

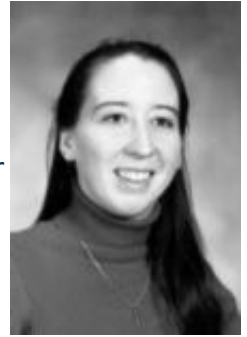
New Dawn 2002-03 Journal

Date: 10/7/2002

Submitted by: Lucy Francisco

Journal Entry:

We've been on the road for about two weeks now—funny how time flies that way. I am reminded of a quote: "Time flies like an arrow, but fruit flies like a banana." ;oD Thus far things have gone really well. We've been to about 7 or 8 different places in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois and now Indiana and met a whole bunch of really cool people. Sometimes it's hard to be on the road and in a different place almost every day, but then we get to know our host parents and it begins to feel just like being home. I am continually humbled by the kindness of the people we have met—so many willing to open homes and share lives with six travel-weary strangers. I have a sinking feeling of late that I am coming down with a cold, so I welcome the wonderful warmth of homey touches like blankets to curl up with on couches and steaming cups of hot chocolate or tea or coffee. 'Tis the season to be sick, but with this kind of comfort, all will be well.



Lucy Francisco

Snuffly nose aside, I am also renewed each day by the amazing beauty that is autumn. I absolutely love this time of year with the leaves' brilliant colors and the wonderful smoky smell of fireplaces and the feeling of Halloween parades in the air. Outside the window right now I can see the sun setting through the trees. Something about it all makes me just want to smile my little head off. (What a horrid thought that is! I don't guess I mean that how it sounds). The other day when we were driving in Minnesota we saw an up-side-down rainbow! Have you ever heard of such a thing?! With closer inspection we realized that it was not up-side-down after all, but was in fact a circle of rainbow around the sun! I was speechless. Actually I lie, I wasn't speechless. I couldn't prevent myself from exclaiming over it. We took a picture.

It is exciting to look ahead to the many different places we have yet to travel and the many people we have yet to meet. I can't wait to see what God has in store for tomorrow or the next day or the day after that or the day after that or two weeks from now or next month or or or...always. J Rejoice!

My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior.

Luke 1: 46-47

Lucy

Date: 10/12/2002

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

As we travel from Hershey PA on the way to Topton PA, I am tickled that I can sit here and type my journal in the van and am once again reminded of the many blessings that God showers on us daily. For the last 2 weeks we have had few programs and if we were a ministry just about music, this would be frustrating and we would feel like we weren't accomplishing anything. However, this is not solely a ministry about music. While music is what we love and it can sometimes seem like the most important thing that we do-it's just a "foot in the door" for us to have the opportunity to share in community and fellowship what our faith means to us and through that help to



Sandy Wittman

strengthen the youth of the church. So imagine the pleasant amazement at realizing that, though they want to hear the music and though they know we have that program, the people that we have met along the way with whom we've had "housing only" have taken us in and treated us like family and shared their lives and faith with us even without the music. This just serves to reiterate to me that this ministry is about so much more than the music that we play. It's so important to remember. A lot of times we get caught up in technicalities-we get down on ourselves about singing wrong notes, we get frustrated when our guitars are out of tune. The greatest thing is that, while we're getting frustrated or down on ourselves about those little imperfections, God is looking down on us, loving us and thinking we're cute. He certainly doesn't care if we came in too early on our harmony or if we have absolutely no rhythm but insist on playing the percussion for at least one song (who, me? ;-)). He delights in the fact that we are doing what we are doing to glorify Him-that we are making a joyful noise. And when it comes down to it, the most important thing about this ministry is what you do before and after the program. That is why, when we have these times when we don't have programs, we should rejoice in them just as much as when we do have a program. The ministry doesn't stop just because our guitars are in the trailer. Christianity is a faith that requires community-what an awesome blessing it is to be a part of creating that community in any small way we can!

On another note-as I sat here writing my journal-Megan, who is sitting behind me, pointed out an amusing passage in the Bible that I thought I would share. In 1 Sam 1, Hannah is upset and she is praying and Eli tells her to go in peace. With that, she leaves and has something to eat. It then says that she was no longer downcast. Megan and I found this amusing because yesterday we went to the Hershey Chocolate factory and ate chocolate which immediately brightened our spirits. Food therapy. Hmm....dangerous. I was then of course reminded of the tendency that we have to congregate and talk in kitchens. Anyway, just a little arbitrary thought for everyone's amusement.

And so I leave you with this. Ecclesiastes 3 tells us that there is a time for everything and that we should rejoice and be happy that God knows what he's doing. Now may be a time of rest for us, and as the year continues we will have times of rest and times of crazy chaos, but in all those times, it is our task to be joyful in where God leads us and have faith that He uses us better than we would use ourselves. - Sandy

Date: 10/15/2002

Submitted by: Marcus Eads

Journal Entry:

We awoke early on the morning of October 15th. Looking out the kitchen window of Lucy's parents' house, I caught the sun with my sleepy eyes and smiled. It was going to be a beautiful day. Sunny days and long drives go hand in hand. I sipped my coffee. Then, from the living room, I heard the day's first news report. My smile slowly faded as I remembered the current events surrounding the region we'd be driving through that afternoon.



Marcus Eads

Outside the birds were singing for the sun and a few happily sedated clouds, while my team huddled in the living room, preparing to make a crucial decision: Should we or should we not risk the drive to Dale City, Virginia? With a program hanging in the balance, it was the toughest decision we'd had to make as a team since the start of our tour. Phone calls were made to contact persons, pastors, co-workers and families. But ultimately, it was our choice.

And we decided to go.

A five hour drive through a scenic country side is, for most people, a pleasant experience. I tried so hard to enjoy it. But I've always been prone to dwelling on things that bother me. And this drive bothered me. Scheduled bathroom breaks in out of the way places is one thing, but what about the time we would spend in the actual city? Where would we be safe? Was safety even a possibility? What were we thinking?

But the more I thought about it, the more I realized how self centered I was being. I would pass through this town and quickly forget my fears. But for those who live in Dale City, the fear will

remain until justice has been served. People are afraid to pump gas. Afraid to go shopping. Children are kept in a near state of lock-down while they're in school.

So, in the famous words of Dain Swanson, I decided to "suck it up". I'd make the most of our stay in Virginia. I would refuse to worry myself over things that are out of my control. That morning's smile found its way back to my face and I felt better.

The program was awesome. I want to say thank you to everyone who, like me, overcame their fears and decided to attend.

Date: 10/18/2002

Submitted by: Megan Nolting

Journal Entry:

At cross-cultural training we learned that the first stage of culture shock is where you think everything in your new surrounding is wonderful and exciting! I must be in that stage, because I love the South so far! We were just in North Carolina and will be in South Carolina tonight. Not only is the scenery beautiful, but the people are so gracious! I had a host mom who used words like "divine" and "glorious" in her vocabulary. Life here is delightful!

God has put a few different things on my heart lately. He's been showing me how real He is and how He wants me to be real with Him. After all, He knows me better than I know myself! In that same regard, He knows what I need more than I do. He fills me up and gives me rest in ways I could never find on my own. God has also shown me the power of giving thanks. When I've felt my attitude slipping, I've tried to find something to be thankful for, and it has immediately changed my attitude!

God's blessings are new every day!

"For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen."

Romans 11:36

In His tender love,

Megan



Megan Nolting

Date: 10/26/2002

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

Last year before I left for team, my mother gave me a 3x5 index card with some words of wisdom written on it. I'm not sure where she got it or if, in fact, she wrote it herself. All I know is that they meant something important. I want to share those words with you.

After a while you learn the difference between holding a hand and chaining a soul; and you know that love doesn't mean luxury and company doesn't mean security. And you begin to learn that kisses aren't contracts and presents aren't promises. You begin to accept your defeats with your head up and your eyes wide open, with the grace of an adult and not the grief of a child. You learn to build your roads on today, because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans and futures have a way of falling mid-flight. After a while you learn that even sunshine burns if you get too close. So you plant your own garden and decorate your own soul and you learn that you really can endure, that you really are strong and you really do have worth. And you learn and learn, with every goodbye you learn.

The fact is, we all grow up. As we get older we learn and become wiser and learn what it really means to be who we are as we live out our Christian life. Most of my life, as I imagine many others can empathize with, I have defined myself by the people around me, linking my identity to each person and trying to identify with everyone. I thought that by doing this, it would make me more acceptable and more able to live in harmony with others. As I have grown older though, I have come to realize that God has an exciting and unique plan for us all, that we were meant to be



Sandy Wittman

different and that is where our strength lies.

I've also been pondering God's will for our relationships. Everyone goes through that phase where they're lonely and they're searching for that one person who will understand their deepest longings and who will cover them in their deepest weaknesses. Of course, when we do that we only plunge ourselves further into loneliness because ultimately, that person doesn't exist. That's what Jesus does for us-that's the spot in our lives that He fills, and only He can fill. For a long time I would stress about this. I'd ask God when I was going to meet this elusive one. The coolest thing is that, now that I've come to this realization, it comes with the assurance that God will provide the one if the, when the, and the who. All I have to do is show up and seek His will. Neat huh? Of course, this doesn't make me cool as a cucumber and ever so superior-but when I start to think about those things and get weighted down with questions, it's a nice little reality check.

