

REFLECTIONS OF CAMP CHRISTY BY REV. LARRY OYER

During World War II gasoline was rationed and many other activities were curtailed so my family used camp activities as our only vacation time. I graduated from high school in Greensburg, Kansas in 1945. The Kansas Baptist Convention staff under the supervision of Rev, Roy Pasley was looking for someone to manage the camp that summer. Rev. Pasley asked me if I was interested. I jumped at the chance. My father was pastoring at the Baptist church in Greensburg so he wanted to go with me to get the camp set up for the summer sessions. A pastor from a church in the country north of Pratt, called and said he had made a power mower that he wanted to donate to the camp. This was before power mowers were available to the public. My Dad and I went to his home and tied the mower on the back of my 1936 Ford and Dad went with me to camp. The pastor had used the front spindle from a car on which he mounted a blade. The power was provided by a Maytag engine from a washing machine. The construction was fine but the motor did not have power enough to do a good job of cutting the tough buffalo grass. I wound up using a large hand scythe to keep the grass down around the buildings. Dad helped me get the grounds and buildings ready for the first campers. I offered to take him back to Greensburg but he said he was going to hitch hike home. I don't believe he had ever hitch hiked like I had but he did get home OK that day .

In those days there was no winter living quarters on the grounds so cabins and other buildings were locked and deserted for the winter months. That proved to be a disaster as several breakins occurred and tools and equipment were stolen. Two cabins were constructed just south of the Administration building. One was for the camp manager and one was the First Aid cabin where the camp nurse stayed. I lived in the one for the manager that summer.

For years after the Baptists started Camp Christy there was no electricity on the grounds. One of my duties each evening was to fill about a dozen gas lanterns to be used for the camp chapel services in the open air chapel then taken to the cabins by the cabin leaders. About this time men came and wired all the cabins and a large generator was installed just west of the Ad building. I could start it for about an hour to lite the cabins but at the given time all lights were out and everyone was supposed to be in bed.

About 1943 or '44 a man named Andy Shore was active in the Dodge City Baptist church. He was a rancher and business man in Dodge. He donated enough money to have a swimming pool built on the hill to the Southwest side of the Ad building. The only way to full the pool was with a windmill at the side of the pool. Rev. Ross Woods was the Western Area Minister at this time. There was no filtering system at the new pool. My job was to get the pool filled with the windmill and then following each camp session, drain it, wash it down and then try to get it filled for the next camp session. The campers last swim session was on Friday morning. After cleaning I attempted to get it full for the next session on Monday . If the wind blew enough I could get enough water for the campers to splash around by Tuesday afternoon. Camps were held for one week sessions in those days and they were coed camps later on. Rev. Woods brought out a pump jack and we attached it to the windmill. The only problem was the engine on the pump jack had a quart gas tank, so I had to get up two or three times in the night

to fill the tank so it would pump all night long. The windmill had only about one and half inch cylinder so it took several hours to supply the pool with the needed amount of water. Soon the men drilled an irrigation well which shot out a seven inch stream. I thought that was great improvement .

For several years before that pool was built the leaders endeavored to transport all campers to the Scott County Lake about eight miles north of Camp. I recall one year someone came up with a 1929 Chev. truck with a stock rack on it. It had a deck about half way across the bed. We boys all piled in the truck and headed for the lake. The original road into camp was up a steep hill next to the property line along a pasture fence. The leaders attempted to get us campers to the lake at least three or times during the two week camp session. That truck had trouble getting up that hill and as the driver shifted gears he jerked when shifting. The upper deck in the stock rack fell down on all the campers in the bottom of the truck bed. No one was seriously hurt.

Later the leaders borrowed a large flat bed implement trailer on which they built 2x4 railing on all sides. We campers all stood on the trailer for the ride to the lake. They had a powerful pick-up to pull the trailer.

