



***Where The Lord Whispers***  
**Thousand Pines 1939-2009**

By Susie Gran

**S**tep off the front porch of the newest Thousand Pines log cabin onto the path to Inspiration Point for a breathtaking view of Lake Gregory.

Named for the man who built the lake, the cabin was reconstructed of logs harvested recently from the 255-acre Thousand Pines Christian Camp and Conference Center in Crestline, Ca.

The Gregory Family Cabin, which houses up to 25 campers, is the first renovation completed with pine trees from this mountain retreat where a logging camp thrived a century ago. And, it is a testament to Arthur Gregory Sr. who was inspired by his faith to donate 10 acres to start a Baptist camp here in 1939, the same year the lake was finished.

The loggers of old were taking down trees to build orange crates needed in the Gregory fruit-packing houses in Redlands. Today's loggers -- camp employees -- are turning 6,000 pines killed by drought and bark beetles into lumber to replace dilapidated cabins that were erected decades before these woods became a church camp.

The last inhabitants on Gregory's 10 acres were lake workers who occupied the Civilian Conservation Corps cabins that dotted his land. After \$25,000 in renovations, Baptist campers arrived in the summer of 1939 for a junior high guild camp, a boys camp and a young married couples camp.

Hundreds of former campers and camp supporters plan to share memories and stories of salvation at a June picnic when the camp celebrates its 70th year. Among them will be the granddaughter of Arthur Gregory Sr., Frances Gregory, who recently offered building materials, including roofing paper and ceiling tile, floor tile, electrical and plumbing supplies to continue the upgrades throughout the camp.

Like her grandfather and father, Frances has a spiritual connection to Thousand Pines. In the summer of 1970, she was a grieving 13-year-old when she walked into the camp's McKee Prayer Chapel alone, seeking comfort.

"It was two or three weeks after my mom, Arline, died," she said in a recent interview. "My friend, Paula Dornbach, from the First Baptist Church in Redlands invited me to camp. She wondered if I had ever asked Jesus into my heart and I guess I thought I had.

"But when I went into McKee chapel and saw the organ that Grandpa Art and Grandma Frances Gregory donated and read the plaque on that organ, my heart opened to what the Lord wanted for me at that moment. I knelt down and asked the Lord into my heart."

On March 15, 1970, she wrote her decision in the chapel's book as follows: "Even though I do not understand your actions sometimes, I guess they are for the best. I have only recently given my life to you, and already I feel different inside. I will do my best to keep the faith and be true to you."

Her father, Arthur Gregory Jr., also sought comfort in Christ during a conversation with Thousand Pines camp director Mike Pate. Weeks before his death in January 2005, Arthur Gregory called Pate to make his annual donation. "He would call me every year at Christmas and ask, 'What do you need this year?' " Pate said. "His last year-end call came two weeks before his stroke and our conversation went much deeper.

"He gave \$10,000 that year. His and Louise' gifts were always generous, and I told him I didn't know how to begin to thank him. I asked if there was anything I could do for him." In response, Gregory shared what was on his mind. "It was a very powerful moment," Pate said. "He said, 'I haven't been the man my father was. My father was a better man. He was much more committed to the Lord.'

"He asked me then to pray for him," Pate said. "My sense was that he wanted to be right with God and my prayer was to give Arthur a sense of Christ's love in his life and that he know his Father."

Until that phone call, Pate said he didn't know "where Arthur was in his relationship to God. It was a wonderful call. Profound."

Frances Gregory learned of the call shortly before her father died. "In my mind, my dad surrendered his heart to the Lord as I did at Thousand Pines."

Thousands of campers have similar testimonies, including Director Pate. Standing in the 45-year-old McKee Prayer Chapel recently, he told visitors, "This is where I prayed to go into ministry. I was in the ninth grade. I said, 'Send me anywhere you want Lord,' and he put me back here living 20 feet from where I prayed."

The chapel named for the late missionary Howard McKee, "is a pretty special spot," Pate said. "What the Lord has done here over the years is consistent. Tens of thousands have come to Christ in this room and in our main Jensen Chapel."

Pate has been the camp's director for 8 years overseeing 25,000 campers annually and a staff of 25 year-round employees and about 100 seasonal workers. The camp draws campers from churches throughout the western United States and groups of Southern California public schoolchildren for an outdoor education program. Within the next few years, Pate expects to count the one-millionth visitor to camp.

