

Captive Free East Lakes 2004-05 Journal

Date: 10/4/2004

Submitted by: Amanda Topham

Journal Entry:

The last week of training was awesome and it was so hard to leave behind all the new friends we had made. However, we have quickly realized that there are so many more people to meet and friends to be made. We have officially known each other a full month (as of yesterday) and it's just beginning!! God has done amazing things with putting the 7 of us together – all of our strengths and weaknesses...it just amazes me more and more each day. It definitely isn't always easy, but we work really well together and He has blessed us with loving people around us to help out when we're having trouble.

Our first full family night concert was in the city I was born in, Michigan City, Indiana. It was awesome for me to be there again (and even had some faces in the crowd from my past which was really cool) and the people were amazing. We got to do a chapel Wednesday morning for the high school students then the program Wednesday night. The energy was awesome and I can't wait to visit more cities and hang out with more youth!

I know most of us have been keeping personal journals and it has been really neat to look back on what I've written in the past month and just how much I've grown and changed in just this short period of time. The Lord works in some awesome and mysterious ways. I really feel blessed to be on this team and am so excited to see what He has in store for us this year.

God Bless,
<3 Amanda <><
Hebrews 11:1



Amanda Topham

Date: 10/6/2004

Submitted by: Kerry Boothby

Journal Entry:

October 3, 2004

WOW! It has only been a little over two weeks for our team being out on the road. These past weeks have been so busy. We have had so many family night programs and things, there is no downtime! The team is excited though to stay busy. Our month of October is looking a little bare, but we will get some spontaneous invites to different places along the way which will be cool.

(Holland, MI) Two nights ago, we got to do a family night program at a homeless shelter for families. Some of us were a little apprehensive about being relational with these people, but when we got there they realized that it was not that hard. There were only about 30 people there, but we had such a blast! Some of the churches that we have been to where we have had over 100 people, were not into our program as much as this shelter was. They were so open to worship God with us and participate in whatever they could. I remember this one woman and her way of worshipping. Every time we said something about God or Jesus, she would come out and say, "AMEN!" or "PRAISE JESUS!" or something to that extent. And when Anthony had done his sharing she would just keep saying, "That's right!" or "Teach it!" and things like that. It was just so awesome to see how open these people were to worship with us. Another fun part about that night, was that they knew at least half of the songs that we played! It was fun to have them sing and dance with us.

(South Haven, MI) This morning we lead worship at 8:30am and 11:00am, and in between services we hung out with the high school youth group. They call their Sunday School group "The Breakfast Club", so we did what the name said; we ate breakfast with them and also did a bible study and just sat and talked about many different things.

(Charlotte, MI) This afternoon, we are headed to a "Crop Walk". To my understanding, it's a fundraiser and we are the background music for those finishing up the walk. It should be pretty fun.

(Charlotte, MI) Tomorrow is our day off to relax and chill, or do some work. It will be nice



Kerry Boothby

to have a little downtime, but we are all pumped to get back on the road to see more people and places and such.

Until next time, GOD BLESS!!!!

Love In Christ,

KERRY BOOTHBY

Date: 10/7/2004

Submitted by: Anthony Celia

Journal Entry:

Hey everyone! This is Anthony here and this is my first journal... yeah, yeah I know... very exciting. So, we are in Saginaw MI, home of Youth Encounter's Spoke Folk director Eric Arundel! Actually the guy James and I just had dinner with was his prayer partner during conformation. So, we have been on the road for 10 or 11 days now? But I have been on team for a month and 10 or 11 days, and let me tell you it has been the most life changing month of my life. Physically, mentally, and spiritually I have grown so much and I am only a month into this year of ministry.



Anthony Celia

Physically, well I guess it hasn't been that big of a change but I am learning to eat smaller portions at pot lucks and trying to gain the self control to not munch in the van all day long. Sadly, I have been fighting a cold since we all got to camp for training and that was a month ago! So I guess you can say I am learning to "suck it up and deal" and still give 100% even when I am not feeling great. But I know God will give me the strength to get from day to day. It's awesome, every time I feel like I can't go on He always give me a chance to sleep in or rest in midst of our crazy schedule. So, physically I am doing well.

Mentally? Well am I ever ok mentally? Haha. I have never had so many thoughts and emotions flying through my head all at once as I have for the past month. At times I feel completely overwhelmed and want to crawl into a corner and hide. I was talking to another 'teamer' (Jenny you rock!) about the whole idea of this year long ministry of living in a van with six strangers, forming a band in three weeks, sleeping in a different city almost every night, and spreading the good news of Jesus all at once. What!? Who does that? If you look at most bands they tour for six months and are shot, and they don't have all the aspects of ministry that we do. We finally came to the point that there is NO way that we can personally do that this year. It has to be all God. We have to rely completely on the strength and grace of our Lord Jesus this year. How cool is that? Being put in a situation where you **have** to rely on God in order to survive. This year we have to die to our selves and let the Spirit use us in what ever way He wishes. The thought of that just makes me smile!

I also made some awesome bonds at training with people from other teams. I thank God everyday for those two people. Even though they aren't on my team I know they are going through the same awesome experiences. I know they are just a phone call away to laugh with, cry with, and most importantly... PRAY with! This brings me into spiritual stuff.

I have to admit, this past month has been the hardest point in my faith walk but the most rewarding and growing. When I first got to camp for training I said, "Ok God, go! Do huge things in my life while I am here, show me things, speak to me in new ways... ready... go!" Yeah... that didn't exactly happen how I had planed (How do you make God laugh?...drum roll... Tell him your plans.) The first two weeks of training I did not feel, or hear God at all. I was so frustrated because I was pursuing Him more than I ever had. I was in His word every day, I was always talking to Him, I was giving Him my whole heart, or so I thought. I was getting so upset. Where was God? Here we are in this beautiful forest and I can't find my creator. At camp we had a day of solitude where for 20 or so hours you didn't talk to anyone, didn't listen to or play any music, did nothing but have "Jesus Time." Solitude finally rolled around and I thought this was going to be when God was going to reveal him self to me, this was going to be my big moment. Yeah... not the case, but I did have a breakthrough. These first two weeks were tough for me because I had no way to get hold of my family, no one to vent to and talk with that I truly trusted. Mind you, I have lived out of my house for over a year, but I still talk to my parents multiple times a day; they are my best friends! Now, here I was surrounded by 85 strangers and that is a bit overwhelming. I was thinking about this and this is when God spoke to me. He put the last half of our theme verse on my heart. It is Luke 8:25. It reads, "Where is your faith?" It hit me... God was asking me, "Anthony, where is your faith

this year? Here you are upset because you can't turn to your family in tough times. Are you going to turn to you friends and family this year when you are feeling low or are you going to turn to Me, you Father in heaven, the God who knew you before you where in the whom, the God who died for you? I will always be here for you, I will always listen, and I will always hold you close to my heart. And at times you family can't be there for what ever reason. So who will it be?" I realized I hadn't been giving everything to God; I wasn't turning to Him for everything. I was expecting answers from God, but I wasn't giving Him anything to work with. All my issues where being bottled up inside until I could get my hands on a cell phone that had service.

That afternoon I sat on the dock and poured my heart out to God. I said, "God, here is my baggage, I am checking it at the Gate with you, hopefully you loose it at the lay over, actually you already did... at Calvary." Our God is a God that longs for us to speak to Him, to give everything to Him, to say, "Here, I don't like this pain, this confusion, this bitter taste in my mouth, you can have it," and God says "Thank you, now you can start living the life I have planned for you." Is it easy? Is it fun... haha I wish... no! It is not always easy and fun, but I doubt it was easy and fun for Jesus to let us hammer nails into his wrists and feet.

This year I am learning that with each trial I come across, big or small, God reveals a little bit more of Him self to me. I don't always understand it or like it at that particular moment, but I can always look back and say to my self... ahhh, ok I get it... duhhh! My challenge to you is to look back at your life, not to dwell on the past, but look back and see where God has left His fingerprints... they are everywhere, sometimes you just have to look a little harder. God is awesome. Jesus, you rock my face off!

In His Grip,
Anthony Celia
1 Thess 5:16-17

Date: 10/7/2004

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

Looking back in my personal journal, I cannot believe the things that I have experienced and how I have grown in my faith – and this is only the third week of being on the road! It's crazy how God works. I am definitely learning to trust Him more, and put my full and complete faith in His plans for me, even though I really have no idea what those plans are right now! I'm also learning to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit more, even when there are times that it seems like the world will crumble (or leave me) if I do. Crazy how God works, eh?

Question for you out there in the "real world," and for those of you who are living in vans for the year: how much time do you spend in God's word? The hunger that I have for scripture grows more each day, and I am discovering that I cannot afford to not be studying my bible! I am learning a new level of intimacy with my savior, and I pray that you will find yourself in this close bond and relationship with your creator. God is so cool!

As far as things on the road go, they are great! I am loving my team mates, I really enjoy my job as Life Encourager for my team, and the people that we meet are amazing. This morning we were able to worship with about 40 elementary youth, and it is such a blessing to be reminded to keep that faith of a child. Tonight we have another program at a family center, so I am really looking forward to that. And I was able to put new strings on my guitar today – which hasn't happened for about 7 months, so I am ecstatic! I pray that all is well for you and that Jesus is showing himself daily in your lives. Please keep us in your prayers, and know that God made you special and He loves you very much!

His Instrument,
Theresa <><

"The Holy Spirit is teaching me all things and bringing all things to my remembrance."

~John 14:26~



Theresa Johnson

Date: 10/18/2004

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson
Journal Entry:

Greetings to you all! Right now I am sitting in a can... I mean, a van... heading to Ohio! That's right, we are heading out of Michigan for real this time. I'm sure we'll be back sooner than we think, and that makes me happy. J

God is doing a lot in our lives as we are constantly on the road, jumping from one host home to the next, leaping from place to place. I am constantly being reminded of how badly and deeply I need Jesus. If there is anything that any of us have learned from being on the road so far it is that nothing – absolutely NOTHING – in our lives remains constant except for the love and friendship that comes from our savior. Host homes are blessings that come and go, the batteries in our Discmans wear out eventually, and even the snacks that we are blessed with become stale with time. If you are sitting in your own comfortable home, you know that things in your life are not always constant, either. People leave for one reason or another. Mom's meatloaf in the back of the refrigerator gets that funky (sometimes dancing) mold after awhile. You grow up, changing schools or grades or styles in clothing. Whether we want to admit it or not we live in a world that is constantly changing and growing, and sometimes falling backwards. But Jesus remains constant and consistent. You want proof? Since I can't sit down and chat with you at this moment, I can only point you in the direction of God's word. Matthew 28:20 – check it out! C'mon now, don't roll your eyes at me! Wipe the dust off that family Bible and spend some time in the word!

My prayers are with you all as we continue to run around with our hectic lives. Know that you are loved, admired, and adored, and that Jesus will never leave you, and that His love for you will never change. Until next time, have a great one!

God's Kid,
Theresa <><



Theresa Johnson

Date: 10/18/2004
Submitted by: Anthony Celia
Journal Entry:

Hey everyone! How are we all doing? To all my friends out in California... yeah, I just bought my first winter coat because it is getting cold here in the east lakes region. There may possibly be snow this Friday! Right now in I am sitting in the van. We are leaving Indiana and headed towards Stevenson Ville MI. It is pouring rain and we are about 20 miles off from the directionsJ Well here is my PMS (physical, mental, spiritual) check.



