

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

BOOMERANG CHURCH YOUTH CLUB

Jan Pritchard



Figure 1
Camp at Coogee beach

Back row, L to R. Bas Wynhorst, Hans Mackaay,
Middle Row, Cor van Bruchem, Maaïke Brands, Nicky Diepeveen
Front Row, Adrie Schokker, Dick Kardol, Willy van Heyst, Jannie Bargerbos, Helene de Boer.
Courtesy: Jan Pritchard.



Figure 2
Coogee Camp, 1962

Back Row, Helene de Boer and Gerrit Schut
Middle Row, L. to R. Nicky Diepeveen, Maaïke Brands, Peter Meinema
Front, Jannie Bargerbos. Courtesy: Jan Pritchard.



Figure 3
Coogee Camp

Dick Kardol, Bas Wynhorst, Nicky Diepeveen, Helene de Boer.
Courtesy: Jan Pritchard.

During the later Fifties and early Sixties, The Boomerang Youth Club was central to the social life of twenty or more teenagers. Most were working full time by the age of sixteen, and parents were strict, so that the weekly club night at a North Perth church hall, was a great escape. The teenagers understood and supported each other – all had experienced broken educations and resettlement problems. Club nights were for confidences, for whinging about parents, but above all for having fun. They played cards, or basketball, or made various plans, and it was more than difficult to call them to order for any formal part of the evening.

At one stage they put on an evening of skits for the congregation. There was, for instance, a shadow play for which a sheet was put up, behind which doctors performed an operation by pulling strings of sausages from the abdomen of a recumbent patient. There were hula girls, and the song ‘*Kissing and Hugging with Fred*’ was enacted, not to mention the creepy song, ‘*An old woman stood by the churchyard door*’.

On weekends, especially on Sunday afternoons after church, smaller groups of friends hung out with each other at home or took off to the hills or the beaches. Freedom grew when some of the boys acquired cars, motorbikes or scooters. Five of the boys formed a band ‘*The Boomerang Five*’ with John van Heyst and Peter Meinema on guitar, Hans Mackaay on bongo drums, Frans Eijgenraam played the mouth organ and Gerry Schut played base on a tea chest. They played songs by the *Kingston Trio*, by the *Brothers Four* and by *Peter, Paul and Mary*. Only one public gig resulted, but by all accounts they were very well received.

By far and away the highlight of the Boomerang Year was the annual camp at Coogee Beach, held on the long weekend in January. Two tents, one for the boys and one for the girls, were erected in the sand dunes. Amateur cooking of tinned food was done by roster, in the open. The results were generally pronounced to be too salty, or too sweet, or tasteless. The after-effects of baked beans provided a recurring motif. Cold showers were available in the ablution block at the beach, but mostly everyone was encrusted with sand, salt and sunburn cream.

The group was warned at the beginning that whatever went on during the year, all were to avoid causing scandal for this weekend, or the church would ban future camps. There was little point in the warning, since unrequited crushes on each other were suffered by nearly all, and the most popular songs of the day shared in the heart-felt woe. Like stranded dolphins they lay on the beach, and sang about the ‘*Ninety-nine ways of losing the blues*’ or ‘*Oh, lonesome me*’, or ‘*Oh yes, I’m the great pretender*’. It was a great time.

The best part of the weekend was the spooky game that was played in the sand dunes at night – in the dark. There were two teams. One team hid a lantern and posted guards and the other team split up to search for and capture the lantern. The guards took prisoners if anyone came within reach of a touch on the shoulder. Each game could take hours until the lantern was found or until the whole searching team was in jail. It was possible for a game to end inconclusively if a pair of searchers got happily lost. On one occasion a guard stood up and waved the lantern as a way of shaking off one of the unrequited.

By Monday afternoon, no one had had more than a few hours sleep and everyone looked bedraggled. One girl making her exhausted way home with a badly packed suitcase was picked up by the police for being a suspected runaway. They took quite a bit of convincing. But more than fifty years later those camps are still the subject of fond reminiscences by old friends.

In spite of all the emotional tangles, only two pairs of members married, Helene de Boer married Peter Meinema, and Adrie Hiemstra married Cor van Bruchem.



Figure 4
Coogee Camp tents, 1962.

Hans van Heyst, Arnold Giltay, Jerry Schut.
Courtesy: Jan Pritchard.

Figure 5
Coogee Camp

Front Row (L to R): Nicky Diepeveen, Helene de Boer

Second Row: Wim Schokker, Corrie Swaan, Willy van Heyst, Jannie Bargerbos, Adrie Schokker

Third Row: Piet Stolp, Maaïke Brands.

Back Row: Hans Smit, Theo Swaan, Bill Swaan, Hans Mackaay, Dick Kardol, Henk Wynhorst, Bas Wynhorst, Cor van Bruchem.
Courtesy: Jan Pritchard.

