

~~THOMAS J. RILLO~~

Character Values in Camping
by
Dr. Lloyd B. Sharp

and

Report on Round Table
Seminar

March 30, 1939

Camp Section
Character Building Division
Council of Social Agencies
Rochester, New York

Character Building Division Meeting
March 30, 1939 - 12:15 o'clock
Chamber of Commerce

Presiding: Mr. Mercer Brugler, Chairman, Character Building Division.

Speaker: Dr. Lloyd B. Sharp, Executive Director of Life Camps, Inc., New York City.

Topic: Character Values in Camping

The falling off of camp enrollments last August was blamed on the weather. It is true that many things are blamed on the weather. The speaker said that numerous people do not know how to live in the rain and battle the elements; as soon as it starts raining at camp everyone flocks inside and someone brings out the kit of rainy day programs. If it rains for any length of time the rainy day programs are worn to monotony. Youth today are ready to do more than play games indoors just because it is raining. It is safe to camp in the rain and campers should have enough ingenuity to camp successfully in the rain.

We must all ask ourselves "why" we are doing certain things. Many people say cabins are better for camping; we should ask "why"? It is best to scatter buildings and not build them close together; let the campers build their own shelters. Some people seem to think that camping means taking a lot of equipment, etc., from the city to the country, changing it around a little and calling it camping. You are missing the mark entirely when you do this and call it camping. Why have gymnasiums in camps in the mountains when there are so many interesting things to do? The gyms are used in the rainy weather but it would be much more interesting and worthwhile if the campers went off on a mountain climbing trip and cooked their meal in the rain. The campers can get inspiration from the mountains, contrasting the beauty of the mountains in the rain with their appearance on a beautiful sunshiny day.

It is high time we gave increased thought and action to the youth of America and less to what is happening across the ocean. One of the faults in this country is that people are separating thought from action. We need action because we learn after we experience a thing. In Europe, especially Germany and Italy, they have used the camping motive for youth to extend national ideals and aims. In this free land of ours, camping can serve as a medium for practicing democratic living. Youth responds to vigorous adventure and they need a chance to be on their own. Camping must be different from other experiences, must put youngsters on their own, away from city life and all other conveniences. Youngsters should have an opportunity to work together on their problems, to have a large share in deciding what they want to eat, select food and prepare it; that is, be a part of the program. This becomes a program of self occupation as against a program entirely and virtually set up by someone other than the campers themselves. If we would only let the youngsters "go to it" we could do something unusual with camping. It takes real ingenuity to find a new way for youth to explore and explode without running into the law. If a child realizes that he is responsible for himself then he will be all right. It is only in places where we say youngster has freedom and responsibility but really does not, that we have trouble.

Character is the sum total of how you act. This poses the question, When is one good or bad? Today we judge a person good or bad by one or maybe two deeds. We should all have a wider scale and realize that a bad man is one who is getting worse and a good man is one who is getting better. We should know youngsters so that we will know how they will react in certain situations. The youngsters must go through a trial and error period and must not be judged hastily. If a child is doing things better, then he is growing in goodness; this means growth in character. The home, the church, and the school are all influences that are highly important and should not be left out. Continuity of contact with the proper influence is necessary. In camping there is a better influence of guidance where you have a youngster over a period of time with a period of continuity and guidance. There is plenty of opportunity to influence behavior in camps, but in order to do this the right amount and kind of leaders are needed; two adult trained leaders to every six or seven campers.

There should be a highly correlated program in camp to make the greatest amount and most wholesome character development for each youngster in each camping situation. The staff should help to furnish, promote, and set up camp, but the youngsters should be allowed to do a great many things for themselves, such as, building their own shelters. He also said that the leadership program is paramount in a camp. Leaders with the proper education and experience should be selected; there should be two counselors to each six or seven campers. Also important is the element of transfer of personality; we cannot tell children to do one thing and then do another thing ourselves.

Democracy and camping go together and camping has something to give to democracy. Urban living is an increased kind of regimented life and people become more dependent on other people and less dependent on themselves. Youngsters are carrying the brunt of this new way of living. The answer to this condition is to change our present pattern of camping which has been modeled after regimented plan of the army and navy, with mess halls, etc. Moving from the city to the country and stirring things around a bit is not camping. Camping should be primitive, then you can see how the youngsters work and what they can do. This camping is far more economical than living in cabins and contributes more than mass camping. The trend seems to be away from mass camping, with more attention on individuals working together in small groups.

