

Bible Labs— More Than a Witnessing Opportunity

Bible Labs* are designed to let church school students put into practice what they learned from their first days in Sabbath school—to do things for others and share Jesus' love. Although Adventist schools have taught these concepts for years, they have not always given them a formal place in the curriculum. Then came the Bible Labs class.

My first exposure to Bible Labs occurred while I was teaching at a one-room school in southwestern Indiana. The school was near an Adventist-operated nursing home where the activities director, a former church teacher, arranged for the 1st through 8th graders to visit once a month. The students sang, read short stories, and presented original skits for the residents. The nursing home provided a van and driver to transport the students. On one occasion, the visit coincided with the residents' monthly birthday party. The children handed out the cake, ice cream, and punch, and fed some of the residents. The party was a big success. After that, the students were always scheduled on Party Day. They looked forward to the cake and ice cream.

However, getting the activities organized was a lot of work for me, and I wondered if the students were gaining any benefit from the nursing home visits or just having fun. On my way into the nursing home one day, a nurse stopped me. She touched my arm and said, "I knew you were coming today—the residents are so hyper."

I must have appeared shocked because she smiled and added, "I know you don't see it, but when you bring the children over, there is a lot of excitement in the air." At that moment, I became committed to the Bible Labs concept.

New Projects at a New School

Four years later, our family moved to Michigan, and I began teaching at a larger school. At last, I had a Bible Labs coordinator. She arranged for my 4th, 5th, and 6th graders to assist the local hospital by stuffing envelopes, rolling bandages, and making compresses for surgeries. (We were assured that the bandages and compresses were sterilized before use.) This project saved the hospital money, since the nurses no longer had

to do these tasks. The students enjoyed helping out, and it was more convenient for me, since no drivers were needed. All supplies were dropped off and picked up at the school. One week, the coordinator

for hospital volunteers called to ask if the students would do a special project. The hospital needed their patient information packs updated quickly. Thrilled with the hospital's confidence in us, we spent a morning pulling old cards out of plastic cases and replacing them.

Soon afterward, the quote, "Cast thy bread upon the waters; for thou shalt find it after many days" (Ecclesiastes 11:1, KJV), took on a new meaning for me. My father was visiting us from Florida and had a heart attack. At the hospital, we wondered how we could get quick information about hospital services. Glancing around the room, I saw one of the information packs we had made, which quickly answered my question.

Creating a Nature Trail

In the spring of 1998, the 9th- and 10th-grade teacher decided that his class would create a nature trail on the school property as their Bible Lab project. Grand Rapids Junior Academy is located in a lovely residential neighborhood and its property includes some woodland areas. The teacher thought this unused wilderness would make a nice trail. The local nature center sent a park ranger

to offer advice about the appropriate width of the trail and the amount of wood chips to use on it. The older students cleaned trash out of the woods, sawed and pruned trees and vines, and cleared a path. One day, an older student looked out the classroom window to see a neighbor's tree being cut down and ground into wood chips. The teacher and students arranged for the wood chips to be dumped at one end of the trail.

Then came the formidable task of hauling, shoveling, and raking the chips into place. Grades 5, 6, 9, and 10 tackled the exhausting job of moving those chips and spreading them on the trail. I helped one of the 9th-grade girls shovel chips into wheelbarrows.

The hard work created a bonding experience. After our "wood chip day," this young woman and I were friends. We had a common experience and a pride in what we had helped accomplish.

One afternoon, as I was walking down the trail, a school neighbor hur-

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BY JUDY L. SHULL

ried out and said, "Thank you so much for what you have done for the neighborhood. I wanted you to know how much families are enjoying this trail in the evening." The students, faculty, and neighborhood had all benefitted from this Bible Labs project.

A TV Show

In the fall of 1998, I called to ask if my students could watch a children's television program being taped at a local public-access television studio. The program's host was glad I called, as she was filming a special Thanksgiv-

The control room operators for one program segment.

Picture Removed

Eric interviews his grandfather, D. E. Van Duinen, former longtime principal of Ruth Murdoch Elementary School, about the importance of education.

ing program and needed older students.

In preparing my students to participate, I reviewed how I expected them to behave. This included being quiet, not touching *anything*, thinking before asking questions, listening carefully, and being polite. The trip went well. I was given the privilege of operating one of the television cameras. My job was to film the children as they watched the show and to make sure every child appeared on air.

After the taping, we toured the control and editing rooms, and learned about the functions of the highly technical equipment throughout the studio. The students followed all the rules, and I was pleased with what they had learned.

As the discussion time concluded, I felt a tap on my shoulder. The show's producer had been impressed with the students' behavior and wondered if we would be interested in creating a weekly program for older children. He offered to teach us how to write and produce our

Eric and Adam tell the audience about their dog, Cindy.

own show. Feeling stunned, I promised to consider his proposal.

During the next two weeks, the producer and I discussed the possibilities. After a great deal of prayer during the Christmas break, I agreed to try a variety program. The students would present the program, operate the cameras, and learn to use the equipment in the control room (all the things I had made them promise not to touch on our first trip to the studio!). I took the proposal for a 5th- and 6th-grade weekly television program to the principal, who consulted the school board. They allowed us to take one morning a week for filming. Now I had to break the news to the students.

After the screams of delight, reality settled in, along with fear about what we would need to learn. Our first studio class was scheduled for the middle of January. As the students prepared to go to the studio, the secretary received a telephone call. The producer was in the hospital. It was a deeply disappointed group that went back to schoolwork.

