

The Centre Years

The period immediately following August 1981, spiraled into a meteoric journey that witnesses so many events and so many special people, I simply cannot begin to recall all of them, and any attempt to do so would be vanity. Sometimes when I lie awake, even decades later, I wonder “whatever happened to Peter, or Londis, or Ed Yamada or Fiona, and so many other coworkers during the ‘ad-years’?” In 2003, I received an unexpected email from Ed Yamada who somehow found me on the internet. He had been an employee of mine in 1975, twenty-eight years ago, and now lived as a professional copywriter in a remote forest region north of Tokyo Japan.

I have called these years "*The Centre Years*," simply to account for the time between 1981 and 1994 (including 1982, when I left the ad agency), a time which also marked the birth of my *Masterpeace Fine Art Studio*. I had named my new journey *Christian Communications Centre*, in a typical business fashion to help me sort through this new adventure called "ministry." At the Centre's core was my calling to be a teacher, specifically a deep desire to be a Bible teacher. After the encounter on that cold February highway just south of Keswick, when I asked for three confirmations to know beyond a doubt I was to leave the business world, I became acutely aware of what can best be described as a *calling*. At first, indications of such a calling came in the form of a hunger and thirst for Godly truth. I spend hours of spare time each day reading the Bible. I began making comprehensive notes. Additional time was spent in prayer. After about a period of two years of immersion, I wrote my first teaching. Naturally it dealt with “communication,” the understanding of which I had learned during my many years in the advertising business.

Opportunities to minister and teach began to open during the following year. In 1984, I was asked to be guest speaker at youth rallies and to teach a number of special workshops for young people throughout southern Ontario. I studied both formally and informally, completing a total of six years of correspondence Bible College. The ride was a fast and exciting one. Things began to snowball. No sooner had I spoken at one event, I was asked to speak at another. I began preaching in so many churches throughout southern Ontario I cannot remember them all.

In every case and at every invitation to be guest preacher and teacher, I do remember speaking about the Kingdom of God and a life led by the Spirit of God. My most frequent "guest spots" were with pastor Brian Mahood and his wife Kathy in their large charismatic church in Peterborough, as well as in my home church called Meadowvale Community Christian Reformed Church, in the Ebenezer Reformed Church in Mississauga, and a small fellowship in Pickering under the pastoral care of Jack de Vries. When Brian Mahood opened a Bible School I was one of the school's favourite teachers.

I am compelled, however, at this time to interrupt my speeding train of thought, at the risk of sounding too impressive.

Because I was professionally trained with over fifteen years of practice to effectively market and advertise just about any product and service, I became painfully aware of abusive advertising and fundraising practices in *Christendom*. Much fundraising was initiated under such noble guises as sacrificial giving, tithing, and "prayer support." Alice and I spent many hours discussing these difficult issues. Then one day we both decided that there was only one way we wanted to know God and that was the way He had revealed Himself in His word. God, not man, would be our source for *all* our daily material, physical, and spiritual needs. And we meant “all. And everything.” Private prayer between the two of us or alone with God would be our only

"advertising campaign." We agreed we would never solicit funds for the sake of personal or ministry needs. Our master plan would indeed be, as one brave pastor once told us: "*If God orders the pizza, He pays for it.*" Faith would be the only "marketing strategy," as we decided to depend on no one but God for all our needs. Only He would know our needs. Our needs were shared between Alice and I and God in that secret place called prayer, and never publically.

It was not an easy task to tell no one of our needs, especially when we had a large family of six children, and by all accounts (of which certain family members and friends made us painfully aware) no visible means of income. They lamented the fact I had left a good paying job for no further gainful employment. They judged us to be rather presumptuous and naïve at the time to begin speaking about "invisible" means of income, when we had no income to show for it. But that was our decision nevertheless. We made that decision in the spring of 1982. Time would prove God's word right concerning our decision in 1982 to "live by faith and faith alone."

