

Cross Fire 2002-03 Journal

Date: 9/24/2002

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

First Journal!!!

Peace to you!

This is our first journal entry of the year! Fun. I have to say that all is well, the team is well, and the ministry is well! We just left cross cultural training on Saturday for our first booking in the twin cities. And yesterday was our first day off! It feels good to be on the road taking our ministry to different churches. It's fun and exciting for us and the people we meet.

Already I've had a great time in the host homes getting to know our host families - how cool it is that we will have new friends to meet everywhere we go. How blessed we are! Please continue to pray for our team and our ministry, especially our health and energy!

God's peace!

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Melinda Broomhall

Date: 9/26/2002

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

This has been our first week of touring, and it has been a good week. Many great things have happened this week, but the one that sticks out in my mind the most is having coffee with the bishop of Togo. It was really a wonderful experience. I was nervous, but I am very thankful for the experience. The bishop has been in the United States for two months, and he will be here until Novermeber. I think that he was as excited to meet us as we were to meet him. He welcomed us with handshakes and a smile. He seemed to be a man filled with the joy and peace of Jesus. He treated us as his brothers and sitters in Christ. I feel so blessed to know that my Christian family extends all over the world. He was happy to know that we have members on our team from different synods and denominations.

Thanks be to Jesus!

Jessica



Jessica Neale

Date: 10/5/2002

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

10/5

Greetings from Cross Fire. It has been awhile since we've done one of these journals and this is my first of the year. Last night we had a program in the northern part of Minneapolis. The pastor told me that it was the worst part of the cities, somewhat in part to those leaving Chicago to get away from gangs or to start another life. The program was attended by about 15 of the youth from the area and involved with the church we were at. It was a very informal program and we tried to feed them with a little encouragement for their lives. I enjoyed the time before the program because they had Kirk Franklin and other gospel music blasting in the front of the church to get people to the church. It pumped me up! That night after the program we went to the Lutheran Volunteer Corps' (LVC) house. Another great experience to talk with them and find out about what they are doing to help further the ministry. This evening taught me about reaching out more to the side most don't think of - the inner city. Most of us are so afraid because of the stories we hear but they live it everyday and want a way out. That's what I think we may have given to the few that were there.



Michael Topolosky

Date: 10/8/2002
Submitted by: Michael Topolosky
Journal Entry:



Michael Topolosky

10/8

So why do we have to leave host homes? Days off are great times to rest but they also give us more chances to talk with the families. The times spent late Sunday night and then again Monday night are unspeakable. Being home when the kids get home from school and seeing that interaction between the parents and the kids is what makes me push on and take note for my future. I also enjoy the quality dinner time and nightly entertainment whether music, movies, or watching football/baseball. Host homes give up so much for us and it's hard to leave each and every day but it seems that we will get one more chance to see them when we return from West Africa. I hope that's the case.

Date: 10/26/2002
Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall
Journal Entry:



Melinda Broomhall

We've spent the last couple weeks in South Dakota, Nebraska, and now we are in Kansas. I celebrated my birthday in South Dakota and it was the best birthday I could have asked for. Though I wasn't able to share it with my family and friends, I did get to talk to some of them on the phone and some of them sent me mail packages. The Lord blessed me abundantly! As He always does! My birthday was on a Sunday so we had two bookings that day. The hosts I stayed with and the members of the congregations were so gracious. They were generous to have a cake for me! I am so thankful for my brothers and sisters in Christ who I got to share my birthday with, they really made it special! GOD IS GOOD - I won't stop saying that because I know it is true! And I really do see God providing for me all my needs. I am thankful for all my family, friends, sponsors and host homes for the amazing gift and ministry they have been to me! PEACE!

Date: 11/1/2002
Submitted by: Dan Bredberg
Journal Entry:



Dan Bredberg

God will provide. I used to say this statement all the time, but God's gracious provisions have never been as clear a reality in my life as they are right now. I am amazed to see how God continues to provide for our team each and every time we are faced with difficulties and challenges. Two days ago we realized that we still had no idea where we would be staying the next night, but none of us were overly concerned about it because we know things would work out--and they did. A wonderful church in Oklahoma City took us in at the last minute, providing not only food and shelter, but also an amazing group of kids who showed us God's love through their selfless prayer requests for friends and family during chapel. God is so good to us! I can only hope and pray that I will always be able to trust in God as much I have been able to do so the last few weeks. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!- Peace, Dan

Date: 11/5/2002
Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall
Journal Entry:

The sun was shining today. It is the first time in at least two weeks that we have

seen the sun.

I am learning everyday. God is great like that. Today I felt a strong love and appreciation for my team. What a blessing it is to have four people to share this ministry with. We are a body, I praise God for his work in all our parts, and I pray for God's blessings on us as we continue to grow and God makes us all He wants us to be. I can see that our differences are a good thing. I think sometimes I have a tendency to wish that we were more alike, more the same. But there are reasons why we are not. We can learn from each other. Just as the Lord is holding us up, I hope that we can hold each other up, please continue to pray for team unity, I can feel our prayers being answered.

God is Good, God is Here, even if we can't see him. Just like the Sun that has been behind clouds for the past two weeks.

May His face shine upon you today.

In Christ.



Melinda Broomhall

Date: 11/10/2002

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

I love hosts who let me use things, especially, when they teach me something. Today I borrowed our host dad's road bike and took it out around the Austin area. Today's ride gave me peace to know that I can continue through anything I put my mind to. I pressed on, got out of the saddle for the hills, and mentally told myself to get a move on it. These are things I daily tell myself as well. Let's go, put on a happy face, it's not for you but others, get moving...the right way, push it. I am reminded each day on the road how great our God is. These past few weeks have made me very reflective of my personal life as well as what my mission is here on team. Working with the kids and adults is the reason we're here and I'm beginning to realize that more and more. Praise to him on high for teaching me to persevere and have patience with not only others, including teammates, but also myself.



Michael Topolosky

Date: 11/16/2002

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

whilst driving in the van today we were caught in gridlock along the interstate ten stretch from Houston to New Orleans, you kinda became familiar with all the peeps who were around you in their respectable auto-mobiles one fellow was talking on his cellphone and kept on accidentally honking his horn. We sorta got used to it after a while.

anyways, this white truck with three teenage girls, sisters I presume, and their mom, I presume, rolled up beside us. And they were waving hello, and they had a teddy bear waving hello too, so we all waved back at them of course, acknowledging them as fellow children of God and probably all around goodly chaps.

Then inspiration hit me! I grabbed my trusty side kick and much loved beanie baby stuffed dog,



Daniel Rebolledo

Date: 12/4/2002

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Arrived back in the cooler climate...finally. I would have to say I prefer it being warm but not during the winter. I need my 0-10 degree weather with a couple feet of snow.

SO, we are in Central City. Another gorgeous day. A balmy 15, maybe 20 degrees!! We did a program for at least 200 people - I counted well over that. We packed them



all into a gym and used one section of bleachers as well as chairs. Acoustics didn't help us in the gym being an 'acoustical' team and all. When they clapped it was so loud that I'm sure the words and message were lost. But a lot of people said they enjoyed it. I know I did. Being we've been averaging 1 or 2 programs a week I enjoyed this. The only time we play for groups over 100 is at church (average program is about 30). It was groovin'!
Working more on our African songs. Getting more and more ready for that as we head over there in a month! I'm excited yet realize that I have a lot of work to get down in preparation. Even though I'm more experienced in French, I still have a lot to work on. That's why each day I've been doing something, whether listening or reading/studying. Speaking of which - watched some of Braveheart the other night before going to bed. superbe! On another point, I'm also ready to go to Africa because I'm at the point of "let's get it over with already". I want to have stories to share with churches/hosts and during programs as well. I also want to experience what I've been soaking in since September. Aller (lets go)!! I'm ready and willing. Peace

Michael Topolosky

Date: 12/6/2002

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Well lazy days are just what we need. Yesterday was a day off b/c next week we'll be at training/retreat with the other teamers. hooha

I know you're all going to think I'm crazy but I watched 8+ hrs of movies yesterday. I started just before 10 and had to stop at 6 to go to dinner. Today's theme was Christianity. I had started 'Prince of Egypt' last night but didn't finish, so I started with that. Then moved on to 'Dogma' which I've heard lots about. It was alright.

Couldn't decide if it was more vulgar or if it was trying to make a point which I think it did about us being dead in our faith and not knowing why we go to church...it's something compulsory. Then I watched 'End of Days' with my man Arnold Schwarzeneger(in your best Arnold voice). I've seen the last 20 min before so it was good to see its entirety. Again a different twist on the end days yet provoked some questions in my head. Then I finished my movie marathon with none other than 'Robin Hood'. Nothing like some action/romance. No explanation there. Oh, and watched some of the 'Grinch' in french as well!

But don't think I didn't do anything else. I did a workout during one of the movies and wrote some notes/letters to get out in the mail. So, I wasn't totally unproductive today.

These movies made me realize that I've also felt a new rebirth in my life. These last few wks I've said enough. I've tried to run my life my way and not according to God's plan. I've been in control way too long and it's time to give up and give over. And it's amazing the change I feel. I've been in my Bible on a daily basis and praying more - as well for strength, joy, peace, you all, etc. I feel good. And I don't let the little things on team get to me. I have a sense of "laissez-faire", it doesn't matter, attitude. I'm realizing that we're all different and I need to accept that in everyone I meet. In closing, I will use something from a communication book I've read interspersedly these past few months, which says something like this...We need to recognize that we are all different. It's how we face that challenge which we will succeed. We need to recognize that we need those persons with opposing views/ideas on our teams because they keep us on our toes. We learn from them! May you be challenged each day to also accept that which God places in your lives. Accept differences and realize that God will pull you through them.

BLESSINGS THROUGHOUT THE UPCOMING HOLIDAYS. THIS IS MY LAST JOURNAL UNTIL AFTER THEY PASS. MAY YOU BE STRENGTHENED AND RENEWED FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR. PEACE....



Michael Topolosky

Date: 1/14/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Greetings Everyone! Grace and peace to you in the name of Jesus Christ! I have the privilege of writing the first journal from West Africa! PRAISE THE LORD! We arrived safe and healthy and were very warmly welcomed! It was a long day of travel. We left New York Monday evening at 8 PM and arrived in Paris at 8 AM after a six hour

flight. At 11 AM we got on the plane to Togo, and we arrived here this evening. I spent a lot of time sleeping. I was a little apprehensive, but I knew the HOLY SPIRIT was guiding me and Cross Fire, and our new friends in Lome'. We were picked up by the Reverend of the local parish and we went to the home of the Bishop (President) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Togo. We gathered and were greeted in the dark yard. How exciting this was for us! We met many people who have been anticipating our arrival. We prayed and thanked God for the safe travel. And we were served our first meal here. Our hosts are very gracious and concerned about our health and well-being, so we were soon taken to a house where we will stay for the majority of our time in Togo. We are so blessed! It is really an act of the LORD that we are here! He has brought us here! And He is going to guide us and guide people to salvation in Christ.



Melinda Broomhall

Please pray for Youth Encounter, for Cross Fire, for our faith, our ministry, our health and safety, and for our brothers and sisters here in West Africa.

And please read our journals! This is a wonderful tool for us to share our ministry with friends all over the world!

Mark 28:18-20 "Jesus said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.'"

Date: 1/15/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Bon Jour! Howdy! And Hello! Our first day in Africa! We departed JFK International Airport from New York on Monday and arrived in Lome', Togo on Tuesday evening. We were immediately greeted by Pastor Koji, an ordained, Togolaise Pastor (Lutheran, too). Anyway, by the end of our first full day in Togo, Wednesday, we had received a great many greetings and many, many blessings. There is a saying in Togo that says that rain is a great blessing. So when you welcome guests, and it rains, they say that your guests will bring you a great many blessings. This is, mind you, for Togo, a month which usually receives less than a third of an inch of rainfall.



Daniel Rebolledo

So, I'm chillin outside...We have been put up in some incredibly nice quarters, by the way! And our accommodations have a fenced in little yard. So I am out there and I see these incredible dark storm clouds rolling in and I ask Gaston (who is the National Youth Representative) in French, "Is it going to rain?" He exclaimed something to me in quite an expedient pace. To which is replied, "Je ne ca pas." I have been saying that quite often. So, anyhoo, then it starts to POUR!!! And oh, man I wish we built an ark to survive the torrent! Well, not really, but it rained really hard!!! So, by this we have been placed in much confidence that God will do many great things through us while we are in Africa. In ministry, my confidence wavers often, as to "Is this the right way? The best way? God's way? I had better be more prepared..." and those have been my prayers! Show me the way, prepare me! All the while, stressing out. But by the brothers and sisters here in Lome', I have been compelled to ask God for something else. God has put it on their hearts to expect many blessings, not because they want it but because He promises that. He promises also what I pray now, "Work in spite of me, God." It is His way. God has shown me to stop asking "Show me your way" and start saying, "I will follow your way."

Date: 1/16/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Demain ce passe bien, peut-etre mieux (English—The day passed well, possibly

better). Because I am the most proficient in French out of the five of us, I get double duty it seems, but it's been fun. Although at times I wish I knew hardly any French, so I wouldn't have to talk as much. It's been helpful because Gaston, the National Youth Director, knows little French and he's been the one with us all the time. Thus, I must say my French is getting better! Listening, fine. Turning my thoughts into words, I have some work to do. However, I think I had a breakthrough this evening at choir practice. During it, we did introductions—them and us. Then I got to talking with some of the boys about soccer ("football"). I was able to hear and understand them. Plus, I wasn't translating every word into English as most might do. This was also the case at the markets we were at and the things Gaston was telling me. Things were making sense and clicking together. There were even some times when I had to think about whether or not I was thinking and listening in French or in English.



Michael Topolosky

A little culture lesson I learned from Gaston included fishing and getting the fish to market, why February 2nd is so important, and also picked up more phrases in Ewe (pronounced "e ve"). We went passed the fish market on the way to the beach (Gulf of Guinea) where we saw in action the fishermen taking care of their catch and then getting it to market. Next we walked by "Rue de 2nd Fevrier" and found out a little history about the President and his plane crashing before that day (end of January) and thus it signified an important day for those of Togo (sorry, that's all I got and could remember). Finally, learned more phrases like "hello", "goodbye" and "my name is..." in Ewe—mostly at the choir practice, but also learned a few during lunch and dinner. It's hard enough getting French and now we start with another language. But it's all good and brings smiles to people's faces when we use it, especially mine because I have no clue what anyone is talking about when they switch from French to Ewe, like Gaston does when others are present—but it helps when in the market or getting a taxi!! Overall, it's been fun! Very welcomed here as well as noticed when walking around town. But it's good for someone to be on the other side—to broaden one's thoughts and perceptions. Au Revoir—ae so (Bye)!

Date: 1/17/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Today began with a breakfast of eggs with onions and tomatoes and some bread. We also had tea and water. This is the breakfast we have had each day and it is very good. Louise is an eighteen-year-old girl who stays with us in the house we live in. Gaston is the head of the youth for the Lutheran Church in Togo. He also stays with us and goes wherever we go: to church, the bank, the market...everywhere. We are very honored guests and they take very good care of us.



Jessica Neale

It is so humbling to me how we are served. It is difficult to take sometimes. I feel as if the church and people are doing so much for us as a team, but I don't feel as if we are doing enough for them. I talked to a pastor here about this and he said not to worry and that our presence here means so much. I believe him, it is so evident in talking with the people here. They are so happy to see us. My prayer is that God will use me to be His servant and the servant of His people.

I few days ago I told a woman and her friend, Saraphin, that I liked the braids that some of the women here where in their hair. She said that she knew someone who could do this for me. This afternoon when we got back to the house where we are staying, a woman was here to braid my hair. It took five hours and it is beautiful. On Sunday I will get a "boo boo", this is traditional dress that the women wear. People now tell me that I will look Togolese. It is exciting to learn and partake in this culture. Even though we come from different places, God has a way of bringing us together. I pray that He brings Christians all over the world, towns and families, together. He has the power to do it!

Date: 1/18/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Today we had the privilege of attending the Civil wedding of Jeanne and Jacob—two of our friends from the ELCT (Evangelical Lutheran Church in Togo). The service seemed much more somber and serious than the ones I have seen, but towards the end, people still clapped and shouted. The Bishop explained to us that these two families did not have a lot of money and so they could not have a grand ceremony, as some other people had. He wanted us to sing a song about how money does not matter, but only God's love for us. We ended up singing "Isn't it Love" with a brief explanation at the beginning, but the rest done in English. I really wish we had more experience with French at this point. Perhaps my greatest frustration is my inability to communicate with many of these people on anything but an elementary level. There are so many questions I have or so many things I would like to say to my brothers and sisters in Christ who have welcomed us with such amazing love, generosity and hospitality. But I am stuck with basic phrases like "Merci Bien", "Vous etes tres gentille", etc...I hope and pray our ability to communicate will grow quickly. Having said that, the people here are so wonderful and no matter what we can or cannot manage to say, our mutual smiles speak volumes.



Dan Bredberg

"You are welcome" is the phrase we hear again and again. These people seem to be living out Christ's call to love one's neighbors and treat everyone as he would treat God Himself. There is so much to say and so little space to write. God has richly blessed us by allowing us to come here and share in this new, vibrant church. Speaking of sharing, I will be preaching tomorrow morning for the Wedding/church service. When I was first told this (the night we arrived), I was a bit nervous to say the least. But I have peace now, knowing that God is very much alive and at work here. Thus, even though I wish I could give the sermon entirely in French without translation, I am honored to be able to speak here at all. And my prayer is that God will truly use our weakness as His strength, and make my words be HIS.

Blessings to you all—from a land of many hardships, much hope, and more love,

Dan

Date: 1/19/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

PEACE! Hello to all God's people! Things here are wonderful! I am learning and seeing so much!

Oy nam be ABLA! I am learning some simple phrases in Ewe (eh-vey) and my Togolese name is Abl because that is Tuesday, and I was born on a Tuesday (is that right, Mom?).



Melinda Broomhall

I have to tell you about yesterday! Yesterday was a wonderful day because I felt the HOLY SPIRIT as we had our first worship with the local parish. As I said before, the Holy Spirit guided us here and the Holy Spirit guided me as I had the opportunity to give the sermon at the confirmation service last night! WOW—I know—me giving a sermon! HA HA—who would've thought! But who would have thought that I would be coming to West Africa! The fact is God has some awe-some plans that are too cool for words—bigger than we can dream of ourselves. But when we let the Holy Spirit guide us, GOD WORKS THROUGH US! At first I didn't want to do it, but I know that God brought me here because He can use me, and HE WILL WORK through me. He will be there when I call upon His name.

I prayed before the service with Jessica, the Bishop, and the Pastor, and I knew that God was working in the place. And I am so thankful for all those praying for me at home, in North America! Special shout out to friends in Edmonton and friends in California! Thank you for your encouragement, and keep praying for our team, ministry, and the body of Christ here in West Africa! Pray for the faith of the confirmands!

This morning's worship service was the next part of the wedding that we witnessed yesterday.

Today in church we were present as our new friends took their wedding vows. It was great to be a part of this! God spoke through Dan Bredberg as he gave a message about the love and grace of Christ, and how that can be shared through marriage! It was awesome! The HOLY SPIRIT was working in him and the hearts of the people there. Pray that people who don't normally attend church will continue to come back to receive the Good News. After the service we attended a large gathering of family and friends at the groom's home and we were so warmly welcomed. They appreciate our presence so much! My favorite moment—men were singing and people were dancing a traditional number, and we jumped right in and the Togolese went wild! They love to see us dancing with them and it was such a blast! PRAISE THE LORD for all the opportunities we have to share with our brothers and sisters in Christ!

Date: 1/20/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Nous Chanton Pour le Seigneur!!! (We're gonna sing for the Lord!!!) Well today was our first time evangelizing to the African Public through music. We visited Gaston's (our host's) home and met his family (sister, mother). And also visited a couple other homes, played some songs at a couple of them and also at a couple of markets. All with the aim of promoting our concerts we are having at the Eglise Lutherienne (Lutheran Church) here in Lome'. We were quite a spectacle and attracted a lot of attention apart from daily life. We know and will continue to learn additional songs of praise in the local languages. French, and the aboriginal language of the South of Togo called Ewe (pronounced E-ve). We sang a chorus in Ewe and were pleasantly surprised to find many people joining in singing with us. Strangers, but Christians no less.



Daniel Rebolledo

Togo supports a population consisting of approximately 29% Christian, 12% Muslim, and the remainder, about 59%, are of Animist beliefs, meaning that they have traditional practices of Ancestor worship and different idol worship. This may come as no small surprise then that the area of the Capital City of Lome' is also the capital for voodoo on a global scale. Anyways, history lesson aside, it was very exciting to see Christians in such a different context than I have witnessed before. We often look at a church and define it by it's size, it's demographic, it's youth program, is it traditional or contemporary. When you find yourself in the span of an hour being in a market, a street, a home, or another market, all the while worshipping and sharing God's love, those definitions of church, house of worship, seem to be called into question. What can any building offer that God cannot? And when you see your brothers and sisters in Christ, instead of strangers, you see also that just as God sets no limits for worship in His creation so in that same way, He has set no limits for Him to dwell in the temples, the hearts of humans.

Date: 1/21/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Still here in Lome' chilling with our main man Gaston. We also were joined for a good part of the day by Secretaire Generale "Kodcho", pastor of the church. We visited a hospital in the morning and got a glimpse of life in the way of an African. Seeing the pediatrics section first we saw some babies newly born up to 15 years old holding on for life with what was available. Some babies were on big oxygen tanks and others to me seemed to not even be breathing because I saw very limited chest movement. After pediatrics we visited the accident building and saw some creative means for splints (from the First Aid standpoint). Could have taken pictures of what we saw, but I just felt wrong doing so.



Michael Topolosky

After leaving the hospital we went to Gaston's house for lunch. Everyone is so welcoming here and willing to do so much for us, dinner being one of them. Then we went and waited at the police center for the police commissioner to arrive. Meanwhile, got a lesson in breaking the law, as the

police were bringing in people that were either stealing or smuggling/trafficking. Met the commissioner, said some words, and then left. Supposedly, he'll come to dinner with us tomorrow night. Again, it's nice to have contacts like the Bishop to help us meet all these high-up officials. Also found out that Kodcho has met the President of Togo. Asked him to try and arrange a visit (probably won't happen as we're so busy and he's busy also).

In the evening, we had another cultural lesson at the Presbyterian Church we were at. We played a few songs, including the crowd-pleasing song, "Ape Ma Da Na Mau Wu" (Mercy and Thanks to God), which is sung in Ewe (local language). But before that we were invited to get up and dance with the choir. It made the crowd hoot and holler and cheer. I'm sure it's not everyday you see Americans dancing on stage with Africans. It was fun and brought joy to us all. I know I had a good time at the service and was really moved and touched by the African songs and music. It was a feel of "Holy Ground" and I was realizing where I was even more (definitely not a familiar and comfortable place for us as a team). But, we've got lots of help and others are watching out for us, thus leaving little time to worry, but instead enjoy life in Africa!

Date: 1/22/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Today was not as busy as yesterday, but I still am tired. It rained today so the weather was a little cool, but still probably around 80 degrees Fahrenheit. In the morning we visited a school. We met the head of the school and he said that he would like to have us for a weekend in February. We also visited a Methodist school. When we entered the school area, all of the children saw us out of the windows and there was a roar of excitement among them. They were so excited to see, hear, and touch us. They came out of their classrooms and stood in formation, each class together. The older children, 12 years old, sang a few songs for us. Then we sang some songs for them. They were so eager to clap along with us, but the teacher had to stop the clapping because it was difficult to hear our singing over all the joyous clapping. As we sang, the younger children, 5 years old, crept closer and closer to us. It puts a smile on my face thinking about it.

