

Captive Free North East 2005-06 Journal

Date: 9/22/2005

Submitted by: Ty Dietzler

Journal Entry:

Hey!

Everything has been going really well this week. We've had a few bookings, all of which have gone fairly smooth. We had a really good service last night doing this campfire/communion service outside. The sun was out and there was a bit of a breeze and there were clouds painted all over the sky. The host families have been amazingly giving; I've never seen the servant heart of Jesus in so many people.



Ty Dietzler

One thing that has really impacted me this week is the amazing power of prayer. I think we all overlook prayer. So many people say, "All you can do is pray" when in all actuality, that's the single most important thing you can do for someone or a situation. Prayer is our hotline to God. The more we use it, the more open we feel to come to the Lord with EVERY request or praise that is in our heart. "Come to the Lord in prayer and petition in every situation." I think that pretty much sums it up. There have been so many answered prayers in my life in this week alone, I can hardly fathom how good our God is to us.

I had a fever of 101 yesterday and felt terrible the whole day. I was really worried about not connecting well with the people at the service and not being up to playing. I spent the whole day off and on praying for God's strength to enter me when He saw fit. I felt dizzy, lightheaded, and had the chills all day. I was entirely drained and was getting really worried about getting really sick. As we were doing sound check and people were just starting to show up, I could physically feel God's presence filter through my body and all the aches and pains started to melt away.

There are going to be many times in our life when God asks us, "Whose strength are you going to rely on? Mine or yours? And what happens when yours runs out?" We need to let go of the control issue in our lives. We try so hard to make things work aside from God and without Him (on our own), and when we do, we make things so much harder.

Another thing I'm having a really hard time understanding is the timing in which God works. I so often want God to do things in my life, on my time, on my understanding; when I need to realize that God's timing is all part of the plan. The timing in which God blesses us is really a test of trust, in my opinion. It's another area of life in which we need to surrender our control and let God take the ropes and lead us in a loving, merciful way that only He can. His ways are above our ways, His thoughts are above our thoughts, and His TIMING is above our timing.

Thanks so much for all the prayers; I can definitely feel them!

Ty

Date: 9/27/2005

Submitted by: Jenn Breitweiser

Journal Entry:

Wow. A lot has happened in the past month and a half...it's so hard to actually sit down and think about it. I can't believe that I've only known the rest of North East for a little more than a month. I'm going to back-peddle for a little bit and think back to training...as long as that was.

When I first arrived in St. Paul, I'm not gonna lie, I was scared out of my mind. I had done a lot of praying about my call to team, but I still found it difficult to leave home (for the first real time) and live on the road with six complete strangers. I said a short prayer right before I walked into Christ the King Lutheran Church...and thankfully, God heard me. As I met Ty, Elise, Kevin, Amanda, Martha, and Evan (when he finally showed up), my apprehension



Jenn Breitweiser

slowly disappeared. We quickly bonded during a game that we played in the gym...and from that time on, we were pretty much inseparable. Dana Peterson even gave us the slogan, "FEAR NORTH EAST." Our team has had countless discussions on how much God had to have impacted the directors' decisions to place us together...it wasn't just a mere coincidence. I'm not gonna lie, I thank God every day that He placed me, Ty, Evan, Martha, Elise, Amanda, and Kevin in this team. Anyhow, training went almost TOO fast, and now we find ourselves on the road.

We've been on the road for two weeks...and already, it seems like longer. God has certainly blessed us with the hospitality, kindness, and safety that we've prayed for. Our past few host homes have been absolutely AMAZING. I cannot get over how people can be so generous and open their doors (not to mention their hearts) to us. God has definitely placed certain people in my life over the past two weeks that have impacted me greatly in a short night. To see the faith of total strangers has been completely refreshing, and it has answered a lot of questions that I've had. God is at work all around us, and it is so clear to see (just looking out the van window as we're driving at his beautiful creation, or being in a church that only has an attendance of maybe 18 people, or feeling the instant love from our hosts and churches) His handiwork in all of this. It's so hard to describe...I guess I shouldn't even try to. I think you all know what I'm trying to say: GOD ROCKS...and He totally has a plan for every single one of us. It's just so amazing to think about.

This weekend was really interesting for our team. We had a Family Night Program, a mini-lock-in, Sunday school, and Sunday Worship. Following that, we had a pot-luck lunch. It was going all normal...until after the meal. I was called back into the fellowship hall (I had been in the sanctuary), and they sang "Happy Birthday" and they had a CAKE for me! Being the emotional person that I am, I cried a little bit. It was totally unexpected because I didn't think anyone would know about it. It amazed me how one church and its people would go to great lengths to get a birthday cake for a complete stranger. I guess God knew how much that would mean to me. Yes, yesterday (the 26th) was my 19th birthday. It was my first birthday that I've celebrated away from home, and I was worried about it. And yet again, God had it all planned out. My teammates made my birthday so incredible, and I'm so thankful that I have them. Evan even repeated my famous quote in the van last night, "I'm glad you were born." Yeah, I'm glad that God created me, too.

