

# Captive Free West Lakes 2005-06 Journal

**Date:** 9/22/2005

**Submitted by:** Todd Ebling

**Journal Entry:**

We had quite an adventure today. We pulled our van into the church a little bit before we were scheduled, and in less than three minutes a man approached. His name was James. He asked if we were Christians, and you could see in his eyes that he needed someone to be there for him. Christopher and I got out to talk to him, and within minutes and through many tears, he told us about his alcoholism, how his wife just kicked him out of his house, and how he was contemplating suicide. We told him that Christ loves him and that there is nothing he can do, no matter how bad it seems, that can separate him from that love. The pastor of the church came shortly and talked to him for some time. Everything got sorted out eventually. The pastor told us that James has a history with alcohol, but that he said he was very grateful for our help. Christ put this awesome ministry opportunity before our team, and through Him I feel that we made a difference. Christ alone makes those who are broken whole again.

With a Smile in Christ,  
Todd



**Todd Ebling**

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**Date:** 9/24/2005

**Submitted by:** Shari Trotter

**Journal Entry:**

Wow, what an amazing journey this has already been. We have had so much fun! There have been so many opportunities to serve. Friday night, we sang at a dinner for the less fortunate. I felt so helpless singing about how great God was. Who was I to tell them that God was so amazing when I had it so easy? After dinner, several of the people came up to our team and thanked us for what we had sung. Our music, something that will become so routine for us, meant so much to them. What an awesome opportunity we have to share with all types of people. It's nice to remember that we are not helpless because God is in control. He will speak through us even when we are silent.

In Him,  
Shari



**Shari Trotter**

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**Date:** 9/29/2005

**Submitted by:** Chris Sibley

**Journal Entry:**

I am so happy to be writing you guys today! Where should I start at? This will be my second week on the road with my team. It has been good and bad. Our team is like a family now that has their ups and downs. My first week on the road was not so good. I did not want to do the sound for the event. The one reason why I did not want to do sound was because the sound was not coming out of anything. So I called one of the staff members at Youth Encounter office, and it was Adam Costenbader, who was on team last year and knew what was going on. Talking to him, we went step by step. After I got off of the phone, I prayed, and the sound was working.



**Chris Sibley**

The next church we went to was okay. It was hard for me because as soon as we got there,

a man came up to our team van. He asked if we were Christians, and we said yes. Todd, one of the guys on my team, got out to talk to him with me, and within minutes and through many tears he told us about his alcoholism, how his wife just kicked him out of his house, and how he was contemplating suicide. The only thing we could do for him was to pray. So that is what Todd and I did for James. Last week we had one lock-in with the youth. The lock-in was great. We had so much fun with the youth. We played a lot of games with them. I am so blessed to be a part of this ministry Youth Encounter has for young people. In closing, I would just like to ask for your prayers for me and the team.

Yours in Christ!

Christopher Sibley

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**Date:** 9/29/2005

**Submitted by:** Ester Nielsen

**Journal Entry:**

So let me get started writing my very first journal in English...I'm not kidding, for this is the Dane writing today's journal for West Lakes. In respect and honor of my home country, Denmark, I will translate all my journals into my native language, which is Danish. See "down under."



**Ester Nielsen**

It would be natural to me to write these journals from my foreign perspective, so thus I will. Do not think that I'm stereotyping Americans; however, the more I see of one specific thing, the more I start to think that all Americans are so. For example, it seems to me that most Americans live in huge houses, that America does have Wal-Mart all over the country, the people sleep in big beds (very comfortable too!!), and they drive A LOT. And the other way around, my team mates think that Danes generally are funny, healthy, quiet, cute, nice and smart...

Just kidding!! Some of it is true though, but even though I'm the one from far away and struggling with culture shock, time zone differences, new language, new food, some of my team mates do too! My teammate Chris is from L.A.—he has never seen snow! And after what I've heard, they get pretty much in our region. The different states have different accents and ways to express things, the food varies. In Wisconsin, I think that 9 out of 10 meals would contain cheese! Seriously! Breakfast, lunch, dinner.

To sum up: I will try to find similarities and differences between Denmark and this part of USA and add some of the fun cultural experiences I'll be put into during this so far non-forgettable and truly amazing year.

Love from Ester Klokmoose N\*

Saa lad mig da faa begyndt at skrive min allerfoerste dagbog paa engelsk. . Jeg laver ikke sjov, for dette er "danskeren" der skriver denne dags dagbog for West Lakes. I respekt og aere for mit land, Danmark vil jeg oversaettte alle mine dagbogsnotater til dansk, som er mit tungemaal. Se nedenfor.

Det er mest naturligt for mig at skirve disse notater fra mit udenlandske perspektiv saa saaledes vil jeg goere. Tro ikke at jeg stereotyper amerikanerne – ikke desto mindre begynder jeg mere og mere at tro at saadan er amerikanere naar jeg ser de samme ting igen og igen. For eksempel synes det mig at amerikanerne bor i kaempe store huse, at Amerika virkelig har Wal-Marts over det hele, folket sover i store senge (tillage meget behagelige!!) og de koerer MEGET rundt i

bil.

Den anden vej rundt generaliserer mine team mates danskere og tror at danskere generelt er sjove, sunde, stille, soede, rare og kloge...

Bare for sjov, - selvom der er noget om det. Men selvom jeg er den der kommer fra langbortigstan og er mit i kulturshokket og kæmper med tidszoner, nyt sprog, ny madkultur er det ikke bare mig. Nogle af mine team mates kæmper ogsaa en kamp. Min team mate Chris er fra Los Angeles, Californien og han har aldrig set sne! Og efter hvad jeg har hoert skulle der komme ret saa meget sne i vores omraade. De forskellige stater har forskellige accenter og maader at udtrykke sig paa. I Wisconsin er jeg ret sikker paa at 9 ud af 10 maaltider ville indeholde ost! Serioest ment! Morgenmad, frokost, aftensmad.

Som en opsummering: Jeg vil proeve at finde ligheder og forskelle mellem DK og denne del af usa og tilfoeje nogle af de sjove kulturelle oplevelser jeg kommer ud for i loebet af dette allerede nu uforglemmelige og helt vidunderlige aar.

Kaerlig hilsen Ester Klokrose N\*

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**Date:** 9/29/2005

**Submitted by:** Jenna Thompson

**Journal Entry:**

Hey everyone! It's finally my turn to get a hold of the computer and write an entry. It's been hard to find time because we have been pretty busy these past couple of days, and I cant type/read/write in the van because of motion sickness--yuck!

So it has been amazing to see how God has been working through us and also the people whom we have met. We spend so much time worrying about how we are going to get to the next booking, where we are going to sleep at night, when we are going to eat, or just even when we can get some alone time. It's frustrating to sit back and think about how much I worry because I shouldn't be worrying. God has begun teaching me, through my team mates and through the people I have met on the road, about how to give up control. I want things done on my time and when I want them done. But I have to remember that it's not about me. I have no control over the future and my "plan." I love remembering that God is ultimately in control. So my goal for this year is to sit in the passenger seat, and let God take the driver's seat. I'm going to enjoy the ride and take glory in the "process."

One of my favorite things to do is to go into schools and get to hang out with the kids. They think we are some kind of celebrity and run after us asking for our autograph. It makes me laugh because if they actually knew that we are just normal college age kids, traveling in a van together, they would think we are much less cool. However, I also looked up to older kids when I was younger and though they were totally cool. My hope is that I, along with the rest of my team, keep focused on why we're here and what we're trying to accomplish.

The church we just stayed with was amazing. The ministry of the church, the people of the congregation, and the school children were all sooooo awesome! This was probably the church where I felt most at home. It reminded me a lot of my home church and even had the same name. It was a comforting feeling to feel like I was back at home. I could even say I would enjoy living in Roselle, IL and attending that church. Our contact and her family were so giving, and seeing their family was an inspiration. They are truly blessed with their wonderful daughters, and even with Chunk, the family dog.



**Jenna Thompson**

Please keep our team, the rest of the Captive Free'ers and International kids, and the Youth Encounter staff in your prayers. Lots of hard work and preparation go into making this ministry happen.

Remember, we like to get snail mail and e-mail! Write us! [westlakes@youthencounter.org](mailto:westlakes@youthencounter.org)

or

*3490 Lexington Ave N Suite 300*

St. Paul, MN 55126

His broken masterpiece,

Jenna L. Thompson

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**Date:** 10/4/2005

**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt

**Journal Entry:**

Hey, everybody! Hope all is well with all of you. It is so great to be on the road again for yet another year of awesome ministry with Captive Free. It still blows my mind how much God works in our lives each and every day, and we so often neglect to recognize His presence, gifts, and unconditional love for us. Such times as these are when I am amazed at the true fullness of God.



