

# Captive Free West Lakes 2004-05 Journal

**Date:** 9/21/2004

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

Here we go for another year on the road! YEAH!!! I feel normal being on the road now after the month of Training. I love spending time at Luther Dell. It is a chance to get away and just be with God. No distractions. No excuses. It is a chance to recharge and refocus my spiritual walk with God.

This year we are going to have a great year! I am thrilled to have the teammates that I have this year. They are a fun bunch to hang out with and grow together musically and spiritually. I can see some of the reasons why God brought us together to minister this year together in the West Lakes region. We are on fire for God and won't let anything stop us from it. There will be struggles this year that we will work through and grow closer to God through them.

I'm hoping to write more journals this year than I did last year. Hopefully, I'll remember the funny stories that happen along the way and get those written down before I forget them. I can't promise anything, except for the fact that I will try harder this year. Here's a hello to all my friends from back home and those that I met last year on the road and to all the friends that I will meet this year as I travel the West Lakes region.

IN HIS NAME,  
Vicki Epper  
Ecc 12:13



**Vicki Epper**

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**Date:** 9/22/2004

**Submitted by:** Hope Downing

**Journal Entry:**

What a wonderful night! Tonight we had our program in Montville, Wisconsin...It was our first "full set-up" program. And it ROCKED! God is doing amazing things, not only for me, but also with our team. Tonight I did my sharing. I was nervous at first, I wasn't sure how people would react because it is a rather deep one. But after I was done, and after the program was over a girl came up to me and was like "thank you so much for sharing your story, that really helped me." I never got the chance to really talk to her because we had to go right into leading a workshop but just her telling me that helps me to get up and press on each day. I knew God was going to do great things with our team, but I didn't know it'd happen so soon into our year. Oh, and for some SUPER EXCITING NEWS...Vicki and I got to milk a cow tonight. It was awesome! Our host mom and dad surprised us with a visit to their dairy farm. It was definately fun. Tonight was a great night, I feel God working in our lives and helping us to reach out to anyone we can. It's a great feeling and it's so reassuring as to why we are all here. Praise the Lord.

God's Peace,  
Hope Downing



**Hope Downing**

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**Date:** 9/25/2004

**Submitted by:** Josh Heslop

**Journal Entry:**

Howdy everyone!

Man... I feel ultra tired! We've been on the road for about a week now, and I am exhausted. However, God never ceases to amaze me. Last night we played a concert at the Youth center in Plymouth, Wisconsin. We all felt like the night could've been better musically, and felt kind of rushed into the night without a lot of practice and prayer. God still moved and most of the kids were still excited despite our missed keys and notes and broken guitar strings.

I think God has a way of humbling us before He shows up... tonight we are in Valders, Wisconsin and we played in conjunction with a "Shantytown", a project by Habitat for Humanity. I had seen one before, but it was great to see all the kids building their cardboard shacks to promote poverty awareness.

We had a concert before the kids retreated into their "homes" and were we ever pumped. I felt really alive just going through all the songs that felt so weird the night before. The kids were all jumping up and down and getting into it and it fueled us through the program.

And now we still get to do Sunday morning worship tomorrow! I always look forward to the opportunity to serve God, and now I appreciate it even more because of the rewards that come out of it. Everyone has been so courteous and the food has been great, so it feels awesome to know that we've done our best for God and hopefully blessed some of God's children in the process.

I don't care if I'm tired the whole year, as long as the Lord leads, I'll never let it get me down.



**Josh Heslop**

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**Date:** 9/27/2004

**Submitted by:** Hannah Pressnell

**Journal Entry:**

God's timing is absolutely amazing! As I reflect on all of the things that I have planned out or tried to control, I realize the beauty of learning to let go. Going on team was never in my life plans. At the point that I felt God calling me, I didn't want to let go of the plans that I had for myself. In that moment I never imagined the extent of the blessings God had in store. In one month I have felt God stretch and grow me in ways beyond what I ever expected. I have gained confidence not just in myself but in who I am in Christ. I have learned to live with and love six amazing brothers and sisters in Christ. It's exciting to be challenged in my faith. Team life forces me to rely on Him and trust in His plan for each day.



**Hannah Pressnell**

Tonight we had a program in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, at the Upper Room Coffee House. It was so refreshing for me. There have been times in missing home, friends, and family that I have questioned why I am doing this. Ultimately I know that I am obeying God's will for my life, but I questioned my role on team. Tonight God made it clear why each of us are here and what we contribute. I was so encouraged by the faith and enthusiasm of the kids that we met. I left the coffee house feeling pure joy, not only because of the kids, but also because of how we interacted and worshiped as a team. I think tonight we learned why it is so important to give each moment of our year to Christ. We gave up control of the evening to Him, and that sacrifice was totally blessed.

Praise God for His providence and His perfect timing!!!

In His Hands,

Hannah  
Phil 4:6

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**Date:** 10/1/2004

**Submitted by:** Elizabeth Blakemore

**Journal Entry:**

So this week has been awesome. On Sunday and Monday we did two programs at

a Christian coffee house in Sheboygan, WI. One of the programs was for homeschoolers which was really cool for me. Amber's birthday was Monday and we did all kinds of cool things for her. Looking back, it probably wasn't the smartest thing to be wandering around in a dark room with a burning candle stuck into a donut while there was toilet paper strung everywhere. Huh. But God protected us and Amber was happy. And she thought the birthday card was cool.



