

Captive Free West Coast 2005-06 Journal

Date: 9/24/2005

Submitted by: Jen Martinez

Journal Entry:

It seems like we've seen nothing but blessings on our journey. Each one of my host families has made us feel completely at home, and they've all had WATERMELON. Beyond incredible blessings from the people we've met, our team has had the express privilege of blessing others through our programs. I've really been learning how God can work in so many different ways that my little human mind can't comprehend. Many times I confine God's Spirit to altar conversion experiences, but I've found Him working in places that don't fit in the box I've created for God. We've heard testimonies that little things like our attitudes, our smiles, our passion, and our everyday interactions have made lasting impressions on people. I can see that even—no, especially in the "little" things, God's glory is being revealed.



Jen Martinez

Date: 9/27/2005

Submitted by: Kristen Elder

Journal Entry:

God is good all the time, and all the time, God is good! Well, off to the West Coast! We've been on the road for a week and two days and have been through Iowa, Nebraska, and Colorado! We have been through six host homes, and I've never felt so at home. I have to admit, this was very nerve-racking at first. Being away from my family was a huge thing for me, and then just the fact of traveling all over, sharing the Gospel with people I've never met—I was a little nervous. "Will I sing all right? How is all this going to work out?" Well, only a week into ministry, and I feel so at peace! God has control over all of it, and that's okay with me; I'm loving it! I'm learning that God is in everything from the small towns in Iowa to the huge mountains in Colorado. It's so amazing! We have had so many compliments about the Spirit moving through us and our programs, and that's what it is all about. It's amazing to see people being touched by God right in front of our faces! The year is just starting, and I am so psyched!!! Your prayers are definitely with us; thank you so much for those! We have been truly blessed by God, and this year is gonna ROCK!



Kristen Elder

We're heading to Arizona in a few days and are pumped and ready to go! Thank you again!

Love always,
Kristen Elder

P.S.—Here's a huge shout out to my family and friends back in STL! I love you all so much, and I couldn't have done it without you. XOXOXOXO

Date: 9/29/2005

Submitted by: Travis Thomas

Journal Entry:

Hey, it's me, Travis Thomas...hmm, that sounds familiar. Well, that's because I was on Captive Free No-Cen last year (also known as North Central)...really.

Now for this year. It is going awesomely. We've done programs in Iowa, Nebraska, and Colorado, making our way west. I am super excited this year. So, I'll see or talk to you soon, but for now...California, here we come! Peace and love



Travis Thomas

Date: 10/2/2005

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

"...God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."—Romans 5:5

God's love is truly visible in the people we encounter. We have been so blessed to stay with amazing families that invite us into their homes, conversations, and lives, even with short notice. The love of God's people is overwhelming. I only hope that God continues to use us in a powerful way and that we will never fail to display God's love in return.



Marta Madsen

God connects people of all ages and sizes. God's love is even present in three-year-olds. One of my most touching experiences was staying with my three-year-old host brother in Colorado Springs. What began as an "I thought you were going to be my size" to the following morning's "Do you have to go?" turned into the last day's "Are you ever going to live with us again?" My heart truly ached as I said goodbye. What is really hard is not being able to make any promises. I learned that my passion for young children is still alive and that God is present in watching "Monsters, Inc.," drawing with chalk, and in finger-painted pictures.

Date: 10/4/2005

Submitted by: Judy Kergel

Journal Entry:

Parker, Colorado—what an amazing place to be! Our church here welcomed us with open arms; they have an amazing youth facility and lots of youth that attend! Tonight we got to hang out with some of the kids before our program—it was pretty cool to just be able to chill and hang out. Our program was phenomenal, and it was all because of the congregation. Before we started our program, the youth pastor had everyone come up and lay hands on us and pray for us—it was an amazing way to start off! After that, it was nothing but fun; fun for Jesus! There was an amazing worship atmosphere, and you could tell that it was all about Jesus and we are merely a tool to help show his love.



Judy Kergel

Date: 10/6/2005

Submitted by: Rick Schwartz

Journal Entry:

Journal, eh? All right then. Colorado—awesome! I'm also happy to report that we've encountered no more problems with our dear van since the tire and trailer plug incidents. However, Josh and I, being from Detroit, are having a hard time getting host families to keep us, what with the Red Wing/Avalanche rivalry and all. Not really. But really... I keep forgetting we aren't destined for New Mexico yet. Oh well, onward and upward...literally.



Rick Schwartz

Date: 10/8/2005
Submitted by: Josh Fiting
Journal Entry:

Life on team. Ah. Life on team is going pretty good; we are in Tucson, AZ where it is just right. Of course, being from Michigan, I would be happy and wearing shorts even if it was in the 50s, but with a sweatshirt, of course. However, our team has had a slight dilemma come up that I am sure we will chuckle about later. Way later. This slight dilemma all started when I talked to Donna. You see, Donna works back in the Youth Encounter office. She is kind of like our life support there so we don't drown. It was my turn on team to give Donna the update of how our team was treading above the water. I told her everything was going great; things couldn't have been better. About three hours later, the team laptop crashed. Ha ha ha! This will be fun later. No worries, though. Rick and I played intense Uno and Phase 10 on our seven-hour ride to Tucson, AZ. Good times, good times.



Josh Fiting

Date: 10/13/2005
Submitted by: Kristen Elder
Journal Entry:

Well, it's been a month already! It's going by so fast! Earlier this week, we had a program at Crossroads Missions in Yuma, Arizona! This missions place does lots of different things; they house homeless and feed them as well as being a drug and alcohol rehabilitation center. I will admit, at first I was a little scared going in, but really, I was so touched by these people. We first helped serve food, and then we put on a program. The crowd was clapping their hands, raising their hands, and just praising the Lord. The Holy Spirit was moving through that room. Afterwards, a lady came up to me and talked to me about her life and her testimony. We sat and cried together, the Holy Spirit just came over me, and we were so blessed. The compassion in her eyes said so much, it was amazing. Now I want to go back there so bad. Hopefully, we will get to.

Now we are in California, and it is so awesome out here. I got to see my cousin Marlena this week, and it was great to see family! Even though the rain has been horrendous, the beach was awesome. I thank God every day for what an awesome opportunity he's given me to do this. Thank you for all your prayers and support!

I love you guys so much!!
Kristen Elder



Kristen Elder

Date: 10/15/2005
Submitted by: Rick Schwartz
Journal Entry:

Hey, hey, it's journal time again. And this time we write to you from the sweetest of sweets—California! Woot! And I do say that it's weird seeing grass again. Right now we're chillin' at an empty parsonage, and as much as we all love leading worship, it'll be nice to just attend a service tomorrow. Yeah. Oh, and Wednesday is our trip to Disneyland! So look forward to that journal. Sorry you can't come with us. I promise to have fun for you. Well, I'm still recovering from Thursday when we started driving at 6:30 a.m., so I'm gonna go take a nap. West Coast, out.



Rick Schwartz

Date: 10/18/2005
Submitted by: Marta Madsen
Journal Entry:

"...You, O Lord, are in the midst of this people..." (Numbers 14:14)

I can't stress enough how amazing the people are that we meet. God is so evident in their generosity, kindness, conversations and welcoming arms. Recently I am realizing the purposes of God's plans for me. Each family I stay with, I feel there is a purpose. What is awesome is when past events in my life connect to my times now. For example, I student taught in Lima, Peru this past spring. I could have taught in Sioux Falls, South Dakota where I attended college, but I felt compelled to go abroad. Tonight, I am staying with a Peruvian lady who also loves little children. A week ago, I stayed with a second grade teacher in Arizona who is from Nebraska, has a music minor as well, and even traveled to Peru! Now, some may say it is all fate or coincidence, but perhaps even housing arrangements are in God's plan, too!



Marta Madsen

Date: 10/20/2005
Submitted by: Josh Fiting
Journal Entry:

I was so excited on Thursday. We got to hang out with youth at St. Mark Lutheran. We played this improv game that Jen made up. Jen and Travis were the MCs, and the rest of the team was split up into different groups with youth. We had ten minutes to come up with a short skit. I think what made it so fun is that Jen and Travis decided to get crazy. They had us use a quote from Napoleon Dynamite and had a hidden object in the room that Jen and Travis decided on. The hidden object was Squish, Jen's bass guitar. Nobody picked Squish. Jen and Travis also decided that one person on our improv team was not allowed to touch the floor. I hope we can come back; we had a blast.

P.S.—Daryl, the youth pastor, is awesome.



Josh Fiting

Date: 10/22/2005
Submitted by: Jen Martinez
Journal Entry:

As the Tucson sun turned my skin from peach to red, and the crimson mountains towered over my bench in this peaceful outdoor chapel, I tried to read the new David Crowder book, but all I could think was, "Wow, we get to go to Disneyland"—every child's dream! I finally gave up reading and found a cactus plant to comfortably stare at as I daydreamed of life-sized Mickey Mouses, Indiana Jones rides, and lots and lots of cotton candy. I had just hugged Goofy when a figure hunched over a cane came hobbling in front of my cactus-fixation—breaking my trance. Slightly unsettled, the old man then became my focal point. I watched him slowly creep to a fenced-in stone cross plastered with engraved plaques. The old man knelt down at the base of the cross, and I suddenly felt like I was intruding on a private moment. I pretended to be interested in a small bug crawling over my Bible and tried to retreat once again to thoughts of Disneyland. Curious, I looked up just in time to see the man stagger to his feet and kiss a plaque on the cross. After a short pause, he turned around, unlatched the gate and made his way past my cactus back to his car. When he came by my bench, I looked into his eyes and



Jen Martinez

saw a sadness that made my heart twinge. The deep wrinkles provided support for the steady stream of tears that followed. I got up, walked over the fence, opened the gate, stepped up to the cross and looked for the plaque the man kissed. I found it, and it read, "Jean; died July 17, 2005." Sister, mother, friend, wife? Like one might see in a movie, I ran my hand across the letters. For some reason I expected the twinge in my heart to grow and erupt into sorrow and pity...that maybe this would be a touching, life-changing moment that I could pass on to my future generations. But I didn't feel this man's pain or experience his sorrow. No tears were shed on his behalf. I walked away untransformed, unmoved, but reflective. Only now as I process this, I remember the love in the man's eyes, the tears that are full of memories, how he tenderly kissed what remains of Jean—a plaque. She meant something to him, a lot to him. There was probably something in her that inspired him, something he adored. I think about my life...am I living in such a way as to deserve a kiss on a plaque? I can say elegant prayers, point out people's faults (with the Bible, no less!), and speak passionately, but what about the moments in between my "spirituality"? I'm prideful, judgmental, and selfish (that's just a crack in the egg)—where's the right living in between the prayers and sermons? That's where it matters, that's where it counts, and that's what we all need to earn our plaque on the cross.

Date: 10/24/2005

Submitted by: Travis Thomas

Journal Entry:

Dearest Readers,

We are here in Reedley, California, having a blast. I had so much fun playing our program. On my day off, I played Halo and hung out with my host bro, Jeff. Good times. See you in the stars!

Travis



Travis Thomas

Date: 10/27/2005

Submitted by: Kristen Elder

Journal Entry:

Running late, and frustrated we had to stop because Jen has the worst bladder ever! The Shell bathroom didn't work, so we had to drive around a little town with only one gas station. We get pulled over! I was driving, and I felt so scared! The police officer pulled us over because he thought we didn't have our seatbelts on. He found we did, and we had a wonderful little conversation with him about our ministry! He was very delighted with us, and he wanted us to take a picture with his cop car! It turned out to be a big laugh session and put us in a really good mood! It's in the little things like that we have come to appreciate God! It's so easy for us to just fall out of the loop and be frustrated with the littlest things, but God is always right there to pick us right back up, and it's amazing how his presence just appears!

On Halloween, we went to the big trees, the sequoias, and the weather was perfect and cool! There are no words to describe how amazing it was! There is not one scenery that's the same, and not one church and congregation that's been the same! Every program is different, and every host family has been so much fun in their own different ways! It's one crazy ride, but it has been awesome and filled with the Holy Spirit every day!

Love you guys,



Kristen Elder

Date: 10/29/2005

Submitted by: Judy Kergel

Journal Entry:

Yesterday we had our first lock-in, and let me tell ya, it was a blast! We arrived around four, had a potluck, and then we kicked it off with a program! The kids were quite enjoyable and were full of energy! They had DDR going, lots of video games, floor hockey, and karaoke! Around 11:30, everyone came into the sanctuary and we had a time of worship. It was a really nice way to keep ourselves focused on what really matters. It was sad to see the kids go the next day, but knowing we'll be back in the spring makes it all worthwhile!



Judy Kergel

Date: 11/3/2005

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

"Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." (Phil. 4:6)

Tonight was the first night in which we also led small groups besides doing a program. I remember when Jen gave me the news about this night's activities five days in advance, and I freaked out! She said each team member was going to have a small group of youth and that we would each lead a study of our own. Immediately I thought back to my experiences in college and church youth group, but nothing came to me. Unfortunately, the next five days were jam-packed and soon it was Thursday. We were sitting in the church parking lot, and I still had nothing. But, I kept telling myself, do not worry, God will provide. God will make things right. Fortunately, Judy came through for me and we teamed together. We led three sixth graders and had an awesome time and thoughtful conversation. It was definitely one step closer to trusting God in everything and not myself. Another cool ironic point is that the devotion for today in my daily devotional book was on our Bible study topic!



Marta Madsen

Date: 11/5/2005

Submitted by: Rick Schwartz

Journal Entry:

O ye! This is gonna be our busiest week yet. Something else somewhere new every night. Sweet! In other news, California has been everything it's cracked up to be so far. Sure, it's gotten a little cool at times, low 60s. Nothing we can't handle. (Captive Free North East shivers and scowls as they read this.) Mostly we can't wait for the Quake looming on the horizon. That's all I got. See ya later.

Rick



Rick Schwartz

Date: 11/8/2005

Submitted by: Josh Fiting

Journal Entry:

On Saturday, the evening was so much fun. The church had a blow-up

obstacle course that a few of our teammates got to play on. When we were done setting up, of course. On Sunday, Marta, Rick and I got to talk to the junior high kids about our theme verse. The kids also got to ask the three of us questions about team, which was fun.



Josh Fiting

Date: 11/10/2005

Submitted by: Jen Martinez

Journal Entry:

People on the road are so gracious to us! God has shown me so much of what it means to be a part of the body of Christ—a family that networks all over the world. We constantly meet new people always knowing it may be our last time together. Still, they supply us with everything we need—even friendship! There has, however, been a family I have stayed with three times now. The first time we stayed up late chatting and jamming, and I left the next morning sad that our stay was so short. By God's grace, it worked out that a week later, we were in the area and were able to come back. The family was at the door with arms literally held open, and we were welcomed "home." That really made me think about our new meaning of home. This year, the cliché "home is where the heart is" rings true. My home is with my host families, my teammates, and most of all, my King.



