

Camp Liahona For Deaf Children

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When Roger Wilkins moved to Utah from Northern California in 1985, he found activities for Deaf children solely lacking. During his childhood, he had attended several Deaf camps that had helped him develop his positive attitude and felt the children of Utah needed the same kinds of experience (Roger Wilkins - - Camp Director).

The establishment of a camp started with Roger who teamed up with Bobby Giles to form a camp for Deaf children. When they were in the process of establishing their camp, they were trying to decide what to name it. While trying to come up with a name, Bobby talked with George and Chris Osmond. George is commonly known as Virl and is one of two Deaf brothers from the famous Osmond family, an American family music group. Chris is his wife. She said, “Why not use the word, “Liahona?” Then Bobby came to Roger and told him about the word,

“Liahona” as mentioned by Chris Osmond. He thought it was a great idea (Bobby Giles, personal communication, 2009).



1989 Camp Liahona

The word, "Liahona" came from the Book of Mormon and it was a round, brass ball "curious workmanship" compass that provided directions for Lehi and his party while traveling

to the Promised Land. Roger and Bobby thought that the name was perfect because they desired to see Deaf children have good direction in their lives. If they did good things, their lives would lead to greater good things. Naming this organization, Camp Liahona for Deaf Children became official in 1986 (Bobby Giles, personal communication, 2009).

Camp Liahona was the beginning of a bright new star for the children of Utah. This camp aimed to achieve several goals. One of the goals was to help prepare children to become leaders in the future. This type of training begins when children are young. They wanted to show children that they could do anything they liked to do, except hear. They felt there were not enough prominent Deaf leaders, but if training and opportunities were available, these children would be leaders in the future (Camp Liahona - 1988).

During the first year the camp consisted only of day activities including ice sliding and pizza. Five children participated (Roger Wilkins - - Camp Director).

The second camp was held in September 1987 at Reid Simonsen's parents' cabin in Big Cottonwood Canyon, Utah for a few days. Reid Simonsen was one of the leaders. The group had fun participating in activities during their three day stay,



1991 Camp Liahona

including skits, games, crafts, and hikes (Roger Wilkins - - Camp Director; Giles 2009).

In August 1988, the third camp was held at the Boy Scout campground in Payson Canyon, Utah. Eighteen children, counselors and volunteers participated in the week-long camp. During the few days of camping together, the children had the opportunity to participate in activities such as archery, crafts, rifle shooting, swimming, and canoeing. They had a great time together and made new friends (Roger Wilkins - - Camp Director).

One of the events the campers had learned at the Camp Liahona was to avoid drinking and drugs, as follows:

“One evening a dramatic skit was planned to emphasize the importance of avoiding drinking and drugs. Roger hid a bottle of "whiskey" in his coat and Bobby hid "pot" pipes and authentic looking "drugs" in his pants. During an announcement, Jack Rose [a police officer who knew ASL], dressed in police uniform, suddenly chased after Roger and Bobby and arrested them. Jack then showed the children what Roger and Bobby had. The arrest sure did get their attention! Afterwards, Roger and Bobby told the children they were only dramatizing. Jack, who was a policeman fluent in American Sign Language, told several interesting stories about his experiences arresting people who used drugs. They hoped the information would help the children refrain from drug use in the future”(Camp Liahona - 1988).

During the five-day camp, the participants were also treated to Deaf guest speakers such as Virl Osmond, Jim Harper, and Curtis Pendleton. On the last day of camping, families joined the campers for dinner. All campers were awarded a certification of participation (Camp Liahona – 1988).

Over the years, the Camp Liahona reserved a variety of campgrounds for a week during summer in Utah. In addition, the activities provided for the children included swimming,

boating, art, drama, riding horses, hiking, rope challenging, and games. Finally, in 1994, the Camp Liahona found a permanent home of its own at Camp Wapiti, located in the Left Hand Fork of Settlement Canyon, five minutes from Tooele, Utah. Staff members were ecstatic



1996 Camp Liahona

about this discovery made by Vea Lynn Jarvis, parent of a hard-of-hearing daughter, Heather and two Deaf sons, Jason and Micah. It was in a beautiful mountain setting, which was conveniently close to stores, services and a hospital (Camp Liahona Has Its Own Home, July 1994).

Every summer, the Camp Liahona was held at Camp Wapiti where it had sixteen sleeping cabins capable of housing ten tenants each. The main lodge had full kitchen services, with second floor sleeping accommodations for the staff and a small meeting room. In addition, there was an activity field, a dispensary, and an arts/crafts building. Tooele City made its public pool available for the campers' use (Camp Liahona Has Its Own Home, July 1994).

Although the majority of Deaf children were members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the Camp Liahona was open to all Deaf children who were between eight and eighteen years old. This camp was not only for Utahns but also had Deaf children from all over America and Canada. Most of them were Latter-day Saints from out of state.

Several Deaf adults were involved with Camp Liahona for a long time as president,

vice president, camp director and/or assistant camp director. The following names that deserve to be recognized are:



2000 Camp Liahona

- Roger Wilkins - 5 years
- David Bair - 10 years
- Bobby Giles - 12 years
- Nan Hix - 14 years

The purpose of the Camp Liahona was to provide opportunity for Deaf children to make new friends from all across the United States, meet other Latter-day Saints children and staff members, meet people who use the same language – American Sign Language, and meet special famous Deaf guests at camp. The children were given opportunity to learn about Deaf culture and about developing self-esteem and a more positive attitude.

Moreover, they learned how to interact with Deaf role models and had someone to look up to. Additionally, their participation helped them develop their leadership qualities and also learn from adults who worked at the camp. They visited

interesting places and experienced a cool environment at camp. A lot of activities and fun slumber parties were offered for seven nights in a row! Lastly, the Camp Liahona was influenced by the Latter-day Saints values in their heart to do good things in this world.



2006 Camp Liahona

The Camp Liahona closed the business in 2008 due to budget shortfalls and staff shortages. Moreover, it was difficult to collect donations (Bobby Giles, personal communication, 2012).

Notes

Bobby Giles, (Camp Liahona), interview by Jodi B. Kinner, February 3, 2009.

Bobby Giles, (Camp Liahona), interview by Jodi B. Kinner, October 2, 2012.

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