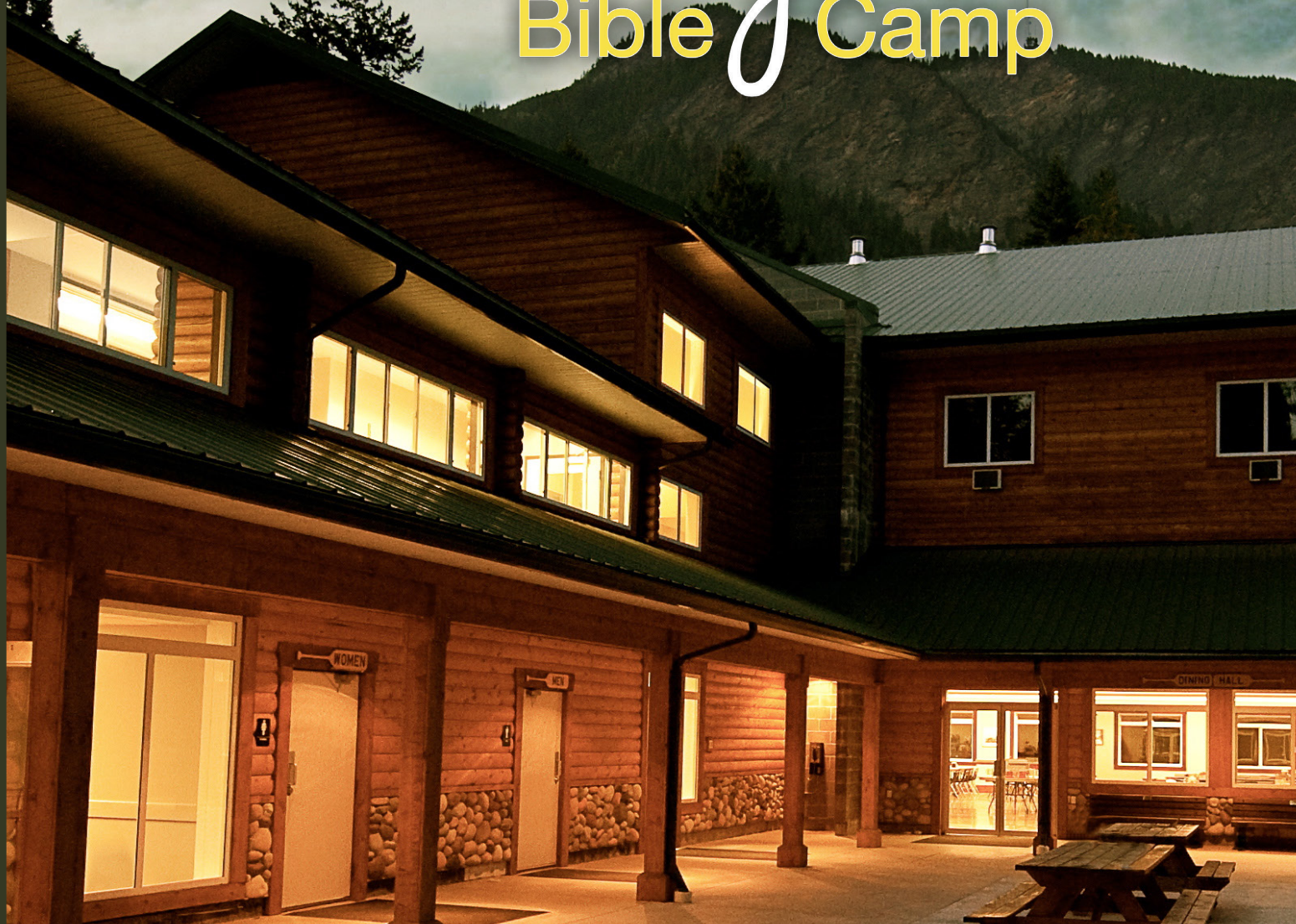


Sunnybrae Bible Camp



Stories Worth Sharing
1990-2015





Sunnybrae
Bible Camp



Introductory Comments

History is far too often understood as a collection of consecutive dates with “important” names and other data thrown in; boring and somewhat like a skeleton, quite lifeless. Yet, such a skeleton is essential in understanding history, for without it history becomes an amorphous blob; no structure, no sense of direction or progression, and again, lifeless.

In attempting to capture something of the history of Sunnybrae Bible Camp and Retreat Centre over the past quarter century, there needs to be a “skeleton”; a sequence of events and developments that give an outline to the progression and growth of this phenomenon on the shore of the Salmon Arm of Shuswap Lake. However, Sunnybrae is much more than a skeleton. It is a living, breathing organism and that life and breath is provided by the thousands of humans who have been part of it’s history; humans including Board Members, Directors, Staff, Volunteers, Campers and Visitors. In other words, leaders and followers, children, youth and adults; people who have come to Sunnybrae for any of a wide variety of reasons including relaxation, enjoyment, refreshment, training, service and ministry.

That, of course suggests another aspect of Sunnybrae Bible Camp and Retreat Centre, namely facilities and programs; facilities to enable programs to exist and

be developed. That is part of the history of Sunnybrae that will be told in these pages. But there is more to the history of Sunnybrae; something that is implicit in its name. This is a Bible Camp and Retreat Centre. So, while it has camps and retreats for children, youth, men, women, families, and those “55+”, as well as a host of other planned activities, the very essence of Sunnybrae is the declaration that the Bible, and the God of the Bible are not only to be acknowledged, but are, in fact, the central focus; yes, the “heart” that gives life and direction, and that are the very reason of being for this facility. The vision of Dr. Dawe 75 years ago has remained central and has developed into what is now Sunnybrae Bible Camp and Retreat Centre and Millar College of the Bible campus.

This is also His Story; a story of God inspiring, empowering, directing, energizing, and enabling a “body” with abundant “vital signs” for the purpose of impacting individuals, families, groups, churches and communities with the transforming message of life in Jesus Christ. Jesus said; “I will build my church”, and certainly Sunnybrae is a significant example of our Savior and Master carrying forward that promise.

This, then, is a chapter in the story of the building of the kingdom of God, initiated by God who has entrusted the stewardship of this story to people of God who are bringing it into being. It will be the

joy of those who have been, are, and will be stewards of this trust to hear their Master's words; "Well done, good and faithful servant!". Of that we can be certain.

