

# Captive Free South East 2003-04 Journal

**Date:** 9/18/2003

**Submitted by:** Bethany Dourson

**Journal Entry:**

Today, we went to a church in Shannon, IL. There we got to meet Nicole, an alumna of Captive Free SE, who was my age and now the youth director at the church. We talked for a while about Captive Free and I told her that before Youth Encounter, I had considered becoming a youth director just like her, so it was really neat to meet her. Our host home family was also very nice and provided for all of our needs. The next day, in church, we performed in two church services. It was so much fun! During the second church service, we taught a couple of sing-a-longs with motions. There were two little girls in the front row that were doing the motions with energy. One of them was doing the motions from the first sing-a-long rather than the motions that we were doing. I don't know why, but I also did the wrong motions, which made her laugh. After the service I talked with her for a while, and found out that she was 10 years old. There were a lot of similarities between the both of us. She was really involved with sports and choir, and at one point I was also very involved in sports, and I love singing. She also said that she didn't have many friends, and I felt glad for the chance to be her friend, if even only for a brief time. I felt like we had connected, and I was glad that God had given me an opportunity to reach this girl. I look forward to seeing her again when we return to her church later on in the year.



**Bethany Dourson**

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**Date:** 9/20/2003

**Submitted by:** Lisa Warner

**Journal Entry:**

9/20/03

A purposeful reminder...

During one of our first Sunday programs God reminded me why I am here. It seems so long ago when I look back at when I filled out the application and thought long and hard about why and if I wanted to join a year long commitment on the road. I remember looking back at my childhood and how Captive Free influenced me at a very young age. I remember dreaming of one day being a Captive Free team member. I was so excited because I wanted to be able to use my gifts and talents for God. A lot has happened since that day I filled out my application. As I was sitting in a small church in Shannon, Illinois, I watched as a man with a rugged farmer appearance sang "Skies of Blue" by Louis Armstrong. I was amazed by his song and I sat and just soaked up the world around me. I thought about the corn fields that surrounded the church and the small farming community that had welcomed us in so graciously. It finally occurred to me that I was not only here to use the gifts and talents that God has given me but that God had called my teammates and I this year to be fishers of men. I realized for the first time how much I love people and became so excited that I choked back tears. It served to remind me what a mighty God we serve. I am overwhelmed by how generous and kind people have been while on the road. Every need has been supplied and I thank God for every person we have come to know so far and praise him for all those that we will meet in the future.



**Lisa Warner**

Lisa Warner – Captive Free, South East

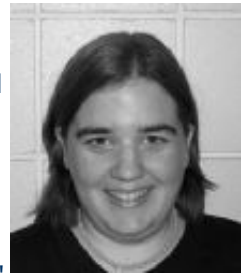
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**Date:** 9/27/2003

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

I have a confession to make here in my first journal entry of the year. I was scared to be the Sound Technician for the South East team. I did not know a thing about sound except for when it was too loud or too soft. I had never even stood behind a soundboard before I left for Training in August. I did not think that I would be able to do a good job for the entire year at something that can be as confusing as the soundboard. Even the first day of training for the Sound Techs was scary with all of the new vocabulary words and equipment that we had to remember and understand. I was overwhelmed right beside all the other Sound Techs on teams this year. But I learned a key lesson about faith that day, "God does not necessarily call the equipped, but rather equips the called." Even though I did not know that noise could be pink before I left to be on Captive Free, God called me to be the Sound Tech for the South East team. He called me to this position and laid out exactly how He was going to equip me for it. I may not have had the experience behind a soundboard before Training, but that did not matter, because God placed in my path some incredibly patient people who showed me exactly how noise could be pink in a manner that I could understand and use with ease everyday on the road. I pray that during this year I will continue to be willing to learn all the things that God has laid out for me to do this year just as I have already learned the Sound Board. Now I actually have a ton of fun in the back moving all of the slides and knobs and making a joyful noise unto the Lord clear and "just loud" enough.



**Vicki Epper**

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**Date:** 10/4/2003  
**Submitted by:** Joshua Scott  
**Journal Entry:**

Captive Free has been an amazing adventure so far. When we are tired out, God still uses us in amazing ways. One Friday night in Birmingham, AL, we drove around for a few hours looking for the church, but kept missing it. We asked directions from 3 different people, and finally rolled in 2 hours and 40 minutes late. We were all really tired, but the next day was truly special.

On Saturday our group had our first real program. We were somewhat nervous, but excited for a good time. Many youth had come to see the program and it turned out great! Everyone sang their hearts out and the message was strong. After the program, our group had the opportunity to hang out with the kids at their lock-in. It was so much fun just to meet new people and play cool games with them, like Silent Football. I am very thankful for my experiences I have already had. This year will truly be special and unique in every way.



**Joshua Scott**

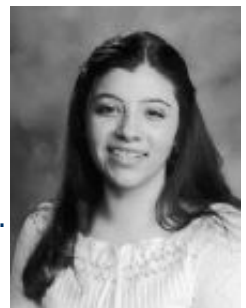
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**Date:** 10/7/2003  
**Submitted by:** Beca Duran  
**Journal Entry:**

Yeah! It's my first team journal! What an exciting week we've had here in the South East. We were just in the town of Arden, North Carolina at Church of the Nativity. Our team spent the night in a spare room of the church while the youth group had a lock-in. The youth at this church were very inspirational. The lock-in, which started at 6:00 on Sat. night and went until Sun. afternoon, was primarily run by high school kids. A lot of planning and organization went into the night. I was so very impressed with what the kids could do. They have very bright futures ahead of them.

Church of the Nativity is the home church of present Crossfire teamer Matt C-K. We had the pleasure of meeting his family and hanging out with his younger brother at the lock-in. When we got there, all we could think about was how cool it would be to see Matt and our other Crossfire buddies. Well, lo and behold Matt shows up at the doors of the church, just to stop by and say hello! What a cool surprise!

We had a great devotion and worship time with the kids, followed by two action-packed Sunday services. All in all, it was a great weekend.



