



COVENANT
CHURCH

2013 SUMMER JOURNAL

The Aslan Anthology

A QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF REFLECTIONS & STORIES FROM COVENANT CHURCH



The Manga Bible Experience

...“bring one person one step closer to Christ.” My first thought when I read that was, “Well, I can’t very well say no to that!”

Bonnie: Part of the our church’s Big Picture 2013 campaign included a commitment to “bring one person one step closer to Christ.” My first thought when I read that was, “Well, I can’t very well say no to that!” But as I thought about that commitment I realized that is exactly what I should be doing in my life; but in truth, I needed that reminder. So, with no one in mind for who that “one person” might be, I said yes to this commitment. I then waited to see what God would do with my simple willingness and newly opened eyes to discover that “one person.”

Upon leaving my Special Education teaching position with PSD a few years ago, I knew I somehow wanted to continue to work part time in the field but without all the meetings and paperwork that most

agencies require. A friend of mine knew of a family in need of someone to work with their son teaching him the skills to live independently. I met this incredible family and began working as a Life Coach with Cale three and half years ago. Working together over this period of time has allowed us to form a relationship – I help Cale learn to do things he needs to do, and he teaches me how to play the card game Yu-gi-Oh. So we work together and then we play cards together which has made our relationship more than just a work relationship – we are also friends. Over the past few months Cale started talking with me about his desire to figure out what he believes about God, or even if he believes in God. He initiated a number of conversations with me about God and about the church and all I had to do was mostly listen as he worked through his

thoughts on God and faith.

Cale: Typically I am cheery and outgoing with other people. I am fun to be around. After finishing high school I got a certificate in Building Maintenance and Landscaping. When I finished my certificate, I returned to Fort Collins and have lived on my own in an apartment. I did landscaping for a while and then went to work for the City of Fort Collins Parks Department for four years. I now work at the Otterbox Distribution Center and have worked there for almost 2 years. I love to play Yu-gi-Oh and have played for over 15 years (maybe); I loose track after so many years! I like to read a lot – generally fantasy

and sci-fi books and some action novels. I have many Star Wars books. One thing I look forward to every year is attending the Anime Convention in Denver.

Anime is a TV or movie

format that originated in Japan and contains lots of computer graphics based off of comic strip or graphic novels. Manga is a genre of comics created in Japan or by Japanese creators with a unique graphic art style. Anime and Manga used to be small, underground art forms, but are now gaining a larger following in the US.

Bonnie: In late February our daughter Carrie interviewed Cale about his church experiences as part of her independent study class on Disability and the Church at North Park Seminary. I was present for the interview and was struck with how well Cale articulates difficulties he has experienced in the church community. His insights about how he experiences church are eye opening to the unintentional barriers in place within the church. He is a voice to help me (and hope-

His insights about how he experiences church are eye opening to the unintentional barriers in place within the church.

Cale West
with Bonnie Bailey



...continued

fully us) understand things from a new perspective. He provides a refreshingly honest look at some things that can help the church to be fully inclusive, meaningful and welcoming to all. Without going into details, a few weeks after Carrie's interview, Cale experienced a very difficult time in his life.

During this difficult time as I listened to Cale's thoughts on God and church, I kept wondering in my prayers with God just how I could better communicate about faith to those whose thought processes (for whatever reason) differ from my own. I recognize the Bible is sometimes very difficult to understand, our "churchy" vocabulary can be very foreign, and the mysteries of God can't be explained. So how do I do this? My own resources seemed to be tapped out. So my question to God was, "So how do You do it Lord? How do You communicate to me and to so many people who are all over the map in different levels of understanding?" In asking the question, I recognized that His communication with each of us is personal. There isn't just one way. He meets us where we are. It "occurred" to me that I must speak the language of the "one person" rather than expecting them to understand and adapt to my language. Knowing that Cale loves reading Manga, I searched online to see if there was something in that genre that he could read. To my surprise, I found *The Manga Bible from Genesis to Revelation* by Siku. Cale read the entire book shortly after delivery and has now also read *Manga Jesus* by Siku.