After our morning, we came home and I took a nap. I get so tired in the afternoon. In the evening we went to a house to eat dinner. The Bishop of the Lutheran Church of Togo was there. We have worked with him a lot as our main contact. He is a very kind man and a joy to be with. The Police Commissioner of Togo was also there. We are such honored guests here.

I feel so happy that God has brought me here. I want to serve Him in every way that He would like to use me. Sometimes it is difficult because I would love to sit down and talk to people, but it is hard because of the language barrier. Some of my high school and college French is coming back, but every once in a while we are spoiled by someone who speaks English, and I lose the French. Please pray that the language difference will not be a barrier to the ministry.



Jessica Neale

Date: 1/23/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Who needs amusement parks when you can have the extreme adventure of riding a Togolese taxi? Yes, this is definitely the new extreme sport—far more exciting than skydiving or bungee jumping. Here, every second is a hair-raising obstacle course. Melinda says the taxis remind her of a roller coaster with all the bumps and quick turns, but I think it's more like being in a video game. Level one is fairly easy—not many cars or bikes, you're on the outskirts of town with fairly level roads, life is good. Level two



Dan Bredberg

adds more cars, trucks, vans, busses, and scooters. Now things are getting more tight and the race has begun. Each car seems to be fighting for a spot in the lead, using whatever means necessary to pass the vehicles in front of it. There are no rules to this game, except try not to get hit. Level three takes you downtown Lome' where you encounter every type of vehicle at every corner. People walk and run across the road, some carrying large loads on their heads, some pulling carts filled with goods. The motor scooters are weaving in or out of traffic as well, on both sides of the car. Every turn is a new challenge with cars missing each other, or pedestrians, or other vehicles. The Bonus level comes after a hard rain, when the roads are suddenly full of water holes, some being impassible, most resembling a dirt bike track with jumps and mud all over—each "puddle" is of an unknown depth and each patch of mud may or may not let us pass. However, the driver prevails and we arrive to our destination safely, with no pushing needed. And we certainly thank God each time we get out of the taxi. Okay, I may be exaggerating a bit, but these rides have become a daily adventure. I am very glad that we do not have to drive ourselves, for I don't think we would make it very far.

As a reassurance for those reading this journal, the drivers are very experienced and we have not been in any real danger—so don't worry! Life is amazing here in Togo. Sometimes fast paced, sometimes slow, but always an adventure. This is a learning experience and a first-hand account of God being active in our midst. May the lessons and the truths learned here not be quickly forgotten, but put into action in our daily lives.

Date: 1/24/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

So, this afternoon we were supposed to be on national television, but we ended up at the beach sipping coconuts...

I had a memorable ministry moment this morning. Our friend Gregoire was over and he mentioned that he listens to the song "Amazing Grace" on CD every morning. He asked me if I knew it, and he asked me to sing it for him. So, next thing I knew, we were singing it together. Gregoire doesn't speak much English—I wrote the words down on paper for him to follow and he did very well.

He was SO HAPPY to have the words! I was glad I helped bring that joy to his face. A member of the church who works for a television station came to see us today. He wanted to interview us for a short program airing Saturday night. Unfortunately, we didn't get it done today. Albert, who works at the ELCT office, was hosting lunch for us at the beach. Now let me tell you a couple of things about eating here. First of all, lunch is eaten in the late afternoon! And dinner later in the evening! And people have been so gracious, many have invited us into their homes so they can feed us—it is an honor for both of us. Today, I most definitely enjoyed the beach. It was beautiful, peaceful. It was called COCO Beach. There were coconuts growing on the trees. Before we ate, they chopped some open for us and gave us straws to drink from. Cool, eh? It was fun, or as I would say in French, "J'ai passe' un bon moment." Our friend Reverend Kotgo told us about his call to servanthood for Christ. But I wish we could have been able to record that segment for the television program tonight because that would have been a great opportunity to witness! To let people know about Christ, and to let people know we are here to share the love of Christ!

Ilest dans les mains du Seigneur. It is in the Lord's hands.

Mark 4:26-27 "Jesus said, 'This is what the Kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how.'"



Melinda Broomhall

Date: 1/25/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo
Journal Entry:

Location: Kpalyme (Blakpa—a village), Togo

We visited a village on a mountain today. It was very, very cool because we are in a relatively flat area, and we were driving on our way to this village. Someone said, "Look, there's the mountain," and it took me a few minutes to bring it into focus because it was hidden behind a humid mist, and then, BOOM! MOUNTAIN!

We drove partway up the mountain to the village, then walked through the village to a church building where, unbeknownst to us, a funeral service was going on. For a time I felt very out of place, but at one point our presence there was announced and everyone was very appreciative of our being there. They were very impressed that these people had come from so far away to pay their respects. I began to understand that I did have a place there by the grieving and mourning, that this young man who had died was my brother who I would soon see in heaven. In this I thought, "I hope I can get to know this brother of mine who has gone to be with our Father in heaven." I am looking forward to the day when we might walk alongside each other.



Daniel Rebolledo

Date: 1/26/2003
Submitted by: Michael Topolosky
Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

A typical day on the road with Cross Fire: many waterholes, holes, dips, turns, bends, people shoved in a car, speeding around other cars/motorcycles/pedestrians. But it's all good because we eventually get to where we're going, in spite of a wrong turn, bad directions, or a flat tire. People here don't seem to mind and I think we're learning that fast and trying to adjust our way of thinking to match theirs! So much to learn, but I think we're managing to get by fine—or at least I don't think anyone's been hurt/disappointed by our visits to the many homes and now the villages we've started to get out to. It's rocked to the max here! Peace out.



Michael Topolosky

Date: 1/27/2003
Submitted by: Jessica Neale
Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Today we had a day off and it was nice. I slept until about 9:00 am. We were supposed to go to Ghana today, but Dan Bredberg was sick yesterday, so we will not go today, perhaps tomorrow. Since we did not leave the house today, we were able to have some "team time". We talked about how things are going, what's good, what could be better. I talked about really enjoying going to the small villages outside of the capital city of Lome'. It is quite an experience to go to a place where perhaps they have never seen white people. Or perhaps some are hearing the message of Christ for the first time. It is hard to explain the feeling. It is a good feeling. Even though the only thing that I can say to them in their language is my name, my presence with them seems to be more than enough. It is difficult because at times I feel I should do more, but we continue to be told that our presence means so much. I pray I am open for God to use me in the best way possible.



Jessica Neale

After we shared I felt I needed to be alone for a little while. I felt I needed some time to process things that were said. I wanted to think about the differences in our cultures. Why did I feel the way I did about certain things? Of course, I didn't get too much time to think about it at that time, but as I continue to live in West Africa, I hope to gain a better understanding of this culture. I hope

to learn from them, and I hope to teach them about my culture. Most importantly, I wish to share the love of Christ.

Date: 1/28/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

I'm writing this journal in the middle of a week of rest. After a very uplifting service on Sunday morning I became ill for the first time. The last two weeks in Lome' had me craving an experience in the village and now that we were finally there, all I wanted to do was get back to our home as quickly as possible. It's amazing how being sick can wipe away any romantic illusions we have. I thought it would be so nice to live in one of these villages, rather than in our house, but now I was able to see what it is like to be sick and have none of the comforts or services offered in a city.

I see now that village life can be a very, very hard existence. Not that there is a lack of joy or praising God here—on the contrary, their faith seems so much brighter than mine. And all of this dancing, singing, and warm hospitality is shown from a people who work very hard to simply survive, while I complain because I have a little headache and stomach pain. It makes me ashamed to think that what I have considered to be trials these people would think nothing of—more so, they would rejoice to have the "trials" I face. What an immensely blessed life I have been allowed to live—so many comforts, so much free time, never needing to go hungry. And yet the way the people of Yarbo village welcomed us...WOW. They are a living example of loving your neighbor as yourself—not merely giving out of excess, like I sometimes do, but giving deeply out of their need.

I thank God for this lesson in the importance of showing love and hospitality to all people whether I feel like it or not, whether it is comfortable for me or not. Our circumstances should have nothing to do with following God's commands. Simple obedience is at the heart of true Christianity—it is that single-minded response to Christ's call that I see so clearly among our brothers and sisters here, and which I want so desperately to be the cornerstone of my life.

Sickness has a way of humbling people. It is a true gift of God to remind us that our health is not to be taken for granted, but is itself a gift from God. It also helps us to share in the suffering of others. Now I have just a slight idea of what a person suffering from Malaria with no option for treatment must go through. And yet, I'm separated by having the privilege of getting that treatment, of returning to air-conditioned comfort, and of resting as long as I like while others must continue to work, sweat, and battle off their illness without any assistance from medicine. I thank God for the amazing way I have been cared for, and I pray His comfort and peace will be with those who suffer without aid.



Dan Bredberg

Date: 1/29/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Today has been another day we didn't spend in Ghana. Each day we wake up, hoping today will be the day we go. We've been waiting all week. But today wasn't the day. Now the reasons we aren't going are a few. The Bishop's jeep broke down, and team health is not 100%. Bredberg got flu-like symptoms first, and today it hit CanaDan like a train. There is a reason we are not going! This gives us an opportunity to stay put and get our rest so we can be healthy to share our ministry outside the home when the opportunity comes to us. Taking it day by day. It is good because it helps us to exercise our patience and flexibility. And it gives us time to spend in devotion and prayer. And devotion and prayer is so important! As a team we need to stay grounded and rooted and connected to our Source! Colossians 2:6-7 says, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in Him, rooted and built up in Him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and



Melinda Broomhall

overflowing with thankfulness."

We as a team are so grateful and thankful for the welcome that we have been given here in Togo. The people are very concerned about our well-being, and they give us their best. They cook for us, clean, treat us like their own family. It is Agape love. They show us the love of Christ. I pray that our team can show the love of Christ to them, too, whether we are out singing in churches or marketplaces or staying at home sick. Jesus Christ is a mighty Savior and He is in our midst!

May God's will be done!
Grace and peace!

Date: 1/30/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

By: MalaraDan

Well, you may be able to discern a couple of things from the author's name written here: One, Melinda can't spell Malaria, and two, I have Malaria. Or, wait...maybe it's like CanaDan, MalaraDan...get it! Oy! Anyhoo, it's no biggy and I've recovered fast with the proper medical attention. Thank you Jesus!! So before going to the Clinic this morning to check out what was going on and what was going wrong with my body, Pastor Kojo, who is with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Togo, poked his head in the room where I was sleeping. He sat on the floor by my bed and we chatted about football for a while (Soccer, that is). I tried to convince him he should import snow from Canada so Togo can have snowboarding. He didn't seem too optimistic about that proposition.

Anyways, we were talking and he, seeing I was in less than ideal physical condition, told me, "We don't take good enough care of you." And I told him how I felt we were incredibly well taken care of, and I was so honored and blessedly undeserving of the abundant care we are receiving. And we got to talking about how both of us had not grown up knowing Christ and how we could see the great many ways in which He had provided for us, sustained us, and brought us to where we were. We talked about how God had brought us together, and our peoples, to celebrate His Son. We talked also about how all these things sustaining us, and even our mortal coils, our flesh, would one day pass away. About how God and His love, His Holy Spirit given to us was in fact the most real thing with us now, and would be the only thing left someday.

I think about how a kid from Canada, of no great stature or achievement, wound up in Togo and started chatting with a Pastor, a jolly guy named Kojo, about football (soccer, that is), and I am just awestruck.

I felt very encouraged and affirmed of our mission here. And being ill for me is a very humbling situation. It shows me the necessity I have for God and for those around me, our brothers and sisters. And I really felt that this was what brought into focus, more so than I had yet realized, that God was working so strongly in the world, in the people around me.

Kojo said then, "It is very encouraging for me to hear you speak of God the way you do." At which point I immediately realized how God is working so strongly in me. Amen.

Dan



Daniel Rebolledo

Date: 1/31/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

o Still moving around the house, doing nothing much. Like the title of Shakespeare's play, "Much Ado About Nothing". Ours is, we have stuff we can do, just not given the chance. Told our friend, Kodcho, today that we're able to do anything and everything even if we are not all together. He said he would talk with the Bishop and see if something could be arranged.

o Received a package slip yesterday but couldn't get it because the ticket booth, "guichet", was closed. So after dropping everyone back off at the Clinic Kodcho and I went and got it. We took motos as our form of taxi. Very exhilarating for me as it was my first real ride in the city on one (got a ride at the beach last week from another friend who works in the office, Gregoire).



Michael Topolosky

o Not feeling as though we are white Americans that we stand out in the crowd. Have had that for over a week now. Probably a sign that I'm adjusting to West Africa quite well. Was the same for me when I was in Paris. Soon after getting accustomed to the language and cultural ways of doing things, etc., I noticed myself fitting in as a national, not an American student. And that's how I feel here. I'm noticing more white people—mostly Europeans or Hispanics—and/but spot them easily. When walking, I also don't feel as though I'm a stranger. I feel like I've been here for over several months (however, it's not the case but to make it my case)! I need, as well as the others, to get accustomed to the culture and language. Over time I know that it will come to us with relative ease. Also the same with the weather. It hasn't helped that we've been out maybe a handful of times this week. Thus, getting used to cooler air-conditioned weather, not dry and humid weather.

o Gotta love the food around here—can't get enough rice and meat (well, one could, it just won't be me!). Also the taxi rides—it makes all the car racing games look easier than what we do (I'm surprised we haven't seen any accidents in the three weeks we've been here). These are professional drivers. I would love to give it a try someday (looks much easier compared to my days driving in Chicago and NYC!).

o Well, all's well, in spite of our sickness. I think I'll never get sick!!

Date: 2/1/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Lomé, Togo

Today Dan B, Mike, Melinda, and I went with some of our friends to a ceremony of the induction of a new chief of Lomé. Dan R. did not go because he is recovering from malaria. There were many people at the ceremony. Many people were from other villages. What really caught my eyes were all of the chiefs that were there. They looked like kings. They were dressed in traditional clothing and they wore crowns. The pastor who was there with us said how important it was to be dressed like this because tradition is such a special aspect of being chief.

After the ceremony we were invited to a family's home for lunch. Everyone is so hospitable to us. I talked to a man from Togo who had also lived in the United States. He said that in Togo people do not need to call to stop by to visit. They can just come. Also if there is not enough food, whatever is available is shared. People are very important in this culture, and spending time with one another is something that is frequently done. Being here I rarely see people alone, and when I am able to talk to someone one on one, I feel that God blesses each relationship.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, please help me to be a sister in Christ to each person I meet. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Date: 2/2/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg
Journal Entry:

Location: Lomé, Togo

Today was another example of the countless ways we are being ministered to. In the morning we were welcomed into two different churches, one Methodist and one Presbyterian. We were blessed to share Holy Communion with the people of the Methodist church, something I greatly enjoyed. I really felt like a part of God's worldwide church as I was given the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ by my brother in Christ called to be a minister here in Togo. The forgiveness of sins offered by our Lord knows no geographical or racial boundaries. Nothing can contain it – for His blood is poured out for all the nations. What an amazing way to experience our unity as fellow sinners in need of forgiveness and fellow saints called to ministry. This church service was nationally televised, so our faces were seen by people throughout Togo – and our explanation of the ministry we came to be a part of was also spread throughout the country. Our friend Pastor Kodjo told us that our being on the TV and mentioning our connection with the Lutheran Church of Togo was a wonderful ministry to them because so few people know about their existence, as they are such a young church. Just the fact of our being here has already enabled them to connect with the much larger Methodist and Presbyterian churches and form some partnerships that will greatly enhance their ministry. So, even though we feel like we are not doing enough for them and are being ministered to far more than we are ministering to others, God is using our presence here in many ways we may never know or see directly. It is so exciting to be part of the ministry here to come together as fellow believers in Christ. I hope and pray that such ecumenical activity may also be a part of our return tour in the U.S. What an amazing statement we could make to the world if we were able to see past our differences and start working together in concrete ways to build the kingdom of God. I pray that this may one day be so.

In His glory, Dan.



Dan Bredberg

Date: 2/3/2003
Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall
Journal Entry:

Location: Lomé, Togo

This morning Dan, my Canadian brother woke us up. He wanted to praise and worship together to start the day. What an awesome way to start the day! We went outside and sat in the sunshine and sang songs to our Lord. We sang "Come, Now is the Time to Worship". It spoke to me "Come just as you are before your God" Isn't that love? Our God loves us, wants us as we are. We can come into his presence as we are. Imperfect, weak, broken. It's ok. God has an amazing love for us that none of us deserve. But his love is there. It is an amazing, beautiful, wonderful ETERNAL gift. "Waves of mercy, waves of grace. Everywhere I look, I see your face. Your love has captured me. Oh, my God, this love, how can it be?"! Our God is love. Our God is holy. His love is reaching out to you wherever you are. Lomé, Togo, on team, around the world, at work, in the hospitals, in prisons, in families, at sea, on the mountain tops, in the valleys, in joy, in pain, in Christ! His love is greater than in any equation. As Riley Armstrong sings, "His love reaches down to where we are. I pray that all the earth will know of this great love." I pray all you reading this will not be able to deny that Jesus Christ is Lord and he has given us unconditional love and eternal life. All glory to God! Peace!



Melinda Broomhall

Date: 2/4/2003
Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo
Journal Entry:

Location: Lomé, Togo

So there I was, front row center amongst a conglomeration of Presbyterian choirs singing Handel's Hallelujah chorus from the infamous Messiah, and not knowing a word of it besides the huge "Hallelujah" part which everyone and their third cousin seems to know. How did I get there?

Welllllllll...

On this particular evening we were attending a worship service where we would sing and then one of the church's six choirs would sing, then us, then a choir and so on and so forth. It was awesome to be witnessed to by such a vibrant community of faith and in so many ways. One thing that really impressed me was the nature with which the whole congregation sang. Truly with one voice, one mind, one heart, all people in unison with the common good, purpose and joy of praising God. "With one mind and mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 15:6) Just as prayer incantation unites us in one voice so too does song. And at the end of the evening at the point when we were all singing Handel, I found myself very so humbled, knowing that I was one among many singing to our Father. "It is not you that sings, it is the church that sings. You as a member of its body may share in its song." Dietrich Bonhoeffer



Daniel Rebolledo

Date: 2/5/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Lomé, Togo

I love market time, it's a very good/fun experience! Today, I went with Gaston after we returned from the seminary to go to the market to get some food. We took our friend Gregoire's moped. Second time on one here – surely not my last. Feels like the bargaining days of old in Paris. Only here it's much more serious – or so it seems. From a business standpoint, I'm not sure how all the people survive when you have, for example; four telephone places, two haircut, and several of the same street vendors working the same street. It seems you pick and choose your vendor – a real sense of the word "barter". Gaston does it real well, but half the time, I'm (we're) not sure what is happening because we walk around until we find the last possible place. But the experience is good for us, just don't like walking in direct sunlight (12-2ish) hottest part of the day trying to find something we've already passed several times! The first point I made about "survival of the fittest" also became evident as we went to the port. Not sure how many things are sold each day, but I'm sure that by selling a VCR (one week of living) or a car (1-3 months) will get you by. They had everything from phones to irons to cars. I guess, if you were the biggest port in West Africa, what would one expect. Gaston told me that people from Côte d'Ivoire to Nigeria come here to buy (because war in Côte d'Ivoire is the reason people would come here because their port isn't safe anymore). Thus, Togo has become the main center for all markets. I guess that would explain their far better economic status than other countries in their area (but this is from a local standpoint, so it could be a little biased) – (my standpoint isn't all that better because you can't compare it to the U.S, or for me, Western European countries – just not the same...soon we'll get the chance to compare it to other countries.) The bishop stopped by just before dinner to talk about our new adventures. It seems Ghana next week, a day in Dapaong (Togo), and then off to Cameroon. A quick stop before we cross the border, in Jos (Nigeria), and then we'll return there for another week, after 2-3 weeks in Cameroon. Then some weeks in Benin before coming back here sometime near the beginning of April. Thus, soon I'll get the chance to compare countries economic, social, political structures! Then I can see what is true and what is biased – from people and books.



Michael Topolosky

Overall, life here has been good. Not much to complain about since there really hasn't been much done here on our part in the last few weeks. It will pick up soon, I know and then the complaining will commence. For that I'm sure of! Oh, heat, heat, HEAT! I detest the heat, but I'm getting better at tolerating it! Michael

Date: 2/6/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Lomé and Yorbo Sedzro, Togo

Today was our first time to spend the night outside of Lomé. In the morning we packed our bags and had breakfast. Then we went to the office of the Bishop. He is very concerned for our well being and he wanted to make sure that everyone was feeling healthy for the trip. We thank and praise God for our health today. We drove to the village in the church car with our usual four in the back and three in the front. Pastor Kodjo and our friend Louise were with us. As we drove deeper into the bush to reach the village, we passed other villages. A lot of people stared at us. It is unusual for them to see white people. I would wave to them and their faces would light up and they would wave back to me. Even though we are from different cultures and speak different languages, a wave and a smile can say so much.

When we reached the village people were very happy to welcome us. We have been here once before and it was wonderful to see familiar faces. We were greeted by the catechist of the church and the chief of the village. We also visited some schools where we sang for the children. Once again they were very excited to have us visit. We ate dinner with people from the church and then we assisted with a confirmation class. To open the class there was singing and dancing. I LOVE THE DANCING! It is so wonderful for me to praise God in this way! In the evening we slept on the porch of a house under our mosquito netting. What a full day.

Prayer: God, I thank you for this day. May your Spirit be alive and well in the village of Yorba Sedzra. Thank you for bringing me here. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Date: 2/7/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Yorbo Sedzro, Fongbe-Dzogbedzi

WOW! What an amazing day of ministry in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord! I have never experienced the power of the Holy Spirit in such a way as I did today. We spent the morning singing to and talking with the children in schools around Yorbo which was a real blessing. But the "Main Event" of the day was our visit to Fongbe Village.

This was a village that Kodjo (our friend/Pastor/Contact) knew had long been rejecting the church. They had even burnt down previous buildings that people had set up as churches, largely because the chief of the village was very anti-Christian. Today, however, we were welcomed into the village by the Chief. After he told us about the difficulties they had been experiencing—such as bad water, sickness, poor roads for trade—he said that we could go ahead and present our "program" for the people who were in the Town Center. Unfortunately, the guitar had just broken a string and our instruments were packed away, so we just sang some songs "a capella"—probably one of our weaker musical presentations. But we did sing in Ewe, the local language, "I Need You, Jesus" and "We're Gonna Sing for the Lord", and the people really enjoyed the songs and wanted to perform them for us to make sure they had learned them correctly. We had an awesome time jumping, dancing, singing, and celebrating with them.

And then came time for me to deliver our "message." At this point, I prayed that God would speak through me and that the Holy Spirit would work in the hearts of these people and I spoke about John 3:16, salvation through faith, God being active in the village. I don't remember much else, but after we finished, the chief talked with his advisors for a while and then suddenly decided to offer us—the Lutheran Church—a large amount of land in the village to be used for building a church, school, or any other necessary buildings related to our ministry. Kodjo was very surprised and happy. We were all very excited as well. It was an amazing moment! The village was now officially opened to the church! Not only that, but plans were set in motion to begin an active ministry at the



Dan Bredberg

location donated by the village to the Lutheran Church.