There is much in my life that I'm thankful for...but this past month has given me so much more. God has been good (like always). There have been a few hard times within this past month, but I seem to find comfort in knowing that God is right here beside me and He knows what He's doing. I know that this year, as much as I'd like it to be, isn't always going to be easy...but that's what life is all about. You fall down occasionally, but then...you have special people and GOD there to help you get back on your feet again. I think the phrase that I've found myself repeating over and over again is, "God is good." And it is absolute truth. I find true comfort knowing that He's in control and I really have nothing to worry about...He'll take care of it all.

I pray for you all every day and hope that life is treating you kindly. Until next time, know that you are in my thoughts, prayers, and heart. Take care and God bless.

In His Mighty Hands,

Jenn

Jeremiah 29:10-11

Date: 10/21/2005

Submitted by: Elise Chesley

Journal Entry:

What is a servant? According to dictionary.com, a servant is "a person working in the service of another." Coming onto team, I expected to be a servant to people we encounter while on the road, not giving much thought to my teammates. Last night however, our team served each other in a very unusual way.

In the Gospels, there is the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. Being a camp counselor, I know that can be a pretty dirty job. Being on the road, you sometimes do not have the opportunity to take a shower everyday. For us, it has been since Monday.



Elise Chesley

We stayed in a small church in the Bronx, New York that didn't have the facilities. Feeling kinda gross, we discovered a new way to serve each other.

We washed each other's hair.

Who knew that washing hair could be such a servantful thing? A small action that makes you feel cleaner even though it only affects your hair.

Not only are we serving people that we meet in churches, schools, nursing homes and random people who ask us questions on the street, but we are serving each other. It has been a huge challenge living with six strangers in a small van and having to deal with everyone's little quirks. It is a learning experience, and you can definitely feel God working through all of us. Being a servant is not just to show people we meet who God is, but showing each other. Sometimes that can be a greater challenge than showing others.

God is continuing to show us grace and mercy while on the road, whether it be through getting to our next booking without getting too lost, helping our sound system get figured out in time for a program, or just recognizing that we are servants to each other. The best way to show your Christian love may not be through words, but through actions. If I take anything away from this year, it will be that.

God's Peace!

Elise <+><

Date: 10/24/2005

Submitted by: Jenn Breitweiser

Journal Entry:

It's been a rough but altogether good week. We were in the Bronx from Tuesday to Friday at a church. When we arrived Tuesday night, we had dinner with Pastor Ruby's family. Her son, Grady, was behind his night-time reading schedule, so I volunteered to do the exercises with him. He was so much fun! We colored together, and then we read [Garfield Goes To School](#) together. I never realized how much I missed coloring and reading with children (I used to babysit back home), but I do. I'm really looking forward to more host homes that have children that I can hang out with.



Jenn Breitweiser

We helped out with the Wednesday after school activity for Calvary Lutheran's kids. It was a very interesting experience. There were about twenty-five kids (ages vary) with extreme energy levels. Come to think of it, I never really realized that I was getting older until I was struggling to keep up with some of the kids. They were everywhere! We had a smaller acoustic program after their Sunday School was over. Some of their parents showed up to see us as well. It was incredibly refreshing to see all the kids jumping and singing around...they also really enjoyed the puppets. They somewhat attacked Oswald's (Ty's puppet) legs...it was relatively entertaining to watch.

On Thursday, we were given the day off. It was amazing. Elise, Evan, and I went to the Bronx Zoo. We spent the entire day there. I haven't been to a zoo in a very, very long time...so it was really fun. It was also extremely incredible being able to hang out with Elise and Evan more.

Thursday night must have been the most entertaining night of the week. Martha and I were having "sleeping bag wars" and bouncing around the mats that we slept on. Evan and Kevin were being the referees, while Elise and Amanda laughed at us. Then, the guys had a go with the sleeping bags. You'd never guess at the many ways we find to entertain ourselves. The best part was when Martha and I volunteered to wash everyone's hair. The water was obscenely cold, but the warmth came from the care in everyone's hands and hearts. It was an experience that I don't think I'll ever forget...I can't say that up until that point, I've ever had someone wash my hair before. It was relaxing and strangely comforting.

³⁸ "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, ³⁹ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38-39

I never realized how much that Bible verse still has an effect on me. If you really think about it, this verse is extremely comforting to come back to when you have struggles in your life. I don't know about you, but I, for one, know that I need that extra assurance that nothing can change God's love for me. That's something I've struggled with for a couple of days. I know

that God's love is never failing, it doesn't change or waiver, and I know that nothing in life or death can come between this amazing love and myself. However, I can't help but feel that I need to do something more to deserve this love. But what can I do? This is where the power of prayer comes in. When all my strength and even my faith seems to leave or fail me, all I have left is to pray. And you know, sometimes that's all I really need. I have always been impressed when I'm feeling down and I get to have an amazing conversation with a close friend and I feel a lot better when I get off the phone. Imagine how I feel after having an incredible conversation with God; I feel triple the amount of comfort after I get done praying. Sure, my struggles and problems don't just disappear, but they do seem a lot less intimidating when I rely a little more on God and a little less on the world. That's an area I know that I can definitely grow in this year...