In the early days of Boys Camps the director always tried to have someone blow a bugle to signal changes in the camp schedule. A bugler was not always available. A church donated a large church bell which was placed just west of the Ad building. It was later moved in front of the "new" dining hall. It is still used for that purpose today.

For several years, there was a shuffleboard court in that same location. Large cracks in the cement caused it to be unusable so it was discarded.

Before the camps were coed we boys and men were allowed some activities that later were prohibited. Each session of camp one of the evenings was designated as Stunt Night. Each cabin of boys with their leader would do a stunt for the whole group. I will never forget one night a cabin leader named Rev. Marion Wheaton and his boys presented "The Little Big Machine". It went like this. They set two saw horses with one by twelve boards on top to make a table. They covered it with a bed sheet. They nailed a one by two on the end for the switch for this machine. One boy stood beside the table and announced to couples passing by that this machine would enlarge any items placed in it. First they put in a small camera and started the machine. Lots of banging noise came from under the table and out popped a large camera. They then placed a small flash light in the machine and out popped a large one. Other items were enlarged. A couple came by with a small doll. The leader took a long time explaining the machine and the "lady" in the couple got restless so she laid her "baby" on the table. It was "accidentally" pushed into the machine and the leader "accidentally" moved the lever. After much clatter from under the table out popped Rev. Wheaton dressed only in a white sheet for a diaper calling out "Momma Momma". It brought down the house. Rev. Wheaton's nick name was Pee Wee but he did not have a wee figure. I believe he was pastoring at Rosell FBC at the time. He was a good swimmer and taught many campers to swim in the "new" pool. We did not have to go to the lake after that.

There are some very interesting sites around the Scott County lake. One we used to enjoy was called the Fossil Beds. We got to tour these channels cut deep in the rock formations. We always found fossils

to bring back to camp with us. Our leaders always brought a picnic lunch to round out the evening. I remember some of the boys were not impressed by this activity so they named it the Fizziel Beds. I understand that these are not open to the public anymore but only the geological students are permitted to tour them .

The valley that passes through Camp Christy dead ends about a mile north. A famous battle was fought here when a tribe of Indians were fleeing from a reservation. The army attempted to stop them. The women, children, and the aged took refuge in a cave at the end of the valley. The army general was wounded and was transported to the hospital at Fort Riley. Visitors can travel to this site to view the canyon and read the story of that battle on a stone memorial. Several years ago I was leading a Model A Ford Club through this area. We had a dinner for the club at Camp Christy. We stopped at all these interesting sites to study the history of Scott County. I believe we had about 25 or so Model A Fords in the procession. Several people climbed up the sides of the Chauk Bluffs.

The summer of 1945 when I served as Camp Manager I always attended the evening Vesper Service at the camp chapel. This chapel was first constructed as a pole building with no closed in sides. We sat on 2x12 planks set on cement blocks. One night a Gospel team from Ottawa University was leading the group in their evening devotions. Roger Fredrickson and four girls were traveling to boost Ottawa U hoping to get high school grads to attend OU. As many of you know Roger could get quite emotional in his talks. I was sitting on the back "seat" with tears in my eyes and promising myself "I'm going to OU just as soon as camp is over. I did just, sold my car and hitch hiked to OU. I have told this story several times when Roger was present. Roger was attracted to one of the girls named Ruth. I always towed a small trailer to Scott City to pick up supplies for the camp like ice, groceries, and any other articles requested by the campers. Roger stopped one day as I was leaving and asked me to pick up a five pound box of chocolates so he could treat the girls. I did pick them up and assumed that he would reimburse me for them when I got back. Maybe he was like me and didn't have much money. He passed the candy to the OU girls and was a hero of the day. I have told this story several times when he was present and he has offered to pay me, but I refused to take his money and told him that if I took his money that would ruin my story. Roger later taught classes at OU as he pastored at FBC in Ottawa. I have taken some of his classes. I believe I made a good investment as he later married Ruthie and both left a very lasting legacy.

