

Camps SSJ and Silver Birch p

By Karen M. Franz

Camp SSJ at the Motherhouse of the Sisters of St. Joseph is much as I remembered it. Games and crafts; swimming in the large refreshing pool; bag lunches under the trees; and a series of events — like Backwards Day or Christmas in July — designed to capture children's imaginations. I was a junior counselor at Camp SSJ in 1974, and the familiarity I felt upon returning last week for the final day of the camping season was duplicated in a visit to the Sisters' of Mercy Camp Silver Birch.

The world of children is constant in many ways — with the possible exception of headphones for micro-cassette players and an increased interest in sunbathing among 10 and 11 year olds. It seemed that little had changed in those 11 years.

The atmosphere at both day camps is calm and relaxed, a series of summer days filled with activities, but little of the commotion and uproar depicted in popular movies about summer camps. Even a bee-sting scare at Camp SSJ was handled quickly but with a quiet certainty.

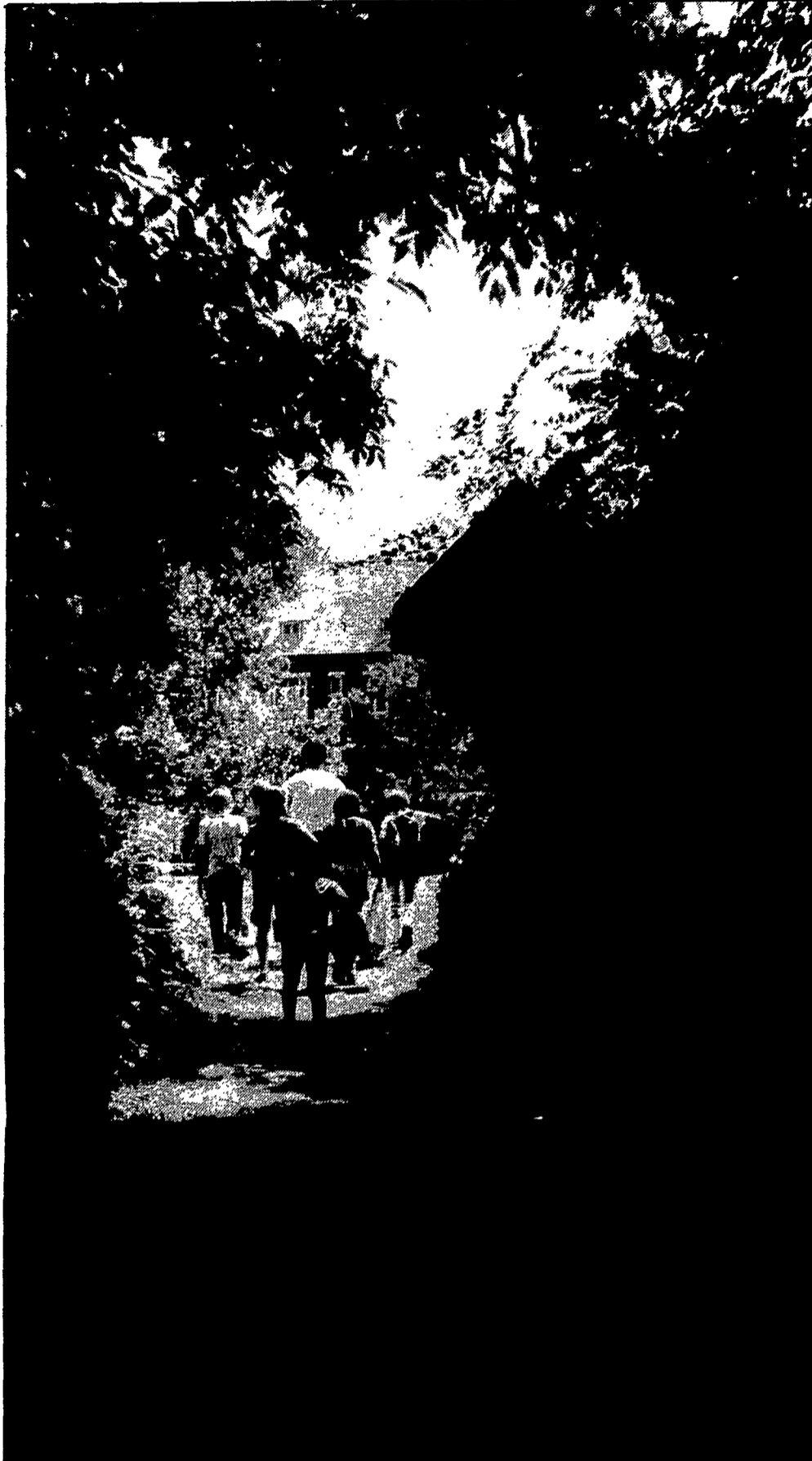
Camp Silver Birch has been in operation for 17 years, and current Director Sister Shiela Stevenson, a instructor of dental assisting at Monroe Community College, has been a participant for the last 13. Camp

SSJ's been around since 1972 or '73, and this year its director is Sister Donna Cucci, who teaches music at Nazareth Academy and directs the school's choirs. Camp Silver Birch runs for five weeks, and children generally sign up to attend for one or two weeks. Camp SSJ runs for four weeks. Both camps can accommodate about 80 children aged five to 11 each week, and both have had waiting lists.

Both orders see running the camps as a form of ministry to children and their parents. In starting the camp, Sister Shiela explained, "we were just looking for a way to deal with children in the summertime, knowing that it's hard, especially with the younger ones, for parents to find a place for the kids."

Placing children in these summer camps provides an extra measure of security as well. Both camps are administered by sisters of the respective orders with the assistance of counselors selected from high school- and college-age applicants. "A lot of the parents want places they're familiar with," Sister Donna explained, "and they're familiar with the sisters."

Working at the camps is also a welcome change for the sisters. "It's nice being with kids in a different way than teaching," said Sister Barbara Skornia SSJ, a teacher at Nazareth Academy.



A group of campers heads toward the Sisters of St. Joseph Motherhouse for some lunch after their turn at swimming



Rena Trama, 7, gets ready to finish her mobile in crafts class at Camp SSJ.



Suzi Molak, 7, just missed this catch at first base during a ballgame at Camp Silver Birch



Bobby Bartash, 9, checks out the scenery from an innertube during his group's turn in the SSJ pool.

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