
My Story; *before, during and after TC*

Present at TC, Grande Prairie from January 4, through mid-July, 1974

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Gandalf: "I'm looking for someone to share in an adventure."
Bilbo Baggins: "An adventure? No, I don't imagine anyone west of Bree would have much interest in adventures. Nasty, disturbing, uncomfortable things. Make you late for dinner..."

1. The Unexpected Journey_____

TC (Teen Challenge), in Grande Prairie, was an unplanned, and unexpected adventure for me; I had no idea what I was in for, and that God would make all things new;

a new year, a new province,
a new life, and new people in it,
a new heart, and a renewing mind,
and like Bilbo, though I'd refused the adventure; I found myself in it anyway;
unplanned, unwanted, but sorely needed.

It was an unexpected adventure, but would become **The Unexpected Journey**.

At the time, I had no idea what God was about to do, where I was going, or that He even had a plan for me; a messed up, mixed up guy- well experienced in the wrong things.

When I arrived at TC, early in January of 1974, at 18, little did I know I would be married a year later; that Heather and me would be working with teens and children, sharing our home with drifters and kids taken from their families, or TC folks or that needed some space and solace, or that I'd be working as a Gas-Plant Operator in Fox Creek, Alberta.

There was a lot I didn't know then, as you will see later in the story.

The very brief ~6-months I'd spent at TC, seemed more like a couple years really; So much happened in my heart and life, around the love and faithfulness of other broken people who welcomed me into the fold.

As for all of us there, a lot happened before TC, during our time there, and in the nearly 50-years since.

So first, bear with me a moment to understand "the before part" and how I ended up at TC in the first place; before the Adventure, and the Long Journey even began.

The Early Shire

Paul the Apostle explained to Timothy; "...the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, I am persuaded is in you also."

My own faith in God, at a tender age was linked deeply to my maternal grandmother and grandfather, and parents as well.

Poppa, would preach in the small Pentecostal Mission in Gooderham, Ontario, and during the week, he and Mumma would fall trees, tend the horses and raise their seven kids.

They both hauled their logs from the forest to my uncle's mill with horses in winter and summer, ran their grocery store, and farmed their land together. After Poppa died when I was about four, Mumma eventually sold the farm, and came to live in our home until she passed away a decade later. She was a gentle and quite woman, yet we learned a lot about the love of God from her, while our parents both worked through the week. Our Dad a school teacher, and our Mum a factory-worker at Union Carbide, working afternoon and night shifts.

My Dad and Mom were also strong of faith in Christ and taught my sister and I about the scriptures, prayer, hope, humility, forgiveness; that each heart God has designed individually; uniquely like no others on this earth, and that He would never abandon us; no matter what.

This all sunk-in deeply, so at eight-years of age I was baptised at my own request. In my heart, I desired to know God and be in His favour, as I did have a fear of God and a desire as well. From that day, and all the way through my life, I also chose never to take the Lord's name in vain, nor did I, that I can remember. All other language was up for grabs.

My first LSD experience was at age eleven. I loved the music and the freedom to be cool. I'd dropped out of school in G-11, and began work in various local factories.

By sixteen, the drinking age of 21 was dropped to 18. I was pressing into the local rock-bands as lead-guitarist, doing needles, drugs, alcohol, seeking women older than I, hanging out in bars with false I.D., and at the end, starting to connect with the bike-gangs and drug dealers as far off as Toronto.

One day I met a pretty girl (Rose) who invited me to a snow-camp where their church youth group was going for long weekend. My intentions for a relationship took me there, but God had a different plan, and I became "saved" indeed, as I heard the testimonies of those around me. God touched my heart once more in the midst of many people I didn't even know, on the last day of the camp.

They celebrated this event and carried the news to their home congregations and other churches, as with their own eyes, they'd seen an immediate change in me, and so did I; it was a peace, confidence, forgiveness and joy that was like a fire inside me.

The following days and months were new to me.

Now, my sister's boyfriend (Steve) and I had grown close over the earlier years; both of us involved in the same vices, yet when Steve saw this change in me, he began his own search for God too. It took him to Alberta.

