

Celebrate the Journey of Solitude

Christ in the Wilderness Benefit
September 10th 2011

1996

In June of 1996 I found my way to CITW. I had come across an article in the RRS the prior year about the value and benefits of using a retreat center and there was a listing of 7 or 8 in the Midwest, including CITW in Stockton. There was no phone number listed, but the article did include an address. I tore the article out of the newspaper and put it in my “things to pursue” folder and tucked it away. I came across it about 9 months later and decided to write a letter and get more information. I received a phone call from Sister Lorraine a week later and scheduled my first visit to Christ in the Wilderness. I would like to share of what I have learned and ways I have grown during my 34 retreats at this wonderful refuge for the spirit, body and soul.

- I have learned and grown so much from the silence and solitude of my journey. I arrived in 1996 tired, overworked, stressed, and feeling very inadequate in many areas of my life. I was 45, wife of 15 years and mother of two daughters...Tracy was 13 and Kara was 11. I was on a fast track at work with lots of expectations and deadlines. I was also involved in the community as a volunteer as well as on several boards.
- Over the last fifteen years and 34 retreats I have kept personal journals and gotten copies of my journal entries at CITW. I thought that today I would try to summarize the key strengths and insights gained by my time spent over the last fifteen years into ten points.

Insight #1 – CITW opens a space to experience...

- At CITW I feel a sense of freedom that is hard to duplicate on an everyday basis.
- There is no one waiting for me to do something, or be something or act in a certain manner. I can do as little or as much as I feel like doing and it's ok.
- Eliminating expectations has allowed more space and time to experience a greater level of contentedness and a spiritual connection.

Insight # 2-sleep is good

- Never underestimate the value of sleep...
 - My first day on every retreat usually involves long, uninterrupted sleep, something I never seem to get enough of anywhere else. It also doesn't matter what time of day or night...I feel at peace and by the end of my retreat I am the most rested since the last time I was at CITW.
 - Is it the crickets, or the coyotes, or the owls or the breeze, or the storms, or the quiet that seems to provide a safety net for blocking out everything else that keeps us anxious, or stressed or just exhausted?
 - (or is it... no phones, e-mails, TV, newspapers???)

Insight #3-less is better

- Simplicity is a good thing....
 - The less I started taking with me on my retreats, the greater gift it was to me.
 - less physical baggage
 - The physical stuff (food, work, clothes, reading materials, etc.)
 - less emotional baggage
 - Old wounds, resentments, anger, judgments were easier to review and shed when I allowed myself the solitude and time to question why I was still holding onto them.

Insight #4- how do I live my life?

- My life guidelines: (formalized in the early 90's, recorded them while at CITW):
 - Pray daily
 - Do not be afraid to love
 - Be more accepting
 - Forgive others
 - Be less defensive
 - Do more for others from desire
 - Eat less fat
 - Exercise 4 x a week
 - Don't judge
 - Play more, laugh more
 - Take time for myself
 - Be reverent of mother earth

Updated Guidelines

- Pray daily
- Be present
- Love unconditionally
- Take more risks
- Keep an open heart
- Be present
- Be reverent of mother earth
- Be kind, compassionate and forgiving
- Play more
- Be

Insight #5 I will never be a number's person

- My job as a COO demanded a good working knowledge of accounting, budgets, cash flow, etc...
- It was, by far, the most stressful part of my job, and one I was constantly left me feeling inadequate. I finally came to the conclusion on one of my CITW retreats (my Strengths Finder book) is that I was much better at counting the ways I could touch an employee or customer's life to make it better than I was at deciphering if we were off a hundred dollars from a targeted revenue flow. I was able to get one of the accounting staff members assigned to our team to be the major interpreter of the numbers side of my job and allow me to focus on what made the difference in growing and retaining our staff and customers.

Insight #6- busyness

- I can become a slave to a schedule I create....
 - “We become so busy that we starve inside”

I went from bringing things to occupy every waking moment, to one good book, hiking shoes and some quiet music.

My current project, is to try to minimize the number of lists I make and to become present more often.

Insight #7 – being present is a gift to myself

- “Glimpses of love and joy or brief moments of deep peace are possible whenever a gap occurs in the stream of thought.”
- It is so easy to think...worry...plan...about the past, people, things, the future....the only time is now and CITW provides the space, beauty and solitude to minimize the “chatter” and to be more present. My body becomes less tense; I can let the muscles in my stomach relax and I can be much more present to all of the beauty of the moment that is around me.

Insight #8- grief and sadness are ok

- CITW has been a safe place to let down my guard and just cry....my quote from a CITW journal from Jan. 31-Feb. 3, 2002...
“....shortly after I was here in November, my mother died quietly in her sleep, only five months after my 44 year-old brother died. This has been my first time to be alone and I am unsure of how I feel about anything. No, that’s not true, I feel sadness and overwhelming grief and a sense of loss. I know I will feel better someday– I feel better after these three days of quiet—but I don’t think there are any short cuts to overcoming the pain one feels on losing those we love so much. My mother was so connected to God, I know she’s at peace and with my 2 brothers who greeted her on November 18. There is comfort in that.
Christ in the Wilderness has become a place for me to become recharged. The trees, the earth, the birds, this wonderful hermitage are sharing of their energy and strength. I will borrow from them on this trip. I will leave here tomorrow stronger and with a little more of me functioning.”

Insight #9 A creative mind needs space to become

- The quieter I become, the more creative I become...

So many times when I was at CITW, I longed for art supplies, or writing materials...48 hours of quiet and stress free living allowed for the creative side of me to emerge. I many times would leave a bag of art supplies or notepad in my car in case that desire arose in me again!

I also found that issues at work became more manageable and creative solutions more apparent when I spent time away from them...even when I was not dwelling on them during my retreat.

Insight #10-Tending my own soul is necessary

- “The flower doesn’t dream of the bee...
 - It blossoms and the bee comes.”

One of my insights at CITW, was that it didn’t matter how much I changed, or what I did to gain someone else’s approval or love. It is the tending to my own soul and nurturing myself that invites the natural process of love peace and joy to enter. I feel CITW as provided a nurturing environment that has helped me to grow emotionally and spiritually.

Overview...Life isn't as serious as my mind makes it out to be....

Thoughts journaled during my stays at CITW:

- Go with the flow
- I will not find myself in things
- Life never gives me more than I can handle
- Everyone in my life is there for a reason....learn from them and help each other
- My ego is not my friend
- Happiness comes from being receptive to whatever arises rather than frantically trying to escape what's unpleasant...
- Let go, let God.
- We all just want to be loved and validated