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Billy Walker

Evangelist in the Land of Hiawatha

by Ed Hindson

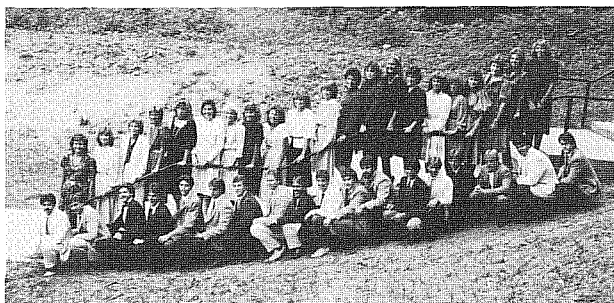
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow made the land of Hiawatha famous in his epic poem, "The Song of Hiawatha." Today, not far from the shores of Lake Superior ("Gitchegume") in the upper peninsula of Michigan, evangelist Billy Walker operates Hiawatha, one of America's outstanding summer youth camps.

Accessible only by gravel roads from nearby Eckerman, population 250, Hiawatha Camp and Conference Grounds sits on the sloping shore of scenic Piatt Lake. It is located about an hour from Saulte Sainte Marie and the Canadian border.

Each summer over 2,000 teenagers pack the grounds to hear speakers such as Mel Johnson, Wendy Collins, Don Lonie, and Lehman Strauss. Saturday nights feature outstanding gospel concerts with guests like Doug Oldham.

Hiawatha was founded in 1964 by Billy Walker, a young evangelist based in Detroit. Billy grew up in a pastor's

"Presenting Christ to people of all ages is the goal of the evangelist," claims Walker, "but my greatest joy is seeing teenagers coming to the Saviour." Billy loves kids and they know it. Unlike many camp directors, Walker participates with the teens in all their activities—to get to know them personally. His rapport breaks down bar-



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home and entered full-time evangelism in 1955 at the age of 17. Since then he has conducted more than 500 evangelistic campaigns, seeing over 30,000 professions of faith in Christ. In 1976 he also assumed the pastorate of Calvary Baptist Church in suburban Southgate, Michigan, where his late father pastored for 22 years.

Billy Walker has always had a special appeal to teenagers. He was converted at age 6 at the Springwells Avenue Baptist Church in Detroit and immediately developed an interest in preaching. While still a teenager, he began conducting tent crusades and youth revivals all over the Great Lakes region in the 1950s. Now his ministry to teens is as great as ever. In addition to his summer camping ministry, Billy conducts a series of highly successful "Youth on the March" rallies throughout the year, with as many as 1,000 teens at each rally.

riers, and he becomes one of them in order to win them.

Despite the excellent array of guest speakers at Hiawatha, the highlights of each week are the nights when Billy Walker himself speaks. His powerful and dynamic delivery captivates the audience. Even the most rebellious teenager sits in rapt attention. The message is followed by a clear and deliberate invitation, and every respondent is carefully and individually counseled by a trained worker. Having over 100 decisions on those nights is not unusual.

Many young people have met Christ in the great northern woods at Hiawatha. Life-changing decisions and life-long commitments have been made there. Hundreds return every summer throughout their high school years as campers, and later as staff workers. But one person remains the same every year—Billy Walker, the evangelist in the land of Hiawatha. ■

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