

Cross Fire 2003-04 Journal

Date: 9/23/2003

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

"On the road again..." That's the best way to describe what is going on in my life right now. We've been on the road two days and it feels good. Training has been a blast, but I'm excited to be out again, singing in churches and meeting new host families. Going on team back-2-back has been a tougher transition than I thought it would be. I'm trying to re-understand team all over again. The best way to describe my emotions is I feel like I'm in a box and in each corner are the people dearest to me in the world.

In one corner are my family and friends back home. I miss them and wish I could have spent more time with them between teams. But I've had a year of being away like this, so I know how to handle the homesickness. I look forward to Christmas break and quality time before going overseas.

In the next corner are my teammates and all the teamers last year. I miss them so much. I just remember all the support and prayers and laughs and hugs and tears we all shared. It's weird to think that after being so connected to those 80 people, we've all gone to our separate ends of the world. I'm really looking forward to connecting with people along the road this year. If any of you are reading this, you rock and I miss you!!

After saying good-bye to all those people, I turn around and there are now all the new teamers from this year. When I first got to training I found myself clinging to the other back-2-backers and staff a lot. I thought I'd never get to know anyone and my new teammates would NEVER understand me. But by the end of the first week of training I found friends I could really relate to and I started to laugh and have real conversations with people beyond the typical "where are you from?", "what did you do last year?", and "what team are you on?" I can hardly believe training is over now. I miss all the new teams a lot. I had forgotten how fast this community grows on you. I can't wait to see everyone at midwinter and share stories and hugs and laughs with everyone again.

But now that training is over and all the teams have parted ways, I see this new corner appearing. I laugh at myself when I think about how worried I was about my team at the beginning. My team is awesome and it has been so fun getting to know them and all the unique, quirky ways they have. Everyone brings such a different personality to the group. I'm glad my team is finally together and doing what we've been training to do. It's fun to see them hanging out in the van or interacting in host homes. It's going to be a good year.

Sometimes I feel like I'm in a whirlwind of home, my old team, my new team, and all the places and people in between. I don't always know how to react or what to feel. Some of my highest highs and lowest lows have taken place in the last month or so, trying to figure out what to feel when so much has happened so quickly. I'm happy and sad, ready for all the new things to come and clinging to last year, frustrated and tired, excited and ready to go. Thankfully, "as servants of God we offer ourselves in every way: in hardships and distresses... in hard work and sleepless nights... in understanding and patience... in the Holy Spirit and sincere love... in the right hand and left hand... through glory and dishonor... dying and yet we live on... sorrowful, yet always rejoicing... poor, yet making many rich... having nothing, and yet possessing everything." 1 Corinthians 6:4-10

So now we go in peace to serve the Lord. Thanks be to God!!

Becca ~XF



Becca Leaf

Date: 10/9/2003

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Wow! What a blessing to be on the road! I can't believe how slow and how fast a month can go by when you are at camps in Minnesota and Wisconsin, training to head out on the road. Now, to be out in the great wide open is such a gift from God. The idea that families who don't even know me, a city boy from California, would be willing to take me into their very own homes is such a cool thing! I have experienced God's love from



families in Marion, IA; Wabash, IN; and now Rolla, MO. One night, I had so much fun just sitting and talking while my host sisters did homework and my host mom made beef jerky. Something I would never do at home, yet, such an amazing experience to soak in the goodness of God.

Clayton Mark

I really feel God leading me in a good direction. As I sometimes struggle with being away from my friends and family back home, He provides me each night with a new family to share my time with and an awesome family of teammates to share a van and a new life with. II Corinthians 5:19 says that "Our message is that God was making all mankind his friends through Christ." I love that every day God gives me a new opportunity to make 'friends through Christ', and to see a little bit of Christ in each and every one of them.

Date: 10/9/2003

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Wow, we've now done our first family night program. So this is what the next few months are going to be like. I think it's pretty amazing to think about how even though we may be sharing many of the same songs, skits and puppet shows with people over the next few months, each program will be completely different from the one before it and the one after. So much goes into a program, the people who attend the program, the style of the space, the health and energy that the team has, and the different programmatic aspects.



Kathy Weber

Our team of Cross Fire will meet many new people, and our relationships with them and each other will grow and change, I imagine making every new day and new place more and more exciting! It's amazing to visit all of these different churches too. It really makes me think about what I look for in a church, and what I connect with. So far, at some of the Sunday morning services, there have been some parts of the service that are the same as my worship services were in Lutheran Campus Ministry at Syracuse University. That has been great, because it makes me feel at home at the different churches, and I really enjoy having a good idea of what's going on, but it does make me homesick for my church where everything is familiar.

I really have been thinking a lot about how different things are and will be everywhere we go. It can be unsettling at times, but then I stop and realize that there is one constant. God is always there with us. God is our unchanging, unconditionally loving, ever present support system. It makes me so excited for the coming year, knowing that God will be here with me throughout the struggles and the joyous occasions. I'm ready to go!

Date: 10/9/2003

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Yes, it's true, we've now traveled over 2000 miles; and it's been just 2 weeks! Today was Oktoberfest for the church we're at now, in Bristol, Tennessee. Man, the mountains are beautiful and for a Minnesota girl who's been a few places, I'll say I haven't been to the mountains for as extensive a time as this! Back to Oktoberfest; we weren't quite sure how things would turn out, but it was great! The weather was overcast for much of the morning and eventually cleared up toward the afternoon. I got quite the heckling because I was wearing a sweatshirt and a jacket and I'm "the one from Minnesota, shouldn't [I] be used to this?" Well, contrary to some popular beliefs though I am from Minnesota the seasonal transitions are still a bit rough at times.



Rachel Haabala

During the church's Oktoberfest Bazaar we had a "cameo" every hour on the hour for 10 – 20 minutes. The church volunteers there got to know us quite well and enjoyed our songs, they even requested to hear one again at the end. What a great day!

To end it out, my host family took me out to show me the town. Bristol is shared by Tennessee and Virginia, so we slowly crossed State Street and wabam! We were in 2 states at once. The high

school that their daughter went to has what they call the castle for their football field, it was built in the 1930s I believe. It's quite amazing.

All in all this living in a van with 5 other people and meeting new folks constantly has been a positive experience. Host homes have been a lot of fun! As a team we're getting to know each other's personalities better and it's a great growing process. I know God's brought all of us here and He knows exactly why. It's amazing, I can look back on the last few years and see how God's made me grow specifically in each of those years. I know this year isn't any different. I'm going to grow tremendously and for that I am excited! "Praise the Lord, for the Lord is good; sing praise to his name, for that is pleasant." Psalm 135:3.

Date: 10/9/2003

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

It's the beginning of our third week on the road and we're on our way to Alabama. In the last two weeks we've been in 6 states. Today we're adding our seventh. I've never been to Alabama, so this should be interesting. I've really enjoyed the South East. We've been in some really great places. Last week we stayed the night in an assisted living facility in Knoxville, TN, then did chapel in the afternoon. I felt so blessed by all the people we met there. I sat with one lady who told me about all the traveling she has done in her life. It was amazing. At the end she gave me a blessing and a hug. It brought tears to my eyes because she shared so easily with me. I pray for the courage and words to share God and myself so freely with people.

Someone once asked me what my biggest fear about going to Africa was. It was a tough question to answer because I'm not scared of a lot of things. I can't even imagine what we're going to encounter overseas, so I really couldn't think of anything to be afraid of at the time. The unknown excites me, more than it scares me. However, since then I've discovered something to worry about: snakes. I am terrified of snakes. So pray for me and my phobia. It will probably be a struggle both here in the south and overseas.

Whenever my family and friends ask me how team life is, I used to answer, "It's been slow." We've only done a few programs, a chapel, music in Sunday worships, and an Oktoberfest. I was expecting to be a lot busier and keep moving all the time. It was really hard to adjust to a slower pace. But I found out I was putting way too much emphasis on the music portion of our ministry. As a music ministry team I expected that music would be our main focus. I know that music is only a foot in the door to the real ministry that takes place. But when we don't do any programming at a church I have learned that it is an opportunity to invest myself on a more personal basis with our host families and the people who come to the church to meet us even without a program. I've stayed with amazing people who give and give and give to us. They're great examples of the generosity I should strive to show. So now when people ask how team is going I'm ready to share all the exciting people we've met and things we've done. We may not be playing a lot of music, but we're certainly making a joyful noise through all the laughing and talking and sharing with the people around us.



Becca Leaf

Date: 10/9/2003

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

So, it turns out that a guy from California can survive the South. With a little "southern hospitality" this week in Huntsville, Alabama, I can truly say that. Here I sit, on Thursday October 9, in the Grace Lutheran Church School Library feeling good from the southern comfort I have received from our hosts over the last 2 days. What a great time we had last night with our new friends here in Huntsville as we worshipped and shared time with each other during our program. Programs rock! It is so much fun to see people of all ages get up out of their seat and start movin' and shakin' to the goodness of God! It's so inspiring to see people enjoy God's music, whether they are doing motions to a song, singing along, or just sitting in the stillness of our Creator and listening. It's great how a program can bring people from many different places and backgrounds into a common ground, a place where we can be in a community that respects and loves one another because Christ respects



Clayton Mark

and loves each of us.

Someone special once shared a cool verse with me. Jeremiah 1:5 says, "I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born I selected you to be a prophet to the nations." It's amazing to think that God might actually consider me for His service. What an honor, what a joy, to follow His call. He has brought me to Alabama, He is leading me to many more awesome churches throughout the surrounding states here in the South, and He is leading me to West Africa! My teammate, Joshua, often shares a verse from Hebrews 12 that says we must rid ourselves of everything that gets in our way, so that we can "run with determination the race that lies before us." As a member of Cross Fire, I know that we have an amazing race, a tremendous path, a remarkable journey to look back upon and to look forward to. It is by God's grace that we continue to follow Him. He is the one who strengthens us when we are weak, and who fills our smiles when we laugh.

Today, it's off to Clay, Alabama. It seems rather serendipitous to spend a birthday there. Thank you, Lord, for all of these opportunities. May you continue to bless us all to be blessings to others.

Date: 10/13/2003

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Southaven, Mississippi. We have now been on the road just over three weeks. Before that were five weeks of training. It is exciting and encouraging when I think of the other 12 teams that have entered into the same ministry ... to know that the many new folks I met at training are sharing in this same experience ... to know that I am not only a part of this Cross Fire team, but that I am a part of something bigger. Together we are certainly reaching thousands of people each week. And then I think that this is only one of many ministries that reach out to people in this country and throughout the world. God's work, through His children, is greater than we can ever imagine ... and the entirety of all He does is beyond that. Praise God that I, one single individual, can be a part of it.

My life, to this point, has never found me far from Indiana for any great length of time. As I daily, and even intimately, step into the lives and homes of people, I am being given a fuller perspective of both God and this world in which we now live. I can't begin to imagine with what newness of vision I will return from Africa next May. May God continue to guide us each day. May He continue to watch over those we have met, those we have yet to meet, and those at home.

Christ's Love,
JoshUa



Joshua Vandercar

Date: 10/14/2003

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Here we are on the road again... I'm surprised that I really don't mind all of the traveling we're constantly doing; I'm really enjoying the time spent with the team.

Yesterday we all got the chance to visit the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis Tennessee on our day off. What an amazing experience to add to everything that has happened so far. There was nowhere near enough time to read all of the information that there was available, but what I did get to see was very powerful. When I was in the gift shop, I was glancing through a book called "The Middle Passage", which is about the journeys Africans were forced into on ships from Africa to "The New World" to be sold into slavery. It was a very powerful book which documented the trips through heart-wrenching drawings. In the introduction to the book, the artist described his emotional journey to try to understand what his ancestors had gone through. He flew to Ghana, and spent months there learning more about African heritage from people still living in Africa.



Kathy Weber

When I read this, I felt really connected to the book and the artist even though I haven't been to Africa yet. This experience also reminded me about how much I want to learn from our four months in Ghana and Nigeria. I am going as a member of Cross Fire to share my experiences with people in West Africa, but to me it's more important that I bring something back from the people I meet there. I want to understand more about their lives, their culture, their religion, their Jesus. I want to take the "Middle Passage" myself in a different context and learn from them about what's important in their lives. I want to share what I learn with the people I know and will meet here in the United States and give them the desire to learn from others as well. I'm very excited to be here and doing this for the year!

Date: 10/18/2003

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Happy Birthday to my sister, a wonderful mother, wife and friend! (Sunday, October 19th)

We are constantly reminded of God's good work all around us. We made a stop at a small Chevron Station this afternoon. Talk about God being at work already! As I was leaving the store, the cashier asked me if we were on our way to a "singing engagement". To my knowledge, none of our team had mentioned anything about our ministry to her. I guess the 15 passenger van and 5x10 trailer must've tipped her off. I told her about our ministry and that we were, in fact, on our way to Kingsland, GA for our next booking. She asked if we had some information to leave with her and if a team could come to her church. Well, certainly we have some information! We dug the pamphlets and yellow-Captive-Free-can-come-to-you card out of the resource bin in the trailer. She was happy to receive it.

It's great to see tangible ways that God is at work. Though we've been told that God is already at work and we are just joining in what He has been doing, it can be easy to forget that fact. I have often found myself forgetting that my life this year (and always) is a ministry. The host homes we stay in, the congregations we share hours and hours with, these are all opportunities to "duck" and let Christ shine through. It's great training to practice this here before we are removed from the comfort of our culture and fully immersed in African culture for 4 months. Wow. I'm really starting to see the big picture, our programs, our host homes, our traveling, it all matters. God is really working everywhere we go.

As far as team life - I last reported that we were "getting to know each other's personalities better" but I think I am getting to know my own personality even more than I thought I could! It's great to know that we each bring something different to this team and that we don't all have to be the same (and we shouldn't, a team with a carbon-copy personality would be . . . hmm, not good). Ah, the beauty in our differences. God has brought together a wonderful creation in Cross Fire '03-'04. A New Creation - hehe!



Rachel Haabala

Date: 10/21/2003

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

We're heading down the Florida peninsula right now. It is so exciting to see palm trees and the ocean. I got to put my feet in the Atlantic for the first time on Sunday morning. It's a lot warmer than the Pacific, that's for sure. The people down here are so nice and the food is so good. We've been exposed to a lot of Southern delicacies like black-eye peas, Hoppin' Johns, and sweet tea. It's overwhelming to think that my family is in Washington, on the completely opposite side of the United States. Sometimes I can't even imagine how big the world is, when it feels so small.

I'm having a great time on the road. The first few weeks were tough, getting used to my new team mates, getting the hang of a new schedule and region, settling in with my different team jobs, and



Becca Leaf

feeling worn out from all the transitions. But we just had a day off and I did a lot of "reflecting" about life on the road. It was good to take a day and process all the things we're experiencing. I learned how to make hemp jewelry a few weeks ago and it has become a full time hobby during long van rides. You know, life is a lot like a hemp necklace. We're all different sizes, shapes, colors, and styles. And even with all our differences God still is able to wind us together and make a beautiful woven creation. Some of us stand out more than others, some of us are bright and shiny, some plain or easy to overlook. But we're all a piece of God's necklace. And I know how much I love my hemp jewelry I make. It takes so much time picking out the right beads and placing them in just the right places. Sometimes when I'm tired or sad or homesick, I start to make a new necklace. It's fun to think that in the same way I'm placing these beads where I want, God is putting me where He wants, even if it means backing me up a little bit or making me wait until He's ready to put me in just the right place. And sometimes I feel like a spacer bead, just placed between some cool ones to even out the pattern. But sometimes I feel like the center bead that everyone is drawn to. But no matter what, I'm still a part of the necklace and it's nice to know I've been handpicked to be right where I'm at.

So now I'm going to say to all those reading this: Please remember us in your prayers, especially as we prepare to get our shots for overseas! I'm such a pansy! I don't know what's worse, the idea of getting a needle stuck in my arm or the idea of getting sick from something I could have prevented by getting a shot. It's pretty much a tie on the ickyness scale, so I think I'll just go ahead with the shots. So pray for me and my poor health coordinator (Clay) who has to listen to me over-react about how bad a few shots can be. God bless you guys and girls.

Date: 10/25/2003

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Summerfield, Florida. All is well. We have had quite a slow week with family night programs, but have been helping out with a greater number of chapels. I've been fighting through weariness and various frustrations these past few days. Fun time with the team, apart from job stuff, has been healthy for my attitude and that of the team. Yesterday, we had the opportunity to clean our van. Afterward, we spent some time at Hammock State Park in Sebring, Florida. The cedar trees amidst the swamp were beautiful. We then all had dinner together. Today, on our trip to Summerfield, we had fun with the cell phones. While briefly lost on the road, we had each of the International Teams on different phones. Another reminder that we are united in this mission. This evening we were able to enjoy a climbing wall that our host family owned.



Joshua Vandercar

Here's a brief excerpt from my journal yesterday ... meditations on Psalm 77:

My soul is troubled and in defiance wants to deny Your comfort, Lord. When I think of You, the Great Comforter, my spirit aches, wanting Your comfort, but content to wallow in its despair. And I search for Your peace and joy in the whispers. I heard them very silently this morning during chapel and tried to grasp it and hold to it with all the strength that remains. I set my eyes on the children's smiles and my ears to their laughter. You are the God who does wonders. Your glory and Your works will continue through the coming days and the coming years. May Your holiness and Your strength rest upon my now, Lord. You are faithful!

Date: 10/26/2003

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

I spent 7 years going to school to emerge my collegiate cocoon as a teacher (A lot of people go to school for 7 years....they're called doctors). Well, one thing I have really been missing, since I left home, has been being in an elementary school classroom. Well, God, in an effort to remind me about the highs of being a teacher, answered my prayers. We spent last Wednesday at St. Michael Lutheran Church, in Fort Myers, FL, and what a huge blessing it was to go there! We woke up at the crack of dawn to get



Clayton Mark

there for opening chapel with the 5th-8th grade students. The hardest part about the chapel was not getting up early, nor was it trying to inspire middle school children to get up and shake their booties for Jesus. No, the most distracting part of the chapel was the little black thing that stood in front of me. Apparently, it is called a "microphone", and it is used to enhance and strengthen our voices. As a member of an acoustic team, we had not yet had the opportunity to work with said microphones. Needless to say, it was weird to hear our own voices as we sang. I became very aware of how "sweet" my voice can be at 8 in the morning.

Regardless of the mikes, the two chapels that we did to start the morning were so awesome! The rest of the day was spent in classrooms. Allow me to let you in on a little secret: The children of St. Michael Lutheran rock! I was really impressed with the 5th graders, who we joined with during their choir class. We shared with them a variety of songs and the different African instruments that we use. They were just so interested in learning from us and sharing with us. We then helped with the middle school drama class and displayed some of our awe-inspiring thespian skills with the children. Actually, we probably learned more from them than they did from us...

The highlight of the day had to be venturing into the cafeteria for lunch. That's right...we ate lunch with Kindergarteners and junior highers and everyone in between. Wow! What an experience to go through the lunch line, grab our grilled cheese sandwich and tomato soup, and head out into the battlefield. I ate with a Kindergarten class and had meaningful discussions about our middle names and the nutritional value of Lunchables. After lunch, we helped with 2nd and 3rd grade music classes. Just before the school day was over, we went into the preschool classes and did some songs (some of them for, like, the 107th time that day) and a puppet show. We even got to chillax with the high school group after school, and let me tell ya', they be some cool peeps. We had a fun time chattin', eating pizza, and jammin' on the guitar and African percussion.

All this in one day! Thank you Lord, for this opportunity. He has truly blessed the children at St. Michael Lutheran. You all rock my world! We hope to return and see all of you again in the summer. Thank you for such an awesome day. And to think that God has allowed us to have this O.T.S., Opportunity to Serve! We are all so blessed as a team to spend days like this with hundreds of God's children. They are such a reminder of how we can live our lives. Jesus said in the gospel of Mark, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." I continue to hope and pray that we all keep having fun and let our faith be like that of a child.

Date: 10/28/2003

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Wow, so this morning we did a program at a youth detention center in Ocala, Florida. The youth ranged from ten years old to around nineteen or twenty years old. This was our first time at a detention center, and to be honest, I was a little nervous that we were going to have a hard time interacting with the group. Let me tell you, I was pleasantly surprised! After a couple of songs, I noticed some of the guys making beats on the tables to the rhythms of the songs, and there were quite a few others who were smiling or clapping, or moving a little to the music. It totally energized me through the rest of the program, and made me wish we had more time to spend with them, getting to know their stories, and sharing ours as well. I will not forget the time we spent there anytime soon. One of the most exciting times during that morning program was singing "Open the Eyes of my Heart" and seeing and hearing other voices along with ours.

It's an awesome thing when we can make connections with people through God and through music, and these connections happen with anyone and everyone at anytime. It reminds me that even though we may only be in places for a short amount of time, God is there before we arrive, while we are there, and after we have moved on, and "we are ambassadors for Christ" (yeah 2nd Corinthians 5: 20) who help to bring God's message in a way we hope all people can connect with. What a cool thing to be dedicating a year of our lives to!



Kathy Weber

Date: 11/1/2003

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

I woke up this morning glad to have been able to sleep in a little. It's been a busy life lately. But luckily beautiful weather! We had a week of chapels again which was fun. Last night was Halloween and the ladies were housed by a wonderful family with an extraordinary 3½ year old. So, yes, we did go trick-or-treating. It was fun! Though we didn't have costumes, we stopped at a secondhand store to pick out some crazy clothes. We came up with a zebra, a dalmation and a snow-bird (you know, those who make their way to Florida for the winter months). Though we didn't score very much candy, the kids we were with sure did! It was a great evening of relaxing and being goofy.



Rachel Haabala

Tonight is a Family night program in Sarasota and guess who's sharing (the mini-sermon/testimony during the program) . . . yes, yours truly! Oh boy, I am a bit nervous because it's the first time I'll have shared. I remember back to the days of public speaking in my classes. The last time I remember speaking solo to a crowd like this was last fall, on Halloween for my senior seminar in college. Yeah, I'm still trying to forget that. I just don't see myself as a public speaker, but I know if I'm interested and confident as to what I'm sharing, I'll be fine. I definitely feel God more present with me tonight as opposed to October 31, 2002. It might be the whole ministry aspect of this life, but when I went to sleep last night, I lay in bed and ran through my sharing with God. Wow, it flowed well and was to the point. I can only pray that I won't get caught up in myself tonight that I forget why I'm up in front. This life is all about Jesus, it's for God, and as long as I remember that I'm good. He is faithful.

Though I am hesitant to speak, I remember Moses's apprehension to go out when God called him. (Exodus 4:10-17)

[Moses] "O Lord, I have never been eloquent"

[the Lord] "Who gave man his mouth? . . . Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say."

To which Moses still didn't get it, still wasn't confident and so said "O Lord, please send someone else to do it."

Verse 14 "The Lord's anger burned against Moses . . ."

I hope I never get to that point. I'd like to make the commitment to follow God's leading wherever He may take me, can I do it?

Date: 11/3/2003

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

I talked to my mom in Washington a few days ago and they got a couple of inches of snow already. It's really hard for me to empathize when I'm basking in the 80 degree sauna that is the Florida coast. We were walking along the beach yesterday when Matt turns to us and says "Hey guys, guess what! It's November." Swimming in the Gulf of Mexico and singing at a beachfront worship service in shorts and swimsuits are not events I connect with the pre-winter months, but I'm not complaining one bit!

Our time in Florida is almost up. We're on our way to Tallahassee, then it's up to Georgia and the Carolinas. Just a few short weeks ago it seemed like Florida was so far away. We're moving so fast across the south. It's hard to slow down when so much is going on in life. I find myself sitting on the edge of my seat, waiting to jump up and go on to the next adventure. When I was little, I couldn't wait to start school. Soon after that I couldn't wait to be done with school. I looked forward to joining team the first time, being done with team, and starting a new team. I'm waiting for Christmas so I can see my family, then I'm getting ready to leaving for Africa. When we get back, team will be almost done and I'll be getting ready for home, work, and school again. People are always asking where we're headed next, how we feel about leaving in a few months for overseas, and what we'll do after team. I hardly ever get the question "How do you feel about where you are right now?"

Life is so short and so full of all the plans God has for us. It's fun to look forward to the places we'll be and the things we'll do when we get there. It's fun to be an example of discipleship, moving from place to place and spreading God's love to an entire section of the U.S. and soon to Africa. But I also have to remember that God is at work in my life wherever I am, whether I'm moving around or not. I'm talking about the same God here in the U.S. as I will overseas. And that good news is the same as the message I was living at home before team. God is the God of everywhere. If we go half way



Becca Leaf

around the world, God goes with us. If we stay at home and serve God our whole lives there, He is with us. So as I sit here and look forward to going all over the place for the rest of my life, I relax in knowing that even though God is right here with me, He's also already where I'll be going next. Sometimes God is the only consistent thing I have in my life, but thankfully He is enough. "The Lord will watch over your coming and your going both now and forevermore." ~Psalm 121:8

Date: 11/6/2003

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

All is now right with the world...I now have an icy-cold beverage at my fingertips. Yep, 44 oz. of pure carbonated goodness sits to my right. I am now ready to journal. I'm sitting in the Cross Fire Party Patrol Van. The ceiling is decorated with streamers that are blowing in my face because of the air conditioning vents. Why, you ask, is the Party Machine in full swing today? Well, Matthew is no longer a teenager. Today, my friends, our little Matt is all grown up on his 20th birthday. It makes me tear up just thinking about it right now...I remember a couple of months ago when he was knee-high to a grasshopper, and now he's just growing like a weed! It's so cool to share birthdays with others, and to give God thanks for another year of life, and to look forward to a year of amazing possibilities, and knowing Matt, he will make the most of this next year.

We're just now moseyin' out of Tallahassee, FL. Florida has become something of a home to us since we have been here for about three weeks now. We're kind of sad to have to leave. We've had some pretty sweet memories created since we came here to the Sunshine State, but one of my favorite memories will be here in Tallahassee. What a treat it was to stay with all of my teammates at Jason, Kim, & Riley's home for the last two days. They were such a cool host family to spend time with. We all might as well have been with our own families for the past two days. That's the amazing part about good host homes. For a night or two, you don't really miss home as much. I mean, you still miss them, but you don't miss them.

Last night, we sat in with them as they helped to lead Confirmation classes. Afterwards, they took us out to a pizza joint where the slices were literally the size of our head, and I've got a pretty good-sized noggin. There's nothing like a good meal to bring people together. When we got home, we broke out the game, "Apples to Apples" and just had a blast late into the evening. Do you ever get to that point in the night where it gets so late, and you're so tired, that everything becomes absolutely hilarious? Well, that's kind of what last night was like. It's not often that a group of people can laugh hysterically about hugging Mahatma Gandhi, but we achieved that last night. It was just so refreshing to have a night of friendship and laughter. A night where we didn't have to think about who we might be missing or problems we might be facing. God's good at bringing those kinds of good times & great oldies along to us when we need them. A very special fiancée of mine once told me in an e-mail from West Africa, "God provides what is lacking." I've always remembered that, and it has always been true no matter what the situation. The only problem is that it's hard to remember that sometimes. Well, last night, as I had struggled over missing my family and friends, He provided for me. He always has. He always will.



Clayton Mark

Date: 11/9/2003

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

North Augusta, South Carolina. What a wonderful day ... my birthday which i have been blessed to spend with my parents, aunts, uncles, and adorable little cousins. In actuality, it is now nearly 2 a.m. of the tenth of November. Matt, Clay, and i took a late night walk to Waffle House. Friday evening we led our first lock-in of the year at Vidette United Methodist in the small town of Vidette, Georgia. The night began with dinner and a family night program. We had an amazing stay with 17 of the youth. They were genuine with us ... eager to share their enthusiasm and passion. May our Lord keep them and carry them on from this place to which He has led.



Joshua Vandercar

Yesterday saw us bid farewell to warm weather and spanish moss. We now welcome the crisp

autumn air. Our time here in North Augusta thus far has been blessed in the opportunities to minister through a family night program, special music at worship, and Sunday school. The pastor here at Holy Trinity has speaks well of us and our ministry and has been a great encouragement to the team. May we continue to rest on You, Lord. That we may press on in Your love and grace.

Today was a joyous time of celebration with family and friends. We congregated at my uncles house, at which some of us are staying, where we had cake and ice cream. i then opened a gift or two ... many from the Lutherhaven ladies of River Forest. Thank you! We enjoyed an extended game of 'The Impossible Present'. Time here has been one of joy and great rest. May our Lord continue to sustain us through the coming month, until we reunite with the other teams for a week of Midwinter Training. Praise God for His precious and abundant gifts!

Christ's Love,
JoshUa

Date: 11/16/2003

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

In case you were wondering, my sharing from 2 weeks ago went very well.

Yes, it's Sunday, and we've just left Buxton, NC which doesn't sound quite as impressive as the Outerbanks of North Carolina. To be even more specific, Hatteras Island in Cape Hatteras. We were visiting Becca's teammate from last year, Adam and ministering with his church. What an awesome stay. Though Hurricane Isabelle came through only a few short months ago, the hospitality and friendliness of the islanders could not be wavered! How can I give this place justice in a short journal?!



Rachel Haabala

There were quite a few walks on the beach (some out to the lighthouse). Saturday morning we decided to have our praise and worship time as a team out on the beach. So, 7 of us (with Adam), 5 guitars and an acoustic bass were serenading the sea, the sunshine and fishermen (they were all men) with songs to our Lord and King. That night we met with the Christian Surfers for a time of worship where we shared about our ministry.

To commemorate our last day here, Kathy and I got up before the crack of dawn by choice, so we could witness the beauty of the sun coming up over the horizon where the water appears to meet the sky. Capturing it with pictures and again serenading the backdrop, Kathy and I became contributors of a beautiful performance. There were fishermen angling, birds diving, and dolphins dancing. I can honestly say that this trip was the first time I'd ever seen dolphins in the wild, and I was not disappointed but humbly astonished.

A short few hours later, Cross Fire was saying goodbye to Adam's grandmother, who'd been capable of housing all of us, as we headed off to church. Sunday morning worship was very flexible and relaxed. We were blessed by this small island congregation and are excited to reunite with them on our return tour next summer.

So, thank you Adam, family and friends for a great time on your island and props to the Gingerbread House and Buxton Munch Company for feeding us some great meals! And now, it's back to Cary, NC where we were just a few short days ago. We are equally excited to reunite with our host families!

Date: 11/17/2003

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Buxton, North Carolina. I spent much of last evening sitting on the Atlantic shores ... listening to the constant roar of the rolling waters and looking as they stretched to the sky. Though they reach, I know they only stretch on ... to touch the shores of

Africa ... such a distant place, but ever so near in thought. But to reach the sky? No, for that they only reach in vain. The sun was setting behind me, causing my shadow to crawl into the sea ... to join the sands that continually surrender to the depths. The sky was painted with every shade of blue, dusty oranges, greens, and gray ... the eastern horizon just as beautiful as what must have lay behind me. Then I looked to the north to see the colored covenant sign resting on the horizon ... bridging cloud to sea, heaven to earth, God to man ... me to my Maker. For only in His promises are we reconciled to Him ... only in His promises does time touch eternity ... and His promises are sure.



This is the message i received last night and the message i gave this morning. i thank **Joshua Vandercar** God for the Church on Hatteras ... an amazingly blessed and loving family.

Christ's Love,
JoshUa

Date: 11/18/2003

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

"Hurricane Evacuation Route". I see these signs up and down the Atlantic coast and I know exactly why they are there. Because when the wind is blowing and it's raining so hard that you can't see anything but a sheet of water and you don't know which way is up or down, let alone east or west, you need something telling you where to go. I've never been through a hurricane, and I don't think I could begin to imagine what it would be like. But you can believe me when I say that even though I have no idea where those evacuation signs lead, I would put all my trust in them and follow them anywhere.



Becca Leaf

We were just on Hatteras Island and it was overwhelming to see all the construction and reconstruction of the island after Hurricane Isabel a month or so ago. I heard a lot of stories from people who stayed on the island and saw the pictures they had taken. The wind moved huge rocks and wiped out the dunes along the beach. Houses and buildings were torn down. A canal had been dug through the southern part of the island and part of the road washed away. The power to alter this terrain was intense.

I sometimes think life on team is like a hurricane. I have been tossed about in so many directions I don't know which way I'm facing. We've been in 14 states in 2 months, a new town every other night. I started out playing mostly bass, but when the pick-up and jack didn't work for a few weeks, I quickly had to make myself useful in other ways during our program. A host home gets comfortable and people become familiar, then we leave the next day for another town and a new family. And just when I think I can navigate my way through a city by myself, I drive to a new city that makes no sense to me. It seems like nothing ever stays the same and the rain is pouring down around me and the wind is twirling me around in circles.

It's so easy to be overwhelmed and exhausted on the road. Sometimes I just feel lost and don't know where I'm supposed to be headed, but I know I need to keep on moving to higher ground. It's the "Evacuation Route" signs that God puts on the path that keep me from being swallowed up or left behind: The hug from a team mate, a phone call home, a letter in the mail packet, a host mom who lets me talk and cry on her shoulder, a prayer with a friend, or a message straight from God saying "keep going, I'm right here with you. It'll be okay." And I keep going, knowing that I would follow my God anywhere.

Date: 12/1/2003

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Taylorsville, Kentucky.

You did not have a home ... there were places you visited frequently

Took off Your shoes and scratched Your feet
'Cause You knew that the whole world belonged to the meek
But You did not have a home (Rich Mullins - You Did Not Have A Home)

We have zig-zagged our way throughout the Southeast and have begun our trek northward. Tomorrow we enter Indiana and i have begun to think of this thing we call home. i have many places i would call home ... my parents' place, Lafayette, Indiana, Lutherhaven, Lakeview, anywhere i might find a friend. Tonight, i am content with a house in Taylorsville, Kentucky ... not only for having a place to lay my head, but having a place to lay my heart. For wherever i might find myself, there i find God. i find the evidence of His love in the folks i meet and the meals i eat ... in the setting sun and the stars above ... in the song i sing and every smile i receive. Many days i wonder about my home. God, grant me my earthly home until i enter the heavenly home.



Joshua Vandercar

For all you five rockers ... i think back to all the floors on which i've played with each of you. Here it finally is ... the Five Rocks - Rules of Play! Find it at <http://www.vandercar.net/fiverocks> Enjoy the fun and share it with a friend.

Christ's Love,
JoshUa

Date: 1/1/2004
Submitted by: Becca Leaf
Journal Entry:

Happy New Years!! I can't believe it's 2004. And what a way to start the new year! In 2 weeks we'll be getting off the plane in Ghana, and I'll be starting the biggest adventure of my 22 years. Being back on team after our Christmas break made me realize how much I depend on my team. I have been fighting off a bad case of apprehension for the past month, but looking around at my team for the first time in 2 weeks, I see 5 other people I can trust and know will be there to help me along the way.

We just finished a lock-in last night here in Chesterton, IN. During the night Joshua led a devotion on reconciliation and being a new creation in Christ (our theme for this year). And a little while later the pastor came in and did a session on remembering our baptisms and starting new things for a new year. I'm excited for 2004. It's going to be one adventure after another. I was talking to a friend last night about going to Africa in 2 weeks and returning this summer to the southeast and starting college again next fall and going back to work and all the other possibilities that are coming up. It's scary sometimes to be so full of hopes and dreams and never really know what's actually going to happen.

We sing a song from Nigeria during our program. It's called Ni Zan Je. The words translated into English are "I must go with Jesus anywhere, no matter the roughness of the road. I must go, I must go." How true is that? As I look at where I've been the last few years and where I'm heading right now, it's easy for me to be completely overwhelmed and scared of all the challenges to come. But I really must go with Jesus anywhere He leads me. I think I'd rather be with Him during the rough times than alone in the best of times.

So please pray for me and my team these next few weeks as we prepare to leave. And pray for us while we're overseas. My prayer for the New Year is to trust in God, to be patient, to love others, and to go anywhere He wants.



Becca Leaf

Date: 1/5/2004
Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar
Journal Entry:

North Canton, Ohio. We are standing on the verge of the unknown. From August until now we have been given glimpses of what we might experience in Africa, but now we are stepping into the reality of it. I am excited to soon find myself in the unfamiliarity of culture, climate, people, and place. I nervously look forward to the

responsibilities that lie ahead for me. One thing I know and cling to ... God is faithful. His faithfulness and goodness does not change from yesterday, today, to tomorrow. "I will remember the works of the Lord; surely I will remember Your wonders of old. I will also meditate on all Your work, and talk of Your deeds. Your way, O God, is in the sanctuary; who is so great a God as our God? You are the God who does wonders; You have declared Your strength among the peoples. You have with Your arm redeemed Your people, the sons of Jacob and Joseph." [Psalm 77:11-15] Praise You, Lord, for Your faithfulness. Continue to lead us in Your love, strength, and peace.

Christ's Love,
JoshUa



Joshua Vandercar

Date: 1/14/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

I woke up a few hours ago thinking, "Where in the world am I?" All I could see outside was a solid wall of blue. There was a line dividing ocean and sky, but they both seemed to go on forever. We've only got a few more hours before we land in Accra, Ghana. In a matter of hours every preconceived notion, every story we've heard, every fact we've read, and every hope I have for this trip is going to be real, tangible. Walking through the airport in London, it dawned on me that I am very, very far from home. I've got 3 pence in my wallet from buying a postcard, I'm sitting near people of at least 6 different nationalities, and what I'm looking at outside is a desert I've only heard of or seen in books and movies. And when I think about my being here I feel so small and vulnerable. How did Paul or Timothy or any of the disciples have the guts to do this?

To answer that, I have to answer a few other questions. What's important? Is where I've come from important? Or is where I'm going important? Is it who I am or what I've done or what I will do that's important? How much does one person matter? Hmmm... that's a little deeper than I wanted to get in this journal, but I've had 15 hours on a plane to ponder the meaning of my existence. "For God so loved every single person who was, who is, and who will be on this earth he sent his only son to die, so whoever believes can live forever." Do I need to know more than the fact that God is looking out for me?

You know, I can sit here, trying to be profound, looking for answers to all of life's questions, but in a few hours we're going to land in Ghana. We're going to meet Elvis and Matthew our new teammates. Life is going to go on and I'm going to praise God every day I'm here. I love this life I'm in. I don't always know what's going on or what to expect. Praise God for His creativity in our lives. He takes care of us in so many different ways. I hope I can repay his kindness by taking care of others as good as I am being taken care of now.



Becca Leaf

Date: 1/15/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Greater Accra Region

We are now on African soil! How sweet it is to be loved by Jesus, because after months of preparation, wondering (and worrying), we are here safely. I will never forget exiting the Accra airport to a sea... check that, OCEAN of people. Imagine looking for two people you've never met before at the mall on Christmas Eve... it was kinda like that.

Somehow, Elvis and Matthew, our new teammates, found us and swept us off to the bus. Accra, the capital of Ghana, is a bustling city at 9 in the evening. We then went to the guest house where we were to be sleeping and met with our new Ghanaian teammates.

It is with a heavy heart that I tell you the following story: Later that evening, it was time to turn in.



Clayton Mark

The three young men of Cross Fire adjourned to their room, eager to get a good night's sleep. There was a double bed and the floor it rested upon. I decided to roll my sleeping mat onto the floor and Joshua and Matt took the bed. It was just as I was getting ready to lie down that I noticed two ginormous ants on my sheet. All they needed were saddles and we could've rode them into town to buy a pair of shoes. Well, obviously, I was not too scared to sleep on the floor, but Matt and Joshua pleaded with me to join them, so that my life might be saved from the invincible, flesh-eating ants... okay, maybe I thought it would be a good idea. Well, imagine a double bed stuffed with three young men, and you've got a good idea of what our first night's sleep was like.

Our first full day was a lesson in Africa time. We ate breakfast, walked to the church office, met our contacts, ate "lunner" and drove home... that took us all day! Here we sit now in a common room at the guest house, sharing new songs with Matthew, and realizing why we are here. We're not here to have the best sleeping arrangements or the tight schedule. We're here to praise God and share His message of love in new ways, and we're here to learn that same message in new ways. The next 3 1/2 months are going to be rough at times and fun at times, but hopefully every day will bring us closer to Christ, here in His glorious land of Africa.

