

Campfire Magic

Jim Sharp and John Spencer
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It is very likely that a boy's-or an adult's-fondest memories of his Scouting experiences are of the times he sat around an evening's campfire with some of his best buddies. Those campfires had a magical quality to them-a quality that often defies description. One would be hard pressed to come up with a better way to end a day in camp, or an evening's activity, than with a campfire. But leaders with the skill and confidence to make good campfires happen often seem few and far between.

Perhaps you are one of those leaders who find it difficult to even think about involving your boys in a campfire, let alone set out to plan one by yourself. It is our hope that the following will help and that you will use the information, ideas and methods we set out, to help develop your skills in planning and leading campfires.

In our review of the resources available to Scouters it quickly became apparent that we have a considerable wealth of information on how to lay fires, how to light them with special effects, how to make campfire robes and torches, etc. What we found most lacking is information on how to plan and provide the leadership for a good campfire program. That's what we have set out to provide you with in this article.

A close relationship exists between the physical arrangements for a campfire and the actual program. While a beautiful setting, a well-designed and well-laid fire (lighted with a special method) is awe inspiring in itself, the magic soon wanes with a poorly planned and executed program. Take the time to develop a quality program, one that is well planned and with close attention paid to format and content, and it will be difficult to detract from it with less than ideal physical arrangements. No doubt you've seen an experienced campfire leader hold a group "in the palm of his hand" in a school gymnasium or church hall seated around an artificial campfire! The reason a good campfire leader is able to do it is program. He has paid particular attention to designing a campfire program that will involve and hold the interest of all the participants.

Why A Campfire?

Perhaps B.-P.'s original idea of a campfire was simply a group of Scouts meeting together in camp at the end of a busy day discussing their achievements during that day and making plans for the following day. Campfires can still serve that very useful purpose and they can do much more. Music can express a mood, release emotion or bring a group closer together. Acting (often in the form of campfire skits) serves a very useful part in a boy's development through which he can learn attitudes and appreciations and through which social and emotional developments are stimulated. Value is not limited to participants. While an audience gains satisfaction by identification with the performers, an enthusiastic audience may so stimulate the players that their performance reaches a high standard.

Whether it be song, acting, or other activity, what is most important is not the quality, it is not the enjoyment of those who hear it or see it. Rather, the real virtue is the effort a boy or group of boys have made-the self consciousness which has been overcome and the sense of achievement when he (or they) sit down to a rousing yell from the rest of the participants.

A campfire is more than just a gathering of people around a fire. Rather than being just an isolated event, a campfire becomes an integral part of Scouting in helping boys develop into the men we want them to become.

A Sing-Song Or A Campfire?

All too often we tend to feel that we can't just sit around a warming fire and have a sing-song. Somehow we have a feeling inside us that someone, somewhere, is expecting us to have a campfire. There is an important difference between a campfire and a sing-song and it is important to realize that either may be appropriate.

Sing-songs can happen whereas campfires must be planned. Don't deprive your boys (or yourself!) of the enjoyment a sing-song can provide. Let them happen, perhaps, at first, with a little urging by yourself. But once you have introduced your boys to the joy of song you'll find that singing will become a natural expression of happiness and well-being. And they will happen-on the trail, in a bus or perhaps as a part of some of your regular meetings.

Campfires are usually seen as more formal events than sing-songs. A campfire requires a considerable amount of advanced planning and can be specifically designed to provide opportunities for further development of boys (or adults) through song leading, acting, etc.

Our experience has shown that there are, perhaps, two rather distinct types of campfires. We've classified them as formal and informal. An informal campfire usually takes place with a bit less planning and a bit less pomp and ceremony than what we have classified as a formal campfire.

The most popular type of campfire is the informal one and this is the one which boys are most often exposed to. There may be some campfire robes; there might be a special technique for lighting the fire; there may be some other special effects such as torches lighting the path to the campfire area, etc. But, just as likely, almost everyone will be gathered around a hastily built campfire with nothing more than the bare necessities in the way of seating and special effects.

