



Dr. Barbara and Dr. Steve Timmermans

How has Tall Turf shaped your faith?

Barbara Timmermans: Tall Turf started in the late 60s in response to the riots happening all over the country. The founders believed there needed to be a faith response to injustice. They believed racial reconciliation needed to start with kids. My dad was one of the founders, and I was deeply impacted by how my parents responded to injustice.

Later, when we were running family camp, I met a lot of spiritual mentors who were firmly rooted in their faith. Many of them had much more difficult lives than I did, but they were still further in their faith journey. One of them was a leader at family camp. She exemplified faith-filled leadership for me in the way she worked with her sisters in Christ. She's been a friend for years and years that I continue to learn from.

What does Tall Turf's multicultural community mean to you?

Steve Timmermans: White folks like us were growing up in really homogeneous environments. Tall Turf gave me the first opportunity to have friendships cross-racially. I realized how important it is to live life with a diverse community. It's one thing to protest downtown, but we can live our white lives and do that. It's another thing to develop friendships that last a lifetime.

Tall Turf oriented us to keep discovering. In 1977, we went to meet John Perkins, a pastor and civil rights leader. Back then he was preaching about the three 'R's: reconciliation, relocation, and redistribution. That challenged us to live in a primarily African American neighborhood so that we could lean on and learn from African American leaders. Tall Turf gave us a yearning to be part of the solution.

In my work, it was always a high priority for me to hire people of color for leadership positions, and I trace a lot of that back to Tall Turf. I recently retired from being the executive director of the Christian Reformed Church. I don't believe we're going to make progress in racial equity until persons of color are intimately involved in decision-making.

Talk about your experience running family camp at Tall Turf.

Steve Timmermans: Family camp was designed so that families could come for a weekend and have fun together, but parents could also have time away from their kids. We hoped it could be a spiritual retreat for parents. We had two churches come every weekend so they could continue ministry with the families after family camp. Our close connection with those churches meant the relationships and faith formative work was year-round.



Barbara Timmermans: Often the sponsoring churches were from Grand Rapids, but some were from Chicago and other cities. We lived on the southwest side of Chicago for eleven years, and we would visit those churches sometimes. Folks would come up to us and say, “we recognize you from family camp!” It was heartening to visit those churches years later and reminisce about our time at Tall Turf together.

What are your favorite Tall Turf chants or traditions?

Steve Timmermans: “We’re from Tall Turf, mighty mighty Tall Turf” and “God has smiled on me.”

Barbara Timmermans: At Tall Turf, when you get one piece of mail, you have to sing with a group. If you get more than one, you have to sing a solo. If you get a package, you get thrown in the lake!