

Ocean-front Christian camp; Two changed lives with an influence throughout Latin America

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Santa Clara, Panama—Almost all of the significant events in missionary Robert Bruneau's life began at an ocean-front Baptist camp in this small Panamanian fishing village.

"I first came here when I was five years old," Robert remembers. "My father was a Baptist pastor and he brought groups here regularly. There has never been a year since then without my coming here."



Robert made his first profession of faith around a campfire at the *Cresta del Mar* camp, and later committed himself to full-time Christian service around another campfire.

Even later, he met his wife, Nina, here. She confirmed her initial profession of faith at the camp and later committed herself also to missionary service during a campfire service.

The couple was married in the camp's chapel and continued to live here while Robert worked as the facility's director.

Today Robert and Nina, who are missionaries with the Latin America Mission, no longer live at the camp, but they visit as often as possible to find renewal and a place of rest.

Now, Robert's love of Christian camping takes him to similar facilities from Mexico to Argentina where he works with local churches and camp leaders to develop quality camping programs throughout Spanish-speaking Latin America.

As the executive director of Christian Camping International—Latin America, Robert is committed to providing others with the life-transforming experiences that he has had.

But, that task isn't always easy. "Camps and playing are not a part of our (Latin American) culture," Robert explains. "Play for many Latin American church leaders is synonymous with sin and a loss of time and recreation is not a part of church life."

“Many pastors believe that the church was established to share the Gospel. It’s something serious therefore they don’t have time to play.”

But, Robert explains that a younger generation, educated in the university and at seminaries, is helping to change those attitudes.

“If you want to know a child, play with him,” Robert says. “Play offers a child the opportunity to express their inside life.”

“At a camp, when you play, you see the needs of the camper, and you build a relationship with him or her. When you invest time in a child, it says that you think they are important because you have spent time with them. When you invest eight hours a day playing with a child, you earn the right to be heard.”



Robert says that the main purpose of Christian camping is to share the Gospel and allow the camper to meet Jesus Christ. “You meet a camper where he is and you take him someplace else.”

Both Robert and Nina confirm that Christian camping helped them to take commitments encouraged by their local church and begin living them out. “Camping gave expression to what the church was

teaching,” Robert says. “At church, we were being challenged to be missionaries. Camping showed me what it looks like to be a missionary. It gave me an opportunity to serve by washing dishes, cleaning up. It’s not just preaching, it’s doing it.”

With a growing number of churches of all denominations throughout Latin America getting into camping ministries, the demands on Robert and his staff are increasing. “We provide material, we mobilize the church, and we help train people to lead in Christian camps,” he explains.

“We have active committees in eight countries and hope to expand to more,” he says. Robert equips those committees to provide resources and training on a local level. “We help them to develop their own vision. We also provide them with tools and curriculum materials.”

In order to meet the demands for training, CCI-Latin America holds regular workshops in various countries, and an international conference every three years.

Just as their life together began at the camp at Santa Clara, the Bruneau's ministry is a shared vocation.

"When we lived here at Cresta del Mar, I put up curtains and helped to decorate many of the buildings," Nina says. "Now, as we travel from camp to camp, I like to minister with the camp director's wife. Our conversations are informal, but I understand. I have done what they are doing and I know what it is like. Many times the wife is here alone, but you really aren't alone."

The Baptist camp at Santa Clara means as much to Nina as it does to Robert. "The most important decisions about my life and my relationship to God were made here," she affirms.

Meanwhile, Robert is looking for a few leaders with experience in Christian camping to join him in developing Latin Americans to expand camping experiences. "We can use people to help develop campsites as well as to prepare material and lead conferences," he says.

As he pushes his daughter, Nicole, on a swing, he reflects, "CCI is relational. We want to be in contact with people. We don't put our resources into web sites, we put them into people. CCI Latin America don't give training or courses, we develop leaders and equip them personally, that is the Jesus model"

"Camping," he says, "is a means to an end. Our goal is to develop a Christ-centered character in every camper. If a child has a background in camping, they will have a servant heart."

For more information on Christian Camping International in Latin America, write to Robert Bruneau, #PTY 2601, PO Box 52507, Miami Florida 33102-5207 USA

Related web sites:

Christian Camping International: <http://www.cciworldwide.org/home.htm>

Christian Camping International Latin America: www.ccial.org

Christian Camping International Brazil: www.cci.org.br

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