There is one more thing that has already been alluded to in these introductory comments. Embedded within "history" we find the word "story". It is significant that on this 75th Anniversary of Sunnybrae the theme for the 55+ Retreat (which is being held on the same weekend as the Anniversary celebration) is "Stories Worth Sharing". Among the stories told will be that of Sunnybrae's past 25 years. That story is certainly worth sharing. But there are many other stories worth telling as well; stories of individuals impacted, yes, transformed by the working of the Holy Spirit, and then used by Him to minister to, disciple, and bless others. Many of these individuals have become leaders or are now leaders and still others will lead in the future, not only at Sunnybrae, but very literally around the world. Obviously not all of these stories will be told or heard this weekend, but this written history will record a few of them; stories from the past as well as from the present. May they be an encouragement to you, the reader, and may your response be one of wholehearted joy and gratitude for the grace of God poured out on and through this place.

A History of Facility Development

A first time visitor to Sunnybrae Bible Camp and Retreat Centre is not initially impressed by the programs or even the personnel, but rather with the setting and the physical facilities. Just across the road from shimmering Shuswap Lake is an impressive lodge fronted by an attractive lawn.

As the visitor proceeds on to the camp property, other facilities quickly become apparent; houses, cabins, modular buildings, fourplexes, a gym complete with climbing wall, a playing field, an amphitheatre enclosing a campfire area, a workshop, horse corrals, (and as of this summer four alpacas!). Should this visitor venture into the forested area behind the playing field she or he will discover an archery and riflery range, a ropes course, several other skill-testing facilities and two tree houses. Now, while physical facilities are certainly not the reason for Sunnybrae's existence, they are essential. So we begin our journey into the history of the camp with an overview of developments in this area.

Mary Scales, whose ministry at Sunnybrae began in the 1970's and continues even to the present stated;

"When I first began working at the camp the buildings were a mix of cabins people had built for their holidays. The dining hall and

some dorms were just rough lumber with lots of ventilation! Basically the only permanent structures were the caretaker's cabin and a cement block lavatory."

While that was certainly an advancement from the tents, pine bough mattresses, and "lakeside" washing facilities of the first years, it still was quite rustic to say the least. From the mid 1970's to the mid 1990's significant additions and upgrades to the camp's facilities took place. By the time Mary Scales had completed her second term as Interim Director in 1997, these additions and upgrades included a log dining hall complete with washrooms and office space on the lower level, a log chapel, a concrete block bathroom complex with heated floors and shower facilities, several concrete block cabins, six wooden cabins, a concrete block workshop, a manufactured home with several additions (to house the director), the "missionary cabin", and a horse barn with corrals. There was, however, much more to come.

In 1997 Jim Neustaeter became Camp Director. His perspective that directing camp was not a "job" but a ministry and a privilege was evidenced in the energy with which he led. His emphasis on excellence certainly is evident in the many physical additions and upgrades which took place during his 15 year tenure. Simply listing the projects completed during those years gives an indication of the extent of development of the camp's physical

facilities. The major building projects included cabins 5 & 6 with indoor bathroom facilities, an upgraded and environmentally friendly sewage disposal system, the gymnasium, the canteen, the lodge, the double-wide modular home, the renovation and expansion of the missionary cabin, the complete reconstruction of the "pump house" and the first fourplex. In addition, an eight acre parcel of land on the North side of the camp property was purchased, and a few years later, another 2 acres including a house on the East edge of the property was added. There were also numerous upgrades and additions to the recreational facilities. These included the basketball court, the dock system, a major upgrade in the horse barn and corrals, the archery and riflery ranges, two tree houses, and the ropes course.

While this list is obviously impressive, it tells only a fraction of the story. In order to comprehend the significance and magnitude of these projects we need to add the human component. Again, it is impossible in this history to give credit to all who were part of these building projects, but some recognition is imperative.

In a number of cases, individuals took the initiative and gathered around them others willing to volunteer their time, effort, and expertise to complete what may be seen as "smaller" projects, but which significantly enhanced the camp's overall ministry. In at least one instance, assistance came from a

group not directly associated with Sunnybrae at all. This was the Salmon Arm Rotary Club which partnered with the camp in the funding and construction of the basketball court. (Prior to that the basketball facilities comprised of a hoop fastened to a tree!)

In significant other cases volunteers from various interior churches volunteered multiple thousands of hours of labour, as well as hundreds of thousands of dollars to provide the excellent facilities that the camp now enjoys. Again, a few notable examples should be cited.

At the turn of the millennium, the Camp Director envisioned the construction of some type of “cover all” roofed shelter, so that campers could enjoy outdoor activities on rainy days. This vision was adopted by the people of the Revelstoke Fellowship Baptist Church, and the result was not the “pole structure” which the Director originally had in mind, but the present gymnasium, complete with climbing wall. Not only did the people of Fellowship Baptist provide the great majority of the “man hours” necessary to complete this project, they also donated materials and fund-raised in excess of \$100,00.00 to bring it to completion.

An even greater effort was the “Journey of Faith” project launched in 2002 and made possible with the support not only of the Interior churches, but also Fellowship churches from across British Columbia and

Alberta as well as the Baptist Foundation. While this venture included several other significant sub-projects such as land acquisition, and sewer system upgrade, the major project was, of course, the construction of the Lodge Facility. This project, arising largely from the vision of the Camp Director and Pastor Larry Dyck who was the Camp Board Chair at the time developed from the realization that if Sunnybrae was to remain a viable camp it would need to expand beyond its summer camping roots and become a year round facility. And expand it did! Convinced of the Lord’s leading, yet with fear and trepidation, the “Journey of Faith” campaign was launched by the Camp Board. Bruce Hlina whose association with the Salmon Arm church and reputation for quality construction was well known, was hired to spearhead the project, and the Camp Director functioned as project manager. (As if directing camp was not already a full time responsibility!) Though there were some who thought “those guys are crazy” because of the magnitude and cost of the project, the people of the churches overwhelmingly caught the vision, and the “journey” was underway. The Board members led by example as each one made a significant financial pledge prior to the launch.

The “journey” extended over several years and included prodigious efforts by a great many people including the Camp Board, the Capital Campaign Committee, and eight Regional Coordinators each

responsible to encourage participation and financial support from churches in their specific areas.

As a result, in 2005 the present Lodge was completed. The initial estimated cost of \$1.8 million dollars expanded to \$2.4 million and despite some misgivings the churches and people continued to respond with extreme generosity, and in retrospect the aptly named “Journey of Faith” opened the door to a whole new and exciting phase of the history of what then became Sunnybrae Bible Camp and Retreat Centre.

Several other projects deserve special mention. The “pump house” which enclosed the water tank and chlorination system had (with its red plywood walls and moss-covered roof) become something of an eyesore. Its reconstruction into what is now an attractive “building with a view” was largely due to the efforts of the Lavington Baptist congregation, and thus is affectionately referred to as the “Lavington Lookout”.

