

CHAT ROOM



ELLEN HERSCHER

July 4th parade was her calling

It was the end of June, 1948, and I was hearing talk about a grand parade that would be held in commemoration of Independence Day. At 7 years old, the holiday had meant only sparklers, firecrackers, and flags; however, the knowledge of a parade added a new dimension; I was eager to be a participant.

I was told that only marching bands, high-stepping horses, and decorated vehicles could participate. That picture changed when my brother came running into the house announcing that his cub pack would be marching as part of the celebration. I begged my parents to let me be a Cub Scout, but they said only boys were allowed. Not willing to be banished, I set out to find a way to be in the parade.

Although my mission wasn't simple, I never felt defeated, not even when none of the neighboring farmers would agree to let me ride one of their horses in the parade. One said his horse was too large; another said I was too little; the last one said that a firecracker would send his horse into a bucking fury.

Undaunted

My options were dwindling, but I remained undaunted. When Mother went to the mailbox, I absconded with a pie pan and two wooden spoons - my makeshift drum set.

Upstairs, I sat on the floor of my bedroom, drumming away with tremendous enthusiasm, trying to create rhythm. Instead of rat-a-tat-tat, it sounded more like clunk-kly-clank-bang and no matter how long I practiced, there was no obvious improvement. My mother put a stop to my rehearsal and retrieved her pie pan.

Riding my older brother's two-wheeler was out of the question and my younger brother's tricycle with the wicker wheel was plainly inferior. Beside the back porch was our abandoned red wagon, covered with a thick layer of dried muck; still, it was in mediocre condition with a sturdy handle and the wheels spun easily. I hauled a bucket of water up from the well and dragged it across the grass to the wagon. With drudgery and determination, the wagon was almost as shiny as a red apple. The only task that remained was embellishment and a bit of imagination.

Mother was quite impressed with the work I had done and offered to get me decorative supplies, so I asked for red, white, and blue crepe paper and a small flag. She returned from the store with three rolls of crepe paper in the colors I had requested and an official-looking flag. For several hours, I scrupulously twisted and taped the crepe paper into uniform swags around the perimeter of the wagon. It took considerable struggling to attach the little wooden flagpole to the wagon handle, but it was worth the effort. Even my brothers were in awe of the transformation to a flashy parade coach.

The following day, families assembled along the street in anticipation of the parade. Some people sat on the curb and others brought stepladders. It was a big event, ablaze with excitement. My brother looked civilized in his scout uniform and I wore my hair in braids tied with a tangle of red, white, and blue ribbons. As directed, I pulled my wagon into the street and was dazzled by the beautiful horses that were also getting into formation. Just as the band started playing, I heard another familiar sound - the wailing of my little brother. When I turned, I saw him tugging on Mother's dress with tears rolling down his cheeks. Until then, it had never occurred to me that he would want to be in the parade.

I beckoned for him to join me. Mother released his hand and he clamored inside the wagon wearing a sweeping grin.

Cheers rang out as we proudly strode past the rows of people and intermittently, I would see my mother weaving her way through the throngs trying to stay adjacent to our little red wagon. What a fabulous Fourth of July!

Ellen Herscher lives in Farmington Hills

TEAMWORK

Church youth groups plan for summer mission

BY MARY RODRIQUE
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Teamwork, confidence building and getting to know one another were the order of the day when youth groups and leaders from the Servant Church of St. Alexander and North Farmington Community Church met in preparation for an upcoming summer mission.

The ropes course at Boys & Girls Republic in Farmington Hills was the scene for the gathering. Pastor Mark Sommers of North Farmington and Deacon Mark Springer of St. Al's organized the joint venture.

"We met through a Farmington interfaith group," explained Springer, who is also director of youth and family services at the Farmington Hills parish.

Sommers notes that it's the first time



All for one: From left are Michael Howard, Julia Mazanka, Meredith Shull, Bridget Kennedy, Deacon Mark Springer, Shawn Hansnecht. They each rated their progress and most from the group thought they improved when they worked together and didn't give up.



