

The Clearing – The Story

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Ever since the early days of our marriage, we have loved the water and boating. I got into boating mid-way through college and have owned a boat ever since. There’s something about both the peace and contentment that water brings – as well as the challenge of water sports. With very few exceptions in the entirety of our marriage which has now exceeded forty years, we have spent at least one vacation week on a lake every summer. Our children have all grown up experiencing and loving our lake vacation weeks. Never did we hear one of them complain about wanting to do something different. In fact, even today they and their children all still love the water and want to go to the lake whenever we’re going.

Our lake vacations started out on Dale Hollow in Tennessee. Then we began camping and boating on Lake Cumberland, Kentucky and more recently Norris Lake, Tennessee. We’ve tent camped, RV camped, stayed in lake cabins, houseboats and more recently the lake homes of friends. Just about every time we’re down on these lakes, we would dream and talk of owning some type of lake home ourselves. Occasionally a phone call about a houseboat, property or lake house would take place – but up to this occasion, no further steps were ever taken.

It was the week of July 17th, 2016 that we were vacationing with some life-long friends of ours, the Johnsons and staying at their Norris Lake home. Our daughter, Mashawn, her husband Cameron and our granddaughter, Raegan were also there that week. It was after that vacation week that, once again we began dreaming and talking about a lake house of our own. We have so loved the experiences with the Johnson’s and have been blessed with their generosity, but the idea of having our own home and the possibilities of using it for some of the ministries we’re involved in as a family began to brew in our hearts again.

After that week, Mashawn began checking Lake Realtor websites and, as you can guess we began getting a plethora of emails of Norris Lake homes. Mashawn and I would often compare notes with some of the homes we would receive from these emails. We began to think more actively about taking a couple days and driving down to check out some of these homes.

Our nephew, TJ Creamer was getting married in Nashville, Tn. the weekend of October 21, 2016. The idea crossed our minds – what if we drove down a couple days before the wedding and checked out a few lake homes before driving on to the wedding in Nashville?

I suggested that Mashawn contact the realtor they had purchased their Waynesville home from that also attends our church, Jon Glista to see if he could send us some realtor references that specialized in Norris lake property and homes.

Jon sent me 2 or 3 names that he recommended. I started with the first name on the list. I left a voice mail message to that realtor about what we were planning. I waited for a couple of days with no return call, so I sent to the second name on the list – Kim Wax, with Gables & Gates Realtors. I left a message from her and received a prompt response within hours of my message. I told her our plans and that we

would like to look at possibly four or five homes with at least a lake view and we wanted to look at homes on the south side of Norris – in the general vicinity of our friend’s home – the Johnsons. I gave her an approximate price range and she began searching.

The weekend of the wedding arrived. My wife, Marla, Mashawn, Camron, Raegan and I drove down on Friday night and spent the night at the Johnson’s home, near Tazewell, Tennessee. We met Kim that Saturday morning and began our house tours to look at 5 homes we had selected.

The first house was actually only a few minutes away from the Johnson’s in a different sub-division. The home sat on 16 acres – mostly wooded with a spectacular view of the lake. The second house was a wooden two-story A-frame that was also very nice. The third house sat on five acres.

But it was the fourth house we looked at on Sunset Blvd. Maynardville in the Hickory Pointe subdivision that blew us all away. As soon as we walked in we were in awe and stunned not only by the beauty of the home and the view – but we all felt an unmistakable peace and calm. Even Kim, our realtor acknowledged the same feeling and remarked several times about how nice this home was. It wasn’t a sales pitch – but she commented how this was her “favorite” – which also meant that she would be recommending it to other of her clients.

The view from the upper and lower deck was simply awesome. The layout of the home was perfect for our needs. It was built in 2010 and immediately became our favorite of the homes we had looked at thus far – with one final home to see.

The fifth house was just up the lane from the Sunset Blvd. home. The interior was unfinished and the layout was confusing and not appealing to us at all. In fact, to this day it still sits in the same condition.

We checked out the Hickory Pointe community – the clubhouse, the boat docks, etc. We said our goodbyes to Kim and began our trip to Nashville. As we drove, the discussion immediately focused on the homes and it became very clear – our unanimous decision was that the Sunset Blvd. home was clearly our favorite. It must be noted that when we began this weekend, we really had no determination to actually make an offer on a home. We were simply “looking”. But as we drove, we began discussing the possibility of actually doing this and making it a reality. We discussed the financial possibilities – that we would own and pay for it together 50/50. Ultimately we made a decision to put an offer on the Sunset Blvd. home – all of this while traveling by car to Nashville – using our phones to make the offer, sign documents, etc.