Following his talk, Dr. Sharp showed a March of Time film, the first part being pictures of camping in America and the second part showing activities at the Life Camps. This film has been shown throughout the country for the purpose of enlisting general interest in the values of a planned camping program.

The luncheon meeting was adjourned and the Chairman announced that there would be a round table session with Dr. Sharp for all those who were interested.

Presiding: Mrs. Miriam B. McIntyre, Chairman, Camp Section

Following the luncheon meeting, a round table discussion was held to which all camp directors, counselors, camp committeemen, etc. were invited.

The following questions and answers were brought out:

Question: Should there be tennis courts at camp?

Answer: Tennis courts are satisfactory but since you can do other things at camp you should leave these activities which can be done in the city out of the camping program. He advised building up the "new" side of the program and not sticking to the things that we already know how to do, or that can be carried on in the city.

Question: What about coeducational camping?

Answer: It is necessary first to get the boys and girls doing a real job of camping independently before they are brought together. Just eating together or gathering around a camp fire together at night is really not coeducational camping. Life camps are now experimenting with coeducational camping at a new camp. The camps are close enough to share and exchange camp experiences. Girls pack up and go on adventure trips and the boys do the same thing. At times the girls are the guests of the boys and the boys are the guests of the girls. The boys are anxious to show the girls what they can do and when the boys visit the girls their eyes are opened because they think that girls cannot camp as boys do. In this way, there is a good exchange of ideas and camping experiences. The common bond is the sharing of good camping ideas.

Question: Can children cook outside when it is raining?

Answer: Cooking in the rain can be done easily and more should be done. Youth like the challenge of such a venture. We must let the children be on their own and most of them are proud to demonstrate what they can do in the rain and out in the elements. The wood can be covered with canvas and racks built on the eaves to put the canvas over. The campers carry the menus in their pockets and put the food under the canvas.

Question: What about parents who object to the program as outlined, and what are the steps to break down this resistance?

Answer: It can and must be done. It is time for camps to stand on their own feet and build up a program of educational worth and sell it. We have been too easily swayed. Parents ask if we have certain activities and if we don't have them we put them in our program. We need to have a clear concept of what camping is, organize our program and then stick to it. If you have golf and want that, then change the name to a golf club instead of a camp. Dr. Sharp

told of a camp in the west whose aim it is to teach a boy to love a horse. Every boy is given a good horse and he must keep the saddle in repair, clean the horse and stable, etc. The boys go exploring on their horses and have a fine time.

Question: How do you tell whether you have gained your goal?

Answer: You find your answer in the way the children act when it is time to go home. When you see the children hugging and kissing the horse you know whether you have reached your goal or not. Adventuring with the horse is fine and this camp certainly is making a splendid contribution.

Question: In a city like Rochester, what program can we follow to inaugurate camping in the public schools?

Answer: Dr. Sharp said that this was a hard question to answer, but suggested that perhaps Rochester could do something like that which was done in Knoxville, Tennessee. In Knoxville, Dr. Compton was working on the cosmic ray and Dr. Sharp suggested that the children go with him and do little things to help him. That is, have scientifically minded children go out together and do things in a group. Might do a similar thing with a group of children interested in literature. In this way, camping might be made an integral part of the public school system. Youngsters range of experience is so small that they do not always know what they are studying, therefore, it is important to get beyond the four walls of the school.

Question: What part do day camps play in relation to the established camps?

Answer: Day camps take youngsters who cannot afford to go to the established summer camps. If you think through a program very carefully you will find that there are many things that you can do in a city. Even living in a tent in the backyard does a lot for a youngster and gives him a good experience. Get the group together and think out what you want to do, get new ideas to snap up the program. Youngsters like to do this. The trouble is that when we get in the woods we get lost for trying to do everything the way we do in the city. Day campers can go just a little way out of the city and camp overnight. The cost would be very small since they can bring their food from home.

Question: Is it not too difficult for the children to build their own shelters, etc.?