Cale: *The Manga Bible* states it is an adaptation of the Holy Bible. For me, it is informative because I can put images to names, people, and places (at least somewhat). God and Satan are defined more as certain

character types so it is easier to connect with them - *The Manga Bible* makes them both a little less mystical to my understanding. I really like the art. It is well drawn and easy to figure out who is who. It is well written. One thing I really like about it is that it has sections that point you directly where to go in a real serious Bible for more information. It takes me back to areas I might otherwise skip because in a real Bible there is too much information. It shortens it up. The best thing about it is the art is really creative and the stories are told better because you can see who and what they are actually talking about. It is written in today's language and not written in religious jargon. It draws my interest where most Bibles have been dusty to me - I have no attention span for the serious Bible. I actually finished it all and I've never done that with a real Bible. I like how short it is. I really like the drawings of God and Satan - well thought out with better images. The image of Satan is dark and reminds me of a used car salesman with



beady eyes. The image of God is light, not so well defined, and there are three of them talking almost in stereo. I've never before read the Bible and been able to put together these abstract ideas without pictures. *The Manga Bible's* art makes things less abstract and more seeable. It's like watching a movie

I actually finished it all and I've never done that with a real Bible.

The Manga Bible Experience continued

It's a curious thing, but I committed to try and bring "one person one step closer to God" and in the process that one important person, Cale, has shown me things that have brought me closer to God.

where you know all the characters and they are like long time friends of yours.

On April 10, 2013 I wrote down five revelations after reading *The Manga Bible*. They are:

1. God exists. I was questioning His existence, but after reading *The Manga Bible* and looking outside at nature, it convinced me there is a higher design. Nature is too well planned. It amazes me too much!

2. Jesus was a rebel. His own culture wanted nothing to do with him and he never conformed to the ruling kings of other regions or religions.

3. God doesn't do face-to-face talks. This is hard to explain, but I was expecting an answer from God and only got silence.

4. I am not a conformist. I want to figure things out for myself rather than accept the status quo.

5. Tolerance is not what it appears to be. The world has too many religions and it is hard to know which one is right. I get different opinions from people I respect and not everyone views everything the same way.

Maybe someday I will actually figure stuff out from reading the Manga editions. Maybe given time these books will help me to figure out my faith. I would like to study *The Manga Bible* with other people because I found it highly informative and there are a lot of people like me who might not want to read the regular Bible because it is lengthy and hard to understand. *The Manga Bible* is short, has really good stories, and you can put the characters into images that are overlooked in a more realistic study. The Manga books have helped me talk to my friends about faith quite a good bit. It helps me talk about things that other people seem to un-

derstand from the older worded Bibles. It clarifies stuff for me. I've been surprised by the level of interest it has garnered from other people. It has drawn interest intellectually from many people I've talked with about it. It has sparked curiosity as a potential source of understanding the Bible.

Bonnie: When I asked Cale if he felt "one step closer to God" from this Manga Bible experience, he replied, "A little bit closer. When I get it all figured out it is going to feel really good. I have a long way to go. This is an epic (cool) resource for me about God and faith." It's a curious thing, but I committed to try and bring "one person one step closer to God" and in the process that one important person, Cale, has shown me things that have brought me closer to God. It's so wonderful how God does that...when we take these steps together, we all get closer to God.

Hope the Poem

Live for the moment,
hope for the future and
learn from your past.
When things are at their darkest,
look towards the dawn.
Light comes when things look darkest.
Look to the future and hope
with all your might.
Live for the now and keep on
dreaming for a better tomorrow.
Be like the Phoenix and be reborn
from the ashes of despair and
burst into the flames of hope.

Cale West

4/19/2013

Serving Strengthens Faith...Who Knew...

Many of our ECC community participated or at least were aware that 11 of our women went to Nicaragua providing the speaker and surrounding team for the CWF-Christian Women's Fellowship Annual Women's Retreat. There were over 80 women present, some a part of the core group of Christian women, many who serve the Lord there in a variety of missions and Christian programs and schools, and some just came seeking Him. Many endure physical hardships in their daily lives and are serving communities and raising children in limited circumstances. Some have been there 1-2 years and others have been serving there for 12-15 years. All were English speakers.

Our title was *James 1-The Power of God*. Michelle Lyons was the presenter for the weekend and I knew she would be amazing and exceed all expectations. I didn't expect that all the rest of us would have the opportunity to offer so much of our own truth and wisdom and that the Spirit of the Lord would use each one of us in such amazing ways...

The setting was stunning, a pristine beach and a beautiful new facility, but driving in we traveled over 40 miles of barren dusty roads with little to no infrastructure to speak of surrounding this oasis. There are no stores or restaurants and few towns of any size leading up to the resort. It was the first time for any of us at this new facility, so there were a few trials to encounter. Our presentation area was a surf shop when we arrived and by evening transformed into a

meeting room. Shortly into the first session on Friday evening the lights went out, all over the whole property. Uh oh, the enemy was starting his war, some thought. . No problem. A few of us whipped out our trusty flashlights and cell phones and Michelle continued to speak through the darkness. What an analogy. It got warm in our surf shop/ meeting room and so the MC opened all the doors and Ingrid Olson led us in song with her guitar, without acoustic sound, without words on the screen, and the voices were like those of the angels! Powerful worship into the dark and we heard later, through the open doors into the hearts of the other hotel guests and staff who were milling about the darkened patios and restaurant.