Anthony Celia

Physical... I have been better. I got a spider bite (I am guessing) on my right pink finger and it is now the size of my thumb and it is nice shiny red and very tender. I went to the urgent care center yesterday and the doctor looked at it and said, "Hmm, it looks like it is infected." Wow, it took years of med school to tell me that lol! She gave me four weeks of antibiotics to clear that up along with my sinuses. I know all these health problems I am having is Satan trying to get me down. So I could really use prayers of healing sent my way. That would rock.

Mentally... once again, am I ever ok mentally haha. Each day on the road one more bolt gets knocked loose. Despite my health I am doing ok. I have been homesick the past week. I miss familiar faces and the ocean. There was a rock jetty at Mission Beach in San Diego that I use to go sit on during sunset before I would go to church on Sunday nights. Sometimes I would bring my Bible and dive into God's word or sometimes I would just sit there and watch the sun slowly set under the peaceful ocean. I miss breathing in the salt air and gazing at the pink sky that looked like it was painted. The breeze would blow on my face and it felt like the Spirit was blowing off all the crud of me from that week. Yeah so, I really miss the ocean; the Great Lakes are awesome but no matter how hard people try to convince me how great they are they will never be a substitute form my ocean! I can't wait to go surfing during winter break! I am still thinking about a lot of stuff. I know it is only October but I am already stressing about next year. I have so many options, some easier done than others. I am praying for God to lead me but I know any choice I make will have its ups and downs, pros and cons, pluses and negatives and that what ever I choose God will take care

of me. See, that is the tough part. Whatever I choose. I have the free will to make a choice, I doubt God is going to throw next year at me in a dream that is crystal clear, not saying He won't, but if He did what would be the point of faith, having to trust in the unknown, having to rely on our Creator? Geeze, I have too much time to think and ponder haha.

Spiritually... once again I have too much time to sit and think and over evaluate stuff. So I will try to take you into the crazy twisted mind of yours truly. At the beginning of team we were told we would be going to homeless shelters and places of that sort. I said to God, "God, please don't put me in those places, I am so uncomfortable with that because I have never been in a shelter." You see, I am from teenage suburbia. Have you seen the movie Pleasantville? If you have... yeah, that is where I am from, all white, perfect little neighborhoods. Last week we were at three homeless shelters and one youth correction facility. Funny God, haha! I went into the first shelter so scared. I had no idea what to expect, what to say... oh, oh, this is another good part of the story. The night before we were going to the shelter I was watching the sharing part of our program and God said to me, "You are going to speak about hope tomorrow night at the shelter." Again, funny God! I said ok and started looking up hope in my new bible dictionary and I asked everyone I could what hope was to them. Everyone I talked to said hope was something they could grab, or touch, usually a person that they could rely on or a friend they could trust in. One of my host dads said hope was his daughter, that on days he didn't want to get out of bed he knew he had to because his little girl needed him to.

I was thinking about all these stories people were telling me and figuring out how I could put this into a "sharing." I knew I needed to start with a story from my own life, be vulnerable with the people I was speaking with. So I said to myself, "Self, what is hope to me?" Good question. I wanted to give my Sunday school answer and say "JESUS!" But I couldn't honestly say that. I started to think about my life and when I moved away to college and all the crazy dumb stuff I did (that was only a year ago) I realized at that time in my life I was putting my hope in the world. I was hoping that if I was at the right parties, maybe then I would be cool enough, I hoped that if I had the hottest girl friend, then maybe I would be cool enough, hoped if I made more money I would be more secure. I was sitting there praying about all this and was confused and stressed because I was suppose to get up and teach these people, who have nothing, about hope! Then I got it. I read through Romans and it spoke to me so clearly. Romans 8:24 reads, "But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has?" I realized that when God talks about hope He isn't telling us to put our hope in this world, in the people and things he has so graciously blessed so many of us with. All that can be taken away in a blink of an eye, and everyone at that shelter could agree with that. Then I read Romans 5:5 which reads, "Hope does not disappoint us." Now, some people may say that this is a lie, that they believe in Jesus and love Jesus but they still are suffering, broken, hurting here on earth, that hope has disappointed them! But Jesus isn't talking about a hope here on earth, rather he is talking about a hope, no not a hope, but declaring the promise of everlasting life, that through Faith in Him, Jesus, that all the suffering we endure here on earth will be turned around to greater riches than we could ever imagine, eternity with Jesus, God, the one who made each of us. I am learning that some people will live their entire lives in brokenness, that to this world's standards they have nothing. I have met and talked with these people over the last week and these people have so much hope in our Jesus. They know that if they put their hope in the things around them that it could all fall through over night, but they know that they don't have to hope for a better life, they know that there is a better life promised to them, a life spent with God for eternity in heaven. That is the hope that gets them from day to day.

I don't know if these words are making any sense to you. All I know is that I can't rely on the people in my life to get me through each day. Don't get me wrong; I thank God every day for all the blessing and my amazing friends and families and I know they are in my life for a reason, to help me get from day to day. But they can't do it 100 percent. As much as I would hate for it to happen, my family could be gone tomorrow morning, then where would I be? If my hope is only in them my hope would be gone. But if my hope is in the promise of salvation my hope will never disappear. So I ask you like I asked my self in my last journal, "Where is your faith?" Luke 8:25

In His Grip,
Anthony Celia

Date: 10/18/2004
Submitted by: Rebecca Huf
Journal Entry:

Hi everyone! Wow, I can hardly believe we've been on the road for 4 weeks now! The time has gone so fast. And I would say this has been the most intense 4 weeks of my life. I have learned so much about myself, about God, about people, and about the state of Michigan already. There have been some challenges, but it really has been awesome.

So far, we've been traveling mostly in the Michigan area, which is beautiful! I love it here, except it is a little cold. OK, it is really cold. I have no idea how I'm going to survive winter here! But the people are wonderful. We have met so many people who have been so generous and encouraging, and everyone has been such a blessing to us. It is so fun to travel around and meet all these people who are so different in so many ways, but who are all connected through the love of Christ.

One of my favorite experiences so far has been visiting the homeless shelters. It was a very new experience for me, and so I was a bit apprehensive at first, but the people we've met at the shelters have been some of the people with the strongest and most open faith! And hearing their stories...it was so inspiring.

And my team!!! They rock!!! All of them are so cool, such strong Christians and so musically talented, I feel so blessed to have them as my teammates. We've had some fun times together. And I'd love to write more, but I need some sleep. We were up till past midnight with an awesome group of youth at Hope Lutheran in Farmington Hills, MI, which was so much fun, but just a little tiring! So, I'll talk to you all later!

God bless,
Bec.



Rebecca Huf

Date: 10/26/2004
Submitted by: Kerry Boothby
Journal Entry:

October 25, 2004

We have had a busy weekend. On Friday night we went to another high school football game; it was awesome, yet cold! That same night, we went to a neighboring town for a senior high lock-in. We played pool for a while and then had an awesome worship with them for about a half an hour.

Saturday night, we did a full set worship for about 60 people. Then had another lock-in, but it was both junior and senior high youth. We played a bunch of games, performed our family night program, did a bible study, and then hung out for a while before leaving for host homes and crashing at about 1am. That night was the first night that I have shared my testimony. I never really get nervous talking in front of people. But that night I had a little bit of butterflies. When it was all over with, I felt not so good about it, but a guy came up to me after words and chatted with me for a few minutes and repeated a few of the things that I had said and agreed with them. He shared a few things that has happened in his life to me and hoped that that night one of the kids went away thinking about what I had said and taken it to heart. I hope and pray that someone felt like that.

Sunday morning, we did two full set worship services and in between both of them we did the Sunday School opening. The kids during Sunday School had a blast. They kept requesting the Hippo Song (if you don't know it, find someone who does and learn it! It's awesome!). That night, we went to another homeless shelter. There were not that many people who were there, but it was still fun.

After this last weekend, we were glad today to have a day to sleep. It was fun, but my voice is shot! So today was a good day to recover physically. We have our first Youth Quake in two weeks, in Niagara Falls, NY! I am very excited to go and I am sure the rest of my team is too! We are expecting a lot of people to be there. I know there will be a lot of kids there. A lot more kids we be there than I expect though, which should be very fun. I, being from Oregon, our gatherings are



Kerry Boothby

a maximum of 150 kids. So this should be very interesting and fun for me! I love that age of kids, they are a blast.

At almost every place that we have been, kids will come up to us and ask all of us for our autograph. It is so weird! I just think in my head "Why do you want my autograph, it's not worth anything?!" But I of course humor them and give it to them because it makes their day. I don't know what to say to them other than do what they request, that's the easiest part. But in the words of my team mate Theresa, "Big God, little us!"

Date: 10/28/2004

Submitted by: Anthony Celia

Journal Entry:

10/28/04

Hello everyone! Here we are in Stow Ohio. The weather has been beautiful, kind of like California's weather... I can't believe I just compared Ohio to California! We have had a bit of down time, well that is program downtime. Today we had four hours of rehearsal. We learned a bunch more sing-a-longs for our first gather which is next weekend! I am very excited for that. I have never been to a quake so my team has to show me the ropes. My family hosted Jenny from Kindred last weekend. Hopefully my family didn't embarrass me too much! Everyone said they had an awesome time. When we got to the youth house we are staying at first thing we saw was a picture of my Pastor, Mark Schaeffer (did I spell his last name wrong) haha. It was from the 2002 quake. Crazy, almost every church we go to someone knows him or knows of him.

Well, let's get to some deeper stuff. Last night our team did a cool devotion. I filled the room with candles, a few bibles and song books were laying around for people to read from. Basically we just had a time of praise and worship. The coolest part for me was watching all the flames of the candles dance around. Ready for it.... "that is kind of like God because..." You see the flame never stops moving, even if we all stopped breathing and made sure there was no moving air in the room the flame would still burn, still flicker still dance. It was a reminder to me on how the Holy Spirit is always there, He will never leave us. Even when we can't feel Him at all... He is still there watching over us. Just light a candle and you'll see Him right there, moving around you, dancing, never stopping.

Eventually a candle will burn out, the wick will burn up and bye, bye no more flame*tear* But no matter how many times we burn out, no matter how many times we mess up and try to take control of our lives, no matter how many times we tell God to back off because we have it under control, no matter how many times we try to lead on the dance floor even when we don't know any of the steps God will still be there, holding us close, and dancing with us, begging us to let Him teach us the steps, never stopping, always and forever. That is His promise. Don't rely on the candles of this world because they will burn you at times and will always burn out, but rather, rely on the everlasting flame of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ



Anthony Celia

Date: 10/28/2004

Submitted by: James Brandt

Journal Entry:

Thursday, October 28, 2004

Hey ya'll! How are all ya'll today? Wow, what a great day of work & rest! We got to start the day off with a nice hour of solitude (great for those of us who are introverts!). I got to do some reading, napping, and drafted plans for our new Drum Screen! Note: While we were at Ft. Wayne (ok, WOODBURN) Indiana for Rachael's birthday, we got some really awesome sections of plexi-glass (sp?) donated! Wow, so then we went to the mall for lunch and some shopping before heading back to the church for a really long full set rehearsal. It was really awesome to get some new songs learned and older ones *spiced* up! (got some sweet effects working now!) So while we were rehearsing, some of the youth (Samantha & Tara) from the church came in to listen to us and I got to tell them about Youth Encounter.



