

mail sales programs, which Kinder says now account for about half of the ABC business. An approach being used to heighten sales at camp meetings is book auctions. Larry Guinn, Adventist Book Center manager for the Texas Conference, was the guest auctioneer at a large book auction on the Georiga-Cumberland campground, where Saturday night sales totaled \$11,746.

For the conferences which sponsor camp meetings, expenses continue to escalate, a primary reason some administrators are cancelling 10-day sessions or conference-wide meetings. Colorado's big camp meeting was trimmed to a weekend "mini-camp meeting" in 1983 for this reason. Safety

considerations also figure. Cooking in canvas tents presents a fire hazard. Fires were one reason for Southern California's decision to end its large camp meeting at Lynwood Academy. Ten thousand people make heavy demands on local water and sanitation systems, a real concern in Oregon.

Nevertheless, it is certain that when the summer of 1984 comes, so will camp meeting. In spite of the changing trends in camp meeting sizes, places, and styles, camp meeting is a tradition entrenched in the Adventist lifestyle and one that holds a fond place in Adventist memories.

2. Soquel Through a Glass Darkly

by Jan Daffern

Only once in 29 summers have I missed camp meeting. In California, Oregon, New Mexico, Michigan, and Virginia I have learned its rhythm, and in recent years my response to it has become predictable. I get edgy each spring at the first hint of its return. Camp meeting is a jarring intrusion in a life built around an urban church, graduate education, and a microwave oven. Two weeks in the country with tents, gospel music, and revival preaching are marked on my calendar, but not discussed in polite conversation. On the day I am to leave for camp pitch, the most trivial detail receives my studied attention until all reasons for

delay are exhausted. By the time the big tent is up I cannot recall my past logic and I am swept into the summery seduction of camp meeting. For reasons I only dimly discern, camp meeting still holds me fast.

This past summer I returned to camp meeting in the Shenandoah Valley in Virginia. I looked for the camp store, which, like others on similar grounds, smelled of ripening produce and college-baked bread. I wanted to see if the women from Loma Linda Foods and Worthington of Ohio who had introduced me at past camp meetings to Chickettes, Stripples, and Tuno had anything new on their toothpicks. I was not disappointed. I got my first taste of an Adventist crabcake, released by Loma Linda Foods. I have no inkling of what a crabcake ought to taste like, but that did not occur to me at the time, nor did it blunt my delight with the innovation. Occasionally, new

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Adventists have noted with some irony that these products fall short of the real thing. It takes members a decade or so in the church to realize that this observation entirely misses the point. An Adventist crabcake assures that our experience is so marginal that it can be comprehended by only a few, but that it is in appearance, smell, and texture like that of our neighbors. In an odd way, this confluence of the exotic with the conventional represents camp meeting itself.

The camp meeting I remember best, the camp meeting of my youth, is held each year in Soquel, a tiny coastal town in Central California. Soquel is a faded and drab town in an area of spectacular beauty. The most notable aspect of Soquel is the light. Filtered through a gray mist, it makes lettuce grow in Salinas and illumines a whole genre of literature in and around Monterey. In Soquel, this fragile light is nearly suffocated by the yellow dust which sifts down from the hillsides and settles in the eucalyptus groves. Each August somewhere around 15,000 Adventists enter this suffusion of light and dust.

In those early years I went to Soquel only on Sabbaths. One of those years I went with my stepsister Sally,* who did not attend church but never missed Soquel. We arrived in her 1968, metal-flake-blue Corvette. As we walked through the campground that day, Sally commented that all that was missing was a rock band like, say, Country Joe and the Fish, set up near the vegeburger stand. Although their music would have fit the scene, years later it occurred to me how utterly out of place the Fish would have been: none of them had ever attended academy with anyone I knew.

It has been estimated that a quarter of us who gathered there in the late 60s and the early 70s were the products of the baby boom of California Adventism. Superficially we were indistinguishable from others of our time and place. As a group we participated in the restlessness of our gen-

eration and our presence resulted in the temporary doubling of the Soquel police force. We got high, celebrated free love, and as the era mellowed, turned on to Jesus and self-help. The recollection which burns through the swirl of those events is that rarely did any of us ever do these things with anyone who had not gone to academy at Fresno, or Glendale, or Rio Lindo. That we were so thoroughly immersed in the turbulence of that time only with each other, and most deeply at camp meeting, reveals a sincere obedience to sectarian Adventism.

Physically, the camp at Soquel offers the appearance of a combination parking lot and tented desert. On one end, the camp meeting tents stand in perfectly pitched rows, the

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remains of a time when the pious of the frontier abandoned the comforts of home for a season of spiritual refreshing. At Soquel in my teen years, the tents were giving way to recreational vehicles. These were parked in the southwest end and came complete with showers, toilets, and even color television. I can recall entering a 40 foot recreational vehicle meticulously decorated in white French provincial with accents in blue. The lady of the mobile home greeted me in a baby blue dressing gown and gold slippers.