**Beca Duran**

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**Date:** 10/11/2003  
**Submitted by:** Travis McKee  
**Journal Entry:**

Well, hello. This is my first writing for the team journals. So, tonight we were at Immanuel, Simpsonville, SC. We got to the part in our program that we do our skit and something occurred to me: This is normal. We are kind of into a routine. We have gotten into a pattern for setup, we have jokes that are normal in our skits and puppet shows, we know how the sharings go, listening for specific phrases throughout. But while I realized this, I also thought something else: our routine is not bad. We have gotten comfortable in sharing the good news. Relating and helping others are part of our daily lives. Sometimes we think that routine can wear people down and make what we do not genuine. But to the contrary, since we are comfortable with how we work as a team, we are able to relate effectively as a team. Things are consistently getting better and I can't wait for what God brings us next.

Travis



**Travis McKee**

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**Date:** 10/14/2003  
**Submitted by:** Bethany Dourson  
**Journal Entry:**

I woke up in a hotel room, and not in a host home, because the church we performed at put us up in a hotel. My teammates woke up soon thereafter. I love my teammates, but this particular morning, and sometimes in general, I just need to be by myself. This morning was one of those mornings. I announced to them all that I was leaving to go off somewhere by myself and read my Bible and pray. I left the room and went outside, not knowing exactly where to go but knowing that I just had to get outside. I ended up at the outside pool and sitting at a table in the shade. It was a beautiful sunny day. The only distraction was that some workers were trying to trim the bushes, which was kind of noisy. I started to read my Bible and pray. There were a couple of ladies sitting at a table on the other end of the pool. A few minutes later, a young man came into the pool area and sat by the edge of the water. He took off his shoes and dipped his feet in the water. I thought that this might be a good opportunity to witness God's love to him. After all, aren't we supposed to take advantage of every opportunity, because the days are few? I prayed about it, and felt that God was leading me to go and talk to him. So I went over there and introduced myself, and found out that his name was Peter. He said he was going to enter the army in 8 days. We each talked about the reason that we were there, and I told him that I was on Captive Free. He said that he and his family were visiting his sister and brother. Then he asked me what book I had been reading, and I told him the Bible. He commented, "that's an interesting book of stories..." and from that point on we proceeded to talk about religion. I didn't really know what to say, and I knew better than to tell him my point of view unless he asked me. I didn't want to cram Christianity down his throat. Most of the time, I just asked him questions, like what he thought about Jesus, heaven, and hell. When he asked what I thought of those things, I had the chance to tell him. He also asked what I wanted to do after Captive Free. I said I wasn't sure, but that I was going to let God provide an opportunity to do something. I don't think that he had thought that God could provide opportunities for people. Before I left, I asked him if he had any prayer requests. He smiled and said not really, but that I could pray for someone else. Well, Peter, know that you will always be in my prayers.



**Bethany Dourson**

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**Date:** 10/20/2003  
**Submitted by:** Lisa Warner  
**Journal Entry:**

Sometimes it is physically tiring to be a teamer. It did not surprise me when all of my teammates were starting to get sick. In fact I was one of the first ones to get sick. God amazes me because there is a lesson to learn in everything. As a vocalist I admit my sinful vanity of always wanting to sound amazing. I noticed when I started to get sick

my focus changed. God convicted me. I worried when I started to lose my voice and had to not sing for a night. In fact I was even mad at God because I was sick. I kept telling myself that God couldn't use me because I wasn't singing and I couldn't share my gift. Then I realized that I was hiding behind my microphone stand. I had avoided talking to people because I was scared. It was easier for me to be behind my microphone stand than talking to someone one on one. I couldn't be behind my microphone stand that night and I couldn't hide behind a song. I found a blessing in my battle. I had an amazing conversation with a young woman who had fallen away from Christ. I always thought that conversations and getting to know people would take a lot of work and time but this conversation fell into my lap and I pray that I was half the blessing that she was to me.



**Lisa Warner**

I learned that God is calling me to take more than just a step outside my comfort zone. He didn't just call me this year to see if I could endure a life without a place to call home or a regular income. He is calling me to serve him and to serve his people. So far on the road I have learned that being a witness for Christ is a 24 hour job. My team has had the opportunity so far to not only serve different churches but also schools, the homeless, and even one another. When I see God supply my every need as well as the needs of his people, I can't help but think what a mighty God we serve!

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**Date:** 10/21/2003

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

It is amazing how life on the road can help you learn to appreciate the simple things in life. Before I came on the road I did not really look forward to laundry and now, I love to do laundry. Even getting a letter in the mail can be the highlight of the week for me. The simple act of someone giving the team some thank-you cards or phone cards can brighten our day. People that we meet along the way on our journey do not always realize how important the simple things they do for us can mean so much to us.



**Vicki Epper**

I love how God is teaching me to slow down and enjoy the simple everyday things of life. I am learning everyday to not worry so much about most of the things that I worried a lot about before I came on the road. I am beginning to savor the small moments of life like the random conversations you can have with someone that you just met two minutes ago. Or I love the home cooked meals we receive from our host homes once in a while and I cherish the family time I get to have with them.

Most of all I thoroughly enjoy the hugs I give and receive from my teammates. I know that in those few moments that we truly love one another and all of the little things that may annoy us about each other does not matter at all in the grand scheme of things. For on this journey we have only each other and God while everything else about our lives is changing constantly. In the end the only thing that really matters is the relationships that we have with one another and God. Possessions will fade away over time, but friendships will remain forever. I treasure my relationships with my teammates, even during the times that we are annoyed with one another because I know in the end we love each other and will help each other no matter what. Thank You, God, for bringing these awesome people into my life and blessing me with genuine relationships with each and every one of them!!!!

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**Date:** 10/22/2003

**Submitted by:** Joshua Scott

**Journal Entry:**

Dear friends and family,  
What a weekend! This weekend was amazing. On Friday, our group played for 250 kids at morning chapel at Holy Cross Lutheran Church. The kids were cool! It was really energizing to see youth jump and sing from their hearts. Friday night, we traveled just

down the road to St. Marks Lutheran church in Miami for a lock-in were we played games, held devotions, and just hung out with kids. The kids were fun because they shared their experiences.

One young adult really opened my eyes. I had a chance to sit down with her and she shared experiences that she had with her family. It was amazing to me because it reminded me that we are all different. We all come from different backgrounds, but we have a common bond in Christ. We are brought together in faith and faith is something we can always count on- it will never lead us wrong.