In about 1946 a man named William (Bill) Alair was teaching Manual Training classes at the High School in Dodge City, Kansas. He was hired to be the camp manager in the summer months. The chapel still did not have enclosed sides. Mr. Alair decided to enclose the sides of the chapel with sections between the supporting poles. He made very accurate measurements and had the high school students construct window sections to fit all the openings. After these sections were made in their high school classes, they hauled them to Christy and set them in place to make the chapel fully enclosed. A church donated some pews so the chapel was more adapted for worship services and other activities. We give Mr. Alair and his students much credit for sharing their skills and hard work to enhance Camp Christy.

I have previously mentioned Cross Hill. It was customary for the campers to lay rocks on the hills around camp to pay thanks to leaders. The campers would spell out something and then whitewash the rocks

so they were visible from a distance. Beside the Cross Hill which was the site for evening devotions, a large dollar sign was formed on the hill above the new dining hall to give honor to Dr. J. E. Dollar who led many camp sessions as he also served as Western Area Minister. I am proud also to relate that some campers formed some rocks just south of that dollar sign in honor of my Dad A.D. (Amos Dwight Oyer) These rocks have been whitewashed for years and they may still be up there someplace.

When I worked at Camp in the summer of '45 I would often visit the First Baptist Church in Leota, Kansas for their evening services where I met a girl named Eva Gene Ford. Her father was the sheriff in that county. I took several rides with her in her father's police car. She liked to get out in the country and blow the siren. Her dad was not very happy when he learned what she had done. She later married a preacher so she mended her ways.

The boy's camps always closed each evening with a vesper service with one of the counselors leading the message. I will never forget a service when we were all assembled on the back side of Cross Hill. The speaker was preaching from I Kings 18:30ff. Please read that passage to recall that Elijah was asking the false prophets to call fire down on the water soaked alter. I love it when he asked the false prophets if their god was sleeping or otherwise occupied. The Speck brothers had built a large pile of brush at the bottom of the hill. We could not see a wire stretched from the top of the hill to the brush pile in the valley. Just as the speaker told of the Lord answering Elijah's request for fire from his God, the Speck boys lite a gasoline torch and shot it down that wire into the brush pile which was also soaked in gasoline. It burst into flame and indelibly etched into our minds the power of our Almighty God.

On another occasion I will cherish was held on the Great Stone Face hill. This was just to the north of the cabins. One of the counselors was very well versed about the stars and planets. We campers all lay on our backs on the hillside as he pointed out the stars, their formations, distances and other interesting facts about our solar system. The experience taught us campers that we possess a mighty God who formed a fantastic earth for our dwelling places. These kinds of experiences influenced many boys to consider heeding a "call" to full time service and over the years many of our ministers can look back on their camp days as having important influences in their lives.

At the close of the camp sessions in 1945, Rev. Woods came to help me close for the winter. He told me that the mattress pads on all the bunks had received some damage from vermin chewing on them. These pads were pads that were first army surplus pads. We loaded them all in the camp trailer and hauled them to the cooks cabin by the dining hall. We surrounded them with mouse and rat poison so they would be usable for the next summer.

In later years when the Baptist church at Amy, Kansas closed, their parsonage was moved to Camp Christy to be used for a full time Manager's residence. This move stopped the break-ins in the winter.

A number of buildings have been constructed on the grounds. I recall when the new dining hall was built, the word was bandied about that it was the first building on the grounds that was not built by volunteer men from the Baptist churches.

Many more improvements have been made on the grounds over the years and I have looked forward to attending the Central Region American Baptist Men's Retreat when I was able to do so. I have really enjoyed having a part in getting men and boys from the Bethany Baptist Church to attend Men's Retreats. They have given selfless assistance to much upkeep and new construction at Camp Christy.

I thank you all for making it possible for me to relate these Reflections and for all who have read them and love Camp Christy like I do . Larry Oyer