

STORY BOOK LODGE CHRISTIAN CAMP, INC.
535 Vermilion Trail
Gilbert, MN 55741

FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY REVIEW--1948-1988
by Ben Tuininga

In the beginning God had a plan to reveal His wonderful ways on a small plot of land with four islands on Cedar Island Lake which first became known as Story Book Lodge and later as Story Book Lodge Christian Camp, Inc. That plan began to work out through the instrumentality of a brilliant woman who was always ready to help the poor, the needy, the rejected, the handicapped, and the suffering. Her name was Elizabeth Spriestersbach, born in 1897 in St. Paul, of German immigrants. She was a graduate of the University of Minnesota, graduating with high honors. She was prepared for social work, home-economics, and teaching. Leaving her much loved family home in St. Paul, she came to the Range Area to do 4-H work and demonstrations among American Indians and out-lying residents who needed and wanted her to help.

These were progressive Iron mining days with many foreign people arriving and then the depression days hit.

Elizabeth loved nature and did some traveling and canoeing in boundry waters, becoming acquainted with many well-known people. However, she was not a Christian.

She had a desire to acquire a lake property that she could develop according to her fancy, wanting to make it attractive and helpful for the people with whom she loved to work.

In 1929 a 45 acre plot on Cedar Island Lake came to her attention, not far from the 4-H camp with which she worked. Bankruptcy of former owners caused this plot to be offered on a sheriff sale in Duluth. She acquired it by diligent and persistant bidding for \$1,700.00, which, with some friends' help, she was able to pay for in cash.

The land came with just one small 10' by 12', hunting shack on it. However, it had beautiful small red pine and birch trees, 1,000 feet of lake shore and four romantic, small islands,

With Elizabeth's limited teacher's salary, and the help of many unemployed workmen, cabins were built during the '30's that represented story ideas; Three Bears, the Pumpkin, Bird House, Ark, Library, Doll House, Seven Dwarfs, Dog House, Dream House, Farm House, Den, and an enlarged Lodge added around the original shack with a beautiful stone fireplace. All of these had appeal to the people and "Story Book Lodge" became well known---even in St. Paul and Minneapolis. A boat house and Sauna were added for fishermen and Finnish friends.

In the providence of God, Elizabeth had among her friends some Christians who openly witnessed to her and whom she respected--Dr. Quade, an osteopathic physician, Edith Whitney, Margaret Yager, and Elsa Perala, (teachers), Dr. Neff, well recognized doctor on the Range, his wife, Lois, and others.

Two events in 1941 changed her life and goals. One was a month of Gospel tent meetings in Leoneth by N.M. Fraser and a young, enthusiastic helper, just out of a year of post-college training in New York City, by name of Ben Tuininga. The other event was the death of her beloved and highly honored father which occurred at that same time.

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The Gospel, as she heard it from these friends and in the meetings, touched her. She realized her bankruptcy as a sinner and came to trust the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. It proved a rebirth in her experience, at age 44, giving her a new vision for winning others to Christ. Elizabeth now wanted her lake property to be a means to that end.

She found help and encouragement in the Bible Chapel, in Virginia, MN, and became an outgoing witness to relatives and friends.

In 1948 she prevailed upon Ben and Jean Tuininga to come for a one-week camp with boys and girls. There were eleven campers, Elizabeth was the cook, Jean was lifeguard, counsellor to girls, hand crafter, sports referee, and story teller, besides being mother to two girls of her own, ages 6 and 4! Ben was camp director, counsellor with boys, and Bible teacher, and evangelist, and became known as "Uncle Ben". No fees were charged. Several came to Christ. The total cost of the week's operation was \$137.00 which Elizabeth paid, as she was treasurer.

The following year we continued in a similar vein. Then more campers came and the need for counsellors and helpers became evident.

During the '50's camps expanded to, first 4, then 6, and finally 8 weeks, and later 2 weeks of family camp were added. Each camp was for two weeks and some 35-45 campers. The Den was our first dining room for 16 people with a very small kitchen.

In '54 the Ranch House became Elizabeth's home and the basement could seat some 45 for dining. Running water and a small inside toilet seemed luxurious! Prior to this, all dishes were washed outside, rain or shine.

Also in the '50's, a faithful friend and brother in Christ from Iowa took it upon himself to be registrar, and transporter of children from his area. His personable and practical help was appreciated for many years; Roland Thompson is nearly 100 years of age and still living!

In the early '50's the Erie Mining development brought an influx of workers who needed living quarters. This brought us in touch with John Wiger, who has done so much, Harold Asp, Harry Holmberg, Paul Waterworth, Ray Anderson, who built Green Gables, Armis Ruotsi, a faithful prayer warrior and contributor, to name a few. During that decade we had visits and able ministry from Robert Little, Robert Arthur, L. Lindsted,

T.E. Mc Cully and others.

At one time, Elizabeth invited her friend, Sigurd Olson, member of the National Park Board, to come and give a Nature talk. When he was introduced, we first read from Isa. 40-42, after which he was moved to tears and spoke with deep emotion. This led to an invited visit and a strong witness at his Burnside Lake hide-out cabin, called "Listening Point". Sigurd was a special friend of Elizabeth's as long as they lived.

In 1960 the camp ministry became so large and demanding that it was thought that a board was needed. A steering committee was formed with Arnold Peterson leading. A corporation of seven men was formed, later enlarged to nine men. Attorney Vander Kooi executed this.