Jen Martinez

Date: 11/15/2005

Submitted by: Rick Schwartz

Journal Entry:

Oh man, this weekend's been crazy! We had our first Quake, which actually went really well. We had sound issues on Friday, but amazing Josh got those cleared up. That was also my first time being at a Quake, so that was neat. Hanging out with Bill Yonker and seeing kids from churches we already played for. It was really cool. Judy, at the same time, had to go home for a family emergency. We're not sure when she'll be back, but the van feels weird. Marta took over treasurer responsibilities. We're just gonna have to pray for a safe and speedy return.



Rick Schwartz

Date: 11/15/2005

Submitted by: Travis Thomas

Journal Entry:

Dearest readers,

This is Travis. Well, we just got out of our Northern California Quake. It was great...such great groups. St. Mark's, Grace Lutheran, St. Matthew's...such a great time. We are now heading to Carson City. It's gonna be fun. Fun fun fun McFunerton. Yeah, that's right.

Travis Thomas



Travis Thomas

Date: 11/17/2005

Submitted by: Kristen Elder

Journal Entry:

Our first Quake! For those of you who don't know, the Quake is a weekend event at a hotel full of speakers, special guest bands, and Captive Free! This was the Northern California Quake; we had 360-400 kids! When you work your butt off, God greatly rewards you, and we are living proof! The days before the Quake were so stressful; as Program Coordinator, there was a lot of planning! My team was such a great help! After it started, it ran so smoothly! Jumping around on stage, singing and playing so hard the whole room was filled with God's Spirit! The first time I heard of Captive Free was because of the Quakes, and I have been going to them for years! Being on the other side of things (on Captive Free) was a totally new experience, one that I can't fathom! Bill Yonker was the speaker, and he was amazing. I saw him at the Quake in St. Louis as a youth, and he was so good. Being on the other side, we got to hang out with him in the hospitality room, which was even better! Beth Gearhart, the special musician, was awesome. The weekend was definitely a huge plus, and I'm looking forward to the next to come!



Kristen Elder

Our Judy has had to leave for a family emergency. This is our first time without one of our teammates, and you don't always realize it, but every teammate matters! We miss Judy so much already, and we are praying for her, so keep her in your prayers also!

Four weeks till Christmas Break, and I can't wait to see the family and all my friends in St. Louis! God bless!

Date: 11/17/2005

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

Tonight I had one of the best experiences thus far after a program. I was one of those nights when you are unsure of how well the program is going and went until afterward. There were about a dozen adults at the program, and afterward, they all stayed to visit. The people at this place were amazing! Their hearts are in the right place. Currently, they are without a pastor, but this group is strong. They were such a blessing to visit with, and it was very renewing.



Marta Madsen

Then later that night, I jammed in my host's music room. The highlight was when I was playing the piano and sang "Grace Like Rain," and she improvised a harmony/countermelody on the saxophone. We both had goosebumps when finished, and we realized that the feeling we had was what happens when you praise God and let your heart sing or play to Him!

Date: 11/19/2005

Submitted by: Josh Fiting

Journal Entry:

Saturday was an early morning. We also lost an hour, but we all were excited because we picked up Judy to join the team again. Judy's grandma was very sick, so she went home for a few days. Our team was so excited to get her back. The program was so much better with Judy there. We actually could not sing some of the songs because Judy was the main singer for that song. It is amazing to me how much you lose when one of your singers is not there, but we have her back now, and we are seven strong again.



Josh Fiting

Date: 1/10/2006
Submitted by: Judy Kergel
Journal Entry:

So yesterday was our day off. Let me tell ya...I love those days off! Not that I don't love all the ministry we do; it's just nice to have "chill" days. Yesterday was exciting because we all went to the drive-in movies! Well, we all went minus Trav...he had some laundry to do, which is understandable. Rick and Kristen have never been to the drive-ins before, so it was a very neat experience for the two of them. Yes...I just said neat! Besides that, everything else is going well. We have an exciting week ahead of us in hot Arizona! Always good times! Catch you all later!

Judy



Judy Kergel

Date: 1/10/2006
Submitted by: Kristen Elder
Journal Entry:

It's great to be back on the road!!! Last weekend, we had our first Construction Zone. Construction Zones are for high schoolers; it's this weekend retreat with speakers and awesome live bands and such! Captive Free's job was to just sort of be staff and run errands for people, but we played also. On Saturday night, during worship, some of my teammates and I sat around the room with candles and another chair. We were there for people to pray with. I have never done anything like this, I admit, and I was really nervous. Why would people come to me for prayer? I don't really know them, and for them to come up to me and tell me their problems and worries and hurts, for me to pray for that, it was huge. Well, that was one of the best experiences I have had so far! These young adults just coming up to you and just breaking down in your arms, just needing God. It turned out to be very emotional for me, also. The Holy Spirit was working in me and giving me the words to say to those people. And the cool thing was that the next day, and even now, I think about those people and they are now in my everyday prayers. That experience was so amazing, and I will never forget that!

Since the Zone, things have been good. We're getting ready for our next Event, and that's in two weeks for younger kids. We have had a lot of down time, and that's great to rest and prepare! Tonight we are going to a drive-in theater (my first one), so I'm pretty excited about that; and it's only \$3.50!!! Arizona is beautiful; it's in the 70s outside. Never thought I'd be wearing a skirt and sandals in January. Don't worry—I'm thinking about you guys back home! Love you!

Kristen Elder



Kristen Elder

Date: 1/12/2006
Submitted by: Rick Schwartz
Journal Entry:

Hello dear readers! We are currently in the middle of Arizona. We got pretty busy the end of this week, and we're gonna be working like mad this coming week, but for now, we've had an awesome stay at the last few churches. It's also been really cool going back and revisiting churches with people we already know. Also meeting people at the Zone who said, "You're coming to



our church in a week!" or "Hey, we'll see you in a few days at the Quake!" or stuff like that. We can actually develop some pretty good relationships seeing people two or three times. It's been really good for us. God has just been super to us via Arizona. And...that's all I have for you guys. I will talk to you later. All right.

Rick

Date: 1/14/2006

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

Being on the road with a team of ministers is pretty amazing. I have been through so many adventures, and the year is barely half complete! However, being on the road for one year, away from home, also means you will face trials. One of the most difficult things about this year is missing out on life at home. Whether it be weddings, seriously ill family members, family reunions, other special once-in-a-lifetime occasions, or even simple evening activities you know you would be doing if you were home that you are absent from, it is difficult to miss the life at home. I rarely find comfort in picking up the Bible and just flipping to any page, but this time I did! I turned to James 1:2-4. I found encouragement in these words: "My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing."

For anyone that faces trials of any kind—in relationships, self-esteem, weaknesses, etc.—look at it as an opportunity to grow in endurance and to seek for positive reasons. Find joy in what you do have and are experiencing. "Consider trials nothing but joy."



