

The Fourth Dimension In Camping

A New Conception Of The Summer Camp

By C. Walton Johnson
*Director, Camp Sequoyah
Weaverville, N. C.*

ORGANIZED camping for children and youth in the United States has been characterized by great vigor and rapid growth, under an enthusiastic, able and devoted leadership. For more than half a century camps have rendered a service of incalculable value to children and youth; yet, the most significant role of the summer camp is still to be played.

During the early days of camping, it was thought that a camp could fulfill its purpose by exposing boys and girls to nature and giving them a recreational program in the out of doors. Camp directors, however, soon realized that camps should do more for children than expose them to nature while they were swimming and playing games. The camp program must have more of an educational content. At this point in the evolution of the summer camp the various crafts, the teaching of skills and school subjects became important features of the camp program.

Now, the most perceptive leaders of the camping movement have conceived of an even greater role for the summer camp. It is now considered the high privilege of the summer camp to guide boys and girls in learn-

ing how to live at their best and to become the finest persons they are capable of becoming. A good camp under strong, fine leadership provides the most favorable situation conceivable for the accomplishment of this great mission.

This new role of the summer camp does not imply any curtailment in appropriate amusement, entertainment and recreational activities, but it does imply putting greater emphasis on moral guidance, truly fine leadership and helping youth work out a sound philosophy of life.

The wide-spread secularism of today with its accompanying loss of faith on the part of both young and old, and the general decline in a sense of moral values accompanied by a rapidly rising rate of delinquency and crime, are two of the factors that have created an unprecedented need for more moral and spiritual guidance for children and youth, supported by the unquestioned integrity of those who guide. Herein lies the supreme opportunity for those who work with children and youth in the summer camp.

The summer camp can and should play an important role in preparing youth for their future in a troubled world. The boys and girls of today will soon enter a future in which they will be tried as by fire. The sum-

mer camp can give them the moral stamina and strength of character they will need for this trial.

The Fourth Dimension in Camping

This new and significant role of the summer camp is the Fourth Dimension in camping. The Fourth Dimension in camping is concerned primarily with the camper's moral and spiritual development and the total impact of the camping experience.

The Fourth Dimension in camping is camping in depth. It is camping that taps and releases the inner resources in boys and girls for more abundant living. It is camping that deals with the total personality of the child. This involves a deep concern for every aspect of a camper's life, especially his social and emotional responses, his moral judgments and his spiritual awakening.

The Fourth Dimension in camping reveals the central purpose of the summer camp and declares this purpose to be: To help boys and girls become the finest persons they are capable of becoming—not only fine athletes, fine swimmers, fine craftsmen, but persons also highly skilled in the fine art of living. *Growth as a person*, not the acquirement of a skill, is the great aim.

Four primary and basic objectives

underlie any effort to achieve the Fourth Dimension in camping.

I. Informal Education

The first objective is to provide children and youth with an essential part of the informal education they will need for living successfully as persons—that is, for living purposefully, joyfully and happily.

Among the many advantages that enable the summer camp to meet this objective are: an out-door setting, a controlled environment, and a 24-hour-a-day program of guidance and education under able and inspiring leadership. Indeed, the summer camp has an unparalleled opportunity for providing the kind of education children need for living at their best.

That a good camp can provide this kind of education is attested by the following quotations from two boys' letters and a mother's letter:

"I can hardly express what camp has meant to me. Not only was it fun but also it built up my body and mind. It's surprising how often I think back of the things I heard at camp and the things I heard you say before I make a decision. It may be just a small decision, but life is made up of many small decisions. Camp has been the inspiration for me to choose the right way over the wrong. I am thankful that I had the opportunity to come to a fine camp where I could start to build my philosophy of life. Thank you for a wonderful summer."

"I just wanted to tell you how much my summers at camp have meant to me—both as a boy and now especially that I am approaching the manhood years. Camp has given me an outlook on life that I don't feel I could ever have been able to obtain from any other source. Camp has caused me to see and appreciate the real things of life—things that most people fail to see, or either take for granted. Camp has given me an understanding, appreciation and admiration for nature and the out-of-doors that cannot be surpassed. For each of these things I am deeply grateful and just hope that I'll be able to pass them on to my children, as you have passed them on to me."

"We feel so strongly that if there is one single factor in Bob's life that has been all good it is camp. It has been sad this year to see a lot of the boys, who have been Bob's friends since the first grade, really cut loose. We feel the thing that has made it possible for Bob to choose the right

and rearrange his friends is the influence of your camp. We are deeply grateful. I am constantly amazed at what some people think constitutes a camp and camping."

