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**Built with Faith, Friends
and a few Miracles -**

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LITTLETON — Faith can move mountains. It can also move dozens of tons of retired railroad box cars and baggage cars to the wooded shore of Lake Gaston, there to become the principal housing of an interdenominational youth camp where fun and Christian guidance are equally emphasized.

It was a happy day for the Reverend and Mrs. Erbie W. Mangum, Jr., back in 1969 when surplus Southern Railway box cars were unloaded at the Littleton railroad station and hauled to the site of Camp Willow Run, there to become camp dormitories. At the left, sharing the enthusiasm of Erbie and Linda Mangum, is W. J. Winfree, Raleigh Division Superintendent for Seaboard Coast Line, which furnished a huge wrecker crane for the operation.

The faith that brought the camp into being originated in the Reverend Mr. Erbie W. Mangum, Jr., and his attractive wife, Linda. Cynical indeed would be anyone who denied the role of faith in the conception and growth of Camp Willow Run since 1968.

Erbie Mangum is a Baptist minister and a former nuclear engineer, hav-

ing received his degree in that science from North Carolina State University in 1959. His life depends upon a transplanted kidney donated by his mother. His life today revolves around Camp Willow Run, the young people who inhabit those converted box cars during the weeks of summer, and the mission of imparting Christian beliefs and ideals to those youngsters along the shores of Lake Gaston. Linda Mangum is an equal partner in faith and in the planning and management of the camp.

It was Linda, in fact, who supplied the original idea for a railroad motif at what later became Camp Willow Run. At the time, she was teaching school at Littleton and Erbie was pastor of the Littleton Baptist Church. They had talked up for some time the idea of the church's inaugurating a summer camp program for its young people. Land had been acquired and the search was on for funds and materials to build a physical complex.

"One day Linda said to me, 'Erbie, is there any way we could get an old caboose to use for an infirmary at the camp?'" Mr. Mangum remembers. "And that started me to thinking — why not ask some railroads to give us some retired rolling stock to use as housing? I guess that if I had really considered the magnitude of that idea I might have just forgotten it."

Genial and jovial Erbie Mangum did not forget it, however. The fruition of the idea today is a line of 14





Willow Run Dining Hall is an exact replica of a Southern Railway passenger station, vintage 1890, located at Scottsboro, Alabama. The building is named in memory of the late Mrs. Fiquet Pate Bailey of Raleigh. A memorial fund in her name obtained money to complete the building.

College, took her B.A. in Elementary Education at UNC-Greensboro in 1964, and then entered Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary at Fort Worth, Texas, where her future husband was also a student. He, having started an engineering career after graduating from North Carolina State, had heeded the call to ministry while working as a nuclear chemical engineer at Schenectady, New York. He entered Gordon Divinity School at Wenham, Massachusetts, took a B.D. degree in 1964, and entered the theological seminary in Texas. While still in Massachusetts, he had started and served as minister of a small Baptist church at Billerica, and he and Linda assumed after their marriage that they would

return to New England.

"But God saw to it that I was called to the pastorate here at Littleton," Erbie Mangum says with conviction but without a trace of sanctimony or solemnity. The Mangums bear their religious faith in high good cheer.

Childless themselves, Linda and Erbie Mangum are strongly attracted to children. Their aforementioned idea to start a youth retreat program for the young people of the Littleton church was the genesis of Camp Willow Run.

"Our friends suggested some lake front property, but at first we were doubtful because it was so valuable," Mr. Mangum recalls. Negotiations were entered into with Alvis P. Fleming, a dairy farmer and owner of land

along Lake Gaston's southern shore. The result of the negotiations was sale of 13.4 acres to the Mangums (Linda's schoolteacher salary was the main source of payment) on condition that the land be leased to the church at \$1 per year for operation of a camp offering Christian education. The land has since been gift deeded to Youth Camps for Christ, Inc. Mr. Fleming became one of Camp Willow Run's greatest supporters and boosters. When it became apparent during the first summer's operation of Willow Run as a day camp that it was too large a project for the small church, a nonprofit corporation, Youth Camps for Christ, was formed to hold and operate the camp. Mr. Mangum became chairman of the board and Mr. Fleming, vice chairman.