On Saturday night my parents flew from Saginaw, MI, to visit me and my team. It was wonderful to have a touch of home once again! I am very thankful for my team experiences because I can already tell it is shaping my life, and changing the way I believe. Until next time.....



**Joshua Scott**

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**Date:** 10/30/2003

**Submitted by:** Lisa Warner

**Journal Entry:**

People amaze me- I have been so encouraged by their generosity! Our team has found it hard to keep items on our needs list because of the people we have meet along the way. My parents worry about how I am taken care of and I hope that this journal will put their minds at ease. I have so many mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters on the road and I praise God for all of them! When I meet new people there is one verse that keeps running through my head.

"As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. He who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit, and he who looks after his master will be honored. As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man." Proverbs 27:17-19

As God works through us to serve His church and people he also tends and feeds us through them. They have served us not only through tangible items, but also through hugs, prayers, worship and fellowship. I praise God for all of you that I have met so far and for those I will come to meet soon! What a Mighty God we serve!

South East Love!  
-Lisa



**Lisa Warner**

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South East Love!



**Lisa Warner**

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**Date:** 11/1/2003

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

So, who would have thought that one taco and 5 packets of mild sauce would equate to one great "God moment"? It was late on Sunday night and I was counting down the minutes until Monday when I knew that I could sleep all day and just relax from a busy week. I was sitting in the parking lot of a supermarket enjoying the one taco and 5 packets of mild sauce with a good friend of mine. We were catching up with one another since we last saw one another a few months ago. The whole time I was amazed at how God was making sure that I was being ministered to at the same time that I was ministering to others.

I have thought at different times this year that as we minister to those that we meet along the way we are ministered to at the same time. Just as a chef needs to eat in order to feed others, we are fed while we are feeding others at the same time. I think that this year is an opportunity for fellow children of God to minister to one another in many opportunities and circumstances. I love the times where I am low on energy and God sends someone to me that re-energizes me and helps me keep going forward for the rest of the day. I treasure those times and thank God for feeding me exactly the way I need it exactly when I need it. So, who ever knew that one taco and 5 packets of mild sauce would equate to one great "God moment"?



**Vicki Epper**

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**Date:** 11/8/2003

**Submitted by:** Travis McKee

**Journal Entry:**

Surprise!

This weekend was the All Tennessee Youth Gathering. We came in prepared for everything we were going to do for the weekend and ready for the smooth flow of it all. Dance mix CDs, workshops planned, program ready, we even got there early! Well, things have a way of happening differently.

The opening welcome was to be at 2:00pm. We found out once we got there that a teachers' conference was going on and we wouldn't be able to get into the room until 1:00. As anyone who has been on team, or at least has set up a sound system and stage, can tell you, it takes a little longer than that to get all set up and properly sound-checked. We ended up getting a few of the youth there to help us haul stuff in, but still weren't allowed in till 1:30ish. The schedule did some rearranging after this and the opening stuff got started later but it went quite well, especially with Pastor Andre getting us pumped. The rest of the weekend went more on schedule but it wasn't what I had planned, yet in a really good way. Leading a workshop on music, I ended up learning from the attendees and it was totally different each one of the three times it ran. There were plenty of people to talk and share with about many different topics. The music was spirit filled, especially considering that we teamed with people we had met once from a church we played at a month ago. Even the "campfire" time had me near tears. We let it go long and just played what songs our hearts felt.

It was in those moments that we didn't over plan or that we had no clues on what to do that we found inspiration. The theme verse of the weekend was Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (think "Turn, Turn, Turn") but I saw something in verses 9 to 11a. 9: "What does the worker gain from his toil? 10: I have seen the burden God has laid on men. 11: He has made everything beautiful in its time." Our plans and comfort zones seem to take a backseat when we let God in on the work. Yeah, so this was an unexpected AWESOME weekend.



**Travis McKee**

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**Date:** 11/11/2003

**Submitted by:** Bethany Dourson

## Journal Entry:

Although at times this world aches, there is still beauty in it. I am sitting in front of a playground full of children, and I realize how precious they are. What beautiful, innocent, and delightful creatures they are! There are days that I wish that I could be like a kid again. For example, today, we played Hands of the Potter during chapel for the kids. Each time that I played the congas, the preschoolers got all excited and moved their legs. When I wasn't playing the congas, they just sat there, like adults. It was really neat to see how responsive they were. Before I came on team, I took a lot of things for granted. I have all of these big dreams for myself. I want to become a singer/songwriter or play in a band. In fact, there is nothing else that I want to do other than sing and perform, preferably for God. There is a kind of satisfaction that I get out of performing that I don't get from anything else. Part of the reason why I joined Youth Encounter was to see what it was like to perform and travel for God. And let me tell you, it's been a great experience thus far! However, I do have to admit that I miss my parents and my friends a lot. It's not that I didn't miss them when I was at college, but when I was at college, I could go home on the weekends and see them. Most importantly, however, I'm beginning to realize the value of everyday life. Last night, I attended a concert of school kids tap dancing, jazz dancing, and performing piano solos. All of their parents were there, dressed up, and filming their kids. I've often thought of what it would be like to have kids and get married, but I definitely want to continue to sing and perform. Is it possible to do both?



**Bethany Dourson**

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**Date:** 11/13/2003

**Submitted by:** Lisa Warner

## Journal Entry:

As I grow older and more aware of what is going on in the world I sometimes wish that I was a child again. Children can be so amazing, trusting, and loving. Tuesday we had a very long day of driving, in fact it was the longest yet. We drove twelve hours from Nashville, Tennessee to Cary, North Carolina. We got into the van at 7am and out of the van at 8pm eastern time. After a long day of driving we were wiped out and excited to see a bed. We arrived at Resurrection Lutheran Church with an excited group of host homes waiting for us and just seeing a group of warm smiles made my day. As I stepped out of the van I found the arms of a little boy wrapped around my legs saying "You're Lisa and you are staying at my house and I love you!" I was awe-struck. I don't know how many adults could tell a perfect stranger that they love them. It's hard enough for us to sometimes tell people that God loves them. When I think of that little boy I think of how Jesus would greet us, with arms open wide and oh-how loved we would feel!



**Lisa Warner**

I think of the song from Jars of Clay "Like a Child". The Chorus says; "They say that I can move the mountains and send them falling to the sea. They say that I can walk on water, if I would follow and believe, with a faith like a child". Praise God for little children and how much we can learn from them. I am excited to return there for Thanksgiving!

