

New Dawn 2004-05 Journal

Date: 9/28/2004

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Hello Friends, Family, and those that I have met so far. So here I am 4 days into tour. Wow have things been so cool. Our first performance is behind us and we've done a few morning services as well. It is so very hard to believe that we are actually on the road, I feel like I'm going to be going back to the camp for training any day. Training was so great for us. We learned so much, and it empowered us to do our ministry this year. Some days I will admit it was very hard, and I was feeling like "I don't want to learn any more stuff, I just want to go home to Canada!" But God has shown me over and over that he is going to give me strength to get through this! I'm finding that my time spent in the word is so important to my performance as a person and on stage this year as well, It's so interesting to realize that my strength this year is directly related to my time in the word! Also exciting is to see how God is providing. We needed to do our first oil change today and before I even asked, our Host Mother said that someone offered to give us a free oil change! So it was great! We got a free oil change! I am so blessed by those people that are going to be supporting us this year! The last host home that I stayed at was such a blessing they let me come to their evening Jam night on our day off and I got to play my Djembe' drum! It is so great to fellowship with all these people. I've only been in two host homes so far and my socks are being blessed off! It still doesn't seem as though I'm actually on team for a year but it's cool. I am so looking forward to seeing all the things that will come and knowing that God has plotted out our course before we even got our van! A big "How's it goin' EH! To all my friends and family back in Canada. I miss ya'll (my U.S. Accent starting!) so much, but God is providing for me and I know he is providing for you! Amen! Thank you everyone for your support!

Drew Bell!



Drew Bell

Date: 9/30/2004

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Hello, Eh!
Right now we are sitting in the parking lot of St.James Lutheran Church in Greensfield, Indiana. We are an hour early (imagine that!) and thus have some time to chill, play frisbee and if you are me.... write your team journal. Yeah!
It's nice having time to just relax, and reflect on our first official week on the road. This morning we dropped off our staff guy, Mr.Matthias, at the airport in the Chicago area, and thus New Dawn has now officially been unleashed on our own. Speaking of unleashing, there was no holding back the energy of the 150+ youth last night at Messiah Lutheran Church in Wauconda, Illinois. Our team was so fortunate to be included in the Wednesday night gathering of the "Pathways" confirmation group. It was genuinely awe-inspiring to see that many youth praising God and having a lot of fun doing it. (Some even brought out "the worm") God is alive indeed! A big thanks to our wonderful puppet curtain holders from last night, and to the Ornigs (my host family), who so graciously welcomed me into their home. I had a blast!
May God Bless and keep you all.



Becky Wray

Till next time,

Becky (Boots) Wray

Date: 10/2/2004

Submitted by: Dallas Rosin

Journal Entry:

Hey, big shout out to all people that rock in Wauconda and Platteville. Big news here on New Dawn is that we got a team fish on Friday! A red and blue Beta, we named him Mullet because he's all business in the front, all party in the back. Mullet lived nearly three hours, but Mullet 2(or M2 as we affectionately refer to him) has lasted nearly a day now and looking alive, happy and healthy.

Friday night we had the opportunity to sing at Peace Manor here in Greenfield, Indiana. It was really a nice change to sing with a piano and get back into some of the classic hymns, and we even learned some new ones.

The first week has been a rollercoaster of ups and downs already. A lot of moving, a lot of learning new stuff on the spot and a lot of new challenges to overcome each day. Within all of this it is easy to see that God is with us, holding our hands, and speaking gently to us as we deal all of life's little surprises.

Thank you to all of you out there supporting us with your prayers, you are more important to us than we will ever know.

God's Peace,
Dallas
Romans 8:28



Dallas Rosin

Date: 10/5/2004
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:

Today we have had one of those tri-state- drives, from Indiana-Ohio-Kentucky-Tennessee.

I was blessed to see different states, staying long enough to appreciate God's kindness through the generosity and hospitality of the people we've met on the road.

Zionsville, Indiana was a very pretty 'Village', known for its very pretty houses, big and small, wooden and brick walls, the gardens and trees...a perfect place for a home, a peaceful community. *'I'd seen this picture before'* I thought. Right before my eyes was like those of inspirational village-painting of Thomas Kinkade. I never thought such place existed. No wonder why the village called Zionsville.

We had church youth gathering Saturday and Sunday night. For the first time we did this year's International Sunday Worship. The congregation enjoyed the songs from around the world. They hardly had songs of worship like we brought. They appreciated diversity in worship in as much as we had fun singing it too. The part I like of the worship was when I said the prayer 'Our Father' in my native language, I felt home was never that far.

There are three of us foreigners in this team. And it's good to feel that I'm not alone on the excitement of being in the states, again and just to explore more of the southeast learning the joy of new encounters and understanding more of God's love working through the people.

Irene Venus
October 5th 2004



Irene Venus

Date: 10/9/2004
Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant
Journal Entry:

Well, greetings to you all! I am writing to you from the beautiful state of Tennessee, from the quaint town of Oak Ridge, which has a unique history to it... part of the WWII atomic bomb was created here. Driving through town without a map is not recommended. Crazy roads with two names wind all over the town and were created this way to confuse spies. It's just bizarre! You get to an intersection and look to your left where the sign will say one thing; then you look to the right, and that sign says a



completely different name. I must give the boys credit for learning to navigate through this crazy town. I think they've enjoyed it. J

Elissa Surprenant

Another fun highlight for me was our team outing on Friday to the Museum of Appalachia just north of Knoxville... and it happened to be the Homecoming Festival, which meant there were well over 75 blue-grass bands there, not to mention tons of Appalachia artisans and historians. It was such a fun day!! I've never seen so many unique string instruments in my entire life. Ms. Lawson, I was thinking of you! It was so cool that this celebration happened to be on the same weekend we were here. I really appreciated the chance to learn more about this area and the history behind it.

This evening was our 3rd Family Night program in Oakridge. There was a small but mighty group that had gathered. It really doesn't matter to me what size the group is... just to see people coming together that might not normally gather on a Friday or Saturday night... I can't begin to tell you how encouraged I am by it. I actually did the sharing tonight. This was the first time that I have done such a thing. I usually shy away from it, but tonight the Holy Spirit led, and to be honest, I'm still not sure all that I said. It was the coolest thing ever!! I read Luke 8:22-25 and related it to my year in Japan.

I have been struggling with being on the road and not having very many programs. And the only reason for this is that I have the responsibility for making the schedule. I love having down time, but I feel this great pressure to fill the time up. I'm really annoyed with myself, to be honest. I am struggling to let go and just enjoy the people that I am with in the moment. My thoughts are 90% of the time on the schedule and thinking ahead. God had a funny sense of humor when he put me in the position of leadership. It's challenging me in many ways.

In reality, all this down time is allowing us more time to hang out with our host families, which has been a huge blessing. . We've been able to stay in one town with one family for more than just one night at a time. Conversations go deeper, and the quality time we can spend is greater. And it's a bonus not to have to sleep in a completely new bed every night. J We've been averaging 2 nights each stop. People that I have been able to stay with in host homes have been amazing. It continues to blow my mind how awesome people are! Their willingness to open up their home and hearts as well as join us in ministry in different ways is huge.

A big thank you and hello to family and friends scattered all over the place. I miss you, and I am sorry that I have not had a chance to write more. To be honest, I'm struggling to put down thoughts. I'm so used to having a slow month to gather them and then spend a week writing them. Time alone to do this is not in abundance this year. You are all in my thoughts and prayers. Thank you for your prayers and the different ways you have been supporting me. You are amazing.

Love,
Elissa

Date: 10/12/2004

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

So it's journal time again! Here we are with a few more states behind us. WOW states just seem to be flying by. Now coming from Canada where all I've ever crossed more than one of its provinces a day, the fact that we are doing a 4 state drive today is quite foreign. Tennessee to Pennsylvania 8 hours in the ol' van! Life on the road is still going well, as a team we are falling more and more into a rhythm. God is continuing to bless us and provide for our needs sometimes before we even think about them. So what have I been learning since my last journal entry. Well one thing that I've been interested to find is that the U.S. is a wonderfully varied country. Starting in Minnesota and going to Tennessee certainly shows me the differences in the culture. I love the accents! Another thing that is really cool is to see how people really enjoy having us. When we were in Oak Ridge we were welcomed with open arms by the people there and our program was such a joy to do because the people there were so interactive! It was great! (not to mention Oak Ridge has the coolest streets ever, I don't think that Dallas and I took the same route back to our Billet in three days!) We also got to go to the Museum of Appalachia so that was an experience of the blue grass culture! I also learned that Oak Ridge was one of the facilities where they were helping to develop the atomic bomb!



Drew Bell

Crazy, all the things that we get to see, what a huge bonus on top of being able to spread the gospel and meet with all these different bodies of faith!

This morning I woke up with a realization though. I can't leave team. This morning when I woke up I could not decide to go back to sleep, I had to just go on, or as they say in training "DEAL with it!". But it's good, builds character right! (not to mention teaches me the importance of sleep!

So it was my birthday yesterday. Now a birthday on the road is quite interesting because normally you get together a bunch of your friends and have a big party and do all those things. But this year, well lets say it's hard to get together your team when your in three different host homes spread out all over Kingsport! But thanks to my Host there we were able to get together and watch a movie! It is such a joy to call home as well. I got to call a few friends from home before my phone cards ran out, it's good to hear familiar voices and hear about familiar things. But 20 years old, I guess that means that magically I'm mature and know everything that I need to know that I never needed as a teenager. Yeah right! But it's cool to know that I'm growing older and that more and more opportunities will slowly open up to me. Praise God. I am given more and more examples of God's provision everyday, and I'm ready for more and more of the team experience.

Drew Bell~

Date: 10/16/2004

Submitted by: Dallas Rosin

Journal Entry:

Hey everyone,

First I wanted to give a big belated happy birthday to Kim! Rock on Kim; hope you had a great birthday!

We have been having a great time on the road here. We got the opportunity to stay in Gettysburg, PA at the Lutheran Seminary. The seminary was nice. The chapel is incredible there! It has this high ceiling with a monstrous pipe organ and gold trim everywhere. I really think it is a treasure of the Lutheran church.

In addition to the seminary, we got to tour Gettysburg. The tour was really cool; there is a feel to the place that puts you back in that mindset. I felt like I could really visualize the battlefields, the troops, the cannons and everything. I could easily spend a week there just walking around.

I know that you are all concerned about the health of Mullet Two. So I am happy to report that he is handling the rigors of life on the road very well. He's a people fish, so he enjoys his time on the sales table as well as seeing the eastern U.S.

Overall, life on the road has been good. God blesses us everyday through the people that we meet as well as meeting our physical and spiritual needs. Although our focus is here on the road, our thoughts and prayers are still with our friends and families back home.

God's Blessings,
Dallas
Romans 8:28



Dallas Rosin

Date: 10/19/2004

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

I am amazed to know how some Lutheran church has its own diverse ethnic community worship. Ethiopian worship, Korean worship...I am glad to see that no matter how far you come from you can always find a common place for worship to the

same God who created us all.

My host mom drove by to a country club golf resort on our way to the house. And she pointed out that that's where the very rich people live whose houses are worth millions of dollars. In awe I said, "Wow!" and she continued, "I think it's ridiculous." I understood what she meant. While she continued to explain her views, I was quiet and began to think how my own house would be like and how much it'll be worth of. I thought of the families back home, Philippines, who live in a bamboo or nipa huts. A simple life, worry-free... but isn't ironic, most houses built in a typhoon belt places are the weakest? It may be the house that'll perish, but a home stays the same. I wonder which houses are the strongest when storm blows. I ended up the drive with a smile at the thought of my mom who cross stitched a pattern that says, "It takes a lot of loving to make a house a home."



Irene Venus

Date: 10/25/2004

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

All right, so here we are in North Augusta, South Carolina. It is super cool here. First of all, when we got out of the church, I definitely saw something that looked like a palm tree. Now it wasn't the biggest plant that I have ever seen, but it was definitely cool and had palm tree type leaves on it. So that was crazy, because I have never seen one of those in real life before. So that was exciting. Second thing that strikes me about here is that it is nearly the end of October and I have not seen snow yet. That is a weird, weird feeling. I get up every morning and I feel like I'm going to have to put on boots, but I walk outside and it's warm. Like, so warm I almost put on shorts the other day. I got an email from some of my friends at Bethany College and they definitely have, like, a foot of snow there! People back home are going to think that I am nuts for saying this, but I miss the snow! I don't know if it has to do with missing home as well, but I could deal with a good snowfall. Apparently down here, though, that shuts things down for a day or two, so that could put a hindrance on our ministry.



Drew Bell

So, aside from my Temperature Confusion, life is going well. One thing that I am really enjoying about my role on team is how much people like the drum. Kids, parents, grandparents; they all come up and want to hit the drum after a program. It's really neat because it totally opens things up for relating to people. It's one of those tools that God is using that I didn't foresee whatsoever. Speaking of God working, it is good to see Him working in the lives of those around me and in the lives of my teammates. Youth Encounter always told us that "it's not natural" for you and five other people to be in a van for a year together and get along. I think there absolutely right. It's hard sometimes to want to be nice, or to say, "all right, let's do it your way." But those are things that God is helping us to smooth over for the sake of the ministry. That's really what's important.

I figured out the other day that there are 46 days left until I go home for X-mas. Now don't get me wrong. I'm not counting down because I hate team and want to leave. But I am so excited for X-mas and being able to see my people at home. It's weird -- I have a bi-polar love of team and home right now. I love to be on team and have the opportunities to serve God and be with his people, and at the same time I miss having my little support group at home and having a routine that involves sleeping in the same bed for more than 2 nights at a time. So that is something that is on my mind. But I do love this life, and in the back of my mind I sometimes wonder about doing a second year. Anyway, I'll see you all later. Thanks everyone for your support!

Date: 10/28/2004

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

This morning I went for a run in the little rural community of Vidette, Georgia. I am taking advantage of the fact that I can still run outside in a t-shirt and shorts, instead of a snowsuit (which may be appropriate for the climate right now in Irricana, Alberta). It is really nice being in a small community again. It's like "Cheers," a place where everybody knows your name; a place where the pace of life seems to be about as fast as my jogging, and where every driver that passed gave me the standard rural greeting of the "one finger wave" (I'm talking the fore-finger).



Becky Wray

I started off on Main Street and then headed down a road past the Methodist church, a couple old farm houses, and an old, large brick building that I found out later to be the school that our host mother attended growing up. After those few buildings, my tour of Vidette the village had ended, and I was now surrounded by pine trees (a recent cash crop for farmers in the area) and fields of previously harvested soybeans.

While passing all this scenery, I was reminded of the fact that I would be leaving all of this tomorrow. That's one of the toughest things about this ministry: having to say goodbye. We are in new homes every two to three days, and thus are given the opportunity to meet so many wonderful people, but unfortunately we have to say goodbye to these many wonderful people as well -- people that, in reality, we may never see again.

It was during this time that I came upon the Rose Due Cemetery. I thought it to be kind of interesting that of all settings, a cemetery is what came across my path while I was thinking about endings and saying goodbyes.

I stopped at the brick entrance and did some stretches and looking around, getting a general feel for the place. There were a number of large sections with family plots, anywhere from two to six relatives in the same cement outlined area. I was intrigued by these tombstones/memorials. Seeing the names in large bold print on the cement got my curiosity going. Who were these people? What were their lives like? How long did they live? How did they die?

While thinking about that, my eyes were awakened to the plethora of bright flowers at the foot of almost every tombstone. I had one of those "Oh, I see!" moments, realizing that indeed, all of these wonderful bouquets were in such vibrant condition due to the consistency of their very being! In other words, they were fake (yes, something I should have known before J). Seeing the flowers however, reminded me of the love and thoughtfulness that was involved with the placing of those flowers at their loved ones tombstones; a love that is anything but fake.

I got to thinking (yes, I did a lot of that this morning) about goodbyes again, and how hard it was to say farewell to my grandpa just under two winters' ago. How sad it was to see him really go, even after years of failing health. How sad it really is to bid adieu.

That's when I saw the cross. Literally. There was a 5' tall cement cross marking the plot for a family in the community. Seeing this cross reminded me of a recent email from a friend in Australia, saying that even if we don't get the chance to see each other again, there'll be a great reunion in Heaven. Yeah! How cool is it to know that all these wonderful people we are meeting on the road; new friends; old friends; those who have gone before us; are all going to be able to celebrate in union with one another and our Saving Lord, Jesus Christ in Heaven! What a party our gracious God has so freely given us, and what JOY then replaces the sadness when thinking about goodbyes. For a goodbye becomes merely a "see ya later."

"The rose may fade, the lily die, but flowers immortal bloom on high." (from one of the tombstones in Rose Due Cemetery)

Date: 10/30/2004

Submitted by: Dallas Rosin

Journal Entry:

Well, hello from Norlina, North Carolina! We just arrived here today after a mostly

catatonic eight-hour drive from beautiful Atlanta, Georgia. We're excited to have the opportunity to do an International Worship Service here, as well as a Fall Festival party tomorrow.

I would like to take this time in today's journal to share a personal story with you. Okay, so Drew and I were at our last host home, and the fan was making this really funny noise. So I turned to Drew and said, "You know what we are going to have to do?" He just smiled and...

BEEEEEEEEEP

We interrupt your regularly scheduled journal entry to bring you a late breaking Mullet update. Mullet the fish has had a near death experience as his owners forgot his food in North Carolina. Instead of buying him another two dollar bottle of fish food, they forced M2 to live on bread and water for an entire week until they were able to recover the lost food. Mullet is currently recovering on the kitchen table in his fishbowl with plenty of protein- packed BettaMin.

We now rejoin your regularly scheduled journaling currently in progress.

...and that's why I can no longer balance on my left foot.

This week has been a good week. God has blessed us with time to refine some of our music, catch up on some work, and be involved in ministry outside of churches. As we press on toward the goal, we thank you all for the support that you have blessed us with by your gifts and prayers. We ask for your continued prayer as there is nothing more powerful that anyone can do for us.

Livin' on God's Graces,
Dallas



Dallas Rosin

Date: 11/2/2004

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

Yesterday was Reformation Sunday. We were in Norlina, NC and we led an International Worship Service, had a Fall Festival Celebration and potluck lunch, and played volleyball and tag with a bunch of kids. It's been a while since I have run around, and I kind-a pulled a muscle. Later on I just joined the younger kids inside the church playing a 'dance-a-round' game. No sweat. No one knows exactly what it's called, but I got a bubble toy out of it. It was fun!

I met a man whose wife is from the Philippines and said he could have mastered 'Tagalog' had his wife spoken the language that often. I assured him that if I were to speak between English and 'Tagalog,' I definitely would choose English for convenience's sake. I speak 'Cebuano,' which is different from 'Tagalog'. When I met his wife, though we come from the same country, we totally spoke in English and had only, I guess, ten 'Tagalog' words spoken.

I was staying with a family that lives in a big flower farm. They grow different kinds of flowers and sell them. They call it the 'cut flowers' business. This time of year, I only got to see some orange and white dahlias, white hydrangeas, deep purple butterfly bushes and marigolds. The couple worked hard from sunrise 'til sunset. It's just amazing to see their labors' fruit - the two lovely kids who are now in high school, their homestead flower farm, their generosity. I also went to their barn where they kept all their farming tools and 'stuff.' What was neat about that place was the attic full of dried flowers. I am a fan of flowers myself, and I was totally overwhelmed. My host mom and I could only wish that the team will be back this way again next year and catch the season where all the flowers bloom. Wouldn't that be exciting? My host sister wanted to have a horse-related work and my host brother wanted to be in the Marines. When I grow up I want to build a Bible Camp and have a flower farm that'll surround it. This is one of the places that I'll never forget; I had a wonderful time.

Thank you again for the hospitality of sharing your home with us. Your kindness is a glimpse of



Irene Venus

heaven. God's blessings!
Irene

Date: 11/6/2004

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:



Elissa Surprenant

Greetings! I am writing from Prattville, AL, where we just wrapped up a fun Family Night Program as well as a long day. We were in Elberta, AL, earlier this morning at a youth retreat at a camp in the area. Friday we were in Pensicola, FL, at a small private Christian school and led a chapel with one energetic and enthusiastic group. Both events were a lot of fun and spoke volumes to my heart. I could tell people are tired and struggling. And it is understandable why. Just because the hurricane is gone doesn't mean the destruction goes with it. There is still a ton of work to be done down here. Trees down everywhere, many blue tarp roofs, homes still waiting to even get on the repairman's list. There are literally mountains of debris growing each day. We saw a dump site at a horse arena... the debris was almost to the top of the light poles in the parking lot. Traffic is just crazy because of the influx of carpenters, technicians, and large trucks hauling debris. Hotels are booked with the technicians and carpenters. It is easy to see now how people are so worn out by it. It was fun to come in and bring a breath of fresh air with us. Redeemer Lutheran Church, our host church, was hit hard. The roof to their school was ripped off, and there was water damage two feet up the walls, so they have had to move their school downtown to another church that has opened their doors to them. I found the most encouragement from the joy I saw in people's faces during the chapel we were able to lead. The energy I experienced there was contagious... both the teachers and students were laughing and singing. It was great! And then we were able to hang out the rest of the morning with the students in their classrooms. It was such a treat for me. The kids were awesome. They even wanted me in their classroom while they took their tests.

One fun moment I want to write about... it is by far my highlight with my teammates. Envision this... a dark cool, fall evening, stars shining bright, riding along in a 15-passenger van, windows open catching the cool dry breeze, six relaxed individuals singing camp songs. This is one that I won't soon forget.

Hope this finds you all well!

Elissa

Date: 11/9/2004

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:



Drew Bell

On the road again. This time I am maxin' and relaxin' in the van with my laptop on my lap (of all places) and just waiting till we stop for gas or a bathroom break. We've been on the road for about 2 months now, and I'm thinking to myself, "Yup, life sure is getting monotonous." It's funny how when I was thinking about doing team, I always thought about how exciting it would be, and how being in a new place all the time would be so awesome. But I find myself slipping into tedium. But then God busts out and shows me that there really are new things to experience in every place, and that every church I come to is a new chance to share in people's lives and experience a little bit of their relationship with the Father. We are in Prattville tonight, and we are staying with this awesome family. They have taken us into their home, and it's just so neat. What is unique about this last family is that they own motorbikes. Now, neither Dallas nor myself have ridden such contraptions before, but our host dad got us on them and driving around. He even took us to this cool little forested area and let us rip around there. I won't say that I didn't fall once... twice... o.k. maybe three times. BUT it was a lot of fun and something new to experience. Now what is even cooler about this is not just getting the chance to do something that I'd never done, but it's the way that it came at just the right time. I cannot have any doubt that God is affecting my life every day! Coming into Prattville I was tired, just expecting another church, another town, and another family. But God showed me that these churches aren't just "another" church -- they are wonderful communities of faith! These families aren't just "another" family, but they are caring, kind, wonderful people who have opened up their homes to us so that we can continue to encourage the church! Awesome! It just gave me a second wind to give my all everywhere we go, whether it's a small program with 8 people or a family night program with 200 youth! Thank

you to all those people that I've been able to visit with on the road so far; your generosity has blessed my heart!

In other news last night I got an e-mail from Ryan Wiebe. He is a friend that I met at Bible school (neither of us returned this year). He just e-mailed me to encourage me! It did two things. One, it made me miss home more than ever before! Two, it showed me that God's love is great because you can spread it in so many ways. I got this e-mail that made me feel so great and appreciated. But we can do that through hugs, encouraging words, being on team or hosting teams. Praise God that he should give us so many ways to share his love!

Anyway I hope it is evident in this journal that I am having a blast on team. Not that there aren't hardships and times I surprise myself with how negative I can be. But God is continually showing his hand in this van and in our team. Hey, everyone from home -- I miss you tremendously. It's, like, four and a half weeks until I get the chance to see you. I can't wait to see you (and snow) again!

Date: 11/11/2004

Submitted by: Dallas Rosin

Journal Entry:

This journal has been transcribed from the verbal testimony of Mullet the Fish.

Team life has been pretty good lately. I got to see the sights in Niceville, Florida. We had the opportunity of doing an hour and a half music program AT A MALL!! It was an outdoor concert in front of the fountain -- that's right, I said fountain. All that water made me a little homesick...but I digress.



Dallas Rosin

Now I am not an American. I was, in fact, born in the Caribbean, but I have lived most of my life here in the U.S. of America, so it feels like home. The wonderful thing about this country is that we were able to stand out *in public* and praise our God. The employees manning the four stands near our stage were very supportive; they even clapped a few times. Also, many of the passersby would look and pause slightly.

Now to those of you that are not fish may be thinking, "Big deal, they paused and ignored you." You are probably also thinking, "Mullet, you're just a small fish in a small bowl." What you're failing to see is that I am, in fact, a small fish in a small bowl with a very large Jesus behind my team.

Point is that when one of those people paused, they may have thought, "Man, it's freezing out here, why are those kids standing up on that stage jumping around and trying to out shout the cars, the fountain and the thirty-mile-an-hour wind?" And when they then walked over to one of the brave Grace Lutheran Church folk and asked, "Hey, what's going on here?" the whole time, my Jesus was standing there, smiling saying, "Just keep singing, team." I may just be a small fish...

Although the stage was a little shaky, and I lost some water from all the jumping around that was going on, overall that program went quite well.

Thursday, November 11th, is a day that I will remember for the rest of my life. It was a long day in the car, nine and a half hours before we reached Heart Missionary Institute. Not that I was stiff or anything, but with all of that sloshing around, I was a little sea sick, if you'll excuse the pun.

The team gets out as usual, leaving me still buckled into the back seat. They chat with the nice contact as I wait patiently. One of the males crawls into the back to get me out, so I think. He passes me over and slams an object into my bowl. As the water rushes out of my home, I take a deep breath. Here we go, boys. The other male screams out, "Mullet!" I resist the urge to scream as their human fumbling is causing me to slide in between the seats. As the darkness of the cloth clouds my vision, I think of the Creator and wonder, do all *fish* go to heaven? Quickly a hand reaches in, snatches me from jaws of death, and I'm back in my bowl gasping for oxygen.

The male that I've affectionately come to call "The Careless One" then placed me on the tailgate of a nearby truck as the team discussed the day's events and gathered their belongings.

As I felt the smooth purr of the engine starting, my heart mimicked the acceleration to nearly three

hundred cycles per minute as I came to the realization that no one on the team grasped the situation. I held on as long as I could, but as my bowl began to slide, I composed myself and realized that my only hope was the humans. Just before my bowl hit the dirt, I took the largest amount of oxygen into my system that I could muster. I hit the ground and lay completely still to last as long as I could. My heart sank as I listened and realized that my absence had not been noticed.

Suddenly the female that I now call "The Angel" posed a peculiar question. "Does the institute have a fish?" The ensuing conversation led them semi-quickly to my location where I lay motionless. To my disdain, The Careless One spoke of **burying** me! I didn't last this long to be buried alive! I started to flip and flop all over the place. As The Careless One somewhat carelessly throws me into my empty bowl, I see the team scramble for water toward the locked van. As they fumble for their keys, I try to suck the last drops of oxygen out of the small puddle in my bowl. With impressive speed, the team relays a bottle of water unnecessarily through four of them before they cooperatively twist off the bottle top and replenish the water level in my tank.

I spent the next two days recovering in my bowl on a desk in a cabin breathing the fresh air of central Florida.

Once again, I am just a fish, and you may believe whatever you choose about the events that happened on that day. But that day will ever serve as a reminder to me that there is a God, He watches over every living thing on this planet and I know that He mourns as He looks over this fallen world, but He rejoices at ordinary "sheep" that are welcomed to the pen. That is why I live in a tiny bowl with six other people and depend on God for my food and housing each day and night. If God uses me in some small way to help someone see Him more clearly, it was all worth it.

Thus ends the testimony of Mullet the fish.

Livin' on God's Graces,
Dallas

Date: 11/13/2004

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

For the last couple of days, our team has been visiting the H.E.A.R.T. (Hunger Education and Resource Training) Missionary Training Institute in central Florida. A place to learn ways that you can bring practical ideas and resources to economically developing nations to which God may be calling you. They do this through class instruction and by actually living in the same modest manner that would be in those places.



Becky Wray

There was a definite sense of community in everything at the institute. From fixing the palm branch siding on a toilet house, to cooking meals, to cleaning up after eating, to gardening and feeding the animals.

We did a revised Family Night Program for the students and the village coordinator's family. It was so much fun, and I truly felt a part of the HEART community. They loved to dance, do actions and be goofy with us in worship. Then as we started to get a little more serious, diving into our theme, I was touched by the openness of the group to sharing stories of "storms" in their lives and the "calming of the storm" that followed. There were tears shed, a few laughs and many smiles when talking about the hope that Jesus brings amongst those junky, uncertain times in our lives.

It was so great to sleep in a simple two-story cabin without electricity, use outdoor bathroom shacks and solar showers, gather together before meals to hold hands and thank God for the food, and everything else as simple as it may be, and to meet some of the wonderful people that God has called to show his love to the world.

Thank you, H.E.A.R.T., for showing us your hearts, (cheesy I know, but thanks!)

Date: 11/16/2004

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

On our first evening in Tampa, Florida, we went to a United Methodist church for dinner and stayed for another hour to see different church communities gathered this evening to have fellowship and listen to missionaries share their experiences from their overseas work in Cuba, Haiti and West Virginia. We get to see some familiar scenes from the pictures -- at least, to me it's familiar. Simple, unfurnished church buildings, dusty road, swarming little ones gathered around a foreigner. We also listened to a group of Haitian youth sing an awesome 'Jubilee' song. And they have a couple displays of 'batik' (dyed) clothes. It was what I needed to hear right now. I could only say that if we are not performing, someone performs before us, and that's what was happening to us. I've seen a very good balance in our abnormal lifestyle. The same with the real life out there -- we can't be performers all the time; we need to be audiences too. There's a time to talk and a time to listen. While hearing all the inspiring stories from different missionaries who have gone before us, my heart has been refreshed, reminding me of my real purpose of this life. There's a greater need out there and only by going to see it with our own eyes can it bring more appreciation of what it means to really help reach out. The speakers encouraged all of us, if we have the opportunity to go overseas and do ministry, 'don't let it pass away.'



Irene Venus

I got a random phone card in my wallet and tried to call home. I actually didn't expect to have some minutes left to have that call, but it worked. It's been a long while that I haven't talked to my family, and I just felt that I needed to call home. So I did. Mom was excited. She expected me to call. She said that she and my sister had a 'mental telepathy' yesterday telling me to call. And it worked. You know, it's hard for families overseas to contact people like me who are always moving from one place to another, especially when it's urgent. Anyways, I've missed a lot of things. I rejoiced at the news that my sister-in-law's having a baby and a friend is getting married here in Oregon. On the other hand, my Dad has been admitted to a Heart Hospital for a surgery. While doing not so much of a program, I thought, I also miss praying. Now I have something to pray for. Also a friend has been recovering from cirrhosis of the liver.

For the past 2 nights we stayed in a hotel, Holiday Inn, on our day off! Thanks to our host, Ms. Cookie. Three of us girls walked to a nearby Michael's and had some stuff and did some crafty projects to while away the unoccupied hours. Later that day we went to a 'ToGo's/Dunkin' Donuts/Baskin & Robbins' for our dinner and celebrated Dallas' 25th birthday.

***"Be joyful always, pray at all times, be thankful in all circumstances."
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18***

Date: 11/20/2004

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Yesterday we were in St. Simons Island, GA. It was a good day. We started out with a little work and then in the afternoon we were able to play a bit. We headed to the beach! We walked the shore and searched for shells... fun pictures and beautiful shells collected. We ended our day with a spaghetti dinner at Lord of Life Lutheran Church. It was a fundraising dinner for the youth. We didn't do a full program... better yet, we just got to play our instruments and sing for them. People were very receptive. I even met someone who actually lived in Eyota, MN for a short time! It's not every day that you meet someone who knows of Eyota! Overall, this was a good day, the last day before we start in the general direction of home. I can't believe we are on our last leg before Christmas



Elissa Surprenant

break and training! I'm eager to get to Mid-winter training and hear from other teamers about their experiences so far and talk with staff about life on team. I'm looking forward to break... I hope and pray I find time to sit and finally put together all the pieces that are flying through my brain about life on team- what God is showing me about his church-the body of Christ, about myself, and my team.

I'm thankful for yesterday. I'm thankful for the few hours of freedom... to walk the beach and do something mindless like looking for shells. I'm thankful for this opportunity to see all these incredible places that I would have never had a chance to visit otherwise. I'm thankful for the generosity of our host families and their willingness to drive us all over so that we can eat lunch at places called Willy's Wee-Nee Wagon (great food, it's a definitely a novelty- a variety of hotdogs in case you were wondering) and to the beach to search for shells.

Thank you, St. Simons Island, for everything...God bless...
Elissa

P.S. - A few verses that a wonderful friend and past teamer from Alabama just recently shared with me... I found them encouraging and refreshing... 2 Corinthians 1:21-22... "Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come." 2 Cor 4:1 "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart"... verse 5 I like as well... "For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake." Hmm... I really like 2 Corinthians. It's a close second favorite to Proverbs.

Date: 11/23/2004

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Man, if there is one cheesy song that comes to my head everyday it's that "On the Road Again" song by... uh. I don't remember. (*Editor's note: Willie Nelson.*) But it is definitely there when we hop in the van, which is most every day, so you can imagine how much I enjoy that song! So this being the 23rd, it means that I have only a few more weeks of my first third of team ministry left. I am so excited to go home and see everyone, and Mid-Winter training is just around the corner where I'll get the chance to go and hang with all the YE Teamers. So that is going to be such a neat time of sharing stories and comparing experiences! I am sick as a dog right now, however, which is making me wish that there were a few weeks more so that I could get healed up for training. But as much as I argue with them, my sinuses have refused to give up, and the cough I have seems to have set up a base somewhere deep inside me. But I've found that with the proper amount of Dayquil before a program I can sound almost normal! Right now we are staying at Luther Ridge, and it is such a good time! We met Matt who was a teamer on Captive Free and on Cross Fire. He was phenomenal; he set us up with a cabin that we could call our own for a few days here, and we've got the projector set up with the amplifier so we can watch some DVDs that he has loaned us. Nice and relaxing! While we are here at L-Ridge I am going to have the chance to experience my first U.S. Thanksgiving. Now from what I've learned it's quite a bit like Canadian Thanksgiving, just about a month later. Same colors, lots of turkey, stuffing, and.... mmmmm.... stuffing... Anyway, it has been really neat to spend some time hanging out with Matt because he is an experienced teamer and can share his experiences with us. Tonight we went to a place called the Mellow Mushroom



Drew Bell

which had some phenomenal pizza and an atmosphere that was really unique! One of the neatest culinary things I have been able to experience on team. Oh, we also got the chance to go to this totally cool theatre near Arden. It's a micro-brewery (but we didn't drink) and pizza place with the Theatre attached. The other unique thing is that in the theatre there is a row of chairs then a row of tables, then chairs, then tables, so you can eat your pizza during the movie! Then closer up there are booths so that you can hang out with your friends and watch it. This is the only theatre that I've ever seen like this, and it was a great guys night out with Matt and Dallas. We got a mail packet this evening and it was great. My girlfriend from back home sent me a CD full of pictures where people from home were holding a "HEY DREW" sign and doing random things! It warmed my heart and helped me to feel a connection to home. Team life is pretty cool, but there is nothing that will replace home! I am glad, however, that we are getting the chance to do the overseas part and break up our time here. We got our Cantonese language CD today as well, so that is really exciting because it's becoming quite real to me that I am going to be heading overseas soon. For a small town boy from Vauxhall, Alberta, this seems like such a huge thing. Praise God that he is here with us all the time. I've been thinking a lot about Romans 8:38-39 and just how wonderful God's love is and how much it is a sure thing! Anyways, it's getting later so I am needing to go to bed, but God bless. Shout out to Matt who is the coolest eva! Talk to you later~

Drew Bell~

Date: 11/25/2004

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

HAPPY THANKSGIVING!!!!!! I'll admit that it seems a little different saying those two words in November, as the Canadian Thanksgiving passed over a month ago. Then again, I am not one to complain about having two chances to intentionally and purposefully set apart a day to think about all those things that I can and should be thankful for (with the added bonus of a delicious turkey dinner or two).



Becky Wray

To encourage a daily devotional schedule for myself, I have been using the "Portals of Prayer" devo guide (from Concordia Publishing House), and I really liked the devotional that was for today. The Scripture readings include Philippians 4:4-7 and Psalm 147.

Phil 4:4-7 says, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." (NIV)

I have been a little anxious lately, thinking about the second leg of our tour. How the overseas adventure is very rapidly becoming a reality. Just as our team seems to be getting the hang of life on the road here in the USA, we are leaving it; leaving it to enter a whole new culture, a whole new lifestyle, and a whole new way of communicating our faith in unfamiliar places. I am so very excited, but at the same time (as you can see) a little worried. Through this worrying, Philippians 4:6, the same verse as in the devotional, kept coming to mind...do not worry about anything, but pray about everything. I thought it to be really cool that that verse was brought to my attention today, reminding me to continue to bring my worries to God, and not only that, to do so with a thankful heart" with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Through any of the worries, I am reminded to be thankful for being given the opportunity to go overseas, to visit my teammate's home, and the chance to play, sing, gather and worship with our brothers and sisters in Christ

almost half way around the world.
May you go in peace today and serve the Lord!
THANKS be to God!

Date: 11/27/2004
Submitted by: Dallas Rosin
Journal Entry:

Mullet is alive and doing well; he's looking forward to settling in for Christmas break. He sends you all his regards.

I am doing pretty well; I am very excited to be in my home congregation in a week and also excited to see my family! Although focus is shifting from the here and now to Christmas break, I am also looking ahead to the exciting events after and around Christmas, getting to see the other teamers, recording, and of course, heading to the Philippine Islands.

Our days have been nice here in the South, but we are preparing now to start moving toward the frozen tundra that is Minnesota. Hope to see you soon.

God's Blessings,
Dallas



Dallas Rosin

Date: 11/30/2004
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:

*8:01 a.m. It started to rain just as we pulled out from the church parking lot. It was cold and wet. We stopped at a nearby gas station and filled in the tank. The rain poured in while Dallas went out cleaning the windshield. Drew was on the wheels while Boots was on the navigating seat. Tania and I sat just beside the heater. I could barely breathe, and that was my low. It takes a while to stabilize the temp in the van.

*12:37 p.m. The road still was sleeky; rain never took a chance to rest from pouring. I got my turkey sandwich for lunch. I tried to spice the meal that seems ordinary. I thought of another low when the people farther back couldn't find my 'tabasco.' No worries.

*3:15 p.m. Snow came in our way. Soon enough the fields were covered with inches of snow. I shivered heedless of the extreme heat in our van.

*6:30 p.m. .We met our contact and had a tour of the church. We were dropped off to our host home and had dinner with our host dad. "Good English there," he said to me, and I replied, "Yeah, thanks. I get that a lot."

During a youth night dinner time, I tried to have a conversation with a second grader and she asked, "So where are you from?"

"I'm from the Philippines. Do you know where that is?" I didn't wait until she could reply so I continued to explain where it is. And inquisitively she asked, "So is that where you speak like Spanish?" I smiled saying, "Actually, I speak Tagalog, Cebuano, English, a little bit of Spanish and Chinese..." I sighed and realized that I was too honest and that left the little girl clueless. In confidence she replied, "I only speak regular." I didn't see that coming and asked, "You mean, regular...English?" And she said, "Uh-huh!"