II. Sense of Moral Values

The second objective is to help children and youth acquire a true sense of moral values; also an understanding of the inexorable and unchanging role of moral law in the life of man.

This objective is implemented by creating an atmosphere of moral soundness in the camp. This can be done by examples of integrity and noble living on the part of directors and counselors. Nothing inspires and motivates good behavior in children like a combination of vibrant personality and spotless character in a leader.

It is difficult for young people to accept the validity of moral law for their own lives under all circumstances until they realize that moral law had a divine origin, that moral law was created by God. Then they can understand why moral law cannot be violated with impunity, why it works inexorably in the life of every person and why the observance of moral law has real meaning for both their happiness and their character.

This objective is difficult to achieve, but it can be implemented in a big way by such counselors as the one I quote below, whose life as a counselor exemplified the ideals expressed in his prayer.

From a prayer by a counselor (a dental student) at a camp worship service:

"We pray that, this summer, we might be so inspired that we will have a new and stronger faith in Thee and in mankind; and that our thoughts may be as high and noble as Thy most lofty peaks, and as pure as Thy icy mountain springs.

"We pray that our moral convictions may become as constant as the stars in their orbits . . . and we pray that our hearts may become as warm as a campfire at dusk. For these things, O God, we pray this morning with all our hearts, all our minds, and all our souls."

In such an atmosphere and under such leadership campers will come to understand something of the nature of moral law, and that moral law was designed to fulfill a two-fold purpose:

1. To regulate human conduct in such a way that a man's dealings with his fellow man would be honest

and kind; and would, thereby, fulfill the law of brotherhood, man's ultimate destiny on earth.

2. To serve as a guide for living so that man could be true to his real nature as a moral and spiritual being.

Boys and girls need to learn that there is a sound reason and a basic need for the observance of moral law—that the good life is the natural, normal, happy life. This concept is not beyond the power of the summer camp to interpret.

A summer camp dedicated to the achievement of this second objective can help campers acquire a true sense of moral values based on an understanding of the origin and nature of moral law, and the place and meaning of moral law in their lives. Young people need to realize that, even though by virtue of their free wills, they can violate moral law, they cannot dispose of it or escape the consequences of its retribution.

Camps should be attuned to the moral sensitivity of boys and girls. The consciences of these young people are still sensitive to right and wrong. The worship services of a camp can contribute to a keener sense of moral values among campers.

The director of a private camp was the speaker for the closing worship service of that camp. In the course of his talk he stressed the need of being honest and truthful. A few days earlier one of the campers had received a letter from his father containing a plane ticket and instructions for the trip home. This boy was over 12 years old, but his father had sent him a half-fare ticket and wrote his son: "I am sending you a half-fare ticket. If anyone at the airport or on the plane should ask how old you are, remember to say you are only 11."

After hearing the director's talk at the Sunday worship service, this boy was deeply disturbed. That night after taps he told his counselor that he *must* see the director. He would not wait until next morning. The boy went to the director's office and told the story of the half-fare ticket. Then he said: "What you said in your talk this morning has made me feel that I should not go home on a half-fare ticket and that I should not lie about my age. I must call Dad." The boy would not agree to write a letter or wait until he got home to discuss the matter with his father. He picked up the telephone receiver and after he had stated his concern about going home on a half-fare ticket and misrepresenting his age, his father said:

"That is the way I have arranged for you to come home, so don't worry. Just follow instructions."

Judge Irving Ben Cooper, the eminent Judge of a Minors' Court in New York said: "The constant, recurring factor that stands out like a sore thumb in the majority of cases involving youth from 16 to 19, which I see, is that they have been deprived of guidance and a sense of moral values."

How tragic the need today for a sense of moral values! Fortunately, the summer camp is peculiarly fitted to help meet this need.

III. Worship

The third objective is to help children and youth acquire an awareness of the place of worship in their lives and to experience the true meaning of worship.

In any consideration of a worship program for a summer camp it is well to remember that children, especially early adolescents, are naturally religious and will respond with genuine interest to a worship program, if it is properly integrated into the life of the camp, and is neither overdone nor poorly done.

The worship program of a summer camp must not be perfunctory, compulsory, or just thrown in for effect. It must be characterized by genuine reverence and sincerity. Those who lead the worship services must be free of sanctimonious and pious attitudes. The religion boys and girls care about is a religion they can apply to their daily lives here and now—a religion to live by. That is one reason children are such severe critics of adults who have lost the idealism of their youth and their sense of honesty and fairness.

