



# Associated Baptist Press

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## Camp experiences designed to build trust in God

By Shane Kohns

EMINENCE, Mo. (ABP) -- Like most college seniors, David Freeman was apprehensive about graduation in the spring of 1993. He was majoring in Bible, with minors in music and biblical studies, at Southwest Baptist University in Bolivar, Mo.

Recently married, Freeman thought a lot about his future occupation. "I decided my dream job would be half-indoors and half-outdoors," he said.

After graduation, the prospects of money and management lured Freeman into Wal-Mart's management-training program. He soon became a successful assistant manager.

But after two years in the world of retail, stress and worry began to take their toll. "I would come home with headaches every day," he recalled. "It was really starting to affect me physically." So in 1995, Freeman and his wife, Collette, took a low-paying summer internship with Discovery Ministries in Eminence, Mo., a camp where Collette had worked during high school.

The transition from manager to intern was difficult for Freeman, but he soon saw how God could use him in the new setting. "It was a hand-in-glove fit for us," he said. "The niches they needed to fill included skills that we had."

Six years later, the Freemans are still serving at Discovery Ministries, and it's easy to see that they have found their dream job.

David, now an instructor, spends a couple of days a week in the office planning adventure trips, and the rest of the week he leads trips or group-building activities. His organizational skills have helped Discovery Ministries to expand, and he's learned to drive a bus, which was a longtime goal.

Collette uses her accounting degree to help with the marketing and business aspects of the ministry.

The change has had a calming influence on Freeman's uptight, "type A" personality, he said. "Giving control of my life to God has physically calmed my body," he said. "I'm very sarcastic by nature. I'm a planner, a worrywart. Now I live without anxiety."

Freeman's headaches soon disappeared. He now teaches others to also put their trust in God.

Discovery's mission statement is to create "Christ-like disciples by utilizing God's creation through experiential education techniques and intensive leadership training."

Phillip McClure, a youth pastor in Jonesboro, Ark., has been bringing his youth group to Discovery Ministries for several years. "For personal growth, hands-on challenges are far superior to being entertained for a week," he said.

Discovery Ministries began in 1983 as a non-profit, non-denominational camping ministry. The camp hosts everything from family vacations to church retreats.

At first glance, it looks like an ordinary family campground, with swing-sets, a swimming pool and tetherball courts. Its ministry, however, extends far beyond the tents and RVs at its headquarters.

In addition to three lodges and 30 campsites, Discovery offers group-building initiative activities, and backpacking, rock climbing and canoeing trips.

Other activities at the 55-acre campground include a climbing wall, a high-ropes course and custom-designed wilderness trips through the forests, rivers and caves of southern Missouri.

The two- to 14-day wilderness trips fall into two categories. A recreational adventure would include backpacking and/or whitewater canoeing. A challenge trip involves more difficult activities such as orienteering, rock climbing and caving.

Discovery, which operates year-round, also features a program for churches that enhances "body life." It's a series of initiatives emphasizing teamwork and love within the church.

But whatever the setting, Freeman, who attends First Baptist Church in Eminence, uses challenges to teach people the same lesson he has learned: trust in God.

"What I try to do is use experiences to pull people out of their comfort zone so that they can no longer put on acts," Freeman explained. "And then comfort them with Jesus, who he is, and how they can grow closer to him."

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-- Shane Kohns is a news-writer intern for Word and Way.

## **Church offers free lodging to traveling mission teams**

By Tim Palmer

EDGERTON, Mo. (ABP) -- A mission team from Tennessee saved a bundle of money recently by staying in a Missouri church while traveling to and from South Dakota. And that's the whole point of Hitching Post Ministries, a 4-year-old ministry of Mount Zion Southern Baptist Church in Edgerton, Mo.

"Our church is hoping to further the cause of Jesus Christ in our nation," an informational letter on the ministry says. "We want to help reduce costs to mission teams so they may have more resources to invest in their mission projects."

Hitching Post Ministries grew from Missouri Baptists' missions partnership with Wyoming Baptists, Mount Zion pastor Rick Lumm said. The church is eight miles off Interstate 29 between Kansas City and St. Joseph.

To accommodate travelers, the church installed four electrical hookups for recreational vehicles. Visitors also have access to showers and the church kitchen. They sleep in their RVs or on the church floor.

As many as 200 people have taken advantage of the free lodgings in a single summer. The church publicizes the ministry by sending a letter every spring to Baptist state conventions and to Campers on Mission chapters, Lumm said.

Most groups that pass through are headed west, the pastor noted. An 18-member team from Hillvale Baptist Church in Clinton, Tenn., used Hitching Post Ministries on a recent mission trip to Spearfish, S.D.

"It was most hospitable," team member Gary Jarnigan said. For the 13 young people along, "it was like a big campout." Jarnigan said he and his teammates likened the ministry to the account in II Kings of a woman who prepared a room for the prophet Elisha.

"Someone made a provision for our comfort and safety and convenience, and it was a real blessing." The team saved an estimated \$400-\$500 in motel costs.

Hillvale Baptist Church is just one block off of Interstate Highway 75 north of Knoxville, Jarnigan said. The Missouri church's ministry "definitely has us thinking of something similar."

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-- EDITOR'S NOTE: To inquire about space availability with Hitching Post Ministries, phone 816-227-3789 or email [mtzionbaptist@juno.com](mailto:mtzionbaptist@juno.com).

## **Ministry helps inmates connect with their kids through reading**

By Shane Kohns

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- On the first Saturday of every month, Brian Pullen reads a book to his daughter. That may not seem unusual, but unlike most fathers, Pullen is separated from his child by electric fences and barbed wire. He is an inmate at the Missouri Eastern Correctional Center in Pacific, Mo.

Through Story Link, a trademarked program of Parkway Prison Ministries of Parkway Baptist Church in St. Louis, Pullen and about 40 other inmates spend the first Saturday morning of each month reading books into tape recorders.

In addition to reading the books, they are allowed to write brief messages in the books and to record greetings for their children on the tapes. The books and tapes then are mailed to the children.

"It gives me a chance to be part of my child's life," Pullen said. For him and many of the inmates, Story Link is one of the few connections to their families.

Inmate Steve Watie observed: "The hardest part about being in here is being separated from our families. This helps maintain that connection that we don't have."

Jerry and Kathy Wisely, members of Rock Hill Baptist Church in St. Louis, travel to the prison every month with five or six other volunteers. For them, Story Link Program is much more than a way to connect inmates with their children. It's a ministry of love.

"It's all about building relationships," Jerry Wisely said. "And reaching people for Christ."

The program began three years ago as an outgrowth of a family day at a women's prison. Dana Abendschein, founder and director of Story Link, also is a member of Rock Hill.

"We realized the parents and kids didn't know each other," he said. "So, we developed a program to link them together." Since then, Story Link has gained national recognition and has grown to reach six prisons in Missouri and Illinois.

"It shows the prisoners that we care," Abendschein said. "We have to get away from the idea of going in preaching and singing. Since we can't share the gospel openly, we have to use a lot more subtle means."

Story Link is listed as a volunteer program, and the majority of the volunteers hold the certification of Volunteer in Corrections, a distinction that requires special training and a trustworthy reputation in the prisons.

Because of Story Link's reputation, other Missouri prisons are calling to request it. Since prisoners must be violation-free for 90 days to participate, prisons with Story Link have experienced a significant drop in violations.

The volunteers also take in and haul out all the books, tapes, tape recorders and other materials so there is little or no work for prison employees. Volunteers also inspect the books and tapes and mail them to the children, free of charge.

"Prisons love us," Abendschein said. "We do everything so they don't have to."

The reputation Story Link has earned has also given the volunteers an opportunity to share their faith. About half the books available to inmates are religiously oriented, and volunteers often take prayer requests.

Many inmates seek out stories with biblical themes, and they often share their prayers and tears with volunteers.

The effects of the program extend even beyond the prisoners, Kathy Wisely said. "We're not there just for the inmates, but the officers as well." Many prison officers initially were cynical of Story Link, she said, but they have grown to embrace the program and the volunteers.