In 2009 a well-equipped and attractive children’s playground was built just to the South of the Office/Games room area of the Lodge. This colourful addition is a poignant reminder of how the camp has been blessed even through tragedy and loss, for it was built in memory of Emily Stauffer and Jonathan Martunnen, both young people from Fellowship churches whose earthly lives came to an end far too early.

The “log cabin” project, with its estimated 3000 man hours of volunteer labour supplied by around 70 individuals is another “special mention” project. This undertaking was spearheaded by Gordon Reeves and David Fairbrother and headed up largely by the people of Emmanuel Baptist Church in Vernon with assistance from several other Interior churches. The “dismantling” of the house near Lavington began in mid September, 2014, and the new occupants (the Kitchen Manager and her family) were able to celebrate Christmas in the (almost) completed building. This three month project was certainly unique as well as very labour intensive. The original building had to be dismantled, almost piece by piece (certainly log by log). Virtually everything was recycled. Almost nothing was scrapped. The dismantled house was then trucked to camp where it was reconstructed on a concrete foundation. The thousands of volunteer hours have resulted in an appropriately rustic, yet beautiful and functional facility, in which the yet unfinished basement can provide housing for additional staff in the future.

This summary of facility development is by no means complete, but it gives the reader some indication of the tremendous changes that have taken place in this area over the past quarter century. Sunnybrae Camp and Retreat Centre in 2015 is vastly different from what existed in 1990. There are, however, at least two principles that

have not changed. First, the development of Sunnybrae into what it is today is significantly due to the ongoing support of the Interior churches and their volunteers. Sunnybrae was founded on the efforts of volunteers. It continues to develop and grow with that same committed spirit of volunteerism. More will be said about this later in this history. At this point, however, we recognize that volunteers have been and continue to be vital in the ministry of camp. May God continue to provide and bless that invaluable source of support.

The second principle that has not changed in the past 25 years, nor in the past 75 years, is the fact that facilities only exist to enhance the central purpose of the camp, that is to reach and minister to people for the sake of the Lord Jesus. To the extent that the facilities contribute to that goal, they bring praise and glory to God, and so we too say “to God be the glory for the things He has done” and for those He has done it through.

Programming

Prior to the formation of the Camp Board and the hiring of a full time Camp Director in the mid 1980s, the camping program at Sunnybrae was the total responsibility of the Interior Churches of the Fellowship Baptist Convention. Generally individual churches, often under the direction of their pastor, took responsibility for one week of camping each summer, providing the director, arranging for speakers, staffing, counselling, and food, as well as planning the program for the week. It is a testimony to the continuing and often sacrificial support of these churches that the camping program at Sunnybrae continued and developed for over 40 years under this arrangement.

An early Camp Leader recalls; *“All help was volunteer and pastors along with their people served in every capacity needed. As leaders we planned our own programs, working with what was available. Each leader led as he (or she) may have learned at other camping venues or from serving at Sunnybrae. Leaders instructed and trained their counsellors. Learning took place on a mentoring basis.”* This individual summarized the situation by referring to the Scripture; “Each man did what was right in his own eyes”. (Judges 21:25) Apparently the results at Sunnybrae were significantly more positive than those occurring during the time of the Judges!

Programming focused on the basics of

Christian camping; namely the centrality of the Scripture, an emphasis on evangelism and spiritual growth, and missions. Recreational activities initially included swimming (from the mid 1970's even on Sundays!), hiking (at times to Margaret Falls and back), and team sports such as softball and soccer, but each year new activities and skill blocks were added.

In the 1980s a more centralized structure was introduced through the formation of a Camp Board and the hiring of a full time Director. While individual churches were still responsible for planning their week of camp, each individual director was responsible to the full-time director who in turn was responsible to the Camp Board, and they to the churches. This allowed for more continuity and uniformity in the programming.

Further changes took place in the latter 1990s, when Jim Neustaeter, was welcomed as the Camp Director, and a Program Director was hired. The Program Director then became responsible for planning the summer camp program, thus relieving churches from some responsibilities. The first Program Director, Adrienne Buhler (Bailie) recalls;

"With very few staff members (just Jim and myself when I was first hired) I got to help out in almost every area of camp life. I loved the variety! In the off season I worked in the office

doing various administrative tasks such as developing the camp brochure, advertising and processing registrations. I also got to travel to a number of Christian Universities and Bible Colleges each winter to promote the camp and hire summer staff. On the weekends when we had rental groups in, I worked in the kitchen assisting Wendy (the kitchen manager), helped in the dishpit and/or led whatever activities the groups were interested in. When we ran weekend retreats, I helped plan the schedule, ran registration, assigned cabins, organized clean up crews, led games and activities, etc. (In the summer) I got to do everything from planning the program, organizing kids into cabins and activities, running wide games, and selecting the next cabin to get seconds at lunch, to leading horsemanship and counselling in a cabin." (One wonders what she did in her spare time!!)

As well, a greater focus was placed on selection of summer staff, with an emphasis on screening and training in order to provide excellence in summer camp leadership. Summer Staff were given extensive training in both practical and spiritual aspects of camp ministry. The CIT (Counsellor in Training) program which has now become the SALT (Servant and Leadership Training) program was implemented in order to prepare future summer counselling and leadership staff for ministry at Sunnybrae. These programs continue to prepare quality leaders and to help ensure a ready supply of summer workers. One measure of the success of these

training programs may be seen in the fact that on a number of occasions, including this summer, there have been more applicants for SALT and Summer Staff positions than could be accommodated.

Another measure of the success of this training is evidenced by visitor response. Many groups, including both church and non-church groups make use of the Camp during the spring months when the Summer Staff is already in place. Frequently these groups comment more about the quality of the Staff than they do about the facilities. The training involves an emphasis on disciplined, exemplary ministry and godliness in life. Summer Staff do not serve at Camp primarily for fun or because of the remuneration they receive or for the relationships they build with other Staff (although several marriages have resulted from relationships built at Camp!), but to impact, win, and disciple campers for Jesus. In doing this they are also given the opportunity to discover and develop their leadership and ministry gifts, which they then are able to use in churches and beyond.

A different aspect of this training was addressed by Wendy Neustaeter, former Food Services Manager and Dining Room Hostess. (Does that title smack of multitasking?) She spoke of looking out for the physical and spiritual needs of Summer Staff, because often they didn't look after themselves properly. She went on to give

examples of what she meant. One sunburn was understandable, but repeatedly "roasting to a crisp" was just poor physical stewardship. Also, using their day off to "party" with other Summer Staff and returning for the next week of camp exhausted demonstrated questionable judgment. The response of the "Camp Mom"? God allowed you to be a counsellor. Take care of yourselves. Make choices that maximize your impact for Him.

