

Forever God is Faithful

The Story of Camp Deerpark



In celebration of fifty years of Camp Deerpark
and the lives touched by its land and its mission

1969-2019

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Photo on cover by Zachary Garber, 2011. Campfires have always offered significant holy moments at Camp Deerpark.

Photo on back cover by Gideon and Meredith Bontrager, dawn 2018. As we close the first fifty years of history at Camp Deerpark we trust in God’s faithfulness for the next fifty years.

Photo on title page by Leon Yost, 2003.

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NO OTHER FOUNDATION



*For no one can lay any foundation other than
the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

—I Corinthians 3:11 (NIV)

An audience of hundreds of millions of people watched in awe in the summer of 1969 as American astronauts traveled to make history. On July 20, with fuel running low and computer alarms adding to the drama, the Apollo 11 spacecraft landed on the moon. Neil Armstrong, the commander of Apollo 11, made the “giant leap for mankind” when he became the first person to set foot on the moon. The world, 240,000 miles away, would never be the same.

And yet, business went on as usual for most Americans, including a small group of Mennonites who earlier that year had formally started a camp in Cuddebackville (with a mailing address in Westbrookville), about 80 miles north of New York City. Camp Deerpark had been dedicated on May 31 as “a Christian camp” that would be “used to point individuals to Jesus Christ.”

On the night of the moon landing, the camp staff had a rare moment to actually sit down and watch TV. They had just completed an intense opening session, with the first children’s camps, for 8–10-year-olds and then 11–12-year-olds, during the two weeks right after Independence Day.

As soon as the older children left, members of Glad Tidings Mennonite Church arrived for the first congregational retreat at Camp Deerpark. Over that July 18–19 weekend they took meals and slept in the main building, Spruce Lodge; they went swimming in the banked pool that was barely warmer than the mountain stream that fed it, sucking the breath away from those who dared to dive in.

When the church retreat ended and the buildings and grounds were cleaned, some staff members headed home to New York City that Sunday



evening, just in time to watch the moon landing the next day. Any staff who stayed would have forfeited the chance to watch the historic event—there was no television on the camp grounds (and the radio reception there in the woods was not much to speak of—one young listener who carried a radio around the property searching for the best signal can confirm that in every Yankees game the static always won out).

Having a camp of their own had been a longtime dream of the Mennonites in New York City. From the beginning, many of the churches had focused on children's and youth programs. Establishing a camp was a natural extension of that ministry.

In the early 1960s, groups of three or four Mennonites from the city traveled north to explore camps that might be used by families and children. They visited camps in Bloomingburg, Chester, Cuddebackville, Middletown, Nyack, and Valley Brook.

The most promising arrangement was with Camp Brookhaven, owned by the Brethren in Christ. The Mennonites leased a cabin at Brookhaven in 1963, their first venture in camping. John Kraybill joined the Camp Brookhaven board as the Mennonite representative, and, when he left New York City, Dale Stoltzfus took his seat on the board. Mennonites from the city participated in retreats there and their children attended summer camps.

In Pennsylvania and elsewhere, church camps for mission outreach and community renewal took root in the 1950s. Tel-Hai Camp opened in 1950, the first to host Mennonite children from New York City. Options increased

with the addition of two other Pennsylvania camps, Black Rock in 1954 and Camp Hebron in 1957.

On September 2, 1968, Mennonites learned that the Brethren in Christ decided that their own churches needed greater use of Camp Brookhaven, which would limit opportunities available to the Mennonites. That same fall, a group known as the Camp Committee began looking for alternatives to Brookhaven.

John Smucker, Dale Stoltzfus and Glenn Zeager visited several properties. By mid October, they had found nothing promising.

On November 5, they spent a long day with Patrick McDermitt, a real estate agent, visiting six properties. The Mennonites were not happy with any of them. Patrick said, “There’s one more place, but it’s much more expensive—it’s more than what you want to pay.”

The Mennonites had determined that their limit was \$50,000. The asking price for the more expensive property Patrick mentioned was more than double that amount, \$125,000. Even so, they decided to have a look.

That same day Patrick drove them to the property, a former country club, in Westbrookville. When they rounded a curve in Brandt Road and saw the property for the first time, Dale remembers thinking, “What a beautiful place.” And then: “This is the answer to our vision for expanding ministries.”

On that first visit, they saw two deer standing on the hill where the pool is now. The former country club included a main lodge, a residential annex, a casino, motel units, a garage, a pool and other amenities.

In reporting to the administrative councils of Mennonite and Brethren-in-Christ churches in New York, Dale described the layout and said “very little work would have to be done” to open a camp there.

The minutes of that November 9 meeting convey a sense of promise: “After some discussion, the question was asked, ‘What should the committee do when they meet with the real estate broker?’ Gene Shelly made the following motion, which the council passed: ‘The camp committee should move ahead in trying to purchase the property through entering into a contract with the widest period of time for the closing of the contract.’”

The churches decided to offer \$85,000 in cash. More than once, church members drew courage from the Gospel account of feeding the 5,000 with a few loaves and fishes.

The New York City Mennonites also invited four church members from Lancaster County, all businessmen, to look over the property: Dan Glick, Don Gunden, Henry Martin Jr. and Paul Smucker. They were from Atlantic

Coast Conference congregations. Before traveling to camp, the four visited New York City. The timing was unfortunate, as a garbage strike had left the city in a foul state. The camp property probably never looked or smelled so good. The four endorsed the purchase. Two of them, Dan Glick and Don Gunden, remain active supporters.

The Mennonite churches in New York City had work to do in securing financing. Patrick called ahead to the Goshen Savings Bank in Goshen, New York, where they hoped to secure a mortgage. At that first meeting Dale and Glenn explained that they were representatives of the Mennonite churches in New York City, which wanted to buy the property for a Christian camp.

By this time it was clear that the \$85,000 offer had been accepted by the owners—but with conditions. The loan officer said that he had to meet with a committee to discuss the loan. He asked Dale and Glenn to check back in with him in a couple of weeks. They went back at the appointed time.

Since he had last met with them, the loan officer said, he had had an interesting discussion at a banking conference in the Midwest. He said he had met someone from Hesston, Kansas, and they got to talking.

The loan officer from Goshen said, “I asked him, ‘Have you ever heard of the Mennonites? I had some in my office and they are asking for a loan. I’ve never heard of them.’”

“Oh, I deal with Mennonites all the time,” the banker from Hesston said. “I would encourage you to give them the loan. Mennonites are as good as their word.”

So with that timely endorsement, Goshen Savings Bank decided to give the Mennonites from New York City a loan, for \$49,600.

They had also applied for a loan from Eastern Mennonite Missions. At a Lancaster Conference meeting, Ira Buckwalter, treasurer, informed them that they, too, would issue a loan, of \$12,000.

The churches in New York City already had \$5,000. That put them at nearly \$67,000, still more than \$18,000 short, at the beginning of April.

The balance had to be raised by the closing date in early May. That’s when Dale decided to quit his job as a case worker with the New York City Department of Social Services to concentrate on raising the remaining funds over the next month. He did so with a supportive New York City team of Mennonite pastors and leaders.

By the first week in May, the churches pulled within \$5,000. The final gap was closed with a check from the Brethren in Christ. The Mennonite churches had made a \$5,000 investment in Camp Brookhaven and now withdrew that amount on deadline for a camp of their own.

The first Camp Deerpark sign at the corner of Route 209 and Brandt Road. Early staff may also remember the Chevrolet pick-up which was included in the camp purchase.



On May 5, Dale drove to Lancaster County to pick up the check, and returned to New York City the same day. He drove the next morning, along with the New York City team, to Middletown, New York. They arrived in time for the closing at 11 a.m.

Under the name Mennonite Action Program, the Mennonite churches from New York City closed on the property on May 6, 1969.

The ministry also had a name: Camp Deerpark. The 277 acres on which the camp would be developed was flush with deer and other wildlife such as raccoons, rabbits, squirrels and at times even bear and wild turkey. The camp name was also inspired by its home in the Town of Deerpark, a municipality made up of seven hamlets, including Westbrookville and Cuddebackville.

The camp property was settled in the early 1800s as a farm. During the Depression, in the mid 1930s, the owners welcomed guests from New York City who wanted to experience country life. The buggy shed, the chicken barn and other buildings were converted into the emerging farm resort, and a golf course claimed 10 acres as the farm resort became a modest country club.



Members of Brandt's Pleasant View playing golf and enjoying an afternoon in the shade.

In selling the property to Mennonites who would create Camp Deerpark, the owners left behind traces of that country club life, including well-used golf clubs and a stately white front porch that looked out on a row of locust trees and a great lawn that encompassed several acres, surrounded by woods on all sides. In the transition from country club to church camp, the building known as the casino became the chapel.

Early visitors to the camp testify to the powerful first impression of the property. After winding along Route 209, a traveler turned onto Brandt Road and climbed about a mile through the woods, suddenly emerging in a clearing, with the pool off to the right and spacious lawns on either side of the road, leading up to the main lodge.

The touches of rustic elegance included a carved-out log just outside the lodge dining room through which a stream ran and then tumbled several feet in a waterfall. For many children at summer camp that log served up their first drink straight from a mountain stream.

The property was soon put to full service for the Mennonite churches and children from New York City. By the second summer, a complete slate of children's camps were offered, extending the ages served from 8 to 15 and then older teens.

Fund-raising would follow, reliant especially on banquets and auctions. The first "Pennsylvania banquet" was held at the Willow Valley Restaurant in Lancaster in 1970, bringing in \$2,333. The following year, the first "New York City banquet" was held at the Neptune Inn in New Jersey, raising \$1,725. The camp auction was introduced in 1970 in Harleysville, Pennsylvania, which was coordinated by auctioneer, Alvin Horning.

Construction at camp would begin almost immediately and never really stop. In the fall of 1972, the one-story wooden chapel was lifted off the ground, courtesy of jacks, and a basement installed (a \$12,000 undertaking). Three years later, work began on a hillside pool to replace the flow-through pool at the lower end of the great lawn.

Half a century later, some of the original facilities, like Spruce Lodge and the chapel, remain in place, humble but comfortable and welcoming. In recent years, the construction of cabins for children and staff, in a tucked-away section known as Promise Woods, transformed both the appearance and services of Camp Deerpark.

As it was in 1969, Camp Deerpark is owned by and dedicated to serving inner-city Mennonites. Presently, 17 churches are joined as owners. The mission remains to extend the ministry of Jesus Christ. The camp continues

to offer people of all ages, races and backgrounds an opportunity to enjoy Christian camping at a reasonable price.

In a 2017 issue of the camp newsletter, the longtime current director, Ken Bontrager, reflected in his column, “From the Director’s Heart,” on the many people who provide money and service that allow Camp Deerpark to flourish, half a century after its founding. He noted that some of the donors were former campers; many were second-generation and even third-generation supporters.

Ken wrote: “Parents who model service and include their children in work experiences are showing vision for their own children and for the entire Camp Deerpark community. If we can get children and youth excited about service, the Camp Deerpark family will be strong for generations to come.”

The many contributors to this commemorative history reflect that shared and abiding commitment to the ministry of the church and to a camp that stands as a light on a hill, from the ringing of the breakfast bell in the morning till singing around the campfire at night.

Written by Duane C. Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.

CHAPTER 1

The Early Years



Five decades later, early memories of Camp Deerpark remain vivid for many of those who experienced the ministry's first year.

Wes Newswanger, one of the first camp pastors, remembers the unbridled enthusiasm of New York City children arriving at camp and bee-lining it down the front lawn for the swings and other playground equipment.

Doris Stoltzfus, one of the earliest hosts for camp events, recalls that "I had to learn to clean really fast" and to "become a cook for a large group."

Volunteer Miriam Buckwalter chuckles in recounting her failed experiment of serving lime Jell-O salad with cottage cheese to young campers. Her husband, John, remembers the "shoe-string" finances that framed so many camp decisions.

And as one of the first children to visit camp, I still remember clearly the bracing sensation of cold mountain water running over my bare feet as I tried, at age 7, to catch slippery salamanders hiding under rocks in the small, flow-through pond that still marks the camp's main entrance.

On May 6, 1969, New York City Mennonites realized a years-long dream when they finalized their purchase of the former "Brandt's Pleasant View" farm resort for \$85,000, equal to about \$572,000 in 2017 dollars.

With the settlement on the 277-acre property, six months after church officials made their offer to purchase it, the idea of a church camp had progressed quickly from a dream to a leap of faith to a call to action.

There was little time to waste. Campers were coming. And the city's Mennonite congregations—which included Bronx Spanish, First Mennonite of Brooklyn, Fox Street, Glad Tidings, Good Shepherd, House of Friendship and Seventh Avenue—would be eager to check out this new country retreat.

The first official event was held three weeks after the property settlement, when several dozen teenagers traveled to camp for a citywide youth retreat on Memorial Day weekend. Camps for children ages 8 to 12 were held in July, the same month that Glad Tidings held the first congregational retreat.

The learning curve was steep. And there was much work to be done. Early leaders had to figure out how to plan, promote, implement and operate a Christian camping program, and how to fund it with meager resources. "There was no budget," recalled Dale Stoltzfus, the first camp coordinator, who made many purchases of bulk canned goods in an effort to keep food on the camp table.

There was also work to do to the property itself, and infinite details to take care of. One early project involved converting what had been known as "the casino" to a chapel. Among the items cleaned out: a bar, a jukebox, 12 beer mugs, 38 highball glasses and a bowling machine (part of which was used in a tree fort that a trio of young boys later built in the woods). Camp Deerpark's electric bill said "Casino" until five years ago when Barb Freeman had it changed.

As summer turned to fall, Dale Stoltzfus purchased 200 "No Trespassing" signs to put up before the fall hunting season.

By early October, five months after settlement on the property, the camp had functioned on a mere \$8,270 in operational income, according to meeting minutes. Revenue included \$4,561 from children's camps, \$3,091 from group use, \$247 from rentals of the motel rooms and \$371 from refreshment sales. Donations and membership fees, including those from churches, provided additional income.

**Richard Pannell and Carl Metzler
present an early financial report at
Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church.**



Spending was similarly modest. Food costs for the first five months of operations totaled \$2,877. Insurance cost 8 cents per camper per day.

By November and December, plans were well underway for the second year. A camp brochure was being designed, a riding mower was donated, tickets for a Pennsylvania fund-raising banquet were being offered at \$2.50 apiece, winter rates were set at \$1.50 a night per person, and Dale Stoltzfus was appointed program director for 1970.

There were also plans to purchase two toboggans for the sledding hill and to develop a letterhead and establish a P.O. Box for camp mail.

According to a December 31 financial statement, Camp Deerpark ended 1969 with a balance of \$38.08. The camp had 51 full members and 29 associate members.

For many New Yorkers, memorable events of 1969 would have included the Miracle Mets and the formerly hapless team's unlikely journey to the World Series Championship, and the Woodstock Music Festival, when a half-million young people converged on a farm in Bethel, New York, just a half-hour drive up Route 17 from Camp Deerpark.

But for New York City Mennonites, the year marked the launching of a much different adventure as they followed the call to develop their own Christian camping program, a ministry that has endured and flourished through faithfulness and God's grace.

What follows are some of the stories from Camp Deerpark's early years.

—*Written by Tim Buckwalter, former camper and staff.*

First Camp Director with Dale Stoltzfus

Dale was working for the New York City Department of Social Services as a case worker when the Mennonite city churches began to consider buying land to start a camp. When a property they wanted to purchase was found—now Camp Deerpark—they quickly needed to raise money. The

desire for a camp for the youth and churches of New York City ran deep, but the finances did not.

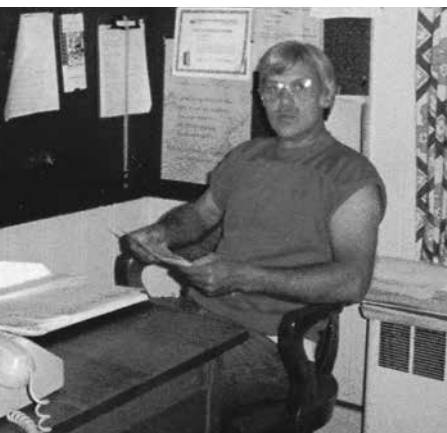
“The asking price was \$125,000 and we had \$5,000,” Dale said. “I guess we pondered on the biblical story of Jesus feeding the 5,000 people with a few fish and some bread. We offered \$85,000 cash and the real estate agent said, ‘That’s a major drop off from \$125,000.’ So Glenn Zeager suggested that the agent could help us out by taking a smaller percentage for his fee.”

When the owners accepted the offer, the leadership group interested in purchasing camp had to raise \$80,000 in about four months. With one month to go before the closing, Dale quit his job as a case worker to fund-raise. “We still needed to raise about \$19,000,” Dale said. “I approached some business people and wrote proposals. I remember a number of people gave \$500, which was a significant amount at that time. The pastors in the city and several friends in Pennsylvania also helped with fund-raising. We managed to pull together the money we needed for the closing on May 6.”

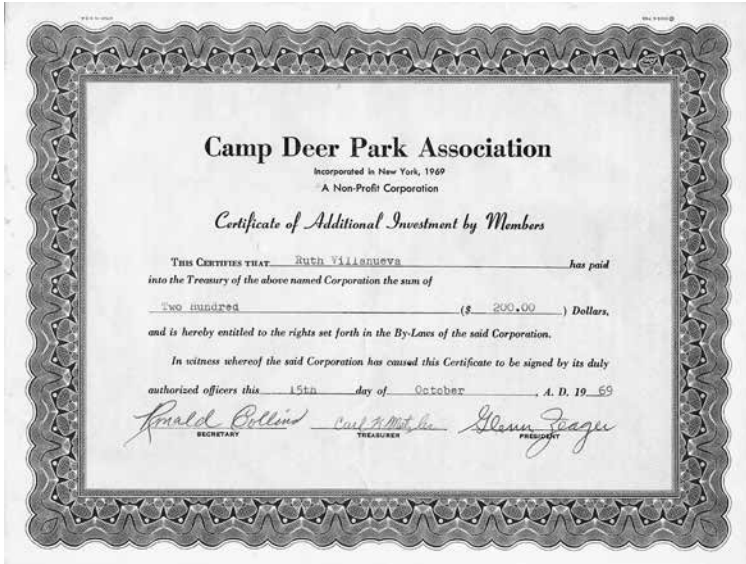
After camp was purchased, Dale took on the role of director and worked in this capacity from 1969 through 1977. “I was very interested in the camp vision and had a desire to become more involved in church ministry,” Dale said. “As a result of becoming involved with camp, I began to attend New York Theological Seminary for Bible and theology. At the time camp began I was taking graduate courses at Hunter College in urban sociology. This change in direction was affirmed by my colleagues in the New York City congregations, who were very supportive.”

“As we were getting started, we didn’t have any kind of budget or a treasurer,” he said. “I opened a checking account in my name to pay the bills. But by October of ’69 we had formed a board and Carl Metzler became our first treasurer.”

As a way of fund-raising, in the summer of 1969, people were invited to purchase memberships in Camp Deerpark. Full memberships were \$200 and associate memberships were \$100. There were no entitlements with membership, but the funds supported the camp. People were given a certificate when they joined. “People from Pennsylvania and from New York pur-



Dale Stoltzfus in the first camp office, which is now part of the dining room.



Camp Deerpark Association certificate issued to Ruth Villanueva on October 15th, 1969. Signed by board members Ronald Collins, Carl Metzler, and Glenn Zeager.

chased memberships in the early days, and we raised \$10,800 in full memberships and \$2,600 in associate memberships by October of that year, which was really helpful,” Dale said. “Though funds were tight over the years, we never missed paying the mortgage.”

“In the late ’60s and early ’70s, the Mennonite churches in New York City had great interest in working at peace and justice issues,” Dale said, “and the pastors were very engaged with youth programs at the time we purchased camp. All of the city churches had youth groups and were working with youth in a variety of ways, and kids traveled to Camp Hebron and Camp Brookhaven. I was on the boards of Camp Brookhaven and Spring Lake Retreat and had a sense of camp programming. When opportunities to use Camp Brookhaven became more limited, some of us began to ask—why not own our own camp? I did push for it. I felt strongly that a local camp, with our own programming, would be beneficial to our church families.”

“Many of us, including most of the pastors from the city churches, felt strongly that the camp should be owned by the New York City churches. I think that was one of the wisest decisions we made. Today the city churches continue to feel ownership of camp. They can run the programming and are engaged with decision-making.

“Though we stopped sending campers to Camp Hebron, I always felt support from Willie Weaver, the director of Camp Hebron in those early years. Willie helped us out in different ways. One summer Lanny Millette applied to Camp Hebron to be a lifeguard. Willie told him he already had a lifeguard but recommended Lanny call Camp Deerpark. Finding a lifeguard was usually difficult and I was grateful. Lanny came to work for us that summer, and continued to come back for several years.

“Another summer Camp Hebron received a large truckload of granola. It was too much for them and they sent part of the truckload to us. We ate a lot of granola that summer. Another time Willie and I decided to exchange staff for one week—to learn from one another and get to know each other. Camp Hebron had been open much longer than Camp Deerpark, and I thought it would provide a teaching opportunity for our staff. Aldine Weaver and Jim Musser came to Camp Deerpark. Eddie Scott, and I believe Eugene Davis, went to Camp Hebron.

“We had three staff members from the Mennonite Voluntary Service program the first summer. Over the years camp benefited from having many VSers, as well as students who came from the Mennonite colleges. Summer staff was usually a combination of VSers, Mennonite college students and young adults from the city churches. I was determined to have about half of the staff from New York City. Pastors would recommend potential staff members. In those early years we didn’t have any time for long-term training of staff, but we had several days of training at camp before summer camp began. Some of the staff began to return year after year, and learned that way. Now there are counselor-in-training programs that are very effective and there is strong youth leadership developed at camp.

“It was a challenge as we hired summer staff to set the stage so that young people from greatly varied backgrounds could work together. But the staff was always committed to working at relationships. This commitment made Camp Deerpark a special place.

“I will always be very grateful to the people and churches from eastern Pennsylvania. From the very beginning, many people gave money, time and energy because they believed in the ministry of the New York City churches. We would never have made it without them. They helped make our vision a reality by offering many gifts to us. Countless volunteers have come to camp over the years to offer expertise and labor. Experienced trades people would help us out. Youth groups would come and say, ‘I’ll work wherever you can use me.’ These supportive relationships are still developing and continuing today. The Promise Woods project is a current

example of our friends in Pennsylvania helping camp to not only survive, but grow and flourish.

“While it was the vision of the early leaders of the Mennonite churches in New York City to purchase a camp, what makes me proud, and has the most meaning to me, is the way so many people caught the vision and continued it for 50 years. Today the vision carries on with the city churches and supporters in Pennsylvania. We continue to have new staff and leaders—new pastors and board members. A large group of people feel connected to and care about Camp Deerpark.”

There are many differences at camp today, yet many similarities to when camp first began. “There is a working budget now,” said Dale, “and there is new growth in Promise Woods.” More staff live and work at camp year round, and campers and summer staff may be second- or third-generation family attenders.

But though there is a budget, money is still tight and the “wish list” for donated items continues to run in camp newsletters. Maintaining the buildings and land takes a lot of work. If Dale walked around the grounds at camp with a can of paint—as he often did in those early years—it’s likely he would find an area or two that needed touching up.

What also remains steadfast is the sight of camp when you round the bend on Brandt Road. If it’s a sunny summer day, you’ll likely see campers on swings or playing basketball. You’ll pass the well-used chapel. Several



2016 Summer staff members: Ashley Marin, Rebecca Lindsay, Emanie Colon, Jordan Stevens, Arielle Reyes, and Genesis Arzu. Second and third generation members of New York City Mennonite Churches and future leaders.

people may be sitting and talking on the front porch of Spruce Lodge. You might hear the bell ring for lunch. Favorite activities are still swimming, hayrides, singing songs around a campfire and sharing meals together.

“Doris and I spent many days in those early years figuring out how to help begin and run a new camp and juggle family life,” Dale said. “It was a great deal of work, but also a lot of fun. Our children grew up in the Bronx and at camp. Camp gave us a balance between city life and the country. The camp and its ministry were a blessing to me and my family. It was meaningful to watch all three of our children get baptized there—Duane and Donna in the old flow-through pool, and Deb in the new pool. I developed many close friendships at camp, which I’m still grateful for today.”

“As the first director, I always wanted other leaders to emerge. Our desire from the beginning was to lay a solid foundation so others could build on it,” Dale said. “The vision was a camp with strong spiritual and biblical core values and that continues today.”

—Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.

Dale Stoltzfus, first camp director, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Buying the Land with Dan Glick and Don Gunden

Fifty years ago, in late 1968, Dan Glick, Don Gunden, Paul Smucker and Henry Martin Jr. drove up to see the land that is now Camp Deepark. They were asked to make a judgment as to whether the property was a good investment for a camp. Don remembers, “Somebody from my mission committee asked me to go from Akron Mennonite Church. The Mennonite Board had asked for assistance. My dad had a couple of farms and they thought I might know how much a farm was worth.”

“I got to go because of John Smucker, who I knew,” Dan said. “John was pastor at Friendship Mennonite in the Bronx. I was a real estate broker so I guess he figured that I knew it all.”

The men first traveled to New York City to see the new Mennonite churches. The pastors greeted them and gave them tours of the different buildings, talking about life in the city and their congregations.

The city wasn’t in the best shape because the garbage workers were on strike. “I remember that, the garbage strike. When we started getting towards

the city there was just junk everywhere,” Don said. “For us Lancaster County natives, it didn’t take long to convince us that the city churches needed a camp out of the city,” Dan said. “A place where they could send their children for some fresh air and to see trees and green grass.”

They stopped in for lunch at Glad Tidings Mennonite Church, where Gene Shelly was pastor. Dan remembers feeling very grateful that it was lunchtime: “I always had a habit of getting a headache on an empty stomach, and I’ll tell you what, I had a bad headache then, from the garbage stench. I was ready to tell them to buy that piece of land at any price.”

Most of the congregations, including Glad Tidings, were “storefront churches,” with narrow and plain building exteriors that gave little indication of being a house of worship. “The pastors wanted us to see the city and the need for the camp and then they finally took us out to Camp Deerpark,” Dan said.

John Smucker, Gene Shelly and Glenn Zeager, all pastors, traveled with the men to Camp Deerpark. Dale Stoltzfus joined them to walk the land and show the visitors around camp. The New York group was hoping that the visitors from Lancaster County would be able to tell them if the property was worth the price.

When they arrived, they were going to take a walk to see some of the 277 acres but as Don recollects, “We couldn’t walk around too much because the snow was knee deep to a giraffe. So instead we just believed Dale when he said that there was a nine-hole golf course and that the land was beautiful.”



Several years before the Mennonites purchased the Brandt Road property the name was changed from Brandt’s Pleasant View to Old Homestead Farm.

They toured the main house, and another building which eventually served as the boy's dormitory, and some of the motels.

After seeing a few of the buildings, the group discussed the price, the land and whether the churches should try to purchase the property. Don believed that there was some hesitation. "I kind of remember some hesitation, but I don't remember who it was from. Then I looked at Dan and said, 'If they aren't interested, let's buy it because this would make a good investment.'"

Dan said, "One walk through the buildings and over the grounds and I thought, 'buy it now.' Even if you don't have any money . . . just buy it and the money will come! The city churches need this place . . . faith will take you on!"

The churches from New York City decided to make an offer of \$85,000. The pastors hoped that the four businessmen from Pennsylvania would go back to Lancaster County and convince congregations to contribute to the purchase of the camp and the cause that the city churches were working towards.

—*Written by Dillon Hershey, Goshen College intern; and Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.*

Dan Glick, volunteer and advocate, attends Forest Hills Mennonite Church in Leola, PA.

Don Gunden, former board member and volunteer, attends Akron Mennonite Church in Akron, PA.

We Loved It Since Day One

with Ray and Annie Pacheco

Ray and Annie sit at picnic tables beside the main house. It is an overcast day. As we talk, passersby casually interrupt to greet them. They are all members of the Torres family, who host yearly family reunions at Camp Deerpark. Ray and Annie live in Puerto Rico now, but in the late '60s, as newlyweds, they were completely immersed in New York City life.

"We were members of Primera Iglesia Menonita (First Mennonite Church) in Brooklyn," Ray remembers. "Our Pastor, Guillermo Torres, saw that I was young and full of energy; and, most importantly, bilingual. So first, he had me sit in on New York City Mennonite pastors' meetings to translate, and eventually I sat in for him as a representative of the Hispanic Mennonite Churches. It was a learning curve for me."

Ray and Annie on her mother's favorite seat at camp during the 2018 Torres family retreat.

“In one of our many meetings with other New York City Mennonite pastors, this idea of finding a campsite in New York that would serve our churches came up. We thought it would serve our church well, especially our children, since the current options for time outside of the city were very far. ‘Wow, this is great!’ I thought.”

“But we had no money,” Annie chimes in. “We had been fundraising heavily to buy our own church building and, now, to ask for more money on top of that seemed like a lot. Our church members were not the type of people that were generating a lot of money at the time, so it was hard . . .”

“But it was a team effort,” Ray adds. “We felt Camp Deerpark was God’s gift to the city, and we were all for it. I remember a substantial donation given by an older lady. She clearly could have, and should have used the money for herself, but she gave it all to the camp. God really came through for us.”

“After it was purchased, our focus was our first church retreat. We brought up about 100 people. Pastor Glenn Zeager was concerned and told me, ‘I don’t think we can handle a group this size’ and so, of course, we brought up even more people the following year.”

Annie laughs, “People were so motivated and excited; they didn’t even mind sleeping outside!”

“I remember my first impression of Camp Deerpark was that it reminded me so much of Puerto Rico: all the green open space. We loved it since day one.” Members of First Mennonite Church were predominantly Puerto Rican, and so many felt the same way.

But the food was a different story: “Culturally, we are not traditional Mennonites.” She glances over at her husband. “I didn’t mind the food, but the majority of our church members preferred rice and beans with fried chicken over meatloaf and mashed potatoes.”

“So, First Mennonite, we were known to be the church that brought our own programming, along with our own menu, our traditional foods, our





1974 Board Members (left to right) John Buckwalter, Ray Pacheco, Gene Shelly, Caesar Richards, Dale Stoltzfus, Camp Administrator; Demaris Lugo, and Carl Metzler.

kitchen volunteers and all. The year-round staff loved it even more when we would leave leftovers, because . . . well, who doesn't love Spanish food?"

Ray and Annie think back on all of the years spent at Camp Deerpark. "I love to get up early and talk to God. I thank Him because he has guided us this whole way. We get to see the fruits," she reflects. "We get to see our family enjoy this place. So many of them have been impacted by God here. I am really touched."

Ray also recalls, "Even the non-Mennonite kids that we would bring up from the neighborhood fell in love with this place. Some of the professionals and adults that you see here today were just kids we brought up back then. I think back on all the campfires. They were always so powerful. When I look back, I feel blessed to have been a part of the transformation."

—Written by Celmali Jaime Okonji, program director in 2006-7, attended Evangelical Garifuna Church and King of Glory Tabernacle, both in the Bronx.

Ray and Annie live in Puerto Rico, but still visit Camp Deerpark for family and church retreats. The Puerto Rican dishes that they share with Camp Deerpark staff continue to be an all-time favorite.

Served on the First Board

with John Buckwalter

On a Sunday afternoon in the early spring of 1969, Glenn and Florence Zeager took Mim and I to Westbrookville, New York to see the camp property. We traveled in the 1948 Packard that Glenn had recently bought from our neighbor, Mr. Davis. I was very excited about the plan to buy camp.

I thought it was a beautiful setting with a nice amount of open grass space and plenty of woodland. Having been a country club, it was available with dishes, silverware, napkins, brooms and many other positive features to start a summer camp on a “shoe string” budget.

I enjoyed working in a variety of roles for Camp Deerpark. Mim and I frequently helped in the kitchen during church retreats. I served on the first board and was board secretary for a number of years. As a board member, I was always aware of tight budget hardships. I became chairman of the camp projects committee, and in order to raise funds, we started having camp auctions. For a number of years an annual auction was held at various locations in Lancaster County. The auctions usually netted \$10,000 to \$12,000 and also served as a great reunion of camp staff, camp support-



Mennonite Action Program Board Members (left to right) Nelson Kauffman, Ron Collins, Aurelio Rodriguez, Glenn Zeager, John Buckwalter, Gene Shelly, Carl Metzler, and Dale Stoltzfus.

ers and friends. It was hard work, but gratifying and fun to see people pull together to make the auctions happen.

We would travel to camp about once a month in those early years with our three boys, Rick, Tim and Bob. One of my fondest memories is inner tubing with the kids on the sledding slope. I remember the long walk up the steep hill, several of us piling on a sled or an inner tube, and the wind whipping at our faces as we flew down the hill. We felt a sense of accomplishment if we made it to the bottom without hitting a bump and falling off.

The first summer, when children's camp began in 1969, camp did not own a bus. I used our station wagon—a maroon 1966 Dodge Coronet—to transport campers. I remember arriving at the very first camp with the first load of kids. I drove about six kids from Good Shepherd Mennonite Church. They were very excited about going to a new camp in the country.

One of the earliest goals of camp was to serve as a leadership training ground for city youth. I can't say it is a surprise to me that this goal continues to be met. I am thankful that the goal and vision have never been lost.

—Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.

John Buckwalter, volunteer and board member, attended Good Shepherd Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

It Had Become Our Nest

with Richard Pannell

I am a nature-lover. Better yet, a wildlife enthusiast. One summer, outside of my window in the room I stayed in at Camp Deerpark, I watched a bird begin to build her nest, twig by twig. Then a few days later, I watched her lay her eggs in that very same nest. Later I witnessed those eggs hatch into small hungry miracles. Eventually, each one of her birds learned to fly. I watched the nest become empty again. This is the story of how Camp Deerpark impacted my life, the youth I worked with, and the lives of my children. I am like that bird.

I was born on a New Jersey chicken farm in 1940. I was raised in Coatesville, Pennsylvania, and at age 11 started attending Newlinville Mennonite Church, one of the first Mennonite Churches established in a Black community. Our pastor invited us to attend Camp Men-O-Lan, also in Pennsylvania, where I met other children of color from DC, Philly, Harrisburg and Reading. My counselor at Men-O-Lan was John Kraybill. I remember

building a great relationship with him, and my age mates. As a teenager, I desperately wanted to attend Lancaster Mennonite High School, to keep in touch with many of my Camp Men-O-Lan friends, but my mother made it very clear that I was going to the local school where the rest of my family had attended. "If it was good enough for them," she told me, "then it's good enough for you." She was right. I graduated the top boy of my senior class.

In 1961, at 21 years of age, I was ready to leave Coatesville. I tagged along with a friend of mine who was heading to New York City to be a 1-W, which was the legal status given to conscientious objectors of war. In exchange for enlisting in the military, we were required to complete a certain number of hours of community service work.

So that's how I found myself in Harlem. And, boy, was I scared. Of course I had seen Black people in Black communities; but not at this level. Harlem was tougher and rougher than Coatesville. My small apartment was right next door to the Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church. Thankfully, at the time, the pastor, and the person in charge of placing the new 1-Ws, was none other than John Kraybill, my counselor and good friend from Camp Men-O-Lan!

Soon after, I became a member of the church, and served as their Youth Leader. In 1966, when Kraybill left New York City, I became the lead pastor. The church began a youth center and I was the coach of a community basketball team. I was known as the "Hoodlum Priest," because many of our youth had intimidating reputations.

One of our players, Jack, a flashy 17-year-old, often visited the center. I knew he was dealing drugs, and tried to warn him about his lifestyle. "I can make more money in a week than you make in a year," he told me one day. He was probably right. I had quit my job to become a teacher in one of the most notorious junior high schools in Harlem. Still, I was worried that I couldn't give Jack what he needed most to survive the streets.

And then late one night, there was a knock on my door. The basketball team spilled the horrible news, "Jack is dead; they killed him." His flashy lifestyle was a threat to the wrong people. As devastating as the news was, it fueled my passion to work with youth even more. I vowed there would be no more "Jacks." Not if I could help it.

In 1968, soon after the assassination of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Mennonite Minority Council was established. The purpose of the council was to diminish the large disparity between money given abroad, and money given to the local community. Around the same time, there were also talks within the Mennonite churches of purchasing a campsite near New



Counselor Richard Pannell helps little brother and camper Shawn with his banquet night tie.

York City. As I visited various locations with other Mennonite pastors, I kept Jack in mind. I was looking for a place where the youth of my community could know God, peace, brotherhood, and love. It had to be a safe place, a place to rescue our youth from the dangers of Harlem's streets. "No more Jacks," I told myself.

We finally settled on Camp Deerpark. With funds from the Mennonite Minority Council and young adults from the Mennonite Voluntary Service Center, we had plenty of helping hands at our Youth Center in Harlem and at Camp Deerpark during the summer. Every spring we would help fill out paperwork and set up doctors' appointments for about 30 of our youth to be able to spend time at Camp Deerpark.

It was a dream come true to see my youth run through the grass, and walk through the woods, and enjoy nature as much as I did. Even my own biological children, all six of them, grew up in the safety of Camp Deerpark. It had become our nest, nature's sanctuary to us.

The nest is empty now. My children, Anita, Richard, Melody, Robert, Shawn, and Kiesha, are all independent adults now. Surely, Camp Deerpark was vital in all of them establishing their faith, growing and maturing spiritually, and finding God's will for their lives. The Harlem youth and basketball teams are all grown up and leading their own lives now too. All I ever wanted was for them to see the world as God sees it. They have all learned to fly. They are all miracles. Camp Deerpark helped me do that.

—Written by *Celmali Jaime Okonji*, program director in 2006–7, attended *Evangelical Garifuna Church and King of Glory Tabernacle*, both in the Bronx.

Richard "Dick" Pannell is a retired podiatrist and lives in New York. He is the former pastor of Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church in Harlem.

In the Kitchen

with Doris Stoltzfus, Dale Stoltzfus
and Miriam Buckwalter

“My first impression of camp was that it seemed huge and like a lot of work,” said Doris Stoltzfus, who was the head cook for the first two years of camp. “Just to look at it seemed a bit overwhelming.”

“We cleaned and cleaned to get the facilities ready to open for the first event at camp—not just the kitchen but the bedrooms, bathrooms and living room area as well. I had to learn to clean really fast. For every retreat we had to set the dining room, clean dishes, sweep, empty garbage cans, vacuum, everything. We would drive up to camp on a Friday after the kids were out of school. That first year Duane was 9; Donna, 7; and Deb was only 2. Dale and I would clean before the group arrived that evening, have a snack ready for them, and then clean on Sunday after they left.”

When Camp Deerpark opened, no one lived at the camp year round. Dale said, “We’d come up on the weekends for retreats, and spend the summers there. The first weekend retreat took place only two weeks after camp was purchased and the youth group was the first group to come. It was Memorial Day weekend and there were about 70 youth from about seven Mennonite churches in New York City.”

The previous business at camp—Brandt’s Pleasant View—had operated a resort that mainly served a German clientele from New York City. It advertised, “Delicious home-cooked meals, family style.” “The kitchen had everything we needed,” Dale said. “From serving dishes to a large, walk-in refrigerator, it was ready to go.”

“All of a sudden I needed to become a cook for a large group,” Doris said. “I didn’t know what I was doing. There was a lot of commercial equipment in the kitchen that I had to learn to use, like the mixers, the oven, the dishwasher, etc. John and Mim Buckwalter came along the first weekend to help us. Mim helped me in the kitchen.”

Mim said, “I remember that it was a lot of hard work, but that it felt like a new adventure. That first weekend I also remember feeling like I didn’t know what I was doing, but I didn’t have full responsibility so it wasn’t as stressful for me as it was for Doris.”

“The first lunch I made—the Saturday noon meal—was a total flop. I didn’t like it myself,” said Doris. “I was mortified. A man who attended Good Shepherd Mennonite Church and worked at Shea Stadium convinced me to buy frozen pizzas like they served at the stadium. He said they would make



1976 summer staff drying dishes include: Duane Stoltzfus, Marian Newswanger, Barbara Millette, Leonor Kennell, and Donna Stoltzfus.

an easy meal. He was trying to be helpful and I didn't know what to make, so I agreed. But these kids were from the city and they knew what good pizza was. The kids hardly ate any of the pizza we served, which was a bit tough. After that we just jumped in and began to cook. The rest of the meals were fine, I believe. The kids seemed to appreciate the home-cooked meals. I think for supper on Saturday we made roast beef and mashed potatoes."

"I don't even remember the frozen pizza," said Mim. "I helped cook on various weekends, and Doris always had a lot of good meals and good ideas in the kitchen. I do have a memory similar to hers though. One time I made a lime Jell-O salad with cottage cheese. It was a popular Pennsylvania Dutch dish. But the kids looked at it and said, 'I'm not eating that swamp juice.' They didn't like that it was green with cheese in it. I was a bit embarrassed. I don't know what we did with all of that left-over Jell-O salad."

During the first couple of years of camp Dale helped in the kitchen and did the food shopping. "When I cooked for retreats and for children's summer camps," Doris recalled, "Dale would go into Port Jervis to shop at the



Dale and Doris Stoltzfus

grocery store. Sometimes I would plan a meal, but if an item was too expensive, he wouldn't get it. I'd be waiting for my ingredients back at camp and that would really throw me."

"Well, we didn't have a budget," said Dale. "We had very little money and were worried about being able to pay the mortgage. The first year we weren't registered to receive government food or buy wholesale. So I had to go into town and buy a lot of stuff off shelves to get going. I remember going to Artie's meat shop between Port Jervis and camp on 209. One time I was filling up a cart with cans of food and I was emptying out some of the shelves of certain items. Duane was along and he remembers the owner getting upset and asking us, 'What do you think you're doing, taking all of the cans?' I usually went to a larger grocery store in Port Jervis. I'd load up a couple of carts, pay, carry the groceries to the car and go in and do it again. I bought fruit cocktail by the gallon. It was a guessing game in terms of quantity and how much to buy. We never knew how many people would show up for retreats. They didn't always register."

During the second summer, camp received surplus food from the government. Doris said, "We were given large cans of peanut butter and pudding, bags of rice and huge chunks of cheese and some other items. One time Camp Hebron gave us boxes and boxes of granola. You had to be creative to use what was given, and not serve the same meals all of the time."



