

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 tin 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 clunkity-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 warped wheel was plainly inferior. Beside the back porch was our abandoned red wagon, covered with a thick layer of dried mud; 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 drizzled 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 machine.

The following day, families assembled along the street in anticipation of the parade. Some people sat on the curb, 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 clambered 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



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



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.



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

STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEMLY



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

cooperatives, 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, Kathyne, 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 group 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 Glut, 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."