

New Direction

SPRING 2009

PO Box 968 Mars Hill, NC 28754 (828) 680-9417

Dear Friends,



Not long ago we were at the North Carolina Museum of History and had the privilege of viewing an exhibit of photography taken by soldiers during the War in Viet Nam. The exhibit gave those of us who had never experienced being in the trenches of such a war a closer look from the eyes and heart of a soldier. One of the photos looked quite familiar. It was of dirty hands with fingers which were raw and infected. The caption beneath described the soldier's realization that this was the norm while in the rice paddies, having to trudge through constant mud and mire, with fingers burned and bleeding from grasping onto weeds to pull a step further. The hands look much like those of many of the boys who have come to live at New Direction Farm. While not engaged in a political war their hands reflect the conflict within. The lack of careful hygiene and gnawed cuticles are only a symptom of an engrained belief they are lone rangers in this life journey.



Some of the teens who come to New Direction Farm experienced severe and prolonged loss in their lives. Whether it was physical or sexual abuse, or abandonment or neglect there was an early attachment injury. Regardless of the present safety of their current living situation many are still operating from early experience with the mindset that one really does not need others in community. *"At some point, coping with prolonged loss meant detaching from it. We disguise our attachment needs with a mask of independence and self-sufficiency. We may say 'I don't need her; she means nothing to me. All I need is me'.*

In this detached state, we may turn inward, finding comfort in a fantasy life. Or we may turn to addictive behavior and replace our need for relationship with drugs, alcohol, the Internet, shopping and/or pornography.” (Attachments by Clinton and Sibcy)

I often wonder about soldiers on the front line and how they must simply have to fortress their hearts in order to survive. We often talk with the boys about the sacrifice many have made to fight for freedom and protection and how this meant a natural dying to self for the greater cause. We have realized that some of the teens need to be brought to a point beyond their comfort zone in order for the fortress to begin to crumble. Several weeks ago, just as it was time for the guys to come in for hot chocolate and showers after an afternoon working on the farm in snow showers and muck, Dave announced they would be taking an evening hike. A rumble traveled through the crowd, disbelief that he would actually do such a crazy thing when it was time to come in and relax. It wasn't long before a fist fight ensued between two of the boys. This is a rare occurrence up here with the current group. Both of the young men involved have had extreme trauma in their past. But something has happened over these past months of living together up here. They were beginning to form bonds; true bonds of relationship and brotherhood with one another. And God was able to use the time of fisticuffs as a time of heart rendering in each of them.

Over these past ten years I have witnessed many teens move in who were totally oblivious to the needs of others. Our three meals a day are always eaten family style around the table with food passed one to another. Other than a more healthy way to eat, there is



also another big reason we choose to serve the food in this manner rather than preparing their plates cafeteria style. It's the one-to-another that is a vital piece of living together. It is not unusual for a new teen to be so absorbed in self he or she will spoon multiple servings for themselves without a thought to the others who will also receive a portion. As well, the rule of continuing to pass the dishes until all are served is a difficult one to adhere to. Conversation around the table is another area of challenge. Some are not used to the two stages of communication being speaking and listening but rather talk at people often interrupting others in the middle of a sentence. In actuality it is a sad picture for this person who has lived such a fortified existence there has been no sense of that valuable two way street of relationship.



What seems to have evolved in America is a turning inward; a sense of independence rather than interdependence. I used to think independence was a good thing. I think most Americans have been raised on the concept of independence being a notable character trait. But this is contrary to God's design for humankind. We are to be dependent upon God and interdependent with one another. I believe what has occurred in America with the loss of family roots and connected relationship is that we have, unknowingly, been raising a generation or two of even more disconnected individuals who think and act independently of the welfare of the community. What we are finding up here on the mountain is that for a heart to be fortified there didn't necessarily have to occur extreme trauma in the past....just a lack of connection. The number of young adults in their twenties still being dependent upon their parents is a symptom of this problem in our country.