We proceeded to the spot of land they offered and went through a ceremony in which we planted a tree to symbolize the birth of the new church. PRAISE GOD! I am in awe of how He used our weak voices and feeble words to stir in the hearts of these people a passion for His service. The Chief explained that God was in control and He could do nothing against God. Because God gave them this message, He was certainly going to do what he could to offer whatever resources he could to promote the growth of God's church! He spoke like a true man of faith and I am sure that this new church will indeed be formed and grow into a place of amazing ministry. And God allowed us to be here at the starting point! What an enormous blessing and honor—and what a humbling experience to be used by God in such a great way. His strength is TRULY made perfect in weakness!

Louez le Dieu,
Dan

Date: 2/8/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Today we attended a ceremony just outside the city of Lome'. There were maybe 2,000 people gathered around a square area to watch cultural dancing. There were three teams of women dressed in bright colors. They danced to choirs with trumpets, horns, and drums. Each number was about thirty minutes long, and each team danced twice. Although I couldn't understand the words they were singing, I could see the Gospel being shared thru the dancing. There were many references to the cross. It was a powerful thing to see. After the dancing, the Chief spoke for a while in Ewe, educating the people on ways to avoid spreading AIDS. Approximately 10% of the population of Togo is HIV+. The fight against AIDS is not strong here. Please remember the people here in your prayers!

From what I understand, there were two reasons for this ceremony: evangelism and education about AIDS. When there is cultural dancing involved in any event, people come from all around to see, so it was a great opportunity to warn them about the dangers of spreading AIDS, and for the Christians to share their faith! After the ceremony, we were served rice and meat. I've learned that we don't go to many places without being fed. Such vivid hospitality! And then we were invited into another home where we also ate. People here are so friendly and welcoming!

Our friend Kodjo pointed out to me the manner in which the man was serving us. He suggested I pay him a compliment. I told him that I thought he was a great husband for helping his wife to serve and everyone went wild! Bishop Kofi told me, "Melinda! You have done a good thing! They are very happy! Perhaps there will be a baby tonight! You have renewed their marriage!" I was glad I could help. I suggested that if they have a daughter next, she will be named Melinda. We were served fufu and goat meat soup for lunch. After the first lunch I wasn't so hungry, but knowing I was on a roll from the helpful comment I made, I decided I would eat hard! It is a huge compliment to the hosts when you love their food. Well, I ate with my right hand my huge ball of fufu, and I was getting thumbs up signals from the ELCT staff who were with us! I did well today. I am glad that I am learning how to compliment people in their culture! THANK YOU GOD FOR YOUR GRACE! Blessings!

Melinda

P.S. Fufu is mashed yams, really gooey, like mashed potatoes but more like tasteless "Playdoh".



Melinda Broomhall

Date: 2/10/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Yesterday was one of my most adventurous days yet—or close to it. After the church service we did a Q & A session with the youth and pastors of the congregation. It went rather well and they were surprised to hear about churches being "dead", compared to our brothers' and sisters' here in Africa; as well as our youth are 12-18ish, while here youth is anyone over 20. Fielded a question all in French, a plus for me. I'm getting more comfortable and understanding a lot more each and every day.



Michael Topolosky

Afterwards, Gaston and I went on Gregoire's moped to get some meat. We got beef and a pintade (like a chicken/turkey combo). It's such a weird feeling riding on a moped and going through town holding a live animal. But there's always a first for everything, and our friend thought it was his last few minutes. But, it was spared another day.

Later in the evening, we went over to Kodcho's brother-in-law's for some snacks, met his wife and talked a bit. It ended up turning into a thirty-minute plus debate on women in the pulpit, women/men roles in the church, and at home. His bro-in-law came from a mixed church (didn't recognize the name), but sounds like he is very much like LCMS, with reserve towards women pastors. I agree with him that we must all work together and need everyone to make church work. Women have roles they can fill and help within the church. Just like him, I prefer men as pastors to fulfill God's plan for me and the church. But like we did tonight, I'll leave it at that. It's all up to personal viewpoints. What does matter, besides improving my vocabulary tonight, is that we all come together as one under God to work together. Bro-in-law mentioned one side of a coin needs the other to be worth anything; also body parts (he mentioned fingers). We worship on true God and THAT is the only real thing that counts. We need to start working together and accept each other's differences. No matter if it hurts us or not to accept it. That's one thing I'm still learning here: All/most of the churches work side by side with each other. They're striving to fix communication barriers among different church denominations, and it's so nice to see that. More later from West Africa. Peace and Blessings,

Michael

Date: 2/11/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, Ghana

Today I had the opportunity to have a wonderful conversation with two Ghanaian girls. They were sisters. The younger one was Grace and she is fourteen. The older one's name was Josephine, she is my age, twenty-five. I found out that both girls were Christians. Grace goes to church with her parents at the Roman Catholic Church. Josephine goes to another Christian Church in Accra. Grace was very interested in being my friend. I gave her my address so that we could correspond.



Jessica Neale

Josephine asked me many questions. She asked me about God being made up of the Father, Son, and Spirit. She also asked me if people who do not know Jesus will be able to go to Heaven. I talked with her about the Trinity. She said she knew of the Trinity and she believed it. When we discussed people who do now know Jesus, I told her that I do not know what will happen because God is the only judge. She took my hand, and with a big smile on her face, she said, "You are my sista!"

God, thank You for bringing me to Ghana today. Thank you for introducing me to my sisters, Grace and Josephine. Lord, may You be with my brothers and sisters all over Ghana, West Africa, and the world. Thank you for bringing us together through your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Date: 2/12/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg
Journal Entry:

Location: Medina-Accra, Ghana

Today was spent "hanging out" at Good News Theological College and Seminary—our new home for the next number of days. While there is not a lot of activity to speak about, there was plenty of time for reading and thinking—two things that I have had very little time to do lately. One thing I've been reflecting on is the bit of culture shock I'm experiencing being in Ghana. It is so strange to be in an English-speaking country. Just when we were getting used to French, we're not able to use it for a week. Also, this area is much more Western-looking than Togo was. Large interstate-style roads, nice houses, US companies or brands are everywhere. There are even US soap operas broadcasted on the TV two times a day, much to my displeasure. If that's where people get ideas of what life in the States is like...YIKES!



Dan Bredberg

Another cultural difference is that people here like to ask questions—even if they already know the answer—so as to test what we believe or know about the issue. That, coupled with the West African openness to spiritual matters, has created many conversations about what we are doing here and what it is that we believe. One girl who worked at a Coke stand—here name was Miranda, I believe—flat out asked me what she should do to be a better Christian, once she found out we were missionaries from the U.S. She mentioned that she did not like going to church or praying, and that her friends made fun of her when she did go to church. She was very interested in the Bible, though, and wanted to have one of her own to carry with her as she heard it would bring protection. We explained that it was the words inside, and her believing in those words given from God that provided protection—not the Bible itself. We also encouraged her to keep going to church. To pray, even when she did not feel like it (then to pray for help in her desire to pray or go to church). We talked about the importance of belonging to a Christian community, of hearing God's Word spoken to her, of receiving the Sacraments, etc. We said we would pray for her, and hoped that she could go because she wanted to—or, more importantly, because God commands it. And all this conversation starting from buying a Coke! It's amazing how naturally the conversation flowed, and how willing she (as many others) was to talk about faith. Such openness does not seem to exist in the States or anywhere near such a wide spread.

Pray that God will open up the minds of our nation (and the hearts) so that His Word may be discussed—and accepted as the truth—which alone brings salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. At times like this I think the U.S. needs missionaries much more than Africa—for different reasons, yes, but eternally significant ones.

Date: 2/13/2003
Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo
Journal Entry:

Location: Ghana, Good News Theological Seminary—Accra

Presently, we are staying at a Seminary training Africans to be Pastors. One of the students here, named Archangelo, is from Sudan. I got to be pretty good pals with him and asked him to teach Dan B and I a song. Now, being from Sudan and thus being Sudanese and speaking the language that a Sudanese person would speak, which is Arabic, it just made sense that one from Sudan being Sudanese and speaking in the language one speaks when one is Sudanese, being Arabic, would also sing that same language. And, of course, Archangelo, a Sudanese person, being from Sudan and speaking the language that a Sudanese person would speak, Arabic, naturally then was able to sing that very same language, and replied, when asked, "Sure!"



Daniel Rebolledo

The greatest thing about this whole endeavor of learning this praise song in Arabic, was that it was in Arabic. Not that the language itself was the great thing but that it was an element that asked me to look beyond the convention. To hear this song in this language seemed to carry God's love in a different way. It is very true, I think, that I myself can very easily box up God, the Gospel message,

all the meanings of the Cross into conventional things, like styles of Worship, buildings, meanings to people, etc. And of course being in another culture helps all the more to break down those walls. Because being a Christian in North America and only in North America is probably what first helped shape what I am calling "convention", or a preconception of Christianity. Not that North America itself is the pervyours of this for me, but to live in one culture, and not understand how the message of the Cross is or isn't heard in other parts of the world lends itself to a limited notion of Christianity, Christians, and the world around us. I would say easily one of the best learning experiences in faith would be travel outside of one's neighborhood, outside of one's church, outside of one's denomination, outside of one's style of Worship, outside of one's country or continent, and see how the rest of the world hears the message of the Cross. Maybe learn a praise song in Arabic.

Date: 2/14/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Good News Theological College and Seminary near Accra, Ghana

Do you ever have those days that are just so good, so filled with God and you just don't want them to end? If you can understand that feeling, you know how I felt today. The day started for me at 4:50 AM. Jessica and I went to devotions with some of the students at 5 AM. It was great (really) to see students up before dawn lifting praises and prayers to our worthy God! Celebrating love on this Valentine's day was thanking God for your mother and father, and the people you have in your life.



Melinda Broomhall

Did you know the taps are turned off in Ghana? There is no water. Water is bought or carried. And I hear it's common for the power to go out like it did today. Today the power went out in the afternoon and it did not come back on. There are many problems here that the people face every single day. But they are not down! The love of Christ shines so brightly here. When I think about the coming of Christ and how we ought to be ready – I am reminded of the African culture's strong sense of welcome to its guests – expected or unexpected. When we arrive unexpected anywhere, people drop what they are doing to accommodate us and give us a warm welcome. It is a wonderful example of Jesus to me, the selflessness displayed. They are always ready. Not only did we encounter this welcome at this seminary when we arrived, we also were so warmly welcomed at a primary school we visited today. The Head Master was so enthusiastic, she is named Comfort. She took us to see each classroom, at which point she notified the teachers of our program. We were then invited into her office for minerals (Minerals are bottles pop or soda). She was SO HAPPY to hear that Dan and I come from Alberta, Canada because she has visited some schools in Alberta who are sponsoring their school. She showed us pictures of her trip. It's not the first time that we've visited places sponsored by Canadian organizations. It's neat to be the Canadians in their presence.

So after the minerals, all classes gathered in one big room and we sang some songs for them. THEY WERE SO ENTHUSIASTIC! They shared with us too! They sang songs, recited Bible verses, and the preschoolers did a sweet presentation of traditional cultural dancing. It blew me away – the manner in which they came up with this presentation for us with only about 15 minutes notice! Let me not forget to mention that the teacher's choir sang for us too. Actually, they didn't sing, dance and recite the scripture for us, they did it for the Lord. I love the way these people share their gifts! They said that our visit made their day. But they sure knew how to make mine! I think everyone started their weekend in good spirits after the celebration shared this afternoon – praise the Lord. The thanks and praise and celebration is such a witness. As I mentioned, there are problems here but so many thanks are given to God, we can't help but dwell on His greatness rather than our sufferings. GOD CANNOT BE IGNORED. He has given so much for us. His life on the cross!

I ended my day in a memorable manner. Picture three of God's children gathered around a table with a candle burning in the middle of them. Dan B, Pastor Holonu and I came together by the light of Christ and shared and discussed His callings for us. We talked about Jesus and Holy Sacraments. By his grace and his Holy Spirit how can it be by any other means that a Togolese, American and Canadian can be together and love and encourage one another? It is love. It is God. Each day is a day that the Lord has made. Rejoice and be glad! Peace!

Date: 2/15/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, Ghana

Well, being we've been in Ghana now for four days, I'm getting used to the change in languages. In case it hasn't already been mentioned by the others, or you just don't know, Ghana is an English speaking country. Thus, you guessed it, we're speaking English – me not so much because I've still got Gaston, Kodjo, and now Nestor to continue speaking French. It really comes in handy knowing a language that others don't comprehend. For example, when Nestor, Gaston and I went to the market the other day, we used no English – all French with them speaking a little Ewe. I asked Nestor if any of them would understand me and he said, "No"! It's so great to be on the other side, where I understand and the others don't. It's our own morse code – if only they had a "windtalker" to break our code. Ha ha ha. It will be nice to get back to all French.



Michael Topolosky

Ghana, however, is drastically different from Togo. It's like all of a sudden, the closer we got to Accra, the more it turned into the U.S., or Europe. Nicer vehicles, not as many packed streets/roads with vendors, newer buildings/houses, streets all paved and lined, I'm sure it all comes down to who is the country's "sponsor", although I'm sure the government has a plan. I listened to Kodjo and the seminary's superintendent talk about Ghanaian and Togolese politics and I got a better picture on political corruption in some of the West African countries (ie. The government of Ghana doubled its gas prices to try and pay off some debts as well as using it as a leverage for the upcoming elections. I realize now why Togo is where it's at – most of its support (from countries like the U.S. and several in Europe) has been suspended because of the country's political problems.

There's a short African history lesson for those of you at home. In case you don't understand, read up on it and talk with others about it, as I'm finding myself also doing.

Date: 2/16/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Medina, Ghana

Today I begin at Good New Theological Seminary. There was a service at 9:00. There is a college near by that is affiliated with the Seventh Day Adventist Church. The Christians at this school are not permitted to hold their own worship service on campus so they come to Good News Theological Seminary to hold their worship service. Our team was invited to do a few songs and I was invited to do the sermon. The topic of the service was "God is coming soon". I read from 2 Peter 3 and spoke about the things we need to do to be ready for God's coming.



Jessica Neale

After the service we went to the Lutheran Church of Ghana. We sang a few songs there and Melinda preached. Then we sat and talked with the youth (age 20-35, youth here is not the same as in the U.S.). One thing that I really appreciate about the West African Christian is the ecumenical relationships that they have with one another. We, as Lutherans, have been invited to partake in many services. It is so encouraging to see the different churches working together.

Prayer: God, please continue to bless each group of Christians in this area of the world. No matter what denomination, we have all been called to serve and glorify you. Amen.

Date: 2/17/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, Ghana to Lomé, Togo

Today was another long travel day – It was sad to leave the seminary and the new friends we made. (It was also sad to leave the seminary library where I had spent much time in commentaries, devotional books and theological readings.) I had forgotten just how much I enjoy reading. And now that I am in countries in which books are sparse and very precious, I am eager to read anything that I can get my hands on. God really blessed my time this last week by providing opportunities to study His Word and to read the thoughts of others who have devoted their lives to such work. One particular insight came as I was reading a journal article on grace. The author explained how people often differentiate between the Old Testament God and the New Testament God – saying the Old Testament God is angry, vengeful, etc. and the New Testament God is loving and merciful. But this is not true at all. He explained how God has shown countless acts of grace and mercy from the very beginning. God creates the world, the world gets lost, God seeks to restore the world. This is the story line of the Old and New Testaments together – one founded on God's grace, not God's anger or judgement. God never wills to punish – rather punishment is what naturally comes when God's will is NOT done. Despite Israel's continued unfaithfulness, God remains faithful – showing even more mercy (as is seen from Jonah's point of view). Yes, there is pain, punishments, exile, and even death. But God then brings renewal, restoration, and finally resurrection! This is shown through the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the prophets, and most clearly through the Gospels. But it is always there – God's grace, mercy, and love did not simply appear out of nowhere when Christ came. Rather, God's relationship with his creation has always been one based out of grace, mercy and love. The Old and New Testaments are both about all about people getting what they DON'T deserve. And that's what grace is all about. That's what our God is all about. We have a God who justifies the ungodly who "demonstrates His love for us that while we were still sinners, Christ dies for us." (Romans 5:8) And yet, Christ did have to die so this grace and love came at a cost for God. God is merciful, gracious, and loving and God is holy and just. Thus we too must be made holy – we must not overlook the cross, but rather we must cling to the cross – to Christ's sacrifice which alone gives us new life. Don't think that God's love and grace mean that nothing is expected of us, rather it is precisely because God loves us and is so merciful to us that he wants us to obey him. His will is what we must seek. And we can only follow his will by denying ourselves, taking up our crosses and following Christ. (Matthew 16:24) This command of Christ is the ultimate example of God's love and mercy. Out of his grace, God sent his Son to die for us, and that same Son now gives us the gracious call to follow him, to become a new creation, to rely on his strength and not our own, to experience the kingdom of God here on earth. This call alone makes us holy. It gives us new life – real life and for the first time we are able to obey God's commands – not through our own strength, but through faith in him who is our strength, our hope, and our salvation. For as we are told in 1 Thessalonians 5:24 "The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it."

May you find your strength solely in the Lord,
In Christ, Dan



Dan Bredberg

Date: 2/19/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Location: Lomé, Togo

*Mateo 26:38

Tete wogblo na wo bena: Nye luv le nu xam kakaka vasede ku me: mino afisia, eye mino nuelzo kpakplim.

(Ewe is a language and people in Southern Togo and Ghana)

*En anglais:



Daniel Rebolledo

Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch over me."

Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, declared to his brethren an impending misfortune to his person. Also he told them how he would find himself, the shepherd, seemingly losing his flock (his disciples scattered, that is), subsequently alone. He said to his friends that he needed some time to pray, so he walked with Peter and two others before he started to pray and explained how overwhelmed with sorrow he was. The very night Jesus felt such distress when he prayed that his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. There is in fact a diagnosis where in times of extreme stress a person's capillaries can burst and one can actually secrete blood. He prayed to God to take away from him this cup, but knew that if it was the cup that his Father had given to him, he could drink from none other. If it was God's will he had to accept that.

What a time. Ponder the thoughts racing through the mind of Jesus. Thousands of years of history, of people sinning and falling short of the law, building up to this point, where one man carried the weight of the world's pain and sin. His friends, all of them about to abandon him. He cries out to God praying for another way. It seems almost that if nothing else, his soul, pained and anguished, overwhelmed with sorrow, might almost bring him to the grave--not anything else but the pain of his soul.

It's fairly well known the subsequent events following his betrayal. And if you didn't know before, maybe now it is easier to see, that Jesus was very in touch with human suffering. God, knowing that He needed to display himself in a widely understood context, sent Jesus in the closest context to us, the world. A place of trouble, a place of sin. And more than that, God stayed with us in the world through the Holy Spirit, calling His people the Body of Christ.

Empowering them, His followers, to leave their homes and share His Good News: the Holy Spirit, God the Father and Jesus Christ stepped into the world, into the hearts of humanity, stepped on a plane, joined Youth Encounter, heard a team preach the message of salvation, for we are all quite literally the Body of Christ. And I can say, my brothers and sisters in pain throughout the world, "I may not totally understand, or maybe even have a glimpse of the pain that you are going through, but I know someone who does, and I can pray for you to see Him, and invite Him into your heart so you can feel understood. And I promise you, too, that He has given us an abundance of more than just understanding, but it's because of where He is right now, that He understands."

I think that knowing where someone is at is a great way to begin a relationship.

Thanks, God. Glad you could show me where you're at.

Date: 2/20/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Coming up to our last days here in Lome'—good and bad. Bad that we have to leave so many familiar faces behind, but good because, first, I'm going to Dapaong to visit my Pastor's (from Montana) family (his son-in-law is the pastor at LCMS Seminary/Training Center), and second, we're going to be visiting some new territory in Benin, Nigeria, and Cameroon. I have a feeling as well that time will go by even faster now that we're moving more frequently. Only in Cameroon for a couple of weeks, Nigeria, one week, and Benin about a month. However, unlike our stay here where most of our time was spent in Lome', in Benin we'll have a lot of land to cover as we're covering the whole country.



Michael Topolosky

Yesterday we met with some cool organizations—the first being an organization that is trying to unite countries and churches from all denominations to bring unity and tackle big issues like AIDS. The second was an organization funded by Canada that deals with fighting AIDS. They are a part of the West African "group." Heard some good things, it's just hard because it's easier to not listen

when French is being spoken. But, I got the gist of it!

Overall, enjoying life and the people we've been meeting. Officially made it 1/3 of the way and can't say it's felt that long. I love it in Togo—a beautiful country with caring people. Couldn't ask for anything more. More to come...

Peace to you all in the States—May God grant you the grace to continue in your work and journey as we are here doing the same!!

Date: 2/21/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Greetings and God's peace to all of you from your brothers and sisters in Togo. I wish you could meet the wonderful people here. God is truly at work in this place.

Last night Melinda, Dan R, Pastor Kodjo and myself got in a taxi and took it to a cyber café. Melinda, Dan, and I went to check our e-mail and Pastor Kodjo went to work at the office of the Lutheran Church. As we checked our e-mail, Mel remembered that we left the guitar, drum, and Dan B's backpack in the trunk of the taxi. This was NOT GOOD! I know you don't know how many taxis are in Lome', but it is the capital city of Togo and very few people have their own cars. There are hundreds of taxis.

Our friend Gregoire came into the cyber café and we told him what happened. He called Pastor Kodjo. We all were praying so hard that the items would be returned. I was hoping to see the taxi driver come into the café with our missing items. About half an hour after Gregoire called Pastor Kodjo, Pastor Kodjo walked into the café with the guitar, drum, and Dan's backpack. How did this happen? It was truly God! Pastor Kodjo said that he was very worried when he found out about the situation. He left the office to go to the police station to report what had happened. When he called for a taxi, the same taxi that had our items pulled up to take him. This is totally God working in our lives. It was not a coincidence. It was God answering our prayers and showing us His awesome power.

Later we discovered that in Dan's backpack was his passport. This could have been such a tragic situation, but God was there every step of the way.

Some people say that God does not accomplish miracles and talk to us like He did to people in the Bible, but I have to disagree. God is alive and well. He is all around us, but sometimes we close our eyes and heart to Him.

I pray...

God, please open our hearts and eyes to you everyday. You are an awesome and wonderful God. Let us praise you everyday. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Date: 2/22/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Today we were blessed with the opportunity to participate in the service for the official installation of the "Youth Office" in the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Togo. Gaston, James, Koffi, and Jeanne were the subjects of honor—all friends of ours—and all wonderful servants of God. We are assured that the church is in very good hands with



youth leaders such as these fine young men and women of God.

Dan Bredberg

Gaston, the President of Youth, has been with us the entire stay in Togo. He is our brother, mentor, guide, servant—he's what allows us to function here, looking out for our every need, making sure everything is taken care of! His joyful service is a strong testimony to the life Christ calls all of us to live. James, from Nigeria, has visited many times. His joy is also very apparent to us and he lightens our hearts when he is around us. Koffi, we do not know well, but he is a great man of God—a gifted singer and drummer and one who is very dedicated to his work, as all treasures must be. Jeanne is the woman who was married the first week we arrived, at whose wedding I was able to preach. Her face is always lit with a smile. Her love flows freely to all those near her and she offers encouragement when needed. She is a beautiful child of God and we are blessed to know her. We are blessed to know all of these people, and all the rest of our church family who have shown such amazing hospitality, love and kindness to us.