Whenever we all sang, in the dark or in the light Ingrid led us and commented that it seemed like a wall of praise and sound going up. The AV equipment had been checked and rechecked but somehow decided not to function by Sunday morning so all the music was offered without the words. Again, no problem. All weekend we seemed to just step casually over whatever difficulty arose..."Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds, James tells us. Michelle never stood alone in offering the Word as we "unpacked" the scriptures together. We had worksheets. We took a solo walk to write out our homework in private and share quiet time with the Lord. We wrote out all the exhortations from James 1: 1-27. 'Be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry' .was the one I chose and we studied the various applicable bible

All weekend we seemed to just step casually over whatever difficulty arose..."Consider it pure joy whenever you face trials of many kinds", James tells us.



Covenant Women in Nicaragua

Jane Mirandette



Serving Strengthens Faith...Who Knew

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verses. Ephesians 4:32 was my favorite to hold close and consider. The other exhortations too, Perseverance, asking for Wisdom, perfect faith, taking pride in humble circumstances; we unpacked them all!

One of my favorite events was the early Saturday morning prayer time in the Gazebo on the beach with the CWF ladies. Several of us offered prayers for each other and then we just listened to the crashing waves and shared and people spoke of the impact of Michelle's words in their lives. The bringing home and unpacking of scripture by delving deeply into James 1 was an exciting new concept that many of the women are still considering.

Our team shined throughout the weekend. Mollie Everitt recited all of James 1 from memory in front of everyone. We gathered as a team around Michelle on Saturday to anoint her and bolster her conviction that she truly was speaking the Word. Diane Gibbs and Anna Jenkins lead us in song. Julie Reed offered a humble and stunning testimony that had everyone in tears and with a sense of their own faith and conviction that we can each "Dare to Live Fully right where we are." Terri Boccanegra offered her Stephens Ministry abilities to some during our quiet times. Anna Yancey, Shawna Linstedt, Diane Borden and I as well as the others sang, hosted tables, and listened and listened and shared and just did whatever it took to make this time memorable and blessed for the women we were there to serve. Several of the women participating offered their testimonies in sweet and powerful ways. It was a very blessed time together. I am a part of both groups so this was a real answer to a prayer for me personally.

We had brought simple and lovely gifts that had been prepared by some of the women at ECC to place on the chairs at each session and they were so appreciated. Mollie stayed late on Saturday evening to share her skill in scrapbooking and crafts while some of both groups were there in the meeting room playing board games at the next table or off to bed or to sit by the ocean with friends. At midnight I went to check to be sure Mollie had a room key and there were still 15-20 women working on scripture cards happily crafting away with her. So much real fellowship happened. I know missions and retreats offer time for those spiritual ah-ha moments that change lives. This one was exceptional in that way and some of the lives most changed were ours! Ingrid

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has put together a short video that shows the physical highlights of the weekend:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awo-o7G18oY>

On the last morning Michelle called us together at the breakfast table to ask us to plan a fitting final event. Lots of ideas were considered and then we had it. We would call the women up to be blessed by one of each of us as a final gift. Wow. Really? We could do that, all of us? Not just Michelle with her ministry background and vast biblical knowledge. Okay, it was going to be in English, that would work, but us? Me? Offer that sacred ending to an already powerful blessed and life changing event?. Sure. We had after all, the words of James and most everyone would be wearing a name tag. So after Michelle's final session and after all of our songs of worship together, Michelle called the women up. The response was immediate, with tears in almost everyone's eyes, these wonderful women surged to their feet and came forward. Oh my, for me it was Spirit who spoke through me, it seemed I just knew what Word to say to each, what



Craft project with women of Ameya.

Nicaragua sunset



Lessons in Fostering

I reluctantly learned about what really matters. As much as I want to have my laundry, the dishes, and my house clean constantly... I can only do so much and investing time in my children is more important.

Lisa Russell



It's been almost two years since God asked us the question: "How would your life look different if you had the perspective of being missionaries in Fort Collins, CO?" Almost immediately, we heard our calling to foster parenting. As many of you know, we were placed with Isaac last July when he was only sixteen days old. He is a miracle child, making it through all sorts of adversities in his first days of life. Thinking we were getting a phone call for confirmation on our certification, it was a phone call asking us to take this little life for a month (since a family member was possibly to take him in August). Two hours later his big brown eyes and little body showed up at our door and moved quickly into our hearts. He became one of us so quickly.

