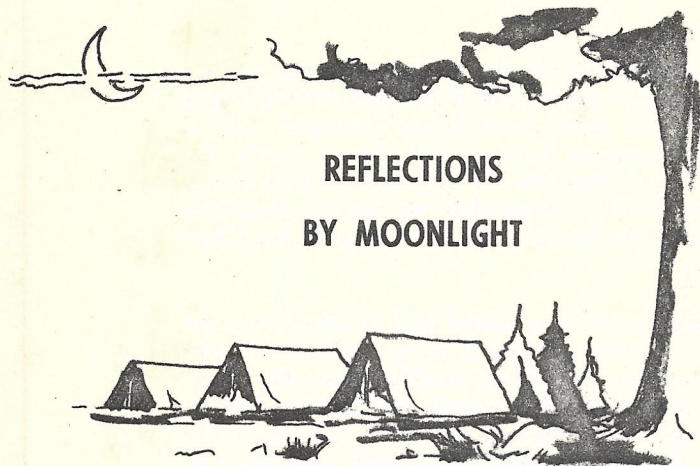


We explained the simple plan of salvation. As the invitation was given to the boys who wanted to accept Christ, we were unprepared for the response. Suddenly, several boys were standing before me. There was Jimmy, our biggest discipline problem; Gary, whose father was a drunk; Ben, the sarcastic wise guy; Tim, the quiet shy boy, and others. They stood looking up at me with searching, questioning eyes. I felt very humble when I prayed for Christ to come into their hearts.

A leader who has looked into the shining face of a boy who has accepted Christ for the first time will never be the same. I was no exception. Suddenly all the work, time, and effort invested in Royal Rangers paid off. I felt ashamed of the moments of discouragement and frustration when I questioned, "Is this program worth the effort?"

These are the thoughts that fill my mind and heart as I look up at the stars. A prayer wells up from my heart and forms on my lips. "O, God, I thank you for a program like Royal Rangers and for what it can do for its members. I'm so grateful for the privilege of being a leader and for the opportunity of ministering to boys."



REFLECTIONS BY MOONLIGHT

I have just slipped away from the sleeping camp. Moonlight is bathing the valley. My heart is full; I feel I must get alone with God and thank Him for the experience of the past day. As I look from the hilltop through the doors of the assembled tents I feel a deep compassion for the boys contained in the distorted bundles of bedding.

It all began yesterday when we gathered at the church for our camping trip. It was a scene of excessive excitement, noise, and confusion. Twenty boys yelling, running, and scurrying about at the same time. There I was in the midst of the turmoil trying to get boys and equipment loaded into the church bus. There

were more boys coming out than I was getting in. Trying to remember if we had everything, I was at the same time being besieged with a dozen questions from a half dozen overly excited Royal Rangers. At last we had everything loaded. With a hope that we hadn't forgotten anything, we headed for our campsite on Clear Creek.

I had heard of a barrel full of monkeys, but this is nothing compared to a bus full of talking, shouting, wiggling, scuffling, teasing boys. Since it was hardly proper for the leaders to jump up and down and pull their hair, we composed ourselves, smiled indulgently and tried to keep order.

At last we arrived at the campsite, a small meadow overlooking a rushing stream, and surrounded by tall trees and rugged hills. I never saw a bus empty out so fast in all my life. In a few moments the meadow was littered with various camping equipment. With the help of my two lieutenant commanders we assigned tent sites and began to set up camp. I had forgotten how excited boys could become over the simple task of pitching tents. Except for a few sway-back tents, loose stakes, and crooked poles, the boys did a fair job. Details were assigned such as digging fire pits and gathering wood.

With camp set up, the boys were divided into three groups with an adult leader in charge of each, and taken on a nature study and exploration hike. The hills and woods soon echoed with joyful shouts upon new discoveries. An animal, a bird, an insect, a fossil, a cave, the bleached bones of an animal—unimportant things? Not to these boys. They were naturalists, geologists, archaeologists, and explorers, making new discoveries.

Back in camp we ate our evening meal. It's amazing how many hamburgers one boy can eat on a campout. Come to think of it, I had three myself.

Twilight was falling when we finished cleaning up. Fireflies flitted about as we made our way to the council fire. There is magic in the atmosphere of a campfire. The flickering flame, the crackling wood, the crickets in the background . . . you seem to be in a different world. There is a bond of fellowship here that only the camper knows.

How boys can sing around a campfire! It matters little if they are off key; it's volume that counts as they give vent to inner contentment and joy. A few stunts, more songs, and then devotions. The devotion was very simple. We told the boys how Christ changed a certain boy's life.