



Koinonia

Episcopal Diocese of West Virginia

May 2015

Camps and More Camps

By Sara Gunter



**Sara Gunter, our
Director of Youth and
Young Adult Ministries**

I grew up going to summer camp in the Diocese of San Joaquin. It was called "Junior Music Camp" and my dad was a counselor and my mom was one of the music directors. Before we were old enough to be campers my sister and I hung out with our priest's kids, who were roughly the same age as us, and the babysitter they hired to watch us for

the week. We ran around the camp like we owned it. It was high up in the Sierra Nevada mountains, surrounded by giant Sequoias. The garbage cans outside the dining hall had to be chained to the wall and all snacks or fruity chap-stick and scented lotions had to be locked in a special refrigerator locked inside a room next to the kitchen to keep them away from bears. Most of the cabins didn't have bathrooms, and if you had to 'go' in the middle of the night you'd have to grab a flashlight and trek down the hill to the dining hall, always cautious and aware that you might encounter a bear or two on your way.

Some of my earliest and fondest memories are at Camp San Joaquin. I loved sitting around the campfire, singing rowdy and silly, haunting and solemn songs. At mail call our priest's wife would do what I could only then have described as an "explorer's hat". Her slogan was "Digging down deep, to get to the bottom, to stay on top." Whoever got the most mail at the end of the week was thrown into the pool after breakfast on the last day. Every cabin had a little dirt "garden" we would clean and decorate for prizes during daily cabin checks.

There was a deep and penetrating silence in the woods at camp, even with the wind rustling through the leaves and the water babbling

from the creek, the birds calling to each other, and the crackle of the fire. Life moved at a different pace and it settled quickly over us as we dumped our bags on rickety old bunk beds. The week spent at camp each summer was holy.

Since moving from California as a middle schooler I have spent time at many different camps. When my dad was at VTS we went to Shrinemont often. In high school I spent two summers working as a counselor at a Fundamental Bible camp in Wisconsin called Phantom Ranch. As an adult I was a program director at Camp Chicago one summer. I have spent glorious weekends at St. Dorothy's Rest and the Bishop's Ranch in the Diocese of California.

Camp is precious to me. The relationships formed, the personal discovery and growth, the connection to nature, the extraordinary encounters with the Holy are unique at camp. I am giddy with excitement for this summer at Peterkin. I hope that you will send your kids to camp this year. I hope that you will consider bringing your family to Family Camp in July. I hope you will participate in the enclosed survey from the Camping Task Force to help us imagine new ways to participate in camping ministries in our diocese.

Please pray for the staff and campers who will be at Peterkin this summer. Consider supporting us through donating what you can to keep Peterkin not only functioning but thriving.





Peterkin: A Learning Experience

By Sarah Ivey



Growing up in a small town with few Episcopal youth in my immediate area meant sitting through long sermons directed to older parishioners. Sometimes I understood and sometimes they made no sense to me, which is probably typical for most pre-teen/teenagers. The situation was so bad that at times I didn't want to go to church. What kept me going was knowing that in a few short months I would be attending a place where I wasn't one of the only youth, and I would be welcomed with all of the same great teachings presented in a way that was easy for youth to understand.

Peterkin became a part of my life the summer before I was in the third grade. I attended for only three days that first year, but from that point on I have attended every year, and I am currently preparing to be a counselor this summer. Growing up at Peterkin I was not only taught how to truly love others regardless of background, gender, race, or even religion, but I could always witness this from any counselor that was there during camp. This one lesson has helped me more throughout my life than any other I have learned because it can and should be used at any given moment. It was like a prerequisite for everything else Peterkin would teach me over the years, from welcoming others to spreading the word of God. It all flows from loving one another.

Without a place like Peterkin I would not have grown as strong in my faith. I would have given up had I not been exposed to how wonderful it can be to learn about God with other youth. That same group of youth and adults I had the privilege of knowing would eventually help me at some of the most crucial points of my life because they wanted nothing more than to be there, in any way they could, regardless of whether it was at camp or elsewhere. Because of this connection I know the friends that I have made at Peterkin will remain some of my best friends for the rest of my life.



“Living Under Grace”

These Three Words...

By Jessica Busch

It's not often that one is blessed with an opportunity as I have been. My words somehow made an impact and now I am sharing more with you. This task seemed to fulfill a dream of mine, and I wanted to tell you all about how I feel and what my experiences were, but, after much reflection, I realized that my words needed to reflect your thoughts as well. So, I went to my spiritual family and requested one thing: Describe Peterkin in one word. I received an overwhelming response of words that almost seemed like divine intervention. My Peterkin family has guided me to what I shall present to you now.