It was a great joy that we could help to honor them and show them our appreciation along with the youth from several other churches—Presbyterian and Methodist included! I believe there were at least 4 or 5 different choirs there to support the EELT (Eglise Evangelique Luthérienne Du Togo) as well as other pastors from the Presbyterian and Methodist church who participated in the official laying on of hands ceremony. This was a living example of the unity to which Christ calls all His followers. Ecumenical relations at their best—three denominations joining together, overlooking any barriers to celebrate these youth called to joyful service of God. Again, our churches in the USA could learn so much from the interdenominational relationships we are witnessing here in Togo.

I was further blessed with the opportunity to give a sermon to the youth. A wonderful experience, for I spoke of our being one Body in Christ, called to the one common mission to love God and neighbor and go and make disciples. And as I looked out, these people were already following these commands of Christ. They were the example that Paul calls youth to be. They were striving for the unity of being One in Christ. So I was overjoyed to offer encouragement and pray for persistence and faith.

The service ended with all the choirs singing Handel's Messiah, The Hallelujah Chorus, finishing with shouts of laughter, praise, and joy! But the praises didn't stop there. Most of the choirs stayed for another hour of jamming, drumming, singing, dancing, and fellowship and giving glory to God. What an awesome night—a foretaste of the feast to come, when we will all be praising God, when every knee bows and we lift up Jesus as our sole source of salvation, giving glory to the Father, singing as one people without division, united forever under the One true God—the God of all grace and mercy. May His peace be with you all.

In Christ,
Dan

Date: 2/23/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Well, let me start by telling you something you probably don't know. Here, at church, there are auctions during worship. Oui, cest vrai. We attended two worship services today. I think we're getting pretty used to the order of worship here. Worship usually takes about two hours. Much like a service in North America, but, yes, longer. The offering is received near the end. Some lively, celebratory songs are played by the band (yes, some churches have brass bands with percussion) and people dance their way up to the front of the church where their monetary gifts are given. It's different from North America. And, in some cases, a table of goods are auctioned off for money for the church. This part of the program took almost an hour.

There are so many differences. I love learning and experiencing things in a new way! God has given me this incredible gift, that is this opportunity to be His ambassador in Togo. It is challenging!



Melinda Broomhall

Sometimes the lack of French comprehension frustrates me so much! But I LOVE IT! I love the reason we're here...GOD! His grace!

He has opened my eyes since I've been here, I've learned about Christ from the people here. I hope they've learned, seen and experienced Christ through me. May PEACE be with you. John 14:27

Date: 2/24/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

We awoke at 4:30 a.m. this morning, eager to be on our way to Daopong, a small city in Northern Togo. An unfortunate turn of events involving a Mini-Bus that wouldn't leave 'til noon caused us to cancel our journey. Because leaving at noon would cause us to do a large portion of driving at night, which we were advised against doing for safety. Later this same day we heard that our contact there was in fact going to Benin the following day, making it fairly difficult to be accommodated and guided around. Also, Mel was not feeling too well and our friend Louise was also sick here in Lome'. So it seems as though a culmination of factors had God decide for us to stay here. We learned about our contact going to Benin when we returned to our residence, Mel got some rest, and we were able to care for and support our friend Louise. Thanks, God.



Daniel Rebolledo

I was reading a story about how a fellow in India asked Mother Teresa why she was "spoiling the people by giving them things for free." There's a strong line of thinking that India needs trained people for its development, but this fellow also sought to show that so much spoiling, free giving, was robbing people of their dignity, and that she (Mother Teresa) should take a portion of what her organization, "The Sisters of Charity", gave out. A murmur rose in the hall. When everyone was quiet, Mother Teresa said calmly, "No one is spoiling us as much as God Himself. See the wonderful gifts He has given us freely. None of you here have glasses on, yet you can all see. Say, if God were to take money for your sight, what would happen? We are spending so much money in Shishu Bharan to buy oxygen for saving life, yet continually we are breathing and living on oxygen we do not pay anything for." There was a profound silence. Nobody spoke a word after that.*

See how we are so abundantly cared for. Every breath is proof of God sustaining us. Why would He do that? Why would we not go to Daopong? To receive rest, to be able to care for those around us. Why would we be fed in hunger of body, spirit, and heart and mind? Love. There is an incredible abundance of God's love in this world. John 10:10 "...I come that you might have life, and have it abundantly" (Jesus said that if you didn't know). For me, these few events have again opened my eyes so to speak. Because we are so often lacking in the realization of what God has done for us. I pray this prayer for all of us who lose sight of what is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12). Paul writes, very succinctly, these words I speak in my heart and on my lips for you.

"I pray also, that the eyes of your heart might be enlightened, in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you." Ephesians 1:15

I can pray with certainty because of what is "living and active." Because my hope is in you (Psalm 25:3). And because of the last breath I took and the one I am about to take. Thanks, God.

* From the book "Reaching Out in Love: Stories Told by Mother Teresa"

Date: 2/25/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Unfortunately, all bad turns good! For us, although I'm saddened by not getting the chance to leave Lome' and see Dapong for a few days, I realize that God had the better hand on knowing why we didn't go...we couldn't get a taxi, as well as Glenn would be leaving Dapong for a meeting in Benin on Tuesday morning, thus I wouldn't have had the chance to visit with him. It sounds like our chances are higher because the relationship and communication are better between Dapong and Benin because they're both LCMS sponsored. I can only pray! Go God.



Michael Topolosky

Thus, I came over my saddened state of affairs by the evening when we had all been sharing a bit as a team (also slept and got more work done). Today we went out to eat at Serafine's house—a friend of the church. Got to talk more with her husband, Bartholemew (Bart for short) who is in his second of four years at Seminary in Cameroon. He's a funny character. Nice to see some guys joke around because I don't get the chance to see that quite so often. But today, the tides changed. I saw it at Serafine's and Jeanne's house (another friend from church). Everyone was running around and joking. Usually the guys I see are all about business—except when I'm with Gaston. We also scared many little kids today at Jeanne's house. I found out after we left that this was the first time the kids had seen white people. It was the look of petrification, like death was upon them. There was no one to protect them now. They were doomed. It was funny for me to see, but I'm sure if I saw a white person for the first time, I would be scared as well. "What is this strange thing—not like anything I've ever seen? Which one of these is not like the others?" Jess also scared one boy as she got down into her crouched position—he ran, she chased after him. He ran to his mom (I think) and cried. I would probably do the same if I saw another color person, much bigger/older than me, chasing after me! I went over minutes later and made amends. He didn't cry and shook my hand. While we were there I also got a lesson in African beer making. Even tried some before it's fermentation cycle. Hopefully, we'll get the chance to come back in April/May before we leave. I can only hope. I've been invited.

Overall, it's fun to be staying here in Lome' for another week, yet I'm definitely ready to leave and see some more West African culture and life. Looks like Saturday will be the "magic" day for leaving for Benin/Cameroon. Still have no clue which is first, but as the days pass by, I believe Benin will still be first and we won't go to the General Assembly in Cameroon. Only time and prayers will tell!

Date: 2/26/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

We are getting ready to leave Togo. I am excited to visit a new country, but it will be difficult to leave our friends who have become our family. I have become friends with Louise, the seventeen-year-old girl who lives with us and helps us by making meals and washing our clothes. Gaston has also become a good friend. He is a twenty-seven-year-old male who is with us all of the time. He is the national youth representative of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Togo, and he has been by our side every step of the way in Togo. He will be greatly missed by our team. Another member of the Lutheran Church who has become very important to us is Pastor Halonau. We call him Kodjo because this is the Eve name given to people born on Monday and he was. Not only has he been the Pastor of our team, but he has been a great Christian example for us. I also have become dear friends with my Togolese sister Seraphine. We are both twenty-five, but she has a son, and her husband attends seminary in Cameroon. To some our lives seem so different, but we both live to glorify Christ. She is a very joyful woman, and I am thankful for the friendship we share.

Dear God,

Thank you for blessing me with such wonderful friends here. Please be with Louise, Gaston, Kodjo, and Seraphine each day as they serve You. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Date: 2/27/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg
Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

If you can, picture in your mind's eye the scene from "Chariots of Fire" where the men are running along the ocean on a sandy beach in slow motion with the signature theme music playing in the background. I felt like I was part of this scene as I ran down the coastline of Togo, digging my feet into the sand, keeping my eye on the line in the sand Mike had previously made with his foot—and finally, lift off—I fly through the air, arms and feet still rotating, still going, hovering above the hot red sand, and then comes the graceful landing—YES! A successful first jump of decent distance! But then, a form appears in the distance—grace, elegance, a finely-tuned African man runs up to the same line, leaps into the heavens, and comes down just ahead of me.



Dan Bredberg

Thus began the unofficial Togolese Olympic Games, starring myself, Mike, Dan R, and Raymond, our new friend from Lome'. They were a shortly lived games, but the passion was there. Despite our best efforts to represent the U.S. and Canada, Raymond won all three events: the Long Jump, Soccer Ball Kicking/Balancing, and the ever-popular Backflip/Handspring event. It is amazing how God can use any and every circumstance to spread His Word. We just planned on a few hours to ourselves at the beach, but then God allowed us to connect with this man to whom we could barely communicate through sports and games. He literally appeared out of nowhere, running down the beach to join in our makeshift competition. And we had a great time running, jumping, laughing, and proving our total ineptness at kicking a small rubber ball. Yet we did connect and were able to learn from each other—to show each other respect and honor—and eventually even to witness to what God was doing in our lives by bringing us to Africa, to Coco Beach, to Raymond, who now knows a bit more about our ministry and the ministry of God in West Africa. Through this encounter God vividly reminded me that each and every situation we are in, every minute of the day, every place we go, everyone with whom we interact, is an opportunity to spread the grace of God, the love of Christ, and the communion of the Holy Spirit. If we only open our eyes we will see the countless ways God can and will use us to lead others to Christ and to build His Kingdom on earth. It is often when we least expect it that God uses us in ways we could never have prepared for, and we are successful because we are forced to rely on His strength and not our own (Philippians 4:13).

I pray that all of you may come ever closer to the total reliance on God and know the everlasting joy such reliance brings. SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS! JESUS IS ALIVE!!

Date: 2/28/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo

Have you ever lived in a situation where you didn't know where you'd be and what you'd be doing from one minute to the next? Because LIFE is like that for us. One minute you can be sending e-mail, the next chatting with your brothers in a Laestadian Lutheran Church. After visiting the Cyber Café tonight, the team piled into a taxi, a very common ritual. Three in the front (including the driver) and four in the back). It was in the evening, we were tired and hungry, sweaty and dirty—wait, that could be anytime, as a matter of fact, pretty close to all the time—anyway, we were hoping we'd be going back to the house for the night--Our final night in Lome L. But God had some cool plans for us.



Melinda Broomhall

Pastor Kodjo took us to another Lutheran Church of a different Synod. We met some brothers and sisters there and we shared with each other about our ministries. It's a small world, you know, CHRIST'S body. There are not many Laestadian churches in the world. It was cool that Dan knew one of their congregations, and both of our head offices are in the Twin Cities. PRAISE GOD. We've had a great ministry here in Lome'. We've made connections between different churches. I hope we've encouraged them, and now they can continue to encourage each other.

I want to thank Youth Encounter and all my sponsors for this ministry. We couldn't do it without you and I'm so thankful for your support. God is good, faithful, just.

Date: 3/1/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome', Togo to Cotonou, Benin

Well, it's been great times in Togo and we look forward to seeing all our wonderful contacts again just before we return to the U.S. Staying in one location for such an extended period of time (five weeks) has really called to mind the nature of our ministry. For we (teams) are normally in and out of places so frequently and so quickly. So in this way there are many things that, having been in Togo for so long, we were able to do. The most important was getting to know people. Being able to connect and relate with people at a different depth and level, especially in terms of faith and how we see our relationships with people and with God. In this way we were able to be more real with each other. To share joys and struggles together. To share each day, with increasing abundance, God's love in our hearts. Such is the nature of a long-term ministry. And inherently one can see the necessity for such ministry to exist. We may not have even been in Togo for too long. And there have been many places we have been for much less time. But still, also in these settings, God works through us to create bonds and relationships that are far surpassing to our human love and open doors to better understand our God, His will, love, grace, and realness in the world.

What better way to see God's love than in a person? What place could be more real than the actions of someone to display the love of God? Just as Jesus did a great many things to display His love, and ultimately the act of dying and rising again, so we, too, have that same opportunity. That is the nature of our ministry. We put God's love into action. Not because He requires it, but because He deserves it and so does everyone we meet for whatever period of time. One can see the obvious advantage of a long-term ministry, but one can also never ignore the grace and power and love in any ministry, any team. You can't stop God. God Bless.



Daniel Rebolledo

Date: 3/2/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

Many things have changed but God is still the same. If love wasn't in it all where would I be? Some words: Today is our first full day in Benin. Lovely drive in from the border, lots of water, cool to see huts built on stilts and learn a little history on that (protection from being overtaken, losing homes during times of war). I got to see Glenn, my pastor's son-in-law. Turns out that his meeting was here in Cotonou and he's been here since Tuesday—big annual budget meeting. If only I could have spent all day with them to be injected with business French. It was good to talk with him, since it's been around 3-4 years since the last time I saw him back in Montana. Today, at our hotel and after church, I got to talk with his working companion, Fred. I found out he worked with the State Department for twenty-one years. He had a lot of good info for me, and I will need to check it out when I get back to the States. It was good in general to see them and hear a little bit about their lives and the center. I just wish we could get up there to see it in person. However, it won't be on the tour with Cross Fire that I do it. I'll have to come back, which isn't all that bad either!



Michael Topolosky

I had a good final talk with our good pal, Gaston, tonight over dinner. Dan wanted to do a Bible Study on 2 Thessalonians, talking about standing firm and taking hold of the Word of God, and Gaston had a lot of insight for us. I played translator as the others looked tired and confused. "We

can't see the light if the torch is behind us, thus walk with the light in front of you so all can see." "Crying and worrying won't get you anywhere, at least get results, but praying to God, who can do all things, can get it done." "Stand firm. You can with the Word of God living inside you." Just some words to pass along to you sitting at home and reading this. As for life...still alive and kicking so I won't complain! Peace to you wherever you may be.

Date: 3/3/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonau and Porto Novo, Benin

Today we had to run some errands since we are in a new country. We mailed a mail packet to YE, we went to the bank to exchange some money, and we registered at the U.S. Embassy. We also drove from Cotonau to Porto Novo.

Now throughout this day there were many lapses in communication, not within the team but between the French-speaking contacts and English-speaking Cross Fires. Now this is the fault of no one, it is just one of the consequences when working with two languages. I praise God for getting us through the day.

When I thought about writing this journal, I thought about writing about all the little mishaps that we had throughout the day. Although it may make you laugh, would that be the best use of this journal? Maybe, but maybe not. What I choose to do is share some other thoughts with you. I could dwell on all of the things that went wrong today, but instead I praise God for being with us. I praise Him for keeping us safe and out of the path of danger. I thank Him for His guidance, for giving us patience, and for giving us the opportunity to pray.

We all have days when it seems that nothing is going right, but God gives us the opportunity to make a bad day good. With Him we can always find reason to praise.

God, be with us each day. Help us to find joy in all things, because you are with us in all things. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Date: 3/4/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Porto Novo and Seme', Benin

Wow! What a day! After complaining that we did not always have enough to do in Togo, I have no doubt that we'll be about as busy as we can handle—scratch that, more busy than we can handle. But God will handle it. Our power, strength, and energy and everything will now have to come from God alone, because we will run out right quickly. And it should be that way, for we truly must rely on God at all times whether we realize it or not. Thank you, Lord, for helping me realize how much I need you.

So, we awoke early in the morning to a breakfast table of large steel bowls—very hot water, bread, mayo, and tea bags. Hmmm, that's interesting... After eating and drinking and burning our hands a bit, we arrived at a nearby school where we were greeted by a hundred kids yelling, "Yovo, yovo," all wanting to shake our hands or just grab us, making it quite challenging to walk down the narrow corridor into the inner courtyard where we would be giving the program. We felt like rock stars squeezing into the first concert of a new tour. Pretty overwhelming. After much fun, praising, puppeting, singing, dancing, laughing, and talking, we met the head of the school who wants to start up groups very much like Cross Fire, who can learn from us when we visit them and then take over when we leave. Sounds like a great idea to me. Talk about equipping the local church for long-term ministry! He offered jobs to Jess and myself to lead in training and counseling the teams, and I



Dan Bredberg

must admit, it sounded appealing.

After a brief rest and a meal eaten in the vicinity of two crocodiles and a cat with one bright blue eye and one yellow eye, we attended a campus Bible Study at a local university where we gave another program. It ended in an extended version of the West African medley we sing which was completely taken over by our brothers and sisters of Benin (and several songs were added to it as well). It was a wonderful worship experience—sharing leadership and freely praising God.

After extended conversation, we packed everything up and headed off to Seme', where we would spend the next few days, finally unpacking, setting up mosquito netting in ways most engineers would be proud of and shutting those weary eyes around midnight. That night, I was more tired than I have been during our whole time in Africa and it felt pretty darn good. What a blessing to be used by the Lord all day long and being forced to rely on Him and not myself. I am learning more every day about the importance of giving up any attempt at controlling my life or trying to provide for myself, and instead casting all of my burdens pains, frustrations and failures unto Jesus, trusting that He truly loves me and will care for me.

Amen, Amen. Louez le Dieu!

Date: 3/5/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Seme', Benin

I am humbled.

I feel so blessed. Many reasons. Being here in West Africa—I am so thankful for the opportunity to be the one who brings the light of Christ and smiles to the faces of the Beninese school children. We did a program at a primary school next to the beach today. The classrooms were huts made with palm branches. The ground was sand—tricky for dancing in, but all good. The students were beaming. They send their salutations to all the students in America. Praise God, we are all one in Jesus. Mon frere et moi, nous sommes un en Jesus!

Our team took some time today to share and listen to each other. To open up and share our burdens, and it was great. I am so thankful we can encourage and just be there for each other. I shared a devotion with the team about the Lenten journey. The time of preparation before we celebrate the great feast and victory on Easter. I think being here in the different culture is a great setting for reflection. You can take a step back and look at yourself and who you are, as well as who you are becoming with this new experience a part of you. Being away from telephone, e-mail, TV, family and friends, and in most cases, English speakers, gives you the chance to ask yourself, "Why am I here?"

And then serving Jesus becomes a bigger reality.



Melinda Broomhall

Date: 3/6/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Seme', Benin

This morning we all woke up, and we were ready to go to do a program in a public gathering area. All we needed was our driver. Well, we waited and we waited, but he didn't come. So we ended up doing a program right in front of the place we were staying. We were right by the side of the road where many people were selling things or just walking by on their way somewhere. Some people stayed to watch and listen, while others passed by with out a glance. I pray that each person who walked passed us and each person



Jessica Neale

who heard every word were all touched by the light of God.

We made lunch and took it to the beach to eat. I stepped in the water for a bit. We walked along the beach with our friends Jacques and Emmanuel. We came to a place with hundreds of palm trees. I was so tired. Michael, Melinda and I laid down for a while. I fell asleep, and when I woke up there were about twenty children gathered around. Melinda was playing with them. Later I found out that they had been watching all three of us sleep. I guess I would be pretty curious too if I had never seen a white person.

The time came to leave. The children followed us for a while as we walked back to the car. New children would come up and yell, "Yovo, yovo!" This is the word for white person. It is not derogatory, but actually a type of compliment. People are always excited to see us.

We ended up doing the program we were supposed to do in the morning, then we went home.

Thank you, God, for this day. I pray that I glorified you. Please forgive me for when I did not. I love you. Amen.

Date: 3/7/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Porto Novo, Benin

Good to be back in Porto Novo, away from the craziness of living so close to a border, especially Nigeria (not saying Nigeria's a bad country—never been there and leave the judging to myself—I've just heard a lot of difficult stories of crossing the border into Nigeria). Lovely people, a good couple of days of evangelism, I just won't go back. Igor, our contact, is a really cool, down-to-earth guy. Such a joker.



Michael Topolosky

We went to a deaf/mute school in the afternoon. It brought back memories of camp (Walcamp J) and having to communicate in a different and unknown manner. But it was well-received by all the kids and the teachers, as if they had been planning on the President to come see them. Instead they got a musical group!! They got into the songs the further we went into the program. Some even got up and danced while others sat and laughed. I thought working with a translator from French to an African language was hard, but seeing French done in sign language is even cooler!

Afterwards, we returned home to the church, and put on a concert there. At first there were only a few of the students from the college we were at on Tuesday. Then as we started to play, more came, as I'm sure the music and our whiteness intrigued them. We played for about an hour then we switched and the church choir—Igor, Justine, and Luis and a few others—sang (Justine and Luis stay at the church as well). I watched others dance—I clapped. I got by because I was in the back next to the wall. But then a couple of guys came over to me and told me to dance with them. So I did for a few minutes. For those who know me as a dancer, you know that I'm a funny one, not a very good one. Especially African dancing. But I'm learning! Maybe I'll put some on tape to bring back and show you at home how I dance, and the others, African.

Well, got to go. Not to cut off time, we're just so busy. Read others—mine are simple! I love the country, but I'm just having problems discussing different terms of payment. But my French only gets better, even though I wish I could use English. Good usage now for the future.

Date: 3/9/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Porto Novo/Cotonou, Benin

I can't talk about today until I tell you how strange it was to be sitting in a restaurant yesterday watching Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles dubbed over in French—"Tortue Ninja, Tortue Ninja"! Perhaps even more interesting was watching a German movie dubbed in French, which came on right after TMNT. It will be strange to hear only English when we get back to the States. Just about everyone here speaks at least two or three or four languages, switching between them with ease. It really makes me want to learn more languages.



Dan Bredberg

Okay, back to this morning... Mike was a little sick so we did our first program without all five of us (pretty good for a month and a half into the tour). The four of us went to a nearby church to lead their Sunday School children in songs and puppets. We had a wonderful time jumping around with them, and they even knew "Cast Your Burdens" from an English-speaking pastor that had previously visited them. The best part of the program was hearing the songs they sang for us—so much joy, big smiles, LOUD LOUD voices, clapping, motions—WOW! What a great way to worship. After singing with them we returned to Sainte Trinite' Lutheran Church (the church we have been staying at for the week) to attend their Sunday AM service. What surprised and impressed me most about this service was the large amount of prayer time. A leader would say to pray for forgiveness, and then everyone would pray aloud at the same time—a true speaking-in-tongues experience. It's thrilling to hear so many different languages praying to God with one voice. It sends shivers over your body. He continued to instruct us to pray for at least six other things, spending a good half hour in prayer before moving on. I thought of what people in the U.S. would think if we tried a similar type of prayer when we returned. Hmmm?

Another highlight was a very passionate sermon preached by Louise in French and translated by Becket in Fongbe. I was surprised to understand the majority of what was said once again, and inspired by Louise's energy. He really cared about what he was saying. You could not help but listen. I wish more preachers could have that passion in their voices on Sunday mornings (I know it is in their hearts, but sometimes it is hard to tell by the way many pastors give very stoic sermons). I'm not knocking them—different styles for different people is good. But for myself, God really grabs a hold of me when a person is fully engaged in what they are speaking and their voice and emotions all testify to the truth of God's Word. Doesn't God tell us to put everything we have into our gifts (1 Timothy 4:15)?