**Elizabeth Blakemore**

Then we went to Waukausee, WI for a program. I got to see the Waukausee Rangers Girls Varsity Volleyball Team (which will be abbreviated as W.R.G.V.V.T. from now on) play on Tuesday night. It was very exciting to see them battle it out with the other team. Unfortunately, we had to leave before the W.R.G.V.V.T. finished so I don't know who won. And then on Wednesday night on the way to our host homes after the family program we kind of took the scenic route through dark country roads... for about half an hour. But eventually we found the road we were looking for so it all worked out.

Then we drove to Shawano, WI (pronounced Shawno) and did a program at a nursing home. It was a cute place and the people there were great. This one lady told us we needed souvenirs to remember the place so she gave us a beanie baby squirrel with "Shawano, WI" written on its stomach.

We've been staying at a church in Shawano the past two nights and it's been great. Last night we all hung out and did domestic things like cross-stitching and crocheting (Vicki has taught basically everyone on the team how to crochet). And today we hung out with the kids who attend the church school and then we worked on a new skit and puppet show and went to Walmart (our second trip this week).

We had to buy a new rubber duckie to adorn the antenna of our van. Our original duckie was stolen! Who would do a thing like that? What kind of people steal a rubber duckie off the antenna of a 15 passenger van? And tonight we amused ourselves by making a video. Yep, we're a pretty creative bunch...we have fun.

So things are going well. I'm enjoying Wisconsin and Nathan and I are working on new music to add to our repertoire. We've met lots of great people, our host homes have been great, my teammates rock, and I can see God working in our team. Plus, I got to see the W.R.G.V.V.T. which I never would have been able to do if I hadn't come on team. Life is good!  
EB

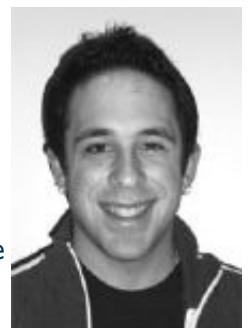
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**Date:** 10/11/2004

**Submitted by:** Nathan Huse

**Journal Entry:**

All I can say is wow! This has been a time of growth and shows me everyday how much I need the power of God in my life. Let's just say that I may have found a state that is just as cool as Texas. The land here in Wisconsin is beautiful but the hospitality of the people here are what makes it the place it is. I have been shown love everywhere I go. I have found that the presence of God is most powerfully felt in the strangest of places. We went to play at a boys detention center and I must admit I was a little apprehensive about this. As we entered we were greeted by the cold sharp rows of fences adorned with razor wire. When we played songs for these boys they clapped



**Nathan Huse**

along and sang the songs. But I guess the most surprising part was how into the puppet show they got. They loved it. We didn't even have to pry to get them to do the actions to Radical God. It was Awesome. This place was warm with the worship of these individuals in such a harsh place. I was blessed to be a part of this.

Team is much more than I could have expected in many ways. It has pushed me to grow and expand who I am. Living with seven strangers is no piece of cake. It also is one of the most rewarding things that I have ever done and I am so glad that the Lord has called me to this ministry this year. I feel like I am taking a part of each place we visit with me. The love people are so willing to share with me I will never forget!

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**Date:** 10/23/2004

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

I am a HUGE !! Red Sox fan. So, needless to say I was very depressed with my beloved Red Sox down 3 games to 0 and having lost the third game 19-8! All hope seemed to be lost. I wanted to give up on the season and hope for next year. My mom even wrote an email to the Red Sox wondering what happened to them. But I sit here extremely nervous for game 7 tonight, praying the momentum continues for another win.



**Vicki Epper**

Now, you are probably wondering how this relates to God. Well, let me share. Many times in our faith walks we get discouraged and have the overwhelming feeling that all hope is lost. I know from being on the road it can get discouraging because we don't always see the results of our ministry. Satan attacks us and we lose focus on God. We sometimes try to do something ourselves and leave God out of the process.

God doesn't want to be left out. He works in us to keep us strong in Him and to not lose focus. He gives us strength in all times and encourages us each day. We can't give up and lose all hope. Each day we need to connect with God and be strengthened by Him.

After game 6 I loved what Curt Schilling had to say about his performance. He talked about how in game 1 he tried to do it all himself but in game 6 he let God do all the work. Now I'm not saying God is a Red Sox fan, but there is a lesson in there. I was reminded not to try to do everything myself because I can't. I was reminded to let God do the work through me. Who would have thought I would learn a lesson about faith from a baseball player?

No matter what happens during game 7 i will not lose hope that the Red Sox will one day win the World Series. And I will not lose hope in God working in me and through me to further His kingdom.

In His Name,

Vicki

Ecc. 12:13

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**Date:** 10/24/2004

**Submitted by:** Hope Downing

**Journal Entry:**

Things have been going so well out here! Especially for me! God blessed me with a wonderful surprise last week. Chris, my boyfriend, drove 15 hours to surprise me out here last Saturday. It was at the perfect time too. I've been sick with a cold and I just wasn't in the best of moods that day and then suddenly there he was at the church. God's timing never ceases to amaze me. We had such an awesome time and he was such an awesome asset to our team for the 5 days he was out here. The team all loved him and he participated in Devotions with us, and helped us unload our trailer and set-up. It was such an uplifting experience for all



of us to see him growing in his faith along with us. He wrote me an email when he had gotten home about how much we had done for him and how inspiring it was for him to see us out here. We all just had a great time. Now he's plannin on coming out in November again to support our team. It's just so wonderful to see God working in his life!!!!