Weekend volunteer, Audrey McGhee, serves family-style lunch, 1994.



Esther Petersheim and Isaac Grable with Eileen Ranck in the background. 1992 Pennsylvania Auction.

Once we were given many gallons of rum raisin ice cream. You couldn't disguise that. And it was hard spreading the surplus peanut butter on bread without the bread tearing, so we mixed grape jelly with the peanut butter. The combination became a favorite of the kids. We went through a lot of the peanut butter and jelly spread."

"One of the favorite meals the kids always enjoyed was roast beef and mashed potatoes," Doris continued. "Just the aroma when we were cooking would invite positive comments. They also liked a meal which Dale helped make which was meatloaf and baked potatoes. A couple of times each summer Dale's parents would bring corn on the cob and fresh tomatoes from Pennsylvania. Dale's mom would sit outside and husk ears and ears of corn. The kids loved the sweet corn and were grateful. It made Dale's parents feel really good to contribute in that way."

"We served the meals family style," Dale said. "During summer camps, the kids would sit with their counselor and we would bring the food to the tables. It was a time for the counselors and campers to pray and be thankful for the food being served, and have time to share together."

"I had to learn how to be efficient in serving," Doris added. "Having things ready when people came in to the dining room, and keeping the food warm. And I often had to work while holding Deb. People would want to watch her and would fuss over her, but she didn't always like the attention. Sometimes it would make her cry and clingy, so I would work while holding her."

After two years in which Doris served as the head cook, Esther Peter-sheim was hired to be in charge in the kitchen during summer camps. “I was very relieved not to be in charge any longer,” Doris said. “I still helped, but didn’t have to run the kitchen. It took a lot of pressure off of me. One of Esther’s popular meals was cornbread and chili.”

“Learning to know and appreciate people from a variety of cultural back-grounds was a special privilege for us,” Doris added. “It gave us a broader perspective on world issues and forced us to confront and challenge some of our own assumptions and beliefs. Fifty-plus years later we still cherish many friendships formed at Camp Deerpark.”

—Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.

Doris Stoltzfus, first head cook at camp, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Dale Stoltzfus, first director of camp, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Miriam Buckwalter, one of the first volunteers at camp, attended Good Shep-herd Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

A Whole Lot of Faith

with John Smucker

John Smucker, originally from Bird-in-Hand, Pennsylvania, had been pastoring a Mennonite church plant in New York City for about 10 years when he first heard talk about the possibility of the New York City Mennonite churches buying and operating their own camp. His other pastor friends, Paul Burkholder, Glenn Zeager and John Freed, were looking at a piece of land about 80 miles away from the city. John said he decided to go look at the land and see if he wanted to jump on board. “The first time, it was me and Dale Stoltzfus and Glenn Zeager and a few other leaders,” he said “and we went there with a whole lot of faith.”

Once there, John was sure this was the place that would be perfect for the camp they envisioned. Everybody loved the quiet woods and the open space for activities. “When we got up there, we really liked the setting,” he said. In fact, he said, they wanted to buy the property, “but we didn’t have any money.” John described the congregations as “half a dozen young churches in New York—just church plants—but we had good connections with Lancaster Conference and (what is now) Atlantic Coast Conference.”

This connection to the broader Mennonite Church was important because both conferences had churches scattered throughout Lancaster County, which was the home community of most of the New York City Mennonite pastors. They sent people into Lancaster County to visit churches and ask for donations from private individuals and congregational offerings.

As they waited for the donations to come in, the pastors and leaders prayed. There was a clear vision for a camp where New York City youth and churches could get away from the city and worship God. John describes “a great unity” and recognition of “a need for a place to call our own.” Until that time, churches in New York City were using other Mennonite and Brethren in Christ camps that were farther away—and the churches didn’t have a strong connection to, or influence on, those camps.

Eventually they had enough money to officially buy the land. When Camp Deerpark first opened, people naturally compared it to other camps. “What we had to offer was always kind of meager,” he said. “It wasn’t highfalutin in any way. Those motels in the back, they weren’t great, but they were the best we had.” And, he added, “People loved it! They wanted to be together, and they liked the feeling of ownership.”

John’s congregation, Mennonite House of Friendship (Bronx, New York), went to Camp Deerpark for congregational retreats, which often included baptisms. John describes the setting as being conducive to “conveying spiritual and Biblical truth,” and says that the retreats were “an opportunity to



John Smucker and Mark Perri baptize members of Immanuel Community Church.

get to know your people more deeply.” Camp Deerpark, he said, “was always a place where you could go and meet God, hear God speak to you.”

Reflecting on where camp came from, and where it is going, John said, “We took this old camp worth \$125,000, and we got it for \$85,000. We didn’t have any money, but we raised the money for it.” At the time, with such limited funds, he wasn’t sure how long the camp would last. But five decades later, Camp Deerpark not only continues to be a special place, but it also has expanded. “I think Camp Deerpark combined the city and the country. That was not easy—and they are still doing it. People love Camp Deerpark. It has a lot of friends!”

—Written by Dillon Hershey, Goshen College intern.

John Smucker served as founding pastor of Friendship Community Church (Mennonite House of Friendship) in the Bronx from 1957–1979; founding pastor of Immanuel Community Church from 1983–1995 in Queens; pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Flushing from 1995–2008 in Flushing; and overseer-bishop of the Atlantic Coast Conference of the Mennonite Church in New York City.

Starlit Nights

by Richard Frey

In September 1968, I continued my voluntary service under Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions in New York City following a summer at Camp Hebron, where I was the assistant director. Pastors of the Mennonite churches had begun to dream about a camp for city children and families. I believe it was in 1969 that the first summer camps were organized. A committee consisting of Lucy Vance, director of the Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church Head Start program; Norma Brenner, director of the Bible Club program at Good Shepherd Mennonite Church; Dale Stoltzfus, overseer of the Lancaster Conference Mennonite Churches; and I began planning for several camps during this first year of operations. Dale and I directed the first weekend of the first camping season. Dale was the first director of Camp Deerpark.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, Mennonite Youth Fellowship (MYF) was an important program of the Mennonite churches. Under the leadership of Damaris Lugo, Sis-Obed Torres, Ruth Villanueva and others, the camp provided a place where city youth could explore the Christian faith and God’s



Jerry Kennell, Richard Frey, and Lowell Jantzi solving camp problems in the kitchen.

creation in an environment totally different from New York City. For many, it was the first time that they were in a place of quiet, starlit nights and strange noises. The camp director and board decided that “boom boxes” would not be permitted at camp.

A favorite activity was singing around a campfire. One of the campfire sites was developed by Jose Cruz and Paul “Tommy” Villanueva and named appropriately JCTV. Another was located on the hill above the site of the future swimming pool. Campers marveled at the starry sky, the moon which could be a sliver or full or somewhere in between, and the sounds of the night.

I was a board member in the early years of Camp Deerpark. The board and staff worked faithfully in developing programs that would speak to the desire of New York City churches to have a place for weekend retreats and summer camp. I enjoyed seeing the smiling faces of children and adults as they exited vans, cars and the camp bus, eager to explore the camp, meet old friends, and make new friends. I quickly learned that Camp Deerpark would be an integral part of the mission and ministry of churches and other programs in the city.

Richard Frey, a former board member and youth leader, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Sign up for Camp Deerpark!

with Wes Newswanger

Wes Newswanger was a member at Good Shepherd Mennonite Church in New York City when he heard rumors about the Mennonite leaders in the city wanting to buy some property for a camp.

When Camp Deerpark opened in 1969, Wes was one of the first persons to work with the children’s summer programming. He also helped out with maintenance and the general flow of the camp. “The kids could be quite a handful sometimes,” Wes said with a chuckle. “I remember going after one of the kids who took a rocking chair from the porch and was running after somebody else.”

Wes was in charge of getting kids from Good Shepherd to sign up for Camp Deerpark. He would encourage them all year long to attend. Most kids had been going to Camp Hebron in Pennsylvania—about four hours away—so they were already familiar with going to camp during the summers. Because Camp Deerpark was closer to New York City, many parents made the switch. “The New York City Mennonite churches owned Camp Deerpark and we felt good about what was happening there,” Wes said. “The adults in our church congregation also appreciated the camp because the children weren’t guests at other camps anymore. They could attend their own church’s summer program.”



1975 Summer maintenance crew (left to right) Jesse (unknown last name), Wes Newswanger, Isaac Grable, Lowell Jantzi, and Duane Stoltzfus.

After the purchase of a used school bus in 1971, Wes became a bus driver for camp. He remembers how fun it was to drive the kids up for summer camp. “When they arrived, the kids would get off the bus and run down across the grass to get on the swings or the playground equipment,” he said. “And then when they would get on the bus to go home there were tears. Many kids wanted to stay longer.”

Wes and his family moved to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, in 1974, but the four-hour distance didn’t stop them from coming back to Camp Deerpark for many summers after. “My wife, Marian, would be the camp nurse, the craft director and sometimes the cook,” he said. “I would be the director or maintenance man or camp pastor or some of all of the above. I worked wherever I was needed. We had three children, Lynda, Ryan and Daryl, who feel like they grew up at camp and remember running around all day with the campers and staff.”

“Camp made me a better person,” Wes said. “I’ve been able to experience both successes and failures, joys and sorrows through the camp. It was very meaningful to be a volunteer there at various times, and to see kids and staff growing together.” Wes was also able to see how the camp grew in the early years, which was critical for its ongoing ministry. “Some campers became interested in being counselors the next year and being on staff, like cooking or maintenance,” Wes said. “And then they grew into various roles and that

Notes from March 29, 1971 minutes:

“Bus—Do some homework. Moved that Gene Shelly and Glenn Zeager come up with some hard facts by the next meeting concerning acquisition and operation of a bus.”

Notes from May 10, 1971 minutes:

We noted the cost of a 1965 Ford school bus for \$1,500.00 without tires. Insurance (\$1000), Bus (\$1800), Inspection (\$100) and Operating exp. (\$700) for a total of \$3,600.00 first year. And second year at \$1,600.00.

“Action: We are in favor of getting a bus for camp.”

I am sure it was purchased soon after that.

Gene Shelly



Wes Newswanger with campers at the carnival rope ladder.

was really neat to see. It's just wonderful to see how the campers developed and how the camp is now basically run by New York City people."

After 1980 the Newswangers stopped working at camp, but they dropped in every once in a while to volunteer. Wes was and continues to be impressed by how smoothly the camp runs. He admires the staff and the summer program that brings the staff and the campers together. "It really is an effort to work at helping kids and to learn how to work together cross-culturally," he said. "And I appreciate the sincere effort that has gone into it all these years, making it successful, and making it work for Christ's kingdom in the city and outside the city."

Wes became a technology education teacher at Lancaster Mennonite High School in Pennsylvania in 1974. He stayed in contact with the people from Camp Deerpark and often sent information to his former church in New York City to encourage high school students to continue their education at Lancaster Mennonite. Sometimes he was caught by surprise: "One morning early in the school year, my kids were coming into class, for home-room period, and I looked up and there was one of my camp kids from Brooklyn sitting in front of me." Wes enjoyed being the bridge between New York City and Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and helping his former campers become successful in school.

Wes's years at Camp Deerpark have provided him with a space to learn and grow as a teacher and as a person. "Camp helped me to gain confidence

in my own abilities and in my ministry both at Lancaster Mennonite High School, at camp, and in life in general,” he said. Wes hopes that camp will continue to grow physically, with the Promise Woods project, and emotionally, with the sincerity of the staff, to benefit all who attend camp.

—*Written by Dillon Hershey, Goshen College intern.*

Wes Newswanger, a former board member, summer staff and volunteer, served as pastor of Good Shepherd Mennonite Church in the Bronx from 1970–1972.

God’s Presence in Nature

with Eugene Shelly

My first memory is of going to Camp Deerpark (at that time it was Brandt’s Pleasant View) in Glenn Zeager’s Packard in the evening after a day of work. I traveled with Dale Stoltzfus and, I believe, John Buckwalter. I remember a neighbor coming to investigate who the intruders were at this time of night. I think the trip was mostly about introducing me and others to the idea of owning a camp to provide more sustainability for our children’s camping programs.

Everyone in the car was excited about the potential of owning this property for a camp. To be clear, my excitement was somewhat limited since I had never had camping experiences as a child or youth. But as pastor of Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the South Bronx, where we had a very active children’s program, the idea of having a camp produced an image of a place to send children away from the streets during the summer. This idea was exciting to me. I thought it could provide a broader experience of life and God’s activity in all of nature.

My first impression of camp was that it could really become a great place for our city youth, but it would take a lot of work and money to achieve this. Of course, we did manage to purchase the property in May of 1969.

My summer focus in 1969 was to organize the several ways to get over 300 children off the streets and into camping programs: Fresh Air Fund, Camp Hebron and now, Camp Deerpark. So for me, not having camping experience to draw on, I could only imagine the value for the kids—a value that I came to appreciate more and more from the reports from campers over the years.

I was also excited about providing our congregation at Glad Tidings with a retreat experience at this new camp. And we succeeded at having our

Glad Tidings youth wash their van before returning to the city from a late winter retreat.

first annual retreat at Camp Deerpark on July 19 and 20, 1969. A memory that has stayed with me is of everyone's reaction to the green space. It was both exciting and a little scary. The young kids would just run around in the grass. This was the first of many Camp Deerpark retreats for Glad Tidings. One of our largest was when we had 109 people attend our retreat in 1977. We had a big fish fry on Saturday evening. Obviously, there were not beds for all and some attended only for Saturday. These were joyful and exciting times for the congregation.

I usually scheduled baptisms each summer during the church retreat in what would now be referred to as the "old pool." This was an exciting part of the retreat, even with the water sometimes being very cold.

In our situation in the inner city, where resources were at a minimum, camp strengthened the spiritual experience of church members. It provided an opportunity to help people see a world outside of New York City and expand their experience of God in nature. It opened up their awareness of country and space.



Pastor Gene Shelly baptizes Jesus Cruz with Luis & Leonor Constantin, Jose Cruz, Maria Lugo.

One summer I developed a curriculum around “God’s presence in nature” for summer camp. I enjoyed speaking to the children at their campfire meetings at night on this topic. Over the years I gained an appreciation for the value of a camp experience for many kids for whom it was their only time spent outside of the city.

For me, personally, camp was also an outlet from the stress of city life. It provided me the opportunity to work with soil and rocks and trees and building things—sort of a return to the ground, trees, weeds and grass of my roots on a farm in Alabama.

I know Camp Deerpark was central to the development of many kids in positive ways. There was an effort to develop programs to foster leadership among the youth. Some kids came from rough backgrounds, but went on to become leaders in their communities. Some went on to be leaders in their career worlds. Some went on to be leaders in the church. Many of the youth were ready to go to camp at every opportunity, even for work projects. And strangely, that was another growth opportunity that Camp Deerpark gave some of the youth—learning some skills of labor like mowing grass and carpentry.

The specialness of Camp Deerpark is found in its vision of helping the children of New York City, especially from the disadvantaged population. I don’t know enough about other camps to compare, but I imagine the vision and mission to focus on programs for children from the Mennonite churches in the inner city is a unique camping mission and challenge.

Camp Deerpark is also special in that there is an effort to be attuned to the different cultures that attend. Camp has worked at providing programs for cross-cultural experiences; the director intentionally structures the staff when possible to reflect the different nationalities and races of those who attend camp. And there is often an ongoing mixture of cultures at camp, as work groups from distant churches—often from Pennsylvania—work on weekends when church retreats with city congregations are taking place.

Camp Deerpark continues to be a part of our life to this day, not doing work projects so much, but leading some retreats for pastors and families. Martine and I still contribute annually to Camp Deerpark and care deeply about its mission and ministry. We are also excited to see the growth and development of camp, especially in recent times with the leadership of Ken and Deborah Bontrager.

—*Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.*

Eugene Shelly, a camp pastor, served as minister of Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx from 1967–1978.

A Beautiful Scene

with Monroe Yoder

Last fall I went with my dad to the annual Camp Deerpark homecoming. It was his third trip to camp in a month—he had already attended a pastors’ retreat and a two-day meeting of the New York City Council of Mennonite Churches (NYCCMC) Executive Committee. We were approaching the chapel when he commented that the experience of driving up Brandt Road had changed since the early days. How so? “It’s paved! The ride is so much less bumpy and dusty than it was in the beginning!”

Very soon we were experiencing two aspects of arriving at camp that have remained constant over the years: the lovely view of the expansive lawn, suddenly visible, and the welcoming smiles and waves from people already happily enjoying the grounds. My dad described being impressed by his first glimpse of camp in December 1968, prior to the actual purchase by the Mennonite churches: “There was fresh snow covering the ground, bright sunshine reflecting off the snow, and, near the casino—now the chapel—there was a deer calmly eating fruit fallen from a bare apple tree. A beautiful scene!”

Although I don’t have any memory of being there that day, my dad says I was—that my mom and brother were there, too, and that we rode along



Rachel Yoder (seated), Monroe Yoder, Frank Freeman, Don and Elsie Gunden, 2003.

with Glenn and Florence Zeager. “The council had pretty well decided to buy the property, and Glenn wanted as many council members as possible to see it before the final decision was made,” he said. “So he got permission from the real estate agent to bring us up after church one Sunday. The agent wasn’t there, but he’d told the property caretaker to let us look around. We didn’t have access to all the buildings, but we were able to go inside the main building and several others, and to get a feel for the place. It seemed like a good fit. But we knew it was a big decision.”

Perhaps I don’t remember that first trip because I was only six years old. Unlike the adults, I had no concept of the scale of the financial commitment, or the intricacies of establishing an appropriate administrative structure, or the potential for Camp Deerpark to play a central role in shaping the emerging identity of the New York City Mennonite churches. “One of the best decisions the council made was to commit to buying and operating camp *together*,” my dad said. “This was not going to be a situation where we operated as Lancaster Conference churches and Ohio and Eastern Conference (now Atlantic Coast Conference) churches—we were committed to this project as *New York City Mennonite churches*.”

As I told my dad about my first camp memory, I realized it was an experience that exemplified camp belonging to us: “It was springtime, and there were lots of people from lots of churches, and we played while the adults worked, and everyone had lunch together in the dining room.” What was going on? “Must have been a ‘Camp Cleanup Day,’” he said. “In fact, it may have been the first one. We wanted as many people as possible to have an introduction to camp. And there was work that needed to be done before the children’s summer program started, so we got together to celebrate and get ready.”

“I liked being around church when the bus came to pick up the campers, and when they came back again the following week,” he told me. “Generally it was relatively quiet when they left. But when they came home, the energy and the noise level was bumped up several notches! I really enjoyed experiencing their enthusiasm and seeing that the children had really gotten to know each other.” Church retreats served a similar purpose, he added. “For years, Seventh Avenue had a summer retreat and a winter retreat. Community people were welcome, and camp was a wonderful setting for becoming better acquainted.”

He asked if I remembered the small golf course that used to be below the main house, and told me a story I had never heard before: “One afternoon, after we played a round of golf, several of us sat down in the shade to relax.

It was a really beautiful summer day, with just enough breeze to be really pleasant. This was in the early 1970s.”

“At the time, the janitor for our Head Start program lived upstairs from the church, and although he didn’t attend our church services, he came to retreats. He often brought along his daughter and her family, who lived in Brooklyn. His son-in-law was one of the golfers that day. After we’d been sitting and chatting for a little while, the young man announced, ‘It’s so peaceful here. I don’t think I’ll be needing this anymore.’ Then he lifted up his pant leg, unstrapped his ankle holster, and offered the gun to Dick [Pannell, the pastor at the time], and then to me. We both declined, saying we didn’t need it either. So he shrugged and put it in his pocket. And that was that.”

I recently found a small package of black and white photos. On the envelope my mother had written: Church Camp Retreat, June 1970. There are pictures of people—black and white, all ages—talking and laughing, sitting on the porch and emerging from the chapel. There are pictures of people—children and grownups—jumping Double Dutch and golfing.

It’s been almost 50 years since those photos were taken, and some of the people in those pictures have died. Some of the kids in those pictures have sent their own children to Camp Deerpark. In fact, at the 2017 homecoming, I even saw the *grandchildren* of one of those children. That morning we rode up to camp in my dad’s red 2015 Hybrid Ford C-Max—which, he assures me,



Double Dutch jump rope on the front drive at camp.

is a far cry from Glenn Zeager's spiffy black 1948 Packard, which took us up bumpy, dusty Brandt Road on our first visit to camp. But this hasn't changed: Camp Deerpark belongs to us. And we belong to each other.

—Written by Naomi Yoder, former camper and member of Infinity Mennonite Church in Harlem.

Monroe J. Yoder, retired bishop of the New York City District of Lancaster Mennonite Conference, has attended Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church in Harlem since 1965 (the name of the congregation was changed to Infinity Mennonite Church in 2009).

CHAPTER 2

Children's Camp



One of the main reasons for purchasing Camp Deerpark was to offer a Christian camping experience to children and youth associated with the New York City Mennonite churches. In July of 1969, only two months after the purchase of camp, the first week of children's summer camp was held. Two one-week camps were offered for children. The first week was for ages 8–9 and the second for ages 10–11. In 1970, the program expanded and additional summer camping options were added.

Eventually camps ran for 10-day sessions. The sessions continued to be offered for specific ages, with the first camp of the summer open to 8–9 year-olds, followed by 10–11, 12–13, and 14–15 year-old campers. A camp session for older teens was held at the end of the summer.



Dale Weaver teaches Bible class on the front porch of Spruce Lodge.

In 2006, 10-day age-specific sessions were replaced with five-day sessions for all children ages 8–13. This change allowed families greater flexibility and some children now attend camp for the entire summer. Camp continues to offer a one-week teen camp near the end of the summer.

In addition to five-day weeks for campers, summer camp also offers opportunities for young adults to learn vocational and leadership skills. A leadership training week is held for staff prior to the start of summer camps. Teenagers and young adults are given the opportunity to stretch their leadership gifts as they love and care for children during the summer.

Campers

By Marisha Joseph

1997 Summer Camp Counselor

Can't wait to see them we said,
Then suddenly they arrived.
They were much more beautiful
Than we had ever expected.
Tears filled our eyes.
There were short ones, tall ones,
They were all so great!
Blonde ones, chubby ones, the loveliest
creatures God could ever make.
As time went by their little minds began to expand.
Feeling the love from the Holy Spirit,
And the gentle touch of God's hand.



Campers celebrate a first place finish on their Delaware River rafting trip.

Though programming has changed and evolved, the heart of the camping experience remains as it was in 1969: a safe environment in which to learn about God and study the Bible; space in which to enjoy nature and outdoor recreation, new friendships and community; campfires and singing together; play and relaxation.

Beloved Camp Deerpark

by Tiffany Powell, Ph.D.

What can I say about my beloved Camp Deerpark? Well, how about I begin by saying that this is where my walk with Jesus began. I will never forget that one day in the wooden-floored chapel down the hill from the main house, where I first invited Jesus into my life at the tender age of 8 years old (now I did it again the next summer because I wasn't sure that it worked the first time.) I learned more about the love of God and sang songs that are forever etched in my heart. Songs like "King Jesus is All," "Said I Wasn't

Gonna Testify” and the fun loving “I Saw a Bear” were the “jams” at campfire each night. This is where my love for worship emerged.

Camp Deerpark is where I learned to swim and to roast hot dogs in a fire; and it’s even where I slept outdoors in a sleeping bag under the stars for the first time in my life. As a camper, I had FUN! There was the occasional homesickness that set in during my summer visits but that quickly passed as I forged close relationships with my peers and fun-loving adults. Ken Bontrager, John Brock and Roland Bailey were the males who showed this little fatherless brown girl from the Bronx that men do care and can be consistent and respectful. I will forever be grateful for their love.

As I grew older, my teenage years were laced with precious moments during youth retreats every winter. Boy, did we have fun sledding down that big ole hill, while still trying to be cute for the boys who were present. We looked forward to attending every year. I would even invite other friends to come along. What I loved most about those moments is that Camp Deerpark provided a safe place to be a teenager, meet other teens and have good clean fun, all undergirded by the Gospel of Christ.

Once I became an adult, Camp Deerpark continued to be a staple in my journey. I worked as a summer camp counselor and was camp pastor for several years. I even served on the board and learned lots about boilers and other technical details that impact the intricate workings of camp.



Summer food service staff (left to right) Pedro Castro, Janel Wilson, and Tiffany’s daughter Imani Francis.

Both of my daughters were campers and my oldest daughter even worked in the kitchen for one summer. I told other families about my beloved Camp Deerpark and they sent their children too. So between my personal experiences and those cultivated through my membership with King of Glory Tabernacle, I have a deep-seated sweet spot for Camp Deerpark.

When I consider all that I am as an adult, there is no way I can ever forget the impact that Camp Deerpark had on my life and the lives of so many others connected to me. I am grateful for every counselor who spoke life into my life, all the hikes to the Back 40, every banquet; and for every camper with whom I had the honor of transferring that very vitality. Every time I have an opportunity to visit Camp Deerpark, the enthusiasm of the little sign off the main road and the long ascent up the hill brings all the joy right back to me. Camp Deerpark ushered in Christ and massaged my innocence as a little girl who grew into a confident woman of God, who knows how to love others and to pay attention to detail and worship. Thank you, Lord, for Camp Deerpark. I am forever grateful.

Dr. Tiffany Powell, a former camper and board member, attended King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.

The Cost of a Sacrifice

by **Celmali Jaime Okonji**

I don't remember the year. All I remember is that my former camper, Moriah, was back after many summers gone. This time around though, she was different. She was older, of course, but she had also come back as a gang member. The little-girl innocence had disappeared; and so had her smile. Every day that summer, she was clad in a red bandana, committed to representing her new-found identity. Nothing would make her give it up. She was tough now, and I doubted whether I, or even God, could get through to her.

The session finally came to a close, and on our last night, we decided to have two separate campfires: one for the girls and the other for the boys. Our spot was in the chapel. We redecorated to make it look like a sanctuary. We put up an altar, a large wooden cross, some pretty fabric and candles. The topic that night was about the woman who anointed Jesus when she poured her alabaster box of perfume on His feet. We talked about the cost of a sacrifice. We sang, we danced, we shared stories, and some of us even



Campers return to New York City.

wept. Before going to bed, we had the girls write notes on pieces of paper. On each note written was what we were choosing to give up to God. That night, each girl left her folded note at the foot of the cross. Surely, we were on Holy Ground.

Early the next morning, I walked into the chapel. The sweet residue of God's presence still lingered in the air. I could feel it. I walked up to the front of the sanctuary. There, lying at the foot of the cross, surrounded by scattered paper notes, was a red bandana. The fact that it was there wasn't what struck me. It was the *way* it was placed there. It was soiled and stained, but neatly and carefully folded. Like the perfumed oil poured on Jesus feet, I could tell this sacrifice wasn't easily given. This sacrifice *cost* her something. Not only was it painful; it was *intentional*.

So this is what I learned: Any sacrifice made for God, whether it be our lifestyle, hairstyle, body, or identity . . . is never easy, but it is worth it. We are so precious to God. He values our sacrifices. Thank you Camp Deerpark, for always being a place set and ready for the presence of God to fall. Thanks Moriah, for laying your life at the cross that night; just as you did it then, may we also be reminded to do it daily. And of course, thank you Jesus, for the greatest, most precious, and most intentional sacrifice of all . . . *You*.

Celmali Jaime Okonji, program director in 2006–7, attended Evangelical Garifuna Church and King of Glory Tabernacle, both in the Bronx.

Being a Counselor

by Lorna Blake-Weaver

The first time I went to Camp Deerpark was for a church retreat in the winter of 1969. I attended Fox Street Mennonite Church in the Bronx. I had never been to a camp before. I fell in love with Deerpark when I first laid eyes on it. To me it was a little bit of paradise that was just outside of New York City. No concrete jungle, lots of grass, a pool. Although the buildings were old, they were quaint, and somehow seemed frozen in time.

I was never a camper at Deerpark, but in the summers of 1977 and 1978 I was a camp counselor. I was assigned to the main building for the majority of camps the two summers I was a counselor. Most of the rooms were a little musty, but one got used to it. Depending on the size of a particular camp some counselors shared rooms with their campers or with other counselors. Every morning at 7:30 we had a staff meeting to discuss the previous day's issues as well as what the new day would entail. Mornings consisted of breakfast, arts and crafts, and nature activities. Some afternoon activities included swimming, organized games, drama, water balloon fights and piling in the bus or van to go tubing or canoeing on the Delaware River.

For dinner we either cooked over a campfire or ate in the dining room in the main house. After dinner we would sing songs around the campfire, then head over to the snack shop. Sometimes we had hay rides, or hiked to a campsite to sleep overnight. The last night was always special because we had a banquet and a talent show. Staff and campers would perform at the talent show and the kids loved seeing the staff being silly and making fools of themselves in skits.

The younger children were usually tired by the end of the evening and most went to bed on time, whereas the older age groups were never ready to go to sleep. Since the camp consisted of city children, it was always interesting to see what their definition of camping consisted of. I remember the older children coming with two or three large suitcases, full of clothing. Some even came with boom boxes, and there would always be a kid who would have a whole snack shop's worth of food in their suitcase.

We took each group of campers on at least one overnight hiking trip. Before embarking we would relay to them that we'd be hiking for quite a distance and they were responsible for carrying whatever they decided to take with them. There was always a camper who wanted to take just about everything in their suitcase and struggled to keep up.



Johnette Benjamin (center), summer program director 1993–94, guiding campers in the foil dinner cookout.

I remember during one camp for 16-year-olds, there was a camper who was not from the city. This particular camper did not come with the other campers on the bus or van; instead, he came in a limousine driven by a chauffeur. I wasn't sure how he would fit in with the other campers and made it my mission to include him whenever I could. It didn't take long before the camper was laughing and joking with the other kids.

I believe Camp Deerpark played an important part in campers' lives. Through kindness and love, staff was able to show God's love to children who grew up in a harsh city. I will never forget the time I was a camp counselor at Camp Deerpark because that was the first time I was away from home. The decisions I made not only had an impact on me but also on the campers who were in my care. I not only grew as a young adult, but also spiritually. Like my campers who depended on me to guide and take care of them, I in turn had to trust in Christ for strength and comfort, for his steady hand.

On the Mennonite Church USA website, it says, "God calls us to be followers of Jesus Christ and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to grow as communities of grace, joy and peace, so that God's healing and hope flow through us to the world." I believe Camp Deerpark is a special place where

this mission is worked on and carried through, where children experience God's love, healing and hope.

Lorna Blake-Weaver, a counselor in the summers of 1977 and 1978, attended Fox Street Mennonite Church, which became Burnside Mennonite Church, both in the Bronx.

A Special Creation of God

with Hyacinth Stevens

James was a 9-year-old foster child from Brooklyn. He came to Camp Deerpark with his little brother, although they were not in the same foster family. Someone had instructed James to watch out for his brother while they were at camp. James took that charge very seriously and became overly protective. In the process he was involved in many conflicts that the counselors had to defuse. Although James was a spirited camper who often required much attention, he soon became a favorite among the staff because of his soft and loving heart. He was always the first to volunteer a song in chapel or at campfire. He was also the first to share what he had learned in Bible class and to confess how he had fallen short that day. He wanted to learn how to be loving and nonviolent, but in the process of protecting his brother he couldn't seem to stop what he had known for the nine short years of his life.

James was very excited to have his birthday at Camp Deerpark. There was a birthday celebration earlier in the week, and after observing how the camp staff honored the other child he was even more excited. He confessed to the staff that he had never really had a birthday party. Every day up to his birthday he would ask the staff if they still remembered and if they were still planning to have a party for him. "Hyacinth," he said, "tell me something more about the birthday party."

Although James had been labeled as a bad kid, he was loved and accepted at Camp Deerpark as a very special creation of God. With about two days left in the camp session James approached his counselor with his desire to change his life. (The Camp Deerpark position on child evangelism is that we invite children at all ages to say yes to Jesus. We acknowledge that they will probably need to continue to say yes as they grow and mature in their personal and spiritual lives. However, a tree that is never planted will never grow.) James said yes to Jesus, he repented of his actions and he made a



Counselor Hyacinth Banks, far right, with her cabin.

commitment to walk on the path of love. The camp staff members were well aware of the struggles that would be facing James upon his return to Brooklyn and did their best to prepare him.

James packed all of his belongings into a large black garbage bag and boarded the bus armed with his new faith. His brother would be returning to the same foster family, but James would be moving on to a new family. The camp staff take several specific steps to prepare children emotionally to transition from camp back to the city, but only the grace of God can keep a child in these kinds of situations. As James got off the bus in Brooklyn and said good-bye to his brother, a very tall, intimidating woman approached the bus. “Where is James?” she asked. “I heard he is a real trouble maker.” Hyacinth Stevens, the Camp Deerpark program director, replied that she must have the wrong person because the James we knew was a sweet and loving boy. The woman went on to explain, “My husband and I don’t play any games, so they give us all of the bad kids.”

As the skinny 10-year-old was dragging his large bag away, he looked back at Hyacinth and said, “I’m going to remember everything I learned at camp. I’m going to remember, and I am going to be back next year.”

The camp staff tried to keep in touch with James throughout the year, but the foster care system made it very difficult. We honestly don't know if this story has a happy ending. Please pray for James and the many others like him who pass through Camp Deerpark every year.

—*Written by Ken Bontrager, current camp director.*

Written April 29, 2004

Hyacinth Stevens, program director, 1997–1999 and 2002–2005, pastor of King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.

His Entire Stipend

by **Celmali Jaime Okonji**

It's always unfortunate when children have to pay for mistakes their parents committed. This was one of those situations:

Two campers sat on the porch. Their bags were packed and heads hung low. They were being sent home early. No, not because of a fight. Not because they were sick or ill-behaved. Unfortunately their mom couldn't afford their stay. She had gone about getting them to camp in a deceitful way; and, so, the summer camp administrative staff (of which I was a part) came to the conclusion that the boys must be sent home. As they waited for their ride home, their eyes took in the place they were about to leave. "This stinks," they must have thought. I, too, thought the same.

But then, something happened.

Just as a car pulled up Brandt Road, junior counselor, Carson, stepped onto the porch. *Ok, maybe it was more of a leap.* "Celmali, is there *any* way they can stay?" he asked me. I could sense desperation in his eyes. The 16-year-old offered his entire stipend, a meager \$75, to have the decision reversed. It was a direct challenge to the course that had been set, but I liked it. The challenge came from the right place. His heart. "Let me talk to Ken," I said.

His stipend was small indeed, but he had asked the million-dollar question. Was \$75 enough to make us see past a deceitful, but desperate, mom's actions? Yes. It was more than enough for us to offer some grace. After all, isn't grace offered to us all daily? The smiles on the campers' faces were priceless as they lugged their bags back indoors. By the end of the night, the rest of the staff members had followed Carson's lead, and enough money was pulled together to cover the cost for both children. We were floored. It



Carson Washington (bottom center).

was a modern day example of Christ redeeming us . . . of course, with an urban twist. Carson had seen the value in keeping two kids at summer camp and was willing to sacrifice all for it.

It's always a fortunate event when we realize we don't have to pay for sins we've committed. That is grace. Undeserved, unmerited grace. And this was one of those situations.

Celmali Jaime Okonji, program director in 2006 and 2007, attended Evangelical Garifuna Church and King of Glory Tabernacle, both in the Bronx.

A Conscious Decision

with Devonne Lila McMorris

It all began in the summer of 1998 when my mother enrolled me into summer camp without my permission, or willing consent, if you will. “But mom,” I cried, “I told you I wanted to go to the Fresh Air Fund, not Christian camp; it’s going to be so boring!” And to that my mother responded, “Devonne, if you think you’re going to be ‘ripping and running’ the streets all summer long while I’m at work, you have another thing coming!” You see, back then I was only 13 years old and my aging grandmother, who had suddenly become ill with lung cancer, could no longer care for me. With limited resources for childcare I was left to roam the streets freely between 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. during the week, and if I didn’t find myself getting into some sort of trouble, trouble was sure to find me.

As a new teenager I was very impressionable and wanted to fit in with the “cool” kids, even if it meant joining the neighborhood gang, formerly known as “Shiesty No Limit,” meaning there was no limit to how shady and sneaky we would be. This particular gang was known for terrorizing the neighborhood by robbing and stealing, initiating fights with innocent bystanders, cutting school and smoking marijuana. Prior to leaving for camp I was scheduled to be “jumped in” upon return, by a gang of 10+ kids, which was the initiation standard. Afterwards, I would then be given the honor to participate in recruiting and “jumping” others as well, with the possibility of becoming a gang leader in the future.

Little did I know, despite my apprehension, my mother’s firm decision to send me to Camp Deerpark would have such a life-changing impact that would eventually lead me down the path to salvation, down a road of no return, because after attending one 10-day camp session there was no doubt about it: I wanted to be simply “sold out” for the Jesus that I had heard about during the nightly campfires.

It was at one particular campfire where the Holy Spirit filled the chapel so heavily that several campers, who were already gang members, began to take off their gang bandanas and lay them at the altar, as a sign of fully surrendering to Christ, while forsaking the life of a “gang banger” if you will. Afterwards we sang “We are blessed in the city, we are blessed in the field, we are blessed when we come or when we go,” which remains my all time favorite camp song.

As Hyacinth Stevens spoke about Jesus’ unconditional love for us during campfire, she made it plain and simple that despite our parents’ and grand-



parents' relationship with God, we were now at the age of accountability and needed to make a firm decision for ourselves. "You're either going to be hot or cold," she said. "Now which one will it be? Because lukewarm isn't a decision!" That question rang over and over in my mind, well after summer camp had come to an end, because I had some serious decisions to make. Either I was going to return to the Bronx and continue ahead with my plans to join the Shiesty No Limit Gang, or I would make a conscious decision to serve Christ wholeheartedly. Because of the positive impact this experience had on my life, in addition to the ongoing encouragement by my camp counselor, Aura Espinosa, I was able to get connected with King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx, where I was immediately connected with the youth group and began receiving weekly mentorship from Pastor Hyacinth Stevens. These strong mentors instilled the importance of servant leadership. This is what ultimately inspired me to get my master's of social work from Fordham University in 2011. I strive to serve my community and other marginalized communities in the same way Camp Deerpark has served me.

*Written by Veronica Dingwall, camper, counselor,
summer camp director 2009, board member 2016–2018,
attends King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.*

Devonne McMorris, assistant director in 2005, attended King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.

Fruits of the Spirit

with Emanie Colon

Emanie Colon spent 15 summers at Camp Deerpark, both as a camper and a staff member. She also attended camp for weekend retreats with her church, United Revival Mennonite Church. Emanie was a camper when summer camp transitioned from the 10-day camps for specific age groups to the rolling one-week camps open to all ages, and she was ecstatic. She recalls being asked for input about the switch. “My parents sent me for every week of the five weeks,” she said. “I could come for all summer and I loved it!”

One of her first memories of camp was when the Bible verse for the summer was Galatians 5:22–23: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law.” (RSV)

Emanie still remembers the song that the counselors made up for the campers to sing so that they could remember the verse. She also remembers the speaker and the topics that were covered that year. “Sister Pamela from King of Glory Tabernacle Church was the camp summer pastor and I remember her speaking about peace, and being kind, and the fruits of the Spirit,” she said. Emanie carried the fruits of the Spirit when she was away from camp and at camp in the coming years that she attended. “The fruits of the Spirit have really been a part of who I am,” Emanie reflected. And she proved it when she was awarded the Peace Leadership Award in 2008. “It was pretty cool that as a kid that had stuck with me and then I got that award when I was a little older,” she said.

Once Emanie realized that the fruits of the Spirit meant so much to her, she couldn't help but point out other ways that Camp Deerpark emphasized the scripture. She immediately mentioned the motels: “The motels are all named for the fruits of the Spirit! Faithfulness, Kindness, Goodness, Love.”

Emanie remembered other experiences at camp that impacted her. When Emanie was a camper she had three counselors who meant a lot to her. They were with her for all of her time at camp and they made her want to become a staff member. “Just seeing the staff and the way they were with campers really motivated me to work at camp,” she said. “They encouraged me and they were so loving—Talibah, Joyse, Onan—those three. I just remember the joy and the happiness and all the things that they taught us.”

The counselors taught her how to live a Christ-like life, she said, using the fruits of the Spirit, being kind to one another and showing love to others.



Counselor Emanie Colon (left) with teen camper, Nia Mack.

When Emanie worked at camp she made sure that she used the fruits of the Spirit to show the campers how to live like Christ. She loved working with the kids and hopes that she made an impact on them. “These children come from all different backgrounds and areas,” she said. “Knowing that you are helping them by sharing what you know and sharing God’s love is really a good feeling.”

Emanie worked as the program assistant for two years and as a counselor for one year. She was also the head cook for the last year that she worked at camp. She was responsible for making all the food for the camp but she didn’t find it too stressful. The kids would come and give her a hug whenever she looked down or stressed. She found joy in the little things that the kids would do. “I felt like it was a great way to close off my camp summer job,” she said. “It was a great way to close that chapter.”

Emanie cannot imagine what her life would be like if she hadn’t gone to Camp Deerpark. “It has molded me into who I am and who I’ve become as a young adult—a young adult in Christ,” she said. “It’s just always been there for me.” She hopes that her church continues to take retreats there for the rest of her life because “camp is holy ground.”

“It’s just special,” she said. “Every time you come, you gain something new.” Everybody at camp has an important job in Emanie’s mind because they all made such a big impact on her and they all care about the camp and the mission behind it. She has met many people at camp who are now her lifelong friends.

“At camp I learned how God works and how you can be faithful to God, and how you can show God’s love through the fruits of the Spirit,” she said. “I learned how you can live a Godly life, a Christ-like life. Galatians 5:22–23 is what camp is to me. That’s my memory of camp’s impact on my life.”

—Written by Dillon Hershey, Goshen College intern.

Emanie Colon, a former camper and staff member, attends United Revival Mennonite Church in Brooklyn.

SIGNS and WONDERS

Look closely at the Camp Deerpark grounds and you'll notice that on each motel hangs a handmade sign quoting one of the fruits of the Spirit. The signs are one of Grandpa's earliest contributions to Camp Deerpark. Alfred "Grandpa" Kruse found much joy at camp. The anticipation before the trip, the glorious time in staying at camp and the memories upon leaving were all part of the wonderful atmosphere of camp. When contemplating what camp meant to Alfred Kruse, it can be absolutely said that he loved Camp Deerpark.

