



**RURAL & MIGRANT MINISTRY
OVERNIGHT LEADERSHIP CAMP
IS 20 YEARS OLD!**





THE OVERNIGHT LEADERSHIP CAMP was created by Ruth Faircloth in 1989 with help from the Rural & Migrant Ministry staff: The Rev. Gail Keeney Mulligan and Donna Robinson. And ever since, Ruth has served as Director of the Camp. It was launched at Camp Epworth, a Methodist camp and conference center in High Falls, NY. It was one week long.



In addition to the summer experience, the Leadership Camp is also a doorway for children who want to become leaders for change to enter into the year round programs of RMM's Youth Empowerment Program. Here

are some glimpses of the Camp throughout its history - from a few of the participants.

THE EARLY DAYS

Long time volunteer with RMM, Kathryn Moran was involved in the early days of the camp serving for four years as a counselor with the youngest children. After that, she was on deck doing whatever was needed, running errands, filling in for counselors. Here are some of her memories . . .



"To be honest, the first three years were rather chaotic, with only the Faircloths, Becky House-



holder and Donna Robinson as constants. We started with a small group, ages 8 through teenagers the first two summers, and volunteers from various churches, many of whom lasted less than our week. As attendance grew, the younger groups went hiking at Mohonk and Minnewaska; some campers went to theme parks. The older boys did rustic camping in the Catskill Mountains north

of Woodstock. Usually, some of the younger kids got homesick, and I drove them home late at night. And once in awhile, I would have to take somebody home for flagrant violation of the rules.

Things got much better in 1992. Again, a few counselors said



they couldn't cope, but we also had people like Earl Brown, who came every year, and led the very popular fishing trips, although I sometimes had to drive miles to find worms. Cave exploring was also popular in the early years at Epworth.



When Tracy Leavitt took

over the Arts and Crafts program, her projects were very creative and fun. The kids looked forward to Arts and Crafts, whereas before they usually asked me for quarters for the ping-pong ball machine. After Alan Weeks took over as Youth Director, our camp trips included all the campers, and we went to many educational places, including a Native American museum, Howe's Cavern, the Bronx Zoo, art museums in NYC, Mystic Seaport, Lake Placid, and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. As with any



Practising dance routine for the Talent Show.

large group – by now we were sponsoring more than 100 campers each summer – there were problems: injuries, sickness, etc. One year I made seven trips to Benedictine Hospital in Kingston.

As for staff, the first years at Epworth we had the excellent services of Pepe (Spartak Delas), as athletic director. He supervised soccer, rope-climbing, boating on the Rondout, caving, and games. I will always remember, with great sadness, Ivan and Irving Medina singing a Croatian hymn Pepe had taught them for Talent Night. Irving later joined the US Army and was killed in Iraq.

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The Ropes course with Alan Weeks (left).





We are indebted to our camp nurses who have faithfully taken care of cases of poison ivy, sunburn, injuries, appendicitis, and cat bites, and all kinds of maladies.”

THE CAMPUS AND PROGRAM

In 2003, the Camp moved its site to Camp Kutz in Warwick. A great facility, it offers a large art building with a dance studio, an indoor theater, and an outdoor theater overlooking the lake. Campers are divided into three groups: Hope, ages 8-10;



Justice, ages 11-13; and Empowerment, ages 14-17.

The Camp day begins with breakfast. One camper from each cabin serves as “cruiser”, going early to the dining room and setting the tables. After the meals, the cruiser clears and cleans the table. Everyone gathers in the indoor theater at nine for warm ups. From there, each camper goes to morning workshops

with visiting artists. 2009 workshops include storytelling and drama, tap dancing, drumming, music, video production, and spoken word. The fruit of the week’s workshops is presented in a talent show on Friday evening. Each afternoon, campers have two “choice times” when they can choose their



activities, such as tap dancing, crochet, fishing, swimming, hiphop dancing, rap singing, bingo. Each evening there is entertainment followed by a candlelit vesper of music, testimony, and storytelling. Each year the whole camp goes on a trip. The Dutchess County Fair was the trip this year.