In Him,  
Lisa CFSE

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**Date:** 11/18/2003

**Submitted by:** Beca Duran

## Journal Entry:

So, here I am in Tallahassee Florida, and I'm trying to think of what I should write about for my second team journal. (Pause for thinking) I think I'll write about what the inside of our van looks like as of today. So, here it goes... We have a Bobble Head Jesus peacefully standing in a middle cup holder in the front of the van. He was given to us at a gracious host church in Davenport Iowa. We've been



through a lot with our Bobble Head Jesus so far. There is much emotional attachment to **Beca Duran** him and I will miss him when the time comes to let him go.

Carefully crafted on the passenger side's dashboard is an alligator made entirely out of Extra sugar-free winterfresh gum wrappers. It took a good hour and five pieces of gum in my mouth to bring him to completion, but I did it in honor of Florida. We named him Navi-gator.

Also in the front portion of our van, on our rear view mirror, hang two handles that broke off of two different suitcases. One of them belongs to Travis, who now has no handles at all remaining on his suitcase, and one of them belongs to our blue suitcase that carries our cords.

On the van ceiling is an assortment of pictures that we've collected so far. Some are from training, but most are from the road. Our prayer list is up there too next to a few drawings from some cool kids in Alabama.

Also on the van ceiling is a tally sheet of how many times we mistake a dead armadillo for a busted tire on the side of the road. I believe that we're up to five mistaken identities to this day.

You might be thinking, "Wow this sounds great! But is their van clean?" Well, no, its not. But we try to clean it out everyday. So far only once has garbage fallen out in front of a host church when the doors were opened! Our goal is to never let that happen again.

Here ends the van description for today. It was nice writing to you all!

In Him~ Beca

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**Date:** 11/20/2003

**Submitted by:** Beca Duran

**Journal Entry:**

Yeah team journal time! This is going to be good guys. We are all in Georgia and today we are headed to a church called Holy Family to do a Thanksgiving service. This church will be a new experience for us because it is a Hispanic church. We are all so excited for the change because we don't see a lot of diversity on the road. We're still going to do our normal program songs and puppet show but we learned a song in Spanish. It was so cool for me, being Hispanic, to teach my teammates a song that I've been singing all my life since before I can remember.

Another reason for me to be excited is that my dad will be there. He not only is coming to Holy Family to watch us, but he's preaching for the service. Boy, am I excited to see him! Talk to you folks later. Thanks for reading our journals. And, a special shout-out to the cool churches that we've visited-you know who you are!



**Beca Duran**

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**Date:** 12/29/2003

**Submitted by:** Joshua Scott

**Journal Entry:**

My team experience has challenged me more than I have ever been challenged before. This year has helped me to grow as a person. I have learned a lot about life and what God has in store for me. Our group had a family night program a few weeks ago in Montgomery, AL. Here someone "planted a seed in me," and opened my eyes to a different thought.

I had met a man who had never played the drums before and who had limited musical experience. The music director of the church prayed that someone would play percussion for the services and she just asked this gentleman if he would be willing. He instantly knew that this is where God called him to be. He picked up the sticks and started to play. He said that the Holy Spirit truly just takes over and uses him.

This experience reminded of many things. We are all unworthy of God's gifts, and we do not deserve the things we have, but He gives them to us anyways. I have felt unworthy of this ministry on many occasions, but I am slowly realizing that God does not necessarily call the equipped, but He equips the called. He works through all of our positive and negative qualities to bring the message of Christ to the people we meet at the store, on the street, and in the church. God is truly working within us and around us.

Until next time my friends!



**Joshua Scott**



**Date:** 1/13/2004

**Submitted by:** Bethany Dourson

**Journal Entry:**

The other night I was talking with an older man named Ray before a program. He told me all kinds of stories about his childhood, and what he did for a living while growing up. Most of all, he was so excited to be at the program and expressed how cool it was that each of my teammates and I were there, playing music for God. He also expressed regret for not doing something that he loved when he was younger. In choosing his job, he had put the desire to earn a living before the desire to do something that he loved. I was so moved by this older gentlemen that I had to write a journal about him. I was a music education major until my senior year of college, and almost chose to become a school teacher. I did this because that is what I thought I needed to do to have a "real" job, and to earn a living in life. However, deep down inside, my professors and my friends helped me to realize that I really wanted to just sing and perform, so I dropped the education part of my major. You could say that I wasted over 3 years of my life trying be someone I wasn't just for the sake of earning a living, but I have learned from those years. I am only too grateful for Youth Encounter, which has given me the opportunity to sing and perform, and to work with kids in youth ministry- my other passion. To Ray, and to everyone who's reading this-it's never too late to start what you really want to do in life, and what God has put on your heart to do in life.



**Bethany Dourson**

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**Date:** 1/15/2004

**Submitted by:** Lisa Warner

**Journal Entry:**

Hello! It has been a while since I last wrote a journal but I am excited to share an awesome experience we had in Shreveport, Louisiana.

God is so awesome! There are so many times that I doubt him and so many times I allow myself to get easily discouraged. This past week God brought our team through a huge change. We recently made some job adjustments. This was something that was a sensitive topic on our team and we were all avoiding the outcome. It was something that if we didn't do anything about it soon, we were all going to drive each other crazy. Then God stepped in. We made some adjustments that we all felt comfortable with and thought that the decisions we made would be the best for the team. Here is the best part... God put someone in our path at exactly the right time! After a program a youth director took us out to eat and did a spiritual check-in. While we are on the road people help us out in so many ways. People always make sure that we have an abundance of food and soft beds to sleep in. Most people are surprised when we ask if we will need our sleeping bags for the night. But after making changes on our team, we needed some follow-through spiritual cleansing. This youth leader sat us down and asked us all how we were doing spiritually. We also discussed where everyone was in their faith right now and how we could support each other more. He reminded us that a different step in faith is not bad, but that it is just different than our own. It was a moment of reconciliation and renewal for all of us. It almost sounds cliché but that is what this whole year has been about for us in our programs and events. Our theme this year is "New Creation." Who would have guessed that God would be working that very same theme into our lives on team? My teammates and I wanted to say "thank you" to that youth minister and his discipline to listen to God. So, thank you!



