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June 7, 1937
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CHARACTER VALUE OF CAMPING

Unless the sum-total of the child's camping experience results in better character, the existence of our camps can hardly be justified.

Our outcome in terms of improved behavior will depend upon what we mean by character, the goals or aims we set up in camp, the type of organization used in dealing with campers and the quality and ability of our camp personnel.

Character is the way on acts; it is the sum-total of his actions, made up of thinking and the will to do certain things at given times. Total character is made up of innumerable quantities of those units of thinking and action.

No camper can be judged as having bad character if he displays just one or a few undesirable units of action and thinking, nor should he be judged as having good character by the mere display of one or a few units of thinking and acting. Character growth implies an increasing amount of good behavior and a preponderance of good acts most of the time.

Society or an individual may judge these acts as good or bad. There is not always agreement on this, so there will be disagreement within a camp staff as to what is right and wrong in many instances. Much depends upon the total character or behavior of those judging.

In some ways society has a norm or average by which a person's actions are judged as either as good or bad. If goodness is synonymous with character, the important thing is to determine whether or not the individual is growing in goodness. The youngster who has been doing a lot of bad things and decides to take a turn for better behavior, finds it difficult to get support and encouragement. Society is tempted to classify him as a bad actor and is against him. It takes a discerning counselor to surround this type of child with understanding and council and nourish (***)

A prime essential is to know what is good and bad. This is to a large extent teachable. Teachable by lecture, council, and most effectively by example. It takes more than knowledge of right and wrong to build right behavior. It takes a will to do the right thing.

Motivation plays a wedging part in this character learning process – too often and entirely too much motivation of the wrong sort surrounds our youth. We need to place more emphasis upon the will to do right because it is right rather than upon the dangerous practice of setting up rewards or prizes to get desired action. Such methods are over-used in our schools and camps. It is too easy for a youngster to be good just long enough to get his mark or prize or reward. The slump comes afterward all too quickly. The total character growth, therefore, is not what we hoped.

Motivation to do right because it is right is the more difficult. It takes more time and patience, but in the end pays greater dividends. We used to build for the principles of right living which will remain in the minds of children, giving them the ability and will to decide what is right and be independent and determined enough to stand upon their own minds and fact, without yielding to the wrong influence of others.

You cannot determine a child's total character, by some sort of mental plugging as you would plug a watermelon to see if it is ripe. It requires a total knowledge of the camper – knowledge of his physical being, his mental being, and the total relationships of his home, friends, and his community, environment. You need to know so much about him that you can foretell with almost unerring certainty with his responses will be in any given situation.

(***) of each individual camper will be increasingly better and better.

Reliable experimentation has shown that the home influences child behavior more than in other institutions. (Sufficient and adequate tests in camping have not been made). Tests show further that in the home the mother has a greater influence on the child than other members of the family. This suggests a definite challenge to camp. If our work is to influence behavior of campers more than other agencies including the home and no less should our objective be, the staff should be made up of the highest type of men and women who consistently practice a high standard of living. We cannot expect any better conduct on the part of children than we ourselves practice, be it in the school, business, home, or our camps.

Right living demands that we go beyond the legal limit of the law and not live just within the legal minimum. More credit and recognition should be given for doing right beyond the law or accepted rule. A sturdy Arctic frontiersman says, "This thing of hard

and fast bound laws for 120,000,000 people doesn't work. There ought to be some place where intentions count". A wise counselor and camp director will give much credence to this matter of intentions of children. It has profound possibilities in character growth.

The success of our camps depend to a very large extent upon the type of program and method of organization. After many years in education work with camps, I have come to feel that considerable change is needed in camp organization. There is too much artificiality in our camp programs. Too often we take from the city bag and baggage of city activities, games, and various paraphernalia, place them out in the woods some place and call it a camp.

The traditional type of camp program is organized around the usual camp activities, games and sports, dancing, crafts, music, dramatics, nature, etc., with departments for each and a director in charge of each. In this type of program the campers shuttle about, receiving instruction in each, in true school fashion. It is hoped that the campers will get this thing we call CAMPING. The program too often becomes one of hodgepodge or unrelated activities without a central drive or purpose.

The method of camping it has been my pleasure to work out in recent years is known as the CAMPTIVITY PROCEDURE. We have found that personality growth and development comes faster and more permanently with this procedure. This program is made up of small groups of 7 campers and a counselor and his assistant living and exploring by themselves. They cook a part or all of their own meals and operate their own program. Activities in this procedure are incidental to the whole program and are means to an end rather than ends in themselves. The chief goals or aims of the CAMPTIVITY PROCEDURE are ADVENTURE, DISCOVERY, and EXPLORATION.

To stir the more vital forces of character development, camping needs to have more hazards, dangers, and risks, as well as the thrills of adventure and discovery – I hurry to add that we need to have our camping techniques and skills developed so that these mere rigorous experiences can be carried out safely. A camp staff must be more experienced. It should be made up of men and women with a wide range of camping knowledge and skill and more mature judgment.

We find that camping in the covered wagon, somewhat as our early pioneers experience as their westward journeys pays generous character dividends. These travels

around the country, exploring, prospecting, in all kinds of weather and under all kinds of conditions, penetrate deeply into the moral fiber of the child's life. Other forms of camping in this CAMPTIVITY procedure consist of living in tree houses, Indian villages, Indian long houses and teepees, crooked houses, prospecting groups, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn river trips, overnight camp, three-day excursion, and many other exploratory and adventurous ways.

Briefly, some of the outcomes of the CAMPTIVITY procedure are: Camping based upon exploration and discovery and adventure where campers and staff provide as many as possible of their necessities for comfortable and happy living tends to build for independence and steadier behavior. This is character.