



Faith
in Action

Stories of Salkehatchie Summer Service
Rev. John Wesley Culp Sr.

FAITH IN ACTION
Stories of Salkehatchie
Summer Service

Compiled by the Rev. John Wesley Culp Sr.
Edited by Jessica Brodie

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Introduction

Salkehatchie Summer Service was designed to bring youth into poverty situations and to bridge the gap of the haves and have-nots. It was an attempt to overcome segregation and bring healing to the racial tensions of the 1960s and 1970s. At the time, 1974-1980, I was serving churches in Hampton and Varnville, South Carolina, in Hampton County surrounded by poverty.

I am convinced young people want to be volunteers and be helpful. We need structures that allow our youth to develop their skills and insights for society. Many of the youth were intelligent and processed this learning experience. This book shares their thoughts and stories of these experiences.

I remember sharing a nightmare I had with my mentor, Dr. Eben Taylor, after one of the early camps. I was with teenagers in a dark room that was dirty and dangerous. I cried with Eben because of the feelings of hurt, despair, and fear. I was responsible for taking these youth to these houses that were so deplorable.

Salkehatchie exists because of the sacrifices these youth have made since 1978.

These Salkehatchie youth experienced the God moments of the Incarnation. These stories reveal the powerful impact Salkehatchie had on these lives, and they are now witnesses of love.

Something special I want to call your attention to is that those who wrote the stories in this book have gone on to be highly influential and impactful people in the world, truly representing God's kingdom. Some of the authors mention their professional calling in the book—for instance, Luke Reynolds is a United States diplomat, while Sarah B. Gowan Hinton became a physician. Others went on to become lawyers, United Methodist pastors, teachers, and social workers.

Here is a listing of the careers they either worked in at the time or ultimately pursued, some of them noting these were inspired directly by their work at Salkehatchie Summer Service, which opened their hearts and their minds to all of God's people: Amy Inglis, teacher; Ward Bradley, lawyer; Rev. Champ Squires, United Methodist

minister; Rev. J. Lawrence McCleskey, United Methodist bishop; Luke Reynolds, U.S. diplomat; Dr. Vince Brawley, physician; Charlene Jones, community leader; Chris Culp McIntyre, pharmaceutical representative; David Bayles, businessperson; Frederick G. Murry, retired U.S. Army officer; Rev. Garth Duke-Barton, United Methodist minister; Emily P. Caskey, teacher; Jack L. Washington, Federal Emergency Management Agency; Rev. Meredith M. Dark, United Methodist minister; Rev. Mike Holly, United Methodist minister; Rev. Scott Efirid, United Methodist minister; Elizabeth (Webber) Akre, real estate agent; Rev. Russell Smith, Presbyterian minister; Dr. Hart Parker, surgeon; Jimmy Patterson Jr., public schools employee; Dr. Larry Hedgepath, family medical doctor; Marshall Taylor, lawyer; Emily O'Tuel, registered nurse; Emory S. Campbell, community leader and writer; Rev. Tommy Wilkes, United Methodist minister; Paige Hutto, real estate agent; Ginny Gentry Fulmer, teacher; John Liebenrood, businessperson and retired military; Dr. Sarah B. Gowan Hinton, family medical doctor; Wes Culp, pharmaceutical representative; Rev. Mike Vandiver, United Methodist minister; Kathy Hart, teacher; Betty Moore, teacher; Art Dexter, physicist; Erica Renee Cosh, social worker; James Edward Bradley, lawyer; Rev. Meredith Essex, United Methodist minister; Paul Robinson, businessperson; Chris Graham, businessperson; Nora Freeman-Engstrom, law professor; Dr. Harris Parker, college professor; Becky Redfern Banks, teacher; and Sarah Ann Moseley, camp director.

*The Rev. John Wesley Culp Sr.
October 2021*

Chapter 1

Closer to God

By Amy Inglis

Unity, laughter, sharing love, drawing near to God, friendship, compassion, acceptance, peace, joy, exhaustion, perspective, inclusion, and receiving love: These are all words and phrases that describe what Salkehatchie has meant to me at different stages of my life.

Excitement and anticipation of a new adventure were building as time was approaching for the first Salkehatchie camp. I was looking forward to escaping my family situation for a week so, and preparations of packing and reading the recommended books, *Salty Christians* and *The Water is Wide*, were a great diversion before the week arrived.

As a teenager, going to Salkehatchie was a great equalizing experience because no one was wearing trendy clothes that I could not afford, nor did I feel athletically inept. We worked together in a kind and fun-loving atmosphere.

Washing dishes with Victoria in the school kitchen, meeting with the nuns, and early morning rides in the back of the pickup truck are all memories I cherish. We were focused on our task at hand, but we also had time to build relationships with each other and our homeowner. As much as we gave to our homeowner, we received joy, peace, and understanding by the tenfold compared to what we gave.

