

Captive Free North Central 2003-04 Journal

Date: 9/16/2003

Submitted by: Erin Miller

Journal Entry:

So, I get the pleasure of writing the very first journal for my team! Yay! That makes me so happy! Why? I am really not so sure, but it does! So far our little tour has been going very well. I am currently staying with an awesome host family! They had three really fun teenage girls, and then they took Caroline and I both in- that is five "girls" in one house! Pure craziness I tell you!



Erin Miller

Tomorrow, we have a youth night program. I am really excited. Our contact informed us that there would be a large amount of youth there and that they were really accustomed to Youth Encounter groups. Basically, he said they were super happy we were coming! That always helps when we know that the congregation and youth are looking forward to us coming!

Team life is good! I have enjoyed getting to spend more time with my teammates, but I still do miss the other teamers! Training was an intense time for us all to spend time together, and I really grew close to quite a few people! Unfortunately, the bubble of our little training world was popped when we had to leave Luther Dell and enter the real world of our ministry! I hope and pray that all the other teams are doing well and God is blessing them as richly as he is us!

I have really enjoyed our tour thus far. God has been so good to us. Everyday I open my eyes and my heart to see a little more of Him. He shows Himself in so many ways and I feel as if I can't thank and praise Him enough for his goodness and love! God is such a mystery to me. Even when I think I know something about Him or understand His nature, He proves me wrong! I Love It!

In Christ's Love, Erin Miller
James 4:8

Date: 9/18/2003

Submitted by: Steven Kois

Journal Entry:

Anyone that is anyone knows that today was the season premiere of the newest Survivor TV show. I didn't know it was the premiere date, but I stayed with a family that did. This specific Survivor caught my attention. In the spirit of the successful "Pirates of the Caribbean", it is a pirate Survivor series. In fact, tomorrow is national 'Talk Like a Pirate Day' (To find out more look at www.talklikeapirate.com).

Why is it that our society is so fascinated by pirates this year? Do we honor their morality? Do we long to lose an eye or leg to blend in? Do we want to exchange our dogs and cats for wise-cracking parrots? Maybe, but I think people love their lingo. Can I get a big collective AAARRRR!!! That's right. There AAARRRR so many words with that notorious letter in them.

Pirates are a hilarious joke today, but I bet they were a ferocious people at one time. Maybe if they had a better sense of humor, they could have been around longer. I think that setting up our equipment is my "pirate" of today. It is a tedious process that seems very scary to me now. But after the year is over, I will probably laugh and say, "Man, I wish I had six monitors to carry up four flights of stairs." Then our whole team could laugh and remember all the times that we had moved our equipment. I will cherish this ministry while I can. God's blessings and love to you all.



Steven Kois

In Christ,
Steve Kois

Date: 9/20/2003

Submitted by: Caroline Evans

Journal Entry:

Our stop in Savage, MN was so much fun! After our family night program on Friday night, we broke up into small groups with the congregation for a Bible study. It was really neat to see the way people opened up and shared their thoughts on the passages. Ice cream followed, and the night ended with some acoustic worship. That was my favorite part because people of all ages and entire families were worshipping our God together in song.

One thing that really inspired me was when, at the close of the night, the congregation laid hands on our team and prayed for us and for our year of travels. It was a wonderful experience!

Caroline



Caroline Evans

Date: 10/3/2003

Submitted by: Steven Kois

Journal Entry:

How many people would agree with me when I say, "The best sound in the world is a laughing child." They laugh so loud and contagiously. Let me share a story with you about my host brother named Eric.

Eric is a four-year-old with dreams of becoming an action figure one day. He is a ball of energy that still takes joy in playing imaginary games with his six-year-old sister Erin. Their family served Breyer's ice cream and Eric and I sat together and chatted. I like being random in front of children to make them laugh uncontrollably. Whenever Eric's mom would turn her back on us I would shovel the ice cream in my mouth as fast as I could. Eric would laugh so loud that his mother would turn around and I would start eating at a normal speed. This made Eric laugh even harder. After a minute of this I realized that Eric was laughing so hard that it might have hurt him. So I decided to eat my ice cream normally for his sake.

When did I stop laughing like this boy? You know, the kind of laugh that makes you cry or short of breath. I find that my greatest joy in life is seeing and remembering how innocent children can be. They can laugh all day long about the simplest things. I think that we have more serious things to focus on as adults and would have to work much harder to laugh at things like taxes and mortgages. But we can still find time to enjoy the simple things in life; even if it is a child's laughter. I thank God for giving me this joy and look forward to a year filled with it.

Yours in Christ,
Steven B Kois



Steven Kois

Date: 10/7/2003

Submitted by: Kristen Hunt

Journal Entry:

Our program last night was performed in a gym for a group of confirmation kids. The acoustics were terrible, and the participation was next to nothing, but talking to the kids afterward made it all worth it. They really were an interesting group.

I was nervous for our program this morning. We were booked at a public school where we had to tip toe around God and Jesus. It was hard to do a censored program, but the kids, who were elementary school age, really seemed to get into it. Praise God. I guess I am still learning to trust Him in all things out here on the road. While both programs could have potentially gone quite poorly, God took over and was able to use both of them. There are so few things that we can really have any kind of control over. I am learning to not worry so much and to let God do the hard stuff. Life's much happier that way.



Kristen Hunt

Also, there are bugs EVERYWHERE – ladybug-like bugs that bite. Thousands swarm inside windows

and outside on screens. Beware. J

God's peace,
Kristen

Date: 10/11/2003

Submitted by: Caroline Evans

Journal Entry:

Last night we had a lock-in in Baxter, Minnesota. It was pretty fun! It was over at midnight, which was probably good. I feel so old now because I get really tired around 9 o'clock at night. But those junior highers and high schoolers sure don't! I think most of us had some good conversations with some of the people there. I did. We played capture the flag and other fun games, did our concert, and had some worship time. That was really cool. I bet the worship times will turn out to be some of my favorite times. It has been really different for me going to all Lutheran churches so far, since I do not come from a Lutheran background. I hope I will learn some things from my Lutheran brothers and sisters that will inspire me to press on to know the person of Jesus more and more. Yipee!
Caroline



Caroline Evans

Date: 10/14/2003

Submitted by: Erin Miller

Journal Entry:

Salutations North Central Groupies! I am excited to write about our adventures to you again! Yesterday, since I am truly writing this on Wednesday, was a really fun day! It started out really slow, with normal team business as usual. We had a really cool devotions with out contacts, a husband and wife team, who both had been on team before! After taking care of all our business and stuff, we headed out on the road for Taylors Falls.

We actually got to play outside of the state of Minnesota! Yay! We played at a youth center in Wisconsin to some community youth and their parents. To be quite honest, I was less than thrilled when we arrived at the youth center. All I could think about was how small the room was. To a sound tech, the room size is a big deal! We hadn't played in a room this small since training! I was really just becoming spoiled with decent sounding rooms. Anyway, after debating how to arrange the small space we had, we set up all the equipment and got ready to go. Before the show, we spent some with the kids and ate dinner with them. This was hard for me. It might sound funny, but just sitting down and talking with the kids is really hard! I feel completely inadequate around them and I never really know what to say. I was lucky, however, and met some really awesome girls who were from the local church. They were fun to talk to and we had a lot in common. Then came the show!