**Lisa Warner**

Praise God that He is maker and creator of all things, even when we feel inadequate! May we all become better listeners of him!

If God can get us to it... He will get us through it!

In Him,  
Lisa Warner CFSE

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**Date:** 1/17/2004

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

"Diet Caffeine Free Mountain Dew, what's the point?"

So, the other day I was at a host home and was drinking a Diet Caffeine Free Mountain Dew. I was excited to try this new drink! I love Mountain Dew and especially love Diet Mountain Dew (since I get the high caffeine intake with no calories). As I was drinking it, I was a little disappointed. It didn't taste that great to me and the joy of drinking Mountain Dew was already gone with it being caffeine free. So, I then asked myself the question, "What's the point?" Why drink Mountain Dew if you don't get any of the high caffeine intake or high caloric intake? Where's the fun in that?

But as I was thinking about it, I started to think about faith and the journey I am taking this year on the road. What's the point of serving the Lord and sharing the Gospel if I am not being fed and growing in the Lord at the same time? How can I tell others the Good News about Jesus Christ if I don't truly experience it myself? How can I show others the comfort that comes only from the blood stained cross and the empty tomb when I don't find comfort in it myself at times? What's the point?

Many times this year on the road I find myself coming to the conclusion that part of our ministry is to give others the opportunity to serve and share their joy and love for Jesus Christ with us. Sometimes I feel that I am being fed more than me feeding others. Today in our Team Devotion we read Hebrews 10:25 which reads, "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching." I believe that part of our ministry this year is to encourage fellow servants of the Lord that we have the awesome privilege of meeting along the way this year. Not only is sharing the Gospel with those who don't know it already important, but encouraging others who are also sharing the Gospel is just as important.

Encouragement is important and that is something that God reminds me and teaches me often this year on the road. It doesn't take a lot, nor does it have to be a huge deal, but its effects do go a long way. The little hug I received from a second grader for whom we just led a chapel service gives me a huge boost and reenergizes me better than any Mountain Dew ever could. The smile or laugh from one of my teammates when I make them laugh during a program keeps me thinking of a new way to make them laugh at the next program we have. Ministry is a long journey that can get tiring at times and we all become weary and tired along the way, but God reenergizes us with the best kind of Mountain Dew to keep us persevering and running the race He has set before us. And without His Mountain Dew, what's the point anyway?



**Vicki Epper**

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**Date:** 1/24/2004

**Submitted by:** Travis McKee

**Journal Entry:**

Well here we are again, back on the road and back into the swing of things. The new year has called for some new adventures and some new ways of thinking, kind of like our New Creation theme this year. So, I decided to do a new sharing for our programs. It is based off of Luke 11:8 and the story of the friend at midnight, right in between the Lord's Prayer and the Ask, Seek, and Knock verse. It has been an amazing testimony for me to share. It is about my dealing with Hirschprunges, a disease of the colon that I have had since birth. There are some not so cool things about Hirschprunges and it was a constant source of difference in elementary school. The sharing relates to how I have asked why I



**Travis McKee**

have this disease and then finding how my story has helped children that I have never met. It is really cool and, most of all, I never thought I would get up in front of a large group and just talk about my medical problems.

This past evening I shared with our audience at our family night program. After the program I was approached by two people. One of them has similar problems to mine and we were able to share and relate to each other about the difficulties of living with these problems. Another approached me about an online health help chat-room of which they are a part. They thought I would be a wonderful addition to the group of hosts, helping those with Hirschprunges or similar problems. Wow! It was amazing to get those kinds of responses from a sharing. In the past couple of years, I have seen that the Lord has done some awesome things through the fact that I have this disease and my perseverance through all of the surgeries and treatments. I have been hoping to find ways to help those with similar problems, but that can be tough in the shoes of a busy Captive Free member. The Lord is showing me ways that I have been able to help others and giving new opportunities. This past night really solidified the words of Luke 11. I suggest reading it and really taking the words to heart. Be Bold and Ask!!!!

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**Date:** 2/3/2004

**Submitted by:** Bethany Dourson

**Journal Entry:**

Today is my first journal in a long time! I just did not know what to write! However, today, Jim, a youth minister from Shreveport, Louisiana gave me an idea. He challenged me to write a letter from God to myself. Although this is a very personal journal, I thought that other people would benefit from reading it. When reading it, you can replace my name with your own name. So, here it goes!



**Bethany Dourson**

Dear Bethany,

I just want you to know how much I love you. Dearest Bethany, you are so precious to me! However, I know that at times you have trouble believing this. Other people cannot always meet your needs and fulfill you emotionally, physically, spiritually, and mentally like I can. They cannot give you meaning and purpose in life like I can, so stop trying to do this! I know that you try to find significance in how well-liked you are by other people. You feel like the more people you know or the more people who like you the better, but this is not necessarily the case. Other people can become a barrier between you and I. People cannot nor will they ever be able to satisfy you wholly like I can. In fact, I did not design people to do that. Place them into my hands and learn how to trust in me and my words more than they and their words. I do place other people in your life to help you, while at the same time, I place you in other peoples' lives so that you can help them and make a positive impact on their lives. Keep trying to trust in me above them and above everything else-you're doing good. Other obstacles for you include the movies, where Hollywood has deceived many women, including you, into believing that they need to look a certain way to be beautiful. I know that these images have been imprinted on your mind your entire life, and that more than anything you wanted to look like the women that you saw in the movies, because they seem to have everything. I also remember that at one point you no longer wished to live because you didn't think that you were pretty enough. Bethany, it is is is my will that you are still here today. However, I need you to stop trusting in Hollywood, and to take a leap of faith. The fact that you don't believe that I created you the "right" way is something that's been hindering you for a while. I made you very precious and beautiful in my image, and I know that you struggle to believe this. In every Captive Free photo that you sign, you write, "You are awesomely made" (Psalm 139:13-16). Your other favorite Bible verse is Matthew 19:26 -"With God, all things are possible." I'm telling you, Bethany, it is is possible to believe that I created you exactly the way you were meant to be! Remember too- I always keep my promises.