At the time, it seemed to me the homeowners were closer to God than I was. They had so little in the material sense but so much more faith and trust in God than I had. Looking back, the experience of Salkehatchie was a catalyst for the growth of my faith. It was the closest thing to a “mountain top” experience I have ever had. That experience is why most of us returned year after year.

This is one of the reasons I wanted my children to attend camp. When my son was 14, I sent him, and I was thrilled when on the evening of the first day he texted



Salkehatchie Summer Service started in 1978 and is a servant ministry throughout South Carolina where youth and adults come together to serve the community

to say he had made so many new friends. The Christian camaraderie makes for life-long friendships. I met my best friend when I was 16 at Penn Center, and she later became my college roommate. She is my best friend to this day. The Salkehatchie experience creates bonds between people that are lasting. My daughter had the same experience.

It is humbling for people to trust you enough to allow you into their home to work on it. It is a gift for them to share their life with you. Salkehatchie evens out the playing field. We are all together, working for one purpose to share the love of God. Salkehatchie always reminds me of the important things in life and draws me closer to God.

When I was interviewed for *On the Road to Salkehatchie*, when they asked what I would say if I could share one thing about Salkehatchie, I said, “The feeling you get from Salkehatchie is what I think a little bit of heaven must feel like ... without the heat!” (They cut the heat part out.)

Chapter 2

Helping Sam Doyle

By Ward Bradley

“Before we get started, remember to be careful and take your time. There are many ways to be hurt on a construction site.”

These words flashed through my mind as I watched the blood flow from Jay’s arm. We’d been on the site about five minutes when I hit the window frame with my hammer. The pane fell and cut open my friend’s arm on its way to the ground. Thankfully, after Bactine and a big Band-Aid, we were ready to get back to work.

Jay and I were both boys believing we were ready to be men. We were in Frogmore, South Carolina, in July. Temperatures had started at about 85 degrees in the morning and went up from there. We had no idea how to deal with the heat. By the afternoon, I was heat-sick and had to sit in the shade the rest of the day.

We were part of a loose team of lost teenagers and a few well-meaning adults who were slightly less lost. We were there to make a difference.

We were there to fix Sam Doyle’s house.

I don’t know how old Sam Doyle was, but he looked like he was at least a century. Deep lines ran through his dark face, and his smile tilted to one side. His hands were cracked and rough as sandpaper. A few small gray hairs peeked out from under his hat. His teeth were broken and as irregular as the windows of his house.

Sam Doyle sat under his live oak all day to paint. Not with paint like that of an artist, and not with paint from a craft store. This was the sort of paint that sits for years on the shelves of a small hardware store in big tin cans. Eventually it is sold at a loss or thrown out.

His canvases also came from a scrapyard. Brightly colored scraps of corrugated tin rested against a split rail fence. The subjects of his art ranged from island lore (a night hag) to history (a recent hurricane) to pop culture (Ray Charles). Every picture

told a story to Sam Doyle. And, as he sat under the live oak, he shared those stories with us.

Sam Doyle's house was like many houses in Frogmore. It sat quietly on a meandering dirt road under a magnificent live oak tree. It was assembled in spare parts. Different sized boards were tacked on here and there. The humps in the tarpaper roof lurched up and down balancing one another out. The house measured one room wide and two rooms deep with a front porch that listed to one side like a boat taking on water.

The first room was Sam Doyle's bedroom, which housed his bed, a picture of him with President Reagan, a lamp, a nightstand, and a shotgun. The second room was the kitchen and sitting area, which held a table and two chairs. There was no running water.

The upstairs was more of an attic than a set of rooms. It had long ago been abandoned to hornets and mice. There was no indoor bathroom.

Although I had seen houses like this from the road as I'd traveled with my family to the beach, I had never been in one. And although I knew people lived in these houses, I had never met such a person. I had certainly never met anyone like Sam Doyle.

We put a new roof on Sam Doyle's house. We fixed his broken windows. And we brought him food.

We were very proud of the hard work we put in to help Sam Doyle. He was gentlemanly in the way old men are and appreciative of our efforts.

We went home thinking we had fixed Sam Doyle's life by fixing his house. We thought that was what Salkehatchie was all about—helping a poor person have a better house.

Years later, when I was older and less sure of myself, I realized that fixing houses is not what Salkehatchie is all about. Yes, that is part of it. But that is not even the most important part. Salkehatchie is more about helping people.

I left Frogmore that summer proud of helping Sam Doyle. I was proud his roof no longer leaked because of me and proud the spiders no longer came in his broken windows.

It took me years to realize what really needed fixing that week was not Sam Doyle's house. What really needed fixing was me. I needed to see the beauty of his paintings in this unexpected place. I needed to feel the quiet dignity of a man who had persevered through years of poverty. I needed to meet a person in an old, run-down house assembled in spare parts. I needed this in order to be a better person. And I needed it to appreciate what I had.

Yes, Salkehatchie is about building bridges between communities. And yes, Salkehatchie is about fixing people's houses.

