

A Rally, the Valley, and a Big Rock
An anecdotal glimpse of youth ministry in the Bible Fellowship Church
Gathered by Pastor Rick Paashaus
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Being a teenager in the early days of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church must have been quite a challenge. Strict rules and regulations were imposed. In the 1867 Book of Discipline from the BFC's forerunner, *The Evangelical Mennonite Society*, specifics on dress included the prohibition of hoops, women's hats, feathers on bonnets, ear and finger rings, powdering of the hair, ribbon bows, and moustaches. Even years later, the 1928 Discipline prohibited participation in "worldly amusements" including festivals, socials, picnics, fairs and anything else that "gratified the carnal mind." Evelyn Yeakel from Quakertown recalls "spotters" being sent out by the church to see if any of their young people might be caught at one of the local dance halls. She remembers having an older woman chastise her a bit for being "overdressed," her clothes not quite plain enough for a Mennonite girl. Celia Shelly was granddaughter to one of the church Fathers, William Gehman. On their way to church she and two other girls were laughing, lighthearted and being typical children, when her grandfather scolded them with the words, "You must give an account of every idle word you speak." I would think that squelched the laughter quite quickly. Life was to be taken *seriously*...always. Who knows? If one were not careful, they could end up in the roll books listed below those most dreaded words, "Lost their religion."

Yes, being an adolescent in those early years must have been quite a challenge. Holiness that meant separation from the world based on externals was a priority that far exceeded a grasp of God's grace and the wonderful depth of meaning behind the doctrine of sanctification. I'll never forget a conversation with a man who was a child in the Coopersburg Church many years ago. Loosely quoted, he said, "I remember how we were viewed by those in public school. The children in the room would be seated alphabetically, A to Z, Adams to Ziegenfuss...and then the Mennonite kids sat in a group. We weren't even alphabetized with the others." Now, I've never been able to verify that and no one else that I knew who attended Coopersburg School remembers that to be the case, but to a bitter old man who rejected the faith most of his life, that was a hurtful memory. I do remember stories of Mennonite children being kept indoors in the late 1940's, away from the influence of neighborhood children. In the early to mid 20th Century, children and teens were expected to participate in the protracted prayer meetings and sit quietly in lengthy church services without even a hint of frivolity or joy.

That's not to say that the heart of our early leaders was totally misplaced. In the period of time between World Wars, they were deeply concerned for the spiritual lives of our young people. HB Musselman reported in an early Mennonite Brethren in Christ Yearbook, "The many young people on the various charges are making good progress on spiritual lines, and their willingness to walk in the Master's steps is manifestly seen, by living obedient and devoted lives for Him whom having not seen they love. They are plain in attire, and blessedly kept from the strong currents of worldliness and from the fleshly allurements that throng this present age." An early Sunday School Convention

included B. Bryan Musselman speaking on *“How to Promote Spirituality Among Young People.”*

The teaching was powerful and concern for teen’s spiritual lives was paramount. Yet, the relational, social, practical concerns of young adults were not often integrated with the spiritual. Yes, being a teen in the early days of the Bible Fellowship Church must have been quite a challenge

But, there were changes in the air.

Mizpah Grove

Way back in 1909 the Annual Conference authorized the purchase of property on Lawrence Street in East Allentown for the sole purpose of being a camp meeting grove for the church. The first encampment was in 1910. By 1912 a tabernacle was built and Mizpah Grove began providing summer ministries that impacted on thousands of worshipers through the years. The 72 by 102 foot auditorium cost a whopping \$1,450 and the “Preachers Dining Hall” was added for \$978.21. By 1918 Mizpah Grove recorded 219 tents for the Bethlehem Division and 199 for the Allentown Division.

A week at Mizpah was most memorable. Pastors and their families came earlier, their task being to lay out wooden blocks as foundation for each of the canvas tents that would become “home” for families for the days to come. The latrines with their “ejection seats” were cleaned. (Dan Allen remembered the fear of those seats when he was too little to hold them down.) Everyone worked together. In the later years one would hope that Pastor Russ Allen was on their team to hoist the center pole of the prayer tent or help move the piano into place...his heft and strength did what they called “the elephant work.” Once hundreds of 12’ X 12’ tents were erected and the tabernacle cleaned and prepared, the folks from miles around would gather for a week of morning and evening meetings, music, rest and relationships. And even though Mizpah held their last services in 1968, the impact of those times together will never be forgotten.

And some of those impacted most were teens and young adults.