The formal campfire has a real flavour of Scouting to it with everyone displaying their prized campfire robes; the campfire circle has been thought out and is very neat; the fire has been laid with care and is lighted as though a thunderbolt has struck it; the pathway to the campfire circle has been cleverly illuminated to guide participants and specially designed torches have been placed at strategic locations surrounding the campfire circle to provide the necessary illumination for skits and stunts; the campfire chief enters the circle and receives an enthusiastic greeting; a well planned program involving most of the participants is executed with skill. The fire burns low and the campfire concludes with an appropriate "Scouters Five Minutes", one or two well-chosen spirituals or quiet songs, a prayer and "Taps". Quietly the campfire chief leaves the circle, followed by the participants, all of whom are in a thoughtful and peaceful mood. A suitable conclusion to another fine Scouting day.

It is important to realize that the informal campfire and the formal campfire each have their place in Scouting. All too often, though, we find that the only people exposed to the formal campfire are Scouters. Youth and adult alike have a common need for pomp and ceremony and it is important that we recognize this need and provide the opportunity for it to be met. By providing the opportunities for your boys to participate in a formal campfire you'll be providing them with some of those memories which will remain in their hearts for many years to come.

The Fire

One very good resource for ideas in building various types of fires suitable for your campfire is the Scout Leaders' Handbook. It is important to remember that the fire will serve as the focal point for your campfire and particular care must be paid to the planning and laying of the fire. It just isn't suitable to pile a great assortment of brush in the centre of your campfire circle and hope that it will light when you throw a match into it!

The fire should be designed to provide warmth to the participants, but it is equally important to ensure that the intensity of the heat will not develop to a point where participants are forced to vacate their spot on the log to retreat to a more safe distance. Through careful attention to design and through experience you'll soon learn to size your fire appropriately so that it will provide just the amount of warmth you require.

Pay particular attention to the type of wood you use in laying the fire. While you may often find that you have little choice in the matter, try to find dry hardwoods to minimize smoke and sparking.

Special techniques for lighting your campfire can add a real sense of drama which helps to build that magical quality we are seeking. The Scout Leaders' Handbook offers a number of workable suggestions and other ideas have appeared in The Leader (see December, 1979 issue). Whatever means you choose to light your fire, take the time to try it out several times in advance of the "big moment" to ensure that it is going to work well. In the event that your method fails in spite of your calculated preparations, be ready with several matches in your pocket! Don't direct particular attention to the fact that it failed, for few will have known of your plans if you've done your planning well.

Appoint a particular person to be the "fire tender" for the duration of the campfire. It will be his duty to ensure that the fire is properly laid (well in advance, of course) and to tend the fire during the campfire program. He will need to be on his toes and ready to take prompt action if a log rolls from the fire, if the flames leap too high and begin to threaten nearby trees (!) or if a small amount of additional wood need be added to the fire if it burns more quickly than you had planned. Make certain that adequate fire protection equipment is readily at hand whenever you plan a campfire.

Your fire should burn in close relationship to your program-strive for a fire that springs to life with bright flames and burns down at about the same rate as you move towards the close of your program. As everyone joins in the singing of "Taps" and the campfire chief intones the inspiring words of the closing, the fire should be little more than a bed of glowing embers.

The Campfire Chief

The campfire chief is responsible for the campfire program. It is important that he (or she) be ready with a well planned program. He will normally arrange with others to be involved in leading various parts of the program (a job which must be done well in advance to give everyone sufficient time to plan his contribution). The campfire chief is responsible for the campfire opening and closing and often is involved in the "Scouter's Five Minutes". If he does his job well he'll find that he often serves as the "co-ordinator" and involves as many others as is feasible.

The campfire chief should always be held in respect by the campfire participants (regardless of the participants' ages). Normally, he enters the campfire circle after the participants have entered and are standing. The amount of pomp and ceremony which the campfire chief builds into the program is strictly a matter of personal choice. However, he should be greeted with an enthusiastic and respectful cheer such as the popular "Hail, Chief!" as he takes his place.

Anyone can be a campfire chief-all it takes is a bit of imagination, good planning and confidence. Everyone tackles the job in a different way and, perhaps, that is what makes a campfire chief seem a bit of a mystical person. Don't fall into the trap of feeling that you have to imitate to do a good job-your individuality is the most important aspect to consider.