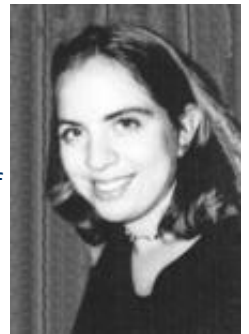
God is good and He will provide. He wants us to grow up and to take hold of what He has created us to be. But, I think He also wants us to enjoy the times in between and to remember that growing up doesn't mean losing that childhood fervor for adventure and discovery. Which, of course, is something that we have in abundance in this crazy thing called team ministry! Matthew 6: 25-34 tells us not to worry about what's going to happen in our lives for God will provide us with the answers we need in His time. If anyone is looking for a good read-I recommend *Wild At Heart* of which I have read 10 pages but has already helped me to clarify the thoughts that I have just shared with you. God's peace! -sandy

Date: 11/2/2002

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

I was standing in the surf at Fort Myers beach in Florida about an hour past sunset. There was a warm breeze passing almost through me and the tranquil waves of the gulf washed over my feet inspiring the sand to dance in circles around me. At once I was taken back, not just to one memory, but to a collage of experiences that have been significant to me. My earliest memory of fear of death was at the beach. I was three I think and a wave overpowered me and swept over me and I did what felt like a million somersaults under the water before I came up gasping for breath and running for the safety of my father's arms. It was at the beach that I was finally able to commit thought to paper, when I was 12 and we were there on vacation and I could hear the waves from my room. I was never a troubled child but I had a lot of thoughts locked up in my brain and somehow the lull of the waves was able to coax them onto the paper. When I was searching for discernment about the longest and hardest relationship of my life, I went to the beach, walked along the sand and was able to make that hard choice to leave it behind. It was at the beach that one of the best friends I ever had confessed his true feelings for me. It's the place I go whenever I need to make a big decision-of course, only if it's an option, and it's been a place of focus for me. I think that the reason behind this is that, in the ocean, I see the great paradox that is God. So much power, beauty and danger wrapped up in those waves. I used to be frightened to death of the ocean. After that experience when I was 3, I didn't like to go into the water. I would, but only for fleeting moments before I would retreat to the sand, the warmth of the sun. After 12, I would go in more frequently-sometimes I would stand in it up to my waist, but even then, I wouldn't stay too long. The water was too powerful, too intense, and I didn't want to get my hair wet. Last week Lucy and I walked headlong right into the water fully clothed. With no regard to the fact that we were wearing nice clothes or that they get heavier when they're wet or that there were others watching in bemusement at our antics. It was amazingly liberating. When God loves us, he's walking headlong into the ocean, fully clothed, with no regard for anything but the way he feels about us. He doesn't hesitate; he doesn't occasionally dip his feet in. That's how we should love God, and by extension, that's how we should love God's people. When we do that, we get that incredible, liberating feeling. It's the feeling that I imagine you would get from the free fall of bungee jumping or soaring through the air on a hang-glider. That embrace of something dangerous, something that can hurt you, something that might kill you but something so beautiful that you can't bear to hold back. To love someone is dangerous. Often you get hurt. Often you get disappointed or frustrated. Often your love goes unanswered. But God calls us to love still, to love our neighbors and to love our enemies. God loves us with reckless abandon. Jesus died because of His love for us. No greater love is there than the love that gives his life for his friends. So love one another, without hesitation and



Sandy Wittman

without expectation of return. Love because that is what we were made for. Don't be afraid to go in the water.

Date: 11/7/2002

Submitted by: Jon Graf

Journal Entry:

Have you ever lost something and looked all over for it, only to realize that you had it all along. I can't count all the times I've looked through the couches for the T.V. remote which ended up being in my hand, or the pair of sunglasses that were gone until they reappeared resting on top of my head. But this goes beyond physical objects, it's the same way with ideas, beliefs, and at times our faith. Lately I've been searching for that passion I've had at certain times in my faith walk. I've tried to obey God's law, grow in Bible Study and prayer, and spread the Gospel, but I come up short and get fed up. Why do we mess up all the time? Why don't we learn our lesson and get rid of all the sin in our lives and follow Him? The reason is, we can't. C.S. Lewis wrote an essay addressing the question of whether Christianity is hard or easy. He says that when we strive to be good, one of two things will happen: 1) we will get frustrated and give up being good, becoming content being bad, or 2) we will become one of those grouches who wonders why everybody doesn't notice their good deeds. Lewis says,



Jon Graf

Date: 11/21/2002

Submitted by: Stephanie Kirkman

Journal Entry:

I'm reading the book Sacred Romance by Brent Curtis and John Eldredge which talks about drawing closer to the heart of God. This has been my prayer for the past few months; to know God's tender heart for me and to be drawn closer and closer to him so that he would be my ONE pure and holy passion. In my search for God's heart and trying to please him and live my life for him I often feel exhausted. I come to the conclusion that being a Christian is hard stuff. It's confusing and tiring. I know God's most important commandment for us, his children, is to LOVE God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to LOVE each other like we LOVE ourselves (Mark 12:28-31). I get frustrated with myself when my patience runs short with teammates or when I'm not as excited about meeting new people and finding out their stories. My love is selfish and weak I want to love God and to love others and love myself like God loves. My heart longs to love and to know God's love for me, but how do I DO that? God's love is a gift of grace and I can't DO anything to receive it or deserve it. It's already there and nothing can separate us from the love our Father has for us. But why am I not experiencing it if there's no way for me to be separated from it? I'm left with the feeling that there has to be so much more to God than what I know and what I'm experiencing. But I don't know how to get there and I wear myself out trying to find God.



Stephanie Kirkman

Matthew 11:28-30 says, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." I want to find the rest that Jesus is talking about. A quote from Sacred Romance shed some light on my confusion. Rest in Jesus, "will happen as we learn to trust TOTALLY in God rather than halfway counting on our own devices with God as fallback... It is in the essence of repentance. It is letting our heart tell us where we are in our own story so that Jesus can minister to us out of the story of his love for us. When in a given moment, we lay down our false self and the smaller story of whatever performance has sustained us, when we give up everything else but him, we experience the freedom of knowing that he simply loves us where we are. We begin to experience our spiritual life as the 'easy yoke and light burden' Jesus tells us is his experience." God is good.

All the time. :)

Date: 11/27/2002

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

As I sit here and watch my cute teammates Jon and Steph play Super Mario Brothers 3-yes folks-the original Nintendo system-I have been engaging with them in a friendly debate over whether or not it's cheating to warp to level 8 with the whistle. Steph and I felt that if you warp to 8, you skip the bulk of the game and therefore cheat yourself out of the journey-out of the fun levels between. Jon however felt that if we didn't warp, we would be prolonging the imprisonment of the princess and therefore all effort must be made to save the princess in a timely fashion. The princess must not be incarcerated any longer than necessary. While Steph and I agreed that the princess might be suffering, we felt that her character could use some building and felt that maybe through this experience she would grow and no longer be the spoiled princess but be a well-rounded woman. And by extension, Mario and Luigi would go through their own process of growing and become



Sandy Wittman

better men by going through all the trials set before them instead of going straight through to the conclusion ill equipped without the experience gained in the other levels. By warping, they might not know about the crazy sun that chases you in little circles or the benefits of having the "p-wing" that allows you to fly over the entire level.

This reminds me of our own lives. Sometimes we get frustrated at the little things that confuse us in our daily lives and the things that we struggle with in our faith. Sometimes we wish we could just press a fast forward button and get to heaven and not worry about all that we have to go through on earth. It seems though that part of what makes our lives as Christians exciting is that journey. There are a lot of times when I get frustrated because I can't see what God is planning and I sometimes wish I knew how it would all turn out. But then of course I come to my senses and realize that that would be like watching the end of a movie first or reading the end of a book first. Then all I have is the knowledge of how things turned out and have no idea what it took to get there. So I have learned to enjoy the journey. Live in today and focus on what God wants me to do THIS day. That way, how can I go wrong? And I get to enjoy all the wonderful little things that God will do in my daily life and not miss them because I'm looking at the bigger picture! And maybe, just maybe, through dealing with the little things that happen everyday I'll be better equipped to handle the big picture.

"Change can be so constant that you don't even feel a difference until there is one. It can be so slow that you don't know whether your life is better or worse until it is, or it can just blow you away-make you something different in an instant"-Life as a House

The changes that God creates in our lives are very different. Sometimes they're obvious. Sometimes you can feel the change occur and you enjoy several stages of confusion while God reveals new things to you. Some other times though, it occurs so gradually that only in retrospect can you see where the breakdown was. No matter how the change occurs, it does. And isn't it wonderful? Wherever you all are in your journeys, enjoy it.

Date: 1/8/2003

Submitted by: Lucy Francisco

Journal Entry:

Dateline Somewhere in Utah:

Greetings and salutations from this state of mountainous scrub bushes and rocky hills. I am writing from the van-oh glamorous-est of glamorous transportation. We are on our way to Page, Arizona currently and perhaps we'd be a wee bit closer only during my shift driving I kinda drove past the exit we wanted and further on for about an hour or so. [blushes] But it is all working out just fine, since there is more than one way to skin a fish and more than one road to Arizona, luckily. And perhaps this detour is meant to be as it gives us plentiful views of this beautiful state so very different than my home state. (Pennsylvania) This is the furthest west I have ever ventured in my 22 years of existence and I am tickled at the prospect of the continuing journey even further in the westward direction.



Lucy Francisco

So, we have been back on the road about a week and a half or so and our overseas trip looms ever nearer on the horizon much like the snow-speckled hills out the travel-dirty van window over the shoulders of my teammates, Sandy and Steph. [beside the cat that chased the rat that ate the malt that lay in the house that Jack built ;-)] This excessive journeying reminds me a little of the story of the nativity (save the birth save the shepherds save the wise men save the stable save Bethlehem). What I mean is journeying in the direction the Lord points without being necessarily certain of where the road leads. Even though I must confess that sometimes this is more than I can deal with and I allow fear and apprehension to overtake me, I know within my heart the continual presence of God in all of this.

What does that mean? Tune in next week for the exciting conclusion of "Ponder Piles with Princess Belly Button Lint (aka. Lucy) and her trusty sidekick, Gidget, the Frizzy-Haired Wonder (aka. Sandy)."