I think at the core of it all has been a fear of allowing children to suffer in a good way. For gratification to be delayed rather than immediately quenched. For natural consequences to fall where they should so, at a young age, one learns the law of sowing and reaping.

Just think about what has occurred in our culture just over the past 10 years. Walk through a grocery store or mall or glance at the driver next to you at the stop light. Most everyone seems to be in a hurry. Most everyone is talking on a cell phone or listening to an ipod. I thought we might be having an increase in schizophrenia because there seemed to be a lot of people talking to themselves. I then was informed they are wearing a cell phone device attached to their ear. (we have been living on this remote mountain a little too long) Many households have several television sets, computers, telephones. Gone are the days when the family would sit together to watch a program. Now everyone can have their personal choice. While it seems as though technology is enabling people to stay more in touch, in reality it is creating a false sense of relationship which is more prone to be superficial and pseudo rather than deep and real. A friend of ours drives a school bus. He described an eerie picture of 6:30 in the morning and looking into the mirror to see many small lights in the back of the bus and silence. Everyone was text messaging on their cell phones rather than talking with one another.

So, as far as attachment disorders it seems, by nature of our choices in this present day, we are creating some unhealthy detachments within our families by simply following what seems to have become the norm in America. And in the bigger picture the real problem is that we have replaced a primary relationship with our Maker with anything and everything. And then wonder why we feel so exhausted and emotionally numb. In this present day our encouragement to families is to assess the "state of your family". Who is really seated on the throne within your home? We are in a war. Each and everyone one of us. A spiritual war. But our enemies are unseen. In many ways I am thankful the hands of some of these boys reflect their inner anguish. Perhaps they will realize, at a very young age, they have been prisoners of war and will realize their need of a Savior.

There once was a young man who lived here who was adopted out of a horribly abusive situation in which his mother caused physical scarring. His adoptive mother, out of sympathy, tried to overcompensate for the damage his biological mother had caused. By the time this young man came to the farm at the age of 15, he was a proud and defiant "*lone ranger*". Whenever possible he would isolate himself while home on weekends, saying that time with the family felt awkward. After a period of time, his mother began holding him accountable for areas of disregard and disrespect. On one occasion in which he lied to her she made him go outside and rake the leaves for several hours. When he returned to the farm on Sunday night the blister on his hand was the first thing he wanted us to see. Throughout the week he would baby the blister, putting on soothing ointment and a bandaid. It was a good pain. And from a deep place in his heart he knew that it was from the heart of a loving mother who would no longer settle for his detachment whether through lying or isolation. One who had skillfully built walls of defense to strategically keep other hearts at bay, found himself tearful several weeks later because he didn't want to leave his family until they had reconciled an argument they had with one another.

A couple of months ago, the boys interviewed a Viet Nam War veteran. We feel these interviews are important for the boys as they enable them to see life from various perspectives. Each of the boys participates in asking questions and then each writes the story of the person's life. We are hoping this tool will help them to begin to understand the turns a life can take and the choices along the way.



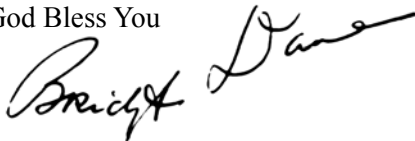
When asked what the most important thing learned from life, this man said

“everyone is fighting their own personal battles so be gentle to them” ;

an intrinsic belief we hope these boys will take to heart.

We want to thank you for your help in enabling us to continue this work with teens and families. We are continuing the making of crafts: wooden pens, wreaths, signs, furniture. Should there be an occasion in which you would be interested in purchasing something for a gift just give us a call. We would love to show you what we have been up to.

God Bless You

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Bridget Dave".

Bridget, Dave, staff and students

“Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity.” Joel 2:13

EXCHANGED LIFE MINISTRIES
dba New Direction Ministries
P. O. Box 968
Mars Hill, NC 28754-0968