James Brandt

Samantha is a senior and looking at the possibility of team this upcoming year! We also talked about Side by Side, Spoke Folk, and Youth Create! They had to go after we were done (Samantha had rugby practice). So we packed up our gear and headed back to the youth house for dinner! YAY Lasagna! And we put in a movie! It was really great to just sit and laugh with the team! A college girl from the church opened her apartment up to us for showers, so most of the girls left to go get clean. Anthony & I, being experienced Spoke Folk'ers, do not need such things as showers as: THEY HAD A HOSE WITH WARM WATER! YAHOO!! So yes, we had hose showers this morning, and will have them again tomorrow morning!! YAY! (Yeah Spoke Folk!). Anyways, time for bed, gotta get up early & try to get some piano (continuous) hinges for the drum shield! Love you guys! God's Blessings

~ James E. A. Brandt
'soundtech'

Date: 11/1/2004

Submitted by: Amanda Topham

Journal Entry:

Hey People,

So, I'm back...It's been an interesting past few days. Since this fall has been so sparse in bookings, we've been doing a lot more shelters and children's homes. It's kind of sad that we haven't had more bookings, but at the same time, it has been really neat to go into all these shelters and see people that we would not have otherwise been able to see or reach. For example, we went to a retirement center in Findlay, Ohio and took a bunch of elderly people shopping at Wal-Mart for an hour then did a program. It was awesome!! Since we have had fewer bookings, we have also had more down time. This has also been somewhat of a double edged sword. We have been able to spend a lot of time as a team and one on one, but we had a couple days last week with no bookings and when we hit the road again we felt so lazy!! The people putting us up and providing us with food and programming have been so amazing, though. God has truly blessed us. I say it is a double edged sword because when we have the excess down time and get into the lazy frame of mind, it is a lot more difficult to get back on the road and to remember why we are really out here. It doesn't take much to come back to us – the smile of a youth's face when a song touches them or a hug from someone after a program...I think these people minister more to us than we do to them.

It has also been really interesting getting to know my team more and more as the days go by. We're not only learning each others quirks, but I know I have learned something new from my teammates each day. Whether it is something new about them or some new way to praise God, it has been quite a ride. I know one thing we have been dealing heavily with on our team this year is spiritual warfare...something I know little to nothing about. I see all the positive things happening as being from God's hand, but I never really thought about what causes the bad things – sicknesses, frustrations, general ickyness. Anthony and Theresa have both given us a lot to think about as far as Satan's involvement in trying to thwart our ministry and it has definitely made me think. For example, the other afternoon we got to one of our bookings and started setting up and our attitudes were in the dumps. There was really no reason for it – we didn't really get lost (we have had issues with being directionally challenged...), we arrived a good hour and a half early, we had slept the night before relatively well...no reason for being upset or frustrated, but most of us were. Anthony – being the amazing team leader that he is – pulled us all together right after we finished setting up and we prayed in a circle. I felt much better after that, but then I was a bit frustrated at myself for being frustrated!! Sheesh. This is the type of thing that is Satan stepping in and trying to push us down, to make us unsure of our ministry, to not share of Christ's love with those we meet. I'm not saying the prayer was an instant fix, but I definitely felt better and the mood of the team greatly improved.

Ok, on to more personal reflections. One thing that has been greatly emphasized for this year is being in The Word daily. I fail miserable at this, I fully admit – whether it be that I left it in the van (again) or that I'm just too tired, I don't read my Bible like I should and like I wish I would. I'm still trying to do it as often as possible and I have found some amazing things when I do take the time to sit down and read. I thought of a new sharing the other morning during church when Bec was reading from Psalms in the service. I know if I just poke around a little more that so many



Amanda Topham

things would jump out at me. I admire my teammates so much for their constant focus on The Word – hopefully it'll continue to rub off on me!! We also have a lot of really neat books floating around the van that we're reading and Anthony and I just bought 2 more tonight. (Our team has an addiction to malls and Boarders...and we continued it this evening!!) Even if I haven't delved into my Bible like I probably should, I have learned so much from the people I've met and the other books I've read that I know my life will never be the same – thank God!! I can't wait to see what else He has up His sleeve.

God Bless,
<3 Amanda <><

Date: 11/11/2004

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

November 8, 2004, Theresa

I am extremely excited that it's my turn to write a journal entry, because I get to write about this last weekend! We had our first "event" of the season in Niagara Falls, NY, with about 200 Jr. High youth. We were rockin' out for Jesus, playing lots of games, studying God's word, listening to an amazing speaker (yeah, Kari Lyn!), heard some great music and sang sing-a-longs with Swen and Dean, and just had a great weekend of fellowship full of little sleep and as much junk food as we could get our hands on. J



Theresa Johnson

A big thing that we all talked about this weekend was how we are all connected, and how each of our lives matter. Kari Lyn (our event speaker) spoke a little on a woman from the Bible named Ruth, who lived a life of truth and loyalty to her mother-in-law, all either of them had was each other. Kari Lyn shared Ruth's story and then opened to the book of Matthew, and at the beginning there is a list of names called a *Genealogy*, which is a record of descendants. Ruth is found in about the 5th verse, giving birth to Obed, who had a son named Jesse, who married and had a son named David, who became one of the greatest kings in history. The list continues, and then you find the name of Joseph, the husband of Mary, who gave birth to Jesus, who is the Christ. What would have happened if Ruth had not remained loyal to her mother-in-law? What if these people had made different choices? Our lives today could very well be extremely different.

Your life matters! Everything that you do has an affect on your life and the lives of others. I remember when I was 12, and I went to my first youth event. I was not in a good place arriving at the gathering. My family had just moved to Odessa, WA, and I was not happy about it. I didn't have any friends, I missed my old school, and my family was struggling. I knew who God was, but I didn't have a relationship with Him, and I still looked at God as something that I did on Sunday mornings with my mom. I went to the Quake, hoping to make some friends with my youth group or maybe see someone from my old home. But God had other plans! I was able to spend time with some guys from Echelon, who were the guest band with Captive Free that year. It was through discussions with them and the friendship that I made throughout the weekend that God made His way into my heart. On November 2, in a Double Tree Hotel, I gave my life to Jesus and have yet to look back ever since. I can almost promise you that if it hadn't been for those people to step out and show me the love of Christ that weekend, I would not be here on team. I would be an extremely troubled person, or maybe I would not be alive at all. I feel very blessed that I don't know the answer to my "what if" questions, and that I am filled with a life that consists of loving on people and living in a van with 6 other amazing contagious Christians.

There is so much that I want to share with you about this weekend! But my time is short! I pray that God is moving in your lives, and that you are seeing daily that your life is significant to the world. Take these words by Swen and Dean to heart:

*Your life is a life worth giving
Your life is a perfect plan
When He looks your way He sees much more
You can know that you are significant to the world*

Date: 11/15/2004
Submitted by: James Brandt
Journal Entry:



James Brandt

Well, it's James alive and well again! After a week of sickness! Yes, I got the flu and some nasty throat congestion! We were in Angola, NY at my friend Bryanna's house (she's my Spoke Folk prayer partner from the Michigan 2004 tour), when I just woke up with the inability to stand or even fully wake up. My throat hurt so bad I couldn't eat! (And if you know me, you would understand just how much of a tragedy that is!) So I was stuck on the floor for that day and much of the next few days. During all that time, my host family was so spectacularly nice and kind! It was not cool to be sick, but it was such a blessing that I happened to be sick in a place that I could stay long enough to get better. They got me some nice soups and crackers to get down, and then when I got better, Pastor drove me all the way to Rochester to meet up with the rest of the team! How's that for awesome? Yeah, they rock! (We get to go back there for Mother's Day (and my birthday) and it's gonna be great!) I was feeling much better then (no more icky flu!), so we spent Thursday night at a nice church in New York that had never heard of Captive Free before. It was awesome to be the front lines in telling them all about Youth Encounter and our ministry! (I love that kind of work!) So it snowed there (not much), but it was really cold. They got us showers lined up at the YMCA across the street, but only Anthony, Bec, and I went- it was so cold! And who wants wet hair? But me, getting over being sick, needed all the showers I could get. Showers are good; they keep nasty germs off of you. So we were not too far from our weekend destination in Altoona, PA, but it took awhile because we were on back country type road, and there was a danger that there could be ice! Yikes! Fortunately, we neither saw nor felt any of the slippery cold stuff, just a good deal of early season snow (and threw a few snow balls- hehe!). We arrived at the Ramada Hotel in the big PA. So, we have become a part of the "Celebration of Life" (the Allegheny Synod ELCA youth gathering) as the house band of sorts. It has been quite interesting- we got shirts! Backing up now, the gathering is to celebrate Luther's birthday. Yes, that's right, a youth gathering to celebrate Martin Luther's birthday. Quite interesting indeed! The weekend should be full of all sorts of fun and excitement- we are supposed to get to see another band of high school/middle school students (their garage band), which should be awesome. But for now, here's James Brandt, saying, "Bundle up, it's cold out there," and "Good day, and God's blessings on you."

Peace be unto you,

James Brandt

Date: 11/17/2004
Submitted by: Anthony Celia
Journal Entry:



Anthony Celia

Hello everyone! It has been a while since I have posted anything. We had our first Quake a week ago and that was so awesome! It was my first one ever, and it rocked my face off. The weather is cold with the occasional snowfall, and let me tell ya... my little California butt is missing the warm Cali weather! We had our day off today in Altoona, PA. I went to the Goodwill, and I am making an out fit for the crazy dress nights at all the Events. I bet you can't wait to see what it is... but you will only be able to see it if you show up... so show up!!

So, I have had much time lately to think and ponder. I spoke with my old roommate the other day, and he had just gotten back from being a nanny for a six-year old boy in Italy for five weeks, and we both came to the conclusion that when you are traveling and have consistent down time, as he did and I do, one finds his mind bringing up stuff one really doesn't want to think about. Not necessarily dark hidden stuff, just stuff you never thought you would think about. I have had so many odd ideas and questions going through my head that I can't even get them out on this screen at the moment. Well, I can try.

I just finished reading *Wild at Heart* for the second time. It is basically a book about

how to truly live as a man of God, what God truly created men to be. I am not talking about "men" as all in all people, but rather men as... well men... not women. Reading it a second time sprung a whole three-ring circus of questions and thoughts in my crazy mind. What is it to be a man? I am 19 and that is a question I must ask my self. "Self... what is it to be a man?" So, after asking myself that question, I have been breaking myself down and examining myself inside and out for the past two weeks. I wish I could say it has been a very pleasurable experience, but it is a painful and sometimes sickening task. It's not fun to see the areas of your life where you are weak and fail continually. Everything from my spiritual life and what I am hiding from God and selfishly holding onto, to personal relationships with team members, family members and friends back at home, to my position as team leader, to dating, to God knows what else. Don't worry, Mom and Dad (who may be reading this), I am not gutting myself and hating everything about myself. Through this process, I am also seeing the areas in which I excel, and I am learning that where I have a weak point, I also have a strong point. But right now, I am focusing on my weaknesses so that I can learn and grow. I think the hardest thing is knowing what needs to be changed in yourself and having some one point it out to you but having no idea how to go about changing it.

For me, it has been letting my feelings dictate my mood and actions. The past week or so, I have been extremely homesick to the point of where all I want is to drive to the airport and catch the first plane to LAX to see the sun set on the ocean and feel the salty air sting my eyes and clear my sinuses. So, basically my feelings have been full of self pity, sadness, and loneliness. I know it's perfectly OK to have those feelings, but I am learning that what is not OK is letting those feelings totally dictate how I act towards my team and God. Living in a van with six other people, I have quickly learned that one person's mood totally affects the entire team in no time at all. If one person is upset... bam -- our entire team's morale drops five points; but on the plus side, one smile can raise the morale back up six points. So, how do I deal with this? I can't just push all these feelings down inside and ignore them because that will do more harm than good in the long run? I pray, but unfortunately God rarely takes these feelings away overnight. As we learned in training, "DEAL!"

