

My late father, Rev. Merl Schiffman, grew up in Dunkirk, and worked (and lived apparently) as a teenager at the Dunkirk Conference Center. I've been editing his memoirs, and found the Conference Center's appeal for Memories. Below, I offer you, an excerpt written in 1977.

"Rev. Carl Haass, our local pastor was also part-time manager of the Conference Grounds, a summer camp grounds a mile and a half east of Dunkirk on Lake Shore road. It opened the previous year with a dining room, auditorium and a few cottages for summer conferences for Evangelical Synod churches. In 1925 it was in full swing with junior, senior, adult camps and teacher training weeks and was rented to other denominations for several weeks. (My) Uncle George Fitzer told me to ask Haass for a job, which I did, and he started me as a kitchen helper. Two weeks before starting, running a table saw in shopwork at school, my partner dropped a board on the saw blade as he drew it through and it shot back and hit my arm. I thought I had broken it but it turned out to be only a bad bruise. At age 15, third year high school in the Fall, I went to work in June at \$15 a week, board and room. Haass did not always have the money to pay us. When I needed cash, he gave me five or ten dollars. I ran the dishwasher, power mover, cleaned the auditorium daily and the cottages between camps. The kitchen and dining room crews, another boy and I were "staff". We worked long hours, never thinking of time or schedule until the work was done.

The missionary-in-residence was M. P. Davis from India. One of his daughters, Margaret, in later years married Walter Bloesch and later as a widow belonged to Bethel Church, Elmhurst, Il. Also at camp were Herb Bass who became a medical missionary in India, Allen Wehrli of Eden, Alvin Keppel, later president of Catawba College, NC. Their daughter married Bob Moss, president of the United Church of Christ. John Baltzer, president of the Evangelical Synod came, along with other national church leaders. I was deeply impressed by the close relationship I had with these people in a relaxed and informal manner."

Some years after this reference, Merl was ordained by Rev. Haass into the (then) Evangelical & Reformed Church, and served several churches in the Dunkirk area before accepting the first full-time position as Pastor of a start-up congregation at Bethel Church, in Elmhurst, Il. in 1954. (I was born in Gowanda in 1951 while Dad served Trinity UCC there.)

In the mid to late '50s, our family stayed at the Center, more than once, when visiting the area. The photo of the beach and bluff on your Web site? I remember it well, as far back as perhaps 1958. We swam in the Lake there, before it died and was saved. At age 10 or 12, I climbed the bluff from the beach with my cousin. A "double-dare" I think. I'm sure I wasn't the first, last or most foolish to do so. I remember the shale breaking away under-foot with every step and realizing reaching the top was the option involving the least pain.

I also recall, the Conference Grounds (as we knew it) had the “coolest” swings in the whole world.

Dad retired from Bethel in 1971, to Prescott, Arizona and later Spring Valley, CA. He passed away a few years ago at the age of 90. Mom now lives in Tucson, AZ and turned 96 last August.

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