

NEVER TOO LATE

TO

REMEMBER

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CENTER LAKE BIBLE CAMP – PROGRAM HISTORY 1956 TO 1988

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Introduction: Program is people. This is an attempt to capture some of the program and people highlighting the years I was a part of Center Lake; as a camper 1956-58, as volunteer staff in 1958, 1962 and 1966, as paid staff 3 summers 1967-69 (Lysle and I - maintenance and nurse), then as the first year round resident staff for the next 18 ¾ years – Sept. 1969 to May 1988. Lysle served on the Camp Development Committee and Carm on the Camp Program Committee until there was a year-round Camp Director.

Submissions are included from others who responded to an invitation to share their memories and stories.

This is a history in process. Corrections, additions and comments are all welcomed to serve as a program record supplementing Camp administrative records kept by Michigan Baptist General Conference.

THE EARLY YEARS

1955 – There was much excitement throughout the Lower Michigan Baptist Conference Churches when the first 40 acres of beautiful property on Center Lake was located and purchased. People envisioned a continuation of the camping program begun years before using various rented facilities. It was well known even then that young people were especially receptive to God's Word in a weeklong spiritual environment of fun, fellowship and age-appropriate Bible study. Salvation and Christian commitment decisions were greater in the weeklong camp setting than in any other setting. Hence, the Conference was eager to own their own facility dreaming to expand the program to adults and entire families.

That first year the program was building the camp, while still renting 4 weeks at Rainbow Lake Bible Camp, Trufant, MI for youth camps. But in 1956 with dining hall/basement chapel, restroom/shower building and 8 cabins in place, 4 weeks at CLBC happened – Jr. Boys, Jr. Girls, Junior High and Sr. High. The theme song of RLBC was just changed to:

"CLBC, that's the place for me,
It's the Center Lake Bible Camp.
Others may have the rest,
As for me I'll take the best,
The Center Lake Bible Camp.

Studying the Word of God,
Living now for Him,
Witnessing to those who stray,
In the paths of sin.
CLBC, that's the place for me,
It's the Center Lake Bible Camp.

Coming from Conference churches, campers age 9-18 rumbled in through the dust on Saturday mornings by buses and cars for 7 full days of experiences that would change lives, etch memories for a lifetime, and set building stones for 50 years and beyond.

In those early years there was an all-summer director (Ron Macdonnell) who coordinated the volunteer staff for each of the weeks scheduled. The Conference Board/Christian Education Committee hired him and they were responsible to the churches of the LMBC. The summer director worked with the Board/Committee to enlist

Pastors and Lay people as Program Directors for each week. The weekly Program Directors enlisted other Pastors and Lay people to be Chapel speakers, Bible teachers and counselors along with a missionary of the week. Cooks, a nurse, and a maintenance person came all summer if possible, or when necessary on a weekly basis, mostly volunteers.

Staff training consisted of pre-camp planning by the weekly program director and a one-hour meeting for weekly counselors upon arrival. State regulations were much less stringent. When inspectors for State licensure came, it was required that credentials be shown for nurse and waterfront director. The menu and daily schedules were reviewed. The staff to camper ratio was reviewed and counselors could be as young as age 16. Facilities were of little concern perhaps comparable to primitive Boy Scout Camps or The Army, just no glaring hazards. I think the inspector looked for a director with common sense for the safety of children. It was pretty easy.

One of the first program areas was required by Wally Peterson, State LMBC Missionary, - a ball field. He came to Camp to play baseball for sure. The waterfront comprised a short dock, a few rowboats, a few canoes, lots of huge pollywogs and bullfrogs, and big trees casting so much shade that swimming was always a cold experience – especially morning dip in that spring-fed lake. The Summer Director usually served as the Waterfront Director assisted by lifeguards according to State regulations. Other activities came shortly thereafter, like archery, riflery, shuffleboard, horseshoes, handcrafts, etc.

The weekly schedule included hilarious skits by cabins, scavenger hunts (including a hair from a cute lifeguard's head), counselor hides, capture the flag at night, a last night banquet, daily flag raising ceremony, Sunday afternoon hike (no Sunday swim rule), canteen time afternoon and evening, daily morning and evening chapels, morning Bible classes, handcrafts, nightly campfires, and counselor-led cabin devotions at bedtime. Most things happened as a whole group (called "centralized camping") except nightly devotions. Daylight Savings Time had not yet come to Michigan so it got dark by 9 PM making possible creative campfires at the lake with a different experience each night: i.e. giving a testimony then crossing a homemade wooden bridge (to represent new life in Christ with a bridge-burning at the end signifying leaving the past behind to follow Christ), fagot service (throwing a stick on the fire after giving a testimony signifying a confessed sin), burning cross (setting fire to a large wooden cross wrapped in gasoline-soaked burlap and mounted somehow out in the lake signifying the cross worth dying for), giving a testimony then lighting a candle attached to a paper plate and floating it out on the lake (signifying let your light shine in a dark world). Lots of campers have kept those commitments to this day. Campfire choruses included: "Give Me Oil in my Lamp", "He Owns the Cattle on a Thousand Hills", "Everybody Ought to Know", "Safe Am I", "Every Day with Jesus", "Let's Talk About Jesus", "Mansion Over the Hilltop", "Heavenly Sunshine", "Christ for Me", "For God So Loved the World", "Do Lord", "Thank you Lord", Sunday School songs and first verses of any gospel hymns we knew from memory.

Personal account: In 1956 at age 14 in Jr. High Camp, Harvey Clark, BGC missionary to the Philippines, was our speaker for the week. He asked for those who sensed God's call to missions and willing to head in that direction unless God shuts the door, to stand for prayer. That was the first time I was given the option "unless God shuts the door" in a missionary commitment request. I responded to that readily because I felt it was a safe promise to God rather than I will be a missionary. I have kept that promise to this day serving in Christian Camping going on 40 years. Christian Camping is still the largest mission field to young people.

