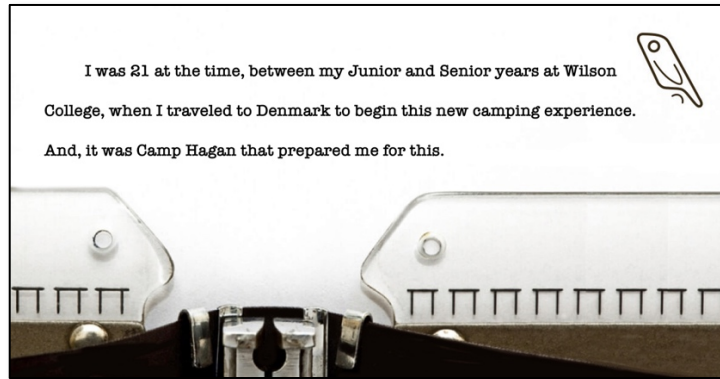


Hikes to Bushkill, Then Hikes in the Swiss Alps
Nancy Holbrook Sweeney
Hagan 1954 – 1964



We all have experiences in our lives which we look back on with fond memories and which help to shape us into the person we have become. I had such an experience in the summers of 1965 and 1966. And it was Camp Hagan that prepared me for this.

I had the wonderful opportunity to be a counselor at the International Ranger Camps in Denmark (1965) and Switzerland (1966) for six weeks during the summer. These camps were founded by a German woman, Mrs. Ott, for American children living abroad and children from other countries who wanted to improve their English. The counselors came from many different countries, and the language we spoke was English.

I was 21 at the time, between my Junior and Senior years at Wilson College, when I traveled to Denmark to begin this new camping experience. The camp was a 45-minute train ride from Copenhagen. Girls and boys between the ages of 8 and 15 came each two-week period (about 60 campers). Two to three counselors were in charge of each age group—a ratio of 5 to 6 campers to one counselor. I was a counselor for six ten-year olds.



Day hike with campers in the Swiss Alps

It wasn't like a typical American camp. Although we did crafts and sports, had swim lessons in the pool, sang songs around a campfire, put on skits, etc., we had some unusual luxuries. We lived in one large building; I think it was a former hunting lodge. Each group had a large room with beds and a hall bathroom—almost like a college dorm. We had common areas where we ate together or gathered in the evening.

We took the campers on several special trips. My favorite was the overnight bicycle trip to a Danish farm where we slept in the hayloft of the farmer's barn. We also took the campers to Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen and walked through the forest to the North Sea for a day at the ocean.



Olympic Day Ceremony at Camp

The second summer I was at Camp Lake Geneva in Switzerland. It was held at a large ski lodge in the small village of Leysin, located in the Swiss Alps. To reach the camp you took a mountain tram from the town of Aigle. Many rooms had a balcony and the view was magnificent. One of my jobs was to take groups down the mountain to Aigle where they had horseback riding lessons. And later we often went to the town pool.

We took many hikes in the mountains—half day, whole day, and once every two weeks, we took the older campers on an overnight hike in the Alps. It wasn't a surprise to meet mountain goats along our way. I remember hiking up to a glacier and the children sliding down the snow and ice in 90- degree weather. I'm not sure where we stayed overnight but probably at a small farm or mountain chalet. A van brought our supplies and sleeping bags.

We traveled with our campers by train to many interesting places. For example, we went to St. Maurice where the oldest monastery in Europe is located. We went to Berne where we toured the Parliament, wandered through gardens of a beautiful church and saw the bear pit.



Campers and mountain goat

And at night we saw movies (probably travel logs) of the countries from which the children came (USA, Canada, Denmark, Switzerland, England, etc.). Several counselors played guitars and there was a lot of singing. We had a Camp Olympics day which was fun.

In the evenings the counselors often had free time as well as one morning afternoon, and full day off each two-week period. I remember going into Copenhagen and Geneva on days off. In Switzerland, we often went up to the Chalet Provendau, a short hike above the camp, where we shared swiss fondue, wine and listened to music, danced or just talked. And there were always evenings when we could get a bridge game going.



That's me at St. Maurice with campers and a monastery in background

I am now in my mid 70s; then I was an adventuresome gal in my early 20s. Although all these years later, I don't remember the exact details of daily camp life, I do know how lucky I was to have had this experience.

When I left for Denmark in 1965, I was very nervous embarking on such an adventure all by myself. I was actually shy and wondered how I would relate to everyone. But I met wonderful people along the way and realized how similar we all are, even in an international community. I was awed by the beauty of nature and felt so small against God's magnificent creation. And I became more independent. After camp in Switzerland, I found someone to travel with and we went to Berlin, (saw the wall and had a tour into East Berlin) Amsterdam, and Paris—navigating it all by train and would you believe, staying in lodging for just two or three dollars a night!

I credit these two summers of my life as a valuable experience that I will never forget.