

# Author publishes stories about Maricopa Village Christian School

By Joshua Jovanelly  
Gila River Indian News

Steve Morris has dedicated most of his life to serving God. Whether it was working with the homeless ministry, volunteering at food banks or writing stories for Christian publications, Morris answered every time he heard God calling.

But when the prospect of moving from his home in Glendale to Maricopa Village in District 7 of the Gila River Indian Community came up, he said thanks but no thanks. The year was 2000. The small, nearly century-old Maricopa Village Adventist Church was struggling; the once thriving church, which boasted 100 members in the 1930s and 1940s, saw its membership faltering. Some of Morris's Adventist friends believed that for the church to really take off again, it needed somebody to be there at all times.

Morris recalls making a lot of excuses. He came from a different cultural background and what seemed at the time like a different world. "I don't think I can relate to those people," he thought. "And they probably couldn't relate to me."

Today, Morris, 59, looks back on the years he spent revamping the church and reopening its accompanying school, calling it "one of the highest points in my Christian experience." His time spent in Maricopa is detailed in one of the chapters in his newly released eBook, titled "My Father Sang to Me & 13 Other True Inspirational Stories" by S.R. Morris. The book is available exclusively on Amazon's Kindle for \$7.99 until June when Morris has the option of making it more widely available.

The book is a compilation of stories that have been published in Christian publications — in-

cluding *Christian Reader*, *Standard*, *Purpose*, *Catholic Digest*, and *Adventist Review* — over the past 25 years. Two of the 14 stories, "Miracle in the Desert" and "The Answer is Under the Sink" — center on seemingly providential events that occurred at Maricopa Village Christian School. Morris double-majored in journalism and religion at Southern Adventist University (formerly Southern College) in Tennessee. The collection of stories, which Morris is publishing and promoting on his own, is his first book.

"S. R. Morris is an easy author to like," said Stephen Chavez, editor of *Adventist Review*, in a press release. "His stories are simple, well-written, and packed with meaning. The spiritual lessons he draws are a wonderful antidote to the cynicism and skepticism of our age."

Morris agreed to meet me at the Maricopa school in April. The place had changed much since he had last seen it — he left in late 2001 to deal with health problems — but the setting elicited the same passionate enthusiasm that had been his trademark during his time here. A springy man of slight stature, Morris wore rounded rectangular glasses and a blue shirt with white flowers. His grayish-white hair stood up as if electrified, which Morris often became, standing up and gesticulating excitedly to emphasize his points.

If reluctantly at first, Morris agreed to move onto the Community in early 2001 with his first wife. "I came down and I loved it," he said. "The people were so friendly." He went around the D7 neighborhoods, knocking on doors and sometimes passing out free food on Fridays. A few people showed interest, but progress was painstakingly slow. Morris noticed a demographic of churchgoers that was glaringly lacking.

"There's no children here, what am I going to do?" he remembers thinking. "You've got to have children to make a church grow."

Morris knew there used to be a small school that accompanied the church, but it had closed in the '60s for reasons that weren't clear. Margie Boulduc, a D7 resident who lives on nearby 78th Street and attended the school in the '40s, remembered the positive impact the school and church provided for Maricopa Village. Boulduc had gotten to know Morris through the church and recognized something about him that was different than other outsiders who had come to the help at the church.

"Just observing him, what he was doing — he was a very hard worker," Boulduc said. "He was a go-getter."

Morris was equally complimentary of Boulduc. The land that was to become the school grounds required a massive cleanup. Morris needed to fill up two huge dumpsters with trash to clear out the space.

"Sometimes the only person that would show up to help fill that thing up was Margie," Morris said. "Margie was the one, she was always there. She's the one I could always count on...She's a worker."

Boulduc and Morris quickly became friends and set their sights on reopening the school. The road would be full of obstacles. "We have no children, how can we start a school with no children?" Morris thought. "We have no money. How can we start a school with no money? How can you have a school when you don't have a building? We have nothing."

As the story "Miracle in the Desert" details, Morris kept praying and kept hope alive. Donations of mobile homes, com-



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Author Steve Morris (far right) is pictured with students and teachers at Maricopa Village Christian School, a school Morris helped reopen in the early 2000s.

puters, library books and desks began to fill out the inanimate objects a school requires. But with the start of the school year only a few months away, and despite putting up signs on bulletin boards around D6 and D7, no parents seemed interested in sending their children to the upstart school.

That was until two *Arizona Republic* reporters got lost driving along Baseline Road and pulled over to ask for directions. Their serendipitous visit turned into a feature story with a full page spread in the newspaper. More donations started to stream in, and more importantly, parents who had read or heard about the article began to call.

The school opened that August with eight students and ended up with about 12 by the end of the year, Morris said. Even as other parts of his life fell apart — his first marriage dissolved — Morris took solace in the success of Maricopa Village Christian School and the growth of the church. His faith in the face of struggles — his own and the school's — served as an example for those around him.

"That's how I learned about

faith, really, through him," Boulduc said of Morris. "Because we had nothing and he always says, 'We're going to do it, we're going to get this.' And I'm thinking, you know, 'How are you going to get it? We have no money.' And then we'll pray about it and in a couple of days he'd call me: 'God is good.' And I know something happened."

The school's size has remained small; this year there are 14 students, grades Kindergarten through third with one sixth-grader. The school now receives funding through the Tribal Education Department.

Morris's faith has steadied him through the difficult times. Transferring his thoughts and experiences to the page was always an outlet, a way to make sense of and draw meaning from his trials.

"I think that for me writing has been a bit of a therapy," Morris said. "And then I wrote for other people as well. Because when I read a story that's very inspirational, it picks me up."