

A FOOTNOTE TO MUTUAL RATING¹

AN ANECDOTE FROM A SUMMER CAMP

By HENRY WOOD SHELTON²

"HOW can we get the girls really interested in the condition of their tents?" was a question put to me this summer by the director of a newly established camp for girls.

"Just what sort of condition do you mean?" I asked.

"We want each girl," she replied, "to feel a sense of responsibility for her section of her tent, as well as to cooperate with her tent-mates in keeping the tent as a whole neat and clean. The girls make their own beds, and although the ideal is standard hospital practice of smooth top and square corner, and we have a trained nurse to show them how, they are not interested in making the necessary effort.

"Each girl has one of a set of five shelves for her own toilet articles and other special use. The bottom shelf is reserved for shoes. She also shares the high swinging shelf which runs the length of the tent, and on which sweaters, rain-coats, ponchos and the like are to be neatly piled. Trunks and bags go under the beds or wherever the tent-mates choose. The problem is how to get the girls really interested in keeping all these belongings neat and shipshape."

"How are you handling it now?"

"Each morning some councillor whom I appoint inspects all the tents, and grades each "A," "B," or "C," according to its condition. I thought that the desire to have a high grading would stimulate the girls to take an interest, but only a few really take hold. Some of them seem utterly indifferent, and are a real problem to the councillors. You know one councillor lives in each tent with three girls."

"Have you thought of putting the responsibility not only for the condition of the tents, but for judging that condition, on the girls?" I asked. "Mutual ratings would enable them to get a collective impersonal judgment in a way which might arouse the interest you want."

Then I explained briefly the underlying principles and general method of mutual ratings, and the director decided to see whether they would appeal to the girls.

Every Sunday evening, just after an open-air sup-

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per, a camp meeting was held to discuss matters of general camp interest and policy, and at the next meeting mutual ratings were presented. The result was a unanimous vote by the girls to try it out. The plan adopted was twofold; first a mutual rating of the occupants of each tent by each other, and second, a rating of all the tents by a representative committee.

From the time mutual ratings started the attitude of almost every one in camp was revolutionized. "Assembly" came at 9.15 A.M., and every camper was required to be present. The time between breakfast and assembly was the only regular time for the tent "chores." Instead of loitering and grudgingly returning to perform a disagreeable duty, the girls raced from breakfast to their tents, and vied with each other in the perfection of their bed-making, the orderliness of their shelves, and the cleanliness of the floors under and around their beds. The bugle for assembly ended all such effort, and at assembly ballots were passed around on which each camper rated the results achieved by all the occupants of her particular tent, herself included, putting the names down in 1, 2, 3 order, so that the person standing first scored one, and the person standing last scored four. In case of a tie of two or more the collective score of the two places was divided between them. For instance, if two girls tied for second and third place, each received two and a half points. If two were tied for first place each received one and a half points.

The persons ranking first in each tent as determined by the ballots cast at assembly constituted a representative inspection committee to act the following morning. Immediately after assembly the inspection committee of those standing first the previous day made the rounds of the tents, and individually graded them likewise in 1, 2, 3 order, noting on their ballots their specific points of criticism. The tabulation of these ballots determined the relative standing of all the tents for that day.

Charts were posted in the assembly room showing the standing of each tent each day, and the cumulative standing of each tent for the week. The tent having the best cumulative score for the week became the proud holder of the "Honor Tent" banner for the week following.

A chart was also posted recording for each individual camper the number of times she achieved first place in her tent. This was made cumulative for the season, at the end of which a special camp insignia was awarded the girl who had the best individual score.

As week-ends approached the competition between two tents almost tied for a particular place often became especially keen. When the inspection committee arrived the girls would challenge it to find anything wrong. Indeed the committee was often hard put to find anything to criticize. Some of their records showed that in one tent the only thing was a nail file not quite straight, in another a box with a cover not down tight, in another a trunk with one hasp up and one down. If a hair brush had three hairs in it, or the prongs of a comb were not perfectly clean it was marked down by the committee. If the heels of shoes on the bottom shelf were noticeably out of perfect alignment, or if the shoe tops flopped some one way and some the other, they were criticized. Of course, if the wash basins were not speckless, and the floor under the beds was not clean swept, these things too came in for censure. Once a comb which had not been thoroughly cleaned was hidden by a girl under her poncho on the swinging shelf. The keen eyes of a committee member in inspecting the shelf spied it, and that tent received last place that day because of the deception. As the personnel of the committee changed as often as there were changes in first place in the individual tents, the critical judgment of the whole camp was noticeably sharpened.

The cumulative score started fresh each week in order that no tent might be permanently handicapped and discouraged by a low score. The constantly shifting standing of the contestants, both individuals and tents, was a positive factor in the sustained interest.

Each week at the camp meeting the whole rating plan was brought up for review, criticism, and vote as to whether it should be abandoned or continued, and if continued, with what modifications. At these meetings the critical notes made by committee members were often read aloud for general information, and it was not long before some rather fundamental problems were brought out and settled. For instance, the question was raised as to which was more serious—lack of cleanliness, such as a dirty comb, or lack of order, such as a misplaced nail file. The unanimous verdict was that cleanliness was more important than orderliness.

After the first few weeks the tents became so uniformly excellent that some of the committee members felt it unnecessary for so many to make inspection rounds every day. This question was solved by a vote to have the committee reduced to three, composed of the ranking members of the tents, standing 1, 2 and

3 in the tent rating of the day before. This seemed to work satisfactorily to the end of the season.

Of course all was not smooth sailing. One of the councillors seemed to have a grudge against mutual ratings, and took every possible opportunity to discourage them. She even went so far as to discourage her own tent-mates from doing their best. Another member of the camp with long academic experience seemed to feel that mutual ratings were wrong in principle, not only because they appealed to the spirit of emulation, but because they set up each day a relative standing from top to bottom when all were so perfect that even those at the bottom would deserve an "A" grade according to college marking. The obvious attitude of these two, however, failed to dampen in any way the interest of the camp as a whole. They voted regularly and enthusiastically to continue the ratings right through the summer.

Visitors from other camps long familiar with camp conditions were amazed. "How do you do it?" they asked the director. When told that she didn't do it, but that it was done entirely by the campers themselves on their own initiative, their interest was keener than ever. The unanimous verdict of visitors was that never had they seen tents in such beautiful condition. They compared them with rooms at a military school, but with the great difference that this result was spontaneous, and not achieved by external compulsion and "discipline."

The son of the director was about to enter Harvard this Fall. He, with the swimming director and another young man, had their sleeping quarters in the converted hay loft of "the barn." Early in the season the director spent nearly half a day trying to establish a semblance of order and cleanliness in the boys' quarters. It seemed an almost hopeless task, because of the accumulated dust on the rafters, and the natural indifference of the occupants to such conditions. Within two weeks of the starting of mutual ratings, however, "the barn" rose from last to first place, and won the "honor tent" banner. They had made their quarters spotless, had learned to make beds with smooth tops and square corners, and even went so far as to get old tin cans and crocks, hand-decorate them in the crafts shop, and place them in effective locations full of wild flowers and ferns. The director said toward the end of the summer that the change in her son was almost unbelievable. His whole boarding school experience had failed to teach him to care for his own things in orderly fashion, and she had looked