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**Date:** 3/9/2004

**Submitted by:** Bethany Dourson

**Journal Entry:**

Well! The Lord is certainly changing things up a bit in my life! I never thought that I

could do half of the things that I have been doing this year so far. In the past, I have considered myself to be an introvert, and extraverted only around a close group of friends. I love to be around people if I feel like they value me, and I would much rather spend an evening with a handful of friends than by myself. However, when it comes to large crowds of people, including kids at Quakes, I become intimidated, and tend to change into an introvert. I'll usually let one of my more extraverted and energetic teammates do all of the talking that I don't have to do. If I was leading a Sing-a-Long with someone else, I figured that as long as one of us was really energetic, then our goal to teach the song would be accomplished. However, what I didn't realize was that I could keep being extraverted and energetic at the same time as my other teammates. In fact, that was probably preferable, rather than letting them do all of the extra work. God kept tugging on my heart, telling me to love the kids and to not be afraid to show that love onstage in front of hundreds of them. All of a sudden, when I was singing in front of 150 kids, my eyes were opened! I allowed myself to cast aside my fears and in turn show love onstage! As a result, I was a lot more extraverted and energetic in front of those kids! It was a great revelation to me of what love can do and learning how to let go of my fears. And so, I would like to leave you all with a verse or two:



**Bethany Dourson**

I Corinthians 13:1-3

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**Date:** 3/11/2004

**Submitted by:** Lisa Warner

**Journal Entry:**

This whole month we have had the privilege of being in Texas, which is exciting for us because we are the Southeast team and the farthest west we usually go is Tennessee. We spent a few days on the coast and got to visit Corpus Christi, as well as North Padre Island. Then we headed over to McAllen, and since we were only about 8 miles from the border, we went and ate dinner in Mexico. My team now jokes that we are an international team.



**Lisa Warner**

The most amazing thing happened to me while we were in McAllen. Right after the service I met a woman who said that I reminded her of her son. She told me that he was studying Graphic Design and loved art and played the guitar. She then told me her son's testimony. He was not able to be at church that day because he was still recovering from surgery. Her son was in a motorcycle accident about a year ago and the doctors told him and his family that he would be paralyzed from the neck down. You can imagine what a shock that was and how devastated he must have felt, especially since so much of the activities he enjoys require full usage of his arms. However, God had other plans. After surgery he was able to use his arms completely, although he was still paralyzed from the waist down. I wish I had had the opportunity to meet this guy, but his testimony alone impacted my life and has made me realize how much I take things for granted. I take for granted everyday that I will be provided first of all with a new day and second of all with daily needs such as a food and shelter.

Praise God for the gifts that he gives us and may we never take them for granted!

In Him,  
Lisa  
CFSE

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**Date:** 3/23/2004

**Submitted by:** Travis McKee

**Journal Entry:**

Well, I have been kicking myself for not writing journals lately! All these cool things have happened and I just have been wrapped up in the moment, not really writing or

doing a whole lot else, but enjoying the blessings we get on team. I have been reading Kindred's journals, the team on which my prayer partner is, and they have been putting us to shame with writing a journal everyday. So, in an effort to make up for those times, I will write a journal surmising the past couple of months.

For a solid month, we were in Texas. Being from the great state of Oklahoma, it was a bit of home and at the same time still another country. I was super excited when we got in, though! There was a thunderstorm on our way to Tyler, TX. I love thunder and lightning and there had been none, zilch, nada, since we came on the road. Then in northern Texas I heard a huge rip of thunder- I let out a huge yell myself and was glad to hear it! It is nice to have those touches of home while on the road.

About a month and a half ago, I was up to writing and we had gone to Mexico. It was my first time EVER out of the country. I was partly nervous, partly excited, and partly in awe. It was just a lunch right over the McAllen, TX border into Mexico. There was some great food over there and definitely a new lifestyle for me to see. It was sad to see the kids over there who sold Chiclets to give their family money. I guess I assume that because of their desperation to sell us those things. There were MANY street vendors and dentists over there. I have heard it is typically like that in border towns, but I never saw it for myself. I am very thankful to have a van and trailer to go around in and people to give us more food than we need and a place to stay.

A big part of our ministry has been the Quakes we've been doing. We've had five since February started. The thing I love about Quakes is that we get to catch up with folks we've seen throughout the year. Even if we just saw them the week before, it is really cool to get to know people in a group of 200-500. I get a ton of energy from the Quakes because we really do a lot of ministry that weekend. We get to lead treks, hangout at family nights, and keep getting to play music loudly. I love it even though I hurt my ankle every time. Genetically, I have really loose ligaments, so a ton of jumping hurts them, but I'll keep it up 'til my feet fall off.

Well, two big things that have been very positive are getting to see my cousin and his family and then the beaches. My cousin and his wife are awesome people and I got to stay with them when we visited their church. Their son, whom we have determined is my 2nd cousin, is a pretty neat little guy too. In that 3 days, I saw him more than I have seen him in his whole 18 months of existence. Ah, the joys of being a college student! And then we went to three beaches in one week! There's a connection I feel to God around huge bodies of water. When I first heard of Youth Encounter, on March 11, 2003, I was on my college's choir tour. We went to a ton of beaches that week too. I am just glad to be on the road doing ministry. Despite what my journal describes, there were rough times throughout the past two months as well. But through all that, God has found many opportunities to show me how he works in not just my life but throughout others' lives too. I always love the Lenten season. As it was a changing time in the church history, it has been a growing and changing time for myself. Who knows what it will bring this time and just what I'll be doing next year. I know that I have been able to trust in God so far and he is always right there.

"I know there's a reason for change / And I know there's a time for us / Think about the good times and you live with all the bad / you can feel it in the air / feeling right this time of year"  
- Better Than Ezra's "This Time Of Year"



**Travis McKee**

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**Date:** 3/25/2004

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

I have rewritten this journal about 4 times and still don't know what to write about. How do you begin to describe the vast array of feelings and lessons that you incur each day of your life and you are not able to even understand it for yourself? Where do you begin to write when you are at a loss of words?

Life on the road is completely different from "normal" life. You lose track of the days and even time. You begin to rely on your watch to tell you what day of the week it is and what time zone you are in at the current moment. You learn to sleep in any situation and at any time. You enjoy the moment more and more and learn to not look too far into the future. You begin to appreciate the little things in life and not worry too much about the large ones. The things that you learn about yourself while on the road are generally things that you never would have thought about in any other situation.



