

## December, 2023

As would be considered normal on the mountain, it has been a fairly busy summer and fall for the Hatley household. While the demands of camp and sports can be tiring, Christopher and I made many memories together. Now that Christopher is older, he was able to spend time working in the operations department during summer camp. He spent hours mowing, weedwacking, and working on various projects to maintain the grounds around the ranch.

When he was not busy with work, he made the all-star baseball team in town and played his first season of tackle football. While only in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, he was honored to be chosen for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade team as a starting lineman. While he found his strength in the center position, he had the opportunity to play all positions on the line throughout the season. While he averaged 60 lbs. under the opponents, his years of wrestling came in handy and he held his own! After a few weeks off, he is busy once again now that wrestling has begun.

Being a typical high-energy boy, he enjoys sports and works hard to improve each season, but while his energy has been channeled into victories on the field and mat, it proves to make school a bit of a challenge for him. We are now into our fourth year of homeschooling, and while he has learned to handle pressures well in sports, in the classroom it has made him begin to dislike school. With that in mind, we have made a few changes this year and things seem to be improving for him at last. While homeschooling definitely presents challenges for both parent and child, we love that it allows us to modify his schedule to help him learn best.

As though sports and school have not kept him busy enough, Toph has discovered a love for babysitting. With so many young families on staff at Miracle Mountain, there have been plenty of opportunities for him to hang out with the younger staff kids.

With Toph as busy as he is, we still work to prioritize family time, and my mom is a frequent guest in our little house. This summer she taught Christopher how to make freezer jam and can the various vegetables from our garden. She enjoys helping Christopher take care of our little “farm” consisting of our two dogs, chickens, rabbits and pony. While our limited space means the pony resides at the ranch’s barn, at times a certain boy brings him home – making a small yard feel very full. The latest goal has been to help our goldendoodle, Duke, understand that he is in fact bigger than he believes and that the chickens don’t typically survive if played with harshly.

While working full time, wrangling a wild child into completing school work and coaching sports can often prove a challenge for me, I am reminded that it is also such a blessing. There are certainly days that feel like too much, but in those moments I am reminded that God has surrounded me and my son with a great support system, if I am only willing to reach out to them.

While life may not be what I always envisioned, I am reminded that sometimes God grants our wishes in ways we may not expect. While Christopher has struggled for several years with not being able to participate in the Father Son retreat here at the ranch due to his dad’s absence in his life, this year, one of his mentors, Matthew Hungerford took time off to attend with Toph. While my heart grieves for my son, I was once again reminded that Christopher is God’s son even more than he is mine, and that God will always watch out for him.

I have also been blessed with my mom’s willingness to be part of our lives. Since I am obviously unbiased, I think I could easily declare her as the best gram (and mom) ever! She comes up almost every weekend and doesn’t miss a single sporting event. She trucks along and travels with us to local and out of town events. She has put many miles on her wheels, wiped many tears and told us it will be okay more times than I could count. I know she gets tired, but she refuses to miss anything. I’m so thankful that she has been in great health to do so. At times, I am filled with anxiety over the idea of someday losing her. It feels as though loss has been a defining feature of my life, and I find myself allowing anger to consume my life when I harbor such thoughts.

These are lessons that I often have to learn alongside my son, and it saddens me to see him face

losses in his own life as well - especially with the most recent loss of his dog, Gus. We have been learning together that the Lord gives, and the Lord takes away – but even though these losses mark the end of a season of life, God is still with us and will never leave us. He has since been gifted our feather loving friend Duke, my Aussie, Oakley is expecting pups, and together we are both learning how to keep moving forward.

When I find myself focusing on these losses, I can (often) become thick headed and try to just shoulder through life. In this mindset, I have found it easy to run over others, expecting them to just tough it out. Through a good friend, God has been challenging me to temper that toughness with gentleness, and I am discovering that there is a better, gentler way.

On a more cheerful note - this summer we got to see many kids come to Christ. I had a very full team in the kitchen with three full-time staff, two second-year students, one first-year student, one summer staff and many volunteers. Many hands and hard dedicated workers made my job a lot easier.

This year I have the privilege of co-advising with as new staff member, Anna Cover. Our students are Hallie and Evelyn. Our group has a wonderful blend of personalities and both of them love to spend time with Christopher. While we are sad that our previous co-advisors, Chip and Sandy Hungerford, moved away this year, these girls have made the adjustment easier.

We were blessed to have Niyah choose to focus in the kitchen again for her 2<sup>nd</sup> year, and we now have a first year, Jolene, as well. I am looking forward to getting to work with these girls this year.

#### **Prayer requests/praises:**

Continued wisdom with raising Christopher

I have started to have trouble with my back. Prayers for healing and strengthening

A good 5<sup>th</sup> grade year

A healthy pregnancy for Oakley

Good health for Gram

My car has hit almost 300,000 miles

*All of the staff at MMR serve on a mission support basis and must raise their own support to be a part of the ministry here. In order to be fully supported, I will need to raise \$1,200 a month, and I am currently at 55% of what the board recommends. Would you prayerfully consider being a part of my support team? If you feel God is leading you to do so, the process is simple. All gifts are tax deductible and should be made out to MMR, then designated for me on a separate piece of paper. Gifts can be mailed to the Ranch at **101 Rodeo Drive, Spring Creek, PA 16436**. You can also give online, through the Ranch's website at [mmrm.org/about/staff/support](http://mmrm.org/about/staff/support). I receive 100% of all gifts designated for me. If you would like any additional information, just let me know. Also, if your church, or someone you know is interested in finding out more about the ministry of MMR, the School of Discipleship, or my part in the ministry here, I would be glad to visit and share my ministry and the ministry of MMR. I can be contacted at the address above. You can also easily find much information about the ministry of MMR by visiting the website listed above. And you are always welcome to come visit and see the ministry for yourself!*

God Bless,

Darci and Christopher

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