

ON THE ROAD WITH PASTOR RICK...

August-September means the end of summer, back to school, football and my annual Pilgrimage of a Promise. I began my 18th pilgrimage on August 15 at the Wyoming-Colorado border. I have been walking across Colorado since then.

RC and Winchester began the walk with me. Winchester had to return early to get his late night College Ministry up and running. RC was able to continue on with me to the end. Elliot joined me and his brothers for a weekend. We hiked through an awesome canyon. One of those that looks like you're in a cowboy movie, towering cliffs above you, a rushing stream beside you, but no Indians. I sure would've loved to have seen some Indians. We did see mountain lion sign and tracks. We almost got caught in a flash flood. We didn't make it out until after dark. It was definitely an adventure. We also hiked the summit of Mt. Elbert, Colorado's highest peak at 14,431 feet. Elbert is the second highest mountain in the continental United States, only 200 feet below Mt. Whitney.

In all my walks, I always climb the highest peak in that state. There's a lot of difference between Driskill Mountain (535 feet), last year's pinnacle in Louisiana and Colorado's "fourteeners". My walk began this year at 8,000 feet on Colorado's "High Plains" North of Fort Collins. I didn't get back to 535 feet until I left the state. Every state is different. Louisiana may not have had mountains, but they had gators... and gumbo.

You can keep up with my walk day to day (in retrospect) on Twitter and on Facebook. It's the one "tech-savvy" thing about me. I try to put something up about the ministry and my life every day. I'd love for you to join us. Knowing a lot of you don't use those mediums I have put excerpts from my walking journals here in this month's message. One day I hope to write a book about my ramblings. Until then these messages will have to suffice.



Last year's walk had gators and gumbo

Journal Entry: Monday, August 15

*Another year, another state. Welcome to the Mile High state Beginning our walk North of Fort Collins on the Wyoming state line, we aren't a mile high, but at 8,040 feet it feels close. Everyone has been asking if we're going to acclimate to the altitude. We started acclimating today. We started walking.*

*Within an hour I had a pretty tough headache. I guess there's something to this altitude thing. Rugged scenery and a cold bottle of water helped keep my mind off my head. It's kinda weird to think about walking (or doing anything) without using your head. As I was trying to think about not thinking a thought came to me (because you can't keep your head from thinking some thoughts). I figured I could walk without thinking because there are plenty of politicians in Washington who do business everyday without using their heads. Not thinking about leaders who don't think made my head hurt even more. I walked on anyway.*

*God is good, and pretty cool in how He does business. Right when it seemed my head would bust we saw a sign in the middle of nowhere, "Whalberg Abbey; All Welcome." We figured we were certainly some part of "ALL", so we took the detour. A mile or so down a dirt drive we found the abbey, and the nuns.*

*Whalberg Abbey is a beautiful site, an oasis in the high desert. The nuns there are a contemplative order. They pray and think a lot. Their abbey is a great setting for such.*

*We visited their lovely abbey, built all of native materials so that it blended into the bluffs. We took a few minutes of quiet prayer and contemplation in the chapel there. Praying in an abbey with nuns seemed to make my "pilgrimage" more authentic. We also talked to an energetic smiling nun named Sister Lioba. She was very interested in our walk and said she would get all the nuns to pray for us. There are 21 nuns who live in the abbey in the desert. It can't hurt to have 21 nuns on your side. I've watched the Bells of St. Mary's about a hundred times. Now with Sister Lioba, I've got me a nun on my side. When we left, I felt like singing some old Bing Crosby tunes. When you whistle you won't notice a headache.*

*I'm not Catholic, but if I were I think I'd pick Jude to be my saint. He's the patron saint of "Hopeless Causes", Sister Lioba told me so. I work with my share of those. I love the "hopeless causes" of the world. I often feel Saint Jude must be my own saint as I can feel quite the hopeless cause myself. So, while I was at the abbey in the desert I bought a Saint Jude medallion. RC is going to weave it on to some leather he has and make me a necklace. For now, the saint is riding in my backpack. It somehow feels lighter already.*

*The nuns gave us permission to ramble on their property. Their property is awesome. We climbed up and down, and in and out some boulders to get at a high desert stream flowing in a canyon by the abbey. It was as lovely a stream as I've*





ever seen and my folks (on my momma's side) were "Creeks". The stream at the abbey gurgled in and out like Tennyson's "Brook". RC, Winchester and I ended up perched on some rocks with the crystal water gushing below our feet. I accidentally sat on a cactus, it was so beautiful there that I didn't care (I would care a little later, those cactus stickers don't come out easy). At least they took my mind off my headache. High on the boulders the stream below us looked like something I figure you'll see in Heaven...minus the stickers.