This third objective in camping cannot be realized without the leadership of men and women who exemplify the highest type of manhood and womanhood.

Camp directors who would achieve the Fourth Dimension in camping will give primary consideration to the character quality of their leadership, keeping in mind that character is not mere goodness, not merely the absence of bad habits and sinful doings. Real character has a robust, positive, dynamic quality, as well as the quality of goodness.

When the worship program of a camp has dynamic leadership, rings with a note of sincerity and applies religion to the daily life of the campers, there will be no lack of response.

Children in such camps, regardless of their religious faith whether Catholic, Jew or Protestant, will learn that worship does have a place in their lives and true meaning for them.

A camper's evaluation of a camp worship service for older boys.

"The Sunday worship service is one of the most important features of our camp life.—Our chapel is the out-of-doors. Its walls are dogwood trees and ferns. The altar is a rock, and the cross is made from a young locust tree. The boys conduct the services themselves and learn to appreciate this chance for worship.

"Any boy in our camp will tell you that some of his finest insights came to him under these conditions. This chapel and this service become a real part of every camper."

In addition to strong leadership, the worship program must have meaningful content for each age group. There should be both traditional and improvised services. The traditional services can increase in richness and inspirational value through the years, provided they do not become stereotyped and lacking in freshness.

The traditional services will call for special places and designated hours, no matter how small and informal the camp may be. There should be an appropriate place set aside for the Sunday morning worship service to be held every Sunday at the same hour. This should be an hour of worship for the entire camp with no other activity of any kind going on. The same arrangement should be had for the Sunday twilight Vesper Services, Morning Watch just before breakfast, and cabin devotions just before taps.

Cabin devotions can have real meaning for campers if properly conducted. The meaning is even greater if the campers help conduct them.

One morning I found a 12-year-old boy sitting alone in the Council Ring reading the Bible. I stopped for a brief visit. He said he had been asked to lead the devotions in his cabin that night and he was preparing for this assignment.

If we would have campers think of daily worship as really important in their lives, cabin devotions and Morning Watch should not be omitted on over-night and longer hikes.

A group of older boys were on a five-day hike in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Fortunately, their counselor had both physical and moral stamina of a high degree. There was a brief devotional period

for the group each night and a meditation each morning. One morning, soon after the hike started, they came upon a magnificent view of the mountains. The counselor stopped and all agreed that here was the very spot for their morning meditation. The group sat quietly for a few minutes drinking in the superb beauty and serenity of the place. Then the counselor read a few verses from the Bible and offered a brief but fervent prayer. One of the boys reported to me later that that few minutes of meditation was the most deeply spiritual experience he had ever had. Another boy on that hike wrote me after he went home:

"I have never in my life felt so much at peace as I did then."

The capacity of a camp to help children acquire an awareness of the place of worship in their lives is measured by the ability of director and counselors to sense the time and place for worship, and to inspire a spiritual response.

A Dedication Service

A camp director and a group of 16 and 17-year old boys sat on the ground around a small camp fire on the shore of a beautiful lake. This was their annual dedication service. Attendance at this service was discouraged except for those who could attend with the utmost sincerity and those who genuinely wanted to dedicate their lives to high standards of living and to some form of unselfish service. Out of a group of 24, 17 attended the service.

There was no schedule to follow. Taps were omitted for that night. Minds were to be as free of consciousness of time and space as possible. As the group gathered silently and the fire was lit, the mountains across the lake were silhouetted against a twilight sky of purple and gold. Ripples on the shore of the lake could be faintly heard.

There were a few words about the purpose of the service by the director and the prayers began. Much of the praying, in fact most of it, was silent. Each boy was facing up to his own personal problems, voicing silently his own petitions and seeking God's grace, forgiveness, direction and His will for his life.

There were six special periods of prayer during the service devoted to six prayer subjects: forgiveness, thanksgiving, guidance, strength to serve, humility, surrender.

After this unhurried period of

prayer, meditation and soul-searching, the boys arose and stood around the dying embers of the fire, enjoying a warmth and depth of fellowship that is seldom experienced. No one appeared to be in a hurry to leave. It seemed they were saying to themselves, "It is good to be here."

IV. A Philosophy of Life

The fourth objective is to help youth formulate and live by a sound philosophy of life.