Careful: Michael Howard, 13, of St. Al's tries to maintain balance. If you fall off, you've got to start over.

these two churches - one Protestant, the other Catholic - are doing a joint work camp mission. He hopes the experience helps build a bridge of friendship between the congregations.

Teens ages 13 to 17 will be traveling to Kanawha, W. Va., the week of July 14-21 to help low income people renovate their homes. The project is sponsored by Group Work-camps of Loveland, Colo. Participants will repair and weatherize homes for elderly, low-income and disabled people.

Several other youth groups from churches of various denominations across the country will also participate.

"It's similar to Habitat for Humanity, but instead of building new homes, we'll be renovating existing houses," explained Therese Rosperski, one of four adults from St. Al's who'll accompany the youth.

The St. Al's contingent ranges from eighth graders to a recent high school graduate. They are Adriane Bracciale, Kathleen Bruder, Zach Byrne, Chris Farraj, Lindsay Gluf, Shawn Hansnecht, Michael Howard and Bridget Kennedy.

Also on board are Joe Long, Jessica Marinucci, Julia Mazanka, Joe Norat, Paul Schneider, Alex Springer and Lea Vigil. Adult supervisors, in addition to Rosperski and Springer, include Cathy Long and Betsy Vigil.

For the ropes course, kids from both congregations were mixed together and given various tasks that required working together to succeed.

Course facilitator Debbie Junkin explained one objective involving a tight rope tied between trees several feet off the ground in the heavily wooded area.

"The idea is to get the team from one side to the other," she said. "If you can't



Easy does it: Bridget Kennedy, 14, of St. Al's reaches out for another's hand. Working cooperatively and overcoming frustration is the best way to get through the course, according to the course folks.



Wow! Adriane Bracciale, 16, from St. Al's looks up at the ropes course she is about to walk across 25 feet in the air.



Come this way: Mark Sommers tries to work in the group to get through a course just a foot or so off the ground.

cooperate, you can't survive."

Junkin and two other course facilitators, Chad Burgess and Travis Wright, shouted encouragement from the sidelines. Sommers and Springer each shepherded a team and did the exercises alongside the teens.

Sommers wife, Kathylene, and daughter Laura Fields Sommers will travel with the North Farmington contingent, which also includes Ken Bond, Eric Halberstadt, Samantha Halberstadt, Rachel Hartman, Greg Hartman, Nicholas Huff, Danielle Lantz, Jacqui Lantz and Meredith Shull.

The youth groups from both churches spent the past eight months raising money for the trip.

But at the ropes course, agility and fun were the order of the day. One task found each person climbing into a harness, scaling a very large tree and then walking across a beam to another tree before jumping down while the tether allowed for a thrilling descent, like a bungee jump without the bounce back upward.

"I thought this (work camp) would be fun, something I've never done before," said Julia Mazanka, 17, a recent Harrison High graduate.

Other kids cited fun, a new experience and an opportunity to help others as reasons they signed on.

Michael Howard, 13, is looking forward to "a chance to work with real tools and also help a lot of people." The East Middle School eighth grader, who had been to the ropes course before with his peer mediation group from school, was enjoying the experience.

"This is as much fun as going to Cedar Point," he said.

Rachel Hartman, 15, a North Farmington sophomore, decided to join in because she enjoys doing volunteer work.

"After doing volunteer work, I feel a lot better about myself," she said, stealing herself for a climb up the tree. "I'm



Hanging in there: Greg Hartman, 19 of the North congregation, is the first in his group to scale the ropes.

afraid of heights. I hope I don't fall." Lindsay Gluf, 14, a Harrison freshman, said "I'm good at carpentry work. I've used a sledgehammer. We've done some home renovations and I've helped. This stuff interests me."

She also enjoyed the ropes course, particularly the high balancing exercise between the trees.

"It's funny to watch people. They're freaking out up there. But it's fun to come down. It feels like flying."

By the end of the evening, all the teens had successfully completed the tasks.

"These young people will gain a life changing understanding about the hardships of poverty in our own country," said Sommers. "And they'll gain a sense of accomplishment knowing they've helped to keep families warm and dry this winter."