Me and the boys talked about the beauty of God's creation Indeed the heavens declare the glory of God. Here in this hidden canyon creation seemed to sing of its creator. When the wind blew the cottonwoods did seem to clap their hands. The rocks seemed poised to praise the Rock of ages. Our hearts were full. Here was my first epiphany of the journey: "Perhaps these places that sing the loudest can only be heard in silence. Aren't the loveliest places, like this stream's sandy bed, towered by looming canyon walls the lowest places. To find beauty maybe we don't need to look up or even around, maybe we need at times to look down."

And then there was the effort to get at that stream. We climbed. We lept. We slid down rough hillsides. We got bruised and scraped. I got stickers in my backside. It was hot. We were thirsty and dusty. Then, there it was, a scene I doubt few have ever seen. I can't imagine nuns climbing like we had to to get there (it's not their "habit"). Thus the thought, "Sometimes to find beauty, you have to work at it." Even though it's there all the time. "Open the eyes of my heart Lord. Open the eyes of my heart, I want to see Jesus..."

My mind was so overwhelmed with the nuns' canyon stream there wasn't any room for a headache. We walked on with the memories we'd just made. We walked on and on and on...

We walked about 15-18 miles, that day, a full day's walk for the first day of any journey, especially when your journey is at 8,000 feet.

Part of the adventure of all my walks is getting back to the van. We park and walk off every day, meaning we have to catch a ride back. Those rides have often proved to be very "unique". This year's first day was no different. Think about it, who picks up a hitchhiker? Well think a little more, who picks up 3 guys hitchhiking together? I can tell you this, a lot of cars didn't pick us up. We continued to walk with our thumbs out for hours. Finally a Jeep Cherokee did a quick u-turn, the window rolled down and the smiling face of a lovely young lady asked, "You guys need a ride?" Duh...

When we all hopped in the back I noticed a Bible on her front seat. We explained who we were and what we were doing and where our van was. Then I asked if she was a Christian. Her smile grew even bigger, "I sure am!" She proclaimed. Her name was Amanda and she told us she had been raised as an atheist. Miraculously, she had come to faith only a few months earlier. No one was discipling her. She was picking up faith like she picked up hitchhikers, with a smile on her face. When we got back to our van, parked on the Wyoming state line, we got her a walking t-shirt like the ones we wear. We gave her copies of all the preaching cd's/dvd's we had. I asked her if she'd like to share a "cold one" with us? That smile almost burst when I pulled her a cold Yoo-Hoo from our cooler.



We prayed with Amanda and parted. But not before I told her, as a dad, "Don't pick up hitchhikers." For us, a cold Yoo-Hoo and a lovely young lady with a glorious smile saying goodbye wasn't a bad way to end the first day.

### Tuesday, August 16

The second day of our walk began a little early and a lot different. I had thought about the nuns we'd met the day before all day as we had walked. I wanted to do something for them, but what? They're nuns. Then the thought hit me, maybe a revelation. Whatever it was, it led me to drive 40 miles back into town. We went to the closest grocery store and bought 21 pints of Ben & Jerry's and Blue Bell ice cream. Every flavor they had and a couple extra of chocolate. We then drove the 40 miles back to the abbey and gave the nuns ice cream. I know nuns have all taken a vow of poverty, but I also know no lady I've met yet will turn down chocolate, or chocolate chip mint ice cream. I was right. The nuns loved it, and loved me for bringing it to them. I asked if they might listen to some of my preaching cd's I always bring along to introduce myself. They took one of everything I had. Poverty makes you grateful for the smallest things. Somewhere in a remote Colorado canyon, the nuns are smiling as they eat Ben & Jerry's, listening to Brother Rick. That makes me smile.

### Wednesday, August 17

On day three the weather turned on us and we got caught in a high plains hail storm. We had rain jackets, which helped a little, but it was hail, not rain. They don't make hail jackets. There is nothing to get under or in up in that high country and you can't dodge hail no matter how quick you think you are. So, we laughed at ourselves and said, "ouch!" (and other adjectives) a lot and walked on. The lesson for this day was pretty obvious, "When you're going through 'hail' keep on going."