Date: 1/16/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, Ghana

To everyone back home: Greetings from Cross Fire and your brothers and sisters in Christ here in Ghana! I sincerely apologize for the fact that it took flying to Africa to get me to write a journal, but now that we're here there's more to tell about than I can possibly write and I truly look forward to all my opportunities to share these crazy times and awesome experiences with all of you.



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

We are now wrapping up our second full day in Africa and from the moment our comfy British Airways plane touched down here in Accra, I've felt like I'm in a dream. Sitting here in this guest house with 90 degree F heat outside at 11:00 p.m. and people speaking a new language all around me and an open marketplace out our front door with all the sights and sounds that go with it, I cannot believe it was only three days ago we were in Maryland, staying in host homes and driving our van and eating at Taco Bell. Things have changed so much so fast, I believe I can speak for the team in saying "overwhelmed" is a good adjective for us right now.

But we're excited! Just in this short time we've met countless people who are so welcoming and so excited to have us, their joy is contagious. We have yet to see all the ways the Lord will use us here, but we can't wait to find out.

Today started early and ended late (that's been the pattern thus far) with us getting up at 6:30 a.m. (1:30 a.m. in Ashville, NC, FYI) to take our hot new ride, the seminary shuttle bus, about 25 minutes away to where the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana is holding a seminar for church leaders and youth representatives from all over Ghana. Our new teammates and buddies, Elvis and Matthew, are the main organizers of the event so they've been running around with a lot to do ever since we arrived Wednesday night, but the seminar was a cool thing for our team to be a part of. We spent most of the day sitting in an open-air sanctuary listening to pastors and leaders discuss various topics and issues facing the Lutheran Church here in Ghana. As people talked of the need for evangelism and outreach and youth ministry, all confusion, frustration and anxiety I've experienced in the past few days fell away and I was reminded of why we are here. The participants talked about us, how excited they are to have Cross Fire back in Ghana, what amazing work they know we will do, and how they all wish they could have our team in their region longer than we are going to be able to stay. It was so humbling, and although I still have tons of questions, I know God will lead us and equip us as we go.

We left the seminar for a while to make a visit to the American Embassy (which was supposed to close 30 minutes before we arrived, but it was nice to learn that the relaxed "African time" swings both ways), buy mosquito nets and a team djembe drum, which was an insane cultural experience

in itself that I'm glad we all survived. We returned to the seminar in the evening for an authentic Ghanaian dinner and our first program of sorts, where we played a few songs and shared our excitement with the conference participants.

Now we're back at our guest house (which is just a small hotel) and Joshua, Kathy and I have been sitting up talking with Matthew for the last hour. Tomorrow is going to be another full day, and then Monday we leave for Kumasi and the official start of our Ghana tour. Please continue to pray for us as we do for all of you. We love you and rejoice in this awesome family we share all over the world. God's blessing and His peace!

Matt
Luke 24:13

Date: 1/17/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Anyaah, Ghana

Anyaah, Ghana! I am happy. Thus far, our time together in Ghana has been amazing. My eyes are daily being opened to a new way of life and it is a beautiful sight. Our God is a very creative God, fashioning so many unique people, places, and cultures.

My day began and ended in the same way... push-starting the church bus. It was a joy to share in the many hands that help. The hands here in Ghana are certainly servant hands. They inspire me to greater giving.

We encounter so many people throughout the day... so many smiles. The humble smiles humble me. The joyous smiles fill me with joy. There's such beauty in the smiles.

Blessings to the store owners who lent us their light and a little land beside the road so that we might praise our God into the night. Pastor said that our presence will be felt, our presence will be felt... people will come. And so it was. Praise God for the offering of praises that rise up from Anyaah.

Christ's Love,
Joshua



Joshua Vandercar

Date: 1/18/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, Ghana

Wow, what a day. We had a church service this morning that we attended in Anyaa, and that was quite an amazing and exciting experience. I don't know if many people in the United States have heard a drum kit playing for hymns from "the red book," otherwise known as The Lutheran Hymnal, but the six of us Americans on Cross Fire and about five other Americans heard it and danced along this morning.

We had such a wonderful time experiencing worship in a new way, singing many hymns and other more contemporary praise and worship songs as well! It was also amazing to get to know many people better than we had formerly had the chance to.

Now on to some VERY exciting and surprising news! We found out that if everything goes as planned, and final preparations are confirmed, we will be able to attend a wedding while here in Ghana! And to top it all off, guess who's getting married? It's our teammate Elvis! We had no idea that we would be so blessed that we could be present for the wedding of one of our teammates in



Kathy Weber

the same year we are on team! Praise God for this wonderful news.

For me, this event has been very telling of our time in Ghana so far. Having never been to the continent of Africa before, I did not know exactly what this time would be like, even though I had seen many pictures and heard many stories of Africa and the different countries here. I feel that I am placing my trust in God that He will bless our trip and keep us safe in a place that I'm unsure about. We haven't yet been here one week and many things have happened that I never expected would occur in my life, and it has been very exciting!

I am reminded of a text I used in some of my sharings in the United States from Jeremiah, Chapter 29:11 which says, "For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope." This verse comforts me in challenging times and also makes me very excited for the surprises that lie ahead. I know that the next few months won't be easy all the time, but I am anxious for the wonderful and amazing experiences to come down the bumpy dirt road!

Date: 1/19/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: To and in Kumasi

After a three day seminar with the Lutheran Youth representatives and the Lutheran Media Ministry Coordinators from all over Ghana, the team was set to travel to Kumasi to begin its tour.



Matthew Abudulai

Here the African culture caught us in an unfortunate problem. What culture am I referring to? The culture of lateness. Having booked our travel time at 12:00 noon we were a little late. To be precise, myself, Elvis, and Kathy. On arriving at the transport yard, here was this total pandemonium. Passengers yelling at us. Elvis managed to get on board with Kathy and I behind. The transport attendant advocated that we should take the next bus since our seats had been sold. To add to my frustration Kathy began weeping. Oh no, I said to myself, what a situation. I began to comfort her to stop crying. To my maximum surprise God Almighty worked a miracle through Kathy's cry. The transport attendant dropped one of the passengers and allowed Kathy to join the team on board. Although I was sad for being left behind, a miracle happened and that brought joy to all my teammates.

When the 7 member team left to Kumasi, there was I again stranded. I was then told that I will be 1 and 1/2 hours late, that even deepened my frustration. Here, God spoke to me, "Why don't you go to another station and take a bus," which I did.

Ten minutes after the team arrived at Kumasi I arrived there also, although my bus took off almost an hour and a half later. I was again blessed to be together again with Cross Fire in Kumasi, and we all took our supper together.

Date: 1/20/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Ashanti Region (Kumasi)

We arrived safely yesterday in Ashanti Region to begin the first part of our tour. Hark, the voice of Jesus crying, Who will go and work today, fields are white and harvest waiting, who will bear the sheaves away? Loud and long the master called, rich reward He offers there. Who will answer gladly saying, "Here am I, send me, send me."



Elvis Kafui Doe

I'm very excited being on team because I've been preparing to join team for almost two years now.

Matthew and I have been refused visas several times but all the same God has made it possible for us to be with our teammates. I deem it a great opportunity to be called to serve God in Ghana and Nigeria. Due to the fact that we were not at training in August, we are compelled to go an extra mile. Interestingly, my teammates are great and as a result I've learned a lot within this short time. Today, we had four programs and during the programs we had the opportunity of sharing the Word of God with about seven hundred people. It's our prayer that the grace of God will see us through our tour successfully. To God alone be the glory.

In Christ,
Elvis

Date: 1/21/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Kumasi, Ghana

Ah, familiarity! What? A young US citizen finding familiarity in a foreign country? As Elvis says, "Sure." The first instance was emerging from the plane a week ago. The smells, the weather and humidity, it brought me back. Then the drive, and so many since then, in tightly packed vehicles on sometimes bumpy, dusty roads. The markets, the street vendors, the bargaining, the Ghanaian culture. On our way here from Accra, we stopped at the common rest stop halfway to Kumasi. As we walked past the toilets, toward the eating area, I realized how very familiar this scene was. Yes, 5 1/2 years ago I had taken a picture of that very sign. There was a bird perched atop of it that I wanted to get a picture of. That was a very different season—in respects to the weather (it was the rainy season, now it is the dry season), the landscape, and myself. Today we ran some errands which took us to the Central Communications Center—post office and public phones. Ah, this is where, 5 1/2 years ago, my family got my updates. Familiarity. Becca and I bought a phone card which, to call internationally, doesn't get either of us individually very far—much less for both of us to share! I did get a chance to call home for a few minutes though.



Rachel Haabala

I'll have to say, though there are some recognizable things, I am still amazed at others. This morning we were at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church and School and did an hour long worship service with all 600 students. Before we started we were singing with the 3-5 year old children, waiting for the older students. Elvis and Matthew were asking the kids, "What songs do you know?" And we would sing them. They are so intelligent! We did a simple puppet show, and I don't know if any of the students heard what it was about because the crowd was in an uproar! They loved the puppets. Early that evening we walked from the church to an area nearby and sang some songs, did a skit and Matthew shared all in the street. On the way we met a small herd of cows! They almost ran us off the road, but the truck that came through certainly ran them off the road! Ghanaian culture will never cease to amaze me, people carrying stuff on their heads, babies wrapped to their backs, the friendliest country I've encountered. Even in the crazy, sometimes uncontrolled traffic, drivers and pedestrians help each other out. Matthew shares in our programs the story of the Good Samaritan. He asks "Who is your neighbor?" The answer is Everyone.

So, me? Sure there's some culture shock, but overall I'm loving this experience to be here in Ghana again. One woman today asked my name and where I was from. I said "Rachel from Minnesota"—she immediately connected me with Rachel who was on Cross Fire 1997-98 and also from Minnesota. Matthew said, "Ah, all Rachels are from Minnesota" in good humor.

It's great to make new friends here. Thank you for your prayers and support. There are ten regions in Ghana, we are planning to do ministry in all ten which means a lot of traveling! Pray for safety—which we've seen already by the Grace of God!

Date: 1/22/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Location: Bechem, Brong Ahafo region

What a day! I am quickly learning that I am not as tough as I like to think. Every day I experience something new which teaches me to rely on my teammates. The eight of us split up in Kumasi to get some errands done. I was in the group going to the market. It is an indescribable place. You can buy anything at the market. There are hundreds of rows, thousands of booths, and it feels like a million people. Rachel and I were very thankful for Vivian (a good friend of our whole team) and Matthew. One led the way, the other followed behind so neither Rachel or I would get lost. But we got all our missions accomplished and rejoined our group downtown for lunch.



Becca Leaf

Part of me has always wanted to be here. It has been a huge dream come true to be in Ghana, meet the people, learn the culture, and actually live in this place. It's taken a week, but I think some of the wonder and excitement is starting to fade. I miss family and friends back home. I think the feeling of "this is a great vacation" is wearing off. I understand that people live here, and now I live here too, even if it is only for a few months.

If there is one verse that is getting me through each day, it is Matthew 6:34: "Do not worry about tomorrow." I would change it to: "Do not worry about this afternoon." So much can change in a few hours here. Rain can come and go, canceling our outdoor programs. One hour I will feel fine, but an hour later I can feel sick or over-heated, and then feel fine again a few hours after that. Every day is put into God's hands. He will put me where I need to be and support me through what every new hour brings. I thank God for bread at breakfast, water in the afternoon sun, and a place to lay my weary head at night. Everything else I consider a gift. I look forward to what God will give to me next.

Date: 1/23/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Bechem, Brong Ahafo Region, Ghana

Let me tell you about the chocolatey goodness that is Milo (pronounces Mee-Low). It is the Cross Fire standard for breakfast. Each morning, we gather around the table, say grace, and patiently pass all of the essential ingredients. First, two scoops of Milo, which is a nutritional, vitamin-packed powder. Next comes two cubes of sugar, condensed creamer, and steaming hot water. What in the heck are we doing drinking a hot beverage in a hot country? I can't answer that. All I know is that it tastes like a big slice of heaven with a side order of fries, and you just kinda get used to it being hot. Serve with a piece o' bread and butter, and you've got a good start to the day... and for a day like today, it's crucial.



Clayton Mark

We started our day by doing a workshop on evangelism. We shared ideas with people from the local church and helped to encourage them as they share the Good News with others. We ate an early lunch of fried plantains and beans known as "red red." Elvis, our Ghanaian teammate, eats plantains like they're going out of style! We then walked back to the center of town to hail a taxi.

We drove to the Boakye Trom Secondary/Technical School, where our contact, John, is a science teacher. We did a program for about 150 high schoolers. From there, we drove to the nearby Dunyaw Nkwanta Camp Prison. That's right: Prison. It was pretty surreal to drive down the bumpy dirt road. I half expected it to be like something out of a movie. I didn't know if they would come out of their cells, like in "Shawshank Redemption." Or maybe they would be working outside like "O Brother, Where Art Thou." I also expected the inmates to be very, very scary and intimidating. The Lord was about to show me a thing or two about my assumptions.

The men were outside, lined up neatly on benches. As soon as we started to sing "Yeda Waseo", a spiritual song in their native language of Twi, they all joined in, giving us the most moving rendition of the song that we've ever heard. 110 Ghanaian men and 6 obrunnis (white people...aka: US!) all

praising God with one language and one heart. It was breathtaking.

It shows the difference between circumstances. The children we sang to at the school seemed to enjoy our program, but did not appear interested at times. These men in prison, with nothing but the clothes on their back, seemed to really treasure our time together, just as we did. Their enthusiasm was contagious, their smiles enormous and joyful. At the end of the program, the head officer said, "When we were hungry, you fed us... When we were thirsty, you gave us a drink." The words of Jesus, used to remind us that we are here to be His ambassadors. We are here to lift Him up and glorify His precious name! Words to inspire us to press on, even when we don't want to. And how amazing it is that those very words could have been said by us. For it is those men who fed us that day, acting as a reminder that, no matter what our circumstances, we can give praise and be thankful to God for His tender mercies.

Date: 1/24/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Brong Ahafo (Kintampo)

Glory be to God for all the good things and blessings he continues to shower on us. I deem it a great opportunity to be part of the Great Commission because it has always been my desire to share the love of Jesus Christ with others, more especially those who are not Christians. We are working very hard as a team in spreading the Good News of Jesus Christ. Actually, it's not going easy but we are doing well amidst a lot of challenges by His grace.



Elvis Kafui Doe

Today for instance, we traveled from Bechem to Kintampo on an urban bus for four hours. Just after we had arrived, we had to quickly organize ourselves, and again travel to a small village for a program. Actually, they were holding a convention in that village and unknowing to us, they've been waiting for us all day long and you can just imagine the joy and excitement when we arrived there. My heart was full of joy to see about 250 people waiting for us only to hear the Good News of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Our team ministry has really changed my life. It has made me develop a personal relationship with Jesus. It has also changed my way of thinking and understanding. To God alone be the Glory. Amen. Remember God is bigger than all your challenges.

Date: 1/25/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Techiman, Grumakrom & Kintampo, Ghana

O Father, hold me now and ever! I have ached for Your law and Your love... quickly You answer. You meet me at my need. The ways and words of others have brought me to frustration and anger... still I hold my peace. Today we faced a long dusty red road and met two chiefs... in Grumakrom and Kintampo. These are the wise, the respected. O Lord... to have such wisdom and respect. I turn Your Word. In these days, God, rekindle it in my heart as a burning fire I cannot contain. O Lord, for Your law and Your love, I praise You!



Joshua Vandercar

The end of a thing is better than the beginning, and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools. Do not say "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this. Also, do not take to heart everything people say. Lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others. –Ecclesiastes 7:8-10, 21-22

Therefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God. –James 1:19-20

Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His Word), in God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me? You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book? When I cry out to you, then my enemies will turn back; this I know because God is for me. In God (I will praise His word), in the Lord (I will praise His word), in God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You, for You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not delivered my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living? –Psalm 56:3-4, 8-13

You, O Lord, have my heart. Take it where You will.

Christ's Love,
Joshua

Date: 1/26/2004
Submitted by: Kathy Weber
Journal Entry:

Location: Kintampo, Brong Ahafo Region, Ghana

Today we found out that a program we had scheduled for the morning was postponed until later in the day. While this would have almost never happened in the U.S., it has become quite a common occurrence to change around our programs. It is a cultural difference that has taken some time to get used to, but it hasn't been too difficult, and I find that I still maintain a relatively laid back attitude toward changes made to the schedule.



Kathy Weber

Anyway, this break in our day happened to give the three of us girls enough time and the opportunity to get our hair braided. Being that this activity can take up to three hours to complete (per person), it was no small adventure we set out on. Luckily we found a hair salon (I think this is an appropriate time to point out that I have noticed at least one or two hair SALOONS so far on our tour here in Ghana, which have proved to be a humorous misspelling of the word salon, not a hair styling place that serves drinks).

So, as I was saying, we found a salon with many apprentices, so Becca, Rachel, and I could all be braided simultaneously, to be more efficient with the time we had. This experience was definitely unforgettable for many reasons, mostly because it was the longest amount of time I spent continuously sitting on a wooden bench (over 2 hours) and each of us had at least five or six women helping to braid our hair, so it was quite a spectacle.

I found myself struggling to keep up a conversation with them, because it was hard for me to understand the English they knew, and they mostly spoke to one another. About an hour and a half had passed, and my rear end hurt from sitting for so long, my scalp hurt from being pulled in many different directions at once, and I was bored. Well, I started humming very softly a song we had learned since coming to Ghana (especially sung on Sundays at church) and the lyrics are, "I will lift up my hands higher, Oh Jehovah, you are wonderful, I will lift up my hands higher." Well, to my surprise, one of the ladies started to sing the song, so I joined in, because I liked the song, and it helped keep my mind off of the discomfort I was feeling. Well, I had no idea how much attention it would draw, but the ladies who were braiding my hair loved it. We finished with that song, and I started to sing another. Some of the other ladies who worked there but didn't have work to do came over and started singing with us and listening to me. When one song was done, they would ask me to sing another. A woman was passing by and she stopped to listen. I think many of them were surprised because I was singing songs in their native language, which was not what they expected from a white woman.

Before I knew it, my hair had been braided completely and it was time to put the finishing touches on it. I was glad that I had found a way to communicate with these women, and I hope they have good memories of the time we spent together, because it was a very memorable time for me.

Date: 1/27/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Kintampo to Tamale

Though a typical Ghanaian born and bred in Tema, Ghana, I have never had the opportunity to visit the monkey sanctuary in Buabeng-Fiema in the Brong Ahafo Region. Life with the ministry of Cross Fire here in Ghana made me find myself in the sanctuary this day. The sanctuary is nestled in between the two villages of Buabeng and Fiema. According to the supervisor of the sanctuary, the sanctuary is a home to over 200 Geoffroy's Pied Colobus and 500 Campbell's Mona Mon Monkeys.



Matthew Abudulai

Members of the team were thrilled when we entered the forest with a variety of trees and the monkeys on the trees. What a sanctuary, I said to myself. I saw the beauty of God's creation. Trees and animals living together and the monkeys and some species of butterflies depending on the leaves of the trees and the fruits. To me that was a resemblance scene of the Garden of Eden.

To remember the sanctuary, we could not help it but taking pictures to always remember the wonderful work of God.

One surprising news I heard from the supervisor was that the people of Buabeng and Fiema have considered the monkeys sacred and that the traditional beliefs in both communities prohibit physical harm of the monkeys.

As human beings, the monkeys have their own cemetery in the forest where a dead monkey is buried.

On our way from Kitampo to the sanctuary, which was about an hour drive, I was quite annoyed with the driver because he told us that it was about twenty minutes drive. Of course after the visit I felt it was worth it.

Thereafter we had to change stay in the region by travelling to Tamale, the regional Capital of the Northern region. Initially I thought our car was not that strong enough to get us to Tamale but the Good Lord granted us the traveling mercies, arriving at Tamale to the Catholic Guest House about 3:00 p.m.

For my first time I had spaghetti as lunch with my teammates in Ghana since they arrived almost two weeks ago. It was fun.

In Kumasi we looked for a team fabric to buy a Kente material. Unfortunately for us we could not get the number of yards we needed. In our morning devotion we prayed to God to help us get this fabric when we got to Tamale. Lo and behold our prayer request was answered by God. This strengthens my faith the more.

In Christ,
Matthew A.B.

Date: 1/28/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Gbintiri, Northern Region, Ghana

Tonight, we are in the bush. We entered Ghana's Northern region yesterday and spent the night in it's capital of Tamale, but it wasn't until we left the city today and traveled north that we started to get our first taste of rural Northern Ghana. We're sleeping now in dorm-style rooms at a Lutheran Training Center in the little village of Gbintiri, and there is NOTHING around us. We arrived here after dark, so it's difficult to gauge exactly how empty the black vastness around us truly is (b/c there is no electricity!) but just the short walk upon arrival from the truck to our rooms, in total darkness, through sand and underbrush with the far-off yet clear sound of drumming in the distance was enough to let us know this place is like nowhere we've been yet.



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

The day started at the Catholic Guest House in Tamale, where I led devotions on "family." It's something I have been thinking about ever since our first African program just a few days after our arrival in Accra, when my new friend Harry Kwese told me plainly, "You don't need family when you're doing the work of God." It sounds somewhat harsh, but I actually found his words surprisingly comforting, and have since been challenging myself to consider who my family truly is. It's tough to remind myself sometimes, but really I know that through the wondrous, all-surpassing love of our Savior, the people we meet here are as close to us as the families we left, and Ghana is as much my home as North Carolina.

We were picked up at the guest house by David Federwitz, a missionary with Lutheran Bible Translators, and made the three-hour trek to the village of Nasuan (in a smooth, air-conditioned Toyota 4-Runner, I might add. NOT a sweaty, dusty, crowded, public chro-chro!) David got along great with the crew and it was interesting to hear his story: His parents were also Lutheran Bible Translators in Liberia, where he was born and lived until the age of 18. Now after 10 years of school and work in the United States, he returned to West Africa to start a new Bible project among the Konkomba people (an overwhelming task to be sure, as I heard him describe all the work they had in front of them). What an amazingly different life he has led than me, spending his entire childhood growing up as a part of this culture I am now struggling to take in at the age of 20.

Nasuan is home to Pastor Nathan and Sarah Esala, colleagues of David and his wife Valerie. We played a program out in front of the church and the entire village came to watch, around 250 people. Afterwards, Clay and I took a dive into the local language and had some fun trying to learn some names, taking pointers from the Esala's four-year-old daughter, Carrissa. This is the first place we've been where Twi is not widely spoken, so it means starting over with all our introductions and phrases and responses. They speak Likonl here, a dialect of Konkomba, and my guess is we'll have mastered our two or three token words right about the time we're moving into an area where they speak something totally different.

We were invited into a compound next to the church for a lip-smacking dinner of ti-zed and ground-nut soup, staple northern food. We were also treated to our first ever rounds of pito, the homemade local brew we hear we'll be offered a lot as an act of hospitality across northern Ghana. In the words of one Nate Houge, "Pito is neato!"

After saying our goodbyes we traveled another hour up a bumpy road to Gbintiri, where we're settled in now about 150 yards from the Federwitz home. It's fun to spend time around other Americans and hear about the things that led them to such a remote place and unique life. They definitely appreciate visitors to their small village, and I hold so much respect for their work. Our short time spent here pales in comparison to their endeavor, a 10-year or more commitment, raising a family, and building a life in Africa. It's mind-boggling to me, but I know the Lord strengthens the missionaries here to do all things just as he feeds us on our journey. Peace!

Date: 1/29/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Gbintiri to Bunkpurugu , the Northern Region

Greetings to all! We are fine by His grace. This morning had a healthy start. Valerie (the missionary here) prepared a local porridge, eggs, and Cinnamon Rolls! Mmmm—sure beats the sugar bread, margarine, fruit (usually oranges or bananas) tea and Milo. What? You're asking what Milo is? Well, if no one's explained it yet, Milo is a tasty "sport drink" with energy-releasing B Vitamins. And, hey, according to the can, we're winners, 'cause "Winners start their day with a cup of Nestle' Milo." And, we take the can's advice seriously when it says, "Drink a cup of Nestle's Milo every day." So, you get the idea! It's "The Food Drink!" Anyway, it tastes almost like Hot Chocolate with a pinch of Carnation Instant Breakfast. Not bad! And, yes we do drink it hot, even though we are in Africa!



Rachel Haabala

So back to today, we didn't have Milo, but the meal was amazing! We met with 2 pastors and shortly after headed off to meet the chiefs of the village. The first formal meeting! We entered the first Chief's palace (the large brown hut) hunched over, took a seat and when we'd all gotten in we squatted down and made a clapping motion with very little sound. After a few minutes of dialogue, David (the missionary) got the A-O-K to take pictures. The purpose was for us to say our greetings and intentions for visiting. He asked us to sing a song so we sang "Lord I Lift Your Name on High". After extending our gratitude, we left. Off to the second Chief's hut. This time much less informal. We sat on a carefully arranged set of tree limbs. Literally translated, David said it's called a "Sit, Rest, and Get Up" and is treated as the front porch of a person's house. Ok, cool. The Chief came out and again we all squatted and "clapped" to the man. As I squatted down, I lost my balance and out of habit, reacted to grab something nearby—ha ha. The closest things were Kathy and Elvis—oh boy! They almost toppled over with me—but by God's grace we stayed up! OOOEE! Elvis then told me not to fall over in front of the Chief—ha ha! OK! So, yes, the chief was happy to hear that we were around to share the Word of God and welcomed us. Joshua thanked him on behalf of the team and we were out. Back to get our program things—I.e.: instruments and puppets!

Our first program of the day was for the school children and was held in the Lutheran Church across from the school. Villagers were welcome, too. The response was great! Kids were having a good time laughing at us and joining us sometimes. We've learned quite a few local songs and sing some each program. Of course the crowds enjoy that and eagerly sing along. Usually they are amazed that we "obrunis" would know the songs (Obruni is "white man" in Twi).

Back to David and Valerie's house where we had spaghetti and garlic bread—American style. I enjoy the food here, but once in a while it's comforting to have American type meals. Small comforts in a strange land. We moved from there with all of our belongings to a village, Jimbale, where it was Market Day and we could do a program, attracting many people. Let me explain Market Day—this is the one day in about a week when vendors from neighboring towns bring their goods to sell. Because the villagers are smaller and more widespread than in the south, Market Days work best on a rotation. So Jimbale had their Market Day today, tomorrow will be Market day in another village and Saturday will be Market Day in Bunkpurugu—our final destination today.

The Market program was intense. Lots of commotion. The crowd circled us and throughout the songs, continued to creep in on us. And, despite all the noise, I would look around and see so many attentive eyes, eager to know what we had to share. It amazes me. These people seem so intrigued by our presence and the white American skin that 6 of us are clothed in. I'd like to know what's in their thoughts. They certainly intrigue me! Sometimes I feel almost disgusted by having white skin—not that I feel guilty, but disappointed in some of the stereotypes we have. And, even though Matthew says he and Elvis understand, I still feel ashamed when the children rush to us "obrunis" to shake our hands and touch our skin, completely bypassing Elvis and Matthew. Ah, the things I wasn't prepared for, yet continue to learn!

It is a wonderful opportunity to be here and experience this culture and to share Jesus and His love for them. Praise be to God for our faithful supporters, friends, and family! Please continue to pray for safe travels, health, and ease of communication with those around us.. Oh—and my birthday wish (in 2 days) is to ride a donkey. They are abundant in Bunkpurugu!

Journal Entry:

Location: Bunkpurugu, Ghana

"Why did the chicken cross the road?" I thought our contact was trying to be humorous, but as it turns out, that is a serious question. We will be barreling down the road at 100 km/h and a chicken will tear out in front of us in a desperate attempt to get to the other side of the road. It's happened every time we travel, so it really begs the question: "Why did the chicken cross the road?" And there really is only one answer: "To get to the other side." It's not profound, but sometimes the answers to life's questions are simple and easy.



Becca Leaf

Okay, I'm changing the subject now. So many people have written and asked me where we are and what it's like. Today we are staying in the coolest place yet. It's a local hotel, but each of the 7 rooms are mud huts with thatched roofs. We have a room off to the side for bathing (literally a bath room), a bucket of water for washing, and only solar power for a small light in our room. It seems like everywhere we go something else is taken away, making life harder, funner, and making us a little more creative! I used to always say, "I need _____" or "I have to have _____" (fill in the blank with running water, electricity, a fan, cold water, whatever) and I really thought I did. Yes, life is very different without electricity or having to filter all our water. And it is harder for me, who has grown up dependant on washing machines, refrigerators, and flushable toilets. But the experience to have no choice but to live without modern conveniences has been priceless. I am not just surviving here, but I am truly living and enjoying it. I do thank God for running water or cold pop from a restaurant, when we can get it. But more often I find myself thanking Him for my water bottle of warm clean water, the bread we are able to buy everyday at the market, and the billions of stars I can see every night because there is no artificial light to block them out. Just when my light goes out, God's lights come on. I'd take starlight over streetlights any night.

As I lay here tonight, I wonder where everyone is. My family is 8 hours away, still in school or at work probably making plans for this weekend. Both the Watermark teams are probably getting ready for bed, like us. Kindred is in South America doing a program looking forward to this evening, and New Dawn is somewhere just staring their day. Most of the Captive Free teams are setting up for events or lock-ins this weekend. And here is Cross Fire, enjoying a few quiet hours before bed, playing cards by flashlight, writing letters, or just enjoying the drop from 110 degrees down to about 85 or 90. Life is always going on somewhere. My day is over, another person's day is just starting. Psalm 121 says God doesn't sleep. He's guarding us from the sun by day or the moon by night. So wherever you are when you read this, God is awake and ready for you, even though I'll probably be asleep.

Date: 1/31/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Bunkpurugu, Northern Region, Ghana/Bawku, Upper East Region, Ghana

The Cross Fire Ghanaian Party Machine is still chuggin'! Today, we celebrated Rachel May's 23rd birthday! How cool to have an African B-day. We began our day in Bunkpurugu with a program in the Marketplace. Once a week, in many cities like Bunkpurugu, there is a Market Day where all the action is happening. Imagine the malls or supermarkets only opening on every Saturday, and all the people in the city have one day to shop for their major needs... it's kind of like that. Just like a farmer's market, there are tables and blankets spread all over the place selling foods, clothing, bicycle parts... you name it!



Clayton Mark

Market programs can best be described as "Double-O-C," or Out of Control! There are people everywhere! We end up being completely encircled by a crowd of people who are eager to hear what we have to say. It's so awesome, yet so not. It's amazing to have so many people there to share God's Word with, yet it is so stressful to control the crowd. We struggle to keep a space where we can perform. We struggle to be heard over the voices of the crowd. We struggle because it feels like there are TOO many people. It's definitely something I struggle with. We come to share the Gospel

with as many people as we can, yet I get discouraged when surrounded by a tsunami of humanity. Still, I trust God's call, both for us and the people there.

Now, we sit in Bawku, after an afternoon of traveling with David, our cool missionary buddy with Lutheran Bible Translators. It was a pretty bumpy ride getting here. In fact, I think we traveled on Sylvester Stallone Blvd, because it was "Rocky!" It's definitely a struggle living in Africa. Seriously, the room we're in right now could be the setting for an episode of "Wild Kingdom." Elvis, Matt and I are being joined by many friends from the reptile and insect worlds. Still, after an evening of tasty dinner, cold minerals (soda pop!) and cards, I find God easing me into this new culture, day by day. I know that if I surrender to God's guidance, that it will be an experience I treasure. I am reminded of the anonymous words from Hebrews 12:11, "No discipline seems pleasurable at the time, yet for those who have been trained by it, it will produce a harvest of righteousness." I pray to surrender daily to God's plans for me and our team.

Date: 2/1/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Upper East (Bawku) Ghana

The Cross Fire team is strong and kicking! At the moment we are in Bawku, the capital city of Upper East Region. We are very grateful to God for His love, blessings and travel mercies. Actually, it has not been very easy but God makes a way where there is no way. Today, we played two programs, a church service and a group of small churches coming together to listen to the Word of God. On our way to church service we drove through mountains with a lot of rocks and at a point in time I thought there no way we get to the place. However, our driver was very skillful, so he managed to drive us there successfully by His grace. Upon arrival we realized that the entire congregation there sitted waiting for us. However, after a short Introduction by the pastor/Lay Leader we were asked to lead the service. The church room was full to it's capacity with about 200 people and our program lasted for one hour.

Again a total of 3 small churches cam together in a village called Ziako. Our second program was witnessed by 150 people and it's amazing to have a group of people waiting patiently to listen to the Good News of Jesus Christ. My life has never been the same, ever since I joined team and I know my life will never be the same. Glory be to God. Amen.



Elvis Kafui Doe

Date: 2/2/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Bawku and Tempielim, Ghana Upper East Region

Bawku and Tempielim, Ghana... I still struggle in grasping the reality that I am in Africa... that if I were to place myself on a globe, to even imagine where I would find my finger pointing. Yet every day brings little reminders of where I now am... the shapes the trees take, the ruddy red dirt roads and harmattan horizon, distant rhythms in the night-lit lands of Gbintiri, little children calling "obruni" and "bature", and the untimeliness of a days' events.

Today the children laughed as they played with a Slinky for the first time. And they laughed as they watched me try to use their toy, an old bicycle tire, as a hula-hoop. They laughed as we sang. Praise God that wherever he leads, there He is. And praise Him for a simple cross scratched on the wall of a one-roomed, tin-roofed church in Ghana.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who only does wondrous things! And blessed be His glorious name forever! And let the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen.



Joshua Vandercar

Date: 2/3/2004
Submitted by: Kathy Weber
Journal Entry:

Location: Bawku, Upper East Region, Ghana

This evening Joshua, Matt and I went outside to throw around a frisbee, and not long after we started, a few children became curious and started coming closer to see what we were doing. They had been playing on their own but three white people playing with a round object that they probably had never seen before draws a lot of attention. So we started to toss it to the children and teach them how to throw and catch. It was a lot of fun! We introduced ourselves and learned their names, which I'm not sure how to spell, so here goes: Hajara, Portia, Nagat, Zakari, Perry, Abadee, and some others. We also met a little one-year-old and guess what her name was ??? Sunitha! Now, for those of you who do not know this, our International Team Director from India shares the same name! When I heard that this was the name of the little girl, I got tears in my eyes. What a cool moment.



Kathy Weber

Today we had two school programs where there were overwhelming numbers of children afterwards asking for our address and wanting to shake our hands. It was very difficult in the short period of time to get to know many of the school children because of how many there were, so it was refreshing to spend some time in a small group setting where there were only about ten children. We spent about an hour with the children who lived near our guests house, got to know them pretty well, quizzed them on spelling and math problems, and just had some good quality time. We ended with taking a picture with them, playing some more with the Frisbee, giving them our addresses, and we made plans to meet them tomorrow evening to spend more time together.

It's nice to know that even though we have a lot of programs in a lot of places, and can't get to know many people very well, that there are places where we can build relationships. God has reminded me that although I may feel exhausted from our programs, I can be totally re-energized in a short period of time by the brief quality time spent with a few people, and what's amazing is those are the times and memories that stick with me. It gives me a new appreciation for host homes. We haven't stayed in a host home yet here in Ghana, and I really hope that we will get to soon. It's just a great opportunity to get to know people we might not think to talk to at our programs, but we are thankful that we were able to spend more time with them. I just want to say a big thank you to all of my host families from the U.S., and I hope we stay in touch. Thanks for being a blessing to me and the rest of Cross Fire!

One cool thing about host homes is that we now have Elvis and Matthew on our team and in our community. That has been an awesome leaning experience and opportunity that has helped me adjust to Ghanaian culture. I know I have a lot more learning to do here in Ghana and then in Nigeria, and I am thankful that I have found ways to make friends and share time with some of the locals here especially since I have realized that more personal relationships drive me and give me more energy to praise God and keep up with our busy schedule. Peace to all of you who are reading this, I hope all is well with you!

Date: 2/4/2004
Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn
Journal Entry:

Location: Bawku, Upper East Region, Ghana

Greetings to you all in the name of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ who is our map, compass, and guide. In our travelling adventures over these last weeks I have come to have no doubt that Jesus is at the reigns of our trip. Our Shepherd leads us and tends to His flock, daily pointing us in new directions (literally and in faith) and feeding us with his awesome glory and unspeakable love, continually renewing the



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

promise he made to the six of us a long time ago when we were sitting in our homes with a letter of call in hand saying, "Wow, Africa is far away." God is great!

Also, greetings to you on behalf of the incredible people and faithful disciples of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana. Our brothers and sisters here welcome us with such joy and always send their prayers and blessings to our families and churches back home with such excitement, it is obvious we are many parts to but one body and one day soon our family will all be drawn together for the happiest of reunions.

Anywho, at the moment Cross Fire 03-04 finds itself crashing hard after yet another tiring day in Ghana's Upper East Region. We arrived here on Saturday afternoon and have been on the go ever since, doing a handful of programs each day, meeting new people in churches and villages, sneaking in a couple plates of fried chicken and french fries a day at the nearby Shalom restaurant, and pursuing our never-ending quest for Fan-Ice, that most delicious of all Ghanaian frozen, creamy indulgences.

This morning after getting our jump start from our daily hit of Milo, the hot Nestle' chocolate drink that's energy-releasing B vitamins have delivered us through many long gaps between meals, we headed off for our first program for a congregation that met in an open-air school classroom in the village of Barbare. The group was almost entirely women and babies, but the school kids joined us despite the fact that their headmaster was Muslim. The people all received us with excitement and, after the program, showed their appreciation by presenting our leader Joshua with two live chickens, feet bound together. We accepted them graciously and moved on.

We hit the post office mid-day to conduct some mail packet business, and after my contributions, I took up my sentinel post on the street, scanning the landscape for passing Fan-Ice bicycles. Matthew said goodbye to us for the rest of the day as he took off to spend time with some of his extended family who make their homes in Upper East villages not too far from Bawku. Matthew's knowledge and background in the region was nice to have, as he filled us in on a lot of cultural customs as well as translating into Kusal at times.

After a bite at Shalom, we rolled on to our next program in the village of Kpalugu, toting our entourage of people we've met from various villages that then decide to accompany us wherever we go. We reached the church feeling beat, but as soon as we all found benches to sprawl out on we heard our awesome contact, Elisha, outside dropping phat beats on the church's hand drums, calling people to our program. I joined him with my guitar and before I knew it, we had a group of women dancing around us and singing in front of the church. We kept it up for a while until we had drawn enough people from the road and out of mud huts that we could get started. The other pre-program entertainment happened when two young boys showed up with a donkey and Rachel fulfilled her birthday dream of taking a ride. Joshua, Elvis, and I took turns trying to get the thing moving, but after it only took a few steps for each of it's passengers we gave up, went inside and played a program.

After we finished, we heard from a few older members of the church and community who had kind and wise words to share with us. It's interesting that here, programs feel much more like mutual sharings in that after we're through, we always sit and listen to a line-up of folks who stand in front of the congregations and deliver testimonies of faith and Gospel to us. We also heard from the youth choir of the church, as we have after many programs, and they never cease to amaze me. All in all, our music/skit/puppets/sharing line-up took the least amount of time out of everything that happened that afternoon in the church.

From there, we moved to the palace of the chief of Bawku to greet and pay our respects for letting us evangelize in his town. He had invited us, and looking at our schedule and monetary restraints (because you must go bearing money and gifts) we said, "No, thank you," to which the chief promptly sent reply that no, we were coming. So off we went.

The paramount chief was actually not around, so we held court with his group of about seven sub-chiefs, along with other men who sat on steps wearing heavy, patterned, flowy smocks and floppy knit hats at the front of a large open-air pavilion. It was a cool experience—we introduced ourselves and sang "Lord, I Lift Your Name on High" for them and they were all very pleased. I enjoyed the thought that the message of graceful salvation we bring to the chiefs in their high formal courts is

the same as we speak to homeless beggars in village streets.

The day closed with us back at our guesthouse late in the evening. The guys tried on our new team outfits, newly-tailored for us from local Kenti cloth, played a little Euker, and called it a night.

