

# Captive Free South Central 2005-06 Journal

Date: 10/4/2005

Submitted by: David Apodaca

## Journal Entry:

Howdy from Kansas. We are in St. Francis, a small town in northwest Kansas, so close to the Colorado border, I can almost smell it. We had a great Family Night Program on Sunday night at Peace Lutheran. Monday was our day off, and the team really took advantage of it and rested well.

I was told of a man that could show us around a place called the "Breaks" and tell us some history stories of the area, so on Monday, while everyone was doing their thing, Tami and I went to have ourselves a little adventure. I haven't been much of a history guy, but something about this ninety-year-old historical gem caught my attention. I didn't want to pass up an opportunity to absorb all that this man had to share.

So let us begin...

His name is Tobe Zwegardt. His grandfather emigrated from Russia in the year 1894. Before his grandfather, he told us that he traced his roots back to Germany.

As soon as Tami and I pulled the van into the dirt driveway in front of his house, the door opened and out came Tobe, ready to go as if we were taking him to a game of bingo. Tobe was obviously worn from the years spent living his entire life in Kansas. He walked like any man his age, probably a bit better. His face and white hair under the sweat-stained ball cap that shaded him now as he was walking out into the midday sun gave a whisper of wisdom. I have never seen any one man present wisdom and age to a point that it screams at you. Tobe is just a normal man with a few stories to tell, and that's probably the way he wants it.

Tami and I stepped out of the van to greet him as he approached. I didn't really know what to say at the time. I think I remember saying that Tami and I were the only ones that would be going on the tour. He mentioned that he had been at the program at Peace Lutheran the night before, but I don't remember if he said he enjoyed it or not. Not long after the brief introductions, Tobe climbed up into the passenger seat and off we went.

At first, all I could think about was the time spent at that moment with this complete stranger and that in a few hours, he would give us all he could give and we would go our separate ways. I would look over at him, burning in my mind as many details about him as possible while trying to drive. Tobe never went to high school. At the age of twelve, his father sent him working on a ranch for a dollar a day plus room and board. He has worked his entire life, and by the dirty jeans and dusty hat that he wore, I knew he still keeps on working.

His skin was tanned and wrinkled from the harvest sun, and as we drove past the metal historical signs on the route that he made with his own hands, he pointed with his thumb, the only digit remaining on his left hand. Tobe would also point to small green crops barely visible, and say, "Them wheat comin' up real nice," and he would also say, "Them corn ready for pickin'!"

As Tami and I drove down brown dusty dirt roads, he told us stories of Native Americans and people that have come and gone, leaving only cement foundations and a few plots of trees. Then Tobe told us the unbelievable story of the 1935 flood, when in one night, it rained twenty-six inches and carried entire houses away and smashed them against the railroad tracks. After the flood, the banks of the Republican River filled up with large cottonwoods, resembling the same landscape as the Rio Grande Bosque that flows down



David Apodaca

the heart of the West and into Mexico.

The afternoon was spent driving, listening, and at a few times, in silence. There was the cemetery out in the boonies that held five Civil War soldiers from 1886. There was also the story of Ron Evans, the astronaut that was born in St. Francis. As the day went on, I remember asking myself why history was so important. For a few seconds during the tour, I remembered my other teammates and wondered what they were doing. How did they know all we were going to do was drive a bit and see a bunch of markers and signs representing an event or place that I bet most of the world couldn't care less about? We drive through towns on our busy way. We don't think of what the history means and how it is still alive through men like Tobe Zwegardt. Tobe, this old man, was telling us some facts that are barely even tangible. Were we just humoring his days that have begun to grow lonely since his wife died seventeen years ago? I mean, Tami and I were the seventeenth tour he has given this year, a figure that is falling short of his usual thirty-five or so. It breaks my heart.

Of course the history is important! It shapes us and makes us into what we are today. We would never learn, never benefit. Where would we be without the Bible, the most important history book ever compiled? In this, I am reminded of Jesus; without him, we are nothing.

God and history keep Tobe alive, and for that, I am grateful.

That is the story of the time with Tobe Zwegardt.

Thank you all for all the prayers; keep them going. To my family and friends and all the teams and staff, we, South Central, miss you all and love you guys very much.

God bless,  
David Apodaca

P.S.—I have some black and white photos of this day that will soon be in our photo album. Take a look.

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**Date:** 10/8/2005

**Submitted by:** Sara Scott

**Journal Entry:**

There are no lights along the road and the time is very late. There isn't a house for nearly a mile. The night is chilly, the stars are beautiful, and the Nebraska mud is thick.

Today marks three weeks of being on the road as a team. We are doing a retreat outside of Kansas City, Kansas. We haven't been in Nebraska for about a week, but the passage above speaks of the most interesting thing that has happened to me on the road so far. The story takes place in a little town named Bloomfield...and now for the rest of the story.

Nebraska. Say the word, and it conjures up images of flat land and sprawling cornfields. There are also a lot of low maintenance roads. Anyway, I'll get to that later. Sunday afternoon we arrived in Bloomfield, the town where we would be spending the next two nights. After dinner and an exciting Family Night Program each team member loaded up their bags and hit the road with their host families. Tami and I stayed together with a great couple who welcomed us into their home like we were their children. We were excited to be spending the next day, our day off, together just relaxing. Monday night David and Boe invited the rest of the team over to their host home to watch a movie. Our host mom was super nice and let Tami and I drive her car. We went into town and picked up MaryBeth and Erik. We watched a movie and played a couple of games of pool then the four of us left. It was about 12:00 when Tami and I headed home (after we dropped the other two off). As we were driving down the road, Tami realized that we hadn't gotten directions back to our host home. We knew how to get to the road that the house was on, but we didn't know what the



Sara Scott

road's name was. As we were driving down the highway, I turned onto the road I thought I needed to be on and somehow didn't realize that there was no gravel on the road. Not long after we left the highway, our progress was hindered by a puddle of mud. We were stuck. After trying for 10 minutes to drive out, Tami and I got out of the car and started to push. The car wouldn't budge. We got back in and tried to drive out again, and with luck we got out. It was apparent by this time that we were on the wrong road, but there was no way to get back out to the highway, so we kept going. It wasn't long before we saw a large puddle of water completely covering the road. Realizing that there was a slim chance of getting out the way we came in we decided to forge on through the puddle. We made it to the other side and were ready to celebrate when we came to a slippery stop. We had again been caught in mud. Try as we might, there was no pushing the car out again. The only thing we could do was walk into town and ask for help. Barefoot, tired, and scared, Tami and I started our trek back to the highway. Walking along, we noticed headlights off in the distance. As the car came closer, we tried to flag the driver down for help, but they did not stop. One and a half miles down the road, we were exhausted and nearing desperation when we, once again, saw headlights. We started running like a sprinter coming off the block; it seemed as if this was our last hope of finding a ride. The truck slowed to a stop right beside us and a man, possibly an angel, stuck his head out the window and asked if we needed help. We told him what had happened, who we were, and where we were staying. The best part is he was friends of the couple we were staying with. So we hopped in and he took us home.

This would be the end of our adventure except that we then had to wake up our host parents and go get the car unstuck. The last part is not as frightening or exhausting as the first so I will only say our host dad got the car out and our night ended with showers (to get the mud off our feet) and bed. Though the story is over, the lesson is not. First of all, always remember to get directions. Secondly, the story of the good Samaritan is quite real, even today. And last, but not least, there is always hope. Even when you are walking down a highway, in a different state, in the middle of the night, there is hope.

Jody and Steve, thank you for being so understanding. Phil, thanks for picking us up.

Now after you have read this, I would like to say something else. It is not always the best idea, or the safest to get into a stranger's car. Had Tami not been with me, and had Phil not known the couple we were staying with, I would not have gotten into his car. Also it is always safest to not leave your vehicle, so remember to charge your cell phone, if you have one, and ALWAYS GET DIRECTIONS.

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**Date:** 10/18/2005

**Submitted by:** Boe Parker

**Journal Entry:**

It was still early when we left Spring, Texas and set out for Nederland, Texas. We were going down there to do some hurricane relief work. When we left, I was still really tired from the night before. We stayed up and had a group meeting and then team devotion, plus I called my parents and talked with them for a while. I was navigating for MaryBeth, and she did an awesome job driving (just wanted to set the stage), and now for my journal.



**Boe Parker**

We set off for Nederland at about 9:00 a.m. At the beginning, I started thinking about what could possibly be lying ahead of us. I started watching the scenery when we got a ways onto the highway. As we kept driving, I started noticing more and more trees were tipped over and more and more bits of debris were lying about. I started wondering how bad this could be and if any of the homes in the town we were going to were going to be like the ones that I saw on T.V. I wondered if I was prepared for what we were going to see. I was getting excited as I saw more and more debris, but I was also getting really nervous.

We finally arrived in Nederland. We got into the town, and I was immediately taken by how much debris there was lying around in piles alongside the road. See, the main clean-up had already started about a week before, so there were lots of branches and cut up logs piled by the roadside waiting to be taken away. We found the church and pulled in. We were on the east side of the building and from that side the damage didn't look so bad. We were told that we needed to pull around to the other side of the building to park and drop the trailer, and when we did, I was blown away by what I

saw.