God's power and peace to you—Le paix de Dieu soit avec vous.

Date: 3/10/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

This morning the plan was to leave for Parakou, but we had a little business to take care of first. Mike (as treasurer) needed to get to a bank to exchange for CFAs. We were all packed and ready to go before 8 AM but the driver was late. When he did arrive, he took Mike and our contact to the bank, which was a process that took much longer than expected. The remaining four of our team had the opportunity to discuss our program and how we can better serve this ministry and share our message with our words and songs. We waited for Mike for a number of hours, wondering what was going to happen, because Parakou is a six-hour drive and we were supposed to leave early! And we didn't have any food with us—we needed the treasurer to buy it for us. When Mike got back we left to eat out for lunch. At one o'clock, we joked that we would have to leave town by four, when really it shouldn't take that long. But we went to about three restaurants before we found a good deal, and then our driver took our contact to an appointment in the car, so we were left waiting in the restaurant. And because Mike hadn't found a good rate of exchange, we needed to go back to the bank. At the bank, I waited in the car and took a nap in the hot sun. I wish I would have gone into the bank because it was air-conditioned and they had real toilets (maybe next time)!



Melinda Broomhall

At about six PM, we stopped by the church for a while and decided it was no good to leave today (it's

not safe to drive in the dark). So, we'll leave tomorrow morning (we hope!). We leave it in God's hands, He knows best. It is HIS ministry! So really, like I said before, you really never know where you'll be or doing what.

Right before we flew here, I talked to the Cross Fire alumni in the office, asking their advice. And I really hung on to what Colleen said. She said, "Be flexible. Don't have any expectations." GOOD ONE!!!

Date: 3/11/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Location: Parakou, Benin

The "Civil Prison" of Parakou was actually fairly civil. We did about a half an hour program, no puppets, and rocked out for Jesus, Cross Fire style. It was pretty interesting as none of us really had a really good understanding of what we were going into. We ended up being in the center of a courtyard-type gathering area and our brothers and sisters in Christ were gathered all around us. We started groovin' and the people were movin'. But a couple of times, at the far end of the courtyard, there was a disturbance of some sort. A lot of people stopped paying attention to us to go check out what was going down. But still many more stayed, attentively listening to the Word of God. At one point, distraction turned into confrontation, as an inmate was being a little aggressive. Those listening intently to us almost immediately leaped up to restrain this inmate. Amidst it all with discernment and joy we sang on. Pushing the hindrances aside and pressing onward.



Daniel Rebolledo

Date: 3/12/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Parakou, Benin

I just need to say how excited I am to be up in the north. It is so lovely here. You want to know why? Let me tell you. Number one—it's DRY country and I don't sweat (well, just a little). It's like being at home once again. I've missed the feeling of dryness. I didn't even recognize it the first time I stepped out of the car into the dryness. The heat fooled me, but I soon realized that I wasn't sweating, or feeling sticky, and things began to click. I won't say I'm happier that I'm always so dirty—filled with dust—but I can get used to that. I'll be sad when we leave for the south, and the humidity, on Tuesday. Number two—We're out of pollution for the most part. Never realized how polluted Contonou was (Porto Novo wasn't so bad). Lome' had very little. Needless to say, it's good to be breathing healthier air. Number three—we are out in the country. Parakou is a big town (Benin standard), but to me it's no bigger than where I grew up in Havre. You can instantly be out in the fields and wide open spaces. It's so nice.



Michael Topolosky

Our contact, Ephraim, is a cool guy. Fun talking to him as it was talking to Igor in Porto Novo. We've been real lucky with our contacts having knowledge from past teams, drive, and a sense of humor. I understand Ephraim for the most part! It was nice, I think, upon our arrival here on Tuesday, for me to do the translating some. I believe the others got the gist or possibly more, because he knows very little English. It's nice being away from the "translator need." I mean, I'm at the point where I can process 80-85% of what I hear. I hear it all, but some words are missed as I continue to build up my vocabulary. But it's fun for me, I'm not sure about the others, to carry on a conversation with someone and letting them know that I understand the words they are speaking to me. I know the others find it difficult not being able to communicate succinct words or phrases. That's why I thank God for this gift He's given me. I thank Him a lot for the opportunities I've had just by choosing French, not Spanish, in high school.

I also thank God for times spent in open market. One white person trying to buy food. RIGHT! It soon becomes a pushing/yelling match. "Here, here, I've got mangos, carrots, etc." And even when I do say "enough", they insist on putting more in until I say and then take the others out. And they insist I buy more and are never satisfied with me just buying one thing. Sorry, but that's all I need. Oh, the joys of buying food for the team. Luckily, I have a contact. I'm sure I would survive, but I would pay an arm and a leg like Dan did this morning for bread (him—2 loaves of bread=600, 10 eggs=1,000 + me—3 loaves=600, 20 eggs=1,500). Much better! Well, out of room. Know that all is well and I am loving every minute here. Seven weeks to go!

Date: 3/13/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Parakou, Benin

For the past few days we have been staying in a church building. Keep in mind that we are in Africa, and a church building here is very different than a church building in the United States. The church contains the sanctuary and three other empty rooms. There also is a bathroom, but the only thing that works is the shower. No indoor toilet, but there is an "outhouse", so I guess you could say we are roughing it a little bit, but it is not bad. Besides the fact that our bathroom is a little out of order, we also do not have a kitchen, but if we want to eat we need to make our own food. Since none of us have cooked without a kitchen, we are experiencing some new things as we try to prepare our food.

I just want to say that Mike has truly been a servant in this situation. I hope his mom is reading this! It literally takes over two hours to prepare each meal. Mike slaves over the raw meat cutting off each piece of fat. He leaves early in the morning to buy us bread. He makes sure that the water is boiling whenever possible. This way we usually have water to drink. For lunch today he peeled, cut, and fried potatoes for all of us to eat. He is truly being a servant as he takes care of our needs. Thanks, Mike!

Now, he hasn't been doing everything. Yesterday for lunch we all pitched in. And even though we didn't eat lunch until 4:00, it was the best meal we have cooked yet.

God, thanks for teammates and teamwork. I pray that we honor you with each thought and action. Amen.

P.S. Mike doesn't know that I wrote this, but I think if he hears from others that his teammates appreciate him it would be great. You can e-mail at crossfire@youthencounter.org. In the subject area type "Mike".



Jessica Neale

Date: 3/14/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Parakou/N'Dali, Benin

Today provided us with a few more excellent examples of how God continues to provide for us and protect us as we seek to do His will and follow His ways. Before we left this morning, Jessica offered a prayer for our driver (we have had to rent a car and the driver stays with us wherever we go because taxis are too expensive and non-existent in some areas we travel). So, we had about a 60 km drive to N'Dali, and towards the middle of the drive, we felt a little worried about some close calls with other autos, motos, etc. We prayed again—at least I did. The car in front of us, who had just passed us, swerved to miss a truck. Then we watched the car in front of us lose control, flipping over in the ditch. We were pretty shaken up for a few minutes. After a mile or so we turned around to see if they were okay. By the time we got back many other cars had already stopped and the people were all out of



Dan Bredberg

the car and in good condition. Again, thank you, Lord, for protecting them. As we turned around once more and headed to N'Dali, we were very silent and prayerful. God watched out for us and for the other people, and we are so thankful for His grace.

Truly everyday is a gift. Every breath is a gift. You never know when your time on this earth will be over. So make the most of each day. Don't let yourself hold in regrets. Seek forgiveness and reconciliation NOW! Show love to your family, friends, neighbors, and, most importantly, to your Lord and Savior NOW. Don't wait. Live your life as the gift that it is. God is so good to us. His love is everlasting, and absolutely nothing can separate us from that love. Not even death! Thus we have hope in all circumstances, not needing to fear death, but also being thankful for this life and the joy Christ gives to us each day. I hope and pray that all of us might live each day as if it were our last. As if Christ was coming tomorrow. If that were true, would anything get in the way of worship? Would I think even for a second to place things in front of my relationship with Christ? Would I overlook the needs of my neighbor? Would I harbor resentment or anger towards my loved ones? NO! Because my focus would be on Christ, where it should be at all times. If I thought that today was the last day I will have on this earth to show others the love and grace of our Lord, wouldn't I be compelled to use every single second to do so? Maybe I will complain...But how? I don't have enough time. I'm too busy. I'm not strong enough...well, yes, all of those may be true. But Jesus said, "Ask and you shall receive!" Ask God for strength and confidence. Rely on His power. Seek His will. And do not doubt that God will indeed give you the ability to live each day as if it were your last.

Today's other example of God's provision proves this point as well. You see, I was asked a few days ago to lead a Bible Study today—in French. And even though I was very concerned that I would not be able to do so, it went very well. God gave me the words to say (and our friend Ephraime to help correct my grammar). And His love and mercy were shown through our study of Le Fils prodigue (the prodigal son), which ended with a further stress on forgiveness. For if our God is so completely loving and full of forgiveness, waiting with open arms for us to return home, so we too must await those who have wronged us, and seek reconciliation and forgiveness. "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." I pray all of us will reexamine our lives this day, and see how we would change if Christ were coming tomorrow, and then go about making that change. For He is coming soon!

Date: 3/15/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Parakou, Benin

My whole experience here in West Africa—the whole thing—increases my testimony in faith.

I know it's by God's grace that I am here.

Through all our encounters, we see God is for us.

Today—this is kind-of funny—we realized we were using the wrong kind of fuel for our portable stove. No wonder it has been taking us hours to cook our meals! We thank God that He kept us safe, because the fuel we were using could have blown up!

Yesterday on our way to a village, the car in front of us on the highway swerved to miss a semi and flipped over into the ditch. I didn't see it happen, but afterward, when we turned around to see if everyone was alright, I got pretty shaken up. I was so scared, I felt so helpless.

The song on the radio right after was "Jesus Our Savior". Amen! Things like this point my attention to the cross. I pray, more and more, thanking God for what He's done—knowing how almighty He is and worthy of our praise, prayer and service! How can I not acknowledge His Greatness?



Melinda Broomhall

Date: 3/16/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Location: Parakou, Benin

Well, we had a jammin' good concert last night, along with a choir and about thirty warmly welcomed people, most of whom had been invited by chance encounter. It started at about nine in the evening and rounded up at about 11:30. We played a few songs, then the choir sang a few. And in between, our contact, Ephraim, who is also the catechist for this six-month-old church, would explain our songs in the local language or do a little dance or share little snippets of the Gospel. You see the big thing about this night is that this extremely young church has only about six members. Also amongst the people invited were people whom we met at different public places while doing programs, schools, markets. As well as kind folk we would get to talking to about what we were doing here and what not. Amongst them were Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of animist beliefs. At the end, our friend Ephraim had everybody join hands, and in French we sang a song that said, "Love, unity, faith. We are one in Christ." God cannot be stopped from pulling people together. Everyone there had an experience with Christ in community. Prayerfully, we hope that God will bring many of those people back to this community and closer to Him.

Amen.

Dan



Daniel Rebolledo

Date: 3/18/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Parakou and Bohicon, Benin

Today we left the city of Parakou, where we had a very nice time with our contact Ephraim. We drove off, five teamers and a taxi driver, Bazeel, four hours on rough, dusty, and curvy roads. We arrived in the town of Bohicon dirty, hungry, and tired. We waited for about three hours for our contact, Alias, to meet us. While waiting we ate lunch. I had spaghetti and a boiled egg. I also drank Maka. This is a drink in Benin and I love it! It is a cold mix between cola and coffee—yummy! After our contact met us we went to a hotel to sleep for a while. It was the first time I had slept in a bed for a week. It was very nice.

After resting for some time we went to meet another contact, Andre. He had to leave us to get a key for the home where we are staying. While waiting, a person with a fully masked face and wearing very colorful, sequined clothing approached us. There were two men accompanying him. They were yelling along with him. There was a group of about twenty children very excitedly following him as he came closer to us. I was a little frightened by this unusual sight. The man in the sequins had a bag of cookies. One of the other men would carefully take a cookie from the masked man's hand and then he would give the cookie to a child. While all this was going on we were told that this was voodoo. When we were staying in the US preparing to come to Benin, we read that, "Benin is the birthplace of voodoo," but up to this point we had not seen anything like this. Melinda and I were sitting in the car with our driver. As the voodoo man approached the car, Melinda asked, "Do you think we should go talk to the kids?" I responded, "I'm not getting out of this car." The man threw down a stick. I couldn't help but think of Charelton Heston in "The Ten Commandments". Then one of our contacts threw down 200 Francs. Later we found out that we had to pay money because we saw the voodoo man. If we wanted a picture he would be willing to pose for 2000 Francs. We refrained from the picture taking. He finally picked up his stick and walked away as the children ran behind him.

I wasn't quite sure what to think about all this. As we drove away from the scene I asked our contact, Alias, if what we had just witnessed was bad. He said no. He explained that the man wearing the mask claimed to be a person back from the dead. I asked if the man knew Jesus. Alias said that the man knew of Jesus, but that he didn't believe in Jesus. I was baffled to know all of this



Jessica Neale

and still be told that it was not bad. I didn't get it.

Later during the day, Dan R said something about this being a part of the culture, and it gave me some insight to the situation. Even though it was very strange to me, and I don't agree with it, it doesn't mean that the people here would think the same thing. I am sure that if people from Benin came to the US they would witness things they didn't understand and even things with which they didn't agree. It could be a situation that I wouldn't see as bad, and I may not understand why they would see it as negative.

So what's the point?

Here I see things that I have never seen before in my life. There are times when I don't understand what is going on around me. However, through it all God is with me, and He has brought me to this place, at this time to work with His people. When everything else around me is different, God is constant. He is constant in my life and your life, too.

God, when life seems to be spinning and going in many directions at once, thank you for being our firm foundation. Amen.

Date: 3/19/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Bohicon, Benin

There was a whole lotta ministry going on today! In the morning we visited a primary school and sang for seven different classrooms—kind-of like U2 coming to your school and giving each class their own private concert rather than just having everyone come together in the gym for a big bash. Okay, not the best comparison, but we were a bit confused why we didn't sing all at once, until we noticed the beaming smiles on those little faces. The eyes open wider than possible, the enthusiastic jumping, clapping, and stomping, singing "Et le Dieu de paix/ecrasera Satan, ecrasera Satan/Sous nos pieds!" C'est vrai—God certainly crushed Satan right out of that room, and out of our minds which had been so full of complaints, but now we are full of praises. Admittedly, by the seventh 1/2 hour mini-praise time we were tired and a little less enthused, but God gave us the strength we needed through those little bundles of energy. Mike had to leave us at noon to sort out problems in Cotonou, so it was down to Mel, Jess, Dan and I for the two remaining programs of the day.

In the afternoon, we did a road-side evangelism program in front of a seamstress shop. Always very interesting, singing over motos, trucks, and passing conversations. But lots of ears heard God's Word—His love, and His grace offered to all people. On the way home from this concert, two men approached us and said they wanted to know who Jesus was and why He was important. We offered some words from John 3:16, John 11, John 14, and Romans 5. Afterward they said that they, too, need Jesus and want Jesus in their heart. We offered to pray with them and we sang a bit of "I Need You, Jesus" (or "Nakutaku Yesu" or "Ndo Jesu Bawe", the Swahili song taught by Boni at training and now translated into French, Ewe, Fon, and Bariba by us--Thanks, Boni). We then parted ways but invited them to church on Sunday. Hopefully we'll meet again.

The next few hours were spent trying to recover from the five hours of singing and dancing we had done. Then we left again to visit a nearby family, where we offered more Bible verses and words of encouragement. By the time we made it back to our house after a brief meal of riz et des oeffs, we had no problem collapsing on the floor and resting those old bones of ours. A tiring day, but an amazing gift as well—to think of all the people we were able to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Praise the Lord, in whom we find all the strength we will ever need. Mon Dieu tu est excellent!



Dan Bredberg

Date: 3/20/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Bohicon, Benin

Well, let me take this opportunity to try to let you visualize life for us today...

Mike is gone. Yes, still... He left yesterday saying, "I'll be back tonight" and he is still taking care of business in Cotonou. So with Mike gone, we are a four-person team, still doing programs like crazy at local schools! I am glad we get to share our ministry! As tiring as it can be—four people (small team) acoustic, completely in French! Dan B does an awesome job leading worship in French. Normally he and Mike take the speaking and praying in French parts of the program. With Mike gone it made it a little exciting for me, because I felt challenged.



Melinda Broomhall

There are many things challenging me this week. One thing is being called "Yovo". Every time we leave the house, kids come running after us from all over the time zone yelling, "Yovo, Yovo Bonsoir!" Another challenge is riding motos in a dress. Every time we leave for a school, our contact Andre' leaves first on his moped and rounds up four taxi motos to take us where we need to go. So we must hop on, girls in our skirts and guys carrying guitars and puppets. Today, the seam of my dress got stuck on the moto handle, and I couldn't get off at the end of the ride! I started fiddling with it frantically, saying, "Uh-oh." Jess watched sympathetically and I sat there helplessly as other men started jumping off their own motos to come and help by wiggling the dress until it came undone.

Despite the trauma, I see Jesus in the midst of what I consider suffering. At a High School today, I felt like the students were just laughing at us. And other students had no expression at all as we played for them, so I thought they didn't like us. But after we finished playing there were several students who were interested in talking to us. That was no surprise, but one girl came directly to me. She was so sweet and humble. I was so thankful to Jesus for the new friend. Her name is Mawugnon. That means "God is good" in the local language, Fon. How cool.

I ended the day on a great note, F#. No, just kidding. But do you ever have conversations that stimulate you so much, you leave feeling so excited about growing in your walk with God? Tonight I had dinner with CanaDan. We left the house and walked for 15 minutes down a busy market street to a restaurant we knew where we got beef and rice for a couple hundred Francs/plate. We sat and talked. It was so relaxing, so good to leave cares behind for a while and be honest and share and relate with one another. I think my teammates are one of the best things about being in Africa. We are growing closer. It can't be helped I suppose when you spend every hour of the day together. I was going to say every waking hour, but we even sleep next to each other. We are really seeking God and seeking to grow in love for one another. It brings me joy.

See you next time,
Mel

Date: 3/21/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Location: Bohicon, Benin

"So, what do you think about the war in Iraq?" someone asks me. I can't really remember if I was more surprised to hear someone speak English to me or if it was that "war in Iraq" part that really caught my attention.

We were at a large High School today in the lovely little town of Bohicon, and after school was let out for the day we put on a little concert in the school courtyard for the student who asked me the question and a few hundred of his friends. I am doubtless that if you were more than 25 feet away from us that you were really straining to hear us. So I was praying very hard for God to carry His words on our lips a lot farther. We started playing and a nice size



Daniel Rebolledo

crowd gathered, maybe for the spectacle if for nothing else, I thought. But I would soon be shown that these kids wanted to praise God right along with us as we broke into a medley of familiar West African praise songs. We all sang together in English, French, Fon, Yoruba, and a couple other languages that couldn't be named by anyone present. And after, we hung out, talked and shared the love and the peace given to us all by our Father in Heaven.

It was at this time that someone asked me, "So, what do you think about the war in Iraq?" Having known that conflict was inevitable, I did not feel really shocked, but searched my heart and prayed to have God's words on my lips for our brothers and sisters. I told them how Paul wrote that our fight for the Gospel is not against flesh. That I knew some of my brothers and sisters would die there, whatever nation they came from, as a result of war. Yet it is in writing this that I find myself remembering God's children singing on this day, with such praise. A foretaste of heaven when we will all sing together. And with that I find myself praying that today, those whom are at conflict in their hearts or minds, or on streets of cities or battlefields near or far, that tomorrow they might be singing together, as today we sang. And as we will one day sing in Heaven. For that is God's will for us through Christ Jesus.

Amen.
Cana-Dan

Date: 3/22/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: ?

For those who see the question mark for the place I've been, or am at, let me quickly explain... come along, PLEASE!!

I left the team. Well, not like you think. Had to return back to Cotonou to do some dirty work. I had to go to the bank and try and withdraw money in order to buy airline tickets to Cameroon as well as have some to live with on team (for the team). After three days, I had the money in hand as well as the best exchange rate of 612 CFA per \$1.00. 30 CFA better than cash. Lesson #1: Wire money! For once, in Benin, I was happy with the exchange rate, from a business standpoint.

Lesson #2: African business is not done the same as in America! Sure, you're thinking, "Why should it be the same?" I'm finding that out little by little. There are no time frames. When you say one, it's a suggestion. When you say "je viens" ("I'm coming") or "tout-a-l'heure" ("See you in a bit"), it doesn't mean that. It means wait until I'm back, which may be two more hours, to go get a banana at the market and come back. I so learned the concept of waiting the past three days I've spent in Cotonou. I mean that's all I did. Two hours at the bank, four at the church, two at home, four more at church. The only part I didn't like about all the waiting is I had nothing with me to do as I thought I would be back in Bohicon after the first day (the 19th). Instead, I had nothing with me for three days. My Lesson #3: Go/come prepared!

But, all is finished. I have money, have our tickets, and have been reunited with the team. It was good to see their faces, hear their voices. However, a sad point was knowing my "trip" as a business man was over. I told our contact (main guy in Cotonou), Elias, that this has been a good few days for me to be away from our rigorous evangelism program. I got the chance to be surrounded by all French, except when a few at church speak English to me. It's fine, but I think I annoy them when I respond in French because they probably want to speak English and know/tell me I speak good French. As for business, that seemed like all I did. Explaining why our credit card won't work, talking with the owner of the car we're renting, plane tickets, tour details in Benin. It all adds up to be one long day for me when all is said and done—bed after twelve, up at seven... still nothing to get done because I wasn't prepared for a three day trip into the city. Oh, well. One of God's little lessons to tuck away in my "How to Improve My Life" book!

Life, when I can forget about all the business and money, is quite fun. Car breaks down—more



Michael Topolosky

waiting. Trying to speak French to five taxi drivers who say they don't know French and didn't receive a full payment for driving us around town when we weren't supposed to be anywhere. Cool contact, just really quiet (I think he doesn't like me because I am a business-type person). It's hard to be grateful since I'm back in humid weather. I really loved the dry northern climate and hope perhaps we'll get it again being our stay will be up north in the mountains. Quiet adults, joyous/envious children. They want so much we don't have and it's hard to explain that sometimes to those we talk with. But it's language practice! Learning how to live life simple—jug showers, hole in the ground for a toilet, sleeping on cement (although ground would be much better), cooking our own meals! But it's a learning experience—just like camp all over again! Thanks to the gang at Walcamp!

Date: 3/23/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Bohicon, Benin

It is 10:00 pm, as I sit, rather lie down, to write this journal. I think, "What should I write about? It was another day in Benin." But then I realize that 99%+ of the people who read this journal have never had a day in Benin, so let me tell you about my day. The alarm on my watch woke me up at 7:00. I think I finally got up around 7:45. And when I say got up, I really mean got up because I was sleeping on the floor. I went to our hole in the ground to empty my final drink of last night's tea, and then I used the water from our bucket of water to wash my face and hands. I got dressed for church and took the braids out of my hair. The braids were braided by a nine-year-old girl a few days ago. My hair is pretty dirty, but I don't even think about washing it, I just throw it back in a ponytail. I eat some bread for breakfast, and I drink some Milo. Milo is a chocolate vitamin drink. It is not chocolate milk. It is more like chocolate water, but the chocolate brown color and taste covers up other visual and tasty floaties, so I appreciate what I have and drink away.