Marta Madsen

Date: 1/16/2006

Submitted by: Travis Thomas

Journal Entry:

Dearest Internet Readers of this here journal entry,

Howdy. This is Travis. We are out here in Arizona partying. We just finished a Zone, which was super cool! Now we are going to drive circles around Arizona for a while. I'm dizzy already. We have our Phoenix Quake coming up soon. You better be ready.

See you soon,
Travis



Travis Thomas

Date: 1/18/2006

Submitted by: Jen Martinez

Journal Entry:

Ever since we stepped outside our van in AZ, I knew we had to be the luckiest team to be able to spend our winter in the sun! The first thing we did when we got here was slip into tanks and shorts. Kristen and I took advantage of the heat and decided on a jog. Our host family lived on the side of a mountain, perfect view over the town. After about a mile we found a fantastic view and sat right in the middle of the road. K-dawg and I decided that if you ignored the cars, it looked like Jurassic Park when they first entered in a helicopter. I almost expected a herbivorous dino to pop over the trees. Man, it was



Jen Martinez

pretty sweet that God got to see the dinosaurs, the flood, the annexation of Puerto Rico...he was there for the births of all 21 of the Bach's children, and now He's watching me hang out in the middle of the road, contemplating the wonders of the universe. God has been there for everything and will be there for everything. Why do we insist on putting our trust in anything less than Him?

Date: 1/18/2006

Submitted by: Josh Fiting

Journal Entry:

So, on Wednesday or Thursday (note: Josh can't remember what day it was, actually), we had the opportunity to get up before the sun did. When we got to the church, we did not have time to set up fully, so we did our chapel acoustic. We also threw in a new song and skit. Well, actually, we just switched the skit around and pretended like it was a new idea.
Shhhhhhhhhhh!

Josh



Josh Fiting

Date: 1/21/2006

Submitted by: Jen Martinez

Journal Entry:

So, Quake #2 is over—sadly only...five?...left...it seems I could hang out with Quakers forever. I would have to say that one of my biggest downfalls is always being the center of attention, which then makes the relational ministry about myself instead of all the kiddies around me. My reality check came Saturday when a leader whom I had seen but never met before handed me a note which changed my whole outlook on the weekend. It read:

"I don't even know your name...but feel so compelled to share with you...When storms arise in your life, know that this very night you radiated God's message of Love to me."

I had let my pride take over once again and focused instead on what I could offer people. But this had nothing to do with my personality, my bass playing, my appearance, or anything else about me but the God in me, and solely that. It still amazes me that through my wretched pride and insufficiencies, my wonderful God still uses me, a sinner, to bring glory to his name. Thank you, Kris, for bringing me conviction and encouragement tonight. Through a letter, God managed to change my life!

In His Embrace,
Jen Martinez



Jen Martinez

Date: 1/24/2006

Submitted by: Travis Thomas

Journal Entry:

This is Travis in AZ, which is short for Arizona. We are heading for California. Here we come...I had an amazing time at the Phoenix Quake and met some awesome people from the sweater church. Oh, good times...

See you soon
Travis



Date: 1/31/2006
Submitted by: Marta Madsen
Journal Entry:

Deuteronomy 15:7-8

"If there is among you anyone in need, a member of your community...do not be hard-hearted or tight-fisted toward your needy neighbor. You should rather open your hand, willingly lending enough to meet the need, whatever it may be."



Marta Madsen

Today is Tuesday, and unusually, also our day off. It was also one of the best days off I could have! I stayed in Salem, OR with a wonderful family who "opened their hands" and were willing to "lend enough to meet my needs." My day was a wonderful mixture of personal time, work time, adventure, and family time! It began with a walk to Wal-Mart. This was a wonderful time to think and just be away. Then I packed a lunch and walked in the rain to my host sister's school to visit her classroom and join her for lunch. It was fun to be surrounded by fourth graders and to be someone's special guest! We walked home from school together, sharing an umbrella but still getting soaked.

Once home, we played games while sipping on some hot chocolate. We also had time to be artsy, so we created our own Valentine's Day cards. The day continued on with wonderful conversations and hang-out time.

Lately, I've needed to feel special, to feel productive, to feel rest, and to feel needed. Today my needs were met by an amazing family of four. God's peace and blessings to those who meet the needs of neighbors, whether they know it or not. All it takes is open hands to lift someone up to a higher place.

Date: 2/2/2006
Submitted by: Josh Fiting
Journal Entry:

So, I was supposed to have a journal last Thursday before our Zone, but I forgot to turn one in (this is me laughing nervously). So, because of this dilemma, I am going to tell you about Monday when we went to a college. Our team got to play a few worship songs and Marta did her sharing for the first time. Hooray, hooray! The college was fun because we got to eat lunch there, too. The college had chicken strips. Mmmmm, chicken. I love chicken. Mmmmm, chicken. They also had chocolate milk. Mmmmm, chocolate milk. I love chocolate milk. Mmmmm, chocolate.



Josh Fiting

Date: 2/7/2006
Submitted by: Jen Martinez
Journal Entry:

So...today was our day off...a wonderful day of rest where we typically choose what we do, don't live by a schedule, and give our voices and instrument fingers a break. But for the West Coast team, it's a day for shopping and sightseeing in Seattle! For me, it was a day of facing my greatest fear: fish. There's this place in Seattle called the Pike's Market, which is famous for its fish tossing antics. My loving and caring team has made it their personal goal to scare the fear out of me. So Judy and Kristen led me toward the Pike's Market. In the Bible, the most repeated command is "Do not fear," so I think I have to



Jen Martinez

give credit to God for what came next. Kristen wanted to have her picture taken with a four-foot pike, so I stayed well away. I was trying not to even look at Kristen and the fish (because I have been known to hyperventilate at the sight of real fish) when I heard the creepy salesman say "Chase her with it." I snapped my head in his direction, thinking that there was no way my own teammate would chase me with a fish—but indeed, I saw her coming after me with the four-foot pike. I immediately took off running and screaming and crying until Kristen finally put the fish down. By now there was quite a crowd of people. Thinking my nightmare was over, I stood behind a pole, trying to get my footing again. I was sooo wrong. The creepy salesman threatened to throw the fish at me if I walked away. So I made him a compromise: I would hold the fish if he wouldn't throw it at me. So, I took two deep breaths as he placed a huge fish in my hands. My psychological reaction is usually to cry uncontrollably, and this was no different, except I had a laughing salesman in my face, a crowd of people, and teammates snapping pictures. I ended up tossing the fish out of my hands. This is just a small example of how society plays on our fears. We work a lot because we are told our life will be hard if we don't have money. We are told we must find love to be happy. And we are convinced that if we don't follow society's rules, we may live as outcasts. I don't know about you, but I am going to continue to encounter fish in order to break my paralyzing fear...but more importantly, I want to battle the fear society places on us.

Date: 2/9/2006

Submitted by: Kristen Elder

Journal Entry:

Today we drove up the Oregon coast. If you have not seen the Oregon coast, it's where there are giant cliffs and huge rocks, and you can see the ocean hit against the rocks, and there are huge lighthouses! When I was a kid, I only saw this in movies! It was the most beautiful thing I have ever seen! A huge God moment; it has been so pretty! We had a lock-in that night also, and that was pretty fun to do. Things have been really good the past few days; we also got to experience the huge aquarium in Oregon, the one where Free Willy stayed. It was really fun. God has blessed us so much coming in contact with the kindest people to stay with and to let us experience extra things like the aquarium!

P.S.—Keep us in your prayers!