But spiritual discipleship was also a concern for this individual. Her love for Summer Staff was made obvious by the availability of the "chair" in her office. Summer Staff would come to the kitchen asking "*Can I talk to you?*" Other kitchen workers would tell her; "*We've got your back out here. You're needed in your office right now*". Listening, praying, and providing a chocolate treat was a practical way of showing love and concern, as well as encouraging and discipling many of her "children". The spiritual warfare waged in that office impacted not only individuals, but also the entire camp in a way that can not yet fully be appreciated.

A bit of a side note is warranted here. The schedule of the Kitchen Staff made it virtually impossible for them to be involved in the "share and prayer" meetings of the Summer Staff, thus creating something of an information gap between them. The "Camp Mom" addressed this issue by encouraging the head counsellors to pass on daily prayer

concerns and praise items to her. Then, in the daily Kitchen Staff prayer times, these requests could be specifically addressed, creating a greater unity in the overall daily camp ministry.

Clearly this emphasis on excellence in the ministry of Sunnybrae has had a widespread and positive impact. The centralization of responsibility involved has yielded significant benefits, however it also had the unfortunate result of appearing to diminish the role of the supporting churches and hence, church ownership of the camping ministry. (It needs to be noted that camp has consistently attempted to maintain a healthy cooperative relationship with the area churches). This is attested to by the comments made by a former Staff Member; *“One of the very unique aspects of Sunnybrae is that it is owned and operated by a large group of churches in the region. Because of that, we had a great opportunity to develop the follow up program alongside of the local church. It was very exciting to build relationships with children’s pastors and youth pastors from our Association churches so that camp could be a great tool for them and so they could be a year long blessing to our campers!”*

However, it was felt that this bond could be strengthened, and so Tim Paquette, the present Director has stated *“A couple of years ago Sunnybrae chose to become more intentional about serving the ministry of the local church. While many Christian camps are*

becoming increasingly distant to the ministry of the church, Sunnybrae is determined to be a humble extension of our interior churches.” This commitment is echoed in the Board Chair’s 2013 report to the Annual Meeting of the Interior Churches; *“We are working on ways to have Sunnybrae become a part of the mission of our churches. Our discussion is around ways we can serve the local church by being a resource and support.”*

Part of that intentionality includes a renewed emphasis on direct church involvement in Sunnybrae program planning and operation. For example, Youth May Camp and the Junior Youth “Edge” Retreat are now jointly planned by the camp Program Director and the Youth Pastors of the Interior churches. Youth pastors are vital “on site” leaders in these ministries. Closely related to this new emphasis is a shift away for “bigger and better” programming to a focus on “ministry” especially in Youth Camps. “Big name” speakers and worship leaders have been replaced by individuals who are involved in faithful and fruitful ministry in local churches. The Camp Director and Youth Pastors chose this new direction partly because they sensed that gifted professional speakers were often viewed with such high expectations that prayer support seemed almost unnecessary. Has this shift of emphasis had an impact on Camp ministry to youth? The current Camp Director relates this example. In previous May Camps it was always difficult to have

campers attend early morning prayer times at the Campfire Amphitheatre. Relatively poor attendance at the beginning of the weekend often dwindled to almost nothing by the end. In contrast, the speaker at the May Camp of 2014 was given the promise that that camp would be the most prayed for camp ..ever.. at Sunnybrae. The first morning prayer time was attended by about 40 people. By the end that number had risen to over 150. That is not a testimony to the abilities of the speaker and worship leaders as much as it is an example of the Spirit working powerfully through the committed prayers of people seeking His blessing.

With the establishment of Millar College at the Sunnybrae Campus, another and reciprocal application to this focus has been added. As part of their practical service Millar students are actively encouraged to become involved in local church ministry, and are doing so in a number of area churches so strengthening the desired camp/church relationship. Such cooperation is essential for the healthy partnership ministry of Sunnybrae with its supporting churches. The changes implemented reflect a growing measure of mutual trust which in addition to strengthening camp/church relationships, also reflects the ongoing direction of the Holy Spirit in these areas.

Looking at programming from another perspective, a previous Camp Director spoke of “adding something new” to the Summer

Camp program each year. Among the “new” things added are certainly facilities. However there have also been additions and changes in the activities provided. At present thirteen “skill blocks” are being offered. These include Archery, Basketball and Volleyball, Canoeing, Crafts, Drama, Floor Hockey, Guitar, Horsemanship, Riflery, Rock Climbing, Soccer, Swimming, and Wilderness Adventure. In addition to these skill blocks, several graduated workshops are offered in Photography, Hiking, Woodworking, and Skimboarding. While the focus of Sunnybrae continues to be centred on salvation and transformation through Jesus Christ, these skill blocks add to the interest level of camp, and give leaders an additional opportunity to image Christ to campers.

Volunteers

Telling the story of Sunnybrae would be impossible without giving significant recognition and credit to volunteers. In fact, were there no volunteers, there would be no Sunnybrae to begin with. Neither would the camp have survived without the ongoing efforts of volunteers “from Kelowna to Barriere”. Nor would it continue to be viable without volunteers today.

In earlier years a significant amount of this “volunteerism” was in kind; meat, vegetables, milk, canning, baking. This, in addition to the before mentioned voluntary staffing and maintenance of the camp

program and facilities was the life blood of Sunnybrae. However with the introduction of government standards and regulations the “in kind” avenue of ministry had to be discontinued. That certainly did not mean volunteers were no longer needed. For, as already stated, until the hiring of Phil Cole, the camp’s first Director in 1984 the entire camping program was run by volunteers, (except that some summer staff were given honoraria to assist them in financing their ongoing education). Again, it is certainly noteworthy to point out that for the first forty-four years of its existence, the ministry of Sunnybrae was carried on almost entirely by volunteers. That has changed, but to the present the contributions of volunteers are essential to the viability of the camp.

A word of explanation is warranted before we continue this tribute. Obviously each volunteer has a name, and just as obviously not all volunteers can be named in this history. Many of you deserve to have your names and efforts chronicled, for you have been and continue to be an indispensable part of this great story. Be assured that your willingness to spend your hours and days and weeks; your “blood, sweat, and tears”, as well as your prayers and finances for the benefit of Sunnybrae are all recorded in a history far more complete and glorious than this effort.