That first year of operation was as a day camp in the summer of 1968, with Linda Mangum serving as camp director, as she still does. Erbie remained as pastor of the Littleton Baptist Church until 1971; he had only a minimal amount of time to devote to the camp in 1968. But what he did during the time he was working on camp matters is the kernel of this story.

A day camp was fine, but what the Mangums really sought was a camp where the youngsters could stay full-time during a series of week-long summer sessions. But where, without money or expertise in camp buildings, was the wherewithal for structures to be acquired?



Norfolk & Western Railway gave surplus rolling stock to Camp Willow Run, including two baggage cars, one of which is the residence of Erbie and Linda Mangum. Generosity of trucking companies and contractors in the free loan of equipment and personnel solved the logistical problem of getting the huge cars to the camp.



A strange procession of surplus Southern Railway box cars from the Littleton station to Camp Willow Run on the shore of Lake Gaston took place in the summer of 1968. Contractors and railroads furnished the equipment which made this incredible operation possible.

Southern Railway box cars, paneled inside, air-conditioned and eminently habitable, serving as dormitories for the boy and girl campers, as Erbie Mangum's office, as camp library and bookstore, as guest houses, and as counsellor housing. The caboose that Linda Mangum envisioned is there also in its proper place, as is a vintage steam locomotive that heads the picturesque procession at Camp Willow Run.

And there's much more: a second fleet of retired Norfolk and Western Railway box cars awaits conversion into further camp housing. And across the camp grounds sit two long and stately black baggage cars that once rolled for Norfolk and Western. One is a combined counsellor lounge and classrooms. The other is Erbie and Linda Mangum's cozy and comfortable home. There are two conventional buildings at Camp Willow Run: the dining hall (a replica of a Scottsboro, Alabama Southern Railway station built in 1890) and the newest structure, an assembly and recreation hall. The dining hall is named in memory of the late Mrs. Fiquet Pate Bailey, former wife of Superior Court Judge James H. Pou Bailey of Raleigh and daughter of Laurinburg banker-businessman Edwin Pate. Friends of the late Mrs. Bailey — individual and corporate — provided several thousand dollars to complete the structure in her memory after building had come to a halt from a lack of funds.

Just how did all this come about? Through faith, if you like. Or, if you prefer a secular explanation, through extraordinary good fortune and exceedingly persistent and imaginative labor. Everyone concerned, Erbie Mangum most of all, will agree that basic and widespread human and corporate generosity in terms of materials, money and time, were basic to the realization

of Camp Willow Run. Some of those individuals and corporations will be mentioned in this account; many others, because of space limitations, cannot be.

A biographical paragraph about the Mangums: He is a native of Durham; she (the former Linda Elkins) is a native of Newport News, Virginia, who spent most of her childhood in Greensboro. She studied at Mars Hill

Four special weeks at Camp Willow Run are held for students from the N. C. training schools where fun and Christian guidance receive equal emphasis. All the normal recreational facilities and activities of a summer camp are present at this unique installation on the shore of Lake Gaston a few miles north of Littleton.



Which brings us up to Linda Mangum's idea about the caboose-in-firmary. Erbie, whose religious faith includes a strong conviction on the subject of self-help, wrote letters to all the major railway companies in the South, asking for the gift of box cars already or about to be retired from service. He had received advice and encouragement from the Seaboard Coast Line trainmaster at Roanoke Rapids. The letters went out in March of 1969.

A number of encouraging replies came back, but none of the respondents at the time had surplus rolling stock available. None, that is, except President W. Graham Claytor, Jr., of Southern Railway Company, who said he would immediately arrange for the donation of the 14 box cars which Erbie Mangum had requested. The surplus caboose, Mr. Claytor added, would come later, as soon as it was retired from service.

Delivery time was set for mid-July of 1969. The Mangums had prayed. God and man had responded. That initial success, however, immediately bred another problem: How were 14 box cars weighing several tons each to be moved from the railroad siding at Littleton to the camp site four miles north of town?

Mr. Mangum, the minister with an engineering background, had a firm idea of how to do it from a technical standpoint. All it would require would be one large railroad derrick crane to lift the cars from their wheel trucks, three lowboy truck trailers to move the car bodies to the camp site, and two cranes at the site to lift the cars off the trailers and deposit them on prepared foundations.