All of the shingles had been blown off the west side of the sanctuary and the other building next to it. The glass from the front sanctuary window (north-west) was blown out, and there were a great number of long blue tarps draped over the roofs of the two buildings. The pastor took us on a small tour of the damage that the church had sustained. The big pipe organ was basically what saved the sanctuary. The pastor said that the storm had blown out the windows and made the pipe organ move three feet (remember this is a gigantic set of pipes that weighs a lot) and made it so the wind couldn't suck out anything and couldn't let rain in.

Later that day, the pastor and the youth pastor took us on a tour of the surrounding area and took us right down into where the storm had come ashore. We drove alongside a channel for quite some time and were told that the eye of the storm had gone right down the middle of that channel. Everywhere there were boats and roofs of houses strewn across the land. The storm surge in that area had gone to over ten feet above the ground. In the town of Sabine, which is on the Texas side of the canal that separates Texas and Louisiana, we came across an awe-inspiring sight. A large barge that should have been about a football field's length away in the water was sitting right next to somebody's house. Then there were all sorts of other boats sitting out in fields and near houses and in trees. Some were even tipped over in the water.

It was almost a surreal feeling, looking at the devastation. Words hardly seem sufficient to describe what I have seen and what I have felt. Now that I have experienced this, I know that to catch a real glimpse of what happens in a storm of this magnitude; one can't simply watch "the tube" and guess how bad it really is. This next week will be tough, and I just pray that God will give me the strength to continue through this next week.

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**Date:** 10/20/2005

**Submitted by:** Erik Moe

**Journal Entry:**

Today (Thursday) we had our first real day of relief work. We got up at around 7:15 am to get ready. The first thing that we had to do, though, was waiting. Waiting is one of my least favorite things to do. We had to wait for the pastor to come pick us up and take us to the house that we were going to be working at. The church that we are staying at, Holy Cross, started up its school again the day after we arrived. So we had to wait for the pastor to be done with chapel. We finally left for our first real day of work at about 9:30. We spent about three hours working on cleaning up an old lady's front and back yard. It was an absolute mess. She is about 86 and has no family. The sweet old lady has been living as a virtual shut in for about eight years. We cut up branches. One of the more interesting things that happened while cutting branches was that Boe and I decided to work on taking down this really big limb of a tree that had partially snapped and was all twisted. Well, we both pulled on it for quite a while until I decided to climb the tree. After a few minutes of me sitting on the tree while David and Boe were pulling on the limb, we had the pastor come over with the chain saw. I wasn't too sure about him having the chain saw up on the ladder, but he did. He cut about a two-inch cut into the wood and together David and Boe pulled it down. Luckily I was holding onto part of it because it came down with a great crash after I dropped it. It hit David right in the foot; luckily it didn't fall very far. So now we had two foot injuries. The first happened the day before when Boe was moving playground equipment around and his big toenail was broken off. He had already had it removed once because it had become ingrown. Well sure enough I got a big toe injury too. I was rolling a log and I kicked it, and sure enough my big toe was bleeding when I took off my sock.



**Erik Moe**

We raked up all of the dead leaves and clippings. We cleaned off her driveway and swept it clean. The old lady had no idea that we were there cleaning her yard. She was at a doctor's appointment. We were nearly done with the entire yard and driveway when she pulled up. Of course her first reaction seemed to be shock. She looked like she was thinking "Who are these people in my yard?" It seemed to pass really quickly, though, because she then started to realize what we were doing. We had turned a tiny little pile of limbs into a huge one from all over her house. She was in shock that someone would come help her out. We worked for a few minutes more before packing up. After we had most of the equipment picked up, we introduced ourselves to the lady. She prayed for us,

and it was very moving prayer. After she was done, we shook her hand and hugged her before we left. It was very moving to help this old woman with her yard because she had no one to help her out. It was the best thing that I think I did in Nederland, TX. And I pray for her because she will be praying for us until she can no longer.

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**Date:** 10/23/2005

**Submitted by:** David Apodaca

**Journal Entry:**

The day felt late when we arrived in Nederland, Texas last Tuesday, the 18<sup>th</sup>. As we drove into town, we half expected a lost city. I was thinking about the destruction that had torn through this town and into the mainland, affecting life a hundred miles north and even more so east, in Louisiana. I remember being up at Camp Luther Dell in Minnesota for training and hearing about the hurricane Katrina days after it had made landfall. It was hard to read the article in the newspaper that made its way up to camp from the regular world about that storm. I wanted to go and help so bad, my heart went out to those folks. I felt so far away.



**David Apodaca**

Soon after taking off on the road this year, hurricane Rita hit Port Author, Texas, and again, I was troubled knowing that people were suffering. When word got to our team that we would possibly make it down to the areas that were hit by the storms, I was grateful. This opportunity presented a physical ministry rather than the musical focus of team. The change in this schedule had an awesome effect on the team's morale on the whole. Personally, team life can wear down spirits at times and this time to stay in one place for a while was a blessing from God.

Over the week we got to know some of the folks of the church and school there. Everyone was making do and in fact, school was starting back up the day after we arrived. Everyone was doing their own part in the community, and the team witnessed the people of Nederland return to their lives, most importantly, thanking God for everything that they had left. When taking us on a tour of some of the town and of the coastal community hit really hard by the hurricane, Pastor Francis described the sounds of the typical day, "filled with the sounds of generators and nail guns, hammers on roof tops and trucks taking scrap and trash out of the town." As the tour continued, we came upon stranded and weather-torn boats, far from water. One house had the water tower from across town in its yard. More incredibly, another house had an entire barge that had floated a couple hundred yards from the bay and planted itself in the front yard, nearly leveling the house.

After the week in Nederland, we drove away with an experience that we will never forget. I will never forget the people, the friends and the new family that were made over that time. I will never forget that great feeling that we were able to go and help, make a difference after feeling so helpless. Feeling helpless in the fight for good. I will certainly return to Nederland, Texas.

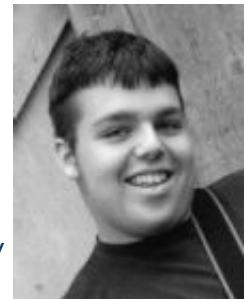
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**Date:** 10/28/2005

**Submitted by:** Boe Parker

**Journal Entry:**

Well, we've been on the road now for over a month, and total we've been together for two months. Our group is now trying to get back up to our region. After doing the hurricane work, we haven't had a whole lot of programs to do. I really have enjoyed all of the little short stays at places and am really enjoying life on the road. I love living day by day.



**Boe Parker**

Every time that we set out from a host church, I get really excited. We are going somewhere new and different. All of the people that we have met in these last few weeks have been great and encouraging. One of the last places we stayed at was a Christian camp called Camp Lone Star. It was really nice because David and I had some time to go out and walk the trails and mess around in the woods. When we were walking on a trail that ran next to our cabin, we came to the road and saw someone sitting in a gazebo. We went and talked to her and found out that she was from Montana, like me. It was amazing to see how small of a world it is. When we left the

camp, we went to Temple, Texas. There I met a guy who had gone through Big Timber and up the Boulder river valley to a Lutheran camp called Christikon, which I have attended numerous times. Again, it was neat to see how small this world is.

I can't believe that so many people have been to where I live, and I am really grateful that God has blessed me with such a great state to live in.

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**Date:** 10/31/2005

**Submitted by:** MaryBeth Smith

**Journal Entry:**

Would you die for love? What is love? Where do we find love? How do we receive love and show love? What kind of love are we talking about? These are a few questions I asked my teammates during one of our devotions at the beginning of this year's journey. We ask ourselves this question daily as we encounter many challenges and opportunities. We discussed the ideal of an unconditional love, *agape*. We considered how easy it is to say, "I dedicate my life to loving all other people despite their faults, just as Jesus loves me without any conditions," and yet how difficult it is to put that love into practice, how hard it is to love. Then after all these considerations, I asked my teammates if they would die for a stranger.



**MaryBeth Smith**

We have stayed with many host homes this last month. I have seen families share their love with one another in several ways. It is beautiful to see love from so many people. Along with meeting several different people we have been introduced to their life values. It is an encouraging and insightful experience to be exposed to the versatile values each family has across the six states we have visited so far. I see God's love shining when I witness the patient father with his children, the mother who wants quality time with someone, youth who are searching for their identity and begin to find themselves in God. We are a world in need of an amazing love. It is wonderful to see that throughout Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas, we all share the desperate commonality of our need for love. It is breathtaking to meet these people who want to make changes within our world and watch as they begin that process by expressing and sharing the universal value of love.

Would you die for a stranger in the name of perfect love? I would like to think "yes." God is so awesome and inspires us to reach out to ourselves in love and to reach out to one another in love. I challenge all of you who read this journal today to not take perfect love for granted. Instead, show love to all people you meet, whether they be the gas station attendant, the woman who seems to have more than one personality every time you meet her, the teenager you bumped into in the hallway at school—in essence, the everyday person. Share the love by loving without judging them. Reach out to them by seeing how you can help them with a little thing that day. Remember, if God is your driving force, then God will give you the strength and the courage you need to love unconditionally.

God's peace to you this day and always,  
MaryBeth

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**Date:** 11/8/2005

**Submitted by:** MaryBeth Smith

**Journal Entry:**

God is a German

On our day off during our stay in Houston, my team decided to drive down to Galveston to spend a glorious day at the beach. When we arrived at the beach and changed into our swimsuits, we realized it was way too cold outside to spend time at the beach. However, we did not drive down this far to not spend time exploring the beauties the beach has to offer. Therefore, we all excitedly and humorously ran into the frigid ocean and embraced the tumultuous waves



**MaryBeth Smith**

and icy piercing wind. This ocean experience was quite an invigorating way to begin our day off. After my lips and nose turned blue, I decided to go chill out on the beach. When my teammates joined me on the beach, Tami, Sara, Erik, and I decided to go get some scrumdiliumptious lunch, and Boe and David decided to defy the ocean waves for a little longer.

