

# The Other Side of the Mountain

—brother Placid and brother John

*The bear went over the mountain . . .  
The bear went over the mountain,  
To see what he could see.  
And all that he could see . . . all that he could see,  
Was the other side of the mountain,  
The other side of the mountain . . .*

(Popular Children's Folk Song)

**I**N OUR TIMES, SO MARKED BY CONFLICT, VIOLENCE AND division, we may be tempted to a kind of cynicism that leads to paralysis and despair. Economic and social inequalities, repression of the rights of minorities and crumbling institutions from church to government, family to schools, and health care to human rights, on local and international levels, threaten to drain the human spirit of creativity and hope.

In this context, it seemed a little outlandish—or perhaps a more apt word would be “ludicrous” (from the Latin word *ludus* meaning playful or funny) for the Priory Community to consider a journey to the Rocky Mountains for an autumn retreat. And of course it was outlandish! Pull up stakes from the glorious fall color of Vermont's Green Mountains and head off to the unknown Wild West with its soaring glacial peaks and roaming bears, elk, goats, sheep, and bison.

It just happened to be brother Michael's fiftieth birthday year. He was born and brought up in Alberta, Canada, near the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park in the Rocky Mountains. So a part of the life of our community has its roots in that faraway place. Family is still living there and feels close in spirit to the brothers in Weston. A welcome mat to celebrate beginnings, old and new, awaited our community in Lethbridge, Waterton, and points far west, beyond the horizon of our Green Mountains. As with the proverbial bear of the childhood song, we thought “. . . to see the other side of the mountain!”

For many of us it was the first time in this part of our continent. We were able to glimpse some of the magnificence of this beautiful area: spectacular granite mountains with islands of glaciers and snow fields, riotously colorful wild flower meadows, alpine forests cradling emerald lakes, and the grand wildlife: bighorn sheep, grizzly bears, moose, and mountain goats.

Throughout the trip, however, hovered another very special gift: the wonderful people and the hospitality they offered us. Beginning with



l to r: brother Michael, Alyssa, Ingrid, Mark, Ben, and brother Daniel, at Wall Lake, BC

brother Michael's family: George and Anne Hoveling, his parents; his brother, Mark, and his wife, Ingrid, and their children, Alyssa and Ben; his sister, Yvonne, and her husband, Ron, we were made to feel right at home. The family accompanied us on our many hikes and trips and helped with so many of the details that made our trip so fruitful as well as adding a good dose of family laughter and fun.

In the daily ramblings and interactions about and in the parks we met so many wonderful, friendly and kind people. From the Sisters of St. Martha who graciously received us at their Retreat Center in Lethbridge, Alberta, to the Canadian and U.S. customs officers as we crossed between Alberta and Montana; the U.S. Park Service personnel at Logan Pass, Montana, and the wonderful Blackfeet Indian nurses and doctor during an unexpected emergency room visit at Blackfeet Community Hospital in Browning, Montana; the hikers and travelers we encountered along the trails; our trip was filled with that particular kindly human beauty.

We never hear just what it was that that bear saw on “. . . the other side of the mountain.” All we are told he saw was the Zen-like “. . . other side of the mountain”, earth's beauty, animal life, human love and friendship.

The autumn retreat presented our community with an opportunity to view the world from the Other Side of the Mountain—to look beyond the limited horizon of immediate concerns, difficulties, and challenges, and to embrace the wider horizon of kinship with a wondrous world that embraces all, from foreigner to family, with care, recognition, and love.

From this playful, serious two weeks of autumn retreat, the brothers returned to the Green Mountains refreshed in spirit. The retreat was a return to the origins, the beginning of life of one brother that could be shared by all. The retreat was not a “going back” but a turning and returning to the beginning, to a new beginning. The stirring events of those days offered a new perspective on the day-to-day challenges and opportunities of the present for this Benedictine community. Alive in a time tempted to cynicism and despair but filled with promise and hope, we made connections with the origins of life and love that embrace our world today and forever.

Now that is a retreat—a gift of new beginnings! ■