

TALK AT BOARD MEETING LAJF JULY 26, 2020

When Tim Wong asked me to say a few words, it seemed that I was being asked to make a council talk and that I would have to find my chief's blanket and remember to say "Yo-hei-yo-hei" I told Tim that I would think about it and let him know. I did give it some thought and I wrote Tim the following:

I don't think we should ignore the intensity, energy, and dedication that thousands of citizens have shown in the past few months, sparked by the unfortunate killing of George Floyd. Racism has been endemic in this country since its inception. Rising Sun's early days were no exception to that. I think that any planning should include heightened awareness of racial diversity of staff and camper recruitment. *Do you think that it would be appropriate for me to speak of that?* I will, of course discuss the changes that I have observed over the years as Rising Sun has grown from a small, elite group of boys to an alumni/ae group encompassing nations throughout the world. Because I have been associated with Rising Sun for 80 years, I am perhaps thought of as an expert in ancient history. That aspect of our history is often good for anecdotal amusement, but not always relevant to the task on hand.

Imagine my surprise then when I received from Helene Mattera the BLACK LIVES MATTER piece that so elegantly and completely lays out a course of action that I had in mind when I wrote that to Tim. I can't tell you how excited I am about Rising Sun plans to address this problem.

The present coronavirus, coupled with a public outcry against the racism that has prevailed in so many aspects of society, has given a new focus to the problem and the demonstrations of people of all races against not only the policing, but housing and employment and corporate power, etc. We are entering a critical time in America and I think we have a chance to make significant changes in public attitudes in regard to these societal problems.

That Rising Sun is prepared to not only address the problem of racism, but can direct its efforts to disseminate information and demonstrate its commitment to positive change should receive the approval and backing of our alums all over the world.

The history of Rising Sun's racist past is one that I am familiar with and I would like to give you some historical perspective.

For years Freddy refused to choose black campers because he said, and I quote: "What would the mothers of campers from Mississippi think if they had to send their sons to a place where they had to sleep in the same tent with a black boy?"

It was only because of pressure from alumni that Freddy relented and in 1947 (17 years after the founding of Camp) he chose two black campers: Ric Haynes and Cliff Alexander whom he found at where? Horace Mann. They were from middle-class families and would go on to have exceptional careers: Ric, as Ambassador to Algeria, and Cliff as Secretary of the Army.

Ric and Freddy had what I would call a “love-hate” relationship, but Ric has remained in the Rising Sun orbit, taking on roles at camp and in alumni affairs. Cliff severed his relationship with Rising Sun. I won’t speculate what his reasons were, but what was the “straw that broke the camel’s back”, as described to me by Ric in 1979, was the incident that occurred at our annual Christmas Reunion dinner when Dwight D. Eisenhower was the guest speaker (he was president of Columbia University at the time) and was invited by Freddy to speak. His topic was Leadership and he focused on his role as a leader. To illustrate some point he told a joke about a Black recruit and his response to an officer. Eisenhower imitated the drawl of the recruit in the stereotypical way that Hollywood portrayed blacks in those days. The joke was greeted by the attendants with silence. I remember wishing that I could sink below the floor. Seated in the audience were Ric and Cliff. We winced at the insensitivity that Eisenhower displayed. I don’t know what the other “straws” were that Cliff objected to, but in 1979 when I had asked Ric to ask Cliff if he would meet and greet our BFA’s when I took them to Washington, he reported to me that Cliff had refused.

I don’t have the information on our recruitment of black campers or staff over the period that includes the 60’s. I know that when I became the ED in 1977, I hired Victor Kendall as the Music counselor. -----

I subsequently hired staff and chose campers of color. In 1981 I went to southern Illinois and courtesy of Senator Paul Simon, was able to get candidates to interview. There were 13 boys: 12 white, 1 black: Steve Meeks. He was an outstanding camper and came back for a second year. Steve became a counselor in 1987 and 1988. Cyril Jermin comes to mind. He did much to make 1978 a notable summer. There had been some disturbing incidents at camp and Cyril came to me and asked if he could speak at council. At that time it was not customary for campers to speak at council. Cyril spoke eloquently about the concept of love as it pertained to our relationships with fellow campers. His talk apparently made a big impression on the campers and there was a noticeable change in inter-camper relationships after that. And believe me, I don’t mean that in any smarmy way.

Although we had some black campers during my time as ED, I frankly was never satisfied that their integration into the Rising Sun family was leading to long-term association and support. One year we had five black campers. They tended to stick together, except for the boy from Africa who wanted to be with the other campers.

I can't let this moment go with out telling you about our camper from Gambia. He was a terribly spoiled kid and a very difficult camper. I asked Freddy how come he got a boy from Gambia, that little, insignificant country? He said that the State Department had asked him to take this boy and that he thought they said Zambia.

But we chose schools to find applicants in NYC that had furnished us with campers over the years, including some private schools. Thus, it was rare to interview a black applicant: there were few. So our outreach was limited and I thought it had to be like that because the recruitment in NYC was time-consuming and it was easier to go to known schools that had top students than to visit schools in neighborhoods that had many black students who were not (Quote) "Rising Sun material."

I would like to say a few words about the Rising Sun objectives that were originally stated by Freddy and which, though tweaked through the years, still resonate with our core mission.

The emphasis of Rising Sun was primarily on a boy's individual development, not a bad thing, of course, but not conceptually broad enough in terms of today's needs. By that I mean that although it is laudable for teenage kids (and of course I include girls: the girls that Freddy and others overlooked in those so-called "halcyon days") to develop the philosophy of living and values that CRS espouses, I don't think that many of us gave much thought beyond that. Europe was at war when I was a camper and yet I don't remember any discussions that pertained to the terrible destruction that was going on or the suffering of millions. Granted, the news available was not what it is today, but still we knew about the German blitzkrieg that overran Poland and France, and so on, but campers were strangely isolated from war topics.

Give Freddy credit though for expanding the camper body after the war to regularly include boys from abroad and National campers (although they were referred to as "guests" at the time.) Our success in getting boys from Poland was a terrific thing, for example, giving American boys the chance to interact with boys from behind the Iron Curtain.(oh Heavens: Communists). And of course, the other countries that have had loyal Rising Sun alumni, making selection of campers from those countries possible and affordable.

After Freddy's death in 1978, I thought that Rising Sun had to include girls. It's hard to conceive these days that there would be opposition to the idea, but there was. It took ten years before the girls camp would open and as we know, in 2018 they celebrated their 30th season.

I don't have to tell you that the change that has been made to have both the boys and the girls share a summer at Clinton, while a necessary fact of practicality, has

certainly altered the scope of what were the typical summer activities of yesteryear. That Rising Sun has adapted to that is laudable. I know that many alums have different feelings and opinions on the subject, but I think that we have to build on what we have. Advances in technology such as Zoom meetings, Skype, and other communications techniques present us with opportunities that can open new avenues for growth. The fact that almost everyone has a mobile phone and can communicate worldwide gives the alumni/ae the advantage of maintaining camp-introduced personal relationships that former generations did not have. This means that the Rising Sun camp experience can influence one's attachment to Camp in a more meaningful and efficient way. It might even enhance our fund-raising programs.

I will end on this note: My association with Rising Sun goes back 80 years. The world was a different place, attitudes about race were different, not only in the South, but also in the North. As time went on, many of us began to recognize the inconsistency between our message of brotherhood and the racism that exists in our society and not addressed as a problem that concerns us. Although we have made progress, this new focus that has been outlined is one that I applaud and makes me that much prouder to be a Rising Sun.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity.