

straightforward prayer. Something along the lines of, 'Lord, we need this, this, and this... somewhere to do it, and all the resources to put it together!'

The Arnotts and the Jollys (Glen & Jenny) had known each other for a while – both couples were involved with Fainfield – but neither couple knew of the others' ideas (the Jolly's experience follows). About a week after that prayer, as Peter and Nina sat in their car preparing to leave after dinner at the Jolly's, Glen leaned in the window and said, 'We've been out looking at properties today!' After a conversation that stretched into the night, their stories, and their lives, came together in a way neither couple could have foreseen.

The Jollys had the desire, finances and leading to resource a youth camp, but didn't see themselves as its managers, and the Arnotts had the desire, skills and leading to manage a youth camp, but not the financial resources to begin. Can anyone guess what happened next?

Things moved rapidly from that point. They drew up a specific list of things that they felt that a property would need to have. It needed to be less than an hour from Adelaide. They wanted it to be on a dirt road. They wanted big gums trees, hills, valleys and a creek. And they wanted a property that they couldn't see the end of (to create a feeling of expanse). All of the criteria were satisfied in this property at Bull Creek.

There was an old shearing shed, a cottage at the bottom of the hill, and a bore feeding a dam in the valley. No other services existed. Every weekend for a year (during 1974) a whole team of people worked tirelessly to establish the infrastructure of the new campsite; trenches, sewerage, a long-drop loo (thankfully now a thing of the past), a water supply, the dining room, and roads and fences. Kevin May helped out immensely with all kinds of electrical work, and Jenny Howland – one of many others – made the pilgrimage each weekend to do 'whatever needed doing'.

In search of a name, they came across an aboriginal word 'Wirraway' meaning 'challenge'. It'd be hard to find a more appropriate name. The Jollys loved the idea of a youth centre, so it was named Wirraway Homestead Youth Centre.

During 1974, Peter gave notice at ICI of his intention to resign. Fortunately he had a very understanding boss, for as Peter's final day approached it was clear the campsite was a long way from being ready. With cap in hand, Peter asked for an extension to his 'final day'. 'As long as you keep yourself busy', was the reply... and good thing too, for it was six more months before that day came.

Finally, in December of '74, the Arnotts left their jobs and moved into 'the caravan' at Wirraway. Ron Fawcett (a carpenter) and Leonie his wife (a nurse) rented a house in Strathalbyn and worked on the site with them. They lived on savings till their first official camp in April of '75.

During 1975, all of the camps were weekends only, except for the school holiday camps that ran over a week. There were only a few bookings during the winter during that first year. It was a while before schools began to request bookings, with Jenny Howland (then Foord) from Elizabeth West High School and Jenny Wichert (then Pederson) – a teacher from The Parks Community Education Centre being the first.

Wirraway started with 32 camp beds. It was increased to 69, but the aim was to always maintain a 'family feel', and so it has remained at its current size since then.

It was 1976 before Wirraway was first approached to run a weekday camp for a school. With public debate about the separation of church and state running fresh and strong, the Arnotts had never imagined they'd have any schools – let alone public schools – content to come knowing the Christian message was to be a central theme of each camp.

It took about 10 years before Wirraway was consistently fully booked each year.

These days, school camps of all kinds make up (85%) of the camps here, with many schools having perpetual bookings, and returning year after year. Currently, weekday camps are booked well into 2006.

Looking back, some of the most striking things are the countless stories of God's faithful provision. Remarkable on many levels, but not surprising really, as He's a God who's bursting with life and creativity and joy.

God continues to build and shape the campsite, and for however long Wirraway remains, He will continue to use it – and all of the incredible people that have wandered through and eaten the shepherd's pie – to reveal Himself to kids who don't know Him.

It's really simple... my life changed one night, sitting on a bunkbed right here, being prayed for by a leader who loved Jesus, and cared about me.

Mark

A TIMELINE & SOME INTERESTING FACTS

Transportable arrived: April, 1974

Power connected: October, 74

Working bees: 1974

Quit jobs: December 74 - house started then

1st group to stay: Grange Baptist working bee 20 April, 1975

1st leader training: 25 April, 1975

1st muster: Elizabeth West High School 20-24 May, 1974

13 weekend camps from Elizabeth West High between 7/1975 and 3/1976

29 camps in first year of operation to 3/1976

1st school camp weekdays: Murray Bridge High 7/1976.

Teacher Wendy (now) Newman, whose son has been involved recently as a camper/volunteer.