Date: 2/5/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Bawku in transit to Bolgatunga—Upper East Region

And now, the information you've all been waiting for... did I get my birthday wish? Did I ride a donkey? Well, we celebrated that morning with Winnie the Pooh hats and napkins. The #3 candle we'd brought (forgetting the #2 to make 23) was propped in the margarine we spread on our breakfast bread. And since the northern region is sparse of gift ideas, a can of Milo wrapped in a black plastic (or "rubber" as the Ghanaians say) bag would suffice. Well, on the way to Bawku, David offered to stop so I could ride a donkey. However, I declined the generous offer. When we arrived at Bawku, David mentioned to Elisha that my birthday wish was to ride a donkey. Which now brings us to yesterday, February 4th. YES, the answer is YES! I and 3 of my teammates got to ride the donkey! As I'm sure Matt's already brought to our attention in his journal yesterday. SO! TODAY! Yes, this journal is about February 5th!



Rachel Haabala

Our day started late, as has been our custom—or at least that of our public (yet privately hired) transport, which was ok today 'cause Alice, the girls' seamstress, came with our finished dresses. The man with the plan, or at least directions to the village for the program, didn't come with us for unknown reasons. So we left to pick up Pastor Matthew on the way out and began our quest for Naraungsaago. It turns out that it's tough to find villages via the African Dirt Roads. One guy knew the way by the bike path which just isn't sufficient for vehicles to travel on. So we came to a village where Market Day was in full swing to ask directions. All in all there were a few wrong turns and use of reverse (which is a much worse and concerning way to travel than driving forward). We got to the intended village and waited under a tree for folks to show up and gather. In our journey, we came upon a neighboring village and invited them to come as well. So, we waited. We've now planned for at least 30 minutes of wait time prior to each program.

The program was fine. Becca got a stripe on her chest from the strap of her passport pouch (and the sun). A man stepped up afterwards and shared about the church there and the building that was constructed in 2001. The 3 mud walls that were still standing looked alright, but the grass roof had collapsed in. We took pictures for Elvis to report back to the ELCG (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana) office and were on our way back to Bawku to pack up. One last lunch at Shalom and we loaded up everything into the trotro. Gladys, who we'd met at church on Sunday, came to see us off. She had walked from home which was a 30 minute bike ride! People amaze me. It was great to see her one last time, though.

Our trip to Bolgatunga (Bolga, for short) was fairly uneventful. There's lots of customs stops and police checks along the way on any Ghanaian road so when the customs officer stopped us rather than flagging us on we weren't TOO concerned. He asked where we'd come from and which country we originally came from. Then waved us along—good. Clay and I worked on a crazy crossword puzzle from the variety puzzle book I'd gotten. That's all. We got to Bolga and were again bargaining with our driver about our PRESET price for that day. The never-ending saga.

The first person we met was a student named Theo. He was helpful in getting us familiarized with Bolgatunga and getting us around to run errands and eat. We shared a meal with him and then went back to the guesthouse for the night. Becca was not feeling well (which proved to stay through the next 2 days), so we let her rest and encouraged her to drink water.

Our days are so chockfull of stuff that writing journals can be a bit intense—but we're happy for this form of communication, even if it's got more than a week's delay. Cross Fire is well and healthy. Thank you for your continued prayers and encouragement! Colossians 1:6 "... All over the world the

Gospel is bearing fruit and growing..." Praise the Lord! Hallelujah! Amen!

Date: 2/6/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Upper East to Upper West Region (Bawku to Nandom)

Turning stumbling blocks into stepping stones has been a phrase that guides me wherever I find myself. One of such stumbling blocks was the team's experience traveling from Bolgatunga, the capital city of the Upper East region to Nandom was a new experience for all the team members. It was also an adventure for the team to explore.



Matthew Abudulai

The journey began with a disappointment from a station wagon driver who could not fulfill his time with us as agreed the previous day. Determined as we were to get to the Upper West region, the team joined a station bus travelling to a town called Tumu. At the station we waited for about three solid hours before taking off. Two strange things happened when we were waiting for the bus to get full before we move. One was that the station attendant bullied us by charging so much for our luggages. This nearly brought a conflict between myself and the station attendant but this was handled tactfully by the team. Again as if this was not enough he was trying to compel us to sit in 6 instead of 5 in a line. We however gave him a strong resistance only for him to withdrawal from that decision. Come ten minutes to 3 pm the bus took off. I then said to myself we will definitely get to our destination. After traveling for about two hours one of our songs came in to my mind, "The Way". This song came into mind because I saw rivers, hills, trees, grasses as the car was moving. This scene really made me feel closer to nature than the manmade visibles I do see around in the cities. I asked myself, "Is this how God created the world from day one?" Indeed I marveled at how God continues to protect his creation without seeking help from anybody.

Bumpy and dusty as the road was, we got to a village called Nakong where we had a flat tyre. This uncomfortable situation really deepened our plight. As we got down from the bus, a turn on the right side behind was this very big looking bird called Ostrich which drew our attention. The back and forth movement of the Ostrich in its fenced territory made us to remove our mind from our slight disappointment the flat tyre gave us. Before we could say "jack" the tyre was fixed up and all the passengers got on board and we continued the journey.

Little by little we were at Tumu, the town we were heading towards. This was around 7:30 pm. Among us was sick Becca whose health caught us in a state of dilemma. Whether to continue the journey to Nandom or sleep at Tumu which will cost us more than necessary was a tug of war. To our total surprise we heard a voice from nowhere which said, "This is a car going to a town, Nandom." I said to myself, "Oh, yes, God has promised us that he will be with us wherever we go." I mean I felt the presence of Jesus in us helping us to take bold decisions. Upon hearing that, we brainstormed and Becca, whose health we were a little bit disturbed about, said she is alright and that we can travel on.

In no time we secured the arrangement for our going with the driver and we took off at 10:00 pm. On our way going the journey became fearful and frustrating due to the nature of the rough road and time we were traveling. Again our Good Lord took us safely to Nandom at exactly 2:20. At this time most people had been asleep including our Pastor contact. We first went to a Catholic guesthouse for rooms only to be told that the place was full up. We tried another guesthouse, the same problem was also there. There the Lord revealed someone who knows our Pastor contact in Nandom to us. He was informed that we were in Nandom. He then quickly came to our aid and took us to the guesthouse he had secured for us.

Myself, Joshua, Clay, Rachel, and Kathy had a dinner/breakfast sort of meal since it was about 4:00 am in the morning, while the rest could not help but go and sleep.

Behold, the next thing that happened was just obvious—we retired to our rooms and had very long sleep.

Date: 2/7/2004
Submitted by: Clayton Mark
Journal Entry:

Location: Nandom, Upper West Region, Ghana

The neckbeard... a mystery that many have tried to know, but few will ever comprehend. Why God has blessed me with this physical abnormality, I'll never know. I've been on a mission to grow out my facial hair for our trip to West Africa. The people of Africa are a kind, forgiving sort of folk, willing to accept others regardless of one's facial hair beliefs. Whether it be mustache, goatee, fu manchu, muttonchops, or even the little "flavor saver" that some grow under their lower lip, the people of Ghana are an accepting bunch. Still, I wonder if they have experienced anything quite like this. My facial hair grows only on my neck... what's the dealio?!? My cheeks are barren. My upper lip yearns to be shielded from the harsh winds of the Dry season, but alas, I cannot do it. My neck, however, is covered in a lush blanket of hair, protected from any dangers lurking in the African skies. I don't understand why it is, yet it is the way it is. God knit me together and this is the way He wants me! Long live God's creation of the neckbeard!



Clayton Mark

Why, you ask, would I write that kind of opening paragraph? Well, I am a Cross Fire who is currently sleep-deprived. After a day of waiting to travel, and then traveling yesterday, we arrived here in Nandom at 2:30 am this morning. Now, this is the first Cross Fire team to visit the Upper West region, which is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, how awesome it is to be Christ's ambassadors to this part of the country. On the other hand, when you arrive somewhere new at 2:30 in the morning, there might arise a problem. No one was there to greet us when we got off the bus. No one was there at all! We wandered the streets, looking for a place to stay. Guided only by the moonlight, we found out that both guesthouses were full. We just happened to meet a man who knew where the pastor lived! We met up with Pastor Patrick Gharton, who led us to a hotel, which was about a one mile walk in the dark. Once we got there, we found out that a meal had been prepared for us. Honestly, at 4 in the morning, eating was not a priority on our list, yet a few of us stayed up to share a meal together. At 5:30, I finally laid my head on my travel pillow.

We woke up at noon to go and meet the chief of Nandom. Naa Dr. Puur-Uurk Chiir VII was a very modern and engaging chief. We met him in his backyard, shared stories and songs, and drank minerals together. Afterwards, we drove to do a program in the village of Piina. It was so cool to be some of the first singing American missionaries that these people saw. You could tell that they really enjoyed the hand motions of the songs and the message of the Gospel. One older man will forever be known as the 9th member of Cross Fire. Every time we sang a song with motions, he'd come up and join us. It was crazy! We drove home, ate dinner, and were in bed by 10:30 pm. A good day. A semi-not-too-hectic kinda day. I find that God always provides what we need. Whether it be food, drink, or transportation. Today, it was an early bedtime to rest up for another day of serving Him.

Date: 2/8/2004
Submitted by: Becca Leaf
Journal Entry:

Location: Nandom, Ghana

This is the day that the Lord has made! Let us rejoice and be glad in it!

I've been singing that song since I was just starting Sunday School and it has never meant so much to me as it did today. Everyday seems to be filled with its share of blessings and curses, but today wanted to knock me down from all angles. It was my first day back with team life. Yesterday I spent all day in bed after being sick the whole day before (It was a 24 hour thing, so don't worry, mom!). The day was hot and extremely dusty, and I knew it was going to be a hectic day. We had a church service and 2 programs to do before we could begin our 24 hour trip back down south to Accra. I was frustrated from the start because it seemed like



Becca Leaf

no one knew where to go or what to do. We walked the mile into church, drove 1/2 hour to a village for a short program, drove back to Nandom to pack our things and then walked back into town to load our luggage and do a final shortened program in the middle of town. It's hard to describe the feeling of being pushed and pulled blindly into each location by contacts who are frantic to get as much programming out of us as possible before our bus leaves at 2 pm. When we finally reached the steps at the center of town, I was ready to cry. And looking at my teammates, those that weren't crying looked how I felt. All of the frustrations, anger, confusion, homesickness, weariness, and illness of the past 3 1/2 weeks just overwhelmed me. As I looked out at the gathering sea of faces, I wasn't sure what to do. How was I supposed to stand up in a few minutes and say and sing "God loves you!" when I didn't want to look at anyone? I didn't want to sing, I wanted to cry. I didn't want to praise God, I just wanted to pray to Him. And I didn't want to "suck it up" and fake my way through a program.

I share the song "Cast Your Burdens" during our program. "Cast your burdens unto Jesus for he cares for you." I didn't want to sing those words unless I could mean them. I was sitting near Kathy on a bench, watching Matt and Joshua tune guitars. At the same time (or so it seemed), Kathy and I began singing "This is the Day" back and forth. We sang it several times, everyone joining in, getting louder and louder until the program began.

There is something powerful and humbling about thinking of today as a gift. I didn't ask for it, didn't want it, but it's what God decided to give me. His grace is sufficient, His decisions are perfect, and He doesn't answer to me or anyone. And even though my day is rough, today might be the best day of someone else's life. After singing with my team, rejoicing in the day God has given us, we stood up and I looked at the crowd again. I couldn't help wondering, "Did Jesus ever get tired? Did he ever just look out at the crowds and want to run away?" Yes, I think he did. He was human too. He got hot and tired and frustrated. But he loved people so much he stayed and healed them, stayed and taught them. So I asked myself the coined phrase, "What Would Jesus Do?" and I started singing about God like my life depended on it. Like my life depended on Him,

And, hey, we have a 24 hour bus ride ahead of us. There will be plenty of time to think and pray coming up.

Date: 2/9/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Upper West Region—Accra

Once again, to God alone be the glory and honour. All too soon we have completed the first part of our tour in Ghana. Actually, today is a travel day and we've been traveling for the past twelve hours. We are traveling on a bus popularly called in Ghana, "City Express."



Elvis Kafui Doe

On board we have 76 passengers instead of 60 passengers, besides we also have 11 goats also traveling with us. Additionally, our bus stopped eleven times, two of which were mechanical faults before we arrived in Kumasi. All things being equal, we had a good bus from Kumasi to Accra. We finally arrived in Accra at 5:30 pm, which makes the entire trip from Upper West region to Accra 25 hours. Above all, in our struggles as we travel, I really saw the Grace of God because taking into consideration the bad state of the road and also driving through in the night. Besides, it also brings to mind the struggles that Paul and the other missionaries went through in the book of Acts.

One interesting thing that happened on the bus which had perhaps never happened was that we had, since our travel from Nandom, not had a straightforward team meal but this happened during our lunch time on the bus. We had our usual rice and chicken in our "take away box" we usually have in Ghana. We satisfied ourselves in the bus.

Fortunately on our part we had a gentleman who called himself an Evangelist preaching to us on the bus. To some of my teammates this day was the only day they ever witnessed someone preaching in a traveling bus. For Matthew and I this is a common thing in Ghana.

Considering our distance from the north we appeared very dusty and dirty. Anyone who sees us wonders and concludes that, Oh! These people are from the north. In fact I've appeared very dirty.

As tradition demands we went to the ELGA head office to announce our presence in Accra. The obvious thing we did next was to have a shower and find something to eat. We did just that and we drove to one of the team's favorite restaurants, SFC, for dinner. To my surprise this time was really American dinner time where all my American teammates had pizza. Indeed I was very amazed at the sizes ordered by all. All except Rachel and Becca ordered for one family size each. It was heavy dinner to crown our first part and of course the difficult part of our Ghana tour.

I said to myself, "This 9th day of February dinner would be forever remembered."

Date: 2/10/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, Ghana

Today began just as so many others have... waiting. Elvis and I visited the ELCG office hoping to speak with the Western region during the regular 7:30 am radio check. This is the primary and most efficient way the church handles its internal correspondence. Unfortunately, no one was at the office who could get us access to the radio. So, we met briefly with Jon, joined some of the staff for their morning devotion, and then returned to our guest house for breakfast and devo with the team. As a team, we then returned for a "brief" stop at the office in order to check in since we had just returned to Accra. We did get to again meet with Kofi Fynn for a short while. And so after a few hours, we departed for Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Park, where we would be doing our overseas photo shoot. Before taking pictures we were given a tour, which turned out to be very interesting. This park used to be the English polo grounds and is also the site where Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, declared the nation's independence. A great structure now marks his burial place. After the photoshoot, we left for dinner. During this trip, Kathy encountered some misfortune with her passport, of which I am sure she will write tomorrow.



Joshua Vandercar

And so the days go... God gives 'em and we live 'em. Rejoice and remember the Maker of Days. The prisoners sang to us in their native tongue and these are the words... "Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, 'I have no pleasure in them.'" Ecclesiastes 12:1

Date: 2/11/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, Greater Accra Region, Ghana

Well, life in Ghana has certainly been interesting. Just yesterday I accidentally left my passport pouch in a taxi cab, and the few seconds it took to do that has delayed me and the team many hours so far. It has been a frustrating experience, but today ended with many good things that I am very thankful for.



Kathy Weber

I had been turned away and told, "Come back tomorrow" from the American Embassy and the Nigerian High Commission, and we didn't even have the time to wait at Ghanaian Immigration. Apparently, Wednesday is not the right day to have to replace your passport and visas, but tomorrow should be productive, and I'm glad it wasn't the weekend.

After travelling around all day in a hot car and not feeling like we had accomplished anything, my spirits were lifted just at the right moment. We took a taxi to the airport to reserve our plane tickets

for Nigeria, and who did we see behind the desk at Ghanaian Airways? Our friend Wilhelmina, a member of the musical ministry choir called the Harps, who we had met during one of their rehearsals at the head office of the ELCG (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana).

Mina (pronounced Mee-na) was able to help us reserve plane tickets, and she really helped turn my frown upside-down. From this point on today, I have been in a much better mood, and I'm glad that Mina was able to help us in a time when I was desperate to accomplish something.

At our favorite internet café this evening, I was getting things prepared for my trip to the embassies tomorrow, and while I was there, a man began to speak with me, which did not surprise me because I'm white, so that is exciting to many Ghanaians. Well, he started to tell me about Jesus, and ask if I had heard of Jesus before. I informed him that I am part of a music ministry team with the Lutheran Church, and we ended up singing a Ghanaian church song, Yeda Waseo, together.

After leaving the internet café and parting ways with this gentleman, I noticed posters plastered all over Accra with his picture on them. Apparently I was speaking with Dr. Lawrence Tetteh, a popular Ghanaian Evangelist who now lives in London.

I started thinking a lot about fame after this experience. Being a white person (obruni is the term we hear most often yelled to us) in Ghana comes pretty close to my idea of what celebrities experience in the United States, especially true in many of the villages that we visit here.

It surprised me that I met someone here who was quite famous, at least here in Ghana, and that I didn't realize it at the time. It has helped to humble me in many ways. White skin can be a burden at times, but it is not something to be taken advantage of. I can get caught up in the excitement of almost every person I see waving to me, and it helps to remember why I'm here at those times.

I will not forget Dr. Tetteh anytime soon and the example he has been to me in being humble but remembering my purpose for being in Ghana. It's not for tourism, or shopping, or any of a number of things that others may come to Ghana for. It helps to remember Youth Encounter's mission statement at this time for encouragement: To strengthen the church through the Christian faith and ministry of its youth.

Date: 2/12/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Greater Accra to the Western Region

This journey was made along the coast line in the southern part of Ghana. I must confess that this journey has been one of the journeys that has been strictly according to time.



Matthew Abudulai

Packing bag and baggage from Nkwadum this morning, a truck owned by the ELCG came to pack our bigger bag packs and two of our team members joined the truck to the transport yard. The two were Elvis and Kathy while the six of us decided to take taxis and join them at the transport yard. As we were looking for the taxis there was a very severe traffic jam which made us to have a change of mind. We decided to walk from where we were to the transport yard which was about 15 minutes walk. Walking along the street attracted so many people to us. Some were in their cars, others were in their home, while some were walking and selling along the road.

At the state transport corporation station we went through all the formalities and loaded all our bag packs. Unfortunately for the team, Elvis and Kathy had to stay behind to work on Kathy's missing passport. At 6 minutes to the actual time it needed to take off, it took off and that was around 9:22 am.

I really enjoyed the bus to Takoradi. We got to Takoradi at around 1:30 pm which was the exact time I expected us to reach. On board the bus, what was very appealing to me was the big ocean just at our left hand side to Takoradi. A very big stretch of space occupied by water. I saw the

amazing things God was doing in the life of people living along the ocean. This ocean serves as a source of livelihood for the people. Not only did I see the ocean but also the trees and mountains and valleys signifying God's wonderful creation.

At Takoradi we met our contact, Evangelist Johnson Madean who informed us that we had a program in a village nearby. Team members were very happy although our two team members were not with us. This time was around lunch, our stomachs were crying for food so we had to walk to a nearby Chinese fast food restaurant. It took us about 20 minutes to get there. This fast food's eating was loved by teamers. After the eating and drinking I said to myself, this place is one in town. We walked to our residence, rested for a while and drove off together with some of the Saint John's youth members to Mampong—an hour drive from our place of residence. This was around 7:00 pm. The place appearing to be a village, we were able to perform under electricity which we earlier thought would be a problem. I said to myself, this is wonderful. The purpose for which we are there will definitely be achieved since we did not go there with our strength but Christ Jesus had prepared the way for us to minister to His people and he did that in an absolutely perfect way. The assurances and promise Jesus gives to us in the Scriptures has really manifested itself in this ministry I found myself. This continues to strengthen my faith day in and day out.

The response we had was very positive. During the program our two teamers Kathy and Elvis who were not with us joined and there was a full team presentation. To me it was a miracle they were able to complete what they were to do in Accra and join us at Mampong to present the Gospel.

Date: 2/13/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi, Western Region, Ghana

"Everyone knows the best always comes from the west." Our friend Harry Kwasi announced this to us yesterday after we safely arrived in his tropical, coastal hometown, Takoradi. And here at the close of our first full day in Ghana's Western Region, I can see how this place earned its reputation.



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Today was of the most full schedules we've had thus far in our international tour, clocking in at three full-length programs at schools during the day and one more for a congregation gathered in a village center after the sun went down. We were worked, but all our efforts today were rewarding and now we are all ready to settle down to a satisfying sleep.

Our first stop of the day was at Future Leaders Educational Center and I won't be surprised when these kids ARE the future leaders running the show because they were sharp. Every song, they belted out the words we taught them and smiled and danced. There were five or six older girls getting down and funky along the back wall of the open air classroom the whole time. It was really fun,

Afterwards, we had the usual mob of waist-high kids reciting, "Please, address? Can I have your address?" But after we waded out of the sea of brown and yellow uniforms (standard issue for Ghana primary and junior secondary school) we were treated to the off-the-hook grooves of the Future Leaders brass band. Trombones and trumpets, all manned by kids who looked to be all of ten years old. But they were so tight, all playing and dancing, watching an older director playing trumpet as the only kind of direction, replacing all sheet music. All the kids spilled out into the courtyard where we were and the school turned into one big episode of "MTV Groove." I do wonder when they do any kind of classroom learning in some of these places, because whenever we're around it's always a big dance party. But the kids were awesome, and after a round of cold minerals from the headmaster (ie: soda [ie: pop]), we did the electric slide on out of there and were on our way.

We dropped Joshua and Kathy back off at our new home, the mission house of St. John's Lutheran, where Harry and his brother Joe live, with their sisters and mom and dad, who is the pastor. We had decided to rotate some folks out of the program throughout the day, just to take a little of the strain off, so that added a fun, new dynamic to the day as we jumped right into each program and then

figured out how to fill in the holes left by absent teammates as we went. Our second program was also good, for about 150 young women at a vocational school underneath an approximately 500 million degrees Fahrenheit of sun.

Afterwards we took a leisurely pit stop at our new favorite hangout, the Original Chinese Fast Food, which in reality is not very fast nor does it have much to do with China, but Harry took us there on our first day and we were hooked. Clay took short hair to the next level after our meal by visiting an adjacent business, the Original Chinese Barber, where he paid five times more for his white man haircut than Elvis and Matthew did for theirs minutes before. But he was looking sharp and trim, and we traded him and Becca for Joshua and Kathy and went to our final school program.

It was more of the same great things: an incredibly welcoming and appreciative headmaster and faculty, attentive and fun kids, a great time. I forgot to mention that each of these school programs required no translator, which was definitely a breath of fresh air. I did my sharing at this third stop and it was such a great change to be able to actually speak straight to the kids.

We left with an army of students waving and yelling from behind us, and the headmaster and a few leaders yelling, "Kotoko! Fabulous!" after spying a sticker for their favorite football club on one of our journals. They were a trip.

Once we were back on the road, Joshua and I talked about how high and low our programs can feel. Sometimes it takes so much work to connect with people; marketplace crowds are unruly, school kids mob us to the point where we can't move, people in churches don't pay attention. I struggle in those times to feel like there is any reason for us being here. We spend one hour with people before hopping back in our chro-chro and sputtering off down a bumpy road to the next group of people and say, "All right, Cross Fire will be back in three years. Peace!"

But on days like today, I don't wonder why we're here. Time after time our efforts were affirmed by the joy we received from the people we met. I wanted to keep playing programs for them all day.

After a little chill time with new friends at the mission house, we capped off the night in a nearby village where we played for a gathering of over 250 people.

Before the program we taught Sunday School songs to the tons of kids hanging on our every move, and I got them engaged in a pretty funny chorus of "We Love Jesus, Yes We Do! We Love Jesus, How 'bout You?"

Our life here is not easy, but through the struggles and tiredness, the Lord remains faithful to us. Some days I dream of a helicopter that will drop out of the sky, scoop me up, and fly me non-stop back to North Carolina. But on days like today, when songs are fun and sharings are heard and people yearn for more, as I relax under a coconut tree after a long day surrounded by teammates I know so well and new friends I met yesterday, I don't want to leave.

Now, rest, Good Lord, please give me rest.

Date: 2/14/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Western Region

Ah! Happy Valentine's Day to all! We've had a light easy day—wonderful for celebrating a day of love! After having our morning breakfast (yes, Milo) we went to Central Prison in Sekondi, which holds about 500 prisoners currently. We ducked through some heavy metal doorways and came to an open area. It had been set up for us. There were canopies (like the party tents used in the US for graduations and such) to shelter us and them from the sun. As the men were gathering, we started to set up. They started the program by



Rachel Haabala

singing some local songs in celebration. Then their band/choir played for us. We did our program and they were so responsive, receptive, and participatory! I easily compare it to the prison program we did in the Brong Ahafo region. Such hunger—they were ready for encouraging visitors. Praise the Lord we were able to enter into prisons and schools, all public! Amazing,

We came back here then to St John's Lutheran Church Mission house for a quick, much needed rehearsal. Yahoo! We've put together a few more songs for our programs and Elvis and Matthew are getting more involved musically. Oh, a short lunch was prepared here (Red-Red, good stuff!), fried plantains and beans of some sort. Back for a couple more songs then a short rest.

Johnson MacLean, and area Evangelist, St John's Lutheran Church Assistant Pastor and our driver brought 14 or so of us to the beach, yes, the ocean! It's crazy to think that just a few months ago we were on the opposite side in North Carolina anticipating our tour here! Wow—the beach! Most of us went straight to the ocean, we were jumping the waves and, well, some may say we were playing with danger: But, no fear! Elvis was concerned for our safety so he was out there with us, counting and watching carefully like a camp lifeguard. It's amazing how protected I feel in their presence, even if all they are doing is translating for me, I know I am protected and cared for. This was the day we really got to know Harry Kwasi and Joseph Kojo (brothers). Harry and I were playing catch with a yellow rubber ball, trying to avoid taking out the children around us when the waves carried us in towards the shore. Joseph joined the rest of the team in the challenge of holding their position in the ocean. Funny how tiring it can be to play in the water. The next noteworthy happening was that Joe, Matt, and Elvis took Matthew by force to the water's edge (yes, he was fully clothed, hadn't been in the water yet). Ah... we just wanted to threaten him a little. So, I splashed some water on him. He's hilarious—his response to the fiasco was "Now I am salted." Ha ha! Yes, ocean water is salty in Africa, too. Football on the beach! Yeah, then we played a keep-away soccer game. Fun times.

After we got back and cleaned up, we ate and rested. Harry wanted to tape record some songs so I sat down with him to work out the words and chords to songs like his favorite, "Romans 16:19". During this, Joe brought in some fruit (oranges and pineapples—mmm!) and was listening to us. The day ended with Kathy, Joe, Harry, and myself finishing off the fruit. Four single young people, enjoying each other's company, wishing a Happy Valentine's Day on our way to bed.

God's Blessings!
Rachel

Date: 2/15/2004
Submitted by: Becca Leaf
Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi, Ghana

"I'm singing in the rain..." Literally. Just when I thought I might actually melt into a little human puddle, a pouring rain swept through the village, drenching everything and cooling the air quite considerably. Along with the downpour came a terrific thunder and lightning storm. We had walked to a water treatment plant for a tour before our program and the sudden storm trapped us about a mile from where our program was to take place. About 30 minutes into our plight the electricity also went out. Out came the deck of cards and some flashlights as our contact made a dash for the nearest vehicle in town. Time passed. It was 7:30, a half hour after our program was to begin and the storm seemed to be letting up. With no sign of our contact, the team decided to leave the shelter of the dark water treatment lobby and head towards town. The 8 of us were quite a sight, trekking one-by-one down the road, following Clay. His headlamp led the way around mud puddles and potholes, the light second only to the bright flashes of lightning overhead. We were almost halfway back to town when headlights came around the bend. We were saved! Our contact piled us all onto a pickup and we proceeded to drive to where our program would take place.

I love the rain. It smells good, it feels good, it tastes good. It makes things grow and washes away all the dust from the air. I can always tell when it's about to rain. The most obvious factor, apart



Becca Leaf

from the change in temperature and pressure, is that I feel very happy and content. Rain is very graceful. And it's very fresh. Like starting over. You know, life is funny sometimes. I used to read "Choose Your Own Adventure" books as a child. There were a million and one choices to make, but if you didn't like the ending, you could always start over. Why isn't it that easy now? Everyday I am faced with choices: "Should I talk to this person or that one?"; "Should I burst out of my comfort shell and attempt to find a way to communicate, or stay hidden in the shade until our program begins?" And on and on. By the end of the day my mind is filled with all the "could have, would have, should have"s. I don't want to miss any opportunities while I'm here, but I also get so overwhelmed by being in this new place. I am glad that Jesus says not to worry about tomorrow because it's true that today has plenty of worries in itself. But by God's grace and a lot of mercy I get through each day, ready to start again tomorrow. I can't change the mistakes I've made or go back to the beginning. Instead of regretting, I am learning though. We don't always get a second chance but we don't have to make the same mistakes over and over. However, when we do, there's always the rain to come again and wash all the yuck away.

Date: 2/16/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi, Western Region, Ghana

"You know, a lot of people go to school for 7 years."

"Yeah, they're called doctors."

Ahhhh, a quote from one of the greats... "Tommy Boy". In my 7-plus years of college, never did I expect to be called a doctor. Now that we have traveled to Ghana, and I am in charge of the health-related issues for the team, I have come to be known as "Dr. Clay." It is quite a serious job to prescribe Tylenol for headaches and Pepto for upset stomachs. More than anything, it reminds me of how I miss my favorite doctor from back home... Dr. Pepper. But every now and then, I do have to get serious.

Today, our team leader, Joshua, woke up with the not-so-good feeling of malaria. It was decided that he should immediately be taken to the doctor. Elvis, Joshua, Joseph (a person who lives here at the mission house we are all staying in) and I packed into a taxi and headed out in search of medical aid. After an hour of waiting at the public hospital, it was decided to go to a private one, where we would be helped much quicker. "Twas a good decision. We had Joshua visit a doctor, get blood drawn and analyzed, and fill out his prescription for medication all in less than two hours, which is a Ghanaian miracle.

Much of the day was then spent maxin' and relaxin'. This evening we went to the marketplace to purchase some authentic African garb. Becca and Kathy were able to purchase cloth for making dresses, and Matt and I successfully navigated the purchase of our first shirt. Now we are home, and I am ready for bed. Tonight, we remember Joshua, our inaugural malaria-getter. Proverbs 3:7-8 says, "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your body, and refreshment to your bones." We remember that doctors and pills can make us feel better and ease our pain for the time being, but Jesus is our one true Healer, who truly refreshes us with eternal life.



Clayton Mark

Date: 2/17/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi (Western Region)

This day was another challenging day for the team to go through. Here was the leader of our team who has been welcomed by Ghana's most common sickness, Malaria.

Joshua, due to the nature of the sickness, and Elvis who was slightly facing the symptoms of malaria had to stay behind and take care of him.

About 5 km of our road the team was traveling through was paved, but the rest was rough road, sort of. Evangelist Johnson, the driver of our car, took us slowly to the village we were to perform our first program. Kobo, the village where we performed the program, was for school kids mainly primary and junior secondary school. Since this program was performed outside under trees it also attracted people living in the village. The teachers and other people who were passing by had to be part of this program and watch. Although Elvis and Joshua were key members of the team, the Lord filled in those created gaps for us.



Matthew Abudulai

Just after the program we had to move to the second program at Aboaboso. Obviously after the first program we were hungry. Considering how remote the village would be, we took with us two loaves of bread and three tins of tuna for our lunch. Arriving at Aboaboso, the teachers welcomed us and allowed us to get into one of the classrooms for our lunch. We had our lunch with tuna that was like a sandwich sort of, but also good.

The headmaster of Aboaboso Junior Secondary School requested for a Disc Bible Study to help him to continue the good work we have come to start there. To me that request was encouraging, considering the position he has as a person as a headmaster in the school he can be used as a very effective tool in our ministry.

Date: 2/18/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi, Ghana Western Region

Today was my second time cooking in a Ghanaian kitchen. Once before we made scrambled eggs, grilled bread and tomato soup, and this time grilled cheese sandwiches were on the menu. Now, there were a few things about this evening that were not as I thought they would be. The team had split up for the afternoon after our programs, and Joshua, Elvis, and I arrived home after the rest of the team to find some hungry teammates looking for dinner.



Kathy Weber

So, I set out to find the kitchen and what I found was not what I'm used to in the United States, but the next hour I spent in that limited HOT space has been one of my favorite cross-cultural memories thus far since coming to Africa.

We were staying at a mission house, which has been the closest thing to a host home here and our host mom, Hannah Bart-Plange, was helping us with dinner preparations. But making 24 grilled cheese sandwiches wasn't going to happen quickly with a pan over a gas stove. So our host mom helped us improvise and be more efficient with our time.

We put eight sandwiches in the oven at a time and grilled them that way. I was skeptical at first that they would turn out the way we wanted them to, but I trusted that Hannah knew her way around the kitchen, even with food that was foreign to her.

After making adjustments to the temperature, the level the baking sheet was on, and the time we allowed for each side to grill, we had our supper and we had a great time making it, laughing, and spending some time talking as well.

It helped me so much to appreciate what is offered and provided for us, and how much people really want to make sure that we are comfortable and happy. At one point that evening, the gas wasn't working for the stove, so Hannah started a fire outside for us to use to cook with, while others were trying hard to find a solution for the propane for the stove. It amazes me to think about that in

times when I'm struggling, that others are working hard to help us, as we are working hard to help them.

These fond memories will "give me umption for my gumption and help me function for the Lord"--as an old familiar camp song reminds me.

Date: 2/19/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi, to Central Region, Abandze

Praise the Lord!!! Malaria has now set me free. Anyway, for the past three days I have been struggling with Malaria. Besides, my team leader Joshua is still struggling with Malaria and I pray that he gets well soon.

Again, today is another travel day. We've completed all our assignments in the Western Region and are moving to the Central Region to continue with our mission work. The Central Region has been divided into 3 areas: namely Abandze, Abrafo, and Bududuran. We are required to be staying at these 3 areas and also work with different contacts.

At the moment, we are in Abandze which is one of the coastal towns in the region. Tonight we played a program in the town and about 300 people we presented to there.

One may assume that the program was fun but it turned out to be the other way around. We as a team worked very hard to share the Good News with the people. However, at the end of the program it was obvious that the majority of the people were not interested in listening to the Good News. Instead most of them were only interested in money and nothing else. Above all, when we were about to leave the program site some of the children surrounded our vehicle and started hitting the van demanding for money. At a point in time our contact had to stop the vehicle, come down, and chase some of the children in order to make a way for us to leave.

Actually, the attitude of the people is the worse so far and as a Ghanaian I felt very sad and frustrated.

Above all, I pray that the Good Lord will help them and turn their hearts to Him. May his name be praised. Amen.



Elvis Kafui Doe

Date: 2/20/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Saltpond, Abandze, Abrafo, Central Region, Ghana

"The Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me—a prayer to the God of my life." Psalm 42:8

Oh, what a comfort to the afflicted are the love songs of God. The past four days found me fighting malaria. I recommend it to no one! Unfortunately, this morning Kathy had to visit the hospital and pick up her Malaria medication. May she find the same comforts I found. I thank God for the songs of Kindred and Captive Free—North East. I thank God for unexpected thoughts of an old friend and an unexpected e-mail from the same friend... all in one day. I thank God for caring teammates. I thank God for a place to rest my head and for the slightest breeze. I thank God for waking me with another harmattan sunrise. I thank God for the simple smile of a child. I thank God for singing His love songs and I thank Him for silencing me to listen.



Joshua Vandercar

We began today early with a 7:30 program at Saltpond Methodist High School. Over 600 students enthusiastically welcomed us to worship with them. They truly ministered to our team during the short time we had with one another. And, thanks to their headmaster we have finally been made aware that winking your thumb is an obscene gesture throughout Ghana. After this first program we returned to our guest house, packed, then split up. Elvis, Clay, and Kathy traveled to the hospital while the rest of us walked across the street to Abandze Primary and J.S.S. As we began the program, Matt nudged me and pointed out the door towards a beautiful view of the Atlantic. The program went very well in spite of being three people short for the first time. We then met up with the hospital crew and left for Abrafo. Our contact, Abraham, welcomed us and we are now relaxing in our home for the next few days. Unfortunately, there is no fan.

Lord, we thank You for another day. Continue to guide us in Your love and by Your grace.

Christ's Love,
Joshua

Date: 2/21/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Abrafo, Central Region, Ghana

To quote my boy Tom Petty, "Some days are diamonds, some days are rocks." For Cross Fire here in Ghana, most days have a hard time making up their mind and we end up with the rocks and the diamonds sitting side by side. That was today.



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

The day began in the Abrafo Guest House, home to Mr. And Mrs. Gyinaah, a warm, welcoming older couple, and their seemingly ever-multiplying children. The place is the closest we've come to staying in a host home since we arrived in Africa so we enjoyed getting to know them throughout the day as well as the intimate glimpse of the day-to-day life of a Ghanaian family. I woke up inside mosquito net for the first time ever this morning, thanks to the pre-rigged netting that hung from the ceiling above my bed, and I must say I fared better than I expected. I opted to use the screen partly due to it's easy accessibility and also for welcome protection from that star of "Arachnophobia" who made her home above our door on the far wall. I read by flashlight for a while the night before and harkened back to my old 2nd grade fort-building days.

With Kathy down for the count with our third case of Malaria in less than a week, after breakfast and devos we piled into an ELCG pick-up with our new friend John at the wheel and Pastor Abraham as 1st mate and scooted off about 35 minutes away down a bumpy dirt road for our first program. After arriving in the village, a small cluster of houses in an open space surrounded by dense trees, Clay declared, "We are in the jungle, y'all," in a way that would make Axel Rose proud. The stark contrast of this country from region to region amazes me, from the insanely dusty, barren sub-Saharan grassland of the north to the tropical rainforests, palm trees, and sandy beaches of the coastal south. We played a fun program for a small, intimate gathering of about 100 people huddled together beneath a straw-roof pavilion, talked with folks for a short time afterwards and were on our way.

We came "straightforward", a popular Ghanaian word, to our second program of the day which was to take place in another village under a few funeral tents erected together in the road. This one was the rock. We waited a long while under the hot sun for who knows what before we could begin, only mildly distracted from our discomfort by the out-of-control Forest Gump ping-pong playing of a couple of Ghanaian children nearby. Once we got started, we were immediately crowded in by children on one side and noisy women on the other. It was only a little after noon but I was already totally drained and really struggled with going through the motions of our program. I had such little energy, and the children continued to push in and fill in every open crack to the point of having toddlers crowded around our feet so we couldn't move. The women directly behind me were so loud and distracting that it was the A-1 Bold and Spicy on the Sirloin when the speakers set up across the street for the funeral started blasting music about 3/4 of the way through our set at such a ridiculously ear-drum-bleeding volume that we couldn't even hear the closing prayer Matthew tried

to yell out as the impromptu ending of our program. We ran back to the truck before our heads exploded and retreated back to Mama Gyinaah's.

I've often said that just when we feel like we've licked the worst of Africa has to throw at us, it pulls an even bigger weapon out of its arsenal. But likewise, just when we're ready to call Sunitha and beg for her to put us out of our misery, the Lord reminds us of the joy that led us here.

After a hard afternoon nap that lasted until what would be dinner time if we ever had dinner at a consistent time, all light had dropped from the sky. We set out for our third and final program of the day, which was to be near the Lutheran church right in Abrafo. Let me tell you, when the sun goes down, Cross Fire wakes up. With the tension of the burning sun off my back, and a solid three hours of sleep, I felt so much better all throughout talking to people before the program, singing songs, delivering a fun sharing, and connecting with the people of the village. The crowd that formed around us there in the light of the lantern rigged to the ELCG truck was so in-tune with everything we said. It consisted of mostly children who loved everything we did. As we climbed into the bed of the truck to leave, a group of kids bid us farewell with a loud, "Wake up, puppets!", their favorite line that we taught them. As we returned home for the evening, through jungle trees and past swampy ponds, we could hear the distant choruses of "Whoop! Whoop! Here we go! Here we go!" echoing from the village behind us. A small boy raced ahead of the pack of kids who chased our truck and jumped into the bed with us, telling me, "I am Isaac. I would like to take you as my friend. Tell me something about Jesus Christ." I recounted the highlights of the Gospel story for him as we bumped back to the Guest House before he said goodnight, jumped out, and ran off into the darkness.