Irene Venus

Date: 12/4/2004
Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Ah, what a day... the day our development skit came to life... in particular, the skit about running out of gas. In the 15-minute drive between Fargo, ND and Casselton, ND (where Dallas is from), our van sputtered to a stop three or four times as Dallas showed me something new. I never knew you could start up the car after it dies the first time. I guess I've never run out of gas before. Man alive, was it cold outside! We had just been in Mississippi three days before, and our blood was still a little thin. This was our orientation to the great North that we had all been longing for (okay, maybe just the Canadians and the Minnesotans... not sure about the North Dakotan who has spent a bit of time on the West Coast and in Texas, and the Filipino who hibernates when it is this cold out). Our last push on fumes got us right before an underpass where there was a larger shoulder for us to stop on. We got out the handy-dandy team cell phone and called Dallas' mom, who graciously came to our rescue with a bit of gas to get us to the nearest gas station. Before the great rescue, we explored the ditch and the overpass. Tall, frozen grass covered the hillside of the overpass, and we marveled at the fact we could walk through it without a fear of snakes. At the top we took a moment to view the great sunset that was not blocked by trees or a hill. It's been a long time since we've been able to do that. I really enjoyed those few moments. And the fun wasn't over. We didn't get enough of the cold so we ventured out again that evening back to Fargo to hang out with a friend of Dallas, with a full tank of gas this time and all six of us crammed into a smaller car. It was hilarious. The evening was filled with laughs, cheap sugar-laden food, and the crazy game of Cranium. It was boys against girls, and I do believe the ladies might have won.



Elissa Surprenant

Only one more day until Mid-Winter Training when we can stop and be still for a moment, surrounded by those who understand our exhaustion, our confusion, our tears, our jokes, for they have been there as well. Surrounded by those who want to help find answers to the questions we have from experiences on the road... find ways to refresh and restore us... at least this is my hope.

This is the last journal before Christmas. So we'll see you on the other side. May your Christmas be blessed with a deep realization of what Immanuel means. (John 1:14)

In Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to His power that is at work within us,

Elissa

Date: 12/27/2004

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

STREEEEETCH! Just off the plane, fresh from two weeks of hangin' out with my girlfriend, friends and family at home. It was a little bit disappointing when I got home because I always told people in the southeast where we toured that we had lots of snow in Canada, and I got home and it was... BROWN! Quite sad, but I was excited to get home after the ordeal that I had to go through to get there. You see we were supposed to leave Minneapolis at 6:05 SHARP! But we didn't leave until about 7:14, so that meant that the 50-minute layover I had in Denver, Colorado would be hard to make. Long story short--they told me when I got there that I could not catch my transfer, so I would have to wait until 6:05 A.M. the next day for my new flight plan, which routed me through San Francisco, where I would have a 4-hour layover before flying to my final destination, Calgary, Alberta. So, around 22 hours after I had planned to arrive home, my plane finally landed! I did, however, get to experience renting a hotel room for the first time with another YE teamer



Drew Bell

who ended up in the same position, so that's a new experience.

Being home--despite the difficulties in getting there--was so great. It was fun to relax and recharge. It's really hard to be telling people about what I've been doing on team because there is so much happening. I mean, every three days we are in a new place. So when someone comes up and says, "TELL ME ALL ABOUT IT!" I have to say, "Hmmm, if I spend one minute talking about every place I went, we would be here for, like, five hours!" But besides taking a few days to remember what it's like to sleep in the same bed for more than two days, it was good to relax.

In all honesty, though, I wondered about coming back on team. I'm here now, but truthfully things are really good for me at home, and I've been going through some different thoughts. I'm starting to understand a little bit more about Jonah. It is really easy to serve God when you want to do it. If you love what you are doing then it's not really work, not really hard to serve. But I LOVE my home. I love the people, I love that I could have a job, I love having a normal schedule. I also love team, but it's really hard to say goodbye for eight months to so many people that I enjoy. This is the first time that God has led me to a place that is really hard, and in some ways, I don't want to do what he has me here for. So it's all coming together now about serving God despite what I feel like. Now, in no way am I on team thinking to myself, "Grrrr... I don't want to be on team, and I don't wanna drive" or any of those things. What this means is that I've been learning to change the way I look at this. Being away from home, for example. On the one hand, I could say, "Man, this is harsh being away from all my friends and family," OR I can say, "It's neat that I get to learn to write letters to people." I could also say, "Man, I've got to leave home for eight months," or "I get to travel the world and share my faith in God." I think that these statements are funny because some days I do feel like it's the worst thing ever that I'm away from home. But when I put it in perspective, I know this is one year of my life that I have to spend for God, and I feel so much better and know that God is indeed blessing me this year.

So that's some stuff that I've been thinking over a whole lot. It's something that I'm still working through and thinking about. But I am so excited to be back on team, and with the Philippines coming up so quick, I'm so excited I can't sit still. Getting back together with the team will be nice, and in some ways, it's like coming home to a family. It's going to be great. I'll talk to you all later!

Date: 12/30/2004

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Happy New Year's Eve Eve! Only two more days till 2005 (and only five more years till the winter Olympics are being hosted in Vancouver, BC, Canada...just a little Canadian trivia for you...)

So, back to 2005....I have been thinking about the New Year and about everything that comes with it: a new calendar to hang on the wall; remembering all the highlights; laughing at all the lowlights, which in retrospect don't seem so low anymore (and really



Becky Wray

do make the best stories); singing as much of "Auld Lang Syne" as you can remember and then humming the rest; taking down the Christmas decorations, tree and lights; playing hockey with cousins; and of course setting those New Year's resolutions (that I'm very good at keeping for at least the first week after they've been set).

This year, ringing in the New Year will be a little different for me, since instead of being out at Camp Kuriakos on Sylvan Lake, AB, I'll be hanging out and singing with 40-60 youth at a lock-in Appleton, Wisconsin. I have never been to a lock-in before, and this will be the first official lock-in for our team, so I'm very excited to see what fun and festivities will arise as we celebrate the ending of 2004, yet I can't help but miss the fun, friends and fellowship guaranteed at the Camp.

Just as I'll be spending New Year's Eve a little differently than in the past, the beginning of this year will be unlike any before as well. In only a couple of weeks our team will be on a plane headed to South East Asia! I am SO excited for our time overseas. Opportunities to worship with our brothers and sisters on the other side of the world; be an encouragement to, and be encouraged by the greater global church community; and to celebrate with others the ending of the old, and the beginning of the "New Year" that God's grace gives us each day.

May you have a blessed New Year!

Boots

P.S. "May old acquaintance be forgot, and never brought to mind.....hmmm, hmmm, hmm, Hmmm, hmmm, hmmmmmm!"

Date: 1/1/2005

Submitted by: Dallas Rosin

Journal Entry:

Happy New Year!!!

We just spent all night hanging out with a group of junior and senior high youth! It was awesome. We were at a church that had a gym, a rockin' youth room, and a bowling alley...I'm not makin' that up. It was a great night--we stayed up all night, played some games, watched some movies, sang and prayed in the New Year, and made some new friends. Then we slept most of the day. They also had this super tall steeple/bell tower; we climbed all the way to the top. It was awesome. I do have to tell you, I've been having a great time since Christmas break. I feel like we are a new team, refreshed and perspectivized from a little time off. I hope this finds you all well, and I thank you for your support and prayer for this ministry.

God's Blessings,
Dallas



Dallas Rosin

Date: 1/4/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

8:45 a.m. Meeting time ended up being 10:15 instead. Boots and I first arrived at the church. None of my teammates arrive on time any other day most of the time. That's why Elissa, our team leader, made an extra time for arrival scheduling. I'm sure the team will do just fine overseas or at least in the Philippines. Time wise, we have this culture called Filipino time; set a time and we'll arrive half an hour later max.

9:45 am. Boots and I sang the entire sing along song compilation in the Program binder. No trace of other teamers yet. I doubted if Boots misheard Elissa's call on meeting @ 9:45 instead an hour earlier. But she's pretty sure she heard 8:45. So we continued



Irene Venus

exploring the Prog. Binder consisting of sample skit scripts, puppet shows and motivational Bible stories. It was a learning, persevering winter-cold Tuesday morning.

10:15 am when the rest of the team arrived. I thought of putting on a feisty face to show that it's not good to be late, you know. As I approached the van to load up on this icy and sleek parking lot, it didn't occur to my mind that there's always a good reason for everything. My face lightened up seeing Drew in his new plaid shirt, Dallas in the 'Grinch' (big green winter jacket) and the smiles of the girls. The morning that was cold and gloomy seemed to warm and light up a bit. I didn't bother to ask why they're delayed. I just remembered we stood out huddled beside the van, and as we prayed, giving thanks to God for the day, I heard that the boys found out earlier that a tire was leaking air--the second tire in two consecutive days. They had it fixed and picked up the girls on their way here to the church--that's where the time was consumed. I smiled at the thought that everyone's shivering cold and I was just heartwarmed.

We visited a Continuing Care center in the afternoon and had a chapel service there. A bunch of cheerful silver-haired folks came in their wheelchairs, gladly clapping and joining us in worship with their egg shakers. One of the ladies' names was Irene. I was reminded that this life we call here is fleeting and heaven is our home.

Date: 1/11/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Hmmmm, weird. That's all I can say about the last few weeks on team. I have been feeling weird. Just ask Boots--every day I stop and say, "Hmmm, this is weird." But it hasn't been until the last two days that I have been able to figure out what is weird.

Faith is something that I have had since I have been young. But what I'm starting to realize is that there are times in our life where our faith really does consist of what we are fed.

While I was young, my faith was being fed by going to the church that my mother went to.

When I was in high school, it was fed by the church that I had chosen and the youth group that I participated in. When I was in college, it was my professors. Now that I am on team I am fed by... no one. I am the one who is doing the feeding. So I have had to examine my faith and make sure that what I am consuming for myself is good and what God wants me to be taking in. I don't have anyone around who is telling me what Bible verses to read or what this means. So what does this mean? I am doing a lot of self examination.

Some things that I have discovered have been about how my faith sometimes can be guilt based.

Sometimes I did the things that I do "for God" so that maybe I would feel better about myself; it was a way that I could get rid of the guilt I felt over the sins I knew that I had committed. I'm not saying that my entire faith was that way, but it was a component of the way that I related to God. The hard thing I'm finding about changing this is that the outward workings of my faith are the same. If I am helping someone to deal with guilt then they are helped. If I am helping them for the glory of God then they are helped. So it has been interesting to work through this idea of "By what are my faith and my life driven?" I want to be driven by God's love, not my guilt.

Aside from feeling a little bit weird about that, things are going well on team. The stress is starting to build about getting ready to go overseas! We all have job stuff that we need to get ready for and final preparations. But we will get through. Today we are leaving Fairchild, Wisconsin, and it has been such a nice stay. Yesterday was our day off and I don't think I went more than 50 yards from where I woke up! Lovely! Played lots of video games with Dallas and slept in--all those things that make a good day off. The weather here is really nice, and I'm excited about having nice roads to drive on. Things have been kind of sketchy for most of the teams as we drive such big vans in the cold and winter weather. We have been safe in God's hands, but we continue to pray for our own safety and that of the other teams. We get to go to Tania's aunt's (pronounced ANT if you're from where I am from, not ON-T *smile*) church today and that will be fun. It's always neat to go to places where someone on the team knows someone. Anyway I pray that God blesses you all, thanks for your support and just reading our journals! Talk to you all later!



Drew Bell

Drew Bell

P.S. Big blessings to all my friends in Calgary whom I cherish and miss, especially one of you!

Date: 1/13/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Magandang hapon! (Good afternoon)

So the countdown is drawing to an end! In only four days we will actually be heading out across the Pacific Ocean to the Philippines! There are still lots of things to do as a team, and the anxiety of never really knowing if you are every going to be fully prepared is setting in on our team.



Becky Wray

With that said, however, I racked up another highlight for our time in the States last night. We did a Family Night Program in Osakis, MN, and it was such a great time. The Elm Church community was awesome! They clapped, sang, and danced so energetically with us the entire time: the first part of the highlight.

The second part of the high of my day came in the realization of God's ability and power vs. our ability. The program last night was definitely one of our least stellar performance-wise, yet, I found it to be truly one of the most worshipful. It was as if by needing a couple of tries to get the timing for the intro, hitting a few more wrong chords than usual, and the order of the program getting a little messed up, we were tangibly reminded that it isn't our ability that has anything to do with God's ability to use us.

This was a greatly appreciated reminder, especially as our team heads to new places and unfamiliar territory. The emotions of feeling unequipped for our time overseas are running a little high, and yet, God really is with us through it all--loving us, guiding us, and using us, no matter if it takes a few tries, or we hit a few wrong chords along the way.

Date: 1/20/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Day two, and feeling the effects of jet lag. I woke up at 1 a.m. feeling fully rested but went back to sleep until 4 a.m., attempting to sleep some "normal" hours. The sleep I got was some of the best I've had in a long time. In our room, we had an air conditioner going—that's right, AC. The temp in Manila was in the 70s (Fahrenheit); rather warm compared to the freezing temp we left in Minneapolis. So the cold bath/shower was refreshing. In order to bathe, you draw water from a large red bin with a small bucket and pour it over yourself. And to flush the toilet, you have to pour water in it, as well. I'm really glad we had our few days at the H.E.A.R.T. Missionary Institute to prepare us for situations like these. I have a feeling this will be a common experience for us as we go. Today we drove six or seven hours by bus to the Northern Mountain provinces. Our destination: Baguio City, the Lutheran Theological Seminary. I like it here. There is less traffic, less air pollution, fewer people, and cooler temps. This will be our home base for the next four weeks. The first meeting with our contact was a bit awkward because I don't think they were expecting us today. The awkwardness soon dissipated during our game of basketball with all the seminarians. It was awesome for two reasons. One, three hours of exercise after 24 hours of travel over the past three days, and two, culture and communication barriers were broken down for that time. Oh, another bonus—we got to meet Irene's brother! It's fun to finally meet some of her family and get more of an understanding of her as well. This evening we went to the local mall for dinner and some groceries. During the next couple days, we don't have any programs/events. It will be nice to settle in one place for a bit. It's good to be here; however, I'd really like a map and a schedule to know what's coming and where we are going. I think God is going to show me a few things about trusting



Elissa Surprenant

Him in all things and how to find joy in all circumstances, no matter how vague or confusing they might be.

Date: 1/21/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Mmmmm, jet lag. Something that I did not understand until now. But, being so tired I cannot keep my eyes open at 9:00 p.m., and then my internal clock telling me it's time to be awake at 5:30 a.m.—that is international travel. This funny feeling I have in my stomach—that is international travel. Walking down the streets of Manila and having your fellow team members be the only ones with your same skin color—that is international travel. People staring at you as you walk by because you are the visible minority—that is international travel. I am having such a great time here in the Philippines, but it is definitely a sensory overload. Colorful Jeepneys, the sounds of street vendors, the pollution in the city and the feeling of humidity that I have never experienced in January before. I can only praise God for bringing me here because in the last three days, I have learned more about the diversity of God's creation than ever before. It is truly going to be a time of growing for me.

It is so hard to know what to write. This has been and will be one of those experiences I sift through for a lifetime. Praise God for the paths that he lays for each of us. My prayer is that we "rejoice in the Lord always."



Drew Bell

Date: 1/22/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Magandang gabi! (Good evening!)

I had a truly great day today! We started off the day at 8:30 a.m. (6:30 p.m. on January 21, Minnesota time) with team devotions, a regular occurrence. But this time we were outside, surrounded by the many beautiful flowers here at L.T.S., and soaking up the heat from the sun.

From there we had some time to catch up on any personal things needing attention until Pastor James, the president of L.C.P. (Lutheran Church of the Philippines) arrived, and more introductions were made. He gave us a little more concrete idea of what we will be doing while we are here, which got me really excited—knowing a bit more about the places we'll be visiting, and the drives/hikes needed to get there.

After a lunch of sausage-stuffed-crust (sausage in the crust instead of cheese) pizza (yep, Pizza Hut is all over the world), we headed to St. Stephen's Church here in Baguio, for our first program event. I was super excited to get the ball rolling, so to speak, but nervous as well, not knowing what to expect.

Accompanied by some of the students at the seminary, we walked up and down hills through Baguio, arriving a few minutes late for the scheduled event. Fortunately, "island time" is in use in the Philippine Islands, and our 1:00 event became a 2:30 event anyway, as we waited for various groups of people to show up.

During that time, I got the chance to meet and play with some of the kids of the congregation. They were like wallflowers when we arrived, too shy to say anything, but antsy with excitement. Their shyness didn't last long, and soon enough we had a parade featuring the various percussion instruments we brought along, accompanied by a mix of English and Tagalog, making a definite joyful noise unto the Lord! The excitement in the kids was contagious, and during our sing-a-longs, everyone was joining in the fun.

In the three short days we've been here, the "Philippine hospitality" has been amazingly gracious. The fluidity of the English language here, as well as the willingness of the young and old alike to



Becky Wray

teach me Tagalog words and phrases, has been a great ease to my mind, the delicious Filipino cuisine and merienda (snacks) have been a blessing to my stomach, and the faithfulness that is evident in those we've met has been a gift to my spiritual walk.
I am so pumped about this opportunity, and so thankful for this path God is laying before me.
Blessings,
Boots

Date: 1/23/2005

Submitted by: Dallas Rosin

Journal Entry:

Church this morning really made me feel at home. We attended 8:30 a.m. Bible Study at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Baguio City. Study was, strangely enough, about the global church. In the Philippines, they are asking the same questions we are in the States about music and dress within the church.

Tonight we played our first program in the Philippines. It actually went quite well, we had a lot of fun, and then after the program we had a snack (merienda) and hung out with the church members. Overall, it was a great day. I think I'm gonna like it here.



Dallas Rosin

Dallas

Romans 8:28

Date: 1/25/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

From Sinisip, we drove to Guinzadan for another two hours in a nine-passenger van. Down the valleys, over the mountains and on a bumpy and dusty road. Yup, this is a mission field indeed.

We had lunch over at the pastor's, an old big mission house on top of a hill. The house has been donated to the church from the first American missionary here in Guinzadan. Some of us girls went down to the village with the pastor to see a burial rite. We ended up just passing the ceremony. The pastor told us that the dead body wasn't embalmed. He led us to the church where we visited some folks and chatted about the growth of St. Paul Lutheran Church. This congregation reaches to about 300 members. It's been said that this is one of the highest Lutheran church populations in the entire LCP. Just right outside of the church building was a construction for Sunday School classrooms.

It made me smile at the sight of these small buildings. There are very faithful and active members of this church.

At 4:00 p.m, we had our program at an open activity area in an elementary school. We had about 500 kids, mostly seated in front of us in concrete "gym-like" seats. Almost towards the end of our program, the Baranggay Captain (town's chieftain) interrupted and shook our hands and extended his gratefulness towards us. He was drunk, but he was conscious enough to hold a speech in front of the crowd. The pastors explained to him that we still have songs to sing, finishing off the event that afternoon. Later on we end up having coffee at the Barangay Captain's house.



Irene Venus

Date: 1/27/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Random, but a good day. A two-hour hike this morning from Tinoc to Tawangan. "Young people," as Pastor Felipe likes to call them, came from Tawangan that morning to carry our instruments and packs. They were amazing! That is no easy hike, and

then to do it twice that day—yeah, I'm impressed. Nothing is flat or straight about the mountains. You either go up or down and left or right. And the funny thing is that we ended up at the same altitude at which we started. My legs aren't complaining yet, so that's good. A snack awaited us, like at all of our destinations. This time it was fried potato wedges (a sweet version) and hot chocolate. Potatoes up here are just as common as rice.

After the program, we hung out and explored the area until dinner. Some went to wash a few clothes in the river. Drew and I only washed our tired feet. The people here are nice, but mostly curious and just want to stare. Many would walk by the house we are staying at just to look. Kids sat in the doorway and stared. Kind of funny. One little boy actually broke that pattern when he started to play with my hair.

Without a mirror in front of me, I forget sometimes that I am blonde and blue-eyed, and how odd it must be for them to see it. For many of the children here, we are the first white North Americans they have ever seen. Our light skin is also a wonder to them. Light skin is considered beautiful.

Ironically how in North America, in general we covet tan skin, and in Asia, it's the opposite.

Tonight after dinner, we taught a group of twenty-five people sing-a-longs. They were so eager to learn. This made me realize more why we are here—truly, we are a resource to the Lutheran churches here. Youth programs are not very strong. I'm still not sure how that all works here or if it ever has. I'm eager to learn more and how we can truly help.