I know some of you are going through your own "he\_ \_". The kind that comes not with a thunder clap, but silence. Cancer, unemployment, depression, foreclosure, confusion...are all hellish enough. Add to that loneliness, despair,





*It's at times like these the lessons of this very walk across Colorado come into play. In a hail storm...walk on. You'll get through it. He'll walk with you, beside you. You'll make it. You won't even need a "hail jacket". Psalm 91:4 promises He'll cover you Himself, like a mother eagle covers her young under her wings.*

*We took a couple of detours in my Colorado Pilgrimage. Alright, to be honest, we took more than a couple of days. There was just so much to see. Some days a looming mountain lured us to come scale it's rugged beauty. We climbed several mountains. We even climbed Colorado's highest peak, Mt. Elbert. At 14,431 feet it is the highest of the Rocky Mountains in America. Like a big bully it taunted us to test our strength and resolve. Like schoolyard boys we took the challenge. Practice? Experience? Acclimation to altitude? That's all for sissies we thought. So we climbed. We felt pretty tough until a group of retirees from Oregon blew past us on their way up. At the top I talked to one of those retirees, a 75 year old lady named "Cloudy." I've never met anyone named Cloudy before. This lady was so full of energy, at 75! She wanted to know if she came to Alabama would I take her to hunt alligators. I promised her that I would. A lady named Cloudy with a smile like her's could probably do whatever she liked in Alabama. She passed us again on the way down. We followed her laughter for well over an hour.*



#### **Saint Nick:**

*After walking across 33 states prior to my Colorado pilgrimage, I'm never surprised to find a "Divine Appointment" involving hitchhiking. My normal routine is to walk 20-25 miles and then hitchhike back to my truck. No one ever expects to pick up a hitchhiking preacher. Many the time God has put me in vehicles with people desperate to hear from God. I've been picked up by everyone from stoned criminals to biker chicks (though not at all like the music videos). A preacher on the way to commit suicide stopped for us in Vermont. When he found out I was a preacher myself he poured his heart out. He left us with fresh blueberries. We left him with the knowledge God loved him enough to send a preacher walking across his state at the exact time he was going to end his life. He decided to go on living. I decided to keep on walking.*

*This year's walk had it's share of "Divine Appointments". God, as always, does things to remind me He's God. He did it again on my walk. Again and again and again. God is always there, sometimes, most of the time, we're just too busy to notice Him.*

*My walking route took me all along the Eastern edge of the Rocky Mountains. Such scenery is medicine for a weary soul (and "soles"). I planned to travel from Wyoming on down through Fort Collins to Boulder, on over to Denver, then down through Colorado Springs, Pueblo and finish in New Mexico. It was a route that made sense to me, but then I'm the one crazy enough to travel like Forrest Gump. So, when my Colorado buddy, Roger Hayslip, mentioned a little church way over in Eastern Colorado that wanted me to come preach, I took it as an opportunity to see what God would do.*

*Early Saturday morning, (August 20), I drove to Haxtun, Colorado and set out walking the 20 miles or so to Holyoke. If you've ever been to Eastern Colorado you know it's as different from the Rocky Mountains as possible. Eastern Colorado is flat farm country, and I do mean flat. When I started walking in Haxtun I could see the grain elevators in the next town. It made it seem nearer than it was. My boys stayed back in Denver for the weekend so I was all alone on this part of the pilgrimage. And in Eastern Colorado, I do mean all alone. Nothing but me and the highway and corn as far as I could see. It reminded me of the old Stephen King movie, "Children of the Corn." It made me walk faster.*

*It was a hot day to be walking, but then I'm from Alabama, hot is our normal setting. At least in Colorado there wasn't so much humidity. I also fudged, or used my Boy Scout training and set me out some water along the route. There aren't any stores between Haxtun and Holyoke. So I was ready.*

*It turned out to be one of my best days ever walking. Nothing spectacular to see, nothing out of the ordinary happened, just me and God and the highway before us. There's a lesson in that. Remember, any day spent with God has the potential to be awesome. Sometimes the clutter of our plans interrupt God's plans. With nothing to do but walk, God had me to Himself.*

*Walking on a flat road in 100' heat with the hazy silhouette of white grain elevators way off down the road can do something to your mind. Earlier on in my walk, higher up in elevation my head hurt. Now it just seemed fuzzy. I'm used to fuzzy, so I kept walking.*

*One thing about walking where the land is so flat is that you can see forever. It's a neat feeling. It's a good setting to think. With absolutely nothing around you but corn it's also a good setting to listen. The irony of all those "ears" and no one to listen wasn't lost on me. Like Samuel long, long before me, my prayer for this day was simple, "Speak Lord your servant is listening."*

*Seems like every time I hear someone pray these days it's long and eloquent and kinda "preachy". We might all do good to pray Samuel's simple prayer more often, "God speak...I'm listening." I'm sure glad I did that day.*





