

My Green Lake Story: Mary Alice Sorenson Girling



My experience at the American Baptist Assembly began in 1944 at the Children's Center. In the postcard above I am sitting on the swing (age 8). My brother, Paul, (age 4) is second from the left sitting on the ground. My family, particularly my father, Perc Sorenson, was very involved in securing the area for the Baptists. We spent many days attending many special events and conferences as a family. When I became middle school age it was time for me to go to "camp" with other Wisconsin youth at Green Lake. The gathering was held in the Abbey area. Campfires, devotionals and other inspirational groups were very meaningful.

When I was in high school I came to Green Lake every summer to join in the Senior High gathering. It was so much fun to meet other Christian youth from around the country. It also was held in the Abbey area. Singing camp songs around the campfire, sharing ideas for youth groups at home, listening to leaders who enhanced our Christian faith. There was a man, Mr. Wheaten, who kept talking about this college called Ottawa University in Ottawa Kansas. He told us of all the wonderful things the college had to offer and about their close connection with the Baptist church in town. I transferred to Ottawa and to my surprise I found there were many of the students I had met at Green Lake.

The summer between my freshman and sophomore years (1956) I went back to Green Lake to work on the Student Staff. That was the first summer that Pillsbury Dining Hall was opened. It was a very hot summer. We wore pink nylon uniforms and had to use hair nets. It was extremely uncomfortable. All the guests sat down to eat at the same time with the food being served family style. The emcee was Dick

Hoiland. He would give the news, tell jokes and have everyone sing Happy Birthday to those who were celebrating that day. He always ended the song with "God Bless You." I remember we were paid \$33 a month for our work effort. Of course food and lodging were included.

During the years I worked on the staff I attended vespers by the lake, listened to special speakers who were there for conferences, and spent time by myself worshiping and reading devotionals. I have a beautiful manger scene that I made at the craft shop run by the Gadabouts.

Since we lived in Milwaukee my father helped secure things that the Assembly needed. Helped get a fire truck for the grounds and an organ. I needed a ride to Green Lake so he said I could ride in the truck. I didn't know that he meant in the back with the organ!

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One of the most meaningful events that I attended when I was on staff was a special communion service. It was held at the time when "BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU" was the way of life in many countries around the world. We gathered at one building and were given directions to the place the service was to be held. We could only go in groups of two or three and could use no lights of any kind. If we were stopped we were to draw the sign of the fish on the ground. When we arrived at the place of the service it was in the lowest level of the building. Only one candle lit the room. We entered without speaking and sat on the floor. The communion service was conducted by one person. At the conclusion of the service we left the way we came. It gave all of us a real feeling of how many Christians around the world had to share their belief in Christ and follow the teachings of Jesus.

Dad, I know that you are looking down on Green Lake Conference Center at this time of celebration. You must be smiling and are so thankful that through worship, music and mission the word of God is being sent out to the world through people attending the conferences held at this beautiful place.