The day did a 180 from our midday experience to the way it closed, and we crashed hard after a roller coaster of emotions packed into eight hours. When we are proud the Lord humbles and when we are weak the Lord renews.

I did a battle all night with the man-eating Mothra, narrowly escaped with my life in my hands, and am here yet another day to give myself to the crazy ministry of Cross Fire. Praise the Lord! Old Tom knows what he's talking about.

Date: 2/22/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Abrafo, Central Region, Ghana

Well, today was my birthday and so it was offered to me that I write the journal for today, especially because we visited Kakum National Park, a spot that has been on our list of places to visit since before we came here in January.

The past couple of days I have been out of commission with Malaria, but it has been a relatively speedy recovery, which I am very thankful for.

Today has been a day of trusting: trusting that I would be strong enough to make the hike through Kakum, trusting the structure canopy walkway through the rainforest treetops, and trusting that I wouldn't fall ill while on the walkway for there was no turning back once we set out on the set of seven continuous rope bridges. There was also a platform between each of the walkways that we had to trust would keep us safe while resting between our adrenaline-pumping trips across to the next platform. It's also interesting that just as we arrived at the park, the rangers realized that there was a threat of rain, so we shouldn't spend a lot of time walking through, so we had to trust that it wouldn't storm or rain on us while we were on the canopy walkway.

Despite all of the uncertainties, we set out determined to experience God's creation in a new and exciting way and it was amazing! The view from the treetops was fantastic! I wasn't sure when looking down if I was seeing the ground or leaves and branches of trees underneath us. There were also many beautiful trees to be seen surrounding us on all sides and off in the distance as well.



Kathy Weber

We were only allowed to cross each bridge one at a time, so it was nice to have some forced solitude while sharing the same experience. It was also very worshipful time for me, just being engulfed in beautiful green foliage, a birthday treat for me because of the weather I usually see in February in the Northeast U.S.

This was the perfect time to reconnect with God,, to be thankful for my healing, to think about being here, far away from home, yet cared for by all of those who surround me, and encouraged by the beauty that spans that countryside of Ghana. Praise God!

Date: 2/23/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Location: Buduburam, Ghana

Home, sweet home... It's been on my mind lately. We've been in Ghana almost six weeks, so I'm really starting to get used to life here. But there is a pang of homesickness every now and then that makes me long for a hug from my mom or a long telephone chat with my best friend. I also get really excited to e-mail or buy stamps because I love to just dump out all my stories and emotions on everyone I know. Time is flying by and the thought of home brings a burst of energy, a sudden realization that I must soak it all in because we'll be leaving in 2 1/2 months. But today something happened that made me wonder what it would be like if I didn't know when, if ever, I would go home.

It began when we arrived in this village. We met a friendly man named Myers who ended up coming to lunch with us. It turns out he is a Liberian refugee who has been living in Ghana for 14 years. When he was a boy his mother put him and his brother on a boat to this camp in Southern Ghana so they would be safe from the war. He hasn't seen her since.

Later that night, walking through the camp after our program I was overcome by the hundreds, probably thousands, of refugees living here. After some investigating, it turns out that some have lived here for a few months, some for years and years. All have the hope of returning home one day to the family and friends they had to leave behind. And all are working hard to make a new home here, day by day. It is such a good example to me of how I should see this time in Ghana and our time on earth. Each day I wake up and thank God for a new day, but I sometimes find myself counting down the days as well. After hearing these refugees' hopes for home yet living for each day, I realized I can't put a time limit on my service here or anywhere. Just as I hope for home, I hope for heaven. And I don't live everyday as a countdown to the end, but as another day to praise God, do the work He's given me, and hope for what may come, sooner or later.

But do me a favor. Find a friend, a parent, a child, or whoever. Give them a hug and tell them how much you love them. Do that for me and for all these refugees who hope to do that with someone again someday.



Becca Leaf

Date: 2/24/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Buduburam, Central Region, Ghana

Is it possible for guys to have morning sickness? Not that I have it! Let's say I have a friend... Clinton, who wakes up each morning and feels nauseous. Actually, I think it's because of the anti-malaria pills I, I mean Clint, has to take. Eventually, it passes, but it's not cool. Keep him in your prayers.



Clayton Mark

This morning, after waking up to another day of not-so-good feelings in my tum-tum, we piled into our tro-tro, which is Ghana's code word for dilapidated mini-van. We drove for almost an hour on

the bumpiest road in Africa. At one point we went over a giant, flat and jagged rock. Our cruiser even broke down once in the bush. All we could see around us were trees, grass, and trees in the grass. Once it started up, we resumed our free total-body workout inside the vehicle as we were jerked around from side to side.

Our program was definitely worth the ride. What an amazing opportunity to go where few westerners have ever dared to go, and to be able to bring the Good News of Jesus... just too cool for school! We drove back to our guest house and packed up our stuff to head to Accra for the night. While we were waiting for our ride, we shared my new African passion: pineapple. Now there was once a day in my life where I would have described pineapple as the fruit of Beelzebub. Turns out, it's pretty good.

Accra has come to be known as Errandville, because our time is always spent fulfilling tasks. Today, it was banks, traveler's cheques, the ELCG office and internet time. The one thing that is constant throughout the day is that I sweat... a lot. Still, I trust that God wants me to perspire. It's teaching me patience and proper health maintenance by getting me to drink buckets of water. Just today, Joshua wrote a Beatitude for me during our devotion:

"Blessed are the huge, hot and sweaty; for they will soak in the refreshing goodness of God's heavenly minerals (soda)."

Amen, my brother... Amen.

Date: 2/25/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Location: Koforidia, Ghana (Eastern Region)

"Remember the Sabbath Day and keep it holy." God put that commandment in there for a reason. Today turned out to be the first day I can remember since coming here where we did absolutely nothing. And it felt good.

The morning started out a little sad. We'd left Kathy and Elvis in Accra to figure our passport/visa/traveler's check issues for a few days. The 6 of us trekked up to the Eastern region, not knowing whether to expect 2 or 3 programs, not knowing where we'll stay, and trying to figure out how to work out our programs minus 2 people. Personally, I was tired. I was frustrated. I needed a Sabbath Day, a day of rest. We arrived at our guesthouse and moved in while Joshua and Matthew spoke with our contact, working out details for the next few days. Rachel and I laid in our room and watched TV for the first time in almost a month. Out of the 3 stations on the TV, we settled for the one playing only the best of American programming. In the 3 days we stayed in the guesthouse we were able to catch a few minutes of Oprah, Rikki Lake, WWE, western movies, and a rerun of Friends. We got word about an hour after arriving that we had all evening to ourselves.

We could have walked into town. We could have gotten caught up on our jobs. We could have rehearsed or had a team meeting. Instead we rested. We played cards, wrote in our journals, wrote post cards, ate supper, watched TV, and went to bed early. I was tempted to feel lazy and unproductive, but the fun we had together and the relaxation we felt having "alone time" was priceless.

My peace was only interrupted by the 2 friends we found in our bathroom. Rachel and I spent an hour trying to trap 2 cockroaches in buckets to get rid of them outside. We tried our best to be humane. I didn't think they deserved to die, no matter how yicky I think they are. But it just wasn't working. Finally we called Matthew in, and he took care of them for us. It was quite an adventure. One came running towards me and I almost had my head chopped off by the ceiling fan when I jumped on the bed. Rachel and I did a better job of scaring each other by screaming and jumping every time one of them moved, than the cockroaches did by just being there. Even on a day of rest, we still needed a little excitement.



Becca Leaf

Date: 2/26/2004
Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar
Journal Entry:

Location: Koforidua and Tinkong—Eastern Region, Ghana

Interesting how in a moment you can curse the wind, then so soon thank God for the wind. It will rage with fury and it will carry a cool gift as the sun scorches the day away. And so today began.



As we walked to Adweso Trinity Presbyterian Model School, where we would have the **Joshua Vandercar** first of two programs for the day, a tro-tro approached us. The driver demanded that we use his services. Our contact had previously told this driver that we would discuss the possibility of using his services. Now the driver asked 700,000 cedis of us, which is many times more than we would usually pay for an hour and a half of travel. As he would not lower this price, we chose to decline his services. He then demanded that we pay 140,000 cedis for his time that we had supposedly wasted. If we were not to pay, then they would sabotage our program. As our contact was dealing with them, he agreed to pay this amount, even out of his own pocket. However, he didn't have the money and asked to borrow from us. So we paid. And after at least an hour full of strong words from our contact, Matthew, and the driver—words I could not understand—we found ourselves all at the school and I found myself with greater frustration and anger than I ever care to have. And all I can do is carry it inside. Now, we see what the coming days will bring. As the vehicle was owned by the station chairman, we will most likely speak with him, see his thoughts, and look for resolve in the situation. Arghh! I can't remember ever being so angered.

We then began our program and I could not help but smile at the enthusiasm of the children. At the open-air evening program in Tinkong I was brought more of the same through the laughter of a small girl, the dancing of a smaller boy, and our songs that ushered in the night. Even in the midst of my anger and frustration, I found joy.

These have been my days in Ghana. I continue to face the winds of a new culture that are pounding against me while offering an encouraging caress of joy and peace every now and again. Lord, bless these days to come.

Date: 2/27/2004
Submitted by: Rachel Haabala
Journal Entry:

Location: Koforidua, Eastern Region, Ghana

There's something about packing 10 adults, 2 guitars, a djembe, puppet curtain, 2 guitar stands and various hand percussion instruments into a station wagon that just doesn't sound comfortable. Well, it wasn't comfortable either! I was the one between the driver's and passenger's seats in this stick-shift automobile. It was an hour's drive to our first program at Prince Boatang Memorial Girls and Vocational Senior Secondary School in Nsawam. I'm sure we looked like a clown car, piling out!



Rachel Haabala

Many of the students were on their mid-term break, had just left the day before we arrived. The reoccurring theme seems to be that A) People weren't expecting us or B) They didn't know when to expect us or C) They were expecting us days/hours ago. Yet, they are still always thankful for our ministry and programs. Here at the vocational school, it was option C. Since they were on Mid-term break they had been expecting us 2 days earlier (before the break started). Even so, there were about 110 excited giggles when we started singing their local song, "Yeda Waseo"—we are still opening all of our programs with it—it's a good song! (Well, in Nigeria we may not be singing it—it's a Ghanaian song). The girls were really receptive and responsive. It was a great feeling to see everyone enjoying the ministry God's brought us here to do.

When we were finished speaking, the Assistant Headmaster was sharing his word of thanks. I was distracted by a girl in the front who wanted ultimately to get "The Big Man's" attention—Hey, Clay! We're still not sure what she wanted but the girls hoped she'd pull him into their dance circle as they were sharing songs with us.

After the program we were done for the day—the other program was intended for the church members, but since it was a work day they would not be able to have a program. Instead we 1st went to meet the owner of the school. She seemed to enjoy calling Matt a small man, one day hoping to see him again. He had just shaved all but the tuft under his lip, so maybe he was a bit young looking to Ms. Gladys. Then we were welcomed to their church—they meet in a small porch area for services and have about 150 members now! So, they are looking for more space.

There had been a handful of church members who came to see us at the Vocational School. They treated us to oranges and minerals ("Pop" for those in the Midwest, "Soda" for those on the East Coast and "Coke" for the rest of y'all). Has anyone explained Cross Fire's new love for oranges? They eat them here by carving the tough outer peel off, and cutting the top off one end. Then—stick your mouth over the exposed "meat" of the fruit and squeeze the juices out. Mmm!

So, back in the station wagon, our lives in the hands of the taxi driver. Minus Matthew who left to go back to Accra for more planning and preparation for the coming wedding! The afternoon was filled with waiting on lunch (made-to-order by Pat & Eva) and relaxing.

Oh! As we waited for our lunch, we were entertained by Oprah interviewing the cast of Friends. Another comforting "snid-bit" of the U.S. We agreed that as sad and disappointing as it is to see a good show end, there isn't much left of the Friends characters to be developed. There will always be reruns. Even later that evening we got to see an episode of the well-appreciated show.

I have decided again to get my hair done up and the ladies who've started it are only part way done and had to quit because it's dark. So, tomorrow morning I'll be sitting on that hard wooden stool again. 'Til then, God's Blessings!

Rachel Ama

Date: 2/28/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Locatiuon: Koforidua, Eastern Region to Accra, Greater Accra Region, Ghana

Our standard puppet show we have always fallen back on here in Ghana is one we borrowed after seeing Captive Free South Central's program at Midwinter Training. It features a group of mixed-up, songwriting puppets struggling to compose a piece on the fruits of the Spirit, and then, of course, the human friend who straightens them out regarding what these qualities actually are (Not coconuts, po-pos or plantains). Every day I find myself squatting behind the puppet curtain receiving a regular reminder of the long list of values the Lord calls us to embody as Christians, and often I receive and embrace the charge with more difficulty and much less enthusiasm than our beloved felt-and-yarn performers. For today's lesson, let's turn our attention towards patience, shall we? We shall.

Back in the first week of our overseas tour, a few of us established a unique organization that has since held meetings with more regularity than I believe any of its members have cared for. It's called the Waiting Club, and it comprises of three or four of us sitting or standing around waiting for something to happen. Today, the group was in full swing.

As soon as we woke up this morning, the whole day took a new, unexpected form. Before we were fully conscious, Elvis came into our guesthouse room and told us we would not be travelling to the Volta region as we had planned but rather, for reasons of time and money, we would head back to Accra for another one-nighter and then find a ride to the new region early tomorrow morning.



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

So we rose, and packed, and waited. The girls finished getting their things together and then we waited for Rachel's hair to get braided. She had left early in the morning to finish the job that had been started yesterday, and it turned into a longer affair than anyone expected. The afternoon check-out time at our guest house booted Clay and I from our cozy reading and CNN-watching den and we waited some more in the lobby with Fan-Ice and James Garner as the original Maverick on a South African station. Elvis and Rachel returned after a while with a tro-tro ready to carry us on the day's journey. We pulled into Accra just in time to wait some more while Joshua and Kathy wrangled up some Ghanaian fast food (chicken and rice) for dinner.

And so our day ended, without us really accomplishing anything except eating and moving from one place to another. A day of no programs in any form is a rare thing for us here, and even at home we may have looked at it as something of a day off. But despite an empty agenda, it is so taxing to always have to be ready to pick up and go at any moment, but to sit through the day with no idea when the time will come. Waiting is hard. I so often long for some small measure of control over my day. But since coming to Africa, myself, as well as the team, have found ourselves constantly at the mercy of people and situations out of our hands.

The Lord tests us all in many ways, and as I sit under a tree and anxiously wonder when we'll start our program or am crammed into a hot bus for hours before it fills and eventually departs, I remember that God is honing me in the fruits of the Spirit. Through all things tiresome and frustrating, God's mighty hands mold us more every day into the image of Christ. And while I'm usually the first to sarcastically quip, "Looks like the Waiting club meeting can come to order," I'm gradually becoming a member of the Patience Club. And I guess that's not so bad.

Date: 2/29/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Accra to Adidome, Greater Region Accra to Volta Region

At the beginning of our tour in Ghana January 19th, little did I know that a very short time is coming when the team will be heading towards the Volta Region where Ghana's bulk electrical energy is generated.



Matthew Abudulai

It is very true that everything that has a beginning has an end. Waking up from bed at about 5:00 am Ghana time, myself and Elvis left to the bus station to get a tro-tro for our journey to Adidome, the town in the Volta region we were expected to be. At the time the tro-tro brought us to the hotel to pick the rest of our teamers, they were about to have breakfast. As a Sunday the team needed to get to Adidome before the church service. Without wasting much time we loaded our baggage on board and set off around 6:50 am—Here again our 2 dear teammates Kathy and Elvis were again not with us.

Driving to Adidome was really a fast one and also fun. We arrived at Adidome at about 9:18 am. At the junction leading to Grace Lutheran Church, here was Blessed Gli, our contact, standing by. He joined us and we drove to the church premises. At the church day, Becca and Rachel joined the Bible Study class while myself, Joshua, and Matt C-K went to the Pastor's Residence to off load our luggage. After this we quickly came back to the church site and joined our other teammates. The officiating Minister was very excited when I informed him that our programme will last for one hour. "I am free," he said to himself and that we are going to take over his sermon. Very amazing as it was that Christ replaced the sermon for the day with our programme. This made me to believe the more, that our presence had been a blessing to the pastor and his congregants. One question I ask myself is that it is the duty of the Pastor to preach to people but who preaches to the Pastor? This day I felt that Jesus had answered that question for me. Our programme content really colored the service and strengthened the faith of those present. I detected this after I spoke to a cross section of the people. Their remarks were very appealing to the ear. Interestingly there was so much joy and smiles on peoples' faces after the service. The chairman of the congregation was given the chance by the Pastor to translate our message. Wonderful job, I said to myself and him after the

programme. This language used for the translation is Ewe.

Just after the service the team assembled at the Pastor's residence for lunch. As in Ghana, the general food was plain rice and chicken sauce. Lunch indeed was very good. Since we did not take breakfast we were able to eat almost all the food.

Tired as we were, all of us appeared sleepy. Some of us decided to have a nap and others went to have their personal stuff done.

A close neighbor around the residence of the Pastor was having a naming ceremony for his twin kids. This ceremony changed the atmosphere and the whole surroundings with music and dance. My U.S. teammates were very excited to be part of the occasion. I saw Becca having fun by dancing with some people. The people were very happy for seeing a U.S. lady showing interest in their dancing.

At 5:30 pm we all gathered, and went to Adidome bus station to close our day with an exciting programme.

Date: 3/1/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Adidome, Volta Region

Rabbit, Rabbit! Kathy says saying this at the beginning of the month, the first thing you say, brings blessings throughout that month. So, there you go. If you forget, at the end of the first month, you can also say "Tibbar, Tibbar." Observe—the reverse of Rabbit, Rabbit!



Rachel Haabala

Well! Clay said it best when he said the weather here in the Volta Region is a blend of Northern heat and the Southern humidity—not pleasant! Hot and sweaty is what we are, sleeping or awake. The terrain is both dry and tropical in some areas. The roads are still dusty and bumpy.

We met today at 5:45 am—yes, early! By 6:30 we were on the road in our chariot—without breakfast (No Milo). The second early day in a row. Why so early? Well, our program was 3 hours north in Gbafi. The church, where we met a worshipping congregation, was prepared and ready for us. Cross Fire was well-received and the people were so thankful for our ministry to them. They had prepared and learned a song to welcome us using the word "Welcome" in multiple languages. Upon leaving we were blessed with 7 pineapples and 7 coconuts, their expression of gratitude.

The second program was in Wusuta and was similar in that the congregation was excited and ready to receive us. When we arrived, there were girls dressed in traditional fabric wrapped around their chest. They were singing local songs and dancing. It was incredible to witness. They invited us to begin, so we did. As we introduced ourselves, a lady dressed in Kente cloth tied a bracelet around our wrists. Later Matthew described this to be their formal welcome to us. We are recognized! The most eventful, out of the ordinary episode during our program was Becca clipping her fingernails during Joshua's sharing. Though she was blocked visually by a wall, the room echoed each "click, click, click." But Joshua surely did a fine job. After the program we were presented again with an offering of pineapples, coconuts, bananas, yams, and cashew fruits. A final picture and farewell to them and back to our tro-tro. On the way home we picked up a few paying stray passengers to offset the cost. A new feeling to take a semi-public tro-tro.

To top off a good day, we got back to Adidome to a supper of jollof rice and fried chicken. Mmm! That evening Clay, Joshua, Matt, and Becca went to have a mineral and play cards. Matthew, myself and Blessed (one of our Volta Region contacts) went further into town to speak with Hannah who prepares our meals. It was a nice relaxing evening to hang out with the Ghanaians!

God's Peace,

Date: 3/2/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Locatyon: Adidome, Ghana (Volta Region)

Some things never change. For example, it is my journal day again and for the 4th time, it has rained. I love it. I love rain. It smells good, it feels good, and it reminds me of my home state, Washington. My teammates, however, want me to quit writing journals so we don't get drenched every 8 days. If I had my way, I'd write a journal everyday and keep the rain coming. Someone once told me that the rain is God's teardrops. That's only true if God is crying because he's laughing so hard at my silly mistakes and misunderstandings. I'd laugh, too, watching me sprint out of bed when Rachel slammed a door and a lizard fell from the ceiling onto my mattress. I'd laugh at the looks on our faces when villages give us gifts of pineapples, coconuts, and bananas, and at the end of the day we have almost a hundred pieces of fruit to eat, share, and give away.



Becca Leaf

Each day is just on fire with so much goodness and so many hardships. Today the goodness consisted of a Ghanaian dance party in a village near Adidome. We showed up, ready to do a program. As we got situated under a thatched canopy, about a dozen girls and women entered, all wearing the brightest, wildest cloth dresses I've seen. We knew something exciting was about to happen when some men came in carrying congas, maracas, and many other hand drums. For the next hour we let the pounding drums, staccato maracas, and dancing women completely overwhelm our senses. One of the leading women came over and got the three of us girls to dance up front. For the life of me I could not get my arms, back, legs, hips or feet to move as quickly or gracefully as these people. But we continued to sing along, clap, laugh, smile, and dance on the sidelines. It was almost sad to see it all end so we could start our program. Thankfully their enthusiasm carried into our hour, so the dancing and singing lived on.

We've been in Ghana 7 weeks so far and one thing I've missed is taking Communion. Each Sunday we are guests and performers during the service. Naturally churches rearrange their weekends of Holy Communion so that we have more time during services. That means though that we miss out on sharing the Lord's Supper on a regular basis. Tonight, however, the pastor we are staying with gathered our team for a brief, private worship service in his living room. We sang songs, prayed together, listened to Scripture, and received a message for us. It was strange and very fulfilling to sit back and be led in our spiritual life. We took communion, received a blessing and then passed out some much-needed hugs.

It is so easy and so dangerous to neglect my spiritual strength. All day, every day we sing songs, share skits, and speak about God, His love, and how He is at work in all of our lives. But it's easy, both as individuals and as a team, to get tired of singing together on our own time, or put off devotions or prayer until later. Even being motivated to read my Bible is hard if it's not my day to give a sharing or lead devotions. Over and over I have found that when it's the hardest to find time, that's the time I need it the most—plus a little extra usually. As time goes on here in Ghana, we are setting into routines, feeling pangs of homesickness, and becoming comfortable with people, programs, and life in general. I am encouraged each day to see my team seek God more and more. We are singing together more, making devotions and prayer a priority, and being intentional about what we say and do. It's easy to slip into an automated lifestyle when we are singing the same songs and doing the same skits. I find comfort and encouragement in seeing the freshness and joy on my teammates faces as well as the people who've come to hear us. God is exciting every day. Whoever says he's not should come to Ghana.

Before I finish, I've gotta say it. Today is March 2, 2004. If you write it the way the whole rest of the world does, it's 2-3-4. And that's cool. Sorry, I just had to point out that if there is nothing else good about today in your life, you got to live on a date that won't roll around again for a thousand years. I hope that cooler things happened for you today. But I am pretty glad I got a cool date to write on.

Date: 3/3/2004
Submitted by: Clayton Mark
Journal Entry:



Clayton Mark

Location: Adidome, Volta Region, Ghana

Okay, this is a message... nay, a mission statement for all of the goats and sheep of Ghana. For those of you non-livestockers out there, you may proceed if you wish, but this is between me and the farm animals (with internet access). I have a very simple message for you: GET OUT OF THE WAY!!! I can't take the stress of nearly running you over anymore. Every day, you gingerly saunter out in front of our speeding vehicles without any notice. As death speeds towards you at ludicrous speed, you continue to nibble at the tasty patch of concrete you've found, yet you still don't move. As we barrel towards you, my fingernails dig their way into any dashboard, armrest, or kneecap that can be found. My mouth slowly becomes agape as all the oxygen in the vehicle gets sucked into my body. Then, and only then, when my fear hits its peak and the tires of the vehicle are nanometers from your soon-to-be-carcass, do you finally move out of the way allowing my body to return to its normal state of happy-go-luckiness. Please, my heart can't take it. My blood pressure will kindly thank you if you please stay off the road and away from our transports.

Today we drove from the Volta Region back to Accra, a 3-hour jaunt. As we weaved in and out of potholes and quadripeds, we stopped at two different villages to do programs. At both programs, we were treated to singing and dancing by the children. There was even a tight drumline in the first village. These children played drums made of empty tin cans with animal hides stretched over the top of them.

The only low point of the day came when we went from dinner to the internet café. We crammed into a public tro-tro and were packed in tight next to many Ghanaian folk. When we arrived at the internet café, it was noticed that Rachel had, what seemed to be, a tear in the side of her backpack. Actually, it proved to be a knife slice along her pack that was used to remove her Palm Pilot. It is this kind of event that continues to frustrate me. Each day, I learn to appreciate this country and its people more and more. Then, something happens to make me struggle with being here. Yes, crime exists everywhere, yet when you are new to a country the bad seems so much worse. On the flip side, the good stuff is so much better. One day, I'll forget about today's theft, but I will always remember the children who danced for us, giving us a gift that will last a lifetime.

Date: 3/4/2004
Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar
Journal Entry:



Joshua Vandercar

Location: Accra & Takoradi, Ghana

We were off into the streets of Accra with nothing more than 700 cedis... enough to buy an orange and a satchet of pure water. Thankfully, Kathy, as our treasurer, caught Clay and I before we managed to find a taxi to the bank, where we would be exchanging money. She covered our taxi fare and we were on our way. After a successful visit to the bank we returned to the ELCG office and bought a lunch of bread, tuna, and oranges to share with those who would soon return from the post office. After lunch we loaded our luggage and ourselves into Ben's truck. He then took us to the station at which we would find a tro-tro traveling to Takoradi. During this trip to the station, Kathy, Clay, Matt, Matthew, and myself stood in the back of the truck. Now, the white man is not normally seen in the back of a truck... especially a cargo truck. Upon arriving at the station, Matthew was successful in finding an already crowded tro-tro. We loaded our stuff on top, said farewell to Ben, and were off to Takoradi. During this trip Kathy and I entertained and were entertained by an adorable little girl of 2 1/2 years. We then arrived in Takoradi, unloaded, visited Original Chinese Fast Food for dinner, and look forward to a relaxing day tomorrow. May our Lord continue to bless these days.

Date: 3/5/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi, Western Region, Ghana

Well, there's just one full day left until Elvis and Alberta's Christian wedding, but tomorrow morning we will experience a traditional wedding ceremony that has been passed down for centuries... How exciting! So, today was Cross Fire's first "day off" since coming to West Africa! Praise God! My definition of day off is—no travel to another region, no team business or errands to be done, and no programs. For the first time in Ghana, we were given the choice of sleeping in and deciding what we wanted to do with our day. Now, for Elvis and Matthew that meant working out final wedding preparations, but the six of us Americans, we had no obligations. The last time we were in Takoradi, we spent some small time at the market looking for gifts and artifacts to bring back to the US with us, and it was so enjoyable we decided to spend at least some of this day doing more of the same, along with finding a tailor for Clay, Matt and Joshua who hoped to get shirts made in time for the wedding with fabric they had recently acquired.

We split into two groups to make keeping the groups together easier for us, and to get more done individually. So Becca and I went with our "host brother" Harry and got many things done and had a great time. She and I attempted to do some bargaining on our own to get good prices, but Harry was very helpful when we didn't know what to do. We were very successful.

Later on we went to dinner as a large group reunited, and had much to talk about in regards to our day. Although this day hasn't offered much in the way of events to record in this journal, it has reminded me about the idea of the Sabbath day and how important it is for rest, in every sense of the word. When looking to God, it says in Mark 2:27 (speaking of Jesus), "And he said to them, 'The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.'" It's a good reminder about how Sabbath days are important, but at the same time, this verse says a lot more to me. To me it means that we shouldn't live only for the Sabbath, but to appreciate it when it comes. I also see this verse saying that it is not always easy to keep a Sabbath day set aside, because we are human, and in our many endeavors and activities, time can be seen to be better used to get stuff done.

Being here in Ghana has really helped me to appreciate the time that we do get to rest, but also to understand that in being here for such a short time, I can sacrifice some of the rest I would like to have, and serve those people who we only get to see for a couple of hours of our time here.

Praise God for refreshing our team with our first day off, and with the excited smiling faces of the people who haven't seen each of the 68 programs we've done here in Ghana so far.



Kathy Weber

Date: 3/6/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi, Western Region, Ghana

This day is a historic day for all Ghanaians--those in Ghana and those who are outside of Ghana. This day reminds all Ghanaians of the day our first President declared the country independent, 6th March 1957.



Matthew Abudulai

In the life of Elvis our teammate this day would also be historic. Not only Elvis but all the other team members. Little did I know that Elvis would end his bachelorship the morning of this

day.

At about 9:00 am this day family members of Elvis and Alberta gathered together for the traditional marriage between the two. Not forgetting loved ones and friends as well as the Cross Fire team. Since the wedding was to take place the following day and which is within the period which Cross Fire is touring Ghana, Elvis and I decided to code name this marriage as "Cross Fire Wedding." This traditional marriage is named as Engagement in Ghana. Since the team did not want Elvis to be lonely, the team decided to be in our team outfit, the Kente wear. We all smartly dressed in our Kente outfits in the marriage gathering. That was very unique.

Before the pastor opened the programme with a word of prayer, the team was asked to give the gathering two songs. These songs were sung beautifully by the team and they were requested by Elvis. Warming and soothing as the American voices were, it attracted a sounding round of applause from the people after the singing.

Just after the song ended, the opening prayer followed. The order of the ceremony begun. The pastor asked the mission of the Elvis family. As a brother and a bosom friend I stood shoulder high and chest out to announce to the whole gathering that we were coming to take Alberta as Elvis' wife. A Spokesperson from Alberta's family requested for what we brought to take their daughter away. I asked the other family members to bring the package to the family. They did that and requested to see Elvis since he was not with us at this time. Before Elvis came the Cross Fire team welcomed Elvis with a song, "I Want To See You." Whiles the team was singing the song I went to bring Elvis and everyone there saw Elvis.

Now it was the turn of Alberta's family to bring Alberta. For them to be sure that Elvis really knew Alberta the brothers of Alberta brought different sisters. The first and second were all not Alberta, proving that Elvis really knew Alberta. Finally, Alberta was brought to Elvis and Elvis embraced her.

It was then time for Elvis to seal his love for Alberta with an engagement ring which he did exactly that. Advice from both families and friends were offered to both of the newly married couple.

At the end of the engagement ceremony there were a lot of groupings. In Ghana friends who have met for a long time—when they meet under such occasions they do stand together and chat a lot. So that was what was going on in the group gatherings. While that was going on the newly engaged couple were taking pictures with friends, loved ones and family members. Clayton Mark, our team member, was honored by Elvis to take the photographs. He did marvelously well. All present were asking many questions. Where were these white people from? To Elvis and I we were very proud for having the team with us at the engagement ceremony.

Soon after the photographs some people who came from far away stayed awaiting the wedding day while the team split up. Some went to town and others also worked towards the preparations towards the wedding.

Indeed the day was historic and a memorable day for me.

Date: 3/7/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi, Western region, Ghana

In the past, some teamers have jokingly labeled a year of volunteer ministry with Youth Encounter, "Larry Johnson's Dating Service," and it's no lie that the team community over the past 40 years has produced more happy young newlyweds than Love Connection, but I believe today was a first. This morning, Cross Fire gave away one of it's own: Mr. Elvis Kafui Doe married Ms. Alberta Dede Mensah.



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

I remember in January, just a few bewildered days after our arrival in Ghana, when Elvis sat down to explain to us why we had a four-day gap in our schedule in the beginning of March. And I recall

watching as, one by one, six American jaws dropped to the floor, mine included. Now after nearly two months of preparing, anticipating, and wondering why on earth a man would get married halfway through a four-month tour, the day came and went off without a hitch.

The ceremony began promptly at 10 am in the sanctuary of St. John's Lutheran in Takoradi, conveniently located directly above where we spent the night. The whole mission house had a buzz to it that started yesterday as decorations went up, last-minute happenings fell into place (of which, true to Ghanaian style, there were a lot) and guests started trickling in from all across the country. We spent some time earlier in our tour planning an imaginary party with all our favorite contacts and friends we met in Ghana, and I was excited today because this service is the closest we'll come.

Visitors and church members packed the festive church building to the gills as well as filling the overflow canopy outside, out of view of anything happening in the sanctuary but just enough within earshot to get the important parts. Members of Cross Fire waited somewhat anxiously with our freshly-assigned jobs (most of them given to us the night before): Becca playing the organ, Kathy, Clay, and Joshua covering different aspects of video and photo documentation, Rachel manning the gift table, and myself reading a passage from Ephesians which was then read a second time in Twi (not by me).

The lineup of the service bore little similarity to the program bulletins we received, but still the organization impressed me. The day involved so many people contributing in so many ways, it was a true celebration of two well-loved people.

The service itself clocked in at two and a half hours and ran like the majority of marriage ceremonies do back in the U.S., except with a few liturgical additions since it replaced regular Sunday worship. Elvis and Alberta exchanged vows and rings, knelt for a blessing with their foreheads together, and danced out of the sanctuary as husband and wife.

The festivities took a short break while Clay kicked the photo shoot into high gear and snapped shots of every possible combination of people present, but shortly took off again with the reception, also in the sanctuary, and with a longer planned lineup than the ceremony itself. And while the morning's service was mostly what I'm used to, the after-party was most definitely Ghanaian. We heard from a host of great choirs, contributed a few Cross Fire songs ourselves, and did a LOT of dancing... that is true, Ghanaians do like to dance.

The highlight for me came when Brother Matthew Abudulai, who was the mind behind the madness of the past few days, proposed his toast (Malta, of course) to his best friend and new best-friend-in-law using all his best quirky catch phrases and Elvis nicknames. Clap for Jesus!

Well into the afternoon, things started to wind down and we found ourselves saying goodbye to a lot of people who feel like old friends. Elvis rode off into the sunset with his fair damsel on his arm, and now we're left with one final sad farewell: Original Chinese Fast Food (single tear).

Today was an amazing peek into the culture of Ghana. How incredible to be so involved in such an intimate and important day! What an awesome blend of strong Christian faith and traditional customs and values! But ultimately, our teammate got married today! How sweet it that? O Good Lord, You are such a good Lord!

The day's sermon, delivered powerfully by Evangelist John S. Donkoh, spoke on the sad truth that this couple marries into a broken world and that while today is happy, not all days to come will be. For us on Cross Fire, the message comes as a reminder that after this joyful celebration, there is much work yet to be done. Tomorrow we'll rise early and journey back to Accra, get right back into programs and wrap up our time in Ghana. But we'll give Elvis a few days before he catches up.

Date: 3/8/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Takoradi, Western Region, to Accra, Greater Accra Region

So, I don't suppose we'll see Elvis for a bit! We left Takoradi today, the final goodbye to some of the friends we were fortunate to see again. It was a relaxing weekend, going to the market, catching up with friends and making new friends! I'll have to say the last time I saw Elvis was yesterday as he, Alberta, Matthew, and the rest of the wedding party left to take pictures on town. Yeah, if I were Mrs. Alberta Doe, I wouldn't prefer my husband to leave quite yet! We took off to Accra without Elvis, haven't heard from him yet today—we're going to call tomorrow and get his plans. Saying goodbye to the Bart-Plange family (Pastor Joe, Sr., Hannah, Joe, Jr., Harry, Ellen and Mary) was emotional. This may very well be the last time we see them, though Joe Jr. and Harry are thinking of coming to see us off in May—when we fly back to the U.S. I mentioned to Hannah (Mrs. Bart-Plange) that I'd been there before—we stayed at St. John's Lutheran 5 years ago. She recalled our group and the trip! I only wish I'd had more time to discuss it with her, because I don't remember much of it.



Rachel Haabala

The trip back to Accra was long. We were hoping to get the flight tickets to Nigeria purchased, however we were later than expected in getting to Accra. Johnson Maclean drove us the 4 hour trip to Accra from Takoradi and was hoping to make the trip back again that evening. As it was, we got to the ELCG office and the bus we were to take was devoid of a driver and keys. Thus Johnson was employed to stay with us, bringing us to our program in Madina then back to Anyaa where we are staying in the Mission house of All Saints Lutheran under the care of Pastor Mills Robertson—brother to Mrs. Hannah Bart-Plange. Johnson will make his trip back tomorrow morning.

The program was planned, but unknown to most of us. We dug more appropriate program clothing from our packs tied on top of Johnson's tro-tro and entered the ministry half-heartedly. Well, at least I know I did. As the program went ahead, we all became more sincere. After our presentation, the youth present of St Peter's Lutheran Church presented a few songs for us. We were given meat pies and minerals to enjoy and they were delicious! Each of us talked with some people after the event. I was talking with one lady who inquired of my education. Explaining the degree I've earned she suggested I should come as an engineer to Ghana and help them out. It got me thinking. We see so much trash along the roads, plastic bags in particular, a recycling program may be beneficial if it was possible to implement. So, maybe one day I will be back to help Ghana. I wasn't planning on coming back here when I left 5 years ago, but God's call came and here I am. Next report from me will be in Nigeria. Halfway through the West African tour. Wow.

In Christ,
Rachel Ama in Ghana

Date: 3/9/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Location: All over Greater Accra, Ghana

Today, I have officially become a 6th toe on team. We ran errands all day in a hot tro-tro, from one end of Accra to the other, buying plane tickets, going to banks, going to the post office, and on and on. I had a good time riding around with my team, seeing the city. But by the end of the day I realized that I was pretty much just a tag-a-long. Some days are like that. Some days I'm feeling like that stray hair that didn't make it back into the ponytail. Or like the last piece of bread on a loaf. I'm just there and no one knows what to do with me. But that's the nice part of ministry work: You can just show up and say, "Here I am," and then God has to find something for you to do.



Becca Leaf

I found my calling for that evening at a church program we did. During our first few songs I noticed a lot of little faces and fingers peeking over the windowsill at us. The room we were in was only half full, so I wasn't sure why they were still outside. So during the skit I went out and stood by a group of a dozen or so children. I wanted to see what they saw, so I got down like them and peered into the window at my team. It was strange to stand on the outside and watch my teammates perform.

I wasn't part of the group while I was standing there. But soon the skit was over and I had to hurry in and put on a guitar for the next song.

I went outside again during Matthew's sharing. I made a few friends and held a little girl named Abigail in my lap so she could play with my face and hair. The number of people outside had grown and now there were people from 3 years old to adult crowding around the window. I went to speak to Ruth, a teenage girl next to me, but she was staring at the open window. I looked around and they all were. Everyone gathered was listening to Matthew speak about how powerful our God is. It wasn't about crazy Americans and Ghanaians jumping around doing silly motions to funny songs. It was about hearing the Word of God.

I couldn't take it anymore. At the end of the sharing I went and rounded up all the people at the open windows. I explained there was so much room inside if they would like to come in. Many began to say no. They just wanted to listen. I had to hurry back in for our next song, but at the door I said one more "please" and waved them all in.

That last invitation was all they needed. I entered the room with about 10 of the people, young and old, from the windows. More came trickling in for the rest of the evening and we had a great and loud time praising God in that small Ghanaian village church/schoolroom.

I knew how these people felt, standing outside our program. I feel like I'm on the outside, watching my team with all their gifts and talents, not knowing whether to stay where I'm at or join them. All I'm waiting for is a friendly invitation. Knowing my team, I don't have to wait long. They're awesome.

I've also learned that sometimes our purpose isn't always to be in front, speaking the powerful words of salvation. It could be as easy as inviting them in for a closer look at what is already being spoken.

Jesus took care of the spiritual barriers between us and God. I pray that through us He might break down the physical barriers as well.

Becca

*Countdown to Nigeria: 4 days!