Here many a young person came to faith in Christ, kneeling at the front of the auditorium. Here many a young man felt the call to the ministry. Here the Lord brought together young ladies from this church or that and a young man from another area to begin relationships that lasted a lifetime. Here pastors and congregations interacted and multiple generations enjoyed true Christian fellowship.

No wonder Mizpah was life-changing for so many Bible Fellowship Church young people.

And it wasn’t all about the preaching or the Bible study. When there was opportunity, young guys and girls anxiously stepped away from the tabernacle and tents to meet other teens at the “Big Rock.” On the hillside a short distance away they’d gather to talk. In later years even Bruce Heffner remembered going up the hill to the rock and the reservoir. As a child he considered it quite a climb, not realizing until later what a short distance it really was. It didn’t change over the years. Quiet summer nights above the noise of the city...the sound of preaching and the instruments of the Gospel Heralds now still...new friends, awkward boys and blushing girls...and a lifetime of memories were cemented in place.

Here relationships were developed. Here young men were called to the preaching ministry or were impressed with a passion to serve in missions. In Saturday night youth services held at 6:15pm before the 7:30pm whole family gathering, young people from Nazareth to Graterford sat in the front of the old auditorium to hear the Word. The sawdust beneath their feet and the music of the brass and choir ringing in their ears, they experienced worship in which the Spirit often called for a response. When the invitation was given at the evening's close, teens and young adults could not remain seated, their hearts stirred by the message and call to serve.

Ralph Mann shared in his memoirs, "Coopersburg Life from 1923 to present:"

In the poor years for a summer vacation we went to Camp Meeting for a week. It was a journey to Allentown east end near the Moser School. The grove was called Mizpah Grove and located in woods.

The ministers and churchmen put up approximately 200 tents making a tent city. One week was for Allentown conference, a group of churches in the western area of the surrounding counties. Then there was a week off, so people could move out of the tents and the new ones from Bethlehem conference could move in. Children played ball and volleyball and enjoyed hiking. There was also a pamphlet of rules to adhere to.

In the area was a grocery store that was open only when there was no service. They had a bookstore, also closed during service. A cafeteria was open for three meals a day for the people tenting and not wanting to cook and also for the people who visited for the day. Most of the people brought their own food from home. The people had a chance to rent one or two tents. There were two brick buildings, a permanent latrine for the men and one for the women. Water was provided at certain areas with pipes with spigots. You had to carry your own water to your tent. You could stay for the three weeks if you wanted. I don't know if there was a fee.

Since this was a yearly event, people had old furniture, tables, chairs, beds, rugs, kerosene lanterns, and kerosene stoves for cooking and ice refrigerators ready for use. The tents had wooden floors, blocked up to make them safe and level. Extra wood was supplied to make safe steps into the tent, bunk beds, and wash stands in the rear of the tent. The Church provided all the lumber and straw for the tents. If you had one tent, you made bunk beds on ½ of the tent and filled it with straw. Put your bedding on top of the straw where you slept. Some had old springs and mattresses for sleeping. The other ½ tent was for eating. If you needed two tents, one was used for sleeping and the other for eating and cooking.

One year yellow string beans were a bumper crop. We had them for what seemed like breakfast, dinner, and supper, day after day. I did not eat yellow string beans for years.

In the morning you had to heat water or use cold water to wash and shave on the outside of the tent. Hang a mirror on a tree and don't use too much water. You had to walk to the water area and bring it in buckets. No electric lights except in the Auditorium and latrines. In all the years, I never saw anybody having a fire. No smoking allowed.

Us kids never had a dull time – hike the woods, play ball at the Moser playground, and generally moving around the camp area. To keep the kids interested and quiet in the services, there was a table in front of the pulpit so they could use coloring books, writing tablets, and making paper belts and other crafts. The tabernacle was open on three sides and straw was on the floor. It was filled with benches for the people attending. The fourth side was the platform where chairs were placed for the ministers attending. There was room in back for storage. You could also bring your own chairs.

There was a big tent with a straw floor used for early morning prayer service. Well, one afternoon we boys went to the tent for boxing matches. You put the gloves on only if you wanted to. We were 10 or 12 years old. Our prayer was that you wouldn't get hit.

Services started Sunday Morning with a prayer service at the large tent. The people carried their own chairs with them. No chairs in the tent. The morning services were held in the main tabernacle about 10:30am till lunch. Everyone went to their tents or cafeteria for lunch. The afternoon service was held about 2:30pm until about 4pm plus. Then off to Supper. An evening service was held about 7:30 to when. Usually during the weekdays only the morning and evening services were held.

