

Discussion Questions



SPIDER GAP

Pure Amore

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About the Book

Lilly, a first-year school teacher is roped into chaperoning a backpacking trip over the Spider Gap glacier. Unfortunately, she cannot find a sitter for her purse-dog and must smuggle him along on the trip.

All her friskiest 6th grade students are participating as well as a handsome ski instructor who resists her efforts to organize their trip in a mathematically pleasing manner.

Can Lilly evoke a thirst for learning within her skeptical students, when she herself can barely survive the rigors of the trail?

TITLE: Spider Gap

Discussion:

Question 1: Lilly is volunteered for an arduous backpacking trip, when her only outdoor experience is walking her dog in the park. Have you ever found yourself in charge of something that is wildly outside your comfort zone?

Answer 1: As a young teen, I was made a senior camp counselor because I was responsible and listened to authority. I was not experienced however and it was terrifying to be in charge of all these young girls. I think that God wants you in that place though, where you must acknowledge your inability, gulp down your fear, and rely solely upon Him.

Question 2: Have you ever had a hiking mishap?

Answer 2: Many of the adventures in this book came from the real hikes that I enjoyed with our youth group as a teen. Yes, I sleepwalk. Yes, a friend of mine sleep ran across Spider Meadows in the middle of the night. Yes, I stood with our youth leader at the very edge of a 2,000 foot cliff. Yes, a friend showed up for a hike with an army backboard instead of a pack. Yes, I slid down the Spider Gap glacier sitting on a coat, although I was able to go much slower than poor Lilly and never smuggled along a pet.

Question 3: Have you ever had an outdoor adventure with a purse dog?

Answer 3: Yes! My mother owned the dog that inspired Strudel in this book. Maggie was a six pound ball of fluff and our family babysat her for over a week once. My children were helping and I remember with horror the moment one of my sons sidled up to me and said: "Maggie is an excellent swimmer." I of course wanted to know how he discovered this fascinating tidbit of information. Apparently, he had tossed her into the creek. It was March and there was still some snow on the ground. It became his responsibility to hold the shivering little dog inside his shirt as we drove back to the house. She was apologized to with lots of treats and snuggles and warm towels. Maggie survived and even enjoyed the rest of her visit, curling up on the boys' bunk beds during story time and pretty much ruling our home after that.

Question 4: What is the most beautiful natural location that you have ever been to?

Answer 4: I have been on some amazing hikes, but I have to say that standing at the top of Spider Gap and looking out across the wilderness is so lovely, it actually does take your breath away.

Question 5: Was that location easy to reach?

Answer 5: Not at all! First you hike into Spider Meadows and the trail crosses many many seasonal creeks (I wrote down the actual number in the book) and it is almost impossible not to get your feet wet. Then you hike across the meadows the next day. Then you hike up the Spider Gap glacier the day after that and you have to do it at the right time of day and during the correct time of year for it to be safe. Finally, when you reach the top of the glacier and the alpine breeze

rips through your hair, freezing the sweat on your brow, you turn around and the whole world is laid out before you in all its glory. So amazing, but not easy to get to at all.

Question 6: Do you think the arduous nature of the trek to places of beauty adds or detracts from their loveliness?

Answer 6: I live near a lovely little tourist town that is smack in the middle of some gorgeous mountains. It is beautiful, you can drive right to it, but amidst these mountains are parking lots and bratwurst stands and thousands of people stumbling around with cameras and ice cream cones. Driving to this little mountain town does not even compare with hiking into a wilderness area. The vast sweep of nature is simply overwhelming as you stand alone upon a peak, just you and God and all of His splendors.

Question 7: Does the difficult nature of hiking reveal something concerning our journey with God?

Answer 7: It isn't just standing upon the mountain that inspires you. It is hiking in soggy shoes and on dusty trails. Sleeping under the attack of a hundred mosquitos and putting that pack on your back the next day. It is stumbling over rocks and pushing through a cloud of biting flies. It is blinking the stinging of sweat out of your eyes and then finally topping that rise and staggering under the glory of the mountains and the crisp slap of the alpine wind. There is beauty in the journey as well and this is true for life with God. We will lose something if we think that life is supposed to just deposit us upon mountain tops like a helicopter zipping from lovely peak to lovely peak. Sometimes you have to hike it, to truly understand it, or perhaps to realize that you cannot understand it and to come to grips with the fact that this is OK.

Question 8: Do you think that people who want God to be simple and easy get the full impact of His majesty?

Answer 8: Just as something from the mountains is lost when you can drive up to them and order a hotdog from a stand while you gaze at their beauty, we miss something of God if we will only take Him in through prepackaged, bite-sized, easy to swallow pieces. He is more than we can imagine and it is foolish to pretend otherwise.

Question 9: Have you ever faced a moment when you wanted to give up and persevered? How would you have been different if you had given up?

Answer 9 My husband took a friend of ours backpacking once and I remember him saying: "If I can't get him to the top, I know he'll never go hiking again." It was true, he wanted to turn around and leave because the trip really was miserable. But after the pain and the dirt and a sleepless night against a rocky cliff and trembling limbs as they kept climbing on, the fabulous beauty of the summit snatched all of those hardships away and left him breathless. So much of life is like this. God has wonders of the heart and soul for us as well, if we will just put one foot in front of the other and keep going, there is so much beauty amidst the horror, but sometimes the journey grows very dark before we get there.

Question 10: Lilly must use strength she did not know she had to rescue her fellow leader and the children. Have you ever had to rely on lessons learned in difficult times for some crisis later on?

Answer 10: Facing the death of a parent at a young age is a terrible thing. Enduring a long night wrapped so tight in depression that you don't know if you will be able to take the next breath and the next after that is excruciating. Watching people you love tear their lives apart leaves you so helpless. But when someone who is drowning in a personal darkness wants to talk, you dare not come to them with preachy little bits of advice and greeting card sentiments. It is these times of suffering which make you real to them. Do not despise the times of darkness, for out of them one will rise stronger and more like our Lord than ever before. Though the pain is terrible, God will not let all this garbage go to waste. He brings beauty and joy out of the ashes and sorrow that surround us.