**Beckie Petzoldt**

The other day we were in Fox Lake, Illinois and we did a Harvest Festival program outside around a campfire. During this program, I told a story about how I had driven that day and we had come from Michigan City, Indiana to Fox Lake, and we had had to drive through the Chicago area. I went on to explain how I thought that Illinois drivers were some of the most unforgiving, suicidal, raging maniac drivers that I had ever encountered in my entire life! The entire drive, I was dodging darting Durangos and swerving around psychotic Spiders. I had no idea that there were actually people out there who saw "Speed Limit: 55" signs and took them as merely a suggestion. Even in work zones where fines double AND start at \$135 (which I was certain Youth Encounter wouldn't have been too keen on the idea of us getting a ticket so we could "keep up with the flow of maniac traffic"), people zoomed and cut around each other like they owned the highways and this was their turf. As a result, I found myself getting more and more irritated and stressed out by the chaotic driving of those around me. There was even a woman in a yellow wood paneled station wagon (no joke, it really was yellow and wood paneled) who just did not see this enormous 15-passenger van and trailer merging onto the freeway and just kept on driving and chatting on her cell phone like we were never there.

So, needless to say, after a few choice phrases by some of us, we finally got to a gas station where we filled up and took a breather. I started thinking as I was filling up a 20oz. cup of gas station coffee (my favorite, second only to Starbucks), and I came to a very eye-opening conclusion. Many times in life, we are called to make decisions: good ones, bad ones, ones that could change our lives forever, or just things as small as which socks to wear with this shirt. As Christians, we are also called to bring other people to Christ. I often find myself looking for the words to bring other people into a relationship with Jesus, when it may not be words that we need at all. We are all given different spiritual gifts and, as part of that, we are also given different ways that we reach people the best. For example, I am a very "life application" person. I think with my heart and try and find things in my life or situations in people's lives that can parallel things in the Bible, whereas other people I know are more biblically based in their comparisons in that they hear a story and say, "in this chapter of this book, it says..." and they go on to quote Scripture like there's no tomorrow. I so admire that, and have recently come to grips with the fact that I am just not built to do that type of outreach. My teammate Todd and I were talking about this the other day and decided that we are all given different spiritual gifts and, depending on how you use them, you can either bring people to Christ or push them away. We so often see these people who think they are so wise and make what they're good at seem so much more important than what we're good at, when really they all hold

the same amount of value. Spiritual gifts kind of fit together like a puzzle. Some pieces get dirty and ripped, wet and swollen by the water they absorbed, and some just stay the same and try and fit in as best as possible. But when we all work together to bring people to Christ and go about it as one body, one whole puzzle, the fruits of our labors are so much sweeter.

Returning to the story about driving through Chicago, I realized that it doesn't matter how fast or mad or crazy people are driving around me. As long as I am following the speed limits and driving as safely as I can, then I am setting an example for those other drivers on the road. I so often try, as I said before, to come up with the words to make things click in people's heads and make them want to change their lives around and come into a constant communion with God. But it's when we stop and look around and just live Christ-like lives that people see you and notice that there's something different about you that they want. We as humans naturally want what other people have. So if we, "dance like no one's watching, sing like no one's listening, and live each day like it's your last," people will naturally see Christ in you, because one thing I have learned over the years is that, it's true; actions do speak louder than words.

In His Grip,

Beckie

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**Date:** 10/20/2005

**Submitted by:** Eric Boerboom

**Journal Entry:**

Hello everyone from northern Illinois. It's a little dreary today, but it has been a wonderful fall with lots of colors and beautiful weather. Even with the sunshiny weather, not all days are filled with joy. God has been using the distance from friends and family to help me trust in God's plan, not just the next few days, but well into the future. Whenever I try to take over a situation I can not control, God reminds me that I am not the one who controls things and instead I need to sit back and trust him. Whenever I think I have learned my lesson, he reminds that I have more to learn. I am thankful for those in my life who God is using to teach me lessons even when it is hard at the time.



**Eric Boerboom**

The best part of growing up with God and allowing him to teach you things is that he then uses our experiences to teach others. In one of our lock-ins, the kids and I created a graph reflecting our spiritual growth. The graph allowed us to really look at what God is doing in our lives and how we have growth or struggles with Him. Sometimes realizing that we are falling from God is important to turning your relationship with him around. Sometimes it takes an effort on our parts and doing hard things to see God working in our lives, but I promise that if you keep track of the prayers you are lifting to God, you will see answers in time and your confidence in His will for your life will grow.

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**Date:** 10/20/2005

**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt

**Journal Entry:**

Hey, everyone! Hope everything is going well for you all! I am still, after all this time, amazed at how God works in our lives through the people He puts in our lives. I never stop learning, and I love that!

This evening, we did a college program at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville for a Christian group called InterVarsity. From what I understand, it's sort of like Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA) or Campus Crusaders. In any case, we did their Thursday night chapel service but did a program instead of a formal worship. It just so happened to also be their first full day of Fall Break, so there wasn't a huge crowd expected. We were cool with that, though, because we've got the mindset of "wherever two or more are gathered". So we set up and got all ready for this program, and since I've been on team since right out of high school, even though I am



**Beckie Petzoldt**



the same age as a lot of college students, I still think of college students as "big kids" sometimes. I know that's really whacked out, but I think that just because I haven't actually taken that typical huge step into the "real world," I sometimes feel younger than they are. It's weird, and clearly, it's kind of hard to explain.

As our program progressed, I became more and more comfortable with the whole situation, which then led to some worship during a program that I hadn't experienced in a long time. It was just so amazing watching all these different college students worship in ways that they were most accustomed to. It made it much more enjoyable for us as worship leaders as well as worshipers.

At the end of the program, they called an "Encore" and we did some of the sing-a-longs that we "revamped," and it was so awesome! Some of the guys that were sitting in the audience came up and shredded on the guitars we had and some of the people in the band that opened for us came up, too, and we just jammed for like 30 minutes! It was so sweet! Afterwards, we went to one of their houses and had a bonfire, and it was just amazing sitting around the campfire singing praises to God voluntarily. How He works in our lives through little things is what still, to this very day, blows me away.

So often, I find myself trying to figure God out; why does He do the things He does, and why are the people that are in my life actually here? It comes down to simply this—that God's plan for us is something that we will never be able to understand, but if we trust that He will lead us to where we need to be and lead us to the people we're supposed to meet, we will be in constant community with Him. I challenge you all to try and spend a week of intentional consistent community time with God. Even if that's just talking to Him when no one else is around and you really have nothing else to do, or you're driving to work, if you just spend that little bit of extra time with God, how much easier life could be! It's when we surrender all that His true power shines through. God bless you all and, I know I say this a lot, but thank you for all of the support, love, and prayers you've given us as West Lakes 05-06 team. We appreciate it more than you know!

In His Grip, Beckie

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**Date:** 10/27/2005

**Submitted by:** Shari Trotter

**Journal Entry:**

Hi everyone! I am so excited that it is my turn to journal again. Yesterday we visited a preschool. We sang some songs, had a lot of fun with a puppet show and acted really goofy in an interactive Bible study. The kids were tons of fun! While they were walking into the room, Eric was playing some music on his guitar. The kids sat down and Jenna and I tried to talk with them about what they had been doing during the day. However, they were in total amazement of the music. Their eyes did not leave that guitar. I think the power of music is amazing. Music can be complex or simple. Todd and I were sitting on the couch at one of our host homes the other day listening to some of his favorite songs. We looked a lot like the children at the preschool. The way that the notes intertwined and the true talent of the person making the music was amazing. God has created massive mountains and tiny little bugs. He has made very warm places and very cold places. (Very cold; my Georgia blood is freezing.) He has made silence and he has made music. I thank God every day for the opportunity to see his extreme works. It has been so much fun to see an active God. I have seen people dance, cry, or simply just sit in awe of our amazing God.

In Him,  
Shari



**Shari Trotter**

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**Date:** 10/29/2005

**Submitted by:** Todd Ebling  
**Journal Entry:**

A locked door is opened by the press of a button in another room. A man escorts us as we walk past a metal detector. Three rows of spiraling razor wire sit on top of a fifteen foot cage, staring at the building filled with hundreds of single rooms, nearly big enough to fit a bed. The occupants of these rooms are between ages sixteen and twenty—some vandals, some rapists, some murderers, some thieves, some gang leaders, and some drug dealers. There are two common factors that tie all of them together. They have committed a crime that placed them in a high security detention center, and they are eternally forgiven by God. I had the honor to worship at Lincoln Hills Detention Center recently, and I have never seen such a spirited worship. The inmates danced, sang, shouted, clapped, and cried, all in the name of God. God has such amazing power to turn lives around. "Beauty for Brokenness" was my motto with Eric that night. The attitude of worship that night was a reflection of God's smiling on us. I have never seen such an amazing example of "by grace through faith." Many of the inmates who worshipped with us that night will never leave prison, so it seems that they have no purpose to live, but you would never be able to tell that by their positive attitudes of praise and their overflowing joyfulness. I encourage anyone who reads this journal entry to count their blessings and reflect God's abounding love in all aspects of life. I have said it before, but now I truly know it: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" and "the wages of sin is death," but "the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus." I saw the reality of God's grace that day on a scale I never imagined, and it was incredible.