—Laura, Vincent, and Jeanette Kruse,
grandchildren of Al and Dottie Kruse.

Excerpt from Winter 1995 Camp Deerpark Newsletter, written soon after Alfred's passing.



Dottie and Al Kruse (left) at PA Auction.

A Place on the Hill

with Hyacinth Stevens

I began my journey with Camp Deerpark as a camper at 9 years old. My church was Burnside Mennonite Church, now called King of Glory Tabernacle. Camp Deerpark was one of the church's outreach programs of the late '70s. I remember I didn't particularly enjoy camp in my early days, but as a teen camper it became a motivational place, a place that meant transformation and symbolized victory.

Because of my experience as a camper, I became an adult leader who is very intentional about creating safe spaces where God dwells. At the age of 14, I was one of three staff members who pioneered the first pilot CIT (Counselors in Training) program at Camp Deerpark. The other two staffers were Richard Pannell and Carmela Arnold. This was also around the time that Ken Bontrager came on board as director. We created activities and a mission fiercely centered on community and encountering Christ in ways that were relevant to the youth. My personal mantra and challenge shifted to: "What can I do to create community?" This would hold true even as I moved into more senior roles at Camp Deerpark. I even credit camp with giving me the stamina and passion I needed to prepare to be a pastor.



Pastor Hyacinth Stevens teaches Bible class during the summer of 2018.

Camp became a place on the hill—this hill being a space that is a sanctuary, a euphoric space to explore and develop community. It is a place I regarded as the systematic development of spiritual growth, providing training and practicum for leadership. Everybody who was a part of that core crew of CIT's went on to become leaders in their communities. Ten days of summer camp was more impactful than a year of Sunday school! This is important work, especially since we are not making space in our schools to develop faith. The challenge and even struggle is how do we take what we learn in spaces like camp and create microcosms of that? How do we create spaces to grow and develop in God in the city?

This is why Discipleship Camp at Camp Deerpark was so powerful. That group was intentional about creating safe, authentic communities and using camp to bring people into common platforms. My journey was blossoming and advancing with each new chapter of my Camp Deerpark story. I was learning to be a compassionate leader with a heart for people. As a Camp Deerpark program director I was intent on giving staff and campers freedom to develop, make mistakes and use those blunders as opportunities to grow. There was a lot of grace extended to people to use gifts that were just being discovered. The grace was the process! So often people hoard space and are territorial, and camp is not like that. Sometimes in our communities we put limits on what people can do and what role that should play. At Camp Deerpark gifts were called out and nurtured. Camp helps take the limits off because you say, "I did this at camp; I can do this in my community."

I remember one of my first levels of conversion. It was with youth leaders, Daryl and Monique Wansley, at campfire on the top of the hill. Daryl talked about sacrifice, and I was feeling so convicted. I recall saying to myself, "God wants a personal relationship with me. I can't get it just because of my father, who was a bishop."

In that moment I had an encounter with Habakkuk 3:18–19: "yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to tread on the heights." (NIV) I had this vision of a deer leaping and felt purposed by God. Camp is that space; camp is that hill where you will hear from God!

*—Written by Veronica Dingwall, camper, counselor,
summer camp director 2009, board member 2016–2018,
attends King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.*

Hyacinth Stevens, program director, 1997–1999 and 2002–2005, pastor of King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.

Camper Quotes



Camp is fun and you can make a lot of friends and at the same time you get to learn a lot about God, and when you go home you can share that with other people. —*Ariel, 10*

I like that we get to go to the pool every day and hang out with our friends. —*Sanaa, 10*

It's a good place to make friends and it's nice to go to the pool every day. I also like campfire, and the teachers are really fun. —*Aisha, 11*

I like camp because I like field games and the different activities they put up for us. —*Kristina, 11*

It's really fun and spiritual and we get to go to the pool. There are different classes to learn about different things like nature and dance. —*Sabrielle, 10*

I like everything. It's fun because they incorporate learning about God in a fun way. We sing songs, we hear stories. —*Amari, 11*

I like it here because we have campfires and the pool, and we get to sing songs and make new friends. It's like going to school but without teachers. —*Emilee, 11*

I like how it's spiritual when you get to sing. It's a lot of fun to be in chapel. —*Ella, 11*

I love that there's all the amazing classes, you're always having fun, and if there's a problem the counselors can always fix it. —*Jade, 8*

I like camp because it's fun and we can do fun activities like pool time and campfire. —*Mariah, 8*

The thing I love about camp is that we have friends to talk to, and when you're feeling lonely you can talk to the counselor. —*Jazlynn, 9*

What you love about camp is that it's fun and that you have amazing counselors that keep you safe every day. You can make new friends every day and the classes are very fun. —*Stefani, 9*





I like that there's a banquet and that we have our own personal space. There are many people to talk to and the counselors are nice and helpful. —*Madison, 9*

I like the pool. I also like classes and I like going to the park. —*Zhoe, 7*

I love rafting and the way we all make friends. Each and every year we meet new people and friends became closer friends. And not being shy and not being afraid and knowing that God is going to be helping us through. Plus, how nice the counselors are. —*Brianna, 12*

I like the atmosphere and the kindness. —*Shana, 12*



My favorite thing about camp is the pool time and how they cooperate with the kids and the adults.
—*Diore, 9*

My favorite part of camp is learning skills for how to be an individual and how to be independent.
—*Skylar, 12*

Camp is a place where I feel like I can really focus on myself spiritually and my personal growth. It's been where I've been able to practice leadership and feel the closest with God. I've grown up here every summer.
—*Marleyna, 21*



CHAPTER 3

Retreats



Since camp was first purchased, weekend retreats have been a constant source of enjoyment for congregations from New York City. The first retreat at camp was held in May of 1969. Camp hosted the youth groups from the city churches, with about 70 youth attending. Glad Tidings Mennonite Church held the first church retreat in July 1969.

Retreats allow congregations to slow down from the busyness of their normal New York City schedule and take the time to deepen their relationships. “It’s different than when you see people each week. You can slow down and go deeper,” was a comment from a retreat attendee.

Camp offers time to celebrate lives together. The Bronx Garifuna Church has an annual men versus women soccer game. Immanuel Community hosts a Sunday evening talent show. Manhattan Mennonite spends Saturday morning in the gardens at Freedom Farm Community. Manhattan Garifuna hikes to the Back 40 before breakfast on Saturday morning. At camp, churches



Friendship Community Church prayer circle to conclude their weekend at Camp Deerpark.

celebrate birthdays, anniversaries and, of course, baptisms. Many baptisms have taken place in the old and the new swimming pools over the years.

“Immanuel Community Church has enjoyed its annual retreat on Labor Day weekend through all its phases of existence (Redeemer Church, Elim-Redeemer, and Immanuel Community Church) for 25 years,” said Annabelle Perri. “The memories carried from young to old are made by people AND place. The consistency of the time and place brought out unforgettable experiences in people, between people, and in a people that are forever etched in our hearts. To this day even those who have long moved on remember Labor Day Weekend at Camp Deerpark.” A retreat group leader was heard saying, “More discipleship happens in a weekend at camp than in a year of church attendance.” Another person shared, “I can’t say what a place it has in my heart. It means a lot to our church.”

Currently Camp Deerpark can accommodate 117 overnight guests in a variety of rooms, including Spruce Lodge, motels, and four Promise Woods cabins.

Camp is About Family Coming Together

with Nancy Lopez

My family was involved with camp from the beginning. Camp was purchased when I was 7 years old, and I remember my family helped to clean it out and prepare for the first summer camp. The chapel was originally a bar, and my family and the Torres family had to help clean out the bottles and grime and turn it into the chapel. My uncle, who was a chef, was one of the first cooks.

Because we were among the first to go to camp from our church, First Mennonite Church of Brooklyn, I remember the original house, before the kitchen and the dining room were extended. I also remember the old swimming pool. There is no way that we could use a pool like that now. It would violate so many health codes; but back then, it was what we had. There were snakes and creatures in the pool, and the water just sat there. There were no filters, no circulation system, nothing to really keep it clean. The current flowed into the middle of the pool, and the moss and crud would just build up along the sides. You would step into the pool from any side and just slide right into the middle. I remember that on one retreat, my cousin got pushed into the pool. She didn't want to go in because she did not know how to swim. It would have been fine, except that the lifeguard, one of my cousins,



also could not swim. Can you imagine that? Someone finally jumped in and pulled her out. When we got a real pool that was safe, clean and more fun, it was great.

I also remember the fun we had on the hayrides with actual hay. (What happened to all the hay? I think we should at least throw some hay on now to make it more realistic.)

We were always getting into trouble at camp, always plotting and staying up too late at night. When we had retreats, the people on the hayride would always be bombarded with water balloons when they returned. That was the tradition. There is no annex (Locust Haven) anymore, but before it was torn down, people would hide behind it and wait for the hayride to go past. Now you would have to be a lot more sneaky about it. The planning that went into these ambushes was very complicated. Directions were given about where people were to hide and how long to wait before throwing. On later retreats, people started to catch on. Some would jump off before the ride was over, to avoid the ambush, and others started bringing umbrellas so that they could cover up and not get wet.

I also remember that there was an aluminum bucket on the floor beside every table in the dining room. The person who sat by the bucket had to clear all the food off of the table and throw it away when we were done eating. It would be amazing how that bucket would make it from one side to the other of the table. People would kick it further under the table. They would sneak it around because no one wanted to get stuck with the bucket. It was hilarious.

It was a big to-do when our church would go out for our retreat. Getting to and from camp was almost as big of an experience as being there. We would get into that school bus and would be talking junk, singing songs and having a great time on the ride. Sometimes we would get lost on the way, though I never understood how you could get lost going to the same place every year.

For the past 50 years, camp has been like an extension of our family; it was built into our summer plans. Camp is about family coming together. You can exhale. It is always such a relief when you are there. To this day, I still look forward to going to camp. I still have memories of that feeling. The most impactful thing is walking into Spruce Lodge and seeing that it still looks the same as when we bought it. That room does not change. The day that room changes is the day that camp will never be the same. How many memories have been made in that room?

—*Written by Malachi Bontrager, former camper and staff.*

Nancy Lopez, a volunteer and board member, attended First Mennonite Church of Brooklyn.

Baked Oatmeal

with Natica Apau

“I was born in Jamaica and moved to New York as a child,” Natica said. “My parents sent us to church, but they were too busy with work and life to go with us. Although I participated in church activities, I never surrendered to Jesus as Lord. As I moved into adulthood I experienced strong feelings of abandonment because of my relationship with my father. I became angry and bitter and made some bad decisions in my life. My childhood friend, Michanne, always invited me to hang out with her. During my college years she kept reaching out to me, praying for me and checking up on me.

“In 2007 I was in a destructive relationship when I had an encounter with Christ. Even though I had accepted Jesus as my Savior, I was completely caught up in the craziness of my life. When Michanne invited me to attend a women’s retreat at Camp Deerpark, I was ready. I knew I couldn’t afford the retreat and, honestly, I don’t know who paid for me to go to camp. That weekend the minister spoke about God being enough. We were in the chapel basement and I remember God’s love overflowing me. I began crying and confessing my sins. I felt God’s love flow over me with every sin I confessed. I felt God telling me, ‘I am enough.’

“The next morning at breakfast they served baked oatmeal. After a prayer was offered, I poured milk over my oatmeal and started eating. An



Open space at Camp Deerpark provides room for healing.

Baked Oatmeal (Camp Deerpark secret recipe)

INGREDIENTS

6 cups rolled oats
2 cups brown sugar
4 teaspoons ground cinnamon
4 teaspoons baking powder
2 teaspoons salt
2 cups milk
4 eggs
1 cup melted butter
4 teaspoons vanilla extract
1½ cups raisins

DIRECTIONS

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

In a large bowl, mix together oats, brown sugar, cinnamon, baking powder and salt. Beat in milk, eggs, melted butter and vanilla extract. Stir in raisins. Spread into an oiled and floured 9x13 inch baking dish. Bake in preheated oven for 40 minutes.

[Serves 9]

overwhelming feeling came over me. It was like God was saying, ‘I love you.’ I began to cry. My friend asked me if I was OK. I said yes, but kept on eating and crying. For the first time in my life I felt that no matter what my sins were God would not abandon me. God was saying, ‘You need to be held? I will hold you.’

“In 2016, after many years of marriage, my husband left me. I saw my daughter experiencing the same feelings of abandonment that I had felt as a girl. I remembered how comforted I had felt at Camp Deerpark, when one morning I had eaten baked oatmeal. I decided to try and make the dish for my daughter. I followed some recipes I found on the internet, but the recipes never came out right. I knew it was God’s love, not perfect baked oatmeal that really touches our lives, but I really wanted to find a recipe that reminded me of camp and God’s love that I experienced there. I never found a recipe that tasted the same.

Joy Fellowship Church is located in the Bronx, N.Y., and was founded by Martin and Ethel Bender in 1979. On May 6, 1969, Camp Deerpark (then called Mennonite Action Program) borrowed \$49,600 from Goshen Savings Bank. Martin Bender's signature, along with those of John I. Smucker, Dale Stoltzfus and Glenn Zeager, appears on the loan documents.

"In November of 2016 I found myself back at Joy Fellowship and again invited to a women's retreat at Camp Deerpark. I attended the retreat, and amazingly, one morning they served baked oatmeal. A server kindly gave me the Camp Deerpark recipe when I asked for it. I was able to go home and bake it with my daughter. Since that weekend, we have made the baked oatmeal recipe together many times. As we work together we talk about God's love.

"I am so grateful for the encouragement that I received at the camp retreats. I learned that God is a restoring God."

— *Written by Ken Bontrager, current camp director.*

Natica Apau, retreat guest with Joy Fellowship.

Michanne is the daughter of the associate pastor at Joy Fellowship, William Campbell.

Labor Day Weekend at Camp Deerpark

by Annabelle Perri

Immanuel Community Church has enjoyed its annual retreat on Labor Day weekend through all its phases of existence (Redeemer Church, Elim-Redeemer and Immanuel Community Church) for 25 years.

For a few years it was a two-night, two-day retreat till we realized that we had no labor to go to on Monday. Camp was available and so were we. There was no going back after that. Labor Day weekend was our coveted time and we made sure we paid our dues and submitted our deposit on time so we

would not lose our claim to that weekend. At one point, quietly, as if hiding a secret, we asked Ken, “Has any other group requested this time?” When he said no, we were stunned. No?! For us, the more time we could spend together the better. If we had a week, we would take it! And it wasn’t just the time. It was the place: Camp Deerpark.

The year camp had the flood we were unable to have our retreat at camp. We booked another very nice campground with great amenities: private rooms with bathrooms, classy dining room, carpeted meeting room with cushioned seats, heated swimming pool, paint ball . . . yup, it was nice! All we heard that weekend from the youngest to the oldest was, “It’s nice, but it’s not camp.” “I miss the view of the grass field of camp.” “I don’t mind the cold pool at camp.” “It’s just not the same this year.” Whaaat?! They missed the closeness of rooming together, the bumping of elbows as we eat in the dining

Immanuel Community Church Women’s Retreat

by Annabelle Perri

We all have events in our lives that, when recalled, make our hearts glad. We seem to remember details and things we said or did with the same laughter as the day it happened.

The Immanuel Community Church Women’s Bible Study retreat at Camp Deerpark is one of those events. What made this occasion one that will have enduring memories is the special banquet Rick Weaver, our Food Service Director, prepared for us on Friday night May 29, 2009.

A small group of about 15 women had been studying the book of Esther and gleaning much understanding and revelation from it. In a book so filled with banquets as Esther is, I was inspired to ask Rick if he would be able to prepare a Persian-style dinner for us on Friday night. I also requested the privacy of the “Waterfall” room. To my great delight it was yes to both!

Several of us arrived early to prepare the room with a Persian décor. When I saw the menu posted on the door of the room, my eyes teared. Rick had truly outdone himself. We felt special, honored and cared for. Bob Martin was there to serve us and treated us like royalty. Here are some of the items on the menu:



George Cleland gives fellow church members a spin.

Shirazi Salad

**Diced cucumber, tomato, red onion,
parsley and mint dressed with olive oil and fresh lemon juice**

Lavash with Hummus

Kabaabe Joojeh

Chicken shish kabob

**Yogurt/herb marinated chicken,
bell pepper, red onion, tomato,
Skewered and flame-grilled**

Basmati Rice

Bastani

**Persian ice cream made from fresh cream,
rosewater, saffron and green cardamom
Kissed with fresh pistachios**

In the privacy of our room we enjoyed delicious food, first-rate attention, laughter, great friendship, and the making of precious memories. This great beginning sparked a momentum that flowed through the rest of our time at camp. At every moment we were at home and accommodated at Camp Deerpark.

I am truly thankful to camp staff for helping to make this short retreat one of our lasting memories.



Judy Ebersol Martin (center) with children and youth from Immanuel Community Church.

room, the lining up and waiting for the bathroom, the freedom of the kids running about freely, all of us lazily sitting and swinging on the front porch; they missed home. I don't think anyone missed Locust Haven though.

Sure, Camp Deerpark had its unpolished, uncomfortable, rustic, easy-to-complain-about facilities, but it was ours. It was the place where some children played mischievously before they got caught, where one or two got lost in the woods, where young and old got saved or transformed and baptized, where we experienced depth of worship and prayer, where the closeness of space brought out the best and the worst in us, where opportunity to forgive was constant, where we played crazy games like ICC Fear Factor, our versions of Jeopardy, ICC Olympics, and Don't Forget the Lyrics, and talent shows that turned into The Gong Show (if you are old enough to remember that.)

The memories carried from young to old are made by people AND place. The consistency of the time and place brought out unforgettable experiences in people, between people, and in *a* people that are forever etched in our hearts. To this day even those who have long moved on remember Labor Day Weekend at Camp Deerpark.

Annabelle Perri and her husband Mark pastor Immanuel Community Church in Flushing.

Garifuna Baptism

by Celmali Jaime Okonji

It's the year 2000. I am 16. I'm so nervous. The concrete around the Camp Deerpark pool scorches the bottoms of my feet as I stand in line, waiting my turn for the plunge. I hear drums in the background, thundering to the rhythm of my heartbeat. The women are singing in high-pitched voices. I tiptoe into the water and reach for my father's hand. He baptizes me, *en el Nombre del Padre, del Hijo, y del Espiritu Santo ... Amen!* As I am submerged, all I can think is . . . this water is so cold.

Our culture and language is called *Garifuna*. It has always been a blessing that we can live out our faith within our cultural context when we are at Camp Deerpark. Growing up in New York City, people were not always so understanding. I remember my friends thinking that *Garifuna* was a culture I had concocted, just for the sake of being unique. It confused some people when they saw a black girl, fluent in Spanish, claiming to be from Honduras, but with African roots, and speaking another language that sounded like . . . who knows what?

However, I looked forward to summers at Camp Deerpark, where I and members of the Garifuna Church in the Bronx could just be ourselves. It was home, because we were welcomed to make ourselves at home . . . and we did (and still do)! Of course, camp isn't anything like Honduras, but there is always that sense of belonging.



Evangelical Garifuna Manhattan baptism, 2017.

At camp, our culture is not just accommodated; it is celebrated. Sometimes we come up to camp and put up a *piñata* under a tree. The church women screech like schoolgirls as they set up the *Maripol* (Maypole) dance with ribbons around the volleyball pitch. We are always extra happy when the kitchen staff makes us beans and tortillas because it reminds us of *Baleadas* from home. And when our churches come to Camp Deerpark, you can count on hearing our *Garaoun* (traditional drums) resounding our rhythms loudly from the poolside, campfire sites and through the chapel walls. Our rich culture infiltrates everything we do. It is who we are; and we are proud of it.

I am now 33. I call the name of the next youth in line, as she nervously awaits her turn. She tiptoes to the edge of the pool and with a shiver, she reaches for my hand. I walk her over to my father, and just like he did with me years ago, he baptizes her in the Name of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit . . . Amen! The water is cold, but we are not in the Camp Deerpark pool. This time around, we are across the globe, in Kenya.

It is an honor to live in a continent where the Garifuna culture is rooted. Every time my parents visit, I hear my mother say for the millionth time, “This is just like Honduras!” I chuckle. Soon, I will return the visit to New York. While there, it’s a must that I visit my most favorite place in the world. I rest assured, knowing that there is a place upstate that reminds us all of home, even when we are very far from it. There is a place, nestled in the mountains and in our hearts, where we can eat, dance, sing and share in languages other than English and traditions rooted in faraway lands. It is Camp Deerpark . . . a place where we will always belong.

Celmali Jaime Okonji, program director in 2006–7, attended Evangelical Garifuna Church and King of Glory Tabernacle, both in the Bronx.

We Go Up That Mountain Expecting Miracles to Happen

with Raymond Ramos

Her name was Valerie. She was fighting two major life battles and was really close to losing them both. One was against cancer; she had lost all her hair and a lot of her weight. Her strength had gone and her body was plenty evidence of that. The other battle was against *Santeria*, an Afro-Latin religious practice rooted in witchcraft. Her boyfriend, Edward, was a *Santero* (Santeria priest), and had been strongly recruiting for her to be initiated.



Recovery House of Worship men's retreat Saturday afternoon football game, 2018.

She was slightly involved and just beginning to dabble in it, but he wanted a full commitment. Her soul was at stake.

Valerie came up to Camp Deerpark with Pastor Raymond Ramos of Recovery House of Worship (RHOW), based in Brooklyn. Since the year 2001, RHOW would bring up their members, which consisted mostly of reformed gang members, ex-convicts, former prostitutes, recovering addicts and the like, for retreats at Camp Deerpark. Pastor Raymond had witnessed many of his church members experience extraordinary change on “the mountain” and Valerie’s story was about to become another one of those many.

It was during that visit to Camp Deerpark that Valerie heard the gospel and accepted Jesus Christ into her life as her Lord and Savior. Even more so, she witnessed the gospel in action through the warmth and service of the staff. When she got back to the city, she decided it was time to clean house. She got rid of all of the idols and statues in her home. Of course, Edward wasn’t too pleased with the new Valerie. But the cleaning had gone even deeper than expected, when doctors told Valerie that her cancer had miraculously gone into remission. The healing Jesus had brought into her life was real.

Not long after, Valerie decided to be baptized. Reluctantly, Edward attended the event, and agreed to capture it on video for her. However, as he witnessed Valerie being baptized, he felt a sudden desire to be a part of God’s family too. Edward set the video recorder down and accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior on that very same day.

Today, Valerie and Edward are happily married ministers of the gospel and members of RHOW. Together they continue to attend Camp Deerpark retreats several times a year, and work alongside Pastor Raymond Ramos in leading people to Christ.

Pastor Raymond says, “This story repeats itself over and over again. When we go to Camp Deerpark, we go up that mountain expecting miracles to happen. We have seen miracles in the lives of drug addicts, alcoholics, and people in need of change. The staff at Camp Deerpark has always been very gracious with us. Even when we didn’t have all the finances lined up, they continued to work with us. Camp Deerpark is a cornerstone, vital to the work that we do.”

—*Written by Celmali Jaime Okonji, program director in 2006–7, attended Evangelical Garifuna Church and King of Glory Tabernacle, both in the Bronx.*

Raymond Ramos is Pastor of Recovery House of Worship in Brooklyn. RHOW is a ministry dedicated to serving families affected by all types of addiction. Not only do they help people find sobriety, they help people find Christ. RHOW leads yearly retreats at Camp Deerpark, usually in October.

Retreat Quotes

by Bob Fell

Bob Fell was a friend of Camp Hebron who worked in the field of marketing, and he enjoyed doing volunteer work for other camps as well. He did market research for Camp Deerpark in 2010, making several trips to camp and to New York City to meet with the board and pastors of the Mennonite churches. “His work was extremely helpful to camp,” Ken Bontrager said. “He helped pull us out of a pretty rough time.”

Below are some quotes he compiled when he asked people how they saw or experienced Camp Deerpark.

“I love that first moment when
I see the clearing and the camp.”

“A release . . . go and relax.”

“A quiet place to think about good things.”



“A very beautiful place with beautiful people . . . it is home.”

“One of the most secret hiding places.”

“I have seen it . . . lives have been changed there.”

“Feels like home away from home.”

“It is a home.”

“My kids don’t get this any other time.”

“I feel like I am going home.”

“It’s just the way they do everything.”

“We start saving for the next year the day we get back home.”

“I don’t have anything else like this.”





Picking mint tea along the stream below Spruce Lodge.



“We connect better . . . differently at camp.”

“It’s different than when you see people each week . . . you can slow down and go deeper.”

“You just fellowship differently . . . it’s different . . . I can’t explain it.”

Bishop Nicholas Angustia and United Revival Mennonite Church members during 2016 church retreat.





“I can’t say what a place it has in my heart . . . it means a lot to our church.”

“Don’t be different than who you are . . . we love who you are.”

“Sometimes you are just another person or group . . . not there.”

“I feel I can breathe better.”

“The open spaces . . . keep the open spaces.”

“There’s no reason to go someplace else.”

“People actually sit there.”

“Better than a five star hotel . . . no Jacuzzi . . . but you feel a part of what it is.”

“They make us feel welcome and taken care of.”

“Rick does a great job with the food.”





Rev. Michael Banks and Lowell Jantzi

“God is definitely there.”

“The kids can just run . . .
it’s amazing.”

“A positive, inviting atmosphere.”

“We really enjoyed the team-
building stuff and wanted more . . .
it just whetted our appetite.”

“Ya kinda gotta fix up the house.”

“I have one little concern . . .
the bugs.”

CHAPTER 4

Events



Pastor Michael Banks once said, “The greatest miracle is still when a person encounters the grace of Christ.” Maybe the greatest events at Camp Deerpark have happened on a quiet walk on the yellow trail, a conversation on the swing set or around a campfire at night. However, there have also been gatherings, natural disasters and construction projects that have marked God’s grace to this ministry.

When Don Gunden, Dan Glick, Henry Martin and Paul Smucker visited camp in the fall of 1968, they probably had no idea how significant their recommendation to buy the property would be. But when John Buckwalter pulled up to camp with the first carload of campers in 1969, he knew it was a historic event. As Ray Pacheco raised his hand to bid on a quilt for his mother at a camp auction, when Dale’s Amish relatives arrived from Pennsylvania to help raise a barn and every time old and new friends gathered around banquet meals to catch up on news and give support to camp, memories were made.



Barn raising, 1983.

Over the past 50 years God has been abundantly faithful to the Camp Deerpark family. The stories in this section illustrate how we have celebrated that faithfulness together.

Auctions

**with Alvin Horning, Ruthie and Lowell Jantzi, Ray Pacheco,
Donald Stoltzfus, Ken Bontrager, and Dale Stoltzfus**

In the fall of 1970 the first auction—a small affair—was held in Harleysville, Pennsylvania, to raise funds for Camp Deerpark. Dale remembers driving to Gid and Betty Miller’s house in New Jersey to pick up a crank phonograph to sell at the sale, one you had to wind up for it to play. Alvin Horning, Doris Stoltzfus’ brother, was a young professional auctioneer who worked at the Harleysville Auction House. Alvin agreed to be the auctioneer for the first benefit sale. He didn’t know how popular the annual Camp Deerpark auction would become, or how many times he would be the auctioneer, urging on the many bidders who traveled from New York City in search of quilts, antiques or Pennsylvania Dutch style foods.

**John Buckwalter and Les Minninger
hang auction sign.**

Alvin was on the Camp Association Committee when Glenn Zeager was the chair of the M.A.P. board in the early years of camp. Alvin remembered there was talk about whether they should have more auctions. “We discussed whether it should be an ongoing kind of thing,” Alvin said. Dale and Alvin had done most of the planning for the first auction. One person on the committee was skeptical that a larger auction would be successful. “I specifically remember that Glenn looked at this person and said, ‘So, you’re saying it won’t work.’” Alvin remembered thinking, “I’m going to be involved and make it work for them.”

The auctions did continue and in the spring of 1971, Ken and Jan Kurtz moved to camp for a two-year voluntary service assignment, taking care of the facilities and assisting in the kitchen. At that time, Ken’s brother, Leon, who was also an auctioneer, began to assist Alvin. “We had auctions at a variety of places,” Alvin said. “The Guernsey Barn, Farmersville, and in New Holland are three that I can recall.”

Dale’s brother, Donald Stoltzfus, and Aldus King also began to help out at the auctions. They would roast a pig and sell pork sandwiches. “Sometimes we



Camp Auction at Guernsey Barn in Lancaster, PA, 1977.



Ray and Annie Pacheco, First Mennonite Church of Brooklyn, pack up purchases after auction.

roasted two pigs,” Don said. “They always sold out. I remember one woman from New York City asked me for the pig’s head every year. She would bring a plastic bag to the auction so she could take the head home with her. She told me I was throwing out some of the best meat. I always gave it to her and she took it home on the bus.” All of the proceeds from the sandwiches went toward the auction proceeds.

“There was always a regular group of people who would sit in the front row every year,” Alvin said. Dale added, “Ray and Annie Pacheco and Lowell and Ruth Jantzi are some of the people I remember sitting in the front rows.”

“On auction days I remember thinking, ‘I’m going to make this a good day for them and make it fun,’” Alvin said. “I’d play around and make jokes when auctioneering and make them laugh. Sometimes I’d jump the price by a large amount or something like that. We had a good time.”

Ray Pacheco said, “Annie and I always enjoyed Camp Deerpark auctions in Pennsylvania. There were many auctions that we participated in since camp was a special place for us. My best recollection of the Camp Deerpark auction was the time that my parents were visiting us in New York from Puerto Rico. We brought them to the auction in Pennsylvania. My mom saw a quilt that had a design with roses and she exclaimed, ‘I like it because I like roses!’ For Annie and I that was a clue that we had to get it for her. After a good effort on the bidding process we were able to purchase it. For many years, when we visited my mom in Puerto Rico, she always brought out the quilt for us. It was used, she told us, for special occasions only.”

Ruth Villanueva Jantzi said, “My objective was always to get to the auction early enough to sit in the first or second row. Our row usually included the Torreses, the Lugo ladies, and my brother, Tommy. Behind us always sat Pearl Lapp and Elsie Gunden. We made them laugh at our outrageous bidding and sheer excitement over getting the \$1 boxes that no one else wanted. Sometimes I would get stuck with things I didn’t have any use for, but I would donate the stuff. From the beginning I knew camp struggled

with lack of funds, so I went with a certain budget each year designated for small and large purchases.”

“In the early years I would travel by bus from the city and had a blast singing camp songs with a rowdy bunch,” she said. “I have tons of wonderful memories of Ray Siegrist and other youth leaders trying to entertain us.”

“It was a highlight of the year for me,” Ruth continued. “I wouldn’t have missed the auctions for the world. I didn’t even get up to buy food. Lowell would have to go and get food for me. I didn’t want to miss any of the bidding. I still have items that Al Kruse handcrafted, and computer art drawn by Donna Stoltzfus. And I really loved the quilts. I still have many beautiful quilts.”

“Some of them she meant to buy,” Lowell said, “and some she didn’t.”

A favorite item that was sold every year at the auction was a rocking chair. “It didn’t even rock well,” Lowell said. “It would go over backwards.” Nevertheless, every year it would be bid on and someone new would purchase it. And every year it would be returned to the auction to be resold. People who bought the chair would sign their names or put their initials on the bottom of the chair before returning it. “I have no idea how much that chair brought in over the years,” Dale said, “or how many people purchased it.”

Ken Bontrager remembered: “Monroe Yoder was the last person to buy the chair—in 1999. I’ve sat in that chair in Monroe’s house in the Bronx.”

Dale has a memory of another chair that was sold at an auction. “There was an old original locust wood chair that was at camp when camp was first purchased,” Dale said. “Lanny Millette decided to remove the plastic lattice strips and I took it to Hope Center to have it refinished. After it was refinished, Lanny put on a macramé seat that he had made himself.” At the next auction, the chair was put up for sale. “I began to bid on it,” Dale said. “I was really interested in the chair as it had a lot of history to it, and because of the added work by Lanny and Hope Center. I was on the board for Hope Center at the time. But the chair quickly went up to \$100 so I quit bidding. I didn’t know that Jerry Kennell



Chair gifted to Dale Stoltzfus by
Jerry Kennell and Jesus Cruz.

Perennial Rocking Chair

This chair has been bought and sold at the Camp Deerpark auction at least 22 times. The following names and dates are written on the bottom of the chair.



Rocking chair is offered for auction.

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Wilmer Ebersol '86 | <i>No Date Written</i> |
| Minnie Santiago '89 | Jerry Whyte |
| Lowell and Ruth Jantzi '90 | Jerry and Leonor Kennell |
| Mel Lapp '91 | Wes and Marian |
| Lucille Shank '92 | Newslinger |
| Amos and Barbara | Earl Martin |
| Sauder '93 | Frank Freeman |
| Earl and Vera Smoker '94 | Gene Shelly |
| Refinished by David | Jim Baer |
| Hess '94 | Jesus Cruz |
| Keith, Lisa, and April | Mel Lapp |
| Yoder '95 | Dale Weaver |
| Ken Bontrager '96 | Note: Monroe and |
| Earl Smoker '97 | Rachel Yoder's grand- |
| Monroe Yoder '98 | daughter, April, is the |
| Monroe Yoder '99 | current owner of the |
| | chair. |

and Jesus Cruz were standing behind me and had begun to bid on the chair when I stopped. They bought it and told me they'd pay the difference. I paid \$100 and they paid \$25. Doris and I brought the chair with us when we moved to Landis Homes. We still have it in our living room."

Alvin remembered that he occasionally had to adjust his auctioneer-ing style at the Deerpark event. "Sometimes I had to slow down," he said, "or help someone bid. Sometimes a person would raise his or her number repeatedly, and when I said, 'Sold!' they'd look surprised. They'd point to themselves and ask, 'Me?'"

"Weren't you just bidding?" I'd ask.

"Yes."

"Then why are you surprised I'm selling it to you?" Alvin said, laughing. "But that didn't only happen with people from the city. It happened with



Ralph Villanueva, Ken Bontrager, Lowell Jantzi, and Monroe Yoder, 1991 auction.

others from Lancaster County as well. And I have to say, as much fun as it was for the people attending, it was also fun for me.”

One year Dale and Alvin thought it would be a good idea to get more publicity for the auction. Henry Martin Jr. arranged for Dale to be interviewed on WDAC, a Christian radio station in Lancaster. John Eby interviewed Dale about the auction for half an hour. Someone from a bike shop in Lititz called in to donate a bike during the show.

(from Camp Deerpark newsletter)

September 10, 1987

The “reunion” is almost here! The annual trek to southeastern Pennsylvania to attend the Camp Deerpark Auction is a fall tradition for many of you. Welcome again! The camp family will be gathering October 10, 1987, at the Martin Sales Pavilion, Route 340 and New Holland Road, east of Intercourse. We will have the usual pig roast, the quilts, the antiques, and of course the fun and laughter. We may even see the Camp Deerpark Auction rocking chair again! Is your name on it yet?

Written by Wes Newswanger.

Eventually the Pennsylvania auctions came to an end. The last auction was held in 1999 at the Liberty Fire House in New Holland. “It was a tremendous amount of work to get donated items to sell,” Dale said. “The camp committee for the auctions in Pennsylvania decided to end them. The amount of work it took, compared to the earnings, no longer seemed worth the effort.”

In 2006, the Camp Deerpark auction was revived, but it was held at Camp Deerpark. “There has been an auction and homecoming—a reunion of people who have connections to camp—every year since 2006 until the present,” Ken said. “In 2018 the total homecoming and auction proceeds were more than \$22,000 with an additional challenge match gift of \$10,000. The event continues to grow.”

—*Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.*

Ken Bontrager, current director.

Alvin Horning, auctioneer for camp auctions in PA.

Ruthie Villanueva Jantzi, counselor in the '70s and former board member, attended Burnside Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Lowell Jantzi, camp staff member in the '70s, former board member.

Ray Pacheco, First Mennonite of Brooklyn, former board member.

Dale Stoltzfus, former camp director.

Donald Stoltzfus, volunteer.

Banquets

with Melody Pannell and Dan Glick

Banquets have long been associated with Camp Deerpark, from special evening banquets during summer camps to fundraising banquets in New York City and Pennsylvania. Many people connected to Camp Deerpark have a banquet memory, including some combination of tasty food, good friends, special music and sharing of the latest camp news.

A tradition during the summer is having a banquet on the last evening of a summer camp. Campers might dress up a bit and enjoy a spruced up dining room. A special menu is planned. The evening has been a favorite activity of campers for many years.

“I started as a camper when I was about 8 or 9 years old,” said Melody Pannell, “and kept going all the way up to 17. One of my earliest memories



Benjamin Stevens, Richard Pannell, Khadedhra Jarvis, Melody Pannell perform at 1992 PA banquet.

was the banquet. It was amazing because we dressed up and it was a special day. It was a wonderful part of my development. I felt special, I felt secure, I felt loved. I felt loved by God, and I felt loved by the people around me, the staff members who were there.”

On November 4, 1969, the M.A.P. Board met. One item on their agenda was having a banquet in Pennsylvania.

The first banquet held in Pennsylvania was on January 20, 1970, at Willow Valley Restaurant.

Since this time, a banquet has continued to be held every year in Pennsylvania. It is a time to support the camp financially, but also to touch base

Banquet:

We discussed the idea of having a banquet and agreed that it would be an excellent way of communicating to people and churches in Penna. the needs of our camp. We then decided in the Ad hoc committee of persons in Penna. should be responsible to plan the banquet for us. We named the following persons to form a committee and to be responsible in planning a banquet. Roy Bomberger, Henry Martin Jr., Earl Martin, Dale Weaver and Rueben Stoltzfus. We chose Henry Martin Jr. to act as chairman. We are hopeful that this banquet can be held in early December at the Willow Valley Inn. Bale will contact the chairman and meet when he can with the committee to help in communicating our feelings with them.

9. Projects to be presented at banquet.

1. Four kitchen units @ \$250	\$1000
2. Ten sheets of paneling for annex	50
3. Twenty five bunk beds @ \$30	750
4. Outside furniture	500
5. Paint for pool	400
6. Drainage tile for wet areas	
7. Recreation equipment	
8. Paint for kitchen and exterior	

a. Report on Banquet It was observed that the local committee in Lancaster did an excellent job and a special letter of appreciation will be sent to each of them. Agreed to convey a letter of thanks accompanied by a \$20.00 honorarium to the speaker. There was a general feeling on the part of the board that the mood and tone of the affair was excellent.

with friends who have been involved with camp over the years. The banquets average about 280 in attendance.

Dan Glick, who has a long history with Camp Deerpark, has worked diligently to help organize banquets in Pennsylvania since 1987, when he sold tickets for \$8. He took over the leadership for planning the banquet in 2002, and continued in that role until 2015. "I helped with announcements, tickets, making arrangements with the restaurant and seating plans," he said. "I stopped being in charge about three years ago, when Janice Barrett from the Deerpark staff became the coordinator. At that point I was grateful to pass on the responsibilities."

"I attend Forest Hills Mennonite Church, and I got the congregation very involved with camp," he said. "We often filled six to seven tables at the banquet. People from the church have gone up to camp for years for work projects. We've helped with repairs, renovations and new buildings."

When asked why he contributed so much time and work to Camp Deerpark, Dan said, "The first time I saw camp I thought it would be ideal for the kids from the city—bring them out and let them enjoy the grass and the trees. I have a soft spot for kids and teenagers, and I love to see them have opportunities. I never got to know my father as he passed away when I was 3. But I was told my dad had that kind of mindset—that we had similar personalities. He was humble and worked for others, especially for the underdog. He left this world early, but I have tried to carry on what was in our hearts. Throughout my life I have tried to help those who need help."

The first banquet for the New York City churches was held at the Neptune Inn in New Jersey in December 1971, raising \$1,725. The cost of the facilities and meals eventually became too expensive to make the fundraising aspect of New York banquets worthwhile. Instead, camp now hosts a homecoming weekend with a fundraising auction every fall. This weekend has also become a reunion event—a mix of people from the early days of camp to the present.

—*Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.*

Dan Glick, volunteer and advocate, attends Forest Hills Mennonite Church in Leola, PA.

Melody Pannell, former camper and staff member; attended Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church in Harlem.

Romance and Weddings

Elvin “Bo” Bowman and Connie Inesta

Camp Deerpark is where I met the love of my life in the fall of 1969. We’ve been married for over 39 years.

I came to New York City as a brand new VSer in the fall of 1969. The VS unit was housed on 19th Street in Manhattan at the time. One night at the dinner table the unit leader said that Brooklyn Spanish Mennonite Church wanted to use the VS van for their church retreat at Camp Deerpark. For insurance reasons that meant a VSer had to drive the van. One of the older VSers poked me in the ribs and said, “Brooklyn Spanish has some good-looking girls attending.” I immediately spoke up and said I would drive the van for the weekend.

On the Saturday morning of the retreat I got to the church early. I stood at the top of the church stairs and watched all the folks coming in. Sure enough I saw this beautiful young girl, Connie Inesta, coming up the sidewalk to the church. When she looked at me, my world kind of stopped. Years later Connie confessed that she too knew something special had happened when she saw me. She said the thought occurred to her that “this was the guy she was going to marry.” But I still had to chase her all over New York City till she married me.

It took me all day Saturday to get around Connie’s older brother’s defenses, but I was finally able to talk with Connie by Saturday campfire.

Thank goodness for Camp Deerpark campfire services. We spent the rest of the weekend getting to know each other and exploring camp. For the next three years we dated off and on. We visited Camp Deerpark whenever possible. We were married in Brooklyn Spanish Church in 1973.

I was fortunate to spend the summer of 1970 or 1971 on staff at Camp Deerpark. Connie and I have been gone from New York City since 1975, but Camp Deerpark holds a special place in our hearts.

Lowell Jantzi and Ruth Villanueva

October 15, 1977

I first noticed Ruth as she sat on the front porch of the main house wearing a red pull over sweater, but I was too shy to talk to her. That July she took two weeks of vacation from work and came to camp to counsel the 8–9 year-old girls. I took a two week break from building the cabins on the hill to counsel the 8–9 year-old boys. Jerry and Leonor Kennell, summer camp directors put us in the same activities group and our attraction became stronger. That August she came with her church, Burnside Mennonite to camp for their summer retreat. At a campfire I worked up the nerve to let her know how I felt and what followed were weekend train rides by Ruth to Otisville and rides by me to New York City in camp's 1951 green Chevrolet pickup truck to deliver firewood. Somehow, it always took two days to unload the truck and return to camp.