But again, before we continue, something else needs to be noted. Certainly

not all volunteer efforts can be characterized by the phrase “blood, sweat, and tears”. As one of the contributors to this history stated; *“the camaraderie of working together was and is a very large contributor to the willingness to volunteer at Sunnybrae.”* How many chuckles and laughs; how many jokes and pranks; how much sharing and listening and encouragement and praying together has taken place in the various “work places” as well as over coffee or meals or on the front lawn or sports field? Again, only the Lord knows, but as many of you can attest, volunteering is not without its moments of both frivolity and edification! (Oh yes, and some work usually gets done as well!)

However, back to the point; your contributions of volunteer ministry are attested to by “a great cloud of witnesses”, some still on earth and some with the Lord. But the One who will ultimately reward your faithful service knows each of your names, and He will not forget any of your deeds and efforts for His glory and the building up of Sunnybrae Bible Camp and Retreat Centre. Whether or not your work is recognized here (and certainly not all of it will be) you can anticipate the time when you stand before the Master, Judge, and Rewarder of all, and hear His commendation; “Well done good and faithful servant(s)! You have been faithful in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master’s joy!” (Matthew 25:21, 23). Bless you for your faithfulness!

But, what has been accomplished in those hours, days, weeks, and months of volunteer service? Certainly the most visibly obvious answers are found in the camp's physical facilities. However, this history has already made reference to many of those developments as they took place during the tenure of the various Directors, and so the emphasis here will be on the impact of volunteers in other areas of camp ministry.

While the Facilities and Maintenance Manager is part of the Sunnybrae staff, his responsibilities are far greater than one person can manage. The solution? Very possibly you are one of those who have received a phone call from him saying; *"We need your help for a couple of days. Could you round up a few others and give us a hand? Oh, by the way, lunch is on us!"*

Speaking of lunch, Camp Sunnybrae has a reputation for serving excellent meals. A vast amount of credit for the high quality of the food goes, of course, to the Kitchen Managers and Assistants who have "served" hungry humans over the years. (How long would the camp exist without them?!) Statistics show that in 2001, 35,370 meals were served at Sunnybrae. By 2014 that number had doubled! While the Kitchen Managers and Assistants have done a remarkable job, again a word needs to be said about volunteers. How many volunteers would it take to prepare and serve these

multiple thousands of meals? A comment made by the current Camp Director summarizes the situation well. *"Can you imagine the hours required to place so many meals in front of so many people? Beyond cooking, our kitchen staff share their love with our guests and contribute to the greater ministry of the camp."* The support of volunteers is critical, but at times those volunteers seem to be in short supply. One Kitchen Manager commented on the difficulty involved in finding enough help. She related that on occasion as campers arrived on the first day of camp, there was still a significant lack of kitchen help, but as parents dropped off their children, some mothers would poke their heads into the kitchen and ask, "Do you need help this week?" Though He sometimes waited until the last minute, the Lord impressed on volunteers the need in the kitchen and provided the help necessary. He has demonstrated His faithfulness through the faithfulness of volunteers.

And what of the hundreds of volunteers, almost totally young people who spend their summers at Sunnybrae serving in a great variety of positions? They are often youth who have attended camp as children and adolescents, and have returned to begin to repay the camp for the blessings they received as campers, bringing with them the exuberance and excitement that is such a contagious part of camp ministry. These are the leaders of the future. The Lord continues to provide fresh and new personnel eager

to serve Him willingly, as they have been served by others before them. Again, He is continuing to build His Kingdom. His promises do not fail!

Growing Pains

As already noted, the past 25 years have seen a transformation of Sunnybrae. What was essentially a summer camping ministry with some off season rentals has developed into the year-round facility which is now Sunnybrae Bible Camp and Retreat Centre and Millar College Extension Campus.

The 1997 Executive Director's report to the annual meeting of the Interior Churches contained the following observations; *"The need for a comfortable, winterized, plumbed sleeping facility was brought up"* (at the Camp Board level). The report went on to say; *"A new lodge attached to the present dining hall will allow us to rent out the camp year round as well as increase our capacity for adult and family (and children's) camps"* In the opinion of one camp leader at that time; *"What this camp needs to take off is a comfortable sleeping lodge. You need to build it right now!"*

It didn't happen "right now", but the vision to expand the ministry of Sunnybrae into a year-round facility became reality within the next decade. The "Journey of

Faith" endeavour launched in May, 2002 has been referred to elsewhere in this history so it is not necessary to tell that story again. It is, however important to watch the face of Sunnybrae change from a different perspective.

Summer camp attendance had increased by 43% between 1997 and 2000, and continued to do so with the Camp Director writing in his 2003 annual report; (when summer camp attendance reached 1221) "Where do we put everyone?" In 1999 the number of summer campers had first surpassed the 1000 mark, and has remained above that level to the present. These encouraging statistics however not only highlight the urgent need for expanded facilities, they also hint at the added stress on camp personnel of such expansion. Added to the growth of the summer camping program was the huge increase in off-season rentals with the completion of the new Lodge in 2005. To address this continual growth a full time Kitchen Manager was hired in 1999, a Facilities and Maintenance Manager was added in 2002, and a full-time Program Director and an Administrative Assistant in 2008. Yet, the demands made of camp staff, especially full time staff, became increasingly heavy.

The growing pains associated with this tremendous expansion are evident in excerpts from the Director's reports from this period.

2005: *“This year has proven to be the most difficult year ever for myself at Sunnybrae. With the added responsibility of overseeing the construction of the new Fellowship Lodge, it made for an extremely busy year.”*

2006: *“I am completely blown away with the amount of (rentals) that have come our way. (They) did, however, come at a cost. As a full-time staff we were worked into the ground. From May 27 to June 24 we did not have a day off. That pace wore us out and we went into the summer very tired.”*

2007: *“From a rental perspective the “off season” can no longer be called that. It has now grown into a very large part of what Sunnybrae is to many people.”* (Statistics show that in 2004/5 prior to the completion of the Lodge, rental revenue was \$44,250.00 and by 2007 that figure had grown to \$159,700.00 which is a clear indicator of the increased rental usage of the facility).

The rental of the Lodge facilities was, then, something of a mixed blessing. The added revenue was certainly necessary for the financial viability of the Camp. However, a significant percentage of these rentals were to non-church groups. In some cases these groups did not wish to allow the “Christian” aspect of the Camp to be included during their time at Sunnybrae. There was a growing concern among the churches that the Camp was becoming a “service industry” during the off season. On the other hand, the exposure

of the Camp to many individuals who did not profess to be believers, did have its benefits. A good number of campers from these families began attending Summer Camps and so were exposed to the Gospel message. In addition to that, the (sometimes necessarily silent) witness of the Camp Staff had an impact. One Board Member commented;

“I believe that the entire Sunnybrae staff love the Lord Jesus deeply. During difficult seasons they continue to live out the purpose statement they themselves authored. ‘We are committed to being living sacrifices; who love sincerely, lead by serving, and serve by depending – to the glory and praise of God’.”