We never got to work with the man who had the vision for our show. He resigned from the station because of poor health. The host of the program we had visited told me that the sta-

Two 6th-graders operate cameras at the studio.

tion's management was disappointed, too. She talked to the studio personnel, who agreed to teach us what we needed to know to produce our own program.

In the past year and a half, the students have created and produced 60 episodes of a TV program called *Out of the Classroom*, which airs on three public-access cable stations in western Michigan.

Out of the Classroom has interviewed a variety of guests. Grandparents rate high on the roster, as do friends and neighbors, other relatives, pastors, and church members. Students and their parents continue to be on the lookout for interesting guests and topics.

Some of the programs have included: interviews with cancer survivors, growing up in New Zealand, life in Korea, a visit to Jerusalem, visiting the emergency room (repeatedly), what it was like to serve in World War II, how to raise prize-winning sheep dogs, what a state police officer does, how a scanning electron microscope works, why it is important to stay in

school, adopting a baby from China, rocks and minerals, and temperance. There were even mini-concerts by Buddy Houghtaling and the school choir.

Segments of various shows have featured interesting books and crafts, cooking instructions, a few science experiments, and a large variety of common and exotic pets—from birds to bunnies, frogs to goats—as well as dogs, cats, rats, and a snake. Students share riddles and explain how to do “really hard” math, they tell jokes and play songs on various instruments. The show has featured abbreviated versions of the National Geography Bee and the National Spelling Bee. Their favorite segment is their own *Out of the Classroom Game*, similar to *Jeopardy*.

The people at the studio have been impressed with the students' behavior and dedication. They are responsible for everything from putting up the sets to purchasing the tapes, making copies of the program, setting up the control room and cameras, and preparing the guests.

One day, as we were getting started, one of the technicians showed me yet another editing sequence. Laughing, I said, “I learn something new every week. I wish I could remember it all.”

He replied, “You know more than 95 percent of the other producers. And your students are amazing—they pick up this stuff so fast.”

With the beginning of the past school year (fall of 1999), we arranged for the 5th and 6th grades to do filming two mornings a month, and the 7th graders (who had done the program the previous year) to participate after school twice a month. One evening, while giving a tour, a studio employee proudly showed off the students in the control room, who were talking to the cameras over the headset, pushing the buttons to film from the different cameras, carefully operating the sound board, and running the tape with our show's introduction music (composed by one of the 6th graders). The tour guide said proudly, “We're not letting Channel 8 see them—they'll hire them all away.”

After several weeks of taping, someone at the station asked why my students had their own show. Was it “because this was a school for only really intelligent students”? I tried not to laugh, but thought about what a wonderful witnessing opportunity we had.

Our special guests usually comment on how seriously the students take their duties and how professional they are. We appear to be meeting one of Ellen G. White's suggestions for a good

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education: “Experience in practical life is indispensable. Order, thoroughness, punctuality, self-control, a sunny temper, evenness of disposition, self-sacrifice, integrity, and courtesy are essential qualifications” (*Education*, p. 277). We try to work on all of these areas each week.

We've made friends with the technicians and have met some of their families at public events. Last spring, a high school-age intern at the studio made friends with our students. He would even stay late when we were there because he liked helping us.

Several producers of other shows at this station have expressed their appreciation for the interesting and educational programs our students create. These are all people whose paths we would not have crossed if we had not participated in this project.

Studio employees have given us special help in learning to use the new graphics computer, and we have had the opportunity to attend classes in linear editing—specialized areas of learning unavailable in our classroom.

Coping With the Challenges

Usually, the biggest stress for field trips is finding drivers. Getting the students to and from the weekly TV programs seemed impossible at first, but then I learned to put my trust in the Lord. At first, I would panic when a driver had to cancel at the last minute. But despite the problems, we have not missed a taping. Now, when I do not have enough vehicles, I say, “Well, Lord, let's see what you're going to do for us today.” It isn't always easy, but it always works out.

The studio is about 20 minutes away from our school. At first, I begrudged the travel time, but the Lord has shown me that this is a valuable opportunity. Our trips are filled with lively

conversation. Students share their stress over parental divorces, worries over poor grades, concerns about getting their assignments done, fears about the health of family members, and questions about how to get along with others.

This project has taught us to work together as a team. (However, my students know more about some of the equipment than I do!) The experience has taught my students self-discipline. When we return to the classroom after a taping, they get right back to work as usual, seeing their television experience as just another class.

Because of the students' repeated experiences in front of the camera and post-taping discussions about what went right, what we would like to do better, and how we plan to improve, they have become more comfortable than most children their age with being in front of people.

When I saw a request for children's TV programs for a new Adventist television station in Georgetown, Guyana, I sent a tape of one of our shows. The people there expressed an interest in airing *Out of the Classroom*. After I shared the news with my “Studio Kids,” one of the 7th graders wondered back into my room and said, “This means we will be real missionaries now, doesn't it?”

As we continue to sow seeds for Jesus, Bible Labs are helping students find joy in service. ✍

*The Bible Labs concept was originated by Glenn Aufderhar, president of the Washington Conference, in the late 1970s. Vic Fullerton, Nathan Merkel, and Edward Norton developed a document on service that contributed to the actual program, although the term was coined by Des Cummings, Jr. A foundational document, “Christian Service in the Curriculum, K-12,” was produced by a committee chaired by Nathan Merkle in 1982. Dave Gillham, Edward Norton, and Tom Lee developed the curriculum beginning in 1984, and helped schools implement it. In 1986, Edward Norton was called to establish and develop Bible Labs in the Michigan Conference, after which the program became an official part of the Lake Union Conference curriculum. Seminars on the subject have been held throughout the North American Division and in the South Pacific Division.

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