

The Willowbank Story

By Irving Harris and Norman Grubb

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WILLOWBANK
STORY***

by
NORMAN GRUBB
and
IRVING HARRIS

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CONTENTS

Foreword by Richard C. Halverson

CHAPTER	Page
I How it began	4
II The Breakthrough	7
III Where God Guides He Provides	9
IV The First Staff	12
V Chosen by God	15
VI Creating Christian Community	18
VII An Inspired Building Programme	21
VIII One Guest's View of Willowbank	24
IX People Finding Faith	27
X Spiritual Dividends	31
XI Consider the Lilies	35
XII The Basic Ingredient – a Team	38
XIII A Time of Trouble	42
XIV “Southlands” – An Investment in the Future	48
Statement of Purpose by Roy Cook	52
The Authors	53
Acknowledgements	55

FOREWORD

HERE IS the fascinating record of a God-inspired vision from its conception in the heart of one man, its growth and maturing as other hearts were kindled and its birth as a reality. Here is exciting evidence of the God-givenness of authentic vision and the certainty of its fulfillment by God when faithful men and women accept the vision, live in its light and obey as the Spirit directs.

As a place Willowbank offers unexcelled beauty, color, fragrance, and vista. It is ideal for rest, recreation and renewal. Its pink beaches offer inviting opportunities for swimming, sunning and relaxing. And its beautiful stretch of ocean front is crowned by a charming old Bermuda home, now greatly enlarged and surrounded by other modern buildings with comfortable accommodations for its guests.

But, as this story clearly tells, Willowbank is infinitely more than a place. Its guests return year after year. Many find their first personal experience of God here, others an answer to pressure in rest and contemplation, while still others soon discover a sense of belonging to a caring family. It is as if God, from the beginning, had intended to provide opportunities for more than the conventional holiday. So, He has made possible a rare opportunity to experience spiritual reality and spiritual growth within a fellowship of kindred spirits.

May these first twenty years serve as both a pattern and a prelude – a sample of God's goodness and a promise of still greater things to come.

RICHARD C. HALVERSON D.D.
Minister of the Fourth Presbyterian
Church of Washington, D.C.

I How It Began

THERE ARE FEW places in the Western World more enchanting as a vacation spot than “Willowbank.” This resort is not primarily a product of man’s planning; it is essentially a gift from God. How it came into being is a two-fold tale. In one sense the story begins with a conference at The Princess Hotel, Hamilton, Bermuda, in 1959, to which Abraham Vereide, founder of the Breakfast Groups and International Christian Leadership, brought some of his friends and associates from Washington.

But actually the story starts long before this event in the life of a young man, Howard Dickinson, when he was taking his pre-med work as a Rhodes Scholar from Bermuda at St. John’s College, Oxford. A fellow student spoke of Jesus Christ “in such a simple, compelling way that,” says Howard, “I accepted Him as Lord and this led to a permanent change in my life.” On his return to Bermuda, after graduating as a doctor, he was not only qualified to practice medicine but ready to bring faith to his friends at home.

Among his first patients was a successful, young commission merchant, an importer, Harold by name, whose business was being so ruined by his addiction to alcohol that an older doctor with whom Howard was working commented, “The only thing you can do with that man is to take him a gun and let him shoot himself!” But Howard had a better plan. He suggested that Harold and he might help each other by meeting each week to read the New Testament together.

“As a Christian I was still dry and fruitless,” Howard says, “and Harold, though an alcoholic, had a sweet, lovely disposition. But his life was in shambles.”

These two men soon discovered that they were engaged on a high adventure, a spiritually significant one and together they formed, under God, a link of creative friendship. Harold tapered off his drinking and a year later through Kay Roberts, a visitor from Philadelphia, whose husband was also an alcoholic, he made a definite commitment of his life to God and found complete sobriety. With his attractive wife, Harold began to meet with Dr. Howard and his wife, Irene Dickinson. Week by week, the two couples enjoyed the further adventure of a home group – the first of its kind in Bermuda.

In God’s providence it was Kay Roberts who then got Harold to go to Washington to attend one of the first Presidential Prayer Breakfasts and, incidentally, to meet “that remarkable man of God,” Abraham Vereide. This visit to the States enormously widened the Bermudian’s vision of the work of Christ’s Kingdom, so much so that he became an active supporter of the Breakfast Groups and the following winter persuaded Dr. Dickinson to accompany him to the next National Prayer Breakfast. Thus Howard Dickinson likewise became enthusiastic

about the various events in Washington and met the political and religious leaders who were sponsoring them. Such interest steadily increased and another year saw two more Bermudians in attendance at the Presidential Breakfast – men who eventually were to figure prominently in the Willowbank story. Back in Bermuda, as a result of their enthusiasm and vision, group meetings multiplied through the Island.

Howard Dickinson also began to dream about a Christian guest-house in Bermuda, a place significantly different from the hotels already serving the island's expanding tourist trade. This dream arose in part from reading an article in an American church magazine, "The Calvary Evangel," published in New York, which an elderly patient, a Mrs. Zuill, had persuaded him to read. The article by Irving Harris, the editor, described an unusual experiment in evangelism in England where a number of Anglican churchmen had banded together and, almost miraculously, acquired beautiful seacoast property in the Lorna Doone country of North Devon which they were beginning to operate as "a Christian retreat center." The article moved Howard deeply and when, in 1953, he and his wife visited England to be in London for the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, they took the opportunity of going to "Lee Abbey," as the place was called, to see at first-hand how God's work was being conducted there. The whole operation was based on a Christian community and the spiritual quality of the meetings and worship services, as well as the obvious benefits derived by the large groups of vacationers who came to the center, made a powerful impression on the Dickinson's. Moreover, Howard was at once able to envisage a parallel to the Lee Abbey experiment in the somewhat similar holiday environment of Bermuda.



By now business leaders who had become interested in creating more opportunities for Christian fellowship in Bermuda had formed weekly groups in various places. There were breakfast groups at The Wesley Methodist Church and at "The Horse and Buggy," a restaurant and a luncheon for Bible study at The English-Speaking Union. Altogether there were at least fifteen such weekly meetings and active in these, three men who were to take a vital role in establishing Willowbank: Jack Davis, later to become President of Rotary International; Fernance Perry, budding business entrepreneur; and John Barritt, who was later to become speaker of Bermuda's House of Assembly.

John Barritt had come spiritually alive after his first breakfast in the basement of the Church. There he remembers he heard comments by Howard Dickinson which intrigued him. He knew Howard by sight and reputation and was pleasantly surprised by the doctor's honesty about himself. As he was leaving one meeting Howard inquired, "How long have you known the Lord?" To which his reply was, "Not at all in the way you chaps do." This led to a talk with the doctor about ten days later and again he was amazed at Howard's openness about his own experience. On the way home in his car he felt compelled to have a further prayer, using the words of the father of the Paralytic Boy in the New

Testament story, “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.” Something happened, John wasn’t sure exactly what, but from that point on he resolved to walk, “as if my hand was in God’s.”

The power which these new-born lives generated overflowed. Links with kindred spirits in the States multiplied and, in due course, kindled a desire to arrange public events in Bermuda similar to the I.C.L. conferences in Washington. As a first step a few of the most active men invited Dr. Vereide to come to the island personally. He agreed to a plan to hold a four-day conference in Bermuda and offered to mobilize a team of speakers to lead it.

II The Breakthrough

THIS FIRST I.C.L. Conference, held at The Princess, opened with one of the hotel's famous banquets. It was a notable event. The attendance of Bermudians was as impressive as the large number of American visitors: His Excellency the Governor of the island was there, as were members of the Legislative Council and other members of parliament. There was also one M.P. from Canada and Canon H. Wallace Bird of London, England, an old friend of Abraham Vereide, was expected to make the principal address. Expectations ran high.

The first difficulty appeared when, as the result of fog (these being pre-jet days), Canon Bird's plane was delayed at Heathrow for forty-eight hours and it was Monday afternoon, the day the conference opened, when he arrived on the island – an extremely tired traveler. Dr. Dickinson picked him up at the airport but then with a physician's natural concern reported to Dr. Vereide at the hotel, "I think we had better let this man off." Abraham Vereide, however, knew from experience the importance of a keynote address on such an occasion and at once replied, "No, this man must speak."

The banquet got itself off to a rather inauspicious start. "The first speakers," Howard remembers, "went on and on about matters which seemed trite and trivial while the air became thick with cigar smoke. By ten o'clock I had a headache and guessed that many guests were even more uncomfortable and like me wanted to go home."

But Wallace Bird met the situation with wisdom and a challenge. He took only ten minutes and within the first three the whole atmosphere changed and became electric. Then for seven minutes the speaker had the entire conference in the palm of his hand. Two of his points especially made an unforgettable impression:

(a) Bermuda is a very small place, but big doors turn on small hinges and events can happen on this little island which can have significance throughout the world.

(b) You have hundreds of thousands of visitors who come here each year for a holiday. What else do you give them beyond just a holiday?

"As we broke up," says Dr. Howard, "I saw a close clergy friend, an active member of our Bible-study group at the English-Speaking Union, hopping up and down with excitement. He grabbed my arm exclaiming, "Did you hear what he said? This is the very thing we've been talking about!"

After breakfast the next day, Norman Grubb, another notable ally of Abraham Vereide, started the conference meetings off with a talk on faith. He too took a personal line, maintaining that if God had some special purpose in mind, it is already eternally there and all that is necessary for its manifestation is for

someone to say, “Yes, I believe You have this for us.” Norman used the verse in ISAIAH 65:24, “Before they call, I will answer,” saying that before ever man calls on God, He has already answered.

The effect of this thought on Howard was startling. “When Norman spoke like this,” he says, “it seemed to me that God was revealing the fact that He already had a place for us as a retreat center – and all that was necessary was for me to acknowledge this. So for a brief moment I blotted out everything else out of my mind and quietly murmured, “Yes, God, I believe – I believe you have this place for us.”

“The following morning,” Howard continues, “I woke up very early and felt that God was saying two things to me. One was that I must go to the bank, set up a fund and deposit \$1,000 in it. And secondly, that the name of this special account should be, “The Heavenly Hotel.” Like so many things when God gives guidance, we often overlay it with our own thoughts and feelings and it gets quite difficult to tell what is of God and what is our own thinking. I don’t know whether the title, “The Heavenly Hotel”, was of the Lord or just my own idea, but in any event, it turned out to be a test, for when I explained the nature of the account to the Bank Manager and told him the name, despite his training not to show surprise in dealing with customers, I clearly saw one of his eyebrow’s twitch! Perhaps the title was given me as a little hurdle to jump over.”

Howard had next to tell the whole conference what he had done, but this he found easy. Full of the Spirit, once on his feet, he fairly thundered away about his plan like an Old Testament prophet. The hotel would be modeled after England’s Lee Abbey. Its staff would form a Christian Community and visitors would find a veritable paradise on earth where many of them would have their faith deepened and others discover faith for the first time.



Before they had left the island, the conference over, both Abraham and Norman went along with Howard to look at two large hotels, either of which would offer as pleasant surroundings for a vacation resort as anything in Britain. But, as it transpired, neither of these places became available.

III Where God Guides He Provides

A FEW MONTHS LATER Howard was again in Washington for the Prayer Breakfast of 1960 and at Abraham Vereide's suggestion told a few I.C.L. leaders about his vision for Bermuda. "With Abraham's encouragement," he says, "I imagined that somebody in the States might well make us the gift of a very large sum of money and that other money would then come fluttering down from heaven."

Other Bermudians among the men interested in creating a Lee Abbey on their island felt the same way for several months. Six of these had begun to meet once a week in the kitchen of the Wesley Methodist Church in Hamilton for fellowship and Bible study. They shared a sense of challenge to try to find a suitable place for the sort of work Howard envisioned.

