

## Church Camp

For a couple of years in the early 80s we were Christians I guess. Mum had got some work cleaning the church, and I suspect all that time vacuuming under the eyes of Jesus wore her down. Whatever the reason, my little sister and I suddenly found ourselves wearing scratchy tights and going to Sunday School while mum, dad, and my older sisters were in 'big' Church.

Winter was freezing in that little hall. We'd press the freshly printed stencils of angel dot-to-dots and Noah's Ark colour-ins to our cheeks for warmth. Our teacher was an overwhelmed elderly lady who smelled like Johnson's baby powder and always had lipstick on her teeth. She struggled with the electric pencil sharpener and offered praise for how well we'd coloured between the lines. Nothing much else happened.

Then one Sunday I heard about church camp *and* that I'd already been signed up to go. I would overcome my usual homesickness for three days of craft. The whole family would come on the drive to drop me off. I would have fun. My mum had assured me.

And yes the craft *was* amazing – the daily sessions announced with a call of *all hands on deck* because we were little sailors with God at the helm, they said. As we wrapped wool for poms-poms, camp leader Karen spoke to us over a scratchy microphone about God moving mountains. We drank watery orange cordial and sang in rounds. I loved our cabin leader Alison who wore giant 80s glasses and smelled like apples. She told me I was a good at drawing, and I tormented myself for the whole three days thinking about how I might gift her one.

On the last night, we got to stay up late and watch *The Wizard of Oz* on a VHS tape as a treat. Alison walked us back to our cabin because we were scared of the flying monkeys and then Karen showed up, on a mission. She asked if we were ready to accept God into our hearts. My cabin mates jumped up immediately, to receive the warm hugs and smiles reserved for good girls and true believers. But I stayed tucked into the corner of my bottom bunk. I didn't accept God into my heart. I didn't know what that meant, and I suspected the others didn't either. I couldn't lie, so I just rolled over, my heart a sinking ship.

And then camp was over. I was getting a lift with one of the other kids' mums and I wondered if she could sense I was missing something that her daughter had. I felt hollow like the tin man.

All packed, we said our goodbyes, and knowing it was my last chance, I gave a drawing to Alison, and then jumped into the car. As we drove off she held it up next to her face, smiling – my drawing of an angel wearing giant glasses – and my heart felt full.