It is cold season once again. We all are either a) getting "cold-like" symptoms, b) already sick, or c) crossing our fingers and hoping that we won't get sick. Luckily I am between a and c. I had a sore throat last night...but I woke up this morning and it wasn't so bad. But, please keep North East in your prayers. I know that some of my teammates aren't feeling 100% and it's no fun being sick. Plus, last night was the first time that I've been able to see my breath...which means, *sigh* as much as I hate to admit it, I'm going to have to start wearing shoes (instead of flip-flops) and I'm going to have to dig in my suitcase for my winter coat pretty soon. Oh well, I'm not gonna lie, I like the cold (snow angels, anyone?). It's the part about wearing shoes that I don't like.

I want you all to know that I keep you in my prayers and thoughts. If you have any prayer concerns or you want to communicate with us, feel free to e-mail the team. We'd love to help out in any way possible...just let us know how we can do so. I wish you all a blessed week and hope you're doing incredibly swell. I'll talk to you all later. Take care and God bless.

Peace Be The Journey,

Jenn

Date: 10/27/2005

Submitted by: Amanda Whittaker

Journal Entry:

This morning we led chapel at a Christian school in Newport News, VA, on the Chesapeake Bay. I love doing chapel at elementary schools because the kids are so responsive! They jump up and down, dance with almost every song, and always laugh at the puppet shows (even the parts that aren't funny).

This evening we did an outdoor program at One Cross, a community youth ministry. A different band plays at One Cross every Thursday night. I think I'm officially a bass player now, since I was forced to play without music tonight because the sun set during the first few minutes of the program. By the end of the program, it was so cold that my fingers were numb. I couldn't even feel the strings I was strumming. But the relational ministry, hangin' out with the youth, was totally worth numb fingers.

The cool thing about Captive Free is that it's ministry in the raw. It's intentional. It's focused. It's God-centered ALL THE TIME. Working in a church and other forms of full-time ministry are great, but those jobs also require so many other time-consuming tasks. You've got to have a committee meeting to plan the activity, okay the activity with the supervisor, check the office calendar to make sure the facilities are available, make sure you've got plenty of ministry partners (a.k.a. chaperones), find someone to make the snacks, design and print publications, and advertise the youth event seven different ways for at least six weeks in advance. Guess what? Captive Free doesn't have to do any of that! We just arrive at a location and radiate God's love in word and deed.

Martin Luther points out that all vocational work is holy, whether it's an ordained minister preaching from the pulpit, a church volunteer typing up a bulletin announcement, or a mom changing a baby's diaper. All vocations are equally important in God's eyes. All may be equally as holy, but getting to do such theocentric, relational ministry every day is way more fun than researching which rental company will give you the best deal on a 15-passenger van for the next mission trip. I don't know how I got so lucky to get to do this for an entire year.



Amanda Whittaker

Date: 11/21/2005

Submitted by: Elise Chesley
Journal Entry:

What a crazy weekend it has been. CFNE just experienced their first Construction Zone in Bushkill, PA. Along with 150 or so high schoolers, we rocked out to the music of Carried Away, worshiped with Brian Spahr, and laughed with Pete Larson and our MCs, Chris and Ryan. Since only one of us had ever been to a YE Event like this, it was all new and exciting. And surprisingly, everything went smoothly--even the computer didn't freak out!!



Elise Chesley

For me, one of the best parts of the Zone was watching everyone worship. I was mainly stuck in the back running the computer but actually really enjoyed it. I got to know the people involved in the on stage and behind the stage parts of the Event because of it. There are some amazing people of God working through these Events, and I could see God in all the kids that were there.

Saturday night was one of the most powerful night of the weekend. Henry, one of the pathway leaders, led a prayer in the middle of worship that was awesome. You could feel God moving through the ballroom. It gives me chills just thinking back to it.

The team as a whole had an awesome experience, whether it was hanging out in the hospitality room after the day's events with all the other staff, eating meals with church youth groups, or rockin' out in the back to music. I pray that everyone who was at the Poconos Zone this weekend will continue to seek out God because I know God was there just like God always is. Keep being real, you guys. I know you can. Even when you feel that you can't, remember this weekend and that God will help you. God will hold you close and tell you how much He loves you and will help you get to where you need to go. God will never leave your side. Remember that.

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Date: 1/3/2006
Submitted by: Martha Leisch
Journal Entry:

Being home, seeing friends and family, and simply relaxing has made coming back after Christmas break difficult. Toward the end of break I was feeling extremely indecisive; half of me just wanted to stay home, but the other missed my teammates and the ministry that we do. Now that I am back on the road, I realized that this most definitely is the place where I need to be.



Martha Leisch

Tonight I was doing my devotional and was reading about when Gabriel appeared to Mary to tell her that she was going to have the "Son of the Most High." Now with this, Mary was a little flustered to say the least, but continued to listen to the angel. He went ahead and answered some of Mary's more obvious questions and then ended with "For nothing is impossible with God." Now, at this point, if I were Mary I would be freaking out, first off because there is an angel in front of me, and second that he is telling me that I am going to have a baby and he is the SON OF GOD! But Mary, on the other hand, handled the situation with such grace and poise. "Mary responded, '**I am the Lord's servant**, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants. May everything you [Gabriel] have said come true.' And then the angel left." Luke 1:38

Mary responded by saying "I am the Lord's servant." How does she do that? She had such faith in God that she could completely let Him control everything. She was not concerned about how or why, but only with the fact of who. God. She put her trust in God alone.