Earlier in March – March 3, 1960, to be exact – the six men mentioned decided to set out together on a further search. The former British Naval Dockyard on Ireland Island at the extreme west end of Bermuda was being developed by Government for both industrial and residential purposes and this seemed a likely place to acquire a piece of property, hopefully at a nominal cost. But the group found the available areas depressing. The rows of old buildings were substantial enough but they had a barrack-like atmosphere and many of the houses had been damaged by vandals; besides, the graveyard was next door. After a short inspection, the friends reluctantly agreed that such a spot could not be used for work of the kind they had in mind.

Somewhat disheartened, they started back towards Hamilton. As they drove along, a thought kept recurring in the doctor's mind: Was there not a place called "Willowbank" in Somerset which had been publicly advertised for sale. When he spoke out, Geoffrey Kitson at once agreed. "Yes, of course. You're quite right. Willowbank is for sale and I am the agent for it. However," Geoff added, "I doubt very much if we could ever afford it." Then after a bit of figuring he explained the sale price, in U.S. dollars, was set at nearly \$200,000, a high price in those days.

The car had already passed Willowbank on the way home but the men decided to turn around and inspect the property. The impressive site overlooking the ocean was itself a marked contrast to the desolate place they had just seen. After walking around the grounds for a few minutes, the group entered the main building. Geoff recalls the moment with emotion: "In that high-ceilinged room with its cedar beams, we seemed transfixed. I think everyone of us knew at once that this place was truly God's will for us. It was a tremendous experience, one of the most amazing of my life."

What happened next was equally dramatic. The bank agreed to advance the full amount required to purchase the property with no security except the personal guarantees of the men themselves. In fact, the bank acted so promptly that, long before a board of trustees could be formed, possession of the property was a **fait accompli!** Was there an undue haste? A few in the group were apparently inclined to wait and pray more before the purchase was concluded, but Fernance Perry, with some of Simon Peter's impulsiveness, consulted with Howard Dickinson and these two took action. "It was such a magnificent property," Fernance explains, "we felt we had no time to lose. We knew there were other offers for it, so without consulting anyone, the two of us put down a deposit to close the sale. We felt a bit uncomfortable about going ahead on our own, but we were very happy to have the property and be in a position to transfer it, in due course, to a proper board."

Howard adds this personal note: "I always remember the date for it was on a March 3rd, at Oxford, that I became a Christian. So I thought it was a loving touch of the Lord that on my spiritual birthday, He should bring us out to the place we needed."



At this point, one might have assumed that, since the project was inspired, progress would be simple and easy. Within a week after Willowbank was acquired, a two-page circular letter announcing the purchase and describing the property was sent to the I.C.L. friends in the United States who thought would help finance the project. The letter called it "Bermuda's Future Conference and Retreat Center" and was signed by all six of the men in the group. (They were later known as the "The Inaugurating Committee" and the following year they became the first trustees of "The Willowbank Foundation": John Barritt, Harold Cooper, Jack Davis, Howard Dickinson, Geoffrey Kitson and Fernance Perry.) Actually, the response to the appeal was disappointing. One substantial gift came from a Philadelphia businessman, Bill Pringle and that was all.

The committee, however, proved undaunted. They decided that they were being tested and as Fernance Perry puts it, they realized that God was teaching them a lesson. "We were still very enthusiastic about the whole thing and believed that what we had done was the will of God, but now we saw that whether we liked it or not, the financing was going to be difficult – in fact, it was going to touch our own pockets. We didn't like this and at first, we didn't say much, but gradually we became open and frank. 'Look,' I said one morning, 'this is **our** responsibility and we must start financing it ourselves."

And so "the future conference center" became an adventure involving major steps of faith on the part of all six of the initial group. They were helped in the early stages by a very large contribution from a close friend and great Christian philanthropist, the late W.S. Purvis. He was to repeat his generosity again in the future and other gifts came in from time to time. A few interest-free

loans also materialized but the indebtedness to the bank remained sizable and quarterly interest payments came due regularly. These and many incidental expenses were all paid by the same men and since there was no income at the beginning from the property itself, the total carrying charges did come straight from their own pockets.

Considerable local interest quickly sprang up among those attending other groups and gifts of various kinds poured in – a deep-freeze unit, a radio, a bit of furniture. Among Bermudians who came to look at the property, there were several who volunteered their services to garden, wash windows and clean. And, furthermore, the wives of some of the trustees and their friends devoted hours of time to refurbishing the old buildings. Sewing-machines were brought in, new drapes were made and rooms were cleaned and put in order. Thus, an enthusiastic number of ladies also experienced the joy of being closely involved in this new and exciting venture of faith.

Uncertainty as to exactly how to proceed and lack of funds, however, gave birth to the suggestions that Willowbank should be temporarily leased. No one felt happy about this but in the pinch, the committee did reluctantly put up the place for rent. Then, in a rather remarkable way, this was shown to be wrong. That May, several of the committee attended a Faith at Work conference in the Pocono Mountains in Pennsylvania and in a different setting, found a further opportunity to talk and pray about their plans. At the conference, they met Admiral Brian Spencer of the Canadian Navy, who expressed keen interest in an I.C.L. retreat center in Bermuda and offered to be one of the overseas advisers. At a quiet-time on the lawn one afternoon, it was he who spoke out most bluntly against marking time. “I don’t believe God would be pleased for us to rent Willowbank at this time,” he said. “I believe He would have wanted us to move ahead as originally planned.” A dead silence ensued during which the entire group felt sure that what the Admiral had expressed was indeed the word of God. In fact, it was so clear that Geoff Kitson immediately telephoned his office in Hamilton to take Willowbank off the market! Howard Dickinson adds that this was but one example of a number of instances when the guidance of a single member of the team suddenly cleared the minds of all.

Actually within but seven years, the entire indebtedness was completely cleared, with each of the original sponsors wholly recompensed for what he had risked at the outset.

IV The First Staff

THE OLD BUILDINGS of Willowbank, white-roofed and charming, stand upon six acres of land facing the open sea to the west, about a mile from Somerset Bridge, widely known as “the smallest drawbridge in the world.” When the property was purchased, it was discovered that the estate had been occupied by families with deeds going back to 1800 and before. The main house which had so impressed the six new owners had been modernized in the 1920s by General Glancey, a Vice President of General Motors. He had the excess plaster of the interior removed, thus revealing its heavy, hand-hewn cedar beams and rafters and the tray ceiling, typical of the best island architecture. The General also had the old slave quarters made into a gate-house and the livery stables remodelled as a second guest-cottage with two bedrooms. There were also a small laundry and a carpenter’s workshop.

On July 1, 1960, Agnes Shields quietly took up residence as the harbinger of a small staff. Agnes was a widow and a most gracious woman, whose radiant faith had already been an inspiration to members of more than one of the early fellowship groups. She came with a vision rivalling that of the inaugurating committee and while she served for less than a year, her loving concern for people made an invaluable contribution to the new work and her kind of caring became a Willowbank hallmark. She acted as hostess and housekeeper.

Before long, Agnes was joined by a friend, Kathleen Tatem, with whom she already had a prayer partnership. Howard Dickinson had selected both of these women, Kathleen partly because of pressing personal problems. She had five young children and was going through difficulties in a marriage, which was in the process of breaking up.

Kathleen had grown up in Bermuda as a nominal Christian, regular at church and a member of the choir, but without knowing God in a truly personal way. The constant friction at home and especially the problems in her marriage made her acutely aware that she needed something. One day, when things were particularly bad, she paid a visit to her sister in Somerset. As she was waiting in the latter’s apartment with her son David, a toddler, the child knocked down a pile of books. Picking them up, Kathleen noticed one by Billy Graham – something about happiness. Thinking she could do with a little happiness in her life, she borrowed the book. It wasn’t exactly what she expected for it didn’t tell her much about happiness, but it **did** tell her about herself and with her deep sense of need, after reading part of it, she got to her knees and asked God to forgive her and help her. This was the start of a spiritual experience, one that greatly deepened a short time later at a Faith at Work conference in Pennsylvania. There, an Anglican clergyman read her the verse from the fifth chapter of the Gospel of John in which Jesus says, “He that heareth My voice and believeth on Him who sent Me hath everlasting life.” She accepted this truth and

at once, became aware of a new inner security. This prepared her for the difficult days ahead when her husband left her.

At the time Howard talked with her about Willowbank, she and her five children were staying temporarily with her mother-in-law. When she first attended a house group at his home, she was in such a nervous state that Howard recalls that even a gentle greeting by a friend would send her flying out into the garden. What she needed most was employment. So the doctor's suggestion seemed like a gift from heaven. "I hear you like to cook," he began. And then, "Your friend Agnes Shields is up there at our new place. Would you like to join her?" When she demurred because of the five children, Dr. Howard assured her that a place could be found for the whole family and not long afterwards, July 28, to be exact, she and all the children were comfortably installed in the gate-house. Significantly, when Kathleen first entered the main house, she too, felt exactly as the men had, namely, that this was indeed God's place. Today, Kathleen is a member of the Willowbank staff with the longest service record.

During that first summer, there was much coming and going. Interested friends stopped by to inspect the new center and once a month, the committee held an open house. Their wives helped and Agnes and Kathleen provided tea and cake. While there was only one regular guest living at Willowbank, there were a number of over-night visitors and one weekend, the grounds were used by a group of young Bermudians from the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Hamilton, who brought their own equipment and cooking utensils and camped out on the property.

Finally, with the help of two long-term friends, Murray Gawne, the Anglican Rector of Devonshire and Brigadier Charles Watt of the Salvation Army, a great Service of Dedication was planned for November 10. Abraham Vereide arrived to participate in this, as did Norman Grubb, then General Secretary for North America of the "Worldwide Evangelization Crusade," – also Bruce Larson, the Director of Fieldwork for "Faith at Work." The Anglican Bishop of Bermuda and clergy from various other denominations also participated.

"The service took place," Howard remembers, "on an absolutely gorgeous day, sunny and calm. In mid-afternoon, the sheer beauty of the place seemed like a token of God's blessing." Not many friends had been expected, but actually crowds of Bermudians gathered from every part of the island. There were hymns, there were prayers and there were four short addresses.

At the heart of the service, this special litany made it possible for the entire assemblage to join in The Act of Dedication:

MINISTER: Recognizing that the Church is a vital and integral part of the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and that to the Church has been committed the task of ministering the Word of God unto the salvation of the lost and for the strengthening of the saints,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this property.

MINISTER: For worship in prayer and gifts and by psalms and hymns and spiritual songs; for instruction in the sacred Scriptures,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this property.

MINISTER: With the prayer that all those who teach and preach here may be imbued with the Holy Spirit,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this property.

MINISTER: With the prayer that this property may ever exist for the great things of the Kingdom of God, a testimony to the grace and glory of the Gospel of Christ, a center of holy life and humane service to all needy souls who come to Willowbank,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this property.

MINISTER: To God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit,

PEOPLE: We dedicate this property.

V Chosen by God

IT IS GOOD to possess property given by God; even more important is it to find “a man sent from God,” so that God’s purposes may be fulfilled through the property. Howard Dickinson’s inspiration led to the discovery of the property, but it was Abraham Vereide who pointed out the man.

It was the day after the dedication. A few of the team were sitting with him on the lawn at Willowbank, talking over the question of who should now come to head up the staff and lead the work. Suddenly, Abraham excused himself and went to his room to pray about it. About an hour later he returned and said, “I know who should come here. There’s a wonderful couple out in Oregon, Roy and Evelyne Cook. They are the ones God wants.” He went on to promise to telephone the Cooks as soon as he returned to Washington.

This may seem like an easy suggestion from a person well acquainted with many able people, but it was far more than that; the fact is that it was an expression of the basic “death and resurrection principle” underlying many major Christian decisions. Abraham Vereide had previously set his heart on having Roy and Evelyne Cook as co-workers with his young associate, Doug Coe, at Fellowship House in Washington. Now, in somewhat the same way that the inaugurating committee had found it necessary to sacrifice personally to purchase the property, Abraham in his hour alone with God, realized that he would have to “die to having Roy in Washington.”

The Cooks have been so central to all that God has been bringing to life in Bermuda that one must take a moment to enquire into their backgrounds and lives.

