Personal Writing by Christy Swarzendruber

Pikes Peak has always been a pretty big deal in my immediate family. My parents climbed it on their honeymoon and we’ve gone on many vacations to Colorado where we have seen Pikes Peak in the distance, so that mountain has always been important to my family. So when I had the chance to climb it when I was ten years old I was ready to take on the challenge. My family and I were at Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp located near Divide, Colorado for a family camp. We enjoyed many activities throughout the week, along with some difficult hikes. When it came time to sign up for the Pikes Peak hike I was eager to write my name down. My parents were unsure whether I would be able to make it to the top since the camp didn’t usually take my age campers on this hike, so I was determined to prove them wrong.

Pikes Peak is one of the “big ones” in Colorado. Its elevation is 14,115 feet, which is quite a difference from the elevation of Rocky Mountain Mennonite Camp, which is at 9,620 feet. So the trek up to the peak would involve almost 4,500 feet of vertical altitude change. From where we started on the Crags trail, the hike would be eight miles and take almost 5 hours. On the day of the big hike we woke up at a very early 6 a.m., giving us just enough time to stuff in some breakfast and pack a quick lunch to eat at the peak. Everyone was all bundled up with about four layers of clothing, because we knew the weather was changeable all the way to the top. Then we started the hike.

The first part of the hike was relatively easy and we got to enjoy the beautiful scenery and the occasional wildlife, but once we hit the tree line the trail got much more difficult. The trail started to become a huge incline on the trudge up to the top of the ridge. The climb up to Sheep Ridge was very steep and we had to stop for constant breaks because people were not acclimated to the altitude. We were working to get to the top of Sheep Ridge which we would travel along until we got to the base of the mountain.

Once we got to the top of Sheep Ridge we thought it would get easier from there, but we were very wrong. The next part of the journey wasn’t necessarily very tough, but it was dangerous. Sometimes we would walk along steep drop offs. We also couldn’t tell where the path was because there was no grass. We had to follow these piles of stones, called cairns, and trust them to lead us to our destination. Along with all those dangers, we had to hike through rain, sleet, snow, and lightning. We stopped at this place called the Devil’s Playground to see if the thunder and lightning would subside. Devil’s Playground got its name from all these huge rocks that lightning would bounce off and make it very dangerous. As one would see, this was a bad predicament to be in, but eventually all was well and we were able to continue on.

When we finally got to the base of the Pikes Peak massif, we looked up and saw this huge boulder field we needed to climb. At this point we were all wheezing because of the altitude and all our muscles were sore from walking up such steep terrain. Worst of all, we didn’t think there was a path up to the top, we were just supposed to go straight up through this boulder field. So we started the trek through the slippery rocks. This part of the hike took the most concentration, and it didn’t help that I was impatient to get to the top. This part of the hike was also the most difficult, but I knew I could make it through with my dad’s help.

We finally made it to the top, and the view was incredible, except that there was also a gift shop and restaurant that was filled with tourists. We felt very superior to those who only had to ride up in either a car or on the cog railway without doing any work like we had done. We eventually ate our packed lunches at the top and the rest of the group started the hike down. My parents didn’t allow me to hike down the mountain. Because they thought it was too dangerous, I rode in a car.

On that day when I was ten years old, I realized that I could reach any goal that I wanted. This was significant because I realized that age is just a number and that what really allows one to reach a goal is one’s determination and desire to succeed. These traits have helped me to succeed throughout my life, in the classroom and on the court.