

Give Camping Back to the Campers

By

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THIS is a very pertinent and intriguing subject. It implies two things: first, that at one time the campers have had camping and second, that it has been taken away from them. It may be true that they never have had it. Perhaps all of these points are true in part. I would not want to assert that campers throughout the country have never had any camping nor would I be willing to say that they have had all of it. Take it any way you please, the important consideration here is how best to give it back to them.

What do we mean by a camp? Is it a summer resort? Is it a soft parking place for the children of tired parents? Is it an athletic training ground? Is it some kind of a finishing school in the woods? Is it a place to teach military discipline and conformity? Or, is it in reality just a school with a few names changed around and called a camp? We need to take stock of camps and discover what they really are and what we are really doing in them.

What could be understood in the mind of youth by this seven letter word, C-A-M-P-I-N-G? A good clue is suggested in this true story. Early one morning a thirteen-year-old boy in one of our large cities left this note on his teacher's desk: "I am running away for three reasons—first, because I am tired of the drab sordid city life; second, because I want to be on my own for a while; third, I want to live out in nature for a while. I will be gone for about three weeks."

His inner urges were satisfied much sooner than he expected. But let us take this appeal to heart. Here is the basis of a camping program that appeals to youth and is basically sound. This boy had adventures—lived on his own—lived daringly and adventurously and

explored and discovered things. The sad part of it is that he had to escape adults to get it.

In my opinion camping by and large is too tame—not sufficiently vigorous to challenge and test out the inner qualities of ingenuity and resourcefulness dormant and abundant in most youth.

The odds are against city youth. They need space, opportunity to explore, grow and expand. We guard and protect them at every turn, perhaps necessarily, but nevertheless the effect is to cramp, stifle and soften. Youth can stand only so much of this, then comes some kind of explosion. The study of crime figures, resolutions of protest at a business luncheon meeting or at parents' meetings, laws by a city government, will not entirely solve the problem. Vigorous, exploratory, on-your-own types of camping can make a real contribution—if we can give camping back to enough youth.

The basic purpose of camping, however, should be concerned with the growth of the whole child. We should aim to secure the greatest amount and the most wholesome total personality growth and development within each child. To do this requires the most favorable camping atmosphere which includes a high quality and adequate leadership.

Our convention theme is "Implementing Democracy." By giving as much camping as possible back to the campers and to an increasing number of youth, we can do much to implement democracy. But first, what do we mean by "Democracy?" It is defined in various ways, but the spirit of it is quite clear to most people. In line with current thought and happenings it may be divided into two types—a *true* democracy and a *false* democracy.

False Democracy

We should beware of the earmarks of the false type. It argues in all its brands and brandishings that everyone should be brought

to an average, irrespective of individual capacity and initiative. That means certain individuals with capacities above the average would be forced down and those who are below the average in capacities would come up to the average in spite of their abilities. This is an insidious philosophy.

The proponents of the false democracy take advantage of the freedom granted them and use it to climb the democratic ladder to gain control and then knock the ladder from under themselves and everyone else. They dote on mass movements, mass psychology and emotional appeal. The public is quite gullible and needs to watch its step.

The false democracy speaks of the common voice and then directs that voice. Who can say or believe that in our dictator countries a plebiscite is a true expression of individual will?

In spite of some objections and criticisms of democracy as we visualize and practice it in this country, every one should be very proud of the privileges, freedom, and right to think and do as he pleases. Our form of government permits far more freedom and is far more liberal than we realize. It is possible to do almost anything we please. The instrumentalities are there.

The false democracy further glibly argues about minorities and then proceeds to choke their minorities into submission and almost complete obliteration; it destroys individual personality by submerging it into a central pattern; it parades in gay costumes of many styles and colors—beware of these styles. Keep in mind that as people become more crowded in large centers there is a greater tendency to centralized control, coercion and authoritarianism. Do we find any traces of false democracy in our camps?

True Democracy

True democracy on the other hand says that each individual should be free and helped to reach the height of his capacity for service to his fellow man and his country, along with the ideals usually associated with the word.

The external signs of democracy are not so vital. We have perhaps made too much of them—allegiances, flag waving, salutes, and parading. They are at times important and we would not want to do without them. But we must not be fooled by them and think that when we parade or salute we necessarily have democracy. There may be sufficient signs of con-

formity, but no real inner understandings or convictions about it.

This inner thing is self control and is an extremely valuable part of true democracy. It is, in fact, something so deep and significant we can well call it *spiritual*. It controls our inner thoughts, convictions and actions.

True democracy is something more than a majority vote. It is an awareness of individual personality and its development to the maximum degree. With the full recognition and understanding of this view, the minority problem cannot be wrongly handled. Opposition is a good thing for us all. It should, however, be constructive and loyal. Our form of government requires opposition. We elect it and pay for it by taxation. Constructive and loyal opposition is an essential part of true democracy.

In our camps the best chances to implement the true democracy come perhaps with the intelligent application of the principles of group work which I take it are well known to this group. Living in small groups with the greatest possible amount of responsibility placed upon the small group for its own comfort, welfare and happiness will give the individuals the best chance for a well-rounded educational growth. With the increase of self direction there is the tendency to develop and use less coercive and dictatorial methods. Where coercion and centralization increase, dictatorship is but around the corner.