Roy was born in Baker in eastern Oregon. His parents were not particularly church-oriented, but he was sent to Sunday School and encouraged to make Christian friends. As he grew up, he remembers being conscious of inner yearnings for a clear faith and at times, that God seemed to be speaking to him.

Music early became the dominant interest in his life and this may explain why he found difficulty in adjusting to life during his high school days. He played the piano extremely well but he kept looking for some firmer base for a career than that of a musician. During his school days, he developed a keen interest in various kinds of philosophy and liked to attend and compare the different denominational churches in his neighbourhood. He even wrote a term paper one year on what he had come to believe, which he describes as “a mixture of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Confucius with a little orthodox Christianity mixed in!”

It was finally at a Baptist Church, through the preaching of Dr. Irving Fox, that the Gospel message was presented in such a clear and compelling way that

Roy felt he had to respond. Though he can't remember the details of the message, one Sunday he made a decision to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and through Him he found a whole new dimension of spiritual reality; this he now believes marks the true beginning of his Christian experience. Among the "many wonderful people who took me under their wing," he says, "there was a Mrs. Milton Coe whose son Doug was to become my closest friend and spiritual teammate." That year, Mrs. Coe spent hours with him studying the Bible and helping him to experiment with prayer.

At this point, World War II intervened and carried him into the United States Merchant Marine where for four years, like a good many other servicemen, he had a very "up and down kind of experience." He worked as a cook for quite a stretch and all along felt that the Lord was with him, but in the nitty-gritty of daily life, there were apparently more spiritual defeats than victories.

After the war, music again became his main interest. He had pretty much turned his back on anything spiritual as a vocation, making music a preoccupation. But then at a meeting of the evangelist Merve Rosell, God again spoke to his heart and turned his attention back to spiritual interests. For a short time, he attended Northwestern Schools, a Christian college in Minneapolis and it was there that he became interested in the "Navigators" program. Their ministry met his spiritual needs and helped him to apply familiar New Testament truths to his daily life. The Navigators helped him further by emphasizing the value of finding one other man to work with, as the Apostle Paul had ministered to Timothy.

In Salem, where he now settled, it was Doug Coe, who became his Timothy and this friendship opened up an entirely new area of activity. The two men became involved in "Young Life" and later they started a chapter of "Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship" at Willamette University. They prayed repeatedly that God would use them to reach other people in Salem, in the state, in the nation and in the world. Requiring a faculty advisor in this outreach work, they approached Mark Hatfield, who was then Professor of Political Science and Dean of Men at Willamette and this older man, who went on to become Governor of Oregon and then a United States Senator, gave them both personal help and practical encouragement.

As for Evelyne, she had grown up in Minnesota. Her family was not particularly active in the Church either, but her home was filled with love and her sister, Lillian and she had close friends in high school who believed in Jesus Christ and whose witness persuaded them to open their hearts to Jesus as Lord. At the same time, a Sunday School teacher had a strong influence on their lives, nurturing them on the Bible and teaching them to pray. One goal they prayed for was that the other members of the family would come to know Christ and before long, this happened. Like Roy, at one time Evelyne attended Northwestern Schools in Minneapolis.

When still quite young, she married. She and her first husband had two very happy years together during which they both became active in local church work; but he was stricken with polio and died after living eighteen months in an iron lung.

Taking up church work as a vocation, Evelyne then moved to Oregon and became secretary to the Rev. Ted Anderson, pastor of the Baptist Church in Salem. It was there she met Roy and after a friendship of five years, they were married. This step Roy always refers to as one of the major miracles of his life!

Both Roy and Doug Coe were intrigued by the possibilities of seeing the teachings of Jesus Christ disseminated more widely in the community life of Salem. They became involved in laymen's groups of various kinds and helped establish a "fellowship house" there. They had met Abraham Vereide when he had visited Salem and were impressed by what they heard of his work in Seattle and in the nation's capital and by his vision of a "leadership led by God". At a later date, he was to invite Doug to work with him in Washington.



As Abraham had promised, he called Roy after his return to Washington. It was a Monday afternoon and the call came as a complete surprise to the Cooks. All that Roy was told that a number of men in Bermuda were starting a retreat center there and wanted someone to manage it. Roy didn't even know where Bermuda was; he had a vague idea that it was an island in the Atlantic Ocean, which he supposed to be in the Caribbean area – no doubt one of the British West Indies. That was all. And Abraham gave no details, nor did he mention what salary would be, if any. However, he did underline the immediacy of the work and asked Roy to make up his mind and call him back the very next day and be prepared to fly to Bermuda "within a week."

As Roy and Evelyne talked over the invitation, they realized that their response would have to be a matter of sheer guidance. The false supposition that Doug was privy to and in accord with, the invitation to head up the center in Bermuda nudged them to say Yes. They further supposed that their work in Bermuda would be somewhat temporary. And so the next day, after plenty of prayer, they acquiesced. But the "one week" provision was an impossible suggestion. From the West Coast, where there was much to be set in order, it was a long journey and the new work represented a rather drastic change of pace. However, soon after the Christmas of 1960, they made the move.

VI Creating Christian Community

WHILE ROY AND EVELYNE came to Willowbank without any preliminary training in hotel management – and in that sense were like “babes in the wood” – they had acquired considerable experience in informal community life. With Doug Coe and others in Salem, Oregon, they had gathered under one roof friends who felt guided to experiment in living as a family in Christ. Without an assured income those responsible for such fellowship groups put to the test the principle of living on a basis of faith and prayer. Ordinarily, food was plentiful in the Oregon work but Roy remembers times when the income was small and the community dependent on what the local people left for them to eat. However, limited rations never kept the adventure from being a creative spiritual experience.

During its first years, the Willowbank staff in Bermuda adopted this community pattern, which had also been basic at Lee Abbey. From the start, volunteers gladly came to participate, many from the United States and Canada and a few all the way from England. Every member of the staff received the same pay – the manager the same as a maid, a gardener the same as a cook or a dishwasher. For several years, the amount was \$43.00 per person – and not per week, but per month.

Among the first to join the community from overseas was an English girl, Gillian Savage, who came although she was quite a new Christian and had a violent distrust of everything American. As might be expected, her understanding of the Scriptures grew and her friendships ripened and so did her trust of friends from the States increase.

In those early days, there was also an older Bermudian who had suffered much in her married life and who found in the staff a new family and a new foundation for living.

One year, five or six girl friends came together for a holiday from Boston and later on, four of them returned to serve in the community. At another time, an American couple from upstate New York decided to take early retirement in order to come to Willowbank to work. They were Paul and Nell Traub whose trial period of a few months stretched out and lasted for more than two years. Like most of the staff, they were richly blessed and at the same time, greatly used.

Then there was Sheila, a Britisher, who found a new love of Jesus in the life of the community and also a husband to love in Harland Buhler, an American. Others included Donald Paget, a Yorkshire man, who became an ardent gardener, fulfilling a personal ministry by greatly improving the grounds of Willowbank. In addition, Madelaine Shaw came from Maryland and Evelyn French from New York City; and from Canada Marjorie Knapp and, later, Helen

Jennings. Also, as some of the many others, Sue Hanaford and Patty Loos from St. Paul, Minnesota and Patty Barrick and Helen Steynor from Oregon.

Staff life was, of course, not without its difficulties and problems arose and many adjustments were made as a team spirit developed and Roy and Evelyne patiently talked and prayed with various workers. With willing hearts and hands, those on the staff had come to serve and as they learned to live and love and work together, not only was the work done but a contagious quality of faith emerged, which, in turn, enriched the ever-increasing number of paying guests.

From the beginning, Evelyne and Kathleen assumed the task of coping with the mass of business details and supplying secretarial needs. They developed a real togetherness. While they lacked theoretical hotel training, through Evelyne's extensive office experience, they were able to set up bookkeeping systems which turned out to be the right way of handling reservations and accounts; they worked side by side. Evelyne chiefly in the office and Kathleen, in the kitchen as well – sometimes disagreeing, sometimes exchanging ideas – ever discovering that the Lord had ways of teaching them. And incidentally, by mastering the management end of things, Evelyne came to feel that Willowbank in truth represented God's call for her as definitely as it had for Roy.



In the long run, it became necessary to put the staff on a more conventional basis with specified salaries to match those in the hotel industry. But, this happened gradually and for a time, many of the staff were semi-volunteers, while others were fully-paid employees. Then, inflation increased and, even more serious, Government's immigration regulations tightened so that fewer volunteer workers were permitted to enter the island and take employment here. Thus, the arrangement for Willowbank personnel necessarily changed, as well as the method of finding help and augmenting the size of the staff – another important factor.

In these changing conditions, however, Roy and Evelyne constantly kept a core of committed Christians in daily fellowship with them at the center of the work and the over-all alterations in the make-up of the staff never affected the Christ-centred flavour of the atmosphere of Willowbank or the nature of the work.

Roy's present secretary, June Godfrey, is a good illustration of the fact that places on the staff have always represented much more than ordinary jobs. Like many another staffer, June was deeply helped personally by several among those with whom she worked and thus before long she came to the place where she, too, decided to turn over her life to God. One result was that, during the days of the difficult labour dispute which eventually embroiled Willowbank with the Bermuda Industrial Union, June voluntarily gave a radiant witness to Government's Fact-Finding Board, a witness which revealed Willowbank's as an operation with a spiritual ministry and not just an ordinary guest-house.

VII An Inspired Building Program

HOW THE WILLOWBANK plant expanded reads like an adventure story. Actually, each stage involved difficult decisions by the board, plus financial problems and of course, the risk of making mistakes.

First, an extension was built onto the old livery-stable which General Glancy had already turned into bedrooms. When this was finished, there was a provision for eight guests and for a while, life proceeded in a happy fashion with a small family made up of the staff and a limited complement of guests. Doug Coe and others from Washington were among the early visitors.

Looking back on these first days, Roy recalls how wonderful was God's preparation of Evelyne and himself for various aspects of their new job. His training as a Chief Cook in the U.S. Merchant Marine and Evelyne's experience in cooking for as many as sixteen in the Oregon Fellowship House stood them in good stead. Also, Evelyne's experience as an executive secretary at the church and Roy's musical background found many opportunities for expression.

But Roy and Evelyne were themselves occupying just one room which also served as the business office. As the number of guests increased, it became necessary to tear down the inside partition and make this part of an enlarged dining-room. The Cooks then spent the next four years together with their enlarged family of two children in the room where Roy's office is currently location – crowded quarters to say the least.

One of the first suggestions entertained by the board to provide Willowbank with additional space was to construct at least one new separate building. After carefully consideration, it was decided that this new unit should be located right on the ocean front, down the slope from the main house. The first approved plan for this new building, "Bay Grape", as it was to be called, specified a two-story structure. Construction was almost ready to begin when the wife of one member of the board pointed out that a two-story building would spoil the view of the ocean – a wonderful one – from the patio of the main building. This put the whole plan in jeopardy and some of the men in their eagerness to proceed secretly thought, "Why can't the women stay out of it!" An informal meeting took place; right on the site and various members of the board came out and looked the situation over. They ended by praying together in a little circle on the grass. Then, since they had already decided only to move ahead in complete unity, they postponed any building and arranged for a review of the architect's plans. When a revised plan was finally adopted, it provided for a lower, more characteristically Bermudian addition and everyone could see that a two-story unit would have been a terrible mistake.

This procedure became the pattern in each step of the development. A vision would come, usually from Roy and Evelyne, plans would be made, but then before these could be consummated, an important change would be suggested. It was as if the Lord Himself kept intervening to make Willowbank what He wanted it to be and at the same time, save the board from a series of false moves.

The Hibiscus unit was the next example. This large addition was at first to be built on the ocean front as an extension to Bay Grape. This time, the Government Director of Planning stepped in and questioned the location of the new building. "And again", Roy says, "some of us felt rather incensed at the delay. However, we realized that it was only fair to let the Director explain his views and as we listened to him, we came to see that he had a real point. Eventually, the board decided to leave the open lawn under the trees as it was and place the building up the slope, thus retaining the sea view for all of our guests instead of limiting it to the few who would be occupying the new rooms. And now as we look back, we see that the original plan would have been a most unwise choice".