In God, through Christ, for us, by us,  
Todd J. Ebling



**Todd Ebling**

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**Date:** 11/3/2005  
**Submitted by:** Jenna Thompson  
**Journal Entry:**

Life on the road has been great. I could've never even imagined the things God has blessed us with so far this year. Every day is a constant reminder of God's love, His love for His people and for His creations. In our own communities at home, our own separate worlds, sometimes we are sheltered from certain social situations. We become closed off to what evil lurks around in our world, and often forget other people's struggles and trials.



**Jenna Thompson**

Single mothers struggling to support their children after a rocky divorce with little to no child support, children who have no fathers, people who are struggling to find their place in the world after being uprooted by a hurricane, people battling cancer, people grieving over the loss of a loved one; despair and struggle surround us. But it's in one's deepest, most sorrowful moments that one realizes the need for God. When someone hits rock bottom and has no where else to go, they cry out to God for help, and their cries are heard.

With our theme "Stand on the Rock" coming from Matthew 7: 24-27, I've come to learn something very valuable; that can be related to many situations: *even though the wise man built his house on rock, the storm still came*. We, as Christians, are given the armor to withhold the storms by building our lives on Christ. However, building your life around God and using Him as a firm foundation upon which to build your life does not exempt you from hardships and struggles. It doesn't say in that verse "Everyone then who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. And because his house was founded on rock, no storms came his way." No way, Jose! Just because we are Christians does not mean that we have it easy, that God will spare us hardships and troubles, and that it will be 80 degrees and sunny (man, oh man, do I wish it were 80 degrees and sunny instead of 45 degrees and cloudy) all the time! Out of struggle comes growth. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

Whether we know it or not, we've heard this same concept of not having it easy all the time before. But my point is that God wants us to know that His word is true. That if we put our trust in Him and build our lives upon the firm foundation which He has provided, we will make it through the storm.

His broken masterpiece,

Jenna L. Thompson

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**Date:** 11/11/2005

**Submitted by:** Ester Nielsen

**Journal Entry:**

So, since my last journal a lot of things have happened...The biggest thing was losing our teammate Chris late in October. Having him sing "Amazing Grace" with his gospel spiritual lovely voice is forever something I will remember. He is now back in L.A, California, but he is still a part of West Lakes.



**Ester Nielsen**

When you're a team, you count on each other a lot—you just have to. So we each have our jobs and things to do. Beckie plays the drums, and if she is not there, we simply don't have anyone to play the drums, and that leaves a big spot in our music open. Shari calls churches ahead so we know what we are doing when we get to places, and if she is not here, we wouldn't know where to go next, and there goes our ministry! And that goes for everyone on the team—each person is extremely important, so losing a teammate causes naturally a lot of dead space and emptiness. We as a team are going through some major transition with filling out all the spots Chris had on our team.

Paul talks in the Bible about us being one team—one body of Christ. (See 1 Corinthians 12:12.) We are all important no matter what role we have, if it's small or big, if you're a pastor or a member in the choir, organist or just sitting on the pew. If you weren't sitting there, why do we have Sunday services? We are the church all together.

We Christians can be spread out throughout the world and still we have all Jesus Christ as our savior and center. Chris is a part of our team, just at home. He can still carry out God's will and share Christ's love back in L.A. They probably need it just as much as we do!

- Ester\*

Translation:

Siden min sidste dagbogsnotat er der sket mange ting... Den største er nok at vi mistede vores teammate Chris sidst i oktober. At have ham til at synge Amazing Grace med sin dejlige gospelstemme er for altid noget jeg vil huske. Han er nu hjemme i Los Angeles, California, men han er stadig en del af West Lakes.

Naar man er paa et team er man meget afhaengig af hinanden – det kan man vaere noedt til. Saa vi har alle hver vores job og ansvarsomraader. Beckie spiller trommer – og hvis hun ikke er der ville vi naturligt nok ikke have nogen til at spille trommer hvilket ville efterlade et stort hul i vores musik. Shari ringer paa forhaand til de forskellige kirker saa vi ved hvad vi skal lave naar vi kommer, og hvis hun ikke var der ville vi ikke ane hvor vi skulle henad naeste dag, og saa ryger vores missionsarbejde sig en tur! Og saadan er det for hvert medlem paa vores team – hver person er ekstremt vigtigt, saa det at miste en teammate skaber naturligt et hul og en tomhed. Som et team er vi nu ved at gennemgaa en maengde forandringer for at faa enderne til at moedes der hvor Chris mangler.



Paulus taler i Bibelen om at vi er et team – eet legeme i Kristus. (se 1.kor. kap.12:12 ff). Vi er alle vigtige uanset hvilken rolle vi har, om den er stor eller lille, om du er praest eller kormedlem, organist eller een der sidder paa kirkebaenken. Hvis du ikke sad der, ville vi stadig have gudstjenester? Vi er kirken alle sammen samlet.

Vi kristne kan vaere spredt ud over hele jorden og stadig alle Jesus Kristus som vores frelser og centrum. Chris er en del af vores team, han er det bare derhjemme. Han kan stadig goere Guds vilje og dele ud af Kristi kaerlighed hjemme i Los Angeles. De har sikkert brug for den lige saa meget som vi har det.

Kaerlig hilsen Ester\*

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**Date:** 11/13/2005

**Submitted by:** Ester Nielsen

**Journal Entry:**

I can't believe how fast things are going!! It's almost Thanksgiving, and the snow is on its way—at least that's what people tell me. Christmas break is coming up in less than a month, and I will be home in Denmark, Europe, in exactly a month (including travel time). Not that I'm extremely homesick, but I'm still excited to go home! Actually, a lot of people ask me if I'm homesick, and I try to tell them that of course there are some things I miss, but because of my team, the people we meet and just this ministry makes me feel really happy about being here. I realize more and more that this is what God wants me to do. To carry out His love and pass it on through the power of music and through relational ministry.



**Ester Nielsen**

One of my favorite songs is called "May I Be His Love", and the chorus goes:

May I be His love for you

May I lift your eyes towards heaven

May I come to you and lead you to His light

May I cry His tears for you

May I be the place that you can run to

Where you hear His voice and see Him in my eyes

All your life

May I be His love

This is what I want to do. I want to be a light of Jesus in this world, and I want people to see His light in me. Not see me, but see Jesus Christ. I cannot strive towards nothing better but to be an example of Christ.

Translation:

Hvor tiden dog flyver af sted,- jeg kan ikke tro det!! Det er naesten Thanksgiving (en amerikansk tradition sidst i november) og sneen er lige om hjoernet – eller det er i hvert fald det jeg bliver fortalt. Juleferie er mindre end en maaned vaek og jeg vil vaere hjemme i Danmark, Europa, om praecis en maaned (incl. rejsetid..). Ikke forstaaet paa den maade at jeg er ekstemt hjemsygt, men jeg er stadig spaendt paa at komme hjem! Faktisk spoerger en masse folk om jeg er hjemsygt og jeg proever at fortaelle dem at selvfoelgelig er der nogle ting jeg savner, men paa grund af mit team, de mennesker vi moeder og bare denne missionsopgave jeg staar i, har jeg det ret godt herovre (og det

goer det hele lidt nemmere..). Jeg indser mere og mere at dette er hvad Gud vil have at jeg skal goere. At give ud af Hans kaerlighed og give den videre ved hjalp af musikken kraft og gennem personlig og relaterende mission.

En af mine yndlingssange hedder: "May I be His love" = "Maa jeg vaere Hans kaerlighed", og omkvaedet er som foelger:

Maa jeg vaere Hans kaerlighed for dig

Maa jeg loefte dine oejne op imod himlen

Maa jeg komme til dig og lede dig til Hans lys

Maa jeg graede Hans taarer for dig

Maa jeg vaere det sted hvor du kan komme loebende til

Hvor du kan hoere Hans stemme og se ham i mine oejne

Hele dit liv

Maa jeg vaere Hans kaerlighed.

Dette er hvad jeg vil. Jeg vil vaere et Jesuslys i denne verden og jeg vil at andre kan se Hans lys i mig! Ikke at de ser mig, men at de ser Jesus Kristus. Der er ikke noget andet jeg kan straebe mere efter end at vaere et eksempel paa Kristus.