Date: 1/14/2003

Submitted by: Lucy Francisco

Journal Entry:

And now, the gripping conclusion of "Ponder Piles--the Saga of a girl and a girl's Teammate and their questions." Yesterday we pondered the everlasting question of "WHAT DOES THIS MEAN???" Well here are the dramatic results of our audience poll.

No, never mind about the audience poll thing--seriously though, sometimes when I hear other people talk about this kind of thing I am like "Well that's all well and good, but what does that mean? How on earth can I understand what that statement means without knowing what that statement means?" How can I see the color blue if I am colorblind? How can I recognize a bird if I don't know what a bird looks like? Good question. I think that is the challenge of any kind of communication-how can one convey something when other people aren't inside one's head and knowing exactly what one means? And having thus opened this can of worms, what is the answer to communication difficulty? Excessive hand gestures? Repetition with a slower and louder tone? A translator from Lucy-lingo to "normal" speech?



Lucy Francisco

To quote Leleina from Reality Bites: "The answer is...the answer is...I don't know."

And I really don't. Sometimes this type of thing just clicks and there you go. Other times it's one person talking English and one person hearing Greek. Sometimes it's only Greek until all of a sudden it isn't. And sometimes it only sounds like Greek but winds up being some language that has died off with an ancient people years and years and years ago.

BUT, all on the same planet, you can just look at someone and know what they are thinking. Someone can say but one word and it's enough to illustrate thirty-some sentences--and sometimes merely a squeeze of the hand or a hug is enough to show just exactly what it is to feel the presence of God. Think about it.

Date: 1/14/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

So, we are leaving in 10 hours. My thoughts right now? Extreme excitement, terribly anxious, butterflies in my stomach, giddiness, goofiness, and exhilaration. The past 48 hours have been a blur. We've been running all over Culver City CA, a part of LA, getting everything we need to go. 3 Target runs, 15 bank visits, 4 pharmacy stops and an outdoor store later, we have everything we could possibly need and it is currently stuffed into the few bags we are taking. Tonight we spent a lovely evening with stephy's grandma's cousin (ha ha-that sounds like a joke-my nephew's, cousin's, sister-in-law's dog's former owner). It is really neat that everywhere we go we run into a member of someone's family. We have been terribly blessed during our stateside tour. Not only do we run into family, but the people that we meet along the way treat us as if we were family. How many situations in life give you the opportunity to add so many people to your "family". It is so cool just to realize the fact that God's family is in all places. That we are all God's children and that he loves us all. So every time we meet new people it's like meeting your long lost sister or brother. We have this amazing opportunity to meet our brothers and sisters in Christ in southeast Asia and that is truly a blessing. What perspective we'll gain. What amazing things we will learn. What incredible people we will meet. In cross cultural training we're taught a phrase to remember when we encounter other cultures-"it's not bad, it's not good, it's just different". Well, different as it may be, there is still something amazing that ties us all together and gives us a common ground-we all have the same heavenly Father who longs for us to meet together in His name. So, your uncle's barber's nephew's son's best-friend's neighbor's brother is someone that you could share a much closer connection with than that. Cool huh?



Sandy Wittman

Date: 1/16/2003

Submitted by: Jon Graf

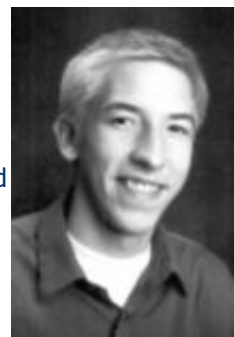
Journal Entry:

Location: L.A to Vancouver to Hong Kong

After months of planning and preparation, the time finally arrived to depart for Southeast Asia. We arrived at our Prep Church in Culver City, California on Saturday and rushed to get everything ready: traveler's checks, exchange money, visit Target every few hours for something we forgot, call the airlines, pack our stuff...the list goes on.

The most stressful time when traveling seems to always be getting ready to go, like when my family gets ready to go somewhere, my mom seems to always come up with a job for me right when we're going out the door. "Hey, Jon, did you feed the dog? Can you wash the dishes? Clean your room?" It never fails, and then I get mad because I didn't do whatever she asked and have to hurry frantically while my dad sits in the driveway honking the horn. But once we get in the car and drive down the road, all of the worries disappear, and we sit back, relax, and there is a peace of knowing the work is done and it's time to play. After our work was seemingly done preparing for this trip, I called my family to say our goodbyes, and then my mom asked the dreaded question, "Jon, I know you don't want me to ask this, but...did you finish writing those Christmas cards that were supposed to be done over a month ago?" Doh! I was going out the door a bit too quick, my work wasn't done. I tried to tell her that I would do them in Hong Kong, but she knew better than that. She proceeded to say, "You know what I think? I think you should stay up tonight 'til you get them done." This was at about 10:00 p.m., and we left for the airport at 4:00 am, but as I thought about it, my mother was right. So I stayed up writing, and writing, and writing, wanting to go to bed, but still writing, and finally at about 3:00 am, I finished and collapsed on to my pillow.

Now I know I've gone off on a lot of tangents and am just rambling, but the point is this. I got my work done of writing Christmas cards, our team got our work done to leave for Southeast Asia, and once we boarded the plane and found our seats, I laid back, closed my eyes, and knew it was time to play. In the same way, when we are called before the great judgement throne, and our name is found in the Book of Life, God will lovingly say, "Well done, good and faithful servant, your work is done, it's time to play."



Jon Graf

Date: 1/17/2003

Submitted by: Lucy Francisco

Journal Entry:

Location: High Rock Christian Center, Shatin, Hong Kong

Hello and welcome to another day of "higher education"—and by higher I mean, of course, the highest—that is, the daily learning of the ways and wills of our Lord and Savior. Today is our first full day here in Hong Kong (Incidentally, if you can name the movie I was quoting, I'll give you a prize;). We arrived yesterday evening around 6:30 or so, but to our travel-weary bodies it felt like about 5 in the morning. Once we got off the plane and into the airport it began to dawn on me (a NEW dawn! Well, hey...) that we hadn't ever discussed who was meeting us there or where. It didn't hit home just how apprehensive I was about this until we exited through customs and were greeted with two smiling, waving faces. It was our contacts (or some of them), John Peterson (a Lutheran Pastor working as a missionary here) and Ryan (a young man who lives here in Hong Kong). I cannot begin to convey the immense sense of relief I felt in that moment. It was like a bunch of years ago when I rode a helicopter for the first time. I was sooo scared and then we got on and it took off and we were not even five feet from the ground and I was like, Oh! This is fine! And I was no longer afraid. John and Ryan escorted us from the airport to the High Rock Christian Center where we will stay for much of our time here. It is located a little above the city streets on this hill—the only way to get to it is to walk up this steep and winding path. By the time we reached the top with all of our things, my little heart was pounding something terrible and I was huffing and puffing like a wolf trying to blow in the walls of a brick house. While at the time I would have rather built an elevator than climb it, I am forced to admit in retrospect that this will be a good daily workout.



Lucy Francisco

Today we plan to meet with the staff here to go over our schedule while in Hong Kong and then travel into the city (or should I say continue along the city?) to register at the consulate, pick up visa forms (for an overnight into China in February), meet Carrie (our main contact), as well as others at the Truth Church—one of the larger Lutheran Churches here in Hong Kong--and do a little sight-seeing. We will also have our first experiences with the food here—so that promises to be exciting and different.

I have a daily devotion booklet that I try to read everyday and more often than not I am surprised by the ways in which the things they speak of relate to my personal experiences on whatever day. Today's verses are from Matthew 28:16-20—including the Great Commission. How fitting it is that those verses—so often associated with the sort of thing we are doing—are those for our first day here. I am excited to see the ways in which God will use us for His purpose here—and I feel very at peace in the knowledge that He is with us always.

Date: 1/18/2003

Submitted by: Marcus Eads

Journal Entry:

ELCHK Youth Center, Hong Kong

I know the sound of traffic. It's a comforting sound. In big cities it is what we listen to when we can't sleep. For some, it is THE reason we can't sleep. But for me, growing up in a large city, traffic is what I'm used to. It's a constant, it's comforting. Hong Kong is no exception. At the High Rock Christian Center where our team is currently staying, the lulling sounds of the city below are there to wish me a good night and to greet me each morning. On Saturday morning I woke to the distant sound of construction, chirping birds and the beloved traffic that surrounds us. Saturday afternoon was our first scheduled program and we needed to leave early to ensure proper arrival time. We were to journey into the very heart of Hong Kong traffic...a journey from which I may never fully recover. Picture seven million people walking at varying speeds and in varying directions. What's that? You have to tie your shoe? Forget it. You'd be trampled instantly. No, There is only one thing to do, and that is to keep moving. Even if we had no particular destination, we would still arrive, and at break neck speed. However, we DID have a destination. And our program at ELCHK Youth Center was really fun. The students' ages ranged from 10-12 and they warmed up to us almost instantly. We sang songs with them and ate snacks, too. In all my life I've never had better cartoon character discussions. We were kind of sad when it was time to say goodbye. Jon cried. No, I'm kidding. He didn't really.

I guess what I'm saying is that our visit to the Youth Center was well worth the frantic subway cars, the bizarre flow of the pedestrian traffic and the street cars that couldn't stop if they had wanted to. So, lying in bed that night I fell asleep to the distant sounds of traffic music and the memories of laughing children. These two sounds are far from familiar, but they are both beautiful.