Kristen Elder



Kristen Elder

Date: 2/11/2006

Submitted by: Judy Kergel

Journal Entry:

So last night we had a lock-in in Newport, OR. There were only a few kids there, but it was a really fun time. A few of us were sick, but we still gave those kids our all, and they seemed like they really enjoyed themselves. I was super happy because I felt as if I connected pretty well with a couple of the kids, which is always a fun time.

Today we had the opportunity to be served by youth. We had a spaghetti dinner and got to watch a movie. We also got to play on those scooter things that you sit on and wheel around on. So, of course, being the mature Captive Free members that we are, we had races!! So yeah, it was a pretty fun weekend, full of memories and scooter fun! Catch you all soon!

Judy



Judy Kergel

Date: 2/14/2006
Submitted by: Rick Schwartz
Journal Entry:

So, today is Valentine's Day. Yep. Yes it is. So the girls decked out the van (as they have a habit of doing) for said V-Day. So it's a pretty white van with pink and red hearts taped up in the windows. And the Valentine Fairy (not to be outdone by Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny) left us all little pink paper bags filled with chocolate, a Fruit Rollup, and a personalized gift. It was very thoughtful of them. I mean, the Fairy. Outlook on this week: pretty sweet. We're going to Boe (South Central) and Ty's (North East) church. Plus, Montana is the only state in our region we have yet to visit. And...I'm done. Bye.



Rick Schwartz

Date: 2/16/2006
Submitted by: Marta Madsen
Journal Entry:

In David's Psalm of praise, found in 2 Samuel 22:44, he writes, "People whom I had not known served me..."

On this Thursday night, I felt served. Tonight was one of those rare occasions when our ministry is purely housing. I was actually able to arrive at a house and meet my host family before 9 or 10 p.m. We had the entire evening to hang out and bless one another with amazing conversations and insight from each other's lives. The conversations went beyond the normal questions as we actually delved into each other's lives and shared opinions and perspectives about life experiences. Kristen and I were housed together, and after leaving this one night stay, we felt refreshed and blessed to have connected so well with yet more of God's amazing servants!



Marta Madsen

Date: 2/18/2006
Submitted by: Josh Fiting
Journal Entry:

So I got to stay with Boe's (from South Central) family on Saturday. It meant so much to stay with a fellow team member's family. I also got to meet Ty's (North East) family. Soon everyone came over to Boe's house, and we got to share stories. It was cool to see Ty's brother because they are so much alike. I felt really blessed to be able to have met such wonderful people.



Josh Fiting

Date: 2/23/2006
Submitted by: Jen Martinez
Journal Entry:

So...I learn a lot of things on the road. Here's the top three things I've learned this week.

1. We have a good God who unconditionally loves humanity as we are (I can't do it).
2. If you eat enough sour Ice Breakers, it will make your tongue raw.
3. Friends are an amazing gift and are easily taken for granted...make



Jen Martinez

every moment with them count because you'll never get it back!

Jen Martinez

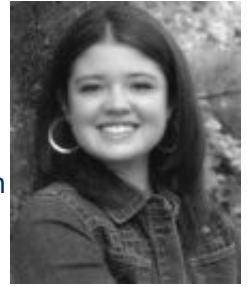
Date: 2/25/2006

Submitted by: Kristen Elder

Journal Entry:

So we have had some time off for a few days. We had a team outing just a few days ago; we played Sardines (a form of Hide and Go Seek) in the church and Family Feud! It's been pretty relaxing for the past days! Saturday night we had a church service that was going to be taped to go on TV the next morning! So that was pretty exciting; we were on TV!! Otherwise, things have been going great. It's beautiful in Montana, and God is good all the time! And all the time, God is good!

Kristen Elder



Kristen Elder

Date: 2/28/2006

Submitted by: Travis Thomas

Journal Entry:

(Submitted via mail packet on a paper towel)

Dearest Readers,

It is I, Travis Thomas, and you're probably asking yourself, "What is Travis doing in Montana?" And the answer's easy: talkin' about Jesus Christ, makin' egg sandwiches, and havin' good times! If you need to know more about this, visit my website: www.youthencounter.org.

Peace, and I'll see you in the stars!
Travis



Travis Thomas

Date: 3/1/2006

Submitted by: Judy Kergel

Journal Entry:

Today we went to a women's correctional facility, and it was pretty darn awesome! You never know what to expect when going to a place like this, and it turned out to be a very rewarding experience. I know that I was touched by the faith these women had. They were the best audience we've had so far! It was just super-inspiring to see all of them and the joy they had, despite their circumstances. Overall, it was a very refreshing experience.



Judy Kergel

Date: 3/4/2006

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

It is Saturday of the Butte Quake. Josh and I did our Stand on the Rock Bible study Trek. For our second Trek, only one girl came. Victoria is in sixth grade and totally made this two-on-one time awesome! At first, I was bummed that

hardly anyone showed at our Trek, but the informality of hanging out with one youth was super exciting and, in the end, very rewarding. Feeling that much more connected with her made each time I saw her later on pretty cool.

I'd also have to say that it was very enjoyable hanging out with the group from Hope Lutheran. They were super fun! They were even a blast to watch from the stage! They totally rocked out the front row.

All in all, I felt that at this Quake, I was able to connect with the most people. It is a pretty good feeling.



Marta Madsen

Date: 3/7/2006

Submitted by: Josh Fiting

Journal Entry:

So the three boys, including myself, got to go to this awesome house, where we each got our own bedroom and bathroom downstairs. It was nice to just crash for a bit since we have kind of been sick lately. The house had an elevator. Yes, an elevator, and I actually got to ride in it. It was the first house I've stayed in on the road that had such a thing. The house was also super coolest because it had two cats that actually liked me. One of them even sat on my lap as the TV was running.



Josh Fiting

Date: 3/25/2006

Submitted by: Rick Schwartz

Journal Entry:

So, right now we are at the Vegas Quake. I'd like to tell you about it, but as everyone knows, what happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas.



Rick Schwartz

Date: 3/28/2006

Submitted by: Kristen Elder

Journal Entry:

What can I say? God is so good, like always! This journal is not for one specific day but for the past weeks because they have been a blast! Marta, Judy and I went horseback riding on the Oregon Coast up the Sand Dunes, a memory never to be forgotten! The past few Quakes we've done have been so amazing, from Butte, Montana to Eugene, Oregon, then Las Vegas!! We connected with the kids so well each time, it's like, "We don't want to leave; it has just been such a great time."



Kristen Elder

This past day off, we stayed with the greatest people, Fran and Earl, 60 miles from Las Vegas. Earl reminded me so much of my grandfather. We had such a good time! "Thank you" doesn't seem to be enough sometimes; we just appreciate it so much. It's so amazing to see the different places God puts us in for different reasons, and how He puts these people in our lives to stay in contact with them for as long as forever! When I write these journals, sometimes I have so much to say but can't get it all on paper! I just feel so blessed to be doing this ministry. I feel like I sometimes say the same things over and over again! But, oh well! God is good!

Kristen Elder

Date: 3/28/2006
Submitted by: Marta Madsen
Journal Entry:

Today I left a wonderful family in Pahrump, Nevada, and arrived in Bishop, California to meet another wonderful family. There was a piano in my room, which I was instantly drawn to. I sat down and played a few songs, and then my host mom got some praise music out of her bag. We sang a few songs together, including one of my favorites, "Shout to the Lord." There really is nothing like uniting voices to sing praises to the Lord. It was awesome! Later that night, I enjoyed trying chicken liver for the first time, as well as listening to miraculous stories from a former law enforcement officer.