Overall the show went really well, our skit was really funny: someone threw a waffle (dinner leftovers) in the air and it seemed as if it was actually a part of the skit! The thing I enjoyed the most however was being able to share my job with some of the kids. It is hard to be a sound tech. Not many people really understand what you do, and because you are not in the front a lot, many people question whether you are really in the band. It is definitely not like many kids come up to me after the show and ask me questions about my sound board either, so sometimes I get very frustrated with my position. Tonight however, that was not the case. There was a little girl sitting next to me, and I asked if she wanted to listen in the headphones. She put them on as if they were a gemstone crown! I let her listen for a few songs and then all her friends started to ask about wearing them. To some, this might seem like nothing special, but it really felt like I was sharing my gift with these children. I was sharing the love of Christ through the simple act of letting them listen with the "special headphones." I don't know if that made their day, but it sure made mine!
In Him, Erin Miller



Erin Miller

Date: 10/17/2003

Submitted by: Steven Kois

Journal Entry:

Has anyone heard the expression, "A breath's time"? Poets and theologians have described our whole existence as a breath's time. It seems like much longer now, but when I think about it, this year is so short and precious. When will I start enjoying every moment of it?

I love the times when a host family plays board games with me. I can't describe how fun it is to have two hour discussions with a stranger who lends me their heart and wisdom. I love those moments when I actually see Jesus in my neighbors. No, my host mom didn't grow a beard and become Arabic. I can sometimes see that I am unconditionally loved by a stranger. It's more than a pillow for my head or food for my stomach. It's the very personal experience of listening to my questions and giving me direction. I wouldn't be surprised if those were the disciples' favorite times. Picture an exhausted Christ, sleeping in one of his follower's houses. Then picture Peter nervously approaching Jesus; crying and nervous. Peter gently shakes the Lord's shoulder and says, "I need to speak with someone." And Jesus, being the good shepherd says, "I'm sleeping, go talk to Bartholomew." NOT! Jesus eagerly cares for His brother Peter and gives him the most excellent advice known to man; God's advice. As always, I pray that anyone reading these words or just feeling unanswered receives God's blessing. I hope that He graces you with His counsel and gives you peace of mind.

Yours in Christ,
Steve



Steven Kois

Date: 10/22/2003

Submitted by: Andy Sell

Journal Entry:

Sunday night we had a family night program in the twin cities and it was so much fun! Some of the staff came by and saw our program which made my day. We played the Hippo song and every one got involved and did all the motions which was great because there were only four kids at the program so it was nice to see the adults sing and dance!

We had a day off the next day and it was nice to sleep till noon and relax the whole day! My host family was awesome! IT was fun to get to hang out and get to know them. Probably the most interesting thing that happened that day to me was that my host family's dog, Tuffy one of the smallest dogs I've seen, went into my bag which was closed. Ripped out my tooth brush and paste and ate half of my favorite pink tooth brush!!!! When I found out all that I was thinking was that the dog was going to die when he did his business out in the back yard, but apparently the poor dog has eaten far worse and bigger things. Which was a scary thought in itself? So I was out my favorite toothbrush for a day, which is also a scary thought. The only good thing about the whole escapade was that the dog's breath finally smelled good.

<><Andy



Andy Sell

Date: 10/24/2003

Submitted by: Erin Miller

Journal Entry:

"Community cannot exist without Solitude"

Perhaps solitude was given to us to demonstrate our need for others.
Perhaps community was given to us to demonstrate our need for solitude.

You can put 6 people together, have them live in a van, serve together, work together, and play together, but unless they have time away from each other, they will not survive. At the extreme opposite, one cannot exist in solitude without community. Team life is the ultimate example of this. There are times when we have nothing but community,



Erin Miller

there is always someone in your presence, a team mate in the background. It is frustrating at times to not have that sense of security in being alone. But, I am finding out that it is totally possible to be surrounded by people at all times and feel more alone than ever before.

I struggle with thoughts of insecurity and vulnerability within my group. I don't always feel that it is safe to open up to them and consequently I refrain from doing so. I will be the first to admit that I have yet to share myself with my team, that they do not know all there is to know about me, or even a fraction of what there is to know about me. It is frustrating to be at that point and to know that to survive on team something needs to change, but not know how to change it. There is a sense of security in not sharing myself with my team- They can't get to me, they can't truly hurt me. At the same time, it is not fair to them to be on the road for a year, and never be given the chance to truly know who I am. Kind of a paradox I guess!

God grant me the security to be open and vulnerable with my teammates and to share with them the gifts you have given me. In Your name, covered by your Grace.....Amen! Erin

Date: 10/25/2003

Submitted by: Liam Conley

Journal Entry:

How many people get to go to their favorite mall on their day off? How many people have the chance to see their family and friends at shows all the time? Being the local boy on the team I have the privilege of doing this. I have family located at almost every spot we travel to, which makes this year pretty easy. And if we have a few days off, we're usually never too far from my house and my favorite places to go around here.

As I have found out, every team is different when it comes to how busy we all are. We usually have a program every night and two on Sundays, which is awesome because that's why we're here. At the same time it gets very tiring, which is why these past few days have been relaxing. We had 3 days off this week due to cancellations and open days, it was rest that was well deserved. I was hoping to spend them at some local farms riding some sheep, and taking the cattle out for a night on the town, but that was voted down...maybe next time.

I really can't think of what to write about, all that comes to mind is how lucky I am for being on team so close to home. Honestly, I wasn't very overjoyed about staying in MN for a year at first. I mean, team is a year of travel and ministries so I wasn't expecting to stay in the tri-state area. Especially knowing what the weather is like here all year. But I have learned that being so young on team, and never really being away from home yet, it was definitely a blessing in disguise. I have had the chance to see my family and stay at home three times now, and it never gets old. Plus nothing is better than looking out and seeing some of my friends in the crowd, unless they're doing something like telling everyone to leave, or booing us...that would definitely be bad.

Well, I know I can't end this letter without thanking all of the host homes that have been so kind and loving to let us into their lives the past few months. Our part in the ministries is pretty small in retrospect to all the people that contribute to Youth Encounter, so thank you to all our sponsors and host families! God bless everyone who reads this, thanks for your on-line support. Bye!



Liam Conley

Date: 10/30/2003

Submitted by: Steven Kois

Journal Entry:

Say your name. What's between your eyes? What is in my wallet this year? If you followed these simple instructions, you just went through a self humbling process. "Steve... nose... nothing!?" Wait a second, Steve knows nothing?! That's an understatement.

Sometimes this is a key fact. From the time I was a baby to the last year of my college career, I have found this to be a phrase of comfort. When my host family asks me what I will do with the next year of my life... When my teammates ask me technical questions about our Ford van... Even when I wonder what heaven will be like, the answer is always



Steven Kois

the same. "STEVE NOSE NOTHING!" Regardless of how it's spelt, it always rings true. This answer doesn't work for everyone though. There once lived a man who knew everything. He was not a president or nuclear scientist. He was a homeless wanderer. Instead of telling people the equations to life's answers, this man would tell simple stories that a child could understand. He even knew His purpose on earth. To stand before the high priests and give them an answer.

"Are you then the Son of God?"

If He wanted to be spared, there was one easy answer. "Umm, I don't know." But this would never leave His mouth.

"You are right in saying I am."

And that was the bullet. That was the truth and nothing else would do. Christ chose not to save Himself, but us. He gave us the perfect lesson of speaking the truth when we have it, and letting God take care of our "I don't knows".

As always, I pray that the Lord blesses you with wisdom. I hope you realize the strength of the wisdom you have been given and freely share it with others. Be humble in life's confusion, but bold in God's truths.

In Christ,
Steve

Date: 11/1/2003

Submitted by: Caroline Evans

Journal Entry:

Hello, friends! Wow, did we ever have a grrreat day on Thursday. In the morning, we had a program at the Union Gospel Mission in downtown St. Paul. It was so awesome! The kids were all under four years old, and they were so cute. They all wanted to sit on our laps and play with us... <sigh> And I guess it's a naptime tradition for the teachers to go around to all the kids and rub their backs while they fall asleep, so all the kids really wanted us to do it. It was so precious to look around and see all of my teammates putting kids to bed and rubbing their backs until they fell asleep. Andy actually fell asleep on the floor next to one of the kids! After that experience, I think I would like to work at a place like that, maybe after this year.