**Vicki Epper**

I thoroughly enjoy traveling around this year and all of the lessons that God is teaching me along the way. I just don't know how to communicate it to someone else at this point while I am still trying to begin to understand it. I do wonder at times what "normal" life will look like for me at the end of this year, if there is even such a thing as a "normal" life. For right now, I take it one day at a time and try to not think too deeply about it. If any insights or new understandings come to me I'll pass them on to you as best as I can describe it.

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**Date:** 4/26/2004

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

"Teka's Love"

Over Easter break, I went to Wisconsin to hang out with a good friend of mine for the week. We talked each night until at least one of us passed out from exhaustion, and I was able to meet many of her friends from her home town. It was a great week full of relaxation and fun. For my birthday we went to a Japanese steak house with her parents. I love watching the chefs entertain us with fire while cooking my food.

During the day while everyone was at work, I slept and chilled the whole day. Well, I should clarify that, I tried to sleep while everyone went off to work. Her dog, Teka, would wake me up with her barking every morning. I thought I could just ignore it and keep sleeping, but I was wrong. Without fail, I would give up and come downstairs and sit with Teka in the living room. The funny part is the fact that the dog is deaf and I couldn't even talk with it.

In the afternoons, Teka and I would hang out outside. I would shoot baskets and she would find new rocks to play with. Every once in awhile I would hear Teka whimpering because her leash would be caught on something or she would be twisted around. I would walk over and free her and she would nudge a rock towards me to throw for her to catch. She loved me every time I did that for her.

Teka can be strange at times, but she taught me that you can say the words, "I love you" but people don't always hear it. Many times you actually have to show them your love. God constantly tells us how much He loves us, but we don't always listen. He died on the cross and rose from the grave three days later to show us His love for us. Words are wonderful, but actions do speak louder and more clearly.

I see love everyday in the people that we meet along the journey. Here, people who never met us before agree to bring us into their homes and hearts for the night and feed us their food. They encourage us and lift us up in prayer constantly. I know they love us through their actions, and I am challenged every day to love others more through my actions than my words. I remember Teka and know that words are not always heard, but tossing a rock to play catch is always heard.



**Vicki Epper**

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**Date:** 5/4/2004

**Submitted by:** Beca Duran

**Journal Entry:**

So I'm going to write about the adventure that I had in Ocean Springs, MS, with my ten-year old host brother on my day off. My host family lived in a jungle, and my host brother had a fort that he had built with his friends, but don't tell anyone, because it's a secret fort that no one knows about. I'm actually taking a huge chance writing this in a journal. This is dangerous stuff. He asked me if I wanted to see it, and of course, I did. So we ventured deep into the heart of the jungle carefully maneuvering our hands and knees along the ground, occasionally having to army crawl in the dirt so not be seen by spies lurking around in the trees. Although our clothes were torn and we were bleeding from the



**Beca Duran**

thorns that completely engulfed every part of the forest, we made it in one piece to his fort. Although I am not an expert in the art of fort building, I am confident enough to say that this was a great fort. I would have liked to stay longer but my host brother said that we needed to leave right away. Apparently, if he was seen taking an enemy, or a girl, into the sacred fort, he would be killed, or worse, banished. Then he asked me if I wanted to go back the hard way or go the way we came. I chose the hard way simply because it meant no more thorns. Well, if I told you the way that we went I would have to kill you, but I will say that it involved big rocks, getting wet, and other people's property. Thank you for reading my journal.

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**Date:** 5/6/2004

**Submitted by:** Bethany Dourson

**Journal Entry:**

Let me tell you about the power of clothing! So, Jim Matthias was doing check-ins with our team, and we all decided to do them at the mall. Each person was supposed to have a one on one with each other or with Jim, but this particular session, everyone else was scheduled to do a one on one except for me (One on ones are where two people on our team meet and talk with each other, usually for about a half hour to an hour). So, I was walking around by myself, going into a few of the shops in the mall. One of my favorite things to do is window shop. I happened to be going into American Eagle, which has really cute clothes. Well, I happened to see a really cute shirt, but after looking at the price tag, I kept moving on. This was pretty much my experience throughout the entire store, so, as you can assume, in time I started to make my way out of the store, when a very nice high school worker asked me if I needed help in finding anything. I said "No," very politely, but then she saw the shirt that I was wearing which said "Captive Free" on it. Originally, when I had put this T-shirt on in the morning, I had no intention of wearing it throughout the entire day. However, I really didn't have time to change it after the Quake ended and before we went to the mall. So, it's not that I don't enjoy my Captive Free T-shirt, but I had been wanting to change it throughout my entire time at the mall. I was fretting and beginning to feel sorry for myself by having not changed my shirt when this high school worker asked me what Captive Free was. I then had the opportunity to tell her what Captive Free was, and how she could find out more about us on the web. So, it was really cool. In fact, I was so inspired by this incidence that I wore my other Captive Free T-shirt, the orange one that has our theme verse for this year on it, to Disney World.



**Bethany Dourson**

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**Date:** 5/13/2004

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

"Crazy Birds on the Road"

You never know what you are going to encounter when you live on the road for an entire year. One of the crazy things we have experienced are birds. One time, when we were in Miami, FL, we met a chicken that lived at the church. Before we met our contact we met the church mascot, Bob the Chicken. We went back to that same church just the other week and found out that Bob the Chicken went missing around Christmas time. It was a sad moment for our team.

Another experience we have had with birds is when we were meeting in the sanctuary for weekly worship and there was a bird that kept hitting one of the stained glass windows, trying to get inside. I guess he enjoyed our music and wanted to join in with the singing. It was funny at first, but after about an hour of hearing this bird bang into the window, we were getting a little concerned about his sanity.

A third strange experience with birds occurred today. Again we were worshipping in the sanctuary and heard another bird wanting to join in with us. I personally think it was the same bird as before and he followed us to Georgia. At least this time he wasn't banging his head into the window for an hour straight. I don't know what it is about birds following us everywhere we go on the road.



**Vicki Epper**

Lastly, I have to share this story with you. We were working with a church while they were having a retreat at a camp outside of the Orlando area. We were walking around the camp enjoying the outdoors and lost our teammate Lisa. We weren't sure where she had gone, but we came across a goose that was responding every time we called out Lisa's name. We were scared that our teammate had turned into a goose! We didn't know what to do and we were reassuring the goose that we would find a way to turn her back into a human. Just as we were saying this Lisa, in human form, turned the corner and greeted us! We ran to her and we were so thankful that she was human again.