What CPS (Child Protective Services) thought was going to be August, turned into eleven months of raising his little life. On May 23rd, Isaac's biological parents had their rights terminated and his aunt took custody of him with the hopes of finalizing an adoption by this Fall. We have had the privilege of getting to know his adoptive family, who lives in Florida, and are so happy that Isaac gets to go to such a wonderful home. They are a strong Christian family. They are also a foster family, and they have adopted other children. What are the odds?! They know the process of fostering and adopting. They can empathize as we hand over Isaac because they have been through the same process. This is just one of the many layers of God's hand in this story. I could write a whole book on the miracles, provisions and lessons that God has gifted us with in our first year of fostering, but here are a few highlights:

Releasing:

From the day we got Isaac, we have had to release him to the Lord. Most parents don't really release their children until they're eighteen and leaving for college. We have learned that none of our children are our own; they are God's first and He loves them even more than we do. When everything in my nature wanted to control the situation with Isaac, I had to release. When I was anxious about his future, I had to release. When I wanted to keep him for myself, I had to release. Even after the "final releasing" of buckling him into his car seat and saying goodbye, we have had to keep releasing a lot of our anxious thoughts and responsibilities. Our children can be idols in our lives, so we have to be willing to place them in the shadow of God's almighty wing and TRUST him with our children's lives.

We quickly found out that we are not meant to do this calling alone. First of all, we need Jesus desperately.

Contentment in the Midst of Chaos:

We found out we were expecting a baby while we were in the middle of our home-study last year. On January 6th, we welcomed Samuel James into this world and our crazy home. At that time, Isaac was six months old, so we had a newborn, a six-month old, and a five-year old. I like to describe our life at home as "triage" during that time. It was physically demanding, but I reluctantly learned about what really matters. As much as I want to have my laundry, the dishes, and my house clean constantly... I can only do so much and investing time in my children is more important. Especially knowing I only had a short time with Isaac, I didn't want to spend all day every day trying to keep up with my house because I ended up drowning anyway and didn't get to have quality time with the kids.

I read a great quote in the midst of it: "Great moms have dishes in their sink, laundry to be done, dirty kitchen floors and HAPPY KIDS."

Embracing Pain:

Everyone asks, "Isn't it hard to foster?" Well, yes... we would be cold-hearted people if it wasn't. But hard does not equal bad. Actually, hard has been really rewarding and good for us. First and foremost, we get to understand and know God's character through pain. He is the utmost example of embracing pain for good and that is our inspiration as we accept the heartache that comes with handing over our foster-son to another family. We were able to love, nurture, and raise him for his first eleven months of life so that he can form healthy attachments later. So, even though saying good-bye was the hardest situation we have ever gone through, it was also the most rewarding.

We are Needy:

We quickly found out that we are not meant to do this calling alone. First of all, we need Jesus desperately. He was, and is, our sure foundation in the unknown through this process. He was our hope when we were worried about Isaac's future. He was our comfort in the midst of heartache. He was our strength and perseverance in days we were tired and weary. He is our everything, providing for all our needs in each moment.

We also realized how much we need people. We learned to accept help and ask for it, which is a very humbling thing to learn how to do; however, we also learned that we can rob people of the blessing it is to help others if we don't. God used people to help us with meals, childcare, finances,

cleaning our house and more. We were always taken care of when we weren't too prideful to accept the help. We were blown away by the support and love the ECC community, family, and friends poured out. It was a beautiful picture of how The Body of Christ is supposed to look: everyone using their gifting to support one another in God's calling. Not everyone is supposed to be a foster parent, but we are all supposed to love the orphans and the widows (James 1:27) and you have done this by supporting us and loving Isaac.

So what now? We are taking a little break—we don't know for how long, but we are praying and we will open up when God says to. Right now we are in the middle of getting our re-certification and we are an open home for respite care (short-term help for foster families). We know eventually we will continue to foster, so you may see us with three children again...or more...soon! Our hope is to eventually take sibling groups since there are few homes in Larimer County that are open to that. You can continue to follow our adventures and lessons by reading my blog at therussfam.blogspot.com



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Walking Through the Open Doors

God is stirring our hearts.

Knock and the door will be opened, seek the kingdom of God and you will find it.

The Lord has been stirring our hearts.

First a little history:

When we were dating and in the first year of our marriage, we dreamed and talked about traveling. Sometimes our adventure were only driving for a few hours through the suburbs of Chicago, other time as far a Cornwall England. And we talked and worshipped together.