The conundrum was that while Sunnybrae had developed into a very well used, year round camping and retreat facility, which was ministering to a greatly expanded clientele, the “ministry” aspect of the Camp was, to some degree, being compromised. As well, the additional stress on full time camp staff was becoming unsustainable. While the additional revenue was essential in keeping the camp solvent, the toll on the staff was very high. Not only were they being “worked into the ground” physically and emotionally, they also suffered spiritually and socially because their seven day a week work load prevented them from being involved to any significant degree in church or small groups activities, and thus being fed and nurtured outside the camp setting. The camp had developed into Sunnybrae Bible Camp and

Retreat Centre, but at what cost to those most directly involved in leadership?

The solution (which can only be attributed to the direction of the Lord) came from a somewhat unexpected source; the addition of a Bible College extension campus to Sunnybrae. While that story merits, and will receive, a separate chapter in this history, suffice it to say at this point that in the fall of 2010 a proposal was received from Millar College of the Bible to establish an extension campus at Sunnybrae. Though a significant amount of negotiation needed to take place before this proposal could be approved, the following year the Sunnybrae Board voted unanimously to sign an agreement with Millar College, and in September 2012 the first 25 students arrived and the first classes began.

But, how did this impact the Sunnybrae staff? Very significantly. It lessened the pressures and responsibilities on them considerably. With Millar College leasing the Sunnybrae campus from September to April, no other rental groups would be accommodated during those months. As part of their practical ministry, Millar students not only took on responsibility for the cleaning of their rooms and living areas, but also served by cleaning the lodge, “manning” the dish pit, and carrying out a significant number of other “work details” which otherwise would have fallen on the shoulders of the camp staff. One of the direct benefits

is that Sunnybrae staff are now able to attend and be involved in local churches and small groups, and so benefit from the spiritual and social aspects of being part of the larger body of Christ. This cooperative venture has most certainly been of huge benefit to Sunnybrae, as well as giving Millar College of the Bible the desired opportunity to expand their ministry. The Lord is continuing to build His kingdom!

The Sunnybrae – Millar Connection

As already stated, in 2010 the Camp Board received a proposal from Millar College in Pambrun, Saskatchewan regarding the possibility of establishing an extension campus at Sunnybrae. The beginnings of this story predate 2010, and it is a story well worth sharing.

While, with the addition of the new lodge facility, Sunnybrae was flourishing both as a Bible Camp and Retreat Centre, the Camp Director and Board Chair began envisioning the development of a “Discipleship Track” to provide more in-depth training specifically for youth involved in summer camp ministry. This vision obviously grew, for as a Camp Board member at the time succinctly stated; *“Whispers of a ‘Ministry Training Centre’ in the B.C. interior were heard.”* The implementation of this dream, however, was another matter. The

time, resources and personnel required for such a venture made it seem as if this dream would remain just that.

Meanwhile, over 1000 kilometres to the East, a Bible College was facing issues of its own. Its emphasis on practical ministry placed restrictions on the number of students it could accommodate, and as a result, a significant number of potential students were being turned away each year. Out of this need grew the vision of establishing a satellite campus. However, this dream also seemed destined to remain just that in view of the prohibitive costs involved in developing a new campus.

Totally by chance (if you discount the direction of God!) Pastor Mel Reimer, then Chair of the Sunnybrae Board, who also happened to be a graduate of Millar College, was travelling to Manitoba to visit relatives in the summer of 2010. The family stopped in at Pambrun to visit his alma mater. Over a meal a conversation between the Chair and the the President of the College took place, and “in a light bulb moment” it became evident that the two visions could perhaps be achieved through a cooperative effort. That was the beginning of the process that resulted in Millar College of the Bible, Sunnybrae Campus.

Thus it “came to pass” that in the fall of 2010 Millar College proposed a cooperative effort with Sunnybrae. The

College would lease the camp facilities from September to April, and Sunnybrae would continue to maintain its camping program during the summer. The following autumn the Sunnybrae Board voted unanimously to pursue this cooperative venture.

There were, obviously, issues that needed to be addressed and resolved. Cooperation on this scale between two non-profit organizations is not a common occurrence. The Interior Churches had some concerns about the impact of a non-denominational Bible College on a Baptist camp. Additional housing for College staff needed to be addressed. Dormitory and classroom space needed to be dealt with. The question of how two “teams” could be brought together in harmonious and trusting cooperation was a major concern. These hurdles were faced and dealt with over time through the efforts of both organizations, and certainly with the wisdom and direction of God. The result; an amazing example of God’s provision for the needs and dreams of both Sunnybrae and Millar; namely the establishment of a well-developed discipleship track and Ministry Training Centre at Sunnybrae Camp, and an extension Bible College campus allowing Millar College to expand its program significantly.

Some of the issues referred to in the previous paragraph warrant further comment. Regarding the impact of a non-denominational College on a Baptist camp,

concerns were gradually laid to rest with the realization that the theological stance of both groups was largely compatible. In addition, the College year and the Camping year were totally separate so each could function within its own theological parameters independently.

The need for additional housing was resolved with the purchase of the second Mackie property. The additional 2 acres not only provided the space needed for several modular homes for College personnel and the Camp Director, but also gave the camp the Mackie home which presently houses a camp staff family. However, before the property could be utilized a great deal of work had to be done. Under the leadership of the Facilities and Maintenance Manager the site was cleared of trees, the water and sewer systems at the Camp were extended to the new property and the area was prepared to accommodate the modular homes.

Classroom and dormitory space was not an immediate concern in the first Millar College year, but with the addition of a second and then third year of studies (and students) this need had to be addressed. Second year classroom space has been provided with the purchase of a modular home which also provides a central location for Millar College during the summer. A double-wide trailer, which will house the third year class during the College year and also provide a spacious “craft room” during the camping season was added this

spring. The addition of a second fourplex, also this spring, has addressed the need for College student housing, as well as providing accommodation for 48 additional campers and cabin leaders during the summer.

The issue of bringing together two teams into a harmonious working relationship continues to be addressed through an ongoing emphasis on team building. This has resulted in a ministry partnership where Millar staff are able to rely on the support of the Sunnybrae team, who in turn are able to be a support to a specifically Christian ministry rather than supervising a service industry.

Another positive factor in the cooperative ministry of the Camp and the College is the pool of young adults essential to both ministries. Summer camp workers represent a significant potential source of future College students. Reciprocally College students are an obvious source of Summer Camp workers. In fact, this summer, thirteen Millar students will be serving in leadership positions at Sunnybrae.

