

STORYTELLING

GOD IS



They watched as the ice cream truck drove away, its cheerful jingle fading as quickly as the setting sun. Next-door neighbors and best friends since kindergarten, Chloe and Finn sat on the curb silently gobbling their extra-drippy, jumbo-sized, double-chocolate Fudgesicles. It had been a great summer filled with Fudgesicles, riding bikes, making lemonade stands, building forts, and walking Chloe's dog, Oliver. Their families even went on a three-day camping trip together.

A bucket of sidewalk chalk, mostly broken pieces after two months of asphalt masterpieces, and Oliver sat between them as they ate. Chloe rested her feet on Finn's kickball; Finn wiped his chin with the back of his hand as melted chocolate dribbled down his shirt. Oliver waited patiently for them to share. The pink summer sky was turning a dusty gray. There was a faint chill in the air. New shoes had been bought. Backpacks had been stuffed with crayons, rulers, colored pencils, and glue sticks. Yep, summer was over.

"Are you nervous?" asked Chloe, picking up a tiny piece of blue chalk and doodling her name on the pavement.

"About school? Nah," Finn said trying to lick the chocolate mustache from his upper lip.

Chloe giggled and continued to eat, hoping her smile would hide the butterflies swooping and diving in her tummy.

Last year, Chloe loved school. Her teacher wore pretty red-rimmed glasses, played kickball for PE, read stories after lunch, and gave hugs every day. Chloe knew all of her classmates and she could always find Finn at recess. But second grade? Chloe had some serious questions ... *What if my new teacher doesn't smile or give hugs or know how to play kickball? What if I don't know anyone in my class? What if I can't find Finn?*

Suddenly the streetlight clicked overhead and began to hum. Time to go in.

"Bye, Finn," Chloe said, picking up her sidewalk chalk. "Let's go, Ollie."

"See you tomorrow!" Finn yelled, as he grabbed his kickball and ran up his front porch steps.

During dinner, Chloe was quiet. She took a bath, got in her jammies, brushed her teeth, and climbed into bed. Her mom sat next to her.

"What's wrong, sweetie?" she asked.

"I wish I was more like Finn," Chloe said. "He's not afraid to go to school."

Chloe's mom hugged her tight. "I know it's scary to start a new school year. I bet even Finn is a little nervous. But God promises you'll never be alone. He's always with you wherever you go."

"Everywhere?" Chloe asked.

"Everywhere." Then Chloe's mom got an idea. "Wait here. I have something for you."

A few minutes later Chloe's mom handed her two small key chains. "Daddy and I got these at church a few weeks ago," she said. "A reminder that God is always with us." Written on the front of each keychain was a message: "God is with you wherever you go." Joshua 1:9 (ESV)."

"Let's hook one on your backpack," she said, picking up Chloe's school bag from her desk. "And keep the other one, too. You might find a friend who needs it."

Chloe felt better, but the next morning after breakfast, the butterflies were back. Chloe's dad gave her a hug. **"Don't forget this," he said, holding Chloe's backpack and lifting the keychain up for her to read: "God is with you wherever you go."** Chloe took a deep breath and smiled.

When they got to school, Chloe stood in her new second grade line, waiting for her teacher. She looked for Finn in his line, but he wasn't there. She spotted him by the drinking fountain talking to his mom. It looked like he'd been crying.

Finn is nervous, Chloe thought. He needs to know that God is with us wherever we go. Chloe smiled as she reached into her backpack for the other keychain. Mom was right—Chloe had found a friend who needed it.

by Kathryn O'Brien

Wife, mom, and award-winning children's book author, Kathryn serves as an administrator for Stoneybrooke Christian School in Southern California. She is most grateful for family, fun, and the daily grace of a loving God.

 Website kathobrien.com