Hope Downing

I've been thinking a lot about "thank-you's" while I've been out here and just how much I take for granted. I have been reading in John and John 1:3 says "In him all things are made" and it makes me think "how often do I stop and thank God for all that he has given me?" He's has done so much in my life, an amazing family, great friends, a boyfriend whom I love, Captive Free, and having the chance to meet all these awesome people on the road this year. Sometimes I feel like I just take everything for granted without stopping to say thank you. I'm so thankful for all of the blessings God has bestowed upon my life. The road has been a jolly good time. Today we're at a church in Pell Lake. It was so fun, especially the Sunday School. We did a bunch of sing-a-longs with the Sunday school and the little children were SO INTO IT. They were singing a long and dancing and clapping, and laughing. It was so awesome to see them all having such a great time and praising God at the same time. Well, I'm super tired so I'm thinkin a quick power nap is in the mix for me. Until next time....KEEP ROCKIN FOR JESUS!!!!!!

God's Peace,  
Hopie  
Isaiah 43:1

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**Date:** 10/25/2004

**Submitted by:** Josh Heslop

**Journal Entry:**

ahh the day off... the day that is sometimes so rewarding.

you've worked hard all week doing ministry, stayed up late tying up loose ends with family, driven more than you wanted to, got really tired of doing singalongs, and now you see the light at the end of the tunnel.

monday. it's (usually) that blessed day that we have as teamers to do absolutely nothing if we so wish. and while most of my teammates have gone to chicago today, i have chosen to kick back, listen to music, watch movies, read, eat, and rest. It may not seem like the most glorious day ever, but at least God and youth encounter give us a day of rest to recharge and get ready for the next week!

so what has the Lord taught me so far this week? He's shown me that when i get tired, lonely, afraid, or stressed, that He's right there for me when i need Him. As well that i need to trust him when everything isn't going my way.

I encourage all of you to keep your trust in God... to stay in His word and listen for what He has to tell you in all situations...

And most of all... cherish your day of rest... if you don't have one, then, you need one! There's a reason that God rested on the 7th day... and i'm not going to complain when monday rolls around... i'm going to rejoice in the fact that God has given me an opportunity to reflect on all the good things that He's done through me.. and then await what He's got planned for the next week!

peace,

josh



**Josh Heslop**

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**Date:** 10/31/2004

**Submitted by:** Josh Heslop

**Journal Entry:**

longg... long... day...

we had a lockin last night in fon du lac, wisconsin.. and we had another concert tonight in byron, illinois!

crazy happenings.. we've lifted our fair share today (me and nathan) and we are exhausted...

and how does God repay us?

a hot tub.

ahhhh... i'm going to sleep like a baby tonight..

and get an extra hour too! i love daylight savings time...

thanks be to God.

good times to be had in byron, illinois.

#josh#



**Josh Heslop**

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**Date:** 11/6/2004

**Submitted by:** Hannah Pressnell

**Journal Entry:**

Over the last month we've gotten to experience all kinds of situations from family night programs to nursing homes to detention centers. Two of the most encouraging moments happened here in the upper peninsula (MI). The other night we went to an adult care facility. I didn't really know what to expect and didn't realize it was a place for the mentally handicapped. It was an awesome experience! They were so into it and so gracious to us. Watching them was so humbling because they had "faith like a child". We were singing "Your Love is Deep" and I looked out and watched their faces. They were so touched and so excited about Christ's amazing love. I thought about all of the people we encounter on a daily basis that are rejected from society. We encounter people in pain and so often forget but Christ's love is bigger than all of that. It extends to the heights and to the depths. It was so cool to see the people of the foster care center clinging so desperately to the hope that is in Jesus. They aren't given a lot but they certainly embraced the gift of Jesus and the offerings of our hearts to them in Christ.

Yesterday afternoon we were at a detention center here in the U.P. and I was struck by the authenticity and vulnerability of the youth there. I had conversations with two girls in particular who were crying and really searching for God. They were struggling with their mistakes, the feeling of abandonment, and also the criticism of the world. I watched and listened to these girls and was struck by the similarity of my feelings and wrestling with God. These girls wanted so desperately to be loved and accepted, to have a relationship they could count on. Their hearts were crying out for God's help. We may have been from different backgrounds and walks of life, but the yearnings of our hearts were still the same.

Thanks to all those who are praying for us. It is so encouraging to have your support.

Because of Christ,  
Hannah



**Hannah Pressnell**

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**Date:** 11/24/2004

**Submitted by:** Nathan Huse

**Journal Entry:**

The power of the Holy Spirit is real! Growing up in the church I never really understood what gifts of the Holy Spirit meant. As I studied theology in college I still didn't get the picture. I always thought it was something He gave you a natural ability to do. I have found since being on team that it is far more than that.

