

God Works in Mysterious Ways

Have you ever considered the events occurring in your life, and had the realization that God really does have a few things in mind for you??? That somehow, things happen for a reason; both good and bad? And the events in our lives often seem to connect, somehow. Connections. This story is about connections... connections that are very obviously made through the works of our Lord. *God, indeed, works in mysterious ways.*

My first real contact with an Indian reservation was back in 1995. I was a graduate student at the State University of New York-Potsdam. Most folks don't expect much in the way of civilization in Upstate New York, let alone an extension of a university. After all, it snows up there at least 9 months out of the year! Sounds a bit like Montana, right? But, a last minute decision by the Army brought my family to the region, and I was blessed with the opportunity to earn a teaching certificate and a graduate degree. *God works in mysterious ways!*

During my schooling, I was asked to put together a social studies unit for middle school children. I wanted to bring focus and appreciation to the culture and contributions of at least one Native American tribe. I wanted students to have an appreciation and working knowledge of the roots our country. I knew my family would be moving to Washington State the next year, so I called my mother-in-law (who lives in Ephrata, Washington) and asked her if she might suggest a tribe (in the region) for me to research and contact. My mother-in-law was a school nurse for a number of years, so I knew she had a wonderful working knowledge of the region. What I didn't know was that (many years ago) she actually served as a community health nurse at the Lapwai Reservation in Idaho! Imagine my surprise! *God works in mysterious ways!*

I made contact with Lapwai immediately and was overwhelmed by their generosity in sharing their culture and history. Through numerous phone calls with kind tribal members, and the receipt of several packets of historical information, I was able to put together a truly remarkable unit! As a result of this tribe's incredible kindness, I not only had earned an "A" on the project, but I also knew that this would be a unit that I would be teaching someday... *God willing!*

The following spring, I flew out to Washington with one mission in mind: I needed to find a job... a teaching position. I was able to line up three informal interviews, and I made sure I brought my Native American Unit as a sample of work. I was hired shortly thereafter! The principal at Ephrata Middle School said he was most impressed with my Native American Unit and would love to have me teaching in his building. *God works in mysterious ways!*

Fast forward to 2009, Ephrata, Washington, where I'm still teaching at the middle school! My family and I became members of Holy Trinity Lutheran Church about a year after our move to Ephrata. We love our church, the people and the traditions. It is the first church my husband and I have attended regularly and of which we have been members. It is the only church my children have attended regularly. Both children were baptized and

confirmed in this church. We know that we will always have the love and support of our church family. *God is good!*

The past few years have been difficult for our church, as it has been for many churches. Of course, dwindling attendance, and budget shortfalls have been at the root of much of this difficulty. These issues didn't stop a particular high school student from pestering the heck out of folks to restart a high school youth program, though! Granted, we only had six high school students, but that didn't stop him from pushing the issue until he had a program! That pest would be my son, Clayton. I have to say, I was a bit surprised with his tenacity! *God works in mysterious ways!*

Our high school youth group met a couple times a month with the pastor and a couple of parents. They began researching the possibility of participating in a mission trip or servant event. They wanted to make a contribution to others in the name of Christ. Although we have a few local church youth groups who were traveling to different countries for their missions, these amazing young people felt that there was plenty need in our region. They wanted to begin by helping their brothers and sisters here! With the support of the pastor and parents, they decided to focus on the Rocky Boy Indian Reservation, in Montana. When I found out the location of Rocky Boy, I was elated! Having spent time researching the Nez Perce 15 years earlier, I knew we would be near Bear Paw, the surrender site of Chief Joseph! *God works in mysterious ways!*

Our pastor contacted Pastor Linda and the ball was rolling! The research and planning had begun! Fundraisers for travel would occur regularly! Pancake dinners, Easter brunch, and good will offerings! These kids were driven and their excitement was contagious! Who would have thought that these teenagers would have been such a driving force! Our lovely group of quilting grandmas even got involved by sewing 30 quilts to be hand delivered to Our Savior Lutheran Church! *God works in mysterious ways!*

Six months before the trip was to take place, our high school youth group hit an abrupt halt. Our pastor was leaving us. As a result of his departure, three of the six youth dropped from the group. The remaining youth and parents were dumbstruck, and unsure of the next step. As one of the adults (and a parent) of this group, (I have to admit) I believed this was the end. There would no longer be a high school youth group, and certainly no servant event to Rocky Boy. But, *God does work in mysterious ways.* Remember that pest? He would have no part in letting this grand plan end. Clayton was determined to continue with the servant event plans and with his youth group... even if there were just three teenagers and three adults remaining! So now, I became the target of his pestering! According to him, I needed to step in as the adult and push this thing forward. Good grief.