Another similar illustration was the site of the swimming pool. Roy again describes what happened. "Our first plan", he says, "was to build this pool on the lawn right in front of the main house, between it and the Bay Grape unit. This time, it was Fernance Perry who questioned the location. He pointed out that the noise and confusion often accompany the use of a pool and he turned our thoughts to a hollow, nearer the road, which on inspection seemed admirable for both pool and tennis courts. So once more, we are happy today, to see the boisterous activity connected with pool and courts exactly where it is and we realized that we were saved from allowing our special sports facilities to interfere with the large life of Willowbank guests".



During the earliest expansion and new construction, Joel Benevides, a building contractor and a brother in Christ, gave much help. He was a member of the board for a time, but was not above working personally on manual jobs like earth-moving and even cutting the lawns. As new units were roofed over, Joel could be seen standing on their precarious summits, taking part in characteristic Bermuda "Roof Wetting Ceremonies".

The most ambitious step in the building program came with the construction of a new dining-room capable of catering to 125 or more guests. All along, some people warned that Willowbank might become too large and lose the intimate atmosphere which was part of its charm. But, Roy, though consistently advocating the creation of new facilities, perhaps more than anyone else, appreciated the family nature of the guest-house he ran. He had always had a certain limit in mind and more than once, affirmed that Willowbank could handle comfortably around 100 people without losing its uniqueness. The old dining-room, congenial as it was, often seemed crowded and made for inefficiency.

In order to build a spacious dining-room with a modern kitchen and other service facilities, it was found necessary to seek the advice of an overseas architect and the total estimated cost came to over \$1 million. But, in the board, there existed more than ever a clear sense of rightness and timeliness about moving ahead with the building program and no questions arose and the results proved highly satisfactory.

The final major undertaking was the development of the beaches. There are two, one on the ocean side of the rocky point, which separates the open sea from Ely's Harbour and the other, a cove within the beautiful sheltered bay itself. First, an extensive job of dredging was carried out, which deepened this area, and a floating dock was installed so that small boats could be used in Ely's Harbour. Then, the old stone boat-house, which had become unsafe, was torn down and replaced by a small marina with a sturdy docking facility for the glass-bottom and other larger boats to use. At the same time, both beaches were built up so that bathing in Ely's Harbour as well as in the ocean itself, was vastly improved.

With all the changes, the Christian nature of Willowbank remained central. As one of the trustees puts it, "We have a guest-house with a difference and we intend to keep it that way. There is grace at meals and the after-breakfast devotional meetings, Sunday-night hymn-sings and inspirational talks. All of this creates opportunities quite different from what is offered at other hotels. But no one is pressured into participating in the religious life of the community. The atmosphere is one of complete freedom in which guests enjoy most of the same pleasures available at any resort hotel".

In 1980, at the Twenty-year Birthday, one must conclude that the spiritual dividends from this place have been enormous. For one thing, at the heart of Willowbank, is a staff of committed workers who continue to pray that each guest may be sent by God and that his or her deepest needs will be met by the all-sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

VIII One Guest's View of Willowbank

OCCASIONALLY A NEW VISITOR with an artist's eye and a ready pen can describe Willowbank in a more striking way than those who have grown more accustomed to it. During the first time, Ethel Gilman and her husband, of Torrington, Connecticut, stayed here, she enjoyed the life and surroundings so intensely and felt that the experience was so different from that of the usual hotel vacation, that she wrote her impressions out at some length, hoping that they might form part of any published story. An excerpt of her account is gratefully given in this chapter with the belief that it will introduce readers to the Willowbank scene in a rather special way.

She writes: "Our spirits lifted the moment we walked down the steps of our big silver jet at the airport and felt the warmth and friendliness which is Bermuda. An hour's leisurely drive (the speed limit is twenty miles an hour) over palm-lined roads with recurring views of a sparkling ocean and lush gardens brought us to the entrance of Willowbank. Inside the handsome cedar doors of the old mansion, which forms the main building, we were greeted by a friendly staff including a genial young man named Herbie, who guided us to our room and wished us a pleasant visit. We had come here as 'a step of faith', for Willowbank was not listed by our travel agent nor was it known to our friends who had visited Bermuda. But, in no respect were we disappointed. Quite the reverse.

"Willowbank is considered one of the finest estates in Bermuda. Situated on the extreme end of the island, its six acres of beauty overlooks Ely's Harbour and the far reaches of the west Atlantic. The older buildings are on a slight rise with most of the guest units near the shore line. All are surrounded by tropical trees, shrubs and flowers. A grove of Casuarinas, or Whispering Pines, sway in the breeze near the shore and Norfolk Pines dot the hillside in stately splendour. A variety of palms, including the fascinating bottle and pineapple species, rattle their fronds near the main house. The large Coconut Palm near the Palm Cottage, has been the subject for many artists and a haven for the tiny green chameleons that delight in showing off their brilliant orange bubble when observed closely. A Glory Vine spreads its crimson bells over the wall near Garden Court and the oriental red fruit of the adjacent Pomegranate could decorate a Christmas tree. The night-blooming Cereus covers the walls near the Oleander unit, producing the flowers of ethereal beauty and delicious fruit resembling a Persian melon in flower.

"Bay Grape forms a hedge near the unit that bears its name. Its edible fruit, violet in color, is used for making jelly and its large kidney-shaped leaves of dark green make interesting flower arrangements. The Hibiscus comes in several shades, the most common, a bright pink. Its blooms are unique as they possess the trait of not wilting for an entire day even though out of water. Guests usually find a spray of these on their dressing-table when they arrive. Another unusual

shrub is the bright-red Sleeping Hibiscus, or Scotchman's Purse, so named as the flowers never open completely. The Bitter Aloe grows freely with stately blooms of brilliant orange fading into yellow. The Aloe has healing properties and is used extensively in cosmetic preparations. The ubiquitous Morning Glory spreads its royal blue and pink stripes in wild abandonment wherever it is permitted to spread.

“Over the past few years, Willowbank has grown tremendously, both in the physical plant and the guest list of friends from all over the world. In visiting there it is a real joy to choose from the list of cottages and units. They read like a program from the Royal Botanical Gardens: Hibiscus, Garden Court, Palm Cottage, Bay Grape, Tamarisk, Oleander and Poinciana. As for the birds, Kiskadees sing from the Whispering Pines and flash back and forth in their black and yellow plumage. Tiny warblers in shades of red, blue and black flit about the flower hedges and bluebirds and cardinals trill a friendly welcome. In contrast, the pale iridescent green of the little chameleons are a charming asset on the dazzling white of the coral-block houses.

“The new dining-room needs special mention. It can seat up to 130 people; its tables provide for either four or eight. Over its double-door entrance are the words ‘Loaves and Fishes’. This phrase was chosen by Roy Cook and is carried out in a suspended mural on the front wall, depicting a large sheaf of wheat, done in black, wrought iron, with gilded tips of grain. From side to side are molded fish in various sizes done in stark white glaze. Indirect lighting adds to the startling beauty of the composition which clearly suggests the Biblical story of the Feeding the Five Thousand. The dropped ceilings of this lovely room are the inverted trays typical of Bermuda. They are done in turquoise blue with white trim centred on white scalloped plates made by the various local potteries. Huge picture windows frame the ocean view and on many occasions, the heavens put on a breathtaking display of rainbow, stretching out from the shore-line to the western horizon. All special days, such as Easter, Thanksgiving and Christmas, are dramatized by special table decorations. Candles and flowers are used generously, all done by talented Evelyne Cook and Kathleen and a few friends.

“It was in the dining-room on the morning after our arrival that we experienced a renewal of the friendly spirit which first greeted us. Here too, we enjoyed a sample of real home-style cooking and were assured that during our stay, we would suffer no loss of weight!

“Breakfast was followed by a Quiet Hour with prayer and Bible study in the sun room, or what is now called the Serendipity Room. While this is entirely voluntary, we found that those who do join the fellowship are rewarded by a true spiritual uplift and so, it became a regular part of our daily schedule. Roy and Evelyne Cook and other members of the staff led most of these meetings but occasionally the half-hour was under the leadership of a member of Willowbank's Board of Trustees.

“One of the areas loved by the guests is the walk to the old dock (since replaced by a new marina). Situated at the foot of a narrow promontory between Ely’s Harbour and the open sea, it has a series of wooden platforms and rocky steps down to the landing. Here, tempted by bread crumbs and cookies, tropical fish dart about in myriad colors of piscatorial beauty. Arcs of glittering droplets shatter the sunlight and one is caught in a web of nature’s world of simple pleasures.

“There is a special enchantment as the light fades towards evening. A seat among the groves of pines will reward anyone with the most spectacular display in Bermuda – the sunset! There appears a soft diffusion of color, then the kaleidoscope of molten gold, rose, peach and pink, flung across the sky. A glimmering path reaches from horizon to shore, reflecting the glorious colors in muted beauty. The turquoise and jade of the ocean are subdued and a sense of profound peace descends. As Longfellow once wrote:

***Soon will die the sunset glory, stars of heaven shine out above,
Telling still the ancient story – their Creator’s changeless
love”.***

IX People Finding Faith

FOR THE WILLOWBANK guests, Roy Cook has a half-hour of daily devotions after breakfast every morning – with a special Breakfast Club in the dining-room on Fridays. Here are countless opportunities both to study the Bible and to hear how people of many different backgrounds are putting Biblical principles to work in daily life.

Roy's aim is always to keep the discussion on an informal basis and to try to make everyone feel at home and under no pressure. Attendance is completely optional; sometimes there is a big group and at other times, not as big. Usually Roy leads the group himself but certain days Evelyne does, with Howard Dickinson often taking over on Saturdays. Then, occasionally, special friends from the States stay at Willowbank for a week or two in order to lead the special program, including the morning devotions. In recent years, for example, Lee and Irma Whiston of Massachusetts have been ministering in this way, as have the late Rev. and Mrs. Churchill, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hare and others.

“This is a new experience for many people”, Roy reports. “The very fact that some guests come from homes where this kind of fellowship is quite unfamiliar seems to open new doors of understanding”. As an example, he tells the story of a New England banker who had suffered a heart attack because of the pressure in his office. In a short talk with Roy one morning, after the devotional group broke up, he confessed quite honestly to the severe worry he felt on his job. Roy reminded him that Jesus promised people peace – in fact, peace passing human understanding. Then, he suggested that the banker might put all of his business responsibilities “under new management”. As a result, the man saw the possibility of deliberately turning his life and his business over to Jesus Christ. After a couple of days, he came back to Roy obviously relieved and at peace and said, “I just want you to know that I'm under new management”. Since then, he has returned to a busy life in business and in his church and on his desk is the provocative sign “UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT”. The results among his staff and with his customers have been remarkable. In a letter, he describes what has happened as “a dream come true”.

From the very start, Willowbank individuals have discovered this kind of an experience by being part of the Willowbank family. One of the first was a woman from Boston who arrived one day without a reservation and was told there wasn't a guest-room left unoccupied. She pleaded for admission. Finally, the manager himself hit upon a plan for her. It seemed that there was one room being remodelled in which the workmen were still busy. Despite its shabby condition, it was offered to her for temporary use if she felt like putting up with the inconvenience involved. She grabbed at the chance and made the room hers. Then, every day, she regularly attended the morning devotions and though having little confidence in her own spiritual life, eagerly listened as all kinds of

people told what rich gifts they had received by asking for God's help. Then, one day, quite secretly, she decided to try the "guided" way of life herself. Alone, in the quiet of her temporary room, she knelt down and simply invited Jesus Christ to come into her heart. The effect was revolutionary. She felt as if a whole new chance was being offered to her and she had a deep compelling sense of forgiveness. Soon, she began letting others know what had happened and even spoke in one of the groups. Her physical condition improved immediately and a new freedom from depression came. Among other gifts she received was a desire to help people and by telling about her own experience, she found that she could do this. On returning home, she undertook a regular job in the diocesan work of the Episcopal Church of Massachusetts. Then, over the years, an ever increasing and varied ministry developed in the evangelical outreach of the Church and she is now one of the outstanding leaders in Christ's work for women in her state.