My college leader back in San Diego talked about this once. I guess he kinda explained it like this. Say you get really mad... do you express that anger by putting a hole in the wall or do you find another way to express it, whether it be working out, music, poetry, etc.? It's not the anger that is wrong -- it's how you express that anger that is good or bad. So, my struggle is, how do I express these feelings I am having in a way that won't affect my entire team negatively? How do I not "punch the wall" and scare everyone around me? How do I not let my feelings overwhelm me and control me? I wish I knew... ha-ha... hopefully in the next few weeks I can write a journal with some ideas. I know that I will never have one answer because everyone is different, every situation, every emotion is different, so every answer will always be different. But I know that God is always faithful, and I know that with His help I will be able to overcome this obstacle.

So, that is the kinda weird stuff that have been going through my head... don't you wish you were on team! Honestly, I can't thank God enough for where I am right now. Thanks God -- you are awesome!

In His Grip,
Anthony Celia
East Lakes 2004-2005
1 Thess 5:16-17
(That verse may be the answer to my problem!)



Rebecca Huf

Hey everyone! I finally get to write another journal! Rach has put us on a schedule for journals, and I'm the very last one, so it has been a while. And so much has happened! I'm not sure what everyone else has written about, so I'll do a quick overview of the past couple of months...they've been awesome! Especially the Niagara Falls Quake, which was incredible! I can't wait for the rest of our Events!

But in the meantime, today we are driving from Erie, PA, to Crestline, OH, and we are on I-90 for 89.8 miles. I'm not a driver, but I like navigating; it's fun. When we don't get lost. That used to happen a lot, but not so much anymore, now that we use the laptop all the time with its nifty little directions and maps.

Our program last night was pretty fun. We were at a Juvenile Detention Centre for boys aged 11 to 19, half of whom were sex offenders or victims of a sex offense, and the rest were charged with armed robbery or some similar crime. I heard that, and I have to confess that I began to get nervous, thinking that there was no way they wanted us there! But then our contact told us that they were a group that loved praise and worship songs, especially Trading My Sorrows, Lord I Lift, and Amazing Love! So then I had no idea what to expect of them. So, we roll up, and a line of big guys walk out to help us unload the trailer, and my spirits immediately started lifting. Half our equipment weighs more than I do, and I'm getting used to carrying it all, but I love it when I don't have to! For dinner, we ate some of the most delicious chicken casserole stuff and an apple coffee cake that was wonderful. Then everybody came in, a group of around 130 boys and staff, and they were all so respectful and excited to be there, it was great. At first they were kinda quiet and it was hard to get them to clap, but by the end of the program, they were up dancing and clapping and really getting into it.

Why is it that people who come from the most difficult backgrounds and circumstances and who don't really know about Jesus seem to get more excited about our programs than some of the people in the churches we visit? I mean, you'd think that the churches would be excited about what we have to say and play, and since they already know Jesus, that they would be overjoyed at the opportunity to worship him in a fun way! But sometimes they don't seem to want to demonstrate that in front of everybody. It's interesting. The people of the church are wonderful as well, but so sedate compared to some of the non-church people we meet on the road. And I heard someone say the other day that we, as followers of Jesus, should be called the same names he was, and he was called many names, but no one ever called him boring or dry. They would be the last terms one would use when talking about Jesus, so why are they some of the first ones that often come to mind when the church is brought up? Hmmm. It's interesting to think about.

And driving in the van gives us a lot of time for thinking. I don't know how other teams work, but our time in the van is our alone time. We all sit with our headphones on (except the driver and navigator), or with a book and we stay, for the most part, very quiet. Here, why don't you take a peek inside our van right now? James is driving, with his hair all sticking up every which way, and he's just gotten me to set Amanda's little white iPod to play only songs by Tim McGraw, so the strains of his song "My Best Friend" are coming through the speakers in the front, combining with the roar of the huge truck we're passing that's coming through the open windows here in the front. I'm in the passenger seat, happily typing away to you guys. Kerry is in the middle seat next to the window behind James, with her headphones on and her pillow on her lap and her eyes closed. She might be asleep, but I'm not sure. Anthony is next to her, with his headphones on and turned up very loud, as usual, just staring out the window. He'll probably fall asleep soon too. All three of the girls in the back – Rach by the window behind Kerry (which, by the way, is where I usually sit when I'm not navigating), Theresa in the middle and Amanda on the other side – have their headphones on and eyes shut. Amanda has her head on her giant blue satin pillow, and I think she's asleep. Reese is sitting up pretty straight, so I think she's praying, not sleeping. When she sleeps she rests her head on the back of the seat, so that's how I can tell. Rachael has her glasses off and her pillow squished into the corner formed by the window and the back of the seat, and is sleeping there covered by her purple Tinkerbell blanket. So it's very peaceful and quiet right now.

It is raining. It's very grey and wet. Snow is predicted for this afternoon, and the roads are supposed to be icy as we head a bit further south. We've been blessed with weather that is apparently pretty warm for this time of year in this region. I don't know if I could've survived if it was snowing already. It's sure going to be an interesting winter. But I was thinking yesterday as we drove along that I'm actually kind of looking forward to when we get some snow, simply so that the trees have some sort of covering. This is a beautiful area, with so many trees that must be

lovely in spring and summer, and gorgeous in fall, but right now, when they are bare and brown, it's a bit depressing. I think staring out at snow covered trees would be better than empty brown sticks.

I'm sick right now. Did James write a journal about when he had the flu? Well, he gave the rest of the team whatever he had, and I've spent the past week and a half sneezing and coughing and blowing my nose and losing my voice, and now, I'm coughing and coughing and coughing. Not fun. If it doesn't go away soon, I'll be visiting the doctor to make sure it's not turning into bronchitis or some such thing. Don't want to be sick over my holidays!

Speaking of holidays, it's Thanksgiving tomorrow. Now, just so all you Americans know, Thanksgiving is not celebrated in Australia. We don't even have a holiday that is anything like it. So this is all kind of new to me. I've been told about how it started, and I think it's a pretty cool tradition. This will be my second Thanksgiving ever, even though I've been living in Seattle for the past three years. I celebrated Thanksgiving in 2001 with a family from my church, but the past two years I've gone back to Australia half way through November and have missed it! So tomorrow will be fun. We're eating at a church that puts on a huge feast for homeless people or people who have no one to share Thanksgiving with, which I thought was really cool. But now I have to go, so I'll talk to you all later!

God bless,
Bec

Date: 11/29/2004

Submitted by: Kerry Boothby

Journal Entry:

Wow....it seems like I have not written a journal in forever, but finally it's my turn!! This past weekend was really fun and busy. Friday night, we had a junior high lock-in at a church in Ridgeway, PA. I love those; they are always so much fun!! I always meet so many awesome youth! We had a full schedule that night. Mixers and get-to-know-you games started the night off (always a blast!), crafts made for shut-ins were next, and then our Family Night Program. That was fun, but for having about 30 junior highers it was really quiet, surprisingly. We chilled for a while and just got to know each other a little better. Then the best part came -- PIZZA MAKING TIME!!! A man they call the "BAGEL MASTER," who owns a bagel shop that also makes pizzas and such, donated a bunch of dough and toppings so we could all make our own pizzas! How cool is that?! The kids had a blast and so did all of us. They were really fun to see; some made regular pizzas, some were crosses, some were calzones, and others were so unique I could not make out what the heck they were, but they were still very cool. To end the night, we asked the kids what they thought heaven looked like and asked them to draw a picture. The pictures were very cool and very unique. Some of them shared what they had drawn and why; it is so warming to hear kids that young sharing that personal part about them. The next morning we went to a different church and ate breakfast while kids were leaving.

Saturday, we traveled a long four and a half hours to Farmington, NY. It was a very beautiful drive, though. That night we hung out with the Confirmation students from about four different churches. We led some games and mixers and then, when the parents left, we gave them scenarios to act out for us. There were about five groups, and each had a scenario for which they had to make up a skit and a resolution that wasn't "Jesus enters and makes everything okay." They all did very well and had a lot of fun with it. Again, I was in awe of the kids; they were so creative and came up with things that I had never even thought of. This morning, still in Farmington, we did two full set worship services and sang some songs with the Sunday school kids in between the services. They were so fun and cute, but they really didn't like the song "Jesus Loves Me." I hope it was because they sing it so much, but I think it was just because they were kids, he he he! They were fun, though!

And now we are currently in Bemus, NY at a really nice camp. We will be here for our day off until Tuesday. They gave us a cabin with 28 beds in it. Jokingly, I told the lady, "I'm sorry, but that is not going to be good enough for me. You see, I like to spread all of my stuff out everywhere." She just laughed. I would never spread my stuff out anywhere; I am not rude! So we are just chilling and relaxing, which is nice. We only had one mishap today; actually it was something that has



Kerry Boothby

happened once before. Our van and trailer got stuck in the mud again! We were off to try and find something to do, and the van tires just kept spinning and went nowhere. When this happens to you a second time, you just kind of laugh and forget it, which is what we did. We are pulling it out tomorrow so we can go somewhere together.

In these past two weeks, personally, I have been struggling some. I am really questioning a lot of things, which is not always good or healthy. Every day I look at my teammates and am in awe! I couldn't have been placed onto a better team. But when I do that, I compare myself to them. I really question my faith. Sometimes I feel as if my faith is not as strong as theirs is, and I sometimes wonder if I will ever get to the level of the relationship that they have with God. I will strive everyday to be at that level or somewhere near it because I know my relationship with God is and will be completely different than my teammates. I just get frustrated sometimes when they can pull Bible passages from their ears, when they know almost every story in the Bible, when they tell their testimonies and amazing stories about their lives, and so on and so forth. I have been talking with my teammates about it some, which makes me feel better and also helps me understand that I am a very unique person in God's eyes. It's just not always easy, especially when I am not one to take verbal affirmations from people very well. I hope and pray every day for understanding, and I know it will get easier as the days and weeks and years go by.

If you want to see an adult with a child-like faith, well, look at me! I am proud of it and am not afraid to admit it. Being on team is such a blessing from God. I am getting closer and closer to God every day and learning so much from my teammates. Bec: the cute one and the musical one; Theresa: the crazy on-fire-for-Jesus one and the great listener; Rachael: the hilarious one and the one with the amazing voice and the one who has conquered so much in her life; Anthony: the really musical one and a guy with a huge heart and wonderful stories and testimony; James: the genius and hilarious guy and a guy who is growing so much; Amanda: the mom of the team and another funny lady with a good heart; and then there's me.....

KERRY BOOTHBY

Date: 1/19/2005

Submitted by: Amanda Topham

Journal Entry:

Hello to all of you and a happy 2005! My apologies for a late start back up in the journal entries...my bad. Things have been so crazy since we were all to meet back up on December 27 after a much-needed holiday with family and friends. Unfortunately, I was unable to reunite with my team until the 29th because I was out in West Virginia with my grandmother who had a stroke the morning after Christmas. As if that wasn't hard enough, the day I met back up with my crew in Indiana, we got into a fender-bender. Now, this situation sounds pretty bad, but there were so many blessings involved...God truly was there with us in the whole thing.



Amanda Topham

We had dropped the trailer at the church and were going back with the van to pick up our luggage when a truck pulled out of a parking lot right into our path. As it turned out, both passengers in the truck were fine, and everyone in our van (except for some minor bumps and bruises) was fine. However amazing this was, the story didn't end there. God kept holding onto us and protecting us.