While he was gone, after another year of exposure to my old haunts, I was soon sliding back into the old-ways. While trying to maintain my faith- doing only drugs that were "organic"- and still trying to be a witness of what God had done in me, I was slowly sinking into the mire again and doing more damage than good.

Around the same time, Steve's journey had taken him to a "Jesus Coffee-house" in Jasper. A short time later, he found a place called Teen Challenge, and returned to Lindsay, hoping I would join him there.

But I said "No- I'm just not ready for that Steve"- Nasty, disturbing, uncomfortable things adventures are. Make you late for dinner.

Steve went back without me.

A short time later, someone who knew the connection between Steve and I, contacted him and said "If you don't get Chris out of here now, he won't be alive when you return". Steve was determined to try once more; he came back again to Ontario, found me in dire-straits, dragged me out of a rowdy hotel-bar, and within a day or two, we were both on a plane to Grande Prairie.

The unexpected, unwanted, sorely needed adventure; the unexpected journey began.

It was January 4th, 1974.

Gate and Pasture

Steve introduced me to Norm and Phillis Labrentz and family, then showed me the dorm having a few beds in back of the Church, and then straight-away told me to "get a job."

Within the first couple months at TC, I'd stopped smoking, and was baptized a second time, (not sure if that's legal). My life was new again, and the old life, was gone.

One important catalyst at TC; we were learning together as would a family growing up.

This was in deed, a time of resting, feeding on God's word, and preparing us to take the real journey ahead, although I'd not been thinking about the future, only the present.

It wasn't a series of training seminars, or courses to take notes and go home with. It was restoring our soul's, learning and working together, over a special time given to us. It was interaction, accountability, and supporting each other. It was putting up with each-other's hang-ups, pride, and normal human traits, as a loving family would need to do.

It was a safe place to make mistakes, learn how to forgive, and move on together:

- Many of us shared similar pasts or experiences;
- There was warmth and encouragement of heart among us, even while in our current state and our issues— and at the same time, trust in God to heal, restore, replace, rebuild, reconcile, and reunite us with Him;
- We learned about “fruits of the Spirit”; the virtue’s and values, knowledge and faith, love and perseverance we would look for in ourselves and each other;
- We listened to Pastor Norm behind the small pulpit, and from others he invited to teach, such as *Reuben and Betty Korpi*;
- We learned that we each had individual gifts and talents, designed by God to make His Church whole; that these things should not divide us but strengthen us together.
- We learned of the promises in God’s Word for us, and how to claim them as our own;
- We learned from Genesis to Revelation how Jesus was promised, how He lived in this world, and How He would live in us whatever may lay ahead;
- We learned how to control our physical self, to confess and move on, and that God is the author and finisher of our faith; and when we messed up, well... we messed up;
- We learned to love Him because He first loved us;
- We had bible-studies, songs, and sharing together on a daily and nightly basis;
- We learned the importance of giving ourselves to serve others, rather than putting our own interests first, and if one should ask forgiveness seven-times in one day, then seven-times a day we would forgive;
- We learned that God’s desire for us, was to reveal *His Son in us*;
- We learned to support each other when in trouble and struggling with our faith or just messing up—encouraging rather than criticizing our short-falls and praying with and for each other;
- We learned what God requires of us; to do justly, to love mercy and walk humbly before Him and others;
- We learned what righteousness is, from Whom it is given, so that none of us should think more highly of ourself than we did for another;
- To listen. To hear a still, small voice that God speaks, ‘this is the way, walk in it.’
- And importantly for me, that I could not possibly live in “The-way” of God on my own; but through His strength, with His church (His people) and in His Word; not by power or might, but by His Spirit; and the Helper He had promised.

The “we” at TC, was the *cap-stone* I think.

Fork in the Trail_____

Well—we are people, and God is God.

As such, there were bound to be some unexpected things along 'The-way' like a fork or two on the trail. These seemed to appear as the more outward displays, behaviours, or things that drew our attention one way or another.

One could just ignore these things (not easy), let them be a mystery, or, feeling the pressure to mature our faith, try hard to imitate some behaviours.

I'll offer a few examples, of what these things were (to me); how they impacted me at the time—and on the long journey ahead.

- Some of those among us, insisted that *speaking in tongues* was in fact, "the evidence of the Holy Spirit in our lives". I felt the tension of having this evidence-- one way or another-- rather than enjoy a sense of inadequacy among my peers.

So, I was one who, with some well-intended coaching, made it happen by imitating others.

But it was like a fly in the ointment; it just didn't seem to fit what I knew in my heart God required of me, or had truly given to me.

It wasn't long before I stopped; because (for me) it became something hollow, something that wasn't as real as what God was already doing in me (without any help).

Should the day come when it happens as in 'Acts', where others could hear my testimony in their own tongue, I hope to be one of them.

- I could see that where an air of spiritual-authority, a higher-calling or a display of the most dynamic 'spiritual' behaviors, would leave tension, suspicion and hesitation.

I often watched new people coming to our church when these things transpired, and hear myself say "well, we'll never see them again". I wasn't often wrong.

- Delving into the depths of one's sin in the 'Prayer Room' with loudness of tongues and shouts, requiring subjectiveness and fearful submission for those under the spotlight, was not a good experience for me, and caused me to walk out of TC one day, without intending to come back.

What ever happened, I thought, to Jesus's approach for even the most devastating of sins..... 'Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more.'

Or, 'He cast them out with one word, and said "Go".

Perhaps we could have had a 'Washing Other's Feet Room' instead.

More than a few of these things carried with them a divisiveness... (please let's face it) that may still exist to this day. Some of us felt the need to follow one path or the other, but in these forks of the road, I found myself wondering about the reality of what God was doing among us... and reconsidering how genuine some things were.

Nasty things, adventures...

Right about now you may wonder why I would bring these things to light.

The simple answer you will find toward the last part of this story.

Please read on.

Kindness and Sacrifice _____

A number of things I did not appreciate then, or certainly "didn't show it" as my Mum would say. One of these was my appreciation of Norm, Phillis and their wonderful family; their kindness and sacrifice for all of us.

With the help of others, these two tender and humble people, had:

- built a Church in the interest of youth and what God was doing in this unique time within North America;
- taken only the small upper-floor of TC for their family, while making the rest of this old funeral-home, a kitchen, fellowship room, bunk-room with a few beds, and oh yeah, a Church;
- made space for a few of us street-people to actually live, hold jobs, access food (PJ sandwiches for me), a bathroom and a shower;
- yielded no prejudice or lording themselves over anyone;
- gave an open door to street people; drunk, sober, stoned, in pain, out of their minds or otherwise in need;
- supported a second house; (the Girl's House) just for females, for privacy and safety;
- seldom scolded me or others when we didn't appear to appreciate or understand the effort needed from them to make for us a safe haven;
- given their privacy and wonderful children to the mission they took on, and enabled them to steward all of us as we occupied their building, God's temple for us, as an offering of love and faithfulness;
- provided a safe environment for all to speak, to learn, to sing, to minister, to be a witness to those who would listen, and to "challenge" us all to let God reveal His Son in us;

Jesus is our High-Priest, Gate to enter God's Kingdom, and Great Shepherd;

Truly, Norm and Phillis, were the faithful shepherds on the ground;

Giving pasture for wayward sheep.

Distant Memories

- Seeing for the first time, my (to-be) wife Heather, walking down the alley outside my TC window, and realizing she lived next door.... I was in love with her that first moment.
- When the pastor from Cherry Point would come, sit with his kids and play his guitar while singing "Heaven came down and glory filled my soul". A humble, soft spoken, gentle man, that I loved to see among us.
- Shooting my bow and arrows at Norm & Phillis's garage door.
- Listening to Pat O'Rourke and his band, sing his own songs; especially the one called "Hands" where Heather also sang with Elaine and others.
- Listening to Norm preach and teach.
- A very personal time with Reuben & Betty that impacted my life.
- Watching the changes in others and in me.
- Seeing new people baptised or ask Jesus into their heart.
- Street witnessing (actually, I feared it, but the memories are good ones).
- Playing songs, that I wrote and sang with Heather by my side.
- Making my lunch for work (as a surveyor) using one loaf of bread to make half a dozen PEJ sandwiches—which always made Phillis laugh.
- Seeing Johnny, and Merela's family together and her loving faith.
- The time my sister Louise came with her friend Jacqueline from France; they painted the new TC-Bus together; Jacqueline having some protest of this reminding her of a brain-washing strategy for children used in her home-land.
- When Steve, Elaine, me, my sister, and Peter Grazanich hiked Mt. Robson. Louise did a sketch at the mountain top, I have it still.
- Fun with Brian, Dave, Steve, and Heather's family on the weekends.
- Riding in Al's truck with Richie and Heather.
- The GP street-parade float; with us all singing, and playing guitars.

Journey's End.... or Another Beginning? _____

After leaving TC with a Christian music-band, travelling across Canada (another story on its own), I went back to Alberta, Fox Creek, where Steve had started a ministry for the youth there. We lived in Roy and Betty Tattersall's welding shop bunk-house.

One day, Brian Moffatt lent me his little car, I took Heather into the Chevron Hills where I had worked, for a last time together. All my hopes of marriage to Heather had seemed to fall into nothing – but in Bruce's car that day, as I was about to end my quest, Heather leaned over and told me "I love you".

A few months later, we married at GP Alliance Church, with Norm laying his blessing on us.

We lived in Fox Creek 15 years and continued with the youth-groups and the local church. We then moved to Medicine Hat in 1990 and lived there 10-years.

1990 was the time of:

- Christian Music Artists divorcing and remarrying; totally rejecting the very words of Jesus;
- Annetta Bryant rejecting her husband's plea for reconciliation;
- The most influential Christian couple in the TV and Church world being found out for using donations for their luxury dog-houses and personal investments;
- The various "Christian" con-artists bilking millions of dollars of donations for their own pleasures while hiring audience persons to fake their false healings;
- My sister providing her own paintings of faith to Huntly Street TV Ministries as an offering in person, only to be tossed aside as a non-financial asset... and a "Thanks" as their only response;
- Jimmy Swagger's "fall from grace" with a hooker while providing money making ministry on TV;
- Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's (CSN&Y) "The American Dream" that adequately described Pastor Swaggered as a thief, fake, and crying on TV for forgiveness and more donations.

This song by CSN&Y hit me hard and seemed to wake me up into reality. Was TC just a fantasy – not real – was *my faith* also fake and just a ruse? – Had I been taken as a fool – would I become one of these people that used God for gain?

Perhaps now it will make more sense, as to the "Fork's in the Road" I spoke of earlier. It wasn't long before making a decision that my experience at TC must have been nothing less than unreal and I was just a dupe... time to face it had come. I would not associate with any of these people or groups ever again in my lifetime. All Christian music I had went in the trash.

The people I worked for in my new role and new job in Medicine Hat, were already associating me with 'these people'- not good- I would not let that happen. So, I cut off all ties with TC people and other Christians—even my soul-brother Steve. (Forgive me brother)
This is the end of this chapter in my life for good, I thought.

--OK, just take a moment to see how this could happen--
I'd forgotten that, if not for TC, I would not be on this earth.
Yet it was truly the end of my faith and the beginning of life on my own terms once more.

Our marriage became strained as Heather saw the changes in my demeanor and most importantly, my values. I argued against sending our kids to a Christian school, and was rebellious and distrusting of anything with a "Christian label". Smoking again, drinking more, flirting, and being angry inside, I started running a different race; obtaining freedom, knowledge and position.

From 1990 to 2000, I became successful in the career at a large Petroleum facility and ultimately in high position at a corporate level. Having obtained Petroleum Safety Specialist, Emergency Medical Technician, Rescue Tech, Fire Command, Specialist in train derailments, Hazardous Materials; obtaining a Graduate Degree in Leadership and Adult Training at RRU, and became a Canadian Registered Safety Professional with 2nd Class Power-Engineer Certification.

During the next ten years I kept pursuing life on my own terms, running my own race; forgetting all that happened at TC and forgetting what happened before TC. I'd worked hard and put God away from my heart, mind and soul. To top things off: I was unfaithful to my first love, and ran from my sin working overseas in UK, Algeria, Libya and Syria.

Twenty years of putting God aside and abandoning Him, yet He was not done about to put me aside or abandon me, but pursued me, whom He purchased, and died for.

'Escapes from death, belong to The Lord', and through this all, I did escape more than once.

After moving to Campbell River, we separated for nearly a year, until I could repent, return and restore. Humbling experience... and so very difficult for our whole family. But He did the restoring of both our hearts; mine of rebellion, and Heathers of brokenness.

This Shire

Now here I am in His beautiful presence, home, with family and my first-love beside me night and day. I am thankful once more, even though, I still struggle with my own will, my own wants, and my self-interests.

When I saw the plan for reunion of TC, and the call for memories of that time, it really made me stop and think deeply into that six-month experience. So, after a while, I collected these thoughts, and offer them to all of you who were there, for a couple reasons.

1. Partly because I wanted to give some account to you all for the last ~50 years since arriving at TC.
2. So that some of you walking a similar trail, may find hope too. You are not abandoned, but He loves you still. And He will seek you out like the lost lambs we can be, and bring you home- without any help.

I remain thankful for each person at TC, and in particular;

Harvey and Deb – who among many things, gave me a gift of money by God's hand when I was in need, offered their friendship over those early years, and were part of our lives until I hit the dust.

Bruce, who gave me his car for the weekend that Heather told me she loved me.

Monty, who just walked through the Edmonton YMCA door one day when I asked God to send someone to pray with me after a fearful experience.

Norm who rebuked me more than once.

Phillis who put me in my place when needed.

Others who did the same.

Peter Grazanich, who I admired for his desire to have the faith Jesus spoke of.

Everette who helped me laugh and was the real himself all the time.

Johnny who showed his passion, strength and purpose of heart.

Merela, a rock, and whom I admired because of her faith for her family.

My only sibling **Louise and her friend Jacqueline** from France, who were a light and conscience that helped me through the forks in the road at TC.

Steve, who was and is still my mentor and only brother of my soul.

And of course, those I have beside me now:

Louise, who was, and is, and always will be my thankfulness, and beloved sister.

My eldest son; father of our 5-grandchildren;

Our three sons, of whom I know, by faith, God has called and who are listening;

My only love Heather, giver of our three-son's, my light, a lamp, who was and is my only first-love on this earth; she who made us a family again.

The Never-Ending Journey _____

I wonder now, if the time of the "Jesus Movement" in Canada and abroad, was to prepare us and our offspring, for the present time we are in.

To equip us then, to pass on now, to our children and grandchildren, as I received from my grandmother and Heather from her family.

To share with people around us, and most importantly, our families, what we learned, and experienced-- sowing this seed of faith we have been given that will grow and guide another generation or two when they remember what we've told them.

To prepare the way like John did, to make straight paths for the highway of God as we and our children, move toward the Great Day of The Lord, when lawlessness, deceit, crushing of institutions, seeking Artificial Intelligence, adopting the lies of man that we are born as something we are not, to change our genders and those of our kids, to love evil, and hate good, to promote the vile and destroy mercy, justice, truth, righteousness and love itself. When these things become like labour-pains getting stronger and faster as we see this very moment of time.

May our God help our children, guide them, equip them, lead them, call them, pour out His Spirit again, and prepare them now.

Gandalf: "I'm looking for someone to share in an adventure."
Bilbo Baggins: "An adventure? No, I don't imagine anyone west of Bree would have much interest in adventures. Nasty, disturbing, uncomfortable things. Make you late for dinner..."

Thanks-Giving

Thanks to all of you, and especially to Merela, for your "idea", and to those who are working with you.

Thank you to those who were at TC when I was; who put up with my antics, self-centredness and still accepted me - as is - knowing the real me was in the making.

Thank-you Lord, for Norm and Phillis and their family.

Love in Him,

Chris

My notes in the bible I got while at TC.

I kept a log of sort's, on where my faith was dwelling through the years each January.....