Years passed in our marriage as we tried to fit into the traditional American family - 2 kids, house, dog, jobs, and our mounting debt. As the years passed the drives got shorter and the dreams collected dust and cobwebs. In 2006 we were given the opportunity to vacation for 2 weeks in San Juan Del Sur, Nicaragua and visit my parents. and then in 2009 we visited my parents in Costa Rica. Both trips awakened in us a dormant yearning for adventure, travel and a desire to be with people of a different culture. and to share the world with our kids. But we were too entrenched in the American dream and all the debt that went along with it. We longed to go back to Nicaragua with the missions team once our church established that relationship with Ameya, but we were stuck.

Shelley's parents (Dan and Carol) who retired in Central America- first in Nicaragua, then in Costa Rica, and now in Panama. Have asked us many times to consider moving down to where they were at, to be part of the entrepreneurial idea that my Dad had. I am always up for adventure, but Dan sees the bigger picture... There has always been a great reason to say no, or not yet. Kids too young, love my job, we just moved, we just bought a house. But back to my first line, God is stirring our hearts.

The Next part of the story

It all changed in November when

Dan said, "Hey why don't we consider a move to Panama?" This was after my folks had quit asking us to move down to Central America. I just looked at him and said what? Now? (see the role reversal here?) and we started to dialogue about it. What does an international move look like, what would we do for money, what about the kids, friends, church, all those things that we hold dear. The more Dan talked the more I was whoa!!! wait up... We decided if this is something we are thinking about maybe we need wiser people to help us out... make sure that we see all we need to see, and possibly hear a different point of view. We enlisted 4 couples in the church, and Pastor Bert, to share our dream with and to ask them to pray with us and advise us. Of those 4 couples and Pastor Bert, who we have shared our heart with, no one has said... you're crazy! (those of you who know us, know we are!) leave here to the unknown? They all said, wow! how amazing... It will be life changing for sure.. I wish I was going, or doing what you are doing. We based on the growing desire, we set out some guidelines..

*A fleece if you will..
And we started to
pray in earnest, Lord
let this be you, not us.
Show us your will and
way, not our own.*

what do we need to do to make it happen.. A fleece if you will... If these things happened then we could go, if not, we cannot. And we started to pray in earnest, Lord let this be you, not us. Show us your will and way, not our own.

Dan started doing research on jobs, and we decided that the teaching English would be a great way to get our foot in the door; he started researching how to get that certification. We stumbled on many programs all with this little tweak to make their program better. Then he happened upon a program that was currently in Costa Rica that was opening up a satellite school in Panama. 3 weeks, and you did a student teaching part to make sure.. we thought that sounds like a great plan for Dan... he hasn't been in the classroom for a while as a student, the online classes seemed not quite the right fit. So he began a conversation with Bernal the head of the program. We had so many questions, that he agreed to

Dan & Shelley Seavey



continued

skype with us one evening... Well that sealed the deal for Dan. and I had to agree it seemed like the best possible scenario... I was a little scared though... interesting to me as I am, the gypsy who wants to go, and now I am digging in my heals... I started to pray to see Dan's vision for the permanence that he was talking about.

Our first thought was for Dan and Ian to head down in July, Dan to take the class, Ian for the time with Nana and Papa that we promised him... I would stay with Ahna and work Dan's church job, and join them after the class was done for a few weeks.

The next big thing was if we are to go, we need to be totally out of debt. A big order as we were carrying way more than we both felt comfortable with. We started looking at our assets and both decided bitterly that selling our home would have to happen. Even if we didn't move we felt that getting out from under the load of debt was crucial to our survival. The Seavey's needed to get their house in order. It was way harder for Dan to part with the house than I. He has put so much work into it. All of his hard work did pay off! We really did enjoy the time that we spent there, but I was tired of the constant projects and work that it represented. With Dan working 2 jobs and myself working, I was jealous of the time he spent working on the house, and not with me and the kids. The tough decision was made.

While the house was going on the market, Dan thought it would be a good idea to take a trip to check things out... Dan was originally going to go, but when I got my new job working at the school district and had a spring break, that plan changed and I was nominated to go. I took a trip to Panama to visit my parents to see if we could live here, do a little reconnaissance. I met with attorneys, friends of my parents, other ex-pats with families, checked out banks, schools, met with Bernal, generally talked to

anyone who would talk to me about relocating a family to a new country. So much information was packed into that week. I met some amazing people, and they too were all excited for our journey. I left Panama with the realization that I could not make this decision for the family, the whole family had to experience Panama! Try it on if you will, and see if we can make the leap. We would head down for the summer and then decide what we as a family should do.

