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June 11, 1937
11:00 A.M.

WHAT CAMPING EXPERIENCES MEAN TO CAMPERS

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

It would be very interesting for me to give you figures showing the number of bushels of potatoes that 500 campers would eat in 15 days or a month and corresponding figures for meat, bread, eggs, soup etc. It would be startling to say that 500 campers came back to the city at the end of two weeks of a month bringing back under their hides 2,500 pounds more boy and girl than went to the country. But again I repeat, regardless of his physical attainments, the vital question is what did we do to his character? This to me is the sole test of the value of camping. To secure the best personality growth and development in the camper we need to have at least one mature professionally prepared and minded counselor for each 6 or campers. Further each counselor needs to be a most discerning student of the campers in his care. His job is to guide and direct camping situations so that the behavior of each campers will be increasingly better and better. I question the wisdom of appending our money on such unsound and catch phase goals as "gain in weight, fresh air, getting them off the smelly streets out to the green grass, two weeks & fortnight vacations etc." Let us dip a little deeper into the spirit of the camp and search for the things that seem to mean most to the campers.

Camp Experience # 2

Camp life has a strong appeal for the campers and something really happens to those who become skilled in the ways of camping which causes them to want to return. First of all the camper realizes that he is away from home influence and must depend upon himself. He must make good all by himself. He is placed on an even basis with others and he has an even chance. This sense of having equal rights and privileges is of a fundamental importance in the building of confidences and character.

Camp should be a place where the humblest bit of work is of great importance. Every minute task plays an important part in the success and happiness of the camp. The campers are aware of this, they learn it and feel it. There is no class distinction. There is opportunity for everyone to make his way through his abilities and interests. There is an atmosphere at camp which causes the youngster to want to do his best. What the camper does at home or a school does not really count at camp. He has to make good in this new situation. In this way everyone at camp has an equal chance. The many little faults and failures at home retard the full development of his personality, but at camp all these things are brushed aside and he has a chance to start a new.

Many talents and abilities are discovered at camp which otherwise would not have been brought to the surface. At camp one is judged not by his position in his social group at home but by the way he does his job at camp, however humble that job may be. The seclusion of self is impossible at camp. Sooner or later the true individual comes to the

surface. Camper cannot live unto himself because there are so many situations which cause him to depend so completely on others.

Camp Experience # 3

Camping in word is a place of peace. The campers are at peace with themselves, their fellow campers, and nature. Everywhere there is a spirit of happiness and harmony, chiefly because everyone is so busy with things in which he is interested. The mountains, the hills, streams, and countysides are filled with so many interesting things of nature that life in camp is a continuous series of adventures and discoveries.

Climbing to the tops of trees – scrambling over the brook to see what is in I – scaling to 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 up into a nice round pile in the water – what was that noise – I saw a deer – no it was a rabbit – we hiked 40 miles, well no it was only four – we put out a big forest fire – and we were lost and had to find our way back. Thrills and exaggerations cultures the child's mind.

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 at the various treasures which are unfolded before him. Everything is in its natural setting – the squirrel – the rabbit – the snake – the chipmunk – the woodchuck – he birds and other moving objects are living at home ready to receive kind visitors. They are not lifeless and grouped alphabetically behind glass doors. They do no have labels on them. Things are quite different.

Everything is real. Nothing is artificial. Everything is designed and placed there by nature itself. There is nothing mechanical. Man's work is no place to be seen, we hope. 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 upon the camper. It carries on through life.

Camp Experience # 4

I visited our outpost camp, a place in the woods where a group of seven boys and their counselors were living. They do all of their own cooking and in nearly every way they are independent. They had built their own cabin, and Adirondack lean-to. The floor was made of carefully selected stones and placed according to a design made by the campers. The kitchen was made out of small logs and a piece of canvas served as the roof. When it was not raining the roof was removed so the sun could get in. The kitchen stove was made of stones, dirt and logs. There was a baking oven in the lower part and a place for cooking on top.

As I inspected the kitchen Patsy the little camp cook for the say das, "Would you like a piece of pie?" I replied "Yes, but it's a long way to New York City to get it." He reached into the oven and brought out an apple pie, said, "You need not go to New York City, here is one I baked and it's snow." I tasted and agreed with him fully. He said "We have learned how to cook out here and have great fun doing it."

The boys took me through their new stockade made of six hundred feet of logs. They have gathered old cedar logs from all parts of the countryside. The entrance gate was artistic and solid. Hanging on both sides of the entrance were candle lanterns made by the campers. The fire place was built in the center of the stockade. The boy who was telling me of the stockade was much impressed with the solitude and quiet of the place. I said to him it would be very difficult for anybody to get into the stockade or to look into it. The boy replied with full spirited pride "Yes, no one can see us in here except God". He had

been greatly touched by the beauty of nature and I am sure the impressions will be life long. Spiritual life is stirred in campers if the proper situations are prepared.