In just a few years, Story Link Program has influenced inmates, officers, children and families. And the success of the program relies solely on volunteers giving their time and energy to help others.

"It's the ripple effect," Jerry Wisely explained. "The good you do for one will be good for everyone."

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## **Man witnesses with license plate**

By Shane Kohns

ST. LOUIS (ABP) -- Witnessing opportunities for Albert Todoroff, a member of South County Baptist Church in St. Louis, happen wherever he goes. In supermarket parking lots, drive-through windows and on the Interstate, people have noticed his personalized license plates, LOVE-2U, and asked him what it means.

"It means just what it says," said Todoroff, who has had the plates for 20 years. "My love goes out to you -- whoever you might be. God's love is the greatest thing in the world."

He has had so many responses to his plates that he created a brochure explaining what they mean. The brochures include the plan of salvation and Todoroff's testimony.

"I'm always looking for new ways to promote the gospel," he said. "Jesus is a fact to me. He is real to me. I believe he is the most powerful fact in the world."

Todoroff, 89, has developed other outreach tools, including "Thought for the Week," a collection of inspirational thoughts for churches, and "Mugs and Kisses," church-logo coffee mugs filled with Hershey's kisses.

"Through the years, I have tried to follow and serve [God] to the best of my ability," Todoroff said. "I really believe that God means what he says. I don't believe in playing games with God."

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## Parents stand beside son through mental illness

By Tim Palmer

BOLIVAR, Mo. (ABP) -- As a 16-year-old musical prodigy, Adam Lynch was the subject of a 1997 profile in his hometown newspaper in Bolivar, Mo. His skill on the violin, which he began playing at age 4, had earned him a place in the Springfield Symphony.

"I'd like it to glorify God," he said in the article. "He's the one who gave me this talent in the first place, and where it will take me, only he knows that."

As an 18-year-old college student, Adam was back in the newspaper, this time for setting his family's house on fire with his father, mother and brother inside. All got out alive, though father Gary and younger brother Andy were badly injured when they dropped from the second floor onto a driveway to escape the flames.

The Lynches' dream home was a total loss.

Prior to the incident, Adam Lynch had been seeing things that weren't there and hearing voices in his head for two-and-a-half years.

He eventually was diagnosed with schizoaffective disorder. This condition causes individuals to experience the symptoms of both schizophrenia and a major mood disorder, such as depression.

For the last two years, Adam has been receiving treatment at a southwest Missouri residential care center operated by the state Department of Mental Health. He was interviewed there for this article.

Adam grew up in First Baptist Church of Bolivar and accepted Christ at age 12. When he first began to experience hallucinations, Adam said he turned to God for help.

"I originally thought it was a demon," he said. "I prayed and prayed and prayed, but he never went away."

The hallucinations began in the form of a mouth on a drinking glass. They progressed to a man wearing a derby hat; three different voices; animals; "black holes" that would swallow him if he stepped in; and others. Adam found them terrifying, and he wondered why they kept happening to him.

"You've pledged your life to Christ -- then this," he said. "It's confusing. There's always this thing that says maybe he's forsaken you. It's part of being human."

Adam tried to deal with the problem by himself for a year. Finally, at the urging of a friend, he told his parents about the hallucinations.

Gary and his wife, Dana, promised to get their older son some help. For Adam, that started a series of psychiatrists, hospitalizations and drug combinations. His struggles continued, however, and more than once he carried out "suicide gestures" -- harming himself deliberately.

Some of the time he did well. He graduated from high school and completed a semester of college at Southwest Baptist University.

Then in February 1999, Adam said, he became convinced his parents were trying to poison him. He secretly stopped taking his medication.

"I decided the only way for me to survive was to kill those who were trying to kill me," he said. "So I torched the house."

About 10 months before the fire, Adam had told his father he had been having thoughts of trying to kill his family by fire-bombing the house. Their conversation led to a hospitalization and an adjustment in Adam's medication, after which he did better. Dana Lynch recalled, "We never considered ourselves in danger."