As I update this account it is now over forty-one years later and we have still not told anyone of our personal needs. Needless to say if someone asked, "do you need baby furniture," as was the case when Suzanne was born, we said "yes," because we had given all our baby furniture away. But we had told no one we were without baby furniture when news of Alice's pregnancy spread. Nevertheless, a van came to our house and delivered brand-new baby furniture. Some came late in the night. Others came in tears because they had known a year earlier they were to give us a gift, yet they had refused. None of this was known to us, nor had we asked anyone for anything. If when I relate these accounts I border on boasting, the facts remain true nevertheless. People came and gave small amounts, large amounts, unusual gifts, spectacular gifts like a holiday in Hawaii and a brand-new van, just to mention some of the provisions along the way. There is no record anywhere of a fundraising letter or desperate plea for money or any other kind of plea. Through it all God had been and continues to be our only source, even when we shared publically what we were believing for, but *never ever* was such sharing with compulsion, pressure or unscrupulous advertising.

This aspect of the journey brought us as often to tears as well as to laughter. Many times we were deeply humbled and other times we could barely contain our enthusiasm. Often we fell short of being able to find the right words to really express what we felt in our hearts, instead we settled for a "praise God," or "thank you Jesus." In my introduction I spoke of three maps that illustrated our journey. But, it was the map of our spiritual journey that took us over the tallest mountains and through the deepest valleys, with discoveries and experiences we would have never thought possible. And it remains the greatest adventure yet, this journey of faith. Years later I discovered God was as interested in the arts as an integral part of this journey of faith as He was interested in the preaching and teaching of His word.

In 1987, we began organizing teaching conferences with a special focus on spiritual life. These grew into yearly all-Ontario conferences and smaller regional ones. We called them "Holy Spirit Conferences." Our attendees were primarily members of mainline churches who were hungry for the new experiences called "Charismatic," or "Pentecostal." Until that time such "moves of the Spirit" had been the reserve of non-denominational and parachurch ministries. Our conferences, however, took the experience into traditional churches, especially those of the Reformed kind. Over a thousand people attended the large conferences. Hundreds came to the regional ones. I also discovered the wonderful world of teaching videos. Alice and I scoured *Christendom* for quality teachings on video. These we organized into an informal curriculum of study which we circulated among eleven "video-cells" we had formed throughout the province. Some video-cells began as far away as New Zealand, Jamaica, Ghana, and Mexico. I made the

rounds of each Ontario video cell on a monthly basis, to provide pastoral counseling and teaching on the Kingdom of God. Our first teaching centre opened in Mississauga, Ontario, on September 8, 1987, in a renovated industrial space. Yet, birthed in my creative thoughts as early as 1979, the ministry was incorporated in 1981, and operational in 1982. The Christian Communications Centre was granted full charitable status in January 1988.

Not long afterwards we began Friday evening fellowship services for teaching and renewal. The numbers grew and we moved to various locations to keep up with people-growth and with short-term leases. Eventually the Friday evenings shifted to Sunday evening and so in 1992, we began the "Church in the City," on Sunday evenings in Mississauga's Ebenezer Reformed Church, and later in an upstairs commercial space in downtown Mississauga. I even had the pleasure of expanding our work into the USA where we partnered with Dr. Marvin Baker of Muskegon, and helped found the Christian Communications Centre of Michigan. Our regular newsletter "*From His Good Storehouse*" grew into a magazine called "*Spiritwind*." I rally my thoughts not to burden you with excessive details, but I cannot forget many years on cable TV with my own show, "*This is the Day*," as well as occasional guest host or co-host of 100 Huntley Street's Nighttime live broadcast called "*Nightline*." And how could I forget Robert and Laura Thody who were so helpful in breaking artistic ground at YWAM, the Youth With A Mission base in Cambridge, Ontario. They prepared the way for me to teach regular studio drawing sessions for many years as well as assist their mission in establishing a fulltime professional theatre in downtown Kitchener, Waterloo. It seemed God had never intended for the arts to be far removed from my journey in ministry and teaching.

During "*The Centre Years*," I served as elder in the Meadowvale Community Christian Reformed Church and saw monumental growth among our young adults. We began with a dozen young people in our home as we searched the Scriptures together. Within a year we moved to the church's main facility. Over seventy-five young adults came every Friday evening just to worship and study together. When the numbers continued to grow we organized young adult teaching retreats at nearby Camp Shalom, where in the intimacy of Drost Lodge we sang, prayed, cried, hugged, studied, and rejoiced together. We saw many miracles during those centre years. Healings were common, some a matter of the heart by faith, others clearly demonstrated and tangible proof of God's healing power. We experienced abundant provisions, but most important we saw the lives of many young adults change forever and for the better. Some were launched into their own ministries such as Colleen Reinders and Grace Moes as Unity Music Ministries. Others continue to serve full or part-time in a variety of Christian organizations and churches. So, whatever happened to Bernice Stegenga and Karyn-grace Hunnerson, two of so many special young adults? Bernice moved to Gabriola with us and married Dave Dewinetz. Both served in the church. Karyn-grace married Wayne Clark, and in 2001, some sixteen years later and after a holiday visit to Gabriola they moved with their three children to this island as well. God is indeed good as He promised me many years ago that I would see the fruit of our entire ministry.

