

the 1950s

An Absolute Dream



hen thoughts drift to the 1950s, wholesome images of America often come to mind. Children of this era might remember playing with hula hoops, Silly Putty, or Mr. Potato Head while watching *The Lone Ranger*, *The Howdy Doody Show*, and *The Mickey Mouse Club* on the family's first television set. At night, their parents enjoyed such fare as *I Love Lucy*, *The Honeymooners*, and *Gunsmoke*.

For the 1950s teenager, the latter half of the decade must have seemed a dream. The youth subculture was now a permanent fixture, and their fashions, slang, and entertainment created a brand-new consumer market. By the middle of the decade, a new style of music had emerged, and it was coined "rock 'n' roll." Deemed by many parents as dangerous, the jumpy sounds of Elvis Presley, Chuck Berry, and Little Richard could be heard blaring out of car radios and on the new national TV show, *American Bandstand*. Cruising in cars to the local hamburger joint or school sock hop became all the rage.

That doesn't mean, of course, everything was fine. In between the history-defining Second World War of the 1940s and the cultural overhaul of the 1960s sat the decade where tensions seemed to bubble just below the surface. War, both hot and cold, still permeated the world, as did the painful presence of racism.

Young Life, meanwhile, continued to faithfully meet and walk alongside kids in the midst of a culture that blended innocence and danger. If the forties were marked by a pioneering spirit, then the fifties would be remembered as a time of expansion. The mission grew up alongside the teenagers of the 1950s, and as Young Life reached its own "teenage years," it truly hit its stride.

"For a Young Life staff person, the 1950s were an absolute dream," said Bill Starr. "There was such a response; the middle class was becoming prominent and we moved with it."

In 1958, Tom Raley, who oversaw the work in Seattle, Washington, came up with a plan to double the city's already impressive number of ten Young Life clubs. "We named the plan 'Operation Flex,'" Raley said. "We selected ten schools where Young Life had never been. We encouraged everyone to begin to pray for those ten schools. We put ten leadership teams together, and they began to get to know some kids from those schools. They also tried to meet some adults in those communities."

In late March, Raley and the leaders hosted a banquet for the new kids at the Olympic Hotel in downtown Seattle. "We invited ten kids from each of the new schools and ten kids from the existing Young Life clubs plus the leadership from all twenty clubs." The banquet itself was a success, but there was still more to be revealed.



Because clubs had outgrown homes, staff had to become creative in finding new locations, like this one—the Swan Funeral Home. Pictured here is Jim Rayburn (top left) with 467 kids at the Colorado Springs club (obviously not everyone fit into the picture!).

The leaders asked the crowd of two hundred kids and leaders to move to the main ballroom, where they were surprised by more than one thousand kids from the existing clubs waiting for them. “The new kids loved it and saw that Young Life was something a lot of kids were into,” Raley remembered. “It was a great evening all the way around. Leaders and committee people were excited.” Just two weeks later, on April 4, 1958, ten brand-new clubs formed in Seattle.

“We had huge clubs in the fifties,” Raley said. “The largest Young Life club in the country, at one point, was in Salem, Oregon.” That club, led by Doug Coe, witnessed more than four hundred kids coming out every week. It was evident that throughout the country, the Lord was opening doors and drawing kids to Himself.

“A MIRACLE BEYOND BELIEF”

In 1950, while serving on work crew at Silver Cliff, Cy Burress and Jerry Kirk would often hike up the mountain behind camp to read the Bible and pray. On one such trip they saw another camp directly above them, the Round-Up Lodge for Boys.

“They actually prayed Young Life would someday have that camp,” explained Bob Mitchell, who was their work crew boss that summer. “When we heard what those kids were doing, we counseled them to pray more appropriately and not ask God for stupid things like that—especially right after He’d

given us Silver Cliff. It’s a wonder we didn’t ruin their prayer life. Instead they strengthened ours.”

Undeterred, Cy and Jerry continued to pray. Meanwhile, Rayburn was also aware of the ranch, and carried a passion for it that matched the boys’ prayers. At the end of the summer, Rayburn served as guest speaker at Round-Up Lodge’s banquet. Driving out of the camp that night, he confided to Maxine, “Max, these folks don’t know it yet, but this place doesn’t belong to them anymore. I asked our Father for it this evening.”