Sara, Tami, Erik, and I enjoyed a very filling meal. I was ecstatic to have sweet tea again, and Sara and Erik were brave enough to try sweet tea for the first time ever. Sara was pleasantly surprised and Erik would not drink another sip. Then we picked up some lunch for Boe and David and headed back to the beach.

We pulled onto the beach and drove over to Boe and David when all of a sudden, the van would no longer drive. After trying different maneuvers, we clearly concluded our van was now stuck in the sand. We tried digging the sand out from under the tires, yet that did not work. Let me make it clear that our van was so stuck in the sand that I could touch the top of our fifteen-passenger van without any strain. We attempted to get the van out of the sand for half an hour before I finally called AAA. We waited for an hour and a half before AAA came and told us that they could not get us out of the sand since it was a certain footage away from the road and AAA no longer covers assistance from that distance. However, for one hundred and fifty dollars the tow company would gladly get our van unstuck. Seeing how we are a financially challenged missionary team, we opted to keep trying ourselves. So...we kept digging. During this two hour experience, no one came over to offer help. Finally, our Godsend appeared.

An older man from Germany on vacation with his family came over and observed our situation. I asked him to share any suggestions or advice he had because at this point we could use or try anything. He then gave us a plan. He told us to dig differently under the van, forming a smoother ramp for the van to climb out of the sand, put the van into second gear, and then we would all push the van out together. Of course, this man's English was only slightly better than my Spanish. It was very interesting working through our language barriers. Sara pulled out the trash can in our van and began digging massive amounts of sand to speed up the process. The trashcan that I previously loathed for always being in the way proved to be most faithful and, as a result, I will never under appreciate the trashcan again. Sara and I at this point wee laughing hysterically and having a jolly good time. When it came time to push the van out, a father and his three sons were walking back to their vehicle and offered to help us push the van. The German man counted us off "ONE...TWO...THREE!" We all pushed the van as David drove. The VAN BEGAN TO MOVE! The German man also told David the path he should take once the van began to move. David followed his directions explicitly, kept driving, and parked the van at a more solid foundation. We were all elated with laughter and relief, and then concluded our day at the beach.

It was at a point in our team life where we experienced the consequences of shifting sand that God came to us in the form of a German in order to help us get back onto solid ground. God's peace to you all, and remember God reaches us through many ways.  
~ MaryBeth

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**Date:** 11/14/2005

**Submitted by:** David Apodaca

**Journal Entry:**

Thank you, God, for an amazing weekend at our very first YE Event. I didn't know what to expect. I mean, this Event was the very first Event ever for me, not just the first being on team and helping on team. Yeah, there were times when we were all tired and times that we had to run around like crazy, but God was ever present in the activities of the weekend. The staff was great, the high school students were great, and to top it all off, the music was great,



too.

**David Apodaca**

I have to look back and laugh at the very first hours at the Event when I was sent out to the Super Wal-Mart to grab some hospitality food for the staff and all the musicians, and some Taco Bell for the team and some of The Swift band members. First, shopping too way too long, and then I forgot to make the lunch order easy on myself by making separated orders. Yeah, it was a stressful event when things that should have been easier weren't. From the very beginning, I felt like an idiot trying to figure out who needed what food and how much change. If you have ever been in that kind of situation, you know what I mean.

But I want to share with you something really super duper great. This one goes right to the top of my list for the weekend. It's on top of meeting the headliner band members and getting to know them a little, and it's better than spiritually refueling myself. There was a high school girl there named Katie. She was quiet and a little shy, but not enough to keep her from telling me her name when I stuck out my hand for a handshake and said, "Hey, my name is David. I am so excited you are here. What is your name?"

During the weekend, our team hosted the Second Stage, where high school students from the weekend get to show their stuff on the stage in a Zone talent show. Some played music and sang. Some students did funny skits. Katie signed up. As the time got closer and closer for Second Stage to begin, Katie let me know how nervous she was to go in front of everyone. In fact, she wanted to wait outside the room and then call her in when it was her time to sing. So I told her, "Sure," and she gave me the CD and told me the track number of the song she was going to sing along with.

As Katie sang her quiet song, I sat right next to her on the stage floor. She closed her eyes tight, pulled her Captive Free hat over her eyes, and sang every word of the slow country song exactly. She definitely proved herself that weekend. She proved to herself that she could do anything. And she did it in spite of her slight case of autism.

After her private encore with her youth group leaders and her mother, and the rest of the CF team, the tears began to flow. I didn't know how much it had meant to her and especially her family and friends that she had done it until they came up to our team and expressed how much they really appreciated us doing what we did.

Well, we didn't do anything. I give all the praise to God.

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**Date:** 12/21/2005

**Submitted by:** Tami Usher

**Journal Entry:**

We hadn't had much time to prepare for the recording of our CD, only about a week. What made it more stressful is that we were doing six new songs. The next town we were staying at was Paten, Iowa. Our contacts Nick and Amy said that they had a place that we could set up and practice. The place we practice at was an old store front that Nick and Amy were using to have a more contemporary worship service. It was a really nice set up. We started to practice, and everything went okay, but it could have gone better. After we started to tear down, our host dad Nick asked if we would like to take communion. My teammates and I had not had communion for a while, so we were totally up for it. Nick put on some soft music and lit a couple of candles. Then Nick performed communion, and it was so personal to be having communion with my teammates and our wonderful host parents. All of a sudden, I was filled with peace, and all my worries about recording and everything washed away. After Nick gave us communion, we all got into a circle and held hands and prayed. I don't remember exactly what



**Tami Usher**

was said, but I felt really close to everyone in that room as well as God. I felt so refreshed and rejuvenated. I knew that everything was going to work out.

I am writing two journals in one because both of these are kind of small. It was that night everyone was together at mid-winter training. The staff held a worship service for us. When we walked in, we had to take off our shoes and each team had to find one of the blankets on the floor and sit as a team. In the middle of each blanket was a little tea candle. The room was lit by many candles. As soon as I walked in, I felt warmth and calmness. We gave communion to our teammates, and I don't remember who it was, either David or Sara, and they broke me off this huge piece of bread. We were doing communion by intinction, where you dip the bread in the wine and then eat it. I had this huge piece of wine-filled bread that I had to shove it in my mouth. After communion, we did some worship songs, and I've come from a traditional Lutheran Missouri Synod church so we sing many hymns, which is fine. Worshiping with all these talented wonderful people is just amazing. During the worship when everyone was singing, I just listened. It is kind of hard to describe, but with everyone worshiping and singing, I felt like you could hear it for miles. It was this wonderful sound, and I felt that it could reach all the way to the heavens. That night I felt that everyone there was truly worshiping with their brother, sister, and God in that hour. God was right there beside me as well as everyone in that room. I was home. Nothing evil or bad could touch me in that moment.

Tami Usher

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**Date:** 1/8/2006

**Submitted by:** Erik Moe

**Journal Entry:**

It was right after our first Quake at Des Moines; we were headed up to Stratford, Iowa. In Stratford, a devastating tornado tore through the town in November. The turn-out to help this town from all of the surrounding towns was amazing, from what I heard. We were in town to help do a benefit concert. We were going to be the openers for Swen and Dean, the headliner band that was at the Des Moines Quake. At first, we figured that it was going to be an acoustic program, but after talking to Swen and Dean, they wanted to have an electric program because it was just the two of them and a guitar. When we arrived, we found out that we were going to be in a gym and that the turn-out could be anything from one hundred to three hundred plus. Looking at the gym, we pulled out everything we had and set up all the mains and subs. It was a good thing that we did, too, because over three hundred people showed up the benefit concert. It was an amazing time for us. We were already exhausted from doing our first Quake, and we had another twenty or so minutes of a program that we were going to do. After we set up and after we sound checked, Swen was playing the drums and Boe, David, and Sara were all playing the guitars while Tami played the keys and MaryBeth sang lead on "Never Alone." It was amazing because we had never rehearsed it or even played it as a whole group before, and we had Swen on the drums and it sounded amazing. Dean walked in halfway through the song and was absolutely amazed by how well it sounded, and after we finished the song, he was blown away to find out that it was the first time ever that we had all played the song together. The benefit concert went off without a hitch. The whole entire gym was filled with people all of whom seemed to love the event. It was really a good time because there were kids from the Quake and other kids that got to come up on stage and sing and do the actions to the sing-alongs that were in our programs. It was a lot of fun to see the audience members get up on stage. An offering was taken to help rebuild the community center for the kids in Stratford. The total was over three thousand dollars with matching funds from the local Thrivent chapter. In the end, dozens of cases of soda were drunk and dozens of pizzas were eaten. The Lord was definitely in that place that night. He is all around us, but the Spirit was definitely moving in that place.



**Erik Moe**

**Date:** 1/17/2006

**Submitted by:** David Apodaca

**Journal Entry:**

We came off the Quad Cities Quake this weekend hard and tired. The Event was a blast; there's nothing like a weekend full of two hundred middle schoolers at a hotel. Last week was our Des Moines Quake, and I have to say I enjoyed both of them.



