

Anne Dierking

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This morning I want to take you back to December, 2010. Sometime earlier in the fall, my husband, Gene, and I had made the decision to leave our home of 47 years in Sioux City and move to Iowa City where we had both gone to school and met so many years before. One of the incentives for the timing was that our friend, Kirk Speraw, had just come to help coach the Hawkeye team. We had watched him grow up in Sioux City, and his parents were good friends.

Over the years we had come to town in early December to watch a few basketball games and decided that year to double up our schedule and also look for a place to live. So, on the morning of Dec.9, we put Kirk's mother, Alice, in the back seat and the three of us started out for a good couple of days of basketball and visits. When we were ready to leave for Sioux City on the morning of the 11th the sky was dark and threatened snow. But - off we went! Now, we were then and still are, back road drivers – avoiding the Interstate if at off possible. And, this was before Highway 20 had been made into a four lane road. But, that was our road of choice. By noon the snow had started - but it was just soft swirls – so we kept going. Now, if you have ever driven across Iowa on 20 you realize that the further you go, your chances for finding a place to stop diminish as the towns are few and far apart. By the time we reached Early, Iowa, which is about 75 miles from Sioux City, the snow was much more of a problem. We stopped at Casey's there to ask about traveling on, and they knew nothing about the road going on west. Right at the edge of Early, Highway 20 makes a turn to the west and that would be the last leg of the trip. We had not gone far on this part of the road when the intensity of the snow picked up along with the intensity of the wind. That was the real problem, and we found ourselves in a "white out". Gene opened his side window, and I did the same--and I remember telling everyone, "Gene's job was to keep steering the car, mine was to see that we did not go off the right into the ditch, and Alice was to pray!!"

It wasn't long after that time that I noticed out of my window both yellow lines on the road and had to quickly tell Gene that he was on the wrong side of the road! He got over safely and soon said that he thought we were coming close to Schaller, Iowa, where he had had a client years before. I was to watch for the road and tell him when we got there. So, head out the window, I finally found it and told him to turn. All he could see was brush and snow and was afraid he was turning into the ditch. But, he did do it, and we found ourselves on the side road. We still had a ways to go, but there was a definite shift in the mood of the car. I think we all felt for the first time that we were going to safety. When we arrived in Schaller we found one small convenience store still open, and we poured into it eagerly! We asked about motels and were told there were none. About that time I remembered that there was a Presbyterian church there and asked if they could call the pastor. They did, and he said immediately for us to come to the church for the night! By this time we had picked up a young man who was also stranded so the four of us found our way to the church.

As we approached the church we noticed a tall young man striding along with his dog – turned out to be the pastor coming to welcome us and get us comfortable. I was picturing sleeping on a church pew but knew that would be far more comfortable than trying to make it back home. When we arrived at the church we were shown around, where the coffee pot was, and we were made to feel as welcome as possible. Then we were taken up stairs where we found a large room – perhaps used for youth - that had three LARGE couches in it. The young man immediately said that they were for the three of us, and he would take the floor. And, we began to settle in, the pastor was back inviting us to his home for dinner. His wife was making chili and baked potatoes. As you can imagine, that sounded a lot better than the few things we had picked up at the convenience store, so off we went out the back door, through the snow, and into the back door of the manse. We ate, we visited, we sang, we prayed, and eventually even played some board games before we went back to the church. As we were preparing to leave we noticed the pastor and his wife going through things in a closet—out came blankets, pillows, and even a blow up mattress for the 4th person!! To put it mildly, we all slept well that night. I awoke to day light and the sound of snow plows on the street and knew that we were going to make it home!

The rest of our trip was without incident, but our minds were on the Christmas story. Like Mary and Joseph who found no room at the Inn and had to accept the kindness of strangers, we had had a similar experience. Surely God was in this place!

Alleluia - Amen !