In October, Ted Benson came across an ad in the back of *The New Yorker* magazine, which touted a half-million-dollar boys’ camp for sale “in the high Continental Divide country of Colorado.” Benson gave the ad to Rayburn as a joke, suggesting the two go in 50-50 on the price.

To Rayburn, however, it was no joke; it was, in fact, a confirmation from the Lord. While the ad never mentioned the camp’s name, Rayburn knew this had to be Round-Up Lodge. After some investigation, it was indeed confirmed to be the camp just up the mountain from Silver Cliff, now listed at an asking price of \$350,000. Rayburn approached the board in January about the unbelievable opportunity that lay before them. They approved the purchase, as long as Rayburn could raise the money from foundations and donors (preferably new ones). Rayburn’s first meeting was with the owner of

Round-Up Lodge, Dr. E. Alfred Marquard. As a result of their meeting, Marquard dropped the asking price down to \$250,000.

Rayburn crisscrossed the country via train to find the funds, and “two months and many miracles later,” he raised the entire amount from nine donors. Later, Rayburn took staff up to the newly named Frontier Ranch, where they dedicated it to the Lord. “We prayed in every building in that place,” said Roy Riviere. “We were overwhelmed with what God had given us!”

Frontier Ranch hosted its first campers a mere six months later, in July 1951. As Emile Cailliet wrote in his book, *Young Life*, “From beginning to end it was all ‘a miracle beyond belief.’ ”

“THE GREATEST KIDS’ CHEF IN THE WORLD”

While speaking on a Young Life weekend in Harvey Cedars, New Jersey, in May 1951, Rayburn met Andy “Goldbrick” Delaney and his wife, Jerry, who worked for a Philadelphia catering company. “Next thing you know,” Jerry said, “he’s asking us if we’d come work for him at a big kids’ camp out in Colorado. We said ‘no,’ so he said he was going to put us on his prayer list. Andy and I looked at each other, both knowing what the other was thinking. ‘This guy is crazy. Put us on a prayer list?’ ”

“Well, we didn’t know what it was like to be in Jim’s prayers!” Within a month the Delaneys were working at Frontier Ranch.

Frog Sullivan remembered an early conversation between Rayburn and his new cook. “Jim, Goldbrick, and I had a meeting one day up in Frontier’s dining room. Jim said, ‘Camp travels on its stomach. You can have the best program in the world, but if you don’t have good food, the program isn’t going to be any good.’ Goldbrick looked at him and said, ‘Boss, it’ll be good.’ And it was.”

The entrance to Frontier Ranch.



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The couple brought far more than good cooking to Frontier. As the first black Young Life staff, their commitment to excellence, love for people, and humble service helped usher in a new era in the mission.

“Goldbrick and Jerry had a profound influence on my life concerning racial issues,” Mal McSwain, longtime staff member, said. “Their attitude and love changed an awful lot of impressions ingrained in so many kids who came out to Frontier from the South in the fifties. It was a powerful thing to see young men and women from these southern states actually fall in love with Goldbrick and Jerry and realize these people not only loved them, but were committed to being their friends for the rest of their lives.”

“Oh, I loved Goldbrick to death,” Frog Sullivan said. “He knew I was a southern white kid and I’m sure he knew the feelings I had, just from growing up in Memphis, but the first time I met him, he said, ‘I know you and I love you,’ and he hugged me.”

It became tradition on the first night of camp for Rayburn to introduce a packed dining hall to “the greatest kids’ chef in the world.” Cheers of “Hurrah for Goldbrick” rang out when the conquering hero entered, replete in tall white chef’s hat and coat.

“There will never be another Goldbrick,” Roy Riviere proclaimed. “With a perfectly straight face, he told me once, ‘Roy, don’t ever trust a skinny cook.’ And he lived up to that!”

For more than a quarter of a century, Goldbrick and Jerry joyfully served thousands of campers, as they served their Lord—whom they both met as a result of their early days in Young Life.

Goldbrick greets the campers.

