

# KOINONIA



L I F E T O G E T H E R  
E D I T I O N



Eagle Nest, the place where we first adopted the phrase Life Together. That means it only seems fitting that we would have a special addition of Koinonia – which means sharing life with each other – that was just about our trip to Eagle Nest.

This was our fourth year to go to Eagle Nest and do VBS, which meant there were plenty of things that we were prepared for and had dealt with before. There were plumbing issues – although thankfully not anything near as bad as last year’s overflow incident – but it was still bad enough that the guys got to use two of their favorite words – hose shower. There was an afternoon in Red River, thunder storms, 4th of July fireworks, tingle juice, the ice cream shop, fudge, and of course plenty of Oreos and nesquik. But there were also a lot of new things this year. It started with the fact that of the 29 people who went with us this year, 7 of them had never been to Eagle Nest before, so almost a quarter of the group were first timers. And with all those first timers, and a group that large, we definitely had to find some things to do other than VBS, and we were very blessed to get several other opportunities around town. We had groups help clean up around the village hall and at the park that is being built. Groups that helped clean up at Angel’s Attic and the Gateway Museum. And others that went to the local senior center and helped out. But the community groups weren’t the only ones that were busy every morning; we had a record number of kids come to VBS

as well with a high of 17 on Tuesday. And there were some of them that we just couldn’t get rid of...literally; they stayed the night (check the picture below of Lawrence sleeping next to Michael one morning). We also got to be a part of a community wide worship event, and once again be in the 4th of July parade, and while participating in the parade was not a new thing, having a flat tire and getting to hold up the trailer while Henry changed the tire was (not to mention keys getting locked in cars and the Sheriff stopping by – all part of the same story). But most importantly we experienced new levels of Life Together, and got to know each other and the God who made us and loves us even better. We all came back with memories and stories to share, and in the following pages you’ll get to see and hear some of those stories. I hope you’ll read them, but even more I hope you’ll ask the students about them, because this brief publication only scratches the surface of what a week of Life Together looks like. They’ll tell you tales about a fence, about snapping pop-its in each other’s ears, about doing things “For Science”, about tests of manhood, and about living life together in such a way that the only way to really describe it is with two simple words “YOLO Mamaw”.





Life together is a big theme for the youth group, and that's what this mission trip is all about. In the duration of this trip to Eagle Nest everyone bonds and gets to know each other better. Considering the fact that we are all stuck in Eagle Nest together we are forced to spend time with each other, even if it means that we just sit down and play a card game or go outside and play a game of Eagle ball. One might say that we are forced to hang out together but in all actuality we all want to be put together and spend time with each other. It was great to be able to actually have kids to teach in VBS this year. Those kids are so wonderful to work with. This trip helps each and every one of us realize that God is everywhere and uses wonderful people and opportunities to show us where he wants us to go in life.

**- Avery Coppedge**





Eagle nest is a grand place for many reasons; the people, the lake, the mountains. Most importantly, Eagle Nest is an opportunity for us to “grow like a ‘fro” and take life together to a whole new level. There’s something about sharing Jesus with kids, consuming large amounts of Nesquik and Oreos every night, and sharing beds as well as “pew troughs”, that bring us all closer together. This last mission trip I was able to grow closer to God, make new friends and strengthen relationships between old friends.

It really amazed me how many kids showed up to V.B.S. throughout the week, and it was a huge blessing to work with the preschoolers this year. I had so much fun getting to know these kids and just hanging out with them. This year we had the opportunity to get more involved with the community by helping with the village senior center, and preparing for the Fourth of July celebration. It was awesome to be able to reach out to so many people and I hope we will be able to return next year. Thank you so much for your prayers and support!

There were a lot of ways I saw God during the week. To start things off, the church was very accepting of us when we got there. Then, when Monday came there were 12 kids that came to VBS. In the past 2 years I had gone on this mission trip, there had only been like 8 kids... at most. So Monday was fantastic. The kids were so happy to be there and the workers were so happy to have the opportunity to teach them. Tuesday came and we had 17 kids. We were so grateful to be able to hang out with the kids. When Wednesday came, the kids were super excited to be there and you could tell they loved the teachers. Thursday was the 4th of July. The kids helped us decorate a float for the parade. Then at night we sat and watched the fireworks. When Friday came, you could tell the kids didn't want it to be the last day.