After the mission, we got to hang out in St. Paul. We went to the History Museum. Sound boring??? Think again! It was really fun. After that, we walked through the gigantic cathedral, which was really cool. It was so nice to just hang out with the team and have fun. It's fun for us to work together, but when we get to relax together and enjoy life, I know I am so refreshed! I think it is so glorifying to God when a community of believers can simply enjoy life together.

Today is Sunday, and I would just like to give a shot out to my Dad. He is on his way from Washington State to Indiana, and he made a pit stop here in Andover, Minnesota to catch a Captive Free North Central performance. It is so fun to see him! Go, Dad! Represent.

Peace and love,
Caroline



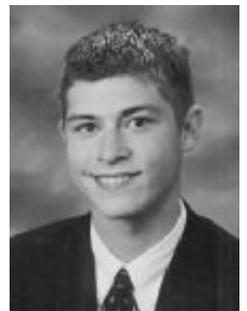
Caroline Evans

Date: 11/4/2003

Submitted by: Andy Sell

Journal Entry:

Sunday I was so tired. The past week was really hectic. The long drives and long nights really got to me. We just finished a program at Camp Wapogasset and we drove to Andover, MN just north of the cities. We finished setting up and we were just about ready to have dinner. I went to the van to get a few things and I ended up just sitting in the van for ten minutes not wanting to leave. Then I asked God for the strength to get through the night. I then dragged myself out of the van and slowly walked to the church. I didn't know it at the time but God answered that prayer. I did a sharing about my first car, and God gave me the strength to do the sharing, play the music, and above all he gave me the strength to be relational with the people at the church. I met a lot of very cool people who are just on fire for God, which was something I needed to see. It is always great to know that God



Andy Sell

will answer prayers. Can I get a AMEN to that my brothers and sisters!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

<><Andy

Date: 11/6/2003

Submitted by: Kristen Hunt

Journal Entry:

You'll never guess what happened last night. As we began to drive to our host home for the evening, we made an amazing discovery. Andy put the car into reverse, and all was silent. The night air was frozen and still, and so was the back up beeper. Um...not that we don't love that shrill, consistent sound; it was just very peaceful for just a few minutes, until it started working again.

In other news, in the program last night was a blast. I had a really great time, even though it wasn't much different than any other program we've done. One of the greatest parts was when Caroline started laughing during the partnership skit. During our interactive slide show, at the point when we're supposed to be looking as though we are having our photo taken with a partner, Caroline and Erin both began laughing. I couldn't help but laugh along, and the audience got a kick out of it, too. I only found out later that Erin had poked Caroline in the side and tickled her, and that was what started the whole thing. But at least that way people could see how amusing and exciting and fun it is to be a partner...

I've been reading a book by John Eldredge called Waking the Dead. I am borrowing it from Caroline. (Just another plus to add to team life is the resources we have at our hands through teammates.) A quote I keep coming back to is: "The glory of God is man fully alive" (Saint Irenaeus). Now there's something to chew on. Jesus came that we may have life to its fullest. It's so great to know that not only do we have heaven to look forward to, but God wants us to live full lives on earth as well... wahoo!!!

Lastly, perhaps some of you were confused by the signing of my last journal. "Banana Head?" you may have thought, "What is this Banana Head business?" Well, fear not, because I have answers. Sometimes in life, nicknames pop up, and this is mine. It all began at our first lock in during a game called Train Wreck. We were supposed to say something about ourselves if we ever found ourselves left in the middle of the circle without a chair. I said, "My name is Kristen, and my favorite way to eat bananas is mashed." Well, some people thought that was pretty gross...but you've got to at least try it before you make a judgment about it. Anyway, since I like bananas so much, Steve started calling me Banana Head, and there you have it. Now, for those of you who weren't wondering about Banana Head, or just didn't really care to find out what all of that meant, I apologize for this somewhat lengthy explanation.

Until next time,
Kristen "Banana Head" Hunt



Kristen Hunt

Date: 11/11/2003

Submitted by: Erin Miller

Journal Entry:

Only on North Central:

Only on North Central do you have the bliss of ...

Always having Ice Cold water- In fact, it is so cold you have to melt it to drink it!

Experiencing an invigorating face washing experience, - In fact, we even had to thaw our face wash first!

Seeing your contact solution crystallize!

Eating frozen Bananas like they were ice cream!

Having the ultimate refrigerator/freezer- The size of a 15 passenger van!

Having the realization that it is colder on the first of November in North Dakota than it normally gets in Indiana throughout the whole winter!



Erin Miller

Yes, that is right; all of these things are true! For the past week it has been extremely cold in our neck of the woods, and what an experience it has been! We have quickly learned to adapt our living styles and van to suit the oncoming winter! It is a scary thought that the first snow of the winter is here to stay until next spring!

Despite the cold, things have been good! Kristen is currently reading me a "bed time story" every night that we are hosted together. The book, Journey of Desire, is incredibly thought provoking and challenging. Some of the concepts presented in the book go against everything I have ever known, yet make so much sense and are so realistic to me! It is as if God is gently tapping me on the shoulder and pointing me in a direction completely opposite of the ideals and values I grew up with.

Normally, this would be a time where I would begin to deeply ponder everything I know and contemplate where the truth lies. But no, not this time. I am learning to let go of my need to always know everything instantly. I am trying to take more time learning about an issue before I come to a conclusion about it! I think this allows God more time to guide my thoughts- hopefully taking my humanly wisdom and making it into His wisdom!

These are my thoughts for the day. I hope and pray they find you well in your journey of life! God Bless! In Him, Erin

Date: 11/13/2003

Submitted by: Steven Kois

Journal Entry:

"Hey man, you sound just like John Denver!" Is that a compliment? Of course it is! I've heard some pretty crazy things since I've been on the road. When a sixty year old woman came up and told me I have a pretty voice like John Denver, I smiled and said, "Thank you so much. My father would be proud."

One time at a lock-in a group of girls kept following me around a gymnasium. They would whisper and smile and laugh with each other. When I finally asked them what the joke was, they surprised me. They were convinced I looked just like Harry Potter.

In Taylor's Falls a gentleman approached me at the sales table. He thanked our group for coming and complimented us on our musical talents. Then he said, "You know, you sound just like Toby Mack." I don't know what I was thinking, but I immediately thought he was referring to the country artist Toby Keith. "Wow... (gulp)... uh, thanks." It wasn't until later that my teammates told me Toby Mack is from DC Talk.

Some youth have approached me or told other members of my team that I resemble someone else. I imagine that it is a compliment and an ethnic mistake wrapped in one. "You look like Jesus." Correct me if I'm wrong, but Jesus was not an Iowan. He wasn't even an American. When I look in the mirror, all I see is messed up brown hair, brown eyes, and a tan-less complexion. Why does this picture hang in our church?

Christ is our brother. Brothers have a certain similarity to their father and mother. You know, our parents' good looks run in our genes. It's comforting to think of Jesus as one of my Kois brothers. With floppy brown hair, a big Czech nose, large feet and an appetite for Macaroni & Cheese with hot dogs.

God is beyond the subject of micro-evolution though. He created the sun that changed our skin tones. He is the artist that shaped our bodies. He colored our eyes and hair as He has seen fit. And to top it all off, when you are done going through the assembly line of your mother's womb, God says, "Perfect."