Some employees from Erie were impressed with the camp and Erie donated a complete kitchen equipment set. A dining hall was needed and built near the lake (now Lakeside), by men during strike time at Erie.

New Bible teachers were encouraged to come. Don Norbie, George Lartz, Ben Parmer and later his son, Paul, became yearly visitors and faithful in the work.

Some of the people who promoted the camp were John Clift, Dr. Neff, Dr. Howell, Jack and Charlotte Mostert, and many others, besides those in Church fellowships in Virginia, Aurora, Minneapolis, and elsewhere.

During the mid-sixties a total land tax-structure change took place and it became evident that the property, as well as the operation, of camp had to become a non-profit, tax-exempt property. At this time, God had graciously provided some special friends of the Tuiningas to come and help manage the camp. Wayne and Carol Messerly and five children were instrumental in counselling and helping to represent the Gospel in the area. They had Bible studies

and friendships that affected a number of lives. Wayne was also, most helpful in formulating a plan to help Elizabeth with property tax problems.

Elizabeth expressed a desire to deed the property to form a total ownership under Story Book Lodge Christian Camps. In turn, the board arranged for her living and that of her survivors, (Bill and Eva, her brother and handicapped sister). Attorney B. Vander Kooi and others were impressed and most helpful in legalizing these matters.

Since that important milestone, a number of buildings were added to the camp: The Barn dormitory, the Oasis Rest area facility, the Chapel, the A-Frame, Cedar Cove, for the Tuingas, the camp garage, the new, and very excellent, kitchen and dining hall, the Log House, (built on the foundation of the burned Ranch House in '85), and the new, commodious, Wayside Rest area. The Foundational Ministries of Fargo, North Dakota and many able men, such as John Beck, did much of this work on a volunteer basis. All this was done without requests for funds, without publicity, without loans and with no indebtedness! Men prayed, planned, worked, and watched God performing it!

From time to time there have been a number of caretakers and watchers in Camp. Early helpers were R. Thompson, Alma Darsnik, Max Mackie, Ray Anderson, C. Minkler, and Bob Oksa. Later came W. Messerly, F. Runyan, M. Stangers, J. St. Dennis, P. Hoover, L. Rodgers, Jerry Brown and Dan Hotchkiss.

Hundreds have assisted in counselling, lifeguarding, and working. Thousands of campers have been served. Hundreds have confessed being saved. It is impossible to name all who have been instruments in God's hand to touch lives for Christ and His kingdom. People helping, warning, encouraging, giving, working, checking, advising and praying----that has been the testimony of Story Book Lodge Christian Camp as the Bible and the Gospel have been promoted.

Living quarters in the early days of camp were limited. For some summers, before her Ranch House was built, Elizabeth slept in the old chicken coop (now the shed near the Log House). During summer camps the Tuiningas lived in the Bunk House (now the linnen room). Several summers they used the Farm House with three children sleeping upstairs. They also resided, for many summers in the Lodge bedroom. Until Cedar Cove was built in 1978 they never had running water except as they ran to get it! Sacrifice for winning souls proved happy and powerful!

The Messerlys lived in the center unit of the Motel and the mobile home, with their office and desk in the Lodge bedroom.

Many have sacrificed and denied self and convenience for His Name's sake. We mention this as a warning to our luxuriant and impotent age in which we have come to live; hoping that we may not lose the spirit of sacrifice and simplicity for Him, Whom we serve!

Through out the years, there have been those specially skilled and dedicated laborers, such as Elwood Abramson, Bill Varder, John Beck, and Tim McIntyre in electrical installations. In plumbing, there were Harold Asp, Ted Johnson, John Wiger, Bob and Tim McLellan. Builders were John Wiger, Paul Waterworth, George Gay, Wilbur McAfee, Myron Martinson, and Foundational Ministries from Fargo, and John Beck. Our special block layer and stone artist was Robert Gebhart. Among the cooks were Elizabeth, Ellen Abramson, Semons and Sissels, Pearl Bowman and numbers of helpers. Alice Erickson and Reino Anderson were chief bakers and pancake makers.

Registrars, over the years, were the Tuiningas, Roland Thompson, Doletta Sams, Beth Anderson, and Sue Ulfers.

Chief leaders and advisors were Dr. Neff, Wayne Messerly, Harry Holmberg, John Clift, George Lartz, Bill Wager, Don McLellan, and Gary Clark. The treasury has been in the charge of John Clift, Harold Asp, and Reino Anderson.

Other workers, lifeguards, and early counsellors were Alma Darsnick, Thelma (Thompson) Hernandez, Max Mackie, David Neff, Bob Williams, Bill Pliens, James Stutesman, Larry and Doloris Cantrall, Peter Cliff and Scott Henderson, to mention a few. The one year when we had horses, the horseman was W. Tewkesbury.

Chief heavy equipment operators were John Wiger and Ray Anderson.

It is impossible to name the hundreds and hundreds of loyal fellow believers who have helped, counselled, prayed, and contributed, that Camps might be blessed and used of God!

No one ever received stipulated or regular wages. Workers volunteered services. From time to time monies were given from Camp treasury for needy people. Gifts to Camp have come from the Lord through His people and without solicitation. God has honored the prayers of His servants and has proved Himself to be the support of the Camp.

After 40 years we say, "Salvation belongeth unto the Lord; Thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah." (Ps 3:8). And again, "O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together." (Ps 34:3). And again, "Hallelujah, for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." (Rev. 19:6). And finally, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." (Rev 22:21).

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Ben Trininga
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