Being in this ministry, we don't typically stay in one place that often, but since this was the end of December and this part of the country is known for random, freak snow storms, we had been booked for two nights in Batesville, IN. This was the first night, so we didn't have to travel to another booking the next day, and the guys at the shop where the van was towed spent the whole next day working on it. They pushed aside all other work and fixed our van so we could head on the road again to our next booking on the 31st. It truly was a blessing. Our theme this year on the road is "Calm the Storm," and I think this is a wonderful example for us. Just because we are believers does not mean that life will suddenly be wonderful and perfect. We will still have challenges, we will still have troubles, but we have Christ looking out for us and turning these storms into amazing miracles. There were so many points in that accident that could have been so much worse, but He used this to show us something amazing about His love for us. He isn't going to take the pain or

hardships away every time, but He will use it for His glory, if only we look. I don't know about you all, but I'm much more excited to look around now.

I hope you all had a wonderful holiday with your loved ones and kept Christ the center of CHRISTmas. God bless you all!!

<3 Amanda <><

Date: 1/26/2005

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

January 26, 2005

It has been five months since I met my teammates. I cannot believe that the year is almost half over! I have been truly blessed with six of the most amazing people that God could put in my life.



Theresa Johnson

Kerry is a wonderful woman of God, who can make me laugh at anything – including myself. She shows me what true strength is and is constantly teaching me more about life and what it means to seek true faith.

James... James is an interesting dude! He reflects the more intricate side of who God is, but he also has a heart the size of the planet Neptune! (Well, not literally, but you get the picture!) I remember one of my first one-on-one's with him. Neither of us really wanted to talk, so we were browsing a book store in a little village town. He ended up reading me "The Polar Express," which is one of my favorite stories. Yay James!

Bec is one of my closest friends on this journey. She radiates the love and joy and peace that can only come from Christ, and she is constantly challenging me to grow and learn more about myself and my faith and others. (We also have a lot of fun shopping at the mall... even though we don't have any money...)

Rachael is just obnoxious, in a good way. She has this sense of humor that just breaks barriers between people. She is also striving for a deeper relationship with others and with Christ, and she takes time with others. I'm excited to see where God leads this girl!

Anthony is the craziest, quietest, deepest, most unique Christian dude I have met in my entire life. He's always searching for answers and playing around – not to mention that he is a true rock star for Christ! I love listening to him jam.

Amanda is the final teammate – my sister from another mother! I can confide in her and come to her for advice at any time. And if I need to go off about how much I miss someone back home or anything like that, she's always there.

I miss home and the people there. But this team has definitely become more than just six people in a van to me. They are my family. My new family members whom I will cherish from now until forever. I know that there are days that I forget how blessed I am by them, and I pray that those days will be few. But it's nice to know that as we continue this crazy journey of living together and rocking out for Jesus, we truly are not on the road alone. (Especially since we have Jesus.)

May God bless you out there in the real world now and always!

In Christ,

Theresa <><

Date: 2/13/2005

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

As of today I have been on this earth for 20 years. I have lived two full decades, and God has surprised me every step of the way. I never expected that I would be celebrating this milestone in life in a van with six other people that I just met about 6 months ago. God works in mysterious and crazy ways, doesn't He?



Theresa Johnson

This past week our team has been visiting many shelters, detention centers, and nursing homes – the three places where my comfort zones are challenged the most. I'm just so unsure of how to act, or what to say, or even what they will think of me. And being in these places also makes me wonder... where would I have been without the loving parents and community that I was blessed with? What does my future hold? Will I live long enough to tell some crazy college students funny stories of what I did when I was their age? Birthdays seem to hold questions and challenges, and some truths.

Some of the people that we have met this past week are searching and dying for one thing – love. Maybe they had it once and lost it, or maybe they are still trying to find it. Some of the people I have met talk of what got them into the situation they are in, while others simply sit, motionless, almost lifeless, and you wonder if they are even breathing.

I think that love is what keeps us going. I truly believe that without the love of Christ and the people that He has put in my life I would not have made it to 20. I would not have gotten past birth, let alone see and do the things that I am seeing and doing now.

I challenge all of you to love. And not just those in your families, but truly love those around you. Share a hug or a joke with someone in class. Smile at strangers as they are walking by – you might be the one thing that gets them through their day. When you're sharing the peace at church, shake someone's hand that you don't know. Go visit a nursing home – they are amazing people with stories galore! And most of the time they have no one to share them with but themselves. 1 John says that if anyone loves they are in Christ, for God is love. And if you do not know love, you do not know God.

Know love, know Christ. And maybe you'll make it another 20 years. J

Rock On, Rock Forward,
Theresa <><

Date: 3/11/2005

Submitted by: Rebecca Huf

Journal Entry:

G'day everybody! I just wanted to let you all know that the youth of St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Stow, Ohio are awesome! We just finished doing a program and some games with them, and I'm now sitting in a very comfy couch in their youth house, and it was such a fun night! Their energy and enthusiasm are fantastic! Never lose that excitement for God, guys. It's inspiring and energizing for us to see.

And energy is something we could always use a bit more of. I love life on the road, it is the most amazing and rewarding and God-filled experience ever, but I have to confess that it is very tiring, and I am looking forward to our Easter break in just over a week. It'll be good to stay in one place for a whole week and have my own bed to sleep in and to be able to sleep in for as long as I want! Yay for sleep! Oh, and it'll be nice to be somewhere where the temperature is in the 60's rather than below 30! I like snow, it is very beautiful and it's fun, but I like sunshine better! And that's about it for now. There's so much more I could write, but it'll have to come later, because I'm going to go sleep!

God bless, Bec



Rebecca Huf

Date: 3/12/2005

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

I know that I just had a journal posted not too long ago, but today (also known as yesterday, since it is after one in the morning), was a rough day for me. It started out as any other day on team – we got together after having breakfast with our host families, had our team devotions and time of prayer, and then hit the road for Stow, Ohio. We've visited this church and its youth a couple times before, so we were excited to see some old friends that we've made along the way.

We had tacos for dinner, did our program, and played some games with the youth – they are absolutely amazing! After our evening events were over and my team and I headed back to the youth house where we were sleeping, I decided to call home. In doing so I found out that a woman I once knew, Mrs. Neil, passed away a couple days ago due to cancer. The treatments had stopped working, and she knew she didn't have much time. A pastor had come to spend time with her last night, and after he read her the last verse of Psalm 23, she closed her eyes and took her last breath. That last gift of physical life from her Creator. And like that, she went home to Heaven.

The events of her passing remind me once again how uncertain my life is, and how often I tend to take too much advantage of it by taking it for granted. I don't know if I will wake up tomorrow morning... but I know that when I do, I want to appreciate every moment of it, and I want to live the next five minutes like they are my last. (Even though I tend to not always do that.)

I look back at our Event season, and remember how alive I felt during those extreme weekends; tons of junk food, no sleep, lots of laughter and times of worship and craziness. I will never forget the people that I met during my time on the road, but I will always keep a special place in my heart for those intense weekends with youth and other crazy youth leaders – who still to this day claim to be adults. I pray that the abundant life that I was feeling back then will be renewed in my heart daily. I don't ever want to take a moment for granted again.

~Theresa <><



Theresa Johnson

Date: 3/13/2005

Submitted by: Kerry Boothby

Journal Entry:

Wow! It seems like forever since I have written a journal! Well, you get to see one from me now, finally! Right now we are in Wyandotte, MI. Yesterday we almost got snowed in at a church in Stow, OH. It had snowed about 4-5 inches overnight! It's at least 60-70 degrees at my home in Oregon! But thankfully we got to Wyandotte safely. The youth (about 40 middle school and high school) had already begun their 30-Hour Famine at 6:30 am yesterday morning. By the time we had gotten there most of them were so tired and obviously hungry. We got to hang out with them and play games and such the entire night. Some of my teammates participated in not eating for the full 30 hours, but unfortunately I could not due to getting over being sick.

Those of us who were sick were provided with meals. So when I ate my dinner (Trix cereal), I sat in the kitchen so I would not tempt the youth in any way. Well they decided to join me and be tempted. But instead of just sitting there watching me eat food, there were these two boys who were funny that decided to sabotage my cereal. They took these graham crackers and crumbled them up in my cereal. All in all, it was fun until they all dared me to eat the Trix cereal mixed with the graham crackers. Of course, all in good fun, I was stupid and tried it and I had an upset stomach the rest of the night.

Today we led a service with the youth, and then at about 12:30 we all had a big lunch. I am very surprised that so many of them survived; some of them looked so sick by the end, I felt so bad for them! But when they finally got to eat, they just went crazy--it was awesome! I wish I could have participated in the Famine with them. I have done them before and had a blast. In previous years of doing so, I learned so much, and I hope the youth who did this weekend did also. For me the Famine is the smallest thing that we can do compared to what Jesus sacrificed for us! He sacrificed so much by taking the sins of the entire world on Himself to save us! We never realize how blessed we are until something of value is taken from us. Food is such a necessity to life, but we as Americans take it for granted all of the time. There are so many people starving in this world, yet we can have food in our cupboards and say that there is nothing to eat. If you ever get the chance



Kerry Boothby

to participate in any kind of Famine, take advantage of the opportunity to sacrifice that little something for a few hours. There is a lot to learn from doing Famines, and I hope one day you all can experience one.

Today we head off to Detroit (only 27 minutes away--long drive!) for the week to help out in soup kitchens, hang out with inner city youth, and show God's love to people less privileged than ourselves. We will all learn a lot this week, and I hope it will be a time that none of us will ever forget. It will be a good way to end the second part of the year. Next week we all get to go home and see our families and tell them all about our experiences and travel stories.

So that is what has been happening as far as our itinerary goes. As for myself, I have been a little down lately. I have learned these past few months how much the weather can really affect someone's mood. I love the sun and we have had so much snow and gray skies, I get kind of tired. Sometimes I feel as if I can't go on and I just need a break. I pray as much as I can to ask God for the strength to get healthier and happier so I can show His love to others to the best of my abilities. After I pray, I sit there in silence and think of how I can better myself to get more strength to do the things that I have been called by God to do. All I keep feeling is that I am being so selfish. I keep thinking about how I can better myself by just taking a break from all this. But all in all, I need to keep thinking about how much Jesus sacrificed for me and the rest of the world. He never quit, and I shouldn't either. That can sound harsh to myself and others, but it actually does keep me going. So, yes, I have my down days, but I know I can finish out the year with a happy servant heart because I know that it will be worth it!

Love in Christ,
KERRY

p.s. – HAPPY EASTER!

Date: 3/16/2005

Submitted by: James Brandt

Journal Entry:

We (Anthony and me) began yesterday at 4:30 AM!! It was our day to prepare breakfast for the people of the shelter. The shelter program of this area is made up of several churches, each of which will agree to turn part of their building space into the physical shelter building for one week out of the year. Thus, someone needed to get up to make breakfast, and it was our day to do so. After breakfast (pancakes, sausage, donuts, eggs, and cereal), the team had a team outing. Now, we had originally planned on going to the African American Museum, but found that it was only open Wednesday-Sunday, and it being a Tuesday, we were out of luck for that venture. But fortunately, right next door was the Science Museum (and with valid AAA membership you get a discount on admission). So we were able to instead go there. It was awesome! We traversed the museum for an hour seeing all sorts of things. There was even a place where you could 'jam' with the instruments they had set up; however, they were horribly out of tune, and we decided it just wouldn't be fair for us to go and 'try and make a song' in front of everybody (as the banner advertised) because we were already a band. We saw some cool tricks with light, electricity, and sound! (Neat stuff for an electric band!) After the hour, we went and saw an IMAX movie- Volcanoes of the Deep! It was really fascinating! (And all of this was less than \$10 per person!) We had a great time, with not much money invested!