A member of the staff who seems always to be at the heart of what's happening in the after-breakfast fellowship is Herbert Knight. The story of "Herbie" is itself a miracle of God's power to remake human life. Fifteen years ago, Herbie was spending most of his days in one of Bermuda's hospitals. Not only that, but he had become such an addict to alcohol that the very doctors who were treating him, had tried everything they knew and lost hope in seeing him cured. Then, one of them, knowing of Howard Dickinson's interest in alcoholics, asked him to see Herbie. The first day, Howard stopped by his room; Herbie simply rolled over and turned his face to the wall. But afterwards, Howard felt strongly convinced that by the power of God – and nothing else – this man, Herbie, could find his way out of the pit.

It was in the spring and fast approaching the time when a band of Bermudians, shepherded by Howard and Geoff Kitson and Charles Watt, would be participating in the annual Memorial Day Conference which Faith at Work for a number of years held at a pleasant resort in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. Howard determined to see if he could persuade Herbie to go along with the Bermudians as their guest. One morning, on his daily rounds, he mentioned the conference and the Pennsylvania hills and invited Herbie to accompany them. "It will be a lot of fun", he said, "and surely better than staying in hospital".

Herbie's grunts were non-committal, but day by day the doctor returned, always smiling and always repeating, "You'd better come along".

Then at almost the last possible moment, Herbie yielded – not because he wanted to attend a religious conference or even with any real understanding of what the trip was all about, but just because, as Howard put it, **anything** would be better than staying in the hospital. And who knew? Perhaps he could snitch a drink or two along the way!

On the plane, he saw his first chance, when a stewardess came by to take orders, but as the doctor dismissed her with a “No, thanks”, Herbie slumped the deeper into his chair.

At the hotel, he found he disliked everyone he met. He sat at the back of the room at a few meetings, but for the most part, simply sulked in the room which he and Howard Dickinson shared together. Then, on the last morning at the conference, after a restless night, Herbie rose early, not for the session on Bible study and prayer, but thinking of a nearby tavern he had seen just outside the conference grounds. At such an hour, however, he found nothing open, so he turned to stroll along the edge of a lake which he had seen shining through the trees. Shuffling across the sand at the edge of the water, he felt completely disconsolate and miserable, longing for the drink that was poison to him. Then a miracle happened. As he kicked a shower of sand, his eye caught the shine of a small bright disc which fell on the beach just a foot or two in front of him. He picked it up and saw it was nothing more valuable than an American five-cent piece, a nickel, but as he rubbed it clean in his hand, something special caught his eye – not the date or the design of the coin, but four short words put there by a Christian legislature years before: **In God We Trust**.

Herbie doesn't remember too clearly what happened next. All he knows is that suddenly he found himself on his knees in the sand, crying out to God for help. With his sharp sense of need, the deep shame of his wasted life overwhelmed him and he says he felt a sorrow, a sense of repentance, he had never known before. “Take the drink, Lord”, he cried, “I can't make it but You can”. And as he knelt there, the knowledge of forgiveness and peace settled like a mantle on his soul.

Brushing himself off but still holding fast the small bright coin, he hurried back to the dining-hall. Breakfast had just commenced and with a spontaneity which surprised himself, he joined some of the very people he had so disliked, as they welcomed him to their table. Within himself, he felt a new and loving friendliness he hadn't had for years and of all the bacon and eggs he ever tasted, the dish he enjoyed at that meal, he says, was by all odds the best.

He was still in time too for the last conference meeting. He found this to be a chance for individuals to give a personal summing up of what the week-end had meant to them. His friend, the doctor, was on the platform, leading the session and welcoming a wide participation from the floor. Surprisingly enough, Herbie felt eager to speak and at once raised his hand along with five or six others who wanted the chance to say a few words. But there was the announcement of a hymn. This nettled him. Perhaps Mr. Dickinson didn't feel that he deserved a turn! With a temporary recurrence of rebelliousness, he slipped out and walked upstairs to his room. But God didn't let him go. How foolish he realized it was to miss this chance after all he had just experienced. Back in the meeting, he tried again and this time, Howard noticed him and at once, called him up to come forward. People say it was hard to tell which was the happier, the doctor or the

patient, as Herbie walked down the aisle. And then as he turned, faced the audience and told briefly what had just happened, an audible murmur of praise rose from the crowd that listened.

Back in Bermuda, many of his buddies met him with derision. “Come off it and have a drink”. And he tried many a time to pass on to his old friends the good news of what had happened in his life. A few listened but his change mystified some and maddened others.

After a short spell, in his old occupation in the building trade, he accepted the offer of a job on the staff of Willowbank and here, as his talents developed, so the variety of his work increased. Today, one sees him at one time carrying bags and at another, running a movie projector, or driving the Willowbank truck, or covering the front desk. But always, it is people who are his real concern and especially their children. And of all his occupations, nothing appears as important as his contributions to Willowbank’s many-sided spiritual program.

What one sees in Herbie’s life is perhaps the secret of Willowbank, for the explanation both of his freedom and the climate of this “guest-house with a difference” is the fact that back of the visible lives the invisible.

X Spiritual Dividends

WHAT CAN CHANGE a hotel or guest-house, open to all comers and operating as a business proposition, into a family? And this, when most of the guests come as strangers to one another? Only a quality which is found when material profit is not the chief consideration. It is only when people, not profits, come first, that the family spirit prevails.

Love for people is what motivates Roy and Evelyne, Kathleen and others in giving all their willing service – loving visitors because God loves them. By the simple way of happy serving love, they have found that the sense of a family is created and strangeness is melted out and overcome. Willowbank may not be quite the “Heavenly Hotel” of Howard Dickinson’s dreams – but almost!

The correspondence files are revealing. A goodly number of visitors write back after they have been to Willowbank to express their appreciation and most of these letters are quite different from conventional bread-and-butter correspondence. Some guests naturally mention the hot rolls and the fish chowder, while others recall the beauty of Bermuda sunsets. But what these “living letters” most frequently express is gratitude for the atmosphere and spirit which the writers have enjoyed and frequently for an experience of fellowship or of renewed faith.

A short sampling of this correspondence finishes the evidence. Here’s a letter in which a guest writes: “The friendliness, warmth and fellowship among Christian folk was an unforgettable experience”. Another says, “There is something about Willowbank you can’t explain. It is like one, big happy family .. We met so many lovely people”. Still another note refers to spiritual nurture: “For two girls who have not been Christian all that long, it is not only a fun place, but it is also a ‘growing’ place, where there is time to get to know the Lord better and people who love Him and help you learn to grow”.

One correspondent describes his time at Willowbank as follows: “Know that your work is appreciated and your friendship is valued ... Our February vacation was so beautiful! It is important for us to sit back occasionally and have our confidence in God’s plan restored”. Another writes: “For several years, I have known about Jesus, but during a week at Willowbank, I came to know Him”.

Referring to Willowbank’s capacity to give guests a special focus during great events in the Christian year, a person who returns December after December to spend Christmas here says: “Christmas at your place is a wonderful experience. Thanks to you and the big family, I never feel lonely”. (The implication here is that the writer had suffered a personal loss which would have, except for Willowbank, made loneliness inevitable).

Vacations are supposed to yield renewed vigor and health and those who use the beaches and tennis courts and breathe the air of this semi-tropical land are usually quite conscious of receiving a full quota of these usual holiday benefits, and say so. But, the striking references in Willowbank's incoming mail often refer to less tangible, more important benefits. As other examples, a couple write that their shaky marriage was repaired, while a family recall their participation in the devotional life at Willowbank as the beginning of an enriching family hour of devotions at home. In several instances, one finds references to renewed activity in the writer's local church as the result of a Willowbank vacation.



Delightful entertainments are an almost nightly feature in the lower lounge, leaving the upper lounge for bridge and other games. The evening nobody wants to miss is Fun Night when the Willowbank "Very, Very Little Theatre" performs. This is a riotous vaudeville show staged by the staff. Roy Cook, as master of ceremonies, Evelyne Cook, Kathleen Taten and Herbie Knight are the regulars in a flexible cast and their acts have to be seen to be believed. What intrigues the audience most is that, while the routines which they perform are patiently absurd, the actors do their stuff in a dead-pan fashion with a complete lack of the self-consciousness that most amateurs exhibit. Herbie's rendition with great gusto of the song "Yellow Bird", Kathleen doing a monologue in Bermuda dialect, or the "cast" coming out in a high-kicking chorus-line inevitably brings down the house.

Colored movies of Bermuda – collections of slides, some provided by photographers, among the guests, feature shorts, and an occasional piano recital are among opening events. The motion picture machine is frequently operated by Clifton ("Robbie") Robinson, the one-time tennis champion of the island and known to a great many visitors for his taxi services. He drives guests on an island tour made famous because he was cited by Queen Elizabeth II in her New Year's Honour List for his notable "affability".



For a time, in the early years, the term "retreat center" might have been an inaccurate designation for Willowbank, but of late, it has become more and more appropriate. Especially during the months of November and early December and again, in January, a number of groups of twenty-five, fifty and sometimes more, take over the entire facilities, establishing their own program of meetings under their own leadership. These have included such groups as Bibles for the World, American Keswick, World Vision Festival of Mission, The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, Christian Discovery, and others.

The Salvation Army of Bermuda, along with other local groups, has used Willowbank for week-end retreats and banquets when the facilities were available.



Strange as it may seem, many North Americans are still apt to think of Bermuda as being in the Caribbean and thus, much farther south than it really is. Actually, the group of more than a hundred small islands which comprise the Bermudas is almost equidistant from New York City and Cape Hatteras on the eastern tip of North Carolina. By air, it is less than eight hundred miles from these and other East Coast points and thus requires but little over two hours in flying time from the mainland. Even from Canada, it is a comparatively quick journey.

Names from a Spanish mariner, Juan de Bermudez, who is known to have sailed in the Western Atlantic during the 16th Century, it was later settled and developed by British colonists after Admiral Sir George Somers had been shipwrecked here in a storm in 1609 while en route to Virginia.

While never a British Crown Colony, Bermuda is still an integral part of the Commonwealth. Because tourism is now its chief industry, it looks to North America for its survival and the true “Bermuda Triangle” has New York and London at its vertices.

In World War I, Bermuda revealed its unique value as a center for Allied operations against the deadly German U-boats; then even more clearly in World War II it proved of enormous value to the Allied cause. The defense of the North American shipping-lanes was undertaken by the United States, who, in return for such activity and for naval equipment, furnished Britain on a “lend-lease” basis were granted 99-year leases on such parts of Bermuda as were developed for naval and air operations.

In these later days of relative peace, we should continue to consider the island’s great contribution as a bridge between the Old World and the New. Since airplanes in this jet age span the oceans as effectively as Roman roads once connected the different sections of the Mediterranean, centuries ago, Bermuda holds a most strategic position in the age-old battle between good and evil. The North Atlantic Alliance has already formed a natural base as was so well illustrated by the Eisenhower-Churchill Conference of 1953. But equally important, are the possibilities of using Bermuda as a meeting place for rank and file Christian leaders who are committed to building and maintaining a better world. Here, teams can be forged for international action; individuals can be trained in Christian evangelism and for political leadership. Understanding and mutual support will result from fellowships between men and women of good will who gather from various quarters, asking for inspiration and clarification of aims and goals. Thus, the importance of Bermuda and Willowbank will be viewed as

enormous by men of vision who believe that Christian leadership is God's answer to the present division between nations and the ever-increasing threat of the destructive forces of Communism and materialism.

XI Consider the Lilies

FROM TIME TO TIME along with the daily announcements which Roy Cook makes at the breakfast table, he or his wife describes an island flower or fruit of special significance. The Hibiscus, for instance, struck both of them as having such remarkable beauty, that they decided to put a Hibiscus blossom in every room which was about to be occupied by a new arrival. Then, one morning, Evelyne gave a little talk about the flower. “You may not realize it”, she said, “but these lovely Hibiscus blooms last only one day, even if put in water, before they shrivel up. I often get up in the morning feeling like a faded Hibiscus. Several years ago, a friend helped me by urging me to start every day with a prayer and a bit of Bible reading. When I do this, life seems to open up wide like the petals of the Hibiscus, which at daybreak, turn way back until they touch the stem, as if they wished to receive all the light and life possible. If I take the time to open myself until I touch the very stem of God Himself, it makes all the difference”.