Another personal account: In 1958 when Lakeside Baptist, Muskegon needed cabin counselors, at age 16, I counseled for two weeks during Jr. Girls and Jr. High. The 9-12 year old girls were easy, going to sleep readily with a good Christian story. Weekly director, Queeny Foster, allowed ½ the counselors, alternately each night, a few hours of fun while the others kept watch. With a couple guy lifeguards, and armed with broom handles fitted with three-pronged spears (purchased at Hoaglund Hardware in Tustin) and high-powered flashlights we prepared to go frog hunting. With life jackets on we rowed a boat along the coves of the lakeshore and speared a couple dozen of those huge frogs. (They are really hard to kill and jump out of the boat unless you grab their legs and beat their heads on the side of the boat - thought you'd like to know that.) We then took the legs, skinned them, rolled them in flour with salt and pepper, and fried them in a pan with some lard. (Think you'd like to know this too - frog legs twitch and wiggle in the pan when fried.) Then we had the feast of a lifetime. These large frog legs tasted just like chicken, of course – and better because we worked hard to get them. Thanks, Queenie, for letting us have this experience and another night on the town of Cadillac at the roller rink during our week of counseling Jr. Girls. She believed that counselors needed to have as much

fun as the campers. Note: Due to the restaurant demand for frog legs, about 1967 some commercial froggers came on the lake from the public beach with long canoes and must have filled their big sacks with all the large-frog variety, because after that no more large pollywogs and huge frogs were seen.

During High School Camp the CYF (Conference Youth Fellowship) helped plan and lead the camp week. The officers were elected each year and they served as representatives for our age group to the LMBC adult leadership. They also planned a weekend retreat later in the year. Among those who served were Evelyn Lundin Barr, Gene Selander (Pastor's son from Dalton) and later Wally Peterson's sons were Presidents of CYF.

At Sr. High camp pranks were plentiful: Short sheeting a counselor's bed (few sleeping bags then). Putting cornflakes, a frog or a snake in a counselor's bed. Pulling PJs or unmentionables up the flagpole so they had to be lowered before raising the flag in the morning while the guilty ones snickered. Stealing the clapper from the bell so the wake up bell could not be rung. Breakfast was not served until the clapper was returned. The Program Director would patrol the grounds after dark making sure no couples were breaking the 6-inch rule. Wally Peterson got especially alarmed when he saw what looked like a hugging couple behind a big tree. Upon investigation it was some smart alick wrapping his arms around himself and standing with his back toward the light. Everyone got a laugh as the story spread around camp the next day.

Wally Peterson and Irvin Piell were known as the ones who could play instruments without instruments. That's right, Pastor Piell would play the juke harp using his finger in the corner of his mouth and Wally would play the Hawaiian guitar pinching his nose and humming – totally crazy.

As Pastor Piell became a grandpa he became more attached to Jr. Girls Camp coming as the weekly chapel speaker for years. Boys Brigade Camp and Jr. Boys Camp brought Uncle John Libke and Walt Kronemeyer as captivating speakers. Missionary Kronemeyer baffled the boys carving away on catalpa wood. He offered a quarter to the first one who could guess what he was carving. At the end of the week he awarded a perfectly carved elephant to program director, Vern Ohs.

More weeks were added for families, Juniors and Jr. Hi then Niners (9th graders). Wally phoned almost every day asking for up-to-the-minute registration numbers; more campers meant budgets met.

One week during Boys Brigade Camp it rained every day. They wanted to take a canoe trip but with the cold rain it wasn't advisable. Royce McCarty and Jim Elenbaas phoned the Cadillac airport every day for a specific forecast for the immediate area. It was always RAIN. In the disappointment the staff tried to keep things lively. Let's have another skit night. Wouldn't you know, every single skit the campers and staff did had WATER in it! Halfway through the week we gathered the wet clothes from each cabin into a mattress cover labeled by cabin to the laundry mat in Cadillac to dry them, then dumped them out in the middle of the floor for kids to claim them. It was the only way to survive the week.

In the early summer really large snapping turtles would come up from the lake to lay their eggs. One such turtle met up with doom when a volunteer counselor told everyone he knew how to make really good turtle soup. He chopped off the head and without any further preparation put the whole thing, shell and all, into an old pot on the kitchen stove. He said boiling would make the shell come off easier and you could clean out the innards later. Well the stench in the kitchen dashed any hope that this would be good soup. The pot was green with slime and the whole pot and contents were thrown out. To my knowledge no one ever came up with the proper way to make turtle soup. Besides, I think turtles became protected species just as those huge frogs should have been.

It was always important to be sure the campers got enough exercise after sitting in class and chapel. For young boys there was nothing better than the famous snipe hunt (the idea came from Mickey Mouse Club on TV). We got a young chicken from a local farmer and dyed it with green food coloring as camouflage. After giving the kids a big story about snipes we sent them into the tall grass to find the snipe, offering big reward for capturing it. The chicken was scared to death being chased by a whole camp of boys and ran like mad. It tired the kids out so they slept well and the winners got a special treat.

Manistee coach, Mal Pearson and his family, spent 3 summers 1963-66 pouring their hearts into the lives of campers creating an atmosphere of tons of fun accompanied by the seriousness of eternal destiny. Mal would

show us the Mexican Hair Dance using a large sheet pan from the kitchen filled with about ¾ inch of water. Then he would find a long hair from one of the campers heads and have the campers move in closer to see it dance on water while his daughter, Diane, played a tune on her flute. Just when we were straining hardest to see the hair dance he would suddenly slap both of his hands flat into the water and splash everyone.

Besides making a really big deal out of mail call after supper, making campers sing for their mail, Mal started the Yellow Ribbon contest. This was a real crazy time when he took the "boners" of the day submitted by campers and staff, real or imagined, and called up the people who had pulled boners. By screaming loudest for their choice of funniest, the crowd voted on who would wear a yellow ribbon around their neck for the next 24 hours. Everyone sang a song for the winner as follows: Around his neck he'll wear the yellow ribbon. He'll wear it in the morning and he'll wear it all day long. And if you ask him why the decoration, he'll say it's for the boner that he pulled yesterday.

Besides mail call and the yellow ribbon contest there was the daily report on cabin clean up with the rooster and pig awards for the best and worst cabin of the day. The decorative plastic critter of your cleanliness or lack thereof sat on your table until the next day when awards were given again.