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**Date:** 11/17/2005

**Submitted by:** Jenna Thompson

**Journal Entry:**

Hey everyone! Things out on the road have been amazing lately. The temperature is starting to drop, and Shari, Todd, and Beckie are really starting to feel it. I tell them every day that is only gets worse from here, so get used to it! Right now, I'm without a coat—well, a real winter coat. Shari gave me her "spring" jacket that she was going to use as a winter jacket, but soon found that it was not going to be enough to keep her warm! I cannot wait for my team to experience snow! A real, heavy, "snowman building" type of snow. But then again, after it comes, it doesn't leave until March, so soon I will be eating my words, and wishing it were June and sunny!

The host homes that I have been at have been remarkable. The families have been so giving, caring, understanding, and genuine. In Clintonville, WI, we had our day off, and I enjoyed nothing more than sitting around the house, watching TV, doing laundry, and checking my email. My host family there, they are the coolest people ever. I really saw God working in that home. I had fun getting to know my host siblings Maddie and Mike, and then my host parents. Shortly after in Waupaca, we did a program at the Lutheran church, and the youth at the church were amazing, absolutely amazing. They worshiped right there with us; I could really feel God and His holy spirit moving in that place. We had fun playing the "Who Done It" game with the youth. They were crazy! We also did a little bit of accents/impersonations. Shari did her "Rifka" and then her "Oompa Loompa" dance, and then two of the youth did a hilarious skit from Mad TV. We were all rolling on the floor, dying from laughter!

My host family, the Fishers, was really awesome in Waupaca. For the first hour or so, we all just sat around the TV, and Todd and I chatted with them about our crazy host home stories—well, mainly Shari's crazy host home stories. The connection was truly one of a kind, and I really wish we could've stayed longer there. It's always the nights where we are in town for one night that I wish we could stay longer. There is always the



**Jenna Thompson**

possibility that we will pass through there again or that we will get another booking at their church. All host homes are fun and exciting, but this one takes the cake. I cannot really put it into words. I don't know if it was because they treated Todd and me like their own children/siblings, or if it was Christ's love and compassion and joy shining through them. Maybe a mix of the two, but either way, I slept wonderfully and felt as if I were at my own home, at a time when I was missing home the most. Speaking of that, I've found that God has a funny and crazy way of doing just that: taking our sorrows and lows, and giving us something or someone to lift our spirits and comfort us.

God has been working in a very real way through this team. I've grown so much and have learned that a relationship with our Savior is something that takes work, discipline, commitment, and love. And that relationship isn't something to be kept secret. I've found myself sharing with family and friends about our awesome God and just completely letting loose and sharing His abundant love, which, surprisingly, wasn't a place I was in the past. My faith was something personal, something that I felt shy and timid about sharing with other people, especially my peers and co-workers. But something I realized was that I would be lost, if it weren't for someone else who reached out to me with the good news of Christ. Remembering that, I suddenly realized that my faith was something I could no longer keep quiet.

I will not be silent

I will not be quiet anymore

I will not be silent

I will not be quiet anymore, anymore, anymore

Those song lyrics ring so true to me. As a child of God, and called servant, it's my calling and our calling as Christians to tell other people about His love, grace and forgiveness. If not, someone lost in a world of sin might be stuck in it eternally. Looking back and seeing this, I've tasted and known the brokenness that comes from sin. I lived in a dark world, but Christ has brought His light into my life and set it on fire. Through Christ, we are saved from that dark and gloomy place. He offers us so much more, if only we were to accept it; to release control, give it all up to God, and rejoice in what He does with our broken lives.

His broken masterpiece,

Jenna

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**Date:** 11/17/2005

**Submitted by:** Shari Trotter

**Journal Entry:**

Howdy friends! I feel the need to be southern, seeing as it is very cold in the West Lakes region, and my Georgian blood is freezing!!! Anyway, things are going great here, and I am feeling very challenged. We have gotten a lot busier, and I love almost every minute of it. I say "almost" because I have been confronted with the part of ministry that is not always beautiful and full of sunshine. We have visited a lot of nursing homes in the last couple of weeks. We went to one last week that seemed like a normal nursing home at first, but the more time we spent there, the more I realized that this one was different. The residents had a lot more going for them. It was kind of shocking to see exhausted and broken bodies with minds that were still as sharp as they had always been. We began our program with a few songs, and then I gave my sharing. In my sharing, I told about my mom and how my family almost lost her to an infection. This is my favorite sharing to give because it is truly the moment that I realized God was real and powerful. We



**Shari Trotter**

finished the program with a few more songs, and then we stopped to talk to the residents. I talked first to this woman who thought that we were the Christian group she had seen on TV. Then I saw another lady in the back of the room waving to me and calling me over to her. I made my way through the crowded room, and I sat down on a huge stack of chairs next to her. She said, "I really liked your sharing; my mom was in the hospital when I was 14 also." "Really?" I said. "Yes, I pounded on the pulpit, and my sister told me to stop, but I was so mad at God," she told me as she acted out the motions. Then she burst into tears and shared with me that her mother passed away that night. In my sharing, I tell about how God created a miracle and healed my mother of her life-threatening infection when I was 14, and here this woman had lost her mother to the same things. I gave her a hug and told her I was sorry. We talked for a little longer, and then I noticed that the lady in front of us was getting her feet run over by a man in a wheelchair. I jumped up to help her, and after I had successfully rescued her precious toes, I kneeled down on the floor to talk to her. "I am from Michigan," she told me, and then she also started to cry. "What's wrong?" I asked. "It's so sad, I can't go back home. I feel like such a baby," she muffled through her tears. I felt so bad for her and was not sure what to say. I can't imagine not being able to go home. Home is more than where you live; it is a part of who you are. After a few minutes of just hugging her and letting her cry, I called Jenna over to us. Jenna is also from Michigan. They shared with each other a little about their hometowns, and I could see a smile return to her face. As her voice became a little more upbeat, we got the signal from Todd that it was time to go. I said goodbye, and I walked out of the room. When I made it to the exit. I told my team that I felt so bad. I felt like my sharing may not be a good one to give any more because miracles don't always happen; people still lose their mothers. As we were driving to the next place, I came to the conclusion that I still wanted to give my sharing because it means so much to me and it is a huge part of who I am. It had also given me the opportunity that day to meet some amazing women. As for the sadness that I witnessed that day, it was just for a moment. The Christian love that I received and shared will last much longer than it takes for tears to dry. Each of us have things that break us down and cause us to weep, but each of us also have a God of compassion on our sides. We have a Father who loves us and cares for us and through our struggles shows himself to us. So after all is said and done, I'm kind of glad for the sadness because that is where God gets to be active in a hug, in a smile, or in a sharing of trials. God's peace and comfort to you all!

In Him,

Shari

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**Date:** 11/29/2005

**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt

**Journal Entry:**

## MERRY CHRISTMAS TO ALL...

Greetings to all from Detroit, Michigan! I pray that you all had a safe Thanksgiving filled with family, friends, and memories that will last a lifetime. We had the privilege of staying with Jenna's family for Thanksgiving. It was so nice to have a break and just spend this family-oriented holiday together.

I love the holidays! The cool weather, falling leaves, warm homes that smell of spices and home cooking, and the shimmer in a child's face as they sit at the big table watching their daddy carve the Thanksgiving turkey just makes such a beautiful start to an even more beautiful time of year. During these last few months of the year, I start to reminisce



**Beckie Petzoldt**

and think about past Thanksgivings and Christmases. I remember how it was my brother Michael's job to set out cookies for Santa on Christmas Eve, and it was my job to set out carrots, celery, and oats for his trusty reindeer. They needed a little bit of a re-charger, too! Or how we'd always go to Grandma Kitty and Grandpa Willie's house for Thanksgiving dinner and everyone would be there. Then, the weekend right after Thanksgiving, we'd have an Ornament Exchange party with all our close friends and family. I love gift bags, and everyone knew this. So, as often as possible, people would try and package their ornaments in gift bags, and they'd give them to me when the evening was complete. I still, to this very day, have a good handful of bags left from those parties.

Reflecting on Christmas traditions reminds me, also, about that good old story that we all learned about as a child and kept us up each Christmas Eve, listening for the clatter of hooves and scraping of a sleigh, carting all kinds of goodies for those good children, on our rooftops. Yes, my friends, we were kept up dreaming of all the presents and surprises that Mr. Kris Kringle himself would bring us. His snowy white beard and candy-apple red suit and cloak iced with white fluff were a sure sign and staple of jolly old Saint Nick. But, why do we place so much emphasis and real trust in such an unreal character?

The realization of the lack of Santa is hitting children earlier and earlier these days. Many of us remember believing in this Christmas custom well over ten years old. Just recently, I stayed at a host home with three kids, the boy was twelve, and the two girls were eight and six and a half. They were talking with me about what they were going to do for Christmas, and I asked them if they'd written a Christmas list to send to Santa. The youngest of the three looked at me and said, "Why do I need to send Santa a letter when he lives in my house?" With a confused look on my face, I questioned her about the meaning of what she'd said. She went on to tell me about how she knew that her mommy and daddy set out presents and wrote "Santa" on them, but that was just a way for them to get one extra present. More or less, she was explaining to me that it was just a way for her parents to bribe her and her siblings to be better around Christmas time, and they knew it.

