

THE “SPIRIT OF CANYON CAMP”

That unique item of good will, called the “Spirit of Canyon Camp”, is now known throughout the Council. Some of the younger staff members, however, may assume that it has always been present - - for it was always talked about when they were campers themselves. Quite to the contrary, the “Spirit of Canyon Camp” has been a rather recent creation. Although a few of its foundations can be traced back to the late 1950”s and early 1960”s, the true “Spirit” as it is presently known did not blossom until the arrival of Denny Pratt as camp director in 1969. I would like to share with you for a few moments one person’s recollection of how the whole idea and concept was developed. Hopefully, in this manner, you will not take for granted this fragile, yet precious ideal which you are about to experience this summer. The “Spirit of Canyon Camp” needs constant care and attention, less it fall into decay and disuse. So sit back and listen to the heritage you are now a part of. It is now up to all of you to understand the “Spirit” in order to keep it alive for campers and staff who are yet to come.

The early beginnings of the “Spirit” can be traced back to at least 5 sources. They are:

First: The physical beauty of the camp itself. While the buildings at camp may appear old and worn out, the land areas of the camp are quite beautiful by themselves. The sweeping parade ground, the canyon wall overlooking the dining hall, the forested campsites and meandering Coon Creek – all combine to create an environment that is easy to love. The land itself whispers that strength of character and peace of mind may be found within its boundaries.

Second: The general philosophy of the Order of the Arrow. The principles of the O.A. are an important and central part of one’s life at Canyon Camp. They stress unselfish cheerful service, Brotherhood, and a concern for one’s fellow man. For as we all once learned, “He who serves his fellows, is of all his fellows greatest.” It should be of no surprise, therefore, that the Spirit of Canyon Camp developed in such an atmosphere of friendship and giving.

Third: Lyle Novinski and Norb Garmen. These two men were camp directors in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s. Denny Pratt worked on their camp staffs and learned a lot from their leadership. Perhaps the most outstanding characteristic about these two men was their deep personal interest in the happiness of each individual scout. They set a pattern whereby the number one goal of the staff became ensuring that each camper had a good time, a friend to talk to, a shoulder to lean on. As Lyle or Norb would walk along the camp road, they were always in constant conversation with a group of scouts. No camper was ignored in those days and none should be ignored today. In short, Lyle and Norb made a large smile official staff equipment.

Fourth: Roy Prange. Roy worked on camp staff for 10 years from 1958 through 1968. Roy’s greatest contribution to camp came during the summer of 1968 which he

knew would be his last. It was Roy who first labeled the feelings of Brotherhood at this camp as “The Spirit of Canyon Camp”. He sentimentally talked about it at every Friday night campfire, and implanted it in the minds of the staff who would remain after he had gone. He made us realize that something special existed at camp and had the potential for continued growth. He was never on staff to experience the end result of his efforts, but he knows that they were worthwhile. He gave us a common name or label for our feelings of deep kinship and brotherhood and made us aware of what we possessed. For this we should always be grateful to Roy.

Fifth: The camp has never had the financial resources it has needed. Because of the chronic lack of financial resources at camp, the staff has always appreciated the equipment that they have had all the more. Almost apologetically, staff men in the late 1960’s frequently would be heard saying to visitors, “Well, what we don’t have in terms of physical resources, we make up for in spirit.” This excuse making based on spirit became ingrained on the staff’s mind. Thus, our chronic poverty was ironically beneficial to the growth of the “Spirit” that we know so well today.

With these five factors laying the foundation, it remained for Denny Pratt to tie them all together in 1969. Denny’s first day in camp established the golden rule that would guide the staff during the years that followed: the higher up in rank and seniority you were, the harder you were expected to work. “Setting the example” Denny called it. A very simple idea but shocking to a staff who had been used to camp directors in the mid 1960’s who never did a bit of work. During Denny’s first day at Canyon, he was out on the tractor mowing grass and hauling garbage. The idea caught on and soon staff members found themselves feeling guilty if they had spare time on their hands. Gone were the old days where spare time meant bunk time. If you had nothing to do, you went and asked Denny to find you something. The camp has never been the same.

I think that it was during the winter and spring of 1970 that the Spirit of Canyon Camp really took hold. During that time, Lee Binkley, Bill Kline and others came out to camp almost every weekend to work on the camp and get it ready for the next summer. Four months before the camp would start, these guys were out working, without pay, for the good of the camp and the scouts who would enjoy it. Working at Canyon Camp had ceased being a job – it was fun, it was an honor, it was exciting. No other camp in the Council has ever developed such undivided loyalty among its staff, nor developed such a large cadre of volunteers who take such pride in improving camp without charging for their labor.

And lest it be considered an oversight on my part in telling this story, when one thinks of volunteers at camp, one individual stands out among all the rest – a person who was as instrumental as Denny in developing the deep love we all feel for Canyon Camp. During the 1960’s and ‘70’s, Doc Held probably put more time and money into the camp than anyone else in the Council. Moreover, it was impossible to find anyone who ever had uttered a bad word about Doc. Between Denny and Doc, the sense of service to the camp flourished and expanded into what it is today. I am sure at this moment in that

great scout camp in the sky, Denny and Doc are looking down on us together thinking: "Job well done. What can we tackle tomorrow?"

It is time for my ramblings to stop. In closing, I would ask you to sense the feelings in the room around you...those of staff men past and present. There are many who can only be with you spiritually tonight, yet they are with you just the same. Once you've opened your heart to Canyon Camp, you become a permanent part of its surroundings. Be aware of the burden placed upon you. It is up to each and everyone of you to continue the message of the "Spirit of Canyon Camp". Don't let your spiritual brothers of past years down. Guarantee for us that you will always keep in your hearts the simple meaning of "The little scout that followed me". For by doing so, you will be joining all of the staff from years gone by who are silently applauding the leadership and love and legacy of Denny Pratt....

(Written by Don Barry, a nine year staff member, in the spring of 1973)