Marta Madsen

"Sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with thanksgiving in your hearts."—Colossians 3:16

Date: 3/30/2006
Submitted by: Josh Fiting
Journal Entry:

So, we got to rock out with the kids at Minder, Nevada. After we rocked out, a few of us played hockey and dodgeball. It was intense. I got a small black shiner in the hockey game. But just make sure you keep that on the DL.



Josh Fiting

Date: 4/1/2006
Submitted by: Travis Thomas
Journal Entry:

This is a journal. I think I'm gonna write a song about it...

Journals, journals are on the computer
Looking you in the face
Can't erase
The journals, journals coming to get you
In the night
To bring crazy to town.



Travis Thomas

So anyway, we are in San Jose, my hometown. It's a good time. We are going to play my church on Sunday. Good times.

Date: 4/8/2006
Submitted by: Judy Kergel
Journal Entry:

Hello everyone! Right now we're in sunny Sunnyvale, CA! I must tell you all about this wonderful story that happened to us. So, we were unloading for our program, and I went outside to grab more stuff and heard this little dog barking. I turned my head and saw this adorable Chihuahua! So, of course, I went up to the little guy (Editor's note: Not recommended behavior), and he was very friendly. Anywho, ends up that one of the kids, Matt, who goes to this church said that he has seen this dog wandering the streets for a couple weeks now! Now this was just unacceptable to me, and my mission was to find Theodore (yeah, I named him) a home! So we did our program, Teddy running around and everything, and he ended up going home with the young man Matt and his family! He is still there today,



Judy Kergel

and reports say that he is an excellent dog and has only peed in the house a couple of times (yay!). So that was my story for all y'all. I hope you enjoyed it; I know that it brought a smile to my heart!

Peace out!
Judy

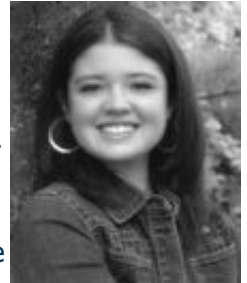
Date: 4/10/2006

Submitted by: Kristen Elder

Journal Entry:

We had a concert at Travis's church the night before we went home for Easter Break! I was so pleased to look up and see my Aunt Marsha, her Joshua, his wife Jessica, and their new baby Josiah! It was such a blessing for them to come and see what I have been doing for the past eight months. The last time I had seen Joshua was when I was two years old, and now I got to meet his wife and new baby. That was one of those times where nothing could have made my day more. I appreciated it so much and felt so awesome! I love when God places things in your life at just the right moments when you need them the most!

Kristen



Kristen Elder

Date: 4/20/2006

Submitted by: Rick Schwartz

Journal Entry:

Okay, folks, here's the deal. Life is peachy, we just got back from break, and California is gorgeous. Now I elaborate. So we all flew back in and bunked with Trav's parents, which is always an amazing time. Yeah, it really just is. And just to make sure we didn't get too fat and lazy, we had a program the next night. Unlike our after Christmas program, during which I almost forgot a couple of the songs, this one went beautifully. Now we're at yet another church, and these guys are awesome! They've got a whole laser tag set-up and all that jazz. So for not having been back for very long, things are very good. Break was a good rest, but it's just as good being back and refreshed.



Rick Schwartz

Date: 4/22/2006

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

Jen and I had an awesome time tonight in Madera, CA! We were able to enjoy an amazing Italian meal at di Cicco's! The fresh warm bread was delicious. When we got home, we had a splendid time looking at pictures from Africa. Our host parents went on a cool safari and saw lots of wild animals! It was neat because my sister has been to Tanzania, too.

Later, before bed, I had a chance to check e-mail and write an update to my boyfriend back home. The next morning, I went on a walk, and the neighborhood was so inspiring. The landscaping was beautiful, the flowers were in bloom, and the snails were alive! Overall, it was a thoroughly enjoyable Saturday evening spent with some fun host parents.

Marta



Marta Madsen

Date: 4/25/2006
Submitted by: Josh Fiting
Journal Entry:

So, on Tuesday we got to do a chapel with the kids. It was neat to see familiar faces again. Some of the kids had seen us and remembered us from the first time we were there. It also was fun because we turned one of our puppet shows into a skit. In the skit, Marta had to stand on the rock. Can you guess who the rock was?

This would be the time you guess which one of us was the rock.

If you guessed Travis Thomas, you would be correct. Well, peace out and God bless.
--Josh



Josh Fiting

Date: 4/27/2006
Submitted by: Jen Martinez
Journal Entry:

Before every sermon I give on the road, I always give a prelude of my pastoral experience, or lack thereof, in case people mistake me for someone who actually has been educationally equipped to teach. Truthfully, it's also a safety net in case someone disagrees; they can't get too mad at me because I've had no formal training. But if people agree, then no glory can go to me for possessing some kind of wisdom. So it's a pretty win-win situation.

I just went to the bathroom really quickly, and I completely forgot where this journal was going. This is a prime—(Editor's note: The top of the next page is ripped off. Oh, Jen. The journal picks up again here.) That's pretty cool to know for a fact that I am a loser without my beautiful Lord.

Jen Martinez



Jen Martinez

Date: 5/2/2006
Submitted by: Kristen Elder
Journal Entry:

Hey!!!

I am still having fun, getting burnt to a crisp in the sweet West Coast sun!! Setting new routines like walking every day. Oh yes, God is in my heart to stay!! Thank you for your prayers along the way. I love you all so much...hey hey hey!!



Kristen Elder

Date: 5/2/2006
Submitted by: Rick Schwartz
Journal Entry:

So we've had a fairly laid back week so far. That's always nice. But today we're working all day, rehearsing and stuff. The only really big thing this week was the Carman concert the other day. Jen, Josh and I thought it would be fun to check out. It was nice to be able to sit back and let someone else

lead the service. Not to say we weren't analyzing the thing. "Would this be a need song? There was no glue there! What's happening?!" Yeah. I guess tomorrow's gonna be crazy. Right now, we're just enjoying Nevada, right down the street from the strip. So, uh, I'm gonna go rehearse and enjoy the summer weather here. Later.



Rick Schwartz

Date: 5/4/2006

Submitted by: Judy Kergel

Journal Entry:

So today we drove to Barstow. It's cool being places where you have been before—gives you a sense of normalcy. It is very hot in Barstow! Me and Kristen are very badly sun-burned right now, so aloe is a good thing. A few teammates are going to a Carman concert tonight. I can't believe he's still around, but hey, rock on, Carman!



Judy Kergel

The rest of us hit up Wal-Mart, always good times there. As Kristen said, the girls have started walking daily, so we bought these cute workout outfits...yay!! We didn't have a program tonight, but we are headed to Vegas for some more sweet times with some Quake kids. So that's that, not that exciting, but hey...sometimes you need the "chill" days!

Peace out!
Judy

Date: 5/5/2006

Submitted by: Travis Thomas

Journal Entry:

Hey you.

This is Travis, in Long Beach, California, riding on a boat, eating at the Clam Jumper, and watching rock superstars Blue Steel. Yeah, you know. See you on the road.