I pray that your actions help others to see Christ in you. Remember the way you act out Christ's love is far more important than sporting Christ's hairdo.

Your brother in Christ,
Steve Kois



Steven Kois

Date: 11/17/2003

Submitted by: Caroline Evans

Journal Entry:

Grrrrreetings, one and all! This is Caroline. Right now it is our day off. I am sitting at our lovely host home in Little Falls, Minnesota looking out the window at the Mississippi River. What a wonderful and relaxing place this is! Well, this weekend was probably not too relaxing, but I mean that in a wonderful and exciting way! We were "the band" for a big youth gathering at a resort thing in Brainerd, MN. There were about 800 kids there. Wowiee! It was SO MUCH FUN. They hired a way cool, professional sound dude, and we got to use his way cool, professional equipment, complete with ultra neat-o lighting. There was an awesome dance party at night, and I got to get some groove out of my system with the kids on the dance floor. I think our whole team would agree that playing for such a large number of people and worshipping with them in song in that kind of high-energy environment was much needed. It was fun to just let loose and dance around and act crazy on stage, and to just be ourselves. What a great time it was!

Sometimes it is hard for me to be at church where people don't seem too excited about the Good News of Jesus, or at least they do not express their excitement. I think I am an excited person in general, but especially when it comes to the Gospel, and when others don't join in my excitement, it can put a damper on things. But I am learning an important lesson! If I am focusing on Jesus instead of focusing on everyone else and their lack of enthusiasm, I can walk away having had an amazing, worshipful experience.

It is still hard for me sometimes, because I know that Jesus came to give us an abundant, exciting life. To be honest, I haven't seen many people rushing into many churches to become a part of this abundant life that they've heard about or seen in the lives of their Christian friends. Why? Because church is boring and we think that's how it's supposed to be. It's been turned into such a sacred, religious experience that all the vitality, all the life is lost. Isn't there something terribly wrong with that? I think so. I mean, if something is truly good (such as the "good news") won't people want it? I think the answer is yes. Do many people you know truly want what most of our churches are offering them? Probably not.

Well, it's laundry time. I hope that everyone who reads this will start on a quest for the abundant life that Jesus came to give us!!! Best wishes for your journey!

Peace and love,
Caroline



Caroline Evans

Date: 11/20/2003

Submitted by: Kristen Hunt

Journal Entry:

I wish I could start every morning like yesterday morning. Caroline and I woke up early to a hot cup of chai, which we enjoyed in the company of three wonderful girls – Lindie, Stephanie, and Christina – and their mom Veronica, who is an excellent cook. While we were waiting for breakfast to cook (yummy homemade blueberry muffins), the girls, Caroline, and I went for a hike on the trail behind their house. We bundled up to face the brisk morning and headed out. We dodged branches and jumped over logs. What a lovely adventure it was. Christina, who is only four, needed some extra help, especially in the giant pile of leaves that came up to our knees. Knee level on us is about waist level for her. After we made it through the leaves she said, "I'm never going through the giant pile of leaves again."

The last couple of days have included a lot of nature walking, I suppose. This afternoon, Caroline and I enjoyed a one on one walk in the woods at the camp where we were staying. We strayed from the path to find a body of water which Caroline knew had to be around somewhere. (You can't go too far from water in Minnesota – the land of a million thousand billion lakes, remember? They're everywhere, and they're all gorgeous.) Sure enough, looking over a steep hill, we found our body of water – not a lake, but a small creek. We stayed there to admire God's work, and even had the added bonus of seeing a bald eagle fly through the trees.

We discussed God's beauty and how it is a legitimate desire in our hearts to want to feel beautiful. God's work is good, and his glory is reflected in his creation, especially in the creation that was made to reflect his image – us! How nice it is to remember that our beauty is not determined by society's definition, but that we are made lovely by bearing God's image and reflecting his glory as we open our hearts to let him work in us.



Kristen Hunt

Date: 11/22/2003

Submitted by: Liam Conley

Journal Entry:

Very few things compare to the joyous experience of a quake and/or congress that Youth Encounter hosts. With the help of some teammates I have compiled a list of things that may compare to this fun:

1. Playing in the "ballroom" at McDonalds and finding a chicken nugget at the bottom.
2. Standing behind Phil Collins in the Cub Foods express lane.
3. Waking up to your teammates breaking a piñata over your bed and having a waterfall of candy stream over you.
4. Riding the small electronic horse outside of Chucky Cheese.
5. Playing with the Bon Jovi band for a day.
6. Finding one of those really, really cute little puppy dog calendars at the discount store
7. Seeing yourself on the Jumbo-tron at the big game.

So this weekend we had our first youth quake, and wow was it amazing!!! It is so cool to see hundreds of youth worshipping the Lord so freely, it's truly a God glorifying experience. Our first night, (Friday) was definitely a special. Some very special people showed up to watch. The president of youth encounter was there which was quite honoring, also a good portion of the YE office showed up and a lot of the music staff from training was there as well. It was so cool to see the people who trained us, out watching us this weekend.

We did so much fun stuff though. We had bible study treks, music treks, amazing campfire worship with the Rachel Kurtz band, an awesome dance that was off-the-wall-crazy! I would totally recommend an event to anyone who likes to have fun....and if you don't want to have fun with awesome music and people, you can move out Montana and become a cowboy or something. So, if you enjoy cute puppy dogs or Bon Jovi , check out an event on our Website, God Bless and have fun!

Serving Him,
Liam



Liam Conley

Date: 11/25/2003

Submitted by: Erin Miller

Journal Entry:

Days off are a beautiful thing! Actually, they are a lifesaver when you are on the road, working everyday for a year! Although my journal day is for Tuesday, I want to write about Monday, our day off!

It started like any other day- sleeping in- oh wait, I can't sleep in anymore, I am just programmed to wake up no later than 8:30! So, I rolled out of bed at 8:30 and got ready for the day! After breakfast I was officially named Liam's Super fan for watching him play a snowboarding video game for 3 hours! Now, I realize that this is not really the best use of my day off and truly there is nothing mentally stimulating about video games, so one might be wondering why I willingly subjected myself to it. Well, to be honest, I am not really sure! So after the video game extravaganza Kristen, Caroline, and I decided to color! One of our favorite pastimes! Did you know that coloring pictures can be very therapeutic? It seems to sooth the soul and relaxes your mind! Not to mention is super fun!

Awhile later the three girls decided to head into Taylors Falls to a little place called Coffee Talk. It is this cute little coffee shop that has an upstairs sitting area where you can play games, read a book, or waste away the day however you please! The three of us decided to just relax and talk over a hot cup of brew. For three hours we pondered the meaning of life, how the kingdom of God should ideally work, the roles of men and women in relationships and society, and whatever else randomly came up!

Although I will not divulge the details of the conversation, I will say that it was one of the best three hour conversations that I had ever had. It was a great time for laughter and fellowship with my two



Erin Miller

companions. God has truly blessed be with some amazing teammates! Till next time! In Him, Erin Miller

Date: 11/27/2003

Submitted by: Steven Kois

Journal Entry:

In hotels across America, if you want to be up at a specific time, you can call down to the front desk and request a wake-up call. Sometimes there are people that cannot wake up without one. I pride myself on waking up to my watch alarm and taking the responsibility of being ready and showered on time. And the funny thing is, I never remember asking for so many wake-up calls...

"STEVE, its time to wake up! Rise and shine. Breakfast is in forty minutes."

Okay, I came up with some conclusions about my host families. First of all, they must set their clocks to the Eastern Time zone. It always seems that when I tell them I will be up at seven, I get a wake-up call at six.