When I got back from Panama, I felt so overwhelmed by my experience and processing that I was losing some sleep. The next church service that I got to attend, during worship I felt God say to me let go of the details! Stop planning and walk through the doors that I am opening for you. The sense of peace that filled my body as the stress left my body was unreal! And it has become my mantra. He has provided for our family more that we have asked for, or imagined. He will show us the right path.

The next part of the story...

God showed up in the most amazing way, when we took our hands off and just started letting Him lead the way.

God showed up in the most amazing way, when we took our hands off and just started letting Him lead the way. We were getting our house ready to sell, and selling off the furniture that needed to go. A nice family answered our ad on craigslist for dressers. They walked through the door and loved our house, and we felt an instant kindred spirit with them... well I mentioned that we were considering moving out of the country and that is why we were downsizing our stuff.. She said I am just taking my test on Tuesday.... I love your house, i would sell it for you for less as it would be my first one. Dan and I didn't say anything. Knowing our profit margin was going to be skinny we decided to pray on it, and get to work finishing up all those little projects. Those who own a house and have done work on them know that it is finishing details that take way more time than the project took! My goodness. The first meeting with the realtor was pretty

I felt God say to me let go of the details! Stop planning and walk through the doors that I am opening for you.

Walking.... continued

*Our God is a God of
the little details.*

disappointing.. She pulled comps and it looked as if our house could sell for the low 170's! Not what we wanted to hear. Dan and I both prayed and decided that \$187 was the right amount that we were going to list the house for.. we felt as we has an appraisal done earlier and it appraised for \$185 that it was a good price. Disappointing as we wanted to be able to pay everything off! and \$187 was just not that magic number for us. But we said it was a starting point and God was faithful and would give us the wisdom we needed to pay everything else off. We listed the house March 19th with a kickoff open house... as I was in Panama, Dan said no showing beforehand... so I jokingly told our realtor she had 24-28 hours to sell it as i could not keep the house that clean for showings daily.. again God showed up and gave us a miracle. Not only did our house sell in 2 hours, we were under contract by Monday morning after an unprecedented 12 offers to go through, (But we feel like we got to pick the best one, prayed over it) and we sold it for more than we were asking and at the end of the day, were able to pay off 100% of our debt and even pay for 1/2 of our plane tickets! We were so blessed, but a new issue had come up..



We had sold our house so quickly that we were homeless before we wanted to be. I looked at Dan and said... hey we have to be out of house April 26th... school is out May 31st.. we don't have any bills associated with a house or anything... why don't we head down there for the whole summer. If we are going to consider a move, it would be great if we could try it on first and see if it works. Dan looked at me like I was crazy at first, then we started to process what that would look like. We called my parents and said hey we got this idea. Of course it was met with "come on down"... so we decided that we now needed to consult with Bert and the council.... tell him of our new vision and see what he thought of our crazy plan... He said that Dan could obtain a leave of absence for the summer, and it was looking

like thumbs up all around. So we booked our tickets! Leaving June 4th and coming back August 7th! We were ready! Ready for the first step of our journey, to try it on.

Now I did say we were ready, but ready for June 4th, it wasn't June 4th yet and we had no place to live...rentals for such a short period of time were astronomically expensive as was a hotel... God again showed up and provided us with people who had space in their homes for our family to stay!! We were humbled again and felt incredibly grateful for those who became the people who put a roof over our head and embodied the body of Christ for us.

Now our God is a God of the little details. One of those little details was our dog Missy. She has been a part of our family for almost 9 years, but upon exploring moving animals even for a short period of time, it was costly and quarantine was 40 days.. UGH! So we began to look for a home for our dog. We had a lot of interest, but all those people said not a good time, just had a baby, etc. So we were despairing over Missy. A cousin was coming to pick up family furniture one Sunday, and I in passing said hey would you like a dog? She looked at me and said well we have been looking at shelters for the last 3 months. We began to talk and Missy went home with her that afternoon... and not just a home... a home with 2 acres of land, 6 kids to play with and another dog; what an amazing answer to prayer!

At this point of the saga, we are delighted to let you know that our family will be trying on living in a different country for the summer! We have been changed forever by this experience so far, and are prayerful that we will be continue to be changed by our experiences. Please join us in prayer that we will continue to have the courage to walk through the doors that God has opened for us.

See ya in August!