The more I thought about this, the more I questioned my own reasoning for believing in Santa Claus for so long. Why do we tell fictitious stories to our children to get their hopes up, just to one day bring them crashing down when they finally come to the realization that there isn't a real live Santa? For days on end, I kept thinking about this in the back of my mind, trying to find some reasonable explanation. I struggled with the idea of lying, tricking, and conniving that we do every Christmas in order to keep the kids happy. Why do we do Santa presents? Why do we hang stockings? What is with the milk and cookies (and carrots, celery, and oats, in my case)?

One morning, I was sitting on the floor of my bedroom at my host home, and Shari came in and we got ready for the day together. I was listening to a Christmas CD on my host brother's



CD player, and we began to talk about Christmas music and holiday traditions that we both had. A discussion about our favorite Christmas songs quickly followed that, and Shari shared with me that her favorite Christmas song was, "I Still Believe in You," by a country group called Alabama. I asked her about this, and she told me a story that I will never forget. She shared with me that, one day, her and her mom were going Christmas shopping. She was about eleven, and this was the year that she finally realized that Santa Claus was not real. She asked her mom if Santa Claus was in fact a hoax, and after a moment of thought, her mom said one of the most eloquent things I've ever heard. Her mother shared with her that, no, Santa was in fact not real. All the stories about a round-bellied man with rosy cheeks and a long white beard sneaking down people's chimneys and leaving presents was, in fact, a fictional story. Saddened by this confirmation, Shari tried to accept it the best she could.

However, Mom shared with her that, just because Santa isn't real in a tangible way, like you can't see him or touch him or sit in his lap and take pictures with him for your family Christmas cards; it's the spirit of Santa Claus that brightens the Christmas season. It's in the smiling faces of those you don't know, the giving hearts of people who donate to charities or volunteer at homeless shelters, it's in the smiles of little children as they anxiously await Christmas day with anticipation, and it's in the families that gather together from all over the country and even the world to share the one holiday that means the most to people. Yes, it is in those faces, smiles, and hearts that Santa Claus, St. Nick, and Kris Kringle DOES exist. Each and every year, Shari and her mom listen to that very song, and it's then that their Christmas begins.

I love the idea that, no matter what race, age, size or shape, the spirit of Christmas can take shape in one man, willing to give so that others may benefit. In the same way, Christ himself did the exact same thing. He came as our Savior, as a small baby that many people didn't believe in, but in the end, gave his very own life that we would be able to have the ultimate Christmas gift. I love the line of the song, "Mary, Did You Know" by Mark Lowry, that says "Did you know that your baby boy has walked where angels trod? When you've kissed your little baby, then you've kissed the face of God?" What better imagery than that is there to even begin to fathom the reality and grandeur of such an amazing gift? So often we focus on the size of the gifts we are giving and receiving. I don't know that I would ever be able to say that, even if I don't necessarily act on it, I don't want to open my biggest present first. You know the ones I am talking about, the present with the biggest box, or the prettiest bag and the biggest bow. Or that we don't get a Christmas card in the mail and try and see if there's money or other small gifts in them. We are a greedy and self-centered race, but because of God sending his only son to come to earth, live a sacrificial life, and die a sacrificial death that we may live, we can know that we are saved and loved passionately by the one that really matters.

So, with this Christmas season beginning (maybe too soon for some), I challenge all of you to recognize the spirit of Christmas in all you say and do. Whether it's as simple as giving a Salvation Army ringer some spare change, or as big as donating large amounts of money in someone's name to a charity or non-profit organization, remember that cold, dark night in the Middle East that began just the same as any other night, but held promises for eternity for all of us in the events to come. May God

and Christ's birth warm your hearts this Christmas season and throughout the year. Next time you hear "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," maybe you'll hear it a little bit differently.

In His Grip,

Beckie

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**Date:** 1/2/2006

**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt

**Journal Entry:**

Hello, all! I pray that the new year has brought you many blessings as you have crossed paths with family and friends this past holiday season. It was such a treat to be able to spend the holidays at home and spend time with those who mean so much to me. However, it was so exciting to get back on the road and be so alive and hyped up to jump back into that 15-passenger van and have our 10-foot trailer drag behind us as we travel on through this journey to spread Christ. Sharing how our Christmases went and what each of us did over our break was interesting because I never realized how many different ways people celebrate Christmas. I guess it's just one of those things that people tend to push to the back of their heads and don't really think about.



**Beckie Petzoldt**

We just finished a weekend retreat with a group from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and let me tell you, it was so great! We arrived on Friday afternoon about 3 pm, and we were greeted by four high school boys who were ready to help us unload our trailer (which we LOVED, by the way). Friday night was filled with games, fun, singing, and so much more. The entire weekend was just so amazing, because these kids weren't there just because their parents made them come or because they got extra points if they went. These kids were at this retreat for the sole reason of striving to become better leaders in their youth groups, churches, families, schools, and communities.

It is so promising to see young people wanting so badly to be able to share Christ with everyone they meet, whether it's directly telling them about a God who loves them so much and longs for them to turn to him and ask for help and guidance, or just leading by a Christian example. Every single one of the eleven youth there that weekend were there to learn, grow, and build, and to me, that's a perfect example of the faith that we should be building each and every day. It doesn't matter how old you are or how many degrees in theology and biblical studies you have, or how many exhausted concordances you have in your collection of books ranging from the studies of Paul to "Would Jesus Wear Blue Jeans?" (Yes, that is actually a book! I owned it when I was ten). When it comes down to facts, it's about a raw faith that should be stretched, pulled, and strained each and every day so that it can grow to its full potential. Body builders don't just sit on their behinds all day watching re-runs of the Golden Girls and miraculously become this vision of strength and power. They have to train hard to be able to go into competitions with a "quality product" for lack of better term. As Christians, we are called to hone our talents, given to us from the Creator, and use them for the things we are called to do.

It's pointless to have a coffeepot that scrambles eggs or cooks toaster pastries. A coffeepot is created solely for the purpose of brewing that beautiful creation, that blessed nectar of awakening that which we all call fondly by the name of "coffee." In the same way, we need to utilize our talents and spiritual gifts in the ways which we were intended to do so. Confusing them and trying to be good at things that just aren't our forte can bog us down and make us think that we aren't good at anything, when in reality, it's the fact that we are great at many things; we just aren't focusing enough time and energy into those things.

So, as I re-read over this journal of chaos and confusion, I have gathered one thing, and I pray that if you have taken nothing from this crazy pile of vowels and consonants, I ask you to remember, be the Builder, not the Egg-Scrambling Coffeepot. Have a great day, and remember to keep rockin' it for Him!

In His Grip,

Beckie

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**Date:** 1/11/2006

**Submitted by:** Todd Ebling

## Journal Entry:

Yet again, hello to my fellow servants of Christ,

I sat in a church, in the middle of Wisconsin, in January, "Free Bird" playing loudly on the foreground, a giant umbrella above me, a fold-out lounge chair beneath me, the taste of non-alcoholic margarita sits on my lips, and I ask God for the umpteenth time, "Why am I here?" Oh yeah, that's right...to be involved with one of the best, awesomest beach parties in which I will ever have the honor of partaking. If I were anywhere else, I would be missing this sweet time to bond, beach style. Friday night was so amazing. We hung out with a bunch of kids in this awesome youth group, and had a hula hoop contest, a limbo contest, a Name That Beach Song game, Hawaiian leis, beach balls, and some awesome beach fun tunes brought to you by a Youth Encounter sound system via DJ Toddlum and the strange, yet soothing sounds of his iPod. And the Captive Free mini-concerts once an hour, every hour made for some great "praise God" time as well. Overall, it was a great night that I won't soon forget, and God is so good through all the crazy youth groups and their crazy beach parties.

