

Ruggles Camp hosts 152nd Camp Meeting July 17-28, 2024
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The theme for the 152nd Camp Meeting is “Deep River”. This is the title of an African American Spiritual that was popularized by a Gospel singer by the name of Henry Burleigh in 1916 and Marian Anderson recorded it in 1923. It has been recorded by many others since those days and it has been called “*perhaps the best known and best loved spiritual.*”

I confess I did not know the history of this wonderful hymn when I heard it on Christian Radio back in the winter months of 2023. The days were cold, snow was falling and I was making numerous trips from Maysville to Flatwoods KY. My precious, saintly mother was dying of cancer. She was 86 years of age and she had battled her cancer for about a year with some degree of success followed by several episodes of failure.

On my trips to Flatwoods, I would often stop by Ruggles Campground to pray. The Camp is generally quiet during the winter months but it is a place of solitude and many times it has served as a place of sanctuary. This was one of those times. I had the radio on a Christian station, not really paying much attention when I heard the chorus of this famous hymn by a choir: “*Deep River...my home is over Jordan, Deep River, Lord, I want to cross over into campground.*” This chorus was sung two or three times. I was stopped in my tracks as it was sung beautifully, meditatively, reverently. I’m not sure I ever heard it before and I was slightly caught off guard at the *last word* of the chorus, the word “*campground*”. In most Christian songs and poetry when we talk about “crossing over Jordan”, we are crossing over into the “Promise Land”, or to “Canaan Land”. These are the words I was expecting to hear. But on this day the beautiful voices were singing “*I want to cross over into Campground*”. I was alone, cold, broken hearted at my mother’s failing health, and I was in the middle of Ruggles Campground. I felt as if God was talking to me.

Tears of assurance began to fall. Mom’s condition was getting noticeably worse. The one who lived and modeled faith to me was approaching heaven’s shore. Two quotes from famous people regarding their mothers rang through my soul on many occasions and this was one of them: Abraham Lincoln said, “*All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother*”, the second from John Wesley, “*I learned more about Christianity from my mother than from all the theologians in England.*”

Both of these quotes fit my mother and my love for her to my core. It is as if they were shouting from the inner sanctuary of my soul. I was crying to the Lord like the Psalmist, “*Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord; Lord hear my voice.*” (Ps. 130:1) Mom went through countless crucibles that made her shine like the sun. Somehow I knew this was a deep river that she would not come out of...not on this side of Jordan. In the solitude and sanctuary of the Campground, I realized that God was walking with both of us and neither one of us were alone. This promise gave me a measure of peace for the days ahead.

The Lord called her home on March 9th, 2024. Her race was run. All five of her children and many grandchildren testify with Proverbs 31 woman, “*rising up and calling her blessed*”. We watched her Deep Rivers first hand. She endured them with much grace. Maybe that is why she was such a student and lover of the Scriptures. Her life identified with the stories when life was at its lowest. Eve in the Garden, Joseph in the pit, Jonah in the belly, and Earth’s greatest low--Calvary’s cross. Yes my friends, *Deep River* is an apt metaphor of the Father’s Hand on the Potter’s Wheel of our lives. In our living and in our dying, may Christ navigate our faith in God’s kingdom, a kingdom which will never end. Join us at the Campground this year!