Elissa Surprenant

Date: 1/28/2005

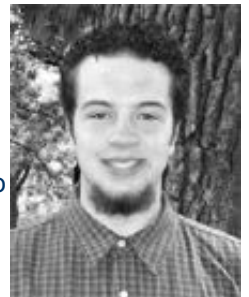
Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Well, we have done a bit o' stuff today! Some days are just so full, it is hard to remember all of the things that fill them. This morning we hiked back from Tawangan to Tinoc, which was a two-hour hike. It wasn't so bad because volunteers from the village offered to carry my bag, so that was the weight of a drum and some clothing off of my back. Honestly, there is no way I am in the proper shape to be hiking up and down mountains, but I can do it. An interesting cultural quirk that I noticed mostly yesterday and today on the hike is that Filipinos are not afraid to say what is. I was told several times, "Oh, you are fat to be hiking this." Now before anyone becomes offended on my behalf, there are a few things to realize. The first I have realized is that they are not being insulting. Instead it is a statement of fact, or even a compliment. In this area of the Philippines, it would be very difficult to be overweight because of the rigors of daily life. This is just one of many cultural differences that I have had to get out of a North American perspective to appreciate!

As far as seeing new things, I walked across a cable bridge that swung in the wind and whose base was a foot wide with holes in it. So cool, and don't worry—it was safe! Tonight we also performed at another school where there were about 200 kids! Wow, so many kids here are excited to see us. Talk about an ego boost! It is so cool to be here, and God is bustin' out blessings left and right!

Drew



Drew Bell

Date: 1/29/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Suey!

Today we were headed off hiking to our afternoon program when we were stopped by a member of the congregation of the church we were going to. He informed us that there would be no program that afternoon, as everyone who might have attended was now at one of the members' house for a dedication of the family's new back hoe. They then invited us to hang around for the festivities and requested a song of blessing to be sung by us later on. We accepted and made our way up the hill to join in the fun.

There were people everywhere, but behind the house there was the largest group of people, and an intense squeal resonating from the centre of it. They were finishing the process of killing the fatted pig for the dedication



Becky Wray

meal, and they took the now silent pig to a more secluded area to prepare it for supper. We were glad the pig was no longer squealing, and that we would know what we were eating for supper that night. Then we saw pig number two--a huge black pig that was to be added to the feast. After some unnerving yet captivating squealing from pig number two, we saw the whole series of events it takes for eight men to prepare a pig.

After this new experience (even for a farm kid like me), there was time needed to prepare the meal, so we went down the hill to the school park to introduce some frisbee playing and ended up playing various games of Tag and Simon Says, and getting plenty of exercise all the while. After a couple of hours of fun in the sun, it was time to sing for our supper, so to speak. We sang our "one" song (followed by ten more) and then were ushered to the front of the line for supper.

We were treated like royalty--given our pork first, and even given pieces with the skin. A little unsettling, but considered an honour, thus I really appreciated the gesture. It was awesome to be part of such a celebration and to see how whole communities come together to thank God for something like a backhoe, feast, and invite us foreigners to be a part of the culture, the festivities, and the fun!

Date: 1/31/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

For the past five days, I was away from my team. I went down to Metro Manila to be with my father who had had a heart surgery. He's doing just fine. Thank you, everyone, for keeping him in your prayers.

I totally didn't plan this to skip the longest hike of the team—it seemed like I had to see my dad. Anyways, I missed the adventures of walking into the mountains and through the rivers and such. It was comforting to know that my dad is all right, and now I'm back at the seminary where I waited for the team to come back. A lot of exciting and challenging stories were told. At some point, I was glad I didn't go with. On the other hand, I'd wished I did. Some things have to be learned by the team on their own. Their trip to Tinoc was indeed an experience.

Tuesday came and we took the day off. Another day to rest and prepare ourselves for another trip the day after. Some walked down to the mall and gotten our air tickets for Mindanao and in Macau. Some wandered just in the mall, just checking out souvenirs to take home with. I, on the other hand, enjoyed a movie (*Elektra*) with my brother Marzan.

"Some lessons cannot be taught, and by living we will learn it." (*Elektra*)



Irene Venus

Date: 2/3/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

What a day! This day was spent at 7500 feet and with the wonderful people of Babadak. To get to our location today, we stood in the back of a truck as it drove up a super bumpy path. It was a chore to stand straight and not be flung back and forth. It was also wise to watch out for our luggage, as it shifted all over as well. Once we reached the top, some of us were feeling a bit motion-sick and exhausted already from the lack of sleep the night before. Traveling is truly unpredictable.

It was a full day, but of course not without several meriendas (snack breaks). After our first merienda and short nap, we traveled yet again on another bumpy road, but this time in a Jeepney. Ironically, this was our very first Jeepney ride, and it was here in the mountains instead of in town. Our destination was a school, overlooking the opposite mountain range and valley in between. We put on a short interactive program for them. The kids were so interactive during the program, but afterwards, super shy. If you would even catch their stare, they would giggle and run away. Boots and I at one point just started chasing them everywhere. It was hilarious. Of course, after that, I couldn't even get within 15 feet of any of them.

Well, after our short merienda with the teachers (number two for the day), we drove back to our home base and had some lunch and a nap. Then that afternoon was spent with the congregation, teaching games and songs. It was a blessing we could just spend this time with the people before the program getting to know each other. It was so great to see familiar faces singing along with us.



Elissa Surprenant

After our program, the people, who were gathered from all over, shared their local traditional dances. We even got to participate by dancing and wearing their traditional outfits, which in the cold mountains consist of layers and warm blankets. The dances I'm finding hard to describe. Basically, the music is from five men creating a rhythm on metal plates of varying sizes, and anywhere from one man and one woman to a large mixed group of people dance around in a circle. The elder of the congregation shared how these were originally pagan dances, and how now they are Christians yet still are required to teach and practice their heritage to preserve it.

Date: 2/4/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Well, my journal day falls on a bit of a boring day. But I was thinking about it, and I realized it is a day I don't believe I could have at home, so I should share it. So here is New Dawn's February 4, 2005.

4:30 a.m. My alarm rings to awaken me to another day.

4:45 a.m. Coffee and warm up by the fire.

5:00 a.m. Ready to leave, but our ride isn't there yet. We find out our ride got misdirected, so we will have a new ride coming around 8:00 a.m. This is a little frustrating, but we are used to schedule changes.

5:10-8:30 a.m. Some of us catch up on sleep. Irene text messages, Boots and I walk up and watch the sunrise hit the Filipino mountains. It is beautiful here because there is a mist that hangs around the mountains so it looks like milk with mountain tops poking through.

8:30 a.m. Breakfast and our ride arrive. It is an "elf," which is a small truck with a shallow box in the back. We load ourselves and our instruments in and take to the bumpy! mountain roads.

9:10 a.m. We arrive at the bus stop...only to learn we have missed the bus. So we quickly head to the next stop to catch the bus.

9:40 a.m. We catch the bus—yay!—and embark on four more hours of bumpy roads to arrive in Baguio at around 2:00.

2:00 p.m. Eat lunch, do some shopping for supplies (toilet paper, ice cream, and *Braveheart* on video disc for five dollars!)

6:00 p.m. Supper and *The Little Mermaid*

9:00 p.m. Bedtime

And that, my friends, was today.



Drew Bell

Date: 2/5/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Hey everybody!

So today began with a three-hour trip from Baguio to Abatan as a five person team, for Dallas was a little/lot under the weather and was left to get better, rather than our day trip away. We've passed through Abatan on almost all of our highland excursions thus far, so it was nice to finally stop here and meet some of the people we'd only waved at before. We arrived just in time for merienda (snack) followed closely by lunch, and then an afternoon to relax...or figure out what having only five people and lacking the primary guitar player would mean for our program that night, if you're the program coordinator (as I am) and other guitarist in the group.

After some rearranging of our program and memorizing chords, I was looking through my journal, and revisiting conversations I'd been having with hosts, and my teammates over the past few weeks. With my teammates, we had discussed a few times about program stuff, and how to get a message (or rather, The Message) across to people who speak a different language than we do, have a difficult culture than we do, and can seem more intrigued by our skin than the news we bring. These discussions have forced me to think about what we're really doing here, and in that have given me great confidence knowing God has called us here for a reason, and there's no doubt he will use us.

So, as I sat in the grass, guitar in hand, I wrote a little song about it, and it goes like this (minus the singing, of course):



Becky Wray

*I was sitting there on the long green grass, reading through the word of the Lord
And as I read I questioned God, asking what am I really here for
Miles away from home, across the great Pacific, in a land like I had never been
To go and sing, share the Good News with God's children, make disciples of all men
Isn't that the great commission Jesus gives to us, but how am I to do that here?
Through song and dance--is it more than entertainment? Is the message of God's love ringing clear?
The language barrier, not always knowing what to say, people captivated by our skin
Will they see Jesus when they look at me, will they see that I'm only foreign kin?
A fellow member of the Body, come to have a reunion
With my brothers and sisters in Asia to worship the one and only King
The word of the Lord will never return empty, so Isaiah has foretold
In that I find my comfort amidst my hesitations, knowing God will use me to mold
The fellow members of the Body, we are having a reunion
All my brothers and sisters in Asia, worshipping the one and only King
Till next time,
Boots*

Date: 2/7/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

We were driving again for two hours, this time going down the mountains. It's a hot and sunny day. Welcome to the lowland district, people! Feel the heat of the Philippine Islands.

Baay is a small town just about an hour's dusty ride from a national road. It's another village uphill, another culture. Most of the residents here are Lutheran and the church is located at the heart of the community. The upper floor is the sanctuary where ten or more sacks full of rice is sitting in one corner—the members' Reformation Sunday offerings. The parsonage is right below the sanctuary, where a room was also spared for fellowship/nursery classroom.

Our first night here was with the young people's game and sing-a-longing time. Some couple of district pastors who came with us joined in the game. It was fun seeing them too having fun with each other. I bet the young people also were surprised how much fun they could share even with their own pastors. We all stayed together for the housing where we walked down a steepy, rocky path having one flashlight to guide our path.

About all the children in the village came into our program. They occupied the front seats and were the most dancers in our do-alongs. We had one microphone and big, loud speakers behind us. We were outside the church when we had our program. Good thing we have the local pastors who did some translations for us, because Tagalog is seldom spoken here. We hung out with the youth again, where they also rendered a couple of songs both in Kalanguya, Ilokano, and English. We also sang solo moments. Some you also crafted our names on a dust-broom—this is the community's famous of their livelihood product, made out of grass/bamboo bushes.



Irene Venus

Date: 2/10/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Well, yesterday I experienced one of the frustrating realities of any major metropolis—pickpockets. Yep, yesterday my passport pouch containing my passport, MN driver's license, all my cash, and my credit card was stolen from my backpack as I was walking in downtown Baguio. Good news is that I'm okay, nothing hurt except a jab to the ego. Plenty of "I should've's" have run their course. So, definitely wear your passport pouch is the lesson I've learned. I also was reminded where my true identity lies—not in papers, in passports or driver's license, not in places or things that can be reached by pickpockets or thieves, but in the strongholds of Christ Jesus and his love, which is stronger.



Elissa Surprenant

So yeah, I'm not too upset. After my initial reactions of shock, then anger, and finally frustration with myself, I found all I could do was smile and laugh. And now, looking back on the day, I see many reasons to give thanks. There was no harm put on my life or Dallas' (who was with me); it happened without me even knowing. Dallas and Irene were such a blessing, as well. Because of their help, by 4:30 p.m. I had the police report and affidavit of loss in my hands and had already called the Embassy to report the stolen passport. This was only three hours after it had happened. Also, despite the circumstances, it was a learning experience and kind of cool to see the inner workings of the police and government here.

Date: 2/11/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

So it's our last day in Baguio. Slept in a little, which was great. It has been amazing to me how much sleep I need while I am here. So I woke up and then took a nice long shower. At this point, I am using quite a bit more shampoo because, like many brave International Teamers before me, I have embarked upon the neck beard. It is an arduous task to grow a good neck beard, and fortunately the Filipinos are nice enough not to comment on my shaggy visage. However, I do not know how much longer it will last due to maintenance and the amount of shampoo I use on my face and not my head.



Drew Bell

One of the other neat things I experienced today is how small technology is making the world. I walked down to the mall this afternoon around 1:00 and went to an Internet café. For two dollars American, I rented a webcam and a computer and got to see and chat with some friends back home. In that moment, it was like the half-world distance disappeared and I was at home! It was great because it was a chance to see little things that you can't describe from hair styles to neck beards. Even just being able to smile or see a reaction from a joke was great! Truly 98 pesos well spent.

Today is our last day in Baguio at the seminary before we start a circuit that will land us in Manila. The last three weeks have flown by, and it will be hard to pull up the little roots we have had here. Even though we were not there every night, the three weeks in Baguio have been the longest in one place so far this year! It is really hard to always be moving to a new place with new people, but the harvest is plentiful and the workers are few (Luke 10:2).

Date: 2/12/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Hello!

We started off today by officially saying farewell to our hosts/tour guides/friends at the seminary in Baguio. Our Highland visits are now finished and thus, so is our time visiting and revisiting Baguio City. It was sad to say goodbye, not knowing fully how to express



my gratitude, due to lack of words and cultural differences. But it was great to find out that two of the seminary students would be taking the trip to Binalonan with us for the day (one of them being Irene's brother).

Becky Wray

The drive to Binalonan was relaxing and fun and more spacious than most of our other trips, as we split our team into two groups/vehicles. I was in the back of the seminary's L300 with Drew and Jordan (seminary student) talking about life and admiring the giant stone-carved lion head on the side of the road just past the city. We arrived in Binalonan about noon, meaning we were fed merienda, and then welcomed to the table for lunch. We ate and rested at the home of a great-aunt of Irene's and then headed over to Redeemer Lutheran Church for some fellowship time with the youth. There were about 50 kids there with varying levels of English and six of us with varying levels of Tagalog or Ilokano. Yet, despite the ever-present language barrier, games were enjoyed and songs were sung, both with great enthusiasm, and everyone left the church with excitement and anticipation for tomorrow afternoon's program.

After the time of fellowship at the church, we loaded up into a van and went to the pastor's farm for some more visiting and relaxing. We were given free range to peruse the area, and I was yet again amazed at the beauty of this country. The variety of plants that can grow in a relatively small area, and the intensity of the colours that come with each individual flower bring me back to the creation story in Genesis and remind yet again that God is good. I am truly thankful every day for this opportunity to be a part of this ministry here in the Philippines—and especially thankful for all the financial and prayer support that is making this dream an ongoing reality!

May God bless and keep you all!
Till next time,
Boots

Date: 2/15/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

There were three pastors with us who were closely related. Either by their immediate families or through marriage/in-laws affiliation. Most of our hosts for the past few days were relatives. It's been refreshing to know that church's smallest consisting unit is the family. And this is how our family ties shaped our personalities, our culture and tradition. Every meal is prepared for the entire people in the household, from the grandparents to the grandkids, to the aunts and uncles and second degree relatives. Every meal is a feast, a celebration. Lately, we almost sing the last line of the "Happy Birthday" song after every meal blessing. It's just truly reminding us all that it's fun to gather as family in one common table.

Our performance was at the local open-area activity center. There was only one area microphone with a couple of big and loud speakers, four bulb lights, about twenty plastic chairs for the elders, and around 200 kids/youth and adults standing and observing us. Some of us were bitten by red ants which were swarming around Dallas' foot. I knocked my forehead on the microphone during our skit. I didn't realize I was that close to the mic and how small I was. I tried not to laugh; later on, it was everybody's highlight of the night.

Isaiah 14:30



Irene Venus

Date: 2/17/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

I really enjoyed today's program. It seemed to come at the right time for the people of Apayao, a small village in northern Luzon. Earlier that hot day, we attended the funeral of a local 50-year-old man who had died a few days earlier. People had been there for the past few days awaiting the funeral. I was told they don't like to leave the

body alone until it is buried, a tradition of sorts. We attended the funeral, which was a new experience for us all, and sang two songs during the service. The pastors requested that we sing, which seemed very odd to me because at a funeral back home the family makes those kinds of decisions. Anyways, the whole service was in Ilokono, the local language, so we sat and zoned until we sang. Irene at one point during a hymn grabbed my Bible, opened it, and began to sing. I asked her what she was doing. She said she was putting words to the music to make it more interesting. I smiled at that. After the service and burial, we had a short merienda (snack) and then headed to the church. There we received one of the warmest, most eloquent and sincere welcomes from a town captain. It's tradition for the captain of the town to welcome us by giving a little speech before we begin. On behalf of the people, he expressed their gratitude and happiness at our presence with them. How much it meant for us brothers and sisters from North America and Mindanao to visit them in their remote location. Our presence alone spoke volumes. He also mentioned that our visit would be living water to their souls. I can't remember his exact words and therefore can't do them justice. The people's smiles and eager glances were awesome. It seemed they were glad to have a reason to smile, laugh, and sing after two or more days of mourning.



Elissa Surprenant

I also thoroughly enjoyed how the day ended. It took us four long, hot, bumpy and dusty hours to get back to Tabuk from Apayao. We were eager to not be sitting and possibly jump in some form of "safe" water. We got to do both. First we visited the second largest dam in Asia and walked all the way across and then back again. It felt so good to walk on flat ground for an extended period of time. Then we visited the nearby swimming pool. It was a refreshing bath and probably the cleanest we've all been in a while.

Thank you, Lord, for such a full day.

Date: 2/18/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

"3:30 a.m. No...no, I do not want get up...fine. Man, I hate this, always up so early to travel! I just want to sleep in till 8:00! Is that too much to ask? Man, and now I'm stuck in our little box truck again, crammed in with the luggage, and it's hot and I just cannot sta..."

I'll spare you from the rest of my thought process of this morning. Needless to say, I was not happy. Some days it is just so easy to be angry and bitter about being here. I wonder why God allows it to be so difficult. But through these hard times, I have realized a few things.

1. A little nap can go a long way.
2. Don't react until you have had time to think.
3. Being uncomfortable will pass.
4. If something is unchangeable, time spent wishing it would change is wasted.
5. God never promised it would be easy.

So, what I've been thinking about mostly is perspective. I can say, "Woe is me, I'm uncomfy and hot and tired and..." or I can say, "God, you have brought me to this wonderful new place and there is so much to see."



Drew Bell

Date: 2/19/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Naimbag na rabii yu amin! ("Good evening to you all" in Ilokano, a language of the Philippines)

Today was officially our one-month mark from the day we arrived in the Philippines. We have done so much, visited so many places, and met so many people that it seems as though we have already been here for much longer than that.

To celebrate today, the itinerary involved sleeping in past 3:30 a.m. (which is always an appreciated event), driving a short trip of only an hour to the next town, merienda (yes, we are well fed here), a time of relaxation or more body surfing in the ocean (I partook in the latter), lunch, relaxing/sleeping, visiting churches and homes in the town and the next town over, devotion, and as of 5:00 p.m. (the time it is now), some more resting/writing journal time as we await supper, and then later tonight, our program in the church next door.



Becky Wray

These events all ran smoothly today, with little car sickness on the drive, merienda involving corn on the cob (which I love), meeting our new hosts and finding some familiar faces here, too, body surfing and swimming in the warmest ocean water I've ever been in, being blessed with many opportunities to try new foods and 90% of the time finding the outcome delicious (like the jack fruit, which tastes like bubble gum and pineapple combined, falling in the 90% category), getting a chance to break out the recorder from our percussion bag (revisiting the days of elementary school and how much noise 30 kids can make on 30 soprano recorders) and playing "Guess That Tune" with the pastors, the welcome sign at a church we visited and the people's willingness to talk with us and share many smiles, hearing how rain is needed for the rice in the area and then hearing and seeing our first Filipino rain showering the ground not but an hour later, and devotion time spent thinking about our identity in Christ and about all the people we know and the impact each has had on our lives, leading to some great prayers of thanksgiving on my part, thanking God for all of you who have come into my life and essentially helped me end up here.

I am excited for our program tonight and to get an opportunity to sing and dance together in worship with those same smiling people we met earlier today. May God bless and keep you all in His grace.

Boots

Date: 2/20/2005
Submitted by: Dallas Rosin
Journal Entry:

Praise God for health and care.

Saturday morning, I woke up at 3:00 a.m. with pain in my left ear, which became severe as it spread to my right ear. I was up the rest of the morning. As we drove that day, I found out that we were staying at a doctor's house...huh. When we reached the house, he offered to look at my ears. He gave me some medicine and some painkillers—problem solved.