We planned an outdoor wedding on the front lawn of camp for October 15, 1977. Blustery, rainy, and chilly is how the morning of our wedding day greeted us. After a few frantic minutes we decided to move everything indoors. Camp staff, guests and family who had arrived the day before pitched in to convert the chapel into a wedding chapel. The wedding arch covered with flowers was dismantled and rebuilt inside, chairs were set up, a white runner was put down and the piano was rolled into position.



Ruth and Lowell Jantzi with niece, Carmen Bell.

The unexpected continued with a phone call from Paul Landis, Ruth's bishop, who baptized her and agreed to officiate the ceremony. He apologized but said he could not come because his brother had a fatal car accident the night before. We were heartbroken for him and panicked for ourselves. Fortunately Dale Stoltzfus, camp administrator and a licensed New York State minister, graciously agreed to fill in.

Lorraine Weaver, who catered the reception, adapted too. She and her staff did a masterful job moving the tables and chairs inside to the chapel basement, covering the block walls with aluminum foil, hanging streamers and on each table placing candles in wood holders made by Isaac Grable, who stayed up most of the night making them. And she found a way to carry all the food from the kitchen to the chapel and serve it hot to 100 plus guests! And we still remember the gracious toast offered by Ruth's boss President John Burkhart from Chase World Information Corp.

By noon, everything was set, the rain stopped, the sun peeked out, and when the music began it all turned to magic. Forty one years later and counting it still sparks magic.

Ken Bontrager and Deborah Sharp

September 9, 1990

On a cool late summer morning in September of 1990, Ken Bontrager and I gathered with our families and friends at a fireside ring at Camp Deerpark called Shalom. At that time we had not the slightest notion that we were pledging our lives to one another in the very place that we would one



Ken Bontrager and Deborah Sharp exchange wedding vows at Shalom. Pastor Michael Banks officiates, September 9, 1990.

day call home, and that we would also pledge our lives to the ministry of Camp Deerpark for over two decades.

Our marriage was only the first of many landmark events that have taken place at camp. Four of our six children were born in our home here, and one of our daughters is buried in the graveyard at the end of our driveway.

Who could have known on that beautiful day in September the days that God had in store for us in this place. Days of great rejoicing, days of toil and care, days of sadness and despair, and ultimately days of feeling the hand of God resting upon us and helping us, loving us and giving us hope.

It was the loveliest of beginnings, and a great hope remains for what will be in the end. I can see now that everything will have been worth it when this chapter closes and we look back to marvel at the goodness and faithfulness of the One who called us here and sustains us. It is an honor. It is a joy. We don't deserve it, but we are grateful for the fruit of our marriage in a place called Camp Deerpark.

Orville Egli and Marian Sauder

I became Camp Deerpark administrator on March 1, 1990. In 1993 we needed a new director of maintenance. Orv was offered the job and he came to camp in October 1993 for an 18-month assignment.

Orv and I worked well together. I was impressed when he would invite neighbors for a meal and when he entertained a college work team who came during spring break. We liked each other's independent spirit. We appreciated each other's friendship. And as we listened to our hearts, "love came softly" and we were married April 29, 1995 at Redeeming Grace Fellowship by Lester Sutter.

I wonder if people thought at the time: why didn't we get married at camp? I remember how I sat down at your wedding, Ken (Bontrager), ready to enjoy the service and the day. Ten to 15 minutes before the wedding began, the batteries went out in a speaker or something and Richard came to me and asked if we had batteries in the snack shop. I didn't have the key with me and neither was I wearing walking shoes. (I was at a wedding.) But I hurriedly went up to the office to get the key and then got the batteries in the snack shop and took them to Shalom.

If we had planned to get married at camp, I could imagine something happening like a main water break an hour before the wedding was to begin and we would be involved or have to advise what to do. It was wonderful having others taking care of the church facilities.

William Ramos and Delma Escobar

June 22, 2002

Will and I met in February 1995. Will had grown up in a different church so he'd never been to Camp Deerpark before. It immediately became one of his favorite places to go to. There's something about being surrounded by God's creation, the warm breezes and the swaying of the trees mingled with the laughter of kids playing and the sounds of people talking and relaxing on the porch swings. It makes you feel connected to something special.

After dating for seven years, Will and I decided to get married. At first, we didn't have a real idea of what our wedding would be like. As we considered different venues, neither of us were overly excited about any of the prospects. I can't remember who suggested it first, but I do remember that the first time we talked about the possibility of having our wedding at camp we were both super excited. We immediately envisioned what the day would look like: the string quartet, the horse drawn carriage, flowers everywhere and a ceremony by the gazebo. It would be the stuff of cheesy Hallmark movies; it would be perfect!

The weekend of the big day arrived and almost immediately things went wrong. The night before the wedding the tent's lighting shorted out so the florist was forced to decorate using only her van's headlights. The rental company sent square tablecloths for the round tables. The baker forgot the netting for the cake (and so for a while the cake threatened to look like a sugary gnat graveyard). The string quartet's car broke down on the way to the wedding. The servers hired by the caterer didn't show up, and the caterer forgot to order the drinks to be served with the meal (it was a hot June day).

Still, in the midst of all of that, Will and I saw God's faithfulness as every issue and every problem found a solution. Two of Will's cousins happened to be electricians and they rewired the tent, the round tablecloths were delivered bright and early, the gnats were kept at bay with some tulle (I still don't know where it came from), the musicians called the office and someone jumped in a van to go pick them up, the camp staff strapped on aprons and volunteered to serve, and someone ran down to the local store to get drinks for our very thirsty guests.

In the end, it was a day full of unexpected challenges but more than that, it was a day when God reminded us of just how much He cares for us. He cares about the details of our lives, about the things that are important to us, about the things that bring us joy. Camp has always been a place where we've felt God's love and peace—a place where we've felt His presence both in us and all around us. But His love overwhelmed us on that day.

Joshua Martinez and Sara Santiago

July 23, 2016

The first time I went to Camp Deerpark was in the year 1996 with a youth group from Love, Power, and Grace Church in the Bronx. I was only 11 years old and this was my first time being away from my parents, camping with a group of teenagers and young adults. I remember sitting at the bottom of the slide on Sunday morning, softly shuffling the autumn foliage with my feet, just thinking, “I don’t want to leave this place.” I fell in love with the grounds. I could literally feel God in everything out there. I knew that Camp Deerpark was a special place on earth; a place where God’s presence could be felt in the breeze.

As a young adult I was ordained as pastor of the Red Letter Church. I was the only pastor I knew who wasn’t married. In the fall of 2014, I decided to do a retreat with my church, this time not as a youth member but as a leader. I wanted my church to experience the same thing I had experienced that weekend in October 1996. Sara had become a member of our church and we had begun a courtship in March. I was able to sit with her and tell her about my first time at Camp Deerpark. She also shared how she had fallen in love with the camp that weekend, and that she too felt the same way I did.

After our engagement in March of 2016 we began looking for venues for our wedding. We saw many places that were top contenders, but it felt



Sara and Joshua Martinez with Ken Bontrager.

like something was missing. We couldn't exactly point out what. I don't remember when and how the topic of getting married at camp came about. We both agreed to camp because of our spiritual connection to the place. We were then faced with the question: Who is going to marry us? We said, "Well, let's have Ken do it." This seemed like a crazy idea at first, because although Ken was a great host every time we went to camp, we didn't really know him like that.

We went to camp to speak with him and hoped that he would accept. We sat at the table with the Bontragers, eating Camp Deerpark's delicious food, and I mustered up the courage to ask. Ken wanted to do it, but he did not have the credentials. I was disappointed at first, but Ken was able to give me a glimpse of hope when he looked at me with that classic Ken Bontrager grin and said, "Let me see what I can do." To make this long story short, Ken was able to get his credentials to marry us. We wanted Ken because in our hearts he was and is the pastor of Camp Deerpark. For one weekend or more a year we came to his church and felt God's manifold presence there.

On our wedding day on July 24, 2016, I remember getting ready at the Promise Woods cabins and just feeling extremely nervous. Once I was dressed I stepped out to the top of that hill and prayed. It was there where God spoke to me and said, "I will bless you and your children for generations to come." And He reiterated, "Yes, I said children." I knew at the moment that getting married at Camp Deerpark was the right choice. It had to be like 96 degrees that day. It was hot! I was wearing a three-piece suit and I was boiling. Once we reached the chapel I was standing at the altar waiting for my bride when Ken leans over to me and says, "I guess it's my job to keep you calm." I personally feel like he might have been a little nervous himself. It's safe to say we were both nervous.

After a special meal prepared by the camp staff we decided to go back up to our cabins and get into our swimwear. It was too hot. We jumped into that pool as husband and wife and have been happily married ever since. Now we take our son, Isaac, to Camp Deerpark. My hope is one day he will have the same connection with Camp Deerpark and it will be part of his story.

Thank you Camp Deerpark; you are forever ingrained in our hearts.

The Barn Raising

with Jim Baer, Frank Freeman, Chris Kennel III,
Dale Stoltzfus, Doris Stoltzfus, Rebecca Stoltzfus

In the early 1980s Jim Baer and Dale Stoltzfus began talking about how beneficial it would be for campers to have the chance to interact with a variety of animals at camp. Jim specifically wanted to have cows. “A goal was to have the summer program oriented toward nature,” Dale said, “and we began to dream about building a barn.”

Dale knew a barn would need to be built on a very limited budget. “I asked my dad how we could do it,” Dale said. “He suggested I go to my uncle Christian Diener Kennel II—my mother’s brother. He was a master carpenter and had done barn raisings with the Amish.”

Dale asked Christian if he would help to build the barn, and Christian agreed to lead a barn raising at camp. Christian’s son, Chris Kennel III, had been a counselor at camp in 1978 and worked as a lifeguard and nature teacher in 1979. Chris was also a skilled carpenter and wanted to help out. “Then I went to my Amish relatives,” Dale said. “My dad had been raised Amish and I had many Amish uncles, aunts and cousins in Lancaster and Lebanon counties in Pennsylvania.”

As the idea of a barn raising became a reality, a spot was chosen for the barn. In the small field east of the front lawn, Jim began preliminary work for the foundation. He bought all of the lumber from Zeager Brothers Sawmill near Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania. “I had negotiated a good price with them,” Jim said. “It was pretty much a donation, and they delivered the wood a couple of weeks before we began building. On the Friday evening before the barn raising, a couple of us set all the vertical posts so the larger group could get right to work Saturday morning.”

Dale envisioned the barn raising as not just a time to build a barn, but as a chance for a rare community experience for both the



Jesus Cruz, David Driver, Amish supervisor.



Janet Landis, Jackie Buck, nailing purlins.

Amish and Mennonites coming from Pennsylvania, camp staff, and people from the city. People from the churches in New York were invited to come and help work if they were interested.

On the morning of the barn raising, in early June of 1983, about 14 Amish relatives of Dale's arrived at 9 a.m., ready to work. As Dale remembers it, there were about eight men and six women. They arrived in vans with hired drivers. Christian, Chris, and Reuben and Dorothy Stoltzfus (Dale's parents) also came from Pennsylvania.

"I know the trip seemed far," said Rebecca Stoltzfus, an Amish cousin to Dale. "We had to leave around five o'clock in the morning." Rebecca's father, Elam, also came along. He was 90 years old and wanted to watch. Rebecca brought homemade cream-filled donuts she had baked, along with freshly made lemonade. "I believe Uncle Reuben asked me to make donuts," Rebecca said. "We set the donuts and drinks on some boards by the side of the barn and served them that way." Rebecca believed in camp and its mission. She and her husband, John, traveled to New York City every summer for 20 years to pick up children involved in the Herald Tribune Fresh Air Fund program and take them by train or bus to Pennsylvania. (Paul Burholder, a pastor of Glad Tidings Mennonite Church, was a leader in this program during the 1960s.)



Strawberry pies made by Valerie Baer and Amish women to feed barn raising crew.

With the Kennels giving direction, the barn began to take shape. The more experienced workers “framed it up” and added the structure of the roof. “After the structure was in place, more inexperienced workers were able to join in to help,” Dale said. “There were probably around 75 people assisting that day.” Donna Stoltzfus, Dale’s daughter, remembers climbing up to the roof—about 20–25 feet off the ground—determined to hammer in one nail and be a part of the building process. The rafters were up and carpenters were nailing on the cross pieces. “It didn’t look that scary from the ground, but when you got up there, it seemed pretty high up,” Donna said. “The way I remember it, if you didn’t watch your step, you could easily fall off. The Amish men walking around on the beams were very sure-footed, but I couldn’t wait to get down. I did slowly hammer in my one nail, with an Amish man looking on, impatiently waiting for me to give him back his hammer.”

“I was on the roof hammering in some roof boards and sweating because I didn’t like heights,” Jesus Cruz said. “I went up to be a part of it. I wanted to have that experience. I remember the Amish men walking back and forth like it was nothing.”

“What I remember,” Mim Cruz said, “was the delicious strawberry pie.” The Amish women brought fresh strawberries and helped Valerie Baer make at least fifteen pies.

“We had some people with a lot of experience—like Dale’s Amish cousins—and some volunteers who were very inexperienced,” Chris said. “But everyone pitched in and had a lot of fun. That’s what I remember. That we all had a lot of fun together.”

The experience made an impression on participants from the city. Dale remembers standing next to Louis Gonzalez, who repeatedly said, “I can’t believe this.” Frank Freeman remembers helping to nail boards and “whatever else they needed me to do.” “I didn’t have any experience with carpentry, but they gave good direction and I felt like I was able to contribute,” he said. “The clearest impression I have was how the city churches and the Amish worked together. I had never experienced anything like that before.”

That is also what Doris Stoltzfus remembers best about that day: “What struck me was how everyone worked so well together. It was amazing how quickly a group of people working together could accomplish something like raising a barn.”

A finished barn was completed by late afternoon. Dale’s relatives returned to Pennsylvania that evening.

“Valerie’s dad—my father-in-law—worked a good bit of the summer of ’83 building fences and feeders,” Jim said. “The ‘pasture’ included the area where the gazebo is now located. People enjoyed seeing the black Angus cows and calves grazing in the evening as they sat on the front porch of Spruce Lodge. The cows were loaned from Walter Mehr, who lived up the road.”

Over the years the barn housed cows, steers, horses, pigs and chickens. Alvin Horning loaned horses for several summers and horseback rides became a popular activity for campers.

The barn has not held animals in recent years, but as it sits close to the new cabins, Ken Bontrager sees the possibility of again having more animals incorporated into camp programming for educational purposes. “I know I am a dreamer, but I see us one day running water and electricity to the barn so it can be used as a nature center and place where animals are kept at least for the summer,” Ken said. “But at present, our kids get the farm experience by visiting Freedom Hill Farm—a visitor-friendly farm in Otisville.”

—Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and summer staff.

Jim Baer, volunteer at camp from 1977–78, returned to work at camp with wife Valerie from 1981–83.

Jesus Cruz, former board member and board chair, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Mim Cruz, former camp director, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church.

Frank Freeman, teen camper in 1970; counselor and maintenance from 1971–1975; helped build House #3 and House #5; former board member.

Chris Kennel III, former counselor, lifeguard and nature teacher, 1978–79.

Rebecca Stoltzfus, Amish cousin to Dale Stoltzfus.

Reflections on First Mennonite Gathering at Camp After 9/11

with Michael Banks and Ruth Wenger

The September 2001 convention of New York City Mennonite churches at Camp Deerpark happened less than two weeks after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. As we drove up the long hill to camp, we saw the familiar greens and golds and reds of changing leaves emerging from the fog, which had obscured the mountains for much of our trip. The big tent off to the left of the driveway above the chapel held promises of a day of intergenerational, multilingual singing, praying, preaching and catching up with dear sisters and brothers from across our 16 congregations.

The theme for the convention, planned many months earlier, was from the account in Isaiah 6 describing the call of the prophet to speak to God's people: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for me?" Isaiah responded, "Here am I. Send me."

Meanwhile, clouds of dust and smoke were still emerging from the enormous tonnage of rubble at Ground Zero caused by the violent action of young men answering a similar call from their particular political/religious leaders in a very different setting.



Pastor Michael Banks teaches Bible, summer 2011.

Back home in the city, despair and calamity surrounded us. All of our congregations were experiencing the effects rippling out from Ground Zero. Some of us had lost friends and family. Some had lost employment and housing. Many were seeing incidents of violence in our neighborhoods toward Muslims and people who looked like Muslims. All of us were hearing hostile, threatening responses from many of our neighbors and our local and national political, civic and religious leaders.

Convention keynote speaker Michael Banks reminded us of God's compelling call to Isaiah in the context of 9/11: "Whom shall I send? Who will go for me?" He proclaimed the nonviolent, proactive peacemaking and justice-seeking way of Jesus as our model for action. He reminded us that as Anabaptists we were called to be people of God's peace. And so we listened and talked with each other about how we could be agents of peace in a time of trauma and turbulence. In that conversation, we found our language as a group. We believed that our city and our communities needed a real-time response of faith that was informed and governed by peace. We found the voice of love, healing and reconciliation.

Mennonite Disaster Service (MDS) had already sent Joe Steiner, a social work professor from Rochester, to offer his skills as a community mental health worker among our people. At the convention at Deerpark, he explored setting up an MDS office in New York City to coordinate offers of aid pouring in from all over the U.S. and Canada. From those initial conversations emerged the Restoring Hope Project, which provided \$400,000 to support peace-building initiatives in our congregations and many hours of service by volunteers from Canada and the U.S. An array of congregation-based projects were funded, such as: upgrading facilities to enhance community outreach; starting peace-oriented afterschool programs; connecting U.S. churches with Iraqi artists exiled in Damascus, Syria; and hosting a citywide inter-Menno concert with Hesston College. Camp Deerpark hosted our city children and Bluffton College's peace center for a Saturday of art-making activities focused on peace.

Almost 20 years later, Michael Banks reflected on the significance of that day at Camp Deerpark:

I am grateful that as New York City Mennonites, we had Camp Deerpark as a place where we had already experienced hearing from God—a safe place, a city of refuge, a sacred space. The mantra of American culture was powerful. We didn't want to lay blame on America, but rather speak to what happens when the church doesn't address injustice. The issues were complex and there was much we couldn't do amid the despair and calamity all

around us. Being at camp that day kept us from being shattered and at the same time enabled us to define our role as agents of community-oriented healing and reconciliation. Because we were in a safe place, we could look back toward the city and ahead to the challenges awaiting us.

The convention program ended with “Thuma Mina,” a Swahili song whose stanzas in English are, “Send me, Jesus. Lead me, Jesus. Fill me, Jesus.” On our way down the hill through emerging sunshine and back home to New York City, we carried with us the echoes of the sermon and scriptures and songs and conversations, resonating with confidence that God’s Spirit was sending us as agents of healing and hope, as messengers of peace, as Mennonites committed to the nonviolent way of Jesus. Our time together at Deerpark, in nature so many miles away from the destruction at Ground Zero, renewed our spirits for whatever might lie ahead.

— *Written by Ruth Wenger, pastor of North Bronx Mennonite Church.*

Michael Banks, former pastor of King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.

FUTURE

In response to the events of September 11, 2001 Camp Deerpark, in partnership with the Restoring Hope Project, formed a drama group to help young adults from New York City share their stories with their peers and the larger church community. Following are reflections from that experience.

The Making of a Drama Group

by Kirsten Wenger

For me, camp has always been a place to discover, develop, and display the gifts that God has given me. The coffee house at this year’s youth retreat was another venue for expressing the gifts God has given me and other young people in the Mennonite churches. It was a night of poetry, rhyming and music. One of the highlights was a poetry slam near the end of the evening that brought the house down. To hear our peers express their faith and struggles in writing was an encouragement to all in attendance. To have a place for our voices to be heard was empowering for all those who performed. It was a night of beginnings. That night was the birth of the idea that became Future.

In the next month, ideas for channeling the energy and talents of that night flowed back and forth between camp and the city. There was talk of a

Members of Future (left to right) Jackie Fernandez, Kirsten Wenger, Nixon Fernandez, Marin Wenger, Hanna Misir, Richie Bernardz, Devonne McMorris, Ashley Smith, and Celmalí Jaime.



poetry book, ongoing poetry slams and coffee houses in the city, anything to nurture the gifts that were shared that night. For my part, I was excited to see things happen, to see exactly what direction everything was taking. Emails went back and forth about the power of sharing our words and the desire to have some more permanent place to express ourselves.

Our answer came at the Summer Staff Pre-Hiring retreat in April. While Celmalí, myself and others had been planning coffee houses in the city, Hyacinth and Ken had other things in mind. They dreamt of a drama troupe where we could tell our stories and share them around the city and country. The dream was realized when camp received a grant from the Restoring Hope Project, and Ingrid De Sanctis was hired to work with a group of us over the summer to develop an hour long piece about our lives growing up in the church and growing up in the city. At the pre-hiring retreat we were invited to sign up to participate in the project.

I went away from that weekend ready. I wasn't sure what I was ready for but it felt good, like we were being given a voice, a way to tell our stories. The next few months came and went, the poetry kept coming, and Celmalí, Hyacinth, Kelly Jones and I organized a coffee house at North Bronx Menonite Church. A lot of the 2002 summer staff were there and as we read our poetry, our desire to be used by God became more and more evident. In June, when we met up again for staff orientation, we did so with an anticipation of what was to come. We were excited about being part of something, but we didn't know much about what we were part of.

The second day of orientation, we met with our director. We entered the chapel that day not knowing what to expect. One of the first things we did was discuss body language, what each of us was saying by simply sitting down. It was hilarious to hear some of the things we were silently communicating. Ingrid also led us in a few ice-breaking activities. Who knew that games like "Pass the Fire" and "Go" would become a much-needed focusing technique over the next months. She also led us in trust building activities; I don't think Ashley will soon forget almost getting dropped when he jumped over our waiting arms. It was an amazing experience to find that, working together, the group could support a person landing on them from a running jump.

Throughout the next few days as we became more familiar with Ingrid, each other, and our warm-ups, we began to share our stories with each other. We spent hours talking about everything from our strict mothers to our ignorant teachers and friends. We shared about our fears and our dreams ... about our doubts and our anger. Ingrid facilitated a process by which we could have our voices heard in this intimate group, a safe haven into which we could speak everything that life had given us and taken from us.

Because we are funded by Restoring Hope, we talked a lot about September 11th in the beginning. The group discussed how we felt alienated for wanting peace. We also felt like the attack was getting too much attention. We decided that if this piece was really to be the story of our lives, the towers would only be a part of it.

That week we read our poetry, shared our favorite songs, and discussed the world's view of us and ours of them. We came to rehearsal sometimes exhausted, sometimes late, sometimes stretched beyond the limit by the campers we were working with, and drama gave us a place to put that all aside and be heard. From that week, Ingrid took our stories, our poems, our lives and created a script. As we eagerly shared who we were, she listened and heard what we were really saying. She taught us theatre techniques, stage position and how to project our voices. The project has given us a way to make that voice heard. This is FUTURE.

Kirsten Wenger, summer camper and staff, attends North Bronx Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Written fall 2002 for the Camp Deerpark Newsletter.

FUTURE

by Celmali Jaime

The week of August 19–23 was one that would make or break FUTURE. It was our first time working on scenes as a unified group, and during that week we were presented with a script. We were really excited, but there were times we thought that making it all happen would be impossible. However, with the help of God and everyone else at camp, we were able to memorize our lines, gain confidence, learn transitions, and pull it all together into a one hour production which we now call: “WHACHA GONNADU?”

During that week, our general audiences were the Bontragers and the Rodriguezes. We were fairly comfortable with them. But on Friday, August 23, we were led into the chapel, filled with about forty faces we had never

seen before. We were all terrified; I know I was. But with Ingrid and Marisha helping us through each scene, we showed our first audience a great time.

Looking back, our first performance was trouble-free in comparison to what we would later face. In many of our following shows, we were confronted with difficult challenges. Once, we performed for a very large audience and had no microphones. Another time, we were on a stage that could barely fit us all. On another occasion we performed outside in the cold, and there were other times when we did numerous shows in one day. One of our greatest challenges was putting on a show without Hanna. When one person is missing, it throws the rest of us off. I remember when we put on a show without running through our lines first. We'll never do that again! I'm astonished at how we got through it all. One thing's for sure, all of these challenges increased our confidence and teamwork. They also taught us a valuable lesson: prayer works.

In spite of all of the difficulties "WHACHA GONNADU?" has been a success. Every time we step on stage we have fun. Through our poetry, singing, dancing, rapping, hand-clapping and feet-stomping, we bring tears and laughter to our audiences. FUTURE has been a blessing for all of those who have seen us, as well as for those of us who perform.

We've come a long way since last summer, and we have a long trip ahead of us. New challenges with traveling, our schoolwork, our jobs, and everyday responsibilities have arisen. But surely, none of these things will stop us from going forward with our ministry. We are continually being blessed. God has brought us this far, and He won't leave us now. God isn't finished with FUTURE yet.

Celmali Jaime Okonji, program director in 2006–7, attended Evangelical Garifuna Church and King of Glory Tabernacle, both in the Bronx.

Written fall 2002 for the Camp Deerpark Newsletter.

FUTURE Comes to a Close

by Veronica Dingwall

There are certain truths we must learn to accept. Such platitudes would include that change is inevitable, all beginnings come to an end; and future, the future is not only forever but it has indeed taken over.

They graced us with a rich biblical medley, incorporated with spoken word, dance, song, and an array of other talents. Yes, I speak of the drama troupe formerly known as FUTURE. In 2001 nine extraordinary individ-



Future on stage

uals were compelled to enter the world of theatrics by means of the drama troupe. They heard the calling, felt the spirit and went to work spreading the gospel. Under the direction of Ingrid De Sanctis, Hyacinth Stevens, and Marisha Joseph, the gifts and talents of these nine cast members were put into motion. Acts such as “If I ruled the world,” “Joseph,” “Job,” and an array of other scenes told a blended tale of the trials and triumphs of biblical times as well as contemporary times.

This troupe of youth were indeed the religious anomaly. They ventured out into new territory unsure of how their audiences would receive them, they took a gigantic leap of faith and God carried them. They have given so much of themselves in their performances and that is why they have touched so many lives and helped open even more hearts. They surpassed entertainment, they were inspirational. This incomparable drama troupe worked diligently at enhancing the creative means of which they displayed God’s love and power. But as the saying goes, all good things must come to an end. They fulfilled their destiny, and with a joyful heart complied with God’s will and now they must move on, spreading the gospel through other modes of ministry.

Celmali Jaime, Ashley Smith, Hanna Misir, Jackie Fernandez, Nixon Fernandez, Richie Bernardez, Marin Wenger, Kirsten Wenger, and Devonne McMorris would like to thank all their fans and critics for all their support, encouragement, and time. As they have poured their hearts into you, they acknowledge and thank all of you for replenishing their spirits by being attentive and responsive. As they bid the world farewell as FUTURE, the members would like to share their highlights and closing remarks.

Devonne: My fondest memory is the positive feedback we received during post-performance discussions and being able to converse with the audience. Sometimes people were brought to tears because they could relate, and just knowing our ministry brought healing and encouragement.

Jackie: Now that Future is over I believe God is calling me to be a leader amongst teens in my church, and I know if I continue to listen it will expand.

Richie: I admire Hyacinth because of her patience and all the energy she poured into us. I know it took a lot and it took someone special.

Kirsten: “Lover of my Soul” was my favorite scene. I cried the first time Hanna sang it in rehearsal and it still tugs at my heart. It’s so real and the words so powerful.

Nixon: I know God is calling me to do something great, something majestic. It is a mystery for now, but I'm listening.

Ashley: I wish the best for everybody. We all knew God was moving but later on we will grasp the severity of FUTURE. It wasn't us, it was God through us.

Veronica Dingwall, camper, counselor, summer camp director 2009, board member 2016–2018, attends King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.

Written winter 2005 for the Camp Deerpark Newsletter.

Clay: Beauty in Brokenness

by Celmali Jaime Okonji

This summer, four items lay side by side on the fireplace mantle in the chapel basement. They were carefully and strategically placed there by me, the summer camp pastor.

The first item: a lump of wet, formless, clay. Next to it: a beautiful clay pot, baked and hardened to perfection. The third item was the pieces of a shattered clay pot, stacked into a sad pile. And last, stood the fourth item: a mosaic picture frame, made of broken clay pieces that had been carefully cemented together. All items, a form of clay, were symbols of the processes we go through as God molds us into who we are meant to be.

This is the story of a group called Future. This is the story of our process.

The Clay.

It was us. We were young and unformed, full of potential energy. Of course we were a little bit rough and grimy on the edges, like the Bronx and Harlem, where we all hailed from. I was 17 years young. We were all in or fresh out of high school. We were excited to be working as summer staff at Camp Deerpark. To us, there were no boundaries. The world was waiting to be explored.

The Clay Pot.

We knew we were talented. So we spent our time perfecting our crafts of spoken word poetry, music, stepping, singing and drama. We would host open mics at our churches, youth group events; and, of course, Camp Deerpark. It was especially at Camp Deerpark, the place that we all considered home, that we solidified ourselves as young performing artists.

The Broken Clay Pot.

The towers came crashing down that fall. 9/11 was the final straw of the racial tension, crime, police brutality, and personal life dramas that had been building up in us, and in New York City for years. It was a tragic disaster that we knew would have permanent repercussions on us all. Scars would be left behind. Nothing would be the same again.

The Mosaic.

The following summer, Hyacinth, the summer program director, asked who was interested in being part of a drama troupe. The Mennonite Disaster Service was helping fund it as a post 9/11 peace initiative. It would be an opportunity to share our stories as Mennonite youth. I was all in. So were Devonne (Deedee), Hanna, Richie, Jackie, Marin, Nixon, Ashley, and Kirsten. We decided to call ourselves “Future” and the title of the piece was “WHACHaGONNADu?” We were like nine broken clay pieces, cemented together by hours of rehearsals, travel, bookings, mistakes, successful performances, forgotten lines, and unforgettable memories. It was the story of us growing up, asking hard questions, and making peace with the broken pieces of our lives.

These were some of our lines:

“WHACHaGONNADu?” —I’m gonna change the world, so that maybe someday it can be a place I can bring my children into. —Celmali

*I am a river with the desire to flow free
It’s scary not knowing where I’m heading
Or where I gotta be. —Richie, Hanna*

*How long have I allowed disrespect
And neglect to claim my name?
How far have I allowed my self-esteem to travel?
Little by little it deteriorates as it unravels. —Deedee*

“WHACHaGONNADu?” —I’m gonna use my gifts to bring people closer to God. —Ashley

*If I ruled the world, no one would live and die for drugs
And white cops would be walking hand in hand with black thugs
Because
If the world were mine there’d be no such thing as hate crimes
No dead bodies in the gutter shot 41 times. —Celmali, Hanna*

*Who is the who? I don't know.
 When is the when? I don't know.
 Where is the where? I don't know.
 I. Don't. Know.*

—Jackie, Celmali, Richie, Nixon

*'Cause all I ever wanted was a little bit of love
 But Mama never taught me what that's made of.
 Begging for attention in the clothes I don't wear
 'cause no one ever bothered to treat me with care
 Until I learned to love myself, no one else would dare.*

—Kirsten

*When will I realize that I am exactly how God intended me to be?
 That the color of my skin fits beautiful on me?
 But more so, when will I learn to appreciate me?*

—Deedee

*Respect's been twisted into ownership and fear
 Property rights over my body?
 Another girl, another year.
 Devil's sittin' pretty till this line hits your ear.
 Until we learn the lesson, stop messin'.
 Reclaim love, abolish lust.
 Turn to God; in Him we must trust.*

—Kirsten, Marin, Hanna

*It's like a pattern that goes from black to white
 And white to black, until we hit our destination
 Yet with all these questions in my head
 I can't seem to find a solution to this confrontation.
 Who can I trust?
 When the individuals around me treat the "I" worse than dust?
 Why?
 That is the question.
 The question which each and every one of us wishes to request.
 When?
 Until "the who" comes at the end of time.
 Who?
 The one with the power.
 The one with the light
 Brighter than the sunshine.*

—Richie

Future toured the U.S. and performed “WHAchaGONNAdu?” over 40 times during the period of 2002–2004 under the leadership of Hycinth Stevens, Marisha Joseph, and Ingrid De Sanctis. Many of their performances were at Mennonite affiliated schools, colleges, churches and events. Most members of the group are still affiliated with Camp Deerpark, the Mennonite churches, and still remain as friends.

List of Future Shows 2002–2004

- Saturday August 23rd, 2002—King of Glory Tabernacle—Bronx, NY
- Saturday September 7th—On the street in front of King of Glory Tabernacle (Peace Day)—Bronx, NY
- Friday September 27th—Community Church of Jesus Christ—Bronx, NY (Hanna’s Church)
- Saturday September 28th—NYC Mennonite Convention (performed twice)—Westbrookville, NY
- Sunday September 29th—Camp Deerpark community—Westbrookville, NY
- Sunday October 27th—East Chestnut Mennonite—Lancaster, PA
- Monday October 28th—Lancaster Mennonite School—Lancaster, PA
- Friday November 15th—United Revival Mennonite Church—Brooklyn, NY
- Saturday November 23rd—Bluffton College—Bluffton, OH
- Sunday November 24th—Grace Mennonite—Bluffton, OH
- Tuesday Dec 31st—Forest Hills Mennonite—Lancaster, PA
- Saturday January 4th, 2003—Immanuel Community Church—Flushing, NY
- Saturday March 1st—Compassion Works U.S.A.—Philadelphia, PA
- Sunday March 2nd—Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship—New York, NY
- Sunday March 9th—1st Mennonite—Allentown, PA
- Sunday March 30th—Atlantic Coast Conference Bible Quizzing—Lancaster, PA
- Saturday April 12th—Mennonite Secondary Education Council—Goshen, IN
- Sunday April 13th—Assembly Mennonite—Goshen, IN
- Sunday April 13th—College Mennonite—Goshen, IN
- Sunday April 13th—Goshen College—Goshen, IN

- Sunday May 4th—Children's Village—Dobbs Ferry, NY
- Saturday June 14th—Branch Church—Souderton, PA
- Thursday July 3rd—Mennonite Convention—Atlanta, GA
- Friday July 4th—Mennonite Convention—Atlanta, GA
- Saturday July 5th—Mennonite Convention—Atlanta, GA
- Sunday July 6th—Mennonite Convention—Atlanta, GA
- Friday August 1st—Eastern Mennonite University (LEAP Training)—
Harrisonburg, VA
- Friday August 1st—Eastern Mennonite University (second show)—
Harrisonburg, VA
- Saturday August 2nd—Eastern Mennonite University—Harrisonburg, VA
- Saturday August 2nd—Eastern Mennonite University (second show) —
Harrisonburg, VA
- Saturday September 27th—New York City Mennonite Convention—
Friends Meeting House—New York, NY
- Saturday November 22nd—Calvary Community—Newport News, VA
- Sunday November 23rd—Calvary Community (second show)—
Newport News, VA
- Sunday December 14th—Woodstown Presbyterian Church—
Woodstown, NJ
- Friday December 26th—King of Glory Tabernacle (LEAP video release
party)—Bronx, NY
- January 17th, 2004—New Covenant Holiness Church (Ashley Smith's
church)—Harlem, NY
- February 20th Eastern Mennonite University (sponsored by LEAP of
EMU)—Harrisonburg, VA
- February 20th Eastern Mennonite University (second show)—
Harrisonburg, VA
- February 21 Eastern Mennonite University (sponsored by the
Multi Cultural office—shared stage with Cross Movement)—
Harrisonburg, VA
- Sunday April 25th—Full Gospel Christian Center (Celmali's Church
while at college)—Port Jefferson Station, NY
- Friday August 13th—African American Mennonite Association—
Chicago, IL
- Sunday August 15th—Camp Deerpark Teen Camp—Westbrookville, NY

So that is it. Just when we think we are done being molded; when we think we are complete and solidified into who we are; that's when the shattering happens, and the breaking comes. With that also comes the uncertainty, the questions, the scars and chiseled edges. And just when we think that that state of brokenness is our new permanent reality, we realize that the Master is still, and always is, at work. He works in us, through us, despite us. God the Artist and Creator brings it all together, the good and the bad, and the ugly, into a beautiful symphony. God doesn't always make the pain disappear; but there is beauty in the brokenness. After all, this is how a mosaic is made from what once was a formless lump of clay. This is how we became whom we were meant to be.

Celmali Jaime Okonji, served as 2018 summer camp pastor.

Flood

Camp Deerpark Newsletter

Fall 2004

“An Act of God, the Acts of God's People”



Front drive of Camp Deerpark the day after the flood. Remarkably camp was only closed for one weekend.



Office documents drying on front porch.

The following are excerpts from the *Times Herald Record* from Tuesday, August 31 through September 5, 2004:

“Local flash flood worst in 49 years”

“Homes evacuated, roads closed, people rescued in heavy flooding”

“Driving rain turned tame streams into torrents”

“By late morning in Westbrookville and Deerpark, county, state and town trucks were lining up to dump loads of rock and soil to fill areas where massive chunks of road and roadbed had washed away.”

Thoughts on the September 4th Work Day at Camp Deerpark

by Jackie Fernandez

When I was first asked about helping clean up at camp, I'm going to admit that I was kind of hesitant. Usually when I go to camp it's to relax and just to be one with its environment. I had no clue what to expect this time after the flood because we were told it was severely damaged. I'm the type of person that would rather hear about happy experiences and not the sad ones so I wasn't too sure about this visit. But I decided to go in the end because everyone that went with me from my church reminded about how Camp Deerpark belongs to us. "It's our second home and if we don't keep it clean, who will?"

The excitement in the young teens' faces was just like the anticipation that's there whenever a camping trip is near. When our van first turned on Brandt Road, we saw and felt how bad things were because of the many bumps. The pretty houses we usually see on our way here were pretty much gone. Our whole van was in shock because we've only seen this kind of damage on TV. We finally got to camp only to walk around in disbelief because our pretty camp was covered in rocks and mud.



Youth from Evangelical Garifuna Bronx were included in the 110 volunteers that showed up in the ten days following the flood.



September 4, 2004 work crew included youth from United Revival Mennonite Church, youth from Evangelical Garifuna Bronx, Forest Hills Mennonite, board members, friends, and staff. As the day drew to a close Dan Glick of Forest Hills Mennonite was heard saying, "I'm not happy we had a flood, but this has been a really good day."

The United Revival Church in Brooklyn had arrived before us and they looked tired of the work but happy to see me, I mean us, of course. Ken showed us pictures of the camp the day after the storm. Thank God that the staff at camp were protected. After the pictures, Ken lovingly assigned some of us to the kitchen where water kept coming in through the foundation in the back corner. Some others were scattered around the camp area. I know that those of us that were in the kitchen never wanted to see a mop or water ever again. It was so much work but we pulled it off by that evening. It was a good experience and we got to meet new people, which is always nice.

We were dismissed by a circle of prayer and were informed that more people would be volunteering over the next few days, which made us happy. Since I had a good time, as usual, at Camp Deerpark, I encourage my fellow teens to help camp out whenever it needs us. Lord knows how much Camp Deerpark has done for us.

Jackie Fernandez, camper, summer staff, attended Evangelical Garifuna in the Bronx.

Local Community



As Anabaptists, we take seriously Jesus’ teachings from the Sermon on the Mount about being the salt of the earth and the light of the world. One of our stated core values at Camp Deerpark is to express the love of Jesus by having integrity in all dealings with our vendors, our neighbors on Brandt Road, the larger community and the government authorities. Walter Mehr often related that, as director, Jim Baer would always plow the neighbors’ snowy driveways before he plowed the camp driveway.

In the late 1990s, a traveling Mennonite high school choir shared a concert at the Presbyterian Church in Port Jervis. The pastor said, “We know Mennonites; Jerry and Leonor Kennell were Mennonites.” Nearly 20 years after the Kennells left the Port Jervis community, the congregation broke into applause at the mention of their names.

The stories in this section are chosen to give the reader a window into the challenges, opportunities and joys of loving our neighbors.

Lenni-Lenape Native Americans

Camp Deerpark is nestled in the Shawangunk Mountains on the land that was once the home of the Lenape (len-AH-pay) or Lenni-Lenape Native American peoples. The Munsee, a subtribe of the Lenape, lived along the upper portion of the Delaware River. Shawangunk is a Dutch translation of the indigenous Munsee name “schawank,” meaning “that which is smoky air.” The Shawangunk area can be noted for the heavy humidity and atmosphere caused by the mountain ridge running southwest to northeast partially blocking the prevailing west to east wind. Camp Deerpark staff and guests have long appreciated the breathtaking view when driving into the Shawangunk valley on Route 17.

The land of the Lenape included what we know as eastern Pennsylvania; southeastern New York state, including New York City; New Jersey; northern Delaware and a small area of southeastern Connecticut. This land was called the Lenapehoking (meaning “Land of the Lenape”) and the land was



View from camp across valley to Shawangunk Mountains.

split between three clans or geographical divisions of the Delaware region: Turtle, Wolf and Turkey. The Wolf clan was known as the Munsee or Minisink, which means “at a place where stones are gathered together.”

The Lenape believed that the land was sacred and belonged to everyone. They usually lived in small groups of 25 to 50 people. They built wigwam-domed-shaped houses—which were 20 feet across and made from young saplings and bark stripped from large trees. They also lived in longhouses, which were built like wigwams but longer, with room for multiple families. Family ties were important and close relationships existed between parents and children and related clans.

The chiefs—sometimes referred to as sachems—were chosen for their behavior, skill in speaking, honesty, and ability to make wise decisions. The chiefs were also knowledgeable about religion and would lead the people in rituals and ceremonies.

