



FAITH: A FRESH TAKE



June 20, 2013



Children prepare a "nest" of grass for fireflies in case they find a few. On this night, no fireflies could be found.

Chasing Fireflies in the Moonlight

Three years ago, I began a nightly walking ritual. Rain, snow, sleet or shine, I make time each evening to walk. This is my "down" time, my reflection space, my meditative escape from my "to do" lists and my attempt to reconnect with self. Last night's walk was particularly peaceful. The night sky was glowing with fireflies. Nothing makes me appreciate summer more than the soft flickering of firefly lights.

As I walked, I recalled running through the neighborhood as a girl catching fireflies in butter bowls. I couldn't help but to remember that it wasn't so long ago that neighborhoods at night were full of the pitter patter of children's feet running along the streets, the shouts of "ready or not, here I come," the laughter of parents convened on one neighbor's driveway enjoying conversation and an iced tea while the children played. Not so long ago, children ran free while the sun set, played hide-and-seek under the shadows cast by big oak trees, and raided their mother's cabinets for butter bowls to house their fireflies.

My mother was a teacher, so my brother and I had the luxury of summers at home. It was not uncommon for me to take off on my bicycle on a June morning and disappear for hours on end. As I peddled away, my mother would call, "Be home by dinner." Today, I cannot imagine affording my own children the same opportunity to escape and explore without me. In most communities, the world today does not allow such freedoms for our children.

Our children are growing up in a much different environment. Though I would love to have the summers with my boys, like many moms, the corporate structure of my work does not afford this luxury. My youngest remains in daycare through the summer, and our oldest is attending a variety of day camps. Their days are structured, and while I do believe there is value in the routine, I also regret that I cannot give them more of the summer freedoms I had as I girl.

As an adult, I've come to understand that during those summer days, my mother's willingness to let me

venture out on my own encouraged my independence and helped me develop a sense of responsibility. Though she made certain that summers included family activities, library hours, and pool time, we were expected to fill most of our summer days with self-directed play. We didn't have "play dates." We learned to make friends with whoever lived close by. We didn't have a designated hour to spend in an indoor inflatable gym. Instead we spent full days building forts, rafts, and tree swings. We didn't have 3D televisions or Xboxes. We played army with water guns, found children to cast as characters in plays we scripted, and built obstacle courses that spanned the community park. We used our imaginations to construct whatever world we desired that day.

I struggle to strike a balance between the realities of today's world and my desire to allow my children the freedom to discover their talents through exploration. It is "safer" to give them a forum. It is safer to send them to camp where a trained camp counselor will ensure their safety. It is safer to send them to daycare where their daily routines will be closely monitored. It may be safe, and I owe them safety; I also owe them enough independence to learn how to create, socialize, and analyze without an adult's watchful eye. The world we live in might make us more cautious as parents, but I think we can still allow our children to run freely under the stars this summer and catch a few fireflies in a butter bowl – even if we only let them run in our own backyards.

Emily Smith lives in Fairview Heights, Ill., with her husband, Kevin and their two young sons, Luke and Christian. Formerly Executive Director of Bring Change 2 Mind, she now works as the Executive Director of the Smith Family non for profit, Karla Smith Foundation. The organization supports families affected by mental illness and suicide.

Through Karla Smith Foundation, Emily has recently launched a new campaign designed to inspire women to proactively care for their physical, mental and spiritual health, I WAS NOT BUILT TO BRAKE.

Email Emily at emily.smith@karla-smithfoundation.org or connect with her on Facebook at Karla Smith Foundation or I Was Not Built to Brake.

– Emily Smith

Music Important Part of Faith Life

My name is Tara Hollinshead. I was born and raised in Red Bud, attending St. John the Baptist Church and school, followed by Gibault Catholic High School in Waterloo. I graduated from Illinois State University in 2011 and am currently completing my second year of teaching students with visual impairments in northwestern Illinois.

Raised in a family that stressed the importance of a Catholic education as well as attending church every weekend, I learned from an early age what it meant to be Catholic. I sat through religion class each day and went to Mass at school as well as on the weekends with my family. We were very involved with music at our church, so most weekends I would sing with my mom and sisters while my dad played guitar. Many weekends my sisters and I would spend time volunteering at the Shrine of Our Lady of the snows, helping out with whatever activity they had going on at the time. When I reached high school, I became involved with youth ministry at St. John's in Red Bud. I attended national and diocesan youth conferences, and served on DYMARC for two years. As a junior in high school, I made my first Teens Encounter Christ (TEC) weekend, and I continue to help out with these retreats whenever possible.

My freshman year of college I made my first Koinonia retreat at Illinois State University's Catholic Newman Center. During my five years of involvement at the Newman Center, I learned more about my Catholic faith through bible studies, retreats, theology classes, and through the faith family that was present at the center. Along with several other friends, I helped start a praise and worship group, IgNite. We planned nights in which people could come to praise God through song and prayer. Through music, I discovered a deeper faith than I had ever experienced, and bringing others to that depth was beautiful to see. My junior year of college, I was asked to be on the music team for a Koinonia retreat, which is when I first picked up the guitar that would become my praise and worship aide.

After graduating in 2011 with my special education degree, I moved to northwestern Illinois, where I was hours away from both my family and friends and the faith community I had leaned on for so many years. I found

a church that I could attend each Sunday, but I felt something was missing. It wasn't until this past year that I found that missing piece. As a child I was involved

with music in my parish, and in high school helped with liturgical choir while also singing in my parish's teen choir. Throughout college I was involved with IgNite and music teams for retreats. Now, I was no longer involved with anything. Simply going to church each Sunday was not enough. I needed to be involved. That's when I was blessed to cross the path of a program called Special People Encounter Christ (SPEC).

SPEC is an incredible religious education program at Christ the King parish in Moline, Ill. Every Wednesday night, between 75-100 people with special needs come to learn about God and their faith. I have the pleasure of being the music coordinator. Each night, I am in charge of the entertainment for the last 45 minutes of the evening. Sometimes entertainers come in, other nights we put on bible-themed puppet shows or sing praise and worship songs. One Wednesday a month I plan the music for a Mass or prayer service. Although I have only been involved with the program for a year, I have encountered the most beautiful people. Through the childlike faith of all of the participants, my faith has grown stronger. Through the kindness of the high school students who take time out of their schedules each week to work with the participants, my faith has grown stronger. Through the huge hearts of the adult volunteers, who have dedicated years to this program and the participants, my faith has grown stronger. Through the music that I am able to provide for the participants at SPEC, my faith has grown stronger.

Faith has always played a huge role in my life, and continues to play a huge role. I can thank my parents for instilling in me a solid faith foundation, and through my experiences, I have continued to build upon that foundation to reach where I am today. I look forward to what God has in store for me in the future.

– Tara Hollinshead



This page for, about and by young adult Catholics in the diocese

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We're tapping into young adults who have been active in their parishes and who have reached out in faith to begin lives of their own.

To make sure this page is about you and what you want to see, we need your input. Send us your story ideas, your concerns, your hopes and your stories of faith.

Email cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org with questions or suggestions.

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