Services were filled with people. There was singing by the crowd, groups, solos, and choirs from different area churches. Each service had a different minister preaching. The tabernacle was usually full at nite. During the day, about half full but on Sunday it was really full for all three services. Of course, offerings were taken at each service and usually one service that took a special offering starting at \$100 and above, than \$50 and above. Somebody had to pay the bill.

One night in particular, they showed slides of pictures of the Bible. One picture I remember was of Daniel in the lion's den. Toward the end of the show the people sang a song, "Faith of our Fathers," that made the rafters ring. It impressed me so much I just laid back in the straw and listened to the singing. When in the Army and having a bit of a hard time, thinking of life at home, sometimes I could hear them singing that song. It put your mind at ease.

Another pastime was looking for money in the straw. Remember a penny in those days was quite a bit of money for a kid. I'm sorry to say there was a little man dressed in black suit, black hat, and black umbrella. Story was he lost all his money in the stock market and it affected him. Someone would jingle their change and this man would start looking for it. We called him "cheap John."

A good time was had by all and new friends were made. As time went on, the church changed its name to the Bible Fellowship Church. Why, I don't know. I don't know if it was the war or what, but the Camp Meetings were eliminated.

Television had a great part in changing a great part of our lives.

I think that Camp Meeting was where my brother Ray met his future wife, Betty Bach. She was from Reading. That was when I lost my brother. You know how that goes. We were together just about all the time. Now a girl took my place.

There was no camp meeting during the war years. After the war it started again.

Ralph's sister, Arlene, said, "I camped with girl friends one year. Mom and Pop did not go again. Aunt Addie always had a tent. I'm not sure whose idea it was, but someone got two tents and (my two sisters) Fern and Bernie would invite kids like Joyce Urmy and Carol and Faye (Mann) to go to Mizpah and I would take care of them. I think Addie was supposed to watch over us but we hardly ever saw her. I do remember one night there was a terrible thunder storm. The lightning lit up the trees and I prayed that no trees would fall on us."

Later Ralph told of his teen years when the boys from Coopersburg would sneak off when they could to meet the girls (and other guys) from the other churches (he particularly mentioned the girls from Quakertown). Innocent fun, talking, maybe a little flirting (appropriate Mennonite flirting) were all part of the memories of his teen years at Mizpah in the late 1930's. But stay aware. Who knew if a Gehman or Hartman or Heffner might just happen over for a surprise visit.

Ralph joined the armed services and on June 6, 1944, D-Day, his Red Devil paratrooper brigade filled the sky and landed on the beach in Normandy. He never forgot a moment of that day when thousands upon thousands of his fellow soldiers lost their lives. Hours later in the French countryside, his parachute gone and his few remaining comrades hiding from the enemy, it was the songs of home and memories of worship he shared at the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church in Coopersburg and Summer nights at Mizpah Grove that kept him focused and hopeful. His prayer was to one day return to the quiet little town of Coopersburg and worship again with his church family. And the Lord heard his prayer. It was the preparation at Mizpah and with other young people with FB Hertzog's preaching in Coopersburg that gave him courage to go on.

Dick Gehman wrote in vivid detail of his memories of the teen years at Mizpah:

Mizpah Grove Camp Meeting played a major role in my life. In this environment Mizpah Grove was a solace that I looked forward to, being with other Christian young people to chum around with. We had lots of fun, putting up the tents, building wooden floors in each tent, going to Irving Street Swimming Pool in the afternoons, eating snacks and talking in the evenings. Several of us kids would play ping pong hour upon hour underneath the auditorium in the back. For six weeks I would stay at Mizpah. We had three weeks of Camp Meeting, each one over two Sundays. Five days in between each camp week enabled families to move out and others to move in. These weeks were preceded by four days of setting up camp and two days taking down.

The afternoons during camp meeting were free from meetings and intended for recreation. Shuffle board was fun. Most afternoons men and boys played baseball on the school playing field below Mizpah. I never played but occasionally watched. Some of us would hike up to the reservoir or follow other paths through the woods, especially to The Rock. A highlight was swimming in the public pool on Irving Street.

Like most teenage boys, food was of dire importance! So, Dick goes on,

I ate all my meals in the cafeteria. We stood in long lines before the door opened. We picked up a tray and chose our dishes as we walked down a long counter, "L" shaped. Each dish cost a given price – bread and butter, salad, dessert, meat, potatoes and vegetables, and a hot drink. I always sat on the side of the auditorium facing the cafeteria. The moment the benediction was pronounced, not before, I raced across the black top and got to the front of the line, standing several steps above the crowd. I gained a reputation because every single time I saw Rev. David Thomann Sr. he always and without fail reminded me of being first in line.