I know that parents miss their children after they've left home. When I tell them that I will wake myself up in the morning and get an "okay" from them, I sleep soundly. Then, because they miss waking up their children, they sneak down and say, "WAKE UP, you're going to be late!"

"What? Mom, is it a school day? Wait a second, I'm a college grad. Man, my alarm is set to go off in two minutes."

It used to bother me that my host parents would wake me up at seven-forty when I told them I had an alarm that would wake me at eight O'clock. I thought, they must not trust me. They probably think I am the type that sleeps in. But I have found that wake-up calls mean so much more...

I am treated like a son. These parents are caring for me like a child. I know that if my watch alarm ever fails me, I will be okay because these parents are looking out for me. I hope when you read this, you will remember how blessed you are to be given security and care from parents or friends. Most of all, remember the love that God shares with you through these people.

Loving you in Christ,
Steve Kois



Steven Kois

Date: 12/6/2003

Submitted by: Liam Conley

Journal Entry:

Dec 6th
(Steve's birthday)

Hey all! So today is Steve's 24th birthday, and we are spending it in the town of Toronto, SD. We had originally planned to bring in a KISS tribute band, but funds were cut short due to our last postage run (we sent a rather large package to Michael Bolton for HIS birthday).

Anyways, I wanted to do something special for Steve's birthday so here it goes...

THE TOP 10 REASONS I AM GLAD THAT STEVE WAS BORN

10. He does an excellent 'Kermit the frog' impression.
9. He is an awesome guitar player
8. People often times have compared his voice to John Denver and Toby Mac.
7. He had a beard like me!
6. If we have to stay together and have only 1 bed available, he's always glad to share.
5. He tells good jokes.
4. If the funny said jokes aren't actually funny, they're usually so bad that they're funny.
3. He writes beautiful music.



Liam Conley

2. He gives good hugs.

1. He always lets me use his beard trimmer, and doesn't make me clean it out when I leave my red wiskers in it.

As you've seen, Steve is a great guy and I am so glad he was born and is here on team with me. Thanks for everything Steve-O, I hope you like this present!

Keep it real y'all!
With much Love,
Liam

Date: 1/1/2004

Submitted by: Kristen Hunt

Journal Entry:

It's a new month, a new year. But our week back has been surprisingly slow compared to what our schedule has been in the past. We did have an event beginning our first day after Christmas break, but the rest of the week we basically have off as far as programming is concerned.

To be honest, I wasn't looking forward to our Congress, but God blessed me so much during that "weekend." (I use quotations with the word "weekend" because it was really a Sunday through Tuesday rather than Friday through Sunday, as would normally be the case for an event. It was a point of slight confusion during the event.) The last event we had, I had been a little stressed, since it was our first one, and it probably didn't help that I got sick in the middle of the day on Saturday. Perhaps those things contributed to my apprehension about another chaotic weekend. To my surprise, I was really able to enter into a time of worship while at the Congress. Daniel's Window and Jonathan Rundman were there. With all the musicians, it was a little less time that we had to fill, and a little more time that we got to take a step back and worship. Daniel's Window did an especially excellent job leading everyone into a time of worship our first night of campfire.

I also had one of the best family times ever! I met with a group of four or five girls and their adult leader. It was really refreshing to be able to listen to what is really going on in there lives as high school students. They were so open, and talked about issues that were truly relevant to them.

I was so encouraged by the attitude of all the kids there that I am now very much looking forward to our next event as a time to meet with God...Only a month and a half until our next quake. I hope to see some who are reading this journal entry in Sioux Falls in mid-February!

Until next time,
Kristen Hunt



Kristen Hunt

Date: 1/6/2004

Submitted by: Erin Miller

Journal Entry:

Oh, how God knows exactly what we need and when we need it! Ever since we have been back, after an all too short Christmas break, I must admit I have not been as enthusiastic about team life as I should be. I was especially un-excited about our upcoming tour into the Dakotas! Little did I know God was going to challenge me once again in a way in which I never would have guessed.

While in Moorhead, I was so blessed to stay with an incredible family, which had four young boys, ranging in age from kindergarten to sixth grade! Now, to a girl who grew up with one older sister and had spent the past two years as the only child in her house, the thought of hanging out with four boys was very intimidating! Actually, it was down right frightening! But once I met



Erin Miller

them, it all changed!

Davis, Crosby, Connor and Seamus (it is Irish for James) were all so excited to be hosting me- even though I was a girl! They all wanted my full attention and boy was it overwhelming- at first. With their excitement and enthusiasm, those four boys filled my heart with so much joy and energy. Instead of wanting to run and hide in my room, I spent the whole night playing finger air hockey, listening as one played the piano, attempting to play video games, and watching another do magic tricks! We also enjoyed family snack time, which was quite an adventure, and then the boys got ready for bed.

By the end of the night I was feeling very tired, but I felt like I hadn't gotten to know the parents very much. Yes, I got to observe how they interacted with their children and had briefly heard what each one did, but I didn't really get to connect with them. Luckily, my host mom and I were able to have a very deep and interesting conversation for about twenty minutes before my body demanded for sleep!

God took my selfish and negative outlook and turned it completely upside down! He showed me his love in the most simple and pure way, a child! Actually, four of them! So many times we overlook God's amazing gift of love when it is what we search for and desire the most. If you are struggling with feeling God's love, I would recommend the therapy of children! Truly they are such an example of selfless love!

In Him, Erin Miller

Date: 1/10/2004

Submitted by: Caroline Evans

Journal Entry:

Wow, it has sure been awhile! How is everyone? I can't hear you! I said how IS everyone?!?! That's more like it. I'm doing well, too. Everyone here on the North Central team is anxious to get back on the road today. We've had a post-holidays dry spell in our region. It was nice and relaxing, but I think we're all excited to get back into the swing of things with programs every day. Places to go, people to meet... Ah. It's what we love!



Caroline Evans

But our region is not the only thing that's been having a dry spell. My heart has been going through a spiritual drought recently. How frustrating these times can be! These times in my life are characterized by opening the Bible only to feel overwhelmed and lost, not knowing what I should be reading and not really "getting anything out of it". During a dry spell of the heart I also start to feel apathetic. Things that would normally inspire me to the point of shouting or laughing or sharing my excitement with whoever will listen just leave me feeling... blah. I start to feel selfish and like I have nothing to offer to the group.

But I've found the answer to these seasons. The only remedy is... are you ready for this? Pray. It's as simple as that. I just have to get on my knees and ask God for help. I must give up all of my own efforts to make things better, as they have proven to be futile, and cry out to God to bring revival to my heart. And why would He refuse? That's right, he wouldn't. And he didn't! Thanks God. You ARE faithful!

So anyone going through a dry season of the heart, fear not! Before he left earth, Jesus told us not to worry that he would be gone, but to ask his father for the things we need. So if you need revival to come to your heart, ask God for it! Just tell him Jesus (and Caroline) sent you. He will not turn you away.

Peace and love,
Caroline

Date: 1/15/2004

Submitted by: Kristen Hunt
Journal Entry:

Who puts a time zone change in the middle of a state? Well, I will tell you one of the possible answers for this question: North Dakota. Strange as it may seem, we actually left yesterday at four o'clock to arrive at our destination at...four o'clock the same day. That was nice. But we knew it would have to catch up to us, and today we find ourselves facing the time change once again...except this time we'll be leaving an hour early.