Not only did I see God in VBS during the week, but also in the community service we were doing. We helped at the senior center, pulled weeds and picked up around town, moved things, and tried to complete nearly impossible tasks. On Monday, I pulled weeds in the morning. Then in the afternoon I went with a group of girls to the senior center to wash dishes. Since you could only sanitize or rinse at a time, we had some free time. I got to talking to this guy named Doc, who was older, on oxygen, and usually got picked up and brought to the senior center and then dropped off back home because it was hard for him to walk. He was so happy to see us helping out, and when we were just kind of standing around he would give us tips on how to do things and ask us questions and that kind of thing. At one point, he told me that he was really happy to see young people out in the community doing something and living for God, and he wished he could see it more often.

- Desi Turrieta





Every year in Eagle Nest we come back with close to a million stories, and usually I have about a million favorite ones. Now if I had to choose one story to tell, which I do, I would tell everyone of the Cowboy band I met. Their actual band name is too long to remember, so I'll just call them the Cowboy band. I ended up getting to meet them because while everyone else was off handing out flyers to the towns folk, I was laying down icing my knee. I'm just sitting there in the house, when Andy comes in with these ribs, and chicken wings with a homemade barbecue sauce, and gives me one, and says that there is more at the church. So i wobble over there, get me a few of each, and sit down with these very friendly people. They tell me that they were all in a band and I just think "ummm, what kind of band?" because at first they don't seem like the type to be having a band. So we talk and after a while before we disbursed we had this awesome prayer time, and after I was just about to leave they asked if we were going to be at 1 night 2 unite, which was the concert on Wednesday July 3rd. I told them we were, and we were having a few of our kids singing in it, and they told me that they were going to be in it as well, and at this point I'm thinking "Now I don't know if I want to go to that concert if the bands are going to be like that". So Wednesday night comes and we go to the concert hear a few of the bands play, then the Cowboy band comes up, and takes the show away. You can't beat someone playing an electric mandola, and harmonica at the same time, you just can't. So all in short, the unexpected amazing Cowboy band was my favorite memory of this years trip to Eagle Nest.

- Matthew Hickman



The trip to Eagle Nest was excellent! This year we were able to do more than teach V.B.S. with all of the amazing people that went. I had a blast talking to some of the older folks at the senior home. They were so happy to see that younger people were doing things to help in the community. The scenery out there was breathtaking! I would eat breakfast on the front porch to watch the fog fade away and every night I would watch the stars after the sunset. It was really nice to be surrounded with all of the beautiful things God made. Being out in Eagle Nest gave me a break from all of the distractions at home and I had a chance to spend more time with God. I left Eagle Nest feeling a little closer to Him and closer to everyone on the trip. We truly experienced life together and it was awesome.

**-Elizabeth Acton**



I can't say that the entire week up at Eagle Nest wasn't a blessing to take part in, but it was what happened on Sunday that changed me. Before my time in Eagle Nest, I had been experiencing a spiritual backslide that I am very ashamed of. But on Sunday morning, as the Ensemble group was rehearsing for the morning songs, there was a particular song that they sang that reminded me of my grandma who has been with the Lord now for some 4 years. I had to leave the room and go outside because I nearly broke down. As I sat outside trying to maintain myself, the sun came out and... I felt what seemed like a presence of comfort blanketing me. I am 100% certain that God had stood by me at that moment. I didn't say a thing, I knew what was happening and that's when I broke down. I know for a fact that while I was up there; I experienced a personal and spiritual revival that I know I desperately needed.

- Randy West





This year in Eagle Nest was really great. It was awesome to have so many kids at VBS as compared to past years. I got to teach the 1st-3rd grade class, which was the big class, I think we had 9 one day, so it was quite a group, but it was really awesome. 4 of the kids I had were related, a brother and his 3 sisters, and they actually came from a Jewish background, and they really knew a lot about some of the stories we talked about, and the first part of the week they pretty much argued with me about everything, but by the end of the week they had settled in a lot better and they really enjoyed hearing stories and listening to what we had to say instead of just arguing. One of my favorite things that happens when we do VBS up there is that I usually get to show kids how to use a Bible, finding different books, and understanding the chapter and verse numbers, and I got to do that with my group again this year and it's just really amazing to watch a child figure out how to read and understand a Bible like that, just to be able to find their way around in it. So VBS was really awesome.