Getting up Sunday morning I had the opportunity to give the message in a church. In the past, this has been a very nerve-racking experience, but recently the Holy Spirit has been



giving me the words to say. I got up there and started off by sharing a story from my life and then got into Scripture, but after that, I really didn't know what I was saying. If you asked me now I couldn't tell you. He literally gave me the words to say. When thinking of a gift, I often thought of it as something you obtain and are free to use whenever you choose. With the Holy Spirit, it is not even something you grasp, but it is the Holy Spirit working through you. I feel the fire of the Spirit within me every day, and I cannot explain this to anyone. The great thing that I have discovered, however, is that it is not just for people doing full-time ministry. The gifts of the Spirit are for all in the family of God. My prayer now is for all to grow closer to God and experience the greatness of Him. He has gifts for everyone and has a purpose for all. Draw close to Him and let Him use you to bring others to Him. Sometimes it is scary to let go, but it is the most crucial part of our relationship with God. To let Him take your life and do with you as He pleases is so against what society tells us. We must throw out the plans we have for ourselves and realize that only He knows the plans for us.

**Nathan Huse**

Father, I pray today that you rain down your Holy Spirit among your church. Fill them with a passionate desire to follow you. Move them all to serve you with the gifts you have given them.

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**Date:** 11/27/2004

**Submitted by:** Elizabeth Blakemore

**Journal Entry:**

So lately God has been teaching me some good stuff. Being on the road can be hard, and I miss my home church. Sometimes it seems like I give away everything I have and don't have anything left to feed myself. So I've been struggling with feeling spiritually dry at times. And I've been questioning some stuff going on in my life. But God has been using some non-traditional ways to feed me spiritually and to let me know that He's around. For instance, a couple weeks ago I was completely exhausted. It was a Sunday night and my team was doing a program at a nursing home. On the way into the building we noticed the Northern Lights in the sky. I don't know anything about the Northern Lights but I'd always thought that you were supposed to be really far north in order to be able to see them. And we were in the middle of Wisconsin. So it was a pleasant surprise. During our program a woman started crying while we were singing. I talked with her afterwards, and it was so uplifting to hear what God has taught her over the years and how He has worked in her life. What an encouragement.



**Elizabeth Blakemore**

That night my team was staying at a camp. So we got back to our cabin and went inside but later that night we noticed that the Northern Lights were still going on. So we all came outside and just enjoyed the show. There were flashes of green and blue and then the colors would swirl and then they would fade and be replaced with new shapes. It was so beautiful! But that's not the best part. So we're all standing out there just marveling at the show our Heavenly Father is giving us when I felt like saying, "OK God. Show us a WL" (for West Lakes). And as soon as I said that, a WL appeared in the lights in the sky. I'm serious. The whole team saw it. It was incredible. And then the image of an eagle appeared. And the way the lights were flashing it looked like the wings were flapping. And that image stayed there for a long time. I felt so restored watching that. It was like God was saying, "Look at what I've made. Look at what I can do. Why don't you trust me?" I'm sure that scientists would disagree with me but I believe that God put those Northern Lights in the sky just for us. It was directly above our cabin. It was like our own private show. Please don't burst my bubble.

So I've been reflecting on that image. I am protected under God's wings, so why do I doubt His plan? Why do I worry about what I'll be doing a year from now when He's already told me everything I need to know? For now I'm supposed to live out of a van and share Jesus with people. That's all the info I've got. And that's good enough.

EB

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**Date:** 11/30/2004

**Submitted by:** Hope Downing

**Journal Entry:**

HEY WORLD!!!!

We've been doing awesome things on the road lately! It's so awesome to see God working through our group to touch so many people! I love going to the pre-school classes and seeing all the little kids doing the "Sheep Song". And I love going to the nursing homes and seeing all the residents closing their eyes and silently worshipping while we are singing "Amazing Grace." We are all so tired, so worn out, both physically and emotionally, but when we go to these places and see the work that God is doing in these people, it lifts our spirits and we continue on a little bit stronger than before.



**Hope Downing**

Mid-Winter is quickly approaching. It is kind of a bitter-sweet feeling. I mean, I am so excited to have a break, catch up on rest, and see my family and friends back at home. Of course, I don't know how restful it's going to be with everything I have planned for those two weeks. haha. I miss my Youth Group back at home, and I miss my friends, and my diner, and my lake, and all the stuff I was so comfortable with. I've been struggling a lot these past three months with homesickness. I thought the feeling would go once I was out on the road, but it's a constant struggle. But my team-mates are so awesome when it comes to that. They just swoop me up in their arms and let me talk, and make me feel so loved, or they just tell a funny joke or laugh at mine. They are teaching me a lot about myself. They encourage me to be more confident in myself and not just take anything from everybody. I'm learning a lot about speaking up when something bothers me and not just letting it build up inside. That's something I was very known for doing back in NJ. So in that respect, it's going to be sad to say good-bye for two weeks. At least Vicki lives down the road! How awesome is that! We're going to NYC together, it'll be awesome. I know you're all jealous! Haha! I can't wait to get to Mid-Winter training, though, and see all the other teams. It's going to be hard to say goodbye to West Lakes for two weeks, but it's going to be awesome to see everyone back at home and be in my own bed. Oh, the things I've taken for granted!!!

God's Peace,  
Hope  
Isaiah 43:1

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**Date:** 1/3/2005  
**Submitted by:** Josh Heslop  
**Journal Entry:**

Hey everyone!

Man, have things been cold up here in Wisconsin! We're in Janesville, Wisconsin right now just dealing with all the ice and jazz on our day off. It's really great to be back on the road though! We have our first Quake at the Wisconsin Dells on Friday and I can't wait! There's supposed to be at least, like, 400 or 500 kids there! It's going to be nuts, but a lot of fun! I keep praying that God will keep us healthy on this leg of the tour, and that He will move mightily through our team's ministry!