After the initial offer, we were on the phone with Kim and she had told us that a similar offer had already been made to which the seller had turned down. She also indicated that there was another showing set for this home the next day.

While Mashawn was looking on the website, primarily to see if some of the lights in the Sunset Blvd home would possibly be included in the sale when she excitedly declared, “Oh my goodness- this house comes fully furnished! Everything stays!” We’re talking furniture, table service, pots and pans, televisions, linens and towels, everything!!”

It was then, that we decided to amend our initial offer to a full-price offer – again all by phone on our way to Nashville. On October 22 our offer was accepted to which Mashawn noted: “We just bought a lake house on my birthday” (October 22 is Mashawn’s birthday).

The adventure now took a new and exciting turn. Unbeknownst to us, we were about to encounter the providential hand of God in an amazing way. He had been involved all along – but now we were going to visibly see what He had been doing and how every single person in this story is interconnected.

Since this was still very early in the financial process, we decided to keep things fairly quiet. The loan approval still had to take place, inspections had to be approved – all the things that go along with buying a home. We told only our immediate family and some of our closest friends about the process. Once the loan had been approved, we began sharing the story – but still very selectively.

Mashawn and Cameron were on a trip to New Jersey as a part of their ministry connection with XXXChurch – a ministry to men and women caught up in the porn industry. A new ministry partner and fellow member of SouthBrook Church, Katie Dorsten was accompanying Mashawn and Cameron. It was her first trip with XXXChurch and with Mashawn and Cameron. Mashawn, a co-owner and hair stylist at Bangs Salon and Spa had done Katie’s hair for some time. But that was pretty much the extent of their relationship. Katie’s husband, Chris is a long-time friend of Marla and me. His mom and dad have been a part of our lives for over thirty years and we have literally watched Chris grow up.

While sitting next to Katie on the plane on the way to New Jersey, and making conversation, Mashawn felt a nudge to share with Katie our Norris lake home decision. Katie is excited and wants to see a picture. Mashawn opens Dropbox on her phone and shows her a picture. Katie looks at the picture and begins to get emotional. Her face shows an unexpected shock – “Oh my goodness,” she declares, “I know this house. Mashawn, you bought ‘The Clearing!’” Mashawn is obviously confused – “What is ‘The Clearing?’” Mashawn asks.

Katie responds, “Do you remember that Chris and I were part of a church plant in Knoxville? Well there are two people that were on the leadership team of that church plant. They built this home specifically with the vision of people being able to go there to clear out and make space for the Holy Spirit. Chris and I have spent some amazing weekends here. I had a very close friend’s bachelorette party here. We’ve spent some amazing times here – Chris especially!”

Mashawn is thinking, “There is no way! Of all the homes for sale around Norris Lake – and this random conversation – we can’t be talking about the same home.” But as Katie scrolls through the pictures with Mashawn still in a state of disbelief, Katie affirms, “Yes, this is the home. This is ‘The Clearing!’”

As soon as the plane lands, Mashawn calls me to let me know this incredible story. What are the odds of all the hundreds of homes on Norris that are for sale and to have these connections with this one? As soon as I heard the story – I told Mashawn that Katie and Chris need to let the sellers know who we are and our connection to the Dorsten’s and our similar purpose for the home.

Before we leave the New Jersey trip, we can now understand in retrospect the divine timing of this conversation between Mashawn and Katie and how God was using this amazing story of “The Clearing” to bless and reveal His power on this particular XXX Church event.

These conventions are an attempt to literally be the hands and feet of Jesus to take the light of Christ into some very dark and depraved corners of the world. Without going into detail, this New Jersey trip, specifically an “Awards Event” would prove to be one of the spiritually darkest trips that Mashawn and Cameron have ever taken. We now believe that this story and the connection between the Dorsten’s and us was one of God’s ways of confirming His divine presence to them. It was His reminder that they were not alone. His presence and power were all around them, over and beneath them. Even when things felt very dark and far away from God – He was actually quite near. The conversation about The Clearing proved to be a tremendous reminder of His love and power that sustained them through this weekend.

In the meantime, Chris has now sent an email to the sellers of “The Clearing” – Kevin and Carol Reeve. Here is Chris’ email:

“I have kind of an awesome story to share with you. I was going to message you but I thought it would be cool to share publicly. Katie is currently serving alongside a few friends this weekend with an organization called XXXChurch. It’s a ministry specially to spread the word to the porn industry that Jesus loves them. The couple that she’s primarily serving with this weekend are friends of ours from the church I work for here in Ohio. They told her that they were buying a home in Tennessee with the purpose of it being a place for them, their family, and others in their world to retreat, “clear out”, and reset. When they showed Katie pictures, she realized it was The Clearing. They are the new owners! 😊

Katie told them about the poem that was hung on the wall and they asked if there was any way they could get a copy to put back up. Hope this encourages you guys. Know that it will continue to be used for great things.”