An observation made by the Director of Millar College Sunnybrae Campus is also worth sharing. *“The way God orchestrated people to design the facilities (at Sunnybrae) even before Millar was on the radar has benefitted Millar today. It functions (almost) perfectly as a College.”* One might be tempted to think that God knew in advance what

would develop here in the second decade of this millennium and directed His people accordingly!

There is one more significant benefit to the Sunnybrae/Millar relationship. The current Camp Director summarizes that benefit in the following way. With Millar College establishing its Sunnybrae Campus a whole wave of new “Prayers” (people); concerned, excited, and serious “Prayers”, have been lifting up these ministries before the Lord . Before the coming of Millar, camp staff, supporting churches and many hundreds of Sunnybrae loving people supported this ministry through their prayers and intercession. When Millar established its campus here a whole new army of Prayers and Intercessors were added for the benefit of both Camp and College. Surely these prayers of God’s people are like fragrant incense, pleasing to the Lord.

What the previous paragraphs demonstrate is that the benefits for both Sunnybrae and Millar through the cooperative venture entered into three years ago are truly amazing. Through the desire and vision of Camp leadership and the needs of a Bible College, objectives have been reached which otherwise could never have been accomplished. This venture is a unique and beautiful example of God’s blessing upon His people who agree to cooperate in ministry by serving together to make disciples and thus build Christ’s kingdom.

Stories

As stated in the introductory comments, embedded in history is the word “story”. This historical sketch of Sunnybrae Bible Camp over the past 25 years is a compilation of stories; stories of growth, blessing and struggle; stories of God using faithful, committed and generous, though fallible human servants for the expansion of His Kingdom work and for His glory.

The concluding chapter of this particular history will focus on individual stories; stories of people touched and impacted by the camp, and who, in return, impacted it. This will certainly not be a compilation of all those stories, but rather a few representative ones. The words of John (21:25) come to mind. (Pardon the contextual violation!) “If every one of them (in this case the stories of people impacted by Sunnybrae) were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.” Hyperbole? Obviously, but the point is made.

Following then are a few examples of individual’s stories about Sunnybrae Bible Camp, some very brief, but others in more detail.

There is the story from a current member of the Fellowship Pacific Ministry Centre Staff who recalls with deep emotion, that as a young counsellor he led his first soul to Christ at Sunnybrae Camp. He learned

just months later that that boy had been killed in an accident. That “first” made an eternal difference.

Again, there is the story told by a pastor, who years ago as a fourteen year old Junior Counsellor at Sunnybrae was asked to give a 15 minute testimony, and proceeded to deliver his first 30 minute sermon! At the same camp that young man also sensed the Lord’s call into pastoral ministry, a call which he heeded and now pursues.

A Camp Director recalls this story. He received a post-camp telephone call from a non-believing mother whose enquiry to him was; *“My son was at camp, and I want to know what you did to him?”* Well, how does one respond to such an ambiguous question? Did camp do something positive or negative to this boy? The mother went on to explain. Our son caused nothing but chaos in our home. He was constantly mean and disruptive to his younger brother and sister. But when he came home from camp, he sat and quietly watched cartoons with his siblings. He then invited his younger sister to go out into the back yard to practice her skill at playing catch, and encouraged her in her efforts. His father took him to a baseball game. He had done so on a previous occasion but the son had been so disruptive that they had to leave early. This time, however, the boy attentively watched the entire game. His mother, baffled by the obvious behaviour change asked him what had happened to

him at camp. His reply; *“It’s not me, it’s Jesus!”* Significantly, the entire family was in church the following Sunday.

The next story is considerably longer, because unfolds over two decades. As usual, the family will remain anonymous, (though many of you will soon recognize them). The family came from anything but a Christian background, but came to faith in Christ in 1985. The following summer they attended Sunnybrae Camp, and continued to do so for several years; attending Men’s and Women’s Retreats, Family Camps, and Children’s Camps. As their relationship with Sunnybrae grew, they began to become involved as more than just visitors. In 1995 the wife agreed to direct the Craft Program for one summer on the condition that their children (ages 11 & 13) be allowed to accompany her. That “one summer” has had a few extensions, twenty to be precise, for it continues to the present.

Since the husband was employed elsewhere, he could only be directly involved during weekends and vacation times. But involved he was, doing much of the prep work for his wife’s craft projects; cutting, sanding, drilling... In addition to this supportive role in his wife’s ministry, he also became involved in maintenance and several significant facility development projects. For a time he served on the Camp Board, and in that capacity was directly involved in the “Journey of Faith” venture.

Directing the craft program has allowed his wife to be in contact with thousands of people; campers, staff, other leaders; and though speaking to large groups is not her forte, her influence on the lives of individuals, often over a number of years, is clearly significant. The “Craft Lady” is fondly remembered by many.

While their two children were introduced to camp when they were too young to assume leadership roles, they were not idle. Sweeping and washing floors, preparing tables for mealtime, cleaning bathrooms and babysitting were among the service acts of these children. Over the years their regular exposure to camp leaders and staff had a profound and positive impact on their spiritual, moral, and social lives. The “positive peer pressure” of camp left it’s indelible mark on them. As young adults both children became involved in leadership roles at camp, specifically lifeguarding, cabin leading, and summer office work. Their exposure to other camp staff resulted in both of them attending Bible College. At present they are both active in their respective churches and are raising their children in the ways of the Lord.

The testimony of this husband and wife team is; *“Camp is the perfect environment for impacting impressionable children and youth, many of whom do not have the privilege of coming from caring Christian homes. Due to the 24/7 nature of camp ministry, what campers*

learn in a week of camp has, in many cases, as much impact as an entire year of learning in church. And, when we can impact a child (at a week of camp), we often impact a whole family.”

The story of this family, while unique in its details, is not uncommon among people who have given years of service at Sunnybrae. Several others have related similar stories; stories of being impacted by, and then impacting, this ministry. These are stories of how God builds His people, His churches, and His kingdom for His praise and glory through the transforming power of the gospel.

Visualize this next incident. Sounds emanating from the kitchen indicate some type of disturbance is taking place there. Out runs a male Summer Staff person with ... what?!... the Kitchen Manager clinging to his back and “smooshing” (her word) a banana peel into his face! The explanation? He had done it to her a few seconds before. The life of summer camp kitchen staff is so terribly boring!