The Lenape men were hunters, but also prepared the land for gardening. Children moved the small rocks away and pulled any weeds. Women planted and harvested the crops and were creative in their methods of planting. To plant corn, beans and squash, their most important crops, the soil was hoed into mounds about three feet in diameter, then planted with five or six corn seeds in a circle at the very top of the mound. About a foot lower on the mound, they planted beans about six inches apart in another circle and finally around the outer edge they planted a circle of squash. This is called the *Three Sister's Garden*. The beans climbed the corn and the squash covered the ground holding in moisture. They planted these gardens several weeks apart so they would have fresh vegetables throughout the summer and fall. The women were also responsible to collect sap from maple trees to make maple syrup.

The men would hunt deer and elk in the forest with bows and arrows. They painted themselves with dark paint to blend in with the shadows. When they would bring the animal back to the village, the Lenape would make sure to use all parts of the animal to honor the kill. Other men would fish with nets and hollowed out tree trunks used as canoes in the tributaries of the Delaware and the Neversink rivers. The Lenape enjoyed a wide variety of food, which was distributed and shared so that no one went hungry.

When the Europeans settled here in the late 1600s and early 1700s, they began to call the tribe the “Delaware Indians” as they had trouble pronouncing Lenape. The settlers generally lived in peace alongside the Lenape near the Peenpack Trail. The Europeans had moved from France to get away from the religious persecution that occurred when King Louis XIV revoked

In the fall of 2007, soon after Rick Weaver joined the Camp Deerpark staff as the food service director, he spent an afternoon hiking in the woods. He was struck by the rich history represented in the stone walls throughout the camp property. His curiosity led him to carry out extensive internet research. He soon had a new source to draw from. *Town of Deerpark*, a history book written by Norma Schadt, was published a year later.

In the spring of 2008 Rick prepared a Saturday evening dinner that reflected his research. The menu read:

300 years ago . . . on this site, we might have eaten:

Pumpkin Soup

Skillet Cornbread with Maple Butter

Shawangunk Salad

(wild greens, watercress, dill weed, corn, tomato, radish, red beans, sunflower seeds, with a honey vinaigrette dressing)

Hog Wild BBQ Loin

Sour Cream & Horseradish Mashers

Msikwatash of the Three Sisters

(corn, beans, squash)

Munsee Cherry Pudding Cake

the Edict of Nantes, the law which let the Huguenots practice their religion. The Huguenots were Protestants and a branch of Calvinism. They traveled in covered wagons on Old Mine Road, which is now Route 209. They officially owned the land that they settled on in 1697 by getting the Peenpack Patent. This granted them the 1,200 acres from where Route 209 crosses the Neversink River, about three miles south of Camp Deerpark.

The Lenape and the Europeans learned a lot from each other. For example, the Lenape began to use European metal field tools to help plant crops. The later generations of the European settlers even learned how to communicate using the Lenape language and they adopted some of the ways of Lenape dress, like using leather for their shoes and clothes.

The European settlers included families named Cuddeback and Westbrook. Mr. Westbrook ran a general store near his house. Four miles south of the Westbrook Store, Mr. Cuddeback built a gristmill near his house

where he would grind the grain for the neighbors. Today Camp Deerpark is located halfway between Westbrookville and Cuddebackville.

During the French and Indian and Revolutionary wars, the Lenape often fought beside their European allies and against each other. Eventually, the Lenape were driven from their land and moved out west, including to Oklahoma, and north into Canada, where the majority of the Lenape live today.

Even so, the Lenape legacy in this region lives on for those who remember, in part through language. Many place names come from the Lenape, such as Hackensack, Manasquan and Manhattan.

—*Written by Dillon Hershey, Ken Bontrager, and Donna Stoltzfus.*

George and Lillian Brandt

George and Lillian Brandt, along with their seven-year-old son Bob moved to Old Homestead Farm Resort in 1936. George had been a milk and butter salesman in Ridgewood, Queens, just a few blocks from where United Revival Mennonite Church is today, making \$100 per week. With no opportunity for advancement in the dairy business, the Brandts were looking for an existing business that they could own and operate as a family. They enrolled their son Bob in the Port Orange School at the bottom of the road. If you look closely you can still see the front steps and foundation of the one room school as you turn from Route 209 onto Brandt Road. Bob later attended Otisville High School and Cornell University.

The Brandts moved into the big house with their bedroom being the current office and their son staying in what was the first camp office, a tiny room off of the living room that is now part of the dining room. George and Lillian renamed their home in the country Brandt's Pleasant View and welcomed visitors from Brooklyn and Queens. Guests remember calling them Uncle George and Aunt Lillian. Every summer the Brandts were joined by their extended family. Grandpa and Grandma Deer always lived in motel #1. Grandpa Deer owned a bar and restaurant in Ridgewood which included a bowling alley in the basement and several families living on the second and third floors. Some of the table and chairs here at camp when the Mennonites arrived originally came from the restaurant in Ridgewood. Lillian's brother, John, along with his wife Margaret and their children, Carol and Jackie, pitched in as well. Margaret was the baker, Lillian handled guest services, George was the summer cook, and John was often leading the singing



Bill Flieger (left), Lillian and George Brandt. Bill was a personal friend of both Elaine Shank and Ken Bontrager through Cuddebackville Reformed Church and the Cuddebackville Fire Department.

as folks gathered around the living room in the evenings with the steps leading upstairs filled with children and teens. On special nights the casino (chapel) would be unlocked and the entire group would enjoy dancing, games, and John's lively piano playing. Back in Ridgewood, John Deer owned a music studio on Knickerbocker Avenue.

During the day the adults would play golf, pitch horse shoes, or sit in the shade. The children would often hike up the road to pick blueberries or catch orange newts after a rain. Some of the young adults would walk down the road to pick wild strawberries which they would drop into their drink for a refreshing summer afternoon cocktail. Everyone swam in the old stream fed pool. The guests tried to convince Aunt Lillian to join them, but she maintained, "I only swim once a year."

Every evening after dinner there was a men versus boys softball game out on the ball field. One day circa 1954, to everyone's surprise the ball field became a landing zone for a military helicopter. Howard Germilth was stationed at a nearby military base and decided to visit his parents who were vacationing at Brandt's. No one found out if he got in trouble for taking the helicopter. The highlight of the evening for the children was when Uncle George would invite them to climb on top of a rusty old red wagon to help take the garbage to the dump.

Uncle George was also a jokester. When a new guest would visit Brandt's Pleasant View, George would begin to talk about the beautiful springs out in the woods. After much hyperbole, George (and everyone in the know) would lead the new guest out into the woods following the signs leading to the springs. Somewhere near the yellow trail they would eventually come to an old wooden box filled with rusty car springs. The new guest would be properly initiated and would be part of the joke the next time.

At night the boys would sneak into the chicken coops (motels 2-7) and catch the rats that were eating the chicken food. Sometimes they would release the five cats and let them catch the rats.

With no internet or televisions, the radio was a main source of information. Bob Brandt vividly remembers sitting at the dining room table when his uncle was listening to the radio news. His Uncle John later announced that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. Guests also remember the Saturday night when the radio announced the end of the war. The next day all of the staff and guests dressed up and attended church services in Wurtsboro.

In 1964 George discovered that he had cancer. After an afternoon nap he was out in the field with the tractor and hay rake. He was found beside

Family Style Dining

The Brandts always served meals family style. If you only had a family of four you would sit at one end of the table and another family may sit at the other end of the table, and each family would be served separately. George and Lillian hired local residents to help serve. The Skinner daughters from up the road often worked as waitresses, and everyone remembers a retired gentleman from Cuddebackville named Joe who had been a waiter at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York City. Although Lillian's sister-in-law, Margaret, was doing most of the cooking, Lillian was known to walk around the dining room asking guests, "How do you like *my* chicken?" Most guests stayed for a week, but they all seem to remember the weekend meals.

Saturday Night Menu

Spaghetti and Meatballs

Fried Onions

Raisin Bread

Sunday Lunch Menu

Baked Chicken

Mashed Potatoes and Gravy

Corn on the Cob

Sunday Night Menu

Hot Open Roast Beef Sandwiches

Fresh Cole Slaw

Monday Night Menu

Chicken A La King on Toast

Legs Diamond

One day while the children at Old Homestead Resort were out playing on the front lawn, they saw five black cars racing up Brandt Road. One black car racing up the road would have been strange, but there was no explanation for five cars. About an hour later the same five cars went racing back down the road. The next day the children and youth decided to walk up the road and explore the incident. At the very top of the road, nearly a mile from the big house at Old Homestead they found a small log cabin. They didn't dare go in, but peering through the windows they saw dishes and chairs strewn across the cabin as though a hurricane had hit. Later in the week they learned that Legs Diamond, the famous bootlegger and New York gangster, had been captured by the federal police. They believed that the black cars racing up the road had captured Legs Diamond and the little log cabin on Brandt Road had been one of his many hideouts.

Sources: Brandt's Pleasant View guest: Around 2000 a woman visited Camp Deerpark who had been a guest at Old Homestead and Brandt's Pleasant View from the time she was eight years old until she was thirty-eight. We have since lost her name. When she walked into the living room at Camp Deerpark she started crying and said, "It still smells the same."

Al Mann, the current resident of the alleged Legs Diamond hideout.

Note: Several artifacts left in the basement and barn indicate that the small cabin at the top of Brandt Road was a location for boot leggers during the prohibition era. In his book "Jack Legs Diamond—Anatomy of a Gangster" Gary Levine notes that Mr. Diamond did indeed hide out in the Hudson Valley. However, we have not found any verification that he was ever on Brandt Road.

the tractor in May of 1964. He is buried in the Westbrookville Cemetery. Bob Brandt along with his wife, Joanne, and their five children had already made their life near Rochester, New York where Bob took over his father-in-law's furniture business. Bob knew his mother could not manage the business alone and convinced her to sell the property in June of 1964 for \$65,000. Aunt Lillian operated through the 1964 summer season before moving away.

Bob Harper and Lynn Tostado remember coming back for a few years after Uncle George and Aunt Lillian were gone. It was called Winkler's

Country Club, and while it was the same place it just didn't feel like home anymore. George and Lillian had a special gift of hospitality. They made everyone feel like family.

Article source: visits from Bob and Joanne Brandt on October 10, 2012; Carol and John (Jackie) Deer on May 31, 2010; Bob and Judy Harper and Lynn and Joe Tostado on July 10, 2009; Herb and Carol Stubman on July 9, 2003; and several visits from long time Cuddebackville resident Bill Flieger.

Written by Ken Bontrager, current director.

Otto Skinner

with Jim Baer, Leonor Kennell, Dale Stoltzfus

One of camp's neighbors during the earlier years was Otto Skinner. His property bordered the northwest side of camp. Otto guessed he was related to the Skinner clan who in the 1800s lived on the property that is now Camp Deerpark, though he couldn't tell you the direct lineage.

Otto passed away several years ago, but folks from camp who interacted with Otto remember him as a colorful character. He was a farmer and ran a saw mill.

"Otto kept pigs," said Dale. "I remember he would drive about 20 miles to an Entenmann's outlet to buy their baked goods. He would buy boxes and boxes of pastries. Otto mixed the pies, cakes and donuts with milk and would then put the mixture in a big trough for the pigs to enjoy." One year, around 1980, Dale bought two pigs from Otto for camp. "We raised them at camp, and then had them butchered," Dale said. "We had many delicious pork dishes that summer."

Jim said, "It didn't make any sense to me that he would milk the eight cows that he owned and then carry the milk over to the pig pen and give the milk to the pigs! The milk was mixed with all of the bakery products of course."

"When Jerry and I think of Otto Skinner," said Leonor, "we remember the pork roasts we had at camp, courtesy of Otto's pigs. The pork had a unique sweet taste and you really didn't need to add barbecue sauce to enjoy one of those delectable sandwiches. You can imagine how this taste came about. We could taste Entenmann's Crumb Cake in every bite."

"Quite often, one of Otto's cows would come wandering through the woods on one of our trails to the main house at the camp. It was always a



Ford tractor and wagon that came with purchase of camp.

pleasant sight and sound as the cow typically had a bell tied around its neck. Those cows presented as Otto's farm appeared—somewhat disheveled but nonchalant. They were good hikers, however, and could always find their way to someone who could help them.”

Jim said, “I first met Otto in 1978 when I drove the old Ford tractor and the red wagon up Brandt Road. I cut through the woods on a lane that went all the way to Otto's to pick up some lumber for a project at camp. That was the first of many trips that I made to the Skinner farm. I remember being impressed with the simple way of life that Otto and his wife, Kate, lived and how content they both were. I would often ask Otto for some advice about life and he always had time to talk. I still treasure the evenings I spent in their kitchen.”

“I remember a quote of Otto's: “What the eye hasn't seen the heart doesn't crave.” I have no idea if he's the originator of that quote, but it's the first time I heard it and I never forgot it. There is a certain wisdom that comes from eking out a living on the top of a mountain and I was honored when Otto and Kate would share some of it with me.

“I remember taking him some Pennsylvania Dutch style venison bologna, hoping he would enjoy it as much as I did. The next time I saw him I



Spruce Lodge, c. 1915. Note size of spruce tree, only four porch pillars, and no stone patio. Most likely relatives of Otto Skinner sitting on front porch.

asked him if he liked it. My heart sank when he said, kind of disgusted-like, ‘My dog wouldn’t eat it.’ But then with that Otto twinkle in his eye, he quickly added, ‘Because I wouldn’t give him any!’ We both laughed.”

“Before I left camp in 1984,” Jim continued, “I made one last trip over to the Skinners to purchase some eastern white pine lumber that I loved so much. I wanted to take a nice pile back to Pennsylvania with me. When I reached into my pocket to pay for it Otto stopped me and simply said, ‘It’s already paid for.’ That was another quote I’ll never forget and one I like to use!”

“As I near the age that Otto and Kate were when I lived at camp, they often come to mind as I relate to young people now who come to me with questions. Otto and Kate will never know how much they influenced me.”

— *Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.*

Jim Baer, volunteer at camp from 1977–78, returned to work at camp with wife Valerie from 1981–83.

Leonor Kennell, co-assistant director 1975–77, co-director 1977–78, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Dale Stoltzfus, first director of camp, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Our Close Neighbor

with Walter Mehr and Dale Stoltzfus

When the owner of a house on Brandt Road discovered his new neighbors were running a summer camp for children from New York City, he put his house on the market. The prospective buyers, Walter and Jacqueline Mehr, drove from New York City to see the property around Labor Day in 1969. They drove past people enjoying their first weekend retreat at the newly purchased Camp Deerpark, to look at a rambling, stone house built in 1810. “As soon as I saw it I fell in love with it,” Walter said. “Before we left after that first visit, I said I’d buy the house. The owner asked me, ‘Don’t you want to negotiate price or something?’ I said no.”

When the Mehrs were in the final stages of the purchase of the house, the owner found out Walter and Jacqueline were Jewish and tried to stop the sale. The Mehrs prevailed and purchased their new house along with 300 acres of surrounding land. They moved from Park Avenue and 66th Street to a road with no stoplights, where they could look out of their window



Jacqueline Russ Mehr and Walter Mehr.

at night and see the eyes of many deer in the field across the road. “I loved the isolation,” Walter said.

“I’ve always been happy with having camp as a neighbor,” he said. “It made me happy to see children from the city spend two weeks in the country.” At 95 years old, Walter said he had many memories of staff he has seen come and go at camp. “I think Dale is the first person I met from camp,” he said. “And I am still in touch with Marian Sauder and Orville. And Arden and Carolyn Landis. We went to see them in Pennsylvania.” Jerry and Leonor

Kennel, Jim and Valerie Baer, and Ken and Deborah Bontrager were other names he mentioned. “The people have been very good neighbors,” he said. “They always plow me out when it snows. Jim Baer would plow me out before he plowed at camp.”

In 1985, Dale was driving to camp and was about to turn onto Brandt Road when he saw fire engines. He was stopped and told he could not drive up the road. Dale asked where the fire was. “It’s up at Mr. Mehr’s,” the fireman said.



The original Mehr house before the fire, which may have been a stage coach stop at one time.

“I was able to drive to camp and walked up the hill to check on you,” Dale said. “You and Jacqueline weren’t there at the time, but I saw that the fire had destroyed most of your home. That was a very sorry thing to see.”

When Dale saw Walter and Jacqueline later on, he asked if they needed a place to stay. “I remember coming up and offering to let you stay in one of the cabins,” he said.

“Which we did,” said Walter.

“We learned to know each other better at that time and became closer friends,” Dale said. “That was your home for about half a year.”

“Five months. Until I built the apartment behind our garage. Then we moved in there until our house was rebuilt.”

Walter was an architect, an inventor and an art collector. “I lost some paintings,” he said. “And some patents on inventions were destroyed because of the fire.”

“I hired a local man to help rebuild the house,” Walter said. “Some of the structure was still there. I designed the house and paid for him to go to a school in Michigan to learn timber framing. When he returned, and was almost finished framing the house, he made an anti-Semitic remark to me. He wasn’t finished assembling the house, but I was done with him. That was a terrible thing.”

Walter was born in Germany in 1921. He and his father spent four months in a concentration camp in 1938. When they were in the camp, “my mother wrote to relatives in the United States. At that time, if you had a sponsor, you could get out of the camp to leave the country.” Walter’s father had a cousin in the United States who was a barber. “He didn’t have much money,” Walter said. “But he sent an affidavit and sponsored us—my parents, me and my brother. We came here to get away from Hitler. That was in 1939.”

“Jacqueline lived in Switzerland during the war, but her parents died in a concentration camp in Germany,” Walter said.

Jacqueline and Walter met in New York City. Jacqueline was a window designer in the city and on Long Island. Walter sometimes worked for his brother, who was a manufacturer of Christmas ornaments. Jacqueline met Walter when she went to purchase ornaments to decorate a window on Madison Avenue. When she went to pay, Walter said, “No, but if you’re free for dinner we’ll have dinner together.” Walter took Jacqueline to a restaurant about an hour outside of the city.

“Tell me something about yourself,” Jacqueline had said to Walter.

“I have an apartment on 66th and Park Avenue. And I have a poodle,” Walter said with a smile. “I was bragging.”

When Jacqueline found out that Walter had not had a chance to walk or feed his dog before leaving, she made him drive back to his apartment immediately without eating. As Walter walked his dog, Jacqueline made dinner. “When I came back she had dinner on the table,” he said. “I asked about driving her home and she said she wasn’t leaving.”

“After that we were never separated,” Walter said, his eyes tearing. “She was a great girl.”

Jacqueline died in 2012, two months shy of 104.

“I treat my women well,” Walter said.

Walter continued to live alone up on the hill. He has help with cooking and cleaning. “And I can’t put on my socks anymore,” he said. His house is both beautiful and fascinating—meticulously crafted and decorated with unique touches. Many European farm-scene paintings grace the walls. Part of an oak tree rises through two floors, and a 16-foot carved wooden giraffe, purchased from Ten Thousand Villages many years ago, towers over the living room.

Brandt Road

Brandt Road was originally a stage coach road from Port Orange to Monticello. According to Al Mann, a neighbor who lives on Brandt Road, the original house on the Walter Mehr property was a stop on the stage coach route.



Early photo of Brandt Road and field across from chapel.

We walked through the house with Walter before we left. He walked up a narrow, winding staircase, up three flights—slowly and carefully—in order to proudly show us a very large painting from Brussels he had purchased for his 90th birthday. “It would only fit on this wall,” he said, when we had reached the top floor. “I love art and I like to see my money on the wall, not in the bank.”

At 95, Walter had a sharp memory about many things. Throughout the interview, when asked about camp, Walter repeatedly said: “Camp was always a good neighbor to us. I’ve always been happy with camp. I was happy to see kids from the city coming to the country. It still makes me very happy.”

—*Written on October 15, 2016 by Donna Stoltzfus,
former camper and staff.*

Walter Mehr passed away on January 3, 2018.

Dale Stoltzfus, first director of camp, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

In Memory of Jacqueline Mehr

Walter and Jacqueline Mehr showed gracious and generous hospitality to Orv and me. I came to Camp Deerpark in 1990, and Orv came in 1993. It was wonderful to have welcoming neighbors when moving to a new home. And they introduced us to their friends as they were happy to know us. One friend became my hairdresser.

Jacqueline’s spirit and liveliness kept people around her on the move. While I was raised to have a more retiring personality, I’ve always been drawn to women like her who “let out” their thoughts and passions.

I enjoyed delicious food prepared and presented by Jacqueline in their fascinating kitchen and dining area. One fall and winter I joined Ken Scheller, a young man from New York City who came to camp a few days every week to houseclean, for dinner on Friday evenings with the Mehrs. Afterwards Jacqueline, Ken and I would play Scrabble. I bought a “Scrabble” Christmas ornament and every year when I hang it on our tree, I remember Jacqueline.

Jacqueline had a love for animals. She was concerned about our ducks on the pond in the winter. And she felt so sorry for our one lonely goat. I had larger concerns about Camp Deerpark’s needs and didn’t seek out a second goat.



Marvin and Ethel Kolb enjoy one of Jacqueline's delicious meals.

“Love came softly” for Orv and me. One evening in the early part of acknowledging our special friendship, we took Walter and Jacqueline out to eat. Jacqueline insisted on sitting in the front seat because of possible car-sickness. Orv expressed some resistance to her demand but then allowed me to sit in the back seat with Walter so we didn't have to let out our secret. When Jacqueline learned that Orv and I were going to see “Christmas Spectacular” at Radio City Music Hall, she asked to go with us. This time we gave her a firm no. Later this became a funny story that all of us shared.

We were honored to have Walter and Jacqueline attend our wedding on Staten Island. They took us from the wedding to the Newark Airport on their way back to Westbrookville. On the way to the airport for our honeymoon I remembered that we had not signed our marriage certificate. Walter was amused that Orv assured me that we were married because Lester (Orv's brother-in-law, who married us) had said so.

Jacqueline showed love and appreciation for my mother. That was special for me.

Our lives have been enriched by knowing Jacqueline. We will carry her in our hearts and memories for the rest of our lives.

—Written by Marian Egli, former New York City Mennonite,
camp director from 1990–1995.

Freedom Farm Community

The first time Ann Rader-Hayes and her husband, Edgar Hayes, visited Camp Deerpark was for a church retreat in the year 2000. They were living at Menno House in Manhattan and attended Manhattan Mennonite Fellowship.

In 2004, Ann and Edgar, along with Ann's brother and sister-in-law, Ben and Elka Rader, and parents, Bill and Clara Rader, purchased a piece of land in Orange County, New York, and began a farm. They named it Freedom Farm Community. In keeping with a vision they had when they were young, the goal of Freedom Farm Community was to combine youth education in peace and justice with organic sustainable farming and Christian community. Ann wanted to grow food without the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides or other artificial chemicals and share it with people who couldn't otherwise afford organic food. Today, Ann and Edgar donate a variety of vegetables, such as carrots, lettuce, tomatoes, squash, kale and onions, to local soup kitchens and senior homes.

When the farm was purchased, Ann and Edgar didn't realize how close it was to the camp that they had visited four years earlier. But when they made the discovery, Edgar ventured across the mountain in the fall of 2004



Freedom Farmer Edgar Hayes gives a soil demonstration to summer staff Litza Laboriel and camper Rebecca Lindsay, 2011.



July Fourth picnic at Freedom Farm during summer camp 2017.

to introduce himself to their new Camp Deerpark neighbors. Edgar found Ken Bontrager in the middle of patching motel walls after a flood and their brief conversation ended with the standard, “Let’s get together sometime.” It was nearly two years later when Ken and Deborah invited Edgar and Ann, and Sean and Kim McConaghay, to their home for a meal. Sean had been hired as facilities director in January of 2006 and the McConaghays were eager to put down roots in the community.

The meal was the start of a beautiful partnership between Camp Deerpark and Freedom Farm Community. Camp Deerpark from early on had a desire to include farming and gardening in the children’s camp program. Freedom Farm had a desire to engage youth in education that offered alternatives to violence, sustainable agriculture and opportunities to discover God’s transformative love for each of us. Over the years, Freedom Farm has helped with racial reconciliation and conflict resolution training of Camp Deerpark summer staff. And during the summers, Ann has shown up at camp each Friday, delivering fresh produce to share with campers and guests.

All of the campers take a trip to Freedom Farm during the summer to help with chores around the farm, or to learn how to make different foods like butter or pizza. The campers love the chance to have even more space to run around, visit animals, and to see how food they eat is grown. In 2017 Freedom Farm hosted a July Fourth picnic for campers.

“Camp Deerpark is fortunate to have a relationship with Freedom Farm and the support they provide us in the form of produce and program sharing,” said Paul Holderbaum, a summer camp nature teacher at Camp Deerpark. “The interaction between our Christian ministries provides an even more powerful witness to our local community.”

“In the ‘early days’ of Freedom Farm, before their barn was built and our kids grew up and rearranged our schedules, we’d gather in the old farmhouse dining room for a weekly potluck we called “Soup Tuesday,” said Sean McConaghay, Camp Deerpark facilities director. “These meals were usually in our collective off-season, and despite the drafty windows, the environment was always warm. Edgar and Ann make you feel welcome not just with their words, but with their lives—which is probably why the single young men from Camp Deerpark had no qualms about showing up late to finish off the food!”

Camp Deerpark campers and staff have also enjoyed worshipping with the Rader-Hayes family at the farm around a campfire. A quote from the farm’s 2016 Annual Update noted that, “Even our valley burst into song when youth from Camp Deerpark belted their praises under the night sky.”

“There is a great deal of love shared between folks at Camp Deerpark and the Rader-Hayes family at Freedom Farm,” said Ken. “Kim McConaghay serves on the Freedom Farm board. Ben Rader served for nine years on the Camp Deerpark board. We have had an annual Thanksgiving Day football game for at least 10 years. And in the months after Hadassah’s death, our family needed a place to spend quality time together away from camp, as there were several young adults living in our home. So we had weekly meals in the Freedom Farm barn. It became a wonderful place of healing for our family.”

—Written by Dillon Hershey, Ken Bontrager, and Donna Stoltzfus.

Land and Buildings

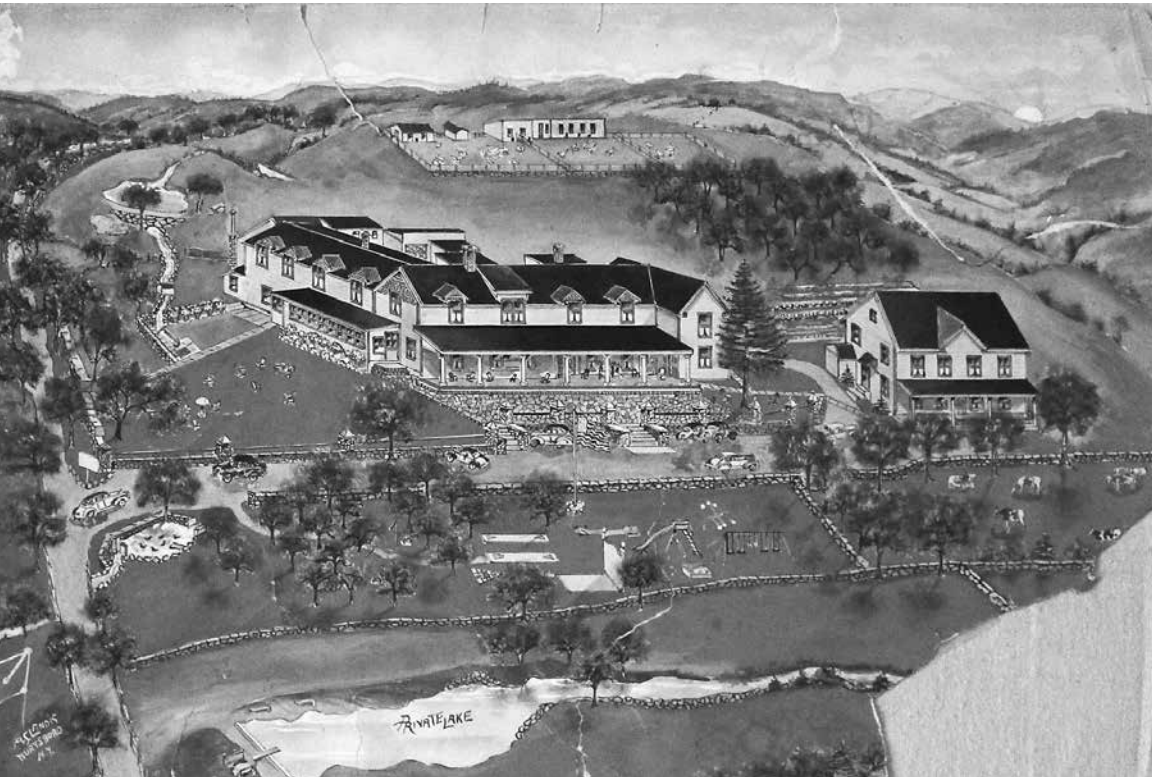


Camp Deerpark sits on 277 acres in the Catskill mountains in West-brookville, New York. The farm that would eventually become the site of Camp Deerpark was settled in the early 1800s. Around 1935 the owners began taking in guests, mostly city folks wanting to experience country life. Such “farm resorts” were common in the area, and as they gained in popularity, the farmers transformed more of their buildings into guest rooms: first the buggy shed, then the chicken barn. By the 1950s the future home of camp had become less “farm” and more “resort”; at one point, 10 acres were even turned into a golf course.

The facilities at camp are humble, yet welcoming and comfortable. The buildings that you see when you drive up Brandt Road off of Route 209 are



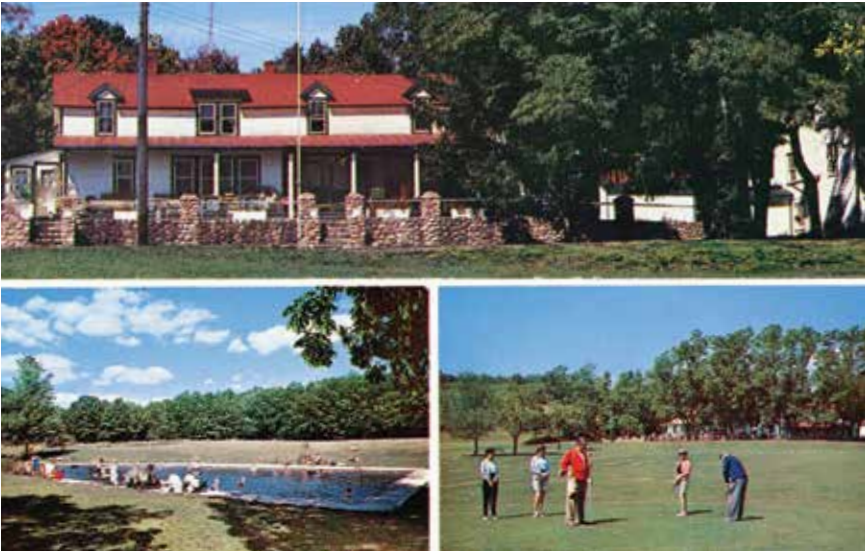
Above: Farm equipment storage building, c. 1915. Later became Locust Haven. The ice house is on the right side of the drive under the locust trees. Below: From back side of artwork. "A.S. Landis, Birds Eye View Artist, Wurtsboro, NY. Old Homestead Farm, Westbrookville, Sullivan County, New York. Ship to George Brandt via Otisville N.Y. Erie R.R Station by April 15, '46."



relatively similar to what existed when camp was purchased in 1969. The center of much activity is still the main building, known as Spruce Lodge, with its spacious porch and large picture window. If the weather is pleasant, there are usually people sitting and talking on porch swings, enjoying the view of the expansive lawn, and activities around the chapel (once a casino), basketball courts and playground.

In 1972 the chapel was raised and a basement was built. A new pool was built in 1977 to replace the flow-through pool that campers now call “Llama Lake.” Several buildings for lodging were added over the years, including the director’s house in 1987, where Ken and Deborah Bontrager raised their family. Hemlock Pavilion was added in 2004. Tucked at the edge of the woods, this octagonal shelter can seat 80 and is ideal for anything from a picnic to a worship service to Bible class at summer camp. The garage that existed when camp was purchased (once the barn for the Skinner farm) was razed and a new maintenance facilities built in 2009. In 2015 the annex (once a buggy shed) was taken down. The annex is where the boy campers were housed for many years. New cabins have been built, and continue to be built, for campers in Promise Woods.

Camp Deerpark has always been a humble place with humble facilities, but it has felt like home to many people over the last 50 years. In 2006 the



When the Mennonites arrived several post cards were found from the former owners which read, Brandt’s Pleasant View.



When the Mennonites arrived in 1969 the roof on the barn had collapsed and was beyond repair. One of the first tasks was to remove the barn and use the materials to build a garage. You may recognize the garage doors.

Site Plan Task Force was charged with the responsibility of assessing camp's facility needs in anticipation of a capital improvement campaign. The consultant, Howard Deardorff, often stated, "We are not trying to move away from being a humble place; we just want to move to high humble."

The Old Flow-Through Pool

**with Dale Stoltzfus, Barb and Frank Freeman,
Jesus Cruz, Duane Stoltzfus, and Lowell Jantzi**

"The first swimming pool was a flow-through pool," Dale said. "We would drain the pool early in spring to clean it out before summer camps began, and the water was ice cold. It would be full of leaves and dirt. Everything came running into it and would accumulate at the bottom.

"The pool was about 6-feet deep. When you hit the water, it was so ice cold you couldn't breathe. There was a wide, wooden plug. At the end was a handle. You would have to dive down and pull it out. Sometimes the handle had a chain on it, which made it easier. But we couldn't have the chain on when children were swimming in the pool during the summer.

“In spring the chain was attached, but sometimes you would still have to pull and pull and pull. And of course you’d have to hold your breath while pulling. It was difficult. The plug fit into a 12” hole and the suction was strong. Sometimes you’d dive down and couldn’t get it. People would come up and almost look blue.

“Once the water drained, we’d sweep and clean it out. In the summer it wasn’t as bad, since the water was a bit warmer.”

Frank Freeman said, “I did not like diving down there to pull out the plug. It was freezing and it was also a little scary. Once you pulled the plug out it felt like the suction could pull you with it.”

Lowell Jantzi said, “What I disliked so much about pulling the plug in the old pool was not so much the coldness of the water, though it was frigid, but never knowing what was in that seven months collection of debris surrounding the plug. It was slimy, oozed through your fingers, and the water was so dark the only way to find the 18-inch chain attached to the plug was to feel for it. Tree branches felt like snakes, cold salamanders hibernating abounded, and you knew it was going to take multiple dives into that morass before you were successful. Every time, I vowed to add a 10-foot chain to that plug and place it on land, but I never did.”

Duane Stoltzfus said, “Ahh . . . the old pool. I remember that it was freezing, no matter what time of year. And I remember being in awe of a youth group leader, Cecil Torres. One spring, maybe the first one, he dove into the pool to attach the chain so that we could pull out the plug and drain the pool and clean it for the new season. What courage, I thought, diving into the mucky, freezing pool.

“One side of the pool was sloped for easy wading, but the other side was so steep, and often slippery. I also remember diving in during the swim season for golf balls. We would throw them in and dive down to retrieve them one at a time. That was just for fun.”

Dale recalled an annual visitor with clout: “An inspector would come to camp every spring. He would look at the facilities and let us know what needed to be updated or fixed. We were sometimes given a list of things to do before a second surprise visit in the summer. We had to be ready because we needed the inspector’s approval to keep the summer camps running.

“We always worried about the inspection of the old pool. Because water was continuously flowing in, it was hard to keep the chlorine levels where they needed to be. When we saw the Health Department car arrive, someone would run down to the pool and dump in more chlorine. We always passed inspection.”



From spring to fall, church retreats would take place at camp and immersion in the pool was often part of baptism ceremonies. Along with appreciating the spiritual significance of baptism, many people have a clear recollection of the water in the pool.

“It was cold!” said Barb Freeman.

“I remember trying to stay focused on the meaning of what we were doing,” said Donna Stoltzfus, “and not just think about how freezing the water was.”

Jesus Cruz said, “I was baptized in the old flow-through pool and it was COLD.” The photograph on page 29 shows Jesus and several other young adults from Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the pool being baptized, including Leonor Constantin Kennell, Louie Constantin, Maria Lugo and Jose Cruz. “Gene Shelly got to dunk us all,” Jesus said. They are each standing in the water with their arms crossed.

The last time the old pool was drained was around 1977, the year building began on the new swimming pool. Campers today probably couldn’t imagine swimming in the old flow-through pool—now part of the area where the llamas live. Campers fondly call it “Llama Lake.”

—Written by Donna Stoltzfus, baptized in old pool,
former camper and staff.

Dale Stoltzfus, first director of camp, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Barbara Freeman, baptized in old pool, former summer staff and volunteer, current office staff, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church and Good Shepherd Mennonite Church, both in the Bronx.

Frank Freeman, teen camper in 1970, counselor and maintenance from 1971–1975, helped build House #3 and House #5, former board member, attended Good Shepherd Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Jesus Cruz, former board member and board chair, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Duane C. Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.

Lowell Jantzi, former staff, former board member, volunteer, attended Burnside Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Fun in the Sun— Playground Equipment

with Nicolas Angustia and Joshua Stevens

When camp was purchased, there was a nine-hole, par 3 golf course, a horseshoe pit, a small basketball court, a see saw and a small swing set (the one that is still there).

Eventually the horseshoe pit and the holes in the golf course were filled in and the golf course came to look like the rest of the expansive lawn.

In the early 1970s, Peifer Welding, a company in Pennsylvania with ties to Mellinger Mennonite Church, traveled to camp and built the large swing set. Offering to help on a volunteer basis, they welded the pipes and built a much taller swing set than the one that was already at camp. They helped to create one of the favorite spots and activities at camp. People of all ages have loved the swing set over the years and it is almost always in use. With wooden seats and long chains, the swings allow you to soar quite high.

“I like the seesaw because it is where I met my best friend,” said Joshua Stevens, a 9-year-old camper, in 2017. “It is a great place to make friends.”

“The swings are my chill spot,” said Nicolas Angustia, who attended children’s camp as an 11-year-old in 2017. “I like to sit and relax on the swings.”

The playground equipment has always attracted the attention of the campers. It’s usually the first thing that they run to when they get to camp



or when they have any free time. But not many know the back story of the Alamo with the slides. The Alamo, the brown triangular structure with two slides, was built by Maynard Shirk and Wes Newswanger, along with the help of Jerry Kennell and Lowell Jantzi. The Alamo was built in 1975 and it featured homemade slides. Lowell put wood slabs up in 1976 to make an enclosure under the platform. The staff began to call it the Alamo, and the name stuck.

The merry-go-round was also built by Maynard Shirk in 1975. Maynard found an old Dodge truck axle in a junkyard and decided that it would make a good merry-go-round for camp. He buried it into the ground and then built the rest of the merry-go-round on the axle that stuck up from the ground. When he first built it there was little space between the ground and the bottom of the merry-go-round. But because of the generations of kids playing on it, the ground eroded and now the truck axle is visible. There have only been a few repairs done to the equipment over the years.

The kids love the merry-go-round, especially when someone gets it spinning fast. Some grownups also brave being spun around in circles, holding tight to the railings, and then struggling to walk in a straight line after they get off.

A baseball field was added to camp in 1970, in the field across the road from the chapel. Many baseball games were played during children's camps



2017 Summer staff Elijah Bontrager and Emmanuel Lindsay give campers a spin.



Artist Lonnie Scott describes handball wall mural, 1978.

and retreats. The baseball field had to be torn up in 2003 when a new sewage system was installed.

In 1976 a handball court was built. Handball was a popular sport in the city at that time, and the camp staff decided to build a court themselves. One winter evening Lowell Jantzi and Ruth Villanueva returned from a date and as they turned into camp the headlights revealed a much lower handball wall with a pile of blocks laying in neat rows on the court. The mason—Lowell—had not filled the block cores with cement all the way to the top and rain had filled the empty cores; when they froze, the wind toppled them over. The scars on the court where they landed are still there. The wall was rebuilt the next spring.

Lonnie Scott was asked to paint the mural on the outer wall. The mural has been re-painted several times and continues to offer a colorful collage of camp life.

The basketball court is another area that gets a great deal of use. The small basketball court was resurfaced in 1994. In 2017, court renovations included relocating it uphill and away from a large tree, widening it to include a 3-point shot, adding new LED lights and installing a new surface.

In 2011 a permanent Gaga ball pit was added to the playground area and has become a camper favorite. Known as the kinder, gentler version of dodge ball, Gaga is a fast-paced, high-energy sport that combines the skills



Gaga ball

of dodging, striking, running and jumping, while trying to hit opponents with the ball below the knees.

“I love playing Gaga when the pit is full with campers and staff,” Nicolas said. “It makes me happy to see everyone together.”

—Written by Dillon Hershey and Donna Stoltzfus.

Nicolas Angustia, camper, future staff, attends United Revival Mennonite Church in Brooklyn.

Joshua Stevens, camper, future staff, attends King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.

The Even Arm Settle

(A favorite spot for Aquilina Torres)

“It is unique and pleasing because of its striking simplicity, its lack of effected ornamentation, its strength and durability, and above all, because it is comfortable.”

The above sentence could be describing the new Promise Woods cabins or the Adirondack chairs on the front lawn at Camp Deerpark. In fact, it is a quote from the 1905 Limbert catalog, describing Arts and Crafts furniture like the “even arm settle” on the front porch of Spruce Lodge. For fifty years Camp Deerpark campers, guests and staff have been sitting on this old green seat on the porch enjoying the view of the front lawn.

Over the years Camp Deerpark has shed most of the furnishings and goods that came with the property when it was purchased in 1969. A few pieces of steel lawn furniture can still be seen on a staff house porch, and most of the tables in the dining room would be familiar to campers from 1969, just as the kitchen staff would remember the wooden walk-in cooler; and, of course, the front porch bell is still being used. In the past few years, though, camp said good-bye to the old rusty red wagon, the Hobart mixer and the last Ashworth woolen blanket, which was returned to the Ashworth family.

The Arts and Crafts Movement in America originated in mid-19th century England, which began as a revolt against the Industrial Revolution and the dehumanization of the workers being replaced by machines. A hallmark of the movement was hand craftsmanship and a return to simplicity, an ideal which applied not only to the lifestyle of the follower, but also to the furniture and accessories throughout the home. Ornately carved rosewood and mahogany furniture was replaced with rectilinear forms of quarter sawn oak. Mortise and tenon joints (a simple and strong way to join pieces of wood), butterfly keys (joint reinforcement in the shape of a butterfly), and the grain of the wood itself were used for decoration. Furniture from the Arts and Crafts period (circa 1894–1916) became hugely popular in the 1980s and '90s. In fact, in 1995, camp staff learned the value of the seat and considered moving it to a safer location.

