

REMINISCENTS OF THE "Y" CAMP IN THE 20'S

It was 1927. The economy of Canada and Peterborough was still struggling to overcome the devastation of the First World War. Income levels were such that summer vacations for young boys away from their own homes were rare indeed.

Living in the area of the avenues south from Charlotte Street, there were many boys born during the war whose fathers worked at the C.G.E. Although the "Y" was over a mile away the activities there drew us like a magnet to swimming in the little pool (skinny of course), Leader Jimmy McNeeley, to the physical programs under Doug Loomis and the Hobby Show and craft activities all controlled by the dour Mr. Roper. But what to do during the summer months?

Eddie Huffman, Jack Cranfield, Ron Howe, the writer and countless others had the good fortune to attend the camp, usually for two weeks. What a wonderful camp it was!

There were many requirements - labels sewn into our clothes (made on cloth tape with indelible pencils), two blankets, two changes of underwear, two shirts, a sweater, two pairs of pants (cotton Kaki), a flash light if you had one (few did). I can't remember night attire if any, a kit bag to hold it all. Tooth paste, soap, a towel, bathing suit, and 50 cents spending money for two weeks rounded off the list.

Virtually all supplies arrived by the pointer as did the boys. The "pointer" being a sturdy seaworthy flat bottomed wood plank boat of some 18 feet over-all. The steamers Stoney Lake and *Islinda* plied the water and were a thrill to see and hear. The "pointer" had an outboard engine which provided reliable transportation.

Upon arrival at the camp four boys were assigned to a separate section of a bunk house which had two double bunks one over the other open at the roof peak. Each section was well equipped with a coal oil lantern and a bench. The first assignment was to fill one's bed covers with clean new straw from a pile of straw at the back of the camp near the raspberry bushes. This project if well done (stuffed firmly into the cotton bag), resulted in good comfortable sleep at night. If not, the bare boards became pretty hard by morning as well as lumpy. Two boys to one mattress.

Then we were told about the management of the camp, in no uncertain terms, by Doug Loomis. Each boy had the same spending money. Twenty-five cents each per week. After morning chores and a swim the canteen was available consisting of candy bars at a nickel a piece. All the boys in camp were assigned to a work unit. The work units were activated each morning. I can't recall there being any unit leader but the camp counselors (Harry Redfern's name comes to mind), got the work done and lots of work was assigned.

Each day, water had to be pumped up to a large tank outside the kitchen. A short handled force pump was installed in the pipe near the waters edge. Each of about eight boys took turns at the handle on the pump from a sitting position. The tank which held about 150-200 gallons of water took quite a while to fill. Some of us got the blisters to prove that statement. Good exercise it was for a bunch of skinny kids.

Another chore was cleaning up the grounds. That was an easy one.

Peeling potatoes for 40 or 50 boys plus the staff took about the same time as pumping water.

Then one year, the “five holer” had to be dug out. This was a very special chore.

Before I describe the chore, let me describe the five holer. It was located up the hill well away from the kitchen and bunkhouses. Five holes in one outhouse all in a row. Simple enough. Well, not exactly. Homosapiens of tender age and skin used the building but so did the porcupines. There being no salt for the porkies they found a source of salt in the seats of the five holer. Try sitting on the end of a splintered piece of pine that looks for all the world like a porkies back. Well, that got us back to our chores in a hurry. What with the odor and discomfort few spent more time than absolutely necessary in that holy of holies.

Now about cleaning out the place. Willing hands were needed and Doug Loomis was not beyond bribing to accomplish his ends in the interests of ecological necessity.

Fifty cents was the bribe and that was ten chocolate bars or one of the special bars available in those days made from coconut from the north sea islands. I never got on that chore but Eddie Huffman did. For some crazy reason I was envious of the ability to buy those extra bars.

The food was not really a major matter of concern. Porridge with Klim and brown sugar bread and jam or marmalade and a glass of Klim was breakfast with a fried egg and bacon on occasion. You don't know what Klim was? Try spelling it backwards.

