

To Your Tents, O Israel

Paul Ransford

Coming back to the Presbyterian Church after being gone for six years was wonderful in itself, but when I found out that there was a group of camp folks that got together on a yearly basis, I was ecstatic.

Alligators and PCCCA (1983)

My first memories of PCCCA began at Cedarkirk, Florida. What a warm gathering! I remember riding out to the camp with Dick and Martha Beidler, whom we picked up at some strange air terminal because they had discovered Peoples' Airline.

When I told A.T. Brown that I wished to camp out in my tent, he didn't bat an eye, but told me to be careful not to put up my tent on a nest of fire ants, and not to be worried about near-sighted armadillos nosing around in the middle of the night.

The PCCCA folks refused to consider anyone a newcomer for long and went out of their way to make newcomers feel at home. One night we showed slides of past gatherings and the group lingered over each slide, not just for the sake of memories but to tell the story of PCCCA to the newcomers. Don Hostetter often in his black suit, white shirt, and tie. "T-Bone," John Ensign, and other mentors also came to those early gatherings. And, now I was part of the group!



Paul Ransford (1985) Wildwood, Ohio

We made a trip to Epcot Center, but it wasn't just for fun. We had a homework assignment. We were to compare Disney's version of the future with the outdoor ministries vision of the future. It did provoke fascinating discussions.

At Cedarkirk I caught up with the Lanktons, whom I had known briefly in Chicago, but ended up driving Bill crazy at the square dance (not an easy

task) until Lynn interceded and assured him that my intentions were entirely friendly. Since our initial misunderstanding, our friendship has grown and I'm glad that we got started off on the right foot in PCCCA.

"Wild Bill" Key was there in Clemson orange, and regaled us with hilarious stories. I also remember lots of corner conversations where old friends pastored each other and gave encouragement.

Doris and A.T. Brown put us on the Alafia River, and even provided an alligator to swim under the canoe. It was a great trip!

I got to the Wildwood meeting (1985) late, but Summi King, the director's wife, picked me up at the airport, which was so typical of PCCCA

folks. They were having a rough time of it then, and I think we've lost them from our family, but I was certainly impressed with how much she trusted me with their story as we drove to Milford, Ohio.

High Hopes for High Ropes

My biggest memory of that year happened after the regular meeting.

We went to a high ropes course, where I was going to show everybody how to be trusting and daring, and I was going to be helpful to the less adventurous.

The women with us expressed some anxiety about the whole venture, but I assured them that I would help them. Though I have had some climbing experience, once I got off the ground and into the course, I almost lost it. I froze! I wanted out, down, away—anywhere but up there on those dinky, little platforms. As I watched, I was totally amazed at the PCCCA women who made their way up various ladders, ropes, chutes, and then did all those wild things up there. Bill Lankton acted as if he were in his own element up above me on a rope bridge, but I remained timid throughout the whole experience. It was still one of the best adult learning experience that I've participated in, even though I could not fully process it at the time. I stayed there partly out of pride, but also because of the example that my PCCCA friends were setting. I guess that sums up my experience on the ground with those above me in the trees. We try new stuff. We spot each other. We "clip" each other in and out.

An Afternoon on the Beach (1989)

Bill Agnew and I took an afternoon off at the Saugatuck meeting, and went for a run on the beach of Lake Michigan. We ended up in a confusing maze of oxbows, swamps, and ship channels and had to wade across several streams and plow through a bunch of trash that had washed into the trees. Across the channel from us, our compatriots from PCCCA were serenely browsing through the shops in the village of Saugatuck, while glancing over at us briar-scratched, filthy wildmen stumbling through the thickets. We didn't waver at them, we were too embarrassed. We tried to sneak back into camp, but Mark Lankton and Lee Voigt saw us and got the story out of us. They told us that no one had ever

done that circuit before and lived.

That was also the year of the early snowfall. I pitched my tent with a great view of Lake Michigan, and woke up one gorgeous fall morning to find that the trees (which were in full color) were all covered with snow. PCCCA folks will do anything to outdo each other when they host an event.

Best place at Saugatuck? The kitchen! What a neat bunch of folks hung out in the kitchen while we were there. Some were locals, some were board members from Chicago, others were former summer staff persons. They loved their camp and were proud of it.

Mountain Goats in Washington

But while Saugatuck supplied snow in October, Buck Creek had mountain goats as a backdrop to one of the most moving worship services I've ever been a part of. Gordon Alford is a superb liturgist, and the sharing that took place that Sunday will always remain a strong part of what bonds us all together. We laughed, we cried, we prayed, and we sang.

The night before, a group of us who had taken an afternoon hike were stranded on a fog-bound road somewhere up above the camp. We were lost, wet, hungry campers. It was eerie. Our vision was completely blocked. Sounds were muffled. We had to wait for the camp van to come and pick us up. In the quiet darkness, somebody (probably a Batchelder) started singing, and then we joined in. We sang every song we ever knew. There was lots of harmony, and we all stood with our arms around each other just eating up the darkness, the fog, and the great music. We were warmed from our hike. We knew the van was on the way. We had each other. Hey! This is camping!

Jay Budde and I stayed behind (at Buck Creek) after everyone else left, for our assault on Mt. Rainier. Bart and Betty Shaw (from Camp Grier, North Carolina) waved goodbye to us,

when they left in their rental car to drive north.

Iffy weather made us scale back our plans, and we ended up hiking closer to Buck Creek. But what an incredible experience to hike through old growth forest while discussing budgets, staffing, meal planning, family histories, and our memories of PCCCA folks. We camped up above the clouds, but we were below the snow. We then returned to Buck Creek camp where we cleaned bathrooms and did laundry just like at home, so as to help them get ready for the next group.

The mountain goats were gone, but we left a fire burning in the fireplace.

The Beginning of a Camper

Paul Ransford started his first camp when he was fifteen. He had six campers in a day camp that lasted for six weeks during the summer. He had more fun that summer, as a camp director, than he's ever had since. No vans, no kitchen, no staff hassles, no septic systems, no board members, no insurance, no sense. But lots of peanut butter, lots of energy. Ahhh!

He now directs three camps for the Presbyteries of New Hope and Salem. He still gets out on as many of the adventure trips as he can, and he tries to eat at least one peanut butter sandwich every summer.

He is ecstatic that his three daughters have grown up as "camp brats" in several different camps, and that they love the out-of-doors. And, that they are as comfortable in the Algonquin wilderness as they are in the mall wilderness.



Jay Budde, Paul Ransford
(1992) Banner Elk, North Carolina

BIOGRAPHY

Born Syracuse, New York 1942

Education

Douglas Southall Freeman HS,
Richmond, Virginia 1961
Hope College, Holland, Michigan
(BA)
Union Theol. Seminary, Richmond,
Virginia (M.Div.)

Churches served

Brucewood Presby., Covington,
Kentucky 1969-71
Covenant Presby., Decatur, Al-
abama 1971-76

Camps served

Manitqua Ministries (RCA) Frank-
fort, Illinois 1976-82
Orange Presbytery Staff (Outdoor
Ministries) 1982-89
Salem/New Hope Outdoor Min-
istries 1989, Chapel Hill, North
Carolina

ACA membership

Since 1982 (served as Associate vis-
itor and visitor)

Personal

Married with three daughters