We thought that our contact was picking us up for 9:00 church. At 9:30 we decide to leave on our own. The contact meets us at church and the service goes well. The sermon is in Fonbe, which of course I don't understand, but I am holding a little African baby who has fallen asleep in my arms, so I am content. After church, Mike, Dan B and I go to the market to buy rice, eggs, tomatoes and bread for lunch. We have rice and egg sandwiches for lunch. I take a little nap, and we leave for the late afternoon program. The people are very happy to have us, and I am happy that we can be there. After we return home by car, we leave by foot to find dinner. We stop by a few different street vendors for fried yams and fried bread.

As we return home I am reminded of driving to many fast food restaurants to get my favorites at each place. Yams here, bread there, kind of like fries at McDonald's, Jr. Bacon Cheeseburger at Wendy's. Back at the home where we are staying we eat out of the bags so we don't have to do dishes. This reminds me of the United States, too. I talk to some neighbors for a little while then I return home to get ready for bed.

Before I bathe I sit, rather lie down, to write my journal. Now I am finished. I will go draw water from the well. I will use the water to wash my body and my dirty, dirty hair. I will brush my teeth with bottled, boiled water. Then I will crawl under my mosquito netting, lay down, put my ear plugs in, and set my alarm on my watch. I will fall asleep and probably dream of the United States.

That is my day in Benin.

God, thank you for today and thank you that I am able to share it with friends all over the world. May your peace and joy be with each one of them. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Date: 3/24/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Bohicon/Abomey, Benin

This morning began with a visit to the local clinic to get Melinda's ear looked at. She has had inner ear pain and drainage for a few days now, so you can pray that she is better by the time you get this journal. I certainly hope and pray that that is indeed the case, that she, along with the rest of the team, are all in good health. When we arrived at the small stone structure, we entered a narrow corridor and turned into a room filled with SIDA (AIDS) posters and other health-related posters. Melinda needed to fill out a patient card and under occupation she decided to write Evangeliste. Upon reading that description, the nurse asked us if we could give her a list of some Bible verses to look up so that she could learn more about Christianity. "Wow, of course," we said.



Dan Bredberg

Actually, it just so happens that I spent a few hours two days ago looking up a series of verses that work well to guide a person through the four themes we use in most programs, i.e., 1) NEED—we are all sinners, all unable to reach God on our own, all NEED a Savior. 2) ANSWER—God, out of grace and love, sent His Son to die for our sins. Jesus is the answer! 3) RESULT—Being justified by grace through faith in Jesus Christ we have peace with God. Not only that but new life. We are turned into a New Creation. 4) RESPONSE—Out of gratitude, and by the power of God, we now live lives of faith. Loving God and neighbor, being compelled to go and tell the Good News to all people as we serve one another in love.

Back to the clinic... so, I was able to quickly write down those verses and give them to the woman before we left. Another example of God using us when we least expect it. And another way we are blessed by being in such an easily visible service of the Lord.

The afternoon was spent visiting the Dahomey Palaces in Abomey. The Dahomey Dynasty of kings goes all the way back to 1620 and did not end until the early 1900's. We toured the two remaining palaces (eleven others still exist in various stages of ruin around the town). Since Benin is the birthplace of voodoo, it was not too surprising to hear some of the practices of these ancient kings, such as making temples out of the blood of slaves and animals (one of which we actually entered), seeing thrones built on the skulls of enemies, and fly swatters made with horse hair and human skulls. This dynasty is also responsible for the Amazon Women, which I had heard of in movies. They were fierce female warriors who battled for the kings. One of their quotes was, "Women on the battlefield, men at home." One of power, fear, gaining land or money, intimidation... hmm, sounds a lot like our world after all. So many lives are still based on seeking these things, but it is my hope and prayer that the world begins to realize that none of these will ever bring the fulfillment people seek. Kingdoms fall, Dynasties end, earthly power fades. But the Word of the Lord is forever. May we all seek God's Kingdom, God's righteousness, trusting in His mercy alone. For God alone is our refuge and strength. Though all else fails, we must not fear for our hope is in the Lord.

In Christ, Amen.

Date: 3/25/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Bohicon/Azove', Benin

So right now, it is Thursday, and I am writing my journal for yesterday on notebook paper because the journal paper is in the car. I am not going to the car right now because—well, we are in a zoo. We are in a room, the five of us, an 8 X 12 feet old sewing shop where we all slept last night. Outside we have several children staring at us. They won't leave. Another man just approached and talked to Michael and demanded to know why the big sister over there was working with her left hand. That's me, by the way—yes, I'm a lefty and it's a faux-pas in this culture. Michael explained it's not bad, it's just different.



Melinda Broomhall

Anyway, the kids are getting closer and closer, now standing at the door. We do not want to draw too much attention. We do not want to make any manifestations right now, because it is election week and it is illegal. This morning our contact told us that we had a problem, and he didn't know what to do because we no longer had permission to do our programs. So right now we are waiting for him as he went into town to make a few phone calls to try to work things out. He said if we made manifestations, the soldiers could come and take us away. Well, God was protecting us yesterday!

Let me tell you what happened when we first arrived... We were waiting in front of a house in a village and I noticed the people across the street were watching us. I think it started when one of my teammates told me to do a dance. Anyway, I started dancing and people started watching. Then Mike joined me and Dan B started with the drum, and we started to sing, "We're Going to Sing for the Lord" in French. We probably had 30 people or more gathered around us, so we continued singing and praising in French. After a while, there were probably more than 100 people whose attention we had. We were JAMMIN' a medley of all the songs we knew in French, and then we realized Ewe is spoken in this region (we are near the Togo border), so we sang songs in Ewe, too. IT WAS WILD because we had everyone's attention! They wouldn't leave us alone! It was fun just to praise the Lord spontaneously—many children recognized our songs and sang with us. We drove away in a car—that was the only way to get the people to leave, to let them see us leave. Good thing we didn't get caught!

Other things that happened...

I woke up in the morning and went to draw a bucket of water from the well. There was a woman sweeping the ground with a palm branch. So impressed by her servanthood as I was watching her, I let the cord slip from my fingers and the whole thing fell into the well! OOPS. I was afraid of that happening all week. I made an "uh-oh" noise to show the woman what I'd done. She was very kind to bring another bucket and cord out of her house for me to use, she wasn't upset. Thank you, God, for the second chance. Since it's our travel day, we had some time to ourselves. So I got a few clothes washed and took the best bucket bath I've had all week.

For our team devotion today, we prayed for one another, laying hands on each person as they sat on the one chair the house has. We invited our driver, Sisgo, to pray with us, and our other contacts, Elias and Andre' arrived during our prayer time, so they joined us, too. I am thankful for Andre' because he held my hand yesterday on the way to the doctor. Yes, here comes another story...

On Monday, I went to the doctor twice. The second time was to get my ears washed out. My right ear has been in pain for the past few days. This morning the check up told me I had stuff in them that the doctor would rinse out. I was so thankful that Andre' took me. I asked him in the car on the way if it would hurt. He told me not to worry and he held my hand. I thought of Jesus who was right beside me also, holding my hand. And I thought of all that has passed in my life, all the things I've been excited or scared to do, and how Jesus' love, friendship, mercy and grace remain CONSTANT. He is always there—there's nothing you can't make it through with Him by your side. You have to believe and have faith!

The doctor went well! I had a whole bunch of goodies in my ear that got washed out. And I sang a song about Jesus in French, and the nurses joined me in singing. Jesus is all around. Open your eyes. Your faith has healed you!

Peace!
Mel

Date: 3/26/2003
Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo
Journal Entry:

Location: Azove', Benin

A quiet, but surprising cooling breeze blew past my skin. And for a moment I was startled at not being really hot and sweaty. For that was what the day of singing, jumping, laughing, and sharing the love of Christ had sent me. And it felt like a great relief. A great reward, even for my sweat put into it the ministry this day. The leaves of palm trees rustled around our small clay dwelling, and the flames of the fire I was gazing upon wavered to and fro, the ashes glowing a vibrant array of red, yellow, and white heat. To my left and to my right were brothers and sisters in Christ. Friends from the town whose name I can't recall, and even if I could I wouldn't dare spell as they were Adja names (a language in western Benin with a very tonal sensibility to it and a different alphabet). Above our heads shone the cosmos. A great field of stars vibrant and clear. The lights of these heavenly bodies not hindered by the electric aura of cities or the haze of pollution. A glimpse of the heavens so clear that the Milky Way, our galaxy and residence of our blue and green globe, could be seen. And past the distances of the brightest stars could be seen a multitude more. The infinite array of illuminated bodies part of the vast tapestry of the universe. And I, with my brothers there, sat in wonder and amazement.



Daniel Rebolledo

Moments before, one of them had asked in French, "Porqoas ete' Vous blanche?" ("Why are you white?") And a few thoughts flew in my mind; genetics, ancestry, not enough time in the sun. Revealed though, in creation is an abundance of complexity, of beauty, amazement, awe and incomprehensible bodies. Bodies like these in the cosmos, and bodies like those darkly browned and peachy-pinky colored ones sitting next to one another. Not really being one who was made to comprehend, I thought fairly simply and said, "I don't really know. I think that God loves colors. Look at the trees, flowers, sky, and sea. And look at the peoples of the world." Ultimately though, I think it is something for none but God to really know. Thus for me, then, it is something to be praised. Take a good long look at the stars whenever you can. Just long enough to not forget the person to your left and to your right.

Thanks God.
Dan

Date: 3/27/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Azove', Benin

"A legally defensible appraisal system should be valid; formal and standardized; based on input from the supervisor; employee, and performance-based data; promotions, transfers, and termination should be documented." (Organizational Behavior, 1988, R. Vecchio) AND "experience is what enables you to recognize a mistake when you make it again." (E. and Wilson) AND "choose a job you love, and you will never have to work a day in your life" (Confucius).



Michael Topolosky

I figured I would open up the book (I'm skimming back through) I read back in University called "Organizational Behavior". I borrowed it from Bishop Gregoire. We are now back in Cotonou, but I would like to tell you about our last full day in Azove'. Minus a contact, we still survived getting around to visit more people. We went with our contact's friend, Raymond, to visit a few bars. A lot of questions were asked of us, and prayers and songs were given for the small crowds at each place. Then we went to Raymond's house where we were able to do some stuff (mostly songs) in Ewe (Togo is about 15-20 miles west of Azove'). That was a good time. They joined us on our "best of African songs" medley. It's really hard to remember what words go with what song, because the words for the local languages are roughly the same, very few changes. Even listening to Ewe, Fon, Yoruba, and Adjah (sp?) causes me to wonder if they really aren't speaking the same language. They're just trying to fool us!

Back at home, the festivities commenced. Soon afterwards, it started to rain. How appropriate; such perfect timing. We are dirty and haven't taken a shower in over 3 days. All (but Mel) of us were outside basking in the coolness of the rain. Goosebumps, dirt leaving our body, hair and feet cleaner

by the second. Heck, by the time we were done we were white again. I was saddened because my feet were almost black because of all the dirt/sand/sweat combo on them. But it was good to be clean again. A FREE bath/shower. Plus, it provided about twenty minutes of live entertainment as our friends (the kids who are always around), who still hadn't left, watched us play and shower in the rain. They hid under the shelter of houses and straw huts. They, I would expect to be out in the rain—playing, enjoying it, taking a shower. Not these ones. They seemed very afraid to be touched by the rain. Eventually, however, they came out as the rain slowed. Even our driver, Cisco, hid in the car! Overall, they day provided entertainment for our friends—something that won't happen for many more years to come! Smiles and laughs were had by all! Such a classic day to always remember! Now, I leave you with one more quote from Organizational Behavior—"Nice guys finish last." (Leo Durocher)

Date: 3/28/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Agove' and Cotonou, Benin

Dear Father, help me to write this journal in a way that will be honest, yet sensitive. Help me to show vulnerability and to reach out to my brothers and sisters in Christ. Please help it to be used as a tool to further your ministry. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Well, you may curious as to what I have to say after an intro like that. I have been struggling a little bit lately and what better way to ask for your prayers than to write in a journal that will be read by many supportive brothers and sisters in Christ. To those of you who know me, especially to Mom and Dad, please don't worry. This is nothing to worry about, I only ask for your prayers. This is not anything abnormal, and many people who have been in my situation, or one similar, have felt the very same way. I believe the words Youth Encounter used at training are CULTURE SHOCK! Please do not take this to mean that I am not enjoying my time here. I am so happy to be serving God in West Africa. However, there are some things I am beginning to miss. I hope you don't mind if I name a few of these things: showers, toilets, beds, reliable electricity, a nice cold glass of water, ice, feeling clean, microwaves, dishwashers, refrigerators, smooth roads, clean hair, time to myself, regular e-mail access, ENGLISH, kitchens, and pizza.

Now, there are many other things that I could add to this list, but really would it do any good? These are all things that I knew I would have to give up when I decided to come to West Africa. And more important than that, I am surviving without all of these things. It is also essential to note that a great majority of the world lives without these things. Yet, I continue to think of life in the United States and all of the comforts that are there.

Now the prayer request—please pray that I and my team will take advantage of every moment we have left in West Africa. Please pray that we will embrace this culture and approach every situation with God's joy in our hearts. Please pray that we will have open hearts for each ministry opportunity that God puts in front of us.

It is a great gift for us to be here. I am sure that I will not realize many of the effects of living in West Africa until I return to the U.S. I am thankful to be here, and I hope to serve God in every way that He will have.

Thank you for your prayers and support. May God grant you His peace and joy,
Jessica

Date: 3/29/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

Today was the first complete and real Sabbath experience we have had in as long as I can remember. Most "days off" consist in lots of travel or trying out a few tourist outings or things of that sort, both of which can be nice, but do not leave too much personal time for rest, Bible Study, or catching up on work that needs to be done. Today however, was totally free. What a joy to get up, pray and read God's Word in an unhurried, focused way with nothing to pull you away—no other pressing needs, just the need of spending time with God. Time to recharge, time to fill up our wells which have been almost totally emptied by the constant out-pouring of song, dance, encouragement, energy, conversation, politeness, and love that we strive to give our friends here each day. You cannot give to others what you yourself do not have, so it is vital to our ministry that we are able to have these times of reconnection with our Lord and Savior—times of meditation, times of really digging deep into the Scriptures. Dipping our hearts in the stream of life, drinking from the Living Water Christ alone can give. What an awesome privilege it is to be free to pray, worship, study and listen for God's direction. I believe it's Psalm 46:10 that says "Be still and know that I am God." I have been longing for the opportunity to truly be still in the midst of the constant activity, the stream of visitors that come to our places of "rest", the team jobs, discussion, activities—so many things pull my attention away from God.



Dan Bredberg

Of course all of them can be great opportunities for ministry, and God is indeed in the midst of all these things. But there comes a time when your soul needs to retreat, to be still, to rediscover why it is you are doing what you're doing, to be pulled out of the routines of daily living and bow down before the God of the Universe, the One, all-powerful, all-merciful, loving Father, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Alpha and Omega, the True God who alone is worthy of praise, asking for forgiveness and mercy, praying for strength and passion, lifting up your brothers and sisters, singing praises for His wonderful deeds, for the gift of His Son which comes to us new each day, seeking the coming of God's Kingdom, and above all, asking, begging for God's Will to be done in each and every aspect of your words, actions, thought—all of your life.

We need to have time for serious soul-searching, inviting God to reveal the areas of our lives that continue to live in conflict with Him, and to ask that they be put to death. Each day this putting to death of sin, of all that is in us that fights God's will, must be done, so that new life can come. So that it is truly no longer we who live, but Christ who lives in us.

Am I following God's will this day? Is Christ living in me and directing my every move? Have I taken up my daily cross and followed Him who gave His life for me and for you? If not, then I must begin to follow. Have I done one thing today because Christ told me to, or refrained from doing something because He said not to do it? Obedience must begin somewhere. So start today, right now. Obey God when He calls you to do something. Hold back that word or action you know God does not approve of and by doing so, you will come a step closer to being the Holy and Blameless Child of God that you were created to be. I pray all of you may have these times of reflection, meditation, and communion with God in which His will can be revealed in your life.

God's peace and power be with you this day.

Dan

Date: 3/30/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

Today was the way a good Sunday should be—in the Lord's presence the whole day. We went to church in the morning for a few hours, came home and then went out in the evening to homes sharing our ministry. Another busy day, but we were blessed to have a true Sabbath day yesterday. We didn't have to go anywhere. We got to stay at the house and rest.



Melinda Broomhall

We returned to Cotonou Friday night. We will be staying here until about April 12, when we depart for Cameroon. I guess my journal day starts at 12:01 AM this morning, at which point I was at a Cyber Café with the team reading e-mail. What an awesome encouragement it is to hear from family in Canada and friends stateside who are thinking of me and praying for the team! We went to church this morning at L'Eglise Evangelique Luthérienne du Benin where we worshipped in French and a little bit in English, because both French-speaking Beninese and English-speaking Nigerians and Ghanaians worship there. This church is trying to pay off a loan to the church in the USA for a new building. Pray for them.

After church we came back to the house at 1:00 for a few hours before going out again. I helped Jessica chop up vegetables for a sauce for lunch. After eating, I took some time to rest and read God's Word. And pray. These things are our daily bread. We must eat, of course, but we must stay in communion with God by praying and getting our spiritual food from LA BIBLE, the Holy Word of God.

After not too much time at all, Patrice, a brother from the church, was here to take us out to homes. We left quick, with a guitar and puppets and we drove around the city stopping at homes. We go inside and sit down and meet people and tell them why we are here in West Africa. We sing songs, share Bible passages, dance, praise, do skits and puppet shows, answer their questions, pray with them and leave. I think it's an awesome ministry because we share joy with each other in our smiles and praise to God. People are so happy to welcome us, and their smiles and excitement mean so much to me! Beni soit les enfants de Dieu! God comes to us through these experiences. We went to about six homes, and one thing that all of them requested is that we pray for them. So I am requesting that you also pray for them! Pray for the families and households here, that Jesus will be their Lord and that they would have faith!

We are all in this ministry together. It is not our ministry, but God's. Thank you for all you are giving to God. Peace.

Date: 4/1/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou & Ouidah

I'm getting married to a Togolese next week. Or, maybe not... April Fools! So, picture this... ten rather old (it's me speaking) guys dancing around and singing with us on the steps of the Ouidah Cultural Center. We finally got (sorry—a quick flashback to explain the first part) to Ouidah after spending many days stuck in Cotonou because of elections and lack of communication. We met Ambroise and talked briefly with him about our now newly revised program. We visited a house which had a pet monkey. It was bouncing off the walls—literally. Fear of white people as well as a fear of our puppets. But Dan R said that it quieted down a bit when his brother, Bojo, came up from behind the curtain. Two monkeys in one small place—what are the odds of that happening at one's house? Quite entertaining. We were also entertained by two boys and their dance routine as they are studying choreography at a dance school.

Next, we stopped by a friend of Ambroise's to see his shop (atelier). He weaves baskets and then draws/paints designs on them. This was the start of our time with "business" men for the evening because we then went to the cultural center for their monthly meeting. It's somewhat like them having their own union. They paid their monthly dues and from the sounds of it, they are supported in return (some kept for office, some for helping out in times of need). I realized how bad my listening skills are as I tried tuning in to what they were saying. I was getting the gist but should be, at this point, understanding almost all of what was said. Just my lack in trying to be all French, all the time! Did some introductions, sat some more, I fielded a few questions by a few of the guys. Then we let them be.

We went out front and hung out with a group of college-aged students. They were singing, playing, and dancing out in the foyer. It was fun to watch them jam. One group was singing, as we entered,



Michael Topolosky

a song by Celine Dion and Garou (a French singer) which I'm so in love with called "Sous le vent" ("Under the Wind"). It's another cheesy love song... if you don't find me, I'm there; if you have fear, don't, I'm there... things like that... I'll find my star when I fly under the wind, etc.... I was very excited to hear the group singing it. The group inside was jamming as well, but to reggae! Good times as I stood and watched a few of the guys jam out on guitar, one dancing, and one belting out Bob Marley sounding words/voices. Anyways, the guys finished their meeting and now I finish from the top. About ten guys remained out of the twenty or so (even the president stayed and danced a bit). They joined us in our songs, especially our big medley we do—African, French and English songs. They were very excited to see us and hear our message of good hope and wished us the best of luck here and on our return.

I hope this makes sense. It's like me trying to say something in French—unknown to others including myself! Oh, well, that's how I learn. Peace to you all there!!

Michael

Date: 4/2/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou and Ouidah, Benin

Tonight we visited a refugee camp for people from the countries of Togo, Nigeria, and Congo. The camp is funded by the United States and Switzerland. It seemed to be well-built, and I was happy to see that my home country is helping the people here.

We visited with some of the people there, and we met a very talented boy named Christ. He was from Congo. When I met him I noticed it was easier for me to understand his French than most of the people that I talk to here. His accent was a little different being from another country. He told us about his many aspirations, and he asked us questions about our lives.

While in the refugee camp we went to two services. Christ followed us to both. The first service was really rockin'! The people were singing their hearts out for Jesus. I just stood there with my hands raised as I listened to the people sing and as we worshipped God together. I thank God for that awesome time of praise.

At the second church the pastor was a very dynamic speaker. Even though I couldn't understand all of the words he said, I could tell that he was very passionate about God. After he finished, Cross Fire led a few songs, and then Christ asked for the guitar. He played very well as he sang sweet songs of worship to God.

After the service we stayed and talked with people, and Christ showed me some of the drawings he had done. God has given him so many talents. Our contact had to tell us many times that we needed to go, but it was so hard for us to leave the people. Even though we were only there for a short time, I pray that we were open to God using us in the way He knew best.

God—Thank you for the opportunity to visit the refugee camp. Thank You for all of the people who have given to support this place. And thank You for providing a place for your people. Amen.

Please keep the people of Ouidah Refugee Camp in your prayers. Please remember the children like Christ.



Jessica Neale

Date: 4/3/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

God blessed us with six different programs in which we could proclaim His Word this fine day. We visited a kindergarten/primary school, then a "college" (i.e. 6-12th grade), then we went to three different homes and finally an Evangelistic program in the middle of a neighborhood. I admit I was rundown and rather unhappy about being out all day and night, but Dan and Mike helped me to remember that this is what we are here to do, that complaining doesn't do any good. But instead we should be grateful for every opportunity we have to spread God's Word.



Dan Bredberg

In my heart I know this is true—I understand that it is an immense blessing to be here, and I know that God will indeed provide for all our needs when we seek to follow His will and devote ourselves to His service. But sometimes we get worn out—sometimes I almost dread singing another verse of "Cast Your Burdens" and all I want to do is go back home and sleep. We are all weak, all imperfect, we all fall short and it's OK to admit that. If we deny it, we are only lying to ourselves and making things worse. Praise God for His grace that allows us to admit we sin, that calls us to confession and makes us realize our total dependence on our Lord.

I could pretend I'm always happy, that I never get sick of singing, that I won't wake up everyday with a smile on my face, ready and willing to serve my Lord. And I certainly thank God that I do have days in which that is the case. But I have bad days, too—we all do—and the only way to get through them is to admit we have fallen short and ask for forgiveness, renewed energy, passion, focus, and faith. Faith will bring us through the worst days for in faith we are certain that God is good. That He will provide, even if we think it is impossible. Philippians 4:13 "I can do ALL THINGS through Christ who strengthens me." An awesome promise and a strong reminder that it is ONLY through Christ we can do anything. When I lose focus, when I stop praying regularly, when my time in the Word falls short, it is very evident that the days become more difficult, and my mood drops down in the mud. But God always calls me back. He gives me the will to read His Word once again and to pray with renewed energy and confidence in His will, His provision, His love. As I remember I have the most loving Father of all looking out for me—wanting to give me abundant life each day, wanting me to be the creature He created me to be—a person who lives to give Him glory and seek His will. Then hope resumes, gratefulness follows, and love sets in to build up an unshakeable foundation that cannot be moved.

