

One of the sacred rituals of an American summer is sending kids to camp. I have many good memories of attending summer camp and even more working at several camps in different locations throughout our Golden State. I remember going to a Junior High camp in the Southern California mountains and discovering for the first time that girls could be pretty darn interesting. A few years later I worked at Indian Village at Camp Forest Home in Southern California where we would take 3-6<sup>th</sup> graders on hikes and hold evening campfires. We instructed the kids in Native American history and folklore, did the usual things with crafts and came up with a fancy name for athletic contests called Witiyape. The campers slept in teepees for the week; I slept in one all summer with other tribal chiefs. A few years later, I was not-too-gainfully, but happily, employed by a camp called Mount Hermon.

My job was to take kids backpacking and climbing--usually in the beautiful mountains just north of Yosemite Valley. There is something transformative about taking only the most essential items into a remote and beautiful area and enjoying the company of a few individuals who share the experience of carrying heavy packs over beautiful mountain peaks, meadows and passes. Up there the air is clean and life, while demanding, is uncomplicated. Well, usually uncomplicated. I have a friend who directed many local camps and remembers hiking with 80 campers up to swim in a remote lake. A bunch of people were swimming and sun bathing in the nude and the kids and nudists had a close encounter of an embarrassing kind. Thereafter, each year they would send a eager scout out ahead to tell the nudists that 80 Methodist kids were soon coming to swim in the lake; so, could you please put on your clothes! Most complied.

Locally, we have several nice camps. The Methodists have Shasta Camp up near Castle Crags, the Lutherans a place called Blue Slide Camp, the Presbyterians Camp Mattole, and evangelicals Triumphant Life Camp (TLC)..... I am a bit partial to the latter two camps because we have been sending kids there for over 20 years to have good clean fun, forge friendships and firm up the foundations for their faith. The theme for TLC camp this year is "under construction." This has nothing to do with the facilities, it has to do with building character into young lives.

Yes, there is more to camp than swimming, eating camp food, and flirting with the opposite sex in or out of the mud. At religious camps you experience a combination of nature and grace. It seems to me that camp is a great place to make a meaningful connection to nature, and nature's Designer--more than we normally do in our urbanized, electronically distracted world. Last week I had the opportunity to back pack with my daughter through some of the most rugged territory on Yosemite National Park. One evening we pulled out the Psalms and read: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament proclaims his handiwork." When the Big Dipper looks close enough to touch, that verse takes on new meaning.

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment