



Albert, Gerry & Alice with Ali, the previous owner.



So much work to be done!



The barn gets a new roof!



The original Linden Lodge.

## THE STEPPING STONES STORY

# "HOW DO WE ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO GROW IN THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LORD?"

That was the question Pastor Jack Visscher and Gerry Vandeburgt discussed at length in 1999, leading to the start of a Youth Mission.

Starting with \$10,000 from the Langley church budget, the Youth Mission sent young people to Pan de Vida orphanage and others to Campfire in Ontario. However, that approach was limited in scale, and there needed to be a better way for more Christian young people to grow and serve. A summer camp seemed like the best way to do that.

In 2003, the Youth Mission, now called Stepping Stones Bible Camp, rented Elks Camp on 0 Ave in Aldergrove for one week. It was a wonderful week, during which the youth grew. For the next two years, the camp was held on Denman Island, which was more of a logistical challenge. Without a proper, permanent location, it wasn't possible to grow this Youth Mission.

For three years, Gerry and his wife Alice travelled all over to find a suitable location. Along with Albert and Trish Visscher, they looked everywhere, from an old hotel in Clinton to a dilapidated retreat on Rolley Lake. Finding an ideal property that was close to the Fraser Valley with enough facilities to host a camp required a miracle.

"It seemed like we had exhausted every possibility," Gerry recalls. "Then one day, I noticed an ad in the paper for a 160-acre property outside Mission and thought I'd check it out. On arrival, I said to Alice, 'This is it; if this property is for sale, our search is done. It's perfect!'"

"Initially, the owner was not interested in us," Gerry continues. "And we left disheartened. But our car broke down at the bottom of the road, which led to me finally getting an opportunity to ask if the property was for sale. The owner showed us around but shared that he had a pending sale. I called him back on the date the other deal was to close, only to learn that the owner now wanted to sell to us. The price was \$1.1 million, which was fair but over budget, and so more fundraising needed to be done."

An open house was hosted on the property for the whole community prior to the deal closing. Visitors to the open house got to see that the property has a humble assortment of old farm buildings with a magnificent vantage point over the eastern Fraser Valley along with a slice of steep mountainside. The simultaneous presence of humble existence combined with the joy and wonder of the views was and is simply captivating, and actually speaks to the message of the Bible Camp. And so, the community at large was in favour of the purchase. With the generosity of a dozen people the property was able to be purchased with the intent of operating a Bible Camp.

After signing the deal, the owner shared that his wife had previously had a dream wherein children were praising the Lord Jesus in the orchard on the property. He felt that it was right the hobby farm become a Bible Camp. How amazing! God had answered many prayers for a permanent Youth Mission with the vision of encouraging young people to grow in their relationship with the Lord.

Once the property was purchased, it needed an enormous amount of work to change the function from a hobby farm into a Bible Camp. Many people have worked tirelessly for many years to patch, fix and clean things up and turn the property into what it is today.

The Red Barn was fixed up and became the hub of camp that so many can look back on with fond memories. With the beds upstairs and the kitchen, dining hall, nurses room and washrooms down below, all of camp ran out of the beloved barn.

When the Red Barn was condemned in 2018, the community came together and built 8 tent cabins. The old farm cottage was retrofitted into a kitchen, and a large tent was purchased to accomodate the many meals served every summer. And so, plans began to form to create a dining hall, a space that would serve Stepping Stones for years to come. The Lord blessed these endeavours, the money was provided, and The Lookout at Stepping Stones was completed just 2 years ago, along with a swimming pool.

The process has been difficult, complex and has taken many years. Yet, through this whole 20 year journey, God has been at work. He has moved people and allowed people, including many young people, to grow in their relationship with Him.