FROM THE BEGINNING

All seven of the Faircloth family – Max, Ruth, Moshiena, Max Jr., Mona, T, and Mahlo – were involved in Camp from the beginning. Moshiena was 14 when Camp began. She attended an all white middle and high school. She was not used to much diversity. At Camp she enjoyed getting to know Asians, Jamaicans, Africans, Hispanics; as the ethnicity of the farmworker population changed, so did the children who came to camp.

The values taught at camp were the family values of the Faircloth family: respecting other people, doing unto others as you would have them do unto you, sharing and caring. In the beginning, all the campers were in one cabin – boys on one side, girls on the other, with communal space in between. Campers were responsible for daily tidying of their personal space as well as the communal space.



Shiena felt that Camp was like a family. They did activities with the Hutterians, learning about the communal way of life. There were many choices of activities every day, as well as a daily trip.

When Shiena was 16, she went to a diverse college, which gave her more appreciation of the diversity at camp. At 18, she became a counselor, and has been coming to camp every year since – through births of her son and daughter and development of her career as a teacher and educational administrator. She enjoys the looks on campers faces when they return each year, and the bonds that have grown with the families who trust and respect this remarkable organization. Camp builds great leaders, but it is also fun, a break from daily pressures of life, and a reunion of friends. Shiena now serves as Program Director. “I can’t imagine not coming to camp. It is part of me.”





THE STORY OF ONE FAMILY

The camp experience and its impact on the campers is revealed in the story of the Acevedo family. Ignacio (known as Iggy) is the oldest of six children, whose family immigrated from Mexico in 1990. His parents worked as farmworkers. While at summer school for migrant kids in Mid-



dletown, his teacher told him of the RMM camp which had four openings and gave him an application in Spanish. He could speak a little English. He was 14 years old. His teacher was also his counselor at that 1991 camp which was held at Camp Epworth in High Falls, NY. At that time, boys' and girls' programs were completely separate. The boys were taken camping

where they learned basic outdoor skills. "It was what boys needed", Iggy said.

The older boys learned to take care of the younger ones, and how to be part of a team. When horseplay got out of hand and got aggressive, they backed off and ended up laughing about it. They realized that in the woods, they were depending on each other, and if you fight, you hurt the team. There were 10-12 boys: a couple of Mexicans, a couple of African Americans, and a few whites.

During the rest of the year, Iggy attended Pine Bush schools where he was the only Mexican student. The school was very welcoming, but he didn't have any Mexican friends. He worked hard in school, and worked when he wasn't in school to help support the



family - in a sweatshop and later in a restaurant.

Camp was “the light at the end of the tunnel each year” for Iggy. His father was in and out of the picture, and didn’t provide a good role model for Iggy. The men he met at camp supported and encouraged him. Ruth’s loving way with kids was a model. There were many temptations in his life. Camp helped him “follow the right path”, learn when and how to say no. Camping taught him maturity: how to be strong and let go of trying to prove anything.



Now, at age 31, why does he come back every year? At this

point, his whole family comes; it’s like a family reunion. He sees his siblings with their peers, coming into their own. “Every time I come, I see myself in the new kids. That kid is me. If I’m not here to help him, who’s gonna do it?” He learns something every year, always hoping to improve himself, and trying to be a role model for the campers.

In his adult life, he works as a contractor through which he helps the skilled laborers in his family get work. But his vocation is photography. He thought of it as his hobby, until he met Karen Maxwell through RMM. She took an interest in him, and helped him go to college. She brought the American dream to life for him – the idea that he can be anything he decides to be, and the importance of believing in himself.

All six Acevedo children plus some extended family have become campers except Karina who came as a counselor at age 18. There are nine Acevedos at camp this summer. Over the years, camp has taught Karina to value life more, and has made her a stronger person outside camp. She has experienced the dif-





A dance "choice time." Karina is on her knees at right.

ferent lives of campers, and has become convinced that anything is possible. Kids can come together, have fun, and help each other. They are amazingly resilient. Camp has taught her teamwork and leadership. Karina's camp experience influenced her decision to become a teacher, using her camp experience as she works. Now at 28, she is expecting her first child.



Rural & Migrant Ministry (RMM) was incorporated as a non-profit, non-sectarian organization in 1981. RMM works alongside disenfranchised rural residents and agricultural workers in New York State through programs of advocacy, empowerment and leadership development.

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