The next story comes from a couple whose ministry at Sunnybrae focused largely on Family Camps because their passion was building up and encouraging strong Christian families. In these camps not only the speaker but also camp group activities centred around the family. Parents who brought cell phones or “work” to camp were

asked to put them away and be involved with family group activities. This emphasis has paid dividends, not only through strengthening family bonds, but also through encouraging children to remain involved in camp ministry as they grew up. This couple observed that young people who get involved with camp ministry tend to continue to walk with the Lord, and that Family Camp is a wonderful place for young people to first become acquainted with camp. The following summary comment from this couple was; *“it was an exciting, moving experience to see children from earlier camps now leading in worship and other camp ministries.”*

Another story, on a much lighter note, is told by a former Camp Board Member whose home was located at the base of Bastion mountain. One summer day this couple was seated on their deck when they heard the sound of rocks sliding on the side of the mountain near their home. This caught their attention and roused their curiosity. Almost immediately, they heard several “yelps”, and in a few minutes two young men (one of whom later became Program Director) emerged from the bushes, dressed in sandals and shorts, went straight to the house and gasped *“Water! Water please!”*. After being somewhat revived with a cool drink, they explained that Bruce Christenson had taken them to the top of the mountain and then told them to find their own way down. (One wonders what Bruce’s version of the story might be.)

Another story worth sharing has to do with the Facilities and Maintenance Manager (hereafter referred to as “the manager”). In his position he often needed to approach the Camp Board for additional funding for upgrades or new construction. Almost as often he was informed there was nothing in the budget. In 2009 the camp was hoping to build a new two storey fourplex to house additional campers, but again, there was no money in the budget. It was then that the creative thought of the manager became evident. Why not sponsor a Golf Marathon to raise funds for the new fourplex? The plan was endorsed by the Board, and the planning and arranging was done by the manager. The result was \$17,500 raised in the first tournament. The fourplex was paid for. Subsequent Marathons raised an average of around \$20,000.00 annually, and the Golf Marathon which has now become an annual Golf Tournament continues to be well supported and so provides funding for new construction. At present four cabins have been built or completely renovated with the proceeds of these tournaments. As well the second fourplex, now nearly complete, bears witness to the ongoing benefits of this endeavour. Thanks “Mr. Manager” for your vision and efforts. You have not only enabled the camp to expand its facilities, you have also brought an annual day of enjoyment to many camp supporters.

A time-honoured camp tradition is the “nicknaming” of staff. A Camp Director had been labelled “Gouda” because he was the “big cheese”. A young camper, however, had another perspective. One day she approached the Director and told him; “I know why they call you Gouda”. “Why?” “‘Cause you’re stinky!”

A wonderful “God story” is told by the Director of Millar College, Sunnybrae Campus. He had come to Sunnybrae in 2010 with a 36 hour window to find accommodation for his family. He and his wife (who had not accompanied him on this quest) had agreed that they would rent rather than purchase a home. Accompanied by the Camp Director, he looked at a number of rental possibilities in the vicinity of the camp, and found them all “less than stellar”. The best of the possibilities appeared to be a fourteen foot double wide trailer for which the owner required \$1150 per month rent. His time in the area was running out. He had to leave the following morning. With some reluctance, he called his wife in the later afternoon, informing her of the options. Her response; “*We need to trust the Lord. Take it.*” Shortly after that phone call, a man who lived near the camp and is significantly involved in Sunnybrae’s ministry, informed the Director that he knew someone wanting to rent out her house. The owner was a truck driver who answered the phone by saying she was just returning from a road trip, and would be willing to meet with them

in an hour. Her house, located within a few kilometres of the camp, was a rustic log home, on two levels, with 4 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms and a large living room. She stated that if she could get \$1000 per month she would be “thrilled”. The deal was settled with a handshake. It was about then that the Lord impressed this message on the Director; “*I’m in this. Don’t worry.*” Indeed. All credit clearly goes to the Lord who orchestrates stories like this for His glory and honour.

Summary Observations

This overview of the Sunnybrae Bible Camp and Retreat Centre and Millar College of the Bible Campus is by no means exhaustive. Much more could be said. Many more people could have been interviewed. Many more stories could be told. Yet as incomplete as this history is, it gives an indication of how God and His people have worked together to develop a facility through which many are coming to faith in Christ and are being discipled and equipped for ministry. This equipping for ministry first of all applies to the Camp itself, but it does not end there by any means. A list of the young people who came to know Christ, were encouraged and discipled at Camp, and then assumed leadership roles here would certainly be almost impossible to complete. (and since attempting to do that would inevitably overlook some, such a list will not

be attempted here!) But beyond ministry at Sunnybrae, campers disciplined, encouraged, and entrusted with leadership here have gone on to become Youth Pastors, Pastors, Missionaries and leading Christian laypersons in churches and communities in many parts of the world. The addition of Millar College has significantly enhanced this discipleship training emphasis and thus expanded the impact of this ministry.

How does one bring this history to a close? Perhaps a fitting way is to share some statistics gleaned from various sources. Those statistics show that over the past quarter century, an average of 160 decisions for Christ, including first time commitments, recommitments, and counselling for assurance, have been made at Camp each year. Using that average approximately 4,000 people, mainly children and youth have made significant commitments to the Lord because of the ministry of Sunnybrae in the past 25 years. From the perspective of Millar College, in the first year 25 students were enrolled. That number grew to 43 in the second year, and to 62 in the 2014/2015 term. Now, obviously those raw statistics do not give a clear indication of the spiritual impact of Sunnybrae and Millar on the lives of those who have spent time on this campus. Have all of those who have made commitments at Camp “followed through”? No. But many have, and many continue to follow the Lord, and many are even now having a powerful and positive impact on

the church of Christ and the Kingdom of God significantly because of the impact of this camp on their lives. Will all of the students of Millar “follow through” and maximize their discipleship training? That would indeed be desirable, but is probably not realistic. Not all seed that is sown falls on fertile ground and bears abundant fruit. Yet the impact for Christ of these students in the “world” in which they will live and serve will also contribute to building His kingdom and so bring joy to the Lord.

This history, then, is the story of our faithful God and Saviour, working through the lives of committed followers for His praise and glory and honour, and the building of His Kingdom; a Kingdom that will only be fully realized when our Lord returns. In other words, the full story of Sunnybrae Bible Camp will only be revealed in eternity. Soli Deo gloria.

List of Contributors

The compilation of this history is due largely to the information and insights supplied by variety of people. A sincere word of thanks is extended to those people for agreeing to be interviewed and supplying the material compiled herein. Obviously many more of you could have been interviewed and would have supplied additional useful information, however the question of “how many is enough” had to be considered. For those of you who have stories to tell that are not found in this history, please do not feel overlooked. Hopefully many of you will be able to tell your story during the 75th anniversary celebration. Happy story telling!

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