Date: 3/10/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Greater Accra Region, Ghana

Growing up in California, I've become no stranger to traffic. I remember the good ole' days of waking up 2 hours earlier than normal just to get a jump on the myriad of cars that appear out of nowhere. Well, Ghana has shown me how to appreciate yet another thing I used to complain about. The traffic here is brutal. We got up at 5:45 this morning to get to our 8:00 program and we were still twenty minutes late. At one point, we were inching towards the Motorway Roundabout, a large circle used to regulate traffic instead of a stoplight, and I looked to see that every car within the circle was stopped.

We arrived at Ashaimam Senior Secondary School where we did a program for over 650 high school children. We were even "Cross Fire: Plugged." That's right, they gave us a microphone. We then proceeded to another school where we thought we'd be singing just two songs, but we ended up doing a full program, which was really cool. School programs are the bomb, because the children love having us there and they totally get into it.

We spent the afternoon with our contact, Pastor Emmanuel Adinkrah, who arranged the three programs for the day. He fed us yams and fish stew and we watched "Babylon 5" on Ghana television. Now, I don't know if you've seen this show before, but it's pretty rank. It's funny how we



Clayton Mark

watch these cheesy shows that we'd never watch at home, yet when we never get to watch any TV we jump on whatever is playing.

Later that evening, we helped lead the Revival Service outside of his house, which was a gathering for the members of the church and community. These peeps were off the hook! They truly loved to shake their bootys for God. It enabled us to keep going even though we were tired. We journeyed home around 10:30 that evening and were in the door by 11:25 p.m. We all made a B-line straight for our sleeping mats.

As we prepare to leave Ghana, I realize I am tuckered out. We have done so much while we have been here. I thank God for this opportunity and pray that He will strengthen us to finish strong in Nigeria.

"Yet those who wait for the Lord will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary."
Isaiah 40:31

Date: 3/11/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, Ghana

Once again, God has taken us through the day successfully. Glory be to His name. As part of the day's program, the team went to the Art and Culture Centre in Accra. Interestingly, each and every one of us had a list of items we intended buying. Some bought drums, stolls, and paintings for ourselves and friends back home.



Elvis Kafui Doe

Soon after shopping we drove to a restaurant for lunch. This restaurant has a nice and cool environment but unfortunately for us their food was very expensive as compared to the other restaurant. Besides, we had to play a program in a small village called Ayikope at 3 p.m. However, myself and Kathy had to go to Ghana Immigration Services for her passport and visa. So we went there and the team continued from there to Ayikope.

At the immigration we met our contact Mr. Godfred Kuffonz, and he asked us to wait but everything was ready and it was left with the boss to sign. We waited for 3 hours and finally he came to inform us that the boss was still not around so we must come the following day.

Waiting in itself is a very difficult thing because it involves a lot of energy, time, and sometimes even frustrating when there is nobody to talk or attend to you. However, it's our prayer and hope that everything will work out for us to get the passport and visa to Nigeria today.

Date: 3/12/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Anyaah, Accra, Tema, and Ashaiman, Ghana

"If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves upon the earth."
Ecclesiastes 11:3

This is the message I shared during devotion on the morning of March 12th. Reminding myself again of God's promises and His faithfulness, I spoke of God-sent storms... knowing nothing of what the coming 40-hour day would bring. Now, how could I contain in words the strongest of storms? Oh, how the winds beat against my body, beat against my mind, beat against my spirit, and lifted my soul. L.B. Cowman, in "Stream in the Desert," writes, "It is true that for a while the dark clouds hide the sun, but it is not extinguished



Joshua Vandercar

and it will soon shine again. Meanwhile, those clouds are filled with rain, and the darker they are, the more likely they are to bring plentiful showers... Our Lord's love letters often come to us in dark envelopes." Now, as I continue to wonder why I am soaked and what these waters mean, let me share the storm.

The day began with a visit to the ELCG office, in which we deposited those things we would not be taking to Nigeria, we received a mail packet including mail from home and an encouraging letter from Sunitha. We were told our traveler's checks were being resent to Accra even as we'd informed them we'd no longer be there, and we bid farewell to friends. After this relatively short visit, we traveled to Ghana Immigration where Kathy was finally able to retrieve her passport with visas for both Nigeria and Ghana having been reissued. We then visited the post office in Accra where I sent mail to Lutherhaven, the team sent a mail packet to the office, and Becca picked up a long-awaited package from home for which she was charged an outrageous amount of cedis. It was then off to Tema for lunch and a visit to the Electoral Commission so that Elvis and Matthew could register for the upcoming election. So, as we arrived in Tema, Rachel, Elvis, and Matthew continued on to the Tema post office while the rest of us ordered and ate lunch at SFC. They returned after a short while, at which I was called outside and informed that the ELCG bus had run into another vehicle. Now all this time that we are dealing with this issue, I am also being pressured with the fact that we need to be at our program in Ashaiman. Why this particular time was chosen to be timely, I don't know. And so I said, "I know. We will leave soon." We arrived in Ashaiman over an hour and a half late.

Now the program in Ashaiman was a calm in the storm. Apart from the ants gnawing at my feet, I found some peace and joy. The children shared with us poems, songs, and Bible quotations. And as the night closed in, we shared our songs with them. Though they pressed in against us and around us, it was not as it has been before. They were not mobbing us, but joining us in lifting praises to our God. As we prepared to leave, they watched a film show in the street... the Gospel of Luke.

Step again into the storm. As we loaded into the bus, I was told the Bishop Paul Kofi Fynn would like to meet with us that night. As he is the owner of SFC and has his office at the main SFC in Tema, we were told to meet him there. As we went, we stopped at a home we'd previously visited and searched for Matthew's Nalgene bottle. After not finding it we went to meet the Bishop. Upon arriving and waiting for some time at SFC, the Bishop was nowhere to be found. We then went to Busy Internet for an hour. Afterwards we returned to Anyaah, arriving after midnight.

We spent the night packing, showering, and preparing for our trip to Nigeria. As 3 am came upon us, we were ready to leave only to find that we had a flat tire. Earlier, when discussing the night's schedule with Kathy, I had mentioned that we needed to allow for such unexpected possibilities. As the tire was being replaced, Kathy said she hoped the rest of the night would go well. I said it would, while wondering what the next challenge could be... even briefly entertaining the thought of a cancelled flight. Our next challenge? A cancelled flight. And so at six in the morning I tucked the team into bed...on the sidewalk in front of Kotoka International Airport. I bought bread and tuna for breakfast and lunch, then began a six-hour struggle to arrange an afternoon flight with Bellview Airlines rather than the evening flight with Lufthansa to which we had been switched. I informed Sunitha and spoke repeatedly with various Ghana Airways representatives, with Bellview Airlines, with Brent, our Nigerian contact, and with Utibe, our assistant Nigerian contact. In the end, I found that it being Saturday, Ghana Airways were unable to refund our tickets and, because of company policy, could not endorse our tickets for Bellview Airlines. Thus we were resigned to waiting on the Lufthansa flight. During this time I was also approached at least three times by individuals wanting to talk for some time only to ask for money. I obliged with the few coins I had remaining. And though I had little time or strength to think about it, I was saddened to see one of these men smoking something more than a cigarette rather than eating the bread he'd said he hoped to purchase. The day was long and tiring and I'd felt that I'd accomplished little. But God was working greater things.

One gentleman from Ghana Airways, I don't even know his name, favored us and ensured that we were among the 30 that would fly with Lufthansa that evening. Though I had been told from early morning that everyone would be ensured a flight that day, that was not the case for 90 other individuals. I wonder what might have led this man to look with favor upon us. I think of speaking with his colleague, Robert, while he was present. I had only a few questions, but Robert was very short with me, even to the point of ignoring me. I understood he was stressed as he was to

coordinate all the switchover. Our friend sat silently and listened as we spoke. Upon finishing our conversation, I said, "Thank you, Robert," and left. He acknowledged me not one bit. But as I walked away I saw my friend relay my "thank you" to Robert. Now, I can't know what that simple moment meant, but I wonder if maybe it was the Lord's way of working. Our friend found favor toward us... whether that came through a kind "thank you," through him seeing me ceaselessly strive that morning, or through the kindness of his own heart, it came through the grace of God, alone. And I am thankful. As we arrived in Nigeria, the storm continued, but of those things I will not now write.

Yes, the storm clouds do come...and with them the rains. A traditional Ghanaian song that we sang quite often says:

It is raining all around me
I can feel it in the latter rain
My Lord Jesus, He brings more rain
Until we are filled and we are soaked in the latter rain

I was soaked that day. And as early evening came, I rested, and the Lord reminded me to look to my devotion for the day. As my team had dubbed me Climbing Oak, these words of Mrs. Charles H. Spurgeon from "Stream in the Desert" were a great encouragement to me. She says, "... The fire was unshackling the imprisoned music from deep within the old oak's heart! The intense heat of the fire wrenched from him both a song and a sacrifice at one. Then I realized: when the fires of affliction draw songs of praise from us, we are indeed purified, and our God is glorified! As I thought of this, the fire burned, and my soul found sweet comfort in the parable so strangely revealed before me."

"But now, thus says the Lord who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: 'Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.'"

Isaiah 43:1-3

The rains fell, the fire burned, and my soul found sweet comfort.

Christ's Love,
Joshua

Date: 3/13/2004
Submitted by: Kathy Weber
Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, GHANA, Lagos, NIGERIA and flying between the two cities

Well, it's hard to know where to start this journal of this day because we didn't sleep last night, so I'll start from 3 am today, the time we had planned to leave for the airport. Our flight with Ghana Airways was scheduled to depart at 6am from Accra to Lagos and the airport opened at 4am for checking in for our flight. So, we had planned for leaving an hour of time to get to the airport, even though it was only a half hour drive (surprisingly, even in Accra, there's no traffic at 3 am) but we needed that extra time anyway. Just after we loaded all of our luggage into the ELCG's bus, we discovered it had a flat tire. It took about twenty minutes to change the tire and then we were off, thrilled that we were still on schedule (maybe I shouldn't mention Joshua had made a comment the night before about padding the schedule in case we got a flat tire).

Anyway, we arrived at the airport somewhere close to four o'clock, and I saw a little sign that said something about Ghana Airways flights being cancelled for West Africa, but for some reason I didn't believe it, and we found where we were supposed to check in. Well, it happens that the sign was



Kathy Weber

right, and they had made plans for us to travel with Lufthansa to Lagos later that day, and we should come back at 3:30 PM to check in for that flight. At this point we didn't really know what we were going to do, someone was supposed to meet us in Lagos at the airport at 9 AM, and we were supposed to fly to Jos as well this afternoon, but we knew we were stuck. The ELCG bus had left us before we knew our flight was cancelled, but we didn't have anywhere to go anyway, and didn't want to risk missing the next flight, so we camped out at the airport; we were so tired it didn't matter how many people were around or what was going on around us, we rolled out our Thermarest™ air mattress and made the most out of the time we had been given.

However, we couldn't all sleep. Our team leader Joshua spent six hours this morning trying to make sure everything worked for us to make it to Lagos today, and that Utibe Thomas, our greeter from Jos, would be at the airport to meet us when we arrived.

We first signed up to be on the Lufthansa flight and were told this time to check in at 3 o'clock, instead of the 3:30 time we had heard originally. Our flight was scheduled now to leave at 8:30 PM, fourteen and a half hours after our scheduled original departure time.

Joshua called Brent Friedrichs (our main contact for Nigeria) and tried to work things out with him as well. He thought we should try to get on a different plane with a different airline that left around 4 in the afternoon, but working out a refund with Ghana Airways and purchasing new tickets would not have worked today, so we stuck with Lufthansa and the 8:30 PM take-off time. It was decided that Mr. Thomas, our greeter, would still meet us at night when we were to land in Lagos at 10:30 PM (one hour ahead of Accra time). After making many phone calls, and feeling like not much was accomplished in spite of all the effort, Joshua came back to fill us all in on what was going on. Lufthansa opened at 2:30, so we should be down there ready to check in early to make sure we made it onto the flight. So we ate some lunch—tuna and bread, which has been a lunch staple for us when we're not near other options for food—and Joshua was able to get some much-needed rest, even though it was brief.

We were very fortunate that a man working for Ghana Airways gave us high priority for getting on the Lufthansa flight. We were concerned because our visas to Nigeria were due to expire in the next couple of days, and our 60 days in Ghana was up as well. So, when we got down to the counter and a woman was preparing to check us in, he helped us by telling her that we were high priority and needed to be on the evening flight. It helped that we were first in line, though, especially because we found out they were only taking thirty passengers for that flight and the other thirty-five would have to fly out the next morning. We were eight of the thirty who made it onto the night flight. Once we checked in we could relax more, because we trusted Lufthansa not to cancel, and because we still had a couple of hours before boarding time, and we also didn't get charged extra money for our bags being heavier than they were supposed to be!

Matthew and I took off in a taxi to try to scare up dinner—fried rice and chicken, another normal Cross Fire meal in Africa—which we were able to do, even though we had to drive faster because today is Saturday and most fast food stands are closed for the weekends. The place we went to get our food was nice, they brought out chairs for Matthew and I to sit in while we waited, and we got to talk with a boy whose father was helping prepare our food. The boy's name was Nee (I'm not sure how to spell it, but that's how it was pronounced), and he came over and asked me to help sharpen his pencil. Matthew asked where he went to school and he said the name of a Montessori school. I had seen a few Montessori schools in Ghana and gotten excited because I attended one as a child, but this was the first time I knowingly met the student of one. It was nice to share a moment with this young boy in the middle of the relaxed chaos of the day. We had to leave soon after this encounter in order to make it back in time for the flight, but I remember the place where we met him and I hope to go back and visit when we pass back through Accra.

Matthew and I quickly found a taxi to take us back to the airport and we all ate our meal before boarding. Now, we've been talking for a while about how we will experience culture shock when we go back to the US, and we have had little tastes of that here and there, and this plane trip was one of them. It was the first flight for Elvis and Matthew, which was exciting for us as a team, along with the shock of how nice the plane was compared to the crowded buses and tro-tros (vans) we've traveled with in Ghana.

It was almost too much to have plenty of leg room, complimentary drinks and a comfy chair, but

the trip from Accra to Lagos by plane is so short we hardly had time to enjoy it. Although I do appreciate the fact that we flew, especially after seeing the station in Accra where buses leave for Lagos.

We arrived into the Lagos airport and were left with getting through with our Nigerian visas and turning in our landing cards. I was a little bit worried when the man at the first checkpoint said they don't accept the kind of visas we were given from New York City's Nigerian Consulate, but it seemed that this man was just out to give us a little scare, so we did make it through.

All of our luggage had arrived safely with us, and our greeter was waiting just outside for us. We briefly met Mr. Thomas, and then set off to find taxis, which was an event in itself. Mr. Thomas made arrangements for three cars because of all our luggage, but the driver of a fourth car was trying to get us to ride with him. We waited to be told by Mr. Thomas which cars to get into and then thought we would be on our way. It turned out that the fourth driver was blocking the exit with his car, so Mr. Thomas and the driver of the car I was in got out and started talking with the man and some parking lot attendants as well, while the driver of Joshua, Matt, and Elvis' taxi jumped the curb, and made their way out, narrowly missing the fourth driver who went as far as to jump in front of their car.

Well, he eventually moved and we were able to leave for our hotel. We had to postpone our flight to Jos until tomorrow because of the late hour of our arrival in Lagos, so we will spend the night at a hotel.

But, we now have a place to lay our heads, and rest for the next adventures to come our way tomorrow and everyday until we come back home.

Date: 3/14/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Lagos to Jos (Plateau State), Nigeria

Ending the ten regions ministry tour in Ghana I found myself in Lagos after flying from Accra the previous night by the internationally acclaimed airline Lufthansa instead of Ghana Airways.



Matthew Abudulai

Here were Elvis and I sleeping in number 110 of the Anchortel Hotel in Lagos a few meters away from Murtala Muhammed Airport—not realizing that a new day has been given to us freely by God. Joshua as part of his leadership duties came to invite us for breakfast. That was a good welcome breakfast in Nigeria, I said to myself. I believe most people of Cross Fire will definitely say the same. While at breakfast Mr. Thomas Utibe who is the assistant business manager to Mr. Brent Friedrichs handed over to us the ticket to Jos. Although I knew that we will be flying to Jos I became very excited the more when I received the ticket. Packing all our small and big backpacks into three cars, the team, including our main contact, were driven through the principal streets of Lagos to the local airport. After going through all the flight proceedings I and my other teammates found ourselves in the plane about to take off to Jos.

What a blessing to be in Youth Encounter ministry in Cross Fire to Ghana and Nigeria, I said to myself. The plane took off at about 12:05 PM. To me it was the magnificent opportunity to be flying twice in two continuous days in my ministry journey. I never believed in my heart that a day will be coming when the Gospel will carry me to an unknown land.

I all the time hear pastors, evangelists, and lay preachers preaching and teaching the Word of God on television, radio, open space market places and even traveling to other countries for Biblical conferences and theological courses and seminars. Little did I know that God was preparing me for a ministry to proclaim His Good News. Indeed my faith continues to grow and strengthen everyday as I journey far along. I am also glad for the many people we have so far touched their lives in our programs.

Flying in the skies, I found out that I could not see anything below me like trees or buildings. I opened my eyes widely and what I could see was whitish substances around the plane and blueish substances further around the plane. That was amazing. I now looked into Becca's face who was sitting in the front of me and she told me that we are now above the clouds. At one time I was looking around me to see whether I could see some of the angles around me because I felt closer to God. Some passengers in the plane were complaining somehow that the pilot is not very good as they expected because they felt there were some ejections but since I was new to the flight, of course my second time of flying, I felt it was a cool flight.

At about 1:10 PM we arrived at Yakabu Gowon airport at Jos. As soon as we came out of the arrival hall, here was Brent Friedrichs waiting for us with the Lutheran Church of Nigeria's Bus. The team boarded the bus and of we drove to the Lutheran Compound. The team had the opportunity to meet some of the youth members who were waiting for us after the close of service. There was a brief back and forth introduction and we left for Brent's house for lunch. At lunch we met some new friends who were very pleased with our ministry.

Some members of the team had to go for swimming in a pool which is just at the guest house and I chose to have a nap.

Date: 3/15/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Plateau State, NIGERIA

Our second full day in Nigeria and we're wearing long-sleeves. Thank you, Jesus.

We woke up this morning in lovely Jos, smack-dab in the middle of Nigeria and situated about a mile high atop the massive plateau from which this state (one of the country's 36) derives its name. We heard fables of brisk mornings and cool nights in Jos from past Cross Fire teamers, but a few short days ago in Accra, Ghana as we all sweat like it was our hobby, the Nigerian land of milk and honey seemed nothing more than a mirage in the desert. But at long last, we are here and it's cold! (Like, 70s, actually.)



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Being in Jos has also brought new things for us because of the awesome community of missionaries that, at least for now, call this place home. In the last day and a half we've met a number of Americans and people hailing from other parts of the world all called here through various mission organizations. We ate breakfast this morning in the home of Brent Friedrichs, our main contact and go-to guy here and the man that, as far as we can tell, runs the Lutheran Church of Nigeria. So his house was a welcome reminder of home: big, comfy couches, hot tea and coffee, cinnamon rolls (mmm...cinnamon rolls...), CNN along with like, 80 other satellite channels and filtered ICE CUBES! We sat in our lap of luxury watching the news of the world and somehow feeling more a part of it than ever before. Terrorist attacks and a new government in Spain, a re-election in Russia, Pakistan and India's historical cricket tournament, the weather in Africa and Europe... so many things happening in so many far reaches of the globe that I have never stopped to think about before.

We tore ourselves away from Sir Brent's castle and began our journey to the village of Jannaret, a little over two hours from Jos on some nice and some not-so nice roads. Brent hurried us along because he wanted us safely home before dark. So we took off with the team, a driver, and a few new friends from the youth group in Jos.

We have our first Nigerian program in Jannaret and it was awesome. Before leaving, Brent had given us some history and background knowledge of the people and area, and we learned that the region is predominantly Muslim. The city of Jos itself sits on an unspoken line dividing Nigeria into the Muslim north and Christian south, and in any surrounding village it's difficult to know which of the two is most prevalent. Brent told of how the chief of Jannaret himself worships as a Muslim, yet jeopardizes his life by taking a neutral leadership role and allowing both religions to practice and grow unbiased.

After a picnic lunch (we love you, Brent!) we began playing at the LCN church in Jannaret for a gathering of about 15 people. As our program went on the numbers grew until we finished with a congregation of 240 spilling out of the doors and windows of the tiny church.

At one point the local pastor, Abel, asked if the people could share music with us, so we paused midway through our program and listened to an awesome song from the women's group and then a few from Pastor Abel and another man on guitar. On one song, Abel sang solo accompanied only by a small local stringed instrument, in Hausa called molo, and after the program when I told him I was interested in learning more about the instrument, he gave it to me. We're excited to share the unique harp-like sound when we return to the States, but I'm still a long way from being program-ready.

The afternoon's events were such a cool time of mutual sharing and a great start to the second chapter of our adventures here in West Africa. Later sharing highs and lows of the day, Elvis commented that he was amazed at how God brought together a packed house of Christians and Muslims during our program to hear His Word. And as I remember the news stories flashing across the screen this morning of war and attacks and retaliation, even something as small as a Cross Fire program in a Nigerian village looks like a miracle.

We wrapped up the day with dinner at a local restaurant with Brent and then retiring to his abode where we added new Nigerian bottle caps to our collection and proved that Bruce Springsteen is right even in Nigeria where there's "57 channels and there's nothing on."

Date: 3/16/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

We started off today with a healthy breakfast (tea, orange juice, rolls, banana bread and brownies!) and a good dose of world news, courtesy of CNN, at Brent's house. Harajatu, the lady who helps Brent out with household things (as is common here—it employs so many ready and willing to work), made our banana bread. Mmm! It was so good. It was nice to have a full breakfast again.



Rachel Haabala

The next event of the day was to go to the local radio station (PRTV—Plateau Radio and Television) to record a 30-minute segment of music and ministry. Two of our Nigerian contacts in Jos, Pastor Rufus and Ofonime ("Ofo" to us) were coaching and cue-ing us through the recording room window. We introduced ourselves, and through a mixture of songs, scripture, and speaking we presented a shortened audio program. It airs at 7:30 AM on Sunday (March 21st) here in Jos. We hope and pray that hearts and lives will be touched and encouraged through this opportunity!

After the recording, we staged a few "Beach Boys" poses and headed back to the van. Of course, recording and waiting took all of the morning (recording time—1.5 hours, waiting time—at least 2 hours) so we were ready for lunch. Ofo drove us to a shop where we could buy the necessary ingredients for grilled cheese. Back at our place we had our meal and an afternoon to relax.

At 4:00 the youth of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria (LCN) here in Jos were to put on a welcoming celebration for us with traditional songs and dance. The whole event started at about 6:00 (African time J) and it was incredible! After an official word of welcome and a few familiar songs, our friends Stanley and Ceasar sang a song as four pairs of children danced in. First two girls representing the Hausa people danced up from the back of the church. They waved their open palms back and forth in front of their torsos turning them over in rhythm with their bouncing steps. They were dressed in traditional clothing with head coverings. A guy-girl pair entering from a side door represented the Yoruba people group. She came in hunched over lifting her skirt gently so as to give it a bit of a bouncing appearance. His steps were a careful dance complimenting the movements of his partner. Both were dressed in shiny cloths. The third pair danced in from the back, dressed in white to

represent the nomadic Fulanni people. He did a gentle bounce-step kind of walk as he and his protective sun hat on his back and his walking stick draped across his shoulders and his hands hanging over. She had her palms together as if praying and was rubbing them together, back and forth. In rhythm with Stanley and Ceasar's song she leaned forward and stood up straight. The final couple entering through a side door, represented the Ebo people and wore traditional clothing as well. Her dance was graceful and fluid as she waved her handkerchief in the air. Her partner's dance was an impressive coordination between standing straight with a dance-like walk and squatting down while opening and closing his knees in a quick way in conjunction with opening and closing his arms. To top it off, he moved his head with the rhythm in a choreographed manner and was holding a walking stick all along! WOW!

After that incredible presentation they introduced themselves as each of the four ethnic groups and gave us their official welcome with words of wisdom that we'd be learning some of their culture and taking it back home with us. So true! The rest of the program was filled with a few more songs by youth in the church and words from some "higher ups" like Pastor Rufus and Mr. Utibe Thomas, the church chairman. I was most impressed by their warm and organized welcome. We can tell they're excited to get to know us and to build the relationships that a relational ministry strives for!

Tonight Kathy, Matt, Joshua, Clay and I went with one of the missionaries here to "Singles' Volleyball" and the exercise was much appreciated. It's easy to forget how much we lack regular exercise other than walking through African markets.

We are experiencing such a warm and comfortable community here which is exciting for us! Thank you all for this opportunity!

Romans 15:5-7: "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God."

Rachel

Date: 3/17/2004
Submitted by: Becca Leaf
Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Nigeria

HAPPY ST. PATRICK'S DAY! The thought of wearing green, leprechauns, pots o' gold, and rainbows really only crossed my mind once. After a quick survey of my team (4 of which were not wearing green) and a check to make sure I was, I proceeded to pinch them for forgetting this holiday. That was about 7:30 AM before a school program. My reminder was not well received J.



Becca Leaf

I love Jos, Nigeria. We're in an apartment on the Lutheran Church of Nigeria compound. It's nice to have a small kitchen and some independence. The best part is how we all pitch in to cook and cleanup for each other. Clay and Matt made grilled cheese, Kool-aid and eggs for lunch and then did dishes afterwards. Coming around the corner and seeing Clay in an apron made my day. It's like "Real World, Nigeria" living in one place for two weeks. We're our own little family. The other missionary families have been so generous, inviting us over for supper or dropping by with goodies to eat. It's nice to feel like someone's kid again.

The LCN also owns a pool next door to our compound, so on hot, free afternoons we like to dive into the icy water and cool down. Kathy and I made plans to meet Matt CK and Clay down there about 4:30 for a quick swim before the Lenten service. On our way down, Kathy turns and says, "Hey, I wonder if the ladies are having water aerobics today." No sooner did we turn the corner we could hear the women laughing and chatting. The surprise came when we turned into the pool enclosure. I will never forget seeing our 2 boys already in the pool, high-kicking, scissor/slicing, and having the time of their lives. The four of us spent the next half hour being worked from one end of the pool to

the other by Natalie, the cheerful aerobics instructor. After 30 minutes my arms, legs, hips, and back were rubber. Natalie would shout, "Recover!" and those precious 10 seconds of inactivity were heaven. We persevered to the end with a new-found respect for the ladies of the mission. If our schedule allows, we've all vowed to go again, next time for the whole hour.

The rest of the evening was good. The Lenten Service was traditional and we sang only 2 songs. We've been in Jos quite a few days so we knew many of the people in church. It was good to worship as a team among friends. After church we went over to a family's house down the road and ate supper. We played with their kids and heard their story of how God brought them to Nigeria.

Being around so many people from all over the world has made me begin to ask, "How did you get here?" Jos is a missionary hub since it's in the center of the country and has a milder climate due to being on a Plateau. More and more I've seen that these are all normal people, normal families that God is working through in such amazing ways. Many of them didn't know they would end up here or even end up in missions. The process to get here is complex and costly. It's easy to see God at work. After voicing my amazement to one woman, she quickly said, "Well, what's your story?" And after I told her about team last year and deciding to go again, she said, "Well, that's amazing to me." My life seems so normal, so ordinary. I'll venture to guess that most people believe they are leading normal lives. Well, you're not. Wherever you are is amazing. So many things had to happen to get you to where you are today. Your job, your school, your family and friends. I thank God all the time for where I'm at in life. It's not an accident, it's not "normal" or predictable. It's a miracle. Now that I realize that, it's just a matter of remembering it.

Date: 3/18/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Nigeria

...So, maybe Target isn't the best place to do your African shoe shopping. Don't get me wrong, I love the place. I mean, where else can you buy a toaster, the bread to toast in it, and the Spongebob Squarepants pajamas to wear while you're making your breakfast, all in one trip? But perhaps it was not the wisest choice for choosing a pair of sandals that I would be wearing for four months straight while in West Africa. At the time, \$15 for a pair of Cherokee sandals sounded like such a bargain, but as I spent my morning duct taping them together, I had a change of heart. They have held up pretty good, but one shoe kinda caved in about a month ago, so I finally did a little cobbling this morning. I think they will make it until the end of the trip as long as I develop some kind of way to levitate myself when I walk.

Today, we began our day by taking a jaunt to the Jos Wildlife Park. We saw a couple of elephants, some ostriches who looked at us like starving velociraptors, and some African Waterbucks, which were big deer with antlers and a neckbeard! I felt close to them as my facial hair still remains everywhere but my face. Other highlights included watching a lion eat a goat (literally), Becca confront a python (she loves snakes...except change the word "loves" out for "is deathly afraid of and will push any nearby teammate in the path of one if she sees any snakes"), and getting lost in the bush trying to find the hippo pool. A few times, we all had to get out of our van so that Ofo, our driver and contact, could make it over some hairy bumps in the road.

We came back to the Lutheran Church compound and made our lunch, which consisted of Top Ramen and grilled cheese sandwiches. Then, I was able to do something I've yet to do in Africa... I took a nap. It was so awesome! Our evening program with the youth was cancelled, so we went to dinner. We had been invited by one of the teachers at a nearby mission school where we had done chapel the day before. We were touring the school, and we came across her 2nd grade class doing P.E. (on a zip line, no less). In the initial introductions, she invited us over for dinner; eight strangers! Jenni is from Michigan and she made us some mean tacos. We also had the opportunity to just sit and talk with her and her two nearby friends from Ireland, Pamela and Caris, both of whom are involved in other ministries. Pamela works with a Christian textbook organization and Caris works with underprivileged children and orphans. There are so many people in this world and a



Clayton Mark

unique story to each of them. It was so cool to just sit and chat with our three new friends.

Jenni's hospitality is just one of many stories of how God uses people who barely know us to take care of us. We've encountered so much kindness and generosity from the people of Ghana and Nigeria. God continues to be our provider by using people like Ofo and Jenni to take care of us and make it through another day. A verse on Jenni's refrigerator says it all, "... Freely you received, freely give." Matthew 10:8

Date: 3/19/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos Plateau, NIGERIA

Thank God we've arrived safely in Nigeria by His grace. May His name be praised.
Amen!!!!

Life in Nigeria is very cool and our contact Brent Friedrich is on top of every situation.

Life in Nigeria is almost the same in Ghana, they are not much different. The hospitality is the same, and the difference I have noticed is the way Nigerians dress. Besides, the weather in Jos plateau is very cold, dry and dusty. Jos is quite unique in Nigeria because it has a lot of foreign nationals and our team has been blessed by some of them inviting us for dinner.

Today we played two programs, Hillcrest school and Mado was started in the year 1945 and LCMS is responsible for recruiting teachers for the school up to this present day. The school was established to take care of missionaries' children. At today's program there were about 150 children made up of Nigerians, Americans, and Europeans among others. The school as part of its social responsibility and support for the community, gave out a total of 56 wheel chairs to some disabled people living in Jos and it's surrounding towns. This day will remain historic and a memorable one in the lives of the disabled people and all who witnessed the presentation. Well, our second program at Mado Clinic attracted about 85 people within the community and it was full of excitement and fun.

Conclusively, life in Nigeria is good contrary to the wild stories and imagination we had before traveling down. Above all, it's our prayer that the Good Lord will carry us through successfully. Amen, Amen, Amen.



Elvis Kafui Doe

Date: 3/20/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

Today was a day of rest.

After a breakfast of eggs, toast, and coffee we rested and rehearsed for a short while. We are now equipped with a small bank of skits and puppet shows from which to draw. After lunch we joined the youth for a game of basketball and a short swim in the frigid pool. Ofo then took us to find take away dinner downtown where the bats of Jos were making their evening migration. What a sight. We then took our dinner to the Rasch's home. They are friends of my friends... a missionary family that has left town for a few days. They opened their home to us during their absence. So we ate dinner at their home and watched "A Beautiful Mind".

Tonight I penned the final words in my journal and will pen the first words in a new one tomorrow. I



Joshua Vandercar

think of all the memories held on those pages and am assured in these truths:

He will quiet you in His love. -Zephaniah 3:17

He shall strengthen your heart. -Psalm 31:24

He gives more grace. -James 4:6

The Lord preserves the simple. -Psalm 116:6

I will guide you. -Psalm 32:8

You shall go out with joy and be led out with peace. -Isaiah 55:12

Every trial, every joy, speaks of His faithfulness. "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." II Corinthians 1:20

Christ's Love,
Joshua

Date: 3/21/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

Today was our first Nigerian Sunday morning worship. Many things at this service were the same as what we experienced in Ghana, but one thing that did jump out at me was that, except for the cultural songs offered up by the choir and congregation, the whole service was in English, which is the first Sunday that has happened since coming to West Africa. After the hour of Sunday School, we worshipped all morning, ate lunch and then traveled to another praise and worship service. We had been asked to do one or two songs there, and so we packed up and went on our way. We arrived in the middle of a praise band singing a bunch of songs in a row, one of which is called, "Trading My Sorrows." This song has been sung by us quite a few times here in West Africa, but this may have been one of the only times I have heard it sung by another group here. It's awesome to know that some of our program songs are well known here in addition to the cultural songs we have in our programs as well. It's awesome to think about the commonalities we have found here, especially when it might be easier to see the differences.

In addition to this praise service, we were headed to a radio station for a live interview with the host of a Sunday evening program called Homefront. As I was sitting at the praise service, I was a little concerned that they wouldn't call us up in time for us to sing and get to the radio station in time, but they called us up just in time. We got a great reaction with our two songs and then I felt bad because we had to play and run, but we were sent off with many smiles from the crowd.

When we arrived at the radio station we discovered that only two of us would be able to fit in the studio, when we had been told four of us would fit previously. So, we were flexible and modified our plans, so that Elvis and Joshua would represent us. The rest of us sat in the Lutheran Church of Nigeria bus that we have adopted as our own for our time in Jos, and we got to listen to them on the radio. They were on for about ten minutes answering most of the same questions we answer everyday, and they even sang a local song in the language of Hausa. It was cool to hear from my teammates on the radio.

At church this morning we had been invited over for dinner at Utibe Thomas' house and we got to spend time with his wife Augustina, and his two young sons, Edmond and Worthy. Utibe had come to Lagos to meet us, and because of our late arrival, he missed his son Worthy's 1st birthday. I have often thought about what a sacrifice was made to make sure we were safe, and how "unworthy (pardon the pun) I feel to be treated in such regard. Thank God for the love we have experienced here, especially when we feel very far away from home. Dinner with the Thomas's was excellent, and we made plans to learn how to make a local dish, Jollof Rice, on Thursday with Utibe's wife Augustina.

We arrived back at our compound to relax after a very full and satisfying day. Praise the Lord!



Kathy Weber

Date: 3/22/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos (Plateau State)

After two months travelling and sharing the precious Word of the living God in the ten regions of Ghana, Cross Fire now finds itself in another country, Nigeria, the giant and most populated country in Africa.



Matthew Abudulai

In Ghana I played a coordinating role on team between our contacts and the team, indeed that was very challenging. I see myself to be relaxing in Nigeria a lot, if not a free man. Travelling in Jos, the capital city of the Plateau state, is very smooth and entertaining. Mr. Brencht Friedrichs, the Business Manager in Africa, had released a Toyota bus to the team throughout our stay in Jos. I believe this accounts for the enjoyable drive while in Jos.

Scrambled eggs, toasted bread, tea, coffee, and Milo were the options members were to choose for breakfast. I went for scrambled eggs, toasted bread and Milo. Few minutes after our team devotion time Ofonime, our principal driver in Jos, picked us up and drove us to Rung Pam Stadium where we had our first program for the day. This was a gathering of sports men and women yearning to listen to the Word of God from us. We spent about 30 minutes with the sports men and women which was unusual of our program's time length. It was indeed a blessing to share with them.

One concerned thing that happened after our closing prayer was that a key member of the sports men and women in turn asked all his colleagues to stretch their hands towards us and bless our ministry, wishing us safe travels. I was so impressed for that Christ-like virtue exhibited. In fact this action inspired my soul and I am sure my other teammates were also inspired, too. Highly spirited I must say I felt. We then drove back to the Lutheran compound, our place of residence.

The previous day the team had a unique time together affirming one another. Unfortunately we could not finish affirming each other so we had to continue today. There was so much joy and smiles within the hearts and faces of people for the soothing and wonderful words each one of us had to share with each member. Truly the atmosphere after the meeting was covered with the absolute love of Christ. Members realized the way Jesus was using each and every member's talent by way of harmonizing them and building a solid Cross Fire team in West Africa this year.

At about 4:30 pm we took off to our next program in northern Jos, a town called Rusa, to strengthen the faith of the people in that preaching station. A few meters to Rusa were pieces of vegetable farms along both sides of the bumpy and undulating rough road. Driving on the road was somehow scary but Ofonime our driver allowed himself to be used by God and took us safely to the program site.

The leader of the preaching station, one Mr. Baala, organized the kids very well rather to educate and entertain us with Gospel songs. The team really enjoyed the cultural display through dancing and singing demonstrated by the members and friends of Rusa Lutheran Church of Nigeria. Teamers were excited having been a part of this program. I must say it was a unique gathering for both our host and visitors around. When it got to our turn to present what we had it was getting dark, we therefore omitted some of the program content. Lovely enough I was for the first time asked by the team's coordinator Matt C.K. to lead a song which I have never attempted to. From the beginning I was nervous because I thought, "I will make a mistake." After teaching through the song, "Good job Matthew" said the Program Coordinator. I said to myself, Jesus has wiped away my fear and replaced it with confidence. The day was very entertaining and educating, Inspired as our hosts were they could not hold up the joy in them than to pour on us gifts of vegetables.

The team together with about six of the Jos Lutheran Church of Nigeria (old airport junction) drove home safely, singing and praising God for the success of our program. The team ended the day by dining at Kingsbite Restaurant in Jos.

Date: 3/23/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Location: Jos, Plateau State, Federal Republic of Nigeria

I love you, Jos! Another fun and laid-back day here in our new plateau-top Lutheran compound Nigerian home. Today was almost what you'd call a day off—what are those, you say? I've almost forgotten myself—but this one happened in typical West African style with us not really knowing beforehand that it was going to happen. But last night when we learned our one engagement for the day, a time of praise and worship with the youth group, needed to be postponed, our leader Joshua, a man of compassion, decided to get this day started out right and set our meeting time for noon.

After good sleep and a rare hot shower, we met in the common room adjacent to the girls rooms to cook some lunch. Hey Mom and Dad, we've stayed here so long that we're actually cooking and cleaning for fun! Can you believe it?

Our first and really only agenda for the day was rehearsal, and we spent most of the time with tape recorders and notebooks on hand, listening and trying to learn new local Hausa songs from a few of the youth, Stanley, Uche, and Portia. We arrived in Nigeria equipped with a couple songs in the people's native tongue, one that we learned from a tape of a previous team and the other taught to us at Cross-Cultural training by Nigerian students from Luther Seminary. But all week we've heard dozens of songs unfamiliar to us, and we've all been itching to learn. We went over the choruses together and then Stanley assigned us the various leader parts which he helped us stumble through until we could hold it all together on our own. We learned some awesome songs, with some of the standout choruses being "No wonder everyone is thinking about Heaven," and "Done it, done it, God has done it; what man cannot do God has done it." In Hausa, of course. Stay tuned to our return tour this summer for more.

We'd been invited for dinner by a family on the other LCN compound, so first we made a luxuriously long two-hour run to the overpriced Internet Café (which is a bigger feat than you might imagine, particularly because we had to choke down our childhood nightmares and brave the thousands upon tens of thousand of bats that swarmed and blacked out the evening sky not far above our heads). We scored yet another dinner invitation for later in the week from a music teacher at Hill Crest school who was checking e-mail with us. Then we continued on to have a heavenly meal of taco/bean burritos and chocolate cake. The incredible cook was Mary Beth, an American, and the rest of her family was composed of her husband Bayo, a Nigerian man, and their young kids Toby and David. We had an awesome visit in their warm home; Bayo interrogated the guys and myself on our every impression of Nigeria and we enjoyed talking to him about his travelling in the States (he LOVES Colorado but Iowa is way too cold), other regions of Nigeria, and his ministry here.

