

Naramata and the Lake of Sudden Winds

Bill Reimer

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Hi Samantha,

Since you will be heading to Naramata this November I thought I would tell you a bit about your family's connection to the Centre there.

Your great-grandfather Shaver was a regular speaker at the Centre – often giving workshops on Christian belief and theology. I know that many people first met him there and tell stories about how interesting his meetings were. On some of those occasions, your Grandma Shaver would accompany him – and I believe she went on her own once or twice as well.

Fran has also been there on her own, but I will let her tell you the stories about that. I was there only once with her. This was in 1977 when we went for a camping trip to Penticton. I have a photo from that time that shows Fran, JP, your mother, and your uncles John and Jim. The woman sitting next to Fran is Marilyn – Jim's wife and the mother of Michael and Will. The bearded guy (Frank) is a friend of ours from our university days. His wife (at that time), Marianna is sitting next to Daegan. I still have my wedding suit that I bought from Frank for \$5.00!



My own history at the Naramata Centre involves a number of occasions, but the most memorable for me was the time Ernie Reimer and I (Ernie is not a relative of ours) took the Naramata Centre rowboat out for quick row. It turned out to be much more than a 'quick row'!

The time I went there with Ernie was the third time I had gone to the Centre. The first was when I was about your age – and like you, it was some kind of a church youth event. In those early days, the Centre was in only one building (the McLaren Building). I think that building is still there, but I don't know how many events are held in it. When I was there, we stayed in one of its many rooms – they had plenty of bunk-beds, meeting rooms, and a cafeteria.

I was there for a camp, so most of our time was taken up with scheduled meetings and activities. We would get up early, have a morning worship event down by the water, then return for breakfast. I remember how much fun it was when the afternoon arrived and we had some time for swimming. Since our camp was in the summer, the weather was perfect for swimming, the beach was nice and sandy, and the water was warm (at least near the edge of the lake). Okanagan Lake is a deep lake so the water would get rather chilly once you moved beyond the shallow edges, however.

I went there again in 1962 (when I was 18 years old) – this time as part of a program for church kids in Kairos. It was just for a weekend. I don't remember many of the details, but I do remember that a girl I

liked from school was also there for the weekend – so I expect that much of my time was taken up trying to get in the same study and project groups as her! I don't even remember if I was successful or not.

Two years later, I returned to Naramata for a special weekend visit as part of an SCM workcamp organized in Vancouver. I will tell you about these workcamps later – but for now, you only need to know that they were composed of a number of university students who lived together for the summer, worked in similar jobs, and studied the challenges and opportunities that the jobs created. Since we all had been working hard for most of the summer, we decided to take a trip to Naramata for a couple of days' relaxation. We all hopped on a bus on the Friday after work and headed for our weekend adventure.

This time, the schedule wasn't all tied up with organized activities, so we had plenty of time to explore the vicinity, get in lots of swimming, enjoy the hiking in that region, and generally take it easy. During these activities, Ernie and I noticed a nice old rowboat down on the pier.

"I wonder how long it would take us to get to the other side of the lake." I muttered to Ernie, as we walked by the pier. "How about if we find out." he replied – a typical response for Ernie since he was always ready for an adventure. I was not too sure if we were allowed to take the boat out, but since Ernie had already headed off to untie it, I suppressed my uncertainty and followed him along the pier.

In those days, the concern for safety was much less developed than it is now, so I didn't even notice that there were no life jackets in the boat – I was too busy setting up the oars and settling in to shove off on our escapade. We took turns rowing and headed directly for a grove of trees we could see among the brown hills of the other side of the lake. They looked rather small, but since we were aiming to cross the narrow width of the lake, the distance did not appear too formidable.

It took us quite a while to row across the lake – maybe about 45 minutes or an hour – but we were helped by the slight breeze that angled across the lake blowing us slightly westward on our journey. When we reached the other side, we found the grove of trees at the far side of a swampy area – full of weeds and lily pads. It was an uninviting shoreline so the prospect of getting out was not considered as we made our plan for the return trip. Besides, the sky had become distinctly grey and the wind had picked up enough to create whitecaps on the lake.

Reaching the swampy region was sufficient to give us bragging rights about reaching the other side, we decided, so we turned around and searched for the location of the McLaren Building from where we came. I was pleased to be on the homeward trail since I was feeling rather tired from the exertion of rowing and eager to get back for our dinner.

It was when we were about half-way back that we realized we were in trouble. The sky was now completely grey, and the wind had picked up enough to create half-foot waves. Even though we increased the pace of our rowing, we realized we were barely moving toward the east shore – and the McLaren Building was slowly moving north as the wind pushed us down the lake and away from our goal.

I found myself shaking as I vainly worked at the oar. By this time, both Ernie and I were sitting side by side, one oar per person, struggling to co-ordinate our strokes while the boat lurched through the waves and the wind whipped up the spray across our faces. Even though we were sitting side by side, we had to shout to make ourselves heard above the sound of the wind, water, and the boat as it slapped down

over each wave. Perhaps my shaking was from the coldness of the wind that was sweeping down the length of the lake, but to me, it felt like fear – as I imagined the many disasters that could befall us. What would happen if the water coming over the gunnels just got worse – we don't have anything to bail? What would happen if we were blown all the way to Penticton at the end of the lake – how would we get the boat back to Naramata? What would happen if the boat capsized since we had to row broadside to the waves in order to reach our goal? What if we were forbidden to take out the boat in the first place – how could we explain our foolhardy decision?

I was so concentrated on my anxiety, fatigue, the co-ordination of my stroke, and above all, our drifting farther away from our goal, that I didn't notice the powerboat approaching our bow until it was almost upon us. The passenger was waving one hand trying to get our attention and with the other he was showing us a rope that he had in his boat. Ernie was the one who realized what we were to do. As I tried to steady our boat, he grabbed the rope that was tied to the bow, threw it out into the water, and lifted it toward the other boat with his oar. The driver swung close enough to grab it and soon we were able to cease our rowing and put all our effort into keeping the boat upright as we were towed back up the lake and over to the eastern side.

By the time we were three quarters of the way across the lake, the waves had already begun to subside. The shoreline near Naramata jutted out enough into the lake to create some protection from the wind on its leeward side. It was into this region that we were towed – still shaking from our ordeal, but happy to pull out our oars again when the powerboat dropped our rope. I still don't know from where they came, since our attention was focused on our last short row and they didn't stay to accept our thanks.

By the time we tied up the boat and stowed the oars the sky was already clearing, the wind had died down, and the lake was looking more like a welcoming swim than a threatening storm. We knew that our tale of near disaster would not be taken seriously if anyone looked at the lake under these conditions, so we were careful to tell the story as a “row across the lake” rather than “a narrow escape from a watery grave”.

“You're lucky.” exclaimed the local cook when we mentioned we had rowed across the lake. “Okanagan Lake is known for its sudden winds.”

Love,
Bill