The Setting

What could be more ideal for a campfire setting than a quiet spot in a bit of a hollow, surrounded by trees or a tranquil campfire circle near the shore of a lake? It is important to consider the location for your campfire circle. Try to make it a special spot, away from the more lived-in areas of your camp. Make it a spot people will be drawn to.

If it is a spot which you will be able to use more than once, then you will want to take the time to make it something very special. Again, your imagination and your boys' imagination will help to develop a very special place. Careful attention can be paid to comfortable seating (eight to twelve inch logs raised slightly off the ground will serve admirably for many years) and you may even want to develop special seating arrangements for the campfire chief, special guests and, possibly, other leaders.

An Indoor Campfire?

It isn't necessary to wait for a warm summer evening for a campfire! It is quite possible to have an excellent campfire take place indoors on a cold winter's night with participants seated around an artificial fire constructed with birch logs and various arrangements of coloured paper, cellophane, lighting and, maybe, a small fan to give life to the flames. All it takes is a little imagination and ingenuity to provide a suitable atmosphere to complement the campfire program. Take the necessary precautions to ensure that your fire doesn't go up in smoke!

The important element for your indoor campfire will always be the campfire program. Pay particular attention to developing your program and you'll find that everyone will soon forget they don't have the open sky overhead.

Campfire Robes

A campfire robe serves admirably to provide the extra protection required against the cold and dampness of the evening while our hearts and the front of our bodies are warmed by the fire. And, too, it can display our traditions and personal history. A smart campfire robe portraying the wearer's history, his achievements and the events of importance in his Scouting career, can be an inspiration to others (boys and adults) to want to work to earn the right to wear a robe which is equally grand. Articles dealing with campfire robe styles have appeared in the October '77 and May '79 issues of *The Leader*. If you don't have access to back issues, contact your Scout Council office and they may be able to provide you with copies of these articles. Take the time to plan your campfire robe to ensure that it will serve you well for many years.

Duration and Pace

Duration, pace, content and style are some of the considerations which you will have to attend to long before the first song is sung.

The duration of the program is largely determined by the nature and age of the participants. In our experience a campfire program should range in time from a maximum of 20 to 30 minutes for Beavers and Cubs and 40 to 50 minutes being about right for Scouts, Venturers and Rovers. We have found that it is wise never to exceed 50 minutes even when working with a group of adults. The point of having what might appear to be a campfire of short duration is quite simple: if it is going well we leave participants in a very positive mood-longing for more; if it isn't going so well it is wise to conclude it without further prolonging the experience. It is difficult to talk about duration for a campfire program without, at the same time, mentioning the pace, since the two factors combine to give us the framework upon which to place the content. The pace has often been described as a mirror image of the fire itself: rising quickly to a plateau of bright activity and then gradually diminishing, as do the flames, becoming like a glow given off by coals. Below is an outline of a program incorporating this principle of a quick build-up (active) and slowing down toward the closing (reflective).

- Opening
- Welcoming song
- Action song
- Yell
- Skit
- Yell
- Lively or action song
- Round
- Game or skit
- Yell
- General song
- Presentation (if any -followed by yell)
- General song
- Quiet song
- Yarn or "Scouter's Five"
- Quiet song
- Spiritual

Spiritual
Prayer
Closing

The program is sometimes viewed as being a parallel to a day in the life at camp. Either way of looking at the program, as a fire or as a day, is useful in that they both provide us with a guide or a model for us to use in the process of planning the program.

Given that we now have an idea of how long we want the campfire program to be and a particular conception of how we would like to see the pace of the program develop, we can now address ourselves to the question of content.

Program Content

If we are in the business of putting on a campfire in the first place, we might just as well admit that it is a "production" and as such, the content should be managed. As a production, it should have some style and we have found that this is best achieved by using a theme. Not all of the content has to rigidly adhere to the theme but it does help to set and maintain the tone if the opening/closing, yarn (or "Scouter's Five Minutes") and the method used in lighting the fire are tied together. A theme also helps in that it often suggests particular songs and skits that might be appropriate and further help to make the program flow. Think of your program as a piece of music and imagine it flowing in phrases.