So, I don't know why we keep having strange experiences with birds. Either way it keeps the long drive days short and gives us some good stories to share with everyone that we meet along the way. If anything else happens with more strange birds I'll let you know. Talk to ya later!!!

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**Date:** 6/30/2004

**Submitted by:** Lisa Warner

**Journal Entry:**

Oh event season! Sadly we finished our last Quake at the end of April. Events taught me a lot of things. I have to confess to all of the Junior High aged young adults out there that before we did events I was scared to death of you. "Thanks!" you might be saying. But I have to tell you that through events I learned a lot about myself. I discovered that a lot of things that scared me about Jr. High kids are some of the experiences that I went through when I was in Jr. High. I remember in Jr. High not being treated very kindly. I now admire Jr. High kids and they have been my favorite group to be around.

Jr. High is such a vital age. I have asked so many people and they say the same... Jr. High is an intimidating age group to work with because so many of our own insecurities and fears can come into play with that group. So why, you may be asking, did they become my favorite? Once I got to know some great kids they helped me face my fears. Yes someone younger than me taught me something about myself and all I can say to that is Praise God! I discovered that I was making preconceived ideas about kids before I even met them based on past experiences. Strange I know... and I don't know if I am even fully explaining it well but I was surprised to come to the conclusion that I was only making the situation scary in my mind.

I just want to say thank you to all of those Jr. High kids that I met and thank you for teaching me something new! I am so sad to see event season over but I love to see the way that God works. I laugh because it was by no mistake that this year we had 6 Quakes (events for Jr. High) and only 1 Congress (events for High School). God always has a perfect plan and I praise God that he moved in my life this way. God truly does equip the called and he taught me that through events.

Praise Him!

Lisa CFSE



**Lisa Warner**

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**Date:** 7/1/2004

**Submitted by:** Bethany Dourson

**Journal Entry:**

I just have to tell you how awesome my team is! My birthday was on June 20, a Sunday, which was also Father's Day. They started out the day by singing Happy Birthday to me while we were warming up vocally. Then, they gave me a card signed by all of them. The church had read when my birthday was, and they bought me a cake. After church a family took us out to lunch at a Chinese restaurant, so that was really nice. We went back to our host homes after that. I wanted to do something for my birthday in the evening, but after asking my teammates, it didn't seem like anything was planned. I was dead wrong.



**Bethany Dourson**



Lisa and I hung out for a couple of hours, then went on a walk. After that, I wanted to keep walking, plus my Grandma had called to wish me a Happy Birthday, so I was going to call her back and talk to her while I continued walking. She said ok, so then I left. Shortly after that, as I was walking down the street, I saw a red 15 passenger van drive down the road. I thought, " That looks like our van" but then I was like, wait, there are a thousand other vans like it." So I kept walking and waited to see if it was truly our van. As the van got nearer, it swerved towards me. Then I knew it was our van! Vicki was driving and Josh was in the front seat, and he hopped out and tackled me (he grabbed both of my legs and just took me out)! Luckily I had enough time to tell my Grandma, right before he tackled me, "Hold on, Grandma, my teammates are kidnapping me- byeee!..." and there the cell phone went, flying out of my hand. Beca was nice enough to pick up the phone and talk with my Grandma and tell her what was going on, as they were blindfolding me! And then they took me to a coffeehouse, one of my favorite places to be on Earth. We played Scrabble in pairs of two, and I think that Travis and Josh won. Later on that night, we rented the new Peter Pan from Blockbuster, which I had really been wanting to see and watched it at our host home. Of course they never let me pay for my coffee or rent for the movie. And then, the next morning, as if all of that wasn't enough, they gave me a Shane and Shane CD! It was all so much and too wonderful, and I really didn't expect all of that. So...yeah! It was great. Thanks, teammates, for making the best birthday ever away from home!

Bethany

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**Date:** 7/27/2004

**Submitted by:** Beca Duran

**Journal Entry:**

Before I start typing this story, you all must know that I am wearing a yellow construction hat out of respect for our current Vacation Bible School theme, Construction Inc.



**Beca Duran**

Once upon a time, my teammates and I were at Camp Woodlands outside Orlando Florida with an amazing 6<sup>th</sup> grade class from St. Petersburg. I hope you sixth graders read this because I want you to know that you are amazing! Boy did we have fun with them! I'll never forget how smart and awesome they were. I could have stayed there forever.

So the story goes like this....

There was this sixth grade boy named Richie. I was lucky enough to hang out with him a few times and I was therefore able to find out a lot about him. One thing I found out about Richie was that he was very funny. He liked to have fun and joke around a lot. Another thing I found out about Richie was that he was very much the class teddy bear. He was taller than me and a bit bigger. It made for an all together very teddy bear-like appearance. A lot of the girls in his class liked to hug him. The most fascinating part about Richie was how much food he could consume in one day. This guy could pack it in, and he knew it. For those of you who know me, you might have noticed that I can be some what of a competitive person. It was about the second day that I knew Richie and I couldn't resist; I challenged him to an eating contest. He accepted.

It was to happen at dinner time. All day long I didn't eat in order to make my stomach feel as hungry as possible. Both of us talked it up to as many people as possible and each of us gained our support from the other sixth graders. Before I knew it, the time came for me to show up the sixth

grader. I walked into the dining room to find Richie and his support group waiting for me in anticipation. Praise the Lord that the meal was spaghetti. That would be easy right? I like spaghetti. Needless to say, I was full after the first plate. But I ate like there was no tomorrow and several plates later with much cheering from my sixth grade friends, I won!! Just kidding! I lost miserably. He ate five big plates of spaghetti, many pieces of garlic bread, a huge salad and desert. I had no chance from the very beginning. After many months of crying over my loss, I am finally able to overcome my shame and embarrassment and tell the story of how I lost an eating contest to a sixth grade boy named Richie.

If any of you sixth graders read this journal, tell everyone that I pray for you guys and that I hope with all my heart that the Lord will let our paths meet again some day.

Shout out to my friends from Resurrection Lutheran in Cary, NC. Katie Kuekes, this is for you! This journal about eating is for you guys.

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