Your comrade in Christ,  
Todd



**Todd Ebling**

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**Date:** 1/15/2006

**Submitted by:** Ester Nielsen

## Journal Entry:

So let me tell you what exactly we do on our days off...as little as possible! Well, I guess that's not quite right all the time. My last day off was a little like that, though. I slept in, did laundry, went for a walk downtown Baraboo. In November—yes I know that's already a long time ago, but—on one of my days off, we were not far away from Chicago city, so I for a change I got up early and took the train to the downtown area. I wanted to go to the Chicago Institute of Art on Michigan Avenue. I had my pockets filled with one-time cameras that needed to be developed soon, so I figured that since I hadn't seen a sky scraper before or for that matter a really big American city with a lot of them, I could take pictures of city things and send them home. I like to just walk, and I wasn't afraid to go by myself. I like art and seeing new things—you know, expanding my world view. So I finally got there, walking around like a tourist, taking pictures, looking up, looking at everything. Seeing the blue sky and breathing the fresh city air. I was in no hurry; I wanted to spend my entire day in Chicago. First I went to the Art Institute. I got in as a student which works well with my stipend...I saw absolutely everything that was to see at the museum and I was just so relaxed and filled up with impressions. After two or three hours, I went on to see the Millennium Park. I also went down to Lake Michigan shore. I wanted to overlook the city, so I walked all the way to Hancock Tower. When I finally got up to the 94<sup>th</sup> floor, I could see all the way to Michigan, to Wisconsin, to Indiana and then of course Illinois—well, they said that you could. It was getting cloudy, so I don't know for sure if I saw other states than Illinois. Afterwards I went back down and went to Starbucks Coffee, bought a hot chocolate with extra whipped crème and got my name on it. It was getting cold outside and the sun was setting—pretty sweet. But I kind of forgot that the train station was far away, so when I finally started to walk back I had to run most of the way to make it... A lot more traffic around 4:30 p.m. than at 9 o'clock in the morning. I was running and stopping for stop lights all the time. Run. Stop. Run. Stop. So I would run and get in front of people, but they would catch up because I had to wait for the green light...I kept running because I had to make it. It was the last afternoon train, and I had to be back for dinner at 6 p.m. The train was on the platform, waiting to go, I was exhausted, fat and out of breath—but I made it! I have no idea how because I didn't know where to go when I got to the station. I just tried to remember what way I came from. I ran a couple of miles in 20 minutes. But it was worth it. It was a great day off!! (I forgot to mention that my teammates were pretty worried about me, since I did call them, but then the train was late and I had turned off the cell phone.)

- Ester\*

Translation:



**Ester Nielsen**

15.januar 2006

Saa lad mig fortælle jer helt præcist hvad vi laver paa vores fridage...saa lidt som muligt! Okay, det passer maaske ikke helt hver gang.. Min sidste fridag var saadan – jeg sov laenge, fik vasket toej, gik en tur i Baraboo by. I november – ja, jeg ved godt det allerede er laenge siden, men – var vi ikke langt vaek fra Chicago centrum paa vores fridag, saa til en forandring stod jeg tidligt op og tog toget ind til centrum. Jeg ville gerne besøge Kunstinstituttet i Chicago, som ligger paa Michigan Avenue. Jeg havde lommerne fyldt med engangskamerarer, der snart skulle fremkaldes, og jeg taenkte, at siden jeg aldrig havde set en rigtig skyskraper foer, eller for den sags skyld en rigtig amerikansk storby fyldt med dem, kunne jeg tage en masse billeder og sende dem hjem. Jeg kan godt li' bare at gaa/ spadserere rundt og jeg var ikke bange for at tage paa udflugt alene. Jeg kan godt li' kunst og bare det at se nye ting – I ved – for at udvide mit verdenssyn. Endelig ankom jeg – jeg gik rundt som en anden tourist og tog billeder, kiggede op, saa paa alting. Kiggede op og saa den blaa himmel, indaandede den friske storbyluft. Jeg havde overhovedet ikke travlt. Jeg ville bare gerne tilbringe hele dagen i Chicago. Foerst besøgte jeg kunstmuseet. Jeg fik studenterrabat paa indgangsbilletten, hvilket passer meget godt sammen med mit stipendie.. Jeg saa alt der var at se paa museet og det var bare super afslappende og jeg fyldtes med indtryk.

Efter en to tre timer fortsaette jeg til Millennium Park, jeg gik ogsaa ned til bredden af Lake Michigan. Jeg ville gerne have en chance for at skue storbyen fra oven saa jeg gik hele vejen til Hancock Tower (= et udsigtstaarn). Da jeg endelig naaede etage 94 kunne jeg se hele vejen til Michigan, til Wisconsin, til Indiana, og saa selvfoelgelig Illinois – okay, de sagde man kunne... Det var ved at blive lidt skyet, saa jeg ved aerligt talt ikke om jeg saa andre stater end Illinois... Bagefter gik jeg ned igen og stoppede hos Starbucks Coffee for at koebe en kop varm chocolate med ekstra floedeskum og jeg fik mit navn paa koppen. Det var ved at blive koldt udenfor og solen var ved at gaa ned – ret flot. Men jeg glemte lidt at togstationen var langt vaek, saa da jeg endelig begyndte at gaa tilbage blev jeg noedt til at loebe naesten hele vejen for at naa det... En hel del mere trafik kl. 16:30 om eftermiddagen end kl.9 om morgenen. Jeg loeb og standsede for roedt lys hele tiden. Loeb. Stop. Loeb. Stop. Jeg ville loebe og komme foran andre men de ville indhente mig fordi jeg skulle vente paa groent lys... Jeg blev ved med at loebe for jeg skulle naa toget. Det var den sidste eftermiddagsafgang og jeg skulle vaere tilbage til aftensmad kl.18. Toget holdt paa perronen, klar til at koere. Jeg var udskoert, overvaegtig og havde tabt pusten – men jeg naaede det!! Jeg har ingen anelse om hvordan for jeg vidste ikke hvor jeg skulle gaa hen da jeg kom til stationen. Jeg proevede at huske hvilken vej jeg kom fra. Jeg loeb ca. 3-4 km paa 20 min. Men det var det hele vaerd. Det var en fantastisk fridag!! (jeg glemte at fortælle at mine teammates var ret saa bekymrede for mig, selvom jeg ringede og sagde jeg var paa vej hjem.. Men toget blev ca. en halv time forsinket og jeg havde haft mobilen slukket hele tiden...)

- Ester\*

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**Date:** 1/17/2006

**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt

**Journal Entry:**

A truly amazing experience...

Hola, mis amigos! I hope you all are doing well. I am realizing more and more each day how many blessings in disguise are put in our lives. Time and time again, I am baffled by God's mystery and "sneakiness" when he puts people and places in our lives to change us and show us the true meaning of undeserved love.



**Beckie Petzoldt**

I love going places where you just feel welcomed. We go into so many homes and share with so many people, it's hard to decipher whether or not it's a "let your hair down" home or not. Fortunately, we have been blessed with a huge number of "let your hair down" families to stay with. This one I'm thinking of in particular is a family from Merrimac, Wisconsin that I just finished my stay with. Truly, they are a family that is God-centered in every form of the word.

It's amazing to see a family in which the parents take such interest in their children's lives. The typical American family is so crazy busy these days that it's hard to find time to sit down and just check in as a family or do something fun together. That's the word that many of us take for granted; togetherness is key! I saw that in an infinite amount of ways this past Sunday evening, Monday, and Tuesday morning. My host mom was so intentional about being all about her two amazing boys, but still kept an identity for herself. Just seeing them

interact with one another was such an eye-opening experience that I will never soon forget. The intentional time spent together was so beneficial for those two boys. I saw how much those kids loved her and how much they truly looked up to her in her ways of guidance, love, compassion, and spirit, and it was so amazingly uplifting. It's times like those when I see God shine through even those people whom we least expect.

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**Date:** 1/18/2006

**Submitted by:** Jenna Thompson

**Journal Entry:**

Hello again! I hope that all of you had a great Christmas and New Year. I know that being able to go home and visit with family, sleep in my own bed, and just relax was the best Christmas gift I could've received. Thanks, Youth Encounter, for that present!

While I was at home, and sitting on the couch in my pj's, I was thinking about team. I was thinking about how much I missed being out on the road and having the privilege to spend everyday with awesome kids who had a great thirst to find out more about Christ, and how much I wanted to be back in the van and with my teammates. It was a strange feeling, because being in the van I wanted nothing more than to be out of the stinky, messy, congested, grey interior "thing" on wheels.

We've had so many great experiences since we have been back at it on the road. We have had absolutely amazing host homes, such caring and interesting contacts and kids at the churches, which has been a total blessing from God, since I've been sick for the good part of the last week and a half. Let me tell you, I've never wanted to be at home and in my own bed resting so bad in my life! Also, being in the van together, someone was bound to catch my bug. But not only did one of us catch it, Todd, Ester, and Eric all caught it...roughly around the same time! Four sick teammates is not the greatest thing! Tear down and load up are just that much worse when you have four sick people doing it.

God has totally been present in all that we've been doing. Especially through the book which I'm reading called "Authentic Beauty" by Leslie Ludy. It has been one of the most awesome, inspiring books I've read in a long time. It has been exactly what I've needed to hear for a long time. I recommend it to any young women, wanting a more intimate relationship with our true Prince.

Keep on keeping on!