But Mizpah Grove was much more than a social oasis and recreational highpoint of the year; it was my Bethel. God had met me there so many times. First thing in the morning after breakfast we carried our camp stools and gathered together under a huge canvas tent with the ground covered with straw. This was an hour of prayer meeting. I must have participated in public prayer on occasion for I remember on one occasion being corrected by Dorothy Hartman, Pastor Herbert Hartman's wife. I apparently prayed, "May this 'ring down' to the glory of God." She informed me that it should be "redound" to the glory of God. After the one hour of prayer meeting we walked over to the main auditorium for an hour of Bible Study which was followed by a Mission's hour. After the evening meal came the youth meeting in the Big Tent followed by the evening service which lasted from 7:30 P.M. to 9:00 P.M.

After 9:00 P.M. many rushed to the Snack Shop and bought ice cream or other snacks. Curfew came at 11:00 P.M. after which time several pastors would parole the camp ground to ensure quiet. Many times youth would stay up, but I generally went to bed by 10:30 P.M. or thereafter because of my need for eight hours of sleep. Every Friday evening service there was an emphasis on youth, challenging them to dedicate their lives to the Lord. How well do I remember the songs of invitation! I have gone through the three camp meeting song books in my possession and picked out those invitation numbers that stirred my heart so deeply. My eyes filled with moisture as I blotted the tears. I sang those songs with deep commitment and sincerity. These hymns included:

"Have Thine Own Way, Lord, have Thine own way."

I'll go where you want me to go, dear Lord, o'er mountain, or plain, or sea.
I'll say what you want me to say, dear Lord, I'll be what you want me to be."

"All to Jesus I surrender, all to Him I freely give"

"To the regions beyond I must go, I must go."

"Salvation! O salvation! The joyful sound proclaim,
till each remotest nation has learned Messiah's Name."

As we would sing one such hymn of invitation, the speaker invited youths to step forward and dedicate their lives to the Lord. This I did many times as an indication that I sincerely dedicated my life to do whatever God called me to do. At the same time I knew beyond doubt that God was calling me to serve as a missionary in Africa. After scores of youth walked forward and stood before the platform and around the altar on the asphalt floor covered with sawdust, the speaker called for a further division. "All those who were willing to serve as missionaries overseas, step over there." Finally, he invited those who believed that they were called to be missionaries to stand below the speaker's platform. God used these occasions to call me to give my whole life as a missionary in Africa. I well remember on one occasion when I stood in this small group to indicate my belief that I was called to go as a missionary. Standing in the sawdust a few feet from the pulpit, I looked up into the eyes of the speaker and thought to myself, "You don't believe that anyone so young like me can know with certainty that I am called to be a missionary. But I know!"

This divine call for missionary service was not some emotional experience at camp meeting. (Our camp meetings were not emotional, though such singing of invitational songs brought a deep emotion to my own heart.) On Friday evening July 17, 1952, Walter Frank spoke. (Austin Paul spoke during the missionary hour.) Walter was one of our MBC pastors who later became a missionary to Europe, and later the General Director of the Greater Europe Mission. Austin was an A.I.M. missionary. When the invitation was given to dedicate our lives to the Lord, I signed a covenant which stated: "Dear Lord Jesus, all I am or ever will be, all that I have or ever will have, I give to Thee, absolutely, unconditionally, now and forever." I signed it at the age of sixteen. Walter Frank and Austin Paul signed it as witnesses. Later I pasted this covenant in my Bible which I used during my high school days. This Bible I still have in my possession, a very precious treasure that I keep. Though I was fully assured in my heart for many years prior to 1952, that God had called me to be a missionary, this signed covenant sealed it in my mind.

The camp was sold in 1968 and the buildings were torn down. Only some macadam and foundations remained. Still, Dick writes, Every Home Assignment from 1971 to 1999, I returned to Mizpah Grove, my Bethel, to walk around, spy out the land and rededicate my life to the Lord. I felt an inner compulsion to do this. My days at Mizpah were life transforming – transformational years.

Oh, kids will always be kids and the young teens who attended Mizpah participated in their share of mischief as well. Rev. Jansen Hartman talked about picture taking at Mizpah. They lined everyone up at the back of the tabernacle, men on one side, women on the other, children in front. Several of the young teen boys stood on the left until the shutter was released, then ran behind the group to stand on the right as well so that they appeared on both sides of the picture. (The photographer used a panoramic camera that would rotate on a tripod while the crowd was urged to stand absolutely still...that is, except for some of the mischievous young teen boys.)