I hope someday that I may have the faith of Mary, the faith that enables me to let go of my life and let God take control.

Date: 1/25/2006

Submitted by: Amanda Whittaker
Journal Entry:

Event season is in full swing as we prepare for our fourth straight weekend of junior high Quakes! We started out January with Family Night Programs and chapels in the Baltimore area during the week and Quakes on the weekends. Last weekend we ventured over to Pennsylvania for the Harrisburg Quake. We lost power during our opening set on Friday night in a ballroom with 530 youth. But, since we have the most amazing sound tech, Martha fixed the problem in about three minutes. Saturday also presented us with new challenges when we had to rearrange the schedule last minute. After lunch we did a concert, variety show, and the most ridiculous puppet show I've ever been a part of, instead of our scheduled Trek (workshop).



Amanda Whittaker

Harrisburg was an amazing weekend, and God once again reminded me of the truth in Ephesians 6:9. "The mighty strength of the Lord will make you strong." The power of God inside us is so much greater that any obstacle the enemy can throw in our way.

And the fun continues. This weekend we'll be at a Quake in Massachusetts. It's been great to reconnect with youth groups we met in the fall. Quakes and Construction Zones offer awesome opportunities for youth groups to get away from everyday distractions and obstacles in order to focus on God. The atmosphere at these Events is so light-hearted and fun, especially Saturday night Crazy Dress Night. I will be sad when Event season ends.

Date: 2/8/2006
Submitted by: Amanda Whittaker
Journal Entry:

This weekend we led worship and games for a district lock-in. Ty led a meditative prayer time that was soooo God inspired. It's amazing the way God can use people. I am overwhelmed by the generosity I've experienced at churches and homes. I've spent five months on the road trying to figure out why people go out of their way to serve us. Why do people do nice things for each other? Why do people do acts of service? Looking at the world around me, I can think of a few reasons, most of which have self-serving agendas:

1. To make someone you know happy
2. Out of guilt
3. To apologize for something
4. To get on someone's good side
5. Sympathy or pity for someone's misfortune

Complete strangers take me out to eat, buy me shampoo, and pretty much treat me like royalty. Why do they do this? None of the five reasons listed above seem to explain my situation.

I guess Christians serve to glorify God. As a result of the unfailing love God pours out upon us, we respond by wanting to make our heavenly dad proud, by living lives that bring glory to God. We glorify God through selfless acts of love to those around us. Helping people is a cool by-product of glorifying God. Interesting, eh? To God be the glory.



Amanda Whittaker

Date: 2/11/2006
Submitted by: Elise Chesley
Journal Entry:

When you are on a Captive Free team, you never know what each day is going to bring. You get a new place every night with a new bed and new people to get to know. Traveling in the Northeast region, we have a tendency to stay in some very wealthy homes. Some homes are so big that you almost get lost in them. This week however, I got to experience the other end of the spectrum. We got our second opportunity to play in the Bronx. This time however, we got to stay in host homes



rather than in church like last time.

Elise Chesley

On Thursday, we arrived at the church and set up like usual. We were scheduled to play a Family Night Program but played a program for mainly after-school program students that had a lot of energy and were a real blessing to play for. They gave the team a renewed sense of why we are on team. Afterwards we ate pizza with the kids and then tore down all of our equipment. After we were done tearing down, the pastor introduced Martha and me to our host grandma Isabelle. I was nervous right away because it was obvious that English was not her first or primary language, and Spanish was definitely not ours. Between the two of us, we knew very little Spanish and what we did know was not very useful.

After we said our prayer with the team, we all headed in our separate directions for the evening. We started to walk with Isabelle a couple of blocks to where we were staying. After walking about 15 minutes, we arrived at a nice little home with the rod iron fence around it. We walked in and were told to go upstairs. There we found a dark hallway with lots of doors, something you would see out of a horror movie. I looked at Martha nervously but with the sense that we can do this. We were actually staying in a boarding house that housed two other men with whom we would be sharing a bathroom and a kitchen. We were given a room with a bed, a couple of chairs, a dresser, and a TV (that picked up three channels, two of which were in Spanish). Isabelle continued to come upstairs and give us a number of different things such as food, blankets, towels, and even shower sandals. She had an amazing giving heart and was very sweet. She made our stay what it was.

Even though we were nervous at the beginning, everything turned out fine. God was working in so many different ways. We are so lucky to be exposed to a way of life that we don't often get to experience. I am thankful everyday for the life that God has given me and the opportunities that he has blessed me with. There will be nothing else in my life that will be like this year.