This morning I got up early to enjoy some quality quiet time with God. I asked Him some questions that I've been wanting some answers to: questions about myself. Funny, you'd think I'd be able to answer questions about myself pretty well, but I really couldn't. I figured when I didn't know the answers, there was only one Person to ask...the only one who knows me better than me: my all-knowing God. (As I write this, I am becoming aware of all the strange punctuation marks I am using whether they fit or not. Lots of "..." and ":" It looks very much like my own journal.) I asked God what lies I had believed about my heart and about myself. If I could identify the lies, then I could let God minister to me with His truth. So it went something like this: "God, what lies have I believed about my heart?" "That it is shameful and should be hidden." "God, what is the truth about my heart?" "That it is beautiful, and you are beautiful. You have wonderful things to contribute to the world that will bring glory to me. Do not hide your heart because that is where I dwell."

Well, let me just say that the truth is way better than the lie. God wants to set all the captives free...and the Truth is always better than a lie.



Kristen Hunt

Date: 1/26/2004
Submitted by: Kristen Hunt
Journal Entry:

Monday night was February team outing night and we went to go see a very talented worship leader: David Crowder. It was my third time seeing "The Crowder," as we have come to call him, but the rest of the team's first time seeing him in action. It was great to be able to worship together without leading, and to remember how important our own ministry is. Music truly reaches people in a way that few things can.

It is interesting to think about how different team life would be if we were a group of people who knew each other beforehand and shared the same theological ideas and similar backgrounds. (This is how I imagine band life to be.) Much might be gained: great things can be accomplished through a group who shares the same vision. Yet much would be lost. For me, growth has come through encountering and experiencing the differences of each member of our team. And glory to God for the work that He accomplishes in us through our differences and the work that He accomplishes through us in our ministry to others despite our differences and our occasional lack of cohesion. Team life and Christian band life share this in common: it seems an exceptionally unique way to live: a group of people, whose goal is ultimately, despite their backgrounds, sharing the love of God and the message of Jesus with those they encounter. Everything after that is just fluff.

It is good for me to remember what is important and what is fluff.

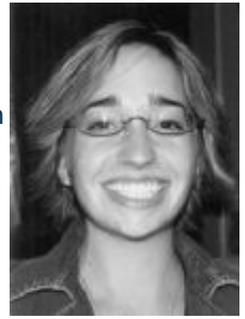
God's blessings,
Kristen
P.S. I like the word "fluff."



Kristen Hunt

Date: 1/29/2004
Submitted by: Kristen Hunt
Journal Entry:

Erin and I had the wonderful opportunity to name day-old lambs at our host home on a farm in North Dakota this week. There were four of them, and you should have seen the way they stuck out their tongues when they said, "baa." I bet you are wondering what clever names we came up with. Well, wait no longer because here they come: Erin named the twins Ezra and Deborah, and I named one Owen. The last one, Crinkles, we named together. He was the wrinkliest lamb I have ever seen (and I have only maybe seen about six or seven).



Kristen Hunt

Our host brother Kevin made a comment about how sheep are not the brightest animals in the world. It made me think about how funny and fitting it is that Jesus refers to his people as his sheep. Just like those little lambs, we can't do anything without our Shepherd. I bet people who hang out with sheep a lot understand that better than I do...which makes me wonder how the people of Jesus' day felt when he said he was the Good Shepherd. Were they terribly offended saying something like "Hey, we're not that dumb"? Or were they glad to have someone who would finally tell them what's up? "Yeah, we are in desperate need of some direction and some serious help."

Until next time, remember that we're sheep. Don't be afraid to let the Shepherd help you out...all the time.

Kristen

"I just want to be a sheep baa, baa, baa, baa!"

Date: 3/9/2004

Submitted by: Caroline Evans

Journal Entry:

Greetings, friends! Well, I'm sure many of you have seen Mel Gibson's movie by now. Our team went to see it on our day off in Bismarck, North Dakota. It was a very intense film, as I'm sure most viewers would agree. It affected me in many ways, to be sure, but there were a few things that stuck with me above the others. First of all, the thing that went through my head the most during the film was, "Stop it! Stop hitting him! Would you just stop it already?" And when Jesus finally died on the cross, it was certainly a very sad and serious thing. However, I was so excited during that part, because I knew the significance of that moment in history. It means that Satan has been defeated, and that what he meant for evil, my God used for the salvation of humankind. I almost felt out of line for feeling such a deep joy, which was interesting.



Caroline Evans

The biggest impact the film had on me really hit me when we stepped out of the theatre. I looked around at the other ads for new films that are coming out soon such as "Hellboy" and some Garfield movie, and at that moment I realized how utterly ridiculous almost everything seems in comparison to the cross. I thought about how so many people live their lives as though what I had just seen depicted on film had never really happened at all. I thought about how I don't live my life every day in this reality, either.

There is one more major thing that the film brought to my mind. Since it focused on the torture of Jesus, I got a very small taste of what he went through for us. I came to the conclusion that Jesus did not suffer such a death only for us to have regular, mundane lives. It just doesn't make sense that followers of Jesus should be merely "surviving". But our Savior lived and died that disgusting death so that we would have LIFE. "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10b)

Friends, I will leave you with this question: If you are being completely honest, do you feel like you have this abundant life that Jesus speaks of? If the answer is no, I encourage you to press on to know and follow Jesus and to become the person He intended you to be, with the full life he intended you to have.

Date: 4/27/2004
Submitted by: Liam Conley
Journal Entry:

Well, It has indeed been a while since I have done a journal entry. I think perhaps about 5 months. So I would like to share my favorite story, which dates back to early February. We were doing a program in a suburb north of the Twin Cities, playing music before a speaker did his thing. It was a great program with a few hundred kids that were great. Well, afterwards a young man whom I met earlier came up to the sales table and said, "Hey! You're that kid.....! Wanna see something cool!?" So I responded, "Sure!" But what came next was something that would change my life forever. He opened up his jacket pocket and pulled out.....A HAMPSTER!!! A hamper!? We definitely meet some very interesting people on the road, and this was a story about my favorite so far this year. Thanks for your time and maybe I'll get around to submitting some more of these soon. Thanks for your patience and your prayers as well. See you all soon!

Serving Him for life,
Liam



Liam Conley

Date: 5/7/2004
Submitted by: Erin Miller
Journal Entry:

Well, hello to all who might venture to read this journal! First off, I want to say that I am excited to get back into journal writing mode, as I haven't wrote one since January! Secondly, I want to preface the rest of my journal by letting you all know that my mind is running a complete blank right now...so I have no clue as to what I am actually going to write.

To say the least, something has been bothering me lately. You see, Again I feel that I am in a position where I am not being completely honest with myself or with my teammates. As the year is quickly winding down I find myself feeling as if I do not know my teammates as well as I should, and wonder if they are in the same position concerning myself? Yes, after spending the past eight months together they know my basic story and I could tell anyone we meet about my teammates, but how well do I know them.

Now, anyone reading this might think to themselves, "Oh, it is not that hard, just open up." But it really is harder than that. I like being open and honest with people, and I love meeting new people, but there is a desire within my heart to keep some things private, which, to say the least, has been more difficult this year than ever before. I think before team, I was accustomed to keeping most of my thoughts, opinions and desires to myself. On team, not only is it impossible to keep those things from your teammates, but we are also coming into contact with host homes, youth and others who want to know all those things in more about us! So, I guess what I am getting at is that I am having a harder time of switching from one end of the spectrum to another.....but that is what we are called to do.

Lord, may you help me to let go of all that I am holding within. May you grant me the ability and willingness to share with others the way you have called me to do this year. And may I always be guided by Your love and grace as I share the Good News with those I meet anew each day, and my teammates whom I have lived with for eight months. Amen
In His Love, Erin Miller



Erin Miller

Date: 5/8/2004
Submitted by: Liam Conley
Journal Entry:

Hello all! I would like to share another story from the road; this one is most definitely

the most hilarious of them all. Taken from the archives of March, 2004.