*You can follow us
on our blog:*

[http://
seaveyadventure.blogspot.com/](http://seaveyadventure.blogspot.com/)

Growing Community on Common Ground

Two years ago I took a bike ride across the country, through my fears, and into a hopeful future. As a new believer, I sought a physical event to figuratively bid farewell to the *old* me and celebrate the *new*, re-born *Christian* me. Of course, there were naysayers who wondered if there might be a safer, easier way to ring in this new chapter of my life. But as the adage goes—Father knows best. God knew that I needed to be alone, vulnerable; on a bicycle; in the midst of tornado season and a flooded Mississippi River for me to “see” with new eyes—His eyes. As I pedaled, I caught the first glimpse of God’s vision for me, my community, and hopefully, this church.

Over the course of my ride, I met 100s of people—veterans, addicts, housewives, teachers, coaches, police officers, truck drivers, and janitors. I slept in public parks, strangers’ backyards, a hotel freezer and a jail. I talked a lot. I listened more. And of all the sights my new eyes took in; all the truths I heard—three have yet to leave me:

We are surrounded by people in desperate need. They are young and old, men and women. They are next door and far away. They are known and unknown. In common, they are all seeking. They crave community, healing, and a sense of place.

For whatever reason, the church is the last place most of these people will go to fill these holes in their lives.

Food is the common denominator between all of us. Whatever our other differences might be, we all eat. **In fact, so much of what we care about—human rights, fair wages, tradition, the environment, the economy, our children’s health—all of it intersects on our dinner plates every night.**

Once home, these realities plagued me. And though my ride was long over, everything in its wake—the questions, the story—continued. I sought ways to replicate the *feeling* of my ride—the long hours of real

labor, outside—and was hired on at Happy Heart Farm, Colorado’s first CSA. As I worked from May to October that season, I made endless connections to the non-believers I worked with, to the land, and most importantly, to the Larimer County Food Bank where the farm donated excess veggies. I learned that 1 in 5 Poudre School District (PSD) students is food insecure—they have limited or uncertain access to the kinds of food necessary to lead active, healthy lives—and 40,000 Larimer County residents suffer from inadequate nutrition. I learned that food insecurity revolves around the uncertainties of daily life—that a job loss or a car repair can financially compromise people living just above or under the poverty line. Things that food secure people take for granted like credit cards and reliable vehicles can be the difference between healthy food making it to the table or not. If you live 5 miles from a grocery store and have no way to get there, you must find food elsewhere—even if that means shopping for food at a nearby convenience store where foods are calorically dense but nutritionally lacking. Food deserts—areas without the presence of large grocery stores where healthy options exist—are present in every state and are highly correlated with food insecurity. If people are living in or close to the poverty line *and* they live in a food desert, food insecurity is almost inevitable. Ft. Collins has five.

It was here that all the dots from my bike ride began to connect. As I hesitantly followed the path they created, it led naturally to the threshold of this church that I call home. Was the role of the church even bigger and more beautiful than I had ever imagined? Could we somehow reach out to people in need, help them restore their health and wellbeing, create community, *and* be the hands and feet of Christ in a post-modern world?

With my new eyes, everything looked different—my history as a science teacher, speaker and writer—even simple things like grass seemed an under-utilized resource

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Julie Reed



Growing Community...

with potential. Something clicked.

On a wing and prayer, I drank too much coffee one night, stayed up ridiculously late, created a PowerPoint presentation and hit send before I could change my mind. To my shock, Bert was intrigued by the vision. We decided to sit with it awhile. And sit I did. Although I planned, scribbled, and dreamed, I took little real action. I didn't want to invite people into this vision, ask for their time, money, or energy, if it might not ever happen. I mostly kept my vision to myself until a coffee meeting with a café-owner friend. I shared my fear of inviting others into the mix before I had money, before I had a go-ahead from anyone, before I had a real plan. And he said, "Julie, the café's story didn't begin with the first meal we served. The story started two years ago when my wife and I started talking about this crazy idea we had. Get out there. Have conversations. Start inviting people into the story. Who doesn't want to be a part of a really good story?"

So here we are. You are officially invited into this really, *really* good story. It has a name. And though it began as *my* story, I am hopeful that it will become *our* story. **The Food School at Common Ground Urban Farm**—right here at home, our church.

Seventeen months have passed since that late-night PowerPoint and some of you have been spectators for quite some time as you've watched this dream slowly become real. But the rest of you are probably wondering, "What is she talking about *exactly*?"

