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The Watcher

Slowly I step up in line barely able to see over the ledge of the counter. “Yes Please, No Thank you, Yes Please, Kool-aid Please.” I say very timidly. As I turn away to find a seat a voice from behind me sternly says, “Young Lady!” I think to myself, “What did I do wrong? Did I forget something? I want to go home!” Scared to death I slowly turn around and there she is, “You have very nice manners.” She turns away and continues serving the next person in line. One of the energetic councilors comes up to me and asks, “Would you like me to carry your drink?” not having another option because my hands are full with a hot plate of meatballs, macaroni, and Jell-o, I follow the councilor to a seat.

Ever since I was a Kindergartner I have looked forward to packing up and moving out for a week. Now it is my home away from home, Bethel Bible Camp. Away from the world I can focus on God and having fun with people who share the same values as me. Many people at camp have influenced me but one stands alone. She is stern, opinionated, and thrifty. I have only meet one person who freezes potato chips and feeds children refried bean muffins. She knows where she stands on everything, her cooking skills are amazing, and she can live off of barely anything. Her name is Carol Lewis, she has taught me how to respect others, most of my cooking skills, many religious views, general life advice, and gardening tricks.

In second grade I made many life decisions. I decided to become one of those busy over achiever students at school that is involved in everything and never sleeps, to work at Bethel Bible Camp, and to commit my life to Christ. At camp I was taught that you live out what you say, today I am involved in everything, a camp volunteer and devoted to Christ, but I do get enough sleep, surprisingly. Carol was always at camp every year working. She mostly stays in her realm, the kitchen, so when growing up I didn’t see her very often. At meals she always sat in the same spot, and mostly minded her own business, but she was always watching. Picking out the good kids and the troublemakers. Luckily, I made it on her good side.

Carol is an amazing woman if she likes you. John is her husband he is also the camp director, if Carol is happy than John is happy generally speaking. Carol is a very headstrong person and can be hard to please. She knows where she stands on everything, there are many unsaid rules because of her opinions. Many believe she is just the grumpy old cook that doesn’t pay attention, but that is wrong. She watches the children and staff. If something doesn’t taste right to someone she knows. When the children line up for food she can pick out the troublemakers, good kids, and quiet ones. I have been influenced by her innate ability to read people, not just to be able to do it myself but also to watch myself. Often I ask myself, “What was that persons first impression of me? Am I leaving the wrong impression?”

Each year a highlight of camp is Carol’s fresh garden produce, fresh mulberry crisp, homegrown garden salad, or cucumber sticks. As I have said earlier Carol can live on barley anything, being a missionary’s wife that is just how she has to be. Bethel Bible Camp has a reputation for being the cheapest summer camp around, there are two reasons why they keep the prices down; volunteer staff and Carol’s cooking. Each meal at camp averages between six to ten cents per person. John and Carol spend the off-season shopping sales and going to food pantries and somehow the food is always amazing. She will make food last year round by freezing everything; butter, cheese, grapes, cookies, eggs, asks and she has probably tried to freeze it.

Refried bean muffins? Who would think of putting refried beans in a muffin or anything else? Some how Carol ended up with several cases of refried beans by the gallon, so she had to get rid of them. When she thinks of something like that she asks herself “Why not?” and throws it in the batter. Carol is a very creative person she uses everything and reuses the leftovers in something else. Each year camp gets lots of food donations, most are useful but there are always those few odd ones. Prunes… She has a lot of prunes… The nursing home couldn’t get rid of them so they sent them to Carol. Prunes in the meat balls, prunes in cookies, and prunes in anything she can hide them in but honestly you would never know unless I told you. That’s why the kitchen has many secrets from the campers because if they were told that they were having cranberry and marinara sauce or fig brownies the children wouldn’t eat, and that would be bad. Each year Carol has to be more creative to get the campers to eat because children are pickier and pickier.

Food isn’t the only battle Carol has to fight she is now in a fight with Breast cancer and suffering complications from double knee replacements but she is still out shopping sales, freezing potato chips, and gardening. This woman has influenced me since I was just able to peak over the counter to see what was for supper. She has helped me discover who I am, in a way nobody else could. I have learned how to squeeze in extra nutrition into good home cooking and how to be thrifty. She has prepared me to be a better camp councilor and to understand that someone is always watching. I guess you get use to it when you work for the Watcher.