

(GREEN PASTURES)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED OCTOBER 1991)

(Marshall) The camp was John Dancy's idea. He patterned it after the play Green Pastures. He got the Children's Fund of Michigan which was established by the late Senator Cousins to fund the camp. At that period, Black children were not accepted at any of the other camps. It started around 1933 or 34.

It was on a lovely, pleasant lake out near Chelsea. Closer to Jackson. It was near Grass Lake. There were lovely Beech trees out there.

(Jones) The girls cottages were at the entrance of the camp and the boys were way over on the other side. In the center we had a big dining hall and there were quarters for some of the folks that worked there. You had to go all the way over the hill, and down there were the five boys cottages.

(Marshall) I was chosen because Mr. Dancy thought I would make a good director with my background. I was a social worker, recreation worker with the city of Detroit. Mr. Dancy was very selective in his counseling staff. They represented a cross-section of people, all economic levels. He always saw to it that some of the counselors were real Black with a lot of talent. So many of our young people would be from middle class Black families and he wanted to make sure that this would be an inspiration to young people.

(Jones) All the counselors had to have had at least a year of college. The first year I got \$60 for 12 weeks but we ate well. When I came back home I had to wear my mother's

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clothes, I was so fat!

(Marshall) We had excellent counselors. The only problem was that after five weeks and that moon came out big, they started romancing.

(Jones) Sunday afternoons a whole lot of folk would come out from Detroit, all the "socialites." That was the place to go on Sunday afternoon, to drive up to Green Pastures Camp.

(Marshall) Every Sunday we had chicken, corn on the cob, string beans, hot rolls.

(Jones) It really was a well built establishment. It was on par with any campsite you would see anywhere with a health cottage and the five cottages nicely spaced. The girls slept inside the cottages. The counselors slept on the screened in porches, the same width as the cottages. The counselors slept on one side of the porch and there was another cot there and the counselor got to choose a camper that she felt was a strong person or leader, and that camper got to sleep on the other cot. The other 10 girls and no boys were inside this one large room that had five beds on either side. They had to learn how to make up their beds, the hospital way to do the sheets and all that. The counselors taught them how to make their own beds. We had inspection every morning to be sure their clothes and all were put away carefully under the bed. We had space; but, you know, it was close. The lavatory for the girls was downhill and that was difficult for some of the girls who had problems because they

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were frightened at night even though there was a light. The lavatory was down there, and it was similar in that they had the lavatory and the bowls for them to wash in. By the time you went swimming three times a day you weren't very dirty. It seems that there was some kind of shower so that you could wash the sand from your feet but it was cold water.

The counselor's part was separated from the students but it was all cold water. I never felt hot water. We swam in the morning, before lunch and then we swam in the afternoon. Three times a day you got into the lake.

(McFadden) I know my father had taken me around town trying to get me into a camp because I was what was known as a "sickly" child. I spent four weeks at Herman Kiefer with Scarlet Fever and I was very much underweight. As I remember, he tried to get me into the Free Press fresh air camp but they did not take any little colored children.

We came on the bus and as we got off the bus, kids were lined up watching us get off. They were shouting things over to us. I can remember one especially yelling at me "Oh, you got good hair now but you'll be going swimming three times a day, your hair is going to beat you back home!"

Before we went to sleep, they talked about different things. Some of the girls were much older and much more sophisticated. My vocabulary increased. I heard words I had never heard before and I began to get an idea about some sexual things I had never heard before because some of them

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were more sophisticated than others.

They named each cottage after some famous Black person and you had to find out something about their background and who they were.

(Marshall) Dancy would stop a child and say "Who was Colonel Young?" and the kid would say "He rode a horse all the way to Washington D.C.). He came out every weekend and sometimes during the week. He lived out there. He loved that place. He had a room in the director's cottage set aside for him.

(McFadden) If you were a good camper you got to go over there and dust the director's cottage.

Another thing that impressed me as a camper, I loved that ceremony where you came out every morning and you raised the flag. It was very solemn. In the evening after supper before sundown, they'd lower it. I was very impressed. We sang taps.

I can remember the main thing that we missed and that we wrote home for and were very frantic to get was candy.

(Jones) I was there I remember writing the folks back home, send me some candy. The other kids all said "If I just had some candy".

(Marshall) Mr. Dancy said it was unheard of to have a runaway from Green Pastures. Kids would get lonely but they wouldn't runaway. Mr. Dancy met this one kid down the road. Mr. Dancy was a correction commission and had a badge. He

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asked the kid where he was going. He said he was going somewhere, he didn't know who Mr. Dancy was. Dancy told him "Boy I'm going to take you back, I'm a commissioner" and showed him his badge. The boy said "Oh, you can buy those at the pawn shop."

(Jones) We took a dip first then we washed up and got dressed. Then they had the flag raising and then we went to breakfast. After breakfast, that's when they had some kind of class like nature study or performing arts. Then you took another dip and then you had dinner. Right after that middle meal of dinner you had quiet hour. That was your big meal of the day. That's when you went back and you could lie down in your bunk or you could write letters or, you were just quiet. After that there were other activities. We would maybe go for a hike or have a nature study lesson or something like that. Then you took another dip and then you had supper. After that, sometimes in the dining hall they would have singing. Always on Saturday nights you had a big program. You had a big show and a dance following that. You went to bed fairly early because you got up so early and you were pretty tired.

(McFadden) The children seemed to get along very well. I just remember there was teasing. I can remember these two girls were friendly and one of them had let the girl borrow an outfit she had. It was kind of like a romper suit or something. This girl liked it so well she wore it two or three times and then later on, when the girl who owned it put

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it on, everybody said, you've got on so and so's suit.

(Marshall) We used to take the boys out on a snipe hunt. You take the boys out in the woods and we'd tell them about this snipe. It's a wild animal out there. You go out and two boys have to hold the bag and a flashlight. The snipe would appear and go into the bag. What you would do is leave them out there. You'd take them way in the woods and you'd leave them. We always had a snipe hunt with every group. We'd make sure that nothing happened to them but they would think they were lost.