**David Apodaca**

Our day off was spent in Tipton, Iowa. Boe and I stayed together with our contact Ginger and husband Andy and their two kids, Jacob and Elizabeth.

Everyone else stayed together at another house in town. Boe and I had fun playing with kids, and I have to admit, I played "pretty pretty princess."

However, early Monday morning, both Elizabeth and Jacob got very sick. Later that Elizabeth found that a booboo she had from Sunday was actually a spiral break! I felt so bad for those kids and Ginger and Andy. But I enjoyed our stay and felt blessed to rest after our busy Quake.

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**Date:** 1/17/2006

**Submitted by:** MaryBeth Smith

**Journal Entry:**

Greetings to all our viewers. Our Quad Cities Quake went really well! The sound board was dropped during set up. However, that did not prove as much as a problem as it potentially could have. I love working with the Junior Guides. They rock my face off! I appreciate them so much. I also really enjoyed being invited to eat with people. The youth are like sponges absorbing all you have to offer, and they starve for acceptance and love. I love that they have the environment and opportunity at the Quake to be themselves and open enough to that acceptance and love.



**MaryBeth Smith**

After the Quake, we stayed in Tipton, Iowa to rejuvenate, and our host family was amazing! I really enjoyed our time there. I finally finished reading "The Lost Message of Jesus." I really enjoyed the insights of that book. It reminds us that our mission as Christians is to love this world and all people no matter their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, country of origin, or level of manners. Now I am reading "Spiritual Traditions." It is like a Cliff's Notes book of the world's religions and spiritual traditions.

Both of these books make me think more deeply about my own spirituality. We get so busy sometimes setting up, leading programs, being relational, and focusing on our daily tasks that we forget what essentially our mission is here. At times it feels like we're in the wilderness and we are blinded by the little things in life, such as not being on time or not saying what we're really feeling, or trying to get everyone to do their jobs perfectly, or not communicating as thoroughly as we could. We put too much focus on how we all could be better people, which is a worthy goal. However, we forget that first and foremost, we are to love one another despite our imperfections and areas of growth. It is great to be refreshed on these insights and be reminded of the many ways God reaches down to us and the many ways we can reach out to one another.

God, help me to remember that message. Help me to love mercy and utilize that with my teammates and contacts, and help me see justice through another lens. I will try to remain open for You, God, to use me as a tool for your love and kindness. I will continually strive to connect and reconnect with You. I will find meaning in this year. Somehow, I will use this wilderness experience as an example of how You draw me closer to You!

God's peace to you all~

MARYBETH

**Date:** 1/25/2006  
**Submitted by:** Sara Scott  
**Journal Entry:**

Breathing. That is what I am right now, just breathing. My energy has been used; we had a busy weekend (Des Moines Quake), and so now I'm just here, sort of. I woke up today later than usual and somehow I still lack sleep, but the memories of the weekend keep me afloat. What a way to spend time, singing and dancing in worship for an entire weekend. God truly blesses us in many ways. Yet today I have been thinking a lot about a new skit that we have been doing. It is called Questions, and it is very true to my life and the lives of my teammates right now. In the skit, we ask questions of God, and in life we ask the same questions.



**Sara Scott**

Who? Will I always be alone?

Where? Where are you leading me?

Why? Why do bad things have to happen?

When? When will it all fit?

What? What is your purpose for me?

Sometimes it seems that they will never be answered. They are open ended questions that will be asked over and over by each of us. The answer is plain and yet not. Simple, yet complicated. God knows and in his time he will reveal it to us, but it is so hard to just sit back and wait. The specific answers to these questions will come in time, but my/our impatience leads to more questions. How is it that we come to think getting our questions answered somehow makes living easier, simpler.

I am slowly learning how important it is to give these questions up. Where will asking them get me? Nowhere. Where will worrying about them get me? Nowhere. And how much time do I waste asking them? Too much. I am learning to be more reliant on God and am asking fewer questions. I am learning to have more faith. Following when I can't see. Letting go of those questions.

In Him

Sara

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**Date:** 2/13/2006  
**Submitted by:** Sara Scott  
**Journal Entry:**

How to say thank you.

I am always amazed at the generosity of those we meet on the road. God continues to show us His love by putting people in our path that give selflessly. The latest incident of servitude occurred in a well-known doughnut shop whose sign read "Hot, Fresh Doughnuts."



**Sara Scott**

Ahhh, the wonder and delight that washed over my teammates and I as we walked inside to witness the spectacular that is Krispy Kreme. We crowded around the viewing window in the brightly lit shop to watch row after row of dough become fried, glazed, fluffy perfection. Then we were each handed one of those works of art (free thanks to the glowing sign outside) and devoured them in seconds flat. I think mine went into my mouth whole. After staring at the doughnut

making process for a little longer, Tami saw an old friend from school working the drive-thru. They talked about his life, about hers, and then he took our order. One dozen doughnuts for breakfast the next morning, but as we stepped up to pay, he said three words, "I've got it."

Now, you may be asking, "How can a box of doughnuts remind you of God's unfailing love?" Simple. God takes care of us and provides for us in every way. Even through a box of doughnuts, but more importantly it made me think of Jesus' sacrifice. We (my team) could have paid for that box of doughnuts, but the gift was much appreciated. We cannot, however, pay the debt for our sins. God took that burden. He went to the cross in our place and said, "I've got it."

In Christ, Sara

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**Date:** 2/21/2006

**Submitted by:** MaryBeth Smith

**Journal Entry:**

*Another Sight from the Van*

We are looking at the Wichita Mountains in Oklahoma. This is the only mountain chain in the U.S. that runs east to west and west to east, whereas all the other mountain chains run north to south and south to north. The mountain sites are so refreshing after spending the last two weeks in the flatlands of Kansas! I love Kansas sunsets and how vast the sky is; however, the mountains make me stand in awe of the amazing details of creation and the mysteries held within these mountains. Also, there is water, a small lake which rejuvenates the spirit of the soul!



**MaryBeth Smith**

We're heading south, where hopefully it's warmer and sunnier! I have had a good time moving through Kansas. We have had a great painter's stroke of generosity and kindness this last month, and I am looking forward to the opportunities and possibilities in the South now. These mountains and water are great omens to the challenges and renewing possibilities within these challenges to come very soon!

God, thank You for sharing Your beauty with me and for giving me the heart to search for Your beauty. May all readers take the time to search and reflect on the beauty that You share with them, and may they be refreshed by such splendor!

~God's Peace~

MaryBeth

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**Date:** 2/24/2006

**Submitted by:** Sara Scott

**Journal Entry:**

Happy Birthday

No, today is not my birthday. Nor is it any of my teammates'. In fact, today is not a birthday to anyone that I happened to celebrate with.



**Sara Scott**

My teammates and I spent the day traveling from retirement home to retirement home in Abilene, Texas doing short chapels at each. Three programs, three different homes, and three entirely different groups of people, yet with all of the differences each place had similar welcomes and joyous thanks for us. Each group held the usual suspects: the storytellers, letting us into the entertaining parts of their lives; the curious, always asking questions; and the gracious, sharing their lives and their pain. In each place we were invited in and instantly became "part of the family." At the second home of the day, we were invited to share more than some music and stories; we were invited to share life, to celebrate it. We enjoyed cake and punch, along with a healthy dose of happiness and laughter. Sitting there in the company of wisdom, I was overcome by how special that moment was. Having only lived twenty years, my experience is somewhat limited, but valuable nonetheless, and at the same time precious to the women at my table. I listened to

their stories, and they listened to mine, age and youth relying on one another's ability to listen, and comprehend. The birthday celebration was in honor of those born in February, but more than that it was a tribute to life. How beautiful and precious our lives really are and how often we take that for granted.

In Christ,

Sara

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**Date:** 2/27/2006

**Submitted by:** Sara Scott

**Journal Entry:**

### God of Wonders

Hundreds of thousands of years, eons. That's how long it has taken to form the caverns in Carlsbad, NM. How beautiful! What masterful artwork our God displays there. Walking into the caverns (no little feat as the trail descends 750 feet into the earth) was fascinating to say the least.



**Sara Scott**

As we, the team, walked the steep trail, we encountered an environment that looked as if it belonged in a sci-fi movie. Stalagmites shooting up from the floor cast eerie shadows across the path. Further and further into the cave we walked as the natural light quickly faded. Each twist and turn of our journey brought a new wonder. Rock formations stretched before my eyes leaving me awestruck and speechless at their beauty. Every room of the cavern seemed more beautiful than the last. The carvings, so intricate and delicate, were each a reminder of the painstaking care our Creator puts into His every work.

This wonder continually reminded me of God's greatness. How long this project has taken to get to its current state and yet God continues to work on it. Will it ever be done? Each room and tunnel purposefully carved by the elements. Every glimpse of beauty shining through grime. All of these things also reminded me of myself. For so long God has been working on me. Will I ever be done? Each part of me purposely carved by life. And every glimpse of beauty pulled from the muck I'm stuck in.