The long tables in the mess hall were covered with white linoleum which draped over the sides of the table about a foot. Alertness was one of the necessities even at the dining table. We each had a glass of water at our places. That flap of linoleum made a dandy canal. You guessed it. Half a glass of or maybe a quarter (it seemed like a quart) would land in the crotch of the first boy that wasn't paying attention to what was going on around him. Yes, I got caught. There were so many absorbing things to think about.

One year we had a German Army cook. They say armies march on their stomachs. We didn't have the stomach for his offerings. I remember one noon hour dinner our bowls were filled with a nice looking tomato soup, but only one boy liked it. So we put all our bowls around his place knowing that before long the cook would leave the kitchen to join the staff on the veranda for dinner. We figured he got the message.

The pointer went to Young's Point each day with the mail and returned with parents letters for the boys. I must have written my Mum and Dad about the awful meals because that weekend they (Mum and Dad that is), arrived in Dad's McLaughlin Buick touring car with a whole stalk of bananas and a giant box of marshmallows. Not even the German cook could spoil our deserts for the next couple of days.

Lights out time always seemed to produce some mayhem in spite of the efforts of Harry Redfern. Remember the bunkhouses were open at the peak the full length of the building. Usually we were pretty tired after a full day of activities but there always seemed to be one or two that wouldn't shut up. At this point running shoes became missiles flying through the air from one section to two or three away. Beans seemed to be a good evening meal with the inevitable gas - one fellow tried to make the lantern flare but it didn't work. Just before lights out, of course.

We all looked forward the once a week overnight trip when the pointer was loaded up and the war canoes roped in tandem behind the pointer. What a thrill to be going away up to Eels Creek. None of us had ever seen an eel and the trip didn't help that anticipation.

When we arrived and had a swim and a meal we were told that we could either sleep in the bunk house of the old abandoned saw mill or make a bed under the stars. My pal and I decided to sleep under the stars. We found a place with dry moss curled up in our blankets and slept the whole night through. But not the chaps who got under cover in the old bunk house. The bunkhouse was not completely abandoned. BED BUGS!!

Early in the morning all the tales of interrupted sleep, spooks and bites were told by the heroes from the bunkhouse. The bites were pretty angry looking red spots, as I recall.

Evenings at the camp resulted in activities ranging from pantomimes enacted behind a sheet with a lantern throwing a silhouette on the screen. Watching yards and yards of intestines coming from a prone patient behind the screen pulled by a surgeon camper was hilarious. Imagination knew no bounds. All the acts...well just about all, were great fun.

The pantomimes were followed by sing songs and we soon learned the words to many songs new to all of us. How about "*About A Mile*".

I know a girl across the lake
She can shake and shimmy like a rattle snake,
She has a sister that's so tall,
She sleeps in the kitchen with her feet in the hall.

About a mile, about a mile,
Oh honey won't you follow me.

I know a man with a wooden leg,
A right he couldn't work,
And a right he couldn't beg,
He got four spools and an old tin can,
Made himself a Ford and the darn thing ran.

About a mile, about a mile,
Oh honey won't you follow me.

Many new verses of that one were composed on the spot. Wish I could remember some more.

One that is still sung at the camp is:

Skinny marink a dink a dink
Skinny marink a do, I love you.
Skinny marink a dink a dink
Skinny marink a do, I love you.
I love you in the morning when the sun is shining bright,
I love you in the evening when it's time to say good night,
Skinny marink a dink a dink
Skinny marink a do, I love you.

How about:

I wear my pink pajamas in the summer when it's hot,
I wear my flannel nighty in the winter when it's not,
And sometimes in the spring time,
And sometimes in the fall,
I jump right in between the sheets,
With nothing on at all, oooh (repeat)

All good fun with Barney Google. "*My Bonny Lies Over the Ocean*" and "*Yes, We Have No Bananas, We Have No Bananas Today,*" and many other favorites.