Carol’s response: “I am stunned. Reading your message, I collapsed in tears. With this knowledge you have given us a greater gift than you can possibly imagine. Our prayer has been that the new owners would love this space and feel its sacredness and carry out the vision God gave us for it. We didn’t imagine we could actually hear of that desire in them! This is SO GOOD and SO GOD! I cannot thank you enough! Yes, Yes! We will leave the poem on the wall.....Wow, I can’t believe this! Thank you SO MUCH! This is restoration. This is redemption. This is God’s amazing sovereignty.”

I don’t have the time or space to write about the amazing communication that began with Kevin and Carol and our families. We learned that Kevin’s mother was a retired elementary teacher in the Xenia school system that had our son in one of her classes back in the 1970’s. My wife, Marla – also a retired teacher in the Xenia system knows Judy personally and just four months prior to the closing had a “random” encounter with Judy at the Global Leadership Summit held at our church in Miamisburg. Neither obviously had any knowledge that our families would soon be connected with The Clearing.

Kevin and Carol have been nothing short of amazing with their generosity and assistance in helping us know and understand the home. I cannot imagine any buyer and seller having a better or healthier relationship than we have. We have offered for the Reeve's to come back and enjoy The Clearing any time they choose. They generously left several very special portraits, each of which has a unique story behind it that are still displayed. One of those portraits was created specifically for The Clearing by a Knoxville artist and incorporates Kevin's poem, "The Clearing". This picture is amazing and remains on a prominent wall in the upstairs family room.

It is so very humbling to be a part of something so much bigger than us – or a lake home – or a financial investment. The vision of The Clearing has simply changed hands from the Reeve's to the Creamers and Rigmaidens and we are privileged to participate in His divine plan that continues on. Our sincere desire is to be faithful stewards of what God has entrusted to us.

Our first weekend in The Clearing was December 2-4, 2016. We spent a portion of that weekend in a time of prayer and dedication of ourselves and this home. We are truly excited to see how God will continue to use The Clearing as a place "nestled in nature, an outpost of grace, a haven of rest, a sacred space."

This was one of Carol's last Facebook posts – dated November 5, 2016.

"This is my last clearing at The Clearing. This sacred space will soon transfer to new owners. The decision to let it go has been bittersweet, but houses are meant to be used. We have always said that it is God's house, not ours. We pray that our hopes in building it (to be a place of peace, clarity, healing, creativity, joy...and restoration) will be fulfilled as long as it stands perched atop this ridge, graced by deer, wild turkeys, fog-covered mornings, and spectacular sunsets."

My response: "I am one of the new "owners" of The Clearing – although it is so obvious from all of these amazing stories of spiritual breakthrough, healing and restoration – that none of us have ever or will ever be an "owner." Just like Carol and Kevin, we too are only managers – seeking to fulfill the desires of the One who owns everything. We are so encouraged by these stories that have already been written and anticipating so many more to be written and experienced in the days and years ahead. The beautiful truth is that they are not all separate stories, but intersect and a part of The One Great Story of our Redeemer- and together form this amazing tapestry of His love and grace. To all of those blessed and to be blessed by The Clearing."

Carol's response: "Thank you, Pete! This is beautiful and makes my heart swell. I only tagged people in this post who have stayed here to retreat from life's storms, some of whom we have never met. This home has been the setting for families celebrating weddings and for a family mourning the loss of a loved one. It has hosted countless small group gatherings, church staff retreats, nonprofit board meetings, and personal clearings for weary souls. Paintings and books have come to life here, friendships have been strengthened, and marriages have been repaired. The peace in my spirit – placed there when I learned of your intent to carry out this vision of ours from 8 years ago – is high and long and wide and deep. Thank you."

Carol's final post of November 28, 2016

"It is finished. Today this view has become someone else's. We are grateful to have been the first characters in the story of the sacred space named The Clearing. The memories set here are beyond measure for us and many others. We are sad but claiming peace. The new owners intend to carry forth the vision God gave us in designing and building the home (that it would be a sacred retreat space for those in need of a break from life). We have long said the house has never been ours; it is God's and will remain so. Many blessings to you and those you will host here, [Pete Creamer](#). Thank you for helping us let go in peace."