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**Date:** 2/28/2006

**Submitted by:** Tami Usher

**Journal Entry:**

Today I am a little sad. We are leaving Carlsbad, New Mexico. We go into town on Sunday afternoon, and we are leaving today (Tuesday). Not only is this place special because my aunt, uncle and cousin live here, but also because I kind of grew up here. I love my mom so much. She is one of the strongest people I know, but being a single parent and raising six girls takes a lot of energy. In the summer, my mom would meet my aunt halfway from Kansas to New Mexico. I have spent many summers and spring breaks here in Carlsbad. My Uncle Mark was the father figure that I didn't have back at home. I remember he would play and sing this song to help us go to sleep. I think it was actually called "Debbie Sue" (my aunt), but he would put our names in place of hers. It was kind of a silly song, but I thought that was the coolest thing, and I remember it like it was yesterday. I remember one spring break, I had been growing out my bangs, and they were always in my face. My aunt would always get on to me about pulling my bangs back. You can bet that I don't ever have my bangs in my face.



**Tami Usher**

I have many wonderful memories in Carlsbad. Whenever one of my sisters gets engaged, she is supposed to come to Carlsbad so my aunt can approve and get to know the groom. So, like I said, I am a little sad to go. Hopefully I will make it back sometime soon.

Tami Usher

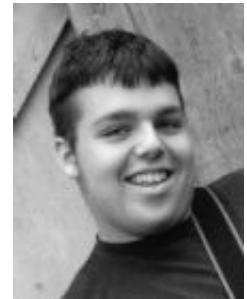
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**Date:** 2/28/2006

**Submitted by:** Boe Parker

**Journal Entry:**

Yesterday was awesome. It was our day off, and we went to the Carlsbad Caverns. It was a blast. The Caverns were so beautiful. I really was amazed at how God's creation can be so incredible. I loved the hike; it really made me sore and showed me how out of shape I am. I can't wait for Easter because I will get to do a lot of hiking.



**Boe Parker**

I am really starting to think about next year. I don't know what God is pushing me towards. I believe that it is New Vision, but I also feel a tug to Montana and school.

I am about 20 pages away from finishing "Wild At Heart." It is a great book, and I wish I never would have put it down for the four months that I did. In addition, I finished Matthew and Mark in the Gospels and am working on Luke. God is so amazing.

Boe Parker

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**Date:** 3/7/2006

**Submitted by:** David Apodaca

**Journal Entry:**

I always wanted to be a firefighter...



**David Apodaca**

A couple of weeks ago, as Tami and I drove to our host home, we noticed a small fire burning on someone's front porch. Now, this fire looked very inconspicuous and contained, but as we got closer, we noticed that the fire was actually a hollow log that had somehow caught on fire. I decided I better investigate, and as I approached the house, I saw that indeed the log was on fire, and the fire was growing. Soon it would probably catch the porch pillar and the dry leaves on the ground on fire. I knocked on the door, and a little old lady opened up; I urgently asked her if she knew why the log was on fire. She had a surprised look on her face and told me she had no idea.

Quickly, I went to the side of the house and found a hose and water faucet and doused the log for a good five minutes. The old lady cried a little. I gave her a hug and told her it would be okay. I can't imagine what she was thinking. I am glad that I was able to do this, though...able to do a different kind of good.

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**Date:** 3/7/2006

**Submitted by:** Boe Parker

**Journal Entry:**

It has really been kind of a rough week for our team, although not as bad as it seemed at the time. I have been having some issues going on. One is that I would love to do

New Vision next year, but there are different thoughts in my head about things that I could do, and I am having a hard time deciphering what the right choice is. It was an eye opener when I got the Alumni Application and I saw that one of the questions said that it would be a real different experience and it could be really hard because it is a different group, not the one that I have now.

I also have been having a hard time with being in places and not having any programs to do. I would love having a program every night, even though the setup would probably take its toll on me. I really do like packing the trailer and unpacking it and even setting all of my stuff up and helping others with theirs when I get a chance.



**Boe Parker**

The long drives also are starting to bother me because I get really bored, like to the point of wiggling out. I can't read because it hurts my eyes because of all the movement. Plus, even if my eyes didn't hurt, I drift off and can't keep focused on the book. Even playing stupid games like "Hey Cow" get boring after a while. "Hey Cow" is a game where you simply roll down the window and yell "HEY COW!!!" at the top of your lungs and try to count how many cows look up to see you.

On a lighter note, I really have enjoyed the last couple of devotions that our team has done. Sara had a great devo where we all drew pictures of some of the memories of the things that we have done on team and also what brought us to this point. MaryBeth had a great one this morning where we closed our eyes and imagined we were filled by light and we imagined our light grew and started to go throughout the world and the universe. It was awesome. So, that is the brighter side of this week.

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**Date:** 3/12/2006

**Submitted by:** MaryBeth Smith

**Journal Entry:**

*My Good Friend Shannon*

I was able to call Shannon this morning and see how she is doing. This week is the anniversary of her first child dying in her womb. She is working on Habitat for Humanity this morning. Her faith and strength are amazing! She has had so many bad things happen to her, and yet she remains passionately faithful to God. She lost her first expected child last March. She lost her grandmother last summer. Her husband lost his job at Christmas time. Major losses have been taking place in her life over the last year. And yet, this morning when I am calling to check up on her and hurt with her, she is cheerfully serving God by serving others with the Habitat Housing project. She is just amazing and her strength is so incredible! I admire her so much! She is so unbelievably blessed and covered by God's love. God is her rock and foundation. The winds have blown and the floods have risen and the rains have fallen repeatedly, and yet she remains so strong and courageous because her life is built on God! Peace out~ MaryBeth



**MaryBeth Smith**

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**Date:** 3/16/2006

**Submitted by:** Tami Usher

**Journal Entry:**

Today is me twenty first birthday. I don't feel any different or any older. I guess you never really do, and I will probably say that I am twenty for a while. My twin sister Toni is out to sea right now, so I can't really talk to her. I can't even call her on her birthday. Sara's and my last host home was really awesome; they had this cute little dog named Bear. I don't know why it is called Bear because it is the nicest, cutest little dog I have ever seen. That is pretty much all that I have to say. I hope everyone's day is sunny side up.

God bless,

Tami Usher



**Tami Usher**

**Date:** 3/16/2006  
**Submitted by:** David Apodaca  
**Journal Entry:**

There is a craziness that has been following us since before we left New Mexico. Craziness my not be the best word to describe it, but it's there—behind, in front and all around us. I look over my shoulder and there it is...as if coming from another world...it's running wild across the land, and it just might uproot the trees that appear so feeble in its grip. It just might tear away the concrete piece by piece from the foundations of houses with the power of a dozen atomic blasts. The wind is blowing. It is blowing from New Mexico all the way to Iowa, I'm sure. Brutal, nasty, it seems like it can drive a person mad with its alien noise. Drives me mad as it blows me into pieces and carries me away as I walk down the road. Craziness...the wind is craziness.



**David Apodaca**

**Date:** 3/19/2006  
**Submitted by:** MaryBeth Smith  
**Journal Entry:**

#### *A Weekend of Games*

We spent this last weekend hosting games and songs and programs and worship for the community in Osborne, Kansas. We played games for hours upon hours with the youth ranging from four-year-olds to middle schoolers. The hours were long and grueling, yet the smiles and enthusiasm beaming from these youth were rewarding and inspiring. Out of the many games we played, two of my favorites were Ultimate Duck Duck Goose and the Dating Game. I could not stop joyfully laughing while watching the four-year-old Sarah leap over the tall pastor in the attempt to reach the ball in the middle of the circle before her competitor. It was a real treat to entertain and captivate the young audience during the Dating Game and then rejoice as the youth volunteered to create characters of their own and entertain their peers. The weekend was filled with laughter and fun! Yeah God, that we can come together and celebrate fellowship with one another in such an exciting way!

~Peace Out~ MaryBeth



**MaryBeth Smith**

**Date:** 3/21/2006  
**Submitted by:** Erik Moe  
**Journal Entry:**

Over the past weekend we stayed in El Paso, Texas. We had a Family Night Program at New Hope Lutheran Church. It was a good-sized crowd from many different churches around the area, including a few from a church in Las Cruces, New Mexico. After our program, we tore down and got to go to our host homes. My host dad's name is George. On the way home we talked about the program a little bit and where we had been already. We talked about the drive from Odessa, Texas and how he used to make the drive in a lot less time than it took us. We talked about small stuff like the weather until we got to his house.



**Erik Moe**

After we walked into the house, I started to look around a bit at what was on the walls. It was really interesting. I saw these little ceramic miniatures that looked really familiar. He asked me if I knew what a Hummel was and he pointed at the ceramics. They are German-made items that are called Die Hummel. He had probably close to a hundred of them. Basically they depict a young German boy and girl doing different things. For instance, around a well getting a drink, or playing in a field of flowers.

His German collection didn't stop there. He also had what are called *Wirtsilmen*, which are pieces of

wood that have a face of a Wood Sprit carved into them. Through talking with him, I found out that he had lived in Germany for several years and liked to go back to visit. He told me about how he went to the shop where they were sold and he bought 40 of them in one trip. After buying all of those, he said that the vender was completely out of them. We had a good time chatting about everything.

The next day we had a great cook out. George went out and bought some hamburgers and hot dogs to grill up. The other host parents and the pastor all brought something to the meal. The whole meal ended up being really good. More fun was had after the meal was over because everyone sat around and laughed. It was really fun.

All in all, our stay in El Paso at New Hope Lutheran Church was excellent. It was a lot of fun to go there.

