

# Fall into Thanks-giving...

**Hope.** Hope seems to be what we're all looking for: news reporters, politicians, writers, speakers, moms, dads, companies and yes, even pastors and congregations. Hope that this recession is about to break and the economy rise again. Hope that the job-less will be employed. Hope that the hungry will be fed. Yet even with this new-ish posture of hopefulness, the reality remains. Friends are still losing jobs, money is still tight and recovery seems a long way off.

Here at Mountain T.O.P., we too are experiencing this struggle to remain hopeful while watching an impoverished community suffer. We know, now more than ever, it is our response to such conditions that indicate who we have hope in. It is in this time that we feel lead to return to the Psalms and the whole gamut of human emotion and experience they express. There, we've discovered God's own "stimulus package." A stimulus package that we're finding still works even all these years later.

Abandonment, loss, discouragement, battles, death, wounds, laments, brokenness, anger, worry, hunger, thirst and betrayal are mixed with joy, praise, prayer, patience, endurance, peace, hope, friendship, faithfulness and love throughout the Psalms. But what has become our own stimulant is actually the pattern that emerges through the various emotion expressed. Often the psalmist pleads, weeps, yells and complains only to end the verse in praise and thanksgiving and hope of, for and in God. We have come to believe that this pattern is a holy habit that is desperately needed in our world, especially during these times. When words of praise and thanksgiving are on our lips; spoken from our mouths on the heels of an honest approach to God about where we are in life, we are transformed. We begin to see hope. Praise and Thanksgiving may not change what has happened or is happening, but it does change us and readjusts our relationship to God.

As we close out another successful year of ministry in the Cumberland Mountains, we want to say Thank You! We praise God for what you have done in His name. Included in these pages are stories of thanks from our Mountain T.O.P. family. It is our hope that these expressions of gratitude will inspire you to continue your support of Mountain T.O.P. Undoubtedly, your financial contributions are what make these stories possible.

In this spirit of thanks, we invite YOU to say Thank You in honor of someone or something that has made a difference in your life this year. With each donation to Mountain T.O.P., we will send a special thank you card to anyone you designate, expressing your thanks with a custom message. Simply fill out the reply card with the recipient's name and your message. We'll take care of the rest.

May you join with the psalmist in hoping continually and praising more and more no matter how dark the world may seem, may you do what you can to take part in God's transformation of this world, and may you continue shining a light of hope on the families in the Cumberland Mountains of TN.

## Meet Vincent Vasquez



Vincent Vasquez from Bethany UMC, Austin, TX has been around Mountain T.O.P. and it's Youth Summer Ministry for seven summers. Five of those summers Vincent spent as a camper and the last two he was on YSM Summer Staff. Vincent says, "Mountain T.O.P. has blessed me in many ways: meeting people & forming life-long friendships. The people I meet I wouldn't meet anywhere else. Being on staff really pushed me on my comfort boundary. It made me talk to families who I wouldn't normally talk to. Working with campers and leading them spiritually through devotionals helped me grow myself. I wouldn't have that opportunity elsewhere."

## Meet Dana Helms



Dana Helms is an upside down artist from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. She also has fallen in love with Mountain T.O.P.'s Kaleidoscope ministry, an art focused camp for special needs children of Grundy County, TN. This past summer was her first experience as a workshop leader, and when she thinks back to her experience, this is what comes to mind: "The other day I heard a self help guru say 'Go to your Happy Place.' I really didn't have a "Happy Place" until I attended Kaleidoscope at Mountain TOP. I was so moved, felt so loved, and transformed during my trip to Mountain T.O.P. Now when I am stressed or sad I simply think back to the Mountain and what Kaleidoscope meant to me and I am happy and stress free. I miss it everyday."

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## Meet Chelsi Warren



Chelsi Warren is a member of the youth group at Hilldale United Methodist Church in Clarksville, TN. She first came to Mountain T.O.P. as a Youth Summer Ministry camper in 2008. Last summer, she worked in the Day Camp program at Cumberland Pines. When asked about her first experience, Chelsi said, "I almost didn't come. I was really nervous because I knew it would be out of my comfort zone. I wasn't really big on going to church at the time. I was really sad all the time and I really wasn't expecting to get anything out of the trip. But when I got to Mountain T.O.P., I really opened up. I got things off my chest. I wasn't worried about being judged. I talked to campers and staff members and I finally told myself, 'God does love you. You aren't alone in your journey.' I saw how really blessed I am. Then, one night at worship, it felt like someone was holding my shoulders. I looked behind me and there was no one around me. It was at that time that I felt someone say, 'You are meant to be here.' Right then I knew I was meant to be a part of this ministry. I love helping kids and I don't want anyone to be in the dark place I was in. It was also in that moment that I heard my calling to be a youth director." Now back at home finishing up her senior year of High School, Chelsi said, "I don't know where I would be today without Mountain T.O.P. It really is that big of a deal to my life. I still feel my glow from Mountain T.O.P.!"

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enclose this form, along with your tax-deductible gift, in the envelop provided. Please see reverse side to pay by credit card.

# Meet the Bailey Family



Terry, Kelly, Kaylin, Shealin and Caleb Bailey have undoubtedly had a lasting impacting on every individual who has worked at their house. Since 2008, Mountain T.O.P. groups have worked on their roof, bathroom, floors, siding, windows and bedrooms. Last summer, Kaylin, nine years old, attended Summer Plus. Overwhelmed by how different their house looks, Terry said, "The television stands up straight. There's no draft through the middle of the house. I'm not embarrassed about the old carpet. The house is not as moist and the heat actually retains." Terry, originally from Georgia, was laid off from Kobelco Machines last Christmas. Since then, he has been receiving unemployment checks, which are starting to decrease in amount. Terry said, "I have \$2.40 in one bank account and \$78.00 in the other. I am trying to get a bachelor's degree in drafting from ITT Tech in Chattanooga, so I am spending money on gas every week. I also have a daughter from a previous marriage that I pay child support for weekly. I feel stressed out a lot of the time, but I am doing my best." Kelly, listening to this conversation, watched as the mailman dropped letters in the box. She said, "I am waiting on a check for groceries. If I don't get food stamps today, I don't get to go to the store." Despite these hard times, the Bailey family stay hopeful. When asked why they are thankful for Mountain T.O.P., Kelly teared up. "This house wouldn't look the way it does without y'all. We love y'all. Y'all are like family." Before I left, little Caleb, their two and half year old son, ran over and demanded a hug. "Lift," he said, with his arms in the air. I lifted him up, let him squeeze my neck and kiss my check. Satisfied, he said, "Okay, down." I placed his feet on the ground and he ran off to rejoin his mom. Smiling and waving as I drove away, the two of them yelled, "We love you!"

## Meet Phil Brown



Phil Brown is the youth director at St. Luke's Presbyterian Church in Dunwoody, GA. 2009 was his second summer to bring the youth from his church to participate in the Service Project and Day Camp programs of Youth Summer Ministry. When asked about his gratefulness towards Mountain T.O.P., his response is this: "One of the things I am most thankful for is your staffing model, both in your professionalism and teaching

good leadership for generations to come. Sure, the work we do and the time we spend in camp is great. One of the things I can take home with my youth is your model of servant leadership. Since the youth themselves have been leaders out on the work sites and watch your staff in front of groups, I can then put the youth in leadership roles back at home. It gives them a different picture of Christian vocation, something other than being a pastor. It gives them ideas of other ways they can serve the church."

## Meet "Big Don" Hill



Don Hill, known as "Big Don," has been a resident of Grundy County his whole life. When asked why he is thankful for Mountain T.O.P., he said, "I am now 70 yrs old and recently I was visited by 2 college age girls from Lee University in

Cleveland, TN. The basis for the friendship between myself and Jessica Hill and her friend Katy is of course that we share the love of God in our lives. However, I would have never known Jessica Hill had I not known Mountain T.O.P. So, my most precious gift that I treasure most from Mountain T.O.P. is the friendship of the people I have met down through the years."

## Meet Julie Reeves



Julie Reeves from City Road Chapel UMC, in Madison, TN, heard a lot about Mountain T.O.P. from the youth who come to the mountain during the summer. Their stories and enthusiasm sparked an interest in Julie. "I heard testimony from others who had been and was ready to get out of my comfort zone." This fall was Julie's second time at Mountain T.O.P. for A.I.M. (Adults In Ministry). Julie had the experience of being in the first MPT to work with the Bailey family. She says, "Their relationship and seeing God through their eyes was wonderful. That was the biggest reason I wanted to come back this year." Seeing the progress of the remodel of their home was remarkable, but spending time with the children was the most memorable. "Kaylin (Bailey) took me on a walk behind the house. She made up a game of 'you pick a leaf and I'll pick a leaf'. We looked for frogs and picked flowers. Being outside in God's creation with her was so special to me. When I got home, I plopped down on the couch and started watching TV, while my kids were upstairs playing the Wii. It really hit me how much I take for granted. The Bailey kids didn't

have many toys; in fact, they didn't have much of anything. And yet they were happy--and happy to share whatever they had. My A.I.M. weekend made me a lot more grateful." Julie is thankful for Millie Grammar and the ways she recruits folks from City Road Chapel UMC. Julie concludes by saying "Everyone should experience the mountain at least once."

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Thank you for turning back praise to God and for giving thanks. Your gifts help carry hope, not only to the families of the Cumberland Mountains, but to every church, family and individual that receives your card of thanksgiving.