So how valuable is our old green seat? If it was built by Limbert, it's value is around \$2,000 as it sits now, and as much as \$4,000 if fully restored. Charles Limbert began branding his work in 1906. If the piece on the Camp Deerpark porch was made by Limbert, it was made before 1906 because no brand is evident. The camp staff has concluded that the even arm settle's greatest value is as a seat on the front porch for children and grand-



Aquilina and Angelo Torres

mothers and everyone in between. It was always a favorite spot for Aquilina Torres, the matriarch of the Torres family, and founding member of First Spanish Mennonite Church in Brooklyn. The latest set of cushions was made possible with a donation from the Torres Family.

New York City Anabaptists live in a hurried and complex city that never sleeps. Camp Deerpark is a quiet and simple place where children and adults can slow down and sit for an extended time and enjoy the serenity of stillness. The Arts and Crafts seat on the front porch of Spruce Lodge has remained for 50 years a symbol of simplicity and beauty.

—*Written by Ken Bontrager, current director.*

Source: Tina A Richey—Antique Week, Vol 30, No 47.

Hopes and Dreams

**with Ken Bontrager, Richard Frey,
Eugene Shelly, Dale Stoltzfus**

From when camp was purchased until the present time, many people have dreamed of new camping facilities. The vision included new cabins and a separate dining hall for children's camps and converting existing buildings, such as Spruce Lodge, into an area solely for congregational retreats and family vacations.

When the Brandt Road property was purchased, it was a turnkey operation that allowed the city churches to open camp within a month of purchase. The main lodge and other buildings were in good enough shape to allow children's camps to begin in the summer of 1969. However, there was always a vision that Camp Deerpark would eventually have cabins like other camps. The general understanding of camping in the 1950s and '60s was of children with a counselor in cabins or tents. All of the camping that the New York City Mennonites had done up to that point was with the cabin model.

Dale remembers sitting on a large rock in the early 1970s, in the general area where Promise Woods now exists, envisioning a circle of cabins to serve the children's camping program. "That was the only place I ever thought about having them," Dale said. "It had a nice view and the ground was level enough to make it work." Dale recalled one week in the early 1970s when there were 82 campers. "Some of the campers had to stay with their counselor in a trailer behind the motels," Dale said. "It made us focus again on the need for better and expanded facilities."

In 2017 Dale Stoltzfus sits on the rock where his original vision for a children's camp village was born forty years earlier.

Glenn Zeager dreamed of having a lake. "A great deal of thought went into trying to make a lake," Dale said. "We had an environmental officer from New York state visit camp to see if it was possible." Gene Shelly noted, "There just wasn't enough water year round to make it feasible, and it wasn't recommended."

Richard Frey remembered there was also a dream of building a gym to go along with the cabins. "I was a board member for a number of years," he said. "We struggled with the huge gap between dreams and reality. In those years, the volunteers and staff of the churches organized basketball and softball teams as a means of engaging with the youth of the churches and neighborhood. The pastors and board dreamed of building a gym at camp where they could share the gospel and hold tournaments. The limited financial resources of the camp prevented their dream from becoming a reality."

Paying the bills at camp was challenging and the vision for new cabins was put on hold. A new pool and a raised chapel with an added basement were achievements in the early years, and those facilities have been well used.

In 1982 a development committee including Dale Stoltzfus, Jim Baer, Frank Freeman, Gene Shelly, and Lowell Jantzi (chair); was established to again envision a new building phase. The committee helped define Camp Deerpark's philosophy with the following goals:

1. To provide a setting (place) where people can experience the presence of God in new forms from urban life.
2. To assist congregations in retreating, meditation, new forms of worship.
3. To provide a setting for leadership training development.
4. To provide a model for Christian discipleship and modeling of the Christian life.
5. To provide Christian education for children, youth and adults.



6. To provide a place for urban youth to experience life in a rural atmosphere.
7. To assist congregations in spiritual, physical and emotional renewal.
8. To provide possibilities of sharing of life between rural and urban congregations and persons.

The committee proposed six building phases. This watercolor, by Jim Baer, roughly illustrated some of the plans.

1. Barn for animals, lake, garden, tree house
2. Children's facilities
 - a. 10 cabins
 - b. One dining room
 - c. Play area



1983 master plan in watercolor.

3. New 4–6 unit motel building on top of hill next to the existing two cabins
4. Remodel Annex into coffee shop, snack shop hall
5. New garage along back path and current garage turned into picnic area
6. House for long-term and summer staff (to replace trailers)

From Development Committee minutes, 3/25/1983.

On November 17, 1984, Dale Stoltzfus presented an extensive long-range plan to the board. This plan included a Spruce Lodge dining room expansion, a bookstore, motel renovations and conversion of a trailer into a pastors' retreat.

In the first paragraph in the report, Dale stated, "There are a variety of ways to understand and share dreams. It is not always clear when dreams should be shared and with whom they should be shared. Many people over the years have had some dreams about the development of Camp Deerpark. In recent years there have been dreams about the development of additional facilities and program. This would free the present facilities to be used and upgraded as a retreat center."

During this time, camp was looking for ways to accommodate a growing request for smaller retreat groups and multiple groups per weekend. Building cabins was still a dream, but one that also now felt like a necessity if camp was to continue to flourish and grow.

In 1985, a September report to the board focused on the construction of the children's camping area. A budget of \$146,000 was projected to complete 10 cabins and a dining room. Also proposed was a two-story building with 24 beds to be constructed near existing cabins on the hill. Several perk

Phase I

Develop a barn for animals, storage in the back field. Develop a lake in lower area of property and an enclosed garden. Develop a tree house in the woods as well as a site for programming group activities.

The proposed cost might be in the area of \$5,500.00 for this phase. I suggest a "barn-raising" as a special event sometime in June.

Phase II

New children's facilities in new area. Check map for new sites. This will include ten cabins, two bathrooms, multi-use facility for kitchen, dining room, recreation, etc. There is also the need to develop recreational facilities.

From Development Committee minutes, March 25, 1983.



The sewer system is expanded in December 2012 to accommodate Promise Woods.

tests and deep soil tests were conducted in preparation for a sewer system. But proper soil was never found. Due to a combination of poor soil and a lack of funds, the children's camp cabins were put on hold once again.

“From 1996 to 1999 we experienced significant growth in retreat and summer camp usage,” said Ken. “Across the country this was a very strong time for Christian camping. Then in the summers of 1998 to 2000 we experienced sewer failure. We made several attempts to patch the problem with little success. At the October 28, 2000 board meeting, the decision was made to no longer patch the problem and take steps toward a completely new system. Jesus Cruz was a strong voice urging us to invest in a new system.” In 2003 a new sewer system was installed (where the baseball field used to be) that would handle up to 150 people.

With a new sewer system in place, the possibility of expanded facilities was again back on the table. Jerry Kennell was asked to help camp think through expansion plans in 2005. Four task force groups were established to look at:

1. Children's camp facilities
2. Adult retreat facilities
3. Sustained funding
4. Strengthened relationship with owner churches

In 2006, following Jerry Kennell's advice, a Site Plan Task Force was established and a site plan architect was hired. A task force interviewed several architects and hired Howard Deardorf from Michigan.

On June 16, 2007, the Site Plan Task Force presented to the camp board a plan that included:

1. Staff housing
2. Maintenance building
3. Children's camp cabins and dining room
4. Gymnasium and swimming pool
5. Family cabins

A feasibility study was presented to more than 30 donors over the summer of 2007 with an overwhelmingly positive response. In January of 2008 the board launched a \$3.5 million campaign entitled "A Time to Build" to cover the five projects listed above. In December 3, 2012, construction began on an expanded sewer system to accommodate all of the children's camp village and family cabins making the total capacity 200 guests. And in June of 2015, four Promise Woods cabins were dedicated and placed into service.



Dedication of Promise Woods cabin #5, Blessing, on June 21, 2015 with Akron Mennonite, Forest Hills Mennonite and Evangelical Garifuna Church.

The movement toward completing the five areas continues, as four more children's cabins are presently being built. A multi-purpose facility—the Promise Woods Program Center—will be framed in the summer of 2019. By June of 2020 the goal is to have two additional cabins (six total) and the program center in service.

—Written by Ken Bontrager and Donna Stoltzfus.

Richard Frey, a former board member and youth leader, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Eugene Shelly, a camp pastor, served as minister of Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx from 1967–1978.

Dale Stoltzfus, first director of camp, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

Forestry Stewardship

with Dr. Chuck Peters

Forest History

Camp Deerpark was founded in 1969 when the New York City Mennonite churches purchased the Winkler's Country Club, which was previously owned by the George Brandt family. In the mid 1970s some logging was done at Camp Deerpark in the Orange Trail area on the south side of Brandt Road. Unfortunately, at that time the general consensus among the constituency was that the logging was far too aggressive and that it had left the forest with unacceptable damage.

The idea of logging at Camp Deerpark was again raised in the summer of 1996 when Dennis Sharp, the father-in-law of Ken Bontrager, suggested that the Camp Deerpark woods was full of adult trees ripe for harvest. When Ken Bontrager brought the idea to the camp board they wisely turned it down, citing the destruction caused by the 1970s logging. In the fall of 1997 when the North Bronx Mennonite Church held their church retreat, Wayne and Annie Shreffler invited their neighbors, Chuck and Elysa Hammond Peters. That weekend Dr. Chuck Peters of the New York Botanical Garden had an opportunity to hike in the woods at Camp Deerpark. Chuck and Ken began to talk about a forestry program that evening over coffee and pumpkin pie. Chuck introduced the principal of sustained-yield forestry, which received complete support from the board.



Charter members Forestry Stewardship Team: Elias Ebert (logger), Dr. Chuck Peters, Lowell Jantzi, Ken Bontrager, Maynard Shirk, and Dr. Wayne Shreffler, 1999.

From the spring of 1998 to the summer of 2000, volunteers and staff conducted a ten percent inventory of all forestland on the property, identified and marked all property lines, produced a map marking trails and roads, and with thanks to Kevin Coffey, a research assistant at the New York Botanical Garden, combined all the information in a data base.

What is Sustained Yield Forestry?

With detailed counting and measuring of trees, one can calculate the stock and annual growth of a given tract of forest. If a logging program only harvests the annual growth each year and leaves the stock intact, the forest will maintain itself and continue growing vigorously. A good analogy is that of a financial investment. One can spend the interest annually, but must take care to not diminish the principal. Sustained-yield forestry strives to harvest the interest (i.e. the growth) while safeguarding the principal (i.e. the growing stock). Unlike a financial investment, however, a forest management program continually increases the growth and health of the overall forest. The oldest and largest trees are harvested first because they are most susceptible to disease, and they have large crowns that suppress the growth of smaller trees.

What Did the Inventory Tell Us?

While there are more than twenty-five species of trees on the 277 acres at camp, there are four primary species: white pine, red oak, chestnut oak, and white oak. The inventory revealed 6000 merchantable trees. (A merchantable tree is one that has value at a local sawmill and generally required to be 14 inches in diameter, 16 feet tall, and straight.) The 1998–2000 inventory and subsequent calculations informed us our forest was growing at a rate of 29,000 board feet per year. A board foot is measured by a piece of wood 12 inches by 12 inches by one inch thick. The typical white pine tree contains approximately 160 board feet. Ben Cheek estimates 40–45 white pine trees are required to build one Promise Woods cabin. From 2002 through 2012 Camp Deerpark harvested 259,482 board feet, approximately 1600 trees, from our property. Remember we started with 6000 merchantable trees. Here is the exciting news. After 10 years of careful stewardship, harvesting approximately 1600 trees, and building four Promise Woods cabins; the 2012 inventory revealed that the Camp Deerpark forest is now growing at a rate of 45,000 board feet per year. The forest is younger, stronger, straighter, well balanced, and ready to serve our children and grandchildren. As Anabaptist Christians we believe that God has blessed us with this beautiful land and our responsibility is to do our best to be good stewards of this gift. The Camp Deerpark board and administration is grateful for the many volunteers who have helped us care for our woods.

—*Written by Dr. Chuck Peters and Ken Bontrager.*

Printed in Camp Deerpark Newsletter, fall 2017.

Dr. Chuck Peters, Curator of Botany, New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx.

The Beginnings of Promise Woods

with Kenton Baer

After volunteering at camp for a year and a half in 2007–2008, Kenton Baer returned as construction supervisor to take on a much larger project: building the first cabin in the area that would become known as Promise Woods. “The decision to go back to camp in 2012 was quite simple,” Kenton said. “It was just perfect timing in my life to do a project like this. The

motivation came from falling in love with camp and all that camp stands for in my previous stay.”

When Jim Baer—Kenton’s father—lived at camp, he was part of a group that had discussed and dreamed about the building of cabins for children’s camp at the setting where Promise Woods now exists. Rough plans had even been drawn up.

“I was not aware in the beginning that when my dad lived at camp he was on a committee that wanted to build cabins at that same spot,” Kenton said. “He even drew up a rough sketch of the plans. That made it extra special for me, for sure. I don’t know how many people get to complete something like that, so long in the making. What are the odds that I’d get to complete part of my dad’s vision 30 years later?”

“I’ve never had any official schooling for building, and I’d never built a stand-alone building before the cabin at camp. I had built a tiny log cabin at home. I just decided to take it on. I like to learn as I go, and I’ll take something on whether I’ve done it before or not. I have to thank my dad, though, for being the best teacher ever. And what is special about camp is whether you know what you’re doing or not, you can figure it out when you’re there. If you’re the only one there to do it, you do it.



Kenton Baer operates Wood-Mizer sawmill with assistance from Eric Smith and Louis Aller.

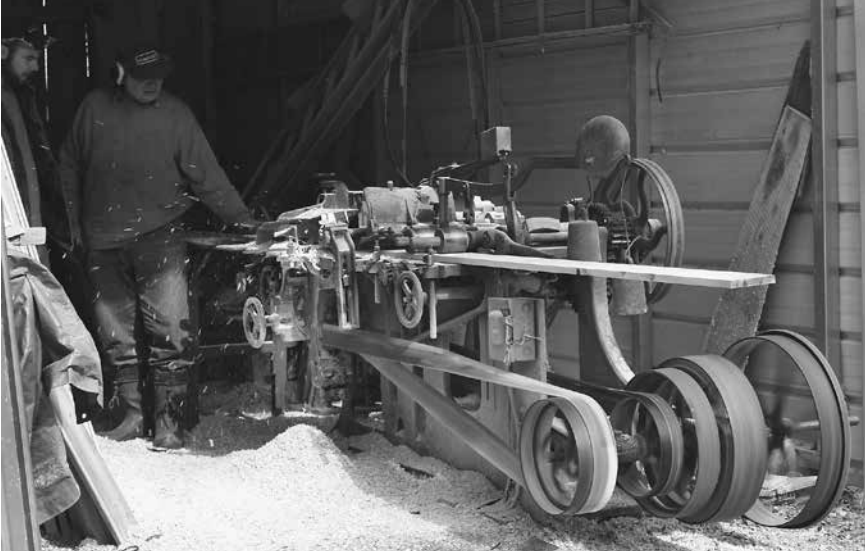
“When I arrived at camp in 2012 they had a concept drawing of the cabins. I spent a few weeks tweaking those initial plans and along with Sean and Ken’s insight we came up with a more revised version to take to an architect. At this point the project suddenly became difficult. Initially camp was working with a Pennsylvania timber framing company as the architect. After we met with them about the drawings, we quickly realized they were not going to be able to provide us with what we needed to build a commercial building in New York state.

“At that point we decided to sit down and draw the buildings by hand in hopes that if we had actual sketches it would be easier to convey our plan to the next company. We then found a local guy that was more than qualified to make up these simple cabin drawings. The problem was he was probably over qualified and a bit out of touch with our reality. I believe in his mind we were building skyscrapers that needed every little detail specified to a stringent standard. He wanted me to take some steps that were just not necessary for a small cabin.

“Anyway, we finally ended things with him and were on to the next guy. At this point we were all pretty discouraged about the situation. Thankfully the next architect was the perfect fit. He understood our vision for the project and was just a joy to work with. He was happy to take all the suggestions and plans we had made and turned them into what we needed to proceed.

“Using white pine from camp to build the cabins was such a joy. To be able to tell people that all the wood they see in the cabins was grown and cut at camp, and never went farther than the bottom of Brandt Road—to Dennis Smith’s for milling—was so satisfying. Using our own wood was definitely a learning process, with a few mistakes made. Camp initially cut down way too many trees before the project was underway and in doing so lost a lot of wood to bugs and nature doing its thing. This was not, however, a totally bad thing. As I began to realize the logs were becoming unusable for building, I became more selective and picked out just the best logs for sawing. This made for more wasted material, but in the end I was able to get a higher grade of lumber for the cabins. We also were able to make mountains of wood chips out of the less desirable logs, which were used for walking trails and mulching all around the camp property. So in the end our mistake was not all bad!

“One thing I will say is that working with volunteers changed me. I’m the first to admit I’m not very good with working with volunteers. To coordinate a group and work together is not my strong suit. I’ll never forget



Dennis Smith with turn of the century wood shaper.

the first group of volunteers I worked with. I wasn't prepared and about 20 things went wrong. In the end it worked out, but I redid some things and maybe ruffled some feathers. But I improved over time and one of the greatest perks of working on the cabin project was getting to work alongside many skilled volunteers. I learned so much from them—everything from plumbing and electrical skills to how to perfectly tuck a pencil under my hat for quick and easy access on the job!"

When asked if there were any design elements he was especially pleased with, Kenton noted, "The porches were originally supposed to be smaller. We were able to make them larger and I'm happy that we did that. People like to sit on porches and enjoy the scenery and each other's company. And something a bit funny is a fancy door I made which leads to the mechanicals loft; it's above the bedroom and you need a ladder to access it. I didn't mean for it to look so inviting. It's only about 4' high. But everyone wants to go up there when they see the door. There are just wires and maintenance items in there."

Kenton ended up building four cabins and lived in the maintenance house on the top of the hill for just under three years, until July of 2015. "I hadn't committed to that," said Kenton, "and maybe that lack of planning drove Ken a little crazy, but it worked out." Ben Cheek replaced Kenton in



Kenton Baer fastens rafter to beam of Promise Woods cabin.

2015 and is presently working on the fifth and sixth cabins as well as the program center.

“I appreciate everything about camp, especially the variety of people,” Kenton said. “People come from everywhere. And they all come there and enjoy the same thing—beautiful mountains and the big front yard. Everyone seems to have a meaningful time there. I was not involved with summer camp, but seeing kids running around and having a blast—that made it for me.”

“I didn’t sleep in one of the cabins until over a year after they were in operation. It was nice to finally get to enjoy a night in something I put so much thought and time into. I hear comments about the cabins when I’m at camp, or even once at my church in Pennsylvania when someone let me know they had liked staying in one of the cabins during a visit to camp. I know the cabins are definitely appreciated.”

—Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.

Kenton Baer, volunteer 2007–08, Promise Woods construction supervisor 2012–2015.

Restoring the Small Graveyard

with Dale and Doris Stoltzfus, Thomas Neufeld,
Kenton Baer, and Ken Bontrager

“When camp was being purchased,” Dale said, “there were two things we were told we wouldn’t own: Brandt Road, the road off of 209 that brings you to camp, and the cemetery. Both of these were owned by the township.”

The Camp Deerpark land was a farm in the 1800s that belonged to the Skinner family. You can still see evidence of their labor at camp in the stone fences they built for farm animals. Their barn eventually became a garage and workspace at camp.

There was also a family graveyard, which is located just down the road from what is now the chapel. Members of the Skinner clan are buried in the graveyard, along with extended family. Some type of illness must have struck the family as there were many deaths from the mid to late 1800s, including children.

“When we first came to camp, the cemetery was in disrepair,” said Doris. “Many of the gravestones had fallen over and were lying flat on the ground.”

Dale said, “There were two stone fences bordering the cemetery, but some stones had fallen down and it wasn’t in great shape. There was also



Restored Skinner family cemetery.

an old wire fence on one side. Since we didn't own the cemetery, over the years we didn't do much to improve the space but around 2005, while I was visiting camp, I got the idea that we should fix it up. Over the years there had been a few inquiries about it—from distant relatives, I believe. I thought we should try and improve how it looked. Ken was in agreement that this was a good idea. I decided to go back to camp for a couple of days in August. Doris and I, Donna and her three children came along to help."

"It looked like a big job," said Doris. "The cemetery was full of brambles, and grown up with weeds. It was hard to know where to begin."

Dale took a chainsaw to the brambles and, though it was a very hot day, progress was made. "We cleared out a lot of thick weeds and branches, and were able to see more of the gravestones," said Dale. "Many of them were broken, but we tried to piece them together. It was a start."

—*Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.*

Dale and Doris Stoltzfus, first director of camp, first head cook at camp, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church in the Bronx.

by Thomas Neufeld

When my grandfather asked me one summer to help do some cleanup work at Camp Deerpark, I agreed to go along, knowing how hard he had worked at camp over the years. I figured I could help out a bit. When we arrived—my grandparents, my mother and two sisters were along—I quickly realized that it was not going to be an easy job. We were going to clean up an old family cemetery that had fallen into disrepair. None of the gravestones were visible underneath all of the weeds and overgrowth. We worked for two days in blistering heat. It was August, humid, and around 98 degrees. My grandfather took a chainsaw and began to try to clear a path into the graveyard, where long patches of thorn bushes covered the graves. When we had cleared a sufficient amount of the weeds to uncover them, we found a disheartening sight; many of the stones were broken in multiple pieces and scattered. Jagged pieces stuck up from the ground and under large branches. So my grandfather and I decided to try to piece the gravestones back together and try to place them back in their original locations in the graveyard.

As we slowly gathered the pieces of gravestones, a family history emerged. It was a sobering moment when I came across four tiny markers, upside down and covered in dirt. After cleaning them, I read the years inscribed on them and realized that all four of them stood for young children, all of the same family, their births and deaths covering a period of

An inscription on a gravestone in the cemetery

Julia M.
 Died
 July 10, 1864
 Aged 2 years 2 months & 7 days
 Patience T.
 Died
 July 23, 1864
 Aged 10 months & 16 days
 Children of
 Festus and Ellen Skinner
 How much we miss those infants dear
 Twere vain to try to tell
 To part with them seems too severe
 But God does all things well.



barely over a decade. It was then I understood the full implications of what we were doing. We were not solely doing a form of yard work or tedious labor; we were restoring dignity to this family and its ancestors.

A restoration research project was started after we left. More information is being found about the families buried there in town documents and archives. The graveyard today looks astonishing in comparison. I was glad to have the opportunity to help work in this small, but meaningful, family graveyard.

— *Written by Thomas Neufeld, grandson of Dale and Doris Stoltzfus.*

Excerpt from an essay written for a class assignment on volunteer work in 2005 at 14 years old.

with Kenton Baer

I went to camp for the first time in the fall of 2007. I had graduated from high school the previous spring and camp seemed like the perfect fit. Growing up and hearing all of dad's stories about Camp Deerpark made it a pretty easy decision for me and I'm so happy that I chose to go. Camp and its community of people that come and go from week to week taught me more skills and life lessons than I could ever have imagined.



Ken or Sean asked me to work on the cemetery project. I think it was one of those projects that kind of evolved as it went. I believe I was asked to clear some of the underbrush away, but as soon as I started I quickly realized it was going to take more than that. So with a chainsaw and Kubota tractor rigged with an old rusty three point hitch backhoe I went to work cutting down trees and digging stumps. I believe I spent a solid two weeks just felling trees, digging stumps and clearing brush. As things slowly started to be cleared, one of the coolest things about the project for me was realizing that just within the boundaries of the graveyard there was somewhere around 15 different species of trees represented. I tried to leave at least one of each standing but sadly a few died soon after completing the project. (I suppose I had disturbed too much dirt around them.) After everything was cleared I, along with some help from Zachary Garber, rebuilt the stone wall along the road side. We then graded and planted grass.

I worked on the project on and off for a good chunk of the summer—maybe put in a solid month or more of work in total. It was lots of manual labor. It would take a fraction of the time today with all of the equipment that is on site now.

It always feels good to complete a project and that one was extra special, just because of how forgotten the area had become and how much people appreciated seeing the old family graveyard kept up once again.

—*Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.*

Kenton Baer, volunteer 2007–08, Promise Woods construction supervisor 2012–2015.

Skinner Family Visit

One afternoon in the summer of 2008 I found a strange car parked along Brandt Road and saw a young couple walking in the cemetery. Of course I made it my business to find out what they were up to. It turned out that they were descendants of the Skinner family who had traveled from their home in Missouri to the Northeast on a family heritage tour. They told us several other family cemeteries had been in such bad repair that they couldn't even find the grave markers. They were so impressed with the care that had been given to our cemetery. We invited them to come sit on the front porch of Spruce Lodge where we took a photo of them sitting in the same place their ancestors had once sat. They purchased some souvenir sweatshirts and were on their way. Unfortunately, we do not have their contact information.

Through my involvement with the local Cuddebackville Fire Department I have become friends with Rich and Deb Skinner, whose father, Ernestus, grew up on the farm that later became the Walter Mehr property. The Ernestus Skinner family came to visit the cemetery after it was restored. Rich conveyed that the cemetery visit opened the door to conversation and stories that Rich had never heard. The Skinner family expressed their appreciation for the way Camp Deerpark has preserved their family history.

The Brandt Road cemetery also has special meaning for the Bontrager family; it is where we buried our daughter and sister, Hadassah Ruth Bontrager, on April 13, 2015.

Written by Ken Bontrager, current director.



Skinner family, c.
1915 on front porch.

Camp Deerpark Buildings



Spruce Lodge: built in 1842.



Locust Haven: built, c. 1915 and removed 2015.



Twin Birch Motels: converted from chicken house, c. 1960.

Mountain Laurel cabins: built in 1975–76 and converted to staff housing in 2008.



Garage: first building project undertaken by Camp Deepark was constructed with salvage materials from barn removal.





Chapel: second building project at Camp Deerpark was to jack up chapel building and dig a foundation and basement, 1972.



Chapel with basement and porch.



Chapel porch receives a roof, 1984.



Chapel Sunroom created by enclosing chapel porch in 2003.



1984 cabin addition to staff housing trailer where the facilities director's house is currently located. In 1998 the cabin was moved to its current location as house #4 in the staff village.



The barn was built in one day in 1983.



The director's house was built in 1988.



The facilities director's house was built in 1998 and includes a basement apartment.



The gazebo was dedicated fall 2000 in memory of Al and Dottie Kruse.



Hemlock Pavilion was constructed by Forest Hills Mennonite Church in 2004.



The maintenance building was constructed in 2009 and includes offices, mechanical shop, wood shop, and storage.



The first four Promise Woods cabins were placed in service June, 2015.

CHAPTER 7

Staff and Volunteers



Camp Deerpark has benefited greatly from hardworking staff and volunteers since New York City church leaders first visited the property in 1968. Belief in the mission of camp has inspired many people to go above and beyond what is asked of them by contributing gifts of labor, vision, knowledge and expertise, donations of equipment and materials, and faithful prayer.

From the annual camp clean-up day, when church groups from New York City come to camp for a weekend to get the facilities ready for summer campers, to work projects taken on by congregations from Pennsylvania, volunteers have played a crucial and necessary role at Camp Deerpark.



Forest Hills Mennonite volunteers and Camp Deerpark staff place beam in Promise Woods cabin #4, 2017.

Year-round and summer staff appreciate working at camp for a variety of reasons. “I like working here because I like being able to protect the children, spread the knowledge of Christ and seek wisdom from the older staff members,” said Alahni, a counselor in 2018. “I like learning from the staff members and from the kids. It’s helping me on my journey with Christ.”

Alicia, another counselor, said, “I like knowing that I can make a positive impact on campers, which causes them to break bad habits. It encourages and inspires me to continue.”

This chapter is dedicated to those who have worked at or for Camp Deerpark. Only a sampling of those who served are represented on these pages, but appreciation abounds for all who have participated in helping to meet the needs of camp, from 1968 to the present.

Camp Deerpark Directors

Dale Stoltzfus

1969–1977

“As the first director I always wanted other leaders to emerge. When Jerry and Leonor Kennell came to camp in 1975 they had the gifts needed to provide leadership. Since I was involved in some other activities in the city, I recommended to the board of directors that the Kennells begin to move toward directing the camp program.

“A challenge was to have the congregations in New York City grow into their awareness of their ownership of the camp and the camp program. A large majority of the campers came from the Mennonite congregations and about half of the staff was from a Mennonite congregation in the city.

“Another major challenge was growing a financial base; we provided a program and staffing without a financial base to count on. However, we were able to pay our bills, including payment on our loans. We dreamed of a new children’s camp facility but needed to find funds to improve the existing facilities. During the early years we did build a new swimming pool and two new cabins on the hill.

“I always lived in the Bronx during this time and never served more than half-time; the office was at my home in the city.



Duane, Deb, Doris, Dale, and Donna Stoltzfus

“The camp and its ministry were a blessing to me and my family. My wife, Doris, also spent many days serving in the ministry, and my children grew up in the Bronx and at camp. Camp gave us a balance between city life and the country. I am thankful to God and the Mennonite churches in the city for the opportunity to serve at Camp Deerpark.”



Leonor and Jerry Kennell

Jerry and Leonor Kennell

1977–1979

Jerry and Leonor were the first directors to live at camp. They joined Camp Deerpark staff as co-assistant directors in late April 1975. In 1977 they became co-directors. In 1979 they again transitioned when Jerry became director and Leonor taught school in the area. These were extremely lean years for Camp Deerpark financially and for a period of time the Kennells worked at McDonald’s to pay themselves.

“Perhaps the most memorable staff times were living with Lowell Jantzi, Isaac Grable, Frank Freeman and Maynard Shirk,” the Kennells noted. “Frank was always cold and wanted to turn up the heat. Isaac kept us all laughing, especially with his adorable dog, Jantzi. And Lowell had that unforgettable laugh, curling his hair over his forehead with his fingers when he was deep in thought. Maynard welded big stuff together.”

Miriam Cruz

1979–1982

Miriam served as director from her home office in the Bronx throughout the year. During the summer she moved to camp with her young son, Daniel, and lived in motel #1 named Kindness. Camp had a very small staff on the grounds during



Miriam and Jesus Cruz sharing music at 1988 New York City banquet.

those years and securing the summer camp nurse and lifeguard as well as volunteer cooks for weekend retreats was Miriam's biggest challenge.

"I feel I was basically an 'interim' director, helping to keep camp going," she said. "Because of being a new mother and living in New York City, and being inexperienced, I don't feel like I made any major contributions. But I did help maintain it.

"I had so many good days at camp. I can't imagine not having had camp in my life. It holds a very special place in my heart."

Jim Baer

1982–1983

Jim arrived at camp in February 1981 as on-site manager and assumed the director position in the fall of 1982, soon after Miriam Cruz's second child, Christina, was born. That fall there was a stack of \$28,000 in bills in the drawer and no money in the checkbook. The board treasurer, Carl Metzler, encouraged Jim to write small checks to all of the creditors to show them we were trying. While facility improvements were limited in those years, under Jim's leadership camp was able to build a barn and install the wood boiler, which heats Spruce Lodge. Through hard work and frugal spending, Jim was able to lead camp in a significant financial turnaround. When the



Gathering of former staff includes (right side) Kenton, Valerie, and Jim Baer; (left side) Zoë and Austin Baer. Also at the table are: Lowell Jantzi, Jerry Kennell, Daniel Cruz, Curtis Jantzi, Mim and Jesus Cruz, 1992.

Baers left on New Year's Day, 1984, all of the bills were paid and roughly \$30,000 was in the bank.

"I have many fond memories—too many to pick a favorite," Jim said. "It was a place where I learned many skills that I still rely on. Sometimes I feel like the biggest contribution I made to Camp Deerpark was encouraging my son Kenton to serve there when he was 18."

Dale Stoltzfus

1984–1986 (part-time)

In 1984 Dale and Doris were living in Westbrookville and Dale was earning a Doctor of Ministry degree at New York Theological Seminary. Doris worked as a school psychologist for the Pine Bush School District, about 15 miles from camp. Dale agreed to step in part time at camp while the board worked toward long-term direction.

Jay Sauder

1986–1990

Jay, along with his wife, Joyce, and their two sons, Ryan and Curt, moved to camp in March of 1986. Their fondest memories are of the many people they learned to know. During Jay's tenure the director's residence was constructed, which began a move toward adequate staff housing. Joyce established the newsletter in its current format. The Sauders placed a renewed emphasis on hospitality, administrative accountability and a deep commitment to the spiritual aspect of camp ministry.

"Aside from the ongoing shortage of funds, which I guess has always been there, and the ongoing challenges of finding dedicated and qualified staff, I would say our greatest challenge was trying to preserve and manage ever scarce resources to provide effective, eternally significant services," Jay said.



The Sauder family in 1986 (left to right) Joyce, Kurt, Jay, and Ryan.

Marian Sauder Egli

1990–1995

Marian moved to camp in March of 1990. As with the directors before her, she found the lack of finances to be one of her biggest challenges and was grateful for the contributions of volunteer services and donations. Marian was great at adding a personal touch to hospitality. Guests enjoyed her homemade dinner rolls and the fresh cut wildflowers on the mantle. One winter retreat she got up early and made homemade doughnuts for all of the youth.

“When I heard the bus come groaning up the hill, whether filled with campers or a church group, and then saw it round the corner, I never got over choking up a little with tears, knowing this was a holy opportunity,” Marian said. “Tears almost came again as the bus left camp and rounded the corner, going down the hill to return campers to their homes. I had experienced holy moments: face to face conversations with so many people of differing cultures. And there were the sounds and sights of people worshipping, relaxing and playing in a nature setting, splashing in the pool.”

Orville Egli came to camp from Illinois, in October of 1993, and served as director of maintenance. “Orv and I worked well together,” Marian said. “We listened to our hearts, and were married on April 29, 1995.”

Ken Bontrager

1995–present

Ken and Deborah Bontrager arrived at Camp Deerpark in early November with two little boys. Four more children and 22 years later they are back to two children at home. “It has been an amazing blessing to raise our family here at Camp Deerpark,” Ken said.

Ken’s office has always looked out onto the front lawn. He has loved the ability to look outside and watch the children play while working.

The Bontragers’ longevity has provided some of the stability required for recent capital improvements. Ken has found his greatest challenge to be



Valentine’s weekend 1995
Marian Sauder, Camp
Administrator, and Orville
Egli, Director of Maintenance,
were engaged.



The Bontrager family Christmas 2014 (left to right) Hannah, Deborah, Ken, Nehemiah, Malachi, Hadassah, Gideon, and Elijah.

striking the balance between the way things are and the way they should be—often at Camp Deerpark there is a huge chasm between the two. The challenge for Ken has been keeping both in perspective while putting energy toward what can be done today.

“My greatest joy at Camp Deerpark is watching young people move through stages of leadership development and training,” he said, “emerging as talented and committed leaders.”

—*Written by Ken Bontrager, current director.*

Board Service—Three perspectives over 50 years

Gene Shelly

Board Member 1969–1984

Founding Board Member

I served on the Camp Deerpark board for many years. This board was a hands-on board, very active in physically taking care of the camp. For the first 10 years, I would frequently help with work projects on Fridays and Saturdays.

Some of the early work projects I remember are:

digging out under the chapel so we could create the basement and

laying cement block in the basement

mowing the grass on the old tractor

dishwashing after meals

cleaning out the old swimming pool in the spring

getting a CDL license and driving the bus

bus motor repairs

roof repairs, sewer repairs and carpenter work

clean-up days

Mennonite Action Program (MAP) was the name chosen to carry the corporate legal entity of owning Camp Deerpark. When I look at my schedule of MAP board meetings, it appears that we met every month for many years. I counted 101 board meetings until 1984 when I left the board. The board was an active and involved group of people who cared deeply about camp, giving of their time, energy and money to help it succeed.

Gene Shelly discusses the spring pool clean up with his father, Paul.



Jesus Cruz

Board Member 1997–2004

Led the transition

Although I had been involved with Camp Deerpark since it opened in 1969, my board service did not begin until 1997. When I joined the board, it was a hands-on board, and was meeting 10 times per year. This was a tall task for board members, some of whom were traveling from Pennsylvania. Camp was at a stage where it needed to move to another level to better serve its supporting churches and constituents. There were also other parts needing development; the board had to move away from being a hands-on board to a policy board, and the director would also need to move from being an operational leader to a bigger picture leader who could represent camp with constituents. It's important to note at this point that camp had a group of very committed board members and staff who were eager to serve camp well, and willing to learn how they could do it better.

As part of the process, we scheduled a two-day board retreat away from camp to do board training, borrowing from *Doing Good Better: How to be an Effective Board*, by Edgar Stoesz, and other tools to help board members understand their roles as a policy board, and to learn how to present ideas for consideration in new ways.

During ensuing meetings, we began practicing the things we spoke about and learned together and made our way to becoming a policy board. The change was instrumental in the ability to make some needed changes in camp operations and helped prepare the board for the future fund-raising work needed to bring a separate children's camp to fruition.

I'm thankful for the wonderful board and staff members I had the privilege to work with during my seven years of board service.

Krista LaRuffa

Board Member 2011–present

Current board chair

Serving as the board chair of Camp Deerpark has proven to be both challenging and rewarding. During my time serving on the board (both as a board member and now as board chair) we have undergone a variety of changes, which I believe have helped us to grow and better serve camp. We meet four times per year for three to four hours and while there are numerous board actions that have been important, below are three that have had the most impact.

Implementation of Board Member Term Limits—At the start of my time on the board, we approved term limits. With term limits, each board member serves for a three year term and is allowed to serve for up to three consecutive terms, for a maximum of nine years. When I initially started, there were several board members who had served for more than 10 years. I appreciated the value in the legacy knowledge of these members and the experiences they were able to share. Therefore, initially I couldn't see how the term limits were a good idea as it would cause a constant rotation in board membership. Additionally, there would be a constant need for finding new board members resulting in continuous stress on the chair and executive director. Now having experienced it, I can say that my feelings toward term limits are the exact opposite. The term limits have enabled the board to have a balance between legacy board members who have served for several years, while also having a constant flow of new members. With new members come new ideas, new perspectives, and the tendency to challenge us from simply doing things “the way we've always done it.” It has allowed our meetings to maintain a freshness throughout, while still having wisdom of the past, which has proven to be extremely valuable.

Overall Meeting Structure—Another major change was suggested by our reading of *Doing Good Better* by Edgar Stoesz. The board has now read through the book three times. Historically, our meetings always started with the “business side” of things (i.e. financials, policy approvals, etc.) and then the second half would be used for items that involved more vision casting, brainstorming, etc. It was discovered that in doing this, we often got bogged down in the details and then were a bit fried by the time it came to the vision casting portion. One simple change of flipping the order of our agenda, having meetings begin with the vision casting and brainstorming items has made such a difference! Our discussions are more thought-provoking and inspired as everyone is fresh, and then that inspiration trails into the second half for the more nitty-gritty details.

Prayer—In many ways, the Camp Deerpark board operates similar to any policy-based, nonprofit board—except when it comes to prayer. It always gives me great encouragement to know that each board member commits to prayer for camp overall as well as specific decisions. Our conscious efforts in prayer have increased in the past few years. There have been several times that the board was faced with a difficult decision. We determined it was best to wait and spend some time dedicated in prayer before finalizing a motion at the next meeting. It is encouraging to see how the Lord has truly led our decisions in those times.



May 2018 joint meeting of current and former board members. (Front row) Dale Weaver, Miriam Cruz, Jesus Cruz, Gene Shelly, Dale Stoltzfus, John Buckwalter, Doris Perkins. (Back row) Rick Buckwalter, Frank Freeman, Moises Angustia, Daniel Angustia-c, Danica Lefever-c, Lanny Millette-c, Krista LaRuffa-c, Luke Berg-c, Carmen Benedith-c, Victor Mendez-c, Sara Mateo-Deo, Maynard Shirk, Marcia Stoesz-c, Ken Bontrager-staff, and Nancy Lopez-Cottrell. (c indicates current board member.)

I consider myself unbelievably blessed and fortunate to have had the pleasure to work with such a wonderful group of board members (both past and present) as well as the camp staff. It is through the combination of these people and each of their unique gifts and talents that camp is the place that it is today; it is truly an honor to be a part of it.

—Written by Krista LaRuffa, Jesus Cruz, and Donna Stoltzfus.

How do we love thee? Let us count the ways . . .

with Jerry and Leonor Kennell

We joined the Camp Deerpark staff as co-assistant directors in late April 1975. Perhaps the most memorable staff times were living with Lowell Jantzi, Isaac Grable, Frank Freeman and Maynard Shirk.

Those were years of growth for camp, with 10-day summer camps, often with up to 80 campers, punctuated by weekend church retreats. We remember LONG days, ENDLESS WEEKS, shopping for hundreds of people at ShopRite, flipping pancakes on the griddle early in the morning with fresh cream for the coffee from the tops of the local dairy's milk bottles. Crafts, nature, lunch, mowing and fixing, dinner, campfire, snack shop, drive the bus with sleeping kids back to the city, pick up the retreat in the morning and back to camp to do it all again with 100 adults. And again. And again.

We had great times with so many staff members and campers. Spook hikes with phosphorescent glow-in-the-dark tape that made people (and Isaac's little dog, Jantzi) look like skeletons. Beautiful campfires. (Jerry loved that little quiet time alone going up to get the fire going in the evening.) Kevin Phillips teaching us the dance step for "Wade in the Water" and Jerry getting down on that Guild 12-string for "King Jesus is All." Biggy (Eugene Davis) singing "Clear-view" ("Have you seen Jesus my lord? He's here in plain—oops—clear view.")

Jackie Buck, Jackie O, Kareem, the Pannels, Harold Davenport, Pastor Mateo, Ray and Anna Pacheco, the Newswanger family—and, of course, all of the wonderful Stoltzfi. And Gene. And Monroe. And Mim and Jesus. And Jim Baer. Singin' in the kitchen. And Ruthie V. The Kruses (all of them!). Too many, too many dear memories. Too much beauty. The loveliest song in the world from the wood thrush. The whip-poor-will with its amazing night game of song pong. The bears. The rat-



Maynard Shirk, left, and Lowell Jantzi survey construction of cabins on the hill, 1975.