His Broken Masterpiece  
Jenna



**Jenna Thompson**

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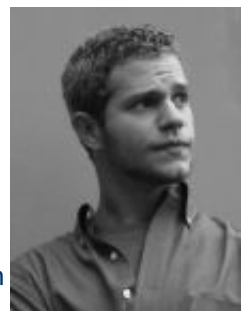
**Date:** 1/18/2006

**Submitted by:** Todd Ebling

**Journal Entry:**

Dear brother and sister ministers of Christ,

What a busy/crazy week we just had. Let me put it in different terms for you. A killer squirrel, a Grace Lutheran Church laundry basket, a gangsta mime, an Oompa Loompa, a singing Christmas card, and the space under some kid's bed--these were all answers in The Murder Game, which consists of a bunch of junior high kids trying to figure out who dunnit, where it was dunned, and with what it was dunned. As adults, we carry these things around with us called inhibitions that sometimes cause a road block to humor. But kids aren't quite aware of this, so almost every one of their ideas for The Murder Game was absolutely hilarious. Something in particular that I really love about youth ministry is the lack the youth have of everything that is adult. No matter how badly they try to act like adults, they still don't have quite the level of insecurity and caution in living because their innocence hasn't been tainted by the real world yet. A child is capable of nothing but a child-like faith that the Bible asks of us. I often try to complicate faith and complicate God, but the truth is that He is there for us in Christ, and that's all I need to know. I will continue to strive to learn just as much from these



**Todd Ebling**



awesome examples of Christ (children) as I attempt to teach them. God really has recently revealed Himself to me in the deepest, most abstract ways through the simplest "kids say the darndest things" lines in Sunday school, or preschool. And to me this is quite an amazing, yet humbling thing. I am so thankful for the youth of this generation, and their awesome potential.

Your comrade in Christ,  
Todd

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**Date:** 1/19/2006

**Submitted by:** Shari Trotter

**Journal Entry:**

Happy New Year everyone,

Christmas break is over, and it is time to get back to work. I have to say that I am actually excited to be back. There are so many adventures left to enjoy. It is time for Event season, and I have never been to one before. I am super excited. I wanted to share a little bit about my Christmas break with all of you. As you know, I taught Special Ed before I came on team, and I got the chance to visit some of my students while I was home. The night after I got home, it was the Christmas program for the school. I went to watch the program thinking it would be the same as it had always been. However, this year it meant so much more. I saw children whose parents were told they would never talk sing entire solos. I noticed that children who, at the beginning of the year, could barely sit still for two minutes were up on stage doing their part perfectly. How amazing the human spirit is. It can conquer amazing boundaries. I think watching these leaps and bounds meant so much this year because I have been immersed in the power of God. I have seen boys, who we were told were hardened criminals, weep at the thought of God's amazing love. I have seen older people, whose minds we thought were lost, tell about their childhood and their love for God with sheer precision. How amazing our God is, how amazing his love, and how amazing are his people.

In Him,

Shari



**Shari Trotter**

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**Date:** 1/22/2006

**Submitted by:** Shari Trotter

**Journal Entry:**

I recently stayed at a host home with a couple whose house was empty. Their children had all moved out and it was just them. When I found out that I was going to their home, I was a little apprehensive. I had to go by myself, and I would rather have one of my teammates with me. But I climbed into my host mom's car and away we went. We had to stop at the grocery store to get some biscuit dough for the rolls she was making for the Sunday potluck. As we walked through the store, we talked about where I came from, and I shared with her that the average weight gain on team was thirty pounds. She was amazed. We paid for the dough and we went back to the car. When we got to the house, we pulled into the garage and unloaded my bags. We went inside and she showed me around the house. After the tour we went into the kitchen. Her husband came upstairs, and the three of us sat in the kitchen and talked while my host mom cooked the rolls. They asked me about my family and my team. They asked me about my future and my faith. It felt awesome. These two people were genuinely interested in me. I realized their home



**Shari Trotter**

was not empty at all. It was filled to the brim with love. I told my team the next day that I truly felt loved. I was not a visitor but another Christian, a member of their family. The love that they showed each other was also amazing. It poured out of everything they did for one another. They gave so much of themselves to me, and all they knew about me were the basics.

In Him,

Shari

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**Date:** 1/25/2006

**Submitted by:** Ester Nielsen

**Journal Entry:**

Beckie, Shari and I were talking the other day about life on the road—well, we talk about what we do, just like any other person would do. When I was in school still, we talked about teachers and homework, when papers were due, and how far away the weekend was. Anyway, we were talking about all the different people we meet and that we've already met more than a thousand different people and a lot of those we will never see again. It's an interesting way to do ministry. It's a lot easier. It's so much easier to do ministry to a whole bunch of people in a hundred different places than to do ministry to the same people every day. Sometimes I think that it would have been better to stay at home to do ministry, but now I'm here, so now this is important.



**Ester Nielsen**

You don't have to have a title as a pastor, a missionary, a volunteer, a Captive Free member to actually do ministry. Any follower of Jesus Christ is called to do ministry to any neighbor—whether they live far away or next door.

We went on to talk about the fact that this year is not just about ministering to the people we meet. It is even more a year of training to minister to others. After this year our challenge will be to minister to the people we live amongst, whether it's back to Mom and Dad or to fellow college students, to co-workers or church members at home. We thought we were on the road to do ministry, but in fact the ministry we will be doing after team is maybe even more important. We didn't train for just a month in August—we are still in training and we will not be done until team is over. In August, I learned that the most important person is the person right next to you, the most important place is right here, and the most important time is right now. This means that no matter where you are, who you're with, and what time it is, you can minister. Don't think that you have to go on team, don't think that you have to travel to foreign countries to tell other people about Jesus Christ, but do think that the person you meet after having read this is a ministry opportunity for you to tell that person about our Savior, and maybe you only get one chance...

- Ester\*

Translation:

25. januar

Beckie, Shari og jeg snakkede den anden dag om livet "on the road" – tjaa, vi snakker om det vi laver, ligesom enhver anden ville goere. Da jeg stadig gik i skole, snakkede vi om laerere og lektier, hvornaar stile skulle afleveres og hvor lang tid der var til weekenden. Tilbage til vores samtale... Vi snakkede om alle de forskellige mennesker vi moeder og det, at vi allerede har moedt over tusind forskellige mennesker og mange af dem vil vi aldrig se igen. Det er en interessant maade at drive mission paa. Det er meget nemmere. Det er saa meget lettere at missionere for en hel bunke mennesker hundrede forskellige steder end det er at missionere til de samme mennesker hver dag. Nogle gange taenker jeg at det ville have vaeret bedre om jeg var blevet hjemme for at drive mission, men nu er jeg her, saa nu er dette vigtigt.

Du behoever ikke at have en titel som praest, missionaer, voluntøer, captive free medlem for at kunne drive mission. Enhver der foelger i Kristi fodspor er kaldet til at drive mission til enhver naeste – uanset om de bor langt vaek eller lige ved siden af.

Vi fortsatte med at snakke om at dette aar i virkeligheden ikke bare drejer sig om at missionere til

de mennesker vi moeder. Det er endnu mere et aars traening til at missionere for andre. Efter dette aar er vores udfordring at drive mission for de mennesker vi lever iblandt, - det vaere sig mor og far eller studiekammerater, medarbejdere eller kirkegaengere derhjemme.

Vi troede vi var "on the road" for at drive mission, men faktisk er den mission vi vil drive efter team maaske endnu vigtigere. Vi traenede ikke bare for een maaned i august - vi er stadig i traening og vi vil ikke vaere faerdige foer dette aar er slut. I august laerte jeg at den vigtigste person er den person lige ved siden af dig. Det vigtigste sted er lige her og den vigtigste tid er lige nu. Dette betyder at ligegyldigt hvor du befinder dig, hvem du er sammen med, og hvad klokken er kan du missionere. Tro ikke at du bliver noedt til at vaere paa et team som jeg er det, tro ikke at du behoever at rejse til fremmede lande for at fortaelle andre mennesker om Jesus Kristus, men tro at den person du moeder efter at have laest dette er en mulighed for dig for at missionere og fortaelle vedkommende om vores Frelser,- og maaske faar du kun een chance...

