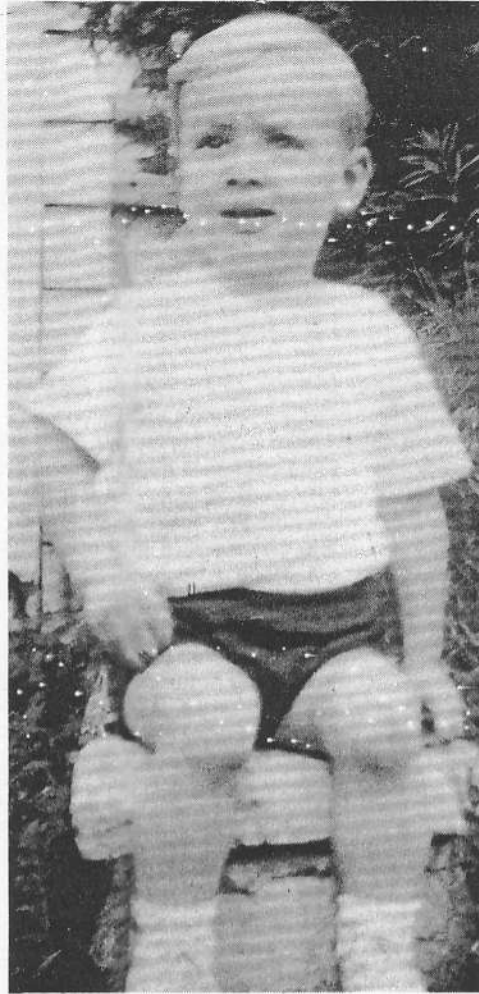


Childhood Days at the Forum

By Mark Kulieke, Green Bay, Wisconsin

In the days of the Forum, bringing the Urantia Papers into being and planning for their publication and dissemination was apparently regarded as a serious adult matter. The custodians of the revelation at 533 Diversey Parkway in Chicago did not want kids around gumming up the works. Children were not permitted within the precincts of 533, with just a couple of exceptions. As a Forum kid, meaning a child of Forum members, I recall the occasions where we were let in and I looked forward to each event with keen anticipation. The first one of the year was Palm Sunday. My father, mother, sister Lynne and I along with numerous uncles, aunts and cousins would usually all rendezvous at my grandparents' home about three miles down Diversey Parkway. We caravanned in from there. Usually six to twelve kids were at these special events. Children were allowed to go to the Forum meetings for the annual communion celebration, and then attend the party held afterward that included punch and cookies. I recall being included in the solemn Remembrance service and drinking the grape juice out of the tiny communion glasses. When we weren't participating in the service, we generally removed ourselves to one corner of the first floor and tried to play and socialize in a somewhat muted manner. I believe we all realized we had to be on better-than-ordinary behavior at the Forum.

The next family occasion of the year was Dr. Sadler's birthday celebration in mid-June. This was not a meeting, but a party held in the doctor's residence on the third floor. This was especially enjoyable for we were celebrating not only his birthday, but also the end of the school season and the beginning of summer. Dr. Sadler received his visitors solidly ensconced in his favorite overstuffed armchair at the head of the living room which lined up with the hallway. He was short and chubby with white hair and glasses and he had the anatomy of a Santa Claus sitting there. Forumites filed by one at a time to extend their greetings. In my child mind, Dr. Sadler was the epitome of a revered, wise old man and all kids were always quite decorous and in awe of the Forum's leader. Beyond piping up, "Hello," conversation was generally limited. It was a setting where he talked and we listened.



The author, Mark Kulieke, about to embark on a Forum outing.



Dr. William S. Sadler welcoming guests to Beverly Shores picnic.

The third occasion which was a family affair was the celebration of Michael's Birthday on August 21st at 8:00 p.m. Whatever else might befall us; the world might crash, but we came to know that we would still be at 533 Diversey Parkway on the evening of August 21st. This annual service was first initiated about 1935 and continued right up into the nineties at the same time and the same place. My cousin David and I recall that the outside temperature on the evening of August 21st was invariably 100 degrees with no breeze and this was long before air conditioning arrived at 533. We always sought window seats. It didn't help much. We came to accept that celebrating Jesus' birthday meant sweating profusely, perhaps to remind us of what the temperature in Palestine was like and what Jesus himself probably went through. In fact, after air conditioning was added, it always felt like something was missing from an August 21st celebration. Recognizing the importance of the occasion, we tried hard not to squirm in the heat and did our best to listen intently as the most honored of Forum leaders would read of the Master's life on Urantia.

While a handful of Forumites may have glared at us kids severely, the overwhelming majority always seemed to greet us warmly, almost like long-lost friends. Old Mrs. Kellog was always very friendly as well as Christy and the other ladies who then and later worked in the 533 office. The parties on the third floor generally involved punch and various trays of goodies and hours of storytelling by Dr. Sadler. He would generally keep the entire room enthralled as he told of his various experiences in detective work, undercover work, medicine and psychiatry, as well as the many anecdotes involving superhuman visitors and his best forecast of the future of our planet.

The only other Forum event we were allowed in on was not held at 533. It was the annual picnic. From around 1950 to the mid 60s, it was held at Dr. Sadler's summer lodge at Beverly Shores, Indiana. Prior to that, it had been held at the senior Hales' residence in Oak Park, just west of Chicago. But from the time I was ambulatory, around 1950, Forum kids were seen scampering about the sand dunes every summer in late June at Pine Lodge in Beverly Shores. There were generally about one or two dozen kids at these events in addition to 50 or 60 adults.