2nd school camp on weekdays: Indulkana Aboriginal School 11/1976

3rd school camp on weekdays: Parkes Community Centre 7/1977. Teacher Jenny Wichert (nee Pederson), whose son is now involved as a volunteer.

of School camps: 2 in 1976, 4 in 1977; 2 in 1978;

5 in 1979; 8 in 1980: now 60 per year.

1st Primary School: Scott Creek 9/1980

1st Catholic School: Our Lady of the Manger 12/1980

To 31/3/05

1474 camps

68,936 campers

Average 47 campers per camp

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Wirraway Homestead

YOUTH CENTRE

When we discussed the idea of writing something about Wirraway's beginnings, Peter & Nina were customarily wary of being in the limelight. Psalm 115's *"Not to us, Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory because of your faithfulness and love..."* has become the litmus test for every idea associated with this 30th celebration. Does it point to us or to Him? We trust that it will point to Him...

Over the years, I'd wondered about the way God's plan came to be birthed in the heart of a few, and grow to affect so many.

Wirraway is part of many of our own personal journeys. So I asked the Arnotts if we could use this celebration of 30 years of God's faithfulness and love to testify to this part of His story.

Like most things with Peter even the highlights are understated, but the goal has always been to point to God, and

to show His great plan, and to marvel at His faithful provision...

It's almost impossible to capture the richness of the Wirraway experience in words or pictures, but I hope to have caught something here of its genesis, as related to me by Peter & Nina, and from Glen & Jenny Jolly.

The fact that you came today probably means that your story is built on this one. We hope to hear about its place in your life, and where He's leading you.

Glen & Jenny Jolly

We had both been given the same dream! God shared his vision with us for non-church kids in our state to be introduced to, and challenged with the Good News about Jesus and God's love for them.

We discovered we were both looking at the same idea – a Youth Camp with activities. We felt the camp needed live-in staff – trained in outdoor activities, administration, counselling (of young people when needed) and housekeeping skills. But most of all they would need to have a love for their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and a vibrant love for teens and pre-teens – a tall order indeed!

We needed a large property (hopefully not flat) where orienteering, adventure activities and maybe horse riding would be taught. Ideally we'd like a good stretch of water for canoeing, some natural scrub, some scenery, preferably not on a major bitumen road or right on the edge of a town, but close enough to be able to access food supplies, medical services, and to be conveniently located. If the site was hilly, we needed some reasonably level land for the main area of the camp, and for team games and activities. We hoped we'd be able to tap into a good, easily accessible underground water supply.

We wrote out our list, filling a foolscap page, prayed for guidance for what we really needed to be looking for, contacted a couple of friends who were real estate agents, and started our search...

A little prior to this, Glen's father had died leaving a complicated Estate of 'dead' assets, debts and court cases. There were also some buildings, warehouses and a Truck Spare Parts business. There was no money, but there was an Insurance Policy.

At that stage, we had to find another house to live in, as legally Glen's business had to have a registered 'office' – not just a part of a lounge room. But as far as we were concerned the proceeds of the Insurance Policy was completely earmarked for the Youth Camp of the vision God had given us. We knew God would provide us a house for our family, and an 'office' for Glen's business, and a property for Wirraway – and He did!

Glen and I had both been involved in youth camps for some years. I decided to follow Jesus at my 1st camp (Nunyara).

I became involved at Christian Endeavour Camps at Mt Barker, and attended camps at Clare, Crystal Brook and Bublacowie (Yorke Peninsula) – the latter for many Easters.

We introduced our kids to Camps in their infancy. I had run camps at Fainfield and Corny Point, and we were both involved in the Gold Coast Crusades for many

years. Glen had been involved since the beginning of Bublacowie, worked at the CE Camps at Christmas times and was on the board of Fainfield Youth Camp.

Through our Charter Bus and Tourist business, Glen had a lot of contact with students, youth groups and other organisations (like scouts, calisthenics, sporting clubs and church groups), doing camping trips, outings and tours etc, so he had seen a wide selection of what kids enjoyed doing.

One evening Glen and I had a conversation about our 'dream' with Peter & Nina Arnott. They had a very similar vision to us, but the main difference being they were to run a camp and that God would provide the property!

Things really moved quickly from then on and pretty soon we looked at a property about 6km from Strathalbyn on the Old Bull Creek Road. There were only two items lacking from the wish-list that we'd made – a good stretch of water and a large tract of virgin scrub. But beyond the old cropduster's airstrip was a pleasant amount of scrub, so that would have to do. The price for the property was quite a bit more than we were going to be able to pay, but we all felt it was 'the one'. We had the bore and the soil tested, checked out the pasture grasses and the weather effects on the terrain, then checked with the land agent to make sure the place hadn't been sold, then we took the bank manager to have a look.