First summer camp 1969, counselors Leonor Constantin and Tom Villanueva.

blesnake the neighbor brought down and my mother cooked for the campers. All those shining eyes of the deer under the apple trees. The porcupine that traveled out from under our trailer on the hill through its groove in the snow each day to eat a little bark on the pine tree. The quills it left, twice, in our Irish setter Shawn's nose. The maples, ash and oak in the fall. The stinking gypsy moths, clicking away in the oak trees. An eight-foot dry red oak log that would split straight and true the whole length with one swing of the axe.

There were the research and development meetings over lunch that resulted in the pool, the cabins on the hill and the handball court. And there were the dreams of taking the junkiest of the buses up to the campfire area, letting it roll down through the Annex and burying the whole mess in the old flow-through pool. (And did we mention the time the three wild horses charged the inspector? For a while we had horses with no facilities and no one specifically to care for them, and yes, they did become a threatening presence now and then.)

We had the pleasure of working with so many wonderful individuals who came to help us out in any way they could. Alfred and Dorothy Kruse, who have certainly left positive memories for many of us, came out one week to work with us. They say that calamities come in sets of three . . . One morning, Leonor went out to feed the chickens (yes, we had chickens at one time). She opened their pen, threw in the feed, then shut the gate as fast as she could as the chickens would rush to get out. In the process, she

Jerry explained, “We had a carnival one evening for each camp. One of the booths was to extinguish a candle with a squirt gun, the most fun being to soak the staff member holding the candle.”

shut the door on one of the chicken’s heads. Horrified, she opened the gate again, stuffed the bobbing, limp head of the half-dead chicken into the pen, and ran off in horror. When she arrived at the camp kitchen to tell her coworkers what had just occurred, Dorothy was busily pulling a cake out of the oven which somehow flipped over and fell on the floor. A few minutes later, Alfred came into the kitchen and informed us that he had just “rearranged” the swing set while mowing.

The mower had caught one of the supporting poles and significantly bent it, making it unusable until repair. We all laughed hard!

How do we love thee? Let us count the ways. Beautiful setting. Beautiful setting. And rich, rich relationships for a lifetime. When we think of heaven, we think of the Deerpark family. It was that good.

—Written by Jerry and Leonor Kennell, co-assistant directors, 1975–77, co-directors 1977–78, Jerry director 1979.



Camp Deerpark Will Always Be My Safe Place

with Talibah Aquil

In all honesty, it has been a true challenge reflecting on what story I want to share about Camp Deerpark. Not because I am unable to think of a memory, but because I have had so many important, valuable and life-changing memories here.

How can I sum up in a few words just how amazing and transformative Camp Deerpark has been to me? How do I share, in short, how I would absolutely not be the woman I am today without all of the love and confidence that Camp Deerpark has poured into my life?

Do I share the story of how I first experienced and encountered God's healing presence at the gazebo at the age of 15, or do I share how teaching drama during summer camp sparked a creative passion in me that brought so much clarity to my calling in theater and the arts?

I definitely should share my experience as a camper, and how even after camp was over, I still sang EVERY Camp Deerpark song for the whole year, EVERY DAY (sorry, mommy), until it was time to return the following summer and do it all again. I would sing at the top of my little lungs, "We are blessed in the ciiiity, we are blessed in the fiiiields, we are blessed when we cooome and when we goooo . . ."

How about the blessing of home-cooked meals at camp and waking up in the morning to that beautiful smell of Camp Deerpark's famous baked oatmeal, and knowing that you will only be able to eat it at camp because if you ever went home to attempt the recipe on your own, you may fail and be traumatized to ever eat baked oatmeal again?

Maybe I should speak on the connections and bonds made and formed at camp. More than half of my friends I have today, I either was privileged to work with during summer camp, or people I shared cabins with as a camper. These are lifelong relationships that were planted and nurtured while at Camp Deerpark. Relationships that started as strangers, progressed to friendships and blossomed to "family."

I have an annual memory of always being so excited to see all of the beautiful Bontrager children and family, and always experiencing the same level of awe at how much they had grown up each year. (Like I was the only one allowed to grow up in a year.) I remember loving the Bontrager family so much because THEY were camp to me.

OK, I got it now. It may be more powerful for me to share about how influential Camp Deerpark has been to me in my adult years. I never really realized during my time working at camp how many professional qualities and skills and how much work experience I was acquiring. It was only after I began applying to jobs that I realized Camp Deerpark



Talibah Aquil and camper Joshua Stevens reciting memory verse during chapel, 2018.

became my point of reference for mostly every position I applied for. You know when you have a job interview and the interviewer asks you to share an example of a specific situation and how you handled it? My response usually, if not always, began with, “I once worked at a camp . . .”

Honestly, there are not enough words, and I, along with countless others, could share all of the stories in the world and I still would not be able to thank God enough for blessing my life with Camp Deerpark. If I had to conclude with anything or sum up in one word what camp is to me, it would simply be HOME. Camp is and will forever be a place where I feel restored, recharged and rejuvenated. It is a place God used to mold me, to empower me and to let loose all of my creative and leadership gifts without being judged or fearful of not being enough. No matter how many countries or continents I will be blessed and called to travel to, Camp Deerpark will always be my safe place and my compass home. “Home is where love resides, memories are created, friends and family belong, and laughter never ends. Home is not a place, it’s a feeling.”

—*Written by Veronica Dingwall, camper, counselor, summer camp director 2009, board member 2016-2018, attends King of Glory Tabernacle in the Bronx.*

Talibah Aquil, camper 1994–1997, staff 2002–2007, 2011, 2014, 2018.

Breaking Down Barriers

with Lanny Millette

Lanny Millette first heard about Camp Deerpark through Eastern Mennonite University (then called Eastern Mennonite College), when he took a class called Urban Seminar in 1973. The summer class, held in New York City, was taught by Dale Stoltzfus. Lanny lived with Wes and Marian Newswanger in the Bronx. “Both Wes and Marian were very involved with a relatively new venture called Camp Deerpark,” Lanny said. “They spent as much time as they could up there. I was intrigued by the idea of a camp owned and operated by city churches.” Lanny had no idea then that he would end up at Camp Deerpark the following summer.

Lanny originally planned to work at Camp Hebron for the summer of 1974, where several of his other friends were going to work. He applied and was accepted, as a lifeguard, but the camp accidentally hired too many lifeguards, so they referred Lanny to other camps. One of these camps was



Lanny the lifeguard, 1974.

Camp Deerpark. Dale offered him a job and Lanny remembers, “I really wanted to go to a camp so I accepted. It was a life-changing decision, and I am sure that God was directing it the whole way.” He was the lifeguard and recreation director for that summer and then ended up at Camp Deerpark for the next six summers, filling in various roles.

One summer, Lanny stayed at camp for the break between camp sessions. Eugene “Biggie” Davis was there as well. The camp directors, Jerry and Leonor Kennell, left to celebrate their anniversary, so Lanny and Biggie were the only ones at camp. “We were sitting on the front porch, sipping coffee and waiting for the deer to come out on the lawn when a bus came driving up the road,” said Lanny. “They pulled into the front of the lodge and told us that they had booked an afternoon picnic, including a supper. After a little shock recovery we jumped into action and began looking through the kitchen to see what we could serve.” Nobody had told them that there were guests coming and the directors had forgotten too, so there wasn’t a lot of food left in the kitchen. In the meantime, Jerry and Leonor had remembered the group was coming, and had quickly returned to camp. Hot dogs were found, and the group had a cookout for supper. Lanny, Biggie, Jerry and Leonor all worked together to get a meal ready. “We tried really hard to not let the group know there was a problem,” Lanny said. “You have to be resourceful and expect the unexpected when you work at camp.”

On another of those break weekends Frank Freeman and Lanny opted to stay behind and clear a fire circle in the lower end of camp below the cemetery. It seemed like an ideal location, secluded and surrounded by natural beauty. It was hard work but they eventually cleared out a nice space in a natural meadow. Frank really enjoyed using the riding mower to cut down the high grass and Lanny worked at trimming out the edges. They pulled logs from the woods for seats and made a fire circle using stones from the creek bed. When it was done they sat down and determined to name this new holy ground. They considered using their initials similar to JCTV (Jose Cruz and Tommy Villanueva) but decided, with a little help from Jane

Jacobs (a counselor), to take inspiration from the peaceful atmosphere and call it Shalom. There were two surprises in its early use. The first came that first night when they tested it out. They thought they had built it deep in the woods but then a car drove by on Brandt Road, only 100 feet from where they were sitting. The second came the first night it was used for campers. About 20 minutes into the singing a whole lot of stinging insects started buzzing around the campers. The next day the nest was found and cleared out. From that point on the site lived up to its name: Shalom!

Campfires offered significant holy moments at Camp Deerpark. It was the time at the end of the day when all of camp came together for fellowship and to worship the Lord. No one wanted to miss these special times to sing silly songs like: “When I First Came to this Land,” spirituals like “Wade in the Water” and other worship songs like “King Jesus is All.” Then there was a time of recounting the highlights of the day and a word from the Lord offered by the camp pastor. Sometimes stories were acted out, sometimes they were straight out of Scripture, and sometimes they were stories like one Wes Newswanger once shared. Little Wally (a fictional character) smelled pancakes at a diner during a time of distress, and the pancakes reminded him of Camp Deerpark. He remembered how he learned about the God who would never leave him when he was at camp. “There were many great times at camp,” Lanny said, “but it seems that those evening campfires stood out as special treasures.”

Camp Deerpark provided many life lessons for Lanny and for many of the campers that he worked with. “That first summer,” he said, “I felt that I had to prove myself in many ways because I was a bit different than most of my co-workers. But by the end of the summer we were brothers and sisters with an appreciation for those very differences. I also felt empowered to come back the next summer and serve in a leadership position.”

Lanny remembers mentoring one camper, in particular. “John ‘Junior’ Brock was one of my repeat campers,” said Lanny. “He would often hang out with ‘Lifeguard Lanny’ during the day. We had many deep discussions, and I felt in my heart that God was going to do something powerful with his life. Today he is an anointed pastor in Ohio and a cherished friend on Facebook.”

Lanny thinks that Camp Deerpark makes campers and staff step out of their comfort zones and that this is one of camp’s best qualities. “Camp has a way of breaking down barriers,” he said. “We are all out of our comfort zones on some level. This makes us a little more vulnerable and more open to change. It helps us start the transformation into becoming leaders.”

Lanny's note: Dottie Nolt Weber would prepare these for us and it went over really well with both campers and staff.

Chinatown Franks

1 green pepper, cut in 1-inch squares
1 medium onion, chopped
¼ cup salad oil
1 pound frankfurters, cut diagonally in 1-inch pieces
2 (8-oz.) cans tomato sauce
¾ cup water
2 tablespoons vinegar
2 tablespoons brown sugar
hot cooked rice

In skillet cook green pepper and onion in salad oil at medium heat until tender. Add frankfurters; brown lightly. Add tomato sauce, water, vinegar, and brown sugar; simmer 20 to 25 minutes, stirring occasionally. Serve over rice. Makes 6 servings.

“It is my prayer that camp will continue to be a place where people can come and experience God in an intimate and powerful way. That young lives will be nurtured into leaders for tomorrow. That camp will continue to provide a safe and supportive place to experience God in a new way.”

—*Written by Dillon Hershey and Lanny Millette.*

Lanny Millette, former staff member, current board member.

What Can I Say About Camp Deerpark?

with John Brock Jr.

What can I say about Camp Deerpark? Camp Deerpark is the place where I got to meet the Savior, in a place that is so peaceful and wholesome. The many people I met there have become a part of who I am today. I have so much love for former campers and staff. Campers like Tiffany Powell, who



Summer camp counselors Duane Stoltzfus, John Brock, and Lenny Torres.

has grown up to have a successful career with a Ph.D. in education. Counselors like Lanny Millette, who was the guy who taught me how to row a boat and truly study the Word of God. Frank and Barb Freeman, Isaac Grable, Eugene “Biggie” Davis, Marvin Scott, Eddie Scott, Jackie Buck, Jackie Oreo and so many others influenced my life.

I enjoyed camp so much I went for 20 years, starting with being a camper at around age 15, to working as a counselor and then a director. God is good, and he has been so good to me.

This is the place where so many city children have been exposed to a culture of peace and love. Camp Deerpark is the place where the soul of a child is cultivated, and grows in the knowledge of the Lord. The Bible says: “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.” Proverbs 22:6 (KJV)

I pray that every person who comes through Camp Deerpark has a life of challenges and accomplishments, but knows there are pitfalls and tests they must go through. Prepare yourself for the journey. God Bless!

— Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.

John Brock Jr., former camper and staff member, attended Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church in Harlem.

One Family's Memories

with Mim Cruz

I loved being at camp. It was a magical place for me. I loved going to campfires and going for walks. As a country girl living in New York City for 22 years, camp made it easier for me to stay in the city. Without camp to go to, I would have struggled more. It helped me survive the Bronx.

The first time I went to camp was with Dale on September 4, 1969. I was 18 years old and had just arrived in New York City to serve a term with Mennonite Voluntary Service. It was my first weekend as a New Yorker. Dale took me, Elvin Bowman and Jim King to camp for VS orientation.

An MYF retreat was also taking place at camp that weekend. Elmer Lapp came up with a carload of youth and he had brought Jesus and Jose Cruz. I joined in a volleyball game, which is where I met Jesus for the first time. He was playing on the other side of the net. I noticed him, thinking he was a nice looking young man.

When I returned to the Bronx, I was assigned to work at the sandwich shop at Glad Tidings Mennonite Church, where I attended the week after I arrived in New York. I was pleasantly surprised to see that Glad Tidings was Jesus' church, and that he apparently thought I was attractive too; the flirting and getting to know each other had begun. Jesus and I had a first date on December 12 of that year, and were married in 1970. So, camp is also special to me as it's the place where I met my husband.

Over the years I have served as director of camp, on the board and on the association committee. Jesus and I would help with camp clean up in May or June. I cooked at summer camps—one camp per summer—when my kids were in grade school. And sometimes we volunteered to help cook on weekends for church retreats.

I was 28 years old when I took a half-time position as director of camp. I was called the director, but I worked off-site from the city, living at camp only in the summertime. I had a babysitter during the summers when I was director and I loved being able to live up there in little motel #1 with my baby Danny for about two months each year. I think I began in the fall of 1979 and resigned when Christina was born during the fall of 1982.

I was responsible to hire summer staff. I traveled to EMU to recruit staff. I also had to get volunteer cooks and schedule retreat groups. Those were my primary tasks. The biggest challenge was finding camp nurses and lifeguards each year, and finding volunteer cooks for the retreat weekends. Also, my inexperience was a challenge!

Gene Shelly was chair of the board during this time. Phil and Bonnie Detweiler were the people on the grounds, while I was in the city. During the summers I spent more time at camp, but during the year I would go out about once a month. I'd send Phil and Bonnie volunteers to help out on weekends. There was very slim staffing in those days!

I didn't have a clue about budgets, but I would meet with Gene and Carl Metzler and follow their advice. Whatever they told me, I did!

It wasn't easy. It could be difficult to find staff. Once at camp, there were sometimes challenges and struggles with expectations. Sometimes kids and staff were rowdy. We had staff orientation for two days, but there wasn't much training. It was very basic safety stuff. I was in my 20s and did the best I could.

During summer camps I tried hard to get the kids into the woods to enjoy nature. Camp programming in the morning rotated between Bible study, nature and crafts. One time I was in charge of nature class and so had three different groups of kids as they rotated. I took the first group of kids for a walk along a stream. We were finding things in the water. One kid crossed through the stream and went to the other side, wandering into a nest of yellow jackets. He got stung a couple of times and threw off his hat and ran. I took him to Theda Siegrist, the camp nurse.

When I took the next group for a walk, we went to the same stream. But I told the group, "No matter what, don't go on that side of the stream." Well, one boy saw the hat and he ran right over to it and picked it up. So of course he got stung. I took him to Theda.

I think someone from all three groups got stung.

Theda couldn't understand what was going on and was a little perturbed. I remember she said, "Mim, why do you keep bringing me kids who are stung? Why do you keep taking groups to where the yellow jackets are?"

I just kept thinking they would listen to me and not wander off to the exact area where I told them not to go!

I had so many good days at camp. I especially loved our church retreats; we had a ball. I can't imagine not having had camp in my life. It holds a very special place in my heart.

with Jesus Cruz

I was born in Puerto Rico but moved to New York at the age of 6, and moved a few times before landing on Sherman Avenue in the Bronx, where I first encountered Mennonites. I grew up as part of the Catholic Church, but eventually found myself being attracted to the Mennonite Church.

Two ladies from Fox Street Mennonite Church (where John Freed was pastor), Mable Herr and Norma Brenner, ran a Bible Club on Sherman Avenue, across the street from where I lived. I was curious about what was going on in there and asked some school friends whom I had seen going in; I learned that we could do crafts but were expected to stay for Bible stories. I started attending the club along with my brother when I was 11 years old. That first summer we were introduced to summer camp seven hours away at Camp Hebron in Halifax, Pennsylvania. It was a couple of years later that we learned about Mennonite churches in New York City and decided to visit one.

My brother, Jose, and I began visiting Fox Street Mennonite Church initially, but migrated to Glad Tidings when we were around 13. There were a couple of young women we found attractive, so we switched.

I was never a camper at Camp Deerpark but was involved with it from the beginning, becoming an association member, participating in getting it ready for summer camp (spring cleaning), going to church retreats or attending MYF retreats there. I have been involved in other ways over the years; together with Miriam, I sometimes helped with cooking for church groups, attended many banquets and auctions, served on the board for about 12 years and have been involved in fund-raising efforts.

A tremendous aspect of camp is that it provides an opportunity for young people to learn leadership skills. I've seen young people who spent time at camp grow in faith and develop into leaders. So many youth have been impacted over the years, from New York City and from Lancaster as well. And many people who have worked at camp—whether from the city or elsewhere—still connect to camp. That is a good legacy.

Camp greatly influenced my life. I met my wife there. We had a lot of fun at retreats, and made lasting friendships. We stay in touch by attending the auction and reunion weekend at camp when we can. We go to the annual camp banquet in Pennsylvania, and I help with the fund-raising campaign for Promise Woods.

My hope for camp is that it can continue to be a resource for the New York City churches in providing leadership opportunities for their young people. I also hope it can continue to be a bridge between Mennonites in New York City and Lancaster and other groups it connects with.

with Christina Cruz

When I smell nature smells—like autumn leaves—it takes me right back to camp. When I was a child I went to camp for church retreats with my family, but also as a camper. I went to children's camp and teen camp.

I also worked at camp for four summers. I helped in the kitchen and was a counselor. It was an important social experience for me—I made wonderful friends. There was always a lot of pleasant, enjoyable teenage drama. It was a fun place to be a teenager. One clear memory I have from the time I was on staff is when we would play hide-and-seek in the main building. On weekends in between camp sessions, when the main house was unoccupied, we would turn off all the lights and play hide and seek throughout the entire building. It was extremely fun and hiders got very creative like hiding on top of the refrigerator. No one ever looks up!

All my memories of camp are great. Camp holds many layers of meaning for me. I lived in the Bronx and it was the first place I learned about nature. Camp seemed like a far off place in the world and I was totally in love with it.

—Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.

Mim Cruz, former director, former board member, volunteer, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church and North Bronx Mennonite Church, both in the Bronx.

Jesus Cruz, former board member, volunteer, attended Glad Tidings Mennonite Church and North Bronx Mennonite Church, both in the Bronx.

Christina Cruz, former camper and counselor.



Pastor Duncan Smith of North Bronx Mennonite Fellowship reads scripture before Christina's baptism.

We Had a Special Program

with Melody Pannell

The first year that I was on staff at camp was 1990. I had been coming to camp on retreats and for summer camp since I was a young child, but I didn't work on staff until I was 19. Camp didn't have the counselor-in-training program yet when I was in my late teens.

I remember a crucial point in my teenage years when I was a camper. There was a really intense campfire in the basement of the chapel. I don't know how this happened, but people started telling stories and two of my good friends opened up and talked about sexual abuse. Other people were sharing hard things, and we had a healing service. I remember this being like, "Wow. We were able to talk about that." This was a big turning point at camp for me.

Ken contacted me when I was 19 years old and working downtown at a clothing store on 5th Avenue. I had my own apartment at the time. I hadn't gone to college yet. I was a couple of years out of high school, but I was on that track. And Ken said, "We need someone to be a counselor for the 10–11-year-old camp." He said the pay would be \$75, and could I use my vacation time to work at camp. Of course I'm thinking, "It's only \$75, I'm on vacation, I don't want that." But it was a call to ministry, so I said yes. It totally changed my life.

I was a counselor from 1990 to 1994 and then in 1995 I became a program director. For two of the years in between I was a counselor for the Urban Youth Discipleship Program that ran at camp for just two years.

We used the cabin on the hill, and 8–12 girls would stay there for 30 days, for three 10-day sessions. They would go home on the weekends in-between, but they were in more of an intense program than regular summer camp. The girls had to apply, and their pastors had to recommend them. The girls may have been at risk or would just benefit from the program.

We lived with the girls. We helped them to get along with each other. We started a gar-



Karlynn Crawford and Melody Pannell share music at the New York City banquet, 1987.

den, had sewing classes and exercise time. The girls had to cook their own food. We memorized Bible verses and had devotions and meditation time. The discipleship program took them out of their usual environment and let them learn deeply about God—especially if they were not going to church on a regular basis. They had the opportunity to hear God and listen to their own spirit.

I think for a lot of girls, it really changed their lives spiritually. They were able to overcome some issues that they were having in the city. We talked about preventing the epidemic of teenage pregnancy and drug use that was happening in the nineties in Harlem. We talked about sexual abuse, abortion, rape, sexual assault; people did not normally talk about these things. We provided a safe environment and it was a healing time. They could ask forgiveness for themselves, ask forgiveness for other people. They were able to make decisions for themselves about the kind of life that they wanted to lead.

One girl who was a part of the program came from a single-parent home. She was like a lot of the girls who came from situations in the city that were less than ideal. It was hard for us to get her up to camp but her mother finally did agree. She came up and Discipleship Camp changed her life. She has gone on to be a senior advisor at the Harlem Children's Zone—a non-profit organization that supports youth in the Harlem community.



Young women in the Urban Youth Discipleship Program learn the art of flower arrangement.

We developed relationships with each other that we hold to this day. They still talk about things that they learned there, particularly the focus on the “woman of a noble character.” A lot of the things that I am trying to do now in my professional life come out of the experiences at camp and what we did there.

Although we were not a social service program, we embodied some therapeutic practices. In some ways, the program was before its time in what we set up to make young people feel safe. The idea of boundaries, role models, and adults who were there and wanted to be there, was important. John Brock Jr., Steady Eddy, Pumpkin (Isaac Grable), Nancy Lopez, Carmen—these were counselors who chose to be there; these were people who made a lasting impression on me.

My father also loved camp. He was involved in the very early days of getting camp started. To this day, my favorite job was being a camp counselor and then later on the program director at Camp Deerpark. If you go to Harlem and talk to people, my generation down to my sister, Keisha’s generation, remember going to camp. Camp wasn’t just for the Mennonite kids; it was for everyone. It was a beautiful and safe space.

—*Written by Malachi Bontrager, former camper and staff.*

Melody Pannell, former camper and staff member, attended Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church in Harlem.

Cross-Cultural Appreciation

with Maynard Shirk

Maynard Shirk was born into a traditionally Mennonite family. For him, that meant he could trace his roots to Shirks in France and Germany almost 10 generations back. He grew up learning Pennsylvania Dutch and English at the same time and he knew almost everyone who lived around him. When he went to college, he was able to expand his horizons and make friends who looked and thought differently than he did, but that wasn’t enough for Maynard. He went to Vietnam through the Eastern Mennonite Board of Missions and volunteered through Mennonite Disaster Service in Honduras. He found out about Camp Deerpark while working in Honduras in 1974, when Dale Stoltzfus, who worked with the churches of New York City, came to visit.



Pastor Celso Jaime, Evangelical Garifuna Bronx, and Maynard Shirk.

“He was the camp program director at Camp Deerpark at the time, and he invited me to come work on maintenance,” Maynard said. “I promptly agreed and that’s how I first came to camp.”

Maynard worked at camp for about two years before he got another job offer at Camp Hebron, in Halifax, Pennsylvania. For about 10 years Maynard was absent from Camp Deerpark, but eventually he found his way back. He joined the board of directors and served on the board for many years. Now he is semi-retired and comes back to help out around the camp.

Maynard recognized that Camp Deerpark was a place that allowed him to expand his horizons. “I learned how parochial my upbringing had been and how poor I was at communicating with people that didn’t look like me,” he said. One of the largest lessons that he took away was learning to relate to people from various cultural backgrounds. “It’s been one of the places where I keep a little bit plugged in with cultural diversity, with Mennonites of many colors and stripes and languages,” he said. He hopes that Camp Deerpark realizes how much of an impact it is making on people’s lives and that camp doesn’t change its ways.

“Camp has done the cross-cultural thing very successfully,” Maynard said. “The churches in New York—what is their culture? They are all different, so it would be expected that camp would be multicultural too. Camp is a place off in the woods that is not New York City and it is not Lancaster

County and it is not Puerto Rico or any of the other bases from which our cultural groups originate,” Maynard said. “It becomes a meeting ground for all because it’s not the home of any one. It is owned by many. And that is a strength—a big strength.”

—*Written by Dillon Hershey, Goshen College intern.*

Maynard Shirk, former staff member, board member, and current volunteer.

We Came Through Mennonite Voluntary Service

with Ken and Jan Kurtz

When Ken and Jan Kurtz came to Camp Deerpark, camp had only been running for two summers. They came through the Mennonite Voluntary Service unit, a program that emphasized service ministry in communities and was located in New York City. “We were there from April of 1971 to April of 1973, and we had just gotten married,” Ken said. “We were actually a part of the unit in New York City, but we lived at camp.” For the two years that they were at camp, they were the only full-time staff. They were involved with maintaining buildings and the grounds.

One of the largest projects Ken was involved with was the addition of a basement in the chapel. “The chapel was only on stilts and so we raised the whole building and put a basement under it,” Ken said. “We had help from folks from Lancaster.” Ken helped with the excavating and the construction of the basement. “It was hard work,” he said, “but it was work that had to be done to make camp ready for the summer programs.”

A smaller project that Ken and Jan remembered working on was more directly involved with the summer camp. A featured story for the summer was Noah’s Ark—so they built their own ark and set it afloat in the old swimming pool. “We built a rustic structure to represent the ark and we had a cat and a dog and a sheep on it and the kids loved it!” Jan said.

Camping was a big part of their life together. Jan and Ken worked at Black Rock Retreat, and even got married there. “Camping was always part of our beginnings, and then when this opened to go to Camp Deerpark, it was almost like a natural fit for us,” Ken said. They enjoyed the time that they had alone in the winters and the time that they had with the campers in the summers. Jan remembered, “There was a lot of enthusiasm and singing



Glenn Zeager, Ken Kurtz, and Les Minninger during the construction of the chapel basement and porch that would later become the Sun Room, 1972.

and clapping and fun times. To us it was a blessing to be able to be there and to help make summer camp happen, even though we weren't always a part of the program."

Even though Ken and Jan weren't working directly with the kids, they could still see how camp was affecting and changing the campers' lives. "The campers could go out and just explore the woods and the big open spaces, with their smiles and their enjoyment of being in a totally different setting," Ken said. "I think that Camp Deerpark was meant to be so that the kids had a place to come that was different from where they lived." Ken and Jan were also there to witness the staff's dedication and commitment to the kids and to camp. "There was a lot of love shown between the counselors and the kids that we saw," Ken said. "It was really great interaction and there were beautiful results of that. They were dedicated; they were willing to do what was required to put on a good camp for the kids."

Ken and Jan were only at camp for two years, but they were able to learn a lot from living there. "Camp really opened doors for us to get to know people from all cultures, and that was a true blessing," Jan said. Even

though they haven't been as involved as they used to be, they are still keeping up to date with all the new building projects happening at camp. They both want to come back at some point and see how much has changed since their time here. "We hope that Camp Deerpark will continue to grow and that more people will experience the camp and the love of the Lord out there," Ken said.

—Written by Dillon Hershey, Goshen College intern.

Ken and Jan Kurtz, volunteers through Mennonite Voluntary Service.

How Could You Not Like It?

with Jim Baer

Jim Baer was 18 years old and working at Agway, a vegetable seed packaging company in Pennsylvania, when he was briefly laid off. At the urging of his former high school shop teacher, Wes Newswanger, Jim went to Camp Deerpark for three weeks in June of 1977 to help build the new pool. "After my short stint at camp, I went back to Agway and became a foreman," Jim said. "But I couldn't get Camp Deerpark out of my mind. So I quit my job and returned to camp in the fall of '77 as a volunteer for one year." Jim worked as a maintenance assistant and as a counselor in 1978.



Jim Baer, center back, with campers.

While working with the campers, Jim began to understand why Camp Deerpark was so important. “I think that camp was mainly about breaking down stereotypes,” he said. “Camp was a place where different cultures would meet and people would come away from it knowing more about one another. Camp put both staff and campers in a situation where we maybe had some fears, but that put us on common ground. We might not have had the same fears or assumptions, but somehow the barriers could melt away because we were in a different place.”

Jim saw a transformation in some of the kids he worked with. “I saw them become aware of another part of creation,” he said. “For some of my kids, it was the first time they were out of the Bronx, so yeah, they were terrified at night. Many of the kids were afraid of how dark it would get at camp, in comparison to the city where there were always lights. But then they would look up and see the stars, and maybe they’d never seen them before. It was incredible.”

Camp Deerpark also helped break down assumptions Jim had about city life, and was influential in his decision to move to New York City. Shortly after his year of volunteer work at camp ended, Jim moved to the Bronx to work with Lowell Jantzi, helping to maintain the Mennonite-owned buildings in the city. “Lowell was the sole employee and needed help,” Jim said. Jim rented a room at the voluntary service house on Sherman Avenue for about six months. “I had a ton of fun, helping Lowell and living with the VSers.”

After returning home to Pennsylvania and working for a time, Jim again couldn’t keep Camp Deerpark out of his mind. “Three hundred acres of woods: How could you not like it?” he asked. He moved back to camp when Mim Cruz was the director in 1981. In 1982 Jim became the camp administrator. That year he also got married and his wife, Valerie, joined him at camp.

Jim had grown up on a farm in Lancaster County and had the grand idea of bringing the farming culture that he knew to Camp Deerpark. He especially wanted to bring cows, but they needed a place to house them first. In 1983, Jim suggested a barn raising.

“Dale Stoltzfus had some Amish relatives, so we hatched this idea to try to have some Amish come up from Lancaster County and have some city people come out from New York City,” Jim said. “We’d bring these two cultures together and we’d raise a barn up in one day.” Jim recalled that about 80 people from New York City and about 15–20 Amish people came to camp on a Saturday in June, and they did just that. The Amish women served homemade donuts and strawberry pie, while the Amish men worked on the barn. The New Yorkers helped in whatever way they could. After the barn



was completed, Jim brought in black beef cows to raise for the summer. They were on loan from a camp neighbor, Walter Mehr. The campers got to watch the cows as they grazed, in the area where the gazebo now stands.

Jim also fondly remembers working in the kitchen at camp. “There weren’t assigned jobs, so everyone would pitch in where they could,” Jim said. “I remember it as a time of pulling together and making the most of a rather mundane job.”

Jerry and Leonor Kennell would often help out in the kitchen when Jim was there, too. The three of them would burst into song while washing dishes or cleaning up from after a meal and their voices would carry throughout the main house. Guests would come and knock on the door to see what was going on. Some would stand for a while and listen while others would applaud when they were finished. Singing in the kitchen is one of Jim’s most cherished memories from his time at camp, as it was a reflection of how happy the staff was as they worked together. “At different times, retreat guests would comment on how meaningful it was to come to a camp where the staff worked and played together in this fashion,” Jim said.

Because Jim never attended college, he counts his four years at Camp Deerpark and time living in New York City as his college experience. It was there that he interacted with a variety of cultures and had new experiences. He also learned new skills that would affect the rest of his life. He became a shop teacher at a local Mennonite school in Lancaster County, where he worked for 33 years. He is now self-employed in home renovation work. “I

would be somewhere else and someone different if I didn't have that camping experience," Jim said.

Jim still visits camp from time to time and keeps in contact with many of the staff members that worked with him. He worked at another camp in rural Pennsylvania but said it wasn't the same as Camp Deerpark. "The urban piece was missing," he said. "Camp Deerpark was the best of both worlds for me; you had a rural setting but yet it was affiliated with the New York City churches. Yeah, I just loved that setting."

Jim hopes that camp stays the same—full of energy and fun, but also that the cultural overlap remains. "The interaction of different cultures is what makes Camp Deerpark special," he said.

—Written by Dillon Hershey and Donna Stoltzfus.

Jim Baer, volunteer at camp from 1977–78, returned to serve as camp administrator with wife Valerie from 1981–83.

The Impact of Camp

with Barbara Freeman

Barb grew up in rural Pennsylvania. She wanted to make a change in her life so she decided to do Mennonite Voluntary Service (VS) in New York City. Barb first came to Camp Deerpark in 1975 when she was working with the VS unit. Barb remembers, "It was kind of a long ride, but I would come up once in a while and help in the kitchen and with some cleaning." Her VS unit was remotely run by Leonor and Jerry Kennell, who were also the directors of Camp Deerpark at the time.

In 1982 Barb married Frank Freeman, and the following year they moved to the town of Bullville in Orange County—about a half-hour drive to camp. Barb volunteered



Barb Kauffman, 1977.



1977 Summer staff orientation three day hike in the Catskill Mountains. Barb Kauffman Freeman, center.

for many years at camp, but accepted a paid position in 1987. She worked part-time as she had a young child at the time.

Barb works in the office now and often gets phone calls from former campers or parents of campers. “Campers call us sometimes, or adults who were once campers here, and they’ll talk about camp memories,” Barb said. There is one story that she remembers from a few years ago. There was a girl who came to camp while her family was going through a rough time. “The family had gone through a divorce with bitter anger and hate; it was a bad situation,” Barb said. “But there was a lot of forgiveness that had come. It was like God’s hands were there working on this family through camp. It was a young girl who wanted the family to start praying together.” Cabin devotions had been meaningful to this camper, and when she got home she requested her family do the same and pray together every night.

Barb says that there are countless other people who have come to her and told her how camp has changed their children for the better. “Their kids came home as changed children, and they couldn’t thank us enough for whatever had happened here,” she said. “Camp helped change attitudes; it changed behavior. There was even one parent that was like, ‘Hey, my son is alive because of camp.’ That was her belief.”

“Many times someone will remember a counselor’s name,” she said. “Those counselors have major impact, as do the directors and all of the

staff. Some campers even send their great-grandchildren here. It's amazing. Above all else I would like to see that remain strong."

Barb remembers many moments at camp that have impacted her life. She met Frank here and she was baptized in the old pool. Barb said, "It was Steady Eddie, Donna Stoltzfus and me, and it was cold! I was around 19 or 20 years old." Barb was born into a conservative Mennonite church and she accepted Jesus into her heart at an earlier age, but decided not to join the church by baptism until she was at Camp Deerpark. When she was baptized at camp it felt right to her because she experienced a sense of community with the people here. "Camp has definitely influenced my life," she said. "Camp helped me to start focusing on being a better follower of Jesus—just being a better disciple."

Barb believes that camp has the ability to impact everyone who comes here and she hopes that it continues to be a second home for people. She thinks of camp as a break from the rush of the city and hopes that camp will "continue to be a place of service and revitalization, of growing, and of people coming to know Christ."

—*Written by Dillon Hershey, Goshen College intern.*

Barbara Freeman, former summer staff and volunteer, current office staff.

Forest Hills Mennonite Church

with Dan Glick

While I was one of the original four from Pennsylvania who went to look at the property prior to the purchase of Camp Deerpark in 1968, and continued to support it financially over the years, it wasn't until around 2000 that I became aware of how much repair work was needed on the buildings.

I think it was 2000 when I was able to get a group of workers from my church—Forest Hills Mennonite Church—to spend a few days at camp doing some repairs. This group became very interested in camp after that first visit, and from that time on until 2012, we had a group of 11–18 people go to work at camp as an annual event. Lee Charles took over leadership of the volunteer work around 2012, and though fewer men went along, they were often more qualified for new construction.

In 2015 a new cabin in Promise Woods was completed that had been financed by Forest Hills. One church member donated funds for a second cabin, but wished to remain anonymous. Several people from Forest Hills



Representing Forest Hills Mennonite and Akron Mennonite, Dan Glick hands the keys to Promise Woods cabin #5, Blessing, to Pastor Celso Jaime of Evangelical Garifuna Bronx as part of the cabin dedication, June 2015.

spent time helping to construct the two cabins. I gave the following message at the dedication ceremony at camp:

Today we celebrate a milestone in the life of Deerpark. We have all been dreaming for a long time about building new cabins and especially replacing the “chicken house.” The question was often asked, “How did Forest Hills become involved with so many projects at Camp Deerpark?” I can’t really tell you except to say our boys’ club—or “vacation with a purpose”—played a big part in seeing the need for maintenance to the old buildings. I described it many times as a smorgasbord of needed repairs.

I really believe it was God leading Forest Hills to partner in the mission work in New York. He moved in many individuals to give of their time, money and talents here at Deerpark, and I believe God is still prodding individuals at Forest Hills to be a partner in the life of Deerpark and the mission of the New York churches.

I believe it was the teamwork between the churches of New York and we at Forest Hills and others that has made Camp Deerpark such a successful program. All our buildings and repairing would have been in vain if you would not have found and sent the kids to camp.

And so now we would like to dedicate these cabins to you and give you the keys to them, so that you might be challenged to continue to find kids that will discover “God’s Country” and find Christ here. May God bless each of you as you continue to work among the kids in the big cities and may God be honored in all that is done here at camp.

Sadly, as many of us have aged or moved away, people from our church are not as involved in volunteering at camp as we once were. But as I said at the dedication of the cabin, I believe God is still prodding individuals at Forest Hills to be a partner in the life of Deerpark and the mission of the New York churches.

—*Written by Donna Stoltzfus, former camper and staff.*

Dan Glick, supporter of camp since 1968.

Excerpt from “Miracles Performed at Deerpark”

From the Newsletter of Forest Hills Mennonite Church

April 28, 2002

By Toby Leaman

5:30 a.m. seemed like an awful early time to go to work, but 11 Forest Hillers did just that on Wednesday, April 3, as we gathered at the church to load up two pick-up trucks and a van to leave for Camp Deerpark in New York. Dale Hertzler and I traveled in one truck carrying many tools, suitcases, plumbing and wiring supplies, and three rolls of carpet that hung out past the tailgate. Dan Stoltzfus drove his van with more suitcases, along with our fearless leader Dan Glick, and Marty Peifer, Jessie High, Gary Loug and Doris Groff.

We arrived at Camp Deerpark shortly after 10:00 a.m. Eddie, the maintenance supervisor, greeted us. He showed us what was to be done at motel #8, and electricians Gary and the two Dans, and plumbers Marv and Jessie tore into their work with great vigor. The front porch floor had been completely torn off and needed to be replaced, and the existing roof needed to be beefed up and straightened to the best of our ability. Before many questions could be asked as to how we were to do that, Eddie said, “Now, I expect a miracle!” Then he left. There was much debate as to how this was going to happen. By day’s end the roof supports were in place and the framework was ready for the flooring to be installed the next day. Miracle accomplished!

There always seemed to be people coming in waves as well as departing to go back home. Jake Bare, John Glick, Merv Hooper and Herb Hoover also

arrived. There was insulation and drywall to be done. Merv became a gofer and assistant to the porch guys. John and Jake were replacement window installers. Herb hung ceiling drywall without stilts or planks to stand on.

Sleeping had its challenges. The first ones to fall asleep were the lucky ones; they didn't have to listen to the others snoring. I planned ahead and brought ear plugs to muffle any night noises. Marv spent one night sleeping on the couch in the main building.

Back on the job, Lee and Cliff also performed a miracle. Using a skill saw and belt sander they made wood siding to match the existing siding. This was accomplished with less prayer and meditation than the porch group. Did they have more faith?

The final wave of guys arrived on Friday. Bob Sherman and John Shertzler jumped in to help where they were needed most. John and Dale Hertzler repaired some wooden lawn chairs.

The biggest miracle worker came in the form of Amos Smucker who was the last volunteer to arrive. Amos came by himself because he needed to check out some horse's teeth on the way to the camp. Amos is a professional drywaller, and his miracle was to make the finished drywall look like a professional had done it all. Amos wants to know how long you have to attend Forest Hills before you get invited to do something like this. He has



Lloyd Smoker, Toby Leaman, Dan Stoltzfus of Forest Hills Mennonite observe progress on Hemlock Pavilion construction, 2004.

been attending for two years, and this was the first time he got to help. For anyone who has the same question, all you have to do is sign up when an announcement is made about a service project being organized.

Everyone left Deerpark with the satisfaction of knowing that we had given 125 percent of our time and talents to a very worthy cause—providing a clean and safe place for the children and families of the New York City churches!

Excerpt from “Vacationing With a Purpose”

From the Newsletter of Forest Hills Mennonite Church

July 20, 2003

By Zac Hummel and Terri Glick

When was the last time you returned from your family vacation not only having had a great time and feeling refreshed but also rejoicing in the knowledge that you were able to help someone else? Well, that is the feeling we had when we returned from our “vacation with a purpose” at Camp Deerpark in New York. Although Grandpa, Dan Glick, has made many trips to this camp, it was our first visit, and we were not disappointed.

We arrived after lunch on Tuesday, July 1, to find a slightly weary group of Forest Hillers finishing their lunch with the camp counselors and staff. We were quickly told of the work they had already accomplished in the 1½ days they had been there—cleaning out the round, stone pond (and finding lots of interesting creatures as a bonus); repaving and repainting the basketball court (done by Gina Hoover, Marcia, Libby and Becca Stoesz); completing a bulk mailing with secretary Margaret Derstine; and a slow but steady start to building a new stone drinking fountain next to the chapel by Dean Stoesz and Herb Hoover. By the time the group finished reciting the list of work they had done, we wondered if there was any left for us to do. Ken Bontrager, the camp director, assured us he would have no problem keeping us busy.