Answer: Dr. Sharp said that he did not feel that it was too difficult for the youngsters to build shelters, fireplaces and the like, and that they get a great deal of satisfaction out of doing these things. Dr. Sharp told of a new camp they are building in several acres of woods. They are building a little community or village, have a store for food, a dining hall, a blacksmith shop, a cobbler shop, a barber shop, a town hall and side shops. The shops are there but there are no persons to tend the shops; the youngsters go in and do the work. The children have a large share in building their own shelters, crude but sturdy. They do not put cement in the ovens but let the winter tear them down and the children rebuild them each

year. Everything is built on a temporary basis. When a child has to face his own problems and realize he is responsible for himself, it is good character development. Dr. Sharp said that thirty days is about the minimum for a camp period; two weeks is not enough.

Question: What about cooking meals?

Answer: What the youngsters are interested in is to have a small group and a chance to answer to: "What would you like to have for breakfast?" The youngsters learn what is good for them and like to plan their meals. They look for appreciation of their cooking.

Question: Is there a cook at the camp to teach the children cooking at the beginning of the season?

Answer: One of the easiest ways to get the children started in doing their own cooking is to have them go on overnight camping trips where they have to do their own cooking. An easy way to start is to have the counselor or dietitian work out a simple breakfast menu and let the campers prepare the meal. In time, the children will be eager to make out their own menus, have them approved by the dietitian and then purchase the necessary food supplies. As a first attempt, it might be wise to have one meal a day eaten at a central dining hall, or at least have the main course prepared at a central kitchen. Many of the counselors find it hard to cook but they must all learn. Dr. Sharp said that it is not hard to follow a recipe; after a little help is given, especially if you get the idea across to the boys that cooking is not hard. There should be a suggestion box for recipes and sample menus submitted by the various camp units. In this way, the dietitian gets ideas and the youngsters go to the dietitian for ideas and help when they need it. The youngsters work out menus for about four days and the dietitian goes over them and sees whether they are balanced meals. She tells them how to make certain dishes and suggests desserts that go well with what they have already planned. They figure out the cost of the meal ahead, and list needed supplies. They go to the grocery store to have the order filled, the order being O.K.'d by the dietitian.

Question: Is it better to have half as many children for five days a week or more for two days a week in day camps?

Answer: We do want to reach as many as possible. Each one must decide what camping is and what we want to do. Every camp is growing and it is necessary to build up a camp with a staff that has a wide range of experience and ability.

Question: How much is paid to counselors?

Answer: The salaries at Life Camps range from \$25 to \$275 per season. One counselor working with a small group was making \$230 while another who was working with a small group made \$25. All counselors cannot do comparable work. Try to have an old counselor in every group with a new person. The average pay for the old counselors is \$100 and they are expected to be grounded in nature study, life saving, etc. New York University asked Dr. Sharp if he would accept their graduate students for training in camp leadership. They are at the

camp for the whole summer and take six weeks course and receive six hours graduate credit. The New York School of Social Work is considering such a plan, also.

Question: What about health responsibility?

Answer: There is a doctor at each camp, but when a group is out on a trip the counselor must be responsible for the children. The camp doctor goes over the campers before they leave and sees that the first aid kit is all right. When the children go out in the covered wagon on an overnight trip they take a riding horse along to be ridden back in case of emergency. In camp the doctor visits the various groups. He is usually invited for lunch and can see how they eat and if their bunks are clean.

Question: What is your actual experience with de-centralizing a centralized camp?

Answer: When you propose to paint and repair, build a shelter out some place with discarded material. Tear down buildings you have and use lumber for another kind of shelter. If you do not have the room where you are, then you should move.

Question: Is it advisable to join the American Camping Association?

Answer: It would prove very advantageous to have membership in this Association. There should be a chapter in Rochester. It is a helpful medium in discussing problems and sharing camp experiences on a nation wide basis. It further gives access to literature and plans from many other camps.

Question: How to proceed with a limited camp site and most of the investment in equipment and buildings?

Answer: If you are thinking of decentralizing the camp, do not continue to build. Write down the aim of the camp program, objectives, and then evaluate the program to see what has been accomplished. Focus attention on thinking and get deeper and deeper into the woods. If you do this you will break up departments and scatter the groups and find that it is easier to get rid of many of the traditional things such as the good night song, etc. It is important to carefully and critically survey every detail of the camp program and say "why" do we do this. In planning the camp program for 1939, do so in light of what you did in 1938 and in light of new researches and then say "where do we go from here." Rethinking and retesting are of paramount importance in the camp program. At Life Camps the camp program for each little camp is written out in detail and vigorously tested and questioned. This is the only way you attain evaluation in planning the camp programs.