And then there was Paul Dunn who would secretly climb to the roof of the tabernacle as a young teen... just to prove he could do it without being caught. It

happened often enough that some called the roof, "Paul's Room." Bruce Heffner remembers it a bit differently. He recounts:

"The code word was 'Paul's Room.' When shouted by any one of us 'in the know' we teen guys would immediately run as fast as we could in any and all directions, trying to lose everybody else. We knew that we would rendezvous at 'Paul's Room.' This happened to be on the roof of the big tabernacle. We would sneak up the back stairs to the top side of the band shell, carefully grabbing onto the steel rafters and footing grids until we reached a small ladder which went up to a cubby-hole. The top of this opened up with a square hole to the roof about 3' by 3'. We'd crawl through that and have our official 'meetings' there on the roof. When I think of all the times we did this dangerous adventure, it is amazing that we were never caught, and more amazing that nobody was killed!"

And Bruce of course was impacted by the music. Every song sounded like the Mormon Tabernacle Choir to a teen boy. He was in awe of his still favorite organist, Lucy Ritter from Quakertown. How he remembers the trumpet playing of Bill Ohlman, Word Record's famous "Ohlman Brothers Brass" and a solo trumpet artist in his own right. Bruce writes, "I used to jump up onto the platform after many meetings to look at his horn, which he sat on the piano bench every day. Boy was that horn beat up - most of the lacquer was worn off and it just looked so old -- kind of like my horn looks today. But I went away from those meetings with the sense that 'I want to do that someday'. My call had not come yet, but those seeds were planted, and I ended up doing just that for nearly 50 years. Mizpah did that."

Mizpah impacted many a teen during those years as the Lord called them to Himself and then set the tone for a life of ministry ahead.

Spiritual growth? Yes. But always mingled with fun and fellowship. Looking through old pictures, one wonders how Roy Hertzog ended up in so many pictures of Girl's Camp. In fact, we have a souvenir tile from Mizpah Grove Girls' Camp August 10-15, 1942. It's signed by the following: Doris Wismer, Dottie Bauder, Mrs. F. B. Hertzog, Marjorie Beahn, Mildred Musselman, Addie Baus, Beulah Mann, Dot Beahn, Katie Bradford...and *Roy Hertzog!* Girls' Camp must have been fairly open-minded in those days! Reality is that Roy and his brother Ernest were often on the grounds of Mizpah because their parents were so deeply involved in the ministry.

Just teens at the time, Dave Thomann, along with Jay Musselman and Bill Hunsberger used to sing in harmony while running the dishwasher in the cafeteria. Later when Dave and Jay served at Victory Valley, Bill Heffner joined in the singing and Steve Groff added his bass for a full quartet. (Steve and Pastor Dave still sing in the men's quartet at Lancaster!)

They were transformational years. And when Mizpah was sold and Pinebrook Bible Conference became our new gathering place, the priority on ministry to teens and young adults continued...and continues to this day. Many a young person began a life of ministry at Pinebrook after serving on Summer Staff. Couples like Matt and Sue Arthur and Charlie and Tara Bomgardner track the start of their relationships to those grounds. Through summer camp and Sno Glo Retreats, young people come to faith and

lives are still being changed. Teens and young adults still matter to the Bible Fellowship Church.

Victory Valley

But in 1956 a major step for the denomination brought an explosion of ministry to youth and young adults. Along the creek in Zionsville, Victory Valley Camp began their first year of ministry!

Pastor Bill Heffner was on the original Board of Directors when the property in Zionsville was purchased; so his son Bruce was involved in the ministry from the get-go. Bruce remembers first of all the dusty, unpaved road that led from Route 29/100 to the old stone house that at that time had a large “Circle H” hanging on it from the previous owners. The cloud of dust that first dry summer was so thick that every vehicle that reached the Valley was gray!

Bruce believes he was the very first camper to register for Victory Valley. In those days the 12' X 12' tents no longer needed at Mizpah were housing for four boys each for a week of camp at the Valley. Barrels of water were used for brushing teeth and washing faces until later when cabins were built with actual running water! Meals were served in the basement of the stone house and the creek was the center for catching crayfish, minnows, and a water snake or two...much as it is today. From week one campfires were the most memorable aspect of camp! As teens, friendships were built, some of which remain until this day for Bruce and so many others.

