On the GO at The 4-H Camp

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Camp staff life will keep you on your toes. If you aren't leading a program then you're telling history and legends around a campfire or leading folk and square dancing for a camp's evening activity. That's the way it was last summer being employed as a nature staff person at the 4-H Camping Center near Madrid, Iowa.

The 4-H camp consists of five separate villages, each accommodating 32 to 120 campers. Each village consists of a main lodge, outdoor chapel, campfire circle, cookout area and cabins. The villages are located on a flat upland area which has enough vegetative cover to isolate each village from the other. Also located on this upland area are basketball/volleyball courts, an outdoor arena called the Pinecone, a swimming pool, and a confidence course and rapelling tower for the adventure program. Linden, the main administrative office, is located in the center of this open area. Located directly west of Linden is Cedar, the staff's summer home.

The rest of the 1125 acres are mostly forested river valley, naturally vegetated bottomland, and some crop land. Some of the forested area has been developed into trail systems which are used by the campers in their free time or are used by the nature staff to supplement their program.

At the camp the permanent summer staff provides supervision and leadership for a variety of programs. Last summer there were fifteen employed as permanent staff. There were pool staff (4), adventure staff (3), maintenance crew (3), nature staff (2), assistant cook (1), secretary (1), and girl friday (1).

Being employed on the camp staff meant, for one thing, setting a good example for the campers which came through each week. We were to be enthusiastic, bold and knowledgeable leaders—always alert and friendly. That within itself was a task some days, especially on some of those 100 degree days.

There were also times when your group would have a few mischievous characters. Once Kathleen Heaney and I were leading our group of juniors (9-11) on a nature scavenger hunt. One of the first things we did was tell the campers about a few objects in nature; among them being poison ivy. We would then let them go out into a designated area for their nature scavenger hunt. This particular day a little girl came up to Kathleen and I not more than five minutes after the activity had begun and asked, "Nature person, is this poison ivy?" Sure enough it was. Kathleen told the little girl to put it down, to stay away from the area she had found it, to wash with a harsh soap when she got back to camp and to go to the nurse if her skin broke out. The little girl nodded obediently and ran off to be with her friends. But not more than two minutes later she came back with a friend who was carrying a sprig of poison ivy. Kathleen went through the same little talk only this time she stayed with our darling angel until the activity was completed.

Then there were the times when everyone in your group seemed to be involved and interested in your program. It was those groups which made you feel on top of the world. One time in particular sticks in my mind. Gary Ehrecke, adventure staff, and I were telling history and legends to a group of juniors from Boone County. Gary told about the Indians that once lived on the surrounding lands while I played my harmonica once again. Another time Marilyn Heitoff, assistant cook, Kathleen Heaney, nature staff, and I were telling history and legends around a campfire. The fire crackled and threw "a few pieces of coals" onto Marilyn's coat, which was right in the middle of her story. Kathleen and I began beating on her coat so it wouldn't go up in flames. Marilyn, with wide eyes and an enthusiastic voice, kept telling her story as if nothing had gone wrong.

History and legends was just one of the night-time programs the camp staff offered. The others included folk and square dancing, night swims, a staff show and a cross lighting for their church service. Each village had their choice of one program per night. When all five villages were full we were kept busy. Usually the staff would divide up and a few would take one program activity and a few another activity. It was a rare occasion to have a night off. Actually the only time we really had off was from 3:00 Saturday afternoon to 3:00 Sunday afternoon.

A typical day consisted of being ready for a staff meeting at 8:00. The staff meeting was usually a time to get organized for the following day. Beginning at 8:30, two hour and a

An aerial view of the camp.

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being employed on the camp staff and the Bonnie and Clyde story. When we had finished, the campers began telling us some stories and had me play my harmonica once again.

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We had a variety of activities to use for the nature program. The activity used depended upon the location of the program and the age level of the group. Most of the campers were juniors. We had some intermediates (12-14) and a few senior groups (15-18).

The day seemed to go by rapidly, but by 5:00 the staff was ready for a break and everyone would head for Cedar, our summer home.

Living in Cedar was an experience in itself. Cedar is a two story summer cottage which could handle 20 people. There is a large living room/dining room, a small kitchen, two bathrooms, and a laundry room.

Living together for two months has developed some close friendships. There was a lot of kidding around and a lot of serious talks.

The staff did quite a few special activities together. We had a special meal with a guest roast where everyone got roasted. There was one night when we laid out under the sky to watch the falling stars from Halley's Comet. There were nights we would go down to Old Hubby Bridge for a marshmallow roast. There were Boyd's runs into Boone for all the ice cream we could eat. Toward the end of camp we had a camp fire to reminisce about our summer's life together.

It was a summer full of experiences. A day full of leading programs—a night full of providing special activities for the campers, and it was a summer full of adventure. We were always on the GO at the 4-H Camp last summer. It was a memorable chapter in my life.

Finding forest fungi is fun.