In addition to scavenger hunts, counselor hides, skits, and capture the flag, there was crazy hat meal, backwards meal (walk backwards and wear your clothes backwards), a no silverware meal but eat with whatever kitchen utensil was beside your plate, and backwards day starting with evening dessert and ending the day with breakfast. Every week included a picnic with grilled meat, potato salad, baked beans, sweet corn and watermelon. For the banquet, the Staff arranged the dining hall tables banquet style with white covering and decorated the room with streamers and balloons. Staff played dominos around the kitchen worktable late at night with Pastor Kolmodin while munching on left over desserts from the cooler. It truly was as much fun to be on staff as to be a camper because the hard work and long hours were so enjoyable.

Right about this time the legend of Pierre began. It is said that Pierre, an old hermit, lived in the roadhouse (that's what the farmhouse by the Camp entrance was called). Every morning Pierre would come down to the lake for a bath. In the winter he had to chop a hole in the ice, but he never missed a day. Pierre never hurt a flea but was just very unsociable. At this point the story took many turns depending on who was telling it. But the most intriguing thing about Pierre was if you were really quiet and listened real hard after climbing into bed at night you could hear Pierre's heartbeat. And I swear I really could; ka-thunk, ka-thunk, ka-thunk. Later we learned the ka-thunk was the oil well just northwest of camp about ¼ mile that was pumping oil.

Army Chef, Don, and wife, Hilma Lamphere with Helene Hammar and others were the best cooks making everything from scratch. Gordon Food Service didn't have much prepared food like now, but the cooks had lots of Government commodities. The breakfast turnovers were excellent. We always ate real good with menus of pancakes, eggs, toast, oatmeal, cinnamon rolls, goulash, macaroni and cheese, meat and potatoes, stew and biscuits, chicken ala king, soups, grilled cheese sandwiches, salads, canned vegetables and fruits, homemade bread and dinner rolls, cakes, cookies, pudding, jello and pies – just like the farmers ate.

ADDING PROGRAMS, BREAKING OUT OF MOLDS

By the mid to late sixties Christian camping was being advanced by the Christian Camps and Conferences Association (became CCI-Christian Camping International, but now back to it's original name), beginning on the West Coast and broadening membership to the East Coast. The fact was recognized: "why should anyone have to reinvent the wheel?" Camaraderie with national and regional conferences drew larger crowds of Christian Camp workers to share ideas with each year. It was a huge resource. Center Lake became a dues-paying member early on. Baptist General Conference was already helping to blaze the way by participation from headquarters and Trout Lake Camp in Minnesota, a BGC model camp. Ted Johnson, BGC Director of Camping; Lee Kingsley, Minnesota Director of Christian Education/Camp Director; and Lloyd Matson, BGC Camp resource writer, were names that CCI members knew well. In the seventies John Pearson became CCI-CEO after directing the BGC Camp Hickory in Illinois for several years.

There was much talk about de-centralized camping to meet the needs of a changing society – kids needing more one on one attention because of more dysfunctional homes and need for experiential learning. Center

Lake began trip camping and wilderness camping on the newly acquired 80 acres. The first trip was a group of about 20 Jr High and Sr High boys going to the Boundary Waters in northern Minnesota for 10 days with Lloyd Matson. The time was fantastic but the distance made everyone say we can design some really neat small group trip experiences in Michigan. The next year was a backpacking trip to Isle Royale National Park. Then canoe trips began using various nearby rivers, followed by bike trips with borrowed chuck wagon, and outdoor living in tents with wilderness director, Dan Peterson, near Sunshine Mountain. Skill classes included fire building, cooking over open fire, wilderness first aid, building natural shelters, forestry, marine biology, etc. Outdoor-loving pastors like Roy Williamson and Harvey Hammond led spiritual times and Bible study. Not to be outdone, the girls also did several wilderness trips led by Peggy Miller, NAB church in Auburn.

About this time the now MBGC established a wonderful relationship with the North American Baptist Church (German Baptists) in Michigan. There was even some talk of a merger, which didn't happen. But the relationship did bring a great camping relationship with the NAB subsidizing each camper financially. Camp promotion was done in the NAB churches resulting not only in campers but Pastors, lay leaders, and lots of work crews.

After the dining hall, chapel and staff cabins were winterized in 1972, the first "winter" retreat came over Thanksgiving break. Dan Wielhower brought about 25 teens from Faith Baptist in Royal Oak. We even got some snow to make the winter retreat more real.

DINING HALL BURNS TO THE GROUND

After the first season of winter camping, and just after Memorial Day weekend Family Camp, disaster struck. Lysle Johnson had been working all day Tuesday to clean buildings including waxing the dining hall floor, all during a severe electrical storm. He went home (up to their mobile home by the entrance) for supper. The sun came out about an hour later as he was resting in his easy chair when a lady came to the door yelling, "There's a big fire down there in the big building by the lake." Lysle flew down to Camp while Carm phoned the Tustin volunteer fire department. She had just completed the call when their phone, an extension of the camp phone, went dead. Lysle immediately shut down the gas and the electricity to the building but already it was filled with thick smoke and flames shot out of a 25-foot diameter hole in the roof. Carm ran to the road and directed the fire truck and firemen to the dining hall. Their excellent response time was 8 minutes.

We thanked the lady who was driving by on 20 Mile Road and was concerned enough to drive in and check out what was causing the black cloud of smoke in the sky. She had tried to use the office phone by breaking a window but couldn't reach it. (The front door wasn't locked but she panicked and didn't think to try that.) The fire department did a great job but the building was a total loss. They kept hosing the surrounding trees and the small pantry behind the kitchen. They refilled their truck from the lake and kept extinguishing the fire until about 11 PM. A crowd of neighbors came to watch the action. Carm took several pictures then phoned Wally Peterson. Rose said he was at a MBGC Board of Trustees meeting at South Kent Baptist Church. Andy Husmann picked up the phone at the church and made me repeat what I had just said. He decided I wasn't joking. The MBGC Board took immediate action to set an emergency committee in place to evaluate all possibilities so summer camp would not be cancelled and to spend money to make it possible.