This year we also got to be a part of something really special called 1 Night 2 Unite. It was the first year that they had done this, but on the night of July 3rd, groups from several of the local churches all came together and shared as part of a time of worship at the Vietnam Memorial. A couple hundred people all met in the amphitheater there, and all the groups had a few minutes to come and share and lead everyone in praising God together, and we got to play a couple of songs as well, and it was just really cool to see Life Together at an even bigger level as we joined with all these people from other churches and just praised God together.

VBS was great, and as I said the concert was really cool, but my favorite part of the week was the afternoon that we went up to Red River, because if you remember the little girl Jessica that we all talked about last year (because she was our only kid the first day, and because she's awesome), well the day we went to Red River she came with us, and I got to hang out with her, and it was pretty much just the two of us. She stayed with us almost every night of the trip, and ate every meal with us, but this was really the only time that it was just the two of us. We got to talk about a lot of really cool stuff, like what it means to follow Jesus and have faith in Him, but the coolest part was that she really understood the whole idea of Life Together, and she called us her family and talked about how she really looks up to us and wants to be just like us. It was really amazing to see how God can take this little girl who lives in Eagle Nest and make her part of our family.

**- Kaitlyn Hickman (well as told by Kaitlyn Hickman anyway)**





Eagle Nest was such a great week! I enjoyed it very much. There was so much to do up there, you were never bored. I think my favorite part about the whole week was, on Fourth of July we were in their parade and for our float we just sang and worshiped together. Many of the people that were there were just getting involved with us singing! Then later that evening we all gathered on the fence and right as the sun was setting we started singing again. In that moment of us worshipping to The Lord, I saw him! The Lord was with us all in that moment taking in all his beauty he's created. It was just a priceless moment! Then later we watched the fireworks over the lake and that was great as well. I enjoyed that week, spending time together. Getting to know people more and more!

- Lydia Nelson

# Kids Say the Darndest Things

By Andy (and Alyssa) Byers

In the summer of 1986 the youth group from First Baptist Church of Artesia, NM loaded up the church vans and headed for Eagle Nest, NM to go and do VBS for a week. Coming along for the ride, and most likely sitting on an ice chest between two of the front seats in one of the vans, was the youth minister's 4 year old son – that was me – and that was the first time I ever went to Eagle Nest for a mission trip. We would make that same trip for seven years in a row, literally until the day that my dad announced that he was resigning from his position as youth minister and moving to become a senior pastor at another church. Well it has been more than a quarter of a century since that first trip, and I am now through 4 years of taking my own students to Eagle Nest, but this year included something really special for me. I got to take my own 4 year old on her first mission trip to Eagle Nest. Of course she didn't have to ride on the ice chest. And since we were asking our students to share about the trip, we decided to get the 4 year old's perspective on our week in Eagle Nest.

**Me:** So this was your first mission trip.

**Alyssa:** Yeah I'd never been before. I was too little.

**Me:** And did you have a good time?

**Alyssa:** Yeah.... (Of course this would be the one time my daughter is not long-winded)

**Me:** So what did you do in Eagle Nest?

**Alyssa:** Went to the park.

**Me:** Anything else?

**Alyssa:** Classes.

**Me:** What kind of classes?

**Alyssa:** Classes for children.

**Me:** What were the classes for?

**Alyssa:** They were for children....that's who goes to VBS.

**Me:** So you went to VBS?

**Alyssa:** Yeah, that's what we went up there to do.

**Me:** And who was in your class?

**Alyssa:** Leslie, and Patton, and...Austin. Leslie was a new kid, because she wasn't there the first day.



And Patton didn't want to come the 2nd day, he just wanted his mom. And Austin....he was there the whole time, and so was Leslie, except the first day.

**Me:** And what did you do in your class?

**Alyssa:** We played a game with little cars, we had to find them, and Steph hid one in a baby chair, that's so silly. Steph was my teacher, that's why she was hiding them. They were just little cars made out of paper.

**Me:** And what else did you do at VBS?

**Alyssa:** Went to the park with Matthew. And had snacks.

**Me:** And were the snacks good?

**Alyssa:** Yeah, they were messy though. Patton got it on his nose one day. He was eating the pudding in his ice cream cone, and he got it all over his nose. Steph had to clean it off with a napkin.