Louez Dieu—Amen.

Date: 4/4/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

Vendredi, la quatre avril. In Cotonou, Benin we had another long day today. I think it's a good sign when I fall asleep in the back seat of the car on the way home at the end of the night. My back is sore. During our puppet show this evening, I could feel sweat pouring down my back. I take all these indicators as a sign that I am working hard.



Melinda Broomhall

Today included some team time to read the Bible, some time to write letters before going to the post office, going to the post office, driving around Cotonou, cooking our meals at the house, and doing programs in schools and homes. It's go, go, go. We never really know for sure where we are going next or what we are doing or how much time we will have. It depends on a number of factors. For example, at the post office this morning we sent out a large number of postcards and had to put two stamps on each one. We expected it would take a long time, but thanks to some team work and a little assembly line action, it only took ten or fifteen minutes. Thank you, Lord. On the way home, though... our contact Joel took us to the Grand Marche (City BIG MARKET) to buy our vegetables for lunch (Yes—for those of you who are going, "Melinda—vegetables?!?!!" I am eating vegetables! Tomatoes and onions. Can you believe it, Mom!). It's Mike's job to do the negotiating. He is the one who buys the food while the rest of us wait in the car. Or we get out and walk around

a bit, because when Mike goes into the market, I know he's not coming out for at least 15 minutes. CanaDan reads his Bible in the car and usually prays every time we take a trip. Jessica and I do a lot of people watching. If you were the lizard running by on the sand beside the car and you had ears, you might hear from us comments like, "Oh, WOW," (as we watch in amazement the women who carry massive loads on top of their heads), or, "I love that fabric, that's the style of outfit I want," or, "Hey—another Yovo!" or, "So that's how the women go on the street," or "Look at that chicken without a foot." After the market we knew we had about two hours to our next program, so we tried to make it home in time to make lunch before we go.

Traffic in Cotonou is like nothing I've ever seen before. Hundreds of motos (little motorcycles), most of them taxis, in the street going every direction, as well as loud vehicles, and in the midst of all the pollution you have people of all ages selling all sorts of stuff, dodging between the traffic. Little girls with fruit on their heads, teenage boys with boxes of fried cakes on their heads, and men carrying all sorts of goodies who will come up to your window while you're stopped at a red light. And by the way, I've only noticed a couple traffic lights in the city. Today I remember watching all these vendors all over the street among the traffic and wondering, what are they going to do when the light turns green—do they just scramble? All I know is, they are professionals.

We drove past an accident scene where there was a large commotion, so many people gathered around I couldn't see what happened. I felt so helpless and I thought to myself WE NEED TO PRAY. About a minute later, I was startled by a loud screeching noise—a flat tire on our car—SURPRISE!! Jess and I got out and started talking to the people on the side of the road. We were in front of their house and they invited us to sit down. A man told us he thought we were so kind for greeting his family. We told him about Youth Encounter and our mission here. He was so excited. He and his friend were so happy to have met us! That was such a gift of a unique ministry opportunity. No time is the wrong time to share your faith, okay? God gave you a light to SHINE. I am never surprised by opportunities to minister because there is need all around and God is always with us! So let that light shine! PEACE!

Date: 4/6/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

Started off the day late again, not by much, maybe thirty minutes. Don't worry, you can always count on church starting about 20-30 minutes later than the time given. Something I think we all have been learning—at least I have. Pastor Aloy, our contact for a western "quartier" (suburb?) of Cotonou, did some good preaching on leaving to tell others about the cross, not to wait because we don't know when our last breath will be. Also the gospel lesson came from grain falling and being fruitful and how our own personal ministry must do the same. Let it fall and multiply. Jesus was here to leave a little with those he ministered to. Then with his death, his work multiplied (and resurrection!) and became even more fruitful. Same message for us, especially as Cross Fire. We're here doing the ministry for them, not seeing much of the results, but I would imagine if we came back in a year or two, we would see the fruits of our labor.

Another change in program produces another change in the level of patience. That's my way of thinking at least, because every time our program changes, I take it and learn to "go with the flow." That's just one more African cultural lesson, and one I should know by now with all the studies I had in college. Laid back; time is not so important except when it's ending; be formal; don't question; don't talk English thinking one can't understand you and your language; etc... So many things to keep learning. HOWEVER, patience and time management (because of so many changes in our daily schedule) are the biggest.

Instead of going to Ouidah, we put on a concert back at Pastor Aloy's church. Very intriguing as we started late, then it was just a few members of the church, then a few neighbors came out, and then by the end we had a group of 30 or so passersby to neighbors listening. Had to talk in English in doing some translating for the Sudanese, who are refugees and going to the church. That was a



Michael Topolosky

real treat. It's amazing that I can say Bible verses in French or other phrases, yet not know how to say them in English (I think I'm going to be in trouble on our return tour?). It was also a good time had by us other Cross Fire members as we watched one of our contacts, Joel, take Jessica's spot in the puppet show (him and Dan/Mel). His puppets mouth never closed—it remained open the whole time. I taped some to show what not to do for a puppet show. But he and the others laughed and enjoyed themselves. So, instead of Ouidah, God gave us more evangelism time. Don't be content, be grateful and satisfied!!

Date: 4/7/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

We just received two mail packets and oh, how wonderful it is. Thank you, Mom for your two letters. It was so wonderful to hear from you, even though one of the letters was dated February. I also send out thanks to my home church, Trinity Lutheran. Thank you for all of the support and the goodies, especially the chocolate. Thank you my cousins Cassandra and Alison. Thank you Uncle Paul, Aunt Michele, and Aunt Paulette. I appreciate all of your thoughts, prayers, and goodies that have come along with the mail packet.

God is good. Just when I needed a little pick-me-up, God sends it to me in a mail packet.

Africa is still treating me well. Today is Monday, which our contacts in Benin have used to show us some of their history and culture. Today we went to Ganvia, the village on water. Most of the homes are built on stilts. We toured the town by boat. I really enjoyed it. We also visited a museum which had been used as a Portuguese Fort. We went to The Temple of Pythons. This is a place for voodoo worship. Yes, Dad, I did hold a python, but I drew the line at putting it around my neck! After that we visited the Catholic Basilique that was across the street from the Temple of Pythons. I thought this was very fitting, and I pray that the Catholics are a great witness to the people who practice voodoo at the Python Temple.

The last piece of culture for the day was the Slave Route. We went from the place where the slaves were sold to the place where the slaves entered the boat. We had to drive the distance, but the slaves walked each step in chains. I had a strange feeling as we stopped along the way to learn the history of the slaves. At the end we reached "The Point of No Return." This was at the beach where the boat took the slaves away from their homes and families and everything they knew.

God, I pray that we learn from these things, and I pray that we treat each person we meet with Your Love. Amen.

Well there was quite a mix of things in this journal, but that is my life in Benin. I thank God for all of my friends and family at home. I also thank Him for my brothers and sisters in Africa. God's family is grand! Peace and joy to the family of God!

Jessica



Jessica Neale

Date: 4/8/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

A year ago—even a few months ago—I would never have imagined that I would find myself standing in front of a large class of University students giving a two-hour presentation on the life of Martin Luther and Reformation history. The fact that these students were from French-speaking West Africa made things even more interesting.



But fortunately, the professor wanted us to present to the class in English, so they could get exposure to American-style English as they were all studying the language. I guess this is one of those examples of becoming an expert by default. I was fairly concerned about what to say—not even knowing if they would understand me (in fact, almost hoping they wouldn't). And when I saw that most of the class was older than me, it was even more intimidating.

Dan Bredberg

Then Matthew 10:19-20 came to mind, "Do not worry about what to say or how to say it, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." Given, it's not the same context, but it was my hope, prayer and comfort nonetheless. And the more I thought about it, the more clearly this was an opportunity for ministry. Here I had a somewhat captive audience (to be honest) waiting to hear why the Reformation happened—an open invitation to explain the pure Gospel of Salvation by grace alone through faith alone. And by that same grace of God, the presentation went pretty well. We even had some time for Q&A afterward, which was very enlightening, because I was able to see how much they really understood. I was pleasantly surprised to hear a number of very insightful questions, realizing that God had indeed spoken through me and opened up some wonderful conversations regarding faith and salvation. Many of the students asked for books or other resources on Lutheranism and some voiced interest in coming to attend the local church—praise God.

One student however was rather angry that we—people coming from a developed country—were telling them about religion, when he thought we should be giving advice for how to become leaders for developing their own country. He said economic development should be our focus. But we were able to explain that our faith was much more important to us than money or development, that this world is only temporary, but the new heaven and earth are forever. Also we tried to explain that local agencies already fulfill that purpose. In fact, many of the local churches strive to build up education and development and we are here to help them. So in a way we're also striving for development. Also, the development of the US has not necessarily been that great of a thing—especially regarding families and faith. Anyway, we were able to restate that our primary purpose here was not to give financial advice or donations but to proclaim the truth of salvation by grace through faith. And nothing is more important than that. Amen? Amen!!

Date: 4/9/2003

Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

Well last night I got my nails done, and today I got my hair done. I AM SUPER AFRICAN WOMAN NOW.

Culture is learned. It almost blows me away as I look back on how many things I've picked up or learned since we arrived in West Africa. The language, the music, the clothing, the appearance. God has guided us into this foreign place, and His spirit has been working in us.

Today we did programs at schools without CanaDan. He is sick and resting in the house. We played for high school-aged students at a school and they went absolutely wild when they heard us sing in their local language. It was really cool, because, of course, then they became impressed and interested in us and what we were singing and saying. A whole group surrounded me after we finished singing and started asking questions about our mission here and for the address so they could write me. But our contact Patrice stepped in and invited them to the Lutheran church. He told them where it was and that he'd give them our address at the church. I hope they go!

After my hair was finished getting braided (FIVE HOURS of waiting, praying, chatting with my coiffeuse), I joined the team in visiting some homes. Tonight the host home ministry was a BLAST! We pulled up in front of my house and I heard a voice say, "Come on in, you guys. You are welcome." I snapped my head around so fast to hear where this familiar sounding English was coming from. It was from Francine, a sister of a girl named Gracia we'd met at a school last week.



Melinda Broomhall

They invited us over to chat—these girls and their family lived in D.C. for seven years. WE HAD TOO MUCH FUN. After talking with them, they cranked up their stereo with African music and we had a dance party! We danced and danced and laughed. And we sang some songs, did a skit and prayed with them and a bunch of their neighbors who had come over to see. And we hugged when we said good-bye, as if they were friends we've always known. God really worked in our relationships with them. We were really happy with the home ministry we did there. It was so evident that common language is such a helpful tool!

We went next to a dinner appointment. The directrice (woman director) of a primary school we played at invited us to her home for dinner. It was a very nice evening of socializing, relaxing, drinking sucrerie (pops or sodas) and eating nuts, coconut, rice, pate, chicken, fish, sauce, watermelons and mangos. We had so much fun with our host Danielle, who was so cool. It was just like she was family. It's truly sweet the way we come together as ONE in fellowship. One body, one Lord. We are one in Christ, united in love and purpose, helping and sharing with our brothers and sisters. It's awe-some. For you reading, I am thankful for this opportunity and all those who help make this possible for our team to do! Peace!

Isaiah 40:28-31

Date: 4/10/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

So, after a couple years in ministry, I'd like to say that I am a stranger to sickness on the road. But this is not the case. Finding oneself far from home, sick and in a strange place can get you kinda down. But my comfort in this time, and in all times that I am down, is that Christ has a very intimate knowledge of human suffering, having been human himself, of course. And more than that, of course, this suffering demonstrates for us a sincerity of love history has never known. Jesus said, "Greater love has not a man than he lay down his life for another."

This love of Christ is very definitely echoed in lives of the followers of Jesus here in West Africa. On this day I was taken to the hospital for a brief stay. We were accompanied by a couple of contacts we had been working with, and their sincerity of caring for me this day, and in all our time in West Africa, didn't cease to humble me. It is like being cared for by your very family members. That's how it is with God. The church is a family with God as the Father and us His children, brothers and sisters. And what love this family has to share with each other.



Daniel Rebolledo

Date: 4/11/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

Okay, one day to go and we're still running around trying to get stuff done for our departure. It provided for one frustrating, yet somewhat exciting, day. I'll add that it rained again last night and because of that I did free laundry with all the water that was left. Cisco came and we headed to the hospital to see Dan as well as make other errands. "Bad boy" is making our departure seem impossible because the doctor said he will need to stay until tomorrow and should seriously stay here for a few more days to rest before changing countries and climate. It's up to God to know.

We had our program, just a small concert, we were told by our contact Patrice. It would be at a school and it would be a quick 45 minute/1 hour concert for the public. However, the public consisted of at least several thousand people. Why? Because we were a part of a grand concert and



Michael Topolosky

cultural festival. It was going on for a few days and goes for a few more. We just happened to be part of the closing act. However, we weren't on stage until just after 6—a 1 and 1/2 hour wait (why? For microphones so all could hear the four of us—because Dan is still in the hospital). We finally went on stage and set up, the crowd was getting energized after waiting so long, and played around with the two mics we had. Then someone came up on stage to give us a megaphone. I used it for the first song (glad I couldn't hear myself—I felt pain for the audience!) and then they told me to mic one of the girls. We played for about 45 minutes, if that, before they told me we had to go—we were done. It was fun explaining our mission and songs and our skit. I saw a lot of blank stares, so I'm not sure whether they understood me or just didn't care. I saw at least a few nods from time to time. It was probably the fact that they wanted us off stage so they could see the groups to follow us. The first was a dance group going off on a Jennifer Lopez song. Very good—entertaining. I think it made me feel good that at least we got to do some witnessing in a "public" arena. They were there and they were listening. I can only hope God planted some seeds in peoples' hearts.

Even though [the message for today] I didn't want to go out today, less do a program, I saw God had other plans for us. He wanted us to do more ministry, one last opportunity to be with God and show the public His love for His people with songs, words, and skits. A good close to a busy day. We will leave tomorrow...?

Michael

Date: 4/12/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

Today we were scheduled to fly to Cameroon. We had our tickets in hand, but because of many factors, we had to change our flight and we are still in Benin. I pray that God's will be done.

One of the reasons we did not leave today is because Dan R has been in the hospital for two days with malaria, again. He was released tonight but he was advised to take some days of rest. If we would have tried to go, we would have missed the plane because he was in the hospital. Another factor as to why we did not go is because the place of destination of the plane is 700 miles away from where we are supposed to meet our contact. We have tried to reach him by e-mail, but we have not yet received a response. We finally attained his phone number and called him today. He said it would be better to change flights. Our contacts here also thought it best to stay here. So with all these things and others reasons we are still in Benin. I pray that wherever we are that God will be using us in whatever way He wants.

In some ways I wonder if there is a reason that we are still here. Does God still have work for us here? Has He saved us from some problems we would have had if we left at the original planned time? Maybe, or maybe it is just the way things are for us. But whatever the reason, I believe that it is important to serve God wherever I am. Whether it be in Benin, Cameroon, or in the US, I know that God can use me wherever I am.

In addition to wanting to serve God, I know that there are many distractions for me. I know that the devil knows my weakness and he wants to use those against me. This is an obstacle that I will face all of my life. The important thing is to realize when Satan is putting these bumps in my path, to hand them off to God.

God, please be with me at all times. Help me to focus on you in every way. God, help me to realize that distractions that take me away from you are from the devil. Please help me to renew my focus on you everyday, so that I may do your will. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Date: 4/13/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg
Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou! Benin

Well, we are still in Cotonou! Day One of our extra stay—I wonder how many days it will turn into? We have such a short stay in Cameroon that I hope we are able to leave ASAP. We figure the next ad for Cross Fire should be something to the effect of a person pulling their legs over the back of their head and saying, "See what a year of Cross Fire did for me? XF 2003-2004—Learn to bend over backwards for Jesus!" Okay, big exaggeration (forgive me, I've lost my ability to spell in English with all this French in my head!). But it is certainly a great lesson in sitting back and trusting in God—enjoying the wild ride—because we really have no idea what the next day (or hour) might bring. For instance, while I thought I would be in Cameroon last night, instead I found myself sitting in a stadium in Cotonou, Benin with a few thousand people listening to a Christian concert starring MAKOMA—a band with dance moves that put N'SYNC to shame. Actually, I was very impressed by the direct Christian message put forth, especially the way they targeted younger children and encouraged them, danced with them, and even sang songs with them on stage. It was so refreshing to sit back and listen to someone else lead worship—allowing us to focus on praising God without worrying about lyrics, chords, transitions, or anything else that goes into our daily programs.

The same goes for this morning—how wonderful it was just to "pop in" unannounced to a church and take in the singing, dancing, readings, or preaching—having no responsibilities of our own but to give God glory and praise. Of course, giving glory and praise to God should always be our primary purpose, shouldn't it? And as I am learning, it is not only in times of organized worship or programs that this must happen, but every minute of the day. For we are to "offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—(for) this is (our) spiritual act of worship." (Romans 12:1) Thus, it really makes no difference whether we stick to any scheduled program, for wherever we are, whatever we do, we can and should devote ourselves to giving glory to God. Someone once said Christ came to make worshippers out of rebels. As Easter Sunday approaches, I pray that Christ continues to transform all of God's rebellious children into devoted and grateful worshippers of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Glory—Alleluia. Lift up His name!

Dan



Dan Bredberg

Date: 4/14/2003
Submitted by: Melinda Broomhall
Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

We are supposed to be in Cameroon now, our 91st day here. We missed our flight to Duala on Saturday night because Dan was in the hospital for malaria and he's still recovering. So today is Monday, we had to go and change our tickets. Mike and I went to do that at 9 AM. It is fun being a WORLD SERVANT for Christ. I love all the different things involved in being God's servant.

Today Mike and I mounted Taxi motos to get to the travel agency. Now THAT is an adventure in itself. It's like any of the Coasters at Six Flags. You close your eyes once in a while, flinching, tensing, clenching! I hold on for dear life. It's just like that. It's exciting, dodging cars, people, driving on mud, sand, and concrete. Not to mention those who are excited to see a white girl—some start waving and talking to me. Add all that together and you have quite an amusing ride. Who needs Disneyland?

Right now, it's pouring rain outside and it is so loud inside the house because of the tin roof rusted. We are just hanging out with Claude (who lives in this house we have been staying in) and a contact person, Joel. As more time goes by, the fonder we grow of one another. Our relationships here have become so meaningful. God is present and I love to see Him work in relationships.



Melinda Broomhall

I have a new girlfriend here. Her name is Belvina. I met her at church last Sunday and I have seen her already a few times—we hit it off. We spent time talking, sharing pictures, cooking, doing hair and nails. She is two months younger than I am. She is very interested in keeping in touch. She says that we are very dear friends. I am so happy that God has given me a new friend! She tells me about life here. It sounds like she doesn't have many friends her age who share the same values, so I thank God for this opportunity.

Date: 4/15/2003

Submitted by: Daniel Rebolledo

Journal Entry:

Location: Cotonou, Benin

Deter. Deter is a 28 year old guy from Germany, the Southwest, that is (Rhine Valley, very beautiful) in Benin studying for his thesis in GeoEcology. Well the darndest thing happened and Deter went and got himself sick at the same time I was in the hospital. So we got to share a room together. Over the next couple of days we talked nonstop. Now Deter wasn't Christian but through the course of the weekend my faith, the work of Cross Fire and the Word of God seemed to keep coming up. As well, the numerous times that my team and various contacts came by to visit, we would pray together and invite Deter to pray with us as well. Now Deter has gone home to Germany where his family and girlfriend and school are. And I hope to keep in touch with Deter as well. But God gave us such a ministry in Deter and I just want to ask all of you who read this to keep Deter in your prayers. Most especially for God to send people into his life that will encourage and guide him in faith.

At one point we were talking about the war in Iraq and Deter asked why it would be that God would make such things happen. I said that God didn't make it happen, people make it happen. Us and our sin made it happen. He said that he could see why the world would need Jesus. I just pray Deter would continue, as we all must, in growing in his understanding of why he needs Jesus.



Daniel Rebolledo

Date: 4/16/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Somewhere, West Africa!

Why are we located in "Somewhere, West Africa?" Well, let me tell you why. After many days of trying to figure out how to try and finally/eventually get out of our beautiful hold-up of Cotonou, we managed to...and at last minute, none-the-least. I like it to that of final exam period, and how appropriate as many are preparing for them in several weeks!

So today we went off to call Claude's friend in Douala, who actually lives over in Yuounde (2 hours away) to arrange some housing just in case there is that chance I can get the money to leave. She wasn't able to help us except for saying there's a Catholic church we could stay at for 7,000 CFA (\$12) per night. Not likely on our budget. Next was a stop at our friends at the travel agency—I really wish I got the lady's name—today I saw her at least three times and many more before today. She's very helpful and understanding; just, like we are, confused on why we keep coming back. No money at the bank either. Can't use credit card. So, do we go without money and spend our days in Douala—the answer was no because we already have a cheap place here in Cotonou. However, if we left next Monday, we would get up on Tuesday and then leave the next Monday as planned—not really worth it for six days, but we'll go because it was planned and we don't want to hurt ministry, communication, and relationships.

We went back home, briefly stopping at church to say hi to our friends holding down the office. Found out Elias, secretary general, can get me the money no matter what, so we'll go back in the



Michael Topolosky

afternoon. Elias' good friend's dad is married to the lady who works at the bank, whom I've seen and talked to many times because of visa card and money wires! I can only hope as I really want to see Cameroon, especially because right now we'll only be there for about 1 and 1/2 weeks. That's my thought all day, running through my head begging God to help us out, yet realizing maybe we weren't supposed to go to Cameroon. BUT, God came through as the money appeared. We waited an hour, got the money, jetted over to the agency.

More bad news. The computers died. We waited thirty minutes, asked Elias if we could go to Cam Air (the other agency for buying our tickets) because it was 5:45. Our plane leaves at 7:30 (which I found out is African time! Really 8:15!). No luck at Cam Air, because they were busy, but I did manage to exchange currency, because one of the ladies buying tickets had tons of the central frame, so we swapped. One less thing to worry about upon arrival. Got to the airport, cleared customs and on our way. It was rather simple, I might add. They didn't even ask to check inside our bags. Good for us! We left finally and arrived in Douala with no contact present. We ended up going to Hotel Picasso after discussing our many options—like staying at the airport (my "fearless" option!!). It didn't pass by the others. So, there you go... a glimpse of our psychotic lifestyle here in our last weeks of Africa!

Date: 4/17/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: All over Cameroon and a trip to Chad

Well, I wasn't planning on visiting the country of Chad while in Africa, but it was only for a little less than an hour.

Let me go back to last night. We got off the plane in Cameroon. We knew no one in the town, but God sent us an angel. Her name was Rose. She noticed that we looked out of place. That is not too difficult to tell since we were the only white people in the airport. She helped us to find a taxi and an inexpensive place to stay. Thank you, Lord!