Peace. What a wonderful word and feeling. That peace you feel when you make the left turn onto Clubhouse Road and suddenly you're free! Peace during the nighttime when you fall asleep to the sound of crickets and tree frogs outside your window. Peace during chapel when you greet your friend with a hug and consume the body and blood of life. Peace when you walk silently up the crooked steps of Prayer Hill to praise your Savior. And Peace while wading down the river on an inner tube making memories you will never forget.

Love. Although love may encompass every part of Peterkin, I think it's most felt when you stand together at meal time and praise God in song. When we come together to eat...we are a family of love. You feel it during any song you sing, and a song like "Friends are Friends Forever" was never truer. We feel only love and acceptance because that's what He wants and we oblige.

Finally, an overwhelming word shared: **Grace.** We live under His grace every day. But somehow at Peterkin His Grace is even more awesome. How is this Heaven on Earth possible? How are WE so lucky as to share in this beauty? Grace is everywhere. From Grenelda and her massive limbs which seem to never wavier, to the front porch of Gravatt...life at Peterkin is Living Under Grace.

We all need a reminder of what Peterkin means to us. Take a moment and close your eyes and just remember how you felt when you spent time at Peterkin. I know, personally, that Peterkin helped me find my faith. Your responses to my request for one word prove that many of you have had similar experiences. As I've said before: If God spent some time on Earth, He would be holding church up on Prayer Hill. But don't just take my word for it, come join me!



What Makes Peterkin So Special?

By Anna Holiday

"Sorry, I will be going off the maps for at least a week out of the summer so I can go to church camp."

This is a statement I thought I would never make, but I tend to speak it every time I am asked about my summer plans.



For me, it's always the question of, "Is it the people or the place that makes this camp so awesome?" Honestly, I think it's a little of both. The people I have met at Peterkin are the most genuine and spiritual individuals I have ever known. Even the location is unique – it really is just you and God hanging out in the mountains of WV.

It was at Peterkin that I realized how important my faith is, and it was there that I began to build a relationship with God. Peterkin has become my sanctuary and one of the most influential places in my life. I know each time I return I will be welcomed 'home.'

Boots

By Nathan E. Arnett

My son, Ben, who is 13, asked me recently, "Dad, I really like my new Nike Kobe Bryant shoes. What are the most expensive shoes that you've ever had?" My answer was, "My Hiking boots." He and his sister avoided asking any more questions. They've heard PLENTY of tales (some on the legendary level) about my '1988 12" L.L. Bean Maine Hunting shoes with a Thinsulate lining'.

I had been no stranger to Peterkin by the time I acquired the boots, having been a camper since 1980 when I was in the 4th grade. By the time I was 16, I had been there at least five times. These boots were my 'Sweet 16' birthday gift from my parents. Some kids get a new car...

Having a birthday in late June was advantageous. My closest life-long friends have surrounded me almost every year for my birthday dinner in the Peterkin dining hall. My mother was shrewd enough to make special arrangements with the kitchen staff, and to leave a cake and a gift or two.

It was Family Camp during my birthday week in '88. I appreciated the expense of these boots and their apparent durability. Throughout my high school years, I would don them at Peterkin for hikes to the Falls, for square dance nights, and for work weekends with my dad. But why am I so endeared to these worn chunks of leather and rubber? Is it possible that my active participation in church activities and community organizations, my faith in God, my devotion to my wife and family, the the basis of my everyday life choices, and much of my social support system ALL come from my experiences at a SUMMER CAMP?!

Since being a camper, volunteer counselor, lodge manager, staff trainer, camp co-leader, work weekend coordinator, campers' parent, and a proud member of the Peterkin Board, I continue to want to do more for this blessing in my life.

Peterkin is not just a tract of land near Nathaniel Mountain in Hampshire County with scant cell service. It is not just an unblemished, God-touched piece of planet that is a bit closer to Heaven. It is not just one of only two streams in the state from which you can drink and never feel ill. It is not just painted silhouettes on the wall of a 50 year-old Strider Chapel. It is not just the serene sound of a creaking rocking chair on Gravatt's front porch. It is not just a refreshing, zero-entry swimming pool. It's not just a pottery kiln or archery range.



It IS the ease of connecting with a new friend while there only a week ago.

It IS the comfort of staid traditions and the hope of our youth's promises.

It IS the music; and the laughter; and the hugs; and the tears.

It IS creativity and life-learning.

It IS the joy of being UNPLUGGED.

It IS the camp where I didn't get better at anything except simply being ME.

Peterkin IS my spiritual home, and I'd like your family to come and experience it. Walk a mile in my boots.

Register NOW for Summer Camp at
www.peterkin.org

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