

The DIAZ Dispatch

August 2017



BIKES, BOATS, AND BIBLICAL BELIEFS

As I write this, Ed and I are resting in a small cabin on board the Ave Maria – a barge that sails along the Poe River in Italy from Mantova to Venice depositing bikers early in the morning and then picking them up again downstream later in the day. The reason we are resting is because we are old – and because we have just completed a 200-kilometer bicycle ride across northern Italy in temperatures topping 100 degrees!

In the last five days, we have pedaled over bumpy gravel roads, along grassy dikes and canals, through wonderfully shaded poplar groves, across narrow bridges, and around potholes that dimpled busy city streets! We have visited historic sites and quaint coffee shops. We have experienced the searing summer sun and cooled off in the gentle waves of the Adriatic Sea. We are very weary, but so wonderfully blessed!

Currently we are moored on a small island, just a short water-taxi ride across the Giudecca Canal from Venice. What an amazing view we have from our tiny porthole! Since this is the time for Venice's biggest festival of the year, and consequently its busiest weekend, tomorrow we may spend some time on the other less crowded islands – like Murano (famous for its hand blown glass) or Burano (famous for hand-stitched lace).

Believe it or not, this is a ministry trip. We were invited to join four friends we met on an earlier biking adventure. None of them claims to have a personal relationship with God, so when they asked if we would come along, we felt that this was an opportunity straight from Him.

We have been preparing both physically (doing a lot of cycling) and spiritually (doing a lot of praying) for more than eight months. And finally, here we are!

I wish I could tell you that all four of our friends have been eager to talk more about the spiritual issues we introduced on our previous journey, but so far this is not the case. We have had a few interesting discussions, but Satan is not making it easy. The timing of interruptions

and the unsolicited opinions of others seem masterfully orchestrated to combat our efforts. However, in the process of speaking and living out our Christianity, we seem to be planting seeds in the hearts of several others we have just met.

A few nights ago, a young Italian tour guide, took some of us on a tour of an ancient cemetery. While walking beside her I commented on the intricate tattoo she had on her arm. It included the ornate outline of an elephant. She informed me that this was the god Ganesha – the most popular and important Hindu deity. Prayers to him must precede all Hindu rituals.

Continuing the conversation, I discovered that this vivacious young lady is not only a guide. Most of the year she teaches philosophy. Her goal is to help teenagers and young adults find hope and discover a purpose for their lives by incorporating religion. As we read the gravestones of several people who had passed away at a young age, she commented on the current epidemic of suicides and how young people are struggling with depression at a much higher rate than ever before. She informed us that recent studies link this to a declining interest in religion. Since hope is only in the present, it is limited by personal abilities and accomplishments. Inevitable failure or discouragement triggers despair. Her solution doesn't concern itself with what religion a person chooses as long as it offers some kind of hope for an after-life.

I gently pointed out that biblical Christianity alone offers true hope for an after-life, since it is the only "religion" that is not based on our own abilities and accomplishments (leaving us in the same quandary as before). Christianity relies on what Jesus did for us on the cross. We talked a little more about it, and then she grew silent for quite a while. Finally she told me she would have to think about that a lot more before she could respond. (Please pray for Rosita. She seems to be avoiding me ever since.)

After hearing that I had written books for teenagers and was in the process of writing some articles on parenting, a fellow biker from Denmark shared that he is a psychologist. His main goal is to help families stay together for the sake of their children. Apparently, the divorce rate in Denmark is astronomical and, in his words, "scientific studies prove that divorce really messes up the kids." I shared a few thoughts on marriage from a biblical perspective. He was amazed that I could come to such great conclusions just by reading the Bible. I smiled and challenged him to read it sometime. (Please pray that John will want to discover God's truths for himself.)

Sadly, for the most part, the people we are encountering seem completely disinterested in anything to do with the Bible. Please pray with us that the tiny seeds we are able to sow will one day grow and bear amazing fruit. (I Corinthians 3:5-8.)



