

Retreats

All-Church Retreats

by Grace Ulp

From time to time there were all-church retreats held at some of the pleasant retreat places around the Bay Area. Freestone retreat was used several times—a sunny day would give views over the valley and of the turkey vultures riding the updrafts, companionship, lunch on the deck, and worship and discussions.

Several times a retreat was held at a Retreat Center—somebody else would cook, and there were great views over the bay.

Perhaps views are not the best reason for a retreat, but silence and worship and companionship certainly are.

Freestone

by Bob Moore



It is hard to think back over nearly 30 years of Freestone, but here are some memories that really stand out for me. Hands down is Homer Merrill taking me in hand during an early visit to show me the water system, such that it was: a hole in the side of a hill producing muddy water—most of us didn't want to get too close to it. I can't remember our conversation, but I definitely remember being asked to fill in on the water as Homer's visits to Freestone became less frequent.

Trips to the “‘Stone’ were often made with Bruce Watkins who had no end of stories about working on the railroad during the depression so he could pay for college. It seemed to me that Bruce was especially proud of two things: taking care of a mentally disabled brother and knowing the name of a small cluster of houses that did not really seem to merit a name:

Cummins, California. I don't really know why those items stick with me, beyond really liking Bruce and Vera.

Thinking about my history with Freestone brings back thoughts of a church board retreat at Freestone when Ann McDonald and Jeanne Griffith were on the Board. It really was a 'dark and stormy night,' and I woke up with rain falling on my head. In my sleepy stupor thought I would go up on the roof, in the dark and in the rain, to do something to stop the leak. Yeah, sure. Like have the rain wake me up and send me back inside where I moved my bunk away from the drip. And went back to sleep.

The "water witching" story is joining with Lester Frank to find the spot for a well after having having paid for two or three dry holes. Lester and I picked out several places we thought water might be by actually carrying bent clothes hangers parallel to each other—they were supposed to separate when water was likely underground. Homer got us a farmer's drill rig and I started drilling. And drilling. And drilling. The rig was so underpowered for the hard ground that I think I was able to go down only 6–8 inches each month.



Freestone Retreat

by David Lingenfelter

In late 2003, the Freestone Retreat Committee was blessed with a generous gift of \$33,000 from the estate of the late Gertrude Hall. Gertrude was an extraordinarily dedicated member of the committee, and had served as its chair for fifteen years. In 2004, the Retreat Committee put this gift to work by contracting out a large number of capital improvements that were required to bring the Retreat Center up to Sonoma County residency standards. Kevin Pryne, the son of another long-time committee member and a local contractor, was hired for the effort.

Over the course of the next year, structural repairs to the dome were completed and—using another gift of \$10,000 from Wally and Pat Ellis—the gravel road leading to the dome was resurfaced. Another important addition was a ceiling fan that dropped from the peak of the dome and circulated the air in that space. Grab bars were installed in the bathrooms for the elderly, and

a new wall heater with an electric starter was added. During this time, many committee members also contributed their furniture and their time to redecorate the three bedrooms.

In January of 2005, as a result of the repairs and improvements, the Freestone Retreat Center was granted an occupancy permit for group use. This permit was a significant landmark in the life of UUCB. The Retreat Center was now an attractive, safe, and accessible place open to all church members who seek space and time for enjoyment, along with spiritual renewal.

The Deer that Didn't Quite Make It

by Grace Ulp

Among the many deer that dine in the residents' gardens near UUCB was one that thought it could make it over Gertrude Hall's fence, which turned out to be too tall to jump. The deer was converted to a Sunday lunch to raise money for the Freestone Retreat. The venison burgers were courtesy of Phil Tubman, a Freestone enthusiast who had many interesting skills. He had also tried to raise pine trees at the Retreat for Christmas tree sales.



Oasis

by Grace Ulp

For at least ten years, programs of spiritual interest were presented, perhaps 6 to 10 times a year, depending upon available leaders and groups. Dr. Dody Donnelly came to us many times; the Abraxas group led a number of retreats; there were dream workshops. A few of the retreats involved bringing a sleeping bag for an overnight stay on the padded benches in the Fireside Room at UUCB. Other retreats joined the UUCB Saturday work party as part of their program.

One very special weekend workshop was given by Zen priests Zenkai Blanche Hartman and her husband Lou to experience mindfulness. Mindfulness was explained to us, and we meditated, did walking meditation and working meditation. Some of us cleaned the kitchen quietly and cooked. Some of us carefully cleaned and polished the Sanctuary. Blanche Hartman is a daughter of Esther Zane, one of our staunch Alliance and church members (and a fabulous cook and

cookbook writer), before we moved up on the hill. Some years later Blanche was made co-abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center.