The spontaneous part of the program is where the action is—fast, rousing songs, fun action songs that get people moving, simple rounds in which all participate, chants, round games, skits and yells all go into this early half of the program. The specific items will, in part, be determined by the nature and age of the participants and, in part, by the material known to those doing the presentation or leading the group in song. A point to be made at this time is that it is preferable to sing songs that most people know, since it is desirable to have everyone participating. Singing songs known to most, or singing songs that can be "picked up quickly" by the novice, ensure good participation and a feeling on the part of most people that they are involved in the shared campfire experience. Skits, games around the circle, yells and chants should be self explanatory or described easily in a few words in order to be understood. The concept behind a campfire is one of a shared experience and despite the fact that not all of us can easily act, dance or sing, we must be made to feel that we are a part of the proceedings or the point of the exercise is lost.

We have called the second part of the program reflective which describes the mood we are striving for. This portion can be broken down into three parts: the first being the two songs prior to the yarn, slowing the pace in preparation for the yarn; the second is the yarn, giving the participants a few thoughts to ponder, and is followed by the final part which eases the pace down, reinforcing the spiritual aspects of Scouting. Let's look at the parts one at a time.

We have indicated a transition point in the program outline which is appropriate for presentations. If they are fun presentations they fit in with the tone of the preceding program. If they are of a more serious nature then they will fit in with the tone of the later program. Either way, they should be followed up with our Scouting form of appreciation—the yell. The two songs following the presentations set the scene for the yarn. We are sure that you have all had experiences trying to present a few words to a less than receptive audience. Bringing down the high spirits is essential and the two songs prior to the yarn serve to do the latter well.

The yarn should be a brief presentation giving a focus to the late day activities. Four to five minutes is usually adequate to make your point. In developing your theme and content for your yarn, it is probably best to look at some activity or incident, common to all of the participants, that happened during the day. However, there are many suitable topics, and suggestions often appear in *The Leader*. B.-P.'s *Scouting For Boys* has a wealth of ideas. We have seen very effective use made of poems, legends and known stories (such as those about B.-P.) as a yarn. You have a wide selection from which to choose.

The final part of the program consists of a quiet song, spirituals, the prayer and the closing. This part and the yarn should serve to highlight the whole campfire program. The participants should

be comfortable with each other and relaxed after a day's activity, and the later part of the program should be supportive of this mood. Most spirituals are well known and leading can often be handled by the shy one in the group without great fear. The closing prayer can take the form of Scout silence or of a more formal benediction. The official closing of the campfire by the campfire chief follows.

After the closing, the campfire chief should make a point of leaving the area decisively to alleviate hesitation about what one should do once the campfire is over. Participants should follow quietly.

Style

Style could be the subject of an article in its own right. However, here are a few points to help bring success to you and your campfire.

The campfire chief should have everyone aware of those who precede him on the program, to ensure that each person involved knows when it is time for his contribution.

This allows introductions and fumbling to be kept to a minimum.

The campfire chief should also be aware that slip-ups will happen no matter how well the program has been planned. Be prepared to quickly smooth over the ragged edges when required. Quick thinking on your feet is a great asset.

Flair helps-but, if you don't have it, good execution of your program can be equally beneficial.

If you must read from a written program do so! Give some creative thought to making your notes a part of the props-for example, inscribe your opening, closing and other program notes on scrolls of paper or birchbark.

Well designed torches can be placed to illuminate your notes. But if you don't have a torch and feel you need a flashlight, then use one. It is far better to do so than to be constantly fumbling while trying to have the flames from the fire illuminate your page.

The list of ideas is endless! Perhaps we can best summarize this point by saying that you are in the process of managing a production and it is worthwhile to think out all aspects of the program ahead of time. Consider how you can maximize effects through an awareness of duration, pace and content. Style tends to be something that develops and emerges over a period of time and increasing experience. Some people have it from day one-you can probably easily pick out those people now. But for the rest of us it's a path which we have to travel along, working at developing our style, but the results are worthwhile. You can turn good campfires into great ones!

Good Scouting and good luck!