**Me:** Anything else you did at VBS?

**Alyssa:** Crafts. Yeah Michael was our teacher for crafts. And one day Danielle was too.

**Me:** So what else did you do in Eagle Nest?

**Alyssa:** Sleep.

**Me:** Oh yeah?

**Alyssa:** Yeah I slept on the bottom, and Desi slept on the top, and Kaitlyn slept on the top and Sarah was on the bottom, and Steph and Danielle slept by each other, and Anna slept there one night, but just one night and one day and then she left, I don't know when she left because I didn't see her leave, but I just know she was only there for one night and one day. And mama and Richelle had their own room. Sydney and Bekkah had a room, and Jessica stayed with them. And then the other girls had



the other room, that was Avery, Julia, Elizabeth and Lydia's room, but the last night Desi stayed in there, but she stayed with Elizabeth so that Lydia could still have her bed, but Lydia came and stayed in Desi's bed. And you and the boys were sleeping in the church.

**Me:** And did you sleep well with all those people around?

**Alyssa:** Yeah. But I couldn't go to sleep because some of the girls were taking showers. And then they would turn the lights off and on, and then Steph and Danielle were laughing so hard, and it just kept waking me up. I would go to sleep, and they would be laughing and it would just wake me up.

**Me:** But you liked staying in there with all the girls?

**Alyssa:** Yeah, it was fun. I watched them play games. I couldn't play, I could just watch, because I didn't know how to play. But they played Uno, and I know how to play that.

**Me:** Anything else about Eagle Nest?

**Alyssa:** At night Steph had to put medicine on her boo-boo. That way it didn't hurt when she got in her sleeping bag.

**Me:** Thanks Alyssa, is that all?

**Alyssa:** Yeah, you're welcome; can I have a horsey back ride to bed?



Now obviously, there was nothing mind-blowing about this little interview. There was no deep spiritual moment that we saw through the eyes of a child or anything. But let me fill you in on a few of the things that Alyssa didn't mention that she did during the week. She went to an ice cream shop, she bought fudge, she went to a candy store, she went to a carnival, she rode in a parade and threw candy, she saw fireworks, and she rode a horse for the first time in her life. But those weren't the things that stuck with her. If you ask her about them she remembers them, and she enjoyed them, but the thing that stuck with her more than anything was just hanging out together, sharing Life Together as we call it. Sometimes we get caught up with crafting the perfect lesson or the perfect program to try and reach people, when really the most important thing to do is just be with them. A friend of mine says that there is no such thing as quality time – there is just time, so we should spend it wisely. Alyssa did a lot of fun things on her first trip to Eagle Nest, but what she remembers most is just spending time with people she loves, and that's essential to Life Together.



# Listen to Your Writer: A Lesson from Eagle Nest

By Richelle Gilsdorf



This year on our trip to Eagle Nest, New Mexico, I started reading this book by Donald Miller called *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years: How I Learned to Live a Better Story*. It's basically about how the author, Miller, constructed the screenplay for his memoir, *Blue Like Jazz*, to become a movie (which actually turned out really well, even if it's almost nothing like the book). The major theme of *A Million Miles* is the idea that we as people must live better stories. As Miller says in his intro, "If what we choose to do with our lives won't make a story meaningful, it won't make a life meaningful either."

But I started reading this book the first night we were in Eagle Nest, after we'd arrived. I've had a busy summer and am preparing to have a very busy fall semester, so to be honest, the annual Eagle Nest mission trip, in which we teach VBS for a week was just a line on my to-do list, an item waiting to be checked off. I had no passion for the trip, although there is always a desire to see lives changed—especially those of children—by God's love. But I tend to think small-scale sometimes; I can be impatient and feel dissatisfied with anything less than instant gratification. And as anyone who's worked with children knows, there is spiritual gratification in the work, but there is also a need for abundant patience, for calm understanding.

This is exactly how the week started. And it wasn't really until I got home and continued to read Miller's book that I realized what purpose our work there was truly serving. Yes, it's good to hang out with kids who may not see very much Jesus, and sometimes, very little love of any kind. But on about day two of VBS, when I was teaching the story of how Paul escaped over the wall of Damascus in a basket to four kids in the 4th to 6th grade age range, the glazed-over look in their eyes disheartened me completely. They weren't getting it—not any of it. I would read the story, and not ten seconds afterward ask them what it was about, and none of them could tell me anything beyond "there was something about a basket." That felt pretty much like a slap in the face. I started to think, "What the heck, God? Help these kids pay attention and get it! This may be the only Jesus-time they get until we come back!"

Aside from this thought completely underestimating God's power and over-estimating my own importance, it was also revealing of my own insecurities with kids: that I don't un-

derstand them, that I don't work well with them, that I might be the reason they never understand about Christ.

About five minutes later, as I was walking the kids to snack time, God talked back: *tell them about me*. Tell them about God? But that's what I was doing. *No, tell them about me*.