I was out to dinner with a pastor, his wife and their children. We were at a place called The Pizza Ranch which is a chain of restaurants in the mid-west. Midway through the meal we noticed their 4 year old son gawking and smiling a young toddler across the room. Most adults would laugh a bit at this and continue on their meal. But my, Pastor Phillip is no ordinary man. He knows that men are hunters and heroes, and long to rescue a woman from despair. So he took his sons chair, pushed it over next to the girls and left him there. I think the parents were definitely surprised and didn't know how to respond, but we just let the boy do his thing.

I think the most interesting part was just that it was a pastor doing this, but at the time it was the funniest thing I have ever seen. Just imagine it. But most of all, I think it challenges all of us to not hold back. Life is so short that we need to take advantage of situations that arise. We must let our hearts run wild and stop fencing ourselves in. Be that guy, go talk to that girl, and if you have trouble walking, have your dad push your chair over to that girl. Be that guy!

As for me, I'm gonna keep on rockin' the Dakotas, hardcore.

Pursuing Him for life,
Liam



Liam Conley

Date: 5/10/2004

Submitted by: Steven Kois

Journal Entry:

I still can't believe my host family gave me \$400 to buy a guitar and amp! Hold on, before any Youth Encounter staff reads this and freaks out, allow me tell you the whole story...

As many of you know, Mondays are our day off. Our team was relaxing in Taylor's Falls, Minnesota. This particular family is our host home for the year. We've stayed at their house at least fifteen times. Needless to say, this family is very tight with our team.

Well, their youngest son Blake was having his golden Birthday the day after our day off. You'll never guess who they entrusted gift shopping to...

It was Monday, our team's Sabbath. I woke up at ten and went upstairs for a shower. Then I heard Blake's voice. "Steve, are you ready to go?" Alright, if you haven't guessed it, Blake was putting off a day of school to go guitar shopping with me. We planned on going to Guitar Center and Music Go Round. We left the house at noon...

We stopped in at Woodbury's Music Go Round at about 1 PM. They have nice employees, but a pretty small guitar section. We went out to eat at Burger King for awhile. Note to the reader, their chili is not that great...

Next we went out looking for Guitar Center. I'd been there with the team a few times before. The strangest thing happened though, I just couldn't find it. We drove for a long time before I said, "Let's try the other Music Go Round on Lexington..."

Now this store was fairly large, and within our budget. Blake immediately set his eyes on a brand new candy red electric Washburn. It has dual hum buckers and was priced well for its line. Next we found a Peavey Studio Chorus 210 for \$170. It sounds great and has many built in effects. After we grabbed a stand, case, cable, tuner, and tuning tool, our bill came up to \$400. Wow, what a setup... Well, you can try to guess what his first words were when we left the store. Was it:

- A. "WOW! Wowie, wow, wow!"
- B. "Wait until my friends see me now!"
- C. "Let's sell this stuff on Ebay!"
- D. "Man, God sure did bless us today."

The correct answer is D. This young boy immediately gave thanks for the deals that we got. I know that my answer would have been closer to A or B. So my question is, why don't we spend more time thanking God for the gifts we receive? It is so easy to go through life saying, "Wowie, wow, wow, look at me!" But the greater joy comes from thanking God and using your gifts wisely. As always, I wish you God's wisdom and blessings in your life. Just remember to give thanks for the blessings you will receive.



Steven Kois

Date: 5/13/2004

Submitted by: Erin Miller

Journal Entry:

So, considering that I back owe about four months of journals, I have decided to start writing them at random, spare moments. Today I am going to share with you a story of something that happened in March- correct, two months ago. Now, before I tell you what happened, I need to approach this with caution. You see, this is totally a God incident, and I don't want it to be misconstrued as something that I did. I feel I was merely a pawn in what God was trying to accomplish that day.....



Erin Miller

Growing up, one thing I was not heavily exposed to was the homeless culture. Sure I saw a few here and there when I was in the "Big Cities" like Chicago and Indianapolis, but I never really knew of anyone who was homeless, and I definitely didn't get a chance to hang out with anyone who was homeless. So, while we were driving around downtown Minneapolis before one of our Congresses, it came as quite a shock to me to see a fairly large population of homeless people in the area. For some reason I guess it never occurred to me that they would want to hang out in the "down town" district! Although I was caught off guard, I quickly brushed it off and went along my merry way preparing for the event.

Due to the beautiful location of the hotel that our event was at, I was able to walk a short two blocks both mornings and enjoy a cup of my favorite beverage- Caribou Coffee! That is right, both mornings of the event I would get up and make the short little trip to Caribou and enjoy some personal devotion time and a cup of Joe! So, on Sunday morning, I started out from the hotel just as I had the morning before, and ventured the two blocks! When I got to Caribou, I started to order my usual, and for some strange reason, I did something I never do....I looked in the pastry case! Now, some of you might be thinking, "Big deal," but for me, it was! First off, I already had a banana in my hotel room, before I left, and secondly, I have a theory that the muffins at coffee shops tend to be dry and over-priced. Then, for some reason, I said to the employee, "I'll have one of those," pointing to the large blueberry muffin in the glass case. Not only was this out of character, but I was not even hungry, so although it seemed normal to any observer, I knew something was different!

At the time not really thinking much of it, I just found a table and sat down to enjoy my coffee and read for awhile. All too quickly I noticed it was time to get back and start setting up for the morning's celebration. On my way back I was approached by a homeless gentleman asking for money. Now, I honestly had spent my last nickel on my coffee and muffin- and I felt horrible! I mean, I had just enjoyed a luxury, while this man was trying to find enough money to meet a basic need- eating! I apologized profusely to him that I had nothing left to give him, but then I remembered somethingI still had the muffin! I pulled it out of my book bag and handed it to him, "It is all I have, but you can have it." He kindly replied, "If that is all you have, then thank you so much!"

As I walked away from him I wanted to do nothing more than to cryI don't know that man's name, I don't know his situation, and I will probably never see him again, but because of God's great goodness, I was able to share with him not only a muffin, but a bit of God's Love. I don't know what would have happened if I wouldn't have bought that muffin, or if I would have even met that man on the street, and I am not even sure if I now know what God wanted me to learn from this experience; but I am thankful that I was given a chance to be used by God to help another.

I feel a lot of times we try to go out of our way to help others, but I am so thankful that I am truly not capable of helping others without God helping me. My actions are worthless if they are not fueled by God! May God use you this week.... Erin

Date: 6/12/2004

Submitted by: Kristen Hunt
Journal Entry:

Vacation Bible School in Lemmon, South Dakota...could life get any better? A week ago, I didn't feel ready to leave Lee Valley Ranch, the site of our VBS training: it was so nice to be around the other teams again and to share our stories and encouragement. But I have been struck by the warmth of the people here in Lemmon, and such wonderful people make the transition easier. My host family was a pleasure to stay with for an entire week...I really felt at home with them.

It was our first VBS, and we were still figuring out how exactly to work everything out, but everything seemed to fall into place. When things didn't work out exactly as planned, our new friends were gracious and quick to offer assistance. And more than once we were treated to some tasty ice cream treats at the local Sugar Shack...(if you are ever planning on visiting Lemmon, South Dakota, I highly recommend that you take the time to visit the Sugar Shack).

Tumbleweeds seem fairly commonplace in Lemmon – at least, more common than anywhere else we've been this year. I saw three and a half (one too small and too young to tumble) while we were there.

Not only did we have a wonderful time in Lemmon, but our friends from the North West team came to visit us all the way from Baker, Montana, and then we drove out to see them the next day – another round of encouragement from team to team. We had an opportunity to worship together, not feeling like we had to be performing, as we often do when we play music.