Sometimes some of the boys would arrive badly needing a haircut (my dad cut mine so I was trimmer before I left). Doug Loomis with hand clippers and a comb soon solved the need on the steps of his cabin. Sometimes for the fun of it the clippers would run away up further than needed but we all had short hair in those days anyway.

How my Dad got into the camp with his car I don't know but it was the only one I ever saw there. Out at the back of the camp beyond the straw pile there were lots and lots of raspberry bushes which provided a nice desert and keep us busy.

Sitting around a camp fire roasting marshmallows, making a French bed for our counselor and being dunked in the lake for our efforts early the next morning, that was the completion day. We raced the war canoes and knocked each other off the slippery pole placed above the water from the dock to the boat house ramps and we slid down the slide from above the boat house when the galvanized metal was about 160 degrees and you burnt your rump (even after a pail of water was slushed down it).

About 1929 the four of us decided to take a bicycle trip around Stoney Lake. With wire and string, rope and lots of knots we tied our blankets, old raincoats, and our food onto our old bicycles and started out. Peddling for hours we finally got to the camp. To our dismay there was not a soul at the place. All gone on an overnight trip. Our dismay was bought on by our plan to beg, borrow or scrounge a couple of loaves of bread from the camp cook.

We set up camp just north of the good old "Y" camp, in the bush, and went down to the lake for a swim, and a solution to our limited bread supply. What could we do besides go hungry?

When we got back from our waterfront jaunt, we found our campsite desecrated by a herd of cattle. What little bread we had they ate and our nice campsite was covered with brown cow patties.

Another decision making conference resulted in our conclusion to set up another camp nearby for the night, we decided to make a raft in order to ferry our bikes across the lake to the Kawartha Park store. We chased the cattle further away, set up camp, ate our meager food, fought mosquitoes all night and arose early to commence our expedition across the lake.

We had one major problem. Jack had not yet learned to swim very well. How could we get 4 bikes, 4 boys and our limited gear across the lake?

Building a raft was a great project with imaginations galore. We assembled logs and boards from along the shoreline north of the "Y" camp. We had a couple of hatchets. Mine had a nail puller. One of us had some flexible wire used to tie his kit to his bike.

Four big logs, some boards, a few nails, some small logs and the wire resulted in a raft Robinson Crusoe would have been proud of. Paddles we shaped from boards with the hatchets.

We had all read Aesop's Fables, so were familiar with the arithmetic's of transporting loads across water.

The first trip (a little better than a mile), carried three bicycles, three boys and some kit. Half way across we abandoned one log which slipped out of the wire and didn't seem to be necessary. But it added a bit to the apprehension. One paddled and two pushed from the rear with lots of flutter kicks. Sometimes two paddled and one swam. Up the lake came the steamer "Stoney Lake." What a big boat it was! The largest any of us had seen. To the great pleasure of all of us the Captain (no doubt Mr. Young) gave us a couple of loud blasts on the whir. Our logging efforts immediately picked up. Two of us left one boy three bikes, and the kits ashore.

The return trip for Jack, one bike and the balance of our gear was exhausting, but we arrived safely to find an anxious Jack convinced. We took him aboard and made the final trip without incidence of note. It was getting on towards supper time when we finally landed on the west shore of the lake just south of Kawartha Park and with our limited funds indulged in candy and pop and replaced our lost bread supply. We camped for the night and next day returned home on those gravel roads. I can't remember flat tires, but there must have been one or two.

Our focal point was the "Y" camp our summer home away from home. None of us ever went back. The next year we all got jobs at Loblaws and that's another good story.

There are a few many fond memories this boy in his 75th year has of the "Y" camp. No beach, no water skis, no sail boats, no (exotic) food, no plumbing facilities, no electric lights, no T.V., no VCR's, just lots of good clean fun for which I give my belated thanks to the men from many walks of life, who made up the "Y" and the supporting service clubs and provided these wonderful memories.

Oh, to be able to relive those wonderful memories!

Doug Cruthers