Travis



Travis Thomas

Date: 5/9/2006

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." (1 John 3:1)

We had a beautiful drive to Salt Lake City today! Tonight we were housed at a church with wonderful people! We had some extra time, so Kristen, Judy and I went to Supercuts to get some new styles! Our hair dresser, Denise, was incredibly nice! We enjoyed spending a couple of hours with her. Kristen was able to donate her hair to Locks of Love at the local children's place. We enjoyed our time so much at Supercuts, that we even took a picture with Denise!



Marta Madsen

Besides Denise, there was a custodian at the church, Brad, who kept close watch over us as we stayed in the church. We were blessed to meet more children of God on the

road!

Date: 5/30/2006

Submitted by: Kristen Elder

Journal Entry:

So, God just puts people in your life for the right reason right at the perfect times! First off, I love the kids in Camby, Oregon and plan on moving out there with them because they were amazing! Lisa too! I just stayed with a lady named Betty that was totally one of the coolest places I've been yet! We laughed and cried and had a wonderful time talking about how the Spirit moves. It was amazing!

Kristen Elder



Kristen Elder

Date: 6/6/2006

Submitted by: Rick Schwartz

Journal Entry:

Hello, loyal readers and dedicated fan base. Welcome to the next installment of the West Coast Journal! We join the team as they are embarking on their first VBS (Vacation Bible School) of the season. Actually, I'm really looking forward to VBS season. It'll be nice to stay with the same bunch of kids long enough to get to know them. So far, it's been good. Music. Games. Snack. It's almost inspiring how little kids attach themselves. So, we're in Yuma, Colorado, if you didn't know that. And Jen has been...delayed getting back from Memorial Day weekend, so it'll be good having her back with us again. Oh yeah, and it's Miller Season. Not Miller Time. Miller Season, like the moth. I've never seen so many moths in one place! Compounded with my not liking bugs in the least, the miller moth shall be my greatest adversary for the next week. Gross. All right, keep on keepin' on. I'll talk to y'all later. Pax!

Rick



Rick Schwartz

Date: 6/8/2006

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

This was our first VBS, and I am loving it! I love the music, games, structure, people, and kids! It is awesome to see and feel the excitement the children bring every morning.

Little kids' innocence just thrills me! For example, the pastor this morning read the Scripture, and each Scripture for the week begins with "You..." So, this morning he asks, "What does 'you' stand for?" And one child yells out, "Yuma!" It was so adorable! (Yuma, CO is where we are staying.)

Anyway, this week definitely has me excited to teach when I get home!

P.S.—Check out our Yuma, CO VBS pictures on our [online photo album](#)!



Marta Madsen

Date: 6/10/2006

Submitted by: Josh Fiting
Journal Entry:

So, Saturday was sad because we had to leave Yuma, Colorado. The VBS that week was so much fun. Yuma, you guys are awesome. Saturday, we had another long, long, long drive. It was exciting, though, because we are back in Wheat Ridge, doing another VBS. We have been to Wheat Ridge twice before this. Well, the time has come to say goodbye. See you real soon.



Josh Fiting

Date: 6/13/2006
Submitted by: Travis Thomas
Journal Entry:

Hey out there, Travis in here. I'm in Wheat Ridge, Colorado, and it's a beautiful place. Having fun doing VBS. We just saw the movie "Cars"—go see it now!! It's a good time.

Big Gulps, huh? Well, see you later.

Travis



Travis Thomas

Date: 6/15/2006
Submitted by: Jen Martinez
Journal Entry:

Hey friends/acquaintances/carny workers,

Today was the end of my first full VBS in Wheat Ridge, Colorado. VBS is a whole new experience for me...I've never had much experience with kids, except once when I babysat and that was no fun, but we won't talk about that. Let's just say I'm still runnin'. I really, really, really liked the preschoolers this year. It was a good week with them, lotsa fun stories; call me if you wanna hear my story. You're great, people. Much love.

The one who doesn't want to write,
Jen Martinez



Jen Martinez

Date: 6/17/2006
Submitted by: Kristen Elder
Journal Entry:

So, I love being on the road! Every time I was at home, I ran into someone I knew whenever I went out—WalMart, out eating somewhere. Being in a region where I don't know anyone, sometimes I still look for familiar faces, but of course I never see anyone I know. My host family and I were at Cold Stone Creamery (an ice cream place), and I ran into a girl (one of my Junior Guides) that was at the Las Vegas Quake. I was so surprised, and we talked a little. She is a counselor at a Christian camp, and I was just so pleased to see her! It is awesome how God puts people in the right place at the right time! It's so amazing!

Otherwise, VBS is awesome, and the kids have been such a blast!

Kristen Elder



Kristen Elder

Date: 6/20/2006
Submitted by: Judy Kergel
Journal Entry:

So this week we are in Flagstaff, Arizona, and it is HOT! So hot that there are actually fires in the distance! Hopefully, the firefighters will take care of that. On a lighter note, the kids this week are pretty sweet. Some of us get to actually teach the classes, and I got the fourth and fifth graders! I was a little nervous going into it, but the results were awesome, and it brought back memories of when I was in fifth grade! So, so far it's going very well—there are some amazing kids here!! Everything else is going well; we're headed to Cali next week, so that should be fun! Yay Cali!

I'll catch you all later! Peace out!



Judy Kergel

Date: 6/23/2006
Submitted by: Marta Madsen
Journal Entry:

This morning the team circled up with some host families to pray before our three-hour drive. This was a super emotional time for me! First of all, prayers often make me cry, but I was also very sad to leave Flagstaff and my host family. Sometimes I don't realize how special they are or how much I've connected to my host families until I leave. They're one of those families that I'd like to invite to my wedding someday. Some things I enjoyed doing with them include water balloon tosses, swimming pool races, shopping, and visiting! I truly hope to see this family again in my life!



Marta Madsen

Date: 6/27/2006
Submitted by: Josh Fiting
Journal Entry:

On Tuesday, we were doing a VBS in Dana Point. The kids were so awesome. Some of the kids screamed into the wireless mic on a few songs. In fact, they were so good at it that on Saturday when Rick, Travis and I were doing music, the mic was so loud outside in the game area that Kristen had to come check to make sure everything was okay. It was pretty fun, good times. I also got owned in Mario Kart thanks to my wonderful host brother, Christian. But it's okay. I'm okay with it now. He even beat me at the tracks that I'm supposed to be good at...

Hang on, I need a moment...

...

So, after dinner, Jen, Christian, and I played in the waves on a cement slab down by the bay. I kind of got Christian back a little bit for beating me so bad in Mario Kart. As the big wave came up on the cement, I hid behind Christian and he got soaking wet and blocked the wave from hitting me. This is me laughing right now.



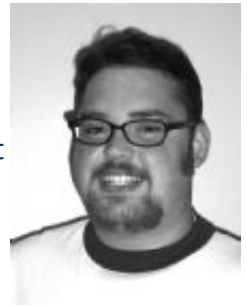
Josh Fiting

Date: 6/30/2006
Submitted by: Travis Thomas
Journal Entry:

(submitted to the office on single-ply toilet paper)

So, I'm in Dana Point, and I'm sick. I'm not doing too hot...well, my temp is 101...runny nose, ache, and sore throat. I had to go to the doc and two IVs because I was dehydrated, but on the up side, I watched 18 movies in the last four days. Well, see you soon. Hope you're doing better than me.