Marcus Eads

Date: 1/19/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

Location: Faith Hope Lutheran Church, Hong Kong Island

WOW! Today was packed. This morning we walked with all our stuff for the first time to the train station. From there we went to meet our contacts/new friends, Carrie and Ryan, at a musical Braille map which has been our meeting place until we figure out the system. Then we went to Faith Hope Lutheran Church, which is on the fourth floor of a much taller building on Hong Kong Island. There we met with the guest pastor and some other lovely people including our translators, Coleen, Phi, Truth, and Justin. The service was entirely in Cantonese. We sang three songs in Cantonese and a couple in English. After the service we had fellowship where Coleen had me try homemade tea eggs—eggs hard-boiled in green tea—which were really good. Then we had lunch. It was so amazing sitting in the service and



Sandy Wittman

listening to Coleen translate the service and realizing the power of Christ in that place and the unity of us all under His banner. When we sang hymns we used an English/Chinese hymnal so while they sang in Chinese we could sing in English. Everyone was very friendly, accepting and genuine. What a privilege!

After lunch, Ryan, who has more energy than any of us, took us to Shek-O beach—which is not on the tourist map. It was absolutely beautiful. We walked around a little—the water was freezing and I, of course, had the video rolling. Jon decided to play his guitar and soon Stephy joined with the djembe and soon we were singing together—just impromptu and trying not to be too loud—and small groups of people began to gather and tap their feet and smile. It was so cool. There were children everywhere laughing and playing and it was just very relaxing and fun.

Then it was dinnertime. Ryan took us to an authentic Chinese restaurant—also not on the tourist map—where we ate very good food. We even tried shrimp heads—SO GOOD.

Today was just an incredible day. We saw Christ in our fellow worshippers, in the beauty of His creation at Shek-O, in the laughter of the children playing in the sand, in the smiling faces of the people listening at the beach, in our contacts as they show hospitality and love and in each other as we watch each other boldly try new things and immerse ourselves in this beautiful and unique culture.

God's Peace,
Sandy
Hebrews 12:1

Date: 1/20/2003

Submitted by: Megan Nolting

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong

Since we've been in Hong Kong, my brain has been like a fire-cracker. Sparks fly during the day with so much to see and do, and then at night, my brain fizzles out. Today I'm going to bed feeling especially frazzled...it's been a long, but lovely, day!

I started out at 8:30 this morning, determined to explore on my own. Although we had been using the transportation systems quite extensively for the last three days, I was still a little confused about how it all worked. A sense of direction is definitely not one of my God-given gifts. So I set out for the "Pacific Coffee Shop" all on my own. Words cannot describe the freedom I felt as I stood on the train headed toward "Lo Wu" (the stop I was sure the coffee shop was at). But my feelings of joy began to fade as I realized it seemed to be taking longer than I remembered. Finally we arrived at "Lo Wu" and I was quickly swept into a crowd of people. I looked up and saw signs that said "Chinese residents", "Hong Kong Residents" and "Foreigners". I got into the "Foreigners" line, and then tried to turn around when it clicked in that these probably weren't designations for entering a coffee shop. But it was too late—there were too many people behind me to get out of the line. So I went through and eventually made my way back out to the train I was supposed to be on (going in the opposite direction). A very kind girl told me how to get to the "Pacific Coffee Shop", and she also informed me that "Lo Wu" is the last stop before crossing into China. Oops... I've always joked about taking a wrong turn and ending up in Nebraska or something, but today I took a wrong turn and almost ended up in China. WOW! Eventually, I did end up at "Pacific Coffee Shop", and quite victoriously at that!



Megan Nolting

Date: 1/21/2003

Submitted by: Stephanie Kirkman

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong

We've been in Hong Kong for almost a week now and it's been amazing. I feel so blessed by the people we've met and how they've opened their homes and lives to us. They are so eager to make us feel welcome and loved. It seems strange to say it but in a way I actually feel more at home here—I feel more comfortable and free and full of life. My heart feels more full of love, eager to know more about and care for the people around me. All of the sudden it seems easier to love and I can't really explain why or how. I know for sure that God's doing wonderful things—not only in my heart but in my teammates' hearts.



A highlight this week was when we joined in Sunday worship with a local congregation. I did a sharing (with a translator—very interesting) about what it means for me to give my best to God. I had woken up two nights before and could not get back to sleep, so I decided to use that time for prayer and time to just sit with God. He put on my heart what to share on Sunday and I wrote out an outline of Scriptures and a personal story and went back to sleep. Now, generally I get pretty nervous for sharings and if I had my way I would rather not do them—it usually feels awkward and rushed and I end up stuttering and worrying about what people think of me. I was even more nervous for this particular sharing since it was my first Sunday morning sharing AND it was our first worship service overseas as a team AND I would be working with a translator (also a first). But for some reason that morning I felt calm. I went up and shared what was truly on my heart with a surprising amount of ease and comfortability. It was weird—but a good weird, a peaceful weird. I sat down and thought, "Whoa! What just happened? I made it through a whole sharing without worrying about what people were thinking, how they were receiving me, or if they didn't like me?" I felt free.

I know it was God with me—surprising me with His peace, His joy, His love. I like God. I like that He works in ways I don't always understand—that I can just believe that He is good and He is God and trust in Him. His love is better than all things. It is THE BEST thing I have, and the best thing I have to give back to Him. I am so thankful that I can only love because he first loved me. 1 John 4:19

Date: 1/22/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong

This morning we had the privilege to help with a beginner's English class. It's a class offered by the church for mothers to learn English, while their children learn it at school. By offering this class, they hope to build relationships with the mothers so hopefully they will come back with their families on Sunday. Anyway, I worked with a very bright woman named Cathy. When she introduced herself I smiled and informed her that she had the same name as my mom—this seemed to please her. As we worked on simple greetings and small talk we decided we wanted to know more so we attempted to learn more, acting out or drawing things when we didn't understand each other. We laughed a lot and I felt like I was just talking to a friend from home. There was also a 2-year-old boy who we played with for a while. This child was absolutely captivated by a paper airplane. You would throw it and he would scream with delight and bring it back to you. It was great. It was such a blessing to be a part of this friendship ministry.

Tonight we had a time of worship as a team. It's been a while since we've done that and it was exponentially refreshing. I never tire of singing some songs and it's so amazing to have people to share worship with. It truly feels like God put us together and put us here! Praise Him!



Sandy Wittman

Date: 1/23/2003

Submitted by: Marcus Eads

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong (Sha Tin)

Thursday morning in Hong Kong. Let's say this is our first Thursday here. I don't rightly remember January 16th (technically, our "first" Thursday) because I was so jet-lagged. No, January 16th was a dream. Or at least it felt that way at the time. In any case, I'm not a very technical person...okay. Where was I? Oh, yes, Thursday morning in Hong Kong. Or should I say, the morning of Thursday, January 23rd?

This was a day of rest for our team. But did we rest? No. We set out with backpacks to explore this giant city. Exploring entails walking and we walked everywhere. A fifteen-minute walk takes us to New Town Plaza where we can catch trains that will take us in any direction we'd like to go. But you have to be quick because trains don't wait...even when you're halfway on.

So, on rest days we walk. And since our arrival, we've developed a certain type of walk. I call it the I-must-be-late-for-something walk. It's odd, but fascinating at the same time. "Fascinating" is a good word. This city is fascinating. And you have to walk fast if you want to see it all.

And on Thursday, January 23rd, we walked fast.



Marcus Eads

Date: 1/24/2003

Submitted by: Jon Graf

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong

Tomorrow evening is the much-awaited Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong's area Youth Gathering, where over 300 youth, aged 13-25, will join for an afternoon of fellowship, games, and praise and worship. We will be helping out with the music, do a few dramas on the message of following Christ, and lead three different workshops. Tomorrow morning we will help lead an English camp with over 100 junior high boys, and lead the music in the morning section. It will be a very busy and tiring day. Right now I feel overwhelmed and a little nervous, but in that anxiety I also find peace, and I can smile for I hear a fatherly voice whispering in my ear, "My gracious favor is all you need. My power works best in your weakness."



Jon Graf

Date: 1/25/2003

Submitted by: Stephanie Kirkman

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong

Today was a pretty long day, but a very good one. In the morning we helped out with an English day camp with a group of middle school boys, which included leading some simple sing-a-longs and leading a discussion in small groups. I've been learning lately to speak slowly and simply and clearly—and I think by the end of our time overseas I'll be a professional at charades. Language barriers make for better listening skills and lots of laughter and humility.



Stephanie Kirkman

The afternoon and evening included a youth gathering of more than 300 people where we joined the worship team and did some dramas for the group. We led three workshops on song-leading, games, and drama. I'm continually amazed at how welcomed and accepted I feel here. Marcus and I led the song-leading workshop and to try and demonstrate some song-leading skills we did two versions of the art of leading a group in song. The first version was the "wrong" way and the second was the more "preferred" way to successfully lead a song. Well, it wasn't so apparent to the group that we were doing it the wrong way and that it was supposed to be funny—like the joke, ice-breaker-type thing we thought it would be. They were all smiling and attempting to sing along as we

were singing "To You, Oh Lord" in hyper speed with no one leading actions, Marcus turning his back to the audience, me drumming way too loud and telling Marcus to speed up, and Marcus yelling, "Stand up!" in the middle of the verse. All the while our translator was scrambling to point at the words on the board directly behind us. When I tried to explain that this was the "wrong way" to lead a song, our translator encouraged us by saying, "No, you are doing a great job, we love the song." When I tried to explain that it was a joke, you know, "ha ha", they just stared at us in confusion. So we proceeded to teach the song and they absolutely loved it, along with a few other good old sing-a-long favorites. Although it was a bit of a humbling experience, it warmed my heart that they wanted to sing our silly song even in our "wrong way" of teaching, not thinking twice to encourage and accept us.

I love being blessed by surprise when I go on with my day, part of a music ministry team, expecting to bless others and show them Jesus and I end up being blessed and feeling Jesus' love 80 times more from the people we meet along the way. God is good, and there is nothing better than His love.