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More Thoughts About Campfires

Reg Roberts
The Leader, December 1985

As promised in the August/September Issue, here is the second in a series of articles about campfires. Again I have used as my resource some material provided by Dave Stephenson of North Vancouver, B.C.

The last article dealt with such things as campfire leadership, instruments at campfires and problems that might arise at a campfire. This time I'd like to look at campfire program content - what we do while we are together.

There's a kind of magic about campfires. It's not evident right away because that's the rowdy fun time but, later, in the fading fire's glow as we sing spirituals and listen to a short yarn, huddling together perhaps for warmth but, most importantly, for human companionship - that's when the magic begins.

Songs

A successful campfire is made of an infinite variety of items - songs, skits, and the happy give and take that signifies this is a pleasurable place to be and a suitable finale to a busy active day or evening.

Of all the material available to us, songs must surely be the most important. Songs break down barriers of reserve and shyness, promote fellowship, generate happy feelings, build morale and bind us together, deepen our loyalty and strengthen our ideals. It seems obvious that it's important to sing the songs in such a way that they express the true spirit of Scouting.

Many "modern" songs have no real place at a Scout campfire, but others fit very well. Every age has songs we should remember, introduce to our campfire programs and pass along to future generations. We may still fondly sing I've Been Working on the Railroad and There's a Long, Long Trail A-Winding, but let's not overlook Four Strong Winds and Where Have All the Flowers Gone? Look also at today's music from groups such as Abba, Alabama and the Oak Ridge Boys, and consider as well Bony M's Waters of Babylon, the Coke song I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing and the very popular We Are the World.

Songs are meant to be sung, not shouted and, when properly sung, sound wonderful. The words themselves provide the clue to how to sing a song, but sometimes a very brief explanation of how the song came about or its significance to us can help generate the appropriate sensitivity and expression, particularly with sea shanties and spirituals. Help participants "learn by doing" at the same time as they're having fun.

Try to introduce new songs to a campfire regularly but in small doses. Whenever possible, introduce them at a regular meeting first. Above all, if you are going to lead it, know the song reasonably well before you start.

Types of Songs

Spirituals, those wonderful songs full of rich emotional messages, are usually favourites at a campfire. They all tell stories that reflect faith and beliefs as important to the original singers as our sacred music is to us today.

Sing cheerful, upbeat songs like Daniel, Rock of My Soul, and Michael Row the Boat with vigour and enthusiasm. Jacob's Ladder, Kum by Ah and Swing Low are slower, more thoughtful songs. Try to have the audience enter into the spirit of the music, be it fast or slow, lighthearted or serious.

Everybody enjoys Sea Shanties. Reminders of the old-time sailing ships with their cargoes of tea, cotton, spices and rum, songs like Blow the Man Down, Fire Down Below or What Shall We Do With a Drunken Sailor? almost make us feel the roll of the ship and the salty spray as we sing. Sailors sang many shanties to help them keep time, so you can add hammer striking actions or slow foot stomping for effect.

Many Rounds have an "Olde Englande" background and go back at least to the 17th century. Because they sound so beautiful, they deserve to be sung more often. Rounds are also a way of introducing youthful voices to the idea of harmonizing, which isn't always easy.

Sung well, rounds are beautiful. Sung poorly, they can sound dreadful. It will lead to more success if you have everyone sing the round together a few times before dividing into sections. A natural division for groups is in sixes or patrols and it helps to have a leader for each section. Remember to remind the boys that rounds are not intended as contests to see who can shout the loudest.

Perhaps the best known round is Row, Row, Row Your Boat with its million versions from Chew, Chew, Chew Your Food to Soap, Soap, Soap and Towel. But don't forget other rounds such as London's Burning, Little Tommy Tinker, Oh How Lovely is the Evening, The Kookaburra Song, Frere Jacques and Three Blind Mice.

Then there are Action Songs. Many songs just naturally lend themselves to some kind of action, whether simple hand movements or dancing around the campfire in a Zulu extravaganza. Actions are a natural and expected part of a campfire program. They are particularly welcome on a cold night but any action, from foot stomping to hand clapping, provides a lot of fun on any night.