For the rest of that day and the next, we combined hard work with fun and getting to know each other better and ended up with some great results. Herb and Dean were able to finish the fountain with the help of experienced cement mixer, Zac. Dan and Byron worked with Ken to replace sewer lines between the pool/bathhouse and motel units. Ann and Eleanor tended to the vegetable and flower gardens, and nearly everyone got involved in the extensive project of re-clearing and re-marking the four camp hiking trails. Christine, the camp cook, also appreciated help with the laundry from Marcia and Becca, kitchen help from Eleanor, and expert dishwashing help from Becca.

Zac's favorite part of the experience was the group swim on Tuesday evening. Dean and Herb's flips, belly flops and can-openers made us all wonder if there would be enough water left in the pool when the campers arrived the following week.

The only bad part of the trip was the mosquito population. So we all treated Herb's extra large can of Off like it was gold! Even with the bug spray, however, we think there had to be over 500 mosquito bites on the entire Forest Hills crew. For us, the mosquito bites have proved to be an itchy reminder of a very rewarding experience.

Tomatoes and Sweet Corn

Reuben and Dorothy Stoltzfus

Reuben and Dorothy Stoltzfus never came to Camp Deerpark empty-handed. In what became a summer tradition, they would drive to camp from their home in Pennsylvania in a car loaded with tomatoes, sweet corn and other fresh food—enough for all of the campers and staff members. Everyone especially enjoyed the corn-on-the-cob, often served at an outdoor picnic.

Reuben and Dorothy were deeply committed to the Christian ministry of camp, and enjoyed its wonderful social opportunities as well. They first visited the camp during the summer of 1969, remembered by many in New York as the Mets' pennant year. Reuben, though, was a stalwart Phillies fan.

They usually visited camp at least once every year. They would often bring some friends along to acquaint them with the camp and its ministry. In October 1970, Reuben decided to invite two of his brothers, Jake and Abner, and their wives. It was the first time the brothers had taken a trip together.

The first camp auction was held in a barn in the early 1970s in Harleysville, Pennsylvania where Alvin Horning Jr. held regular auctions. Reuben and Dorothy attended every auction thereafter until the fall of 1994. Dorothy always provided a quilt or two and Reuben assisted by collecting sale items and helping during the auction.

"At the auction in 1991, Reuben asked for the microphone as it was time to sell the quilts," Marion Sauder Egli recalled in a camp newsletter. "He prayed, blessing those who quilted, putting in many hours and stitches."



Reuben & Dorothy Stoltzfus celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary at Camp Deerpark. This photo was found in an album belonging to Walter Mehr.

Reuben served for several years on the camp committee that plans for the auctions and banquets in Pennsylvania. Reuben always enjoyed attending the banquets and meeting the many different people who assisted in the programs.

When the camp board of directors decided to build a barn in 1983, many people came together for a barn raising. The barn was built in one day. About 20 of Reuben's Amish relatives assisted in the barn raising, as well as some members of the Kennel family, who are Dorothy's relatives.

In September 1984, Dorothy and Reuben celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary at Camp Deerpark with their children and grandchildren. It seemed fitting to celebrate there, a place where they had both greatly given and greatly received. They donated money and materials to renovate motel #7 as part of their 50th wedding anniversary.

Many memories of Reuben and Dorothy are linked with Camp Deerpark, a place they kept in their prayers. One of their favorite scriptures was Psalm 23:1-2, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters." (KJV)

—Written by Dale & Duane Stoltzfus.

Reuben and Dorothy Stoltzfus, volunteers and parents of Dale Stoltzfus, one of Camp Deerpark's founders and camp administrator for many years.

Camp Deerpark and I

by Marian Sauder Egli

As an 11-year-old farm girl from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, I was enthralled riding over the awesome and expansive George Washington Bridge into Harlem, in New York City, in 1956–58. That bridge has remained a landmark in my soul until this day.

We visited our sister and her husband, Grace and Jacob Good, who lived in the tiny apartment behind the Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church. Jacob was serving in 1-W service as his alternative to serving in the military.

After Grace and Jacob moved to Reading, Pennsylvania, I kept attuned to urban ministry in Reading and in New York City. I learned about the Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church fire from Dottie Nolt, now Weber. As an Eastern Mennonite University residence director, I took special care of the students from cities and other countries. In 1981, I took the Eastern Mennonite Seminary course “Cross Cultural Evangelism” in which we spent a week in New York City with Dale Stoltzfus instructing us. This was one month after my sister, Grace, passed away, and it was emotional and comforting to visit the church my sister had been a part of in its early days.

My summer job was being cook at Camp Hebron. There I met Jesus and Mim Cruz, who were from New York City. I learned about Camp Deerpark from Lanny Millette, a college friend who was on the summer staff. I was happy when Mim Cruz hired me to cook at Deerpark for two summers. Reuben and Dorothy Stoltzfus surprised me when they brought my parents, Amos and Barbara Sauder, along with lots of sweet corn, to camp. Those summers reconnected me with children and churches in New York City.

While in seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, I had friends who studied urban ministry in Chicago. We discussed how the Bible relates to the inner city. After seminary, I took a job at Heartsease Home for teenage girls in Manhattan and moved across the George Washington Bridge into an apartment above Seventh Avenue Mennonite Church, about 30 years after I had first crossed the bridge. Later



Lynda Newswanger, Lenny Torres, and Marian Sauder, c. 1990.

I moved to an apartment in the Bronx above the apartment where Jesus and Mim Cruz lived.

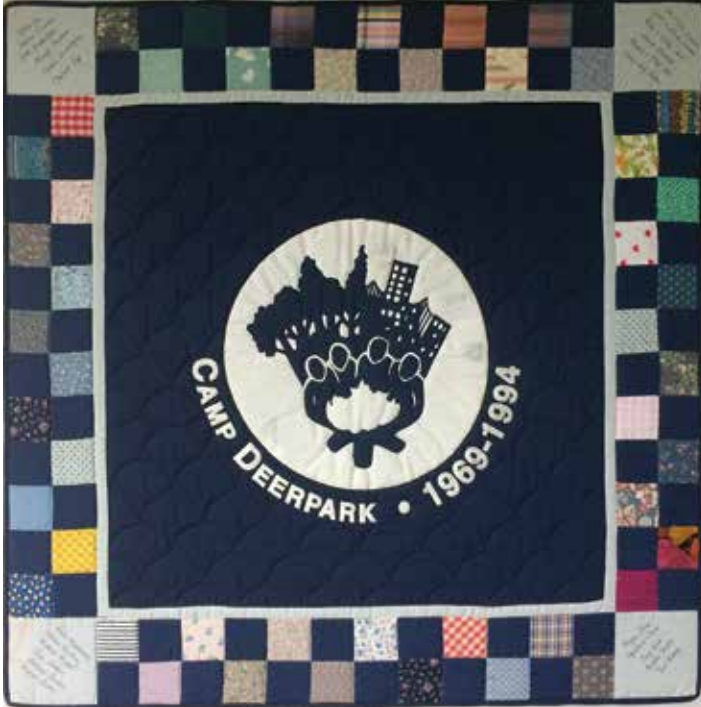
While working in jobs with New York City Children and Family Services, I served as secretary of the New York City Council of Mennonite Churches and was on the Camp Deerpark Board of Directors. I participated in Seventh Avenue, Manhattan Fellowship and North Bronx Mennonite churches.

When we as a camp board were searching for a new administrator, Gene Shelly and Ray Pacheco addressed me with what I first thought was an absurd idea, that I could do the job. I talked with Bill and Ann Troyer from the Bronx. Bill was asked to be director of maintenance, and they agreed to serve at camp. The Lord helped me realize how much I cared for the churches and for camp, so I accepted the job and served from March 1, 1990, through October 31, 1995.

One of my goals as administrator was for the churches to enjoy and own Deerpark as their camp. And I wanted for the volunteers and supporters from Pennsylvania to know the beauty and riches of the churches and people of New York City. When a church youth group came for a week of service, I took them to Seventh Avenue in the city for Sunday worship and spent the afternoon sightseeing. For morning devotions, I read Bible images of the city where people felt safe and secure within the city gates while thieves and robbers roamed the countryside.

I found that in Hebrew a “camp” is a temporary (never permanent) protective enclosure. The word “camp” comes from the verb “to bend, curve.” I had Psalm 34:7 written on the bottom of the camp stationary: “The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.” Sue Schlabach (wife of Ryan Newswanger and daughter-in-law to Wes and Marian) used a campfire when designing a new graphic for the 25th anniversary celebration.

I never got over choking-up with tears when I heard the bus come groaning up the hill, whether filled with campers or a church group, and then seeing it round the bend in the road. It was a holy moment, knowing that God was present and would speak to all of us anew through worship, nature and fellowship. I liked being present at baptisms in the pool. The sound of people singing in differing languages in the chapel and around the campfire still rings in my soul. I loved the face-to-face conversations with campers and staff, including people from differing cultures. When we settled the bill in my office at the end of a retreat, I enjoyed hearing the pastor recount what had happened over the weekend. Tears almost came again as the bus and cars left camp, going out of sight as they rounded the



25th Anniversary Quilt

corner, returning to their homes in the city. We all had been touched by an Almighty God.

Not everything went smoothly. In one of the skits planned for camper devotions, the mostly African-American and Hispanic staff had a white young man in the role of Jesus and an African-American young man as the devil. I had them modify the skit and one staff person said that I interfered with the spirit—the message of the skit didn't come through. One lesson I wasn't happy about was when staff used hearts with differing colors, the black heart representing sin. I had African-American friends and church leaders (Hubert and Helen Brown) and had listened to them for 25 years speak of their concerns about race and how the Scriptures related to them. I was emotionally involved with the concerns of the civil rights movement. A board member, Doris Perkins from Seventh Avenue, said that I had done the right thing in the first mentioned instance. But I see that I must be in conversation and listen to others define racism.

The New York State Health Department required that children and youth “sleep-away camps” have a pool lifeguard certified to teach campers

to swim. One summer the staff person whom we expected to be our lifeguard didn't complete her training. Johnette Benjamin, the program director, and I contacted every aquatic training program we could find in New York City and in Orange County and communities around camp in search of a qualified lifeguard. The Christian camp down the road from us also needed a qualified lifeguard.

A professor who summered up the road from camp was qualified but she didn't want to lifeguard. A qualified woman from New York City called for an interview and then didn't show up. During that time, as I gathered towels from the wash line, I looked at the pool and thought: "It can't be God's will that we have no lifeguard for the campers."

I sat in the office that Tuesday morning, knowing that campers in the city had already boarded the bus and were on their way to camp. I just couldn't pick up the phone to call many different aquatic programs and hear people say one more time, "We don't know of anyone available to serve you." But I couldn't bear to think of a summer with campers not being able to jump into the pool. So, I prayed again, picked-up the phone, and in my second call to the city, an instructor said he knew of someone who just completed training and may be available.

Ten minutes later, Constantine, a Russian young man, called and we set up the next morning for an interview. I can still see that red car coming up the road and recall the knowledge that God was answering our prayers. Constantine served both of our Christian camps. Some campers and even staff thought he was a little too strict as a lifeguard. I couldn't have cared less about their complaints. I knew how close they had come to not being able to go to the pool at all; and I knew they were safe under his careful eye.

That summer an Ethiopian young man, Helina, was on staff. Both he and Constantine had lived under communist regimes. I felt like I touched base with another world. Under usual circumstance we didn't hire staff who claimed no religion. But this hiring turned out okay. Constantine attended campfire. And he was so respectful to everyone and of the camp.

As I worked hard managing everything, I felt good knowing people were experiencing God and nature. Many of the campers had moved to New York City from the South or immigrated from other countries. When they touched the soil, and breathed in the country air, their souls also touched the soil of their home state or homeland.

Garifuna women played soccer while barefoot. Some women gathered tea by the stream to take home with them. We had a lame duck by the pond and the other ducks were mistreating it. Some West Indian women from

Guyana heard staff discussing it and asked if they could dress and cook the duck. We said yes and they seemed blessed to be able to cook up fresh fowl for their group. They dressed it in the kitchen. This was after the summer camping season and I felt that the health department wasn't likely to stop by.

There is intimacy in lodging and feeding groups of people. One learns about distinctions in their cultures. One group asked for an iron as they royally prepared to honor God in worship Sunday morning, looking their best. When I found iron marks on the carpet I didn't care because the carpet was well-worn.

The people who had more recently immigrated to the city were the ones most grateful for the camp facilities. The people with the higher incomes had the most complaints. I felt at times that people wanted "resort facilities" at "rustic camp" prices. I was ashamed of the Annex building but the other facilities were okay. God blessed camp with many volunteers who gave money and helped to make upgrades to the facilities over the years. We got bales of comforters from the Mennonite Central Committee Material Resource Center, which added color to the rooms. It was simply fun and a blessing to learn to know and interact with so many people.

When Bill Troyer resigned from his position as director of maintenance, Lester Sutter, a camp board member and pastor of Redeeming Grace Fellowship on Staten Island, brought his brother-in-law, Orville Egli, to come and see camp and maybe apply for Bill's job. Orv was from Hopedale, Illinois, and had gone to Staten Island to do a major renovation of the church parsonage next to the church they had purchased, but the city building permit was on hold.

I was so happy and relieved when Orv accepted the position because he seemed like he could fix everything about everything. There was a closet between the porch and office in the lodge that held sports equipment and whatever was thrown into it. Orv removed the wall and the office was open with a view to the front of the lodge. He added a semi-bath and two rooms in the administrator's house basement where I lived in addition to keeping up with all the major and minor maintenance. On occasion he was camp's ever-fastest dishwasher.

I was impressed that someone who had always lived within a 10 mile radius in rural Illinois could come and live in the mountains and enjoy relating to many different people. He knew folks in Staten Island, but I showed him more of the city by taking him to Seventh Avenue on a Sunday morning. After church we walked to a "soul" restaurant for lunch. Orv

noted that he and I were the only white people on the sidewalk. Since I acted like I knew what I was doing, he thought we must be okay. We attended the Ethiopian pastor's ordination in the afternoon.

Orv and I worked well together. We listened to our hearts, and Lester Sutter married us on April 29, 1995, at Redeeming Grace Fellowship. We stayed at camp until October 31. Orv had brought his motorcycle to camp, and staff saw a new me when I rode with him up the hill to see Walter and Jacqueline Mehr. I already had a strong friendship with them, and Orv and Walter enjoyed each other's companionship. It was fun to do things with them as a couple.

Yes, finances were a constant struggle. During my first summer, when bills were piling high and I didn't know what to do, I spoke to the chairman of the New York City Council of Mennonite Churches. He said, "What is the board doing about it?" I talked with the board chairman, who was from Pennsylvania, and he said, "The people in New York City need to learn that they can't depend on the people from Pennsylvania all of their lives." Barb Freeman gave me support as we worked together in the office. I valued her friendship and good work.

At the end of my five-year term the board offered me another two years to serve. I was tired. I did so much hands-on work. I felt that camp needed an administrator to focus on development and marketing. Orv suggested that camp needed a broader relationship with the local community. I served an additional eight months and then was grateful to hand the care of Camp Deerpark over to Ken Bontrager. I'll always be grateful for the treasure camp was to me.

Marian Sauder Egli, former board member, camp director 1990–95.

Volunteering at Camp

with Charlie and Joyce Martin

Charlie and Joyce Martin first learned about Camp Deerpark through their daughter, who volunteered as part of a Sunday School group from Sandy Hill Church when she was about 14 years old. This was in 1969, shortly after camp was purchased. But it wasn't until several years later, around 1978, when Charlie and Joyce became youth sponsors at Conestoga Mennonite Church in Morgantown, Pennsylvania, that they thought of their



Hopewell Mennonite, Conestoga Mennonite, Bowmansville Mennonite and Mercersburg Mennonite churches have sent youth groups for more than 30 years to cut firewood at camp. Hopewell Mennonite youth pose in front of a full wood shed. Charlie is top left and Joyce top right, c. 1986.

daughter's experience at the camp and decided to take the youth group for a work weekend.

When they arrived at camp, Joyce remembered how the youth disappeared into the main house. "The kids were going upstairs, and I didn't ever see them come down," Joyce said. "When I asked them later on what was so interesting about it, they answered, 'Oh, you should see upstairs; there's all kinds of stairways and stuff!'"

In 1981, Charlie and Joyce began to bring youth from Hopewell Mennonite Church to camp. They had begun attending Hopewell, and thought the new youth group would also enjoy the experience.

The youth groups that Charlie and Joyce brought were always in charge of cutting wood, but the kids didn't mind the repetition. Even though Charlie and Joyce no longer brought up the youth group from Conestoga Mennonite Church, the church continued to send volunteers to cut wood. (As of 2018, Conestoga Mennonite Church has been to camp to cut wood for 37 years.)

In 1981, Spruce Lodge converted to wood heat. "The kids were excited when they got to see the new furnace for the main house," Joyce said. "This

helped them realize how much wood it actually took to warm the building. The kids felt like, wow, this really made a difference.”

Joyce remembers a rivalry between the two church youth groups about who could cut the most wood. Jim Baer, who lived at camp, had a solution. “Well, I decide who wins,” Jim said. “I can help Hopewell win or I can help Conestoga. It’s easy. I just send one group farther into the woods, and then they don’t get as much done!”

Charlie and Joyce also kept returning to camp because of the connection with the staff and the ministry of camp. Charlie remembers how amazed he was at the year-round staff. “They had a lot of people that gave a tremendous amount of time and commitment, and they had a heart for what God was doing,” he said. “They would come up with ways to keep advancing the program with what little they had.”

“You would realize that some of the campers would come back and be leaders, which really says that camp had an effect on a number of kids and their lives,” Charlie said. “It just felt good to be a part of what was going on there.”

Charlie believes that camp is a relaxing space, even if most of their time at camp is for volunteer work. He worked at camp for a few years, after they stopped taking volunteer groups, as a builder for the staff housing and the new maintenance shed. “I was up long before anybody else,” he said, “and I would see the sun rising and the birds singing. The way that you could sit on the big porch and look down and watch the deer and you could see the sun coming up—compared to the city, it’s such a quiet, peaceful environment.”

Charlie and Joyce got to watch camp grow, both in the number of people served and in the facilities available to guests. They hope that the ministry of camp will continue to be transformative and integrative.

“I think that at Camp Deerpark they really taught you that you can be committed in your faith and walk with the Lord but also can get committed in your lifestyle and how it relates to those around you in a positive way,” Joyce

In 2009 Charlie served as Construction Supervisor during the construction of two staff houses and the maintenance building.



said. The Martins also learned that being able to put your complete trust in faith is a valuable tool.

Charlie added, “There was a time that I would say, ‘Well, Lord, why don’t you just bring a couple of rich guys in here and just pour money in here and let them build their camp!’ Then I realized that camp still needed to maintain a dependency on the Lord, or would they just think, well, finally we’ve arrived and they might lose some of their commitment. Camp should continue to embrace their vision and their trust in God because he’s been faithful in the past. He’ll meet the needs as he sees the need there.”

—Written by Dillon Hershey, Goshen College intern.

Charlie and Joyce Martin, volunteers for over 30 years, former members of the Lancaster banquet planning committee.

Reflecting on the Past and Vision For the Future

by Ken Bontrager

As the Camp Deerpark board and leadership looks toward the next fifty years of ministry we will hold precious the collection of stories compiled in the previous pages. We will not forget where and how God has led us to this point. We will look back to learn and look forward with renewed faith. We will work toward keeping our eyes and hearts open to a vision for the future while maintaining a realistic expectation for today.

Working in the present, while also developing ideas and plans for the future, is one of the executive director’s biggest challenges. If directors move too far on the side of vision, they may be perceived to have their head in the clouds. On the other hand, if directors focus excessively on the struggles of the day-to-day operations, without developing future plans for improvement, they may appear to lack vision. Over the years I have worked to balance these responsibilities, sometimes tipping the scale too much on one side or the other. But I have also watched camp grow and flourish, and am grateful for those I work with, such as a strong board, to help provide clarity.

Documented core values have been the most helpful guiding tool in creating a balance between vision for the future and the practical application today. The core values have become the playbook for ministry operation. Both our visions and dreams for the future and our daily practices can be regularly checked against our documented core values.

In 2008 Zachary Garber joined our staff as the Program Director. He came with a wealth of outdoor and camping experience, but he had never spent a summer at Camp Deerpark. It goes without saying that there was conflict in expectations. The summer children's camp had evolved into a beautiful program with strongly held, yet unwritten, values and practices. In part to provide clarity for Zachary and in part to prevent mission drift in the future, we proceeded to place on paper the essence of Camp Deerpark. On an October Saturday in 2009 at a back table in the IHOP on 232nd Street and Broadway, I sat for several hours with the summer staff leadership team of Zachary Garber and Veronica Dingwall as we talked through the thirteen points that continue to guide our ministry.

A few years later the five Core Values of Camp Deerpark again came out of a bit of a crisis. Deborah's parents live in Florida and our family has often enjoyed spending a few weeks over Christmas in sunny Florida. On one of those trips back to New York I was overwhelmed with dread of returning to camp. I sought counsel from several trusted friends. Two friends essentially told me to put my big boy pants on, stop whining, and get back to work. Board member Hyacinth Stevens was a bit more compassionate. "If you are going to leave, you need to tell the stories of camp before you leave. The current staff need to know who we are and what God has done for us." Over the next few months I dedicated time at each weekly staff meeting to tell a new story of God's faithfulness to Camp Deerpark. I told about



Zachary Garber with camper at Sam's Point.

the day we received an insurance rebate check the same day the electricity was scheduled to be disconnected. I told about the soil tests and the new sewer system. I told about Brubaker Excavating offering the Kubota tractor a few hours after we said we would start praying for the exact same tractor. Remembering and telling the stories reignited my passion for the ministry of Camp Deerpark. Along with the storytelling exercise I began to document what I saw as the core values of Camp Deerpark.

The board and staff discussed and processed the core values over several meetings in 2013. They recounted what we have done in the past and looked ahead to what we agree as a community to continue. In September of 2013 the board officially adopted our current five point document of core values. Following are stories of how the heart of Camp Deerpark was lived out through the hands, feet, and attitudes of our staff and board.

Express the Love of Jesus and Biblical Principles.

A few years ago one of our neighbors was doing some construction work at his house and because he had limited driveway space asked if the excavator he was renting could be loaded and unloaded in the camp parking lot. At the end of the week they again asked if the machine could be parked at camp until it was picked up. The gentleman hired to do the work added, “We have twenty unused hours on the rental agreement so feel free to use it if you have any projects”. Of course my eyes lit up and I worked all afternoon replacing a culvert at the bottom of the tubing hill. As often happens there was a misunderstanding and our neighbor was convinced he had been charged \$300 for additional hours. I knew the charge was for an earlier rental, but several attempts to communicate the truth only added to the conflict. In the end the camp board made a decision to value relationship over money. At a time when finances were extremely tight I wrote a check for \$300 to our very wealthy neighbor because it seemed like the best way to express the love of Christ.

Stay Tightly Connected to our Original Mission. Camp Deerpark is owned by the New York City Mennonite Churches and our mission is to serve those churches.

In the fall of 2014 as we were looking toward the completion of the first four Promise Woods cabins, we invited four different owner churches to take on the responsibility for ongoing maintenance of each cabin. As we gathered to dedicate each cabin the construction supervisor, Kenton Baer, handed the keys to the primary donor. The donor then handed the keys to



Members of Immanuel Community Church: Sherman Johnson, Jeryl Zimmerman, Bedel Kiah, and Elijah Woods clean their Promise Woods cabin #7, Glory.

a representative of the sponsoring church. Finally, the church handed the keys to our facilities director, Sean McConaghay. The exercise was meant to celebrate several landmarks. First we celebrated the completion of the construction work and all of the volunteers who helped make it possible. Secondly, we celebrated the financial gifts that helped to make the cabin possible. Third, we publicly noted the commitment of the owner church to: pray for the ministry that would happen in the cabin, spend one day each year deep cleaning their cabin, and make an annual contribution toward the depreciation costs of the cabin. Finally, as the keys were passed to Sean we acknowledged that it falls on the camp staff to take day to day responsibility for physical maintenance and ministry program. One person noted, “The easy work is finished and the hard work begins.” It was important to the financial donors, construction workers, and camp staff that the owner church was in the middle of the Promise Woods dedication and ownership.

Hospitality is Central to our Summer Camp and Retreat Ministry.

Soon after Rick Weaver joined the camp staff in 2008, he served pork chops with a Jamaican Jerk spice and they were amazing. As the host I went through the dinner buffet line last and was a little discouraged to discover the pork chops were completely gone.

As I was reluctantly loading my plate with salad, rice, and the vegetable of the day, I noticed a pretty large man along with his family in the corner of the dining room with five pork chops wrapped in a napkin. At camp we have an all you can eat policy, but it is not an all you can eat and all you can carry policy. I was more than a little upset. A few minutes later one of the long time members of the church came over to me and said, “Isn’t it great? This is their first time coming to church.” I was immediately humbled as I remembered that hospitality is our core value. If a few extra pork chops will help make a new family feel welcome then I will happily eat rice and broccoli.

In May, Camp Deerpark hosted several families along with a church retreat group. One of the families had lost a daughter to cancer less than two months earlier. The mother told us, “I just needed to get to camp, to sit and allow God to heal me.” Of course she also spent time speaking with Deborah Bontrager who was able to give comfort as only one who has been through the death of a child. On this Sunday afternoon, hospitality was a hug and a listening ear.

We are an Organization that Considers Policy in the Context of People.

In 1997 Hyacinth Banks (Stevens) was serving as our summer program director. Together we had reviewed the list of summer staff and felt very good about the team that she had assembled. However, on the second day



Father and son, Miguel and Victor Mendez, color their art project, Family Camp 2017.

of staff training I noticed an extra five-year-old girl on the playground. I pulled Hyacinth to the side and was told that one of the kitchen staff had brought their little sister. “I don’t know, she just showed up on the bus.” I am embarrassed to say that my response was less than compassionate, “Well, she needs to get back on that bus and go home.” Our policy did not allow for summer staff bringing their younger siblings along to camp. A few days later I came back to Hyacinth because the child was still at camp. I was informed the family had recently experienced a fire in their apartment which left them living with an uncle. There was no way the family could leave a five-year-old daughter with the uncle. Hyacinth had the wisdom to place the organizational needs in the context of the individual need. As it turned out, there was another five-year-old staff daughter at camp that summer and the two spent hours on the playground together.

Be Good Stewards of the Resources God has Given Us.

Dear Camp Deerpark Staff

I am 91½ years old—live alone and cannot afford a constant donation. Enclosed please find a check for \$20.

God Bless You

Eva

A few days after we received this gift from Eva in 2003, I was in the Otisville Hardware to pick up a few items and my total bill came to about \$20. I remember thinking very soberly about the items that I had just purchased and the ninety-one year old woman on a fixed income who had made significant sacrifice to support the ministry of Camp Deerpark. We will never take lightly a gift of any size.

As we follow our core values, the Camp Deerpark board and leadership has a vision to complete the Promise Woods Children’s Camp Village and then address our need for expanded food service and dining room facilities. We will keep pushing forward with leadership training for pastors and young adults. We will continue to encourage and strengthen families through our August family camp programs. We will strive to host the best summer children’s camp with the most loving summer staff in the world. Camp Deerpark is a ministry that has always been short on resources, but strong on mission. We have seldom doubted the important role that this place has in the life of the churches in New York City and larger church. We have always had more ministry outreach opportunities than resources to

meet those needs, which is why we will always need the financial support of our friends.

It has been a joy to follow great leaders like Dale and Doris Stoltzfus, Jerry and Leonor Kennell, Miriam Cruz, Jim Baer, Jay and Joyce Sauder, and Marian Sauder Egli. This place and the people who have made it possible are a gift from God to the churches of New York City. It is a gift that provides more than we ever thought it would and perhaps more than we will ever know. It is a gift that none of us deserve, but one that we appreciate beyond words. Thank You, God, for Camp Deerpark.

—Ken Bontrager, current director.



First director, Dale and Doris Stoltzfus, with current director, Ken Bontrager, on steps of Promise Woods cabin #5, Blessing, 2017.

Appendices



Mission Statement

The mission statement adopted by the board in February, 2006 says:

Camp Deerpark is a ministry of the New York City Mennonite Churches—a community of Christ where children, youth, and families from all cultures are welcomed to fellowship together in the serenity of God’s creation.

Camp Deerpark Core Values

Adopted By Board of Directors September 28, 2013

1. Express the Love of Jesus and Biblical Principles
 - a. To every person that comes on to the camp grounds including summer camp children, weekend retreat guests, individuals on personal retreat, and the garbage truck driver.
 - b. By having integrity in all business dealings with:
 - Vendors
 - Guest groups
 - Campers and parents
 - Staff and volunteers
 - Donors
 - Neighbors and community
 - Government authority
 - c. By fostering Christian community: We want to be an organization that takes the lead in resolving conflicts, opening communication, and strengthening relationships.

2. Stay Tightly Connected to our Original Mission—Camp Deerpark is owned by the New York City Mennonite Churches and our mission is to serve those churches.
 - a. We need to make sure that we never take Camp Deerpark in a direction that the owner churches are not ready to go.
 - b. We need to put our programming resources into programs that benefit all of the churches.
 - c. An ancillary, yet important result of staying tightly connected to our New York City Mennonite Churches is that Camp Deerpark will continue to be a bridge between the urban and rural Mennonite Church.
3. Hospitality is Central to our Summer Camp and Retreat Ministry
 - a. We serve New Yorkers and those who live in the greater New York City metropolitan area. While New York City is made up of a collection of neighborhoods that are often very warm and friendly, it can also be a place that is overcrowded and impersonal. After a hard week of work, fighting traffic home, rushing to church on Friday night, waiting for the folks who encountered even more obstacles, fighting traffic out of the city, and finally arriving at camp an hour or more later than planned; we want our guests to take a deep breath of fresh air, smell freshly brewed coffee, and know that they are in their home in the country.
 - b. In a world where people are known by their account number, we want to be very personal.
 - c. We do not have a five star facility, but we want to treat every person with a five star attitude.
 - d. When children arrive for a week of summer camp after a two hour bus ride, we want to have cheering staff eagerly anticipating their arrival.
 - e. We want our staff to be good listeners that encourage our guests and campers to unload their stress.
4. We Are an Organization that Considers Policy in the Context of People
 - a. Policies are created to ensure that decisions are made to protect the organization and the greatest number of people. However, those policies often make life more difficult for individuals.
 - b. We want to be very considerate to how our policies affect individuals and find creative ways of meeting the needs of our campers, guests, staff, volunteers, and donors.
 - c. When we need to enforce policy we want to communicate with compassion and empathy.

- d. We never want policies that simply make our lives easier at the expense of people.
 - e. A policy should never replace an honest and loving conversation.
5. Be Good Stewards of the Resources God has Given Us
- a. Approximately 50% of our operating income comes from donations. We don't ever want to take those contributions for granted.
 - b. Many of our guests make significant financial sacrifices to make their weekend retreat possible. We also don't ever want to take that sacrifice for granted.
 - c. We want to continue to use the tool triangle to determine the need for expenditures.
 - d. We want to continue to make good use of volunteers.
 - e. We want to be meticulous with maintenance to ensure that our tools, equipment, and buildings are useful as long as possible.
 - f. We need to be careful that a lack of cash flow does not turn our thinking into a mentality of poverty and result in bad financial decisions.
 - g. Continue to work towards raising our earned income percentage.
 - h. We want to continue caring for and managing our forest and the 277 acres that we own.
 - i. We acknowledge that the staff here at Camp Deerpark have and continue to make significant sacrifices to be here. We want to be good stewards of their commitment to this ministry.

Volunteers from Hudson Valley Draft Horse Association skid logs that will be used to build the Promise Woods program center, 2018.



Summer Camp Values

These values articulated in the fall of 2009 are used as a decision making tool and as a guiding reference point for the summer camp program. They are not in order of importance.

1. Responsibility

- Responsibility for one's own self
- Responsibility to the family
- Responsibility to the community

2. Peacemaking

- Resolving conflicts and healing broken relationships with those around us, even if we are the wronged party.

3. Community

- Being a part of a close group. In the camp setting this would be the cabin group.

4. Nature Appreciation

- Valuing nature because it was created by God and reflects God's artistry.

5. Worship

- Praising God for who He is and what He has done.

6. Fun

- Making every activity a joy to participate in.

7. Scripture taught from an Anabaptist perspective

- Creating biblical literacy in future church leaders.

8. Christ Centered

- Bringing Jesus into everything we do.

9. Leadership Development

- Modeling good leadership while giving opportunities for others to try out their leadership skills.

10. Accessible and Affordable

- Making camp open to everyone regardless of economic status or disability.

11. Stewardship

- Taking care of what we have been given. Using resources wisely and minimizing waste.

12. Service

- Helping others in practical ways as a demonstration of how Christ loves us.

13. Safety

- Assess the risk of each activity beforehand.
- Provide proper supervision for all activities.



Camp Deerpark staff spring 2018 (front row) Jack McConaghay, Elias McConaghay, Nehemiah Bontrager, Joseph Cheek, Noah Cheek, Ethan Cheek; (second row) Sean McConaghay, Kim McConaghay, Hannah Bontrager, Deborah Bontrager, Ken Bontrager, Caleb Cheek, Susan Cheek, Ben Cheek; (third row) Jason Jarrett, Nancy Reichert, Barb Freeman, Janice Barrett, Gideon Bontrager, Meredith Bontrager; (back row) Connor MacNeil, Mallorie MacNeil, Sodelina Holderbaum, Paul Holderbaum, Leonard Mow, Kevin Smith, and Rick Weauer.

Timeline

First Mennonite congregation established in NYC (Fox Street)	1949
First organized camping for NYC youth (Camp Tel Hai)	1953
First meeting to discuss purchasing a camp specifically for NYC Mennonites	October 1968
Property at Brandt Road, Westbrookville, NY purchased	May 6, 1969
Youth Retreat, first program at Camp Deerpark	May 30, 1969
First children's camp at Camp Deerpark	July 7–12, 1969
First church retreat	July 18–19, 1969
Board of directors formed	October 8, 1969
Camp Deerpark Association established for financial support	1969
First fundraising banquet held in Pennsylvania	1970
First voluntary resident staff	summer 1970
First NYC area fundraising banquet	1971
Chapel raised for basement addition	fall 1972
First paid resident staff	1975
Hill cabins built	1975–1976
“Alamo” and other playground equipment added	1976
New swimming pool built	1977
Spruce Lodge converted to wood heat	1981
Barn “raising”	1983
Neighbor Walter and Jacqueline Mehr house destroyed by fire	1984
Challenge course built	1984
First staff house built	1988

Began producing maple syrup from camp's sugar maple trees	1997
Forestry team organized to manage Camp Deerpark forests	1998
Second staff house built	1998
Dedication of gazebo in memory of Alfred and Dorothy Kruse	2000
FUTURE represents Camp Deerpark with more than 40 performances across the country	2002–2004
Chapel Sunroom enclosed to create second meeting room	2003
New sewer system installed	2003
Spruce Lodge experienced flooding	2004
Hemlock Pavilion constructed	2004
First Camp Deerpark Homecoming held	2006
Wood-Mizer Bandsaw mill purchased	2008
Hill cabins renovated into staff housing	2008
New maintenance building completed	2009
Promise Woods cabin cluster construction begins	2012
Four cabins at Promise Woods placed into service	2015
Locust Haven a.k.a. "The Annex" demolished	2015
Ground breaking ceremony for Promise Woods Program Center	2018

—Compiled by Jim Baer.

Summer Camp Directors

Camp Deerpark from its inception has been committed to training and developing young adults as leaders. The summer camp program director position has been fertile ground for growing leaders. From 1969 to 1985 the camp administrator was responsible for providing overall direction to the summer camp program while each weekly session had a different director (2009-2013 followed a similar model). Unfortunately, we do not have a comprehensive list of the weekly directors prior to 1986.

2014–present	Kevin Smith
2009–2013	Zachary Garber
2013	Litza Laboriel
2012	Ben Stevens
2011	Kevin Smith, Talibah Aquil, Moises Angustia, Celmalí Jaime
2010	Joyse Saravia
2009	Veronica Dingwall
2008	Moises Angustia
2006–2007	Celmalí Jaime
2002–2005	Hyacinth Stevens
2000–2001	Aura Espinosa and Kacy Brooks
1997–1999	Hyacinth Banks
1995–1996	Melody Pannell
1993–1994	Johnette Benjamin
1989–1992	Ken Bontrager
1988	Joyce Sauder, Ken Bontrager, and Lucille Petracca
1986–1987	Ken Bontrager

Chronological List of Board Members

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| John Buckwalter 1969–1977,
1981–1989 | Ruth Jantzi 1979–1982 |
| Glenn Zeager 1969–1975 | Luis Gonzalez 1981–1993 |
| Carl Metzler 1969–1982 | Melvin Lapp 1983–1990 |
| Gene Shelly 1969–1985, 1988–1994 | Mim Cruz 1984–1986 |
| Ronald Collins 1969–1971 | Lowell Jantzi 1985–2003 |
| Richard “Dick” Pannell
1969–1972, 1995–1997 | Marian Sauder Egli 1987–1995 |
| Nelson Kauffman 1969–1970 | Doris Perkins 1989–1994 |
| Aurelio Rodriguez 1970–1972, 1978 | Jim Leonard 1990–1992 |
| Ray Pacheco 1971–1981,
1985–1991 | Edgar Ortiz 1992–1998 |
| Dale Weaver 1971, 1975,
1978–1979, 1981–1993 | Lester Sutter 1992–1994 |
| Richard Frey 1971–1975,
1978–1983 | Maynard Shirk 1992–2013 |
| Don Gunden 1972–1976,
1979–1990 | Ken Kurtz 1994–1997 |
| Harold Davenport 1972–1978 | Richard Pannell 1995–1997 |
| Ruth Burkholder 1972, 1975–1976 | Billy Thompson 1995–1998 |
| Cesar Richards 1972–1976 | Jesus Cruz 1997–2005 |
| Damaris Lugo 1972–1976 | Darcell Lawrence 1997 |
| Elvin Bowman 1973–1974 | Lenny Torres 1997–1998 |
| Jay Lehman 1974 | Antonieta Calderon 1998 |
| Les Mininger 1974–1975, 1978,
1991–1993 | Melody Pannell 1998–2003 |
| Jose Feliz 1974, 1977–1979 | Tiffany Powell-Lambright
1998–2000 |
| Frank Gonzalez 1974–1975 | Amin Laboriel 1999–2000 |
| Evelyn Brown 1975–1978,
1983–1984 | Sara Mateo–Deo 1999–2013 |
| John Smucker 1976–1977 | Wayne Shreffler 2001–2009 |
| Abraham Aponte 1976–1977 | Nancy Lopez–Cottrell 2002–2003 |
| Cecelia Robinson 1977 | Moises Angustia 2002–2014 |
| Frank Freeman 1978–1979,
1982–1985 | Annabelle Perri 2002–2014 |
| Wes Newswanger 1979–1983 | Navara Iris Sebastian 2003–2014 |
| | Rick Buckwalter 2003–2015 |
| | Hyacinth Stevens 2003–2014 |
| | Brian Murray 2003–2017 |
| | Ben Rader 2007–2017 |
| | Daryl Groff 2008–2010 |
| | Lilian Flores 2012–2017 |
| | Robert Charles 2012–2014 |
| | Anthony Sensenig 2014–2017 |

Board of Directors in 2019

Daniel Angustia	Danica Lefever
Carmen Benedith	Victor Mendez
Luke Berg	Lanny Millette
Veronica Dingwall	Marcia Stoesz
Krista LaRuffa	Grace Smith

Camp Deerpark Fun Facts

The llamas, Nadora and Bernice, were both born at Camp Deerpark. A few hours after her birth in June 2007 Nadora fell into the old pool. Sean McConaghay observed her mother Ono looking highly upset and ran down to help. Upon arrival he climbed into the water saving Nadora's short life. In Spanish the word for swim is nadar. The name Nadora is derived from the female version of swimmer. Bernice was born July 2008. A few weeks after her birth the right to name her was sold at our Homecoming Auction. In a tightly contested bidding war the five Smith brothers outbid the Freedom Farmers with a price of \$280. Bernice is named after the Smith's grandmother who had passed away earlier in the year.

Since the **wood boiler** was installed in 1981 Camp Deerpark has burned approximately **1225 cords of firewood**. If the wood were stacked on the Camp Deerpark basketball court, the wood pile would be almost 50 feet high. It would have required 165,375 gallons of fuel oil to provide the same amount of heat.

The **white ash tree** near the gazebo, standing 85 feet tall and 42½ inches in diameter, is the **largest tree** at Camp Deerpark.

On June 30 to July 2, 2017 Camp Deerpark hosted Evangelical Garifuna Church Manhattan who brought **178 guests**, setting the record for the **most guests on a weekend** at Camp Deerpark. With 117 beds, at least 61 people slept on the floor.

The maple syrup operation has produced **674 gallons of syrup** from 1997 to 2018 with the 62 gallons in 2008 being the highest yield.

The **steel pipe handrail** on the steps leading to the motels was constructed using the black pipe **golf course flag sticks** left in the rafters of the lawn and garden shed.

The first resident staff living at Camp Deerpark were **Newton and Elsie Beiler**. Their bedroom was what is now the office.

Between **40 and 45 white pine trees** are required to build one Promise Woods cabin. If the cut wood were laid end to end it would stretch 2 miles.

The concrete floor in Hemlock Pavilion was poured by 8th graders from the Bruderhof Community under the generous supervision of Al Schock, owner of Peenpack Sand and Gravel.

50 species of birds were identified by Scott Reichert at camp during one week in May, 2018.

The **rock walls** at camp were built as the first **farmers cleared rocks** from the fields. The walls may have been built over a 20 year time span.

The desks in Promise Woods cabin #5, Blessing, were **hand crafted by Lowell Jantzi** from American Chestnut that had been the Locust Haven attic floor.





Camp Deerpark is sustained by your generous gifts.
www.campdeerpark.org