

# Annie Learns of Joy

By Alicia Sindt

Annie loved vacation. She loved the mountains. The air smelled dry but piney. The sun was so clear. It was fun camping with Mom and Dad. Grandma and Grandpa Netter always came too. She loved the campfire and roasted marshmallows. She loved her sleeping bag. She thought hard. She just couldn't think of any part of vacation she didn't, well—love. Even Jeff, her brother, was fun on vacation.

Annie wiggled her feet into her wet tennis shoes. She had fallen into the stream this morning when she caught a trout. She smiled. The trout was too small to keep but it was fun to reel it in and let it go.

“Hurry up, Annie. We have to get back before lunch,” Grandpa Netter called to her.

Annie finished with her shoes. She scampered out of the tent. In the sunshine she grabbed Grandpa's hand.

“I'm ready, Grandpa. Where's Jeff?” Annie called.

“I'm on the trail already slow-poke!” Jeff yelled.

“Wait up Jeff, we're going together,” Grandpa said.

Annie and Grandpa started on the trail. Jeff kept running ahead. Sometimes Annie would pull on Grandpa's hand and try to get him to go faster.

Grandpa would only say, “Slow and steady wins the race. Jeff will get tired and slow down.”

Higher up the mountain they went. Sometimes the trees shadowed their path and sometimes they were in

the sunshine. Annie thought she wouldn't be able to go one step further. She was really tired. It seemed like they had walked forever. She eyed Grandpa.

"Annie, we've only been walking twenty minutes. We'll be on top in another ten. You're tired because of the altitude," Grandpa told her. Annie wondered how Grandpa read her mind.

Annie sighed. "Can we stop and rest awhile?"

"Hold up Jeff," Grandpa directed.

They found a nice boulder and sat down. Annie swigged some water from the canteen. She stretched her legs. Her tennis shoes were only a little damp now.

"Are your feet okay? Wet shoes can cause a blister." Grandpa looked closely at her feet.

"They're fine Grandpa," Annie answered. "Oh Grandpa, I just love vacation. I love the mountains, I love the pine trees. I love the blue sky. And I love you." Annie sprang up and gave Grandpa a big hug.

Grandpa chuckled. "Annie, what you're feeling is joy. Joy is gladness, cheer, a calmness of knowing the Lord loves you. It is also appreciating all that the Lord has made for us."

Annie thought as she stared through the trees to the mountain peaks beyond. "It would be hard to not know Jesus loves me when I'm here. Everything is so beautiful." She looked at the ground. "Even the rocks have special shiny places making them extra pretty. It's just peaceful and lovely." She turned her smile up to her Grandpa's face.

"Alma told about this when he wrote 'yea, and all things denote there is a God; yea, even the earth, and all

things that are upon the face of it.” (Alma 16:54 RLDS, Alma 30:44 LDS)

“What does that mean?” Annie asked.

“It means everything, the trees and the mountains, even the pretty rocks are created by the Lord and when you look at them you can tell that only God could create them. They testify of their creator.”

Annie thought about that. Annie smiled again at Grandpa. “It’s really easy to see God had to create all of this. God must be very smart and very big to do all of this.”

Grandpa tweaked her nose. “He’s very smart and very, very big.” Grandpa paused and looked directly into her eyes. “But God isn’t so big that he doesn’t know you and love you.”

Annie’s forehead wrinkled. For the first time in her life she really thought about whether God loved her. She sang “Jesus Loves Me,” but did God the Father of all even notice a little girl like her? “Do you really think so? It’s a big world and then there’s the sun and all those other planets. There are people all over the world, and grown-ups that are way more important than I am. Can God really love or even notice just me?”

“Yes. God says He does. The Apostle Paul wrote in Romans that nothing can separate us from the love of God. Nothing. The Lord knows when a little sparrow falls from the sky. You are of much greater worth than a sparrow. Annie, He made you. He sees you and all you do and think. You are important to him. The Book of Mormon says that God is no respecter of persons. That means that you are just as important as the President of the United States in the Lord’s eyes. It’s Satan that tries

to make us feel too small to be loved.” Grandpa gave Annie a hug. “You know, to me, the big miracle is that God is so big. He has created everything. And yet God loves me as an individual. Knowing that He loves me fills me with such joy. I can scarcely take it in.”

Annie looked out through the trees. She could see the other mountains were much bigger than the one they were climbing. They were so big. But God was even bigger. She looked up at the sky peeking through the green pine trees. God was bigger than the blue sky. She thought about nights when she saw stars and the moon. God was bigger than all of that. And that great big God knew her – Annie. And that great big God loved her. He really did. All the feelings of happiness melted and were replaced by a deep wonder. She was important and loved by the biggest thing that ever was. Her heart was so full and warm she felt it would burst. She felt wetness on her cheeks. She looked up at Grandpa and she couldn't speak. There weren't words to explain how she felt.

Grandpa hugged her tight. “That's exactly how I feel when I take time to know how much God loves me. What you're feeling right now is the joy of the Lord.” They sat a little longer. Then together with Jeff they walked on up to the summit of the mountain. The sights were very beautiful and large. But Annie thought while she was up there that God was much, much bigger than all of the mountains. And God loved her. The joy of knowing that God loved her was greater than all the things she saw. That joy was the beginning of something special between her and God. Annie knew she would never forget this day or this joy that she felt.