Pastor Ron Kohl from Grace Bible Fellowship in Quakertown has great memories of ten summers he spent at “The Valley.” At 19, Ron, a freshman at Moravian College was introduced to Jim Thornton. It was 1979 and Jim had just started as Director of Victory Valley Camp. He invited Ron to join the staff as a counselor that year. Ron tells the story:

My first question: “How much does it pay?” When he told me the salary for a counselor was \$300, my initial thought was, “Hmmm, \$300 per week – that’s a pretty sweet summer job.” It was only after agreeing to come that I learned that it was \$300 for the **whole** summer. My Junior Counselor for much of that summer, Dan Ziegler Jr., factored it out to about 23 cents an hour – and I think he was being generous.

But, it was a great decision. Victory Valley is one of the most precious places to me on earth, because it was here – at age 19 – that God began to show me His purposes for me concerning ministry.

I don’t know how many future BFC pastors cut their eye-teeth in ministry at the Valley, but I know it was a lot. I know Randy Grossman served there. Tim Schmoyer met his wife Rachel there. At Quakertown, Mark and Ardith Matson met while working at the Valley...and many years later, their daughter Sarah met her future husband Colin Bartholomew at Victory Valley, where both were on staff. And now Colin chairs the Victory Valley Camp board.

Ron went on to tell just one experience during Teen Camp at the Valley when he was counselor. He writes,

I had the oldest kids, most of whom were inner-city kids from Mahwah, NJ. We were playing “Mission Impossible,” a night game where each cabin is sent out to retrieve certain clues without being spotted via flashlight. The way we used to line it up, the younger cabins always had the shortest missions. As the older kids, we were sent furthest away...and by the time we were just getting started, the bell rang, signaling that the game was over. Only...we didn’t want it to be over. So we just kept playing, wandering around in the woods. I don’t think we came back to the cabin area until after midnight. And when we did, we ran right into Aunt Donna, our Program Director who I believe was given the gift of omniscience. She knew where everybody was and what everybody in camp was up to...all the time. Let’s just say she was NOT happy with me. And on more than one occasion, I’m sure she related her favorite “scold” to me – “Have you lost vision?”

It’s clear that neither Ron Kohl nor Aunt Donna Bauer nor Victory Valley Camp ever lost their vision for teens. From the 1950’s to the 80’s when Ron served there to the present, our camp in Zionsville has been used of God to share the Gospel with thousands of teens, preparing many for a lifetime of service.

Way back in its earliest days a young pastor and his wife were deeply involved in getting the Camp off to a good start. Carl and Charlene Cassel participated in leadership and on the board of the Valley. They bought into the fact that this beautiful property in Zionsville would be used specifically to minister to children and teens. Carl and other leaders recognized that the camp wouldn’t just provide weeks of fun and learning for youngsters, but that equally great value would be found by young adults who served as staff. Their training in preparation for the weeks of Summer camp, weeks of hard work, and opportunity to see the Gospel have impact on children and teens was of immeasurable value. Donna Bailey Stortz, Karen Ettinger Stull, Hank Snyder, Arlene and Bernie Mann, Jim Bigley, Pastors Bruce Ellingson, Randy Grossman, Roy Hertzog, and Calvin Reed among others all had their first experiences with leadership and ministry in the rustic cabins and woods of Victory Valley.

While some of the legalism remained, transition to experiencing the freedom and grace of the Gospel was coming, even in the tiniest of ways. In the early years the pool was not to be used on Sunday. In fact, until the early 60’s there was no pool. The campers were transported to the Wentz farm nearby for swimming when it fit the schedule. But now, the pool at the Valley was built. On a sweltering Summer Sunday, the gleaming water of the new pool beckoned. Karen Ettinger (not yet Stull) gathered up the courage to call Pastor Carl Cassel, then chairman of the Board of the Valley. She was director of the Girls Camp and she just had to ask, Sunday or not: “Pastor Cassel. May we use the pool today?” He answered in the affirmative and campers have used that great pool even on the Lord’s Day ever since.

In the kitchen Rev. and Mrs. F. M. Hottel and cook, Eva Fegely led the staff. Young people like Esther Tress learned how to serve as they worked by their side. Pastor Richard Taylor was a counselor, even though one of his charges was David Thomann, only two years his junior.

In the camp newsletter, carefully prepared by the teens themselves, Jim Bigley apparently was the focus of attention for most of the teen girls. Always fun and outgoing, the suave young man gained quite a following there in Zionsville.

At the Valley many teens begin to grasp what it really meant to be a Believer, perhaps their first opportunity without Mom and Dad by their side. What do I really believe? Is it *my* faith...or merely the faith of my family or church? In quiet times along the Camp's trails, beside the evening campfires, during devotions when the sound of the busyness of life was not blocking out the Spirit, they heard His voice. Lives were changed and are being changed at Victory Valley.