When they first took charge of Willowbank, Roy and Evelyne became deeply interested in a small banana patch on the place. Knowing nothing about the banana and thinking it a curious, fascinating fruit, they turned to a local horticulturalist for advice and were told that they should first fertilize the patch by bringing up a quantity of seaweed from nearby Ely’s Harbour. As the banana trees grew and blossomed and bore fruit, the Cooks saw a strange phenomenon – each plant produced at least one new shoot from its roots – in fact, it was only in the new shoot that the old tree continued to live. This “life through death” principle dramatized by the banana plant, as Evelyne took opportunity to point out, has a parallel in human life for as Christ says, “He who would save his life must lose it”.

Another local plant from which Evelyne drew a lesson was the Aloe. Straight down the years from the Bible times, she said, men have recognized this plant as a healing agent. Evelyne discovered that one of today’s major pharmaceutical companies uses it as an ingredient in a medication to relieve radiation burns. One morning, she brought an Aloe to the dining-room and then, as she spoke, broke it in two to show how people can use it as a home-remedy for sunburn or bee-string. Here, too, she pointed out that a spiritual pattern exists in human life since many of us can be used as healing agents with friends or family if we too, are willing to be “broken”.



Roy has frequently talked about the island’s Cedars. As most friends of Bermuda know, this rocky island, a mere pin-point in the North Atlantic, used to be completely covered by a green mantle of beautiful Cedars (technical they should be classified as Junipers). Then, in the mid-1940’s, a mysterious blight suddenly and swiftly began killing the Cedars. Actually, the trees were infected

with two separate scale insects, one of which, the juniper scale, was so deadly, that by 1948, tremendous losses of trees in every stage of growth were taking place. A major control programme was initiated with emphasis being placed upon biological control, utilizing parasites and predators such as ladybird beetles. While this approach brought a measure of control, the juniper scale continued to kill trees in such large numbers that by 1952, fewer than five per cent of the original trees remained alive. Chemical control was not attempted to any great extent because of the difficulty of spraying tens of thousands of trees with pesticides which, at that time, were not very effective against the particular insect causing the havoc and which would have, at the same time, raised serious health hazards if used indiscriminately around homes where drinking-water must be obtained from roof-tops.

The task of replacing the dead cedars was given to the Department of Agriculture and Fisheries. Operating under a Re-afforestation Act (1952), government workers felled dead cedars on public lands and also on private lands where the dead trees stood within one hundred feet of public roads, replacing them with a variety of evergreens and flowering trees and shrubs, including the Casuarina, or Whispering Pine. The latter became the mainstay in the re-afforestation programme.

“These new trees are very valuable”, Evelyne explains, “as they grow as much as six feet in a single year and have thus restored much of the island’s verdure and given Bermuda back its original native green. Some people claim that the Casuarina is a nuisance tree because it has a small cone which dirties the ground and is not very comfortable to step on, but we like it as it is a tree that can be used almost anywhere and in several ways. It can be pruned and made decorative, as has been done on the beach at the Lantana Club, a nearby guest-house. Or it can be trimmed to form a low hedge to act as a windbreak for a garden. At Willowbank, we have allowed most of ours to grow and grow so as to provide our guests with maximum shade on hot summer days. Over the years, we have become well aware that men and women are very much like our trees. Some of them like the old Cedars stand firm and survive every storm. But most of us serve in other ways and find God’s will for our lives in the special places where He wants us”.



Long before ladybird beetles were brought to Bermuda, in 1905 to be exact, we are informed that three species of tree lizards appeared in Bermuda all brought in from Jamaica, with the hope of controlling the Mediterranean fruit-fly, which, in the early years of this century, was a serious menace to both citrus and soft fruits. The kind of lizards commonly referred to as chameleons became extremely abundant, feeding no doubt on a few fruit-flies but then, later on, making something of a specialty of the ladybird beetles. Then, in 1958, with a view of controlling the lizards and perhaps enhancing the effectiveness of the ladybird beetles, a tropical bird, the Kiskadee, was introduced. Like the lizard,

this robin-sized bird with chestnut-colored wings and a yellow breast found Bermuda an ideal home became quickly established and is now seen on every hand throughout the island. It is much admired but its value as a control of lizards is highly questionable! This beautiful, if sometimes, troublesome bird was apparently given its name by the natives of Trinidad who thought its loud, strident call sounded like the French phrase “Qu’est ce qu’il dit?” The birds seem to be asking the question, “What is he saying?” and their English name, of course, a phonetic equivalent of the French phrase.

Roy refers to the Kiskadee when he wants to warn guests against being in too great a hurry in their shopping and sight-seeing. There’s always a danger for Americans, especially, in their haste, to miss much of the island’s beauty. For such tourists, a substitute for the ancient admonition to “Stop, Look and Listen” may be found in a question similar to the Kiskadees “What is he saying?” if we think of the “he” as “the still small Voice”.

“And what about the lilies?” we asked Evelyne. “Yes”, she said, “there are two kinds on the island and while Bermuda no longer carries on a thriving export trade in them, for horticulturalists in the States have learned to grow their own, they appear everywhere on the island in the spring. And they are always a constant reminder of the very essence of the Willowbank family, for in seeing them, we remember some of Jesus’ most familiar words, ‘Behold the lilies of the field. They toil nor neither do they spin, but I tell you that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these’.”

XII The Basic Ingredient – a Team

BACK OF THE PROPERTY and buildings at Willowbank, have been God's men. At the beginning, twenty years ago, it took a key person with imagination and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, to conceive of Willowbank. Howard Dickinson, the initiator, led the way, but he did not act alone. As he shared his vision, others caught fire. How six friends banded together to make a place available for God's work, has been told in an earlier chapter. We will look here at three more of that first team: W. Jack David, Geoffrey Kitson and Fernance Perry. These came from exceedingly diverse backgrounds but they had one important fact in common: each in his own way had caught a compelling vision of the perfection of Jesus Christ and found a fresh spiritual experience through personal commitment to Him. And, as a result, each came to feel equipped to take action for God, in His Church and in the world.



Jack Davis grew up on a farm in Canada. His family life was closely tied to the activities of the local church and church-going and Sunday School were natural and central throughout his boyhood days. From the time he entered business in Bermuda, everything he set his hand to, seemed destined to succeed and he rose quickly and easily in the organization of one of the outstanding business firms on the island. At the same time, he became an extremely active member of the Wesley Methodist Church and accepted office in numerous civic organizations such as the Bermuda Chamber of Commerce.

In his life, perhaps, it could be said, that for many years, the good proved the enemy of the best. In any event, on a Sunday night in New York City, in November 1956, he became suddenly aware of the hollowness of his respectable life-style through his forthright "gospel" preaching of the Baptist minister, Stephen Olford. It came home to him, with shocking clarity, that his self-satisfaction and self-righteousness were just as offensive in God's sight as the grosser sins of the flesh, which he had found it so easy to condemn in the lives of others. Smugness appeared as a "filthy rag" and repentance as the only antidote. When the service closed, he was quick to find a fellow-worshipper with whom he could talk and pray and in his prayer, he asked to be different. Something, of course, happened. Not only did he sense the forgiving love of God, but, for the first time in his life, he felt that he had come to know Jesus Christ personally, as a friend and his redeemer.

Back in Bermuda, he rejoiced in discovering a few kindred spirits, whose faith was also contagious and whose witness was vocal. One of these was Howard Dickinson. A deepening friendship developed and a mutual desire to grow in the spirit. Then came the vision for the first businessmen's breakfast group on the island. This was held once a week in the kitchen of the Wesley Methodist Church,

of which they were both members. Once started, the meetings gathered power and numbers and in due course, made contact with men's meetings in Washington, D.C. and in New York where A.A. and I.C.L. and other groups had been operating for some time.



Another of the “discoverers” of the Willowbank property, Geoffrey Kitson, also dates his availability to God, from an evening in New York City. It was at a Billy Graham crusade at Madison Square Garden that he experienced a radical personal awakening that turned his life inside out.

Geoff was born in Scotland and had a most successful career in the British Royal Navy during World War II before, with his Bermudian wife, entering the business life of Bermuda. Here, he also did extremely well and extended his activities from the travel business into a number of other activities. However, he had quietly abandoned many of his early ideals and gradually became less and less responsible as a husband and parent.

It was to this divided personality that Bill Graham spoke with convicting candor and a specific challenge. Sitting high up in the top balcony of the auditorium, Geoff heard the evangelist as if he were talking directly to no one but himself and as Billy pointed “the sword of Christ” at him, he saw himself as he really was – an employer who ruled his staff by fear rather than by love, an unreliable husband and a father, who would rather say Yes to his children than bring them up “in the way they should go” with loving discipline. But, Billy offered a way out and when the chance was given to move forward and declare his repentance and dedication, he found himself joining almost a thousand fellow listeners in a corporate act of decision. Bill Graham had said that his sins would be forgiven if he accepted Jesus Christ and as he yielded his life to Him that night, that's exactly what happened. He says: “For one thing, an extraordinary feeling came over me and I knew that it was no exaggeration to believe that I had been born again”.

Within a day or two after his return to Bermuda, he ran into his neighbour, Howard Dickinson and standing on the street corner, poured out the whole story of his New York experience. Howard listened but then quietly asked, “Don't you know what happened to you at the Garden?” When Geoff shook his head, Howard laughingly gave him the answer. “You were converted”, he said. Geoff reacted with alarm but then was quick to accept the doctor's diagnosis and the suggestion that he join a small study group at the Dickinson's' home the following Tuesday evening. There, week by week, he and his wife, Betty, met others who were discovering a new brand of unselfish living. “How the Bible came alive at those meetings!” Geoff recalls. “The stories we read in the book of Acts seemed as contemporary and relevant as the events of our daily lives”.

One afternoon, he decided to look up the rector of his church and see if there was something he could do to help him. On the way home from work, he stopped at the latter's study. The clergyman opened the door himself and, as he laughingly admitted later, almost had a nervous breakdown when he saw Geoff and heard why he had called. "For two years I've been praying for a man like you to help me", he declared, "and now that you're here, I can hardly believe it's true. In a couple of weeks, I'll have you teaching my own Bible class!" Geoff thought this was not quite the job for a new convert, but arrived with a concordance and a Phillip's translation of the New Testament – and with the encouragement of the doctor's group – he went full steam ahead and things caught on in a big way.

Today, there is a new parish-hall at St. Paul's Church, a Religious Education Building, in the creation of which Geoffrey Kitson, was the prime mover and chief money-raiser.

At long last, he felt a free man with the best of his life spreading out before him. So, when two years later, the I.C.L. Conference took place at the Princess Hotel, he, at once, became very much part of it and heartily joined in everything which subsequently followed from the great challenged given at the opening banquet by Canon Wallace Bird.



Then, there is Fernance Perry, whose rich Portuguese ancestry furnishes him with qualities of a special kind. He is aggressive, imaginative, musical, and intense. Like the other two, as a young man, he was carrying on quite happily on his own, without any sense of spiritual need.

During World War II, when he was but nineteen, he served as a soldier in one of the local defense units in Bermuda. On leave one day, he was unexpectedly invited by the owner of a neighbourhood grocery store to attend a prayer meeting and to be polite, and since he had nothing else to do, he went along to see what it was all about.

The Holy Spirit was working in his heart for in this small prayer meeting, he immediately realized the very presence of God and was conscious of His speaking to him "in a very personal way, through the humble prayers of the devout people present". Fernance understood that there was nothing for it but to accept gladly the message that in Jesus Christ, he could receive a new and better life. Quietly, right there in the pew, he made a decision "to let go and let God" – a decision he never regretted, for almost immediately, he felt his life taking on a wholly new meaning and purpose.