*Walking 20 miles that turned into 28 because I kept wandering off gives one plenty of time to listen and to think. It seemed silent until I listened closer and heard the wind playing in the corn, whistling down one row only to whisper out a further row on down the road. Birds whistled. Pheasants surprised me as they tumbled out of cut fields rising with thunder in their wings. Even the grasshoppers added to the symphony with their incessant clickety-clack scrambling across hard-top roads. The pounding of my feet on pavement and the labor for my breath became a part of my one act opera, Pastor Rick-walking on. And as simple as it was, simpler even now in retelling it, that afternoon became music for my soul. I heard Heaven in the grind of a far off combine harvesting corn and the whistle of a freight train heavy laden with grain. I counted the different shades of green in the fields overcome with the awesome simplicity of the fields. Straight field rows looked like abstract art done by giants. Dust swirling from far off tractors gave everything a hazy, ethereal look, like I was living in a Norman Rockwell scene.*

*I finally turned on my i-pod and listened to the Issacs singing "Big Sky", and I was there. This was real. I felt so alive, more alive than I had felt in years. Yes my feet hurt. Yes I was hot, dehydrated. My back ached and I got blisters. It was tough, but tough = alive. Dead is easy. I was alive that day with my feet on Colorado asphalt, and my heart beyond the sunset.*

*When a friend facebooked me, concerned by my hurting feet and dehydration she kindly posted, "I'm praying this day will end soon for you." I posted back, "Don't you dare...I want this day to go on and on forever. I am alive! Life like this don't come every day."*

*I was blessed by the opportunity to preach to those fine Colorado farm folk the next day. My feet hurt, my back ached, but my voice was fine. What an honor to plant the seed of God's word in the lives of those who make their living planting seed. In all the states I've walked (34 now) across all the miles (over 8,000) I've never met nicer people than those in Eastern Colorado. They don't call it the "Heartland" for nothing.*

*Driving back to the Rockies that evening we stopped and ate Mexican food cooked with green chilies, WOW! It was the best Mexican food I've ever eaten, but then walking all day can peak your appetite. Either way, God bless green chilies. Next year I'm going to grow a ton myself.*

*My good weekend was finally topped when we stopped to pick up two hitchhikers right beside a prison. I knew this would prove interesting. The man who got in with me wasn't a prisoner, but rather a blue collar worker looking for work. It was like picking up Woody Guthrie. The hitchhiker's name was Nicholas. Once we got to talking he warmed up and said I could call him Nick.*

*Nick said he had never been to church, but once, when he was baptized as an infant. He knew little about God. His hurt and pain from having to leave his family for work left a glaring need in his life. He was open to the Gospels' good news. Over the miles we talked. I thought about all those fields planted with corn and silently prayed, "Lord, let this seed fall on good ground."*

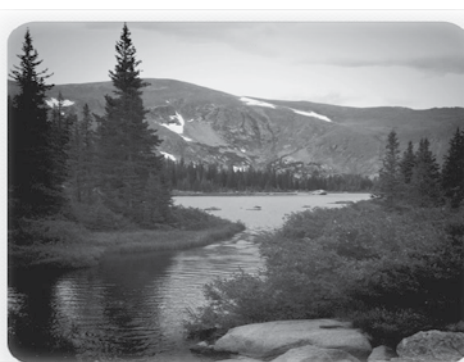
*It did. By the time we let Nick out in Denver he prayed with me to receive Christ. When we got out he asked, "Are you a saint?" I told him no, but now he was, "Saint Nicholas."*

*The air was cold and the wind was brisk as I drove off with Nick smiling in my rearview. It felt like Christmas.*

*Thanks to all of you who helped with the walk. I can't do all that I do without great friends like ya'll. God bless you. loved my walk, but the best part of it is coming home (my wife and kids say "YES!!")*

*I hope to see ya'll sometime soon. Keep in touch.*

*Walking on with Jesus...Pastor Rick*



The goal for my pilgrimage is to raise shoes for needy people around the world. We hope to be able to take 4,000 pair of shoes to Mexico this Christmas. Thanks to our friends at Soles 4 Souls we have a promise of 4,000 pair of shoes already.

Now we need to raise the money to ship our shoes and supplies to Mexico. Denny Nissley, Christ in Action ministries has promised to haul our stuff to Mexico this Christmas. He has done it for years. Yeah! Denny!

All we have to do is pay for the fuel, approximately \$2,500-\$3,000. We'd like to raise those funds now so we can approach the holidays without the burden.