One of the words Millennials like to use today is, "Authenticity." Is our faith real? Are we people who integrate faith and life? A hint of hypocrisy will turn them off in an instant. Reality is, nothing has really changed. Teens and young adults in the 1960's were looking for authentic faith as well.

Retired School Teacher, Arlene Mann from our Coopersburg Church was a counselor at the Valley in her younger years. She was helping a group of young teen girls learn how to pray...authentically, openly, not in churchy or flowery words, but just being themselves before God. On the last night, a camper from Mt. Carmel (a young lady who later became Harold Snyder's wife) began to pray, sounding *just* like her mother. Arlene, sitting next to her, jammed her stiff fingers into the adolescent's ribs. She groaned...became silent...and then started to pray again in the words of a school girl who was truly speaking to God. Thanks Arlene for teaching real people about real faith in a real world.

No campfire at the Valley was ever complete without some singing. Of course, the fun songs included 57+ years ago differed a bit from the songs of today. Not so concerned about being politically correct (including references to a segment of the morning Bible study titled, "The White Lady Speaks), one still wonders what was on the minds of the leaders who taught the teens in Girls Camp 1960 songs like these:

I'm goin' to camp until I'm seventy-three.
This camping life is simply great.
I want to avoid that married state,
So, Cupid, keep your darts away from me,
Until I'm thirty, forty, fifty, sixty...seventy three

Or

Oh, she sailed away on a sunny summer day,
On the back of a crocodile;
"You'll see," said she, "He's tame as can be.
I'll ride him down the Nile."
The croc winked his eye
as she bade them all good-bye,
wearing a happy smile.
At the end of the ride
The lady was inside;
And the smile was on the crocodile.

But as the embers glowed and the day that had begun at 7:30 that morning finally caught up with the girls, the songs turned much more reflective and worshipful. Listen now and you can almost hear young teen ladies singing in the firelight:

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,
All His wonderful passion and purity;
Oh, Thou Spirit divine, All my nature refine
Till the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

And

All there is of me, Lord, All there is of me;
Time and talent, day by day, All I bring to Thee.
All there is of me, Lord, All there is of me,
On Thine altar I lay, All there is of me.

Similarly the teen boys' selections ranged from, "There was a Little Chigger" and the gay life of "Kookaburra" but ended with the unchanged, changing, and mature voices of those young men singing,

Take all of my life, Lord,
Take perfect control;
Each hour and each moment,
Mind, body, and soul.
Use all of my life, Lord,
That others may see
Thy truth and Thy likeness
Reflected in me.

And the evening would end with:

Now the day is over, Night is drawing nigh,
Shadows of the evening steal across the sky.
Jesus give the weary, Calm and sweet repose
With Thy tend'rest blessing, may our eyelids close.
When the morning wakens, Then may I arise
Pure and fresh and sinless, in Thy holy eyes.

Why does God work around campfires? We may never fully understand. Yet, it was there that His Spirit spoke to teens and their leaders and campers like Randy Grossman, Calvin Reed, Tim and Alon Hogan, Kathy Schlonecker Cassel, Clyde Bomgardner, Hannah Zettlemyer, Karen Ettinger Stull, and Hank Snyder...and their lives were changed. Often starting out as campers, they ended up being counselors and staff, and now, along with dozens of others, are making tremendous impact on the rest of the Bible Fellowship Church as pastors, teachers, counselors, laymen and women.

And now with beautiful grounds, excellent facilities, and a new Dining Hall on the way, the camp is thriving and ministering to teens and children and families year round. Since 1956 its impact has been immeasurable. Thank God for Victory Valley.

Thanksgiving Youth Rallies, Sno-Glo, and Other Teen Only Events

Back in the 50's and 60's several gatherings of teens gave opportunity for youth ministry to develop particularly in settings with other churches. Teens who met at Mizpah or later at Victory Valley during Summer could reunite at fall and winter retreats.

One such gathering, a precursor to the Youth Rally that took place Thanksgiving Weekend, a Regional Youth Fellowship was held at Harmony Heart Lake in Jermyn, Pennsylvania in February of 1961 in which teens from Emmaus, Coopersburg, Zionsville, Lehighton, Nazareth, Catasauqua, Walnutport, Graterford, Harleysville, Hatfield, Royersford, Spring City, and Quakertown participated. They met with Rev. Art Glasser from China Inland Mission for a weekend that included a fish fry, campfires, Bible study and fun. During the weekend, the teens sang, "And Can It Be?," "Go and Tell the Message," and several campfire songs. The continuing focus on holiness was reflected in the unfamiliar hymn:

Let Thy Word, O Lord, be fire in my soul,
Burning out every sin.
Cleanse my heart and mind from ev'ry evil thought.
Make me pure within.
Burning out ev'ry sin,
Make me pure within.
Let Thy Word, O Lord, be fire in my soul,
Make me pure within.

