

Crippled Children's Camp Is Ready For Another Season

By Don Becker

Check For Crippled Children



Mrs. L. E. Gerkenmeyer turns over a \$1593 check to Mike O'Gara to be used to help pay the tab for the tenth annual Santa Cruz county crippled children's camp to be at Camp Campbell near Boulder Creek this month. Mrs. Gerkenmeyer

is turning over the check in behalf of the Marri-Eds, who raised the money by the staging of a dance. Mrs. Gerkenmeyer headed the dance committee. O'Gara is the camp director.

The summer sun had early passed from view as is its custom in California's tree-filled mountains. In the blue-grey light of dusk and the enveloping dull green of the tall redwoods, a small group sat in a ritual-like state of pleasant quietude.

Lights had not yet appeared in the brown wooden cabins that dotted the small clearings. The silence was almost engulfing. Only occasionally could a short laugh from the mouth of child be heard.

It was unquestionably a perfect time of day. The warmth that had been the day had begun to pass into the inevitable chill of the night. Flies had disappeared to wherever they go at dusk and the mosquitoes had not seen fit to make their evening debut.

Picturesque Camp Campbell was a wonderful place to be. Reflecting on the crises, joys and amusing incidents, the group could feel only contentment. And there was justification.

Because of them, and others like them, 100 kids who made their way through life with two and a half strikes against them, were for the first time living what might approximate a normal life.

These youngsters, who suffered crippling diseases from cerebral palsy to polio, had a collective smile on their faces. In many instances, the smile had been gone for far too long.

Mike O'Gara, a balding ex-pro boxer, rocked quietly as he watched a small girl make her way toward the porch.

Her walk was awkward. Her legs were made of steel. At 10 she would never run again. Her right leg was missing to the hip and her left cut off just above the knee. But her eyes were bright as she hastened her pace nearing the porch.

"Mr. O'Gara," she said, standing near the edge of the porch, "can I talk to you a minute." Mike smiled and his nose, flattened in a football game years before, wrinkled and he reached out his hand. "Come up and sit here with us, Marie."

"I just wanted to tell you something," she said. "When my mother told me I had to come here, I didn't want to come. I'm not really crippled like the others. Well, ... well, Mr. O'Gara," Marie tailed off.

"Marie," Mike said, interrupting her falter, "you're not to call me Mr. O'Gara. My name is Mike."

"I just wanted to say that I'm having the best time I ever had in my whole life and I like everybody here and there are so many kids I would like to help. Mike. I'm so happy because I got to come."

"Thank you Marie," Mike said. "Say, young lady, you certainly are becoming quite a swimmer," he said changing the subject with the knowledge Marie had been made happiest because she had accomplished something she never thought she could do.

She blushed and smiled at the same time and told Mike she had to leave because she promised to push Jim over to the recreation hall.

"You know," Mike said recently, "I don't think I could ever run a regular summer camp for kids—not after running a crippled children's camp. The kids are so darned understanding of one another, so appreciative of what is done for them.

"It's a funny thing. We get these kids on what is in many cases their first vacation. It is the first time they have a chance to get away from the close supervision they get at home. The first time they are put on their own. One of the greatest joys of this work is that you can actually see the kids grow. Their personalities

change. A lot of times they are quiet and unsure of themselves, but after a while, they come out of it. I think that is the greatest of many pleasures derived from working with these children."

Next Saturday, Mike will once again be back at the work he loves. He's running the Santa Cruz county crippled children's camp for the second straight year. Actually his work begins sometime before the camp officially opens its gates to the children.

Two sessions will be staged at Camp Campbell, three miles north of Boulder Creek on Highway 9. Owned by the San Jose YMCA, there are 20 cabins at the camp, each capable of holding 12 persons. Facilities include a recreation and dining hall, rifle range, craft shops, cookout area's, swimming pool, boating, archery range and fishing in a screened off area (to keep the fish in), of the San Lorenzo river.

"The facilities are the same as you find at any normal camp," O'Gara said. "The kids, even though they are crippled, have the same normal drives of a healthy kid. They like physical activity despite their own personal ailments but they can't participate in a normal manner. We make modifications."

Runways are set up at the doors of all cabins for wheel chairs. There are trails through the camp area that can be traveled by the chairs.

"It's amazing. A kid with paralyzed legs can fish, shoot a bow and arrow and many other things. His life is not entirely devoid of normal endeavors. We try to make them realize this," said O'Gara.

One of the basic goals of the camp is to make the youngsters as self-reliant as possible. Nothing is forced down their throats. If they want to swim, they can. If not, they can do what ever they want.

"If a child wanted to spend his whole day sitting in a cabin he could and no one would say a word to him. That has never happened, though," Mike said. "The only rule we have is that everyone must be on time for meals and we don't have much trouble there."

"Say, you ought to see the kids enjoy themselves, there's really

the three-week season. The money is provided by Santa Cruz county as well as other area counties which send children here. Other money is raised by local social organizations like the Marri-Eds, who recently turned over a \$1593 check for this year's camp operation. The Marri-Eds raised the money by holding a dance. Other organizations do similar things. Somehow each year enough money is raised to pay for the camp.

This year, the camp has been able to handle all requests by parents and doctors to place children in the camp. Last year, some were turned away.

"Because none were turned away this year does not mean that we could not use more camps," Mike noted. "I don't think there will ever be enough camps for all the kids who could benefit from them. I think now, that not enough people really realize all the benefits of a camp like this. When they do, I'm afraid we will be woefully short of room."

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Sherborne, England (AP).—Firemen and their \$15,000 engine were called out yesterday to put out a smudge in the stubble of a corn field. The engine caught fire and was destroyed.