Date: 1/26/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

Since we had an evening worship instead of morning, Steph and I went to the library to check our e-mail. The first few times we did this, the computer attendant looked weary but this time he gave us a tentative smile. Steph and I concluded that we're growing on him and by the end of six weeks here we will know him well and he will be the Godfather to our respective children.

This evening's service was great. I was nervous because we were at the Seminary and the congregation was actually mostly Scandinavian and had a theological studies background and I was giving the sharing. For some reason I was really nervous. So I talked to a friendly Norwegian named Bjorn before the service. That calmed me a little. The service went well and afterwards we had fellowship. Lucy and I had a lovely chat with the pastor about the church in Hong Kong. It turned out to be a relaxing and worshipful night.

Afterwards, Jon and I ate at a place called Café de Coral. As is the custom in many countries, it is perfectly acceptable to sit at a table with other people you don't know. So we sat with a woman and her 21 year old son and as it turned out, had a great talk. They had heard of the place where we are staying and, though they weren't Christian, were very interested in what we do and what we believe. They also shared with us a little of who they are and about the upcoming Chinese New Year holiday. They told us some places we should check out and we just had a pleasant dinner conversation. As Jon and I got lost on the way back we mused at the great opportunity we just had. It was wonderful to chat with some local people and be able to talk a little about our faith in a non-church setting. Who knows, maybe a seed was planted!

God's Peace!



Sandy Wittman

Date: 1/27/2003

Submitted by: Megan Nolting

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong International School

Today we went to Hong Kong International School on Hong Kong Island. I had heard a lot about the school before coming to Hong Kong, since it has its origins in the Lutheran Church. HKIS has around 2,000 students, pre-school age through high school. We spent our day at the middle school (we'll be there tomorrow, also). We led a discussion with a couple of classes on values. When we asked the kids what they wanted out of



Megan Nolting

life, one of the boys said, "Cash and girls." I thought it was pretty funny, but it also made me realize how much materialism the kids are faced with. As the day went on, however, I could also see the love of Christ shining brightly through many of them. Some of the kids talked openly about their faith, and others didn't share their backgrounds, but they all showed love in their actions. We will probably never know exactly how God used us at HKIS, but I was greatly encouraged by how He is already using the students and staff there. I pray that God will empower the Christians at HKIS to share with the others that there is more to life than "cash and girls."

God is also showing me in my own life that there is more to my life than the gods I often chase after. At the times when I feel most alone and broken-hearted, He is there to restore my soul with His love, peace, joy, and hope. God lets us know He alone will bring the satisfaction we so diligently look for in other things. What a message to learn and to share!

Date: 1/28/2003

Submitted by: Lucy Francisco

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong International School

We spent the day today (and yesterday, for that matter) at Hong Kong International School where we led their chapel, visited classes, led games, discussions, interactive Bible Studies, and songs, as well as some other things I am neglecting to mention. It has been a lot of fun as the kids have gotten more comfortable around us and had begun to recognize the songs and sing-a-longs a lot. There is something about hearing all their voices singing so excitedly that works to recharge me. It is great that they are so excited in general but the fact that it gives me energy to keep going has been a blessing as I have been struggling of late with culture shock. At least I believe it is struggle brought on by culture even though the flavor of it in my mind is a familiar one. Do my scattered metaphors confuse rather than clarify? What I mean is, it feels to me like my current struggle is not new at all—it is just in a different place. And as a result of these struggles, I find myself entrenched by doubts and fears and I feel like I am holding myself back.

Wouldn't it be great if there were a product to remove doubt? Hmmm...Try New and Improved DOUBT BEGONE! Directives for Doubt-Destroying Usage—Pour exactly three times DBG as the amount of doubt present over uncertain thing. Scrub vigorously, avoiding important documents and washing machines. Leave set on uncertain thing 1 hour, longer if it tries to run away. Rinse clean away and if doubt remains, try our super-deluxe DOUBLE DOUBT BEGONE: For that tough quandry that leaves you hopeless (Also try *NEW* Fear-killer, Cruelness-Buster and Silence Stinger and please write to our company Needco to complain about such lame product names).

Sometimes I forget that the removal of my doubts and fears is even easier than a miracle product that probably causes cancer and eats away at wood surfaces.

It has been always my comfort, this verse from Deuteronomy 31:6, "BE STRONG AND BOLD; IT IS THE LORD YOUR GOD WHO GOES WITH YOU; HE WILL NOT FAIL OR FORSAKE YOU."

I will let this be my comfort now and the peace I pass to all of you.



Lucy Francisco

Date: 1/30/2003

Submitted by: Marcus Eads

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong (Sha Tin)

This morning we met with Elaine, who works here at the High Rock Christian Center to discuss a three-day English camp that will be hosted here in February. Each member of our team will be assigned ten campers between the ages of 12 and 14. We're all really



looking forward to it. What I'm excited most for is the all-day activity planned for day two. It's a scavenger hunt (of sorts) through the city.

Marcus Eads

We will also help lead songs and discussions and games during the course of the camp. I'm sure it'll be a lot of fun, but one can't help but feel a little nervous.

Date: 2/2/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

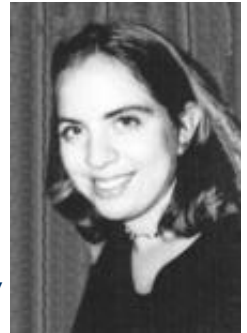
Ah. Chinese New Year. The children dressed in lovely outfits, the red lights and decorations everywhere, the exciting things to do and see and the exotic foods.....and the crowds. today was an interesting day full of cultural highs and cultural lows-i will share of both.

this morning we were to lead a church service and halfway to the rail station (mind you, we were already a little late) the dog (Friend) was following us and we were somehow missing marcus and lucy. so we made the decision that jon would run back with the dog and find marcus and lucy and meg, steph and i would continue. but when we got to the station we realized that maybe the others didn't know where to go. so megan stayed and steph and i went ahead. there are 2 major rail systems in hong kong. the mtr which is underground for the most part and the kcr which is above. now, you can get to mong kok-which was our destination-by either but they don't share the same station. we were to take the mtr. which is what steph and i did. but the rest took the kcr. so it was this mad dash and steph and i started to think we would be leading the service by ourselves-which made us laugh quite nervously-when we caught a glimpse of floppy blond hair and a guitar and we knew that it was ok!

So, after the church service this morning, we had the chance to hang out with a group of people who were roughly our age and good friends with our best friends in Hong Kong, Carrie and Ryan. we had a great time navigating the hordes at the ladies market and i got some video footage of a lion (a costume, por supuesto) eating red packets. it was alot of fun.

that night we went to the fireworks. it was very very crowded. due to the fact that i wanted to film the light display at the beginning of the park, i got caught in the crowd on the way back. it is important to mention that crowds, particularly loud ones pressing against me, make me anxious. so i was feeling pretty ill. i could feel the tears well up and i started to feel very light headed. i felt a hand reach out to steady me. i turned and it was a boy, about 18, of middle eastern descent. when the fireworks started, he stayed behind me, as if protecting me.

he was my angel tonight. God is amazing and his love manifests in so many places and in so many ways. this boy, who didn't know me, showed me love in a very unselfish way. i'm thankful!



Sandy Wittman

Date: 2/3/2003

Submitted by: Megan Nolting

Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong

Today Steph and I went hiking with a friend of ours from Hong Kong and twelve of his friends. We saw a breath-taking view of the ocean from the top of the mountain! It's so awesome to have the opportunity to hang out with people from Hong Kong. It's the best way to get a real feel for the culture. Most of the people we hung out with could speak English very well, so we had some interesting conversations. One thing that continually impresses me about the Hong Kong people we've met so far is their hospitality. The moment we met everyone today, we were swept up into their group and taken care of. They made sure our needs were met before their own. I pray that, while I'm here, I will grow in my sense of community and be inspired to put other's needs above my own.



Megan Nolting

This evening we were invited into a home for the first time. We were served a traditional Chinese New Year meal. Once again, we were treated with tremendous hospitality! It can be frustrating at times to try to relate to people who live in a culture so different from my own. Yet I'm learning so much from those differences that I wouldn't trade the challenges they create for anything! I'm also experiencing Christ's love bringing us together in spite of our differences. He unites us where we can't relate!

Date: 2/5/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

today was an great day. we started a three day camp with 80 13-year-old girls. today was mostly the painful getting to know you stuff which is sometimes difficult with the language barrier. the purpose of the camp is to have the girls hang out with us in small groups and practice their english. so i had my own group of 12 girls. they were very shy but i could tell that once we got to know each other, we would have alot of fun. and as the day went on, they felt more at ease and we had some good joking time. it's great when, despite language difficulty, you can still laugh! tonight we did a cultural program. each of the groups of girls put on a little performance about their culture and then we and tessa, our fellow american, put on a little presentation about american culture. for some reason unknown to me, we decided it would be fun to improv a puppet show. so marcus, jon and i chose our puppets and went. we talked about the fourth of july and fireworks. then we all (puppets and the rest of the team) sang the national anthem. it was great for 2 reasons. one, we got to share our culture with the girls in a silly yet informative way and two, i got to use my christopher walken impression voice for my puppet =]. it doesn't get much better than that! ha ha. at any rate, we learned lessons today in the power of laughter in sharing Christ's love with others. the gilrs may not have always known what we were saying but they knew what we stood for as Christians and we loved them with our smiles-and they returned the favor!



Sandy Wittman

Date: 2/6/2003

Submitted by: Marcus Eads

Journal Entry:

Location: The streets of Hong Kong and High Rock Christian Center

The "Amazing Race" lasted nearly an entire day. We helped lead a three-day, Junior High, all-girl English camp. We were camp counselors again. Each if us had ten campers. The Amazing Race took place on the second day of camp. Our campers were given thirty minutes to plan an all-day trip around Hong Kong. My group said we should go shopping at the mall. I said I didn't need anymore shoes so we went to some other places instead. We visited beautiful Kowloon Park and walked through its Hedge Maze. We went to the Bird Market and saw...well, birds. Hundreds of birds. Some were very rare and exotic. And we went to a restaurant and ate octopus soup. It doesn't sound much like a race, does it? Well, here's how it works: We were given six hours to visit the main tourist attractions and obtain proof of the visit. We had to take at least four modes of transportation, and we had to interview five westerners in the process. Somehow we managed to do it all, and it was a lot of fun.



