

Three Years in the Rockies

Life at CPS Camp #55, Belton, Montana

Daniel R. Schrag
as told to Ann E. Schrag

Three Years in the Rockies

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Acknowledgements

I'm grateful to Dad for being willing to let his story be told. His letters, photographs, and written and oral answers to my questions make up this book. It is written in his words. Where I have edited or added for the sake of clarity, I have done my best to remain true to what I believe he would say.

Thanks to my mom, Betty, and to my siblings, Tim, Pauline, and Sarah for believing that I could do it. Their eagerness to see the finished product helped keep me going.

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I want to thank those who gave their permission to use portions of letters they wrote to Dad; William Schrag, Anna Marie Pratt, Elda Schrag (for Abe Schrag, deceased), and Wilda Schrag (for David Schrag, deceased). All letters, including Dad's, have been edited and abbreviated. I used what I thought would add to the value of this book while maintaining the writers' intent.

Thanks to my cousin, Janell Janzen, for going through Marie Schrag's and Abe Schrag's diaries to find references to Dad. They helped fill in missing dates.

Other Sources:

Two publications produced by the campers; *The Trailmaker* (published monthly) and the *Camp Letter* (published weekly).

Handbook of Information and *Camp Ideals and Standards*. I believe these two were given to campers upon their arrival in camp. They provided important information on camp structure and expectations.

Rather Than War by Dave Walter gave me a good over-all picture of camp life. The camp layout used on page ix, comes from there.

Experiences of C.O.'s in CPS Camps, in I-W Service in Hospitals, and During World War I compiled by William and Malinda Beechy. The bear stories on page 42 are taken from Daniel Kemp's memories as recorded in this book. The list of what to bring to camp, on page 69, also came from there.

Plants of Waterton-Glacier National Parks by Richard J. Shaw and Danny On and *Exploring Glacier National Park* by David Rockwell provided information on the plants and animals of the park.

Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version of the Bible unless otherwise noted.

Most of all, I thank God for giving me the inspiration for how to put Dad's story together and for giving me the courage to forge ahead. Without His favor this project would not have come together.

Introduction

My father, Daniel Ray Schrag, grew up on a farm three miles west of McPherson, Kansas. He was born on November 2, 1921, to Reinhold and Marie Schrag. At the time of this story he belonged to the Hopefield General Conference Mennonite Church at Moundridge, Kansas.

He was drafted during the early years of World War II and obtained conscientious objector status. At the time this story begins he had already served in Civilian Public Service for six months at Weeping Water, Nebraska, from November 1942 through April 1943. He hoped to receive a farm deferment soon. However, that didn't happen and he went on to serve for three more years at Belton, Montana, before he got his release.

The stand that he took was not a popular one among the general population. Conscientious objectors were often ridiculed and sometimes worse. The townspeople of Weeping Water did not appreciate having C.O.'s in the area. It was partly because of this that Dad was glad to go to a more remote setting where he would be able to live his beliefs in peace.

Dad unknowingly planted the first seeds for this book years ago during supper table conversations. We children listened as he told stories about his hikes in the mountains and the grizzly bears and other wildlife he saw.

In 1970, Camp #55 held its first reunion. That was my first visit to the park, but not the last. Our family vacationed in the park several times after that and Dad missed only one of the succeeding reunions.

One time he took us to the place where the camp used to be. He pointed out where the buildings had been located. We saw huge trees which had been only saplings when he lived there. We also hiked to Avalanche Lake and ate a picnic lunch beside it. Above Logan Pass we threw snowballs in July just as he had done years before. We drove the Going-to-the-Sun Road many times. Each visit watered those early seeds.

Later Mom suggested I write down Dad's stories. Several years ago the idea of a book began to sprout. I asked Dad some questions and he wrote answers in detail. Then I discovered a gold mine – the letters he had written home and the letters his family had written to him. They had nearly all been saved! The photographs he took and the leather photo album he made are also part of the tangible treasure linking his memories to real life.

Although life in Camp #55 wasn't all pleasant, Dad chose to focus on the good things. Those are the things he wrote home about. The difficulties he barely alluded to, or didn't mention at all. What has come down to us through the intervening years is a picture of delight and wonder, health regained and courage restored. Such a picture invites us to go back in time and relive it with him. What was it that made those years so memorable? What impact did they have on his life?

Dad enjoys recalling his experiences in Glacier. This book is an effort to preserve his memories of those years. Listen with me as he shares his story of *Three Years in the Rockies*.

Ann E. Schrag

Note: The town of Belton has since been renamed West Glacier.