Word spread throughout the MBGC churches like wild fire (no pun intended). Tustin school offered to allow food service there all summer if needed. But God had better plans. Our church in Sawyer, MI knew of Anderson's Swedish restaurant near them that was going out of business and the building was to be purchased by a Catholic dentist. When approached he was willing to sell all the equipment at half appraised value. Wally asked Lysle and Carm to see if the equipment was useable and worth \$5,000. The variety of small items and large pieces were just what we needed to get started. A quick evaluation of the chapel led the Committee to believe it was the best option – store the pews in a neighbor's barn and turn one wing into a kitchen using the building multipurpose. We knew Caberfae ski area was vacant in the summer and asked them what we could borrow. For the next three years we hauled heavy fold up tables with seats attached to Camp in spring and back to Caberfae in fall at no cost except for the back strain. The Johnsons shopped for used equipment and found some great items at low cost to complete the kitchen needs.

This is where the folks from several NAB churches really helped installing heavy duty electrical service, propane gas hook ups, plumbing for sinks and dishwasher, septic system, hot water heater, equipment installation, walk in cooler behind the chapel and shelves for food storage in the prayer room. Cereal and paper products were stored in the choir loft. The dinner bell was moved nearby the chapel. Only one early June rental group had to be cancelled. Another small group was fed by cooking in Johnson's mobile home. Everything was ready enough for summer camp.

Thanks to Spring Hill Camps, in Evert MI we had the use of their dump truck and backhoe to clean up the burn mess. The basement was cleaned to use for crafts again. It took an enormous amount of work by scores of volunteers to make the 6-week deadline but God gave the right connections and skilled workers.

Church Mutual Insurance came through well. We collected the maximum amount for tree damage (about 25 trees were scorched). The hardest part of the insurance requirement was to list absolutely all the building contents, every peeler and pan. We could even put a value on recipes. Helene Hammar was excellent for all this. She even had a handwritten back up of most recipes. She was paid by the insurance to recopy them all for a new kitchen file.

The total insurance money was only a drop in the bucket for rebuilding-now with plans for bigger and better. It took 3 years to move into the new dining hall built in the same location. Actually the fire was a blessing in disguise because the old building could not be easily remodeled and expanded to be as nice as the replacement.

Apparently the fire was caused by lightning that struck the electrical entrance to the building, because there was a hole in the galvanized conduit burned from the inside out. It smoldered for some time before burning through the roof.

REBUILDING AND BI-CENTENNIAL

The temporary kitchen served well while the MBGC raised money, secured architectural plans, a contractor, and built the new dining hall/lodge building - first the lower level to see if money would be available to continue with Phase 2. Again God supplied and the upper level took form. One day when the carpenters were hammering away we had a waterfront emergency drill. When the air horn sounded everyone on the grounds followed procedure and ran to their instructed places to be counted while the waterfront staff began their wading/diving patterns. The carpenters didn't know what to do when they saw all this from high up on the construction site. They didn't know if they should run too or see if they could help with some emergency. When everything returned to normal, they told us never to scare them like that again but let them know what was going on.

Ginger Manson and Donna Crum cooked in the temporary kitchen. Ask them about the naked chicken dance or spilling the liquid Jell-O in the walk in cooler behind the chapel. They did a great job improvising in many ways to still provide tasty food that kids like. Their service for our Lord was always full of fun and laughter.

Just about this time the "Jesus" movement hit the west coast. This was really influencing the youth culture across the country. The latest songs were, "It Only Takes a Spark", "We Are One in the Spirit", "Here Comes Jesus", "The King is Coming", "I Wish We'd All Been Ready", "There's Just Something About That Name", "I'm So Glad I'm a Part of the Family of God", "Heaven is a Wonderful Place", etc. Guitars were becoming predominant for church services and not just campfires. Campers and staff could be seen just sitting around jamming in free time. At Camp it was obvious that folks from the East side of the State were far more progressive than the West side. It was easy for the East side folks to accept the rowdy JESUS cheers brought in by Ian Leitch but the West side folks weren't too sure this was spiritual. Eventually the West side folks decided there was no harm done and joined in on the fun. After all, we can yell until our voices are hoarse at football games, why not shout for Jesus. Ian's messages were definitely Bible centered and convicting. The Gospel message stayed the same but the Camp protocol sure was changing. These years brought a new sincerity and renewed zeal for serving Christ with your whole life and making Christ appealing to a new generation.

A summer Staff Manual was started giving job descriptions, activity safety procedures, procedures for Lost Camper, Waterfront Emergency, Fire Emergency, Discipline, description of Growth and Development of various aged campers, How to lead a child to Christ, etc. At the encouragement of CCI and the State all-summer, paid counselors were given a week of training. Safety issues and counselor effectiveness were main topics along with team development being a high priority. Emergency procedures, taught by Mercy Ambulance Service from Grand Rapids, Aquatic skills, CPR, Program enhancement, and personal Spiritual preparation all gave solidity and confidence to the all-summer staff. Many counselors were hired who could also lead a skill area such as rifle instructor or fill another role such as canteen manager. Since the cabins each had 19 or 20 beds one paid counselor was placed in each cabin assisted by a weekly volunteer. The volunteers were still crucial because with a 7-day camp week the all-summer counselors needed a day off. There was talk of making each week a 6-day camp but then the gasoline prices soared so that idea was nixed.

In the office all bookkeeping was done by hand with adding machine. It was difficult to have a different secretary keep the books and registration records each summer. Then the books changed hands to a Camp Committee member in the non-summer. After moving their mobile home to Camp in 1969, Carm offered to care for the bookkeeping year round. She could attend Board planning meetings to give greater understanding. That solved a lot of problems. The AB Dick mimeograph machine was used for all the printing of reports, schedules, program songs etc. You typed on a blue stencil with blue liquid to cover mistakes, placed the stencil on a round drum with thick liquid ink poured into it, turned a crank to make copies, then washed your hands to get off the unavoidable messy ink. You can't appreciate a copier unless you've run the mimeograph machine. Wally Peterson kept us supplied with reams of white and colored paper so we could color-code everything. He delivered this paper all over the Conference to get a high volume discount. Amazingly the paper cost was as much or more than it is now.

After 7 years with various summer directors serving one or two summers, (Stevens, Morlands, Shields, Carigons, and Legrees), 1967-1973, the next 5 summers were led by Steve Butts and Jerry Wheeler. The program was becoming more complex and creative all the time. The Camp was seeing a need to be competitive with nearby camps that had horses. To establish a horse ranch at Center Lake would require knowledgeable year-round personnel, purchase of horses, added insurance and construction of barn and coral. The cost was prohibitive. After some creative thinking, Camp Living Waters 25 miles west was approached for sharing their existing horse program in the mornings when they weren't riding. They were delighted to have the additional income and worked with us nicely. On our end, campers paid extra to sign up specifically for horsemanship. For the next 5 or 6 years a bus or van took 24 campers and a Bible teacher on the 1/2 hour trip to horsemanship. One half the campers received horsemanship instruction and the other half had Bible, then the groups switched. The desirability and success of the program led to Center Lake's own horse program in the late eighties.

