

## *Smoky Mountain Reflections, September 2009*

What are some of your favorite places? I have a number of favorite places. The first would have to be my kitchen table, early in the morning before anyone else is up, just before sunrise, in quiet reflection and prayer. The birds are making their morning music, and it is just me, God's Word, and a hot cup of coffee.

Next to that would have to be walking a gentle descent on any shaded trail, in that time between morning mist and full sunlight when the cool of the night still hangs in the air, but you know the bright sun is on its way.

Of course, another is any place where I am sharing a good time with those I love. I recently was able to visit one of my favorite places and I would like to share with you a little about this place and why I love it so much. Let me first give you a brief view from this favorite place. If you look to the south, you see a gentle ridge covered with trees and in the distance beyond the ridge are the beautiful majestic peaks of mountains with names like Gimpe & Kollenspitz. If you have walked the trail on the shoreline in the distance, you know that just beyond the tree line in the saddle of the ridge, it is an ancient trail that cuts over the saddle and across the German/Austrian border. Then it descends into the small town of Vils. If you look to the north, you see a similar ridge but there are no mountains in the distance—just clear blue sky. In that saddle there is a parking lot for the many visitors to this place. To the west, where these two ridges come together, is a beautiful deep green field where you can often see brown Bavarian cows grazing and hear the bells with their deep glocking sound as the cows lumber from clump of grass to clump of grass. At the top of this field is another saddle, and if you are lucky, a large long half red and half white flag is flying there. This means if you take the half hour walk up that somewhat steep trail/road, there will be waiting for you some cool refreshment at the popular Salober Alm (a small mountain cabin that has a café which serves great Bavarian food and drink for the weary hiker or mountain biker). And now for the view to the East—the two ridges come together again and in this direction you see a small hotel and café on a grassy waterfront with lots of summer bathers. In the distance beyond this view, you see mountains with names like Tegelberg and Sauling. The only way to really enjoy this beautiful 360-degree panorama is to be neck-deep, treading the very cold water in the center of the Alatssee. In order to get to this location, you must first brave the transition from the heat of the summer day to icy cold water. After a few minutes of swimming, your body warms up and instead of very cold, the water now feels very refreshing. The sights, sounds, smells and somewhat cleansing sensation of swimming in my favorite Alpine lake late on a summer day are reasons why this is one of my favorite places on earth. But all these reasons—while very good—are really secondary to why it is one of my favorite places.

There are really two other reasons that are even greater than all the beauty I have just shared with you as to why this is one of my favorite places. First, every time I go there for a late afternoon swim, I get to relive the first time I swam there a little over 25 years ago. I was enjoying not only the excitement of this new visually and physically beautiful place, but also the excitement of becoming part of my new family. Gerda and I had only been married a few months. Finally, every time I have been there, it has been during a time of rest and relaxation—times when I get to enjoy God's beautiful work, and actually separate myself from all the commotion of my daily life. I do love the commotion and excitement of my daily life, but times of reflection and thanksgiving are also important parts of a God-pleasing balance that we should all work into our schedules.

Next time you are in one of your favorite places, take time to appreciate how God has blessed you. Thank Him for all that is good in your life, and if you cannot find any good, you are not looking hard enough!

In Christ,  
Pastor Portier



South view



East View



West View