Both he and Mary Beth work with people living with HIV/AIDS. The stories they told of the people and dire situations they've seen firsthand were unbelievable, and through the conversation I was reminded of what an overwhelming epidemic sweeps the world. Later we were joined by their friend Bob from Santa Barbara, CA who is here on his second trip to Nigeria to speak on HIV/AIDS from the firsthand perspective of a man who has lived with the disease for over twenty years. Hearing pieces of his personal testimony was amazing, and I'm excited that we set up programs for Thursday at both Bayo's and Mary Beth's workplaces.

We came back to ur pad here which every day is feeling more and more like a familiar home. We're all enjoying this feeling of being settled in a "permanent" place so much—permanent might be an exaggeration, but after two-plus months of moving every three or four days, this place is the closest thing to a home we've had. And we also love that in such a short time, we've become part of the community. People embrace us and welcome us and are excited to get to know us. In a place so full of mission work where people come and go so regularly, the people here have learned to make the most of the time they have with others and waste none in sharing Christ. With all our new friends and cool families and great dinners and awesome conversations, leaving Jos will be a sad day.

But the Lord reminds us that He is everywhere. Today at the Internet Café I received an e-mail from my mom saying that a young woman named Laura joined our home church in North Carolina just last Sunday, and that she recently returned from two years in Jos. My family heard reports from her on the area and people and enjoyed piecing together some of the places I've seen and experiences I've had. So at dinner tonight I dropped the name for Mary Beth. "Oh, I know her well," she said. "She lived on this compound." The family of Christ is so big and yet so small! How awesome that across continents, God shows us we are connected and when we feel so far away, God shows us we are not. Leaving our home and family here in Jos will be hard. But no matter how far we travel, the people we meet will be our family and wherever we go will be our home.

Date: 3/24/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

"In His heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps." Proverbs 16:9

Our day started with a team devotion and then we were whisked off to a basketball court to lead the players in a devotion. We sang a few songs that many people seemed to know (who knew "Trading My Sorrows" was so popular in Nigeria?) and our skit was a **Rachel Haabala** huge hit! They loved the crowd interaction, and received God's love ball with open arms! After the "program" Ofo, Uche, and Stanley (our LCN roadies) handed out some devotional resources. Folks were hungry for them and asked for more for their friends. Hallelujah!

We headed back to the LCN office compound and waited for Utibe to arrive, he'd requested to see us to discuss our schedule. Harajatu arrived and waited to get Brent's house key from the locked office. She came around with her greetings for each of us proclaiming that she'd missed us the last couple of days. We greeted her with gladness and secret hopes of breakfast. Having such a servant and loving heart she invited us in for tea and coffee, promising to make us some oats (oatmeal). Mmm, how could we turn her down? Utibe arrived and we followed Harajatu's invitation into the house while Joshua and Kathy took care of some logistics.

This is where Proverbs 16:9 comes in: over a bowl of oats and cornflakes Kathy announced "Oh, if you haven't heard, we'll be staying here in Jos until next Thursday." Wow! A week after we'd originally planned to leave, we are now proposing to leave (I cannot surely say we'll leave in a week because the Lord is determining our steps)! So, yes, that means possibly 3 more exhilarating days of Water Aerobics! (Between you and me, it seems that Matt and Clay are the most gaga about it).

Our day brought us back to our place where 4 of us met up with Vera, Amen, and Esther to check out the Market and buy headwraps which are worn "religiously" here. Though busy and crowded, the Nigerian market here in Jos is similar to what we experienced in Ghana. At noon we returned back again to rest and prepare for water aerobics! Those 4 hours were spent napping, eating, practicing guitar and djembe, finishing logic puzzles, doing laundry and purchasing fabric. Finally, at 3:50 pm, it was time!

Becca, Kathy, Matt, Clay, and I all dispersed to prepare for water aerobics. When we girls arrived, the boys were already soaking in the frigid pool. I'll have to say, it was my first experience with water aerobics here in Jos, AND all of our first experience with the full hour's workout! Phew! After the first ten minutes we realized what the full hour would require of us. Natalie (our Wednesday instructor) didn't let us down, she made certain that each of us got good exercise. Believe me, we were happy to hear her exclaim, "Recover!" because we knew we were treated to a ten-second breather. Hebrews 12:11 states it well: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it." Yes, we feel wonderful that it's over and though it wasn't completely painful, a full hour of water aerobics certainly isn't pleasant!

A quick shower and we were out the door again for 6 pm Wednesday Lent service. Finally, supper after worship. Mmmm, that was good!



All in all, I realize we surely are here for a great purpose, and we have the passion and call for West Africa, may we continue to be flexible as God guides our steps! Because we are all training for something bigger than where we currently are. Praise the Lord that He knows how and where to guide us, we just need to be willing to follow!

Amen,
Rachel

Date: 3/25/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Nigeria

Today has hit me like a ton of bricks. Instead of leaving Jos for Abuja we get to spend another week in the fun-filled Plateau State. Since we have seven extra days to fill with programs, Joshua and Kathy and, well, really all of us started talking to the pastors, teachers, and missionaries here trying to create some sort of schedule. I'm not sure who talked with Bayo and Mary Beth, but the programs they set up this morning have become an unforgettable few hours for me.



Becca Leaf

Mary Beth works part time teaching English at a school here in town. And 2 days a week she teaches sewing to a group of women who sell their handiwork to make a living. The thing that makes these women so amazing to me is that they are all living with HIV/AIDS. Many are widows and nearly all are mothers. We sang songs and worshipped together, admired their crafts, and received many hugs and handshakes before leaving that place. Standing in that room, seeing my teammates all talking with these women, some as young as 20, some as old as 40, I thought, "Wow, you can't even tell they are dying." It may sound like a silly realization, but this is the first time I have ever knowingly met someone with HIV or AIDS. I've read books, taken health classes, and watched TV specials on these diseases, but I've never worked around it firsthand. I felt pretty unprepared for the thoughts and ideas that struck me. I hear the phrase "dying from AIDS" and it sounds pretty ominous and despairing. But aren't we all dying in a way?

I was finding out more about a few women and what their lives are like and that question came up. Basically they responded: "Why, yes we are all dying. But don't you need to be living in order to die? So let's live. I live with AIDS, you live with your friends (my team), we are all living right now." So as we said our goodbyes to these funny, cheerful women, I enjoyed being blessed and hugged and kissed on the cheek by people who know how to truly live. I admire their courage and faith.

Next we went to a youth center and played a program for young adults living with HIV/AIDS. They were having a seminar so we weren't able to hang out with them very long, but it was fun to sing with our peers. Again there was the realization that no one is invincible and everyone will die one day. But it's nothing to worry about or be afraid of. These guys and girls were dancing and doing motions, laughing at our silly skits, and having a good time. I don't know what I was expecting when I heard we would be doing these programs, but it opened my eyes to the reality they face and the fact that life can be lived until it's over. Life doesn't stop when you get AIDS or HIV or a broken leg or a scratch on your hand. Unless you let it. So I'd like to say a big thank you to all the people today who taught me to keep living no matter what. You've all touched me in an unforgettable way.

After that busy and enlightening morning, we stopped by Hillcrest School to see Lottie, who makes the best "huff puff" (doughnut holes), "cose" (bean cakes), and fried potatoes in the world, as I know it. Add a stick of "suya" (BBQ Beef) and a "masa" (corn and rice) roll and you've got enough food to fill 2 people. Lottie has been one of my favorite people to visit here in Jos. She is always smiling, always teaching me a new phrase in Hausa, and sometimes lets me stir whatever is in her giant "casco" (cooking pot) which is outside over an open fire near the basketball court. She is always apologizing for the billowing smoke, but smelly clothes are a very small price to pay to spend a few minutes with Lottie. No one, including Lottie, knows how long she's prepared food at the school, but she's an ageless gem. It's surprising to see how God puts these people like her in our

paths to take care of us, encourage us, and let us do a little cooking, too.

After lunch Ivan and Jennifer, another missionary couple who have adopted us, invited us to a young men's discipleship group after school. I'm not sure why we thought we'd have problems finding programs. After 1 1/2 weeks, we've met over a dozen people working with just as many ministry opportunities. The Jr. High boys were a blast. It was good to be singing songs and playing silly games like "Boppity Bop Bop Bop". Hillcrest is a missionary/International school, so in our group of 8 guys there were 6 different countries represented. Nigerian, American, Lebanese, Indian, Canadian, British, and Serbian kids are just a taste of the people we've met. Not only are we learning about Nigerians living in Nigeria, we get to see this country through the eyes of people from over half a dozen cultures, some who are as new as us, some who have lived here 5, 10, or 20 years.

Our world is so diverse. How can we even begin to put any kind of label on a person? I try to categorize people, sorting things out in my head to save time and space in my brain. It should be easy, something like: Today I talked to 3 Americans. But one lady's been here 3 months, one 4 years, and one girl her whole life. Or a lot of times people use skin color. But then people would confuse my Ghanaian teammates for Nigerians. It doesn't work! You can't tell if someone is from Cameroon, Ghana or Togo based on looks. You can't tell someone is or isn't living with HIV based on a hug or handshake. This week I've learned we are all very unique children of God and deserved to be treated as such. Amen!

Date: 3/26/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Nigeria

When Jesus had prepared to send out His called disciples for the first time, He told them who to seek and how to live as one of His disciples. While you read His words in Matthew 10, you can almost feel Him speaking directly to you as He lays out what serving Him will entail. He says that you will be "a sheep amidst the wolves," that "you will be hated by all on account of Jesus' name," and that "a man's enemies will be the members of his household." Amidst all of these warnings and forecoming trials, He states that, as disciples, "Freely we have received, so then we should freely give."



Clayton Mark

This concept has been around since the beginning of the Bible. In Genesis 12, God tells Abraham that He will bless him and make him a great nation, AND that Abe must be a blessing to others. Both Jesus and God are saying the same thing here... we are blessed to be a blessing. We are constantly being provided for and cared for by God and we are showered with blessings, yet we cannot be content with that. We must share our blessings with others. "Freely you received, freely give."

There have been many days here in Africa that I get into a selfish routine of thinking that all I do is give. Whether it is by doing programs or meeting with people or whatever, I start to see all of our activities as things I should be doing. I think that I'm making this huge sacrifice of my time and my talents. In reality, they are God's time and most definitely God's talents. All good gifts come from heaven above... and it is up to us to share them as much as we can. "Freely you received, freely give."

Today was a day of humility for me. A way of showing me how to freely give. We did nothing as a team today... I gave nothing, yet many people freely gave to me. Our main contact, Brent, invited us into his home as he does on so many mornings. We were fed, able to share devotion, and allowed a glimpse into world news with some CNN. Lunch was also taken, this time a Nigerian dish of egussi soup and pounded yams. The soup consisted of beef and dried fish. After an afternoon of water aerobics and rehearsal, we were once again invited into someone's home. This time, a music teacher at Hillcrest school, Patty Chumley. We had a night of fine dining and laughs with Patty, her husband John, their children Joanne and Jonathan, and Joanne's friend from Switzerland, Mirja. After chicken pot pie and creamy mashed potatoes, we were treated to drama by Mirja and Joanne.

It was buckets o' fun and a day that reminded me that even though I didn't give, I am still always being given to. "Freely you received, freely give."

Date: 3/27/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Nigeria

Glory be to God for making it possible for us to see this day.

Election!! Election!!! Election!!!

Today is a local government election day in Nigeria.

We woke up early this morning realizing that the entire town was very quiet, all the shops were closed, very few cars on the street, and there were not many people in town.

Elections in most African countries end up in violence and Nigeria is no exception. Sadly, if care is not taken some of these elections end up in civil war and many innocent people, especially children and women, lose their lives.

Again, because of security reasons and the fear that something could happen during and after the election, our contact Brent Friedrich advised that we stay in his home until election is over.

As a result, we spent most of our time watching movies and also rehearsing.

Above all, the elections went ahead successfully and there was absolute peace in Jos. We are very grateful to God for a peaceful election in Jos and the entire Nigeria. May His name be praised now and forever. Amen! Amen!! Amen!!!



Elvis Kafui Doe

Date: 3/28/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."

1 Corinthians 15:58

As a team, we have begun to discuss the spectrum of our ministry here in Jos. It has encompassed more than we had expected. This morning we were invited to and attended worship at the Hillcrest Chapel. The congregation held many familiar faces from the past several days. Stepping away from the Afri-Lutheran worship we've attended for so many weeks into something with more similarity to home was a small comfort and yet disheartening. After service, Scott, a Hillcrest teacher, approached us concerning the high schoolers' program and praise time in the evening. He asked if we would like to share with the students. We gladly accepted his invitation. We filled the rest of the day with meals, relaxation, and a visit to a nearby dam. As evening came we joined the high schoolers for a joy-filled program. None of the students were of Nigerian descent and so after sharing in our program we were able to share cultural issues and impressions with one another. Thank you, Lord, for this evening and this opportunity.

As I had said, many of our ministry opportunities here were not of the sort we had expected. In part, this is due to the fact that we have stayed here in Jos longer than expected. And, in large part,



Joshua Vandercar

it is due to so many invitations like that of today. On top of being with the LCN church here in Jos, we have had great opportunity to minister to and be ministered to by the many missionaries we have met. Thank you, Lord, that whatever work we find ourselves in is Your work. Knowing this, we know it is not in vain.

Christ's Love,
Joshua

Date: 3/29/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

So NOW we are nearing the end of our stay in Jos. Our time here has been extended a few times, but barring any unforeseen circumstances, we will leave for Abuja, that capital of Nigeria, on the first of April. Because of our time lengthening, we have been adding programs in, but today we did not have any programs, so we spent a good portion of the day doing other team stuff and relaxing.



Kathy Weber

This morning we went over to what I would call our second home here in Jos, that of our main contact for Nigeria, Brent Friedrichs (pronounced Fredricks), a missionary from Iowa. We ate breakfast and did a team huddle, where we each check in and share a couple of highs and lows from the past few days. We then made a recording of some songs on a cassette tape for Mary Beth Oyebade, a missionary who organized a program for us to do last week with her HIV-positive ladies quilting group. She had mentioned that they really enjoyed our program, and would love to have a recording of us, so we spent the rest of our morning on that project.

We ate lunch made by Brent's househelp, Hajaratu, an amazing lady who we have become great friends with, and then had a team meeting. This was a more intense way of checking in, and we were able to air some of our dirty laundry. It was a very productive time, and the rest of the day things just seemed better on our team.

We traveled back to our first home in Jos, and had some time off until dinner. Rachel and I took some fabric we had just purchased, and went with our friend Esther and a little baby named Abigail to a shop to get outfits tailored for us while we are here in Jos. I got a few stares carrying a six-month old Nigerian baby down the street, which was pretty fun.

This evening we went to dinner at Mrs. Landoni's house, a Nigerian woman who is very much like a church mother at the LCN church we've been spending our time with. We weren't sure what kind of food to expect, but we were very surprised to see... drumroll, please... LASAGNA! It turns out she's married to a man from Italy, and they eat Italian food very often. It was a very nice four-course meal, and we enjoyed seeing pictures of their four daughters, and pictures from two of their daughters' weddings to Italian men in Italy. It was fun to learn more about Mrs. Landoni and her family, and have good food and fellowship. Not much was scheduled in for today, but it was a good day of being productive and having some rest. Tomorrow we will be travelling a few hours north of here to Yankari National Park for wildlife viewing and swimming in a hot spring. After that day trip we will have only one more day in Jos for programs and getting other stuff done along with saying goodbye. It will be difficult to say goodbye because of how long we've been here and how many people we've gotten to know so well, but it will be exciting to move on in our journey and experience more adventures throughout more of Nigeria! Peace to you all!

Date: 3/30/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

Almost all the cars I have seen in Jos have a description on its number plate. Cars from Abuja has Centre of Unity, those from the Plateau State have Peace and Tourism. As the name tourism suggest in Jos, the team could not help itself than to travel to a National Park in Yankari in Bauchi State to tour due to the fact that we are living in a tourist state. The team, with three youth members from Lutheran Church of Nigeria (old airport junction) and Mr Brent Friedrichs had an entertaining time in Yankari.



Matthew Abudulai

Since the tem wanted the tour to be a return one we took off at exactly 7:05 AM. I really enjoyed the paved road but there were so many checkpoints on the road. Since members did not have enough sleep in the night some people continued their sleeping on the bus while others were busy working with their mouth on one loaf of bread. Mr. Brent, the chief driver for the day, did a marvelous job by driving the team to Yankari. When we got to the National Park entry point, we declared our cameras and paid for each of the cameras and our entrance fee. Unfortunately Matt CK's camera, being a digital camera, attracted so much cost. Matt CK thought it was too expensive compared to the other ones, so he decided not to send it in. Matt was quite worried for that situation but later organized himself.

We drove about 45 minutes to the camp of the national park. Here the team was asked to pay for swimming and touring. That was a very big blow to us since we thought we were done with monies on entry. Since we traveled that distance we could not help it but to pay and start the tour. We paid, got a tour guide, and entered into the park which I must say was equal to a jungle. The time was almost 11:00 AM so we could not see most of the animals. We did see animals like Water Bucks, Baboons, Elephants, Guinea Fowls, Vultures, Lizards, and Monkeys. These were not in their numbers. On our return tour, we had the opportunity to see a number of animals in groups which were quite interesting to see human beings come closer to wildlife without any attack. Driving back to the camp, here was this large group of elephants drinking water and others cooling their bodies with the water. Our chief driver drove towards these huge looking animals and our tour guide encouraged us to come down from the car and take as many pictures as we want. Some were nervous, but it was exciting to have a scene of elephants and human beings mixed together in the jungle. We took many pictures and that was incredible. In fact it was fun. Though we did not see many of the animals we had in mind seeing, what we saw somehow satisfied our curiosity. We then drove to the campsite and prepared ourselves for swimming in the long-expected spring water. As we were picking our lunch stuff from the car a baboon which was very hungry attempted entering another group of tourists' car to grab some food. It was just unbelievable to see the baboon jump aggressively into the car. Unfortunately it did not achieve its aim. Before we realized about three of them were coming towards our car. Quickly our tour guide asked us to keep our bottles and food out of their sight otherwise the baboons would forcibly collect our food. We did just that and quickly switched on to the next business of the day, swimming. The water coming from under about 70 feet high rock was just as clean as treated water for drinking. The longest depth of the water level was about 6 feet and the low side was about 3 feet and about 30 feet wide and 30 feet long.

Everybody jumped in the clean water except myself and Uche, one of the youth members who was with us. We finally realized that those in the clean water were all having a good time swimming. We could not help but to jump into the clean water for a lovely swimming time. Indeed I would have lost a great new experience if I had not jumped into the water to have a direct feel of the joy other members were having.

At 3:45 PM we set off to Jos where we had Sloppy Joe's, ships, and other additives as our dinner and popsicles as a dessert in Mr. And Mrs. Bayo's home. We finally thanked the family by entertaining them with some of our songs which sent David and Toby (the two sons of Bayo) to bed. I said to myself what a lovely day. New experiences such as these I believe Jesus is preparing to use someday, sometime, somewhere in me for His ministry of sharing the Gospel.

Date: 3/31/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria

The problem with this relational ministry business is that you make so many dang friends. And despite the rewarding harvest of riches reaped by taking the strangeness out of strangers, a friendship worth beginning means one that will be hard to leave. For Cross Fire, today was a day of goodbyes, and it did not go the way we wanted it to. But it went God's way.



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Perhaps you've heard: Jos is da bomb! At the next possible business hour you need to clear your calendar and call your travel agent to book the next family vacation at this lovely Nigerian destination. We may not be experts, but our mysterious overseas schedule, often lacking both rhyme AND reason, allowed us to become more intimate with this place and people than anywhere we have visited thus far. While I'm sure our next stop of Abuja will have awesome opportunities all its own, over the past two and a half weeks our team has counted down to our farewell-Jos day somewhat like a school child crosses off the dwindling days of summer vacation. We knew today would be sad and full and tiring on more than just the physical level, and the emotional ride began early.

We were to start our last day in the best way any of us could imagine: chilling in the comfy coziness of our All-Star contact, Brent's, house, taking in CNN and BBC World News, sipping hot tea, munching on cinnamon rolls and banana bread unanimously voted to be better than anything we ever had back home. And best of all, enjoying the company of Hajaratu, the saintly woman behind the banana bread and all other domestic duties around the home. She shops, cooks, cleans, and takes care of Brent in more ways than we know, and for the last 18 days, she took care of us, too. So the LCN bus rolled up to collect us as it has every morning and dropped us down the street at Brent's compound where breakfast was waiting for us, but Hajaratu was not. Brent told us we would be on our own for the day; his beloved house helper had come to work only to inform him that her mother was close to death and that she needed to stay and care for her. We worried for Hajaratu's family, and knew there would be no goodbye for us.

Describing our first program of the day, Clay said, "We'll be playing for about 60 new creations." The invitation came out of our ever-growing connections in the Jos missionary community. We went to a transition house for youth called Gidan Bege, meaning House of Hope, where we met a group of boys, aged 10-18, all Muslim and living lives of street-begging and homelessness before coming to the home. The young men were now Christian and given a chance to start over. It was a cool time, watching everyone go about their daily chores before the program and shooting some basketball afterwards. Many of the youth were excited for us to be there and seemed eager just to talk with other young people about being Christian and what it means to be a new creation.

Around lunch time we trekked over to Hill Crest School, another favorite hangout, to wrap up more loose ends. With heavy hearts we ate what would be our last meal of suye from the meat man by the basketball courts and other fried delicacies from Lati, the adorable woman who sets up shop under the roof outside the music room. After a few swigs of water from the FILTERED drinking fountain, we joined our friend and LCMS missionary Jennifer for her high school music class. A tear came to my eye as we listened to them perform a medley of classic Disney songs (with choreography!) and then we shared sing-a-longs and a skit with them for the rest of their period and a little over... Cross Fire, responsible for student tardiness. It ended our Jos programs appropriately as we all think Hill Crest is about the coolest place ever and have gotten to know a number of students from the class over the course of our time at the school, either because we were asked to come sing or because we snuck in for the cheap, good food.

None of us looked forward to saying goodbye to Lati. From our first visit to the school, she had immediately taken to our group as it seems she does with everyone, and we had made every effort to get back and patronize her area as often as possible. So on our way out, we bent to stick our heads under the low grass roof and said goodbye to the smiling woman. She came outside to hug us and shake hands and then surprised us all. She started crying. This woman who had seen us four, maybe five times ever, who deals with hundreds of people everyday, who has watched countless students come as children and grow to adults and leave the school—she cried for us.

"I'm so sorry to say goodbye to you," she choked out. "I love the music." We realized that stationed there, a stone's throw from the music room's door, she had heard us every time we'd come to play

for students. So we did the only thing we could think to do. We took off our backpacks there outside her area, took out our freshly-packed instruments, and played for Lati. We sang in Hausa, just the few songs we've mastered in the native tongue, but her eyes shone and she clapped and danced with the beat of our drum. Students came from off the nearby playground and teachers stopped short of their cars in the parking lot to watch such a familiar figure caught in a light perhaps they had never seen her in before. When we finished, things resumed motion and Lati continued her goodbyes, thanking us and sending greetings to our families. As we walked away from Hill Crest, I thought, "Lati does relational ministry."

Next, another momentous occasion: our last hang-out session at Brent's swingin' bachelor pad. We made good use of our last satellite-TV session by tuning into an 80s horror flick, "Killer Klowns from Outer Space," which, by our selecting the channel, was broadcast into not only Brent's house but also the TV in his office across the compound, so the quality program was one last forget-me-not to Brent as he sat figuring up finances for all of Nigeria.

When we last saw, the killer klowns had melted one policeman into a giant hot fudge sundae and taken the blonde girl hostage, trapped within a floating circus balloon, inside the fun house. But alas, we will have no closure on the distressing situation because more pressing matters demanded our attention: the last session of water aerobics. We wanted to get back to our compound by four in the afternoon to have a farewell workout with our water crew, particularly the cool instructor Natalie who had been absent for a while. Unfortunately, this made our goodbye with Brent shorter than we would have liked. It was sad to drive away from the compound and on the way home I realized that for the large part Brent played in our Jos stay, I didn't get one picture of the guy. The people and sights here became so familiar to me that it didn't occur to me to snap everything that moves with my camera, my usual strategy.

Quick! Back to the rooms, change, and get to the pool, where we found our next disappointment: no Natalie. I went through the workout but with little of my original enthusiasm. Afterwards, we said goodbye to the ladies including Jennifer and her kids, Heather and Timmy, another hard door to close.

With the sun quickly dropping, the day held one more grand errand for us, a farewell ceremony/Wednesday Lenten service with the people of our "home church", LCN-old Airport Junction. Our friend Good News (or Gospel, she has no preference), a daughter of the pastor, took Clay and I down the street to the cramped tailor's hops where we dropped material off two days earlier for the making of our authentic Nigerian garb. We returned to the compound, donned our ocean of flowing fabric, and joined the rest of the team in the front pew of the church building.

The worship portion of the evening concluded after a number of hymns, local choruses, and a message. Then the Last Hurrah began. All day we felt plagued by hard goodbyes, short goodbyes, or worse, no chance to say goodbye at all. But at long last, God delivered the final Jos closure we'd all longed for. The send-off service was a blowout, with nearly everyone we'd come in contact with in the Lutheran church in attendance. We heard thank-you speeches from leaders of the church, leaders of the youth, and our friends. They called us up graduation-style to award each of the eight of us with a laminated certificate of appreciation for our ministry in the Plateau State. The youth gave us gifts, the women served us food, and members of the congregation sang special numbers in our honor. And after all the planned program, oh, the pictures! I snapped pictures until my index finger hurt, shots with so many combinations of awesome people and warm, smiling faces. We finally collapsed back in our rooms, fully satisfied and maybe even supersaturated with the amount of send-off and finality we received. At last, a good feeling.

For as many people as we leave in Jos, I take with me a hundred times the number of memories. Jos, for me, will always be the place we took an entire day in front of the TV and indulged our every movie whim with Brent's endless, catalogued video collection. It is the place we played basketball with youth until we were sweating and then swam until we were freezing. The place we were schooled by Nigerian volleyball players. The place I broke a hand-peddling wheelchair. It's where we came within 15 feet of a grazing herd of elephants and saw a lion crush a goat's skull with one crunch. It's where I met girls named after nearly every fruit of the Spirit. It's where I saw a second-grader launch down a zipline. It's where I met a 17-year-old American girl born and raised in Nigeria. It's where I saw a third-grade class of fifteen children representing eight nations. Jos is the place where Cross Fire was welcomed warmly, loved genuinely, and sent out boldly.

The Lord Almighty leads our journey as He does everyone's, and grasping for control over where God leads us is as vain as us trying to plan our last day here. But as we meet one another along our roads, let us live like Lati—following the footsteps of Jesus, welcoming all, serving with humility, and loving with an intensity that would make us cry for strangers.

Date: 4/1/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

What?! We're staying in Jos for how much longer? Ha, funny—good April Fool's joke y'all! Well, it's true, we're here in Abuja for new adventures. We met this morning in Jos at 6:30 AM to leave at 7:00. There was a lot to do as we had been unpacked and residing here for 17 days, the longest we've stayed anywhere as a team since our training in Luther Dell in Minnesota. At 7:20 AM we loaded our luggage strategically so the 8 of us, a driver and an entourage of 3 stowaways could fit in the 10 passenger LCN van. We jumped in and embarked on our "3 hour" journey.



Rachel Haabala

Our first mission was to rescue Matt's lone zip-off trouser pant leg from the picnic table in front of the LCN office. Ofo was the hero and Matt lovingly put it around his head like an African lady head-wrap! Ok, the journey continues. Just shy of an hour later we stopped at Aesop's Falls. Mmm—it is a beautiful waterfall spilling down the side of some rock and foliage only to splash into the pool below. The pool then feeds a stream twisting between and over some rocks. Also making it's own small contributions was a second waterfall, much thinner in comparison to the first, but just as spectacular a site to see. It's tucked back into the crevasse of the rock formations, but can easily be spotted.

I imagine many people may miss the smaller waterfall, just as they could miss the joy and gait of jumping from rock to rock as a mountain lion, or the wonderment of following the stream from its turbulent beginning to its serene end. Before we were advised to load up and leave, I followed the stream a small bit and found still many turbulent areas. I was on a search, just to discover the path of the stream. When did it become as glass and appear still? How did it flow? What did it bring to life? Where was its end? I haven't understood yet why the water intrigued me so much, but it certainly does make me think about the questions I have for God about my faith. If I continue searching, the answers will be revealed.

We got to Abuja at noon—4 hours of travel with 30 minutes at the Falls. Members of the church were there to greet us, some had been waiting since 9 or 10 that morning. After some introductions and welcoming, our caravan of four vehicles trekked across town to our guest house. We unloaded our luggage from every nook and cranny of the van and climbed the 3 flights of stairs to the rooms. Someone mentioned minerals and we all accepted, noting that we had yet to eat lunch. The church unexpectedly bought us minerals and lunch. Goodbyes were tough when we saw Oto, Uche, and Bako (the driver) off, back to Jos. Our new friends in Abuja bid us farewell to allow us time to rest.

Exhausted from travelling, hellos, goodbyes and the heat we all collapsed for a few hours of productive sleep.

At about 6:00 we were awoken by a strange but familiar sound, a light pounding, like trickling water. Splashing on rooftops and the ground. As each of us became more coherent we realized it was raining! The first time since October 2003, we learned. Our friends here are so welcoming and are happy to see us—we've brought the rain, they say. What a blessing from God!

Rachel

Date: 4/2/2004
Submitted by: Becca Leaf
Journal Entry:



Becca Leaf

Location: Abuja, Nigeria

And now, a Limerick:

Today our team did not shower,
Cuz there ain't no water or power.
Team meetings got done,
Our program was fun,
We danced and sang hour after hour. The end.

That poem sums up our whole day. We woke up to no power, and since our room is on the 3rd floor of the ECWA guest house, no power means the pump to get water from the ground up was off. So the 8 of us met downstairs, slightly smelly and missing the breeze of the ceiling fans scattered around the compound. We had our daily devotions and check-ins. Joshua facilitated a team meeting, we split for some one-on-one time with another teammate, and then had some programming time with Matt C-K. All before lunch. We're really productive when the power goes off. For our one-on-one, Kathy and I made friendship bracelets. Simple little knots in tight little patterns, but a taste of my Girl Scout days and a reminder of home ;).

After lunch we napped, read, wrote postcards, and relaxed. We left for our welcoming service at the Lutheran Church of Nigeria here in town. It was pretty informal and a lot of fun. Their choirs and members would sing a little, then we sang a little. We took a break for supper and the pastor and chairman had fun refilling our plates 2, 3, and even 4 times with rice and chicken curry-like soup. We finally had to refuse anymore when Matt reminded us we had at least another 30 minutes of singing and dancing to do. It was great to share in a meal among friends, though.

The rest of the evening was spent in a lot of worship and celebration. The only other real excitement was the scorpion that tried to attack Kathy. She was wrapping up the puppet show and this 4-inch creature came running in straight for her feet. I didn't know what was happening until I heard her yelp. I looked up in time to see her leap on to a pew as a few men ran forward to squash it. There was quite a ruckus until it scurried out the door again. Most things don't phase us too much anymore, but when the people who live here get nervous, we do too.

Praise the Lord! When we arrived home we had power and water! Yippee!! You know, something the chairman at the church said tonight stuck with me. It was a little poem (I started this journal with a poem, and now I'll end it...):

Live your life
Give your life
Make your life
A sacrifice
To everyone around you.

No matter what happens during the day, our lives should not be our own. Each day I'm learning that I have to give my whole self to this. It's exhausting to try and hold back. When I give all of myself to this life I can relax and let go. Some days it's easier to take up my cross and follow Jesus, especially when my cross to bear is dancing and eating with new friends half the night. At 100 degrees+, a 6 hour car ride or a long night with a queasy stomach can be a little bit harder to carry.

Like the Israelites, we do our share of complaining and worrying in our own wilderness. But we keep moving, knowing that God will carry us through to all the awesome places He promises. (Inspired by Kathy's devotion ;).

Date: 4/3/2004
Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Abuja, Nigeria

Do you ever have those days where, no matter how hard you try, you just feel down? Like when your cheap sandals are an inch away from falling apart, or when your 3-month neckbeard just won't become a normal, manly beard, or when you're just tired of traveling, singing, and drinking hot water out of your bottle. Toady was that day for me.



Clayton Mark

I have grown to love West Africa gradually over the past 2 1/2 months, but some days are just better than others, and many days have just felt better than today. It didn't help that most of our day was spent either waiting or driving inside of a vehicle. If the vehicle were a chemical compound, it would most definitely be super-saturated with people. We traveled to the tiny village of Kuti, which is in the Niger state, adjacent to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Abuja, where we are staying. It was only a two-hour drive, but in my state of melancholy, it felt eternal being crammed in and having to sit hunched forward so as not to hit my head on the metal bar above me.

Luckily, God has a way of refreshing us, and for me, my renewed spirit came by way of Pastor Sylvanus Willie. The name says it all, doesn't it? He is so on fire for God, I sweat just standing next to him. We arrived at Kuti with about 25 people and Pastor had us all march up the street, singing songs in the key of Hausa, the local language. He has quoted Psalm 133 three times since we have met him. The opening verse says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers and sisters to dwell together in unity!" And he strives for this to happen. We returned with a crowd numbering about 100, and by the time we finished, over 150 people were packed inside the tiny cement church with a faded and rusty tin roof. How amazing is that? We had a great time sharing songs and a drama sketch with them. The puppet show was especially fun for the children who screamed with delight every time a new puppet appeared.

Pastor Sylvanus' enthusiasm was so inspiring. That man loves the Lord, and he makes others want to do it, including myself. Eventually I did turn that frown upside down (except for 5 minutes on the ride home when I tried a new vegetable—the garden egg. A mix between cucumber and chum) and it was another amazing day in Africa. I will never forget this journey, and all the valleys and mountaintops that we experience here. I give thanks to God for those valleys, because without them, the mountaintops would never be as beautiful as they are.

Date: 4/4/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Abuja—Kado, Nigeria

What else should I say? God is good all the time and all the time God is good. Once again, God has given us another bright and sunny day freely. By His grace we are all in good health. Today is Palm Sunday and we worshipped at the Lutheran Church of Nigeria—Abuja Kado. The service was headed by Rev. S.O. Willie and interestingly we had our second communion service ever since we started the West Africa tour.



Elvis Kafui Doe

Additionally, the service was full of fun and dancing with praises to the Lord. Besides, the entire church service was covered by Nigeria Television Authority (N.T.A.) and was telecasted later in the day. On the other hand, myself, Rachel, and Joshua our Team Leader were interviewed by the TV station. A couple of questions were asked mainly about our mission in Nigeria and they were answered satisfactorily by us. Soon after the service, the church provided lunch for us and the entire membership. As a result, we had the opportunity of interacting with the church members.

The leadership and the entire membership of the church has been very supportive and caring in everything we do. I pray that the Good Lord will bless them in all their endeavors.

Date: 4/5/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Abuja: Kubwa, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

I am tired. I am tired of asking questions only to be not understood, misunderstood, or to receive no answer. I am tired of having to have the answer to my question. I am tired. Even so, I try to remind myself that our time here is short. Up to this point in our journey I feel that I have sacrificed so much of my own experience for the well-being of the team. Now, in the face of these sacrifices and the few remaining weeks in Africa, I long for something to keep... something to call my own... one more simple and sincere memory. And I do long for rest... to step away from these responsibilities of team leader for a day... soon.



Joshua Vandercar

This morning we waited. We were to be led to a cyber café by a friend. After waiting nearly two hours we ventured out on our own, searched about the neighborhood, and finally found a decently priced café with enough available computers. News from home was good and pictures of my niece, Emma, were precious. We took a quick lunch with cold minerals, then returned to our guesthouse.

This afternoon we waited. We were to be picked by the pastor and chairman and taken to Kubwa where our program was. After waiting nearly two hours they arrived and we left for the church. We waited another short while until pastor began the program with a prayer. During this prayer he shocked us with his choice of words. I have never heard such an extreme expletive used in a prayer and didn't know what cultural sensitivity they have here to such words... to us it was shocking. The program went well. The youth choir of Kubwa welcomed us and shared songs with us. Nsikak, the leader, spoke of when he was a child in the early 80s and met the Cross Fire team. One of the young men on the team gave him a nickel, which he still has. He spoke highly of this ministry and the encouragement it has been to him. After program, the people shared with us local food of pounded yam, white soup, and coconut rice. And it seems the food has finally gotten the best of me. After returning to the guesthouse, we taught Matt the game of hearts and took some rest.

Lord, I do thank You for these days. Ease my aching. May I continue to "bend low and see what the Lord will do."

Christ's Love,
Joshua

Date: 4/6/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria

Today we were visited by NEPA on a few occasions. NEPA, which is meant to stand for the National Electrical Power Authority, is more truly represented by the phrase Never Expect Power Always! Since coming to Abuja, NEPA has come to us more than just once or twice so we have had to make do.



Kathy Weber

We didn't have any programs planned for today, so we tried to organize some sightseeing around the capital of Nigeria. Because of plans being changed and falling through, we didn't until late in the afternoon, but it was very worth it. We got the chance to climb to the top of the hill which is known to be in the very center of Abuja in the very center of Nigeria. It was amazing. We had a great view of the city, surrounding suburbs and the beautiful mountains on the outskirts of Abuja.

I'm not sure why it is more special to be on the top of a hill that is in the center of everything than any other hill, but it was pretty awesome. Maybe it's just the fact that someone took the time to discover the central point, and that we were there in the middle of everything, I don't know.

I'm reminded of a trip to Europe in high school when I saw Nice, Geneva, and Paris in ten days. In front of the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris, there is a seal marking the center of the city. Tradition says that one should stand on the seal and say, "I will be back here someday." I remember saying those words at the fresh young age of seventeen, and capturing the moment with a photograph. I have often wondered if I will return to the center of Paris, France someday. Now, since coming to West Africa, I have had the same thoughts. Will I return to West Africa after these four months are finished? What a loaded question.

In the time that we have been here, we have met so many people. Sometimes we leave and people ask us when we will be back, or tell us they wish they could come with us. So I contemplate whether or not I will have the chance to return to Ghana and Nigeria, or if maybe I will seek opportunities to visit places I haven't been before. One thing is certain, though, I have many friends here in West Africa!

The second and final stop on our sightseeing tour was the unity fountain. When we arrived, NEPA was already there, so all we were seeing was a dark sculpture. It was after the sun had set, so lights are usually on the fountain, but they weren't. We were told they were working on it, and in five minutes they would be on, but we hadn't eaten dinner and it was 7:30 PM. So we put our stopwatch on, and waited for five minutes to be up so we could go if the lights didn't come on. Well, apparently NEPA, like many people including myself, works best under pressure. We were just about to leave and the lights and fountain came on! It was a beautiful sight. The thirty-six states that make up Nigeria each had their own block surrounding the fountain to show their unity. I am so glad we waited for the lights to come on, because although we could see a sculpture in the dark, when it was lit up and the fountain was running it was much more awesome! We have one more day here in Abuja and then we will travel to the southern state of Akwa Ibom. Thanks to Abuja for a wonderful stay!

Date: 4/7/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Abuja and Mararaba, Nigeria

Life in Abuja was very smooth and enjoyable. As young missionaries we are really attracted many people to ourselves after every program. The smiles and joys written on peoples' faces goes to confirm that the word of God is life and there is spirit in it.



Matthew Abudulai

Today was also another last day in the second place of stay in Nigeria. It was also a day the team had to go to an internet café and post office to get stuff done. Myself, Kathy, Matt and Clay agreed to go to the post office while Joshua, Becca, and Rachel went to the internet café. Going to the post office was fun, because we preferred walking than taking a taxi or "okada" (Nigerian motorbike). On our way we got to a point where we missed direction. We then talked to two ladies who were selling along the street to help us. They did direct us and we finally found our way to the Nigerian Postal Services office. We were very excited to get there at long last. At the end of 45 minutes stay at the post office, we finished buying our stamps, pasted on the post cards and bought some post cards. We then gave all the envelopes we were to post and the post cards to the lady at the counter to post them for us after we had paid her. We decided to board a car after a few minutes walk from the post office. It was a struggle for us to get an affordable fare taxi to our guesthouse but later we had one which was quite affordable. On reaching the guesthouse we realized that our other teammates who went to the internet cafe had not yet returned so we went to the restaurant nearby and ordered our food for the afternoon.