Dallas Rosin

Today we went to church, sang a couple songs, and got on a bus. Our thirteen-hour bus trip was marked by bad movies—*Belly of the Beast* with Steven Segall, *Anaconda 2*, and last but not least, *Frankenfish*. I won't go into detail; I'm just sayin' if it's playing on your flight, you may want to consider canceling the trip.

God's power and love continue to astound me.

Praising Him daily,
Dallas
Romans 8:28

Date: 2/21/2005
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:

It was the longest bus ride we have so far. It's like riding a plane from U.S. to Philippines. Yes, I'm talkin' about a 14-hour drive: from the northeast coast of Luzon down to southern Metro Manila.

We arrive 4 a.m. in the city, walk down some blocks with our one month stuff from the mountain province. Sticky dry feeling, we all went to bed and said our good nights (I mean mornings) and slept. Wake up feelin' hungry, around 10 a.m. I dig for food. Good thing we still have that merienda packed for us by our host during our bus ride the day before. Later on, I looked for some more. I found a "carenderia" food vendor within the place we're staying. The vendors brought our meal in our place. Four of us were up communing the brunch for the first time in weeks. The rest of Monday was spent at the mall after we did laundry. Had lunch, keepin' up with our e-mails, and had our team outing—dining with two pastors and a colleague was really great being reunited again to chat and visit with them and with ourselves just enjoying the familiar faces and just dining in. The team spent time alone in the movie theatre. We love the show The Phantom of the Opera.

Tuesday was our recording. We had a bunch of action songs and some couple of program music that we did in a used-to-be-owned recording studio of the Lutheran Hour of the Philippines. This we did hoping to assist the music ministry of each local church here in LCP (Lutheran Church of the Philippines). This was my worship for the day.

Psalms 100:2



Irene Venus

Date: 2/24/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

This afternoon, in between programs, we visited the headquarters for the SIL Bible Translators of the Philippines. Even though I was anticipating the afternoon off, I'm grateful we got this unexpected opportunity to visit.

What we saw and heard there reminded me of the importance and need to translate God's word into one's native language. We heard one story about a man who, at the first time reading the Bible in his own dialect, shared how he never knew of God's love. In the Philippines alone, according to SIL research, there are approximately 101 different dialects. That's a lot of work to be done. There are still many people waiting for the Bible in their own dialect. They are waiting for the Word to become alive to them. Think about a time when you didn't really understand something until someone took the time to explain it or say it in a way that you could relate. That's kind of what's happening here. But it isn't just one person that is doing it here, there are many. And they are not only Bible translators involved in this process, but literacy workers, airplane pilots and mechanics that fly people to the different villages on the 7000 different islands here, administrators, managers, accountants, secretaries, typesetters and publishers, teachers, computer specialists and more.

Another fact that was shared got me thinking a lot as well...the Bible has yet to be translated into approximately 3000 languages spoken by 250 million people and the majority of translation remaining needs to be done in Asia.

I realize how much I take for granted that I have the word of God so readily at my fingertips in my own language. I have heard and read stories about Christians get their hands on the Bible and immediately start copying it so that they can pass it on to someone else because the number of Bibles they have is so few. This visit has given me many questions and thoughts to mull and pray over.

John 1:1~ In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.



Elissa Surprenant

Date: 2/25/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

What a blessing today is! We have been here in Manila for a few days now, and I have been hoping for a break. Well, today the church of Pastor Chris took the team out with them on a trip out to a private pool. It was so much fun just to get a chance to be in a non-church/non-performance setting and hang out without feeling like I had to. It was very fun.

So, I have a new saying that is coming up more and more now with our last few programs. It is, "Wow, it's hot in this country." Usually said after leading an energetic sing-a-long with drops of sweat running off my nose and my sleeves turning into towels. It has taken a bit to swallow my embarrassment and put a smile on my face and just keep singing and looking at the crowd. It is not something I really expected to deal with but is another of those reality checks of ministry.

I am feeling good about being here and seeing the effects of God working through us here. It's hard to believe that one of three months is already a week behind us. I try to remind myself to live every day to the fullest because we only have, like, 60 left!

Sincerely adjusting to 40+ (or 100+ if you're American),
Drew Bell



Drew Bell

Date: 2/26/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

This Saturday morning began with a delicious breakfast of pansit (a noodle/vegetable combo), lumpia (like spring rolls), and pancakes. From there, the day only got better, as we visited the nursery at Concordia Children's Services and were able to hold two adorable babies and visit with a number of other youngsters. We then proceeded outside where we sang with a group of 40 kids of all ages. They were quick to catch on to the words and actions, keeping their energy high right to the last song. It was great to see the ministry and care that has been instituted here in Manila for these many orphans. We had to leave directly after our program so that we would make it to our next destination on time. It was sad to not get to hang out with the kids and get to know them better, a tough part of this ministry.

From the orphanage we went to Antipolo to sing some more songs with a smaller, but just as excited, group. The kids were so fun and couldn't keep away as we enjoyed merienda together.

Another highlight of the day was meeting an American from Chicago who, along with his wife, started a not-for-profit organization. They have been in the Philippines for two years now and are working to buy the land in Antipolo. The current residents of the area have been living there for many, many years but are essentially squatters, having no real claim to the places they call home. The American and his wife are hoping to purchase the land from the government before the big developers, who would force out those who currently live there and can't afford to buy it. Once the couple purchases the land, they'll give it to the people living there, and thus the current residents will no longer have to worry about having their homes taken away. It is truly a wonderful gift, and besides that, the couple also played a role in calling a pastor to the area to serve the people of Antipolo.

It is wonderful to see how God uses people to truly further His kingdom, and it's awesome how He uses such tangible ways to remind us of that.

God's blessings,
Boots



Becky Wray

Date: 2/27/2005

Submitted by: Dallas Rosin
Journal Entry:

So this Sunday, we went to church in Manila and had a little bit of a scary moment. During church we heard some loud bangs from down the street and thought they may have been gunshots, but nobody in the church seemed too concerned, so we tried not to be. But then later in the service we heard what could only be described as a volley of exchanging gunfire. Nobody seemed too riled up, so we finished church and did our program (where we had a professional videographer taping us). We found out later that the bangs were firecrackers, but it was still quite a shock to our system.

After our program at the church we went to church/school for another program, and it all went well. It was a good day.

Miss you all back in the States,
Dallas
Romans 8:28



Dallas Rosin

Date: 2/28/2005
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:

At 8 a.m., I went to accompany Elissa to the U.S. Embassy for her passport reapplication. A lot of applicants and interviewees were there waiting, both U.S. and non-U.S. citizens. Young and old, girls and boys, applicants for adoption and citizenship just the same...it's a long wait. It wasn't very encouraging for me to marry any foreigner. Good thing we settled Elissa's case as 3 p.m. We all went to a Japanese/Filipino restaurant for dinner where the LCMS staff was our hosts. There were blind men in the restaurant who serenaded us with a Spanish song ("La Bamba") and an English song (written by a Filipino). It was classic seeing them sing while playing their string instruments—cello, guitars and mandolin, with the traditional Filipino costume, "Barong Tagalog."



Irene Venus

Date: 3/1/2005
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:

We left around 7 a.m. for the airport. We're heading to Mindanao! Yahoo! We bid our farewells to our host and our entourage who've been with us all days of the week—"Mr. Ed," our kind of team manager. It's been wonderful! Ronald, who drives us around and Rev. Sony and Rev. Chris, "Daghang salamat sa tanan!" Many thanks for everything!

So we touched down on the island of Mindanao. My island, welcome all. We meet our new contact and new entourage and new warmer climate. Oh yeah, the heat is on. And of course, I'm so glad to speak my native tongue Cebuano; finally, we're here. All the days before, we were anxious of what situation Mindanao is in, and we're here safe and sound. We swung by a local Immigration office and had the team's visa extended (except Elissa's, since she doesn't have her passport yet). The same day, we took the bus at 7:30 p.m. and headed to Davao City for a week. First MDD (Mindanao District) booking. Peace, Kalinaw!



Irene Venus

Date: 3/4/2005
Submitted by: Drew Bell
Journal Entry:

Been a busy few days! Mindanao has been wonderful! Fewer big cities and so many beautiful palm trees and beaches. But we are not on vacation. We have had many full

days here, like today. Up at 7:30 and on the road by 8:00. Two hours on highway and then one hour off the beaten path. But it is very fun because we are in Todd's (our contact) Ford 4x4 and going up steep hills, over muddy sloughs, through rivers, and over rocks! (The rocks actually ripped the skid plate off the truck.) We got to the village and did a program and hung out until 3:00. Then it was back over rocks, hills, rivers and mud to get home for supper. (Pork chop! Very yummy.) Then another program and fellowship till 11:45 p.m., and now I'm writing this! Busy days, but blessed!



Drew Bell

Two cool things lately. One has been Caras, our host family's three-year-old. So cute, and she has taken a liking to me, so it's "Andrew, watch" and "Andrew, this" and "Andrew, that," but she's so funny and really brings me joy even though I'm so tired! Second thing was tonight, I got to do some recruitment and had a chance to talk with some really inspiring and talented youth. I think the Recruitment Department at Youth Encounter will be happy. Anyway, it's time for bed before I fall asleep writing this! G'night.

Date: 3/5/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Today we started off by piling into the Ford Ranger Diesel, our second home since arriving in Mindanao. After a few traveling hours from Davao full of scenery watching, chatting, reading some Anne of Green Gables and personal zoning time, we arrived in San Roque. In San Roque, we headed straight to the market, stopping at a complex found in the heart of the busy Saturday marketplace. As we set up our stuff, people began to gather, and soon enough there were at least 30 kids following our every move, and twice that many adults acting like wallflowers on the perimeter. Our program was good for me, as I find that I always enjoy the times of singing and dancing brought on by our program. After the program, we headed to a house for merienda, turning over the complex to a group of kids anxious to get their afternoon basketball fix.



Becky Wray

Mid-afternoon, we found ourselves back in the Ranger as we got ready to head back to Davao in time for supper. I took my turn joining Dallas in the covered box of the truck, so there was more room up front. It was an exciting ride, as we cruised over bumps and rocks and dips in the road, reminding me of rounding up cows in the pasture at home. Eventually, both Dallas and I found our grooves amongst our bags and instruments and managed to find ourselves relaxed and enjoying the rough ride.

Unfortunately, the ride was quickly halted by some unfortunate events. As we came around a corner, a horse carrying a small family (mom, dad and two daughters) was spooked by the truck and ended up throwing the passengers off its back. The parents were physically unharmed but emotionally frantic as their youngest daughter landed very hard on the ground and appeared to be not breathing. Our contact and driver of the truck was an American missionary who, fortunately, speaks fluent Tagakaulo, the language of the family involved in the accident. We got to see firsthand how God is using this missionary here, as he calmed down the parents and then rearranged people in the truck so the mother and daughters could be taken to the hospital. When we arrived at the hospital, the missionary translated for the mother and made sure all concerns were addressed in regard to her little girls. After suspicions of a concussion were confirmed, we drove the older daughter back home, and the mother and the other little girl were to await an ambulance to be ushered to a bigger hospital in a bigger city. By the time we dropped off the older daughter and made it back to the hospital, the mother and little girl were already headed to the bigger hospital.

The events of the day left some of us wondering yet again why accidents happen and why bad things happen to good people. In that, however, we were given a tangible reminder that God is there through it all, caring and providing with his steadfast love.

Boots

Luke 8:24

Date: 3/6/2005
Submitted by: Dallas Rosin
Journal Entry:

Hey, this is Dallas checking in again from Davau from the island of Mindanao in the Philippines. So this week was a great week with our favorite missionary, Todd; we were workin' it pretty hard and logged about 40 hours in the vehicles this week! We've seen a lot of Mindanao already.

Today was a good day; we got up around 6 to be out of the house by 6:30, went to another long church service in a different language...not that long is bad. It's great because the Word is being preached; it's just that we don't understand what's going on. This week was better, though, because Todd translated a lot for us. After church, we did a program on a bamboo stage that we weren't quite sure about, but it held up, even during the action songs, although we did get some good bounce going on sometimes.

Later that day, I had a very interesting videoke experience. Before we began our program there was an outdoor videoke bar and some young men belting songs out at the top of their lungs. When we thought that it could get no louder, the neighboring videoke bar fired up their system for some healthy competition. I'm not sure how healthy it was, but it was a moment that I can not describe to its full intensity and one that I will never forget.

Hey to everyone back home, miss you all,
Dallas
Romans 8:28



Dallas Rosin

Date: 3/7/2005
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:

And so our Tagakaulo mission came to an end. It's hard for the rest of the team to leave here, since they've come to like the stay for a long (one week) time. For me, I am ready to go. So we hopped in a bus for another six hour drive back to Cagayan de Oro City. It was a refreshing afternoon ride for me to see rain showers over the Bukidnon Province (the mountains of Mindanao). This was the first rain in three months! So we get to catch up with the Internet system in Cagayan de Oro City. The sky continued to shed tears, a blessing to a dry land. For the night and for the next six days, we get to stay in one base, which means I don't have to drag all my things wherever we go.



Irene Venus

Date: 3/8/2005
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:

Now it's Tuesday. Hopped in a bus again for two hour drive to Medina, just right by the coastline. We had our lunch at the beach with the pastor and some of his young people in the church. Some went snorkeling for like an hour. Some went on a boat ride, and I just stayed under a cottage, watching them swim at a distance. It was fun visiting with the new generation of young people—they're jokingly claiming that they're "New Intawon." It means "still new."

Same afternoon, we went to the town's public high school for a program. About 300 students gathered around the school stage and just screaming at the excitement of having us sing and do our skit. They're very interactive, and we're glad! There was one sing-a-long song that they just won't stop singin', so I step up front and did an "umpire" baseball "safe" sign and yell, "Now stop it; out!" It was a blast! The students came up stage swarming to get our autograph on a shirt and even on a flip-flop.

Same day, that evening, we had another program in the church. The church pews were filled with mostly kids and young people—some were from the school this afternoon. It rained earlier this



Irene Venus

evening, so we're a little bit Filipino time conscious. Thank God for a long, blessed day!

Peace

Date: 3/10/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Today during our morning program, I was blessed by one little boy I saw at the Special Education Center here in Cagayan de Oro. The situation we found ourselves in was rather ironic. We didn't speak the same language, plus there were students who were sight-impaired, others mentally challenged, and still others deaf. This was potentially a very unnerving experience because of the uncertainty of what to do, what to say, and fears of what could happen. However, the little boy in the front row who never did one action with us told me I had nothing to fear by the short glances I would catch of his eye and the huge smile he would give me. He would just beam, and I couldn't help but smile back at him. As the program progressed, I was encouraged to see the number of kids that did do the actions with us. So many of them did an incredible job at keeping the rhythm—actually better than most congregations we've been at.



Elissa Surprenant

We shared songs with them all and then we were treated by the kids as they shared their talents with us. We saw the Down's Syndrome kids do a dance that just made me smile all over. I love the enthusiasm and energy with which they danced. They were just so engrossed with the music as they wore grass skirts over their uniforms and waved palm leaves in different directions. Two visually impaired girls sang songs for us. They were so amazing! And the deaf girls who did a dance to music without even hearing one note... I'm again amazed. I am thankful that there is a school where they can go, where there are teachers and staff who love these kids so much and have great amounts of patience for them.

Overall, the children here in the Philippines have been an amazing source of energy and strength for me. There have been numerous times when we are hiking somewhere after a program when I am tired and just want to sit down, but then the kids running by our side, chattering and laughing, even sometimes singing, bring renewed strength to me. Or other times during programs in villages where the language barrier is evident and the adults aren't responsive, the kids once again are the ones singing, giggling, and smiling back at us reassuring us that someone out there is listening and wants to sing and laugh with us.

I think Jesus knew something when he said, "Let the little children come to me."

Date: 3/11/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Today was another great day hanging out here in Cagayan De Oro. What has been wonderful is not having to travel more than half an hour per day! So today was even refreshing driving out to the Naawan School to do a program for the kids there. Tania wasn't with us today because her leg is bothering her. But what was great is seeing how the girls get some special treatment here. You see, A/C is definitely something that people enjoy having around here, and it's no wonder. Have you ever had those summer days in an old vehicle where you have the windows open, but even when you're on the highway the air just doesn't seem to be enough? Well think of that here, but it's every day, and it's not even the hot season yet! So the girls got loaded into the back of this sweet truck with a video screen in it, and Dallas and I jumped into what I can only really call a blue box with an engine! But even though it was hot, we got to ride with the Reverend here, and he told me of the history of the area as we drove alongside the ocean for two hours to arrive at the school.



Drew Bell

Now I am not a little man. I can't claim to be a lightweight (even though two months in the Philippines has made my clothing a little baggier). But today we had a stage that was made of wood... thin wood. No, I didn't break through it, but on some of our more energetic songs, I

certainly got looks from my teammates because they were bouncing up and down and I was the only one moving! The crowd didn't seem to notice and the kids were really fun to hang out with.

The ride home was fun as well, as we didn't ride in the blue box again. We rode in the back of the girls' truck, but the great thing is that in the Philippines you never travel too fast, so it is perfectly acceptable to stand up in the back of the truck and hang onto the roll bar. So Dallas and I had a great view of the country rolling by, and got many shouts of "HEY JOE!" Now at first I was a little concerned because I thought that they were saying "HEY DREW!" and I didn't know how they all knew my name. But the Reverend soon explained to us that white people aren't very common there, and most of the white people that have come down have been American G.I.s, therefore, G.I. Joe. So now all white men are called JOE whether they are Canadian, German, or American!

We're gettin' ready to head out to Mindinau soon, so that should be fun. It's neat to see Irene get so excited about going home!

Drew~

Date: 3/12/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

From Psalm 100:

Shout with joy to the Lord, O earth! Worship the Lord with gladness. Come before him, singing with joy. Acknowledge that the Lord is God! He made us, and we are his. We are his people, the sheep of his pasture. Enter his gates with thanksgiving; go into his courts with praise. Give thanks to him and bless him name. For the Lord is good. His unfailing love continues forever, and his faithfulness continues to each generation.



Becky Wray

The above Psalm was referenced a few times today as we led a workshop on praise and worship for the youth of Cross Lutheran Church. Through games, sing-a-longs, hymns, interactive Bible studies, puppets and Scripture, we took a look at what worship is, and why it is such an important and necessary part of our lives. The youth were so welcoming to our group and participated fully in every aspect of the day we spent together.

After talking about praise and worship over the course of the day, it was fitting then that the rest of the congregation joined with us that evening for our Family Night Program. The program was so much fun, and even though our clothes dripped from the sweat produced in this 30°C climate (85°F), the smiles on our faces were sincere, and it was truly a great time of worship. The night continued on in the same manner, with the youth sharing their own music with us. It was nothing short of AWESOME! I was actually a little taken aback, as the energy produced from the band, singers and dancers could have probably powered the whole Cagayan de Oro City. It was inspiring to see the 20 youth all working together to lead the congregation in worship, and to see how they all redirected their amazing musical talents back to God. I felt so blessed to be a part of this day totally focused on praising God, and then being reminded by the youth of how wonderfully contagious being on fire for the Lord really is. It was inspiring and encouraging to see these future leaders of the church "shouting to the Lord with joy, worshipping him with gladness, acknowledging that the Lord is God!"

Magad ya Tyumanem Kamayu (God be with you, in Tagakaulo)
Boots

Date: 3/13/2005

Submitted by: Dallas Rosin

Journal Entry:

Hi everyone from Cagayan de Oro! We went to church today here and even got to sing a couple of songs during the service. After church we had a program, which went really

well. I am often annoyed by the traffic at churches. You see, none of the churches here are sealed, most of them don't have screens or glass over the windows, and they are very often near busy streets. This can cause a lot of interference during programs, but today we were very fortunate to have two microphones with stands, and a cordless microphone which we clipped right inside our acoustic guitar; it was pretty sweet.

After church we ate and retreated to our host home. Until around 4:30 when we headed back to the church for some hang out time with the young adults, it was really nice to spend some time with people our own age—that's a rarity. We played some games, and then they did some music for us, which really turned into an open mic night. It was great. I am finding a lot of guitar players here and was interested to learn that schools often teach classes on guitar instead of piano; in fact, in some places it is a required class.