Marcus Eads

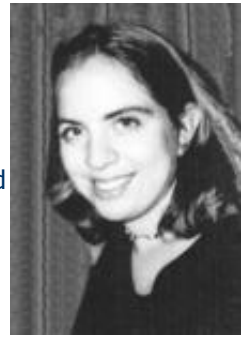
Date: 2/9/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

have i mentioned yet how nervous i get when i have to speak in public? and have i further mentioned that i am particularly wary of speaking on sunday morning? it just seems to me that sunday is this really important time and with the whole congregation there i'm afraid that i will somehow say something theologically incorrect or something

wrong or dumb or uninspiring. so i wrack my brain to death, searching for the words to say, the perfect combination of words that will be profound and will inspire the multitudes. this always results in a huge headache and the feeling that i want to cry and laugh all at the same time. so, needless to say, when i found out that it was once again my turn to talk on a sunday, i was a little upset. i didn't understand why in the time of 3 weeks i was to speak two times on sunday. wasn't it someone else's turn? and so for the first day that i knew this (which was thursday) i was a little bitter and having, of course, a very difficult time coming up with anything. which is a good thing. because if i had come up with anything during that time, it certainly wouldn't have had the proper motivation. because this is the lesson i have learned-and learned finally. yes, sunday is important. yes, the whole congregation is there. yes, there is pressure. but in the end, they didn't come to see me. they came to hear the word of God. it's not my job to inspire, it's not my job to come up with the most profound thing ever heard. it's my job to let God's love shine through me. it's my job to pray and to calmly put together what God shows me into words. because as long as i am doing that, i'm grounded in the right place. once i stop worrying about the right words and about how i am going to inspire, that's when i allow God to work through me. so, luckily, before i spoke this morning, i'd had that revelation. so i stopped in my mad dash to find a story from my life and i stopped trying to mix humor with poignancy and i simply said the things that i felt God was telling me through the scripture of the day. the widow's offering. ironic. the widdow had little but she gave all. so that is what i will strive to do. most of the time i feel like i have little to offer when it comes to speaking. but i must offer it all. i've found that when i do, i am pleasantly surprised to see that i am able to touch people. and i know that that is only because of God.



Sandy Wittman

Date: 2/10/2003
Submitted by: Megan Nolting
Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong

Over the last four or five days, we've had the opportunity to hang out with a lot of youth from Hong Kong. They offer lots of insight into the culture! I'm beginning to learn how much depth there is to every culture. I want to know how the experiences they've had, which are so vastly different from my own, change their outlook on life. There's a Jars of Clay song that refers to a trip they took to China. They talk about wanting to see life through the eyes of a person from China. I've had that same longing since I've been here. I want to know what it's like to grow up in a small apartment in the middle of a fast-paced, crowded city. I want to know how my outlook on life would change if I was still living at home with my family and supporting them, or if my grandparents had lived with us, too.



Megan Nolting

I could go on and on with questions. To even begin to understand this culture would take years. I'm sad to have such a short time to learn about the culture here. However, when I think about my teammates or my friends back home, I realize there is a lot I don't know about them either. Experiences shape much of who we are, and even those from the same culture have had experiences all their own. The coolest thing is, even when we can't even begin to see life from someone else's eyes, God allows us to see them through His eyes, and that's the best point of view of all!

Date: 2/11/2003
Submitted by: Lucy Francisco
Journal Entry:

Location: Hong Kong

Hello and welcome to another session of "Tales From Another Part of the World"—the radio program that dares to ask the really powerful questions like, "How many phone cards does it take to call home?" and "Have you seen the peanut butter?" On today's

show we will spend some time interviewing I. Venshopping about his adventures in the marketplace, learn a tasty recipe for 1000-year-old eggs and tofu and finally, the weather report. But first, these messages from our sponsor...

"Are you tired, run-down, and listless? Do you poop out at parties?"

[sound of radio being switched off]

Allright. Don't mind the intro. Sandy and I spent much of yesterday shopping in various markets for special things to bring back to all the many and much-loved people back home (and perhaps also a few things for ourselves). In the evening we met up with the youth committee at an area church to get to know them a little better and plan out an upcoming youth event we will take part in with them. It was a nice, pleasantly busy day and I fell into slumber much fatigued and dreamed a peaceful sleep and slept a peaceful dream all night long J.

I feel in a pretty good place right now—with of course the normal worries that accompany any trip to a foreign land.

I would like to leave you with a favorite quote of mine (or two):

"Time flies like an arrow, but fruit flies like a banana."

And...

"Be strong, and bold—It is the Lord your God who goes with you; He will not fail or forsake you." Deuteronomy 31:6



Lucy Francisco

Date: 2/13/2003
Submitted by: Marcus Eads
Journal Entry:

Location: Taoist Secondary School, Hong Kong

We spent nearly the entire day hanging out with students at a Taoist school. In preparation for their upcoming English exams, we facilitated small group discussions for most of the day. By the end, we were so wiped out an old woman had to help me on to the bus. But it was really fun to just talk with the students. It was something new. We spend so much time leading songs and/or worship in a programmatic bubble that often separates us from the audience and/or congregation. But on Thursday, February 13th, I walked away remembering everyone's name. And the old woman gave me a stick of gum.



Marcus Eads

Date: 2/14/2003
Submitted by: Jon Graf
Journal Entry:

I awoke this morning with the desire to remain in bed, which is nothing new, because I like to sleep. In fact, I bet I could stay in bed for a few days at a time, without ever getting bored, but life has different expectations. Sometimes it seems like everyone is asleep, even though they get up everyday and go to work or to school, or to wherever their responsibility lies. Their eyes are open but they are merely sleepwalking, asleep in routine. God longs to speak to us, "Wake up, O sleeper, arise from the dead," but we do not listen, and prefer instead to remain in the darkness. The reason I like to stay in bed, ironically, is because it is the place where I am most awake, because I take time to be. There are no distractions, no frivolous chores, there is no movement, everything is still, and it forces me to go deeper, to go past the mask of my physical surroundings, and into true reality, in other words, life in Spirit. My imagination becomes alive and dreams become a reality. We all need to take



Jon Graf

time to "be still and know that He is God," even though it's so easy to fall into our comfortable ignorance.

After a rather busy morning, we made our way to meet our contact for an afternoon program at a local secondary school. It was a great opportunity. We got to talk to the students—many of who weren't Christians—and also led an after-school youth gospel program. The language barrier seemed to water down our message a little, but it still went great. Afterwards we joined some missionaries for a vegetarian meal to celebrate Valentine's Day. I was a little skeptical of eating a meal without meat, but they prepared tofu in a way that mimicked different types of meat. I was surprised how good it was.

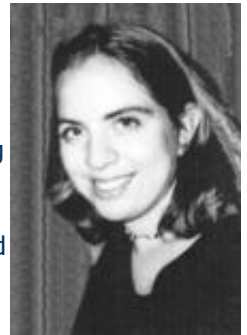
Now, I'm back in bed, where I started this morning, reflecting upon the day's events, and looking forward to our excursion into mainland China tomorrow. As it turns out, I'm glad I didn't follow through with my original intention for the day, but instead woke up and got out of bed. Life is too short to go through it sleeping.

Date: 2/16/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

We sing a song called living water in which there is a phrase "how lovely is your dwelling place, oh Lord God almighty" and today I saw this in such an amazing way. We had the incredible chance to go to Guangzhou china for the weekend. While we were there we went to a museum about history and some other things. We also visited a seminary and a church and that was encouraging. But this morning was the best. We went to attended a church service in china this morning and it was incredible to be there, across the world literally from anything that is familiar to me and worshiping with my brothers and sisters in Christ in China. They were very welcoming, gracious and humble and they invited us to sing and to share with them. So we sang a few songs in English and Jon did a brief sharing that was very good-but my favorite part was when we got up and we were singing our song in mandarin. We have been unsure as to whether our mandarin was accurate and we were a little nervous to sing it in a mandarin service but as we sang the first verse the congregation started to smile when they realized that we were singing in mandarin and they began to sing along and clap. It was this amazing moment of all speaking the same language and praising the same God and sharing in our faith. It was awesome to see. We sang three verses and by the end of the third verse I had that wonderful feeling that you get before you cry because you are so moved by a something. I could see the tears in their eyes and feel the tears in mine and the love that was in the room was overwhelming. Afterwards we stayed and talked to people in the congregation, many wondering when new dawn would come back to china and for how long. We were sad to tell them that we would not be back but maybe someday another team may have the opportunity. I talked to five people about my age, all eager to speak English and one who had just become a Christian 6 months ago. It's amazing to me to realize the time frame of the Christian church in china. Much of the substantial growth has happened in the last 20 years-within my life time. To me that's incredible. The year I was born was the beginning of many interesting things in china and I'm glad to know the history now. To see the Lord dwelling in such a place as Guangzhou, where there is such a blatant contrast of beauty and pain, was absolutely lovely. Overall it was a very inspiring weekend. We took the train back and now we're back at the Christian center on the mountain that has been such a blessing to us and we're looking at the last two weeks in Hong Kong with new energy and renewed sense of purpose and a feeling of joy in the beauty of Christ and His love for all people everywhere. Thank you for your prayers and your love-we feel it. Praise God.