In the barracks the next day, he found the courage to speak about the step he had taken and the new quality of life of which he was already conscious. Then and later his was a compelling witness. After a time, one of his Christian buddies and he started a Bible-study group for the service men right on their post.

Following the war, he married and entered the grocery business himself. About 1952, two or three of his friends put some money into a little grocery store and gave him the management of it. If successful, the profits were to be split fifty-fifty.

Within eighteen months, Fernance declares, “two things happened: the business succeeded and my sponsors decided to move to England. They wanted to sell and I was fortunate enough at this point to be able to acquire the ownership myself. It continued to expand and under the pressure of success, I acquired a new property on the corner of Parliament and Church Streets. We remodelled the premises and established a self-service supermarket – one of the first on the island. And, still the business continued to grow steadily. Finally, I purchased a piece of property in a very central location, right across Church Street, from the Cathedral and there, we put up a brand new, large building. This was a giant step, one I could only have taken with the faith and foresight God was giving me.

“On the opening day, the Mayor of Hamilton cut the ribbon to open the store for business. Just before the ceremony, as I was taking him on a tour of the building, he expressed the concern which many of the business community felt about the development. ‘Fernance’, he said, ‘how on earth are you going to make this pay? You know I’ve been in the food business myself and I’ve found out that there isn’t much profit in food, especially in the face of inflation and with the amount of stealing which is going on. This is such an enormous place’. But, I assured him that I was quite confident about the step and five minutes after the opening, we had something like 150 food carts out on the floor, with customers lined up outside waiting to get in. Indeed, the whole move was simply one big success”.

Then, through Howard Dickinson and Harold Cooper, Fernance became associated with the prayer breakfast in the kitchen of the Wesley Methodist Church in Hamilton. Here, he met other Christians who were active in business and fellow-employers like himself. “It was a tremendous privilege to be part of that group”, he says, “and it was also a means of further spiritual growth. And, from that point on, like the others, I became fired up with a burning desire to do something significant for God in Bermuda”.

XIII

A Time of Trouble

IT IS UNLIKELY that any forward movement of the Spirit will be unattended by periods of difficulty and testing. Immediately after the acquisition of "Southlands" (the details of which are described in the next chapter) Willowbank entered upon such a period. It was a time which all of those connected with Willowbank will always remember as one of extreme difficulty and yet as one which was also marked by a keen sense of God's strengthening presence.

This time of trouble started with a confrontation between the Bermuda Industrial Union and the Willowbank Trustees and management. The issue focused on the question whether or not Willowbank would recognize the Union as the bargaining agent for all Willowbank employees. Early in 1977, the Union began to enlist Willowbank employees as members and before long, half the staff had signed up. Then, at the end of February, the Willowbank Trustees were requested to recognize the Union as bargaining agent for the staff as a whole.

From the beginning of the controversy, the Trustees had taken the position that while they accepted the Union as a normal factor in the business life of the island; they believed that the specialized nature of Willowbank's work and ministry would be jeopardized by the type of authority which the Union desired.

When these convictions were explained to the Union leadership, the Union asked the Trustees to reconsider their position. This was a reasonable request and the Trustees agreed to review their position at their next regular meeting which was scheduled for April. However, before the date of this meeting, events took place which thrust Willowbank into a conflict with the Union which was to last, with an interlude in the summer, for the next six months.

An employee who had been repeatedly warned about his disorderly behaviour was finally discharged by Roy Cook for threatening Kathleen Tatem with violence. The man redirected his violence against Roy and attacked him physically and viciously with the result that Roy suffered considerable pain for some weeks afterwards. The next morning, all employees who were Union members walked off their jobs midway through breakfast and the Union immediately set up a picket line at Willowbank's main entrance.

This started an exceedingly unhappy period for the management, the guests and for the entire Willowbank family.

This first strike lasted for six weeks. Easy access to Willowbank was interfered with, service was sharply reduced and constant pressure was exerted on those who continued to work in an attempt to force them to stop. And picket lines were maintained from dawn to dark. Almost daily reports began appearing in the press and the whole affair became a matter of general public interest and

debate, attracting attention throughout the island. When it appeared that the dispute might spread and affect other situations, Government set up an official Board of Enquiry. The Cabinet minister concerned asked the Willowbank Trustees to attend the meetings of the Board of Enquiry but stated that the findings of the Board would not be binding on Willowbank.

It soon became apparent that the Board of Enquiry failed to understand the special position claimed by Willowbank as a charitable trust and a specifically religious undertaking and, as a result, the Board asked Willowbank to terminate the dispute by complying with the Union's demands. When the Willowbank Trustees explained that they were unable to do this, they were regarded officially as rather tiresome and obstinate people! Nothing, if not unreasonable. At the same time, a wave of popular support appeared, friendly letters and encouraging 'phone calls came in and warm expressions of support were voiced by correspondents whose letters were printed in the press.

Then, the Union threatened to take Willowbank into court on the charge that workers' rights were being infringed. While the Trustees would not have turned to legal action themselves, they stated publicly that they were perfectly willing to answer to such court action for indeed, they were aware of no illegality of any kind. On their part, with the hope of breaking the deadlock, at the beginning of May, the Trustees offered to take back all but one of those who had struck, provided they could do this without accepting the Union's demand for official recognition. The Willowbank leadership further stated that it would give serious consideration to any recommendations the Union might make concerning the working conditions of the staff.

The offer of reemployment was promptly accepted and the strikers returned to work. As a gesture of good will, the Trustees paid them for two of the weeks during which they were on strike. But this settlement proved short-lived for trouble broke out again three months later, in August, and in September, the Union threatened the island's entire hotel industry with a general strike if Willowbank still refused to capitulate and agree to the Union's original demands. The situation again became very tense indeed.

Now as early as March, the Trustees had felt obligated to consider what eventualities might lay ahead in case the labor trouble continued indefinitely. At that time, it had been unanimously decided that no course of action would be pursued which might jeopardize the welfare of Bermuda as a whole. The Trustees had, in fact, so informed the Government.

The threat of a general strike created just such a situation. Apprehension became widespread; the Premier undertook intervention and other Cabinet members also sought ways to ward off action which would cause chaos in the main industry of the island. It was all to no avail and on September 19, the union proclaimed that a strike against all the hotels on the island would commence at midnight.

Immediately, travelers were kept from proceeding to Bermuda; extra planes arrived to return tourists to their homes; and the entire economy of the island was threatened with disaster.

Late in the afternoon of the first day of the general strike, Willowbank Trustees met with a group of Cabinet Ministers, including the Premier and, at once, told them that a decision had been taken to close Willowbank as a way to settle the strike. It was unnecessary to explain that this decision had only been taken with the utmost reluctance after an agonizing review of all the issues involved and the belief that it alone would provide an answer. The truth is that some Trustees had been so utterly crushed by need of this action that they felt sure that Willowbank would never be able to open its doors again.

The offer was accepted and as expected, the entire crisis ended – the situation was immediately “de-fused”. The Union called the strike off the very next day and the hotels – all except one – and the travel industry rapidly returned to normal. At Willowbank, no new guests were accepted and the whole operation was closed down as of the end of the month. About half of the staff remained faithful during the entire controversy and these employees were retained on the payroll and eventually put to work renovating and cleaning the premises.



There are three points of special importance which should be set down in summary of this time of trouble:

(1) While Willowbank was vilified in many quarters and the Trustees labelled as monsters of injustice with no appreciation of the personal rights of working people, a far wider expression of appreciation and support came from the general public. The immense volume of friendly letters included many from overseas, a large number of which were addressed to Bermuda and its Government, urging backing for Willowbank and a guarantee that such a center be jealously guarded and maintained. Former guests wrote to express their gratitude for the benefits they had received at Willowbank and to signify their intention to return for further holidays in this unique place.

(2) The attitude of the guests during the troublesome months is another fact which should be remembered. Not only did these visitors cheerfully accept the inconvenience caused by a depleted staff, but any number of them pitched in to help in any way they could. They fully matched the extra zeal of those loyal members of the staff who carried on.

(3) One must further remember the strong conviction that, however painful the path had been, it represented a policy the Trustees thought was pleasing to God and was dictated by faith and trust in Him. There was a general sense that no other course could have been followed.



On Sunday, October 25, a memorable event then occurred in the form of an “Open House”. The surprising number of several hundred people crowded the grounds, more friends, in fact, than had ever attended a Willowbank gathering. It was a wonderful occasion and an opportunity for a countless number of Bermudians to demonstrate their interest in and backing of Willowbank. Much good food was consumed and several important talks made and the meeting was closed by one of the very friends who had taken a leading part in the dedication of Willowbank in 1960, Brigadier Charles Wall of the Salvation Army. His words were prophetic for he declared, “I believe that God Himself is going to do great things again through Willowbank”. These words gave a very different impression to the sentiment expressed in a newspaper report which appeared on the following day under the heading: “Several hundred attend **last** tea at Willowbank”.

This announcement of course, proved quite untrue as the Trustees were of one mind in believing that the difficulties by which they had been beset in no sense indicated that Willowbank’s ministry was an at end. They continued to meeting regularly and very shortly came to the united decision to open Willowbank again on December 1. In preparation for this happy event, an advertisement was prepared for the press which redefined the purposes of Willowbank and the nature of the staff which it was hoped would operate what practically everyone considered to be God’s guest-house. Parts of the advertisement will be of special interest to all friends of Willowbank and form an important link in this Willowbank Story:

“We the Trustees believe that the difficulties experienced at Willowbank ... will be found to have resulted in positive gains – that out of all the trauma and unpleasantness will come a new depth to the ministry, greater than anything we have experienced in recent years.

“We have been forced to re-examine very carefully the concepts under which we have been operating and to take a fresh look at our whole philosophy; and out of this appraisal have come decisions which we believe will result, under God, in new vitality and a new blessing in the ministry.

“One conviction that has emerged is that we must get back to the type of staff that we originally planned for Willowbank and that in the early days, we actually had ... We are not looking for perfect people to work at Willowbank. It is obvious that we ourselves are far from perfect – and we know of only One who is. However, what we are looking for are people who have an honest commitment in their hearts to Our Lord Jesus Christ and a sincere desire to see His purposes accomplished in our community and in the world. We invite such people to work with us at Willowbank ... Each person will have a clearly defined job, but all will be expected to help others in their own work, should the need arise. We believe

sincerely in the dignity and worth of all types of work and will hope that every person working at Willowbank will have the satisfaction of knowing that his or her own effort has a vital part to play in the total ministry.

“We intend to ensure that working conditions and teams of service are all that can be reasonably expected and an important innovation will be that the Chairman of the Trustees, F. John Barritt, will be personally concerned with the welfare of each member of the staff in his additional capacity as Personnel Officer

...

“A further conviction is that we should encourage the formation of an association to be known as The Willowbank Fellowship. This will be an informal group of friends, both in Bermuda and abroad, who will come together at certain times of the year for fellowship, prayer and inspiration and who will be kept informed on all matters pertaining to development of the vision which we have been given. It should be made plain that we see the operation of the guest-house at Willowbank as only one part of the ministry that the Foundation has been called upon to undertake. In addition to the work among tourists, there have always been local people who have been helped and inspired and we believe that Willowbank can increasingly be used to be a blessing in the life of this beautiful and unique island in which we live. There is also the work at “Southlands” to be developed in all of the aspects that we have put before the public; and our links with many people abroad, including the group based in Washington, formerly known as ‘International Christian Leadership’, will provide avenues of services on an international scale ...

“We cannot conclude this announcement without an expression of good will towards those with whom we have engaged in public controversy. We desire to have good personal relationships with all in our community even if at times we have to differ on points of conviction; and as far as we are concerned, we sincerely wish to live at peace with all. We shall be willing to do whatever is in our power to demonstrate this.”

The advertisement outlined the procedures to be followed by any who wished to apply for employment on the basis outlined and during the days following the announcement Willowbank had no less than 250 applicants for places on its staff. New members of the staff were soon selected from those who not merely wished to hold a regular job but who expressed a willingness to combine their normal activities with a commitment to Christ in serving guests in His name. Each morning, this augmented staff starts their day’s work by praying together in the kitchen. Their friendliness and even the expression on the faces of those who serve make it obvious that they are no ordinary hired staff.