Part of preparing for a servant event of this nature is to make sure members understand the history of the area, the culture of this nation and its people (the Chippewa-Cree), and how we all are *connected*. I felt I could do a fair job at that end. We also needed to have spiritual guidance, but we no longer had the pastoral support. Now I became the pest...

not just the mother of the pest! Pastor Linda received numerous e-mails and phone calls asking for scripture and spiritual support that would help our group understand our place and our responsibility on this servant event. Our small group continued to gather regularly. We met, we prayed, we researched, we prayed, we read, we prayed, we investigated, we prayed. By the time we were finalizing the plans, our group had grown to six youth and four adults! *God works in mysterious ways!*

July 17, 2010. The time for our departure had finally arrived. With two pick-up trucks, nine people, 30 quilts, sleeping bags, duffle bags and snack coolers, we were on our way! Twelve hours later we were pulling up to Our Savior Lutheran Church, with Pastor Linda waiting for us, ladle in hand, and ready to dish out bowls of hot “mystery” soup. *Talk about God working in mysterious ways!*

Although we did not know exactly what our “work” would be, in our hearts were ready to serve in any way possible. Little did we know that just two weeks before our arrival, the reservation had endured a horrific flood. That first night, as Pastor Linda spoke of the devastation... we could only imagine. The next day, she loaded us in the church van and drove us around to see, with our own eyes, the damages. It was heartbreaking: culvert bridges washed away, homes and buildings flooded, thick mud piles everywhere. Not much escaped the vicious flood waters and mud. Even the church office building had suffered. The basement was a mess; mold and mildew was already eating away at the newly painted drywall, doors and bunk beds. Clothing donated for the church thrift shop (what seemed like a hundred plus large bags) was quickly removed from the thrift shop room because it too had been flooded. We were completely overwhelmed by the devastation. *God works in mysterious ways.*

Over the next several days, Pastor Linda set us on to our daily tasks. We sorted clothing, bleached away mold and mildew, moved items out of flooded areas, delivered donated clothing to those in need in Havre, washed windows, and stained cabins (all though it looked like we were staining teenagers). On a few occasions, Pastor Linda would ask one of our adults to “take a look at something”, and before she knew it someone was up to their eyeballs in shingles or crawling under a porch making repairs. I think this took her by surprise. This adult explained that in his house “take a look at something” means “please fix this.” *God works in mysterious ways.*

We were blessed to have met and worked with an amazing man by the name of Mike Lamebull. This hardworking, kind man and his beautiful daughter took the time to share parts of their lives with us. They told us about the area, and shared their heritage and their traditions with us freely. Our boys became especially fond of Mike after a trip to get rid of a broken refrigerator that ended in a side trip to pick berries. His daughter Mia, connected quickly with our girls as they worked side-by-side, sorting bags and bags of donated clothing. They giggled, shared stories and quickly became friends. These young people crossed into each others lives and found *connections* through their different cultures and beyond their cultures. They saw each other as brother and sister. *God works in mysterious ways!*

Each day, Pastor Linda made sure we had time for learning about the area, its history, the culture and the people. She ensured we had a chance to break bread and share meals together with local families on several occasions. She organized an incredible trip to Bear Paw National Park and the local museum. We enjoyed an amazing Pow Wow with dancing by Mia and her adorable little brother. There were young men who played their drums and sang with such skill and heartfelt pride. We even had the opportunity to see the intricate beadwork made by local artisans, and we jumped at the chance to purchase items to bring back to our family members as souvenirs made by our new friends. These events and many more were blessed gifts to each of us, and the memories we will each hold closely to our hearts forever. We cannot thank the people of Rocky Boy enough, or Pastor Linda, for their kindness, their generosity, and their open hearts. We felt truly welcome every step of the way. What a gift from God to have met each and every one of you. *God is good.*

Flashback 15 years, back in Upstate New York, researching Native Americans from 3000 miles away: Really, all I wanted to do was to teach children that this country began with and belonged to a native people. They are the roots and should not be forgotten. They are still with us. I wanted to teach them what has happened to these people and to this country so that they have an appreciation and respect for the land and those that lived here before them and who live with us now. This unit of study came full-circle and the *connections* for me are now incredibly tangible. Who else is forgotten? I think this is what God is asking of me. *God works in mysterious ways.*

Pastor Linda... back to *connections*, of course. I felt *connected* to Pastor Linda the first moment I spoke to her on the phone. I felt as though we had been friends for years. I found out she spent a good number of years in Washington State. I learned she is a scientist, of sorts! I found out that her heart is right where I pray my heart will be some day. Each day, morning and evening, Pastor Linda ministered to us. She saw that we were a group dealing with “issues”. Our church had been in turmoil and without a pastor for some time. Some of us were dealing with painful family issues, financial issues and even some personal issues. Pastor Linda must have sensed this... because this is indeed her nature. She took us into her warm embrace and fed us more than just her “mystery soup”. She fed our hearts, tended to our hurts, and showed us the beauty of hope. *God is good.*

Through Christ, there is always hope. Pastor Linda, you are hope, the people of Rocky Boy are hope. We have Christ and He gives us people like Pastor Linda, Mike, Mia, and so many more to help us remember there is always hope. I feel confident in saying that each of us felt more *connected* to each other, to God, and to hope than we had been in quite some time. We came to Rocky Boy to serve others through Christ. Five days later we left feeling that it was us who had been served through Christ’s love. *God works in mysterious ways.*

Dominique Bracht
Ephrata, Washington