Sandy Wittman

Date: 2/17/2003

Submitted by: Megan Nolting

Journal Entry:

It's a Chinese myth that if you eat certain parts of an animal's body, such as feet or ears, you'll walk faster or hear better. Today I decided to try that out. Yes...I ate part of

a pig ear. However, that was hardly the most memorable part of my day. Along with trying out some of the local cuisine, I also got to tour some of the ancient artifacts in Hong Kong with a group of Form 6 students (ages 16-18). They had the opportunity to practice their English by teaching us about a Pagoda, Buddhist alters, and an old war village. Even though I learned a lot, even that wasn't the best part of the day. What will forever stand out in my mind and in my heart are the students. They were a delight to get to know and made us feel so welcome! We have been to a lot of schools in the past week, and I am finding that it is both draining and energizing. Draining because we are so busy, but energizing because the kids are so amazing! These experiences are yet another example of how we are ministered to just as much as we minister. Praise God!



Megan Nolting

Date: 2/18/2003

Submitted by: Lucy Francisco

Journal Entry:

Hallo. My name is Inigo Montoya...no, it's not, but you already know that, fair journal-reading public. Greetings to you from the bustling hub-bub of Hong Kong. I hope this journal finds you all doing well. I myself am well as I write this—though at times I do miss the snow that I hear tell of in the great state of Pennsylvania—among other things (or moreover, people) in that same great state. It does not snow here, and hardly rains either, so far. I wish I could put pieces of Hong Kong in an envelope and send them to you, but since I can't, I will share with you some pieces that my memory has retained to attempt at painting an overall picture of this new and different place.



Lucy Francisco

Recipe for Lucy's Hong Kong experience:

- Add one dash of two tiny turtles peeking their little heads above the water in the park
- Mix vigorously with two cups double decker busses
- Combine mixture with the following: the sounds of drumbeats on Chinese New Year, tofu prepared to look like many things (other than tofu), leaves falling down from trees and hitting me in the head, far too many people crammed into a train, and the smell of incense and stir.
- Sprinkle over batter 6 heaping cups smiling, friendly secondary school students
- At this point imagine the recipe's print gets too small to read OR the page has been torn so that the rest of the recipe has been lost in the same place socks go when they are in the dryer (along with the cooking instructions and temperature that would make your understanding of this meander in words complete).

And there you have it! Of course, the ingredients are hard to come by unless you know the right places to go.

Isn't it great how experiences in our lives are diverse enough to not just be one smell or taste or one image, but many—to create a beautiful mosaic of sensation—both good and bad joined together in one display by a hand far more artistic than our own. And when you look at it, you can't help but be amazed at how it all fits together—each piece seems like not much on it's own but with the others it is this beautiful, ugly, sad, happy, bittersweet piece of something. And each piece joins other pieces and other pieces and then they are all together as one giant mosaic that is each of us and each of our experiences and some great hand put it all together and it's too complex to ever understand and, and, and...

[pause]

Okay, my eyes just crossed—I'm getting ahead of myself and ahead of the guy in front of me too, for that matter J. Suffice to say that I like this strange, wonderful, happy, sad mosaic and I can't wait to see what else will be added to it before it is finished.

Date: 2/22/2003
Submitted by: Stephanie Kirkman
Journal Entry:



Stephanie Kirkman

Today we walked in shoes we've never walked in before. Today we were clowns. We joined in the fun at a school fair and it was invigorating-I felt instantly happy and energetic and wacky and wild. We sang, we played, we loved, we danced, we laughed- I don't remember crying...

Lucy and I liked our clown outfits so much that we kept them on for the way back home which included walking the busy streets of Hong Kong, riding a mini-bus, and taking the underground train system. We were stylin': Lucy with her huge blue hair 5 times the size of her head and me with pink hair and fluorescently flamboyant dress. Don't worry, we got pictures. (And I thought I knew all about how it felt to be different and stand out and be stared at.)

Lots of laughs were had today. I encourage you to read Psalm 98- It's a goody. I'm glad that there are so many ways to Praise our God!

"The joy of the Lord is your strength" Nehemiah 8:10

"Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth; burst into jubilant song with music" Psalm 98:4

"Let them praise his name with dancing" Psalm 149:3

God is good. All the time. :)

Date: 2/24/2003
Submitted by: Megan Nolting
Journal Entry:



Megan Nolting

Location: Hong Kong

Today I experienced one of those moments where I had to laugh, or I just might have cried. It was our first day at a Lutheran Secondary School that we'll be at for the next three days. They split our team into pairs, and put each pair in charge of a class full of Form 1 students (seventh grade). It felt like a scene out of a movie... Steph and I walked into the classroom, only to find that there was no teacher and 42 very rambunctious kids, who couldn't understand us after we said, "Hello." It was a very long hour and 10 minutes. That afternoon, Marcus and I got to repeat the same experience. At the end of the school day, I felt discouraged because it seemed like it was pointless for us to try to share Christ with kids who couldn't understand us and didn't seem like they wanted to anyway.

Then God helped me realize that maybe it wasn't only the students He was trying to reach today. God wanted to help me grow in my understanding of the role of a teacher. Since I'm majoring in education in college, I can sometimes be prideful about my "natural" abilities to work with kids. Yet today God reminded me that I have no idea what I'm doing! God is also teaching me what it means to be motivated by love. My main agenda should always be to show God's love through my actions. Tomorrow I pray that I'll spend less time "shushing" and more time listening to what God wants me to say and how I can communicate His love through my actions.

Date: 3/1/2003

Submitted by: Stephanie Kirkman

Journal Entry:

Tomorrow we leave for Malaysia- We've been in Hong Kong now for six weeks- that's crazy!! It's gone super fast. So, for our last day here a few of us went with our lovely contact, Carrie, to Macau, which is a one-and-a-half-hour ferry ride from Hong Kong. Many good times were had. One thing that sticks out in my mind is that all the street and building signs were in Chinese and Portugese (no English)- that was different.

We walked up and down the streets of down town just enjoying a different culture and taking in all the new sights. There was Portugese dancing and singing, live statues, all sorts of art, and plenty of street markets and shops to look at. Carrie took us to the main attractions and we had a blast talking and laughing and taking silly pictures. We had lunch on the beach at a quaint little Portugese restaurant, close enough to the water so we could hear the waves crash against the shore as we enjoyed our food.

I like days like today- carefree and laid back. Nothing to plan, nothing to perform or lead, no tight schedule- just walking, talking, enjoying and resting. At the same time, I think I might grow restless if every day were like today. Things would just seem boring instead of refreshing and free. It's a good thing God knows how to mix things up; to challenge us and cheer us on, to run with us and climb with us, to fight and struggle along with us, to sing and dance with us, or to just sit and rest with us. There's a balance for everything, I guess. God's so good.

"There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven" Ecclesiastes 3:1

"And surely I am with you always" Matthew 28:20



Stephanie Kirkman

God is good. All the time :)

Date: 3/8/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

It was right about the time that the glass of orangeade went crashing to the floor and splashed on my teammate Steph that I decided that it was time to start taking myself a little less seriously. Sometimes we set out on days with a certain plan. Our plan today was to take a bus 3 hours to Ipoh, which is in northern Malaysia, where we had a weekend full of programming to do with the local churches and with some native churches in the highlands. I was terribly excited for 2 reasons. 1)I'm not a city person by any stretch of the imagination and I was looking forward to being in a much more rural setting for the first time in almost 2 months and 2)the weather there is cooler (so it's like 80 degrees instead of 98 with only 80% humidity instead of 99%). So at the beginning of today, I was pumped and I was also fairly proud of myself because I managed to fit everything that I would need for 4 days in my little day pack and my green Jansport backpack-quite a feat if you know me because I have to bring books and I have to bring my journal and the camera... the list goes on. So, to alleviate the packing problem I knew I would have, I decided that I only needed one pair of pants. So I wore my best khakis. I figured I've been really good about not spilling for a while and it would really be good to just have one pair of pants because then I would have room to bring



Sandy Wittman

that book that I need to read on the bus. So we got up early and went to the bus station where we had breakfast. Chinese breakfast. Basically what that means is noodles (they're called "mee") soaked in a black sauce that they tell me is soy sauce but I think it tastes much different (and better) than the soy sauce I know. Well, you can imagine what might have happened with this yummy sauce and my khaki pants. Yep, definitely spilled. So, at this point, my sense of humor paid off. I simply laughed at the irony and dumped half my water bottle on my pants and went along my merry, if a little soggy, way. Then we spent 3 hours on the bus. That was enjoyable because I looked out the window and it's beautiful-I couldn't even concentrate on my book as much as I thought I would. When we got there we stood in the sun for about 40 minutes and then our contact picked us up. Our contact is a very jolly, very sweet and very funny man. I made it through lunch with no major incident and everything was great. Then we started to get our schedule. Now, it should be mentioned at this time that we were very busy in Hong Kong but we'd had a little rest since we'd been in Malaysia. So we weren't really prepared mentally when we saw that there was basically back to back programming for 2 days. Now, at this point, I had a headache and my joints were stiff from sitting on the bus for 3 hours with no leg room and it should be said that my attitude was certainly not where it should be. So, it happened that at this moment I decided to try the red bean soup (a dessert with a strangely sweet taste that is not consistent with our thoughts of red beans in the western world). Three guesses where my bowl of red bean soup ended up. Sure, my pants. So about this time I turned into a stand up comedian and made a huge joke out of it, much to the amusement of my teammates who had no idea that if it weren't for my loud joking and their good reaction to it, I would probably be in tears over something that at the time felt like the last straw. Right now you're starting to think I'm awfully petty-don't worry-I'm not done yet. So we got in the van to go to our first of several bookings. It was a children's party. In the van we thought that we were just going to hang out. When we got there, they were all patiently waiting in chairs for us to show up and looking expectantly at the space where, indeed, we were to do a 2 hour program. I was beside myself. I had let the combination of heat, spilling things on my only nice khaki pants and not knowing what was going on to completely turn me negative. I drank my orangeade with a vengeance, refusing to admit how cute the kids were and how I kind of wanted to play with them-I was too busy focusing on my own silly bitterness. It's then that the contact for the party brought her son over to introduce to Lucy and me. As I reached to shake his hand, my hand hit Lu's orangeade that happened to be sitting on the djembe and sent it crashing to the floor. There was a silence-I think it was a second long but it felt like an hour as I realized the juice was spilling all over the floor and that maybe it wasn't all that big a deal. So I spilled things on my only nice pants. The stains came out. So I had a cramped ride on the bus. What does one expect? So the schedule was packed. What am I here for? It seems that I was letting all the stupid little concerns get in the way of realizing that I am here for the ministry and if the day is packed then that is a good thing-it means that I have more opportunity to do the thing I was called to do. So, with that, I put my hair in pigtails and smiled and joined the kids. And it was fun. I ceased to let my bad attitude get in the way of the ministry to be done and the kids really responded well. In The Sacred Romance, John Eldridge mentions that it's sometimes easy for us to get caught up in our own little dramas and miss the greater picture. For a large part of today, I was caught up in my own little drama-and a very little drama at that. I'm glad that God made me clutzy sometimes. Sometimes we just need to stop taking ourselves so seriously and just do the things that we are called to do without complaint. God will take care of the rest. =].