I had a fun conversation with a member of the church today about food. She asked me if I noticed how often Filipinos eat, and then we talked a lot about merienda. It was funny because I told her how we often have miryenda (a snack similar to lunch) three to four times a day, plus three meals. She asked me if I was hungry now, and I could tell her not really because we had merienda at 4:30 and then again at 4:40, which is often the case when we move locations—we will eat before we leave and immediately when we arrive. I was worried about being hungry all of the time here, but I am proud to report that I have seldom felt hungry in the last two months.

I pray this finds you all well.

Dallas

Romans 8:28



Dallas Rosin

Date: 3/15/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

Today we're supposed to travel to my hometown, but I guess not. So technically it's a work day/day off. Elissa went to extend her visa; good thing she just paid for her extra stay here. Dallas sent in our mail packet and accompanied Tania to the doctor with other contacts. Me and Drew went to my aunt's place and uploaded our digital pictures. And to my surprise, my family was there too. It has been a long, busy day, but God still continued to remind me that He is good and surprises me with people I know before. I just feel bad that whenever there's opportunity to be relational there's also that programmatic event to fulfill. I thank God still for giving me and the gang enough strength and enthusiasm to get along with these surprising schedules and moments of flexibility. Tomorrow was our schedule for cultural promo shoot, since Tania is staying for the week (she pulled her hamstring pretty bad), we get to do it today. Just right before the sunset, New Dawn poses for a cultural moment!

Tuesday morning, the plan was to leave at 9 a.m. taking the public bus to my town. Our contact here worried about the security and safety of my American and Canadian colleagues, so instead we waited for two private vehicles provided by local church members here in Cagayan de Oro City and had some entourage that took us all the way to my home. We left early afternoon and wished Tania all the best rest and fast recovery.

Home, finally. All those days, anxious days of not coming here were over. Thank God for bringing us all here safe and sound. The exciting acquaintance with my family and the team and our entourage was fun! We all were looking forward to this moment and 'tis here. We refreshed our bodies and minds at Tunaga swimming pool, a spring water resort a ten minute Jeep ride from home. Daghang Salamat sa inyong pagpahinutang sa amoang pagtisisa. Kamunay namong mahimimaumon ang inyong manggihatagong kasingkasing. Thank you all for your generosity! God's blessings.



Irene Venus

Date: 3/18/2005
Submitted by: Drew Bell
Journal Entry:

MMMMMM, sleeping in. I have been amazed at the power of a good night's sleep, or as we have experienced here in Mindinau, many nights of good sleep. Due to the political nature of Irene's area, we aren't doing too many programs. So that means that we get to sleep in until 10:00 and then take it easy in the afternoons. Do some relaxing and swimming at the waterfalls and fresh springs and things. It has been great to relax here and just get some energy back before we go to Macau.

Today we did a workshop for some of the young adults at the church here. It was good to hang out with some people our own age and just share some of the hints and tricks that we've picked up in the last 7 months. Workshops are neat because we get a chance to analyze what it is we do and how we can do it better. It was a good day.

I miss home today a lot. I'm happy about being able to relax, but it's got us writing letters and postcards home, and that makes me miss it. It's been hard to be away from weddings and all of my college and high school friends this year. But it's cool to see that even though it does take sacrifice to do God's will sometimes, all I have to do is look around and remember the waterfalls we've been to and the smiling faces of the kids and I realize that God will bless me beyond my dreams! It's awesome.

Drew~



Drew Bell

Date: 3/19/2005
Submitted by: Becky Wray
Journal Entry:

I'm sitting here writing this journal by candlelight, as the power has temporarily been put out of commission due to a storm rolling in. It's kind of nice to be in a "brown-out" right now, not able to do anything that will need electricity, and to be forced to just sit down by a candle and reflect on the day as the warm wind blows around me. Speaking of today, it was grand! We are currently at Irene's house in Linamon still, and I'm loving it. It's great to see the Venuses in action (or should I say the Von Trapps?), and see Irene in her element—her home. Today started off with breakfast at 9:00 a.m., followed shortly by a trip to the ocean. We walked maybe for three minutes; that was all it took to find ourselves soaking in the salty water. Many kids from the church that we met a few days ago after our program joined us in the water, and we had so much fun playing in the awesome natural wave pool called the Pacific. It was so great to hang out with kids we had met already and get a chance to build even more of a relationship with them.

After returning to Irene's house for lunch, we then had a short time to chill for awhile as we waited for those same kids to arrive and join us for some games, Bible study and all around fun times. I loved every minute of it, and again, I was so thankful for the chance to keep getting to know these kids and have such a great time doing it.

After the power comes back on, we are planning to go over to the church for more festivities with the kids, as they have worked hard to prepare some cultural dances for us to see; they were all so excited about it this afternoon. Hopefully that won't be too long now...weird! The power just came back on! I think that is my cue to bid farewell and go see the fruits of the labours these kids have prepared.

Hope your day goes as swimmingly as mine!
Boots



Becky Wray

Date: 3/22/2005
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:

We left home early morning. We have to move on and catch a plane in Cagayan de Oro

at noon. We picked up Tania on the way. She looks better, I thought. She had crutches on still, which conflicted her flight back to MNLA. She didn't get a chance to secure a medical certificate for air travel, but we can't afford to let her stay behind again. I'm so glad we had some couple of contact friends who helped us through this. Daghang Salamat sa inyo! We were two hours early for our flight; our groupies showed up and surprised us catching up a last moment with us. It's so good to see them one last time. Anyways—we're all in the plane and the trip was short for me. I slept the entire one hour ten minute flight, I was so tired leaving home. Who wouldn't be? It's good to be greeted by a familiar face again. Later that night, we went out dining at a Chinese restaurant with the same people who took us for dinner last time we were here. The host told us that he wanted us to be prepared for the Macau cuisine. It was a parade of big dishes! We were all full when desserts came in. Then again we were blessed by so much generosity and hospitality of the people here.



Irene Venus

I ended up waking midnight helping Tania out with my cell phone, which its battery died and had to borrow someone else's. I visited some new acquaintances while I waited for her to return. He was just married last week to a Filipino-born woman here, and he and his brother-in-law were just talking about culture. I wasn't surprised when asked about how I thought about the Western culture. We had a very interesting visit on some intercultural issues which his brother-in-law came to agree with me. I was for sure that my waking in the middle of the night was more than the cell phone stuff.

For the past few weeks, were all worried and concerned about Tania's health. Today was decided, she has to fly home back to the States for full medical attention. She was not with us when we flew out for Macau. Macau is foggy, gloomy and chilly. I miss home already. We had a lot of jumps seeing cows coming towards us. Watch out! I thought the drivers were crazy! Nope. They just drive on the opposite side of the road! First impression.

Date: 3/22/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

Yesterday we just came in here in Manila, and today at an early morning, we bid Tania farewell. She has not been really well physically to travel with us. I was still dragging myself to where I should be. For the past five days I was home, home. Now I began to miss what it means of staying. At some point I wish I could be Tania and stay behind and rest. Through the traffic and through the nostalgia, I made it through the airport, in the air barely awake. I fell into a deep sleep on the last hour of the flight. The unclenching of the seatbelts awoke me up and I was ready to go, 'til I saw the gloomy and foggy weather through the window. I want to go back to sleep.



Irene Venus

Welcome to Macau! Our American entourage has been awaiting for this moment. They all clapped in excitement of our arrival. Two of us went with one contact on a yellow cab, but wait—our contact is not driving, is he? Nope, he is in a front seat. "They drive on the opposite side of the road here!" Becky and I sighed in relief but in amazement and curiosity we watched the road how this right hand wheeled vehicle runs. As our eyes wander the surroundings our contact oriented us with some stuff and often turned his body to face us at the back, and we jumped forgetting that he's not driving! Otherwise, we could have said, "Please do drive—we can always talk later!" Our hearts burst out and voices screamed within us as we saw a car coming speedily towards us on the right hand side of the road! It took us a while to remind ourselves that sometimes, the other side of the world does the contrary of what we're used to; this is what I call culture. It's not wrong, it's just different!

So we get to have our own apartment. Becky and I in one place near the church. The boys together at another, just 15 minutes walk away from the English Center (our working base) and Elissa with one of the teachers here at the center (she lives near

McDonald's). It was around 4 in the afternoon where we had our lunch and met the rest of the English Center teachers that we're gonna work with for the next six weeks. We had a tour at the Concordia English Center and the neighboring catering services. It's awesome. We could walk all the time; all roads seemed to meet together.

Date: 3/24/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:



Elissa Surprenant

We are in Macau now!!

We are no longer in either the mountains or the open plains. We are no longer in a place where the sun always shines to the point where you seek out shade. We are no longer in a place where fresh air is readily accessible. We are now in a city that covers a 1 mile by 2.5 miles peninsula, plus two islands that are connected by long bridges, where tall buildings that light up at night are our mountains and small oases called parks are our plains. And even though I would love sunshine, some fresh air, and greenery, I'm actually very happy to be here. I am in a culture that I more readily understand and know how to operate in. I am surrounded by language that is just as hard as Japanese and people who are eager to help you learn. I am again helping to teach English, but this time I get to do it in a setting where I'm encouraged to share my faith while doing it. We are going to be working with the Concordia English Center while we are here for the next 6 weeks! Woo-hoo! That's right—we are in one place for 6 weeks! (Can you tell I'm excited?) We have an office that our binders call home and where our backs rejoice that the load has been lifted. We have a schedule that once again includes Monday as our official day off and has some consistency to it. We have our own places of residence (fully furnished apartments) scattered throughout the city where we can unpack our bags, hang our clothes and let the wrinkles out, and invite each other over for dinner. We are learning to read maps as we walk everywhere, find local groceries, learning the good cheap places to eat like "rice boxes" and the more expensive and familiar ones like McDonald's. We are going to be working with the same people in different settings for the next 6 weeks. We are actually going to have the chance to make some solid relationships and possibly good friends while we are here. We might even be able to have an English service for once! I crave hearing, not just reading, but hearing the word spoken... even liturgy.

Ah, there are so many reasons why I am excited to be here. From day one of orientation, I saw God answering many silent prayers that I have been lifting up over this year and I saw him answer several of those in one day. One of our contacts shared how she hoped this would be a time of refreshment for us. For me, I have this quiet still voice inside of me saying it will be.

Today was über busy though. I think things will settle down after this weekend and the mad rush of today. We are doing a program for this Good Friday and started from scratch, today being Maundy Thursday. It was a bit stressful because we are not only accountable to ourselves to get things done, but have others outside of our group to work with as well. We have to type words out, get copies made, get people to translate for us, etc. It was a bit hairy at some points, but I was super proud of everyone and how we got the jobs done.

Ah, thank you Lord, for this new place that you have brought us to! I am excited to see what you have in mind for this time here that we get to be a part of. I am thankful for the ways that you work, how they are indeed good and perfect even though I can't always see that in the moment. Thank for this time here to reflect upon where we have been, where we are now and where you are leading us.

Date: 3/25/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Mabuhay... oh wait, we're not in the Philippines, so that doesn't work anymore. I think that here I have to say "nee-how." At least, that's how you say it, not how you spell it.

Because of course everything here is in little characters, which makes shopping and getting directions quite an ordeal for us. "Oh yeah, our apartment is by that one with the little, um, dog shape in it with two transverse lines coming out the top."...Right. To avoid this, however, we all carry around little cards that we can show to taxi-drivers, and that way, we get to our homes when we get lost. There have been many adventures here like finding out that all of the light switches are upside down from what we're used to. To turn the lights on, you flick it down and off is up. They also do indeed drive on the other side of the road here, which is way fun and makes it so confusing trying to remember what side of the taxi to get into! But the cars are way nice, and it's neat. My greatest story so far in Macau is this, however.



Drew Bell

Yesterday we had met early in the morning so that we could practice some music before the rest of the office staff came into our building. So we were practicing and got done early. That afternoon we decided to relax at Becky and Irene's apartment. So everyone went to sleep and Becky and I decided that we would go and do some shopping and cooking. So down the elevator and out onto the streets of Macau we went, looking for a supermarket. It was not long until we found a building with food in it, although we can't read the Chinese to find out if it really is a supermarket or not. But inside we begin to buy the ingredients that we need for our macaroni dinner. Well, we got everything no problem until it came to the cheese. Looking at the cheese we settled on some pre-shredded cheddar, which was expensive, but we figured we'd splurge. So back to the apartment and we began to make our meal as quietly as possible because the other team members were all taking naps. But we found when we got there that in the kitchen there were not many things to cook with. We found one pot, and one rice cooker. So we began boiling water in each of these and found a spoon to stir with. We ended up straining the macaroni with a piece of Tupperware, and then we added the cheese. But soon we noticed that the cheese had an interesting smell to it. Turns out that we bought super low fat cheese and there were only two cheese-like things in the ingredients. Needless to say, it had the taste of Play-doh and the smell of paint thinner. So half of our batch of macaroni was ruined and the bellies of the team were in danger. But intrepid as Boots and I are, we decided that with the little bit of meal money left, we would go back to the market to see if there was anything that could salvage this meal. We found some tomato sauce and decided that it would be a good substitute and came home and ended up having a pretty good meal of pasta with tomato sauce and vegetables.

Being here in Macau is presenting many challenges that I didn't expect to face while on team—learning how to live with a roommate, buying food labeled in Chinese, figuring out the best way to walk from work to home. But it is also very exciting to have the opportunity we do to come alongside the people already working here. I'm really pumped to see what this next month and a half will bring!

Drew~

Date: 3/26/2005
Submitted by: Becky Wray
Journal Entry:

So we have now been in Macau for roughly four days, and it has taken me that long to really feel comfortable here. There was a mix of missing the Philippines (the people, sun, language, merienda and fellowship); missing home; and adjusting to this new place: the driving on the left hand side of the road, new language, culture, and the realization that Macau seems to be all metropolis, which can be a bit overwhelming for a girl from the farm.



Becky Wray

Also, within the last few days, it has taken until today for me to figure out the fastest and easiest way to the Concordia English Centre. Irene and I have been exploring our options, in regards to the route we have been taking from the apartment we're bunking at together. It usually ends up in some kind of dead end, and another hour being logged into our travel time, with the realization that we couldn't find the same path twice, even if we tried. The street signs are on the side of buildings at intersections, but not every intersection is marked, and not very many of the streets were on our map even if they were marked. So it was great yesterday to finally feel like we know where we were going and now have a route to fall back on (cause we know that more exploring will probably

take place anyway).

Our programmatic debut on Friday night also helped to put me at ease—getting to start singing again, and meet the people that we will be worshipping with on a regular basis for the duration of our time here in Macau. It was also a blessing, after planning a Good Friday service, to get the chance to see it unfold, and to take the time to just worship, reflect and meditate on the sacrifice God made for us through His Son.

I pray that this Holy Saturday finds you all well, and excited/thankful for the end of the story....

Peace,
Boots

Date: 3/29/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

So today we took the bus for half hour drive to the third and last in the series of islands that are the country of Macau. The island of Coloane, our destination, is much different than the island in which we do the majority of our work, play and sleep. Coloane, unlike Macau (the island), has very few developed areas. There are many hills full of lush green trees, and many hiking trails, which our team has already talked about putting to use. The bus stopped in "The Village," which is the main urban part of the island and is appropriately named. It is a small place with a large fruit market, little seafood places, and buildings that are very colourful and, I am told, are very Portuguese in their architectural design.



Becky Wray

Besides fruit markets and beautiful buildings, "The Village" is also home to ARTM. This is the drug rehabilitation center for men that we will be working with three days a week teaching English and music during our stay in Macau. Today was our first visit to the center, and after some hesitations/apprehensions, or just being not really sure what to expect, I am glad that it will not be our last.

Joel, our contact for the ARTM visits, taught the lesson, giving us a chance to observe and see what level of English everybody was at. There are only about 12 guys at the center, so between the six of us there, it meant that we could give some great personal attention to the students. It was fun to try and talk, even if a translator is required for us to say more words than whatever is being taught. It was easy to see the excitement most of these guys have for learning English, and great to see them embrace the resources the center is providing for them as they get a second chance at life. Our time there is for teaching English and music, not for evangelizing. Bible stories can be told, but not as the primary focus. I pray then that these new "students" of ours will really "know we are Christians by our love," and that our actions can continue to speak louder than words.

Thanks for reading; blessings to you this day!

Boots

Date: 3/30/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Knee-How! At least, that's how it sounds when you say hello here. Don't ask me what the symbols are. I found out today that there are well over 1000 different symbols in Cantonese. Not only that, but it shares those symbols with Mandarin, but they just mean different things. Also Cantonese has nine tones, meaning that every sound you make can potentially mean nine different things depending on HOW you say it. It's wild. But I have loved being here, and I'm getting used to walking around and finding my way through the city. I've been noticing more and more, and I've found that



Drew Bell

although Cantonese can be a harsh sounding language if you're not used to it, I really enjoy listening to people speak this language. Which is good because we went to a Bible study tonight that was completely run in Cantonese.

For the Bible study, we went to the house of Michael, an evangelist who is originally from Taiwan but is working here in Macau with the English Center. He is an amazing guy; he speaks Cantonese, Mandarin, and English all really well. The Bible study was fun. They started to teach us a few songs in Mandarin, and I got to hang out with Michael's son and teach and learn some guitar. All in all, it was a great time. I feel like we are really getting the chance to become part of a family here with all the members of the Concordia English Center!

Current favourite music—Chris Tomlin, *Indescribable*

Current hobby—blogging! <http://drewfuspdx.blogspot.com> and <http://newlens.blogspot.com>

Date: 3/31/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

It's our second visit in ARTM (Association of Rehabilitation for Toxic-dependents of Macau), and Dallas was the first amongst us to teach English to 10 Chinese men. I had anticipation on how the class would go and if ever our ministry here would work. When I saw the men having fun with games, I knew then that this was going to be an interesting experience. That afternoon, they learned all about directions. I am sure they have north and south, east and west. The exciting part for them was knowing more about the equivalent terms in English language. I've never seen such amazement of one's face of having and learning a lot of new things. It made me smile and thought I am needed here.

Becky and I went to visit the post office for the first time and had our mail packet. I stood in a long line in one of the counters for like 10 minutes after realizing that it's the line for paying 'the bill'. No wonder why people carried those 'white receipt' things that I don't have. I did ask one lady behind me if that was the line for sending mail, she just smiled and spoke in Cantonese, I assumed she understood and nod in affirmation. (Bad move). I was almost to the next customer in service when Becky called and I jerked myself out of the queue and walked towards her. It was the wrong line, I reckoned. So we sent out and received our first mail packet that prime afternoon visit at the post office of Macau.



Irene Venus

Date: 4/2/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Journal me this, journal me that. What shall I journal about today? The sun showed itself for the first time in a week. *sigh* That was my body saying, "Ahhh! THANK YOU, Lord, for the sunshine—for the tall building next to us with all of its glass windows that provide a great reflecting mirror for the light to bounce off of and create a nice warm glow in our little office space on the sixth floor!" It's a good day. We got some good work done on



the program side of things. Tasks have been listed and assigned. Let the fun begin. We **Elissa Surprenant** started to learn two new songs, one of which is quite catchy—you can't help but do interpretive dance to it. We are learning these two songs for a special visitor that will be coming at the end of April.

The teachers are leaving this week to go on vacation, so we're going to be left in charge. What a blessing to have this opportunity to come in and be able to serve the teachers here by giving them a break and by being able to continue the ministry. So, prayers for this week would be much appreciated—prayers for communication amongst us and the students and some staff that is still going to be around, that we might be able to see how much of an honor and blessing it is to be able to do this and greet each person and task with joyful and thankful hearts.

Thank you,

Elissa

Date: 4/3/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

French toast, Chinese apple-pears, Australian milk—some of the components of our post-church lunch which I wouldn't have even thought of being too cultural of a meal, but in essence are. And if you add the fact that they were consumed by two Americans, two Canadians, and a Filipino, you either get the start of a bad joke, or the appreciation I have for being on an international team, and in more ways than one.