Elise <+><

Date: 4/26/2006

Submitted by: Martha Leisch

Journal Entry:

Amanda and I had a fun afternoon, and I just thought I would share the moment. Today, being Monday, our one day off from a very intense schedule, we decided to leave our host home for a bit and go on a walk. It was great, the sun was shining, it was warm and there were tons of blossoming trees. We walked for about an hour and then as we approached our street a thought came into my head; "I wonder if we left the door unlocked?" We got up to the house and climbed the steps and sure enough I pressed the handle down and it moved, but the door didn't open. The house has been deadlocked. How has the house been deadlocked, no one was home? There is no way the house could have been locked by us because we didn't have a key. At this point, we began searching under big rocks, the door mat and anywhere we thought a key may be hidden. No luck. Amanda and I then ran to the back of the house and checked the other two entrances, again, no luck. Well, we were officially locked out.

It was about 1:10 and we knew one of the kids would be home from school around 3:00. That was too long to wait, I am not that patient. I had my cell phone with, so we decided to call the Youth Encounter office and get the number of the church. We did, but we didn't have any paper so we wrote the number in the mud. It was a good idea, but in the end turned out to be very difficult to read. We started calling and it turns out we couldn't get the last number right. We finally got it and called and got the answering machine when my phone died. Yeh for technology! We just had to be patient and wait. Time passes and now it is 3:00, our host sister walks up to the house with a puzzled look on her face. We told her that we were locked out and grateful that she was there to let us in. Then she looked at us and said she didn't have a key. Patience. I really got to work on that virtue today. Another 20 minutes passes and our host dad pulls up, there were three distinct sighs of relief! He approaches us and fills us in on the deadbolt situation. He had come home for lunch while we were on a walk and must have forgotten that we didn't have a key and locked the door! It was an interesting afternoon, and we got to take in the sun, Amanda and I had some good bonding



Martha Leisch

time, and just being forced to be patient and see that everything works itself out with time proved to make for a pretty good day off.

Date: 5/2/2006

Submitted by: Elise Chesley

Journal Entry:

This weekend we had our last Quake in Parsippany, NJ, and we definitely went out big. Daniel's Window was there as well as Bob Lenz. It was an amazing time of rocking out, worshiping and attempting to rap to "Open the Eyes." For me, I had some great fellowship with previous host sisters and made some new connections with other youth there. I am really bummed that this was our last big Event.

Yesterday, however, during our day off, I really got an experience of a lifetime. Our wonderful host family treated us to a Broadway play. I got to go see RENT! I have been on a Rent kick for a while now and never dreamed I would be able to actually see it on Broadway. We got a full experience of bussing into the city, eating at street vendors, then waiting in line to get inside. I don't think I stopped smiling through the whole entire thing. I had to control myself from singing along.

It keeps bringing me back to how generous people are in the world. Most people don't get to experience the kindness of others enough. Being on team, we have to rely on that kindness to get through the year. So, thank you so much to everyone who has helped us out in whatever way you were able to. We couldn't do this without you!

God's Peace <+><



Elise Chesley

Date: 5/8/2006

Submitted by: Amanda Whittaker

Journal Entry:

Has your church ever done a family retreat with our church? After team, when I'm a youth director again, I think I'm gonna have to host a family retreat. This weekend we helped with a family retreat at a hotel in Lancaster, PA. The family retreat was the best bonding experience I've ever seen a church provide for families. We led some music at large group gatherings and also led the break out sessions for 5-through 11-year-olds. Saturday night was Western night at the retreat. We dressed up like cowboys and played games like lasso-the-inflatable-cactus and barrel racing.

Parents were the horses for barrel racing and children were the cowboy or cowgirl riders. Martha and Kevin barrel raced against Ty and myself. Martha and I were the horses. My knees still have rug burn. Maybe some of the pictures will make it to the Youth Encounter website; it was a hilarious sight. After the evening was over, some of the kindergarteners found one of the lassoes. I spent a good twenty minutes galloping around the ballroom like a horse and neighing as a small parade of children led me by a rope. It was a weekend of free-spirited good ol'clean fun. Playing Sleeping Sheep, tag, and various other kids games was a nice change from being on stage playing music all the time. The weekend made me excited for when we get to lead Vacation Bible Schools in the summer.

Sunday afternoon, after the family retreat, we wondered over to Hershey, PA. I've never seen so much candy in one place. We took the tour of Chocolate World, a replica of a chocolate factory. While you're in the little car on the track, they take your picture, just like they would on a roller coaster at a theme park. The tour is free but your picture costs \$10. At the end of the tour, they give you free chocolate. We went on the tour twice. There is definitely something holy about play. It was a great weekend.



Amanda Whittaker

Date: 5/9/2006

Submitted by: Amanda Whittaker
Journal Entry:

We stayed in Westminster, MD on our day off. Elise and I staying with a couple who met on the North East team a few years back. One of their fathers, who was on Youth Encounter's National Board for five years, lives across the street. Sunday night when we arrived, he was trimming the grass along the edge of his driveway. When he finished, he noticed that there was a pile of black pebbles below one of our van doors on the ground. He walked across the street to check out the situation and realized that our van window was missing. A stone must have gotten picked up by the weed wacker and shot across the street to shatter our van window. The pile of black debris under our van door were not pebbles, but a thousand little pieces of glass. When Elise and I found out our response was, "Eh, all right, do you have a shop vac to clean up the glass?" I don't think anything could surprise me on team anymore. Every day is a new adventure, that's for sure. The guy with the weed wacker called up the president of the local Ford dealer at home on Sunday night and made him stop planting spinach in his garden to find us glass for our van window. By 7:30 a.m. Monday morning, the president of the Ford dealership found us glass for our model of van and got us an appointment that same day. God surely does take care of us!