We are uniquely positioned here—walking distance from so many residential, recreational, medical, and retirement facilities—is no accident. We are so close to these establishments, but do we really know our neighbors? Do they know us? Can our

church better convey who we are and what we believe to people on the outside looking in? Is it possible to grow *new* community outside of our church doors but on our property? It is my hope to create common ground for both believer and non-believer, young and old, food secure and food insecure, right in our own backyard. What if our manicured lawn became a working urban farm? What if we began to use our state-certified kitchen for nutrition education? This vision—The Food School at Ground Urban Farm—a separate non-profit organization—has a multi-faceted mission but at the heart

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of it all, it's to do Kingdom work through education, empowerment, and of course, community-building around the concept of nutrition education, hands-on agricultural experiences, and "common ground." People *need* natural areas to play, heal, learn, eat, and gather. The Food School at Common Ground Urban Farm wants to be exactly *that* kind of

place. I would love for our church to be *that* kind of a place. We hope to remind people—*any* people—that common ground can always be found, regardless of age, education, orientation, socio-economic demographic, or ethnicity. Here, The Food School and ECC will share common ground—we will occupy the same space, literally. But our common ground will also be figurative as we connect to one another through love, learning, and the land.

I came to Christ as a full-blown adult—a rarity these days. At the time, I didn't see God saving me. I saw *people*—people in this church who gifted me with *relationship* and changed my eternal destiny. Although I can most assuredly credit God for my conversion now, at the time, I saw it differently. I credited the women of this church with having saved me, and then, eventually, I came to know God *through* them. People in relationship are God's remarkable redemption plan in *action*. God through people, stepping



Polaris students discuss food equity & food insecurity at the church.



Polaris students enjoy the end results of their Food School Intensive

continued

into lives, teaching, guiding, showing The Way—as they step into a new community built from the ground up. God meets us right *there*. In the messy. In the laughter. In the conversation, the tears, and the joy. God does His Holy work inside of our church walls. He will do it outside our church too—in the near future, on our transformed property—with us on our knees in the dirt, weeding thistles and bind weed with strangers, friends, family—God meets people wherever they are.

I want to share this quote from Franciscan priest, Richard Rohr.

“We cannot think our way into a new kind of living. We must *live* our way into a new way of thinking.”

We can think all day about where it is that Jesus resides. Thinking doesn't change much and if we are honest it doesn't feed us either. But what if we started *living* like Jesus? Jesus didn't throw his name or his connections around. On the road to Emmaus, we are told that Jesus walked with the people. They had no idea who he was, and he didn't tell them. Instead, he lived in that moment with them, side by side. They were attracted to him but weren't exactly sure why. People who come to The Food School and volunteer at Common Ground Urban Farm *will* see, hear, and feel *this* something. Fellow believers, I seek transformation: not just for myself, but also for the church I love so much; for the non-believers I ache for, for the believers who hunger for more but don't know how to get what they crave. I want restoration—for people, for this property. I know that we are not the kind of church that would put so much energy, time, and money into building this amazing facility to have its rooms sit empty. Over 60 groups (with over 5000 usage hours) call our facility home. Shouldn't we have the same high expectations for our property? Can our grass, our space, be a living sacrifice to help do Kingdom work? I think it can.

There is, of course, much I don't bring to the table. Despite The Food School's blos-

soming partnerships (Miramont Lifestyle Fitness, Polaris Expeditionary School, The FOCO Café, The Food Bank of Larimer County), a five-member board, and burgeoning 501c3 status, I am not an architect, an accountant or a lawyer. But I do know that God will work with what I have, as we are told in John Chapter 6. Jesus sits with his disciples on a mountainside, and watches a massive crowd approach. Jesus asks Philip what they might have to feed all of them. Philip replies that it would take more money than they have to buy food for everyone. But another disciple tells Jesus about a little boy who has five barley loaves and two fish. He wonders aloud how far these resources will go among so many in need of food. Jesus takes the loaves and gives thanks. Then he distributes the bread to all 5,000 people. He did the same with the fish. Everyone ate until they were full. A miracle.

The disciples faced massive need and a complete lack of resources. Sound familiar? They even said, “We're not part of the solution here! We don't have enough to go around.” And Jesus asks them, “Well, what *do* you have?” The disciples came to him with almost nothing, just meager amounts of bread and fish. They must have felt so helpless, knowing what they had wasn't enough. But Jesus said to them, “Bring what you've got. Let *me* do the miracle.” God doesn't expect me, our church council, any volunteer, or Food School board member to have every answer regarding this project, have access to every resource, or have their hands on a steady flow of money; He isn't asking *us* to perform the miracles. He's just asking us to bring what we *have*. And, my brothers and sisters, we have *so much*. Let's put it to good work.

Check out The Food School at Common Ground Urban Farm on Facebook where you can learn the nitty-gritty details! Wanna chat more about this journey? Call me! (970)672-7356



If kids make it, they'll eat it!
Food education at every age is good for kids.



The winning salad from the Polaris Chopped competition.



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Have a reflection or story you'd like to share? Let's start by contacting the office.