John Barritt spoke for the whole board when he summarized this period of difficulty in the following words:

“Recently, I believe we ran ahead of God’s will; the requirements of our expanded physical plant considerably exceeded the number of Christian workers available on the staff partially because the island’s more stringent immigration policy – which no one but God could have anticipated. But, from our difficulties, there must be lessons to be learned.

“God’s economy is not money, though this has its place; neither is it a physical plant, although accommodations should be of good standard. It is rather men and women committed to Him and to one another. So as the old song says, ‘We have to go right back to the beginning’, looking unto Him, the author and finisher of our faith. Following not afar but closely, let us individually and corporately, realize that He will continue to surprise us as He meets our needs and the need of Willowbank – in His own timing.

“Southlands, a glorious estate, exceeding forty acres, has been returned not just to Bermudian ownership, but to Him who created it. A promised land awaiting the feet of many Joshuas. In embryo, it is exciting with possibilities. May we be found worthy of its trust-stewardship for the Kingdom and for future generations on these islands. In a way, we are the first of many brethren. In view of the possibilities of a world ministry, we must see that in the redemptive work performed, the redeemed play their part in whatever way they can. ‘Let the redeemed say so’, in deed as well as in word.”

XIV “Southlands” – An Investment in the Future

THE TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY of the opening of Willowbank, November 11, 1980, is a time of grateful rejoicing. It is also a most appropriate moment to consider the extended opportunities open to the Willowbank family through the recent acquisition of “Southlands”. This magnificent forty-acre estate came into the hands of the Board in a fashion reminiscent of the way the original Willowbank property was acquired in 1960.

In 1976, when only a very few large private properties remained undeveloped on the island; one of the Trustees was informed that Southlands was up for sale. As in the earlier years, the cost seemed absolutely prohibitive. But negotiations were begun and eventually, a purchase price of \$1,750,000 was agreed upon, a huge sum of money but one considerably below the amount first asked.

As the Willowbank Incorporation Act only permitted Willowbank to hold ten acres of land, the purchase of “Southlands” had to go before the Legislature for special approval. Contrary to expectations, instead of requiring a considerable investment of time and trouble, the necessary legislation went through the House of Assembly with no delay whatsoever, there being three readings of the bill in a single day. The Legislative Council treated the bill with the same consideration, also arranging for three readings of the bill in one day. Then, the Governor’s asset which was expected to take further time was secured in less than a week and the transaction stood approved. Because of this and the reasonable terms on which the transaction was financed, the Trustees were confirmed in their belief that God Himself was behind their purchase and would support the venture, as He had the development of Willowbank, every step of the way.



It takes a personal visit to Southlands to understand even partially the scope and promise of this place and to appreciate its beauty. Roy Cook has the habit of taking groups of Willowbank guests to inspect the property; he also occasionally spends an hour there on his own; for Southlands is very inspiring. He rightly says that touring Southlands “very much resembles visiting a botanical garden, so luxuriant is the growth of plant life and the variety of magnificent trees”. One can walk along almost unending shaded, wooded paths and discover numerous flowering quarries and moss-covered grottos. Marble benches have been placed in some of the smaller gardens; by a secluded pool in the one lovely nook a statue of St. Francis stands in a niche in the quarry wall. The constant delight of moving from one quiet retreat area to another is heightened by the rare vistas one gets of the reef-studded ocean far below. Then, there are citrus groves with oranges, grapefruit, limes and lemons and peach trees and fertile fields for

garden vegetables. The shore itself is easily accessible and offers a magnificent stretch of private beach.

In the center of this idyllic setting, is the main house, a gracious mansion, part of which dates back to 1745. The old stables and carriage-house have been converted into a series of modern apartments while a gardener's cottage and other small buildings offer accommodation for a working staff. On the crest of the hill stands another cottage which has recently been repaired and modernized.



What would be your vision be for such a place? Remembering that it is not to be used as an extension of the tourist facilities of Willowbank itself, since it is quite clear that this has reached ideal proportions, you must consider different possibilities. And there are many. Already, the Trustees have received a number of suggestions of various kinds.

Speaking as both a Trustee and a doctor, Howard Dickinson has this to say about one of several dreams he has entertained in connection with Southlands. "I have always been very keen on a place where people who have suffered emotional breakdowns might come to a certain stage of their recovery to experience the fullness of healing which can occur in a specifically Christian environment. So many men and women float along through life believing they are making out O.K. without any conscious need of God. Then a crash of some kind occurs – a sudden loss or a more gradual feeling of frustration or a sense of their inability to carry on. International relations change, economic conditions deteriorate and serious questions arise: What is life all about? Where am I headed? Why am I here? I believe that a unit could be established on a section of the new property where for three or four weeks – or even longer – this sort of environment could be provided.

"Or, again, people who are recovering from physical illness may need a special spot where they can spend a short period and gather strength and become freshly oriented before they again undertake their full responsibilities at home or in business.

"I also long to have a place available where young Christians can be trained in the basics of Christian faith and helped to discover their capacities for passing such faith on to their friends and relating their new life to their homes and vocations.

"Further, with our beautiful shoreline property, we might well provide appropriate sites for local groups who wish to go on retreat. There might well be sites which could be used for youth camps and these could be available for organizations such as 'Young Life'."

Roy Cook also has his dreams: “We have the chance to move out beyond the bounds of Willowbank proper. In my early days, I was strongly impressed with the teaching of Dawson Trotman of ‘The Navigators’. Along with his programs for Bible training, I have also thought much about the value of a School of Intercession ... Christians need to think in terms of the world and not just a particular locality. It seems to me that God’s way of doing this is by developing men and women who understand the principles of discipleship and are ready to serve in Christ’s name wherever opportunities open throughout the world. Bermuda could provide this center for intercessors and for discipleship training.

“Then I have pictured a retirement center for older people in some special location at Southlands. My idea would be that while in the main such a home would be self-supporting, some persons without sufficient funds for their old age would be provided for. Beyond this, it would be hoped that the wisdom of certain older folks in residence would be available for the counselling of those who are younger and less experienced.”

Among the Trustees of Willowbank, there is further a keen desire to assist in providing a home for helping those of the younger generation who have been caught by the drug habit. The seriousness of both hard and soft drugs in western society is fully appreciated and the work of organizations like Teen Challenge in the States is of vital interest. How Southlands might work with other groups in Bermuda who are attacking this problem is a major consideration of the Board.



It has been suggested that the main house on the Southlands estate might conceivably be furnished and staffed as a small retreat center for special groups similar to ones which have already been meeting at Willowbank. One can visualize such facilities as being used in a ministry such as Francis Shaeffer has at L’Abri and Norman Grubb carries on in North America. The contacts Willowbank already has with organisations like the Consortium of Christian Colleges in the U.S.A. ... the Committee for World Evangelization (one outcome of the significant Lausanne Conference) ... World Vision International and Washington’s Fellowship Foundation will doubtless lead to the use of these beautiful new grounds for countless future gatherings. When privacy with maximum opportunity for fellowship is of the essence, Southlands should be unexcelled. The list of friends who may be interested seems almost endless especially in view of the size and nature of “The Willowbank Fellowship” which as mentioned was established soon after the Willowbank guest-house was re-opened in December 1977. This is a large family of between three and four thousand including many former guests and hundreds of Bermudians.



In this turbulent Twentieth Century, the power of God has repeatedly blazed forth against the black destruction of war and destitution in the splendour of sacrifice and the valor of inspired leadership.

The nineteen eighties surely mark another world crisis – one which should again challenge those who call themselves followers of Jesus Christ to re-evaluate the quality of their lives and ministries. Christians are committed to carry the Good News of forgiveness and renewal to the whole world. Do we take our commission seriously? Is our service adequate?

Anyone reading the best seller “A Man Called Intrepid” becomes aware of how invaluable Bermuda proved to the Allies during World War II. A few leaders had the imagination to see this island as a center for strategic planning and as a place where a staff could be mobilized to cope with espionage and radio communications. United, highly-effective action resulted.

In 1960, a few men visualized Bermuda in a similar positive way as a training ground and coordinating center for **spiritual** warfare. In twenty years, as this story shows, much has been accomplished and the vision of Abraham Vereide, Wallace Bird and the Willowbank Trustees has been confirmed.

Now in Southlands, additional resources have been supplied. The spiritual fruits of these next twenty years, the last two decades of the century, should be even more abundant. We pray that each reader of this book, wherever he or she may be, will have some part in this expected development and in the enlarging work which results.

God’s vision is man’s highest destiny.

The Willowbank Foundation

PURPOSE: To extend the Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ in Bermuda and around the world by means of:

(1) **Willowbank:** This is a Christian mission to the tourist. It is a resort which brings tourists in contact with a Christian fellowship, making possible a Christian commitment and/or help and encouragement in the Christian life. Willowbank is self-supporting but is non-profit in the sense that no one can take any financial profit from the venture. If it were sold, the proceeds must be given to a mission or some other Christian work. Any income above operating expenses will help to carry out the objectives of the Foundation.

(2) **Willowbank-Southlands:** This is a forty-acre piece of land upon which there will be developed a complex of various Christian ministries such as a Fellowship House to be used for Christian training and outreach, a home for the handicapped, possibly a rehabilitation center for drug abuse, a retirement home, a retreat center, and so on. This will be developed for both Bermuda and international outreach.

(3) **The Willowbank Fellowship:** This is to bring together and encourage a world-wide Christian fellowship which will be an effective instrument in behalf of the Kingdom of God.

Norman Grubb

Norman Grubb, a famous missionary, lecturer, and prolific writer, was intimately involved with “Willowbank” from its very beginning. As a close friend of Abraham Vereide, founder of International Christian Leadership, he took a leading role on the team which “Abram” brought to Bermuda for the first conference at the Princess Hotel when the plan for a Christian retreat center for the island was conceived. In fact, it was Norman’s message, which challenged Howard Dickinson to take the first step in bringing “Willowbank” into being. Known to many as the former General Secretary of the Worldwide Evangelization Crusade in North America, Norman Grubb’s books include *C.T. Studd, Cricketer and Pioneer*; *Touching the Invisible*; *The Law of Faith*; *The Liberating Secret*; *The Deep Things of God*; *Continuous Revival*; *God Unlimited*; and *The Spontaneous You*. *One Caught, No Escape* is his autobiography.

Irving Harris

After working for the Princeton University Press in the 1920's, where he edited the Princeton Alumni Weekly, Irving Harris entered the Presbyterian ministry. He served on the staff of Central Presbyterian Church New York and then, in 1929, became active in the ecumenical work being carried on by Sam Shoemaker and the Oxford Group at Calvary House, 61 Gramercy Park. There, he eventually became the first non-Episcopal editor of The Calvary Evangel, later known as Faith at Work magazine. As a member of the Calvary Church Staff, he participated in the ever-widening movement of laymen's renewal which Sam Shoemaker spearheaded. Books edited or written by him are An Outline of the Life of Christ; God Has the Answer; What It Takes!; Creating Christian Cells (later known as Groups That Work); and The Breeze of the Spirit – Sam Shoemaker and the Story of Faith-at-Work.

Acknowledgements

WHEN THE TRUSTEES of Willowbank and Norman Grubb suggested that I re-write and bring up to date the first version of this book, it seemed like a fairly simple task. With the help and encouragement of Dr. Howard Dickinson, the Hon. F. John Barritt, and Roy and Evelyne Cook, I undertook the amplification, in a kind of narrative style, in December 1979.

As the story unfolded, however, it became clear that a good deal of consultation would be needed with other Willowbank trustees and some historical research. This was provided by Cmdr. Geoffrey Kitson, for example, got from the director of Fisheries and Agriculture in Bermuda an accurate description of the land's tragic loss of its cedar forest – reference to which is made in Chapter XI. Brigadier Charles Watt of the Salvation Army (retired) ... Rene Dickinson ... Betty Kitson and several other Bermudians read chapters of the book and offered helpful comments and encouragement.

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IRVING HARRIS