Amanda Whittaker

Today we're off to Conyngham, PA to do a concert at a church where we've been before. It'll be nice to hang out with people we've already met.

Date: 5/10/2006
Submitted by: Kevin Shangle
Journal Entry:

Hello world,

In honor of Amanda's 27th, I, Kevin Matthew Shangle, am finally writing my first journal of the year.

The last two days have been great. Yesterday we were in Conyngham, PA. Typically at churches we put on a concert and the congregation watches. But, the church in Conyngham was different. Before we did our program, we were ministered to by the youth, who put on a puppet show. We had hot dogs and sloppy joes with the congregation after the youth puppet show. Then we did our program. It was very refreshing to see a congregation really get into the music by dancing, singing, and clapping along. After the program, Ty, Evan, and I stayed with the youth director from the church. She's a great lady with a great servant's heart. The dog at our host home was very entertaining. He chased a laser light pointer around the room with exuberance.



Kevin Shangle

Today on our way through New York we stopped by Walmart to pick up a few necessities. Some of us were sleeping in the van with the van doors open in the Walmart parking lot. Ty noticed that there was a dog in the jeep next to us. The dog was sticking his head out the drivers side window. Ty approached the jeep, and as he did, we heard him say, "Oh the cute little doggy." The next thing we heard was "Grrrrr, WOOF WOOF, Grrrrr" as the dog nearly bit Ty's head off.

Our drive to Southington, CT was absolutely gorgeous today, though I slept most of the van ride. We did a family night concert at the church. There was a little kid in the front row that clapped and danced along with all our songs. Currently we are at our host home and I am playing Tiddly Winks with my host mom. . . and am losing horribly.

.... until next time.

God's Peace,

~kevin shangle

p.s. I think Amanda is only turning 26.

Date: 5/15/2006
Submitted by: Amanda Whittaker
Journal Entry:

There is a church in New Hampshire that thinks I'm 27 years old. Why? Because my teammates told them so! The church even got a cake that said it's my 27th birthday; it's not. I'm only turning 26. I was born in 1980, not 1979. It's been a memorable weekend.

Friday morning we left Acton, Massachusetts after having done a Family Night Program and chapel at the church. Friday afternoon we stopped in Salem and learned a bit of history about the witch hysteria of the 1600s. Friday night we ate dinner with a church in Exeter, New Hampshire and went bowling with the youth group.



Saturday a church baseball game was scheduled, but sadly, got rained out. I suppose the rain was a blessing, though, because we caught up on some much needed rest. Saturday night my host home had some of my teammates over to celebrate my birthday. They made a cake, put up birthday decorations, and even had party hats and birthday blowers. The party was very unnecessary of my host family, but extremely kind of them.

New England is starting to look like a repeat of Noah's ark. Except we have a big white van instead of a wooden boat. I've woken up five mornings in a row to the sound of rain outside my window. Sunday morning we had to turn around and find a different route to church because the road was flooded. We led two worship services at church and a few songs for Sunday School.

Sunday night we drove to Mt. Kisco, NY, which is about 30 miles outside of New York City. We've been told we are within three blocks of the houses of Chevy Chase, DMX, and Martha Stewart. We're staying at the church, which we haven't done in a while, so it's a nice change of pace. We've spent the entire day sleeping, reading, journaling, playing guitar, watching movies, and having great conversations about God. In other words, we are truly enjoying a Sabbath day of rest. This evening we went over to the pastor's house for a barbecue with some of the youth from the church. Please keep us in your prayers and pray for God's heavenly angels to protect us in this ministry.

Please keep us in your prayers and pray for God's heavenly angels to protect us in this ministry.

Date: 5/22/2006

Submitted by: Amanda Whittaker

Journal Entry:

Ten programs...five team members (Ty is at home for a few days celebrating his brother's high school graduation)...three cities...one weekend...equals one rockin' Captive Free North East team. God definitely gets the credit for successfully taking us through the busiest weekend we've ever had. We've just done three chapels, three family night concerts, two youth group lock-ins, and two worship services. Plus we had to create two more skits and a new puppet show Friday afternoon because one of the venues had already seen all of our material.



Amanda Whittaker

Undoubtedly it was a tiring weekend, but I'd rather be busy. Plus lock-ins are always a high point for me because we get to spend a significant amount of time with the youth, as opposed to the three hours we usually spend with a church to eat dinner and have a concert.

Date: 5/25/2006

Submitted by: Amanda Whittaker

Journal Entry:

This evening we are staying in Moundsville, West Virginia. Tomorrow morning we're off to the good ol' Midwest where most of us are going camping at Kevin's house for Memorial Day break. One great thing about being on the road is that we get to see sooo many churches. Which means we get to witness amazing

ministries taking leaps of faith into God's hands. But we also experience church horror stories. For example, a homeless man told Ty about an experience he had had where a pastor made him leave a worship service, at the prompting of the congregation, because he smelled. Having such a variety of experiences challenges me to look at what being a true Christian is and separating that from cultural expectations that accompany Christianity in our society.