Peace and see you in the stars,
Travis



Travis Thomas

Date: 7/4/2006

Submitted by: Kristen Elder

Journal Entry:

Whoo hoo, Fourth of July! Back home, it is so humid and hot. We are in sunny California right now in San Jose, staying with Travis's family at his house! Today we went to a barbeque at his aunt's house; how fun was that! Some of his family had remembered us from before, so we felt right at home! Later that evening, we went to see fireworks with just us (the team), which was a good time...It is so fun sometimes just to go out with the other people on the team and go spend time together laughing and making tons of memories we'll never forget! Good times, as I say, oh good times!!

I love team and I love you!

Peace out,
Kristen Elder



Kristen Elder

Date: 7/8/2006

Submitted by: Rick Schwartz

Journal Entry:

Today's a drive day. Though I hear it won't be long. This past week has been really good for us. It's been super nice to just chill with Travis's parents and have, essentially, a week off to recharge. However, I'm so looking forward to next week. It's gonna be so awesome hanging out at a camp for a week, doing campfires and all that whatnot. Yeah. Sorry this hain't been terribly long. Ye caught me on an off week.



Rick Schwartz

Date: 7/10/2006

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

This week we are staying at a Lutheran Bible camp. We have the opportunity to relax, hang out, and lead various activities. Today we got to run the Slip and Slide! It was fun to watch the campers go down the soapy tarp, as well as test it out myself! We also managed the homemade ice cream station! It was exciting to relive childhood memories.

Being at this camp was an awesome way to serve those who are constantly serving, as well as to learn new songs and games. It also ended up being a neat chance to be served—the counselors, staff, and campers gave a lot to us, too! As two separate organizations, it is neat to come together as one Body of Christ and to share in praise and worship.



Marta Madsen

Date: 7/13/2006
Submitted by: Josh Fiting
Journal Entry:

So we went to this boardwalk thingy in Santa Cruz. It had lots of crazy rides, including this Ghost Riders ride that Jen and I went on together. It was kind of like the Buzz Lightyear ride at Disneyland, where you get to shoot things with your plastic laser guns. Except this one was a lot scarier. Things jump out at you. Yes, jump out. Every time this happened, Jen and I would scream. We screamed so much that we could not stop laughing. I think there was a point in time where we both stopped shooting for, like, 20 seconds.

In case you are wondering, Jen beat me. She had, like, 100 more points than I did. I am okay with that now.



Josh Fiting

Date: 7/15/2006
Submitted by: Travis Thomas
Journal Entry:

This, My Journal.

Hi, I'm Travis, and I'm in the beautiful state of California and am still alive. We are in Santa Clarita having fun. So, yeah. Any questions, e-mail me at westcoast@youthencounter.org.

Peace.



Travis Thomas

Date: 7/20/2006
Submitted by: Kristen Elder
Journal Entry:

This week, we had a VBS of 300 kids! It was crazy! Today our host families took us to Universal Studios Hollywood! We had so much fun! Talk about amazing host families! There's no other word to describe them—amazing!

It's coming down to the wire. The West Coast team 05-06 is almost done, and it is gonna be a hard goodbye! It's been so amazing this VBS season; I've gotten to know so many kids that I will always stay in contact with. That's awesome.

Until my last and final journal, I love the West Coast!

Kristen Elder



Kristen Elder

Date: 7/22/2006
Submitted by: Judy Kergel
Journal Entry:

Well, hey there, everyone! Today we are traveling to Reedley, CA. This past week, we had an amazing VBS in Santa Clarita. There were around 300 kids there!! It felt like a Quake; the energy was awesome! Speaking of awesome, our host families rocked the house! It's so amazing to be able to connect with

a host family so well. However, saying goodbye is never fun. The Watsons are an amazing family!! And let me tell ya, it's impossible to beat a four-year-old at Battleship...they will always win! I also got to learn how to drive stick shift (thanks, teammate)! So, all in all, it was an awesome VBS that I will never forget!



Judy Kergel

Date: 7/25/2006

Submitted by: Jen Martinez

Journal Entry:

So it's Tuesday. I definitely went to the beach today with the most amazing people—my Santa Clarita family! If you know me, you know that I loooove the beach...and definitely not for the guys in Speedos, but for the huge waves! So, I was the first in the water, and the last one out...I was in so long my lips were wrinkly—kinda like after you have five bags of popcorn and you lick each bag afterward. So, that's why I like the beach. Oh, and it was Ventura Beach—home of Hulk Hogan. That's my story. Eat your heart out, Spielberg.



Jen Martinez

Love, unconditionally and forever, always, till the end of time,
Jen Martinez

Date: 7/27/2006

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

Today at VBS, we decided to try a new song for sing-alongs! It ended up being a blast because it is a song in which we take suggestions from the kids for things to do for the Lord. We had kids biking, skiing, jumping, driving, dancing, marching, singing, etc. for the Lord. They had ownership of the song, and we were able to be crazy for almost 15 minutes straight!



Marta Madsen

Later, we had our closing VBS program and potluck. It is so neat to have the children share all the songs they have learned, and to look out and see all the proud parents and grandparents. "The things we teach a child today will shape all of his tomorrows." I truly hope the songs we taught and the daily themes will stick with the children and shape their lives.

Date: 8/11/2006

Submitted by: Marta Madsen

Journal Entry:

*Oh, what I would do to have the kind of faith
It takes to step out of this boat of mine
Onto the crashing waves
Step out of my comfort zone
Into the realm of the unknown where Jesus is
And he's holding out his hand...*



Marta Madsen

--"Voice of Truth" by Casting Crowns

This year was definitely a year to step out of my boat and onto the crashing waves of the unknown. Leaving the love of my life, Jason, leaving familiarity of home and family, finding my own faith story, dealing with change and initiating conversations with strangers all contribute to the crashing waves of my year on Captive Free.

It was definitely a year to challenge myself and, within this challenge, trust God. Some challenges I faced were having confidence that I have testimonies to share, growing in my own faith, personality conflicts with teammates and even accepting the call to serve others in this ministry. With God's helping hand, I have completed an amazing year with six other wonderful teammates who may at times contribute to the challenges, but also supported and encouraged me through them.

This last week was probably our busiest on the road, but so many memorable moments still occurred. At one of our programs, I convinced myself to do the sharing. I had this sharing since training, but had never shared it because it never came together for me. That night, I felt compelled to share my experience at the SD State Penitentiary chapel service, and although I cried, God still helped me get through it.

Later this week, the team was able to stay at a house on a lake. We had just completed an affirmation session, and some teammates wrote about my goofy/crazy/fun side that I feel they hardly ever see, so I had lots of gumption to try the rope swing into the lake! We had lots of fun hanging out at this beautiful place. In fact, we wanted to buy the house and use it for our team reunions! Later that night, Judy and I slept out on the trampoline! Talk about a bad night's rest!

Finally, at the end of the week, we were able to do a program at my church. Since it was our second to last program, we decided everyone would have slightly longer glues or mini-sharings. This created a very emotional, inspirational, and moving program as everyone shared a piece of information from our year on the road. It was neat to hear everyone share from their heart that night.

At times, the year was extremely difficult. I almost felt like a whole year of my life was taken away from me. While I did miss life at home, I did answer a call to live my life for Jesus in a different way this year. We are all called to be ambassadors for Christ, whether we exhibit this in our communities or travel the world; everyone needs to know and feel the love of Christ. I am thoroughly excited to go home and see how I can serve and minister in Lincoln, NE!

Marta