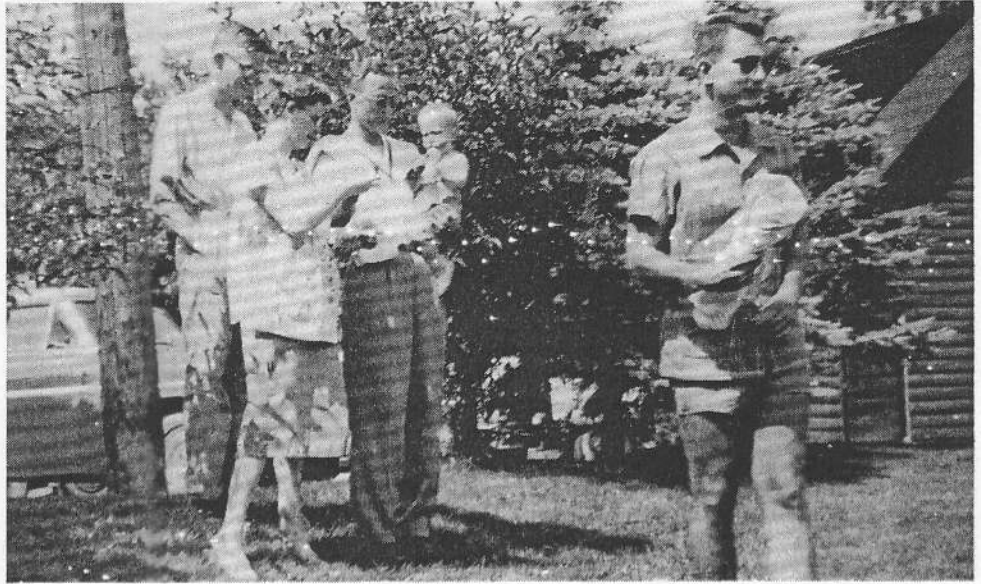
Pine Lodge was a grand estate, made entirely of logs. There was a very large main house with a big fireplace and wooden porches running the length of two sides. It was fun to run up and down and hang off the rustic porches. The front of the house had a nice elevated view of Lake Michigan. Two small bunk houses were just down the drive from the house where Forumites could change into their bathing suits and head down the long wooded drive to the beach. A three-car garage with an apartment over it bordered on the extensive back yard. There were several horseshoe pits and a shuffleboard court behind the garage. The estate was entirely surrounded by wooded dunes. Because no other homes could be seen, the area felt like an island of Urantia activity amid an ocean of vegetation.

The beach was broad and sandy and the water at the southern end of the lake was quite warm. Swimming was generally the first item on the agenda after a long, hot drive through Chicago and northern Indiana. Kids and adults alike splashed in the water and played ball in the sand. This was followed by a picnic on the broad lawn and some group singing led by my father and Uncle (Warren and Alvin Kulieke). There was, of course, considerable socializing going on throughout the long afternoon by all. A few adults napped in the shade. In the early evening, most people started to work their way up to the manor house to visit in the large main room with its cozy fireplace. This was, once again, an occasion for listening intently while Dr. Sadler served up story after story. He was a natural storyteller in the grand tradition. His talks, it seemed, served to inspire us all and give us all another boost of morale before we went back into the world where nobody knew, or could appreciate, the new revelation of truth we felt part of. At least this is how I felt and others seemed to feel. When Dr. Sadler talked, the clock stood still and we would become conscious once again of the experience we were all sharing in.

I remember in those days feeling odd and different in the everyday world. When I came together with my relatives at a Urantia gathering, it felt good and normal to be involved with the Urantia Papers. These occasions were the payoff times when you felt you were among a special group of people and blessed to be a part of this fledgling project. The picnics reminded me that I was participating in a historic moment on this beleaguered planet.

The Pine Lodge property was sold a few years before Dr. Sadler died when he was in failing health. Last year I tried to go back and visit the grand old estate to bring myself up-to-date with my childhood memories and found a vacant meadow where the house and outbuildings once stood. The property is now part of the Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore. The long drive up the dune looked like a woodland path and only some old pine trees and some utility poles revealed the positions where the buildings and grounds once existed. I stood in the meadow where once a hundred Forumites used to picnic and the sun streamed down and the only sound was that of innumerable birds. In this reflective moment, I pondered how fleeting our mortal lives and doings are and how rapidly the elements of history having to do with the birth of our revelation are escaping from our grasp. Many of the physical sites of significance are gone and 533 itself may soon be beyond our recovery. Only a handful of the old Forum members are left to share their memories of the times when God and man worked together to shape a new revelation. ●

(Portions of this article are modeled after a recent feature in Pervaded Space and are used with permission.)



Arriving at Beverly Shores: Larry Bowman, Carolyn and Tom Kendall with Barrie Bedell, and Clyde Bedell.



Jane Allen, Phil Copenhagen, Jr., Mrs. Edmond Kulieke, Kenton Stephens, unidentified child, Olga DuVal, Edna Schell and Bob Burton at buffet.



Dr. Sadler, Art, and Sandra Burch with 81-candle birthday cake.