All in all it was a great day to spend with my team! After the museum we went back to church to help with dinner (fried chicken & fixin's). It went great, and we did a short concert afterwards, which was greatly appreciated! Well, today we have planned to go to the African American Museum, so for now, have a happy Wednesday and look forward to the rising of our Savior upon Easter – coming up soon!

James Brandt

~ A/V Tech, Captive Free East Lakes



James Brandt

Date: 3/17/2005

Submitted by: Anthony Celia
Journal Entry:

Hey everyone. So, we are in Detroit for an entire week! Yes, that is a right; we are in one place for an entire week! We are here for our multi-cultural week, working at a shelter here at the church. We all take turns at serving breakfast at five in the morning, and we all help serve dinner at night. We did a short concert a few nights ago, and today we are playing with the daycare kids from the church and doing a concert for the kids at the school. It has been a very cool experience. The church we are at is in one of the wealthiest parts of Detroit but is surrounded by one of the most deprived neighborhoods in the nation.



Anthony Celia

We have been able to do a little sight-seeing. Yesterday we went to the African-American Museum, which was very interesting, and the day before that we went to the Science Museum and got to see an IMAX movie on underwater volcanoes. All in all, this has been a great week and a great way to end this leg of our tour before Easter break. God has shown me a different part of our country that I have never experienced before. I have learned a lot, and my eyes and heart have been opened a lot; I am so thankful for all I have been blessed with.

In His Grip,
Anthony

Date: 3/19/2005
Submitted by: Amanda Topham
Journal Entry:

Hello all and a blessed day before Palm Sunday! We are still hangin' out here in Detroit, Michigan. The homeless people have moved on to the next church in the rotation and things are kinda quiet. It has been such an awesome week that it's sad to think we will probably never see them again this side of Heaven. We've done programs at shelters before, but this week has been vastly different. We weren't just around for an evening, we got to come in and see these people every morning (ok, so we each did only one or two mornings – 5 am is early!!) and again in the evening to serve them dinner and just hang out with them.



Amanda Topham

Even though I had talked to our contact prior to getting here on Sunday, none of us really knew what to expect this week. Everything is so different from what we have done thus far, and some of us were a bit wary about a week with homeless people—not sure how to relate, what to say—but I know we have all benefited and grown. I think we've also grown as a team. We are all a bit worn (it's been a long week), but we have spent much time together as a team, hanging out and doing stuff and just enjoying each others' company. We went to two museums (the Science Center and the African American Museum) as well as saw an IMAX movie (at the Science Center) and even caught the new Vin Diesel movie. It's been a jam-packed week, but a week we will never forget. As for me personally, the homeless people we have encountered on the road have never ceased to amaze me. The stories they have and the ways God is working in their lives, the unwavering faith. Too often, we see what we don't have and get mad at God for it, but they look a lot more to what they *do* have and how thankful they are for that. There is one guy I met this week—actually our first night here—who has just gotten out of prison. He had quite the story. He wasn't in the shelter program because he had no home or place to stay, but he chose it. He could've stayed with his brother here in town, but that would put him right back into the place he was when he was sent to prison seven years ago. He doesn't want to risk getting pulled back into that lifestyle. He is on his way up to Flint, MI to see his wife (he even showed me his bus ticket J). He knows where he's been and doesn't want to go back, even if it means living in shelters for a month or so instead of with his own brother. He went on and on about how good God is and how Satan looks for anything he can to get into your life and steer it away from God. It was so neat to talk to him all week. He, as well as a few others, also helped out around the church cleaning and offering to help with dinner or the clothes closet (donations of clothes for them to look through and take), to help give back. That was the attitude of a large number of the people here—to be thankful and wanting to return that any way they could.

I wish we had more time here so that I could hear more stories and get to know some of the people

even better, but our time here is almost up. We fly home tomorrow for Easter break, and I know we are all more than ready, but part of us will still be here in Detroit with the amazing people we had the privilege of meeting this week.

Date: 4/9/2005

Submitted by: Amanda Topham

Journal Entry:



Amanda Topham

Hello everyone! Just updating you all on a little bit of what we as a team have been up to recently. We've actually had the past two days off, so we've been in a youth house together and have gotten a lot of work done, which is good. We also did a team outing last night and went to a roller-rink. Wow, does that take me back!! It was so much fun hanging out and goofing off as a team while getting exercise, but it also got me worried about the state of our youth. OK, time to slip into being a psychologist (that's what my undergrad degree is in). It was a bit depressing knowing that I was probably 10 years older than most of the kids there, but that wasn't what worried me.

The music they were playing didn't surprise me, but it frustrated me. Now I understand that music is an expression, and I have no problem with that or with songs that were written as an expression of that artist or whatever. However, there are lots of songs that do not have the F-word as every other word that could be played at a place that is mostly populated by 8-15 year olds. Granted, to give the DJ credit, they were the edited versions of the songs, but it didn't matter. The kids filled in the missing words at the top of their lungs. Again, I know it is expression, but do they have any idea what they are "expressing"? A lot of the songs had great beats for skating and such, but it just seemed excessive. It probably would not have registered as much with me either had I not seen the actions and body language from so many of the youngest ones. As Kerry, Anthony and I took a drink break over in the snack section, I saw a young girl, maybe 10 tops, practicing her "grinding." That flat out scared me.

Seeing this made me wonder what we as a team are doing. How can we battle this prevailing trend? I know it is possible for people to appreciate music and where it came from and enjoy it without following what the words say. A couple of the songs that were played I have on my iPod, and Kerry knew a lot of them and enjoyed them. However, when these young kids are listening to the messages of the songs and taking them to heart, what then? That age group is so malleable. Now, I know taking those songs or whatever out of the roller-rink won't do much, if anything. The kids will still listen to them elsewhere. They will still see it on TV, they'll still see it in movies--those messages (mainly having to do with sex) are so prevalent in our society that there is almost no escape. What can we do as Christians? As "youth" out on the road? I don't know that there is really an answer, but I know it's something that I'll be thinking about for quite a while.

I think this is a main reason I want to work with youth as a career. I want to be there to help guide them and show them that expression is one thing, but just because you see it or hear it doesn't make it right. I hope we as a team are showing another side to the youth we meet out on the road this year. I hate the fact that when we do lock-ins and youth nights and such we don't get a lot of time to just hang out with the youth. We have programming and then have to get some sleep so we can make it to our next booking. However, I hope that even with the little amount of time we have, we can plant that seed, give them something to think about, maybe even learn from our mistakes. I hope and pray that a difference will be made and fewer kids will fall into this junk that society keeps throwing our way. I encourage you out there to pray for your youth as well. They are the future, and they are the present

1 Timothy 4:12

Peace,

<3 Amanda <><

Date: 4/9/2005

Submitted by: Anthony Celia

Journal Entry:

Hey everyone! It has been a long time since I have posted a journal. I am so excited that the snow is gone (for now). I never realized how much the weather affects

me. I can say and truly mean it that I don't like snow at all. At least I can say I lived through one real winter, even though all my host families told me this was a mild winter. If this was mild I don't EVER want to see bad. Ha ha. We have had a relaxing past few days. We have been hanging out in a youth house in Northville, MI. It has been a refreshing time and a good time for all of us to grow closer as a team by having time to just play together. Today we have a whopping 15 minute drive to Farmington Hills, MI where we have a Family Night Program and a youth night.

God has been working on me a lot lately and teaching me some good lessons. We sing and talk about God's love every night. We tell people how He wants a passionate relationship with them, and His love will never fail. Sadly, on the road, it is so easy to forget that, and it just becomes routine. Sometimes I feel like I always have to put on a smiling face all the time no matter what, and if I do not, I am letting God down. But after lots of prayer and some reading, I am finally realizing for myself how much God wants me. Not just the smiling "everything is great" Anthony, but rather he wants me the most in my darkest and hardest times. It is not always easy to go to God when I am hurting, feeling lonely, angry, and tired. So many times I want a quick fix, but those things leave me empty and dry and feeling just as lonely as before a few short days later.

I am hearing God calling me into a deeper and more passionate and honest relationship than ever before in my faith walk. It is scary responding to that call. But my prayer is that I have faith like Peter and trust that it is Jesus calling me out of my little comfortable boat. I just need to have faith that God will be right there with me holding out his arms when I start to doubt again and start going under. We will always have doubts as humans. And God wants us to embrace our imperfections such as doubting so he can use that weakness to show us his power, and love. Do you hear God calling you out of your boat?

In His Grip,
Anthony Celia
Great Lakes, Great Times



Anthony Celia

Date: 4/12/2005

Submitted by: Kerry Boothby

Journal Entry:

Hello all! It's so weird how I get to write another journal so fast; we finally got the hang of the rotation after our eight months on the road, lol! Wow, we have really been on the road for eight months?! I feel so old! It has all gone by really fast. But there are plenty of good things that happened, and I don't regret anything that I did; this has been a great life-changing experience so far, and there is still so much more that will happen to myself and the rest of the East Lakes team.

Lately though, I have been struggling a bit. I have had a streak of bad luck this past week, and it doesn't seem to want to stop. These past few mornings I have woken up and felt wonderful, but then a few minutes later something goes wrong and I don't know why. I have been praying so much in these last couple of weeks because I know the only one who can really fix all of this is God. But I seem to keep on getting the silent treatment. I believe that everything happens for a reason, but what is the reasoning this time? I haven't gotten an answer yet, and I most likely never will. God likes to work that way in my life a lot. And when I don't get an answer, I know that I am supposed to learn something out of all of the bad stuff on my own, meaning that God is trying to teach me some sort of lesson, but I can't seem to figure out what the lesson is. So, all I can continue to do is to pray and give it all up to God, because in the end He is the one who will fix my brokenness. I still keep thinking about something that one of my teammates said. They said that I don't deserve any of this at all. Well, if I didn't deserve any of it, then why is it happening to me? But I like to look on the bright side of things and try and remember that God is working through me in this time. He works the hardest in us when we are broken and give it all to Him.

A couple of the churches that we have been to have been starting this program called "The 40 Days of Purpose". I haven't figured it all out yet, but I do know that it's supposed to help your congregation come closer together as a community in Christ with one another. This last church that we were at was giving out the books for free, and they asked for a five dollar donation if you wanted the journal too. Well, since I have been wanting to know what my purpose is for sometime now, and the purpose of this past bad luck streak for me, Amanda and I decided to start reading it



Kerry Boothby

together. They recommend that you read it with someone so you can discuss any of the questions that you might have. So we just started reading it a few days ago, and we agreed to meet once a week to discuss it. We are only on day four, but I know the both of us have plenty of questions to ask each other and things to say about the book and the writer. I am glad that I decided to do this. Ever since I started the book, I have been confused, but it's a good confused. This book makes you think in ways you never thought to think about different situations. I strongly encourage you all to read it with someone and discuss it with each other or even get a small group together. I know that they have materials for this for small groups too. Or if your church is doing this, then get involved. Especially if you are feeling broken and really are curious about what your purpose here on earth is. I can tell that this book is going to help me a lot in some ways, and I hope it does the same for you.

Today I have been feeling a little bit better, though. The weather is getting better, which is really good for me because I live off of the sun's energy most of the time. I am just stuck in a rut, but this is the time I really need to stick to praying and giving all my problems and worries and such up to God. My teammates have really helped me through this rough spot that I am going through because most of them went through the same thing, and I am sure other teamers have been through the same thing also. They are my rocks and my family this year, and I would not be able to do this year without their love and support through especially the toughest times when Satan is trying to get us down. You know you are doing good works for the Lord when evil strikes you and tries to break you down. But I won't let it happen! Yes, I am in a rut and need help and prayer, but I know my Jesus will get me out of this mood and mindset soon and show me the meaning and the way. We are doing good things this year in His name. And we will continue to do them for all eternity!