Some of the neat program ideas during these summers were: Christmas in July, Humpty Dumpty theme, a Laotian supper - served to cabin groups on the floor in circles with only a bowl of rice, eggs, and water and eating with fingers, designed by a counselor who'd served in Laos, followed by a pizza party before bedtime; and a Japanese banquet with Marji Sorley, missionary daughter adopted from Japan - a lot of work for the cooks but very exquisitely executed for a special missionary emphasis. There were a number of college summer music traveling teams that spent a week especially during Sr. Hi camps. It was extra special when they gave concerts in the neighbor's barn about a one-mile walk from Camp. It was neat to sit on the bales of hay stacked stepwise and look down on the presentation of youthful music, skits, speaker and snacks.

In 1976 the country was gearing up to celebrate USA Bi Centennial. During the entire previous year the leadership planned to center the summer theme on our country's 200th birthday with celebration and patriotism - eighteenth century style. Ladies made hundreds of colorful early settler bonnets so every girl got one. Triangular navy felt patriot hats were purchased for the boys. The dining hall/chapel was decorated with fancy tissue paper foldouts. Small fireworks and sparklers were displayed each week. Many games and activities also carried out this theme. Definitely lots of thought and planning made it great.

Besides canoe trips using our own canoes with canoe trailer, another trip was a daylong trip to Sleeping Bear Dunes. This broke up the week and made Camp more exciting for older kids. It required some busses and drivers plus packed lunches. It took creative programming to make the trip special. It gave the non-program staff a chance to recoup and regroup back at Camp now the summers were longer with rental weeks before

and after our own camps. Some more new programs were added such as sailing, obstacle course, skeet shooting, and Sunday early morning service at the new waterfront amphitheater with Bob Hamlet designing a message through drama using The Wizard of Oz characters. Another program addition was the development of a marked nature trail that was self-guided using a booklet explaining vegetation, trees, and possible wildlife that could sometimes be seen along the way. Some of the games and activities were Pony Express, 43 Man Squamish (developed by George Butler), Wells Fargo and water carnivals.

RETREATS AND RENTALS

Some of the earliest retreats shortly after Center Lake opened were Michigan Conference Men's, Women's, Pastors (weekday), Families and College Age weekend retreats scheduled during spring and fall. Adults enjoyed Camp a lot too. Recreation and spiritual renewal plus Camp awareness proved good for Camp because money was raised for purchases and volunteers were recruited for projects. The women kept the kitchen supplied with aprons and potholders and made curtains for cabins while the men cut firewood, revamped septic systems, and built buildings. Regular volunteers doing a large amount of work were Lester Larsen and Jerry Wheeler, Sr. They would tackle anything, staying weeks on end during the summer. They did the projects so Lysle Johnson could supervise the maintenance staff, keep up the buildings and grounds and repair vehicles and equipment.

After winterizing in 1972 and having in place a resident couple to coordinate winter retreats and rentals, the Camp started hosting a growing number of guest groups, many of which became regulars. The groups were asked to subscribe to the Camp rules and be compatible with a Christian emphasis. Most groups ministered in the same way as we did. The Camp was in a desirable location for mostly snowy winters, nearness to Caberfae and Crystal Mountain Ski Areas, great tubing hills, groomed cross country ski trails, a short distance to Pine River canoeing, and excellent food and facilities. Our year round cook, Madge Schultz, faithfully drove up from Muskegon for years for the larger retreats with grandsons, Steve and Richard, for safety and extra kitchen help, to delight everyone with her skillfully prepared menus. In the summer, volunteers, Bob and Janet DeVries, maintained a large garden and produce was really enjoyed by fall adult retreats.

Camping rentals in the cold weather months financially subsidized the summer program because the income helped pay the large annual bill of Church Mutual Insurance Multiperil Policy and we could operate with less staff than summer. Heating costs were kept low using airtight woodstoves in the two largest buildings with wood harvested on the property.

It was great to have Jerry Wheeler, Jr. as first additional year round resident staff to help with the workload. Jerry did wilderness camping, programming, hosting, food service, split tons of stone for fireplace construction, and fed the woodstove fires for little pay, but drove school bus for real money. When he married Andi in 1976 they bought a mobile home and lived on the east side of the roadhouse. Dorothy Trowbridge was also a tremendous asset for several years. She helped in the kitchen with retreats, ran canteen, was year round secretary and helped Lysle clean after retreats. Mark Tanner also was on year round staff.

The largest retreat ever was an MBGC Sr. High winter retreat. Over 350 campers registered. We had slept campers in wings of the chapel, the dining hall lounge, the basement meeting room etc. with mattresses on the floors before, but even this would not be adequate. Many times our Camp had networked with Kettunen Center, 4-H Leadership Camp across the lake, for extra bunks etc. but now we needed the floor space and more restrooms as well. Kett graciously came to the rescue housing about 100 there. The chapel seating was crowded but OK. The meal service fed campers continuously with a one hour serving line doing dishes fast to reuse them for the last served. It turned out great spiritually with fairly well behaved campers for such a large group. There was one surprising incident for cook Madge though. She filled the largest stockpot (about 15 gal.) with chili a day ahead of this retreat. It was wheeled into a back room on a cart and left to "chill down". When time to reheat the pot she stirred it with the large wooden utensil we called a "canoe paddle". She jumped back and almost screamed. It was alive! It turned out someone had filled one of those extra long, skinny balloons that magicians use with water and submerged it in the chili. No one knows for sure but everyone thinks Jeff Brodrick did it.

Two longstanding summer rentals were one week with Troy Baptist Church of about 150 Jr. & Jr. Hi kids, and two weeks with Grand Rapids Youth for Christ Youth Guidance of about 100 "at risk" 12-17 year olds. Other summer rentals included Armada Police Youth Assistance and a couple band camps. They challenged our support staff as much as our own camps.