Chester Have You Heard About Harry, Ach Von Der Musica, One Finger, One Thumb and Head and Shoulders are all happy, fun action songs. My Bonny, Peter's Fountain, Love Grows Under the Wild Oak Tree and Green Grow the Rushes are a little more thoughtful and serious - good to use as a lead into the quiet part of the evening.

Two Part or Split Songs are those favourites where one half of the group sings one part of the song and the other half sings a different part. Probably the best known is Ging Gang Gooli but Animal Fair and the old chestnut Ham and Eggs are other good examples.

Then there are Mixed Melodies or Combination Songs where one half of the group sings one song and the other half a different song. For example, one half might sing There's a Long, Long Trail while the other half sings Pack Up Your Troubles. How about Three Blind Mice with Are You Sleeping?

For this kind of singing, you really need a leader for each group and some strict timekeeping, but the resulting sound can be truly delightful.

Whenever people come together, you'll hear Nonsense Songs. Whether they are Scouts, Guides, or campers at Camp Opeongo, the words likely have a special meaning to that particular group.

Ach Von Der Musica, When It's Springtime in Alaska, My Tall Silk Hat and Insy, Winsy Spider are just a few of the many daffy songs people love to sing.

Always try to make a place in the program for Folk Songs. They are the songs that tell the history of a country and its people - a way we have of passing on our heritage to future generations. This Land is Your Land is one we know well in Canada, but how many other folk songs are there? The Atlantic provinces seem to have cornered the market with songs such as Jack was Every Inch a Sailor, The Squid Jigging Grounds and Nova Scotia Farewell. I can also think of Quebec's Alouette, but what do we have from B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario or the North West Territories?

Skits, Stunts, Sketches

A campfire without a skit is like a pie without the filling. You can rest assured that, although you may be hard-pressed to get young people to volunteer to present a song, you will be overwhelmed by volunteers if you ask them to present a skit or a stunt.

A humorous skit provides a welcome break, especially since the leaders usually are the butt of the jokes. Most often the skits are just clean fun but, occasionally, a skit can be downright embarrassing and you'll need to come up with some appropriate comment to ease the campfire out of a difficult situation. As I mentioned in my last article, you can generally avoid this type of problem if you set out, in advance, guidelines to what is and what is not acceptable.

Funny skits are always acceptable and so are serious ones. The young actors will usually opt for something funny and that's fine. It's their show and the serious input can come from a leader later on. Scouting's traditions and history, the writings of Baden-Powell and everyday life offer a wealth of material. Costumes can enhance the skit, but sometimes the simpler the better.

Remember to tell performers to keep skits short (about three or four minutes) insist on originality, allow time for adequate preparation and rehearsal, and advise against harmful practical jokes.

Finally, recognize the training value in skits and stunts. A shy boy may blossom behind a set of rope whiskers or a floor mop wig where his shyness flies away to be replaced by a developing self-confidence.

There's still more to campfires and I'll tackle that in a final article in the near future. For now, though, while parts of our country are in winter's icy grip, I hope you're not overlooking the potential of indoor campfires. For those who live where the climate is less severe, a winter evening around a blazing fire under the stars will be a memorable experience. Pass the hot chocolate!

Campfire Magic

Michael Lee Zwiers

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Campfire Magic! You've experienced it. You chose the songs, practiced skits, and organized everything into a program. Then you brought people together and began.

Everything went without a hitch. Participants sang the songs enthusiastically and laughed uproariously (or groaned painfully) at the skits. From there, the tone and pace of the program slowed until the final prayer was just a memory on the lips and in the ears.

As the dying campfire crumbled into ashes, campers reluctantly drifted off to bed. You stood before the glowing embers, soaking in their fading warmth and knowing that everything was just right. You've been touched by campfire magic.

Campfires like this are special but rare. They need not be. With a little careful thought and preparation, they can become the rule and not the exception. What follows are some hints and ideas from Alberta's campfire leader training courses to help you plan a campfire program, deliver it smoothly, and bring the magic to it.

Planning

The structure of a magic campfire is like the shape of the fire. It builds up slowly from the lighting and opening to a peak, then subsides gradually to the closing as the fire burns down to embers.