To top off the week, the new pastor in town – Pastor Ken – is a wonderfully fun and funny man and a servant in so many ways. Before he came into town midweek, a few of the girls in town (who will remain nameless in case Pastor Ken should read this journal entry) took us to the parsonage to arrange a few things in his home – to make him feel welcome, if you will. A giant drawing of a football player named Biff hanging in his bathroom, a blow-up clown, and some glow-in-the-dark bugs adorned the house to make for an exciting arrival. After Pastor Ken arrived, it wasn't long before we saw Biff proudly displayed in the doorway. Soon after, he told Caroline that he was going to get us back...someone had informed him that we had been in on the pranks. (It was Caroline's artistic ability that had produced Biff.) Well, the next day in the van we found two, horribly ugly – but in the way that makes you say, "These are so ugly, they're almost really cool" – pillows, one pink, one mustard yellow. These pillows would have gone perfectly in a home with gold shag carpeting. Anyway, all that to say, I had a wonderful time in Lemmon, South Dakota. It was a fantastic way to begin our VBS season. Our inclusion in the practical joking made me feel like part of this small community.

And I wonder...was Jesus the type to play harmless practical jokes on his disciples? I am inclined to think that he was. Although his words were deep, his love was deeper. And what kind of friend wouldn't want to have a good laugh with his buddies? He was able to tell his friends to "lighten up" when they needed to for he said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10) A life without joy, without love is not full at all.



Kristen Hunt

Date: 6/16/2004
Submitted by: Erin Miller
Journal Entry:

Well, I went rock climbing for the first time in my life! Yepp, and I didn't Die! It was quite the rush! Ok, so rewind.....On a day off about a month ago, three of my teammates and I decided to go hiking at a state park that was nearby. It was quite an innocent thing to do, you know...take a walk, but before I knew it, I was being led deeper into the forest and higher up the rocks by my more adventurous teammates!

Now, to be honest, I was a tad hesitant to actually go any farther – one thing you should know is that I am afraid of heights, along with the fact that I had never dreamed of climbing rocks. But, when all your friends are leaving you to climb upward, you don't have many options! So, I embraced a willing spirit and trudged on. It was good for awhile, in fact, I actually enjoyed it! It was an adventure! But then we came to a point. And at this point, well, it got extremely steep and more "exciting" as some would say!



Erin Miller

Now, at this point, there was no going back, so, that left forward! Sounds easy, right? Well, it wasn't as easy as it should have been! See, my legs would not stretch to the extreme length as that of my teammates; henceforth, I had to find an alternative route. Moving on, I was able to venture my way around and up, until I reached this particular ledge. I was stuck- I couldn't go up, go over, or go down. In a panicked state, I called out for my teammate to faithfully come and rescue me! And she did. Eventually, I did make it up the side of the rock, and I felt a sense of accomplishment and achievement!

As funny of a story this might be, it made me think of a point to share with you—Come on, you knew it was coming! Sometimes in life we will each encounter our mountains! At those mountains in life, we have two options- face them and overcome, or avoid them by going around. I am sure that there are times when we feel that it would be much better to avoid the situation and go around the mountain; however, we cannot avoid all of life's mountains, or we will never reach our goal that God has designed for us. If we try to avoid the challenges set before us to strengthen us, we will quickly veer off the path that God has set for us. And what will that accomplish?

So, I now leave you with this final thought: whatever your mountain in your life right now is- go climb it! Ask God to help you, and he will give you the strength, patience and perseverance you need to reach the top!

In his Grace, Erin Miller

Date: 6/17/2004

Submitted by: Caroline Evans

Journal Entry:

"Suck the marrow out of life." The first time I read those words of Thoreau, I fell in love with them. That is absolutely what my heart wants to do. And I am so refreshed and inspired when I see that idea manifesting itself in the lives of others.

There are obviously countless ways to "suck the marrow out of life", and it will look very different from person to person. But here is a collection of some marrow-sucking kinds of people I have observed that I think are so amazingly beautiful:

1. Older women who wear way too much perfume and/or lipstick
2. People who stay up ridiculously late fairly consistently just to spend time with people
3. Smart people who make mediocre grades at school because they spend their studying time doing things they are really passionate about, such as experiencing nature
4. People who eat really spicy food
5. People who start food fights and never really care about getting their clothes dirty
6. People who like to play outside even if it is really hot, really cold, or really rainy
7. People who would rather play a game than watch TV
8. People who laugh and talk more loudly in public places than is socially acceptable
9. The people who were in charge of writing "Imaginary friends stay free" on the sign in front of the Days Inn in Pierre, South Dakota

I wonder if this sounds like a bad graduation speech... Well nonetheless, these are the people who, in my opinion, understand life. If you fall into any of these categories, please feel free to contact me. I want to be friends with you!

Peace and Love,
Caroline



Caroline Evans

Date: 6/21/2004

Submitted by: Erin Miller

Journal Entry:

Cows, cows, sheep, cows, buffalo, cows, goats, cows, llamas, cows, antelope, cows, deer, cows, horses, cows and even more cows! Yes, that is what I see as I look out of the van window on our drives! You are correct if you guessed we are in South Dakota! This week, we are in Buffalo SD.

Now, don't let my first paragraph confuse you.... I do like animals, but to be honest, I have had my fill of seeing cows! They are everywhere out here! It is almost as if they are taking over the state, with the exception of the fact that they are virtually powerless animals! In all seriousness though, we are in the heart of Ranching country! What I would call "farms" I have quickly been informed are "ranches". It is quite a different concept for me, but hey, I am just a small town girl from Indiana!

Which brings me to another conclusion- I truly had no concept of what life in a "small town" is like. Growing up I always considered my town to be a small town. And, compared to bigger cities and metropolises, it was! But now, after being in a town with a population of about 350, I feel as if my hometown is much larger than I wanted to believe! Small towns are nice; everyone knows everyone, you can walk anywhere in town and there is definitely no overpopulating! It is a breath of fresh air!

I wish I had something profound to share with you today, but I am struggling to find something for my own mind to chew on. One thing that has been running through my head lately is this: Am I experiencing all that God wants me to experience this year? Yes, I have definitely been thrown into situations that I would never have dreamed I would be in, I have met some of the coolest people and I have had some of the best "God experiences" of my life, but am I getting all of it, or letting some slip by? I guess I will never truly know the answer to that question, but I have realized that I need to slow down and refocus on some of the very things I always thought of as coincidences. This year is almost over for us, as a team, and after that life will continue- I may never again have some of the opportunities that have been presented to me this year. Therefore, I am going to stop writing and go relish on some of the things that happened to day. You should too! In His Grace, Erin



Erin Miller

Date: 7/29/2004

Submitted by: Erin Miller

Journal Entry:

7/29/04

Only a short year ago I stood in this very spot and gazed innocently at the image in the mirror. This week we have been at Christ the King in New Brighton MN, where almost a year ago we started this amazing journey known as team! I once again find myself standing at the sink in the women's restroom looking up at the girl in the mirror, and from all outward appearances, the only differences are a small stud in my nose and some red streaks in my hair. But looking back over the last year makes me realize that the changes that occurred are more so in me than on the outside.

The last year has been filled with some of the most intense times of my life! But it has also been a year filled with laughter, love, practical experience, amazing people and lasagna! I have been blessed with some of the highest mountaintop experiences and some of the lowest valley experiences! I have endured the North/South Dakota January. I have grown in my ability to trust others. I have seen God's precise provision for my every need. I have experienced a new side of God's Amazing Grace through Himself and others. And, I have come to a realization of who I am and what I believe. This year has easily been the most valuable of my life. God certainly is Good!

May you experience His Grace and goodness this day! In His Grace,



Erin Miller

Erin Miller
