**My Camp Miniwanca Experience**

"MY OWN SELF AT MY VERY BEST ALL THE TIME"--This was the motto engraved in my heart and mind as a Miniwanca Camper in 1956. This 4-H experience not only had a great influence on my life, it gave me information and values to live by AND to pass on to other 4-Hers, my high school students, Sunday School students, members of women's groups, and the School Food Service Staff of which I was director.

I have always liked to travel and it was an exciting day when I received a letter telling me I had been named the Kentucky 4-H Girls' Leadership State Champion.  In my Leadership project, I had held offices in several clubs, taught Sunday School, led a 4-H Club at Boyce Elementary School and served as a Junior Leader at Dawson Springs 4-H Camp.  Compiling my records and filling out my record book paid off with my award being a two-week expense-paid trip to the American Youth Foundation (AYF) National Leadership Conference at Camp Miniwanca on Lake Michigan and Shelby Lake near Muskegon, Michigan. Traveling alone on a double-decker Greyhound bus to meet my fellow campers forced me to grow up quickly and put those leadership skills into action.

William H. Danforth, one of the co-founders of Camp Miniwanca and president of the Ralston-Purina Company wrote the motivational book, "I Dare You." In it, he outlined the four-fold philosophy of a balanced life—mental, physical, religious, and social. This concept was based on Luke 2:52, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man."  Camp Miniwanca is a leadership training camp established on non-denominational Christian principles in 1925. Mr. Danforth's successful business enabled him to give continued support to the American Youth Foundation today.  Although Kentucky 4-H is no longer involved, Camp Miniwanca still serves youth today.

This camp experience inspired me to:  work toward discovering and developing my personal best, strive toward living a balanced life, and make a positive difference in my community and world back home.  Throughout the week, time was spent each day on self-discipline, leadership development based on a four-year curriculum, friendly competition, fun camp activities, interest groups and reflection time.

SWEET MEMORIES

* As first-year campers, we were divided into classes.  Our identity was through an Indian tribal name (WANYAKES) and class colors (orange and brown) and a song written by us.  After two weeks, the camaraderie and loyalty to this camp and fellow campers was unreal.  Fifty-two years later, I still remember the words to our song and have and would immediately bond with a stranger who has had the Miniwanca experience.  It was my strong desire to return to camp for three more years and graduate from National Leadership Camp, but my college schedule and finances did not permit me to do so.

* There were seven or nine girls in our cabin from different states.  Our mentor was from the Philippine Islands.  Sharing lifestyles back home with each other was a real education within itself.  I recall the camper from Ohio showing us pictures of her family.  I was totally shocked to see a picture of her dad in Bermuda shorts.  In 1956, women did not wear shorts in Alvaton, Kentucky.  I couldn't believe my eyes—men dressed in shorts????  I thought farmers wore overalls.  That same school year, I visited a 4-H family in Massachusetts and the beverage served was Coke in cans.  I had only seen Cokes in bottles and refused to show my parents the photos because I feared they would think I had been drinking beer.  Time does change many things.

* Wake-up Dinner Bell—If one did not rise and shine at the sound of the bell, a bucket of cold water was thrown in the face.  If that did not wake us up, the cold dip in Lake Michigan and calisthenics on the shores surely did.  Prior to the dip, time was allotted for morning devotions.  After the dip, the hungry gang raced to the dining hall for a nutritious, hearty breakfast to prepare us for a vigorous, energetic, exciting day. I remember there was always a jar of peanut butter with crackers on the table three times a day for the extra hungry campers.

* Sing-a-longs, skits, and vespers were held every night around the campfires.  No televisions, radios, or newspapers were allowed on campgrounds.  All entertainment was created and designed by campers.  Modern conveniences were few.

* A clambake on the beach was another new fun experience for me.  Quite different from a Kentucky catfish fry.

* The highlight of my two weeks was putting on hip boots and trekking through the sand to the top of the mountain for vesper services one evening.  The song service was timed to coincide with the sunset on Lake Michigan.  We were singing "Nearer My God to Thee" when the sun set on the lake forming the reflection of a cross on the water.  Wow!  What a spiritual vision!  I took a colored slide photo of that magnificent sunset but the real picture is still in my memory.

* This memory was not so sweet but I survived the situation.  As the guys were loading our luggage to take us back to the bus station; mine fell off the truck and broke into pieces.  They wired it together with baling wire.  When I left home, it was 90 degrees in July.  Returning in mid-August, the temperature dropped and Chicago was very cold.  I was wearing a sleeveless dress with a low-cut back and no coat.  I felt that everyone was feeling sorry for the young girl who had no coat and a piece of luggage wired together with baling wire.

* But what those staring strangers did not know:  I was returning to My Old Kentucky Home with many new friendships, extraordinary camping experiences, new confidence, and leadership tools which I would eventually use throughout my professional life.  After nervously passing a taxing test and interview, I learned that I was living a balanced life—mentally, physically, religiously, and socially. My goal is to continue that balance for the remainder of my life.  I frequently do a self examination and realize that sometimes I need to shift and rearrange my priorities.  Two years ago, I began to categorize my New Year's Resolutions using the four-fold concept--mental, physical, religious and social.   To that, I also added a financial category.  Doing this has helped me keep my life in balance.

There is no doubt that this Camp Miniwanca experience molded my life forever.  I am so grateful to the 4-H Club and all who made it possible for me to participate in this life discovery event.

Living happily ever after,

Doris Smith Pruitt

Warren Co. 4-H member 1947-1959