

ALASKAWANA, December 22, 2011

This year..... 2011.

We have seen speaking, trainings, and events permeate individual kids, leaders, parents, churches, and communities. Some of the rural churches have captivated the community via leaders demonstrating the love of Christ. Leaders continue offering their time to the Lord, their church, and specifically the youth and kids coming to the 50 Awana churches across Alaska, sharing the good news of the Gospel, and affording a training ground for kids to grow and exercise their faith. I wish to share a personal family story that has been a highlight of many in this year of service.

Meet Scott and Amber; Amber is our niece age 31 years. Married a military man (Scott) in Kentucky, and eventually after 2 tours in Iraq, they with 2 kids in tow were transferred to Fort Wainright, Fairbanks, Alaska. Scott had been acquainted to Christianity by family, but was skeptical most of his adult years of God and the Bible. Amber was raised in a home where church and the gospel had been more prevalent than not. Enter the Awana Interior schedule that allows visits and events to bring Geraldine and myself to the area a minimum of 3 times per year. At the end of March, the annual Interior AwanaGames and Sparks-A-Rama happen. I am convinced the Holy Spirit was moving me to spend time with my niece and family. Arriving on Friday and after some meetings and cold calls to non-Awana churches, arrangements were made to have supper at a local restaurant. In the course of conversation I suggested they visit the Awana event the following day held in North Pole. I further asked them if they would be interested in attending church with me on Sunday at an Awana church. I mentioned that I was pretty much in control of the event, and wanted to share their concern with the crowd, as husband Scott was about 1 month away from being deployed to Afghanistan. It was not a coincidence that the Lord had arranged for the Pastor of that same church as one of the halftime speakers, sharing the good news of the Gospel. Our time together was very brief and public that day. I introduced them, but they were not familiar with the event, its routine, or the demand of my time in organizing and running it. Their daughter, Caitlyn, was awe-struck and both parents were quite timid in their brief visit. I privately made mention I would connect with them after the event.

We did connect via telephone and scheduled a rendezvous in the church parking lot in time to attend morning worship. I was unsure if Scott had any intention of trying to be there that Sunday morning. With a speaking engagement yet pending that evening and a meeting with a Commander set for the afternoon, the Lord continued His divine schedule. After a hearty message from God's Word the thought in my mind was 'Thanks Lord' in working Your plan. My early afternoon appointment was postponed, so I ate lunch with a very active Awana family from that church. Nearly finished with lunch at a restaurant within the Wal-Mart store, walking into the store was Amber and her family for a shopping trip for needs of the upcoming week. I finished lunch, and not being obligated until 6:00 pm in the evening, I sought out Amber and family with no particular agenda but that of time with family. I am not a shopper, but this time was special. Nearly an hour of touring the aisles and engaging with them was enjoyable particularly after the cancelled meeting left me with no particular place to go for the next 2 hours. Later the Lord blessed in reengaging the previous postponed meeting. I was later privileged to speak during T&T Large Group Time; observe, encourage, and evaluate one of the churches in the area that hold Awana on Sunday afternoon.

My prayer had been to acquaint Scott, Amber, and family with a church to allow the Lord to begin and continue His work with them. He has answered with abundant blessing. Amber at this time was pregnant with their 3rd child. Scott was deployed and out of country for the majority of this pregnancy. Until and during deployment, the family, including Scott, fell in love with Jesus and the church that showered them with the love of Christ. Scott duty bound, deployed in late April. Scott was being prepared and convicted by the Holy Spirit. He was inquisitive and piqued in interest of all things spiritual at this juncture. Biblical discussions between Amber and Scott were relayed to me. Geraldine and I encouraged patience and confidence the Lord would in His time accomplish His will in this skeptical man.

In early August was another occasion to train and visit in the Interior. The Lord arranged for Amber, 8 months pregnant now, to attend Awana training, trusting God as to how this would work for her to be an Awana Leader; still somewhat new to the church. The Lord knew her determination; I must say it was a joyous day of training with Amber as a student.

Amber informed me that the Lord was working it out for Scott, to return from duty briefly for the birth of their child. Nearly 1 month later, on September 7th, I learn that upon arrival, without rest after traveling 2+days, the baby is born. It thrilled my heart to hear that upon Scott's testimony of salvation, he determined his need for baptism the following Sunday. I was unable to attend, but did view it via Facebook.

Scott and family need our prayers. He has begun a new birth, is away from family, and in a war zone of Afghanistan. This last Sunday evening, December 18, I received a phone call from Scott and Amber's daughter Caitlyn. Caitlyn is 9 years old and could not wait to inform me that she had received her Streamwood badge and an award to put on it, as a result of her scripture memory and achievement in the church's Awana club.

Geraldine and I long for this story to be multiplied around our great state. Seeing the Lord use His Word and its power demonstrated in lives of kids and adults is our vision and prayer. "That all youth and children throughout Alaska will come to know, love, and serve the Lord Jesus Christ."

Dan and Geraldine Bylsma
Awana Missionaries for Alaska