

April 25, 2004

**HYG Youth Sunday Sermon**  
*Letting the Cat Out of the Little White Box*

When I was a little girl I had this small white box. Externally, that was pretty much it. But, like many things, the beauty was on the inside. When I lifted the lid, a delicate ballerina was twirling to the sound of her precious melody. Here I kept and left many of my childhood secrets. I'm pretty sure this news to even my parents.

Now, I find myself holding tight to another secret. For four years now, I have been blessed with a community—a community that strips me of all my titles, social groups and stereotypes, embracing me and each member down to our cores. The magic of HYG is so special; the ability to both laugh and cry with 46 of your peers is so rare that you can only truly understand it from within. Thus, this has been my and many other people's excuse in keeping the secret of our church youth group. At times I have felt a bit embarrassed, hesitant to share. But why? I think I fear people will misunderstand, or can't understand something that has touched and continues to touch the deepest parts within me. So I haven't taken the risk. But let me now. Let me disclose the secrets of HYG.

We wake up to the thundering sound of Mr. Phil Terry followed by groggy giggles from our "adults" Sarah Akin, Amy Jackson and Cheryl Kerr. Our days fly by with water fights, races, hugs, songs and of course a little work here and there. At night, the consumption of obscene quantities of food, the strategic placement of water balloons in sleeping bags, hours of dosie-doeing and line dancing as well as the dedication and launching fire works, all fit between discussions of hope, trust, change, and why we are Christians. And that's just the cliff notes.

But our true secret is the love, the acceptance and the intimacy present in our laughter, hugs, punches and tears.

Now, in my final time with HYG, I am confronting a far more personal and terrifying secret: my religion. I have hidden behind claims of not being very religious, behind countless criticisms of Christianity, all the while keeping my true faith a secret to both the outside world as well as myself. I have criticized and defined myself by what I am not because I am terrified I will be cast in the wrong group.

But let me take the risk, let me disclose my secret. I am very religious. I have felt the grace of God in conversations with Charles Hicks—an impoverished one-armed elderly man whose spirit was simply unbreakable. I feel the grace of God as I now well with emotion because I have been blessed with 8 years of love, friendship, challenges and guidance, much of which has been Dan's ministry. And I know I will continue to feel the grace of God with each memory of this incredible group, through each friendship made, in each lesson learned and amid every breathtaking landscape I encounter where ever I may go.

And with this I go back to realize, I question not because I am skeptical of my religion. I question because it is so important to me I just don't want to get it wrong. And, I will continue to question for just that reason.

So now the cat is out of the bag. I have opened my little white box and exposed the beauty within. Thank you to the HYG, the hands of 53 kids and adults who helped lift the lid.