In 1970 I made the transition from weekend visitor at Soquel to a resident for the full ten days. I stayed in a camp meeting tent with my best friend Betsy and her family. Betsy and I walked through a cold fog at dawn to the youth tent to hear Morris Venden present the precise parsing of the phrase, “a total submission to Christ.” There we were also told that the youth of

the church would “finish the work.” Betsy and I were confident of our place in the cosmic struggle for the return of Christ. That we did not know what the reproduction of the life of Christ might look like in adolescent females was only vaguely unsettling. That we were responsible for the return of Christ and the end of all things was certain. However, by noon each day, the sun had burned through the layer of gray and we were headed for the beach with Scott and Bobby, where the possibility of “perfect submission” took on a more exquisite clarity. Betsy and Scott were a solid couple; that is they were still together at the next camp meeting. I learned of the end of all things that first year when Bobby, the son of a literature evangelist, told me at camp tear-down that he was in love with someone back at home.

In scheduled camp meeting seminars Betsy and I learned how to cook without eggs or milk, develop self-esteem through the pages of *Desire of Ages*, and discover our history and future through the *Great Controversy*. But we also joined small spontaneous prayer groups on campus. I can recall that in one such group a 19-year old from Lodi announced, “if the Lord wants us to speak in tongues here, we’re going to go with it.” It was in these groups that we developed both a sense of importance and impatience. Following one such camp meeting experience, Betsy and I insisted on attending a conference executive committee meeting to ask for money to start a youth center. That we were scarcely 16 and arrived at the meeting in mini-skirts only made us more certain of our rightness for the task. When the conference president gently suggested that we work with the youth department for guidance and money, we announced that the Lord was coming, that our friends were dying, and that we did not have time to work with committees. When we left that meeting we were confident the Holy Spirit had been withdrawn from the Central California Conference

Committee and taken up residence with us.

At the official level, communication at Soquel was clear. Several conference employees worked on it full time. Those of us who stayed through the week came to depend on a voice over the loudspeaker to wake us in the morning and give a summary of the day’s events. At headquarters a complete list of campers with their tent or vehicle location was posted. The bookstore handed out lists of camp meeting specials. But this kind of communication only assured me that I would be told of a sale on the latest gospel music album, or could find an old roommate, or that I might have my blood pressure checked on Tuesday. It did not suggest that I would be changed, and yet a pervasive awareness of the cataclysmic spread among us through labyrinthine channels. A young woman camped in row K or J had been mysteriously healed of a blood disease which might or might not have been terminal. A hitchhiker from somewhere near Los Angeles was brought to the front gate of Soquel and left by a driver who did not reveal his name or final destination. A retired minister from Merced or Modesto had a dream in which he was told that we had little time left.

I remember that in 1972 Bonnie Letcher and two seductively spiritual young men sang of our apocalyptic anxieties. “But tell me where am I now? Am I almost there? Is that heaven’s bright glory I see? Is that Jesus I hear calling out my name? Is the door standing open for me?” I also remember that my good friend Brad almost died at Soquel that year after swallowing several reds and a fifth of Southern Comfort.

During my adolescence at Soquel it was a common, even mundane, impression among youth growing up on the edges of places like San Francisco, Berkeley, and Big Sur, that change was imminent and would not be effected through established channels. Revolution had been assimilated into the mainstream of our consciousness and in the

particular intensity of Soquel, 10 days was not too short a time to work a radical restructuring of our lives.

And I was changed at Soquel in ways I did not imagine. It was at Soquel that a sweet-faced 18-year old from my senior class was arrested for threatening to shoot up the campground. He was carrying a concealed and loaded .38. It was at Soquel that I first realized that the thirst for souls was related to drought in the conference coffers. It was at Soquel that I learned even the church is not always as it appears to be.

It was at Soquel that I first saw a woman, Madelyn Haldeman, preach a sermon. One evening as she walked through the youth tent, tall, forceful, and feminine, I first dreamed of preaching my own sermon. At Soquel I also listened to the wit, intelligence, and integrity of H.M.S. Richards, Sr. Summer by summer he created an oasis in a desert of chaos. That he had withstood a lifetime of camp meetings, had made peace with the "boys at the G.C.," as he called them, that he never appeared without his Bible, assured me and my generation that the center would hold.

Many question the relevance of camp meeting. It is an administrative headache. It

is expensive and anachronistic. There are problems with health departments and city officials. There are summer storms which threaten tents. But camp meeting still stands.

That we ought not to return to camp meeting another year is often the theme of the Sabbath sermon. Speakers at camp meetings in 1964 repeatedly said that we were 120 years from the disappointment and that "as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of Man." This same message was proclaimed at camp meetings in 1983. As surely as every Adventist camp meeting repeats these words, year after year we return again. I suspect that we go on this ritual errand into the wilderness because there, finally, our fury of Apocalyptic words is swallowed up in a sea of glass. Camp meeting is a promise of grace, an assurance that the covenant and community still hold fast, that in a sky churning with clouds the size of a man's hand, the rainbow still shines.

*Some names have been changed throughout the article.