It took a minute for me to understand what God meant, but actually, it took until the morning after I got back from Eagle Nest for the meaning of these words to really sink in. What was I doing, really, dropping the kids in the middle of a story they knew neither the beginning nor the end of? Who cares about Paul if they don't know about Jesus? Who cares about the One who died to save them if they don't know what they're being saved *from*? What's the use of praying the prayer to accept salvation if they don't know what comes after? Who cares about the Bible if they don't know who wrote it?

## **Who wrote it. The author. The ultimate Writer.**

The morning after we came back from Eagle Nest, I was sitting at the kitchen table, enjoying a much-missed cup of instant coffee, when I read a chapter in Miller's book called "Listen to Your Writer." My thoughts had not been on Eagle Nest in that moment, but instantly they were. I suddenly understood that insistent message from God on Tuesday, when I felt my class was a total failure. From that day on, I'd completely dismissed the VBS materials for honest conversation, and Q&A time with the kids. I'd asked them if they knew who Jesus was, and though they said yes, they couldn't tell me anything about Him. Not even what He did. Even the one girl who had previously prayed to accept Christ couldn't really tell me what her salvation meant. It wasn't that she was stupid, or that her previous teachers hadn't done their jobs—knowing them personally, I know they absolutely did. It was that she didn't understand the *significance* of Jesus, His place in her life, His place in the universe, His place in the Story. This girl had a book, but she didn't understand the role of the protagonist at all.

Reading that chapter from Miller's book, I suddenly became so humbled and grateful for God's intervention on that Tuesday. He'd told me to step about a thousand paces back and start with the basics. I thought that was counter-productive up until I realized how truly confused these kids were about who

Jesus is. How could they live for Him if they didn't understand His life or His will?

**How could they live their stories, if they didn't know the Writer?**

If I can say nothing else about my time in Eagle Nest, I can say this: I did my absolute best to introduce them to the Writer. As we say in Christianese, "I planted a seed." But more importantly, the Writer reminded me of His story, and my place in it. That the chapters of His story are not lines on a to-do list, they are moments of growth, of spiritual joy, of walking in the footsteps of the Author and feeling excited for what comes next. God is the Creator—anything we create is ultimately His creation. Why should I expect that such an awesome God would write me such a boring story, one in which I went to Eagle Nest and just did what I was supposed to do so I could check it off my list? God's too creative for that. And he made my life—all our lives—too precious for that.

**We do not live to exist, we exist to live.**

On Wednesday of the mission trip, we were doing our Q&A session when my trouble-child in the group—there's always one, isn't there?—took a serious interest in the conversation. His name is Laurence. He asked the question, "So how old is God?"

"God has been around forever," I answered. "God was never born, and He'll never die."

His eyes glazed over a bit, but in a good way, I sensed. "So wait," he continued, "does that mean God was around before the earth?"

"Absolutely," I said. "He created the earth. He created everything."

His eyes widened. "What?! Dang, that means God is like, crazy

smart, huh?"

"He's the smartest," I said.

"Smarter than Einstein?"

"God made Einstein's brain, so yeah," I chuckled. "He's smarter than anyone who's ever lived."

"No one's smarter than Einstein."

I smiled. "God is."

Laurence shook his head. "So in a fight—" by which he meant an argument—"between God and Einstein, would God win?"

"Absolutely every time."

"No way! Einstein would win."

"Einstein was a man, man was made from dirt, God made the dirt. Therefore, God wins."

Another glazed look. "So God knew about Einstein before he was born?"

"God knew about Einstein before God made the universe," I said. "He knew about you before you were born. He knew exactly how many sneezes you would sneeze thousands of years before your parents were born."

"What?! That's crazy! So I guess God is pretty awesome, huh?"

I literally felt my heart jump. I've never been pregnant, but I wonder if the sensation wasn't about the same as a baby kicking for the first time, a tiny flicker of life. It was an innocent spark of beginning, fragile but true. Laurence was meeting his Writer, his Maker. He didn't necessarily want to get to know the Author yet, but at least He knew the power of his Writer. He understood the potential. And that's what a seed is, really: potential. That's a blank page with the Writer's pen poised above it, the tip seeping ink and so, so eager to get the story going.

I pray that our lives would be like that—not necessarily blank anymore, but perhaps the excited turning of pages to see what the Author will compose next.

I can't wait to see what the Writer has in store, can't wait to live a better story.