The opening includes parading to the formal circle, introductions, the fire lighting, and a short, upbeat opening verse that sets the mood and guidelines for the fire and welcomes people to the magic of the experience. You may deliver it dramatically with arms in the air or holding a hand over the fire. You may involve participants by having them echo a line or, if you are using a "magic start", asking them to concentrate to inspire the fire to light. Perhaps you'll have a number of torch bearers light the fire as you declare it open.

Build up from the opening with some well known songs, a few rounds, some fun songs, some action songs, a game and stunt or two and, at the peak of excitement, skits and yells. Bring down things slowly with a few rousing songs, some quieter songs, a story or Scouter's Five, a spiritual song or two, vespers and taps, and a closing verse.

You might include a short Scout silence before the verse or invite participants to pause for a moment to listen to night sounds or reflect and be thankful. Many campfire leaders end the verse with "I now declare this campfire closed" but, as Lewis Carroll once said, "They don't seem to have any rules in particular; at least, if there are, nobody attends to them."

Hints For Success

Before the event, review campfire etiquette with your gang. The campfire circle is sacred and always quiet before and after the fire. Prohibit flashlights from the circle. Make a no-talking rule. If wood needs to be added to the fire during the campfire, only the Keeper of the Flame may do it. Applause takes the form of yells, not clapping.

Choose a magic site (on the lakeshore, etc.) and, however you start it, keep the fire a reasonable size. Fires that are too big can take away the magic. To enhance the mystique, you may want to add ashes from your last campfire to this new one. And, if you clean up all the coals and other signs of festivity before the next morning, your campers will always think of the campfire site as a special place.

Keep the program short. If you will offer refreshments later, plan time so that it won't break up

a good program. For the greatest success, involve as many people as possible in the campfire as leaders of songs or yells or players in skits or stunts. If you can, audition songs and skits ahead of time to avoid any possible problems, either with difficulty or poor taste.

Choose songs you enjoy and know your young members enjoy. Stick to the familiar rather than trying to teach a new song, unless it is something really easy, repetitive, and fun. Be sure you include parents and special guests as well as campers. Avoid song sheets or books, a sure way to destroy atmosphere as participants turn their backs to the fire in hopes of catching some light to read the words.

Look for audience feedback. Are they singing and taking part or looking bored? Keep it alive. If a song is too slow, speed it up. If it is really dragging, simply end it and move into a "no fail" song you have up your sleeve. Set a brisk pace with minimum breaks between songs.

Sometimes campers become so caught up in the fun they want to sing every song they've ever heard. You have to be firm, but remind them they can have their own sing song and put in all their favourites at their tent site after the formal campfire is over.

If someone brings along a musical instrument, ensure that it enhances the experience. If it begins to detract by becoming a "solo" act because nobody knows the songs or they are all slow ballads, stop the player firmly but politely.

Announce the next act or song at least one act ahead so that the people involved have time to prepare. If you know who is on next, you can simply whisper in an ear to alert them. Keep a set of quickie yells, stunts, or songs on hand in case a person or group is not ready to perform when the time comes or you need to stop a performance for some reason.

For example if, despite your screening, a group begins a skit or stunt in poor taste, stop it. Indicate simply that it is not appropriate and go on with something else. After the campfire, talk with those involved to explain the reason for your actions.

Once you've eliminated the problem of poor taste, skits or stunts can still go wrong if the players speak too quietly or position themselves badly (e.g. with backs to the audience). That's another good reason for pre-campfire auditions. To work well and safely, a skit needs good light. The Keeper of the Flame can add small sticks to a dim fire. You might also provide pot lights or kerosene lanterns, as long as they aren't so bright they detract from the atmosphere.

Keep a firm rein on proceedings to avoid things like poorly timed announcements that can destroy the magic. If some participants begin to cause a distraction, you can do one of two things. Signal another Scouter to tap them on the shoulder and talk quietly to them, or quickly bring into the program a Scouter's Five related to their behaviour. If you stop a campfire to lecture noisemakers, it's an automatic downer.

A campfire may be magic, but there's no trick to it, just good planning and some common sense. At the many campfires in your future, may you often be touched by the magic.

Scouter Michael Lee Zwiers, Edmonton, Alta., has six years experience at helping with campfire leader training courses.