**Josh Heslop**

Thanks to all those who've supported us on the road so far and those who continue to do so!

God bless you!

Josh

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**Date:** 1/12/2005  
**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper  
**Journal Entry:**

I love winter!!!! Last year, being in the south east region was great! I loved being on the beach in February, but I missed the snow at the same time. This year we definitely have the snow. It does make driving a little more challenging, but we are doing okay in that realm. This past weekend was our first event, Wisconsin Dells I. I had an incredibly fun time at it!!!! I was the crazy Dance Master up in front of the stage with the kids. I didn't have to worry about working the sound system, so I was freed up to be completely relational with the kids and be funny the entire time!!! It did help going into the weekend knowing how to pace myself and not get too tired from the weekend. It is also helpful to have a lot of water or Mountain Dew with you at all times, especially when it is free for the weekend. I loved the fact that I was able to sleep in my own bed for the weekend. That ROCKS!!! I learned from this first event of the season how God provides for all of our needs at exactly the right time. There were some things that we were nervous about going into the weekend and at a couple points during the Event, but God took care of all the details for us. We just needed to get out of His way and let Him do the work. I was surprised at the blessings and was very thankful for them. I once read that blessings do not occur that often in life. I would have to disagree with that statement. I believe that blessings surround us each and every day of our lives. We just don't always have the proper vision to recognize them for what they are. Sometimes we want to see things a certain way, and when they are not that way, then we do not see the blessings as blessings. I guess they can be like optical illusions, and we need to get better glasses to see them for what they are. Thank You, Lord, for blessing me and everyone each day with the great gifts of love and grace. May we see them for what they truly are and never forget that You will always provide for what we need when we need it.

IN HIS NAME, Vicki (Ecc.12:13)



**Vicki Epper**

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**Date:** 1/30/2005  
**Submitted by:** Josh Heslop  
**Journal Entry:**

Ohhh Indiana.... how I love thee... let me count the ways!!!

hehe... well... let me start off by saying it's been great to be out of wisconsin for a few days! \*snicker and giggle\* We as a team LOVE wisconsin, but we're there ALL the time!

We're in richmond, indiana right now and i'm getting ready to head for bed... it's sunday night and now is the time for sleeping. We've had a program every night this week and it's been very challenging as half the team is sick and we're all tired!

But let me tell you how faithful God is, he is our rock and our fortress, an ever present help in trouble. He never fails to show us his love through the music that we play, the people that we meet, the people that house us, or just whoever we encounter. God is good all the time!

Even when I wake up and have nothing left, God always seems to make a way.

Praise Him.

josh



**Josh Heslop**

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**Date:** 2/8/2005  
**Submitted by:** Hope Downing  
**Journal Entry:**

Back in Wisconsin. Not too bad. Let's see...it's 10:30 p.m. and I'm getting ready to go call the boyfriend and head off to sleep. We are in Cross Plains, Wisconsin right now.

This last week has been absolutely beautiful. I actually broke a sweat loading up the trailer because it was so warm. Blue skies, NO SNOW (I do not like snow), and temperatures at about 50 degrees. The last few weeks have been hard for our team, we are just so tired. We have had Family Night Programs every night. But God provides. When we think we are too tired or worn out and beat down to possibly be energetic on stage, he provides us with that energy; when we wonder why we are doing this, he brings someone into our lives to point out "this is why." I have just been in awe this last week at the blessings he has bestowed upon our team. From the beautiful weather, to the indescribable hospitality of the churches we have visited. Praise God for all that he has blessed us with.



**Hope Downing**

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**Date:** 2/9/2005

**Submitted by:** Elizabeth Blakemore

**Journal Entry:**

All right, it's been a long time since I've done a journal. A lot has been going on...I've met so many incredible people recently that I'm not quite sure where to begin. First of all, we've been having a great time doing Quakes. We've done two so far and our third one will be at Wisconsin Dells this weekend. They are a total blast! We get to hang out with all these kids and play music and hear another great band...fun has definitely been had.



**Elizabeth Blakemore**

And the cool thing is that every time we get worn out from our crazy lifestyle, God does something to pick us up and encourage us. For instance, a couple weeks ago we were completely drained after an Event and really needed some rest. We got to the church where we were going to have our day off in Delafield, WI, and Pastor Dave informed us that they were putting us up in a hotel. Now, we love staying in host homes because we meet lots of different people and do lots of cool stuff, but, come on. I have five words for you: pool, hot tub, and sauna. We had a wonderful day off just relaxing at the hotel, and Pastor Dave hung out with us and drove us around to run errands. He really encouraged us, and when we parted ways he gave us all mini cheese heads with crosses stuck in them. God works through every church we go to to strengthen my faith and to remind me that He is there.

And we got the chance to go snow tubing a while back. That was really fun. A church loaned us a couple tubes, and we spent an hour sliding down a hill and then climbing back up and doing it all over again. I'd have to say the high point of the adventure was when we all crammed onto three tubes, held them together, and went down in a line while I sat in the back and recorded it on a camcorder. Hope fell off halfway down...she was holding onto me, and she knew that if she held on much longer we'd both fall off, and I was holding Vicki's camera. You know what they say: greater love has no man than this, that a man fall off a tube for a friend. So as we approach Valentine's Day, I am reminded of God's love for me through my teammates. I hope you all find time to reflect on His love for you.