One night the Haslett Band camp decided to go down by the lake about 9:30 PM with their instruments and blast across the lake to the band camp at Kettunen Center. Very soon Madge Schultz stopped the noise. She went down there and told them they had to be quiet so she could sleep if they wanted breakfast in the morning. They immediately complied because to miss breakfast and march all morning on an empty stomach would be agony.

It took a couple years to adapt to the philosophy and methods of Youth for Christ Camps. Because of the backgrounds of these kids there were strict rules mixed with lots of love and adventure. There was a day each for riding mini bikes (Nip 'Em Program), a canoe trip, a horseback ride, and a day at Silver Lake dunes on the way home. Watching the YFC staff work with rough kids was an eye opener. These kids did not have a concept of a Loving Heavenly Father when their earthly father was bad or absent. One day Jerry and Lester were working along the lakeshore and overheard a counselor talking with a camper out in a canoe about receiving Christ. Jerry was so moved as he listened to this tough kid turn his life over to Christ that he still talks about it.

Personal account: The mini bike program inspired our own son, Nathan, both by the bikes and the needs of the kids. He saved up pop can money and bought his own mini bike at age 11. He worked for Youth for Christ Youth Guidance as a missionary from 11th grade through college with the same program when we moved to Cedar Springs near Byron Olsen.

THE EIGHTIES - MORE CHANGES AND MORE PROGRAMS

MBGC Leadership expanded the summer camp directorship to a full-time Director of Christian Education who also directed summer camp, then to a full-time Camp Director hired by the Trustee Board with MBGC supplying salary. This made it possible to grow the Camp program without undue strain on Camp finances. Over the years the buildings were also funded by MBGC and accomplished through the Camp Development Committee. This arrangement stayed in place until MBGC restructured in about 1987. The Camp Program Committee gave approval to the Camp Director for hiring personnel and developing programs. Tim Gillette was the first Camp Director who was not also DCE. A person dedicated to just Camp had plenty of work and responsibility. Tim met his wife, Becky, at Camp and they also lived in a mobile home adjacent to camp property.

More nice programs were added. One early Saturday morning the cement trucks started rolling in one by one dumping a total of 100 yards of concrete for double tennis courts/ basketball courts. With a construction supervisor from Detroit accustomed to large concrete jobs and a host of men armed with bull floats and power trowels the surface was worked smooth and level by evening. This large surface has been enjoyed by campers ever since.

As Christian Camps explored more of experiential learning the popularity of Low Ropes Initiatives and Challenge Courses were developed. This provided individual challenge and team building. Art Radlicki took specialized training and led CLBC program. It was always good to see how Biblical truth and scripture could be applied giving campers a good mental and emotional picture of the application.

There had been talk of designing a mini golf range of 9 holes for some time. The question was how to make it durable enough for the long term yet innovative and interesting. It was decided to use natural obstacles mounted in cement. Lester and Jerry worked the greater portion of one summer to complete it. Kids and adults have enjoyed it a lot.

The first waterslide was nowhere near the lake. A company in Beaverton supplied a long, fairly rigid strip of black plastic, which was laid in a hollowed out run on the hill near the maintenance garage. There was a crash pond at the bottom. It was very necessary to cool the hot plastic with cold well water out of the hose before sliding. It was also good to get any drowned critters out of the crash pond. Big guys with slippery fabric suits

could shoot through the crash pond and off the end of the slide even though the end of the slide went up the next hill a bit.

Bob Carigon brought the first mini farm with a few ducks, rabbits and small pony in 1970. During the summer of 1986 we revived the idea and had a mini farm by borrowing baby animals from farmers. Whenever kids see animals they can touch they are fascinated and spend time enjoying them. There were 2 of McCaughna's angora goats, 2 natural colored turkeys, 2 hybrid chickens, 2 piglets, 2 turtles, 1 lamb, and 1 bunny. The smallest goat and the lamb loved to be bottle fed so that was an added attraction. Vonda Johnson, affectionately called Mrs. Noah, was the farmer. The fencing and shelter were close to the Johnson house at the Camp entrance so special times were set up for campers to walk up to visit the mini farm. Vonda took good care of the animals so that the farmers who owned the animals were pleased with their growth when they were returned. Thanks to unusable leftovers from the kitchen, the pigs that were runts of the litter were much bigger than all the rest. Personal note: One Sunday when we came home from church we saw the 2 piggys running down the drive to Camp. They had dug out under the fence and knew exactly where their food came from. After a good chase they were caught and put back reinforcing the fencing.

Tom McIntosh served some 5 years teaching archery and designing exciting programs of every imagination. Sue, his wife, was the Dining Room Hostess and helped with some of the games and registration. Together Tom and Lysle scouted out canoe trips in advance. Tom initiated the X-country ski program supplying the first skis. Their kids Rob and Janet also loved camp. In the fall Tom shot deer at camp for some tasty meals and has kept the Johnson's freezer supplied with venison for years. With lots of laughs, it was never dull when the McIntoshes were around.

On into the 80's more leadership included the Bergmans, the McIntoshes, the Gillettes, and the Kalbs until the Cousineaus when we left Center Lake. Each era and each directorship had its own uniqueness but one thing remained constant and that's the cause for which Center Lake still stands – reaching people for Christ and helping people reach maturity in their Christian lives.

PERSONAL COMMENTS AND CONCLUSION

It would be great to turn back the tables of time and re-live the years at Center Lake. Every one of them was a privilege for which Lysle and I give thanks to God and will forever cherish the fond memories. My own roots run deep - back to my Swedish grandparents, growing up in Lakeside Baptist Church in Muskegon, and MBGC camping even before Center Lake. Our kids were born and raised there so count it as home. We became a part of the First Baptist Church of Tustin and loved the surrounding community.

As beautiful as the Camp is, program and people are remembered most of all. Only heaven will reveal all the changed lives and Christian service accomplished through commitments made at Center Lake. Many campers and staff serve in Christian vocations around the world. Lysle takes pride in that two of his maintenance boys have become directors of Center Lake, Tim Gillette and Duane Whitley. I always liked to read the sign over the gate when leaving the main part of Camp that read "Depart to Serve Christ". Some folks do not depart but stay right there to serve Christ!