"Kids come up who have never been in nature, never seen a squirrel or a blue jay. They've known only concrete and asphalt and the anxieties of the world," Pate said. "Here, they can listen to the whisper of the Lord."

"It's such a privilege," Pate said, "to be in the front row and watch all of this."

The first children in these woods lived with their parents in the logging camp, attended classes and played near the tree that for years supported the camp bell. After the mills shut down, the camp evolved with booming tourism on the mountain.

The Crest Forest Club occupied the former logging camp and transformed it into a frontier town with a dance hall that served liquor and "echoed with raucous laughter and rattling dice." according to camp archives.

The San Bernardino County sheriff closed the club after a murder was committed on the grounds. Later, the CCC occupied the camp, followed by Lake Gregory workers until 1939 when the lake was finished and Arthur Gregory's donation was accepted by the Southern California Baptist Convention. Dr. Ralph Jensen was Executive Secretary of the convention at the time. Jensen Chapel on the camp property is named in his honor.

Gregory's offer of land was first made to the university association (which later founded the University of Redlands), but it was not incorporated, so the Riverside First Baptist Church, the largest in the area, was asked to accept the acreage. In 1938, Riverside Baptist's Pastor Dr. Catherwood, the trustees and Cathie Scott (later Chapman) toured the area with Gregory, a founding member of the Redlands First Baptist Church. The group decided it was a project too big for a single church to take on.

Catherwood, Rev. Ivan Bell and the pastor of the Compton church formed a committee that recommended Gregory's offer not be accepted unless the convention board commit financial support to the program. The board accepted the property and the responsibility.

The job of renovation was assigned to Mr. and Mrs. Evans who used a \$25,000 appropriation to line the cabins with knotty pine, build two large toilet and shower buildings, a new kitchen and other improvements.

Dr. Sam West took over the renovation at the end of the first year and managed the camp for 10 years. West built Long Beach Lodge, Hospitality House, the administration building, bunkhouses and more cabins. Cabins 7,8 and 9 were designed by G. Stanley Wilson, a Riverside architect who worked on the historic Mission Inn Hotel, according to Cathie Chapman.

After the Wests left Thousand Pines to become manager of Atherton Court, a home for retired ministers and missionaries, the convention board decided to combine grounds maintenance and camp programming into one office with the Rev. G. Wayne Murphy as director of camps and conferences. Other camp directors in the early years were Dr. Oliver Cummings and the Rev. J. Sam Bailey. Ted Cathey, served for several years in the 1950's, Hank Westrup who also served several years until 1968.

In 1956, under the leadership the McKee Prayer Chapel was completed with funding from the First Baptist Church of Downey. The chapel was built in the memory of the Rev. Howard

McKee who was the pastor at First Baptist Church of Taft when he died. He had been a dean and recreation director for several Thousand Pines camps.

A gift of Grace Hershey of Bakersfield First Baptist Church allowed the purchase of 110 acres adjacent to the camp. Four cabins and a lodge were constructed for the Ponderosa unit to house an additional 98 campers. The Ponderosa kitchen was vital in October 1968 when a fire destroyed the main camp's dining room, kitchen, an upper-story dormitory and the museum. The canteen was converted to a temporary, long-term kitchen and the Hospitality House (now the Malt Shop) was converted to a dining room for winter campers. Summer campers ate in a large circus tent in 1969 and 1970.

In June 1969, the Rev. Ron Kallander was hired as site director. In February 1970, Gene and Loretta Grimm were hired as property and kitchen supervisors. In 1971, the Wayne Murphy dining hall and kitchen were completed. In 1981, members of the First Baptist Church of Covina donated funds for the first duplex in a new unit called the Cedars. The Rev. Doug Jeffrey played a key fundraising role in heading the "Investment in Life" campaign that provided funds to build three more Cedars duplexes in the early 1980's. The Rev. Robert Neill also brought great leadership to Thousand Pines as the Director of Camping for the ABC/PSW.

Funds provided by the Santa Monica Trinity Baptist Church and Lois Brownlee completed the Chester Scott Assembly/Craft Building. Brownlee, a Southern Baptist, attended the 50th anniversary of the camp in 1989 with her investment counselor, Doyle Allen. Before she left, she wrote a \$25,000 check to the camp. Every year until her death, she donated funds and left a large sum in her will to the camp.

In May 1995, the Rev. Kevin Trevithick became camp director. His wife, Jennifer, and a small group of women created Thousand Pines Partners, which sponsored the 1997 Independence Day Celebration featuring a concert, games, BBQ dinner, silent auction and all the camp's regular activities, including the confidence course, pool, biking, hiking, gift shop and canteen.