Amanda Whittaker

For example, we are proud of our Protestant work ethic heritage that has helped us to become financially and socially successful. But has our hard work created a success-addicted society? If so, has that negatively affected the Church? Is this one of the sources of bad church politics?

Financially, Jesus was poor. Jesus' family couldn't even afford a lamb for a religious celebration; they had to use two small birds instead (Mark 2:24). In terms of social status, Jesus was poor, too. Yes, Jesus ate meals with rich and powerful people, but he never used their social leverage to pull strings. Jesus wouldn't have tried to get the mayor or the town banker on his church council. I bet Jesus would have looked for a church council of people searching after God's own heart, and that very well could have included the homeless man living at the shelter downtown. I'm no better; when I worked at a church I too wanted to fill my committees with people who had lots of experience and knew lots of people in the church. Where did I learn these techniques? From my Business Psychology 301 class, not from the Bible.

Jesus didn't use his miracles as marketing ploys to try to make people have faith in him. Interestingly, he did miracles for those who already had faith. So why does the Church work so hard to use savvy business and marketing skills to coerce faith into people? Phillip Yancy comments in [The Jesus I Never Knew](#), "Strength, good looks, connections, and a competitive instinct may bring a person success in a society like ours, but those very qualities may block entrance to the kingdom of heaven". If a good church (good church = a church that pleases God) will not be successful by societal standards, then why do we run our churches similar to the way we'd run a Fortune 500 company or an elite country club? Something to think about, eh?

Date: 7/2/2006

Submitted by: Elise Chesley

Journal Entry:

Greetings from our driest week of VBS yet this summer (granted it is only Sunday)! I think our season of VBS has been cursed with rain. I think it has actually flooded everywhere that we have gone so far. Let's hope that doesn't happen this week (even though the forecast is calling for thunderstorms all week).

VBS has been such a blessing for our team. VBS has given us a chance to relax a bit more and rest our weary bodies. It is such a change to only have to set up all of our equipment once a week and only drive once a week. It's hard to believe that it is already July and that we only have six weeks left on the road.

We have been blessed with amazing host homes and churches for VBS. Last week we got an opportunity to get an authentic Kenyan meal because Martha and my host dad was from Kenya. We even got to go to the Broadway production of The Lion King in Philadelphia.

Along with VBS comes the bigger question of "what are you doing after team?" For some of us, it is not very definite, and for others it is very definite. For me, it has been a struggle to keep focused on what is right in front of me and stop worrying about looking for a job and everything that comes



Elise Chesley

along with it. God has provided so much for me already this year I don't know why I am worrying about it now.

I have always loved to verse from Jeremiah 29:11 that says, *"I know the plans I have for you', declares the Lord, 'plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."* The hard part is just putting all your trust into those plans and waiting for them to be revealed. I know that I will end up right where God wants me.

Elise <+><

Date: 7/5/2006

Submitted by: Ty Dietzler

Journal Entry:

I'm walking down the street at Penn State University making my way along the sidewalks towards the stadium to watch the fireworks go off; admiring the pink and blue clouds when I stop to think a bit. A wave of emotions were washing over me... I couldn't tell if it was just the nostalgia of being back on a campus, or if I was just in awe that we've been on the road for almost a year now.

I've been praying a prayer lately. That God would "Surprise me" daily, in ways that I wouldn't normally see or be on the lookout for. Go ahead God, you have free range to mess up any schedule I have. Bring people into it, take people out, scare up feelings I didn't know were there... that sort of thing. And in small ways (sometimes big), I get a glimpse of these surprises. Last night was one of those glimpses.

So, I'm walking down the sidewalk amidst thousands of college kids to see the celebration of our nation's independence, and I say a quick "surprise me" prayer and not three minutes later; I see a young man on the corner with a bible saying "repent, the kingdom is near! Jesus's message is clear! Repent!" I walk over to him and asked him if he has a minute to talk.

Here's a short overview of the conversation we had...

I say, "Hey bro, whatcha talkin' about?"

"Are you serious, or are you being sarcastic? Do you really wanna talk?"

"Yeah, you bet. Whatcha talkin' about?"

"Jesus."

"Yeah? What are ya saying about him?"

"Well, I'm talking about his message, trying to bring the good news to people; hoping some people will get saved and go to heaven tonight"

"Wow, sounds like a pretty heavy burden for you to try to take on... About Christ's message; would you say his message was repentance, or love?"

"Well, I see them as the same thing."

"Really? How so?"

"Well, Jesus' message was that we are to repent because the end is near. He came so we can go to heaven."

"It seems to me that the Jesus was far more concerned with loving others than telling people to repent of their ways."

"Well, yeah. It's important for us to show the love of Jesus to others."

"Do you figure that this is the best way to do it?"