The property's Estate Trustee had told the Agents to hold off until we had made up our minds – having hundreds of kids enjoying the family property appealed to him and he reduced the price. This meant we had enough money to buy the property and erect the main house. The real estate agents had both drastically reduced their commissions too.

A constitution was prepared in consultation with our lawyer (who thought we were crazy, but he was enthusiastic about our dream) who did all the legal stuff for us.

In Glen's dad's Estate was an old tractor/backhoe which was given to Wirraway and used to dig the trenches for the pipes running for the bore to the camp site, the septic tank hole and, much later, the start of the swimming pool excavations, level various areas and clear rubbish and weeds.

We had been looking at all sorts of buildings for the campsite when, early one morning we received a phone call to come up north of Gawler and look at some Transportable Units which had come from a mining company in the mid-north of South Australia.

The kitchen/dining/ablution unit had not been used much, as it was only a few months old, and the sleeping units as did another kitchen/dining/ablution unit had good 'camp' potential. They were all supposed to have been used for a camp on a

foreshore on southern Yorke Peninsula, but the government had just banned such development on foreshores and God knew we would be able to use them.

The buildings were brought down from the Gawler area on semi-trailers, and things really looked like they were about to happen when the convoy of semis wound it's way up the hill out of Strathalbyn. Peter, helped by friends and our family, had



done most of the surveying, so there was not any guess work as to where the units had to go, and the tractor helped in the unloading and levelling of each unit.

The beds had a mixture of mattress covers, so I went to Actil and was able to purchase bulk dark green sheeting offcuts, everything looked good when it matched.

Together with a group of friends, we made 32 complete mattress and pillow cover sets, and metres and metres of curtains to be used as screens, cover ups and stage curtains for the Shearing Shed.

The Cottage at the bottom of the hill had potential, but it had long been used for baby farm animals and had no floors or ceilings and had huge cracks in the walls. It was not long before the cottage was resurrected and made into a truly gorgeous bungalow for Ron and Leonie Fawcett.

We had bought a Franklin 3-section caravan, which up to that point had been their home, so the cottage was spacious by comparison. Many of the fixtures, fittings and materials needed for the cottage as well as the other facilities were available right at the time we needed them, just like God was piecing everything together 'just so'.

Many helpers, some with specific skills, but most with just an enthusiastic work attitude and a glimpse of the vision, gave untold hours of labour, expertise and skills as well as donations of goods and money all backed by prayer and thanks to God who had so richly blessed us. And continue to bless us over the next 30 years beyond our wildest dreams.

We started with our first camp on the 1975 Anzac weekend, training leaders and assistants. I was cook and our daughter Beth was my assistant. Our dining room was the Christian Endeavour Camp's marquee. It was to be returned to the Mt Barker CE Camp in time for Christmas, so the original dining

room had to be, and was, finished in time for our first summer musters.

Buildings, roads, the pool, the dam, equipment fixtures and fittings – almost everything has a story of God's amazing provision at the right time. His love towards us is so wonderful.

The visual appearance of Wirraway has changed as it has grown over the years, but God's love has never changed, and the 'vision' from the 1970's is still a place where many, many lives are changed as they are challenged with the good news of Jesus' love for them.

Glen & Jenny Jolly

Peter & Nina Arnott

Being involved with young people was a pattern that formed pretty early on in their marriage. Nina was working as Personal Assistant to the Vice Chancellor at Adelaide Uni, and Peter was employed by ICI as a Mechanical Engineer.

Church activities soon formed the core of their weekends, and they became involved in running Fainfield Venture Youth Club (as it was known) in their spare time.

Based in the Adelaide Hills, Fainfield was a weekend activity camp for youth groups of various kinds, and had elements that have been carried over into Wirraway. While they loved the atmosphere that camping created, and the opportunities to share their faith that it afforded, the Arnotts became increasingly frustrated at the lack of control over the Christian program there.

One of the Fainfield board members had visited Mill Valley Ranch in Victoria and suggested that the Arnotts go have a look. They had a themed camp (a Western Village) that helped create a great atmosphere, a full-time staff that ran the camps, and a format that included a bunkhouse leaders' meeting after lunch

each day to discuss and pray about what happened the previous day with their groups.

The camp had to be a place where kids could mix with Christians in a day to day setting and not get freaked out. The physical environment needed to be able to promote all of these activities, and help point kids to God. Much of what they saw modelled at Mill Valley was adopted and adapted for Wirraway. Discussions began about a new beginning, and their enthusiasm for a campsite of their own grew and grew.

Their jobs provided good money, but not enough for something of this magnitude, and so they prayed a fairly