The partners sponsored the annual July 4 event for several years. The group also held a scholarship benefit in 2001 on the Queen Mary and a similar benefit at Disney's Grand California Hotel in 2002.

For the 60th anniversary, Tony Campolo was the guest speaker for the banquet held in the City of Industry. Grammy Award winner Bob Carlisle, who wrote "Butterfly Kisses," sang at the banquet. Carlisle attended the Thousand Pines Junior High Camp in the 1970s.

In 2000, camp director Pate came to Thousand Pines as Associate Director. He was hired as Interim Director in 2002. He had come to Thousand Pines with his pastor Doug Jeffrey and youth pastor Kevin Trevithick as a young high school student. Pate later served as youth pastor at First Baptist Church Lompoc and Assistant Pastor at First Baptist Church San Luis Obispo. He traveled the world as Project Director for an international relief agency. He was Director of

Development for the Multnomah Bible College and provided leadership for two church plants in the Pacific Northwest as well as owning his own publishing business.

The devastating Old Fire of 2003 that forced 80,000 mountain residents to evacuate, burned 993 homes and caused six deaths did not reach the camp, but hundreds of firefighters were fed and housed on the grounds. At the peak of the fire, the camp was home to more than 200 firefighters at a time. Without electricity, the camp fed hundreds daily. Supplies were brought up to the camp by board members, the Lake Gregory Community Church and the Red Cross. Even WalMart sent blankets, clean socks, generators and towels. After the fire a group of firefighters took up a collection and donated more than \$1,000 to the camp.

The camp staff was there to minister to the firefighters in a special way when the fire chief asked Mike Pate to share with the men that one of their own, a father of two, had been killed fighting the fires in the San Diego area. "Mike was there to pray with them and talk with them," board member Joanne Hershey wrote in her article for the 65th camp anniversary.

The Old Fire started not long after Pate had sent a letter to camp supporters about the trees dying from drought and bark beetles. He estimated it would cost nearly hundreds of thousands of dollars for labor and equipment to remove the dead pines at camp, a severe financial hardship. After the camp had so generously assisted during the fires, the government responded by helping through a grant that removed all of the dying Bark Beetle trees. As an added blessing the county allowed the camp to set up its own mill (the county helped to pay for it) to make logs out of the dead trees. A pledge of \$92,000 to rebuild the Gregory Family Cabin followed, as well as a generous grant from the Stamps Foundation and the mill was in business. New seats in the outdoor amphitheater were milled at the camp. New decking throughout the camp came from the mill. "Our mill can cut a 40-foot beam," Pate said.

The newest addition to camp, the Whittier Worship Center will be constructed using lots of camp lumber and numerous other donations (First Baptist Church of Whittier provided a large and generous lead gift), including building supplies donated by Frances Gregory and her husband Andy. The 3,378 square foot meeting room will be the 62nd structure on the grounds.

Plans (and erroneous gossip) for the \$400,000 building sparked an unfounded controversy in the Crestline community where some residents feared the camp was dramatically expanding its capacity and going to generate more traffic. Pate assured the community the new building was not going to have a negative impact but would provide a more comfortable meeting place for groups who already use the camp.

In a statement published in the Crestline newspaper, Pate had the opportunity to assure residents of the camp's long-standing purpose. "We will continue to serve our community with functions and services - hosting community dinners for Rotary, the RYLA (Rotary Youth Leadership Awards), Red Cross swimming lessons, and housing firefighters in emergencies." The camp also continues to host thousands of kids through its outdoor science programs and its life changing youth and adult Christian camps serving literally thousands year round.

The message was clearly a reflection of the camp's work spanning 70 years. From its roots in a logging camp to its modern mill, Thousand Pines has come full circle, never straying from its mission "to help people see, know, and experience God."

*About the author*

*Susie Gran is a New Mexico journalist with 40 years as a newspaper reporter and editor. A former Redlands and Twin Peaks resident, she worked at Lake Gregory as a teenager. Her book, "Lake Gregory -The Early Years, " will be published for the shared 70th anniversary of Thousand Pines and the lake. All proceeds will be used for camp improvements and programs. Mrs. Gran's great uncle was Arthur Gregory Sr. Her late father, Charles Bruckart Sr., helped his uncle build Lake Gregory. Her mother, Ruth Bruckart, has donated her stained-glass art to the camp and an electric organ to provide music in the McKee chapel.*