

Tim,

Mom read me this note while I was sitting at a roadside picnic table at Dick's Creek Gap, near Hiawassee, Ga. I had just finished 11 miles from the Muskrat Creek Shelter, and was pretty tired and sore. But, most of all, at the time, I was still spending my mornings looking for you and your brothers, hearing your steps behind me, or imagining that I saw you down the trail ahead, remembering. You may be able to imagine what effect your letter had on me, even hearing it over a cell-phone connection. Now that I am able to read it and remain somewhat coherent I will try to tell you what it said to me.

I think one of the phenomena that occur while hiking is that the world of the spirit becomes more real, or said another way, the noise and distractions of our normal lives are removed so we can see the reality of the love of our family, the love of our friends, the love of God. In the mornings when hiking is easy I write letters in my head, most of which never reach print, too many of which end when my emotions overwhelm me. That day was no exception. I had gotten to the point where I was considering stopping at the foot of Springer Mountain, postponing the final ascent until some year when you and your brothers (and Michael) could do it with me. If we never got around to it, so be it.

But, of course, last week I did climb Springer, alone, and the most surprising consequence was that it wasn't a really big deal. If all of you guys had been there it would obviously have been a whole lot more fun, but in the week since Hiawassee I had time to do a lot of thinking and I realized that once again the trail is a microcosm of life. I shouldn't ask or expect my sons to walk the trail, or live their lives, to give my life meaning. My "trail" isn't your trail, and although I am grateful for the parts we have walked together, mine is going different places for different reasons than yours, and this is how it should be. The idea of boycotting the final climb unless you all could be with me was really a reaction to the much larger loss Mom and I are experiencing as our family has dispersed and we are left with just our treasured memories and confusion about our purpose from here on out. The trail just focused the emotions and allowed me to see the real issue more clearly.

But God is faithful in all things. Sometime in the ensuing days I found myself thinking more and more about the people you have all become, the trails you are walking, the places you will see that I will never go, the wonders you will experience - and I realized that I rejoice most completely in knowing that you have your own lives to lead and are capable of walking your own trails without me. And God whispered to me the great truth of loving other people: You must increase and I must decrease, or, in the vernacular, "Its not about me, its about you". And thinking more and more about you and Dave and Ben and Dan and Carlisle and Michael, and the miles we have traveled together, I was glad for it all and when I got to Springer I climbed it more as a beginning than an end. Thank you for helping me get there.

Love,
Dad.

-----Original Message-----

From: tjgreen@us.ibm.com [<mailto:tjgreen@us.ibm.com>]

Sent: Sunday, July 16, 2000 8:25 PM

To: akgreen@bellsouth.net

Subject: this morning

Dear Dad,

This morning as I rode to work, I was listening to Sing for Joy on WCPE 89.7, and I heard a simple arrangement of The Lord's Prayer. I started to sing along, as is my wont, when I suddenly found I couldn't get any sound past the lump in my throat, and my eyes brimmed with tears. I'm not sure why, but of a sudden I was powerfully aware of my love for you and Mom, and for your children, my beloved brothers and sisters, and for their various broods, my nieces and nephews. Wandering on from there, I started thinking about Grandpa, and the letter you sent. I don't know how others received it (well, except for David, who read it at work, and fled to the bathroom to compose himself), but I was deeply touched. Just on the face of it, although I've long understood what an amazing man Grandpa is (it's hard not to notice), the stories you shared reinforce and augment that truth. Beyond that, though, after reading it I felt closer to both of you. As you were (and are) to me, Grandpa was (and is) to you - larger than life, the father of my childhood, the man who knew everything, the "here" that stopped the buck, and the rock I lean on; always have, always will. It's hard to imagine you as me, and Grandpa as you, but your letter helps, because we share something pretty fundamental - my father is much like yours, I think. Just wanted to tell you that, and I'll talk to you soon I hope.

Love,

Tim