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**Date:** 3/27/2006

**Submitted by:** David Apodaca

**Journal Entry:**

I would like to share an inspiring event that occurred to Boe, Erik and me when we were in Garden City, Kansas. The team was primarily housed at the church; however, we were put in charge of a great college night with a great attendance. Later that night when everyone was just hanging out, I played a chess game with one of the guys. I love chess. I have played a lot in my days, but this guy was amazing! Never mind the chess, he and I got talking about plans for our futures and he told me he was going to be moving soon and that he had a tent that he was giving away. I gladly offered to take the tent off his hands, but he assured me that there was nothing special about the tent. But, for me, a free tent seemed like it could be useful.



**David Apodaca**

I now had a tent. The following day, the team took our favorite trip to our favorite place... WalMart. On the corner outside the WalMart parking lot stood a man with a backpacking pack, a dog and a sign asking for a ride. Boe took advantage of our food bin we have in the back of the van as we decided we were going to give the man some food. "Cookies, yeah. Ohh, those chips would be good." This wouldn't be the first time we have given food to someone needy. The last time I handed a man a couple of plastic bags full of unfinished lunches out of my driver window at a stoplight. Yeah, that guy had all the food groups that day.

So, Erik, Boe and I walk up to the guy and his dog. He didn't seem like he was too bad off. Just a dude, down on his luck. We gave him the food, which he gladly accepted, and in our chat, we found that someone had stolen his tent and sleeping bag the night before.

After awhile, I remembered the promised tent, and we decided to go back to the church to see if it had arrived. We soon found out that the tent had just been delivered moments before. That made me have butterflies in my stomach. To top it off, Boe decided to put the icing on the cake and give the man his own sleeping bag. He thought he didn't use it enough, anyway. So, we traveled back to WalMart, hoping he was still there, and he was. We all felt so AWESOME that day. I really didn't need that tent, anyway.

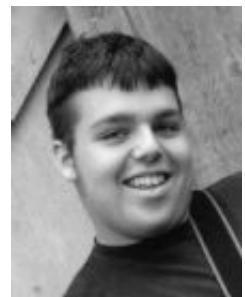
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**Date:** 4/4/2006

**Submitted by:** Boe Parker

**Journal Entry:**

I really have enjoyed the last few host homes that we have had on our days off. I've loved their hospitality and loved their generosity. Erik and I got the chance to stay with two people right after the Omaha Quake who were awesome. They let us stay at their house all day and bring over our teammates. It was nice to have the chance to rest up without having to entertain people or be woken up by a bunch of noise going on.



**Boe Parker**

I have never been a person who could sleep in for a long time. I usually got up at 7:00

to go to work, so I had my biological alarm set at 6:59, which made it annoying, because I would set my alarm and wake up before it would go off. But anyway, I never really valued sleeping in that much until I joined Captive Free. Now, I thank God for every Monday because that is my lounging day when I can sleep in and get rested up for the week.

It has also been a new experience being Program Coordinator. I loved being the Resource Ministries Manager, but I am glad that I was able to help MaryBeth out and take that burden from her. She is doing great with this new job and so far, I feel I am doing well at PC. I do like having to make song lists for us, and I do like having the call on what songs we do.

I am definitely feeling the power of the "Six Month Hump." I feel really tired, and I feel like we are in a rut sometimes. I wish that we didn't have so many long drives and that we were a little busier. I love setting up and playing. I really have a passion for leading people in worship, and I just hope that our being up in the front helps others worship.

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**Date:** 4/27/2006

**Submitted by:** Sara Scott

**Journal Entry:**

Legacy

I've been thinking about life a lot lately, how fleeting it is, and about the legacies we leave behind. About two and a half weeks ago, a friend of mine was killed in a car accident, and I was shocked when I found out. Here was a girl who really lived for Jesus. She absolutely shone with his light and love. Wendi and I were camp counselors together every summer, and she always amazed me with her wisdom. In her obituary, it said that her highest ambition in life was to serve God. Again and again, I thought about those who would never meet her or experience the strength of her faith. And as I thought about her and grieved my loss, the world's loss, I realized that my friend had achieved her goal. She was in Paradise. I heard that while cleaning out her bedroom, her father read some things she had written about her faith, and he came to know Christ because of it. I realized that she has left a legacy that will continue to be a beacon for those who don't know the Lord. I don't know what kind of legacy I will leave, as I'm sure most of you don't, but I pray that God will use me as he used my friend Wendi. Please pray for Wendi's family and friends that they might find healing and ultimately joy in their loss and the Kingdom's gain.



**Sara Scott**

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**Date:** 4/27/2006

**Submitted by:** MaryBeth Smith

**Journal Entry:**

#### **Planes, Philosophy, and Automobiles**

The answers are right here. They've always been here, right in front of me, with me, a part of me, my own ideas even. I lose sight of them; I lose faith in them. I lose the value of the trial, thus losing the value of the solution or medicine that was once held in such high esteem. Then I am reminded of such pearls of wisdom, and there is hope again. There is a sense of newness, a chance to try again and start new and fresh. I am inspired by the lyrics of a song in the musical *Rent*, "There's only this; forget regret." I had the most fun and exhilarating plane ride from Nashville to Chicago on my way to Denver after Easter break at home.



**MaryBeth Smith**

On a tangent note, being home was exactly what I needed. I was surrounded by the joys of my family and then my best friends. I spent some good, quality time with family members. In some cases talking, playing, or just hanging around together. I love my family so much. Then I was able to spend a good chunk of time with Lindsey and Shannon (two of my best friends). At one point with Lindsey, after visiting Krispy Kreme Donuts and getting a free hot donut, I touched her arm,

and I was like, "I'm touching you. We're here hanging out together." It was awesome, after talking on the phone as much as we can, being able in the middle of this year's journey to reach out and touch my friends arm. Here we are in the flesh.

Also very importantly, I was able to spend some quality time with myself, some good alone time. This break was exactly the de-stressor that I needed to refocus my goals, my calling, and my mission. I was able to think on what I need to re-prioritize on team. I remembered at home what I enjoy doing and why I enjoy it. I was able to more clearly evaluate my behavior on team with my teammates and realize we are a team here for each other, yet more importantly we are here for the youth of America sharing with them a message of hope, love, and value. I am discovering the tangents are the learning experiences, which are not always "rainbows and butterflies. It's compromise that moves us along." Our primary mission should not be blinded by our life's tangents. We should use the tangents for life lessons, while always keeping in mind that our higher purpose for this year is to make a connection, and in that connection we will share a message that love really can overcome everything, that there is hope for all people because love will prevail against all odds, and finally that every single person is so valuable to God that God's love is for them. This love is worth hell. At least Jesus believed that message and lived it out.

Back to the plane ride. In the "A" line of Southwest airlines I met Debbie from Chicago, who was visiting her mother in Nashville. We talked the entire time from standing in line until our goodbyes at the end of the flight. In our row on the plane we met Matt. He was on the longest plane ride I have ever heard of from Hawaii, where he is in the Navy, going to New York where his sister is getting married and where he will also rejoin his wife of four years. We talked about what we are currently doing with our lives – Navy and airplane assembly; third grade teacher who loves geography; in a traveling band called Captive Free. We told stories from our lives. We talked about our families, travels, and had a great time joking and laughing. This was the best plane ride of my life. I hope it was a good omen for the remainder of this year. As our plane was beginning the landing process, I asked Matt and Debbie my favorite question, "What is the meaning of life?" They were so funny, just as we were throughout most of the flight. Then finally they answered. Debbie asked, "Is this a trick question?" And I said, "No. I want to know what *you* think the meaning of life is." She then proceeded to express that for her the meaning of life is to live and discover the purpose God has for us, to discover God's love and peace. Matt jokingly responded, "She took my answer. I can't follow that." Yet, he did come up with his own idea of life's meaning, which is to live for one's own needs – to help other people and to also care for yourself. Both answers were refreshing, thought filled and not a canned answer. It was a genuine reflection based on what they have experienced in their lives so far. They were original and I loved every minute of my connection with these two people that I will more than likely never see again. Our connection became a bond when we dug deeper, beyond the surface talk, and we talked philosophy. We took time out of our day to flirt with truly unanswerable questions. We shared an expression of ourselves, our ideas, and thoughts. Our collective consciousness, our souls, our beings, our connection with God all met to answer, "What is the meaning of life?"

God, You have a tricky sense of humor. I am sure that out of asking so many people this question that I will in turn find the meaning of life and realize in asking the question I am in reality living out the meaning of life. Thank You for the Third Peacock and may the romance continue. Also, thank you Dad, for reminding me last night that the answer I needed was the answer I wrote in one of my online CF journals. It reminded me of the hope I once passionately burned with and desired to share, and the love I know in God, and in the life that is so difficult to share (my teammates) and yet so easy at the same time (my plane ride friends). God, let's Rock the Flock!

~Peace out to all readers and may you reflect today on the meaning of life~

MaryBeth

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**Date:** 5/1/2006

**Submitted by:** David Apodaca

**Journal Entry:**

I love the color green, so I am loving to be in Kansas City right now. We have returned to the team favorite church (St. James) in Kansas City after our final and great Quake this past weekend. This place may be our favorite place to be because we have all expressed how much we individually like our host homes, or it may just be because we

have gotten to know them all just so well.

I particularly feel very comfortable in my host home. My day off today consisted of sleeping in, munching on some good breakfast, watching a movie, going to Starbucks to get my favorite green tea raspberry frappachino and taking Super Soaker squirt guns with my host brother and surprising my host sister and her friends as they went on a walk in the neighborhood. Ahh, a good day in Kansas City. I really like it here. Just thought you may like to know that. Thanks.