<He turns bright red> "Well, maybe, I don't know. I just know that God wanted me to be out here to talk to people tonight, I



Ty Dietzler

know I'm supposed to be a street preacher, and being persecuted for it is all part of the message of Jesus. He says we'll be outcasts and persecuted for telling others about him."

"Is it a possibility that God wanted us to talk tonight? That out of all the "unsaved" people here, that maybe God crossed our paths?"

"Yeah, I suppose. I guess it's good for Christians to talk with each other. I mean, do you ever notice that if you try to talk stuff like this with say, a Native Hindu, or Muslim, that it's like talking right past them? Like, they don't get it?"

"I guess I don't spend too much time thinking about that. But you know what really makes me think?"

"What's that?"

"That this Jesus that we're both trying to follow, loves us the EXACT same as the others who don't have the exact same take on him as we do. He cares for us no different than everybody else that is walking past us right now. In my opinion, I'd say that God shows no favoritism."

"Huh. Well, I just know I'm supposed to be out here."

"Cool man, thanks for talking with me. Best of luck, have a happy 4th."

I start to walk off...

"Hey Ty?"

"Yeah?"

"Maybe I'll be a little softer with my approach from now on, ya think?"

"Wherever God leads you bud, peace."

I found myself saddened after our conversation. I guess it just makes me feel sad that we've reduced our God to a formula, a prayer, a sales pitch for "heaven", a means to an end. Is it possible that there's more to this "Christianity" thing? Maybe this "kingdom" is already here, and it's our choice whether or not we want to live in it? Maybe it's more than "heaven and hell"...

Cool how God has 'surprises' for us in each day.

-peace

Date: 7/18/2006

Submitted by: Ty Dietzler

Journal Entry:

I had the privilege of helping lead a discussion tonight with a bunch of high school age kids. We told them to write any questions that they had about whatever, (God, sex, music, church, abuse) and we'd try to answer them, knowing full well that we wouldn't be able to give answers to a lot of them.

The kids were very honest and vulnerable. "How do I forgive someone who's molested me?" "Does God hear my prayers? And if so, why don't they get answered?" Not cut and dried, easily answered stuff. We continued to talk about music, band stuff, faith, and some things that have been on my heart started to stir...

Many of the talks I've had with people on the road this year have revolved around the central theme of "Who's right", "Who's wrong" and "Who's going to heaven." There seems to be this religious need to determine "who's in" and "who's out" that's very prevalent in many the churches I've been to. And it seems that many people are so concerned with getting to "heaven" and making sure that they're right that they show little regard for the life that they're living right now or the



Ty Dietzler

people around them. I want to follow the teachings of Jesus because I think it's the best possible way to live my life, and the best for the people around me, not because I want to go to heaven or reap some sort of spiritual benefits in an afterlife.

Jesus didn't see people as potential "Christians" (the last thing he came to do was start another religion), he saw them as valuable, worthwhile companions. He saw/sees *all* people that way. Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Wiccans, athiests, murderers, rapists, pastors, plumbers, pedophiles... you name it. There is *no* favoritism in his love. What would happen if we stopped seeing people as different religions, ethnicities, generations, classes, political parties, and saw them as... *people*? Would our actions start to change towards those around us? Would we start to view people and the world around us in a different light?

Would we stop trying to convert people to our "right religion"? It seems to me that if we're loving people with an agenda, then we're not really loving them. As long as we're in this "we're in/they're out" sort of mentality, we'll continue to miss the point of Jesus' message, and contribute to prejudices, judgement, and ultimately, religious wars.

In the country and culture that we live in, maybe a more beneficial question to ask would be, "Who can I help?" or "What can I give?"

Date: 7/23/2006

Submitted by: Ty Dietzler

Journal Entry:

A friend asked me today: "There's plenty of anti-religion/establishment/church out there. Christians are often noted for what they are against. Can you share what you are for?"

My response is: I find it's very easy to be a cynic and talk about all the things that are being done wrong and need to be changed, and I find myself residing among that group more often than I'd like to admit. I find the more I'm in "complain mode," the less likely I am to go out and live the difference I want to see happen.

I'm passionate about a small circle of things, but the more I question, the more I learn about others, and the more I'm willing to apply the things I'm learning to my daily life, the farther the circle grows. I find that the more you search for God and seek to know him, the less you pretend to know, and the more you can trust your passions.

I'm passionate about following the desires of my heart, wherever God leads. Wherever.

I'm passionate about learning to live in tune with the teachings of Jesus and learn from others who are following his teachings, especially those who don't even realize that they're following them.

I'm passionate about finding out why Jesus' way of life is the best possible way to live.

I'm becoming more passionate about asking, "How can I help the people around me?" and, "How can I help to clothe the naked, take food to the hungry, and take water to the thirsty?"

I'm passionate about trying to help others experience God's love, instead of telling them about it, unless they ask.

I'm passionate about learning what it means for God to "love me".

I'm passionate about trying to continue bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth.

I'm passionate about trying to identify who the "tax collectors, the poor, the prostitutes, and the outcasts" are of today.

I'm passionate about asking questions and not pretending that I have all of the answers.



Ty Dietzler

I'm passionate about searching for truth wherever it can be found. Wherever.
