

FOREWORD

By Jeanne McDowell McGuire

“I was CYO born and CYO bred. . .” How many thousands of campers and counselors of various ages and socio-economic backgrounds have had the privilege of singing this song at Camp Christopher? How many have left this special place better, wiser persons for having shared in the inexplicable phenomenon we call the Christopher Spirit?

“What is the Christopher Spirit?” many have asked. Does it really matter? What does matter are the lives it has touched for nearly a century. The Christopher Spirit has survived the Great Depression, World War II, the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam, 9-11, the current recession, as well as the rural development which has changed the pastoral landscape surrounding Camp property. Through the decades, Camp Christopher has flourished, physically and spiritually, predominantly through volunteers. This Camp family spans multi-generations of campers and staff who have given countless hours of labor and love to a place which has been “second home” to many. Perhaps this is the foundation for that Spirit so strongly associated with Camp.

Since 1924, Camp Christopher has offered traditional camping with a Catholic base. Staffs consisting of seminarians, Sisters of St. Dominic (today the Sisters of Peace), and lay men and women of high school, college, and post-college ages have interwoven God, campers, and self into a program we proudly proclaimed as “Camping at Its Finest.” From the Old Swimming Hole and the Glory Barns of the Northampton Township site to Lake Marian and the indoor plumbing of the current site, Camp has thrived. God willing, it will continue to do so for another century or more.

Camp Christopher has a history rich in nature, community, and spirit. How blessed was the Catholic Youth Organization when the current property on Hametown Road in Bath, Ohio, was purchased in the early 1950’s. The original 82 acres bear God’s fingerprint in their caves, cliffs, natural bridge, springs, and meadows. It is the amazing beauty of God’s creation in the middle of what was nearly untouched country. Almost 57 years later, with additional land purchased in 1964, Camp’s 165 acres now sit amidst million dollar houses and subdivisions. Yet passing through the front gate still evokes that Middle of Nowhere feeling coupled with a calming peace.

My personal experiences with Camp date back to December 29, 1957; that is my birth date. My father, Ray McDowell, was Camp Director, and we lived on the grounds in the Ranger home located just north of the Camp entrance. With his passing on March 20, 1960, I became a Day Camper at the age of 2 ½! After outgrowing that program, I moved on to Resident Camp. It was here that I captured the Spirit. After nine years of resident camping, I was one of the “chosen” to become a Junior Counselor in 1975. I worked on staff for 5 years and then married Herb McGuire, the Camp Director at that time. We have four children: Meghan, Colleen, Brigid and Michael. All have worked on staff. A participant in Family Camp for nearly every summer since 1981, I am now part of something even bigger – September Song, a week of camping devoted to those fifty years and older.

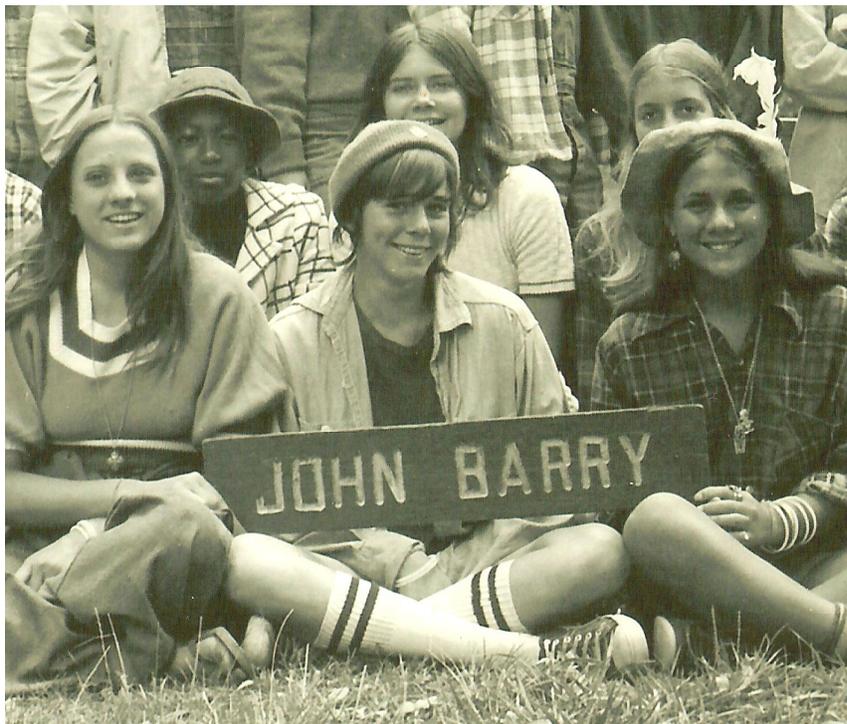
It has been said that friends come and go, but in my experience, Camp friends have been steadfast. Having captured the Spirit as children, we continue to celebrate our friendships today. As adults, many of us have shared a cabin during Family Camp and now, some of us have moved on to September Song where we revel in recreating the magic of going back in time.

This book is a compilation of memories and photos from past campers, counselors and volunteers who are part of the Camp family which makes the history of Christopher so rich. They have been touched and have touched others with the Spirit which remains so strong. A number of those who have added their memories to this book for current and future generations to enjoy have left this world a better place and have now passed on to that camp which is heaven.

Thank you, Tim and Patti, for your hard work in the creation of this book. You two are a big part of the Christopher Spirit! Thank you for the honor of sharing these opening thoughts. I only hope I did Camp Christopher justice when there is so much to say, so much emotion, so many memories of this place so very close to my heart.

Thank you, Camp Christopher, for the amazing experiences, the growth, and the friendships you have brought my family. May our children, our children's children and beyond continue to preserve not only the physical place we call Camp Christopher, but the Spirit which has made it so special.

“ . . . and when I die, I'll be CYO dead. Rah-rah for our camp. Rah-rah for our camp. Rah-rah for Christopher.”



*Summer of 1973: Camper Jeanne McDowell, surrounded by her buds of Cabin John Barry, a couple of short seasons away from becoming a counselor.
(CYO photo courtesy of Mary Kay Welsh Thompson.)*