Becky Wray

We talked a lot about culture at our training in the fall of 2004, and how everything from your nationality, your neighborhood, your family, etc., all affect and create your culture. Just as adjusting to Macau, the new place and culture, has had its ups and downs, so has been adjusting to this new schedule of team life we've been living here. We have our own places to call home, a routine schedule of events to groove with, and the refreshment of a new type of ministry involving teaching English as a second language, which are all exciting things. However, just as the "honeymoon stage" of culture shock wears off, I've found that living on our own took a rapid decline in excitement after the first couple of days. Sure, it's nice to have our own space, but I have missed not having host families to talk, play or sing with. And I think after a couple weeks of working, playing, living, essentially breathing each others' air, our team has been a little on edge the last couple of days. We have been a lot more like co-workers or acquaintances than the friends that we are...which brings us to today...

Today was where I felt like our team was able to feel like we now know what's going on as far as programming goes, having met all the different groups that we will be working with; we all know how to travel efficiently and successfully in Macau; there are still some cultural things still don't quite make sense, yet we can appreciate them for what they are; and I think we have now figured out how each of us can get our own space once and a while, which inevitably brought us all together today once again as teammates, co-workers, AND friends.

After church and French toast, Irene, Elissa and I went and checked the "St. Paul ruins" while the boys went shopping to gather supplies for the delicious (candlelit!) dinner that we enjoyed later that evening, followed by a screening of "A Beautiful Mind" on the token English channel on TV. It was fun to hang out as friends again, and I'm thankful for the time that God has used to stretch us, causing us to grow, and be more appreciative of what each of us has to given to add to this ministry and of each other.

Date: 4/5/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Hello hello!

Wow, things are going so good here in Macau. It has been so nice to have a place to call "home" for the last little while. Every night I get to go home and sleep in my own bed that I can choose to make or not. I can stay up late and watch shows if I want and not have to worry about keeping up host brothers and sisters. I even get to cook my own food nowadays, which is much different than the rest of the time we've been on team. Don't get me wrong—I love that people are so generous and that they treat us so well. But this next month in Macau is going to be a refreshing time of being able to make decisions! Sometimes on team it becomes a little bit frustrating because everything is so scheduled that you have to just DO and you don't have a chance to think, so it's great to just sit.... and.... do.... nothing....



Drew Bell

Another really exciting aspect of being here in Macau is that we are working with the guys at the ARTM teaching them English. Now, it makes me a little bit nervous knowing that I've never taught English before. It's also really fun though because it's something so totally new to me! They are extremely bright and just fun to be around. So that helping experience has been really good.

Um, I'm a little bit tired, but it's OK. One thing that I have been learning a lot about the last few days is how God's word truly is strength. It's like a Powerade in book form, man! I am continually amazed at how much insight the word of God really does have to offer to my life. I'm also amazed by how often I forget that it is full of so much good advice and encouragement. It's the hardest thing in the world to get into a habit of "needing" to read the Bible. But that's what I'm working on right now!

Anyway, time to get going; another busy day tomorrow! Thanks for all you people that read these and for your prayers!

Drew~

Date: 4/6/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

Each staircase had a number carved on as we ascend to the third floor. 1, 2, 3...the mounted drawings and paintings on the stair wall become transparent that this is a special school that we are working with for the day every Wednesday. We were greeted with huge smiles and cheerful hand waves by the students. They crowded along the hallway as we waited for our contact in the lounge room. Throughout our sessions in the mornings, we've learn that students who came for chapel time, more than half of them were hearing impaired and that there were two teachers who did the sign language for Cantonese and Chinese Mandarin. We did our songs, skits and dance anyway. I thought they were very attentive. While the teachers translated most of our speaking parts and did the sign languages, I couldn't help seeing myself being one of the teachers making the sign language. How I wished. How awesome this opportunity is to be this close to the mind of the silence, a beautiful one.



Irene Venus

There were 7 grade sevens who joined us for lunch and only one girl who spoke English, asking us towards the end of the meal what our favorite food is. On one table with Dallas and Becky, the girls spoke to each other in Cantonese on Drew 's table, the students did the sign language, and they showed him their composition on English phrases about themselves. Non-verbal medium has always been effective communication. One student came up to me and introduced himself on a piece of paper. "My name is Joel. Hi." My heart was pumped with gladness knowing that this boy, Joel, sincerely took the moment to talk and say hi beyond spoken words. It was, for me, the sweetest acquaintance thus far. Towards the end of our time there, I can spell my name in sign language, and do "thank you" and "see you later."

While walking back home, the sky began to drizzle. My eyes were on the paces I made. I started counting the words I know to express in sign language. 1, 2, 3...17, not enough to relate to these special kids. My mind wander on things that could have been and how I could... I looked up. I counted my blessings. I thank God for making me special in my own way.

Date: 4/8/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Today instead of going to the rehabilitation center, we met the guys in the north part of Macau. They took an hour bus ride to get there, while for us it was about a half hour. Even though this place is rather small, I guess it can take rather long to get places. Anyway, we met there to go visit a center where people of varying disabilities come and work. They have a variety of jobs that they get to do. They have to go through training and a series of tests identifies what jobs they are capable of doing. They help package items such as washcloths and plastic combo of a spoon, fork and knife. They have a laundromat where they wash the clothes of people who live in the apartment buildings surrounding them. They also have a cleaning service where a team of them will go out and clean offices or homes. They sell crafts and wedding party favors as well. They were friendly, and some even knew English, so we could talk a bit with them.



Elissa Surprenant

The social worker from the rehab told us his hope in coming here was to some how motivate the rehab guys to do something with their life. And I see some of them wanting to and already making good healthy choices. Others are still working through it. It is such a struggle of the mind and will. At the end of the tour, we sat in a circle to share our thoughts about what we saw. I wish I knew Chinese because I would have loved to know what they were saying! Today I saw two different groups of people surrounded by people who love and care for them and want to help give them a chance to do something with their life. People in the one group didn't have a choice about the situation life gave them, and people in the other had a choice and almost lost their lives and are now on the road to getting them back again.

Date: 4/9/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

It rained again in Macau, so our "singing in the park depending on the weather" has again been put off for another day. That meant that today was a more relaxed day, allowing for some time to work on the new music we've been asked to learn for a special guest visiting the center at the end of the month, and lots of down time to catch up on any personal job tasks needing to be done.



Becky Wray

And again, in the evening our programmed event did not occur, so we had more time to just chat/hang out, play with the "laugh track" on the keyboard here at the center (hours of entertainment right there), fill our outgoing mail packet with gifts for other teams and such, and read the "deep thoughts" from the latest incoming mail packet.

So all in all, it was nice to have a little break from scheduled activity, and have a chance to hang out, laugh a lot, and think and pray for the other teams and staff involved with YE, too.

Later,
Boots

Date: 4/14/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

It was a great day... the second time I've been blessed to spend a birthday overseas. I am officially a quarter of a century old. I woke up at 7:30 a.m. to my mom and dad calling to wish me well and send their love on this day. It was good to hear their voices. My teammates were and still are awesome. They helped make it an extraordinarily special day. The day consisted of song as the rehab guys broke out "Happy birthday to you..." after Drew taught them "Happy 25th Birthday". The day had some adventure as Drew and Dallas joined me...er, distracted me for a couple hours climbing the rocks along the beach. It was filled with laughter, surprises, and yummy food as Irene and Boots made a "surprise" dinner for me. The menu was pancakes with Nutella, peanut butter, syrup, fruit and ice cream as toppings, along with rice, beef, and a delicious fish dish. I ate so much! I had a feeling something was going on, but I never expected the meal and the effort that went into it. I was also surprised with a few gifts and had already received the package of birthday cards from my cousins and family at home. Thank you guys! I got some good laughs from them!

I went home with a belly full of food, a heart full of love, and a mind full of peace. It was a great day...



Elissa Surprenant

Date: 4/15/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Hey everybody! So it's Friday, which means that our layout for the day often looks a little something like this:

We meet as a team in the morning, do our team devo and check-in, and then work on some program stuff. After making a "joyful noise unto the Lord," we break for lunch. For me, this usually means heading to the bakery up the street, getting a "rice box" from around the corner, noodles from the "Pink Market," or if I had been a little more lively this morning, feasting on whatever leftover/sandwich I could have managed to compile before leaving the apartment. After lunch, we all meet at the bus stop next to the Hotel Lisboa (one of the many popular casinos in Macau) and hitch a ride to the island of Coloane where we teach music at the ARTM (drug rehabilitation center). From there we head back to Macau and do a couple more hours of team stuff, or we call 'er a day and spend some time catching up individually on our job stuff, practicing songs, writing journals, or sometimes just hanging out.

Today pretty much followed that routine...Drew led the devo; everybody had a good night's sleep; I opted for the bakery; we hitched our ride to the ARTM (sang, actioned and laughed the afternoon away); and then...

Hopped another bus to China! Okay, so today may have started off like most of our Fridays here in Macau, but it ended with another stamp in the passport and excitement for the weekend we are spending away from our "homes." We are in China teaching English and getting the chance to experience the culture of the Chinese people not only in Macau, but those on the mainland as well.

Our ride to China was a pretty smooth one, the bus being comfortable, and the roads being paved the whole way. The only disturbance in the trip was having to unload all of our belongings at the border as we left Macau and then repeat the procedure again, after crossing the bridge and officially entering China. The bus driver was very friendly and patient as our crew took the longest to get through the customs, and the "in-ride" stewardess was über helpful in the repacking/loading of all our stuff. And after forgetting that you are not supposed to take pictures in Customs, I was asked very nicely not to take any more...could have been much worse.

I'm looking forward to the weekend, seeing more of Asia, and boning up on my own English skills as I try and teach others...

Have a blessed day!

Boots



Becky Wray

Date: 4/16/2005
Submitted by: Drew Bell
Journal Entry:



Drew Bell

We are in China! What an experience this is! Here are some interesting Chinese customs that we picked up. 1. Tea is huge in China, every restaurant that you go to will serve it, and before you fill your own tea cup, you have to fill someone else's. 2. When someone fills your tea, you tap two fingers on the table to say thank you. 3. Your first cup of tea is used to sterilize your chop sticks and bowl; you do this by pouring the tea over your chop sticks and having it run into the bowl, after which you pour it out into a pot they have. 4. The table cloth is not sacred! If you need to get something out of your mouth, it's okay to just put it on the table, wherever. Also, spilling tea is not a problem at all—the table cloth is there to soak it up! 5. We never had this happen, but we hear that if you were to visit someone's house and they offered you something, you should say no. Then they will offer again later, and you say no. Then one more time they offer, and you say no thank you. Then when they offer a fourth time, you are allowed to say yes. It is a culture where you are to think of the other person first, so it's rude to "put someone out" even if they have offered. 6. Pushing. Everyone pushes; if you need to get through, just push!

Now, obviously, not all these things apply to all people in China. We were only in one area, and it is a large country. Anyway, aside from having a little bit of a learning curve to find out what was okay and what was a little bit rude, we had a wonderful time. We spent most of our time in one area and got to teach English! They were all very apt students and great at learning. I had so much fun in China, and it is definitely a place that I would visit again!

Hey, thanks for all the support of the people that read these journals!
Drew~

P.S. remember to check out another set of our pictures @ <http://newlens.blogspot.com>

Date: 4/17/2005
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:



Irene Venus

We once again had our breakfast at a 10-minute walk McDonald's. The street was quite cleaned from the rain that poured in yesterday. It was a little bit foggy and misty morning.

In my English class today, I had two new students who joined with us in learning some words like faith, sunny and hungry. One of my students excitedly pulled her e-translator palm pad, which I thought it was very neat and handy. I can see their eyes glow attentively in the process of discovering a new foreign word for the common translation of their native tongue. I myself was moved by their enthusiasm of coming here on a Saturday early morning to enhance their English communication skills.

I befriended a lady from yesterday, and she placed her arms around me every time she sees me and spoke only this English words, "I like you." Guess I found a friend. She was with us during our breakfast, and I asked her name. She was nervous; I could tell from her face. English language sometimes scare people away here, so I assumed that's what she was feeling when she spoke in Chinese. So I speak the Chinese phrase I know too well. "*Ni jiao shenma?*" (It means "What is your name?") She leaped towards me hearing these familiar words. Believe me, I only know 10 Mandarin Chinese words, "*yi, er, san, si, wu, liu, chi, ba, jiu, shi*" (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10). But this lady told me in Chinese that I made her nervous when I ask her name in English when I knew Chinese! I think she called me 'silly' but she liked me anyway, couldn't get her hand

away from my shoulders since that acquaintance. Oh man, now I know how much little can make a big difference. In spite of the communication barrier, she took Dallas and me to eat out and shop. It was a short two-hour stroll around the city, and we had fun exchanging bilingual expressions. She too has an e-translator palm pad. I've noticed the day after that she has become more involved in our action songs. Somehow the Spirit of peace and understanding came along in us and through us. Praise God for the sunshine amidst the foggy day.

Date: 4/20/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

We went to the Concordia School for Special Education today as per the usual Wednesday routine. We start each day with the morning prayer, which usually consists of prayer and then an action song. We also lead two times of chapel—one for the K-1 classes and then for the rest of the students. And we also teach two classes of religion with the hearing impaired.

I love the little kids, even though you never know what they might do. The kindergarten class is mostly the class we have to be ready for anything. There is one girl in particular that we've decided doesn't like the drum. She hits whoever has it. And there are two others that really like to strum the guitar wherever it might be. There is another little boy that has joined us several times in the front dancing to songs like the JOY song. There is a boy we've named "Albert" that just sits and smiles and laughs, at what I'm never sure. Despite the unpredictability, I don't know what it is, but as soon as I enter that room, I can't stop smiling.

The atmosphere with the hearing impaired students is strikingly different. There is a silence except for whoever is teaching and then our translators and the occasional sounds from the students... hands hitting hands, fingers moving, mouths moving with little or no sound coming from them. You can see their minds working, and the answers and questions about faith amaze and inspire me.



Elissa Surprenant

Date: 4/21/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Oh man, today was GREAT! It was my turn to teach English at the ARTM today, and the theme for the day was sports. We covered various sports and their main players (i.e., ball, puck, paddle, stick...), introduced the "Frisbee"—a novelty here in Asia—and did "the wave," which alone could claim responsibility for this being a great day, as I believe that any day in which you can participate in "doing the wave," can be marked with a superior stamp of "great day-ness." However (and fortunately so), after the adventures of sporting fun at the ARTM, my day only got better (and thus "the wave" can only claim some of the greatness in this day).

Because we did not have any more scheduled events for the rest of the day, Dallas, Elissa and I hit the trails on the green hills of Coloane. It was a beautiful day with a little bit of sun actually poking through the clouds, and when added to the great scenery and fresh air of the place, it was a perfect setting for a continued great day. We followed many different routes, leading us to various lookout points to the island and ocean below, as well as an old dam that we walked across with turtles swimming in the waters underneath us. Needless to say...it was great. It was especially nice to be somewhere opposite of the hustle and the bustle of Macau and really take in God's beauty and stillness.

I pray that our great God grants you a GREAT day today too,
Boots



Becky Wray

Date: 4/23/2005
Submitted by: Drew Bell
Journal Entry:



Drew Bell

The Search for Essentials

So over the last few days, the temperature here in Macau has slowly been rising. It's a strange phenomenon to me, since at home the temperature between days is a little more predictable. If it's sunny, it's warm, if it's cloudy, it's cold, and if it's snowy, it's colder. Predictable, nice. But here in Macau we have had maybe five days of sunshine, but the weather is consistently on a climb. It makes you feel like you are losing fitness in leaps and bounds because even though the day looks the same, a walk that made you feel refreshed the day before has become a walk where you need to stop and take a rest! So it's been very strange to be here where the weather is less dependent on what a day "looks like." The reason this has to do with my search for essentials is that I've begun to run low on deodorant, and in all my searching I have yet to find some "normal" deodorant. I just want some Old Spice. Really; please? Or at least something that comes in a container that I recognize. Instead I find myself having to choose between spray bottles and this strange roll-on liquid. Needless to say, I'm a little worried for my deodorant needs as I'm running low on deodorant that I understand! I suppose that this is just one more of those things that we put under "culture shock..."

Aside from coming down to a crunch and trying to prolong my deodorant resources, things have been going quite well here. We have just over two weeks left and soon I will be hopping planes left and right on my long trip "home" to the U.S. I'm excited to get on the planes again; I really do enjoy flying, but I'm also finding that Macau has found a special little place in my heart, and I think there is a large possibility of coming back here someday.

Date: 4/26/2005
Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant
Journal Entry:



Elissa Surprenant

Scaffolding. Bamboo. What do they have in common? Bamboo is scaffolding!! It is crazy and super cool how people in Macau use this natural resource in this way. They use it on buildings of all shapes and sizes. The heights are what impress me. There are numerous buildings over 20 stories that have bamboo scaffolding all the way up. It looks like a giant jungle gym around a tall business building you'd find in the middle of the Twin Cities. Each stick of bamboo is tied together to the next with strong plastic. They do no drilling or hammering to put these together... only ties! And the bamboo itself is a strong hollow tube, so I would guess this makes the whole structure fairly light. I don't know how it all works, but it's a sight to see.

Laundry. Dehumidifier. What do they have in common? A dehumidifier doubles as a dryer for my laundry here. As I look across the street to my neighbors, most clothes are hung outside, which is funny because this is a rather humid climate, and with all the cars and scooters that drive by, I wouldn't want all my clean clothes hanging in that. So I'm glad we've got a great drying system here at my apartment. We put all the clothes into the bathroom, roll in the dehumidifier, close the door with the light on, and in about four hours, we've got dry clothes! It gets warm in there rather fast. The plug-in doesn't work unless the light is on. The bathroom light switches are on the outside, usually. I often wonder if people take advantage of that for pranks.

Scooters. A wave. What do they have in common? The scooters are all over the place. They are definitely the way to get around here. You can weave in and out of traffic easily and find your way to the front in no time. Whenever there is a red light, all the scooters wait at the front of the pack of cars. And when the green light comes, a wave of scooters...

Date: 4/27/2005
Submitted by: Becky Wray
Journal Entry:

With only 10 more sleeps left of our stay in Macau, the farewells officially started today. It feels a little strange to start saying "this is the last time..." as our time overseas has really flown by so fast, but alas, today we said "Cai jien" (goodbye) to our new friends at the CSSE (Concordia School for Special Education). We have been visiting the CSSE each Wednesday in April and have been blessed to do so. Today was fantastic, as even the kids who were less enthusiastic or just plain shy during our first visit had now joined in the fun wholeheartedly, doing actions and singing along as best they could.



Becky Wray

At the end of our first morning chapel (the only time that we are with almost all of the students), the Principal presented us with a school banner and gracious monetary donation. Then a student from our morning Bible study class presented a card to our group on behalf of the whole student body. The presentations were followed by much clapping and cheering, and the students who use sign language as their means of communication all had their arms in the air, repeatedly moving their thumb away, and then back again to their fisted other fingers--the sign for "thank you." It was a beautiful moment.

This joyous time was followed by more fun with the kindergarten group. They were so lively today, so we sang and danced our hearts out, which proved helpful about a half hour later, when I walked by their class and saw 30 little kids all enjoying their nap time. So cute....

After more singing, Bible studies, and more group goodbyes, we finally said our last to May, our translator for almost everything we did at the school. She was an amazing help to us, making us feel at home at the school with her very welcoming personality, and then providing a medium for which we could connect with the students on more than just a "Hey, my name is..." level. I will miss her infectious laugh and awesome facial expressions that accompanied the sign language and Chinese to help the students understand our message that much better. I am thankful for May and the other teachers at the school, who tirelessly work with these kids to make sure they are comfortable, and not only teach them about God's love, but show it in all that they do.

Thank you CSSE!

Becky

Date: 4/29/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

Today was our last day with ARTM people at the center. Elissa and Dallas were not with us because he has to go visit the doctor for his allergy check-up. With Julie, another English teacher from Concordia English Center, there were four of us having the Friday music session with the guys. We played the rhythm game where somebody would guess who the leader was among the group. I was also glad to see surprising giggles and laughs from the simplest do-along song called 'dum-dum diddy-diddy'. Yesterday during my English/Art Class, one of the guys drew a picture of his home and shared that he was homesick. I saw some couple of nods including myself. While we played and just had fun for the hours that remained, I could see that somehow they enjoyed their time here; I did. I couldn't help myself hoping that all these good times together may be remembered and be a reminder that there's a brighter life waiting for all of us who are seeking restoration. We will be seeing them one last time on Tuesday for a beach party. Until then I held my good byes.