The achievement of this fourth objective is one of the triumphs of the Fourth Dimension in camping. It is, indeed, the culmination of all that is best in camping. This fourth objective can be achieved only after the other three objectives are achieved. The four objectives underlying the Fourth Dimension in camping are related by a logic and unity of purpose which gives camping a basic philosophy.

A sound philosophy of life gives direction and meaning to one's life. It also gives one a sense of mission, an understanding of his place in the scheme of things, and the ability to view life's problems objectively and with equanimity. May we not also contend that one cannot have a sound philosophy of life without a deep faith in God as the Creator of the universe and the source of all wisdom.

Campers are formulating their philosophy of life when they are led to face up to their personal responsibilities and to the moral issues of their daily lives; when they are encouraged to think through the great questions of life and when they are inspired to form strong moral convictions based on truth and reason.

Campers are inspired to live by a sound philosophy of life, first and foremost, by directors and counselors who are living by a sound philosophy of life. Camp counselors should be, in a rather large measure, the way, the truth and the life to the boys and girls under their direction.

The All-Night Vigil

The All-Night Vigil should rank first as an experience designed to help campers formulate and live by a sound philosophy of life.

In preparing for an All-Night Vigil a camper makes whatever preparations are necessary for spending the

entire night from taps to reveille alone by a small fire. He is given 12 sealed envelopes containing instructions regarding what he is to read and think about and report on. The reading material includes inspiring books and pamphlets. The site for the Vigil is just without the immediate environs of the camp. When the vigiler is ready to leave for his Vigil, he goes to the Council Ring where his camp mates have gathered in his honor and to offer a prayer on his behalf.

When he returns next morning he reports to the Council Ring where his camp mates have gathered. As the vigiler approaches, the campers and counselors stand to welcome him as he enters the Council Ring.

This profound, spiritual experience has given older campers a moral perspective and a religious awakening that transcends in value any other camp experience. During the All-Night Vigil a camper becomes more keenly aware of his relationship to his fellow man and to God, and what is involved in these two vital relationships. He also gets a truer and somewhat detached view of himself.

During the long hours of the night alone the camper reviews his past life, weighs it, and discovers his strong and weak points. There is a chance for self-analysis. Fortunately, the very nature of the Vigil and the circumstances under which it is held are such as to give encouragement, renew faith and dispel doubts. One vigiler wrote:

"I prayed to-night and all the ashes in my heart were swept away, and only God and I and the misty hills were here."

Another vigiler reported:

"The All-Night Vigil is a growth experience. Every boy should have this opportunity. It has made a great and lasting impression on me. This vigil at night under God's magnificent canopy of stars, with good books and nature to commune with, gives a person a chance to 'grow' in many ways."

The All-Night Vigil is, indeed, a soul-searching and maturing experience which has marked the beginning of a successful attempt by many older campers to formulate and live by a sound philosophy of life. Camp life can be on such a high plane and so challenging that campers will be inspired to live by a sound philosophy of life.

Camp Fire Discussions

A camp fire discussion can help boys and girls in a very definite way to formulate and live by a sound philosophy of life. Here is a description of the type of camp fire discussion that has real meaning.

"It was becoming dark and the last places were being taken at the Council Ring when a second year camper instructed the fire-keeper to light the chestnut and oak ceremonial fire. Then the presiding camper introduced the speaker and topic for discussion. In the glowing light our director rose to begin one of his talks on how to live at our best.

"The principles were not forced down anyone but were offered to stimulate thinking, and to help us decide in what manner we were going to live. There were many things to consider: Our personal influence on others, our sense of values, whether we had the moral right to form harmful habits, our role of leadership in a changing world. Personally, the camp fire discussions have been very important to me. They have counted a great deal in forming a 'Fourteen Points' for living."

Thus we see that the summer camp must offer more than recreation, amusement and entertainment—more than physical development and the acquirement of skills. Moreover, we may rightfully assume that camps were established that children and youth might have life, and have it more abundantly; that they might grow *as persons* until each becomes the finest person he is capable of becoming.

It is, therefore, the high privilege of the summer camp to help boys and girls:

I. Acquire skill in the fine art of living.

II. Develop a true sense of moral values.

III. Become aware of the place and meaning of worship in their lives.

IV. Formulate and live by a sound philosophy of life.

These are the four avenues through which the Fourth Dimension in camping is achieved.

Here is a conception of the summer camp big enough to challenge the strongest and finest leadership our country affords. May such a sacred trust be placed only in consecrated hands.