Camp Experience # 5

Perhaps we can best understand what this all means to the campers by telling you what some of them have said or written and how they have responded in various situations at camp. This is about how say it in scrolls left to future campers.

A view of the spruce trees from tent. The big beautifully tree at the entrance of camp.

The beautifully stars in the heavens wen on the over night camping trip you sleep out-of-doors. The stars seem closer to you when looking up at them while laying in your bed on the ground.

The thrill of finding chokeberries, strawberries, razzberries, blueberries, blackberries, wild grapes and many other kinds of wild fruit.

To find the sassafrass and learn how to make it into a delicately flavored tea.

The thrill and fun of exploring old, empty house and of course it is always “haunted.”

The quiet feeling of rest which steals over us every night after taps. The pleasure of reading a good book as we sit out in the grass in the shade of trees with no disturbances but that of the chirp of the cricket, the twittering of the birds.

The thrill that comes with climbing trees, and that means climbing to the very top to look out. To see how nature provides her own houthouses and keeps flowers of some sort in blossom during the entire summer. Daises buttercups, dandelions, Queen Anne’s lace, goldenrod, sunflowers, gentians, wild orchids, daffodils, devils paint brush, black eyed susan and many others.

To learn to enjoy strange sounds, especially those of animals and insects. The frogs, the toads, the crickets, the birds of all kinds, especially the whippoor-will, the thrush the robin, the wren and the bob white. To watch the flicker of the camp-fire and enjoy the fragrance of its smoke. Going barefooted after a refreshing rain and feel the clean mud squash up between your toes.

Camp Experience # 6

To enjoy games of baseball without the fear of cops or trucks.

To fly a kite and have plenty of room – at least more than on top of an apartment twenty feet wide and fifty feet long.

When you learn that the zooming of a bull frog is not really an approaching young lion.

That pork chops are really part of a cow. Yes and mild comes from the cow and not from a bottle.

That peaches, apples and other similar fruits grow on trees and not in baskets.

That you are not in another country as soon as you have crossed the Hudson River.

That it is not strange when you discover that the city streets and water hydrants are not scattered all over the mountains and hillsides.

One camper as he arrived at camp for the first time was very lonesome for those hydrants and streets. After looking all about and seeing the beautiful trees, hills and mountains, said, “What a heck of a place! All these woods and hills and not a street to play in.”

What place must have been close to the little camper who had tried desperately to go to sleep and could not. She said to her counselor “I just can’t go to sleep, it is too quiet here.”

This is also something suggested of what children get at camp when we read what one tent group wrote as a message to leave for the next year’s group. “We, the Hoot owls, leave to the following group a spider web bejeweled with dew on a sunny morning, the

lovely color of clouds during sunset, the pathway which we built during our stay at camp,
and the hill on which we have camp fires when I doesn't rain.

Camp Experience # 7

And Again

We, the girls of Tuckaway enjoyed most in Tuckaway:

Cooking our own breakfast and eating it with the birds and our chickens as visitors.

Our own activities, where we made candy and cookies using the new oven which we built out of rocks and mud.

Washing and ironing our own clothes, planning and acting our play, learning to chop wood, singing camp songs around the campfire, toasting marshmallows and popping corn, watching the moon and stars come out at night, the fun of rolling down the hill to Tuckaway, songs in the dining room, the fun of hiking to Pine Point. Eating ice cream and going to vespers; listening to the rain on the canvas of our tents. Going on our exploration overnight camping trips. Hunting for Indian arrowheads and making use of our own library which we built. The camp is a good place for fun, so we leave to you the fun of living in such a friendly place.

Imagine my surprise upon visiting an art class in our city high schools the other day to find an old camper busy with his brush and watercolors – I asked him what he was doing there and he said. “Well, chief you know I got started in my art work at camp and some day I hope to be able to paint wild flowers at camp just as I saw them in the field.”

It was noticed that Freddy became frequently absent from camp and told no one of his whereabouts. He was searched for by everybody. He did, however, show up at mealtimes, rest hour and bed time. He was discovered one day under a culvert or bridge sitting in a very awkward position, looking eagerly and steadily watching a group of rare spiders. He

had drawn pictures of the spiders and webs and was making careful study of them. A camp staff must be more experience. It should be made up of men and women with a wide range of camping knowledge and skills and more mature judgment.

We find that camping in the covered wagon, somewhat as our early pioneers experienced on their westward journeys pays generous character dividends. These travels around the country in a covered wagon camp, 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 the CAMPTIVITY procedure consist of living in tree houses, Indian villagers, Indian long houses and tepees, crooked houses, prospecting groups, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn river trips, overnight camp, three day excursions and many other exploratory and adventurous ways.

Camp life when properly conducted has a powerful influence upon the lives of young people and I hope that it will be possible for more children to have experience in good camps this year – summer and winter – Better camping for more children.

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