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**Date:** 2/21/2005

**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper

**Journal Entry:**

Sometimes on the road, it is easy to fall into a rut and sing songs more out of habit rather than as a prayer. Night after night, you are singing the same songs in generally the same order, and it is easy to shut off the brain and go simply by rote. That is the pattern that I have fallen into lately, and I was not able to find my way out of it. It is not always easy to remember that what we are doing makes an impact when we are out of town by the next morning. When you are the seed scatterer you are not always able to see where the seeds are landing.



**Vicki Epper**

This past weekend has been a time of rejuvenation for me. We were at the Indy Quake with about 350 middle schoolers. While there, God did some amazing things through us, the speaker, Natalie Hagen, and the musician, Beth Gearhart. He came in and filled the entire hotel, and we were all blessed by being there. After the Quake, myself and some of my teammates were able to go to the MercyMe concert that night. They were appearing with Monk and Neagle, The Afters and Jeremy Camp. Even though we were tired from the weekend, we were excited to be going to the concert.

The concert was amazing! It was a genuine time of worship for us. We were there in the audience worshipping our God and not having to worry about what is next in the set list. I loved it! I was free to worship and truly be fed by the Holy Spirit during that time. While we were there, I also began to remember what it is like to be in the audience for one of our programs. I had forgotten the impact the songs have on people and reaching them where they are at in that moment. Instead, I had become focused on the technical side of things and forgotten about the holiness of everything.

Someone told me in the past couple of weeks about finding worship in the everyday things that we do. What we find to be mundane and boring are some of the holiest moments of our lives. Doing laundry is a holy time with God, just like pouring ourselves into a song of praise. I had started thinking that God can only be found in certain places and times. I had forgotten that God is everywhere, wanting to spend each moment with me. I had been so caught up in making everything perfect that I tried to do God's job for Him. The concert last night reminded me to lift what I have and do to the Lord in worship. This is not about doing a job, but rather about being with the Lord and worshipping Him in all that we do and say. I was reminded of that last night, and I pray that I do not forget it again.

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**Date:** 4/5/2005

**Submitted by:** Josh Heslop

**Journal Entry:**

Wooooooo!!!!!!!!!!!!

Hot ham and cheese!

Man, has it been a crazy weekend! We just got back from the Chicago Construction Zone two days ago, and still I'm feeling the effects...it wiped me out! We had a hilarious time, though...I got to be on the stage crew and run the computer all weekend and have lots of fun behind the scenes working backstage. Getting to talk to the bands was a huge plus; I really enjoyed John Reuben and the drummer for Daniel's Window. They were both incredibly nice guys and incredibly talented! All in all, the Chicago Zone was very cool. I was disappointed that we didn't get to interact with everybody more, but I know that the kids still had a great time diving deeper with God, and that's what this year is all about!

We only have two more Events and I know I'm going to miss them a lot. We even miss the sound techs Andrew and Craig! They totally rocked the house!

Well, I'm gonna hit the sack. I've got a haircut early tomorrow morning. I just hope the barber is awake enough so he doesn't butcher my head! hehe...

Okey dokey!

Adios,

Josher



**Josh Heslop**

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**Date:** 4/21/2005

**Submitted by:** Hope Downing

**Journal Entry:**

Here we are in Wisconsin, and our time on the road is winding down. We are getting ready for our VBS season. Our last Event is this coming weekend. I'm pretty sad for Event season to be over. It was awesome fun getting to hang out at hotels all weekend with amazing groups of kids from all over. Events have always been something very special to me. I've been going to them since I was in the sixth grade. This coming Event will be my seventeenth one. I still love them just as much as I loved the first one I ever went to. You can feel God's presence at these Events. Youth are pouring out their hearts to God and growing in a deeper relationship with Him by the minute. When times get hard on the road, and I begin to wonder what I'm doing out here or why I am here, it is always beyond encouraging to see the kids at these Events. It reminds me why I'm here. The Events sure are tiring, though. Oh yes. Every day off after an Event, we all sleep until about 12 or 1 the next day. Praise God for Mondays off after a weekend long Youth Quake or Construction Zone! A lot of the team, if not all of us, are doing a lot of thinking as to what we are going to be doing once we are off the road. It's hard because we want to know what's going to happen; we want to have a plan for August. However, we know that God has plans for us and that we need only to trust in him. I for one am struggling with what to do next. School or work??? I know that I need to finish up my schooling; I've always wanted to be a guidance counselor, and with only an Associates in Early Childhood education, I know I am still four years away from that. However, I've spent more money on the road this year than I was allotted, and so my practical side says "Hope, it's time for you to go and get a job." Growing up I always knew what I wanted to do, and I've always strived to get it done. However, at this moment in my life, I do not know what I am going to do in four months. I pray to God and lean on him for guidance, and I know that in time he will show me my path. It's just hard to lean not on your own understanding or knowledge. The reality of being off the road in four months has also kicked in. It's nice to think that I'll be back home in my GORGEOUS AND AMAZINGLY PERFECT state of New Jersey soon, back home with my family, and with my Christopher, but at the same time, I'm leaving five other individuals who have become my family, as well as the entire Youth Encounter organization. Never in my life have I met a group of people who are more caring and loving. These are people with whom I want to keep in contact, and who I know will do all they can to keep in contact with me along with the rest of the teamers. So the Captive Free teams out there may be tired, they may be confused as to what is in store for them come August 13, they may be excited to go back to their homes yet sad about leaving their new family--we are all pressing on and staying strong, because when it boils down to it, we are out here for nothing else but God. We are out here for a reason, to duck and point people to the cross. And while doing that, we have been blessed beyond blessed, so we continue to press on.