After the fire, Adam was admitted to a psychiatric unit before moving to the residential center where he lives today. He continued to struggle with reconciling his Christian beliefs with his situation.

"You read in the Bible about God healing all your wounds, and the doctors are saying you need stuff humans give," he said. "Somewhere in there, I turned it over to him."

That decision, he said, changed his outlook from "woe is me" to "this is who I am; this is how my mind is now."

The change has been positive for Adam, who turned 21 in June. "I haven't felt this good since I was 15 years old," he said.

He gives credit to his family. "I have the best support system of anybody here," he said. "That support has helped reassure me that God never forgets you."

Asked what advice he would have for individuals and families dealing with mental illness, Adam said: "For the person who suspects a problem, realize they're not the only ones. There is a system to help. I thought I was the only person in the world who was suffering with this."

For parents: "Just listen and know it's not your fault. You didn't do anything raising the child. It's brain chemistry. Listen, support, do everything you can to help him get over that problem."

He tries to help his fellow residents through expressions of concern and prayer. Many of them lack a support system. "With no family, no God, no faith to lean on, you feel left behind, like no one cares. If no one cares about you, why should you care about yourself? And I've seen that here."

Dana Lynch said the hardest thing in trying to help someone with a mental illness is finding the appropriate treatment. The challenge is twofold -- the right personnel and the right medication.

"The recovery is what you focus on," she said, "because there is not a cure."

The Lynches decided to talk freely about Adam's illness with people who asked. Dana advised other families dealing with mental illness to do the same.

"Talking openly is the best way," she said. "As church families, as communities, we need to help people feel comfortable talking about it." The Lynches say they have been able to minister to many people who have approached them to share about similar struggles.

Gary advised parents of teenagers to be concerned when what might appear to be "teen angst" goes on for a long time. "Adam struggled with being normal, as all teens do," he said, "while struggling with something abnormal. It's a lot better to get it checked out."

Dana added, "It can happen to anybody. Mental illness tears some families apart. I was determined through this that we were going to get closer."

The couple says their faith has sustained them. "I think I'm much less fearful of bad things happening now," Dana said. "When you need God's strength, it's there. You don't even have to ask for it -- it's there."

She had spent four years getting her dream house just the way she wanted it. "It went in seconds. It's just stuff. It was not a real tragedy," she now says.

"Adam's situation is the heartbreaking thing. He has to deal with it every day."

Two-and-a-half years after the fire, the Lynches continue to be amazed and grateful for the outpouring of love and support and prayer they have received, especially from their church.

Along with God's strength is God's hope. Gary said he and Dana are thankful that Adam's illness occurred in the late 1990s and not in the 1950s.

"We have hope now that Adam can live independently the rest of his life, and have a very healthy, productive life." A few decades ago, that was not an option.

Five years after he began his struggle with mental illness, Adam Lynch believes God has been faithful.

"I think in the long run, he did answer my prayers -- to help me control it," he said.

## Couple hopes testimony helps others struggling

By Stacey Hamby

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. (ABP) -- Shyre McCune's life changed unexpectedly in 1992, when she started feeling overwhelmed to the point of losing control.

She wanted to disappear. She wanted to die. She thought her family would be better off without her. She couldn't feel anything.

On the mission field in Honduras with her husband, Ken, and two sons, Shyre -- who previously never had exhibited any signs of mental problems -- started having episodes of self-destructive behavior.

"I would bang my head on the wall, and I would hit my arms and legs until they were bruised," recalled Shyre, a Baptist pastor's daughter.

Ken was bewildered. "I didn't know what was going on," he said. "Shyre had always been independent and not afraid to do things, and then she started withdrawing and doing strange things."

Shyre became afraid to leave the house alone, and she started having hallucinations. "She's arachnophobic anyway, and she would see real spiders, but she also would see spiders that weren't there," he said. "She would want me to kill a spider, and it wouldn't really be there, but I would kill it anyway."

The McCunes had been on the mission field four years and had just returned to Honduras after a furlough when the problems became noticeable. Several months later, they requested a medical furlough from the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention and soon were in Dallas at a center for mental health.