Please add your own memories to those above and share the blessings. *It is never too late to remember!*

MEMORIES FROM OTHERS

Dave & Jean Mueller (Portage): Our kids attended camp, retreats, bike tours; we were involved with Men's and Women's retreats, Family Camps, Michigan Gold, Second ½ for Him from 1969 to the present. Dave was interim director winter of '88 and Jean the nurse several times. Our daughter, Sally was a counselor. Now our grand children have been campers. We have enjoyed seeing all the improvements over the years and the spiritual emphasis that is always current. My first Women's Retreat, '69 or '70, was when our church, Grace Baptist, was responsible for meals. We cooked and baked for days ahead then spent the entire weekend working in the kitchen for food prep and washing dishes. It was great fun, but we were happy to have paid

staff take over later on. Before events were held on Memorial Day weekend, our family stayed there, all alone. During a hike in the area where the horses are now, we encountered 3 or 4 teepees. Our kids were convinced that early Indians used them. Our first family camp was shared in a cabin with the Hamlets, separated by a curtain of sorts, and was the beginning of a long friendship.

Sylvia Smith Rennie (Cadillac): In 1974 I was a first-time camper at Jr. Hi Camp. At the end of this week I was called to give my life to Jesus Christ. I can vividly see in my mind's eye the counselor and the picnic table we sat upon. That decision was and is the most important one I have made in my life. It has guided me in every area of my life for the past 32 years. Center Lake is truly a life-changing ministry. Now my children have had the privilege of attending for the past 3 summers. In 1977 and 1979 I work in the kitchen starting as early as 6:30 AM when I was assistant cook. During those summers I had the privilege of being mentored by people like Jerry and Andi Wheeler. This was one of the biggest impacts of my life developing friendships with them and Dorothy Trowbridge. I cannot put into words what these dear friends added to my life. The old saying is true about Christian brothers and sisters being closer than family. They are family.

Jalayne Cramblet Ellis (Muskegon, Dalton): I've been involved in Family Camps ever since the 70's, youth retreats in early 80's, as a camper, and kitchen girl 1983. I always love the feeling of family and friendship. The speakers are always interesting and challenging and the activities are always fun. When I worked, there was a terrific staff. I appreciated the fact that Bob Hamlet let us kitchen girls be involved in music and skits. Madge Schultz was a tough boss in the kitchen, but if we did our work she allowed us to have fun. I remember the fun contests at family camp, trips down "spook road" after dark, downhill skiing during winter retreat and somehow making it back alive! the beauty of a sunset from Sunshine Mountain and tubing down it in winter. Friendships developed over the years. The common bond in Christ is so strong. Even though I have lost track of many of my friends from CLBC I still love them and have very fond memories of our times spent together.

Bob & Janet DeVries (retiree volunteers from Evart): 1976-85 Bob was gardener, maintenance, and painter. Janet was laundress, craft leader. Phase one of the dining hall was just completed. We lived in the roadhouse between Wheeler's and Johnson's trailers where we entertained bats, mice and a path of ants across the living area (we just happened to be in their path, no problem, just amusing). Nate Johnson, age 4, early riser, wondered over and crawled in bed with Bob. We enjoyed seeing Vonda with her first puppy. Friends we made were a great part. I remember the first time seeing Jerry Wheeler, Sr. and afraid to meet him because I thought he was a rich man – like Colonel Sanders! Les Larsen was funny with his antics and calling 'lil girls, "Dolly Chicken". Those two guys sawed off the back of an old bus (fondly called the Blue Goose) so they could haul wood chips for pathways. Madge Schultz was a great improviser. Kids didn't eat cooked carrots, so she blended them to make "pumpkin pie". Left over oatmeal went into her delicious homemade bread. Still have sweet memories of when we lived at camp. Glad to be a small part in the lives of the kids - probably some of the best years that Bob and I have spent.

Brenda Keller Goldammer (Tustin): I attended summer camp for roughly five years along with Jr. Hi retreats in the early and mid '70s and worked winter retreats and summer bookstore 1981-82. I learned how to swim, use a bow and arrow as well as a rifle. Jerry and Jim Wheeler dressed as mistreated slaves and I remember our cabin bidding on them. What they didn't do to illustrate a point.

My sisters and I worked winter retreats in the kitchen because we lived close to camp. After high school when I worked in the bookstore/canteen my name was "Brenda Bookstore" around camp. The bookstore was located in the basement of the lodge at that time. I was one of the few staff members that stayed up late Friday nights to refund unused money from canteen cards. There was a mouse in the office that would come out from behind the safe closet those nights. I refused to allow the maintenance guys to set a trip because it kept me company. One week the camp was short on counselors so many of us had to cover our regular duties and counsel. All week two of us had done our best to care for our cabin although I felt badly because I had not been available enough to reach my cabin for Christ. I wasn't able to sleep on Sunshine Mountain with my group due to Friday night canteen duties. However after chapel the final night, the entire cabin came to the canteen at the same time to let me know they had all made decisions to accept or rededicate their lives to Christ. It still brings tears to my eyes because it showed me that God works through us - it is nothing we do. Apparently God was using me all week and I didn't know it.

A few years later my baby sister was killed in a camp related accident. The driver was injured and Nathan Johnson spent the night in the hospital. Although I was sad to lose my sister that day, I recognized the "feeling of freedom" the staff felt as they were enjoying each other's company away from camp because when

you work at camp all week you are unaware that anything outside of Camp. Many people from other churches felt our pain. I remember attending a ladies retreat with my mother in the fall. A lady approached our table, knowing we were from Tustin and asked how the family of the girl who was killed was doing. We thanked her for asking, said we were the family, and we were doing okay. I don't think she ever thought she'd run into us. Another time I attended a meeting at Camp of area youth leaders on leading high school youth groups. I met a woman who expressed excitement in meeting me saying she had been praying that she could meet Arlene's family. She told her story of losing her younger sibling and how God helped her family through it. She was indeed encouraging as we sat by the canteen and cried together a long time.

God has used the camp setting in ways we may never know. As a child I was baptized in the lake. Throughout my adult life I have attended retreats, helped in the kitchen after our church activities there, rented the camp for company picnics, and participated in Follow the Star. My kids have attended camp and have worked several summers on staff, my oldest even supervising the kitchen staff. Each life that comes in contact with Camp is exposed to God.