In Him <><

Hope Downing

Isaiah 43:1

Captive Free West Lakes!



**Hope Downing**

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**Date:** 4/28/2005

**Submitted by:** Josh Heslop

**Journal Entry:**

Hot potatoes!

We're here in Mauston, Wisconsin just chilling out after a long time of super busyness... we've got an acoustic gig tonight and then two lock-ins this weekend, so it's time to rest up!

I was fortunate enough last night to stay with a couple that had been on team before. They were both team leaders when they were on team, and it was awesome to just chat about that and our similar experiences and struggles.

It's funny how God knows exactly what we need, you know?

God has been teaching me a lot about giving of myself, especially when I don't want to. It is really hard on the road being so busy, but really rewarding because of God's goodness and faithfulness.

I encourage you all to pray about what God is calling you all to use for him! Whether it be money or maybe a gift of skateboarding...use what you have for God's glory!

Booyah!

#joshers#



**Josh Heslop**

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**Date:** 4/28/2005  
**Submitted by:** Vicki Epper  
**Journal Entry:**

### **Unspoken Prayers**

Life on the road is a great adventure. You wake up every morning and have no idea what the day is going to bring to you. It can be nerve wracking when you first begin the year, but after awhile it becomes the norm and you don't even think twice about it. I find it exciting myself. It also reminds me that I am ultimately not in control and that I must continually look to God for daily guidance in all that I do and say. Without Him, I have no direction and just wander aimlessly throughout the day.



**Vicki Epper**

Prayer was something that I struggled with before coming on the road; over the course of my ministry with Captive Free, I have come to greatly depend on it. Before, I would pray and simply list for God the things that I was looking for and wait for Him to give them to me. I guess you could say that it was similar to a little child sitting on Santa's lap listing off what she wanted for Christmas that year. I knew prayer to be powerful, but never truly understood it. Now my perspective on prayer is completely different.

I have found myself at times crying out to God and not knowing the words to say to Him. The eighth chapter of Romans tells us how the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we do not have the words to cry out to God. The relationship between God the Father and the Holy Spirit is so close that the Father knows every thought of the Spirit and words are not necessary for clear communication. I rest securely on this thought knowing that my Father in Heaven loves me and knows me so well that I do not need to worry about saying the right things to Him. He knows where my heart is and responds accordingly.

There are many times that when I have difficulty expressing my prayer to God, I cry out to Him through music. The words and the melodies combined together find a way from my heart to the Father's and everything is understood. One song in particular that I pray a great deal is "All I Can Say" by David Crowder Band. The amount that I have to offer or the lack of elegant words that I have to say does not matter. God loves us, and when we give Him everything that we have, He is thankful. At times the size of the offering may be considered large; at other times it may be small. It does not matter. It is everything that we have to give in that moment that is important to the Father.

My prayers may be elegant at times, and at other times they may be simple and quiet. This morning I cried out not knowing how to express myself to my Father. His response to me was simple. He reminded me that He will always be there. In fact He sang it to me in the form of the song "Until the World" by The Afters. I love the open communication I have with the Father, where even if words are not spoken, He understands and I am comforted.

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**Date:** 5/15/2005  
**Submitted by:** Elizabeth Blakemore  
**Journal Entry:**

This is totally random, but I love warm weather. I love driving around with the windows down and the breeze blowing into the van. We have stuff tacked to our ceiling, so if we start going too fast, we have to put the windows up because everything gets blown down. But once we're off the highway and driving around trying to find the church, the windows can come down. It's great.



**Elizabeth Blakemore**

And the thing I love about spring is that it comes after winter. See, if we didn't have to go through all that snow in Wisconsin, I don't think spring would be as special as it is. It's kind of like our theme this year. A calm sea in the morning wouldn't be as special unless you had seen the huge storm churning the waves the night before. I think that sometimes going through hard stuff in life allows us to appreciate things more when we come out the other side. Yes, stuff happens and life's not perfect. But God is faithful and caring and loving and even if

we don't see how things will work out, the cool thing is that He does.

Anyway, we're all doing pretty well. We're looking forward to going to Ohio for a few days and then on to Josh's church in West Virginia. It's a little bit out of our region but well worth the drive. And after that, we get a short break to reconnect with family and friends. And then we come back and start VBS stuff.

As the year has progressed, we've all been praying about what we're going to do once our year on the road is done. Some of us have more concrete plans than others, but we're all trying to listen to God and figure out what our next steps should be. That's something that you all could keep in mind when you pray for us. Thanks guys! It means so much to know that folks are lifting us up in prayer.

