

Scenes from the Bible: *Al Fresco*

By Julie Lorenz

“Okay, let’s get started,” said the pastor. We’d gathered for Sabbath School *al fresco* at our annual church campout, but we didn’t feel ablaze with the Spirit. The sun hadn’t risen high enough above the pine trees to dispel the chill of a fall morning on the shores of Lake Tahoe. Most people huddled miserably in their lawn chairs, frozen and tired after a night in cheap sleeping bags. The only patch of sunny ground was infested with ants, and the church members brave enough to sit there stared at the area around their ankles in a riveted manner.

“Okay, let’s get started,” the pastor said again. “Back home, we usually split up by age for Sabbath School, but today I want us all to participate in an activity everyone can enjoy together. Divide yourselves into teams of six or seven and create a Bible scene using materials from nature. You’ll have about 20 minutes. Then, we’ll gather together and go around and try to guess what each team has created.”

The adults reluctantly hauled themselves to their feet and eventually formed themselves into groups at the edges of the campfire circle, while the children danced around excitedly.

My team consisted of the pastor, a retired colonel, his wife and several teenaged boys. We stood considering.

“Let’s make the giant bed of Og the King. Nobody will ever guess that!”

“I’ve played this game before. My friends made the head of John the Baptist out of a pine cone and put it on a paper plate next to a pocket knife. Let’s do that.”

Suggestions were made and dismissed rapidly. The team finally chose to implement one of the colonel’s wife’s suggestions—the Ark of the Covenant. We decided to use aluminum foil to

make the angels over the Mercy Seat.

“Aluminum foil isn’t nature,” grumbled the colonel, but everyone ignored him as we went looking for an ark-shaped rock, two appropriate sticks for rods and pine needles to lash it all together. The colonel’s wife went to her campsite for a sheet of aluminum foil, and we assembled our ark before the 20 minute time limit.

“Time’s up,” said the pastor.

By the picnic tables, several families had made a circle of upended firewood logs. We all gazed at it solemnly. One of the fathers reached over and tapped the wood with his foot, and all the logs fell down.

“The walls of Jericho!” we shouted in unison.

Another display had small sticks arranged all over the ground. A few half-hearted suggestions were thrown out until someone ventured tentatively, “Ezekial’s bones.”

“What? What’s that story?” several asked.

“It’s that weird story about the bones coming back to life. You know, there’s a song about it: ‘The ankle bone’s connected to the . . . leg bone. The leg bone’s connected to the . . . knee bone.’”

We moved over to the next creation. Ours. “It’s the ark!” a child shouted.



"Hey," someone said, "Aluminum foil isn't nature!"

The group drifted on to look at several more displays . . . the huge bunch of grapes carried by the spies out of Canaan, the manger scene, the other ark with small bits of wood lined up two by two.

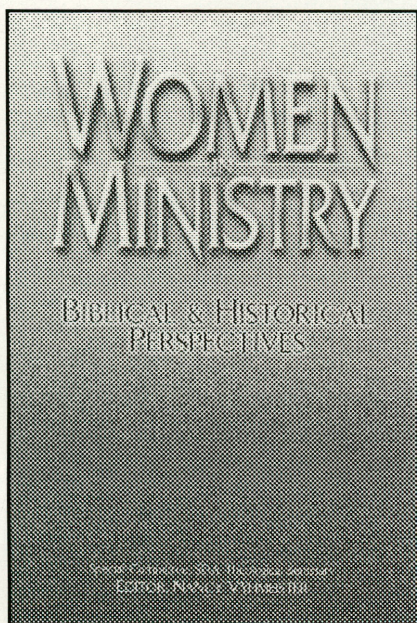
The next team had started a small fire. One of the "cool" young mothers of the church pulled three dripping pine cones out of a bucket of water and gently tossed them into the flames. She then threw in a rock. "It's Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace," laughed several people, and everyone burst into a spontaneous round of applause. "The rock is the Son of God walking in the midst," prompted one of the creators of the best scene of all.

By now the sun had cleared the tree tops, and we were finally warm. We complemented each other's creations and knelt in the dirt beside our

scenes to pose for photographs. We admired the displays hastily put together by a couple little boys who had decided the game was too fun to stop. We told the pastor what a good idea he'd had for Sabbath School. Then, we returned to our lawn chairs for a few energetic choruses before the church service and the rest of our campout Sabbath.

Still to come was the inevitable Adventist potluck, then a nine mile hike into the mountains for the tough among us and a one mile hike to the lake for the rest of us. That evening, as we prepared for a campfire vespers, we could see our miniature Biblical scenes slowly disappearing into the landscape like future archeology sites.

Julie Lorenz is a technical writer living in Antelope, California. She is a graduate of Pacific Union College and has a masters in English from California State University at Sacramento.



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