

Dr. Austin's Dream

A message from Canoe Island French Camp's founder, the late Dr. Warren Austin

When I was young, as World War I was ending, I used to read every book in the little lumber-town library at Cosmopolis, Washington. One of my golden discoveries was a series of "Twin" books: in each of these the author would reveal a new country to me through the eyes and adventures of a set of twins, always a boy and a girl. My favorite book was "The French Twins," (although "The Belgian Twins" was a close second). Right then and there, I decided that, outside my own country, the French, especially the children, were the most wonderful people in the world. I marveled at their courage, their fierce loyalty to their country, their charming manners, customs and traditions. And best of all, they could speak that beautiful, musical language, French! Thus began my love affair with the French.



My enthusiasm only increased as I swept across France with General Patton's Third Army, in the 49th Field Hospital, during World War II. Years later, when my daughter was ready to learn a foreign language, we could find no appropriate French school or camp in the West so, with the help of Le Lyceé Francais de Los Angeles, we created one on Canoe Island: Institut Francile, the French Camp in the San Juans.

With such a glorious setting, in the heart of the San Juans, on our own 47-acre island, and under the "umbrella" of the surrounding Olympic and Cascade mountains, our success was assured. But we wanted to be something more than a healthful outdoor camp with swimming, sailing and other appropriate activities. We wanted our campers to grow to appreciate, consciously or not, the wonders of the forest, the sky and the water - the environment - while living and growing up with other intellectually curious young people from around the world. Without being academic, we wanted them to learn to appreciate the manners, morals and traditions of their own country by comparing them (in sports, language, drama and other activities) with those of France. We wanted them to learn to be ladies and gentlemen and future leaders of their country without losing the spontaneous joy of shared outdoor living, without the artifices of a pseudo-sophisticated society. We wanted them to discover that being kind, courteous and curious was not old fashioned and out-of-date, but filled with the pleasure of discovery and maturity. We wanted them to be proud of themselves. With a French Accent!

And now, almost three decades later, we are thrilled with the results that our wonderful staffs and campers have created. These are the traditions that you are entrusted with. We hope you, too, will have great pleasure carrying on our traditions and becoming part of the fabric of this, surely one of the most wonderful and unique camps in the world. Welcome! Bienvenue!

Warren R. Austin, M.D., C.C.D
Founder: 1911 - 1999