

While At Trail Blazers by Eleanor McLellan Roleston

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I attended Wayne State University sixty-five years ago. I was thin. I had dark brown hair. I was agile and energetic. The world was my oyster.

I spent the summers of my college years as a camp counselor. I worked the first summer at Camp Metamora which is a Girl Scout camp. I liked the experience there. The next two summers I worked at Trail Blazer Camps in New Jersey, which was rustic and served underprivileged children from New York City and its Boroughs. It was there that I was far away from home for the first time. It was there that I was encouraged to write about my feelings and experiences. It was also there that I met the most remarkable woman I have ever met, Lois Goodrich. She played a huge part in the person I have become. My last two summer as a college student were spent at Camp Pinecliff in Harrison, Maine where I was the mountain climbing counselor. What an adventure that was. At that camp, the campers were from wealthy families, and the sleeping facilities were cabins instead of teepees and lean-tos in front of a fire pit, so it was a different experience.

While I was at Trail Blazer Camps, I wrote the following letter to myself which I recently found in an old book I had compiled. My handwriting then was much better. It was still small and angled, but very clear. I opened my 'e's then which is something I rarely do now for some odd reason.

The summer is quickly drawing to its end. The time has flown by and yet, it seems as if I have always lived here. It is as if this is my home and where I belong.

When I first arrived at camp, everything was strange. It had been months since I had camped out and the sounds of the nights were strange. It was strange to walk along rocky, wooded paths. The noises of the city were still in my ears. In a few days the nervous tension from the rushing city life began to ease away and I started to feel the peace and security one finds when living close to nature. We were busy the first days preparing camp for the campers, and yet, there wasn't the same tension I had felt in the city.

As the summer progressed, I grew to love the trees, birds, and sky as I never had before. They became a part of me. My eyes opened so that I wouldn't miss a thing. There was too much to see; insect galls, new flowers, the patterns the wood of the fallen chestnut trees made, the way the mountains changed daily, the plants growing in the garden, and so many birds, deer, and other wild animals. Each time I looked I saw them anew. There was always something to see and to learn.

The sounds! How I have loved them. The katydids that are so loud you can barely think above their noises. The sounds of the Peewee, Towhee, and Ovenbird. The sounds of the leaves rustling in the trees and Pioneer Brook gurgling in the night. These are sounds I will miss in the city. How will I get to sleep without them?

Little things mean so much here. The slightest observation is thrilling. In the city where all is noise and rush, who would think that the shooting star I just saw would give me such a thrill? Just seeing a Goldfinch swinging on a tall grass is enough to brighten my spirits for a while.

The wonderful things which live here have not been all that has made this such a special summer for me. My summer was filled with people who could share my experiences. They were people who I played with, worked with, and shared my disappointments and troubles with. We all went through much the same thing. I learned to feel closer to a greater number of people than I ever have in my life. When something happened to another I felt also their sorrow or their joy. It was then that I first knew the love which Christianity means.

Soon it will be time to return to the city. There will no longer be a roof of leaves over my head and the sounds will not be Peewees, gurgling water, or the donkey's bray. Many times I will be discouraged and tired of the city. It is then that memories of camp will help me hold my own. I will be able to recall the serenity of the woods, the friends I have made here, and know that life is good and worth the troubles one must endure to be here on earth.

Eleanor McLellan

This was written either in 1959 or 1960

Each of us is a product of our family and experiences as well as books we have read. I have been blessed by having spent two summers at Trail Blazer Camps. It has made a difference in my life.