But more importantly, Salkehatchie was about fixing me. It was about making me a better person than I was before— more patient, more appreciative of my blessings, and more understanding of others.

I am not yet where I need to be. I worry too much about life. I focus too much on myself. And I still fail to understand the difficult road many of our fellow travelers walk.

But I am grateful to Sam Doyle and Salkehatchie for opening my eyes to how much I have to learn and showing me what lies at the end of the dirt road. I am not the only person who feels this way. Over the years, thousands of boys and girls have begun their journey into adulthood at Salkehatchie.

We fixed peoples' houses. Later on, we realize it was us that needed fixing.



From humble beginnings, Salkehatchie has grown to more than 40 service camps and more than 2,000 volunteers each summer.

Chapter 3

A Salkehatchie Lifestyle

By the Rev. Champ Squires

My name is Champ Squires, I am 28 years old, I have been coming to Black Swamp Salkehatchie since July 2008, and I have yet to miss a single year.

I was born with cerebral palsy, which means I am unable to walk independently. Therefore, I have to walk with the assistance of a walker. I imagine what some people are thinking: “Well, then, why in the world do you come to Salkehatchie summer after summer, and what in the world are you able to get out of it if there are parts of the physical labor that you physically are unable to do?”

That’s a great question. You see, there’s more to Salkehatchie Summer Service than simply just the physical labor; it’s the spiritual transformation that happens summer after summer. Salkehatchie is one of those experiences that is unforgettable, and once you’ve gone one year and dived headfirst into the entire experience, you can’t help but want to go back year after year to simply dig even deeper from the treasures of the well God has dug there and from the blessings he extends and pours out on us while we are there.

Going year after year has given me the opportunity to meet so many incredibly special people who have become near and dear to my heart. They have become like family.

Even though I may not be able to do some of the physical labor, I have a unique perspective and a unique opportunity to witness what’s happening in the hearts and lives of the homeowners for whom we are working, as well as the adults and students who are working on a particular home. It’s a marvelous thing to witness.

From 2008 until 2018, I had the opportunity to be on several different homesites and work alongside a team and homeowners as we worked to make their homes warm, safe, and dry. In 2019, I was given the opportunity to join in a leadership role

with the spiritual director at Black Swamp, Diane Williams. During that time, I rode with her day after day and helped in delivering devotions. I got to see the things happening in the lives of students while learning from Mrs. Diane directly. It was like learning and drinking from a well of wisdom and knowledge, and it is a treasure I will never forget.

Salkehatchie is not just about the homes being repaired, even though that is critically important to the mission. The mission runs so much deeper than that. It's about the relationships that are being formed and built that will last a lifetime.

In 2013, I came to Salkehatchie not expecting anything necessarily out of the ordinary other than I knew God always had something special planned for that week, so I just came into the week expecting God to do something. And behold during that week I was placed on a site with a few people from another church from my hometown of Sumter.

Little did I know that I and one of the guys on the site, Chris Beaudet, would become quick and lifelong best friends. This is no exaggeration.

Toward the end of 2019, our friendship grew even deeper, and shortly thereafter, my family and I had to step into a crisis moment. My dad was diagnosed with a form of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Stage 3. This diagnosis caught our family by surprise, but I tell that to say that it was because of the friendship that was formed at Salkehatchie with Chris, and having this brother to walk through this journey with me, that I was able to bear it better. He continuously helped me redirect my vision toward Christ and his will in the midst of all of this, and for that I am forever grateful.

I'm grateful to God for allowing me this opportunity and grateful to Salkehatchie as being the place where this bond and relationship formed.

Salkehatchie is not just a "one week out of the year experience." It's a formative experience that lasts a lifetime.

And, in return, it becomes a lifestyle.

A life-changing ministry.

Since 1978, Salkehatchie Summer Service has been changing hearts and lives by offering youth and adults an opportunity to draw closer to Christ through service. Teams go directly into communities of chronic poverty and repair the homes of local families there. By immersing them in an intense physical, emotional, and spiritual experience, Salkehatchie aims to make disciples of Christ. After a week of service, many of the volunteers say, “My life changed forever.”

In this book, Salkehatchie’s founder, the Rev. John Wesley Culp Sr., gathers stories of those who offered sweat, blood, and tears in grueling heat, some for one summer and some returning summer after summer for decades—today bringing their own children and even grandchildren. Today, these volunteers are teachers, doctors, lawyers, business people, ministers, military personnel, parents, and community members engaged in all walks of life.

Their work is a collective witness of the power of Christ’s redeeming and merciful love at work in our lives.



The Rev. John Wesley Culp Sr. is a retired elder in the South Carolina Conference of The United Methodist Church, having pastored churches large and small all over the state in a career spanning more than four decades. Ordained as a deacon in 1969 and an elder in 1972, he retired from full-time ministry in 2014. He and his wife, Peggy, live in West Columbia. He remains an active advocate for justice in his retirement.

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