Tom & Sue McIntosh (Haslett): As Camp Director, Program Director and kitchen staff we finally found a "comfortable nitch" – little sleep, tons of challenges, and the strength of the Lord in action. Wow! Irreplaceable! It was 24/7 activities, challenges, and blessings. Memories include new bell tower, redone baths, camp packed out, and special chapels with super speakers, fantastic music and interesting skill classes. Program features were cougar hunts, ad lib games/competitions like blob, "canoe with hole in it" race, relays, side trips to dunes, float trips down the Pine, bicycle trips, the "new" B-ball/tennis courts, mini golf, new bonfire area, lots of new archery equipment, shot gunning and horse riding. There were packed out camps with cabin groups housed in the chapel, tent village, and dining hall - campers everywhere! More kids=more decisions and more challenges! The food from Madge's kitchen, INCREDIBLE! - Fresh garden food to overabundance of (overproduction) yogurt! The camp was usually spotless, the weather was hot, the campers UNIQUE individuals with many stories, and a great staff all around. The counselors were incredible; maintenance guys were wild and fun.

Dave Plyler (Muskegon, Bethel): I volunteered as a counselor at junior boy's camp for several years. Almost every summer the boys would ask me how much I got paid. I would tell them I was on vacation and was there because I loved them and wanted to be a part of their coming to know Jesus as their Savior. "Really? No kidding?" would be their response. They seemed so surprised that someone would actually spend their vacation as a counselor.

One summer my youngest son, Jeff, was with me as a CIT and we reported to the office upon our arrival. As soon as Tim Gillette saw me he said he had a big favor to ask of me. Would I be willing to take a group of boys from Detroit and stay with them at the tent site where about eight, two-man tents were set up? Without much thought I agreed to do it. It is marvelous how the Lord walks before us! Had we been in a cabin as one group the week would have been unbearable, but by being grouped two in a tent it worked out great. The fellows were quite well behaved; only one minor skirmish, and they participated in activities well. We had our own campfire each night and that allowed us to get real serious about what life is all about. All but one boy gave a testimony on the last night. The Lord gave us a week without rain. What a week! I went home rejoicing and thanking God for increasing my faith.

Another summer we had more junior boys than the Camp would house so a couple of us counselors and about a dozen boys stayed at Camp Kett at night, traveling back and forth by bus. Each morning I would round up the "wet" bedding (usually two or three) and take it back to Camp to lay it out in the sun to dry. I would usually hear a few good-natured comments about doing my laundry. One evening after campfire they were treated to watermelon, and you guessed it! The next morning every bed was soaked, excluding the counselors. I really took some razzing as I laid all the bed rolls in the sun. I kindly asked the Staff if they could serve watermelon earlier in the day and they agreed to consider it.

And then there was Don Windmiller! We were playing softball with the junior boys. Don's team was at bat and he was on base when one of the boys hit the ball. I was covering home plate when Don came charging home. He saw me on the plate and tried to slow down, but he and the ball arrived at the same moment. Don, being the big fellow he was, felt like an eighteen-wheeler when he impacted me and sent me rolling. Fortunately I survived with only a few bumps and bruises. We were always thankful for Carm being there to tend to our wounds.

Meryl Jakushevich Poynter (Royal Oak, Faith): I attended camp as a camper during Jr. Hi and Sr. Hi 1962-68 and worked with Marianna Wright and Mary Gardner in the kitchen 1967. Tim Gillette, John Barrett

and Diane Pearson were lifeguards, Mabel and Helene were cooks, Lysle was maintenance, Carm was nurse and Mal Pearson was the Camp Director. Camp was a big experience for me and it helped me become stronger in my faith during my high school years. I enjoyed the bus rides to camp with Elim and Chandler Park – getting up before the sun to leave (not always so thrilling). We sang songs all the way up there but mostly slept on the trip back home. I enjoyed chapel times. One speaker, Ian Leitch, brought Christianity down to my everyday life. Being so young then he was one of the cutest speakers camp ever had. One of the things I still remember about him was his “joking” blessing, “Rub a dub dub, thanks for the grub”. I always enjoyed the campfires and was so touched by the commitments made during each week. Testimonies were emotional; praise choruses and quoting of scripture also impressed me. I enjoyed being a camper in Skunk cabin. The name didn’t bother me and I made many new friends I met at winter retreats or camp the next year. I liked learning to shoot bow and arrow, something I have since passed down to my daughter. The one thing I dreaded was the rising bell and Mal’s lovely voice telling us to rise and shine!

Another thing that became very precious to me were the bedtime devotions led by the counselors when many of the girls made decisions to stand up for Christ when they went home. Those times brought us together as a cabin more than the competitions and skits we did. Remember the skit, “Pebbles on the Beach”? Boy, did that make a big impression on us! I think one of the boy’s cabins did that one! As an employee I enjoyed sitting on the picnic table by the canteen at night with the other staff after campers went to bed and drinking Frescas with ice chips in them while watching the raccoons at the garbage cans. It was great to go fishing for frogs and have my first taste of frog legs. We made lots of gimp key chains in crafts. We used to walk to the public beach once a week for a BBQ with the campers. Mal did a skit where he gathered campers real close around a cookie sheet filled with water on the picnic table. I am not sure what he said but he did some sort of magic dance raising his hands high and then he shouted and down came his hands in the cookie sheet, splashing all the campers with water – definitely not expected!

My experiences at camp are all well remembered. I am so glad that I was able to have the experiences I did during my Jr. Hi and high school years as a camper, kitchen helper and a counselor. I learned so much that contributed to my devotional life and my witness during my daily life at school, church and work. Carm and Lysle were an inspiration and excellent role models that have always made a big impact on my life. I have always enjoyed returning to camp for family camps and women’s retreats or picking up my kids, nieces and nephews from weekly camps or band camp during my kid’s high school years. Walking out in God’s natural world always brought me peace and calmness allowing my mind and heart to focus on the important things in life. The things I learned from the classes and chapels and testimonies have become building blocks that have aided my life many times over the years and helped carry me through the rough patches. My memories and decisions I made at camp each year have contributed to who I am today. Because of my memories and the good times I had at camp, I have sent my children to enjoy camp too and now they have some good camping memories to pass down as they continue the tradition to my grandchildren.

