24 - - WEST Wary 2017

66 I expect Mamawi Atosketan Native School
(MANS) kids to change the world, and I am
eternally grateful to the Adventist school
system for being the catalyst for that change.

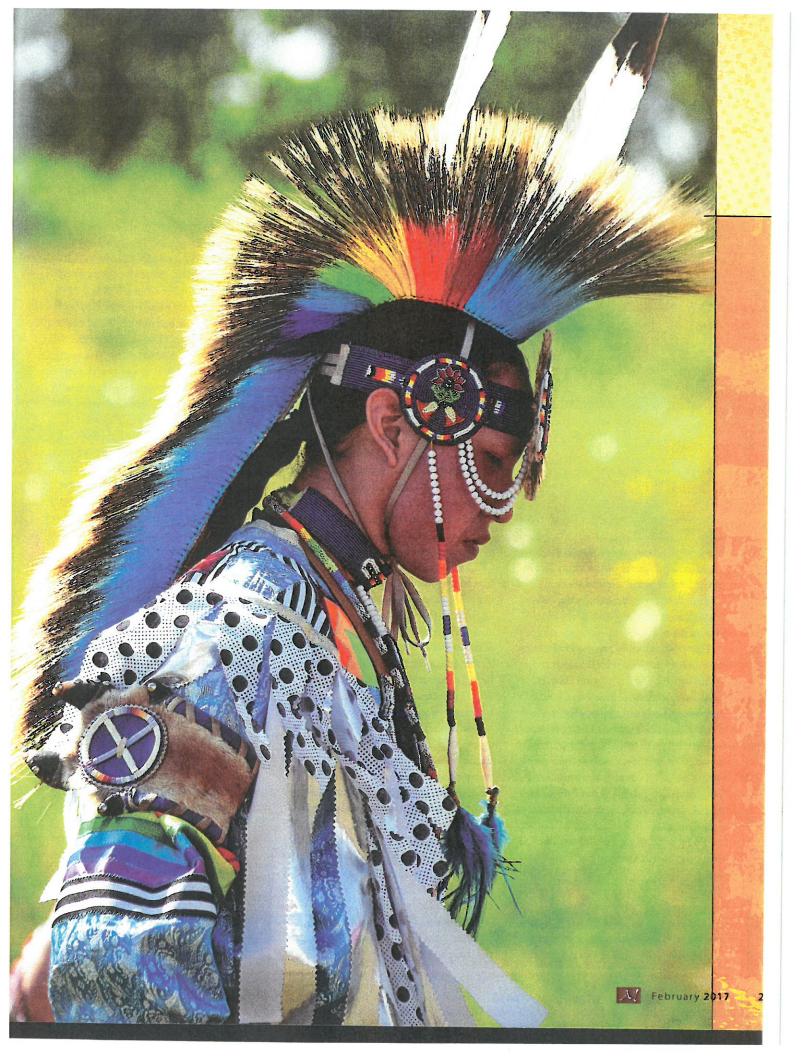
99

Catalysto date and carry to that the carry to the carry to

BY LARRY WILKINS

s a young man in high school, I was trying to understand myself and this world we live in. I wasn't just curious; I had a voracious appetite for knowledge and understanding. I studied all of the sciences. I loved studying our physical world. It all made sense to me, and it kept my mind very busy. In fact, I have never experienced boredom. For me there has always been more to learn, always more work to be done.

In high school, while my young mind was being developed, I was sold the biggest lie of all. In, amongst all of the pure sciences, they threw in a complete work of fiction so that my mind accepted it along with everything else. For a while in my formative years I believed in the theory of evolution.





Larry Wilkins turns the first sod for MANS's new high school building. Larry got his start in construction, and he credits Adventist education along with skills he learned in high school industrial arts for giving him the tools that he needed to succeed. Larry's unfailing faith in the mission of MANS and the power of Adventist education played a pivotal role in The Bridge Campaign, inspiring many with his vision of reproducing the MANS model across Canada. Larry's inspiring campmeeting talk can be seen and heard in its entirety at https://vimeo. com/189817502

It made sense, but it also made me doubt the very existence of God. When I focused exclusively on our physical world and denied the existence of God's world, life lost all meaning.

I understand why there is an epidemic of teen suicides on reservations across Canada. With no purpose in life, life need not exist. This "meat suit" that we live in can be both a physically and mentally painful place for a spirit to reside. Why bother enduring the pain if there is no joy and no reward?

First Nations children need to know the truth about God. He did concern himself with their conception. Their lives are important. Their lives do have purpose. When the spirit of God is fostered and doubt about His existence is removed, great things can happen. I expect Mamawi Atosketan Native School (MANS) kids to change the world, and I am eternally grateful to the Adventist school system for being the catalyst for that change.

The second thing the tempter did to my adolescent self was to get me to focus exclusively on the "No-Thing" or "nothing": what we all perceive as reality, everything in our physical world.

The reason I call it the No-Thing is that atoms have a nucleus made up of neutrons and protons. If we compare the

Lazarus was dead. Then Jesus brought him back to life. Let me check that against my sciences. ... No, that's impossible. It doesn't fit into the No-Thing.

He called Peter out of the boat, and a mere mortal walked on water as long as he was focused on our Lord. The second he began to turn his attention to the No-Thing instead of Jesus, he sank like a rock.

He tried showing us, "OK guys, watch again. With a handful of fish and loaves we are going to feed thousands and have many times more leftovers than what we started with." The lesson, again, is that through faith there is no such thing as lack or limitation.

Let me check the loaves and the fish thing with the mathematicians and the weights and measures, guys. ... Nope, the laws of the No-Thing say that's impossible.