**David Apodaca**

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**Date:** 5/2/2006

**Submitted by:** Boe Parker

**Journal Entry:**

I can't believe it is already May. Our last Quake was this past weekend. It was so great. Even though there wasn't a ton of kids, they made up for it with their energy. I was probably more tired after this Quake than after some of the bigger ones. I definitely will miss Quakes. I think that they were my favorite thing that we did this year so far.



**Boe Parker**

I am so glad that we had our day off in Kansas City. I really love staying with the people from St. James. I feel right at home when we are here. I actually wouldn't mind living in KC, even though I like a small town atmosphere. I really am starting to like big cities, too.

I am getting excited for VBS season to start. When I first heard about doing VBS, I really didn't want to do it. But now that we have the material, and I kind of have an idea of what is expected of us, I feel a lot more comfortable with it. I am really excited to work with all of the kids this summer.

Peace out,  
Boe

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**Date:** 5/22/2006

**Submitted by:** David Apodaca

**Journal Entry:**

My older siblings used to jokingly say that I would probably be the first of us kids to get married and have a dozen kids. I have no idea where they got that idea, but I am a little sorry to say that I am not going to be the first. My eldest sister Andrea is getting married on Saturday! I am not yet sure what to say about my sister being married; it's a little weird, I must admit. However, in my opinion, love and the unity of two people that love each other are such beautiful things that I cannot help myself from feeling only happiness for my sister and her soon to be husband, Weylin. I will be flying home this weekend to share in this good thing!



**David Apodaca**

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**Date:** 6/7/2006

**Submitted by:** Boe Parker

**Journal Entry:**

VBS rocks! I am having such a blast with the kids, and I am having such a blast doing all of the songs. I am so relieved that VBS is a good time. When I first thought about VBS when I applied for team, I wasn't so sure that I wanted to do it. I am so glad, though, that everything is working out. It is so



nice to be refreshed and doing something different than going to a different place every night.

**Boe Parker**

It has been so awesome to come into VBS every morning and see all of the kids getting excited to sing and praise God. We are in Levant, Kansas, which we have been to twice before. I really enjoy the people here, especially the kids. We have done some really neat things here. We went swimming, sang at the nursing homes with the kids, went to the park and played on the equipment with the kids, and had a barbecue.

God is definitely at work, and I am glad that he is using our team to show himself to these kids. I am also glad that he is showing himself to us through the smiles and laughter and energy of the kids we are working with.

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**Date:** 6/13/2006

**Submitted by:** Tami Usher

**Journal Entry:**

I come from a traditional church. I love my church and the people, but I have never really felt like I was worshiping. I really enjoy when we have Training because I have never felt so close to God as I do when I worship with other teamers. When we worship, I feel so at peace and at home. I also really enjoyed Training because I got to know the other teamers better. Since there were only three teams total at VBS Training, we got to know everyone a lot better.



**Tami Usher**

I am really enjoying VBS. I like that we stay for a week instead of a couple days. We really get to know the host families.

The year on team is almost over, and I am happy and sad that the end is near. I can't say that this year has been easy. I have grown up a little bit more and I feel that I know myself much better. I have now a lifetime of memories, and I still have seven more weeks until it's over. I wouldn't trade this year for anything. Thanks for listening.

Love ya,  
Tami Usher

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**Date:** 6/30/2006

**Submitted by:** Sara Scott

**Journal Entry:**

The Beauty of a Bike Ride

When my host parents showed Tami and me the bike path and offered us the use of their bikes, I didn't realize what a blessing it was.



**Sara Scott**

After arriving at their home, a mere block away from the Mississippi River, in Port Byron, we got our bags settled in and took a tour of their home and were told to make ourselves at home. After remembering their offer, I asked Tami if she wanted to take a ride. Soon we were out the door and on our way to the bike path. We rode along the Mississippi, sometimes leaving its banks to fly through a tunnel of trees.

As we rode, we each remarked on how great it felt to ride a bike again. "I haven't done this in forever!" I said as we wended our way along. We joked about a bike accident Tami had as a child and about riding with no hands, a talent I never possessed and Tami's sister used to scare her. We spent periods of time talking, reminiscing, and were silent at others, lost in our own thoughts. We laughed as bugs flew into our mouths and

eyes. With each minute, we soaked in the beauty of the sunset and the world around us.

We reached a public boat landing and decided to rest in a nearby gazebo. We looked out at the river and our island we had seen earlier that afternoon and thought about how great the bike ride had been. After a short rest, we headed back and as I rode, I thought about why I felt so good. I'm not the world's most athletic person, so why was I so happy about an eight-mile bike ride?

And then it hit me. It wasn't the bike ride, or the endorphins—don't get me wrong, they were great—but the happiness came from what the ride represented to me, something important...childhood. That time when the world moved slower and summer seemed to last for years. A time when I didn't worry about being too busy and about what I was going to do with my life, and new adventures were just a trip to the library away.

Ahhh, childhood...when did I grow out of it? When did I "grow up"? When did I stop taking the time to enjoy life? When did I speed up and forget to be, to dream, to drink in the moment? As years have passed, that innocence has slipped farther and farther away, and I don't know when it started to fall away.

I see this afternoon as my reminder from God to take those moments and revert back to my childhood, if only for a second, and remind myself to live and dream.

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**Date:** 7/5/2006

**Submitted by:** MaryBeth Smith

**Journal Entry:**

*Breathe deep/Breathe deep the breath of God...*

What's going on in the world of Captive Free South Central? So far, we have had week after week of high energy, spirit moving Vacation Bible Schools. The kids come, not really knowing what to expect, with more and more surprises every day. There are new games to learn and play. There are new songs with crazy motions to grasp and express as their praise to their "Radical God" to whom they can "trade their sorrows," knowing full well that their God will save them from the clutches of their daily "Pharoah"s, or that if they get eaten by a "baby shark," they will celebrate "what is good," screaming "Yes, yes Lord" and "Amen" through it all! They will dance before the altar of their God, their Jesus, the love of their lives, and no longer be afraid. They celebrate! *Breathe deep the breath of God.* These kids and youth GOT WHOOSH!



**MaryBeth Smith**

"When the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me [Jesus] everywhere."—Acts 1:8a.

I challenge all readers today to dance life without fear, for our God in the name of love. Get whoosh!

Peace out—  
MaryBeth

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**Date:** 7/5/2006

**Submitted by:** MaryBeth Smith

**Journal Entry:**

I went to prison because I love God. We had our first prison experience last Saturday. We arrived early in order to complete the whole check-in and entry process. We made it into the prison and then had to make our way across the

yard to get to the chapel building where we would be leading praise and worship. As soon as we stepped outside, the men greeted us with whistles, "Whoo hoo"s, "How you doing?" with a wink and a smile, "Thank you, God," and my personal favorite, "Is it too late to come to church, pastor?" I couldn't help but laugh at some of these greetings. It takes two weeks for these men to get onto the roster for Chapel, so only the few on the roster were able to come praise God with us!



**MaryBeth Smith**

Inside the chapel had a completely different feel and atmosphere than in the yard. It felt safe. It was a safe place. We invited the men to sing along with us as they felt comfortable joining in. It didn't take long for me to loosen up and really get into worship. It is so difficult to find the right word for how I felt when I looked out among the faces and saw them singing with us, singing "Better Is One Day" and "How Great Is Our God." The joy, the inspiration, the affirmation, the assurance I felt praising God with them. These men are a candle in the dark. Everywhere I go, I can see God shining through. We all shared a celebration of thanksgiving for life, for life in Christ by communing together. They were all encouraging, despite the occasional wrong chord or note we did. They were not there to judge us or ogle us lovely ladies. They were there for the same reason we were there. We are broken people in need of a loving, forgiving, healing, sustaining God. We were there because Jesus calls out to us, "Let all who are thirsty, come to the water."

We concluded the evening by circling up and doing a mini Bible study and Q&A for Captive Free time. It was illuminating, hearing some of their stories. One of the men shared his appreciation to us for overcoming the media's presentations of prison life and having the courage to come here to worship with them. I felt so comfortable and accepted here by them. Then the chaplain reminded us that we may be getting a distorted view of prison life in here because out there—out of the chapel—prison life is completely different. He said we had a small taste of it walking through the yard on the way here. He reminded us that prison is not fun; there are fights and other serious concerns.

He is so right. This is even true outside the prison walls. I feel as though some organizations and venues in the Christian church ask us, encourage us, and demand that we put on masks. We wear the masks that say we are happy all the time, we never do anything wrong, we are perfect. And even if we're not perfect, we at least have to appear to be that way. The Church is no longer a place where we can go to be real or genuine. There is no longer a place for us to go when we're broken, unsure of anything, or just sad, angry, or upset. These feelings aren't allowed in some versions of Christianity. But they are allowed in prison. There was a safe place within these walls of socially unacceptables where we could go as failures and cry out to a God of compassion, grace, and love for help or comfort or just some assurance of my identity and value. And it was here that we felt the kind touch of God and knew that we are loved for who we are: a child of God, broken and cherished nonetheless. I went to prison because I love God, and I wanted to share that love with them. But it was here that I felt God's love for me the strongest all year.