Shortly after lunch Mr. Baco, the Lutheran Church of Nigeria's Business office driver, arrived with the bus from Jos, the Plateau State. He was ready to drive us the following day to Akwa Ibom State. This was a very quick answer to our prayers as to how we were going to make our journey to Akwa Ibom State. We saw how God is just with us and subsiding our worries.

The youth of KCN Kado in Abuja and the team now drove to Mararaba LCN in Nasarawa State to have a program. On reaching Mararaba there were lots of church members waiting for us to start the program. After welcoming us with songs the pastor in charge of the congregation gave us a chance to perform. After programming there was a resounding round of applause for the team followed by a drama by the youth in the church entitled, "Who is the Greatest?" In the drama there were three people by the names Faith, Hope, and Love. Each of these three men were all claiming that they were the greatest. At a point in time a voice called to them when they were struggling among themselves who the greatest was and promised to visit them and announce to them who the greatest was. The voice did visit each of them in their individual homes in the form of a hungry, frustrated old man. At the homes of Faith and Hope the old man was cruelly driven from the home like a lost troublesome goat. At the home of Love he received him, gave him food to eat and a place to sleep and gave him some money the following morning to enable him to pick a car to wherever he was going. These three men waited and waited for the visitor and the visitor never came. Then they heard the voice again saying that he had visited them in the form of the old man and that he was only welcomed by the man named Love and therefore Love is the greatest among the three of them. At the end of the drama I really appreciated the drama and learned that according to 1 Corinthians 13:13, love is the greatest.

After the program the usual way of Nigerians welcoming their visitors with special food was something unique we were blessed with. The whole church and the team had the local food called pounded yam and white soup. Though it was the first time most of us were eating such soup we managed to eat quite some quantity for the evening.

Since this day was our last day in the district many renowned personalities made welfare speeches for the Cross Fire team and thanked us for the good job we are doing and wished us very many travelling mercies.

As if the wonderful speeches and food were not enough the district administration offered each member of Cross Fire team a Nigerian outfit. I must say it was a day of lots and lots of joy. Exchange of greetings took place and here again the youth members were very sad of our departure.

We all got on board our bus and off we began our journey back to the guesthouse. On our way to the guesthouse we passed through the home of the district chairman who was sick for about six months. It was really a blessing to visit him and the team could not leave the home without singing and praying for the chairman. He was indeed very, very happy for the visit. We continued on our journey to the guesthouse.

Since this day was the last day and night at Abuja we exchanged goodbye messages to all the youth members, loved ones and friends we have made throughout our stay in Abuja.

The unfortunate part was that leaving each other and seeing them going was a very strong emotional bond to break since we may not meet again. Of all these yet we finally had to say goodbye by taking group pictures.

The spirit of unity planted in the hearts of the people through our visits and programs has really revealed the Jesus that we serve to me better and stronger through the reception given to us and the blessings God pours on us through the people we meet. Indeed God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply.

Date: 4/8/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Abuja, Federal Capital Territory to Obot Idom, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

As I write from our new (and final) Nigerian home, my parents and younger brothers back in the US are on a relaxing vacation in Wisconsin, visiting my grandma and the rest of my Dad's family for Easter. Now the trip from our home in Asheville, North

Carolina to Milwaukee clocks in at 12 hours, a pilgrimage we've made many times before, and in recent years it has become our family's practice to split the driving time over two days with a comfy night in a Holiday Inn somewhere around LaFayette in between. Given that their traveling companions are two teenage boys, my parents undoubtedly made a fair share of fast food stops along the way and I'm sure otherwise broke up the trip with a scattering of leg-stretching pit stops at Kentucky rest areas and Chicago overpass oases. Sound reasonable?



Now take Cross Fire. Our day's agenda looked something like this: 1) Wake up. 2) Drive. 3) Fall asleep, and we stuck to the plan with our only real deviance being the occasional attempt at inserting #3 in the middle of #2. We journeyed 13 hours today **Matt Canniff-Kuhn** in the Lutheran Church of Nigeria van, gassing up twice, getting out of the vehicle once. We rose to a wet Maundy Thursday morning at 4:30 AM, around the time folks at home were settling down for the Wednesday evening news, in Nigeria's federal capital, Abuja. After groggy-eyed devos and yet another round of goodbyes with the folks from church, we shoved off at 6:15 with our more than capable friend from Jos, Bako, behind the wheel. Our only riding break of the day came around 10 AM when we pulled into a hotel restaurant for a meat pie lunch on Brent Friedrich's recommendation (even from two states away, the man takes care of us). Trips to the bathroom all around and we were rolling again in 20 minutes, left to the Nigerian landscape and the memory of stateside tour travel when we would stop for a driver change and an icy cold beverage promptly every tow hours.

We drove south, away from the wide, paved streets and modern skyline of the central capital city heading toward the coastal Akwa Ibom State, birthplace and headquarters of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria. As we passed beyond the reaches of Abuja's wealth, Bako's role became less that of driver and more like a river guide, drawing in his knowledge of the terrain ahead to artfully navigate the broken road. Aside from zig-zagging between gaping potholes, another obstacle stood in our way: Nigerian police road checks. Over the course of the day, we slowed to a stop maybe 30 times, some not 100 yards apart, waiting for officers wearing shirts that read "Operation: Fire for Fire" to pull back the nail-spiked two-by-four from across the road and wave us through. And in all our military encounters, only on thing got us through every time. Tracks. Brent's office in Jos receives boxes of old Lutheran devotional booklets from church narthexes 15 years ago by the box load and in turn he, among other things., always has a fat stash of them on hand in the van. He taught us to hand out the booklets at road stops to appease the policeman's desire for bribery and to stay on good terms with the bored men wielding semi-automatic weapons. The officers along the way from Jos to Akwa Ibom have grown so used to this that they spot our LCN van approaching, and we heard, "Do you have any tracks for us?" all day. After taking pointers from Bako, our faithful shotgun-seat man Clay even started handling the distribution himself, complete with friendly chit chat. When we leave the Operation: Fire to Fire eagerly thumbing through a Portals of Prayer, we like to think of it as outreach.

We entered the city of Uyo, a few kilometers shy of our final destination, around 7:00 PM and just in time to sit in some ridiculous, motorbike-infested traffic. We finally alighted, to the joy of our leg-ligaments, took a little dinner and frozen yogurt at another Brent spot and headed on to our guest house.

Darkness. We rolled past the LCN HQ and seminary and into the guesthouse compound where we could see faint candles burning in a few windows. NEPA had struck (we recently learned that NEPA, officially, is the National Electric Power Authority, but if you ask a Nigerian, they'll more accurately define it as Never Expect Power Always). We unloaded into the black house, found beds and mattresses and got right to work on point #3 of the day's schedule. This may be a far cry from hotel jacuzzis and Taco Bell, but we survived and have another story to tell. Now we close this stage of Holy Week sore and exhausted, and that's without even going to church.

Da End.

Date: 4/9/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Ibom State, Nigeria

"Crucified, laid behind a stone. He lived and died, rejected and alone..."

Good Friday. My first outside of the US and away from my family. We knew that today would be a day of rest for us, which is great since we're still recovering from our 12 hour trip. There was no power last night (NEPA!) so we made our way around by candlelight and woke up soaked in sweat. After showering, we met the LCN president who gave us some great advice (like, "girls wear skirts and headwraps in church") and a lot of insight to our schedule here ("Here's a program of where you will go and when, as determined by the youth here"). It was a short meeting and we were on our way back to the guesthouse. Kathy and Joshua were whisked away to stock our kitchen with familiar foods in the area.



Rachel Haabala

Visitors stopped by, Emem (which means peace) and Emyak. They welcomed us and stayed to share some language and songs. Language can be difficult here because if you don't use the right tones or vowel sounds, Africans can't always distinguish what you are trying to say. For example, "Ami ndo" means "I am" however, if the "o" isn't pronounced correctly, you may incur giggles and crushed hearts for then you are proclaiming "I am married." About this time in our lessons Kathy and Joshua returned, arms laden with edible bounty! Good news to us because we were hungry!

The rest of the afternoon was peaceful. We ate eggs by Master Chef, Clayton Mark, and fried bread by Chef Assistant, Becca Leaf. Delicious. At about 9:00 PM our friends returned as we had invited them for our Cross Fire Good Friday Service (we hadn't gotten any information on church services and later found out that they'd been in the morning). Matt did an excellent job of putting the service together and allowing each of us a part in the service by way of 7 passage readings. Seven candles had been arranged on the center table and after each reading we gently blew out one candle, careful to guard the back of the candle as we blew so as to not splash wax or extinguish other candles. A time of explanation and reflection followed each passage.

Matt went on to explain the final passage, the Lord desires our commitment. It was required of Jesus in his crucifixion. Elvis read from Luke 23:46: "Jesus called out with a loud voice, 'Father into your hands I commit my spirit.' When he said this he breathed his last." And with that, Elvis reached forward and with a commanding hand, pinched out the flame with his thumb and index finger. Suddenly there was darkness and we were left to reflect and absorb the moment, the words. Matt closed the service with a few words of wisdom, a song for us all to share in and a prayer. Our guests left in silence as we were finishing the night in complete solitude, respectful of the mourning period following Jesus' death.

I'd never experienced such an awesome service. It reminds me of how deep and reverent traditions are, how worshipful it can be when done with a true heart. I don't think any of the Africans present, our guests and teammates, had experienced such a service from the sounds of it. The glory and honor was truly given to God through this experience and we all walked away touched somehow. Now we wait—for Easter and for Jesus to come again someday. Sosongo Jesus. Song Idem. Thank you Jesus. Well done.

Your sister in the Lord,
Rachel

Date: 4/10/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot-Idom, Akwa-Ibom State, Nigeria, West Africa, Earth

It's the day before Easter, my first Easter away from home. I've missed a few Thanksgivings, a Christmas, and an Arbor Day here or there. This is the first time I haven't been home for chocolate bunnies, deviled eggs (you know, the ones where the dye has bled through the shell creating a tie-dye effect), and an Easter egg hunt. You're



never too old for an Easter egg hunt, no matter what teammates say ("You're 22 years old for cryin' out loud!"). **Becca Leaf**

In addition to preparing for our Easter abroad, we're also getting ready for our last three weeks in Nigeria. This morning we went over to the seminary and presented a short program for the National Youth Council, which was meeting this weekend. A lot of our contacts in southern Nigeria were there, so we began becoming friends with these people we'll be working with. We haven't done a program in a few days, so it was nice to sing again.

The rest of the afternoon was a free day, so I decorated the walls in my room with pictures of family and friends. The afternoon stretched endlessly before me, so I got out paper, colored pens, scissors, and tape, and went to work decorating our living room with colored eggs, butterflies, a good-sized cross, an empty tomb, and a "Happy Easter" sign. Don't tell my team, but I also put together makeshift baskets full of gum, stickers, candy, and other goodies. It's a secret, though. I'll put them up tonight along with the fluffy bunny I made from cotton balls, tape, and toilet paper rolls. Can you tell I have no problem entertaining myself?

Kathy and I made a huge Easter supper tonight, since we'll be gone until Monday night. We cooked by candlelight over our propane stove. In Jos, Nigeria we found a recipe for pancakes that has become a team favorite. So along with that we had eggs and Kool-Aid. It was a cozy meal on our porch with just the 8 of us and an oil lantern. Clay did the dishes, which can be quite a task when I cook (I love to use just about every square inch in the kitchen). We played cards and spent a quiet evening together. Now everyone's headed to bed. I can only imagine service tomorrow. On a regular Sunday things get pretty wild. Who knows what a holiday will be like, especially one as exciting as Easter.

Today felt like a nice, normal day. But 3 months ago you'd never have convinced me that any aspect of life here in West Africa would feel normal. Not much feels awkward anymore. In fact, it's hard to imagine a life without handshakes and fingersnaps, open air markets, dancing in church, dirt roads, mud houses, chickens and goats, and honking cars. Maybe it's me that is becoming weird. I can only guess what kinds of things will feel awkward when I come home in a month. It's going to be Culture Shock 101 all over again. What the heck?!? I'm just getting over it from coming here!

Date: 4/11/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

This is the tale of how I came to spend a night sharing a bed with a big Nigerian man named Obot. The day started out wonderfully as we awoke to a celebration of Easter. How wonderful an opportunity for all of us to celebrate the Risen Savior in Nigeria! We even woke up to a visit from the Easter Bunny. Our plastic, green hot drink cups were filled with little goodies. Did I also mention that we had no running water or electricity? We were pretty ripe. We were picked up a little late, so our driver, Sylvester, put the car into ludicrous gear and punched it to eleventy kilometers per hour. We were seriously bookin' down the roads weaving in and out of oncoming traffic to pass "slow" vehicles. He weaved so much, we were making baskets. I asked Sylvester who his favorite movie star was... Sigourney Weaver.

We arrived at church ten minutes behind schedule, which is actually 20 minutes early. We were escorted to the front row, where we spent the next 3 hours and 10 minutes singing, clapping, and enjoying the Resurrection Party. Still, we were all a bit reminiscent of the services preparing to happen in our home churches. I know that I thought of St Andrew Lutheran Church quite a bit as we sang hymns and listened to the sermon. A great day to appreciate the familiar and embrace the new way of celebration.

Today was also a monumental occasion because we were spending the night in Calabar and, thus, were staying in host homes! Staying in host homes had become a staple of our stateside tour, but we've yet to really have a night in a smaller setting with a host family. We ate a fine meal for lunch



Clayton Mark

at the girls' host home and enjoyed a new Nigerian dish called edeke ikon, a spicy pumpkin soup with meat and fish that is eaten with pounded yams or ebam a starch made from the cassava plant. Afterwards, the mother of the house, Meme, showed Joshua, Matt and I into a room where we could rest until the start of our evening program. We sipped on minerals as I laid down to rest while the two guys engaged in a grudge match on the chessboard.

We arrived at the church for the "Easter Praise Service", where we were to perform a music program. Matt said it right when he stated that the quote of the night was from the emcee, Will, who kept saying, "... and then we'll bring out Cross Fire," for he kept introducing numerous choirs, singing groups and dancers. For about 2 and 1/2 hours. They were totally awesome and provided beautiful music for us to enjoy an Easter we'd never forget.

We took dinner at the guys' host home. A meal of ricew and stew with chicken was oh-so-good. After the girls were taken home, the wild times began...

Our host parents, Thompson and Ekaete Umoetuk, have six children above the age of 22 living in their home: Victor, Obot, Imoh, Eno-Obong, Ndi Fereeke, and Mercy. The antics began when Imoh, a lawyer, came home. What started as an innocent invitation to see the city and take a drink became quite a fun night for Matt and me. As Joshua was bathing, Matthew, Elvis, Matt and I all piled into Imoh's car to go cruising around Calabar. As we drove down the road, Imoh spotted his elder brother, Obot, talking on his cell phone. Within seconds, Obot was jumping (more like cramming) into the back seat with the other three fellas. As we drove around listening to the soothing sounds of Sade, Imoh repeatedly told us, "We'll drive around and show you Calabar, and then we'll take a drink." Every time we'd take a pothole or swerve to miss one, Imoh would give my knee a boisterous slap and ask if we had driving like this back in the States.

As Sade changed over to "We Are the World," we decided on the local watering hole, "The Krab." Imoh and Obot suddenly took an interest not in the sites, but now our marital status. Elvis, having now been married for a month, was able to join in the insanity provided by our two new friends. Matt was deemed too young for marriage and Matthew A was already African, so Imoh set his matchmaking powers to work on me. As the waitress brought us a round of Star, he immediately asked if she was looking for a husband and that I was looking for a wife. All of the other guys laughed in the way that guys just do. She wisely moved on to the next table. As we moved on to discuss the pros and cons of pounded yams (Nigerian) and fufu (Ghanaian), Imoh took out his cell phone and called a lady friend of his (at midnight, mind you) to ask if she was willing to talk to a guy "looking for a wife." He then handed the cell phone over to me. I don't know the woman's name, but she provided the longest 20 second phone call of my life. By the next 5 minutes, everyone had the cell phone handed to them by Imoh. We just laughed and enjoyed our beverages. It was great!

We drove home in a silence listening to Bryan Adams croon "Everything I Do, I Do It For You." It was a really fun night, and I think Matt and I won't forget it anytime soon. We pulled into our home around 12:45 AM. I proceeded to bathe... finally. As I came downstairs to get in bed, Imoh once again handed me his cell phone without any warning. After another 17 seconds of uncomfortable silences, I got in bed with Obot.

Good Times... Great Oldies... Imoh and Obot, wherever you guys are, deserve many thanks. You guys went out of your way to show two white guys in Africa a good time, and we really appreciate that. Definitely not your average Easter, but a perfectly normal day of craziness for us.

Date: 4/12/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Calabar, Obot Idim

Christ is Risen, He is Risen Indeed

Praises, glory and honour be to God the Father who created this world and the resurrected son Jesus Christ who shed his blood on the cross and to the Holy Spirit who



Elvis Kafui Doe

continues to create and sustain us in faith.

The day was bright and we are still celebrating the joy of Easter here in Calabar, the capital of the Cross River State. We spent last night with host families. We the guys stayed with Mr and Mrs Umoetuk and the ladies stayed with Mr and Mrs Meme Akpabio. Both families took very good care of us and they were a blessing to our team by providing lunch, dinner, and breakfast for us this morning.

Later in the day, we went out on an excursion with the youth group of LCN Calabar to Kwa Water Falls. The trip was full of fun walking through rocks and also admiring God's creation. However, we had to leave the youth group behind of the water falls and travel back to a village called Nung Udoe Ibesikpo in Akwa Ibom State for a program.

Upon arriving there, the youth and adults present were all excited and started singing praises to God. Before the program began, several speeches were delivered by various leaders.

Noteable among them was a speech delivered by the District Youth Chairman, Brother Uyime Ekong. According to him this church (LCN) Nung Udoe Ibesikpo is the first Lutheran Church in Nigeria and the entire West Africa. It was established in April 1936 by an American Missionary and wife, Dr & Mrs Henery Nau. Through their hard-working and determination the church started spreading in Nigeria and the sub-region.

On the other hand, our program was full of joy, praises and dancing to the glory of God. The youth presented a drama and its central message was based on how Christ rescues and delivers us from the evil one by shedding his blood for us on the cross.

Today has been a blessed one and may the grace of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us now and forever. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives. Amen!!!

Date: 4/13/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Idom, Eket, Odoro-Nkit—Akwa Idom State, Nigeria

What message will I have upon returning to the States? The day draws nearer. I think I will share these simple words from my personal journal (10 April 04):

Sometimes it's so hard to say Amen! The word has become almost too common to my ear here in Africa. "Praise the Lord!" "Amen!" "Alleluia!" "Amen!" "In Jesus name!" "Amen! Amen! Amen!" Have I gone a day with out the word? So I come, I come to think of what meaning it holds and I hold to that meaning... as weak as my hands might become, even as such "amens" may cling to my lips, I know they won't be silenced, for it is not I alone who speaks. "For the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us." (2 Corinthians 1:20). In Him, Amen!

This day began so well. During our morning devotion, I spoke of love... of the "abandonment of self-giving." I had coffee. However, with each new moment came the familiar challenges of team life in Africa. Today they hit me hard. I said the "amens"... whispered them... hoping to still my raging heart or, at times, reluctant to proclaim and embrace the day. It came upon us in a whirlwind of bus rides, long walks, motorcycle rides (in which Clay was bucked off and kissed the ground), schedule confusion, demanding words, overloaded sound systems, intense heat, Nigerian fast food, and so much more. As we sped home at the end of the day, I wrote these words: My African companions of frustration and fatigue have taken me by the hand and led me to the edge of unrighteous anger. This place is so unfamiliar to me. The sight is horrid and I fear. Still, You are with me, my Deliverer. You take my hand and speak. "Behold anger... now, turn away from here. Come, rest in the beauty of my peace."



Joshua Vandercar

And then, in this night, I find comfort and strength in the familiar songs of Andy and Rich... two of the few albums I have carried with me these days.

"If I shrink back from the light so I can sink into the dark. If I take cover and I close my eyes—even then You would see my heart. And You cut through all the pain and rage. The darkness is not dark to You—the night's as bright as day. Nothing is beyond You..." (Rich Mullins—Nothing is Beyond You)

"So where, O Lord, are You leading? I can get so scared in the night. My feet are cut and bleeding and every step I feel less alive. Oh, but Pillar of Fire, You've blazed that trail. You've been there every step along that road. From a barn in Bethlehem, to hell and back again, You've blazed that trail that leads me home. Always whirling, swirling, and spinning all around, onward and upward, now homeward bound. Oh, Jesus, won't you hold me through the night, Pillar of Fire." (Andrew Peterson—Pillar of Fire)

In my night, Jesus, You are the Light. And in my silence I hear the echo of Your Amen... reminding me, Lord, Your promises are sure.

Christ's Love,
Joshua

Date: 4/14/2004
Submitted by: Kathy Weber
Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Idom and Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Today we didn't have any programs, but we went to eat breakfast with our friend Victoria's family. Victoria is the National Youth Fellowship Treasurer here in Nigeria, and her father, Mr. Inyang, is the Chairman of the Pastoral Conference and also the Dean of Students at the seminary here in Obot Idom. We ate a breakfast of mangos, chicken curry meat pies, and minerals (the term for soda, pop, soft drinks, whatever you call them). It was a good time of fellowship as well, looking at family photos and hearing Mr. Inyang talk of his recent trip to Germany for a conference with many other Lutherans from around the world. After a photo shoot with the family, we left to get some much-desired internet time, and then the rains came.



Kathy Weber

We are now in the rainy season here in West Africa, which will end somewhere in July or August, and I would like to share some words I wrote the other day inspired on a walk to our program:

The Rainy Season

Puddles are scattered on the dirt road only passable by foot or Okada (a local term for motorcycles). My once-black sandals sink into the miry red dirt on its way to mud from the recent rains. There is a brief breeze in the midst of the sun pounding down onto our bodies, and then, the humidity surrounding us in sweat and heat increases and falls in showers to temporarily relieve us before the sun returns...

This evening we made breakfast for dinner, and Becca and I helped show Clay how to make pancakes without Bisquick®! It has been nice to have our own kitchen here, even if we have to cook with lanterns and candles as our only source of light in the evening because of how infrequently the power comes on here. The candlelight brings a peaceful ambiance to the house ushering out the busyness of the day...

Date: 4/15/2004
Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai
Journal Entry:

Location: Ibot Idim, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

As a day off immediately after the Easter Festivities, members were not too much pressure to wake early for any program for today. It was a day of resting and doing one's own personal stuff.

After taking my breakfast, Elvis and I had the opportunity to visit the Lutheran Christian Radio Studio at the compound. At the studio we were privileged to meet the director in the person of Mr Effiong James. At the studio there was a downpour of rain for about 45 minutes. After some chat with the director he sent us round through some of the departments to see what they are doing there. At the recording studio we met the choir of the New Apostolic church recording a piece. It was lovely to see the sound engineer working hard to get the good sound he wanted from the people. After a successful move around in the studio we came to join our other teamers at the guesthouse where we had a return tour team meeting. It was really wonderful for the Lord gave us brilliant ideas in a package to process them for our return tour. Lunch after the meeting followed while Rachel and Emayak went to the market to buy stuff for the evening meal. Emayak is a daughter of one Reverend Utin who is one of the lecturers at the seminary. At this time Joshua and Kathy were busy reconciling treasury stuff while Clay and Matt were busily getting their post cards ready for the next mail packet. Christopher and Douglas, a friend and the Vice Chairman of the National Youth Fellowship of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria were with me and Elvis discussing issues concerning the youth. During our discussion time, there came Rachel and Emayuk from the market with Nigeria's most popular means of transport "Okada"—motorbike.

They prepared coconut rice as dinner where the team and all its visitors had dinner together. Most of us went for first and second rounds of the food. The delicious tastes of the food made me to go for three times after the team health coordinator gave me the go-ahead to eat as much as I could.

It was very amazing to meet Emayak who assisted our ladies to get this meal done. To me, I see that Christ Jesus brought this young lady to teach us how to cook the Nigerian way.



Matthew Abudulai

Date: 4/16/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Idim, Akwa Ibom State, NIGERIA

Washing dishes is therapeutic. Something about the soap and the water; the suds and the sponge. The scrubbing. And the rinsing. Watching as a towering stack of sticky, greasy, rice-dotted (who's not scrapping into the trash can?) plates steadily shrinks as one by one each piece is dunked into the sink and emerges clean, ready to be used again. The task may sometimes be less than enjoyable, but one can't help but find satisfaction in that. The poignancy is beautiful.



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

So maybe I've put too much thought into dishes. That would be because I had more than ample time to contemplate the whole concept tonight as I spent the last two-and-a-half hours of my evening hunched over our single kitchen sink, up to my elbows in sudsy water, meticulously cleaning our guest house flatware by the soft glow of my headlamp. Did I mention we have no electricity? 'Cause we don't. This is hard, and tonight I'm not happy about it.

Sometimes all I want to do is complain. This is not the training we received in our August orientation. Nobody taught me how to stack dishes so they can air dry and sterilize the contaminated water used to wash them, or how to feel around in every dark corner and cabinet looking for more candles when the last of our faint light supply has melted away, or how to fetch water from the well and carry heavy buckets across the compound just so I can flush a toilet. I mean seriously, we spend all day under the hot sun and in sweaty, crowded buses, we meet an exhausting number of people, we put all our energy into these programs and churches, and then we come home after the sun has disappeared to a house with no power and sporadic running water, miles from nowhere and have to light candles, cook for 12, and entertain the ever-present guests?

Who signed up for this?

Of course I know the answer to that: I did. But at times it takes a lot of reminding. I grumble about small annoyances like today: a "rest day" for our team. A member of the Youth Fellowship asked us if we'd like to tour a local history museum, to which we felt it would be rude to refuse. The outing turned into taking long tours at two museums, one over an hour away, and doing a program for the staff to show our appreciation. An all-day affair.

I think, why do we always have to do this? Why can't we get a straight answer about what we're doing in a given day? Why can't we get a break? Why can't we be left alone? I feel like we are so on our own; so cut off and far away from everything we know and anyone who can help us. I can't count the times on this journey that our team has found itself in jams that I could never have dreamed up before coming here, situations where I say, "I can't believe we're the only ones out here to handle this."

And I wonder if, in some way, this is my first glimpse at understanding some of what it means to be African. Nary a day goes by that someone didn't inform us of "a problem Africa is facing." People constantly ask us, as Americans, to do something to help. Start a hospital. Give us computers. Please tell your people we need them. There is nowhere to turn away from the beggars, the poverty, the hardships. I am certainly aware that the United States takes up more than its fair share of problems in this world, and by no means is every day brutally unbearable for every third world citizen. Just the contrary, in fact—I believe, though far away and often forgotten by the political and economic movers and shakers, the people we have met in West Africa approach each day and all that it brings with a thankfulness and joy from which we could all learn greatly. So many have such an open, loving heart towards God and a strong faith that He will continue to provide.

One of the many small things we have had to adapt to here comes every time we join in the Lord's Prayer with a congregation; West Africans break up the phrases slightly differently than we do, pausing in different places and placing emphasis on different words. One example is, "Give us this day [pause] our daily bread." This tripped us up for weeks, but I believe this is telling of the importance that each of these words carries. The soul-bearing honesty of a people who sometimes do not know how they will make it through the day except by the grace of God.

It's like the worship service in Abuja where Becca and I were plucked from within the semi-obscurity of the team's pew and pulled to the choir's side, where we were handed a keyboard and electric guitar and asked to fill in for the missing instrumentalists. Wide-eyed and clueless, with the choir master belting out choruses in front of us, we looked to the bass player. "What key are we playing in?" He answered, "Oh, whatever key you want. It doesn't matter. Just play." What? Baffled beyond belief, I did my best to mimic the bass' motions while Becca performed a stellar air keyboard, both wincing uncomfortably at the clamor we were creating until the choir ended and we could slip back to our seats. But we missed the point. It's not knowing the right thing to play or looking to some sheet music for direction. It's making a joyful noise! For us, IN Africa, it's not looking to outsiders to solve our problems or worrying about how far away the YE office support is. It is living with the fullness of the Spirit moving us and the certainty that we never face anything alone. Since coming to Ghana and Nigeria, we have seen many people who've got that right.

Who am I to complain? God always provides and provides SO MUCH. What right do I have to be entitled to anything of my own? How can I even say "MY evening" or "MY day"? All things start and end with God, and I should do nothing but dance to His praise every waking moment for the breath to experience it.

However undeserving, God DOES entitle us. We are God's heirs by dying in sin and rising to new life with Christ. And as I whine about the dishes taking too long, God makes cleaning His full-time business. Dear Lord, dunk me in the sink and scrub me until I shine. Amen.

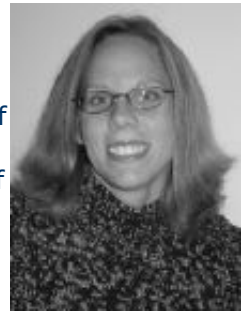
Date: 4/17/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Idim, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

I have been enlightened! Well, despite the rest and stability this part of our tour has brought us, I am tired! Matt helped me realize that I may be tired because after a day of travels, team stuff and program, we still come back to our house to cook a meal for 8 in the dark. ["Now about spiritual gifts..."] Sometimes we have guests, 2 or 3, for a total of ten plus. ["There are different kinds of gifts..."]. Our kitchen facilities consist of a kerosene-powered fridge, 2 gas burners, one large sink, some pots and pans, and lots of dishes to eat on. No oven, no toasting or reheating devices. ["To one there is given through the Spirit..."] So, I am weary. However, there is one among us who finds comfort and relaxation to be in the kitchen creating ["...miraculous powers."] Becca amazes me because despite the limited ingredients and meager facilities she creates miraculous meals! Thank God that our "body is made up of not one part, but many." (1 Corinthians 12:14), because when I fall, my friends are here to help me up (Ecclesiastes 4:10), when I am too discouraged or weak to create a meal, Becca picks me up. Likewise, I hope I am returning the help when my teammates need it.



Rachel Haabala

Today was relaxed as we had one-on-ones, rehearsal, and a program. Elvis and I walked down the road to check out the Obot Idim Post Office, which we never found, but we had a good talk. We talked about work, plans for life after team (in just a few short weeks for Elvis, August '04 for me), and relationships. It was good and we returned to lunch which Clay and Kathy had prepared. Next was rehearsal, we successfully recorded as many Ghanaian songs as we knew, to be passed on to future teams.

The program tonight was a joy as we watched their presentation to us. Our presentation to them was not as smooth with out-of-tune guitars and other small things, but they appreciated it still! Though God uses us and our ministry, we surely do not have to be perfect! Again their praise team started playing songs and it wasn't long until Cross Fire was lost in the African Dance Extravaganza, twisting and bending our bodies trying to mimic that of our brothers and sisters in Christ. We were presented with gifts of woven raffia bags.

Now we're home and I'm tired. Becca worked another miracle for us to eat and I've just finished doing the stack of dishes with the water that Mr. Effiong had to pump from the well tonight. That's how we get our running water. And since the pump requires the generator to run, we get to enjoy the lights and fan for a few hours tonight. Yipee!

By His Grace,
Rachel

Date: 4/18/2004
Submitted by: Becca Leaf
Journal Entry:

Location: UYO, Lutheran Church of Nigeria Effiat Offot, Nigeria

Everyday we drive by hundreds of "Operation: Fire-for-Fire" police officers carrying huge semi-automatic weapons. One time I asked Douglas (our contact) if they were loaded. He just laughed and said, "Of course! Why else would they carry them?" Yeah, it was a silly question. I've just never seen guns like that in real life.



Becca Leaf

So anyways, my goal before leaving Nigeria was to befriend one of these gun-toting guards and snap a picture. This is one image I know (hope?) I never see in the USA. Unfortunately, it is very extremely forbidden to just whip out a camera and capture the magic of Nigerian police. I wasn't too optimistic that I'd get my photo.

Then today after church, we stopped by the house of the ex-chairman of the National Youth Fellowship for refreshments and pleasantries. As we were looking through his stack of pictures I commented on one of him with a machine gun resting on his shoulder. He seemed pleased that we were interested in the work he was doing. He quickly selected 8 photos, wrote his name and address

on the back and VIOLA! I had my picture of a tough guy and his gun. And it didn't require me getting arrested for an illegal snapping! That's the highlight of my day.

We had a program nearby after that and I was less than enthusiastic. It was really hot and muggy because the rain was moving in and I wasn't feeling too well. I walked into the church full of youth, singing and clapping and excited to see us, and all I wanted to do was follow my team to the front of the room and try to hide behind their energy. I figured if they were all dancing and interacting, I could hang back a little. Right away I knew I needed to change my attitude.

I got a little help from a girl about halfway back in the church. As I walked by she waved me over, grabbed my hand and said, "Dance with me." My team kept walking and I hung back, trying to get a feel for the music and style of dancing she was doing. We ended up laughing a lot and shakin' our groove thang for about an hour. I'll tell you what, nothing beats a bad mood out of me faster than letting go and making friends. And by being in the middle of a huge crowd, I felt like I was blending in a little more. Or maybe I just didn't care about standing out anymore.

The only damper on the evening was in pulling away from the church we hit a bump. The back door of the van flew open and both guitars fell out. Chaos erupted as people yelled for the driver to stop and others were leaping out the side and back doors to collect them. No one wanted to look at them until we got home. They were both fine, but it was still an experience no one wanted to relive. I guess it could be fun to do our last 2 or 3 weeks of programs with only percussion. But I'm sure we'd rather choose to do that than have it be our only option.

So today I learned dreams do come true (picture). Every cloud has a silver lining (dancing the blahs away), and miracles can happen (our guitars didn't shatter on the ground). I am just amazed at how life is filled with so much: desires, goals, moods, events... and all of these things can make a day feel so great or so miserable. I think I'm trying to find something deep or wise to say here, but nothing's coming. So to end, I guess all I can say is, "Yay, God! He is awesome!" Amen.

Date: 4/19/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

... Meat pies: a concoction of meat, onions, potatoes, fish, pie crust, and/or who knows what else that looks like an apple turnover. Two things are certain of them: #1 is that they are everywhere we go and #2 is that they are a total mystery to the person holding one in his/her hand. It's a roll of the Nigerian dice as you bite into one. You never know if your pie's going to be chock full of chickeny, meaty goodness or if you'll have a mouthful of onion. We've had ones with beef, chicken curry, and even no meat at all! Yet, strangely, I have been growing to enjoy them even though my taste buds reflect those of Morris the Cat, the finicky spokescat for '9 Lives" cat food. I had no less than three of them today.

We woke up, had our devotion, and met up with our contact, Douglas, the Vice Chairman of the National Youth Fellowship. He and our pilot, Sylvester, escorted us to an internet café, the marketplace, and our evening program in Uyo. The marketplace has become one of my least favorite places to go. Yes, it is the place to go if you want a good deal on fabric or dried fish, but OH THE HUMANITY! People are just crammed into small alleyways with shops on both sides. Many people walking back and forth are selling goods themselves as they balance their items on their head. As the sun beats down on me and numerous people ask me, the "white man", to come buy something, I want nothing more than to crawl into the fetal position and weep my frustrations away. Still, many of our team members have embraced this part of West African culture, which is cool. Becca has haggled so much, she's ready to open her own fabric store.

Our evening program at the LCN-Afaha Ibesikpo was a breath of fresh air. We participated in our first processional, which is where we get to dance/march in from the rear of the church along with the choir and the pastor. We have definitely improved our groove since coming here, and we hope to have it finely honed by the time we return. Our program was really fun as we shared the Good



Clayton Mark

News and received their love and culture in return through drama and dance.

We returned home to generated power and airflow and spent the night chatting with our new Nigerian and Ghanaian friends. I took my late-night cold shower to cool me down for another night of rest after taking in another day of living in God's country.

Date: 4/20/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Praise the Lord, all you nations; extol him all you peoples.
For how great is his love towards us and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever.
Praise the Lord: Amen. (Psalm 117)

Well, today is another great day, bright and sunny. Interestingly, today is our seventh official holiday since we started our African tour. As a result most of us slept in to 10 AM which was really good because we all had enough rest.

Later in the day, we came together for rehearsal in preparation for return tour and also recorded a couple of Ghanaian and Nigerian songs for the next Cross Fire 2006/7.

After rehearsing, five of my teammates went out to check their e-mails, so I was left with Matthew and Joshua. The three of us were chatting until we received tow ladies, namely Emen Utin and Mary Iquot who came to visit us. As time went on, the conversation was turned to rehearsals, and they taught us two Ibibio songs (Ibibio is the most spoken language in the Akwa Ibom State).

Our other mates arrived from town and everyone was happy sharing with the mails received from their families and friends.

Once again, we are grateful to God for another successful day. To Him alone be the glory. Amen.



Elvis Kafui Doe

Date: 4/21/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Ituk Mbang, Ekpewe Ukim, Obot Idin, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Today was a relatively good day. Two programs. One at a Methodist hospital and the other at a nearby Lutheran church. I say it was relatively good in that it is among the first in which I have been able to, for some reason, cast my cares further from me... casting all my care upon Him, for He cares for me. Why should I find this so difficult to do at times? Today I was able to cast them... or have I only been ignoring them?

Either way, I was able to more fully embrace the simple reality and the day-to-day joys of being in Africa. Then night came and just before heading to bed the continual challenges were thrown in my face. Our days here are soon to end... may I embrace them all... may I cast my cares. For You are God and You are good.

Christ's Love,
Joshua



Joshua Vandercar

Date: 4/22/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Idim Akwa Ibom State to Onne-Elеме, Rivers State, Nigeria

Today is another day where we slept in a different town other than Obot Idim in these last twenty days in Nigeria. Last time we stayed in Calabar, and tonight we came to Onne-Elеме, near Port Harcourt. We were welcomed here with open arms, and again we have seen an amazing display of Nigerian hospitality. Not only have we been fed well and put up in a nice hotel, but the program tonight showed us how excited this congregation (especially the youth fellowship) was to have visitors come and share in worship. I must admit that one of my favorite parts of our program tonight was during the district choir's welcome song for us which had lyrics welcoming Cross Fire to their church and the district as well. When we have already experienced West African worship in many different forms, it was exciting to feel special because the song was written for us and wasn't a rendition we had heard before.



Kathy Weber

We also participated in offering tonight, which if I may say so, is always quite a workout. Not only do we walk/dance our way up to the offering bowl, after we have given what we have, we either go for another round or just have a dance party with the whole congregation. We learned that in this specific area, the style of dance was focused on shaking our hips for extended periods of time! We all tried our best to mimic the actions that others were trying to share with us, and while the shaking was hard to keep up for longer than a few seconds at a time, we were able to do some other steps that we had learned in other churches along the way as well.

After our portion of the program for the evening, we came to the point where they told us they wanted to present us with gifts. The district youth chairman invited forward some of the elders, deaconesses and other prominent folks from the church and community to present us with these awards. They had made plaques for us with our names on them thanking us for visiting them, and they said they wanted to appreciate us, and leave us with something to remember them by.

The electric keyboarder played horn fanfares for us as we were called up one by one to receive our plaques and shake hands. They then presented the keyboard player (a youth who was very involved) with an award for all of his hard work and dedication to the church. Another youth made sure there was still a fanfare for this presentation as well. It was a wonderful moment. We then took many pictures and concluded the program for the evening. It was nice today to get away for a short while, and give ourselves a break from all of the cooking we have been doing in Obot Idim. It was a good day.

Date: 4/23/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai

Journal Entry:

Location: Ibot Idim, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

What a tour! What a tour!! What a tour!!! Little did I know that this would come when my six American teammates arrived in Ghana on the 14th of January 2004. Here I am thinking of how life will be after team. I wish I could follow my American teammates to the States to complete the one year commitment signed with Youth Encounter but unfortunately I cannot...