What is the situation in our camps? How are we organized? What kind of democracy do we practice and how much? How can we re-organize our camps to secure the greatest amount of individual growth and development? Can we let an increasing amount of the practice of true democracy flow from our camps? Can we give more and more camping back to the campers?

Early American Life

A study of the struggles and living conditions of our early settlers gives us a basis for our camping program. They lived a life of daring and adventure. They were on their own as individuals and families. Out of their pattern of living was created our concept and form of democracy. It might be said that camping and democracy started together in this country. A careful study of their progress will show that shelter, food, self-occupation, spiritual influence, group living and community effort were basic elements in the development of our country. At the time of the signing of our

American Constitution approximately ninety-eight percent of the people lived in a strictly rural area. Today about fifty-five percent of the people live in large cities and are necessarily subjected to much regimentation, coercion and regulation along with all their modern conveniences. It is not contended here that we should abandon our social and economic progress and go back to the days of the Pilgrims and early settlers. Not at all. It is maintained, however, that these principles to which reference has been made are as fundamental and necessary in our present day living as they ever were. Also, there is a better opportunity to experience them in a favorable camp situation.

Regimentation

We have far too much regimentation in our camps—more of it than we realize. Many do not desire it, but it grows around us without our realizing it. Most of it comes to our camps by the adoption of some pattern of organization from city life rather than adapting an ideal form of living to an outdoor woods environment.

In most instances our camps are patterned after school or military systems or dominated by an athletic system of control. If we examine the type of organization in most camps we find it follows this school, military or athletic pattern.

Centralization or Decentralization

In the main, camps are organized on either a centralized or decentralized plan. Most of them are on the former. In these there are the traditional departments—crafts, music, dramatics, nature, and on around the circle. Each has a department head to teach the activities. Activity periods are offered for each and in varying degrees campers may choose their activities. You are well acquainted with the competition for patronage in each department and the conflicts which often prevent the consummation of the program of each department head.

The decentralized plan, on the other and better hand, does not have departments as such. Specialists, if they must be called that, are counselors and there is a larger percentage of them. Campers and counselors live in small groups—six to eight campers and two counselors with them. They have their own camp all to themselves. Their program is their own. They plan most of their own meals, secure the provisions from the camp store and keep their

food costs. They then have the fun of cooking. The dietitian now takes the role of consultant to them. She is responsible only for the menus to be made for the central dining room. There is free and frequent inter-group exchange and visiting of staff which divides the special abilities of the staff to other campers. Their craft projects are chiefly those things required to enhance their needs and comforts. The finer arts are stimulated to a greater degree and a greater percentage of the campers participates. They arise naturally and creatively out of their program of living and are not arranged by a schedule.

This method of organization is known as the *campativity procedure*. An activity is a skill or subject separately taught, while campativity comprises numerous skills used to accomplish a larger objective—something related to the camper's comfort, welfare or happiness.

Basis for Camp Living

If we wish to teach youth to love the out-of-doors and the woods naturally, it can best be done by living in the woods as much as possible. Briefly stated, there are five major emphases basic to the campativity procedure of the decentralized type of camp:

Shelter: There should be various types of shelters. Campers should share in designing, building, altering and keeping them in repair. Man has always had an urge to put a roof over his head. Youth likes to build, work and create, especially when they can enjoy the benefits quickly.

Food: Campers should share as much as possible in planning their menus under proper guidance. They should know what various items cost—how to care for food and how to cook. We should take full advantage of this fine educational opportunity. Campers cannot learn much about these problems when the dietitian does it all. They can do it and like to do it.

Self Occupation: Each small camp should work out its own program. Under wise and careful counselor guidance they should and can assume the most of this responsibility. A centralized program, no matter how many choices are given, does not develop the powers of self direction comparable to the small group plan.

Spiritual Uplift: A fuller knowledge and deeper understanding of nature causes one to dip deeper into the realm of things spiritual. A part of the spiritual influence is found in this

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Book Corner

Solving Camp Behavior Problems

By J. Kenneth Doherty (New York: Association Press, 1940) 62 pages, paper, 50 cents.

Here is the book of the year in organized camping. No more significant contribution has been made to the literature on guidance in camp. There is no theory, no use of unnecessary words—in semi-outline form it hits directly and specifically at what to do in each type of behavior with direct, concise, affirmative statements. It covers campers who are timid, who have eating problems, who are homesick, who have sex problems, who steal, who show off, who are troubled with enuresis, etc. In each case the material is divided into two sections; first, why the camper is in this condition, and second, what the counselor can do about it.

This is a book of first importance. It is one of those rare publications that appears absolutely indispensable to every worker in camping, director or counselor. Priced as it is, no one need be without it.

American Vacations

By Larry Nixon (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1939) 380 pages, \$2.25.

A popular and readable book covering the vacation resources of every state in the Union. It describes graphically and appealingly the opportunities for hikers, campers, bicyclers, riders, anglers, and travelers by rail, water and road. It covers farmhouse vacations, dude ranches, youth hostels, and national parks. It tells how to plan, what to wear, what to take, where to get it, costs, etc.