WARRIOR PARENTING PRINCIPLE #4

We Must Practice

‘Letting Our Children Go’

Part 5 in a series by Ed and Gwen Diaz

Early in our parenting career, Ed and I discovered five important principles imbedded in Psalm 127:4. King Solomon wrote, *Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth.* In previous newsletters, we introduced warrior parenting and discussed the first three principles:

Principle #1: *As warrior parents, we must place our arrows in a Bow – a Source of Power outside of ourselves.* God is the only Source of True power, and we can engage His power through prayer.

Principle #2: *As warrior parents, we must draw our arrows back to ourselves.* We must invest time and energy to effectively draw our children close to ourselves and to God.

Principle #3: *As warrior parents, we must aim our arrows at a target.* This requires us to set goals. We must be sure these goals focus on developing character rather than rewarding achievement.

This month we will discuss the fourth principle in the process. **Principle #4:** *As warrior parents, we must practice ‘letting our children go!’*

Before a young warrior ever launched an arrow in a battle, long hours were spent on a practice range. There he would learn to use the bow, grip the arrow, draw it back to himself, and aim it at a target. But aiming was not enough. At some point he had to let that arrow fly if he really wanted it to hit the mark. It took a lot of practice – and many repetitions of ‘letting go’ before he was finally ready to launch his arrows in a real battlefield.

In the same way, if we want our children to be successful, we must diligently practice ‘letting them go’ before we release them into the real world.

This means we must provide “unchaperoned” experiences while they are still at home. We must find ways to allow them to venture into places where their faith and values will be tested without us hovering over them like helicopters. We must give them the freedom

to fail while we are still close enough to pick them up; place them back in the bow; draw them back to ourselves once again; re-aim them at the right target; and give them another chance to fly.

The releasing process works best if we begin while they are young. In our family, we introduced our sons to chores while they were still very small. These grew incrementally as they matured and included cleaning, doing laundry, helping with meals, mowing the yard, etc. Soon these grew into helping elderly neighbors and friends.

Teaching our children *to serve* was one of the most important concepts we introduced, and probably one of the most significant tools in our parenting tool kit! We found it to be the solution to just about every parenting dilemma we faced! It turned our children’s focus away from *themselves* and onto *others*. It gave them appreciation for the things God had provided rather than regret for the things they felt they were missing. It built their self-esteem, brought them contentment and gave them a sense of fulfillment and joy. And getting them involved in service activities proved to be a wonderful way to practice releasing our children into the world!

As they grew older, as well as playing baseball they each had summer jobs. Zach cleaned a neighbor’s pool, MattE worked in construction, Ben was a wrangler at a summer camp and Jonny sold copiers. Although none of these jobs were a part of their future career development, they were all important in their character development. Each son spent at least one summer away from home in the process.

By the time each son was a senior in high school, we felt he had earned the right for us to remove his curfew. He had to keep us informed as to where he would be and what time he expected to arrive home, but the rest of the details were up to him. This proved to be a great preparation for college. Instead of testing out brand new freedoms when arriving on campus, our child could focus on why he was really there. Under our tutelage he had already discovered that nothing really worthwhile happens after midnight!

Another significant factor in releasing successful arrows proved to be our willingness to provide answers for the spiritual, social and emotional questions they raised. This did not require us to already have the answers to every possible question, but it meant we had to be willing to find them.

This process is what inspired the three books that Gwen wrote for teenagers. As our sons began to ask questions, we began to research answers, and Gwen wrote them down (realizing that younger siblings would soon be posing similar questions). A friend compiled her notes and sent them to a publisher and soon the “Sticking Up For . . .” books were helping parents all over the world answer their teenagers’ questions about God and life. (Although we are happy to make these available to you, there are many other wonderful resources that you can find through your local church and youth leaders.)

It is our job to prepare and then propel our children into the world, giving God the freedom to use them.

[Next month we will look at Principle #5. You can find previous ones on our website 71-17.org]