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**Date:** 7/9/2006

**Submitted by:** Sara Scott

**Journal Entry:**

Homeless

We were driving through the city (Austin, Texas) today on our way to church, and as we drove, I looked out the window. The day was beautiful and sunny, a little hot, but otherwise gorgeous. I watched the city fly by. Gigantic buildings stretched



**Sara Scott**

to the heavens. Why was I surprised? Everything's bigger in Texas! The giants left the smaller buildings and streets in shadows; much like the canopy covers the rainforest floor. Come to think of it the city does resemble a jungle. Looking out into the urban jungle was an assault on my eyes and brain. It seemed as if everything screamed for my attention. The buildings sparkled in the sun. Billboards thrust out of the ground like invasive weeds. There was so much to look at.

We drove on, rolling along the interstate past the visual cacophony of the city. I turned away from it all, but as we drove under an overpass, I saw something out of the corner of my eye that made me gasp. There, two homeless people were asleep on the concrete a few feet away from the interstate traffic speeding along at 70 mph. I couldn't believe my eyes. I asked myself if I had imagined it, but when I looked back, there they were, fading into two black spots on the horizon.

Now maybe this is just the rural, small town girl coming out in me, but I was astonished, appalled, and deeply hurt. I had never in my life actually witnessed someone sleeping on the street. I have always been aware that a percentage of Americans are homeless, I've even met and served a few in soup kitchens, but this glimpse into their lives was like a punch in the stomach. I guess never having seen the truth about homelessness made me naive about the reality of it.

I couldn't stop thinking about it. Even through church my mind played reruns of the split second scene. So I prayed. I prayed for the people I had seen and those that I hadn't. I prayed all through church and asked God why, because I knew that there were millions throughout the world in the same position, if not worse off, as the people I had seen. Then after awhile I realized that what I had seen was only one kind of homelessness and that so many more struggle with being homeless in different ways.

Webster's definition of homelessness is as follows: *having no home or permanent place of residence*. That covers a lot of people who live in a house. In fact, I have felt homeless quite a few times in my life because, well, my real home is in heaven. I know that I do have a "permanent place of residence" and that God has welcomed me to it, but let's face it, it could be awhile before I'm there, and sometimes I dearly miss it.

I was at my Grandma's funeral two weeks ago, and the pastor quoted Audio Adrenaline's song "Big House," and it made me think of how lucky I am to be here, but how much I can't wait to be there. And I hope that when I go, I'll see those two people from Austin.

Come and go with me  
to my Father's house  
Come and go with me  
to my Father's house

It's a big, big house  
with lots and lots of room  
A big, big table  
with lots and lots of food  
A big, big yard  
where we can play football  
A big, big house  
It's my Father's house

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**Date:** 7/15/2006

**Submitted by:** David Apodaca

**Journal Entry:**

I thought about it and wondered, "I'm going into a place, willingly, while everyone that is already inside wants to desperately get out!" I didn't know what to think of actually entering the Lincoln, NE state pen. Hollywood sure does make it seem like hell... Hell is a place you don't want to be... did any of these guys want to be here?



It took about an hour to get through security... walk through the hot Nebraska summer heat to the chapel that was on the other side of the prison yard. All men... all guilty? I can't judge.

**David Apodaca**

While the group of us walking to the chapel went, I lagged behind and walked side by side with one of the blue and black dressed prison guards. As I chatted with the guard, probably to make myself more comfortable, some of the men cat-called to the girls that magnetized themselves to the larger walking body. I don't blame them...

The chapel was a large brick building with double doors in front. There at the doors stood a small crowd of men, waiting... waiting to get inside. I walked into a large room with theatre style seating and a large stage up front. Set in the middle, before the stage and in between the front row of seats, stood a table. On the table was the bread and the wine that we would share together in worship. A worship experience that I will never forget.

I pulled out my guitar, tuned it to satisfaction, and stood off center in the front of the room with the rest of the band. We were probably all nervous. We all went through that yard. We all tried to smile as we got real close to the men as we walked through the front doors of the chapel.

One by one, two by two, the men came in, walked to the front of the room where Pastor Bud stood. Pastor Bud, as far as I knew, was the man responsible for all this, the men coming to worship. Good man. He was a smaller to average sized man depending on the one telling the story. He was plainly dressed except his minister's collar that was as white as the hair that fully filled his face and hair that lay sparsely combed on his head. Each man in front of Pastor Bud would give him a good hug, like family. Then they would whisper into his ear. Later, Pastor Bud said that the men would whisper little updates... like, "Fifty-four more days." Or they would whisper news on their faith walk. Good days...bad days...

When the service began, they sang. They all sang and it was beautiful. These men had commonalities with the men in this facility, but they had them too with every person on the earth. They also came together as brothers in Christ, and the place was transformed. I began to forget what was outside the walls of the chapel. We played...it was dreadfully hot and not always beautiful...there were loud fans that tore through the physical praises that we gave with our voices, but they did not take away the real praises that were lifted high for God to see!

Later, we all got together and talked. I learned about some of the men. They were all so glad to be in worship and so glad to have us come spend time together. Some asked us how we felt going into a place like that... most of us said that we had no idea what to expect. We all agreed that the chapel was the place to be, but the inmates reminded us that this place was not a nice place by any means. I wanted to go cry... I wanted to go cry because they made such a beautiful impact on me... on everyone. I often felt my throat swell up as the men talked about their lives, about how they were so blessed, even in that place. In that place...

I didn't want to have negative feelings to any man in that prison, but I didn't want to act like I knew how they felt and how I knew that Christ was their real home boy and He could take away pain. I couldn't do that... I have no idea what any of those men went through. I don't know all their stories but I did have the HONOR... the HONOR of spending just a few hours with a few amazing

men that I could picture Christ walking and talking with on the road. Just like YOU AND ME. Yup.

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**Date:** 7/27/2006

**Submitted by:** Sara Scott

**Journal Entry:**

### Go Fish

You know, I haven't played Go Fish for a really long time, at least six years, so I don't know what made me ask him if he wanted to play, but I did. I didn't want him to feel left out.



**Sara Scott**

About a week ago, we were in Wichita; we were doing music for VBS and decided to use some of our time up by playing Duck, Duck, Goose; we play it a lot with younger kids. As we played, I glanced up and noticed a little boy in the back of the room watching us. He couldn't join in the fun. I had met Nicholas at the beginning of the week; my team had made a point of introducing ourselves to him. The first thing I noticed about him was his smile, amazing. I couldn't help but smile with him. And his eyes would light up every time he talked. He knew almost every song we did, by heart, and will be going into second grade. What a great kid! I wanted to talk with him, but our time was short. I went to the front, to open our day, and Nicholas remained in the back, separated from the rest of the kids. You see, Nicholas is autistic and has leukemia...cancer.

So when I saw him watching while we played games, I knew he wanted to play but couldn't; his immune system can't take being so close to so many other kids. So I asked if he wanted to play Go Fish. I couldn't remember the game well, but he did, and soon we were caught up in it. "Do you have a six, Nicholas?" I asked, "Go fish." He replied. "Do you have a jack, Sara?" "Go fish." Nicholas went fishing a lot. He'd ask me, only me, for cards even though there was another player. We kept going, sometimes making a needed match, mostly "fishing" for more cards. Our game finished and we counted our pairs, nearly ending with a three-way tie. I went back to music time while Nicholas returned home, tired from his excursion.

A day later Nicholas didn't show up for VBS; he was at the hospital receiving more chemotherapy. He didn't come back the rest of the week; chemo makes most people very sick. I've thought about Nicholas a lot in the past week. I've thought about his beautiful smile and how he laughed when I made a joke, and I've come to see how parallel Nicholas' life and our game of Go Fish are. Each day is judged by how good or bad he feels. "Do you want to go to VBS today, Nicholas?" "Go fish." Each day rests on how weak or strong he feels. His body has been taken over, and yet he still smiles. Still laughs. Still loves God. Talk about faith and standing on the rock.

The faithfulness of Nicholas reminded me how to live for Christ, no matter what. I have a renewed strength of spirit because of an amazing little boy and a game of Go Fish.

Please pray for Nicholas and his family.

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**Date:** 8/11/2006

**Submitted by:** Sara Scott

**Journal Entry:**

## Goodbye

What about saying goodbye is good? I've asked myself this question many times, as goodbye is a word we use very often, almost regularly. Why is leaving so "good"? There are definitely those times when leaving is much easier than staying, but for me, those have been few and far between. Then there are those amazingly wonderful times when "goodbye" isn't enough, "I'll miss you" can't convey, and "God bless" doesn't express the emotions that well up in your throat and behind your eyes. That ache in your heart that goes as quickly as it comes, but was there nonetheless. Goodbye can change your perspective, or your life. Goodbyes can surprise you, stun you, and leave you amazed. Goodbye can be brief or drawn out, and it can last a short time, a long time, or even forever.

I was recently saying goodbye to a host family I had. I was very close with the three kids, and I was surprised when my parting with them went extremely smoothly. I thought everything would be fine, but when I said goodbye to the mother, I was shocked to see her crying. In an instant, our relationship changed. So I guess goodbye can be a good thing, but I have found that this year, my thoughts on goodbyes have changed. I have left behind so many people that I will never see again, and yet those goodbyes have taken on a different meaning for me. My heart no longer says "Goodbye forever" but "Goodbye for now." The kingdom of God is waiting for us to say hello. So, to all of those whose lives we have touched this year, and those who have touched ours, goodbye, for now.

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**Sara Scott**