Matthew Abudulai

After a marathon of African dancing for the Lord in a program at Onne-Elеме (River State) the team was given a special treat by one of the key youth members of LCN Onne-Elеме District, Pious Ejemere. He sent us to one of the best hotels in Elеме to have a conducive rest for the night. The comfort we had this night made us to convene quite later than was planned this morning. Elеме, which is quite close to Port Harcourt is about two hours drive from Ibot Idim where the Lutheran Church of Nigeria guesthouse is. That is the guesthouse where we are staying now. From Elеме to the guesthouse was very tiring. We were very fortunate to have been given a bus by the women fellowship of the church throughout our whole stay here in Akwa Ibom State. This was the very bus we used in addition to about seven youth members and officers of the LNN youth. Although we were very tired, we had also in mind to honor a prison program in a town called Ikot Ekpene, a town about forty-five minutes from the Lutheran guesthouse. To my surprise, as soon as the team

entered the prison yard, here were these prisoners praising God with all their hearts, all their souls and all their strength. These people who are considered to be criminals were demonstrating the love of God by singing and praising God with joy. The charged atmosphere with songs of praises deepened my desire to serve the living God in this manner again the coming year. I later asked myself, is God talking to me through these supposed criminals? Maybe yes, I said to myself. What do you think?

After setting our instruments down, we were about to start sharing with them when a young man ushered us by telling them that the last word Jesus said on the cross was, "It is finished." In fact this phrase touched my heart so much that when I was about to teach my song, "Trading My Sorrows" (which most Nigerians know how to sing which I always precede teaching by releasing some words of inspiration) I did quote that phrase, "It is finished." This was a place I personally thought it was wrong to be, but after the program the spirit of God confronted my heart and declared to me that I and my teammates are at the right place doing the right thing at the right time. Indeed the power of the Holy Ghost was hovering in the pavilion in which we were, working within the hearts of the people. Soon after the program was over the inmates wished we would stay with them there for long hours. We then moved to the guesthouse. On the way to the guesthouse we bought some items from a supermarket and prepared some lunch in the house for ourselves.

One thing I loved so much about the Lutheran Church in Nigeria was that every week there is a church that organized convention. Today was the turn of Lutheran Church of Nigeria Ikot Okubo district. We were privileged to be a part of this Christian convention where we had the opportunity to share the love of Christ with them by ministering to them through songs, puppet show, drama and the word of God. In fact the whole convention was a time of joy. We also enjoyed the songs and the sermon that was shared by the praise team and the Pastor respectively. The convention planning committee was hoping to have our show be telecasted but unfortunately the video man did not show up. They lovingly asked the team to please show up the next day after a special dinner treat. We responded in the positive way. It was really a great joy to be part of this convention.

Date: 4/24/2004

Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Idim, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

"Dear Lord, thank you for another glorious day here in Africa!" Mr. Brent Friedrichs would often start his prayers with us this way, and today I can't say it any better. It's been a rare restful, quiet day for your friendly neighborhood Cross Fire 03-04, a day to thank God for where we are and to look forward to where God will soon lead us. Kathy and I started the day with a brisk stroll across the grassy yard, down the dirt path out of our guest house/Christian Radio Station compound and across the street to the LCN head offices where we shopped in the Youth Book Store for gifts to carry home. Matthew led us in devotion after having two weeks of byes, and we enjoyed some good fried cuisine and good rest for the morning. In the afternoon, we turned our attention to rehearsing new music and discussing ideas for our quickly-approaching return stateside tour. We have so many ideas I think we may have to make the programs six hours long or so, maybe with a short bathroom break—MAYBE. An exciting time of planning for us, although also a sad note as we prepare for team after Elvis and Matthew.

More good Cross Fire standards for dinner and we were off to our one program engagement of the day—a back-by-popular-demand return visit to Pastor Joshua's congregation in Okukak, host to a three-day district gathering. Last night they were for some reason unable to videotape our performance, so they more than made up for it tonight with two cameramen diligently documenting our every move. Dancing with the choir, minerals with the church leaders, an invitation to come back a third day which we had to respectfully decline, and we were on the road, making the short jaunt back to home sweet home.

You know by the time we say goodbye to the Obot Idim Lutheran guesthouse, I will have spent more consecutive nights here than any other one place since August 2002. Wow. Thank you, Lord,



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

for every glorious day!

Date: 4/25/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Idim, Akwa Ibom, Nigeria

Well, that's it! The straw that broke the camel's back. The end of the road; Away, bus!

We were late getting to church this morning. It was Youth Sunday at Afaha Offiong and youths from nearby congregations were in attendance. At the Pastor's random selection, he called 10 of them, representing all areas present for a Bible quiz. He'd call out a passage and the first person to turn to it and read it correctly was awarded five points. The final four contestants with the most points were asked to step forward and the passage was a verse in Jude Chapter 2. After a moment's hesitation, one girl called out that Jude did not have a 2nd chapter. Claiming her the winner, her prize was 200 Naira (approximately \$1.33)!

Shortly after that we were on stage with our program. Clay did a great job sharing about how welcomed we've felt here. He got us all singing the welcome song ("You Are Welcome in the Name of the Lord") to which Clay followed with "Mmm! Mmm! Mmm! I love Nigeria!"

Before the close of the service we were invited to a side room where we were offered Malta and biscuits. Clay, Elvis, Kathy and I finished our 29 centiliters as Joshua polished off 2 of them! Becca and Matt both hired Matthew "Tema Man" as their lawyer and he did them justice! We expected to leave when we were finished there, but the bus was out, so we waited for it to show up. When it arrived, we got to go load up ourselves and our instruments. As we walked past the sanctuary, the youth chairman came out (did I forget to mention that the congregation was still seated having a meeting?) requesting that we come in for just a moment. They wanted to introduce the church officials to us and tell us they appreciated and enjoyed us coming. Okay, time to go—oops, no, they want a picture. Ok, no problem, a few more minutes as we gather the pastor, youth chairman and a few others. *snap! Let's go. Ooooh... they're talking to Joshua... that could mean multiple things; 1) They're thanking him again, 2) They want us back; 3) They're requesting resources... We're not leaving yet. Following the theme of the morning, we were invited to stay until the meeting was over to join them in Holy Communion. "How long will that be?" "Oh, not long. Just a few minutes." About 15 minutes later, we again were sitting in the church pews. In true African style, we crowded approximately 25 bodies around the Pastor for the sacraments. Bidding farewell to our brothers and sisters and at the end of the 4-hour church service, we headed home to get some lunch.

Becca and I started cookin' up eggs and toast. I left her to finish up the last order for Elvis, we soon heard a frantic cry, "Rachel?" "Yeah?" "Rachel, come here quick!" What could it be? Another giant bug? Call Matthew, he's the bug whisperer. "Ok, just a second!" I walked into the kitchen as Becca lit a match and said, "Watch!" She lowered the flame to the burner and turned the knob. Nothing. No blazing cooking fire. We'd been saying for days after we lost power, then the fridge, then running water that all we had left was the stove. Becca, the meal miracle worker, depended on that flame. So, no, there was not a shred of hope that we'd have supper that night. I did what came naturally, broke into hysterical laughter! Of course everyone then got the impression that Becca's discovery was humorous, which it wasn't but I knew that Becca would follow through with her threat to pack up and leave "if we lost the stove." It was like Matthew 8:12 for us—we were cast into a darkness and were weeping and gnashing our teeth as we muttered our opinions to ourselves. Joshua immediately proclaimed that he'd go looking for Mr. Effiong so we could get the propane tank refilled. I volunteered to accompany him.

We ended up at the house of the LCN president who promised to send over his driver to help us out stating that Mr. Effiong's house was not close. Joshua and I bought bread on the way back. When the driver arrived, Joshua relayed the message that we wouldn't have propane until the next day, as they don't sell it on Sundays. *SIGH! Kathy and I took orders for Nigeria's Equivalent to McDonald's, Mr. Bigg's. Sure enough by the end of the day Becca was packing up, singing along to some music. Four of us were in another room playing cards by candlelight when we noticed the



Rachel Haabala

gentle voice trying to sing softly so as not to be heard, yet as a result it was just creepy. Reference was made to Samara in "The Ring," and how similar Becca sounded. With a water well in walking distance and kerosene lanterns floating through the dark African night, I felt like I was transported into a movie. Can't wait for the sun to come up!

Date: 4/26/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Location: All day at Obot Idim. Nigeria

8 AM—Rachel's not in bed. I can hear her talking to Clay in the hallway about being sick. I'm not feeling too good either. I'm still pretty upset about the death of our propane stove last night. I can live without power, water, and a fridge, but that stove gave me sanity and a way to relax at night. Without it, my role as "team cook" was cancelled out. Maybe that's why I have a queasy, tired feeling in my stomach.



Becca Leaf

Rachel just mentioned "Mr. Bigg's" and the chicken burgers we ate last night, since we couldn't cook. Mr. Bigg's is the Nigerian equivalent to McDonald's. The food is prepared early on in the day and then placed under heat lamps. That should have been a red flag to us right away. The next warning sign was when we cleaned them out of the remaining meals under that lamp. Getting home and biting into a slimy chicken burger topped with warm mayo, soggy tomatoes, and wilted cucumbers should have been our final tip off that this food should not be consumed. But we were hot, tired, frustrated, and frankly, no matter what it may taste like, wasting food is just not an option.

So as Rachel climbs back into bed and my stomach does another flip, I roll over for 10 more minutes of sleep.

9 AM—All eight of us are at devotions and morning check-ins. We decide to leave Rachel behind for today's programs so she can rest. We pack our things and walk next door to the seminary. I made it through 3 songs and a skit before the nausea and weakness in my legs took over. Clay walked me home, took mine and Rachel's temperatures (both 99.1), said a prayer over us, and went to the next program. I rolled onto my side and slept.

2 PM—The team's back. I hurt all over. Every time I move I want to throw up. I heard mention of malaria, but this is food poisoning. I've had it before. The fan just came on, praise the Lord. I roll over one last time and curl myself into a ball. Clay comes in to check on us and I tell him, "If I don't make it, tell my family I love them." With a grin, he rolls his eyes and goes out to report our latest vitals. I go back to sleep.

4:30 PM—The power is off again and I am sweating bullets. My fever is up to 99.8. Clay and Kathy are taking care of us, trying to get Rachel and I to sip water. She seems to be feeling better, even got up and sat in the living room for a while. I can't take the heat. I grab my pillow and roll off the bed on to our concrete floor. I couldn't tell you if it is hard or rough or swarming with ants. All I know is it feels cool. I lay on my back for a while. Now I'm on my stomach. I just want to pull up the cold stone floor and wrap it around me. Back to sleep now...

7:30 PM—The fan is working so power must be on. I'm going to use the bathroom quick. I am so stiff, whether from being sick or from laying on the floor. I don't care anymore, though.

7:45 PM—I'm back from the bathroom and from saying hi to my teammates. Getting out of the room was exciting, but I'm sad to hear Joshua and Elvis are feeling ill as well. Sheesh! It's good to be back on the cold floor. All my energy is gone now. Time to sleep again.

4:40 AM—My fever's gone. I can just tell. I know I'm better because I can stretch out my legs and even sit up with reaching for the bucket. The blinds are shut and so is the door so our room is pitch black. I've been asleep almost all day and night. I just lay here, trying to remember this day, filled with the blackness of sleep. I never dreamt, but the brief flashes of wakefulness might as well have

been dreams. There was once when I think Kathy stepped on me during my first few hours on the floor, but I can't be sure. Another time I think I woke up and heard everyone talking about "Friends." I couldn't tell if they were watching it on TV or just remembering favorite episodes. It finally dawned on me: Oh, yeah, we don't have a TV. I might be better, but I'm still so tired. I climb back into bed next to Kathy and close my eyes. Tomorrow is almost here.

Date: 4/27/2004

Submitted by: Clayton Mark

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Idim, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

... Medical checklist for the Cross Fire team Monday and Tuesday:

Becca—"Near death" (as quoted by the patient herself)

Elvis—Possible Malaria (the African flu)

Joshua—abdominal pains (Ingesting maximum amount of tropical-flavored Tums per day)

Kathy—a rash on her neck (stop scratching!)

Matthew—doing fine (Praise the Lord!)

Matt C-K—"the trots" (no comment)

Rachel—threw up 5 times in less than 12 hours (vom... not cool)

Dr. Clay—Severe stress due to team illness



Clayton Mark

The last couple of days have been strange as our healthy team has been hit hard with one final wave of physical ailments. After surviving a long day in bed yesterday, Becca and Rachel are doing much better while the rest of the team is getting stronger as we speak. I am reminded of the words in Isaiah 40:

"He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak... those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah 40: 29, 31

This reminds me that even though our illnesses can be helped by pills and vitamins, it is God who is our true healer.

This morning began with our final Nigerian program at the Lutheran High School. We had a great time praising God and sharing a common love for Christ. The program ended with refreshments: our arch-enemy known as Malta. Malta is a common non-alcoholic drink as popular as cola, but it tastes like bottled fiber. The worst part is the malty smell. We really struggle to drink them, but it would be considered rude to refuse. Our team has made quite a tradition of swapping bottles to help each other out. Matthew has become the Malta black hole. He loves the stuff, so when he finishes his own, someone can swap their full bottle for his empty one. Today, I decided to polish off my own bottle in two gulps. The basic formula is that the less you stop while drinking it, the less you will have to smell. One swig = one smell, five swigs = not a good idea. I then noticed that Becca was not touching hers, so I decided to help her out. This time, I did the malt beverage in one gasp. It really hit me hard, but I kept it down.

After coming home and enjoying a lunch of noodles and fried bread prepared by the newly-strengthened Rachel, we drove into town with the compound supervisor, Mr. Effiong. He's a really nice guy, and he offered to drive us to the internet café. We tittered with glee as we all enjoyed "personal time" with loved ones. We returned home to visit a family for a dinner invitation. The Iquot family lives on the campus of the Synod office for the Lutheran Church of Nigeria. Their daughter, Mary, invited us over to share a meal together. We were treated to some wonderful music by all six children: Mary, Ubong, Udeme, Ndifreke, Simeon, and Joshua. Known as "The Family Good News Fellowship," we were treated to some amazing and captivating a capella singing and a drama. They were so good! We also shared some songs with them in a "Dueling Banjos" fashion, but we were definitely treated to some beautiful singing this evening.

The real excitement began when we returned home to our guesthouse. We were putting our stuff away when we heard Becca yell, "Geez Louise!" Rachel then added a phrase of her own, and Kathy was also flippin' out. Matt and I came to discover a new roommate had joined the girls: a spider. I think all five of us will agree that it was the largest spider we've seen with our own eyes, up close and personal. Matthew, our usual spider wrangler, was nowhere to be found, so it was decided that the spider had to go. My usual weapon of choice, the "Harp Bird" flip-flops, would be of no use against this beast, so Matt and I grabbed the only weapons we could find: a broom and 2 red Lutheran hymnals. Matt's original hopes of throwing a hymnal from a safe distance were dashed when the spider left its position and scurried into a pile of Kathy's stuff. Matt and I went in. He stood by with broom and songbook as I took away each article of clothing and piece of paper that had accumulated in the corner. We got to the bottom and still saw no sign of the spider. We then found the beast after moving out the wooden desk against the wall. It laid resting on the wall, just daring us to make the first move. After many theories and ideas of attack, we planned for Matt to brush it down onto the floor and then we would attack, using the sacred books of lyrical praise to Jesus. After a few moments of fear and hesitation, we struck. Matt landed a sweeping blow that brought the arachnid down to the floor. Our first hits missed! The hymnals bounced off it with no effect. Matt, in a moment of genius, used the broom to sweep the hymnals back to us for one more try before the spider would have probably used the hymnals to beat us. The next round of hits proved to be too much. We killed the beast with 2 fatal blows that would've made Martin Luther proud to see his collection of melodies used for the good of common man.

As the carcass lay there, we began to feel like Sam and Frodo. We had conquered Shelob with God's "help." Without those songs of joy and servanthood, the creature might have gotten loose on the town of Obot Idim like a T-Rex from Jurassic Park. This is our life: Giant spiders that terrify us, but bring a lot of fun memories. As Matt and I sit on the couch, feeling joyful yet sad for having to claim a life, we knew that this is the good stuff that God gives us to have great times in a new place.

Date: 4/28/2004

Submitted by: Elvis Kafui Doe

Journal Entry:

Location: Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Today is a great day and our last day with the Lutheran Church of Nigeria. In Ecclesiastes 3:1 the Bible says, and I quote, "There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven."

Yes, this is very true, we've completed our programs in Nigeria successfully, and we are very thankful to God for His love and protection.

Well, being our last day, the National Youth Fellowship of the Lutheran Church of Nigeria (LCN) organized a sendforth party for us. We ate and drank together, they presented us with gifts and souvenirs. Actually, it was cool and full of fun but you will also agree with me that some of us were also sad because we were going to miss our Nigerian friends. All the same we have no choice than to say goodbye.

Throughout our tour one word we use frequently is GOODBYE. We say goodbye almost every day. No doubt today I have to say goodbye to you all. Thank you very much for taking time out of your schedule to read our journals.

Perhaps you may be aware or not, but to set the record straight, I have completed my four month (January 14-May 3) term with Cross Fire 2003/4 successfully by His grace. I'm very thankful to God and Youth Encounter for giving me this unique opportunity to serve God. Besides, I thank my teammates for their love, support and care for me and Matthew. I've enjoyed their fellowship and it's going to be a difficult thing. Me, I will miss that sweet fellowship but it's my fervent prayer that God will grant them His grace through the next four-month stateside tour.

Again, we are also grateful to all our sponsors and partners for their support and kind donations. In conclusion, I look forward to developing a good relationship with you all. Below is my name and



Elvis Kafui Doe

address:
Elvis Kafui Doe
P.O. Box CO 143
Tema/Ghana

Elvis_doe at hotmail.com

I look forward to hearing from you soon. May the Good Lord richly bless you. Amen.

Date: 4/29/2004

Submitted by: Joshua Vandercar

Journal Entry:

Location: Obot Idim, Akwa Ibom State, and Lagos, Lagos Sate, Nigeria

Today we awoke to a Nigerian fog. And, as the hidden sun rose, we began our journey into the fog. The trek took us from Obot Idim to Lagos and lasted about eleven hours. I still think of that fog this morning... it gradually lifted to reveal so much. And then I think of our four-month journey throughout Ghana and Nigeria. The fog has yet to fully lift. When might I fully know what this time means for my life? In four days we return to our homes and to a new ministry. I then must begin to see through the mist... to understand these days and our Lord's ways... and share. My God, please bring the sun that I might see more clearly. Show something new and give me a renewed passion. Let me lead others to even glimpse that which I've seen and that which lies beyond the rising fog. To your glory, Lord!

Christ's Love,
Joshua



Joshua Vandercar

Date: 4/30/2004

Submitted by: Kathy Weber

Journal Entry:

Location: Lagos, Nigeria to Accra, Ghana

So today we said our goodbyes to the country of Nigeria. We had been in Nigeria since March 13th, which means that is how long we have been away from Ghana as well. Our plane ride and the events leading up to it went a little more smoothly this time as opposed to when we were leaving Ghana (see my own journal entry from March 13th).

You know, coming back to Ghana it was easier for me to notice the differences between Nigeria (known often as the Giant of Africa) and Ghana (often referred to as the Gateway to Africa). I think that when we first went to Nigeria I was looking more for what was similar to what I had already experienced to ease the transition, but after spending almost the same amount of time in both countries, returning to Ghana really helped the differences stand out.

As I have been realizing more and more about all of the varieties of cultural experiences we have encountered, I am excited to think of how to describe all of this to folks at home. I'm looking forward to displaying my favorite parts from all of the different places we have been all in our return tour program this summer and in one-on-one conversations with family and friends and people I meet through being on team.

It will be a struggle to find the best ways to share about the past four months with people who I may only speak with for a few minutes, but I can't wait for the challenge!



Kathy Weber

Date: 5/1/2004

Submitted by: Matthew Abudulai
Journal Entry:

Location: Anya, Greater Accra, Ghana

After about seven weeks tour in Nigeria sharing the word of God through music, puppet shows, and drama the team is back to Anya, Ghana. As a matter of fact Anya is going to be the last place of stay as we are rounding up our tour in West Africa. Tired as the team was, we slept so much from last night throughout the early part of this morning and convened as a team at 11 AM. The team meeting was very interesting as we talked about the experiences we have had on team as African and Americans. We also took the opportunity to wish ourselves a semi-farewell before we finally separate ourselves on the fourth day of May. We had a nice time together wishing each other continued relationship even as we depart physically from each other. This meeting brought us very close again as a family in Christ. During the team meeting we also had a breakfast. The breakfast was not as usual as we did but mainly oranges, bananas, and bread. The joy of the meeting even took away all our hunger leaving most of the food around.



Matthew Abudulai

Leaving the corridors of Africa through Ghana prompted my American friends to get some gifts from Africa for friends and family members. Most of this buying stuff was done the previous day but there was more to be done. Myself, Kathy, Joshua and Matt left to a Ghanaian art and craft cultural center to buy the stuff needed. Elvis moved to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana's office to announce his presence from Nigeria and Clayton, Rachel, and Becca stayed behind to play a game called Uno with Pastor Mills Robertson, our host Pastor in Anya.

At the cultural center as we were combing through the shops back and forth we managed to get some desired African stuff. It was a pleasure to witness my friends bargaining before buying stuff as a tradition in Ghana. From the art center we met our other teammates at Southern Fried Chicken, a popular restaurant in Ghana where we normally go for our meals. Matthew is now a big fan of American pizza which has now become a favorite dish to me. Today I told my American teammates that I will consume four season family size pizzas, they did not doubt nor believe me but to wait patiently for me to eat. Little by little and there I was with two slice sectors of pizza. Elvis then took one slice leaving one and finally finished the last one with all my friends wondering. "Oh Matthew can eat," Becca said. "If you visit me in America you will eat and eat," and I responded by saying, "All I will do is eat and sleep." Matt, my namesake, also said, "Matthew, in America there are restaurants that you will visit, pay for food and drink and you will be given food and drink continuously till you get satisfied." Indeed it was all fun to be dining together as a team. I could sense the spirit of oneness and love demonstrated among us. Unfortunately our teammate who does not like pizza, Elvis, was not with us to enjoy this eating fellowship.

Soon after eating we waited for a while and left to the roadside to pick a car to the biggest internet café in Africa, Busy Internet, a short distance from where we were. The popular choice was to take a trotro, the name given to a bigger commercial car in Ghana. Soon after the decision was made here was this big city commercial bus coming. We all jumped in. We stood in because there were less seats in the bus, only for a few people. In fact it was fun driving with a lot of people in the bus to Busy Internet. At Busy Internet some of us went to browse and others went to do some phone calls. The day was very enjoyable I must say. Elvis was standing right in front of a phone booth when we got to Busy. He was in a good conversation.

After the days activity we submitted ourselves into the hands of our good Lord into two taxis which sent us safely home to meet our host Pastor and we all said goodbye to him and went to bed.

Date: 5/2/2004
Submitted by: Matt Canniff-Kuhn
Journal Entry:

Location: Accra, Greater Accra Region, Ghana

My last West African journal. Our last full day under African skies. Our last program.

And our last night with our Ghanaian teammates. In recent days, our team has had more "lasts" than a class of seniors in May, and it's been all we can do just to keep up with it all.



Matt Canniff-Kuhn

We woke this morning in Anyaa, a forty-five minute drive from central Accra, in the familiar home of Pastor Mills-Robertson and family. Pastor Mills has been an awesome encouragement and friend to our team, as we've found ourselves taking residence on his floors at every stage of our trip, and his ever-present smile, charming quotable phrases, and passionate Uno antics will surely live on in our team's inside jokes long past August. We met for a devotion from Elvis before recruiting a bus for our days travels and embarked for the city and, yet another, our last Sunday worship in Ghana. This was our first trip to St. Paul's although the large Lutheran church is a regular landmark for us as we cruise through Accra and we arrived to a warm welcome of familiar faces, including the Federwitzes! The Lutheran Bible Translators family who befriended us green, bewildered newbies back in Ghana's northern region three months ago (wow, can it really have been that long?). We dusted off a few of our long dormant by Ghanaian standards for worship, took in the sermon by ELCG Bishop Dr. Finn, and shook our thangs on up to the offering plate, appreciating that this would be our final chance to do any of these things with any of these people. We enjoyed catching up with our LBT friends David and Valerie after church, along with their cute daughter and David's missionary mom, said a number of goodbyes, and retired to Frankie's which, we have on several authorities, is home to West Africa's best burger.

After lunch we scooted off to Tema, and hour's drive. The hometown of our beloved boys. Elvis and Matthew planned one last Ghanaian homecoming program at their home church, Trinity Lutheran, the place where the two of them have laid down their head at the end of the day for nearly the past ten years. It wouldn't be right if our last day came and went without us waiting around for a long time, so we upheld the standard and hung out for a good chunk of the afternoon waiting for things to happen. Eventually some old friends started to roll in, like Elvis' friend Francis and Matthew's trippy little brother John, the night's co-emcee, and the evening's program got underway with a number of presentations from guest choirs and some short time with Cross Fire. Good music, good fun, and we were on our way.

Before leaving for home we stopped by Elvis' neighborhood, just a few minutes drive from his church, to greet his family who couldn't make it to the program. We had already met Elvis' parents once at his wedding, but tonight we saw his mother again on a bench in a dark alley behind two large apartment buildings. "Where we were brought up," Elvis said. We greeted the kind woman and shared a prayer with her before leaving. As we held hands she prayed for us, her opening words stood out in my mind: "I thank you, Lord, for the lives of these, my children." I think of how much bigger our family has become in that last four months, yet I imagine God smiling, "You have no idea."

On the ride home along the dark highway, I was keenly aware of every sense that flashed by me. Every sight and sound—flatboard grocery stands, hawkers yelling, candles burning in powerless windows, women balancing unbelievably awkward objects atop their heads with total ease—all to which we have become accustomed to the point of tuning out now. All things that will disappear from our surroundings within the next day.

We arrived home in Anyaa, a long night of packing and preparing in store, to no electricity. The driver and his mate dropped us off and gave us the usual hassle for more money than the original agreement, and I was brought back to many of the things I won't miss about Africa. But thus is anywhere. I can't wait to get home to my family, my bed, my break, but there are many facets of the United States that I don't find nearly as appealing and I'm sure after my time here I won't have any trouble picking out more. No place is perfect. But God is and God's everywhere. So every place we look has God in it. Sometimes He's easier for me to see than others, but through all mixed-up emotions of lasts and goodbyes and returns I must remember that God will not change. No matter how many questions or worries or excitements or hopes I have, God is there. And so is Elvis' mother and all the rest of our family, just as they always have been.



Rachel Haabala

Location: Accra, Greater Accra Region, Ghana

I knew this day would be emotional—and as Elvis said, "Goodbyes are never easy." But it has to happen. I woke up this morning at 5:45 AM—the room was grey because the sun hadn't come up yet. I knew I wouldn't go back to sleep, though I wanted to. Kathy was up around 6, as was Clay. We couldn't work on packing because we didn't want to wake our sleeping teammates unnecessarily early, so we did small projects that we could quietly finish. Last night I packed a few things, though we didn't have power so it was tough to do much. It seems NEPA's followed us from Obot Ididm because we still don't have power today.

The morning wasn't completely organized as we all were packing, re-packing or taking care of last-minute things. Though, all through the morning someone would mention the time (say, 8:30 AM) and we'd be surprised at how awake we felt, how much we'd gotten done by then, but mostly we were amazed at how much of the day we had left to go. In the course of discussion and conversation, a plan was devised to pack up all of our belongings into a tro-tro and hire it to take us on our final errands—getting lunch, buying fabric, stopping at the Cultural Arts Center and to the airport. We finished packing up, eliminating the things that weren't necessary to bring home and presenting some gifts to Elvis, Matthew and Pastor Mills-Robertson's family (He's the pastor at the All-Saints Lutheran Church in Anyaa whose guesthouse we stayed at). Elvis went to hire a bus (tro-tro) while a few of us took our last African showers. Well, six large backpacks, a guitar (Joshua left his), and 13 djembes (we still had to stop and pick up the final two) later, we were packed into the vehicle. We took pictures with the Mills-Robertson family and said goodbye for the final time. It's interesting, Cross Fire started our tour in Anyaa with Pastor Mills-Robertson and before we left for Nigeria, in the middle of our West-African journey, we were with the man. Now, as we leave, we realize he's seen us in every stage of this journey! And we are grateful for his friendship with us!

First stop—lunch. Our final SFC meal. Joshua went across the street to get fabric, I went with to get some laundry soap—strange, I know. A last, quick run to the Cultural Arts Center along the oceanfront where they sell drums and wood carvings. Matt went to retrieve his drum he'd brought in 2 days before which had just been repaired due to some major damage to the drum head. (It had been stored in Ghana during our time in Nigeria and the drum guys said the damage was due to heat and/or water). Elvis went to purchase a drum for a friend in the States that we would deliver. Matthew and I went to bargain for one more wood carving, I had just 19,000 cedis left—about U.S. \$2.10. I found my friends, Eric, Kojo, and Ahmud, to buy it from. When I was there on Friday, Eric was singing a song and we got to be friends as I asked about it. He gladly sold me the piece and encouraged me to write.

Back to the bus where neither djembe had appeared yet. Matthew went to see how Matt was doing, the replaced drum head had been damaged again and so was once again being replaced. Elvis came back first and we packed it in with my djembe where I'd saved a spot. Then Matt came with his drum, we packed it in his bag and set out on the road again, this time for the airport.

We unloaded our stuff and waited on the sidewalk, security said check-in wasn't until 5:00 PM; it was 2:30. Elvis and Matthew finished up a few journals and the newsletter articles while we waited so we could take them with us. Kathy and I finished a few postcards so we could leave them with our Ghanaians. The others played hearts—we've gotten good at playin' anywhere and anytime, but we've got quite a few unfinished games! When we went inside to check-in, we realized how funny it was. For four months, we've been living simply, with just a bag on our backs, a smaller pack and a few instruments. Here we were now, 6 people with 13 bags, a guitar, and our carry-ons. Within the 13 bags, there were 15 djembes! Elvis and Matthew waited outside the building as they didn't have flight tickets to get past the security man (Squeezy man ;).

We checked our luggage—surprisingly still considerably under the weight limit! Walking back outside, the 8 of us went for one last mineral as Cross Fire 2003-2004. We shared some memories and humor, as a group of 4 Europeans came in. That made things a little awkward because the room was very small for 12 of us to be sitting, there were just that many chairs to go around, and we were going to be saying some tough goodbyes. We read Acts 14: 21-28, reminding us of how

busy our ministry here has been, and how the ministry may change, but our mission will continue in Ghana and the U.S.! Outside again we gathered as a group, holding each other in a tight circle we prayed. We lifted our travels, our plans, transitions, family, health and more to God. We asked Him to protect and guide us. Most of all we thanked Him, for the ministry done here, the fellowship, communion, and friendship we have. Matthew calls us a family. We are. Hugging each other, we said our last goodbyes, and shared our tears. The Obrunnis walked into the office building, leaving our Ghanaian teammates standing, watching at the window. Always watching us, Elvis and Matthew have not stopped caring for, protecting, and watching out for us. This was the hardest part of goodbye for me, knowing that our friends were not allowed to go where we would go. We couldn't slide them though, or give them a backstage pass—this was really goodbye.

I climbed the stairs, waving and blowing kisses until I couldn't see them anymore. Choking back tears, I had my passport, boarding pass and immigration card ready. As I stood in line for the officer to check my stuff. I heard, "So who is not married?" And pointing to me, Becca responded witfully, "She isn't!" I'm amazed I made it this far for how much the girls tried to marry me off! Well, we're not on U.S. soil yet, so there's still hope that they'll get a good deal for me, but, I'll stand my ground! Nothing less than an airplane ticket home—or at least a few goats, that'd make Clay happy, he's been wanting to liberate the goats for quite some time now. So, the officer pushed a piece of paper toward me, "Put your phone number here." No kidding! I had to politely disappoint him saying we didn't have a phone as we were living on the road. So, that's Africa. Praise the Lord.

Rachel Ama

Date: 5/4/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Location: Over France, London Heathrow Airport, The Atlantic Ocean, over Canada, approaching Baltimore

4:30 AM—DING DING "Good morning passengers. We will be arriving in just under one hour..." My first thought of the day is, "I wonder where we're at?" My second thought is, "Hey look! Food!" It's a funny transition time right now. Neither here nor there, home nor away. Sitting in a comfy plane, watching movies, sipping juice, surrounded by people from the home we just left. Rachel lets me know we just flew over Paris. Okay, back to sleep. I'm not sure exactly how I feel about any of this yet.

7 AM—Getting off the plane in London, we crossed that gap between plane and jet way and it was cold! It's a gray, drizzly day. I love it. It's a little preview of home. Walking to our connecting flight, we felt a heater running. Sitting here, it feels natural to be in an airport that feels like a mall, 50 degrees outside, surrounded by white people. It's not the awe of seeing something new, but the relief of something familiar that I feel. But... McDonald's is closed so it'll be fourteen hours until we see another one ;).

12:50 PM—Back on the plane. At the gate next to ours was a flight leaving for Legos, Nigeria. After travelling so far already, to sit in a watching area full of Africans was very comforting. The transition into home is disorienting, but exciting. Okay, time to get some more sleep. I've still got 22 hours of catching planes, going through customs, and waiting in airports. Home sweet home.

6 PM—We're about 2 hours away from landing in Baltimore. I haven't realized it until now but I'm about to spend a whole week away from my team. For the past four months we've done everything together. In fact, only one night the girls and guys stayed in separate homes across town. Otherwise, we've always been next door, down a hallway, or at most a short walk across a compound from each other. I've never had a room to myself, hardly had a bed to myself. I'm going to be lonely. I praise God that our team has gotten along so well. It would have been impossible to do all this alone. By putting our faith in God, He in turn had us put our faith in each other.

We are about to land. Thanks for all the prayers and encouragements over the past few months. In Zephaniah 3:20, God promises to bring His children home. And once again, God is about to fulfill



Becca Leaf

that promise and deliver us safely back into the United States. We still have 3 months of team life, but the overseas portion is over. Our team is about to become something new, shaped by African people, strengthened by God.

Like the last page of a good book, it's time to say THE END. But it won't stay over. One portion may be over, but another adventure is just waiting to begin. Amen!

Date: 6/6/2004

Submitted by: Becca Leaf

Journal Entry:

Wow, it's been a month. Sometimes Africa feels so far away, like a vivid dream or a story someone told us once. But at other times I feel like it was just yesterday and I want to find my way there again, as if I could turn a corner and be on a street in Accra, Ghana, looking for an orange to snack on. I had no problem coming back to life in the United States, checking e-mail, calling friends, and buying things with a price tag once again.



Becca Leaf

Sometimes I'm still in awe of the life I always took for granted before living life in a new way. I was in Denny's over break and the waitress kept refilling my coffee cup. So I kept emptying it. My sister just laughed after about my 5th cup and told me to switch to decaf. I had forgotten most restaurants give free refills for beverages, and in fact usually refill before you even ask. Another thing I forgot about was how much food my parents keep stocked in the house. I got home at about 4am and just snacked for about 2 hours, eating one cookie, a piece of teriyaki chicken, a few Doritos, a small glass of milk, a piece of bread...

A lady I stayed with recently asked me "So what now?" That's a good question. I've got the easy answer of school, work, family, friends, and the great big overview of life. But what about Africa? Where does the last 4 months of my life fit in to the first 22 years? The time I spent overseas was enough to open my eyes to a world I can't even explain or describe. Time will tell if it was enough to change my ways of living, loving, thinking, and learning. For now, we've got about 2 months left as a team and I'm taking comfort in the debriefing I get to do with my teammates during van rides, devotions, and late night walks down memory lane. I'm also relieved I've got a God to turn to who is also the God of all those people in Africa and the one who will continue to affect others through me, no matter where I'm at in this world.

Date: 7/16/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

Wow, yes, we are alive, and very much on the move here in the Southeast, United States! It's now the 9th hour of our trip from near Knoxville, TN and we are currently on our way out to Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. Though the year is winding down, we are still having fun together, hanging out with new people, reuniting with friends from the fall, and encouraging one another in our plans for the upcoming months.



Rachel Haabala

Sometimes I reflect on the similarities between our ministry here in the States and what we experienced overseas. We've had the opportunity to enjoy the ocean, experience the local foods, take part in holidays (we were in Ghana for their Independence Day, March 6th, and in Sarasota, FL for the US Independence Day) and be blessed by the hospitality and generosity of people we meet.

After our first stop in Sarasota in early July, I was experiencing some swelling in my ear and it got to

be a little painful. By the time we got to Orlando on July 6th, things weren't looking good. After a program, our contact introduced me to a member of the church who happened to be a doctor, I was amazed at her care and generosity, she called in a prescription for me to pick up that night so I wouldn't have to be in pain. Similar generosity was extended to Kathy just last night, we were staying with another doctor and she brought home a gift for Kathy unexpectedly. This generosity reminds me of the people of West Africa. We were provided for in many ways; in Accra, Ghana, Ben gave us his time by driving us all around the city, sometimes in the church vehicle and sometimes in his personal vehicle. In Jos, Nigeria, Joshua was given medication out of the offering of the missionaries we met there. In many places, people presented us with refreshments, food, clothing, and other gifts to show their appreciation. We continue to see the appreciation of our own American culture when our needs are provided for, when a host family brings us into their home, or when a church body decides we need a fun day and we get to go to the local attractions.

Just the other day someone mentioned that Cross Fire ('03-'04) had been together for 11 months. It made me realize that I'd spent a good 320 days with these 5 people, and 112 days with Matthew and Elvis. Looking ahead, we only have 30 days left until we move on. It's amazing how short our ministry interacts with one area, yet, the impact is felt through eternity. "What you do now echoes through eternity" is a quote my church back at college has embraced and instills in the people there. It's true, the people we have met I will remember through eternity.

God's Blessings to each of you!
Rachel

Date: 7/16/2004

Submitted by: Rachel Haabala

Journal Entry:

I wanted to give you a view of what we've been doing on the road here too! So, here it goes! Put your seatbelt on, we're taking a whirlwind tour and you're sitting in our van!



May brought on the beginning of lots of traveling. We went from Baltimore, MD to Harrisburg, PA where we met up with Matt's teammate from CFNW last year. Some of us went to Hershey, PA where we got to take a little tour through Chocolate World. We found out that they import some of their cocoa from Ghana, which is a large cocoa producing country! We moved on to Kathy's church, where we got to meet some of her friends and reunite with her family. In Ohio, Cross Fire stayed with a 2 pastor family and became part of a long standing Youth Encounter legacy. This home houses teams every year. The team got it's fair share of Midwest weather when we stayed in The Heartland of Missouri and experienced the threat of a tornado! Reuniting again with a beloved family, we stayed with Jennifer Jarvis' (from Kindred) parents on our stop in Tennessee! Illinois was our next stop and we were surprised to find a note at the church from a visitor who had missed us by a day. We would catch up with him again when we were in Valpraiso where we camped out with the Camp Creation VBS and stayed in one place for nearly a week. At Lutheridge Cross Fire reunited with Matt's family and the spirit of summer camps. It was my first week at summer camp, and though I wasn't a camper, I certainly experienced the magic of outdoor ministries! In Kingsland, GA we experienced the blueberry festival and my family came up from their vacation in Florida to visit us!

Of all the states, we've spent the most time in Florida so far. We zigzagged from the ocean coast to the gulf coast and spent some time in-between. Somewhere in there we shook off the bad weather that'd been following us for a while. Our last stop in Florida was with a YE Alumni in Lake Wales. She and her family live and work in H.E.A.R.T, which stands for the Institute for Hunger Education

and Resources Training. It's a third world simulation village for those who want to experience life in another culture, or for those preparing for missions ministry. We got a tour of the facilities and got to spend a day off away from the busyness of the city. The facilities combined with the program described to us seemed to simulate what we experienced in West Africa well. I bet it would prepare someone well to adjust easier to the culture shock.

Ok, rest your eyes, we've come to a stop for now. We'll catch up again later!

In Christ, By His Grace

Rachel
