

The DIAZ Dispatch

March 2018



MattE and family enjoying their rental home.

MOVING EXPERIENCES!

I apologize to anyone who has tried to keep tabs on our family over the past six months. That would have been a tough assignment, because each of our sons has sold (or rented out) their old house; bought, built, rented or started renovating a new one; and then moved! Bricks and mortar have been flying at a breakneck pace and moving trucks have continuously been loaded and unloaded. The good news is that three of the four are currently making Lakeland their home – and we are loving it!

As I type this newsletter:

- The home **Zach and Heather** lived in for the past four years sold after just a few days on the market! So they, along with their four children, are currently crammed into a small rental house while the old, run-down ranch house they just bought goes through a total renovation. Heather tore down most of the ceilings herself and knocked out walls and cabinets during the week. Zach and the kids joined her on the weekends ripping up all the old flooring and hauling trash to the dumpster. They have since called in electricians and plumbers and are getting help with the drywall.

There have been a few snags along the way, including a “floating swimming pool” and the resulting destruction of the existing pool deck. For some reason, after resurfacing the pool the contractor left it empty a few days too long. During that time we experienced a very heavy thunderstorm (extremely unusual for the month of February!) and as the rain soaked into the ground, it lifted the empty pool floating it nearly three feet into the air! Now, instead of a resurfaced pool and deck, they will be getting a brand new one!

The new house and the five acres it is situated on are definitely a great asset for them in ministry – especially since Heather has taken a position as a youth leader in their church and Zach enjoys hosting

events for his co-workers. There has already been a huge campout on the property.

- **MattE and Leslee** finally came up with a floor plan they both like and began construction on the beautiful lot they have owned for several years. Their old home sold in a matter of hours after hitting the market, so they had to quickly find a rental. They did, but after moving most of their boxes in, they realized that there was a terrible odor that no amount of carpet cleaning could eradicate. They had just one day left to find a new rental before everything had to be out of their old house. God came through, providing the perfect place for them and their three kids. It includes a swing, a hill, a huge deck and a small fishing pond just a few yards away.

They are now much closer to the school their kids attend as well as the high school team that MattE coaches. (In case you didn't know it – MattE is the new varsity baseball coach at Lakeland Christian School.) I can easily envision team meetings and cookouts on the shady back deck.

- **Ben and Lydia** put their house on the market just before Hurricane Irma blew through Central Florida last September. It ravaged their beautiful, tree-shaded lot, tearing up the roof and tossing branches through an upstairs window. The timing seemed terrible. The house had to be removed from the real estate market while repairs were made. (The roof didn't get replaced until last month.) But God knew what He was doing. He provided the perfect couple to purchase it at exactly the right time.

Ben and Lydia are in the process of moving to Lakeland and have found an ideal apartment just 3 miles from us. Ben will commute to Orlando for work, but the apartment complex is only yards from the Parkway. The amenities include a large swimming pool, a playground, and a workout center, so they have several places to hang out with family and new friends. We are very excited to have them, and our granddaughters, so close by!

- **Jonny and Libby**, who had rented a tiny 850 square foot house for 4 years, started this whole Diaz moving process last Spring when they decided it was time to build. With baby number two on the way, they bought a lot, designed their own home (which includes an Air bnb rental), and hired a contractor. (Libby actually drew up the plans herself.) Just weeks before baby Dodger's birth, they moved into their new home in the west side of Nashville.

This house has already provided many opportunities for ministry as Jonny and Libby continually host guests in their rental and entertain family and friends in the wonderful place God has provided.

- And **US?** We have had the same address for fifteen years, but you still might have a hard time locating us. We just returned from a trip to Nashville and are about to fly out to Israel!



THINGS I HAVE LEARNED *and* WANT TO PASS ON

by Ed Diaz (with a little help from Gwen)

#5 – Christianity is better caught than taught!

Gwen and I met at the University of Pennsylvania and started dating in March of 1970. That summer I dragged her with me to Ithaca, New York, to attend a six-week Institute of Biblical Studies course. It was there, at Cornell University, that we first met Dr. H. Phillip Hook. He immediately became my favorite professor. He taught a course in New Testament survey, and I was extremely hungry to learn and understand the Scriptures.

To make a long story short, we returned to Penn, were married before our senior year, and began to plan for the future. Initially those plans involved making a lot of money, but there was a growing hunger inside of me to learn more about my new faith. Several people encouraged me to consider going to seminary. This idea did not excite Gwen.

Not knowing how to proceed, I called Dr. Hook. I knew that he taught at Dallas Theological Seminary during the school year, but I did not know that he was on the Admissions Committee. He encouraged me to apply. I decided that, although it was a four-year program, I would apply to attend for just a year. (After all, how long could it take to get a grasp on the Bible?) Phil advised me not to mention my 1-year plan on the application. “You never know what God is going to do,” was his counsel. I applied and was accepted. (At the time I did not realize what a big deal that was!)

Gwen slowly warmed up to the plan, and after graduating from Penn in 1972, we packed all our worldly possessions into a Volkswagen bug and headed to Dallas. We were warmly welcomed by Phil and his family.

Although Phil’s seminary courses were much tougher than the introductory ones he had taught at Cornell, I loved them. I had never been a deep thinker, but he stretched me and forced me

to reason. I worked hard to earn the “B’s” that I received in his classes.

Gwen and I fell in love with the whole Dallas experience, and our 1-year plan quickly became a 2-year plan. During the Spring semester of our 2nd year, we decide to spend the summer in Spain. We had been asked to help a mission start a Christian camp – and, of course, we were excited to explore the birthplace of one of my grandfathers. However, in March of that year, Phil called and informed us that he would be running the Conference Center at a Christian Camp in Texas that summer. “We are building a new junior high camp called the Ranch,” he informed us, “and I want you to be the director and Gwen to be the camp nurse!”

I informed him that we were committed to Spain, but he asked me to come and visit. The site was barely under construction and set to open in less than two months! But we promised to pray about it. After all, “You never know what God is going to do!”

We ended up staying in Texas! Thus began a love affair with Pine Cove that is still shared by our children and grandchildren. And Phil became a real mentor in my life. As my mentor, he did some amazing things:

- **He gave me the keys to the bus – and let me drive!** I had never even been to camp as a kid. I certainly had no idea what being a director involved. But Phil trusted me! He gave me the responsibility and authority that went with the position. No one had done this before in my life. I felt valued. Over the years, I have tried to maintain the same kind of trust in the young men God has allowed me to serve.
- He was always there to **help me think through my decisions** when things got tough. He never imposed his agendas, but guided me as I formulated my own.
- He dragged me with him everywhere he went. He took me to lunch meetings; he let me teach his Bible studies; he flew me to California to listen to him speak, etc. Phil’s mantra was: **“Christianity is better caught than taught.”** And that was evident in the way he mentored me.
- He taught me how to do relational evangelism by insisting that I **never eat lunch alone**. I learned from him that a lot more ministry takes place over a meal than it does in a church.

Those of you who know Dr. Hook, are aware that he did not finish well, and after 41 years his marriage ended. But I will always be grateful for the huge impact he had on my life and ministry. The goal of 71:17 Ministries is to pass our faith on to the next generation. And thanks to Phil we understand that “Christianity is better caught than taught.”