

Wherever I Go

Published in The Bethel Banner, September 2017

© by Myrna CG Mibus

Last year when my Dad was sick and it felt like everything in my world was falling apart I told my husband, Owen, "Next summer I'm going on the Christikon trip with Ryan!" I admit, I wasn't thinking about what it meant to be a chaperone when I told Barb Farmer, that I wanted to go to Christikon. In fact, I was almost completely selfish in volunteering. I wanted to go to the the mountains. I wanted to spend time with my son, Ryan. I wanted a break from family struggles. I wanted to get away. I didn't consider the possibility that maybe I wasn't the only one who wanted me to go on the trip. Perhaps God wanted me to go, too.

Fast forward to this spring. Despite my best intentions, I wasn't as physically fit as I wanted to be for the trip. On top of that, I realized that I barely know the kids I'm to chaperone. The reality of serving as some sort of guide - especially a spiritual guide - on the Christikon trip is starting to weigh me down.

In the weeks before our trip, I shoved my doubts about my physical and spiritual state away and concentrated on gathering clothing and equipment for the adventure. "It will all work out," I told myself. But as our departure neared, I really wondered what I had signed myself up for. Looking back, I see now that God had things under control.

On the night before departure I should have been packing but felt drawn to open my chaperone folder folder instead. I looked at the names of the 18 kids of the three other chaperones and I felt like I needed to pray. I asked God for safety and guidance and said aloud the name of each kid and chaperone going on the trip. It was a stumbling prayer, most of my prayers are awkward at best, but by the time I said "Amen" I felt a sense of peace.

On departure day the kids and chaperones gathered at Bethel for a send-off blessing. We said our good-byes to our families, loaded the bus, and were off! After 18 hours or so on the coach bus and a four hour delay in Big Timber due to road construction, we boarded a second bus for the bumpy ride to Christikon. We arrived at last!

The next morning dawned bright. We had breakfast then packed our gear and started out on the trail. My group of thirteen was made up of nine kids, two counselors: Molly and Thomas, and two chaperones: Bob and me. We started our day full of excitement, and some trepidation, about the hike ahead.

We were slated to hike seven miles and climb 3,000 feet that first day. The hiking was beyond difficult and we didn't make it to our destination before we had to set up camp. I'll be honest, had I been offered a chance to go home that first evening, I think I would have taken it. But here's the thing, once you are even a mile up the trail there's really no going back.

So I kept on hiking. We all kept on hiking. Yes, there were seemingly endless uphill and switchbacks. There were blisters and lost sunglasses, spilled food and damp clothes and spirits. There were frustrations and, in my case, a few tears. But each day we learned to work in community. We helped set up camp and prepare meals. We laughed. We sang. We prayed. We took in the beauty of God's creation. Each day our packs got lighter and our bodies grew more accustomed to the altitude. Each day at quiet time I prayed for every person in our group. And each day my spirit lifted in seeing God's spirit shine through our counselors and the kids and in realizing that, yes, I was called to be here and that this trip was about more than just me getting away; it was about hearing God's call to go and do the best I could, even though I didn't feel at all physically or spiritually prepared.

On the last day of our hike, our group, excited to get back to base camp, clean clothes and warm showers, moved along at a good clip. Before we knew it we were at the long driveway leading up to Christikon where we stopped to take pictures under the entry gate sign. Molly and Thomas pointed out that the back of the sign, the part you would all see upon leaving Christikon, states "Wherever you go Christ will go with you!" - a reminder that God is not only with us as we hike and struggle but that He's there with us as we go back to our lives at home.

In the moments before we trekked up the driveway, I smiled as I thought back on how of how inadequate I felt as a chaperone and of how I thought that going to Christikon was primarily an escape from my life only to discover that the trip was so much more. In saying "yes" to going to Christikon, I was also saying "yes" to Christ walking with me wherever I go.