No wonder Jesus said to His disciples in frustration, "How long must I suffer with you guys?" Jesus wanted desperately for those around Him to wipe the salve from their eyes and see the world that Jesus saw.

Jesus also said, faith the size of a mustard seed could take a mountain and chuck it into the ocean. Notice the scale that Christ uses. A tiny mustard seed versus a giant mountain. What are the limits of possibility?

I found a life-changing verse in a little book by the prophet Malachi. God is speaking through His prophet when He says, and I paraphrase, "Bring me my tithes and offerings into my storehouse. If you do I will open the windows of Heaven and pour you out a blessing so great you will not be able to contain it. I will guard your businesses [What He actually said was, 'I'll look after your grapes' ... which, I'm assuming, was really important or big business or both], you will radiate with happiness, and people will call you blessed." Now here is the kicker: He says, in essence, "Try it! Let me prove it to you!" There are 1,500 pages in the Old Testament and over 500 in the New. And in only one place God says, "Test Me. Try it. Let me prove

You mean to say that I can run an experiment to (a) prove to myself the very existence of God and (b) that He is actually speaking to me through the words of His prophets and (c) that I can trust God to do what he says He will do? And the really cool thing is that I did not design the experiment, so I cannot accuse myself at some later date of experimenter bias. God, not I, designed the test. All I have to do is run it.

Remember, Christ taught us through His mustard seed analogy that faith is on a continuum. This experiment of faith begins at 10 percent of gross income, and the whole offerings thing is where the rubber meets the road.

When I was contemplating making a long-term commitment to the MANS High School building project, I had one good reason to do it, to test and grow my faith; and a million reasons why I shouldn't also came to mind.

It was God's world and God's words, versus the No-Thing. I struggled, sweated, sighed, prayed, and then finally, I pulled the trigger. I made a financial commitment.

Because of this commitment, Lynn



The Original "Home" of MANS—Students feel good about coming to MANS because of the clear respect shown to their culture. The teepee at the entrance of the existing school is an important symbol for the Cree, traditionally associated with the mother and the giving of life.

McDowell did a story on me in the *Messenger*, and a faithful reader was inspired to match my donation. I knew that if I could increase the amount of my donation and the couple would match it, the building project would receive a much-needed boost in seed money. I asked Lynn to give me the night to think about it.

I didn't sleep much that night. I prayed and fretted and fought off the distraction of the No-Thing as hard as I could. I focused as hard as I could on Jesus and on God's words in Malachi. What a battle. The truth is I was petrified, anxious, nervous, sweating like a pig, and praying as hard as I could.

I thought about Jesus in the garden the night before He was to be crucified. While Christ was the embodiment of God on earth, He did wear a "meat suit" the same way everyone else does. He knew what was coming and He knew this was gonna hurt—every way that a body and mind could hurt.

So, I decided that if Christ was my example, I would put my big boy pants on and do it anyway. I called Lynn that morning and asked her to double my commitment and tell the donor. After I did that, my mind continued to race. I was a nervous wreck.

The next morning I looked out my window and saw my neighbour wheel into his driveway. Right behind him was a car I didn't recognize. My neighbor had moved out about a year and a half ago and never once, to my knowledge, returned. I was going to be late if I went

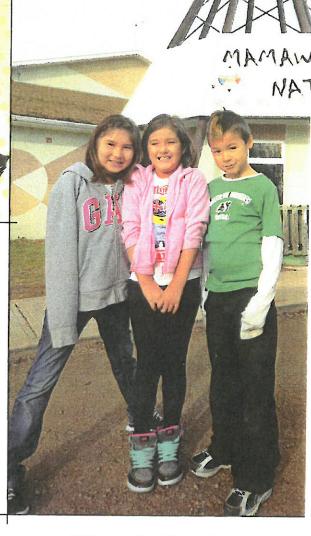
over to say hi, but I thought I should go to see how he was doing. As it turned out, the second car was the realtor's, and the realtor was there to list the house. He handed me his card and told me to call him later.

My neighbor had bought the house in 2007 before the real-estate crash. He paid \$700,000, then spent about \$200,000 in renovations. I offered him \$525,000 with no financial conditions and immediate possession. By 5 p.m. that day I owned the house that was ready to sell with a healthy profit.

The moment of time I had doubled my commitment to MANS to the time I had more than enough money to make my first year's payment (with zero sacrifice) was around eight hours.

This year the Alberta economy is down at least 14 percent, layoffs galore, and my competitors across the board are down compared to 2015. Yet, my businesses are up year-to-date 11 percent, and we are now the number one volume age management clinic in Northern Alberta and one of the top clinics in Canada.

Please understand: I did not suddenly become a much smarter businessman. I take no credit for my success. This is all from the hand of God. I am a firsthand witness to the hand of God in action. I don't know why, but the Alberta Conference gave me a front-row seat to watch our Father do His thing.



While we still need help and we are a long way from completing the MANS High School funding and construction projects, I am already eagerly anticipating what job our merciful Father is going to put us to work on next.

My prayer is this: "Lord, please don't fire me. Please let me work for you for the rest of my life. Lord, You know I get scared and I'm absolutely useless when I take my eyes off of You. Please have mercy on me. Let me focus on You instead of on this world, and let my work be Your will And Lord, please give me the faith and the bravery I need in this life in order to prepare myself to meet you face to face. Amen."

Larry Wilkins is Honorary Chair of The Bridge Campaign for Mamawi Atosketan Native School's high school building project. He is a Mohawk entrepreneur who owns and is CEO of External Affairs Medical Spas in Edmonton and St. Albert.