Despite an increasingly busy teaching schedule, I was often invited to fill in for vacationing pastors. In some churches this is strangely called "pulpit supply." I will never forget the warmth and hospitality with which I was received in many churches of many denominations. When Alice and I left the Christian Reformed Church to set out on our own adventure in church-planting, we continued to experience daily fruit of that decision we had made years earlier. Many of those we touched became students in my regular weekly teaching classes where I taught the Kingdom of God and life in the Spirit.

In 1991, I was officially ordained into the ministry through ECA, the Evangelical Church Alliance, and licensed with the province of Ontario. Alice was ordained in 1995. When we moved to British Columbia our licensing was changed to BC. When we realized we wanted pastoral fellowship and accountability "closer-to-home," especially since we lived on such a small island as Gabriola, we joined our ordination to CCCC, the Christian Congregational Churches of Canada, who had a number of churches on Vancouver Island. Years later, VEA, Verstraete Evangelistic Association, was granted Denominations status in BC which allowed us to ordain our own pastors. I am skipping over a lot of details, but I was once told by the pastor of the Bay Community Church, a "4-C's", Christian Congregational Church in Comox, BC, on Vancouver Island, that I was voted "the favourite of all guest pastors," an honour I cherished but did not ask for or seek, yet an honour that warmed me.

So, whatever happened to fine art during this whirlwind adventure of ministry?

After all, I had put my drawing and painting on the back burner in 1982.

It was impossible to find time for fine art in those days, but the fires of creativity never completely ceased to smolder. After five years on the back burner, the artistic gifts and abilities turned to bright flames again in 1987. It was the year I rejoined my friend and mentor, and Canadian drawing master, David Owen Campbell, for mid-week life drawing sessions at the Ontario College of Art & Design. David had remained an instructor at the college since the seventies. He welcomed me back with open arms, delighted to see my face again in his drawing sessions.

These were *"The Centre Years,"* when Alice taught the children at home and I taught the other "children" wherever doors opened. Many such doors opened to Sunday services, video cells, regional and provincial conferences, both ours and those conferences and workshops organized by other ministries, as well as our special workshops and our regular teaching sessions at the centre. To help Alice with homeschooling and also free her for counseling and teaching of our other "children," we received another miracle. A young woman named Bernice Stegenga, who I mentioned earlier, joined our family. It remains her testimony to this day that she felt led by the Spirit of God to join our ministry and serve wherever needed. She became like a daughter to us and remains a wonderful blessing to this day. She served as assistant in home-schooling our children, and she participated in the music ministry of our services, conferences and workshops. She was also a most diligent student of my teaching courses and graduating from both major courses. Our children all adopted Bernice as one of their own and love her still very much. Her casseroles were a real adventure.

Our joy was made complete when in 1993, and as I have mentioned earlier, she moved to Gabriola with us and a few years later we married her in our home to a local businessman, David Dewinetz. The two have been a blessing to us and pillars of support in our island work.

All in all, the centre years were exuberant and alive years. Our family fared well, as homeschooling and most of my teaching assignments were confined to evenings, keeping us all close together during the day. They were exciting and happy years. Needless to say, however, changes were inevitable as people's lives changed. Some changes were painful. Some left for *greener pastures* off-island and others never spoke to us again. Dave Dewinetz went home to be with the Lord. But, Bernice still serves at the Hope Centre, a ministry initiative we began on Gabriola Island and one that has grown into the island's only and premier Infant, Toddler, & Licensed Childcare Facility. Wayne Clark is a missionary in Vietnam. Yet, having journeyed through these years rather quickly, and I apologize if rather randomly and somewhat scattered -

forty-one years is a long time - I do want to pause and reflect on a number of very unique events that took place during the centre years.