for a wider range of opportunities for teachers and students to share these educational hobbies. Those