Love in Christ always!!!!

Kerry

Date: 4/16/2005

Submitted by: Rebecca Huf

Journal Entry:

Hi everybody!

I've been promising Theresa for a week that I'd write a journal, and we're on I-75 for forever, so I have nothing to distract me, so I can finally get this done! Guess what! It's sunny! The weather here in Michigan is gorgeous! Still slightly chilly by my standards, but after the winter we just had, I am not complaining at all. The sky is so blue, and the sun is warm and everything is turning green and flowers are coming up and it's all so beautiful! And guess what else! I went and played laser tag for the first time ever last night! It was awesome! We went with a fantastic group of youth from Trinity Lutheran in Clinton Township, MI. They were more enthusiastic about the Pasta Song than anyone I've ever met! They came up with the craziest things, like cannolis and quadratic equations and dingoes and llamas and pomegranates--it was so much fun! The first group ever to request that song as an encore. So hi to Jenna (you'll be a great teamer!) and Angelica and Jon and Thomas and Alex and Matt and all you other God-crazy youth! Thanks for blessing us last night; it was truly wonderful to hang out with you all.

Detroit is an interesting city. I've never been someplace like it before. We're just driving over a bridge that provides a good view of the city, and it has so many factories, and it is quite dirty, it's almost a depressing sight! But I like it. We've stayed here a lot recently, and it is just so interesting--the people, its history, its culture--it's so different from what this sheltered little Aussie is used to.

Want to know what I've learned the most about so far this year? Love. I don't mean the fluffy feel-good kind; I mean the hard-core-dedicated-sticking-with-someone-no-matter-what kind of love. I've always spouted off the whole "Love isn't a feeling, it's an action, a choice" thing, but I've never understood it as completely as I do now. I'd always thought of myself as a fairly loving, caring, accepting person, and I guess I always was, but I've been challenged and stretched and taught so much more here on team. From learning to really listen and striving to understand someone when you just feel like yelling, to learning each teammate's love language and how to speak it (harder than you'd think!), to training yourself to not judge the people we meet every day, but to look



Rebecca Huf

deeper inside them and their situations and accept them and give them our best no matter what, it has been a long, difficult journey that is so worth every step of the way. I imagine God'll always be training me to love more like He does, but I can honestly say I have a much deeper understanding of it now than I did eight months ago.

Well, our exit is coming up soon, so I'd better go! God bless you all,
Bec

Date: 4/18/2005

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

This has been one heck of a weekend! We had a lock-in the other night with an amazing youth group, and they even took us to play Lazer Tag with them! It was my second time going, and I placed twelfth out of 30 players... woohoo! But I think I had more fun just enjoying the company of a few chaperones and some youth. It's just cool to see how God is working in different people's lives, and it was nice to have someone to share our ministry with again. I never get tired of telling people about what we do or the interesting places we go and the people we meet.

In six weeks or so we have our extended weekend for Memorial Day Break, and then it's time to get ready for VBS! I am really looking forward to that time of our tour. The last three summers for me have been filled with nothing but camp, counseling, and hanging out with kids. So I'm thinking that VBS is definitely my element. The only scary thing about our VBS season coming is that we only have four months left of this year. I cannot imagine my life without my teammates any more! They're just super...

Anyhoo, this is one of the shorter journals that I've ever written! But maybe I'll write another one soon. May your days be blessed and filled with Christ! PEACE!

~Theresa <><



Theresa Johnson

Date: 4/22/2005

Submitted by: Amanda Topham

Journal Entry:

Hello all, it's me Amanda again. Just sitting in the back of the van, so I thought I'd write a little note to let you all in on our crazy life. Things have been fairly normal--for us, that is. We got to stay back at a youth house last night that we've stayed at a couple times thus far, so it was really cool seeing the youth group again. We got to go out to dinner with them at this really neat little Italian restaurant. It's always cool going back to a place we've been before--it's like a little taste of home. Thank you all for being our support through this craziness for God.

Along with seeing familiar faces and doing some cool programs, I've also been battling being sick. It isn't anything specific that I know of, just random symptoms (right now I'm coughing up a lung on a regular basis), so it's just one of those "let it run its course" things, which is fabulous when you are in a different person's house every day. It's just another one of those things--without the valleys there couldn't be any peaks. We've definitely had our share of both, so it has been an amazing ride. May you all continue to be blessed by the One that we're out here for.

God Bless,
<3 Amanda <><



Amanda Topham

Date: 4/28/2005

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

Today is kind of a rough day. I can't tell you why... it's just one of those days, where everything just seems so far away. Just like you, at home, have those days that aren't

the best, we on team have those days that just make you want to crawl into a hole and not come out for a while. I kind of woke up feeling that way, and I have come to the realization that the reason why I feel this way is because I am homesick. For the first time in my life, I'm homesick. I never imagined that I would miss my little town where everyone knows everything about everyone. I never imagined that I would long to put dishes away, fill my cat's water dish, or clean my brother's stuff up in the bathroom that the three of us kids used to share.

I miss my friends and my camp that I truly call home, Lutherhaven. I miss my parents. I wish that I could have a hug from my sister, and more than anything I want to watch my brother play a game of baseball. This is the first year I won't be there for that. I want to attend my church and spend time with my Sunday school kids. I would love to see my boyfriend, Kelly, give him a hug, and play a game of Mexican Rummy with his folks.

And I'm even "homesick" for some of the host families that I've been with. I want to see our families in the Detroit area, especially the Papke family. I want to find out how my host moms who have been expecting babies are doing. I would love to see if some of the youth groups that my team and I have met along the way have been challenging each other in life and faith since Event season or lock-ins.

But GOD has other plans.

My job this year is to keep going, no matter how homesick I am. I remember when we were talking with a friend, Kari Lyn. She tells great stories, and when she was speaking once she told a story of when she was tired on team. During a concert she saw a young girl's heart get hit with the message of being a child of Christ, and it reminded Kari Lynn that there are so many people who need to hear about Jesus, or simply be reminded of the things that He has done and is still doing. So, I can have an off-day. But I need to take hope in the promise that God is with me, and when the time is right He'll take me home. There is just too much work left for me to do here on the road for the next four months! I will play cards, receive hugs (and return them!), see games, have chats over coffee, and I will be able to return home. But until then, I will hold onto Christ, my true source of home.

Don't get me wrong... I love my teammates, and I love this adventure that God has blessed me with. But my heart misses those with whom I used to spend all that time. Someday I'll see them again. God, thanks for the adventure. I pray that I can have patience for Your plan. I leave with you all the lyrics to "Homesick" by Mercy Me. God bless, you guys.

Theresa <><

You're in a better place, I've heard a thousand times
And at least a thousand times I've rejoiced for you
But the reason why I'm broken, the reason why I cry
Is how long must I wait to be with you?

I close my eyes, and I see your face
There's holes where my heart is, and I'm out of place
Lord, won't you give me strength to make it through somehow?
I've never been more homesick than now

Help me, Lord, 'cause I don't understand your ways
The reason why, I wonder if I'll ever know
But even if you showed me, the hurt would be the same
'Cause I'm still here, so far away from home

I close my eyes, and I see your face
There's holes where my heart is, and I'm out of place
Lord, won't you give me strength to make it through somehow?
I've never been more homesick than now

In Christ there are no "goodbyes"
And in Christ there is no end
So I'll hold onto to Jesus with all that I have
To see you again, to see you again...



Theresa Johnson

And I close my eyes, and I see your face
There are holes where my heart is, and I'm out of place
Lord, won't you give me strength to make it through somehow?
Won't you give me strength to make it through somehow?
Won't you give me strength to make it through somehow?
I've never been more homesick than now.

Date: 5/5/2005

Submitted by: Anthony Celia

Journal Entry:

Adoration

By Anthony Celia

O Lord, our Lord
How majestic is Your name in all the earth! Psalm 8:1

Lord, You made the stars in the sky and the rolling seas
You control the wind and the rain with a motion of Your mighty hand.
You give the sun light and heat to warm us when it is cold and dark.
You gave us the moon to remind us how to reflect Your light in this world just as the moon reflects the light if the sun.

And still, You made me?

You made mountains that shake in honor of Your glory,
Shooting stars that wipe Your sky clean
Waterfalls to show your powerful, overflowing, abundant love.

And still, You made me?

You made all the creatures of the earth, sea, and sky.

And still, You made me?

Even in all Your creation which You have made, and said it was good
In all the awe inspiring features of this universe, the seen and the unseen
You still love one thing more than all the rest.
You traded Your perfect love
Your blood was shed on wood and nails,
Mixed with sweat and dirt,
Scarred by thorns and chains
Mocked
Spit upon
Disgusted
Tormented
Abused
Humiliated
Denied three times,

Still, You love me?

You have conquered death itself
Even death cannot separate me from You.
Even if I were the last living creature in all the land,
Nothing would have stopped You.
Nothing!
How can I not dance and sing?
How can I not rejoice in this act of true love?
How can I not love my brother?



Anthony Celia

How can I not give You my all every waking moment?
I try and I fail
But you see my heart, O God!
You know my deepest desires
That is why You choose to die for me.
How precious is Your name!
For You are the greatest lover!
For You are the greatest romancer!
And You are my God!
How amazing is Your holy and precious name!
Father, Spirit, Son
Three in One
Amen

Date: 5/10/2005

Submitted by: Rebecca Huf

Journal Entry:

Yay for warm weather!!! I love, love, love spring and summer! Life always seems so much better when the sun is shining and the sky is blue. Now all I need is an ocean with a nice beach, and life would be absolutely perfect! And all I need to do is wait four more months, and I'll have that! Although I won't be able to share it with my teammates. Can you believe we only have three months and three days left? Wow. Hey, that means that in three months and one day, I'll be 19! Cool! But it's kind of depressing to think about this year ending. What'll I do without my teammates?

They are such a big part of my life now. But I know I am definitely ready to head on home to Australia. I love the USA, and a part of my heart will always be here, but Australia is home. I long to be surrounded by that accent again, and to eat normal bread and biscuits (not cookies) and scones (not biscuits), and to say temperature in Celsius instead of struggling to translate it into Fahrenheit first, and oh, to be on the beach again....mmmm, that'd be so good. It was exciting last night; Corey from New Vision (the team that goes to Australia) called me because they'd just arrived back in the States, and he already wanted to hear the accent again! And I found out that they went to one of my old schools, which is really weird.

Hmm, what else to write about? My brain doesn't really feel like thinking deep and meaningful thoughts today, there's too much sunshine for that. But I feel like I should be writing words of wisdom. Oh, saved by the battery--the computer battery is running low, so I've gotta go before it crashes. So, everybody take care, and keep on living loud and proud for Jesus, and I leave you with way better words of wisdom than mine:

Psalm 100

Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
Come before Him with joyful songs.
Know that the Lord is God.
It is He who made us, and we are His,
We are His people, the sheep of his pasture.
Enter His gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise;
Give thanks to Him and praise His name.
For the Lord is good and His love endures forever;
His faithfulness continues through all generations.



Rebecca Huf

Date: 5/11/2005

Submitted by: Rebecca Huf

Journal Entry:

Bec's Words of Wisdom for the Day:

Don't leave an open cup of Diet Coke in the van unless you're the one sitting under it....or you will feel the wrath of your teammates. (As James found out today when *his* Coke spilled on *my* pants!)

P.S.

Three months *exactly* until my birthday!