How, without funds, to obtain the use of such heavy and expensive equipment? At this point in the story, Providence, or felicitous coincidence if you prefer, brought to Mr. Mangum's acquaintance and aid Jesse Helms of Raleigh, then the executive vice president and editorial voice of WRAL Television.

Mr. Helms was meeting with a contractor, Mr. J. D. Pegram, Jr., who is also one of the camp's board of directors, to discuss plans for a lake-side house on Lake Gaston. Afterwards, Mr. Pegram outlined plans for the camp, "I asked Mr. Helms if he would give Mr. Mangum five minutes of time on television to make an appeal for the camp's needs," says Mr. Pegram. "Mr. Helms answered that he couldn't give five minutes of time, but he would be glad to give thirty minutes."

A 30-minute feature program about the camp plans was produced and shown on the Raleigh station. But Mr. Helms, who is now North Carolina's first Republican U. S. Senator of this century, did far more than that. He made calls, wrote letters, and used station personnel to help arrange for the loan of the trucks and cranes needed for the box car operation. A steady friend of Willow Run, Senator Helms is a member of the camp's board of directors.

By early summer, and after dozens of starts and stops, three large contractors had agreed to provide the necessary equipment. They were the Nello Teer Company of Durham, Bowers Construction Company of Raleigh, and Foster Construction Company with headquarters at Wadley, Georgia. And Seaboard Coast Line agreed to bring a huge railroad wrecker crane from Rocky Mount to Littleton.

It was all arranged to take place on July 8, 1969. Then came word from Southern Railway that delivery of the box cars would be delayed until July 15.

"That was a serious complication," Mr. Mangum relates. "It meant we had to get in touch with the other companies and ask them to re-arrange the scheduling of their equipment. Somehow it all worked out, and the Lord had a hand in it. It started raining on the morning of July 8, when the box cars were originally supposed to be delivered. It rained hard, and it rained all week long. With all the mud out at the camp site, there was no way on earth we could have moved those box cars that week.

"On the morning of the 15th, the day dawned bright and clear. The box cars came in. The equipment from Teer and Bowers and Foster showed up. And then I heard and saw that Seaboard crane rumbling along the track. It was the greatest moment of my life. We started at about eight in the morning and we had every box car moved and in place at 3:30 that afternoon."

That would be a happy ending to any story, but for this one it was just a big beginning. The caboose came and was installed one year later. Still later came more box cars and the baggage cars, about which there is another intriguing incident which must be told.

In 1971, Norfolk and Western Railway donated to the camp several retired box cars and two 70-foot baggage cars, proud relics of the days when the railroad passenger business still rode high. The logistics of moving box cars to the camp site had already

been worked out to an exact science, but the problem of those big, heavy baggage cars was something else again. And again private industry and individuals solved it. Carolina Crane Company of Raleigh and Dennis Equipment Company of Durham supplied the hardware. All was arranged for everything to come together at Littleton on a certain day of September, 1971. Again, the weather threatened, this time with a hurricane moving up the southern coast. All indications pointed, shortly before the appointed time, to the storm's coming ashore along the North Carolina coast and drenching the area at exactly the wrong time.

"You can be sure we did a lot of praying over that hurricane," declares Erbie Mangum. "If it had rained hard that day we could never have moved all those cars to the camp, and there was no telling when the equipment could be brought together again."

The outcome you've probably guessed. Contrary to weather forecasts, the storm stalled off the coast. The appointed moving day was clear and the terrain dry. Moving went off without a hitch, and by the time the rains did come, everything was safely in place.

Acquisition of the locomotive is still another story. Mr. Mangum discovered the engine sitting on a siding at Sanford. It belonged to a Chicago man who had purchased it with the intention of restoring it for a railroad museum. Contacted by Mr. Mangum, he agreed to sell it for \$3,000 which, so far as Camp Willow Run's capital reserve is concerned, might as well have been \$30,000. To the rescue, as he had on previous occasions, came Raleigh broadcaster and now Senator Jesse Helms. From anonymous sources he raised the necessary money. The locomotive and tender were purchased. Southern Railway moved it on flat cars to Littleton. McLeod Trucking and Rigging Company of Charlotte provided oversize equipment to move the engine to its present resting place at Willow Run.