Irene Venus

Drew, Becky and I walked down for 15 minutes from the CEC (Concordia English Center) to the mall. This was one of those trips that you want to check out before leaving the place. It'll be a week till we fly out for vacation and back for return tour, so we figured out, sure. It was just another mall, where everything was at any other mall in US would cost. First floor, then second, third...cool massage chair. Should we try it out? Nah, maybe... "You go try it, Irene." Without question I jumped in one of the medium-sized massage chairs. 'Comfy,' I thought. I wonder if we pay...nah. So I switched on the power as the Canadians watched. "It's working Irene!" they said, so I leaned back and started groaning the oh's and ah's. In a slight second, I watched the two grabbed one of the empty chairs. Hehehehe. We found the best stuff and enjoyed it like no one else would, because it was free. We stayed for like 30 minutes, and I asked if we have 5 more minutes more, or maybe 3. The two just took off in a hurry, but we all said our unfeigned thank you's to the sales lady. Uh huh. That was swell!

xxx

It was Friday Bible study night at every teacher's apartment. Our Chinese teacher didn't show up so we had our lesson in English, having three Chinese students who came and three of us, Becky, Julie and me. There was an intense question among two students about Christianity, believing in Christ and going to heaven. I was drawn and silent for the most part; I wasn't sure then if it would be helpful for me to say at least something. Becky and Julie were deliberately conveying the gospel amidst the frustration of language barrier. I was dissuaded by my own anticipation whether or not 'our' words would satisfy their bewildered heart. I meditated and prayed. Then I was back again in the conversation; I heard Simon, one of the students said, "I understand, now I understand..." I opened the Bible and showed him Luke 23:39-43, the Crucifixion of Jesus. He read the Chinese version of it and understood the account of two criminals, how Jesus suffered and how faith saves.

Date: 5/1/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Today we spent the whole day in church! We were invited by two of the Filipino churches of Macau to participate with them in their worship services. It was a crazy day full of energy, good food and the Holy Spirit. It was awesome being surrounded by Filipinos again and being able to use a bit of Tagalog and see their faces light up with enthusiasm when we did!



Elissa Surprenant

Ah, I was kind of hoping for a more relaxing last Sunday, but this really was a good day for me. It was a lot of time fellowshiping and hearing the word being taught, which I've really needed. Other Sundays have been a great day for us as a team to just hang out as friends and not "teammates." I can more readily relax on Sunday afternoons and evenings knowing that Monday I don't have to be anywhere or plan for something. It has been a real blessing. I'm going to miss it.

There are those days that I long to be home and not be on the go all the time, but then I catch myself and realize just how blessed I am to have the schedule that I do and places that I get to go and see and the people that I get to work with

Well, this begins our last week here in Macau. There are a few festivities in store this week that I'm looking forward to. I am getting eager to get home. I think this next leg of tour in the U.S. will be fun. I keep looking at the schedule online and see that we are heading back to places we've already been. It will be great to see familiar faces. And I'm eager to see if everything will feel old hat and those stresses of things being new will be gone now. I am also eager to see what it will be like coming home this time. I say this time because I've already lived overseas before, and coming home that time was super hard. I hope and pray that sharing this with my teammates and now sharing the return culture shock will help. Not to say it will be any easier, but having others to share in the experience with is a good thing. And return culture shock is an odd thing. You'd think it'd be easy coming home...but home really isn't the same because we are no longer the same. And people at home aren't either, and things have been happening as well. It doesn't matter if you just move to a different state and then come back home, or go to college and come home. Home changes and you change. That's just the way it is. It's not good or bad. Just reality. It can be a real time of growth for both sides if they are willing to go through it with each other.

Overall, this has been another great overseas experience in Asia, and I'm excited to share it with people at home.

Date: 5/3/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

More fun today, followed by more farewells...

Today was our last time with the ARTM guys, and to end our time together with a little fun and festivities, the ARTM invited us to a BBQ on the beach. We met up with the group of English/music students at 12:00 p.m. and made the beach our home till late afternoon.



Becky Wray

We started with eating, and while a couple of the guys were preparing the BBQ, I was taught the chords to a song by the Hong Kong band, "Beyond," (the musical stylings of which are a favorite of all of the men at the ARTM). The same guy who taught me the chords also shared more about his "story," and what it was that brought him to this place. It was inspiring to hear him talk about his faith in God, and how despite all the hard times he's been through, and the daily challenges of "keeping clean," his faith is stronger than ever. He's thankful for the second and third chances that he has been given by the ARTM and for the hope that only God can provide.

After eating the delicious food, and allowing for some digestion time, we threw the Frisbees around and then commenced the hours of tiring fun in the sand as we played the rest of the afternoon away. It was great to play games, as everyone was so into it, and by the end, it left all of us tired from exertion, but mostly just sore from laughing.

Around 5 p.m. we cleaned up our picnic site and took group photos to help this day not only be remembered in our hearts and minds, but on paper too. It was a hard goodbye to make, but all of us were so thankful for the time that we could spend together. I am blessed to be able to call that group of wonderful guys my students, my teachers, and my friends.

"With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the Lord: 'He is good; his love to Israel endures forever.'" Ezra 3:11

Date: 5/5/2005

Submitted by: Drew Bell

Journal Entry:

Time is runnin' down now, I guess. It's strange to think that I've been in Macau for a month and a half. It's strange to think that this is the first apartment that I've ever lived in, the first time I've taken mass transit consistently, the first time I've bought food at McDonald's and had them look at me strange when I say "cheeseburger." But all in all as we wrap up and start the cleaning of the apartments and the final souvenir buying, it has been so great, and this place has definitely found a joyous little place in my heart.



Drew Bell

One of the fun things has been how much people truly have enjoyed us here. When it's yourself it's hard to say that you've brought something new because to yourself you're not new...make sense? Tonight we were all really blessed by the Living Water fellowship as they gave us blessings and gifts for our trip home. The people here have been so appreciative and the teachers at the centre have been great to us. It has been like one GIANT host home for a month and a half.

These last few days coming up are going to be filled with the joy of packing, and cleaning our apartments, and trying to clean out our fridges, and spending the last of our currency and finding cool things to bring home! It should be good, even though we have to be at the airport around 5:00 a.m. on Saturday! Oh my goodness!

Anyway talk to ya'll (practicin' my accent up again for return tour) later.

Drew Bell~

(P.S.--Final overseas pictures are up at <http://newlens.blogspot.com>)

Date: 5/26/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Well here we are again, back on the road until August. It feels good to be back home, seeing familiar faces and places. We just got done with five days of VBS training and debriefing with the other International Teams. I can't tell you how great it was to see them, hear stories, watch the new Family Night Programs, and share woes and jokes. For me, it was great to realize, once again, that we are not alone in this year of ministry as it can seem when it is just your own team traveling around.



Elissa Surprenant

Today was jam packed. We sent all the other teams off with our program in the morning and then headed to Eyota, MN—my hometown—to share our Family Night Program there. It was so good to see everyone there and be greeted with such enthusiasm and inquisitiveness as they showed us. It is way easier to share stories with those who want to know and have questions ready. My time overseas comes alive when people ask me questions. It's a lot of fun to share then. Thank you to those who have helped make this experience come alive through their questions.

"In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Matt 5:16

Date: 6/4/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

For the past few days we've stayed with the same host churches/homes from our fall tour last year before overseas. It's just amazing to feel that it seems like yesterday that we were here. Days ran so fast and memories too. Just right beside the church was the mansion. As we made our way up to the empty rooms, memory flashed back: tall Christmas trees were all lit up, red poinsettias sitting on some corners, our friends who came to play sardines with us, and the Christmas chill. Good old times.



Irene Venus

We had our program right outside the church garden/parking lot. The sun still dazzled

our eyes while we were setting up, but it cooled right off before the program night ended. Some older couples showed up and some fellow schoolteachers were among the interactive participants in our worship/concert. It was fun seeing them four in synchronized actions whenever we had sing/do along songs.

Some of the Spanish community of the congregation joined in halfway through our program. They just finished their worship time in the sanctuary when they noticed that another worship event was going on. We ended our worship with a Spanish song, "Saturame."

O let me overflow with your Spirit, Lord, and let me feel within the fire of your love as it consumes my heart, O God.

Date: 6/7/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Okay. A few stories to share.

First story—Itasca, IL. I want to write about our day off (June 6), which is odd because usually our day off is rather quiet and mostly used for sleeping. When I first heard that our day off wouldn't truly be a day off, I have to admit that I wasn't too excited about it...I was really looking forward to that time off. But as I always figure out later, God's plans and blessings unfold on his time, not my time. That evening we gathered back together at the church for some fellowship time. It was awesome!! The food was amazing, Sunitha (our former Team Director) ended up meeting us there, and the time spent together with the congregation was food for my soul. Pastor Scot had planned for us to have more time to sit and talk as a group about our time as missionaries this year. He had four great questions that really got us all thinking and truly gave us an opportunity to share from our hearts what God has been showing us and doing in our lives. It gave us a chance to let those gathered get a glimpse into our lives and those who are doing full time ministry. Thank you to those in Itasca, IL that blessed me with the opportunity to share, for your incredible hospitality...you will always be in my heart and mind, both in prayer and memory.



Elissa Surprenant

Second story—Albion, IN or Albion, IL. So today (June 7) was a great day and ended as a great day, but there were a few adventures in between. Our day started at 9:30 a.m. as we departed from our awesome host families in Itasca, IL. We were excited to be on our way to Camp Lutherhaven because we were meeting up with Watermark! We figured we'd get there around 4 p.m.—the standard arrival time for all our destinations.

Well, it was about 3 p.m. when we were an hour away from camp and we called our contact to ask for the final directions. That is when we found out that we had been heading to the wrong Albion the whole time. We had driven south four-and-a-half hours when we should have been driving three-and-a-half hours east to Albion, IN. So what could have been a three hour drive took 11 hours instead. We just had to laugh it off and turn around. We arrived at 9:30 p.m. The end.

This is a rather scattered journal so I will continue to make it that way with my last thing...I wanted to update you all on our teammate Tania who, for those of you who haven't been following our team, went home during our overseas tour to take care of a leg injury. We got an e-mail from her the other day saying she is almost at 100%, which is great news. Keep praying that she continues on that path of recovery and for all the transitions she is experiencing now that she is at home. And for all of you who met Tania on in the fall tour and have her contact info feel free to email her at her Yahoo! account. I'm sure she would love to hear from you! And to the rest of the teamers throughout Youth Encounter that have had to return home for various reasons, know that you are not forgotten and you are still an important part of this ministry even though you aren't physically present. I know that for our team the conversations that have been opened by the topic of Tania's absence have been a blessing and a common ground. I pray for you in your times of transitions and questions. In some ways you get to experience now what the rest of us are going to experience in a few months: re-entry.

May the peace of Christ be with you all,
Elissa

Date: 6/9/2005
Submitted by: Drew Bell
Journal Entry:



Drew Bell

...it's like a dream...

It's so strange to think back of my time overseas, as I sit here in a host home with Internet, flushing toilets, warm showers, Pringles, and soft beds. Did I really go there? Have I really changed? Am I really the person in those pictures I show to people every night? What a strange experience it has been to get into a lifestyle of travel and then do four months overseas and come home back into that same lifestyle. Has anything changed?

I have been thinking about this return tour phenomena, and it has actually made me worried when I think about the fact that maybe I've just come back and I'm the same person. It was quite built up in my mind that going overseas was going to change me so undeniably. From people telling me that my girlfriend will think I'm a different person to my friends finding me obnoxious because of a "worldly traveler" view. But I don't feel any different. I still enjoy things like air conditioning, Wal-Mart and Starbucks. So is there something wrong with me? Am I a callous person because I haven't changed so drastically?

Upon further discussion and thought I'm realizing that everyone just reacts to the experience a little differently. I'm noticing that I am a lot more inclined to being content. We will come into a host home and they will say, "We're so sorry; all we have is a couch for you." Just a couch? JUST A COUCH!? That's AWESOME!! This is so much better than the plywood beds we slept on overseas! I guess it's just one of the ways that I'm learning the truth of "count your blessings" and "make the best of every situation". Couches are quite nice!

The other thing I have begun to realize about change is that it's not instant. I kind of expected to get off the plane in San Francisco and, POOF, become disgusted with the excess and money-loving ways around me. But I'm not...yet. But the more I look around and the more I look at my own life, I'm realizing that I do have a lot of things that I don't need, and that money isn't really the end-all-be-all! But it didn't hit me until I was on the road for a while and I'd look around and go... that's silly. Why do I need that, or why is that a "status" symbol? So it's neat how that's slowly coming out in the way that I view things.

That last thing that has really changed in my perspective is how I view vehicles. Now most people who know me know that I am prone to having a conversation, but if a Mustang or another nice car drives by, it's quite possible that my words will trail off and my jaw will hang slightly open and my neck will crane until the vehicle is gone before I'm able to regain my composure and continue on with the conversation. But since going overseas I have realized how nasty pollution can get, so when I see all these SUV's on the road with one person in them doing their 30-minute commute with their 50 cubic feet of storage space filled with their briefcase, I can only shake my head in wonder at the word "excess."

I predict that in the aftermath of this experience there will be many more changes that come out in the way I view and live my life. Neat.

Drew~

Date: 6/16/2005
Submitted by: Irene Venus
Journal Entry:

One of the things that I've grown meeting were ones who knew someone from or have gone to the Philippines. Some were the WWII veterans. For some who were young, revisits the exciting jeepney rides; the old remembers the war. Sometimes visiting the past with them could be an interesting venture and sometimes hard and sad. Knowing

only the facts of history, I could only nod to what I knew is true, and sometimes I wished in wonder how I could say more or should I've had to say more to just even understand a glimpse of history from someone else's eyes.

It was a good afternoon, the bright sun was setting, and a little spring breeze was in the air. We had a program outside the church's front lawn right beside the main street. During the passing of peace, an old man from the congregation, grabbed me to his side saying, "YOU listen very well young lady!" While being held in his grip, I thought for a second that I was in trouble. Trying to break away, I initiated the side hug and said, "Uh, okay...PEACE?" but the clench grew more. "Now, I've been to your country and I know, oh, I KNOW what it's like to be out there." I don't know if his might of shaking me was as tremendous at his age—maybe I'm just small enough to be shaken—but I held my consciousness up to comprehend what he's trying to convey. "Now you be CAREFUL of yourself, all right!?" he said, then released me. I was a free girl. "OKAY (sigh)." It was something I needed to hear. Before the program I felt that this was one of those days that you wanted to just get done with and move on. Praise God for the stillness of His grip, even though I tried to refuse it.

Thank you for everyone who wished us well in all our travels.



Irene Venus

Date: 6/18/2005

Submitted by: Elissa Surprenant

Journal Entry:

Ironically, today is a drive day. The driving situation for me has been a bit overwhelming these past few weeks, and I was starting to wonder if there was an end in sight. Today there finally was. Praise God! I've been the only driver for the past two weeks, and it was really starting to wear on me. And of course these past few weeks have been the heavier driving times between five and nine hours a day, plus all the driving in between. The reasons why we were down to one driver were these: 1. Drew needed new paperwork because of an insurance change and couldn't drive until then. 2. Dallas' back has been bothering him a lot to the point where he can't sit up or stand for a long time...so he's been laying down. So in a lot of ways we have been down to four members as well. The good news today was that Drew's paperwork went through, and I am no longer the only driver! *Sigh—collapse—sleep* Thank you to those in the Youth Encounter office who helped us get that paperwork through!



Elissa Surprenant

Keep praying for Dallas' back and for his sanity as he is not doing much right now! Lift up the team as well as we are picking up new tasks on top of a busy schedule. I really don't know what else to write about except for driving, staring at roads and the scenery that goes along with it. I'm kind of tired right now...A lot of things besides driving are running through my head. I crave a place of stillness and quietness where I can hear God's still, calm voice. Matt 11:28-30 is calling to me...

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find *rest for your souls*. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Date: 6/28/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

"It's a Circus Spectacular!" I don't know about the rest of the team, but I get excited every time we sing our week's VBS theme song. We choreographed it a bit to fit our participants' capabilities. What gets me and the kids excited was the jumping part as we sing, "It's Circus Spectacular!" We only have from 6:15—8:30 p.m. as our official work time. And what we do the rest of the day? Yeah, we sleep in, hang out, watch old school movies. We have the parish house right beside the church where we all stayed for the rest of the week. Our meals have been provided by the generosity of the congregation of St. Paul Lutheran Church of Jefferson, MD. Thank you!



Irene Venus

Sometime today were spent exploring downtown Washington, D.C.—the Mall, the Smithsonian Museum, the National Museum of Natural History, and National Air and Space Museum. It was hot and bright midday as four of us walked the busy pedestrian. We settled for a while at Albert Einstein's Planetarium, where the show was "Infinity Express," a voyage through the solar system. It was my first time in a planetarium, and I'm amazed how such technology can emulate realistic atmosphere of the universe. The show was thought provoking indeed. It's a big world out there, a lot of questions, a lot of possibilities. Looking at the vastness of our universe, we discover more of them out there. At some point I'm convinced I am that small, such as earth compared to our solar system. The wonder of seeing the stars at night, whether through a pretend sky or a real one is to discover and understand our place, us, as children of God in His transcendent creation.

Then God commanded, "Let lights appear in the sky ... to shine on the earth."
Gen 1:14-17

Date: 7/5/2005

Submitted by: Becky Wray

Journal Entry:

Greetings everybody! Happy (day after) Independence Day for all of you south of the 49th parallel, and for those on the north side, Happy (fourth day after) Canada Day! Drew and I were fortunate enough to receive wonderful support from the Jefferson, Marylanders that attended our Family night program on Friday night, as we sang about "The true north, strong and free." It was a highlight of my day, getting to bring a little piece of the celebration at home, as well as another "cultural" element to our international program.



Becky Wray

I also was able to partake in the Fourth of July celebrations with a wonderful salmon dinner, and then a viewing of the fireworks being lit up at the nation's capitol. It was a wonderful display, and a really cool thing to be a part of another country's festivities. (And after watching enough hockey games in the past, I was able to sing along with the "Star Spangled Banner" pretty well too....)

Unfortunately this past weekend has not been all celebrations. Due to back problems that show no sign of improving through this "life on the road" lifestyle that we YE teams live, Dallas has gone home to try and remedy the pain, and hopefully get the rest and relaxation required for a future healthy back. Thus our Independence Day started with a trip to the airport, consisting of hugs, tears and farewells made to yet another teammate due to physical injury. We have been praying for healing for Tania and now unfortunately have Dallas to add to that list. With that said however, I take comfort in knowing that he is in good hands.

That now brings us to today. I am a little anxious about what the next few days will mean for our team, as we do programs and share stories about our experiences about our time as a six member team, and yet try and move forward as a team of four. I selfishly feel like after 11 months of working, playing, driving, praying, singing, etc., that we have earned the right to avoid any major changes, ones that will cause us to have to start anew in some way. After all, there's only one month left, right? But then I remember how lucky I am that God starts anew with me everyday, and how maybe new beginnings aren't so terrible after all.

God's peace,
Boots

Date: 7/21/2005

Submitted by: Irene Venus

Journal Entry:

Columbia, SC

I get to roller skate for the first time ever. For beginners, you know how it goes, especially when you start late of age. You sweat the anticipation hurting from the fall, then you fall and then you get up and try again, and again and again. I enjoyed the part where I get to laugh just at myself with Elissa. She put me on my feet first. Bless her heart for the patience of pushing me to do it. I wouldn't have stayed long enough in the rink if hadn't for her by my side and the rest of the encouraging girls. (I appreciate it very much, 'salamat'/thank you).



Irene Venus

Roller skating is definitely one of the mind set activity to learn. On my second round on the rink, I told myself that I've done this before, just like me and my siblings used to play as kids. I remember after seeing figure skating Olympics/movies, we would put on our socks and skate on our wooden floor until we hurt ourselves. Ah, good old, happy memories, sure does keep you going I see a lot of skaters learned it when they're young and unafraid, so naïve about pains yet so full of beautiful hopes and dreams.

I am so blessed by these kids at Serengeti Trek VBS crew (kids and young at heart). At their cheerfulness glows the joy that is ours through Jesus. A nine-year-old girl was gladly persisting for me to get out there saying, "If I can do it you can! I'll go if you go."