Rebecca Huf

Date: 5/11/2005

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

Greetings from the road! As I write this my team and I are on the road, heading out of the state of New York into Pennsylvania. I'm excited to be back there--it's a great state! We've definitely met some great people while we've stayed in NY. This last week I had some of the greatest host siblings *ever*! I stayed with a family of 6, and we had pizza at about 11:30 p.m. If the world hasn't caught on yet, BBQ wings and pepperoni pizza is one of the greatest combinations! And yesterday I was able to stay with an amazing girl named Makayla. She is seven years old and is filled with the joy of Christ. We played with her American Girl dolls (woohoo!), chatted, sang, and watched TV together. She and her folks brought so much sunshine to my heart.



Theresa Johnson

I have been learning so much these past few weeks. My homesickness is still lingering on my heart, but I am learning more to trust my God and lean on Him for everything. Sometimes that's hard to do--we can't really see God. We can't hold his hand, and most of us have a really hard time hearing His voice. We can't smell him, and we can't taste him...so basically all of our physical senses do nothing for our connection with our Creator. The cool thing is that we don't need those things to be with God. He wants a relationship much deeper than a physical one with us. It amazes me how close I feel to God when I am in His creation. A few days ago my team and I spent some quiet time out on Lake Ontario. First off, it was incredible to see that lake! I've been reading about it since I was a little kid in school. But it was even more amazing to just stop the chaotic life style that my teammates and I lead and just be still in the creation that God has made for us. I took off my shoes and walked in the sand, my toes feeling the sand shifting underneath. I stood in the lake, the chilly water reminding me of the refreshment that God brings us. I gathered stones from the beach and made an "altar." And I prayed. It was so energizing to sit on that beach. My heart could almost hear an affirmation of God's love.

God could have left this world flat and gray, just like the road that our van drives on now. But He didn't. He wanted to show us how much He truly loves us. He made the sands that shift and move with the tides and the waves. He made stones, and grass, and trees, and dirt. He created flowers to remind us that we are His treasure. One of the most romantic thoughts that any girl can have is a guy bringing her a bouquet of flowers--well, God gives us FIELDS of them! He paints the sky in so many colors and makes the sun shine to bring warmth to our bodies and our souls. Even now as I sit in the van next to my teammates, I realize how much God truly loves me. There are green trees in every direction I turn, and sun rays beam from the clouds.

The next time that something in nature takes your breath away, remain that way. Breathe, but be still. May it remind you of the fullness of God's love, and may you be reminded daily of the love He has for you. Yes, YOU! Until next time, blessings!

In Christ,
Theresa <><

"My heart and my body may fail me, but You, O Lord, are my stronghold." ~Psalm 73:26

Date: 5/14/2005

Submitted by: Kerry Boothby

Journal Entry:

Hello all! Wow, it feels as if I have not written a journal in years! Actually it's only been two or three weeks; time is so confusing while you are on team. I have been doing pretty well, except for my month long streak of bad luck! So much has happened, and sadly, I have gotten used to it. I have been feeling better mentally, though. Every time something bad happens, I just laugh because it's beginning to get really funny. Actually, last night was the funniest one yet!

We were in Pittsburgh, PA at Berkley Hills Lutheran Church for a lock-in with the junior and senior high. It was cool to see some familiar faces; some of them were at one of the Quakes that we were at. My day was going weird so far, and I just missed people from home and from other teams. While we were sound checking, Paige (from New Vision) and Craig (from Crossfire) came into the sanctuary and started dancing! All of our faces dropped because we had no idea that the church we were at was Paige's (and that Craig was with her)! It was so awesome! My day just flipped around, and I was so excited that they came and saw us. We all hung out for a little while and caught up; it was great.

So here starts the night; we are all doing great and have high spirits. Our Family Night Program went well, and we had a lot of participation! The lock-in started, and we started playing games. For the first game, we went outside and played "Captain-Captain" (if you are in need of instruction for that game, please contact my teammate Theresa). It involves running, and if you don't know some of my history first, then you won't understand how bad the incident was. I have really bad joints from dancing and playing sports since I was little, and my right leg is the most messed up. My hip pops out whenever it wants; same with my knee cap too, and then my ankle just hurts sometimes, but now I have a contusion on it from our spare tire that fell out of the trailer (if you want to know more details on that story, contact me), so now I can't flex it all the way.

In the middle of this Friday the 13th, complete with a huge lightning and thundering storm, something happened again TO MY RIGHT LEG! AAAHHHHHH!! Bec and two other girls were taking down this circular table that was about five feet in diameter; it was really heavy and almost taller than Bec. Well, the other girls who were "helping" let go of the table, and it collapsed on my right leg. And it didn't just fall and roll away. It first fell on my hip, which popped out, then it slid down my leg, popping out my knee, and then finally slid down my gastrocnemius (it's the muscle on your calf; one of the more fun muscles to say), leaving a huge scrape, stopping abruptly on my ankle! Wow, what a feeling, let me tell you what! I just held in my screams and words and fell onto Theresa and then onto a table. I held my breath and started to cry. I wasn't crying because it hurt, although don't get me wrong--it did hurt. I got upset because my bad luck streak doesn't seem to end! My leg now is fine; it's still a little scarred, though, and the bruise is so gnarly looking! It hurt for a while and still does at times, but I am surviving.

There is so much that has happened in the past month, I can't write it all down in one sitting! But I can't figure out why it's all happening to me. After praying so much, I still have not figured out anything or heard an answer. But I am now okay with that. Sometimes things happen to people for no reason at all. I don't know why, but it is helping me to be a stronger person in the end. I haven't really learned any lessons from any of the bad stuff that has been going on, but I don't know if I ever will. And I am okay with that too. What I do know is that I am so glad that I am going through this instead of any of my teammates. I know they will always try so hard to feel my pain to help me feel better, but they can't. I love them for trying, but I am glad it's me and not them. At least my teammates whom I love don't have to go through this. I have gone through so much in life already that I know I can deal with this. I just wish them to be safe and happy, and I know that they are, and that makes me happy!

Praying hard does work. I have a calm and peaceful heart now about everything because I finally gave it all up to God. Yes, we all say that we give things up to Him, but when you really mean it, it really happens. And when it happens, it feels so good, and you feel like you can function as yourself again. So if there is anything that is going on in your life or if there is anything that keeps on happening for no apparent reason, give it up! You can't do much about it, especially on your own. Don't just say it either! Words are just words until you put a meaning and your feelings behind it. God gave up so much for us so that we could do this for us. So all you have to do is ask, and it will all be taken up for you so you won't have to feel the burden anymore. I know it sounds hard; believe me, it took me a while, but I feel so much better, and you will too. I don't know how many times I tell that to my teammates. They told me the same thing before I felt that amazing feeling come across my heart. At that time I did not believe them, but now that I have gone through it all, I am so glad that I really did listen. And I hope you do too!



Kerry Boothby

IN CHRIST'S LOVE!

Date: 5/24/2005

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

A few days ago my team and I were in Kalamazoo, MI. My host family there was absolutely amazing! Bryce and Hanna were my host siblings--it was Bryce's birthday, and Hanna is just a beautiful child of God. We all had a blast together.

One of the things that we did while we were together was a visit to a local dairy farm, where the motto is "From 'Moo' to You!" for their ice cream. Let me tell you, it was beautiful ice cream! Some of the best I have ever had. You were allowed to walk around the farm, and there were tons of pigs and cows all around the facility.

I was noticing all the "cow pies" as we were walking, and I decided that there is a lot of manure in life. Yes, you heard me... lots and lots of smelly, dirty, nasty piles of gunk. Eewwww...the thought makes me cringe! But however you receive it, your life is filled with nastiness. But it doesn't mean that it's all bad nastiness. Some of the best rose bushes that have ever grown are some that have been covered and planted in pounds of manure. So you see, God can take that manure from your life, and turn it into something beautiful...you just have to let him.

Those are my thoughts for the week for you. Hope that you were semi-enlightened. Blessings to you all!

In Christ, Theresa <><

2 Corinthians 5:17



Theresa Johnson

Date: 6/19/2005

Submitted by: Theresa Johnson

Journal Entry:

Greetings to you all! It's been a while since we posted a journal--things have gotten crazy since our VBS Season started--finally! I have been loving every bit of this year, but VBS is probably my favorite time, simply because it is the closest to camp that I am going to get for the year. Hahaha...

This morning we led worship at Amanda's church--yes, we're in Cincinnati, OH for the week! It's nice to see some people from the course of the year again and a joy to worship with them as well.

One of the songs in our worship service is "Blessed Be Your Name," by Matt Redman. This morning I let go for a few moments during the song and really paid attention to the lyrics. I meditated on them, breathed them in...and realized that the song is my life prayer--especially this year! It's a song that talks about praising God, giving everything back to Him, even when things are just junky. I have found that it's not just in those happy times that God calls us to worship Him--it's in even the broken times that God yearns for his kids to fall at the foot of the cross and put down all the tears and the burdens...and then raise our hands in praise.

Okay...I've said enough...here are the lyrics...be blessed!

~Theresa <>< Psalm 91

Blessed be Your name
In the land that is plentiful
Where Your streams of abundance flow
Blessed be Your name



Theresa Johnson

Blessed be Your name
When I'm found in the desert place
Though I walk through the wilderness
Blessed be Your name

Every blessing You pour out
I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say

Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

Blessed be Your name
When the sun's shining down on me
When the world's 'all as it should be'
Blessed be Your name

Blessed be Your name
On the road marked with suffering
Though there's pain in the offering
Blessed be Your name

Every blessing You pour out
I'll turn back to praise
When the darkness closes in, Lord
Still I will say

Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your name
Blessed be the name of the Lord
Blessed be Your glorious name

You give and take away
You give and take away
My heart will choose to say
Lord, blessed be Your name

Date: 7/3/2005

Submitted by: Rebecca Huf

Journal Entry:

Hey y'all!

I am feeling very Southern today! We are in the very southern part of Illinois, right next to Kentucky, and the people here have the most amazing accents. I love it! And all the little kids at VBS have the strongest accents; it's so cute!

I love VBS. These past few weeks have been amazing. Watching the kids learn and grow in their faith right before your eyes is an incredible experience--humbling, really. They deserve so much more than I have to offer. It makes me very aware that I need to be pointing them to God, not getting in the way at all. They are so responsive to every song, every lesson, every game--they emulate everything we do or say, which is why I need to be pointing them to God so that they see only His perfect love. They need that love so much! Some of the kids we've met seem so starved for love and attention that we have no hope of coming near to filling the hole inside of them. I just want to gather them all up in my arms and take them with us. So I'm begging anyone who's reading this to really pray for all the kids at all the VBS's going on this summer. Most people make their decision to follow Christ or not before the age of 18, and VBS is



Rebecca Huf

such a awesome environment to meet Christ in. Pray that the kids will learn about the love Christ has to offer and will develop a desire to follow Him. Pray that the leaders will be open to God's leading so that they can reach all the kids, no matter what their age or home situation or energy level or attention span. nd thank Him for the awesome work he has done already!

It is my little sister's 13th birthday today (June 30th). HAPPY BIRTHDAY STEPH!!! She is now officially a teenager. Wow. And I'm not there! It feels weird--like I'm being a bad sister coz I'm not there for such an important birthday. I remember when I was 13--I thought I was practically an adult and life was going to be a breeze from then on. (Ha! I was in for a shock!) And now I'm 18--an adult according to the law--I can vote, drink (in my home country), drive, and I feel so very young and unprepared. But very excited about what God's got in store for me!

Right now we're headed to Nashville, because its only two-and-a-half hours away from Metropolis, IL, and I'm going to go to sleep so that I'll actually have energy to explore Nashville. I'm so excited! I think this'll be my 17th state! Wow. So, take care, God bless, and I'll talk to you later!

Bec

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 14:19