EB

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**Date:** 6/12/2005

**Submitted by:** Hannah Pressnell

**Journal Entry:**

Hello from Marion, Wisconsin! I know that it has been ages since I have written, but I can assure you that my lack of writing doesn't mean that there has been a lack of amazing ministry moments. Through the weariness and frustrations that come from a year on the road, God has truly worked through my team. I'm going to be honest, though, and say that I wasn't the most excited about coming back after Memorial Day. With only the summer to go, I was tired and ready to be done. I went into VBS training struggling to see why I was still doing this, but something God showed me once again is that none of this is about me. I was down because I was consumed in myself, but when my team came together to rehearse for our program at training, it was clear why I had come back. When we came together, all of the petty irritations and hurts didn't matter; we came together to worship and glorify Jesus. I was so encouraged that night because I experienced the beauty that comes when people lay down their pride and simply kneel before the one true and living God.

Last week my team and I experienced our first week of VBS in Danforth, Illinois. Once again I was truly blessed and encouraged by the gracious giving of the community there. To paint you a little picture, Danforth has a population of 600 people and over ten percent of the population came to VBS. Farmland and train lines surrounded the church. We had a cool opportunity to stay in two trailers in the church parking lot. The home-cooked meals and generosity that was poured out on us there was truly amazing. We even got a ride back from dinner in a fire truck. Hope got to blow all the horns and whistles...I think the pastor was a little nervous to hear the sounds of a fire truck pulling up to the church, but it was quite a ride. Honestly, the best part of the week, though, was having a whole week to stay and get to know the congregation. The West Lakes team is used to being in a new place pretty much every day, so to have the chance to invest more of ourselves in the community was a blessing. A bunch of the kids lived right by the church, so we got to play with them throughout each day. It made me smile to see their faces light up and have them run in for hugs. They were so excited to see us and always wanted to hear their favorite songs. The community in Danforth truly affected my team, and I can only hope that we gave them a new look at Jesus.

Thanks so much to all of you out there praying for our team. With only a couple months to go, we are trying to take in every moment for all that it is. Prayers for health, energy, guidance for next year, and that the hearts of the people we meet would continue to be touched by our ministry would be greatly appreciated. I hope that you are having a stellar summer! God bless!

Because of Christ,

Hannah

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**Hannah Pressnell**

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**Date:** 6/29/2005

**Submitted by:** Josh Heslop

**Journal Entry:**

Holy mackerel!

I'm here in Valparaiso, Indiana...and the weather is blazin' hot! Things have been great this week, however, and night Vacation Bible School is fun. Our VBS has been from 5-7:30 p.m. this week, and it's been nice to be able to sleep in every day!

The highlight of the week was definitely Monday, which was my birthday! My teammates and I went to the Dunes National Park area on Lake Michigan. We got a bunch of food (steak, shrimp, corn, and chips) and had a big cookout. Then we went swimming in Lake Michigan and cooled off. It was a great time to just chill out and spend time with my teammates and rue the day!

It's been amazing how fast this year has gone, and it seems like just yesterday I was still in college wondering what to do about the next year. God has done so much this year to help me grow, as well as test me and give me perspective. I cannot praise God enough for His neverending love and mercy in my life and seeing how He's used me as His servant this year. I just pray that He continues to do so in my life as well as the lives of my teammates after this year is through!

I look forward to seminary in about a year, hopefully in the Twin Cities of Minnesota, and to see where God leads!

In Him,  
Josh



**Josh Heslop**

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**Date:** 7/25/2005

**Submitted by:** Elizabeth Blakemore

**Journal Entry:**

Wow, I haven't written a journal in a really long time. Sorry. We are in Harlan, IN doing a VBS. It's really cool to be here because we spent Thanksgiving at this church, so I already knew my host family. It is really hot right now. They have a pool which wasn't up and running back in November, but it is now and that makes me happy.

So we only have two weeks left before our tour is done. Hard to believe that the year is almost up. I've been thinking back on all the places we've been and all the people we've met over the past year. I have a ton of favorite memories, and as a team we probably have a couple thousand pictures.

One of my favorite memories was when we were doing a 30 Hour Famine for some lock-in, and Hannah, Hope, and I were soooo hungry, so we snuck out and went to a Red Robin for a little while. That was fun. Another time Josh and I played Walmart Tag with our contact. That's a really fun game because you have to look like you're shopping when in fact you're just hiding from each other. But I think what I'll really miss is the good times we have in our van, like listening to boy band music and dancing. Good times.

Anyway, we're enjoying our time on the road, but we're also excited about what God has planned for each of us once we get off team. Some of us still don't have a clue what we're going to be doing, so we'd appreciate your prayers for us. Thanks!

E



**Elizabeth Blakemore**

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**Date:** 8/5/2005

**Submitted by:** Josh Heslop

**Journal Entry:**

Greetings from Peoria, Illinois...

Our last week of Vacation Bible School has ended...the tour is almost at an end...and I sit back for a moment to reflect.

Hmm...to reflect. To take a look back on the year that has changed my life forever. To think back at all the programs, the nursing homes, the detention centers, the soup kitchens, the Events, and all the other places we preached the Gospel. They brought a lot of sleepless nights, aches and pains, and confusion., but that could never measure up to the amount of growth, satisfaction, insatiable joy, and knowledge that was received this year. God has truly done major work this year, through us and through the lives that blessed us. And as this year comes to an end, I will try only to look back at this year to learn from my experience.

The experience of learning to love, to hope, to pray, and to grow like I've never done before, is something that I thank God for every day.

Thanks for listening,

Josh Heslop

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**Josh Heslop**