After 14 months of therapy, they returned to Honduras -- with misgivings. "I told the counselor I had doubts about her being ready to go back to the mission field, but he talked me into it, saying she'd be fine."

Three weeks later, Shyre had another episode.

"I quit having any feelings for anyone," she recalled. "Everything shut down. I had a lot of anger, usually at myself, but later on, I took my anger out on Ken for things he hadn't done." But after an episode subsided, Shyre said, she felt ridiculous.

"I'd wonder why I did that. I didn't want Ken or the kids to see me like that. But I couldn't control this. I felt something going on, but I couldn't stop it. That's why I sought help. But it wasn't stopping."

By this time, the marriage was under severe strain. Shyre's conversations were irrational, making it difficult for the two to talk without arguing.

"Everybody has normal marital problems, but this was irrational problems," Ken said. "We recognized marriage problems were happening, but that wasn't the root problem -- her illness was."

They returned to the United States, this time to Shawnee, Okla.

"I had another episode," Shyre said. "Ken took me to the hospital, and there was a good psychiatrist on the team. Within a month, I was doing a whole lot better."

The difference? "Shyre's psychiatrist was the first person in the mental-health field who didn't blame her problem on me or her childhood or anything other than what it was -- an illness treatable by medication," Ken said.

Shyre was diagnosed with borderline personality disorder. The condition combines symptoms such as irrational behaviors, anxieties, depression, obsessive-compulsive behaviors and hallucinations.

"It took a while to get the right medication with the right dosage, and I've still been back in the hospital a couple of times, but I was on the road to recovery," Shyre said.

For the past two years, Shyre has not had any episodes. As long as she takes her medication and doesn't "overdo," she is fine.

"I can feel an episode coming on now, I start to feeling a sensation that things are getting out of control; if I've got too much going on, I know I need to back off."

Once, she decided to stop taking her medication, and she became suicidal; Ken took her to the hospital after she overdosed on some pills.

"After that last hospitalization, I decided I'd rather take medicine than have the problems like I had been having; they disrupted my family life. I decided if that's what I have to do, then thank God for providing the medicine for me."

The McCunes said if they had seen a psychiatrist sooner, they could have saved themselves a lot of trouble.

"One of the worst things you can do with someone with borderline personality disorder is (talk) therapy, because they're not thinking rationally," Shyre said. "The counselors I saw were intent on us becoming angry with God, but we didn't see it as God causing it at all. God was the one carrying us through."

Today, the McCunes live in Springfield, Mo., where they are members of Ridgecrest Baptist Church. Ken is coordinator of the church-planting initiative for the Missouri Baptist Convention. Shyre is a homemaker. She has been an activities director in a nursing home and an administrator at a senior-citizens center.

Both said they had wondered what good could possibly come out of their experience, but they said one thing is they can help other people through similar situations.

"I had been real skeptical that people could have a mental illness," Shyre said. "I thought they were weak. It's made me a lot more sympathetic for people with mental illness or just struggling to get their life together."

Christians have been supportive of them throughout the past nine years, they said, including the IMB.

"Now we're appointed by the North American Mission Board. A mental illness doesn't necessarily prevent someone from serving God."

They said only a few Christians have told them she just needs to have more faith, that Christians should not have such problems.

"It's easy to fall into that kind of thinking, if I'm not careful," Shyre said. "But I knew the Bible. When I first started having problems, I was spending time in prayer, doing my devotions, reading my Bible. It's not like I had strayed or been unfaithful.

"If anything, I obsessed with Scripture. It's the only thing I knew to do -- go to God's Word.

"For some reason, God chose not to use a miraculous healing, but he has provided a medicine and a means for us to get it."

Shyre encouraged other Christians not to be afraid to acknowledge that they might be dealing with a mental illness and to see their medical doctor or go to a psychiatrist. "Christians can have mental illness," she said.

The McCunes' marriage is stronger now, they said, and their sons -- Brent, 17, and Kenny, 15 -- are enjoying a "happier" mom.

Ken said: "For a long time, it seemed as if things would never be normal again. But it does get to a point where you can go on with life.

"There is hope."

**END**

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