So this morning we had a flight from the southern part of Cameroon to the northern part of the country. While waiting for our flight I slept on the airport floor for two hours. I guess you could say that I have been a little tired lately. After my nap and a little bit of lunch we went to the terminal. It was air-conditioned! I sat in a corner by myself. It was so nice to relax and have some time to think. It was very refreshing for me. The plane left about 1 and 1/2 hours late, but that was okay, because I was enjoying my "terminal time". Throughout our flight we stopped at two places before our final arrival. This was where our stop in Chad came into play. From what I could see from the plane window at 8:30 at night, it seemed like a nice country.

We finally made it to Garaue, Cameroon, our final destination. But alas, no one was at the airport to pick us up. We talked to security and called our contact's phone number, but we weren't able to get a hold of him. Once again, God watched over us. We loaded up two taxis with our luggage and ourselves. We drove to another phone cabinet and tried to call our contact, but still there was no answer. I continued to pray. The taxi drivers said that they knew where the church was, but we had no idea of anyone who would be there at 11:30 at night. We pulled up to the church to discover a man who told us that they went to the airport and waited for us all day, YESTERDAY!

Well, we made it safe and sound, and everything is okay. We are staying in a house for missionaries. The boys are sharing one room because there is a king size bed that they can all share. Melinda and I have our own rooms with single beds. Once again, it is nice to have some time to myself.

Despite this crazy day, God was definitely with us every step of the way.

Thank you, God for never deserting us. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Date: 4/18/2003
Submitted by: Dan Bredberg
Journal Entry:

Location: Garoua, Cameroon!

Yes! We made it to Garoua and can now enjoy our last days with the Brethren Lutheran Church of Cameroon. This morning we attended a special Good Friday service for les junesse (youth). It was amazing to see the whole building filled with young people—most of them elementary to junior high aged. Some older teenagers were there to help run things and to take care of the kids who were amazingly well-behaved. The children sang many fun songs, then they took turns going up front and reciting Bible verses, with applause after each one. Ad finally, they did a series of skits which were quite good—the trial of Jesus, the good Samaritan, Peter healing a lame man, and a few others. It was pretty wild to see the kids dressed up in the same sort of costumes we use in the US—the traditional robes of Israel, makeshift paper hats, plastic swords, jeweled crowns—almost like they took a visit to my church's costume closet.



Dan Bredberg

One other thing we immediately noticed was the fact that all the children were sitting on one side, then the women were interspersed and most of the men were up front in their own area. All the women and most of the young girls had head coverings, making us wonder if Mel or Jess should be wearing them, too. Again we were reminded of Sunitha's comment, "It's not bad or good. It's just different."

As I look around at the landscape—the people, the dress—and hear the sounds of this place, I realize just how different it is from anywhere else we have been in West Africa. This is a semi-arid to almost-desert-like climate. The temperature has been 95-110 degrees so far. It has a very Arabic feel as well—many more long robes with hats worn by the men. And the women are fully covered with only a bit of their face showing. This is not the case for all people, but a majority for sure. There is also a large Muslim presence here, as is evidenced by the dress as well as the many Mosques we have already seen in just one visit to town. I will really miss the markets with all of the bright, colorful fruits and vegetables, the multi-colored grains, beans, rice, and yams, the rainbow of fabrique, the sounds of multiple languages being spoken at once, the smells of exotic spice, fruit, and especially meat that sits out in the sun all day. I truly will miss picking out a large slab of meat and watching the butcher chop through the bones and throw chunks on to a scale with counter weights. I remember the first time I saw this happen. I thought, "There's no way I will eat that," but now it's no big deal, just normal life. And we're fine (we just can't cook it very well).

In the evening we heard drums and singing coming from the other side of campus (we are staying on a fairly large enclosed campus including a big central church, a secondary worship site, school, housing, and offices). So, Melinda and I went down to check out the music around 12:30 am. When we got close to the church we saw two men sitting down playing the tom toms and a large group of men and women singing and dancing in circles around the drums. It was almost trance-like, hearing the beat of the drums, the stomping feet, singing, yelling, praising, dancing. There is so much life and passion in their worship. WOW—I wish my junior high kids from church who thought Christianity was so boring could be here to experience this. And I pray that we can bring some of the vitality we have seen and infuse the church of America with renewed energy and focus and joy free of barriers of tradition, free of inhibition.

Date: 4/21/2003
Submitted by: Michael Topolosky
Journal Entry:

Location: Garoua, Cameroon

Well, beautiful Cameroon is what I imagined it would be—well, from paintings others gave me of their trips here, like past "XFers". It's very dry! I could really care less that by 9 AM it's 100 degrees and by the afternoon over 110, because as long as it's dry and not humid "I will survive". Mountains galore, surrounding Garoua. Very beautiful



Michael Topolosky

to see them. It's been a while—since Kpolime in Togo. Very desert-like as one might imagine living up in the north, just south of the Sahara desert.

Today, I was reminded a lot of home, more so of Eastern Montana. Our drive to Ngong, 40 km south, and then to Lagdo Lake, another 20 km, was exactly the same terrain. Flat with rolling hills, limited vegetation and trees, tons of sand/dirt/rocks, can see for miles on end, very deserted-like feeling. I felt at peace sitting alone in the way back of the van from the church. Looking out the windows, catching stuff on tape, reflecting. It was oh, so peaceful! The lake at Lagdo was also magnificent—a good 30 km long, several wide, with mountains surrounding it. Kids playing in the water, fishers coming in with the catch, fishers going out for more, men, women, and children cutting up the fish, etc... A true sense of peace for me and the people I watched working. We took a tour around the mountain to see the dam and on passing it had to stop for a baboon crossing. Yes, we saw a baboon—oh, so cute—crossing the road. I can't remember if I ever saw wildlife not caged up here in West Africa since our tour started. I seriously think this is my first.

I should mention our ride to and from this lake, as it's part of African life and stories told me by friends who have been here (Alli P!). No more than 20 km/h was our speed, I'm guessing, because every 15-30 feet we were slowing down for potholes. I felt like I got the most vertical movement, being at the back. It was like "African slalom driving", a new sport for the upcoming summer Olympics! I figured it was due as all were either all paved or all gravel, never a mix. I almost wished it was all gravel. At least it would have been a smoother ride. Villages made of straw huts and clay also helped to close the day and journey through the Cameroonian countryside. It felt like a real African safari, minus animals! Maybe just an African trip! Anyways, I love it here—I won't say anything about communication or no program yet—way too complicated to explain. Plus, I don't want to waste more of your time because all I write is nonsense that leaves people wishing I was a comedian or historian or a monkey that eats bananas all day...??

Date: 4/22/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Garoua, Cameroon

Today for lunch we went to eat with the Browns. They are a couple from Canada working with the people in Cameroon. Today is their 38th wedding anniversary. It was nice to be invited to their home and to share mission stories. We didn't have a tangible gift to give them for their anniversary, but we were able to share some songs with them. I was glad that God used us in this way.

Sometimes it is difficult to see the work that God is doing through us. I was talking to Mrs. Brown about this subject. I discussed with her that sometimes I wonder why we are where we are. She said that maybe a reason that we are where we are today is to be ministers to she and her husband. Well, I know that they were great encouragers to us, and I hope that we were encouragers to them also.

Thank you, God, for the blessing that the Browns have been to us. May you bless them and the ministry they do. Amen.



Jessica Neale

Date: 4/23/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Location: Garoua, Cameroon

Reflections on my walk with God

"He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's

ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us." (2 Corinthians 19b-20a) Lord, you have challenged and changed me in so many ways. I pray you will help me to discern how I can best be your servant—how I can be your ambassador and work in others your ministry of reconciliation through sharing this experience of ministry in West Africa. I know Ecumenical relations, or striving to be One unified body is a clear task and something I have come to believe in much more strongly. Help us open hearts to see the common mission we all have who claim to be your disciples. Thank you for showing me what is truly important—spreading the Gospel through Word and deed.



Dan Bredberg

I have also learned to trust you and depend on you more. Thank you for the plethora of experiences in which we had no option but to trust you totally—especially the time You brought us from Cotonou to Garoua without contacts. Thank you for providing people to direct us to lodging, transportation, and give us needed information. Thanks for the strength of bringing us here to West Africa, of getting off the plane in a totally foreign place and trusting you to take care of us. Thanks for increased ability to speak and preach your Word—for understanding that we are all truly the body of Christ. For allowing me to read Bonhoeffer and learn from him, understanding the Old Testament as a constant message of grace, one of judgement with forgiveness, always loving. That you were not a different God back then, but have always had the same mission of reconciling the world to yourself.

Thanks for increased understanding of suffering, of the cross, of the mysteries of faith. Thanks for showing me so many people totally devoted to you, willing to lose their friends and families for your sake. Willing to be persecuted, beaten, even killed for your name. Thanks for renewed passion and urgency that the Gospel message cannot wait but must be proclaimed NOW. "The kingdom is at hand, repent and believe." As new doors have opened, as I consider being a pastor or a missionary, I pray for increased guidance. Use this experience to teach me. Give me an open and willing heart, mind, soul. Thanks for showing me that your will is ALWAYS best—no matter what I think—for you know all. My only true hope is in you.

Thanks for us missing the bus to Dapaong and teaching me to trust you. Thanks for protecting us from car accidents, fires, food and countless other unknown dangers. Thanks for giving us examples of servants—of true hospitality and self-sacrifice to welcome those who come in your name. Thanks for a glimpse of your global church, of the "Bigger Picture" in ministry and for showing me the dangers of closing yourself off or your church off. I see now we are ALL interconnected. We are all your children. You see us on the inside, not the outside. I see the horrors of violence and war, refugees, orphans, maimed children and pray for peace and an end to all forms of prejudice. Thanks for showing us the difference just one person can make and for giving us a look at the fruits of ministry through people brought to faith in Christ and churches united in missions and evangelism. As we see the churches in Lome work so well together we thank and praise your name.

I learned the place of suffering with others, mourning with others at funerals, and joy and love at weddings, of thankfulness and praise at Baptisms where you mark us and call us to follow you. Forgive me for being short or angry or frustrated with my teammates. And thanks for increased patience and the ability to serve others—something with which I need so much more help from you. Thank you for safely passing through customs, governments, military, police, of not knowing if you would be detained or ousted for any number of unknown reasons. Please help us to be thankful of all we have—to not overlook the blessings you have given us. Help us to be better stewards of our time, our possessions, our money—knowing that they are not really ours at all, but are all gifts from you, and as such are to be used to build up the body of Christ.

Thank you for showing me what a blessing it is to live in Christian fellowship. And I pray we can help other Christians understand that this is not something to be taken for granted and overlooked. But rather, this fellowship is a gift that could be taken away at any time. I think of all the people we have met who have little or no fellowship because they are serving you in remote areas, or were driven from their homes due to war or persecution. Thank you for showing me the simplicity of the Christian life which all centers on your command, "Follow Me." I pray all of us indeed follow you where you lead us each day—doing things we never imagined we would or could ever do, trusting in your will, relying on your strength, and seeking the glory of your Name.

May every action of everyday be done not out of selfishness or vanity, but for your Name's sake. We praise you, we thank you, we lift up your Name, we worship you, we want to serve you, we want to

follow you, we want to trust you. Grant unto us the faith to do so—to live for you alone. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, forgive us, renew us, and lead us, so that we may delight in your will and walk in your ways, to the glory of your Holy Name. AMEN.

Date: 4/27/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Garoua, Cameroon

Today was a very long day, a good day, but a long day. I am very tired. It started off with a service at 8:00 in the local language of Fulfulde. Since it was in Fulfulde, I didn't understand anything, but I enjoyed the music and the enthusiasm of worship. The service was finished at 10:20. At 10:30 the French service began. Cross Fire sat with the choir. We had taught them a few songs during the week. For the service we sang these songs together. Not only did we teach them some songs, but they taught us some songs, including dance moves! It was great to dance with them during the worship service, even if I didn't understand the words.

The rest of the day we spent visiting with people. It was especially nice to visit our friend Euginie for dinner. She welcomed us so warmly as did her mother, one of her three brothers and her six sisters. We had a great time sharing a meal with them and afterward the kids all sang songs for us.

Thank God for great relationships and friends in Cameroon.



Jessica Neale

Date: 4/28/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

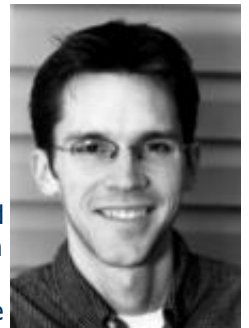
Journal Entry:

Location: Garoua/Duala, Cameroon

Already time to say goodbye to our new friends in Cameroon. It was so strange to spend only 11 days in the country. We felt like we were just beginning to feel comfortable with our contacts and getting some great ministry going—then, BAM, time to leave! Quelle Domage! Mais Dieu est Bon—Yes, God is certainly good, at all times, in all places. We are still amazed by the ways God continues to protect, provide for and use us to build up His kingdom. It's quite different for me to imagine our return tour when we only get to spend one night with most people. What a blessing it has been to have extended contact with the same people and be able to foster relationships within the global body of Christ.

However, while we were only here for a short time, we were able to leave a bit of Youth Encounter with them, as we taught some songs to the Grand Choral and left a Sing-A-Long songbook with the main Music Director, Jean. He was quite excited to have this resource and made me sit down and sing through as many songs as I could so he could get the melodies in his head. We had a great time singing with his choirs, especially two songs we sang yesterday for the French-speaking church service. The whole chorus danced together and made motions along with the songs in the typical rhythmic and grooving style we are used to seeing in Africa. One cannot help but get caught up in the festive praise sessions, glorifying God with voice, instruments, dance, smiles, cries of joy. Oh, it has been so wonderful to experience the different forms of worship here. What a true blessing to see firsthand how God's children from all parts of the world show Him thanks and praise.

For our part of the service we led Romans 16:19, Nous Chantons (We're gonna dance for the Lord) and Ben Soit (Blessed Be), all of which sounded better than they ever had due to the help of the choir. If only they could come with us and give you a taste of what we experienced. We pray that we can bear witness to God's work in Africa. We pray that we can build up connections between the churches in the US and those we visited. We pray God will use us to help meet some of the many needs that exist in both areas of God's church—the pressing material needs in Africa and the



Dan Bredberg

spiritual needs in the US. We all have the same hunger and thirst for our Lord—whether it's physical or spiritual or both. Perhaps the US has learned to better hide those needs under the mask of success in business, wealth, sports, education, etc. But all these are only temporary and will quickly pass away. If only we could all have the clarity of thought and sight to look past earthly goods and standards to the eternal life that awaits all who heed Christ's command, "Follow Me". May we all follow more closely this day and always. Je veux chanter pour Jesus; il est le roi de ma vie!

Date: 5/1/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome, Togo

Back at home, sort of. So excited to be back, not sure why, I just feel a much closer connection to those here in Lome. It probably has something to do with the massive amount of extra work I had to do "business-wise" compared to Togo and Cameroon—also a blast! The days are passing faster and faster as we all know, yet dread. I spent another morning out on the town with Gaston prowling the markets in search for the last minute items. Today, being the first of the month, made for a great day to be out on the market. That's because it's the national work holiday today..."fete du travail." Thus everything was closed except small boutiques and the open market. Plus it helped that I was there by 9, as everyone was getting the shops set up. Practical note for all: when going to open markets, go early in the morning so as not to be swarmed by the vendors, like the afternoon provides when they can concentrate more time on the "passerbys." Needless to say, it was a fun time to be on the market.

It will be so hard to leave so much of Africa behind. Being flocked on the streets by everyone because they can see me and my white skin; being the only one in a bank that was white or American; having fun playing the game "Find the Yovos" (white people); speaking French all the time; listening to so many cool local languages; making people smile because we came from so far to evangelize or, just plainly put, be with them; getting smiles and laughs as we try speaking their local language; going to the market and starting a bartering war with the vendors; taking taxi rides all over town; programs at schools with so many kids smiling and getting into our songs; crying kids and a freaked out monkey during our puppet shows; cultural museums and all the historical facts gained from Ancient Africa—more specifically in Ouidah (Benin) and the slave trade route; many frustrating hours spent negotiating money issues with contacts; a better knowledge of West Africa and their simplicity of life and amazing faith in God; a grand time given by all the people we met, places we ate, churches visited, houses visited, contacts time spent from work just for us. Just fully reminded of all the things I am to be grateful for because I've made this trip, even as short as it was. I'll never forget God's protection and amazing protection he had over me and the team during our stay here. 'Til we talk again from America...

Peace,
Michael



Michael Topolosky

Date: 5/3/2003

Submitted by: Jessica Neale

Journal Entry:

Location: Lome, Togo

Today is our last day in West Africa. How sad. I am going to miss it so much. I will miss the spirit of Africa. I will miss the dancing and the music, but most of all I will miss my friends.

Today for lunch we were invited to Pastor Holonau's home. It was such a blessing. There were friends there from Ghana (Elvis, XF 2003-04), Cameroon, Benin and Togo, all of the countries we have visited. It was so wonderful to have people from different countries and churches come



Jessica Neale

together.

I thank God for the opportunity to come to this place and to work with His people. It is so difficult for me to leave. Africa has become such a part of me. I cried today because I don't want to leave. However, I know I must. I know that God did not send me here to keep this experience to myself. I must return to the US. I must share my thoughts, feelings, and things that I have learned from the awesome adventure from God. He has called me to do this.

Thank you, God, for the indescribable opportunity to serve you in Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Cameroon. I pray that the change that Africa has made in me will be a part of me for the rest of my life. I pray that I will have the courage and strength to share this experience with each person whom you put in my path. Thank you, Almighty God. Amen.

Date: 6/3/2003

Submitted by: Dan Bredberg

Journal Entry:

Well, this is my first journal since we returned from West Africa- a little behind yes, but quite telling of the busy pace that we've been experiencing on our return tour. I noticed immediately how much more hurried people seem to be here in the states. People drive fast, walk fast, talk fast, even sleep fast. It has been difficult for me to adjust to this new schedule of exact times and places, no longer needing to wait until the last second to plan our activities.

The infamous return culture shock has struck all of us in different ways at varied times and places. God certainly blessed us with an amazing host church to lessen the return culture shock in the hospitality department. I was a bit afraid of being in places where we would not feel as welcome as we did in west Africa, but this church made us feel wonderful. What amazing examples of service in the Lord's name! It has been churches and host families like this that have enabled me to stay excited about doing ministry back here in the US.

One night we even had a number of families from Sudan at program, a real treat for us. I could not stop staring at them, realizing just how much I missed being around Africans. All of us were very eager to talk with them after the program, just to give ourselves a little reminder of the place people that have become so dear to our hearts. I could feel myself relax and breathe easier in their presence, and it is was then that I felt more strongly than even that I definitely want to return to Africa- most likely Togo sometime in the future. For now, I am very much in the dark as to what to Lord has planned, but I have learned to trust in Him and believe that He will indeed show me the right path for my future, so I wait and listen and pray and try to put my all into ministering to the great people we are privileged to meet each day. God's peace to you all.



Dan Bredberg

Date: 6/23/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

As more weeks pass, more things start popping into my mind of the slight and drastic changes of the US and W. Africa. First, the cars. Bigger, yet empty. How is that we had 6-7 in a car no bigger than a four door Ford or Honda? It seems so bizarre now, but we did it for 4 months. Next, is the massive amount of paved roads, or roads for that matter. I remember driving down a long hill through central Pennsylvania and looking out at the massive 3 lane highways on both sides that extended into the horizon. It was somewhat shocking to see what was destroyed just to make room for another lane, which didn't seem necessary. One lane works, but I know we're in a hurry, so we need more. That leads into difference #3 I see – hurriedness. Once on the road, we, as a team, were now responsible for what happens during the day. There was more stuff we had to plan for and less time hanging out with our contacts and families. That definitely was one thing I'm glad I got to experience overseas. Seeing that there is a time for both work and play. That's probably why I enjoyed my time over there – things were being taken care of for us by our contacts. Left us more



Michael Topolosky

time to relax and get to know families, friends of the church, and friends of our contacts instead of running around town trying to arrange a booking.

So, there you go with some differences I've noticed. But there have been others, of course. Can't forget about not being able to go to the bathroom outside, open markets, fresh baked bread, open fields with people walking through them (also working them). It all adds up and comes back to mind when I look through anything that was brought back, whether photos, video clips, or artifacts/mementos. It seems so surreal. Was I really there? I know I was but it seems so distant. Even trying to talk in French or send back emails in French is getting harder for me to do these days. Talking with a host family last night I mentioned my needing to be re-immersed in French again – total immersion. I never thought I would be using French this long in my life, but I have a feeling it's not the last time I'll be using it.

Take care. Don't ever think that what you're doing is ever going to fully leave you...IT WON'T. God has a different plan for you and me. Peace

michael

Date: 6/25/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Life this week was great. Very relaxing. Tuesday we did a program, the only one for the week. Wednesday we spent at Briarwood Camp just north of Fort Worth (TX). We got the chance to hang out with the staff and familiar faces in Steve and Chad, who work in the youth office at Advent, a church we visited on our fall tour. We had dinner and then began all camp games. How appropriate that we show up on water days. First was water balloon volleyball, then the slip and slide was opened up and the fun began. 100 feet of pure slippery CRAZINNESS FUNNN! We all tried doing some crazy tricks on it, but again there's only so much one can do. Some of the little kids scooted their way rather fast across the tarp. That night we had worship with the mosquitoes, I mean the camp, although this was the first time I've really noticed mosquitoes in some time. Even in W. Africa they weren't this bad. Ended up, Dan and myself, chilling and playing some songs with a few staff members. Even sang a little Garth Brooks! Yee Haw.



Michael Topolosky

These past few days have been fun as well. Hit it up in Stillwater, OK. - home of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame (I'm sure a few from MSU-N, from my hometown, are in there), OSU, and Eskimo Joes, where we had lunch on Sunday. Nice place with a lot of history. Our (Dan and I) host mom was a Valpo graduate, former teamer, and now works with Eskimo Joes in merchandise and retailing so we went away with a few goodies!! Thanks Stacy.

Now, we're basking in the beautiful confines of Wichita, KS. When will they let us out of this prison? JK. My sis lives here and a few others I know! Well, just a brief look into our "busy" life. Oh, by the way, we are still being ministers as Sunday we helped a little with the services and I ended up talking with one of the older bible studies about our adventures in Africa. Got a few parents interested for their kids to try this sort of thing out. That was a good time. Its fun sharing our stories and thinking that some people have never been outside of Kansas/Texas/Chicago/etc., much alone been to Africa. Oh the times we had...

michael

Date: 7/2/2003

Submitted by: Michael Topolosky

Journal Entry:

Can't imagine speaking a foreign language with fellow Cameroonians or Senegalese...if that's the proper english! We're here chilling at Carthage College in

beautiful Kenosha, WI. We're here for the ELCA missionary conference. We are the guests this year. Fortunate enough to be with those who have been on team before or in other cases were just with the most recent New Dawn team in Hong Kong. We've had some good times hanging out with the kids, since we get them all day long while the parents are in seminars. Last night we did a program for the whole group and they really dug it, getting in to it. I'm sure because it was very real, that is the things we did and the things they do all year round. It was nice for me to be surrounded by missionaries and people who had been overseas and could somehow relate to our short experience. Even got to speak french and have others understand what I'm saying (doesn't happen to often, if you can imagine that).



Michael Topolosky

Besides getting some physical exercise, I've also been getting some spiritual exercise in talking to some of the kids and parents and getting a feel for the struggles they go through. Also tested in doing some bible studies and getting that
