

# Aldersgator Stories

## Camp Memories with Sherry Theobald



### Written by Marianne Augenstein

In June of 1948, a pastor by the name of Walter S. Dobbie filled his car with teenagers and brought them from Canton Methodist Church to a brand-new camp called Aldersgate. One of those kids was Sherry (Thompson) Theobald, who had just graduated from 8th grade. She remembers working alongside other children and adults from different churches, preparing everything for the first summer of camp. They swept sawdust from the newly-built cabins, stacked lumber, and helped make everything neat and inviting.

The camp was the site of the old Lucy King farm. At the time, it wasn't much more than some fields, cabins, and a dining hall next to Pleasant Lake. Still, those who built it had a vision for a place where people could come together and experience God in

a different way. Pastor Dobby wanted to make sure the kids at his church had an opportunity to get involved. Sherry remembers her days as a camper fondly. She attended Jr. High Camp that first summer with a close friend, Ortha (Whitmore) Sibbitts. They only had the cabins in the A and B sections at that point. The C cabins were built later, in the 1960s. Boys stayed in A, and girls in B, with the road separating the two sections. Sherry says the campers were good at respecting the boundary.

The camper groups were quite large, about 125 kids, and much more formal in those days. Sherry remembers lots of singing. They would fill the dining hall and sing in rounds and lively spirituals. Just like kids today, Sherry remembered the words of those songs for many years, long after camp ended.

The day began with a flag-raising ceremony. Then, campers took part in Bible classes during the morning and afternoon. They sat in the grass near the cross by the lake. If the weather was rainy, they used a cabin. Sherry soon realized she was walking on "holy ground."

A highlight of the day was swimming and boating in Pleasant Lake, just as campers do today. In the evenings, everyone gathered back in the dining hall for different large group activities. There was singing, dancing,



**ALDERSGATE**

games, a talent show or vespers. Everyone would work together to push back the tables and benches -- the same benches, Sherry noted, that we still have today! She especially loved the square dances and folk dancing. She realized most of the kids probably enjoyed this part of the day the best, but they still learned a lot in their Bible Study classes.

As the years progressed, Sherry and her family got more involved in Camp Aldersgate. Sherry served as a counselor and teacher for various camps. Sherry's sister, Sharon "Cookie" Thompson, worked in food service in the kitchen at Camp Aldersgate in 1964.

Sherry and her late husband, Walt, began attending Family Life Weekend in 1964. In 1968, they returned, bringing their children and, eventually, their grandchildren. They attended Family Life for 52 years, interrupted only by the lockdown of 2020 when formal camps were not held.

The Theobalds have been active Family Life Weekend Committee members for many years. Walt was often seen building a campfire for evening devotions, and Sherry was usually surrounded by her grandchildren. Their family table is always full of smiles and lots of laughter.

"We've built a legacy of attending camp," Sherry says. "I feel very blessed that our family has this heritage and hope Aldersgate will be there for generations."

Some traditions are the same at Aldersgate, such as having table hoppers and singing plenty of fun songs. Some things are different, such as co-ed cabin sections and the addition of Fellowship Hall, Hamer Lodge and Aldersgate Cottage. The dining hall was also expanded in 2001 to add the Stacy Dining Room, retreat and meeting room downstairs, but kept the original rustic Walker Dining Hall Sherry grew up with.

One central thing, however, remains the same. Aldersgate is a place where lives are changed. God has used this "holy ground" as a way to reach children, adults, and families with His love. May it continue for many more years.

Thank you, Sherry, for all your help at Aldersgate over the last 75 years! May God bless you and your family as you continue to enjoy this "Diamond in the Woods."



**ALDERSGATE**