Date: 3/9/2003

Submitted by: Stephanie Kirkman

Journal Entry:

Location: Malaysia

I feel confident in saying that this has been THE busiest day of our time on team. Yesterday we traveled, from Kuala Lumpur, three hours by bus, then led two 2-hour programs. Today we had not 2, not 3, but 4 programs. We led a Sunday school class for an hour, then the morning worship service, another Sunday school at a different church for 2 hours, and finally an evening program at yet another church. As you can imagine, right now I'm quite worn out and tired and sick of doing the same sing-a-longs over and over and over and over...

BUT! Each of these chances we had to lead youth (and all ages, really) in song and dance and drama and praise of our Lord was a blessing to me. I could feel God filling me up as I was pouring out every



Stephanie Kirkman

last drop of energy and love in me.

I did NOT feel the most excited about my job as program coordinator today. I had never planned out a whole worship service or a two-hour sunday school class before- let alone in one day and along with two other programs. It seems like I could have been (or at least would have had an excuse to have been) more stressed out, had less patience with my teammates or contacts, complained more, and maybe even pulled out my hair. But, strangely enough, it went smoothly and joyfully well. And at the end of the day I feel peace and not angst. Oh, I still feel exhausted and desperately ready for sleep. But I feel good: a peace that's hard to describe. I know it's from God. I know He hears all of our prayers and that He is faithful, and His heart is good. He knows just what we need to sustain and refresh us, to keep us going and keep on loving.

Thank you God for your amazing love.

"We love because He first loved us" I John 4:19

God is good. All the time :)

Date: 3/10/2003

Submitted by: Megan Nolting

Journal Entry:

Location: Cameron Highlands, Malaysia

The other day I was flipping through some magazines in a bookstore, and came across articles titled, "Keep it Simple." One article was talking about decorating tips, and the other, new summer styles. It occurred to me that the world's idea of a simple lifestyle is so different than ours as Christians. Yet, even Christians can get bogged down by busyness. I recently read a quote that said, "Busyness isn't of the devil, it is the devil." Since we've been overseas, I've been discovering what a blessing it is to have less distractions. Because I have less stuff and options for things to do, I have naturally been spending more time with God.



Megan Nolting

Today we visited some indigenous villages in the Malaysian Highlands. We gathered with some of the women and children in their small church building. As we were singing with them, I was struck by the insignificance of some of the things I occupy my time with. I would imagine these women hardly brag about how busy their schedule is, or fret over what their new summer wardrobe will be.

In my own life, I have created all sorts of unnecessary worries. Thankfully, God is showing me another way. From now on, the phrase "Keep it simple" will have a new meaning to me. Psalm 36:8 says, "They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house...". We can continue to complicate our lives by chasing after possessions and activities that will never satisfy us. Or we can focus on a singular goal of seeking after God, and taste the goodness of His joy and rest. Rest is certainly a welcome choice!

Date: 3/24/2003

Submitted by: Megan Nolting

Journal Entry:

Location: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Today I met a man who had only two teeth, but a lot to say. A group of friends took me to the town of Malacca, which has been inhabited by both the Portuguese and the Dutch. One place we visited was a bombed out cathedral that was built hundreds of years ago by the Portuguese. As we were looking around, it began to rain, so we took cover under the only spot that still has a roof. A few men tried to sell their paintings to me, but I brushed them off, figuring they just thought I was another tourist. Then I noticed my friends gathered around a man selling paintings in the corner. He asked me where I was from, and revealed his almost toothless smile when I told him I was from America. My agitation grew to interest as he began to tell his story. It turns out he had studied in America for a few years in the 1970s. Since then, he's been selling paintings in the cathedral. He told us about the people he's met from around the world; most of them having more reputable occupations than his own. Yet the twinkle in his eye told me he wouldn't trade his lot in life for anything. As we all sat and talked to him a little longer, and listened to a man play Simon and Garfunkel hits in the background, I had an overwhelming feeling that this was going to be a significant experience in my life. His reputation and the amount of stuff he owned meant nothing to him. He is passionate about painting and truly enjoys life!



Megan Nolting

I walked away that afternoon with a lovely painting and a renewed sense of purpose in life. I'm at a point where I can choose to seek after success and "more stuff", or where I can surrender to God's will for my life, trusting He will fulfill my deepest heart's desires. Though the latter may bring more struggle, it will also bring more joy, and hopefully a twinkle in my eye that is a witness in itself to the passion God longs for our lives to have!

Date: 7/2/2003

Submitted by: Jon Graf

Journal Entry:

The years quickly coming to an end and it's time to start making plans for what to do after team. Looking back over the past ten months I'm having troubles even processing what all we've done. I'm trying to see how my faith has grown, and other ways I've matured, and I haven't really pinpointed any major changes. Every day is a new chance to look at life, and forget anything holding you back from the past. God gives us that kind of fresh start so we can always have hope and live to the fullest. It's best to live in the moment, if we try to focus on things too far ahead of us we'll miss out on what's right in front of us. Sort of goes along with some misconceptions about missions. You don't have to go somewhere far off to share Jesus, if you think like that you know something is wrong, you just have to show jESUS love wherever and whenever because Christ lives in us. I'm going to try to keep my focus on what God wants with me right now, today, where I'm at, and enjoy it while I'm at it.



Jon Graf

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Date: 7/2/2003

Submitted by: Sandy Wittman

Journal Entry:

so, it's been a while. i debated with the idea of updating. i keep a personal journal and i thought, hey, this is great, i'll just open up my journal to certain days and write. but, then it occurred to me that by the second or third one i would start feeling like i was just writing events and what i was feeling and since i have had so many different experiences since the last journal i wrote, i thought it would be better if i just started from now. our time overseas was amazing. it would take so long to talk about all the things that i learned and the things that God showed me during that time. i'm also finding that as we travel here in the states, the learning is continuing. i feel that in alot of ways my eyes have been opened to a bigger picture and i've been gaining alot of perspective on what God wants for me in my life. i've talked about this before but i think it's a good thing to remember and that is that, no matter what plans we make for our life, no matter which way we plan to go, we always have to be open that what we want and think could be totally different than what God has planned. several times this year i've had that moment of "OH!" thinking i have it all figured out. and usually, when i think that, God throws something else in to make it impossible to see the end result. but my dad said something recently that really spoke to me and that is that if God let us see the light at the end of the tunnel, if he let us see that path stretching easily and straight in front of us, we'd be more likely to stray. living by faith, we have to take things day by day. that doesn't mean that we don't have plans, that doesn't mean that we don't invest in our 401K, it just means that we live our lives daily as if this could be the day, the last day, that we are on earth. we need to live for Christ and in constant consideration of His plan for us. this doesn't mean that we worry-it means exactly the opposite. we have a song that we sing in our programs in mandarin called flowers of the field. it talks about how God takes care of the flowers and the birds and he loves us so much more-imagine what he does for us. i think that one of the biggest issues that we deal with in faith these days is not REALLY trusting that God is going to take care of us. not REALLY believing that when we pray, God's going to move in our lives. i beleive that if we are praying and we are truly seeking God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven, then we will see more clearly those plans, we will see more clearly God's vision for our lives. i'm not sure what my future holds. i could be anywhere. and you know what? i'm excited to see the adventures that God has for me-whether they are in other countries or at my home church or in my backyard. because i know that the adventures that God has planned for me, the things that he wants for my life, are so much better for me than anything that i could come up with.



Sandy Wittman

Date: 7/2/2003

Submitted by: Megan Nolting

Journal Entry:

It was about a year ago that I decided to go on an international team. At that point, the thought of being on team for another 14 months was beyond my comprehension. I couldn't imagine what my life would be like a year from then. Well here I am, one year later... For the past 23 months, I've been living out of a suitcase and staying in a new place almost every night. I've met more people and seen more sights in that time than in the 20 years before that. Team life is a very unique way of life, and I honestly wasn't sure what 2 years on team would do to me. I expected to be pretty bogged down by now. Instead God has surprised me with an overwhelming feeling of thankfulness. Sure I feel worn out at times, but I can't help but dwell on all that God has done in my life since I've been on team. My teammates have taught me so much and have become some of my dearest friends. I've also gotten to see so many spectacular places! And more than anything, I have been blessed by the



Megan Nolting

outstanding people we've met. Night after night, people welcome us into their homes and their lives. Their hospitality and love blows me away! God is so good and has worked in my life in more ways than I ever could've imagined!

dgj