Perhaps somewhere in America there exists a record of more extensive and varied corporate giving to a worthy project than the story of Camp Willow Run. It would have to be a whopper to top the list recently put together by Erbie Mangum. His list includes nearly 100 gifts of materials, equipment, time and money from businesses within and beyond the borders of North Carolina, and there are others in the files which need to be added to the list when time permits.

The gifts are structural steel, air-conditioners, kitchen equipment, stone, plastic sheeting, septic tanks, pipe and fittings, printing, paneling, electrical wiring, paint — on and on goes the list. It would scarcely be fair to list any of these donors without listing them all.

Again, how was all this possible? Says Mr. Mangum, who still occasionally has difficulty believing it himself:

"I would make lists of what we needed. Then I would get the names and the presidents of corporations out of business directories. I sat down and wrote letters to them — often there would be letters to three different companies manufacturing what we needed. I explained the nature of our camp, its non-profit nature, and our needs. And I asked their help.

In some cases there was no response. In others there were polite refusals, pointing to corporate policy against such giving. There were, of course, many letters of cordial acquiescence. And there were instances where no reply was received, but deliveries of the requested materials came unannounced and unexpected.

"I get embarrassed," says Mr. Mangum, "when people want to give me credit for all of this. I deserve very little credit. God motivated me and showed me the direction. He also motivated hundreds of wonderful and generous people whose time and help actually built Camp Willow Run."

Willow Run opened as a residential camp in the summer of 1970. Camp terms run for one week. There are program groupings for children in three age brackets spanning school grades three through 12. Campers are drawn mainly from North Carolina

and Virginia, but they have come from as far away as Mississippi and California. The cost for young campers is kept as low as possible — only enough to meet operating expenses, the Mangums say. The staff includes Erbie Mangum as Willow Run's executive director, Linda Mangum as director, five male and five female counsellors, plus the service staff found at all such camps. To be eligible as a Willow Run counsellor, applicants must have had at least one year of college. Their average age is in the early twenties.

The exposure to Christian ideals and guidance is offered all the youngsters, of course, but so also are swimming, canoeing, sailing, hiking, archery, music and all the other activities familiar to summer campers past and present.

"We have a lot of fun here," Mr. Mangum declares. "We want to be sure that the youngsters leave here knowing that the Christian life is by no means a drab life."

Children whose parents pay their way, and who are physically healthy and situated within excellent familial environments, attend Camp Willow Run. So, also, do children with handicaps, and those dwelling on society's bottom rung.

Last summer, in cooperation with the North Carolina Department of Social Rehabilitation and Control, approximately one third of all the children in the state's correctional schools attended Willow Run during special weeks set aside for them. The Mangums are presently looking for sponsors to send more of these youngsters in the state's custody to Willow Run

each summer.

Another group of disadvantaged youngsters sent to Willow Run are deaf children. They mingle with the other campers and by the end of a single week many of the normal young people have learned sufficient sign language to converse with their less fortunate contemporaries. Mr. Mangum says Hargrove (Skipper) Bowles of Greensboro, a good friend of the Mangums and of Willow Run, suggested this program.

Last summer, a girl named Kathy, who is an inmate of a state correctional school, attended Willow Run for a week. Later she sent the Mangums a letter, the first paragraph of which we quote verbatim:

"I hope this letter find you in the best of health. Will there not much to say to you. Because I told you all most everything in the last letter. There are a few things left. Will to start with I'm still trying to live a Christian lift (sic). It hard but I won't give up. I might stumble and fall but God there to pick me up when I do. I've got to keep on trying."

For Erbie and Linda Mangum, such letters as Kathy's make their years of labor seem as child's play.

"We — the people who operate Camp Willow Run — are the greatest beneficiaries of all this," says Erbie. "God gave us the privilege of helping it to happen, and we pray that He will keep on doing so."

If one may be so presumptuous as to predict the acts of the Almighty, it appears likely that God will continue to smile on the Mangums and that spot of earth called Camp Willow Run. ●

On June 16, 1975, death claimed the earthly life of Erbie W. Mangum, Jr. The work and ministry of Camp Willow Run continues to grow. There is a twelve week summer camping ministry for children in grades 3-8 and youth in grades 9-12. From late August through May, the facilities are available for Christian retreats and meetings.

For further information contact:

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