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Give Camping Back

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poem written by camper Joe True at *Life Camp Pole Bridge* last summer:

What is the night?
A dark and fearsome thing
That causes us to tremble,
To bend our knees,
And pray for light?

Ah no! 'tis beauty
'Tis beauty born of peace
And rest from daily strife,
A part of eternity
Is the beauty of the night.

Group Relationship: Living in small groups of six or eight campers and two counselors intensifies individual relationship and interdependence. Little things count for more and are more readily observed and evaluated by camper and counselor alike.

Values of Campativity Procedure

Briefly summarized a few tentative conclusions concerning the value of the decentralized campativity procedure can be stated:

1. A greater amount of total personality growth and development accrues to each child.
2. Each member of the staff participates in the program and contributes the most and best he has to offer. At the same time the strain on each staff member is less.
3. The best opportunity for the application of the principles of group work is afforded. Each small group operates as an entity. Therefore the problems of living are more realistic.
4. Construction costs are less because there are not as many central buildings needed nor do they need to be so large. The shelters for campers cost less because they are built out of natural and inexpensive materials. Also the campers share in the construction of them. A camp built on the decentralized campativity plan by the Big Brothers organization of Dallas, Texas, last year is an example of low cost construction as well as of other benefits.
5. Maintenance costs are naturally less where construction costs are less.
6. It puts the emphasis upon counselorship where it really belongs. Staff members who have greater experience, skill and ability live with the campers. Their chief responsibility is in counselorship.
7. It is educationally better because more of the sound principles of education can be applied to a greater extent.
8. In a creative sense it is better that the needs for individuals be met, insofar as possible, by them-

selves alone and in small groups. It affords a commendable maximum of results in individual growth.

9. It tends to cause the camp population to live more and deeper in the woods. This cannot help but be good if we believe in real camping.

10. There is less tendency to copy and follow regimented patterns of living unavoidable in the city.

11. The program is much easier to adjust to individual needs. The camp of course should be run for the campers.

12. There is a greater amount of participation by all in more things and the interest seems to be deeper and more lasting.

13. The program results in more exploration, discovery and vigorous living.

14. There is less tension and strain, and more relaxation. External controls and regulations are removed, thus putting a premium upon inner control, self direction and the need for cooperation.

Public School Camps

In *Life Camps* this year there was started a significant experiment in cooperation with the New York City Public Schools through the Mrs. Johanna M. Lindlof Camp Fund. The chief purpose of this program is to determine wherein and to what extent the experiences in camp are educationally sound, worthwhile, and can rightfully be included as an integral part of the public school program. One hundred and ten children are selected from seven different schools and they stayed at camp for a month each. The program and procedure has been carefully set up and the outcome will be observed for several years before any very conclusive results can be determined.

City children seldom come in direct contact with nature, the fields, streams, mountains, animals and flowers. Also, they have little experience in living on their own, getting shelter, obtaining food and cooking their own meals, as well as determining their own occupations, providing for their own comfort and welfare, meeting adversities of weather, and exploring and adventuring in nature on their own. Their range of country experience is extremely limited and consequently they often do not comprehend what they study in their school books. It would seem, therefore, that a program of living in an isolated environment, away from the humdrum of the city and its adult-made laws and regimentation, for a part of a child's

life, is a sensible and necessary provision in our newer education of tomorrow.

Ways can be found for school children and camp-trained teachers to learn and teach in camps, with valuable educational results. A month in camp (counting waking hours only) is equal to forty-six percent of the time that a child spends in the city schools in an entire ten-month school year—a sizeable opportunity for learning.

This pioneering venture is a new kind of education, making it possible for boys and girls to have, as a part of the regular school curriculum, opportunities to solve on their own the questions posed by life outdoors. If camping is so sound educationally, it is not asking too much that the equivalent of at least four years out of twelve be spent in favorable camping experiences.

Evaluation

Many details should be explained concerning the campativity procedure. In *Life Camps* we have experimented long and carefully for many years. The decentralized plan and the campativity procedure have resulted. We feel supported with considerable evidence in that we secure a greater amount of more wholesome personality growth and development within each child; the campers have a better time; they camp more vigorously and without increasing accidents; there is more adventure and exploration on the part of more campers; the program is far more democratic and is sounder educationally. Time does not permit of explanation of the various points.

It has been proposed in these remarks that camping be given back to the campers; that to do so is what youth needs and desires; that the campativity decentralized plan accomplishes these aims more effectively and results in a better implementation of democracy.

Perhaps in the past we all have *acted* ourselves into a way of thinking. Now, during this conference and the days following, let us, in the light of the ideals and principles here set forth, do our best to *think* ourselves into a better way of acting in regard to all matters of camping.

Wones and Samson Re-Elected

W. H. Wones and P. B. Samson were re-elected Treasurer and Secretary respectively of the American Camping Association at the Annual Business Meeting in Asilomar. The Board of Directors expressed formally their deep appreciation for the service that these two men have rendered the A.C.A.

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