They ended the evening with this beautiful old Lutheran hymn from 1820:

Savior, breathe an evening blessing,
Ere repose our spirits seal;
Sin and want we come confessing;
Thou can'st save, and Thou can'st heal.

Though the night be dark and dreary,
Darkness cannot hide from Thee;
Thou art He who, never weary,
Watchest where Thy people be.

In the 1960's men like Bert Baker helped organize a special annual treat just for teens that became known as "The Thanksgiving Youth Rally." On the day after Thanksgiving teens from across the denomination would gather in places like Bethel BFC on 8th Street in Allentown for a day of music, challenge from the Word, lots of

pizza, and lots of fun. The annual event allowed teens who met at Victory Valley or Pinebrook Bible Conference in the summer to reunite on a frosty fall afternoon. Speakers and musicians ranged from our own pastors to missions speakers to Buster Soaries and Bruce Heffner. Some recollect gatherings of 800+ teens. Several rallies were held at Pinebrook Junior College, Spring City, and Sinking Spring. At times the group was too large for one facility so they would meet for activities in multiple locations and then gather at either the Valley or another large church or fellowship hall for a corporate end of the day.

Music was and is always part of BFC ministry to teens. At the Thanksgiving Youth Rally, at Sno-Glo, and at other special gatherings over the years, musicians have included people like Ken Medema, Jars of Clay, the Jeremiah People, Five Smooth Stones, The Dan Harney Group, and Michael Card.

Dave Thomann remembers one Thanksgiving Rally that didn't go quite as planned. Mike Kauffman brought a soloist and slide presentation to Reading Church. The creativity of "Rock of Truth" ministries included a "slide presentation" that ended up being a major failure when just before the presentation the tray of slides fell on the floor and resulted in them being out of order and backwards.

Clyde Bomgardner gulped hard as he remembered a rally twenty years ago when their speaker, Todd Henley, a former Victory Valley counselor, didn't show up. With hundreds of waiting teens, Clyde decided to "wing it"...and started to speak spontaneously to the kids...and just then Todd came through the door. He was relieved, to say the least. Clyde and his wife Lisa also recalled music competitions featuring teens from various Bible Fellowship Churches as part of the Rally's appeal.

In the early 2000s participation had dwindled a bit and then stopped entirely. But just a few years back the Youth and Young Adult leadership of the BFC in conjunction with the staff of Victory Valley Camp gave the Thanksgiving Youth Rally a "re-start." Teens by the hundred still descend on Victory Hall for dodgeball and volleyball, music and challenge, and pizza...always pizza. Relationships are rekindled and contacts are made for a new generation of BFC kids.

Concluding Thoughts

I never heard the singing at Mizpah nor met friends at the Big Rock. Never even stayed overnight at the Valley nor attended more than one or two Youth Rallies. But through the memories of precious friends, some who are Home now, I sensed the impact of these wonderful places and events. I can almost hear the bell calling us to Young People's Meeting in the tabernacle and smell the campfire as the sun set at the Valley. While few dates nor a chronological timeline nor a list of names and events were included in this paper (and for those of you who are detailed historians, I beg your forgiveness) I hope that you have gained the big picture of youth ministries from the early days of the Bible Fellowship Church until the present. Time did not allow for consideration of Sno-Glo; the biggest Youth Event of the year that has been making impact for almost half a century. Nor did we take the time to talk about our rich heritage of lay youth leaders and staff Youth Pastors who have been used of God for decades. In fact, the current crew of called, gifted, enthusiastic Youth Pastors is a clear harbinger of what lies ahead for the denomination. Both current and future youth ministries are in outstanding hands.

Who knows what the Lord has in store? Who like Dick Gehman will one day be proclaiming the Gospel because of a message they heard at Sno-Glo? Will a teen boy and girl meet as staff members at the Valley this year and one day marry to have impact on their family and church like Pastor Tim and Rachel Schmoyer? Will a speaker at Pinebrook or at another youth gathering be used of the Spirit to call another Randy Grossman or Calvin Reed to preach? Only time will tell. But be assured, youth ministry in the Bible Fellowship Church is alive and well, making impact on one generation after another after another.

To God be the glory.

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