- Ester\*

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**Date:** 1/25/2006

**Submitted by:** Todd Ebling

**Journal Entry:**

Strum, strum, SNAP!!! Oh, why am I such an idiot?! Who does stuff like this?! Really! Why me?! What kind of "image of God" breaks a string on the intro of the first song of an hour long Saturday night acoustic program?! I mean, REALLY!!! Not only that...but I'm down to zero strings, so now I'm without a guitar. I'd like to blame Youth Encounter, but I'm the idiot who broke all of them. In the middle of downtown Chicago, at some all-black church in the heart of the city, and now our program has to go down the drain because of the doof on the guitar. All these people are staring at me. All of them, judging this rich white kid, who thinks he's got it, then he blows the whole program. I bet they're glad. I bet they're glad I screwed up, so now I look like the idiot I am instead of some rock star. I want to just hop in the van and drive somewhere...anywhere is fine as long as it's away from all this embarrassment. Just let me hang my head, and try to ignore the fact that I'm here, in front of all these people who scowl at me and judge my failures. Why am I even here? In all honesty, I probably couldn't even tell you right now. I slowly lift my head, but I can't open my eyes and face this crowd who I'm sure is scowling at me in disgust. I know I already have let them down. I need a solution; I need to fix this problem. What can I do?! I can't do it myself. God, help me please. -No response- God, help me *please*! -No response- Well, thanks for nothing then, God. I might as well open my eyes and deal with this disaster. As I open my eyes, I can only see one thing. There is so much commotion in the room, yet I can only concentrate on this solitary scene. I look, and there is Sam. Sam is the organists' son and is about eight years old. He has his eyes closed too, only not out of some fear of being seen. Sam is closing his eyes to pretend he is somewhere special and magnificent. I'm not sure where he was exactly pretending to be, but wherever it was there was lots of dancing. And now he is definitely joining in the fun. He heard our music and imagined something spectacular. That something was intangible to my burdened, work-oriented mind. There was a certain freedom and creativity that Sam was capable of that was out of my grasp because I was so blinded by my own agenda that I didn't make room for the people I was supposed to be serving. God answers me. I instantly feel a peace in my heart that I thought left with the broken guitar string. Thank you, God. That is just the solution I needed. All this time I had a rotten attitude about how our music sounded terrible without a guitar, and there was Sam, enjoying it more than I feel I ever have before. I'm not here for me, to make some extraordinary guitarist dream come true. I'm not here out of some kind of selfishness that comes from our programs going perfectly and sounding great. I'm not here to stand in front of people with my head down and eyes closed in stubbornness. I'm here for Sam. I'm here because God said "Todd, you should give a year of your life to me, in praise and worship, and to serve others in my name." I lost sight of this calling in my own ambitions, and it built a wall to separate the love that exists between me and any of God's creations. Pride crept into this ministry and put God in the back seat, but through Sam, God showed His triumph in love. I gave in when that thought finally entered my tiny brain, and I started singing, loudly, and with more joy than I've had in a really long time. I hear clapping. And as I look around the room, these people aren't judging me by any means, but instead they are all smiling and clapping, and tapping their toes. Well, now I truly feel like a jerk. I was becoming more of a judge on



**Todd Ebling**

these people than I thought that they were, and it was truly unfair. As my attitude changed for the better, so did my perception of our program. It wasn't bad without a guitar; in fact we have beautiful voices that I hadn't really taken the time to pay attention to before then. In fact, it sounded good. God is always pleased when we sing and praise in His name, but I'm sure He was much more pleased when my heart changed. Wait, I'm not out of strings, I have electric ones. I might as well strap one of those babies on the acoustic and see how things go. It sounded awkward, but not bad. Well, that fits my personality description fairly well anyway, so I guess I'll just be me and see how this program goes. It went great, and a lot of people were very happy that we came. They gave us quite a few compliments that I would have never thought possible after the mistake in the beginning. Compliments... wow... All in God's glory, I guess. Well, thanks for everything then, God. We stayed in Chicago for the church service the next morning, not to play but to experience worship is what the pastor told us. It was one of the most incredible worship services I've attended. Everyone was excited and singing, shouting, and dancing before God. The choir had about thirty of the loudest, most beautiful voices I could imagine, all singing the gospel songs better than any attempt a high school choir of two hundred could give. And our team was welcomed with open arms to join them in an impromptu song of "Lord I Lift Your Name on High." The sharing of God's peace didn't consist of a bunch of rigid suit-and-ties introducing themselves with a firm shake of a hand while saying "Peace be with you" in a monotone voice to everyone within a two step radius. I was made to feel and experience God's peace in this place by a sharing of God's peace that lasted close to twenty minutes with everyone hugging and kissing everyone on the cheek, and asking how you're doing and really wanting to know. And then they said "Peace be with you" with a smile and a kind of look in their eyes like they desired that God's peace would just descend like a dove from heaven and rest on your shoulder. It was such a real experience. I am privileged and blessed to take part in this new and real kind of worship. It amazes me how the actions of a life loving, carefree child named Sam witnessed Christ's love to me, and really put me in place in my faith. So, wherever you are, Sam, thanks bud.

-Todd

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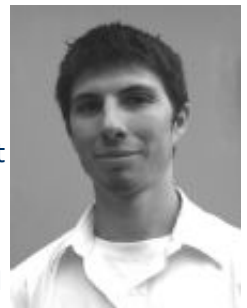
**Date:** 2/15/2006

**Submitted by:** Eric Boerboom

**Journal Entry:**

Greetings from West Lakes America. Our Quake at Indianapolis was lots of fun. It wasn't our largest Quake, but we had some wild and crazy kids and adults. It was awesome to have Agape there to share stage time with. He brought diversity to our music and showed us that we can use any kind of music to praise God. It has nothing to do with the style and everything to do with our words and the spirit behind them. I am thankful that Quakes can teach us such simple and yet powerful ways to praise God in everything we do.

~Eric



**Eric Boerboom**

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**Date:** 2/21/2006

**Submitted by:** Shari Trotter

**Journal Entry:**

Wow, so we just got done with our Indianapolis Quake and it was awesome! Dave Scherer, also known as Agape, was our music guest and he was so much fun. He said a lot of really awesome things but one stuck in my mind the whole weekend. He told the kids that questioning our faith was good. That always striving to know more is what God calls us to do. One of the Ten Commandments is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and your entire **mind** and all your soul. I thought this was awesome, but I was a little concerned because I knew that I was leading three Treks the next day and that I might get a question I could not answer. So the next day came and I started my first Trek and it went really well, there were no questions and I thought to myself, "Whew, you breezed by on that one." I started the second Trek and we were finishing up the discussion part, and I was excited because I had escaped the questions again. Then all of a sudden one of the youngest kids in the



**Shari Trotter**

group raised his hand and said, "I have a question." "Oh no," I thought to myself, "Here we go." He proceeded to ask "If God is as big and powerful as everyone says he is, then why does he love such tiny, insignificant, worthless humans?" Wow! I sat quiet for a minute, kind of taken back by the question, and then I realized my teammate Todd and I had been discussing a similar topic the other day. So I told the youth in my Trek about our conversation and told them that we spent an hour trying to explain God and then finally came to the conclusion that we couldn't. One of the kids raised his hand and said "So let me get this straight. You spent a whole hour explaining to each other that you couldn't explain it?" I said, "Yep!" One of the other adults in the room asked if he could add something and I said sure. He read to the group a part in the Bible where King David asked that very same question. It is amazing to me that so many people ask that question. We want so badly to explain a love that is beyond our comprehension. It is beyond any word we could find in our dictionary and beyond any emotion that we ourselves can show. I think that lack of understanding is beautiful. If we knew it all now, then there would be no excitement for heaven. We would take for granted God's amazing love because it would be definable and reachable and would lose its vastness. I have come to the conclusion that not knowing is God's plan for us. He wants us to keep searching for answers. He wants us to invest our hearts, and our **minds**, and our souls in him. So questioning our faith is good. However, when we spend an hour trying to explain God and finally realize we can't, then we should just rejoice in the greatness that God is.

God's Peace,  
Shari

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**Date:** 2/21/2006

**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt

**Journal Entry:**

Hey, y'all! Clearly, Shari's Southern-ness is rubbing off on me! I just can't seem to get away from it! Just kidding! Well, we are currently in a town called Zionsville, Indiana. We just finished our Indianapolis Quake, and it was so amazing! I got the chance to work with the Junior Guides at Quakes, and I had some of the most amazing Junior Guides I've ever had! In the two years that I've been doing this (man, I tried so hard to make it sound like a long time), they were truly some of the most fabulous high school kids I've ever worked with. So, if any of you are reading this, know that you're awesome and that I'm praying for you and your leadership in your churches, schools, families, and friends. You guys rocked my face this weekend! Be encouraged in that! However, this journal is not about the Indy Quake, but about a post-Quake event that began shortly after our Wisconsin Dells II Quake. And it starts...



**Beckie Petzoldt**

We just recently had a time of on the road support with our director, Tiffany. She came out to the Dells II and worked sales for the Event, but her main deal for being there was to do support staff stuff with us. It was a time for us to be able to recharge, be out of the host home and ministry setting for a few days, and also talk and process through various team stuff.

One of the many things we did while she was there was we did these Team Support Journals, where we had personal devotions. Each day, we had some quiet time to read some verses, journal, and reflect on certain things. On Monday afternoon, we got together and did some meeting stuff, and then proceeded to do our devotions for the day. Now, our meeting room at the Chula Vista Resort was one of the Hospitality Suites, so it was roomy and had a lot of space, one of which was a very large coat closet. I had found in the devotion times before that this closet worked very well for seclusion because I could shut one door and it would be dark, but at the same time, I'd still have some light coming in. For these devotions, we'd also been given a little votive candle for our time to just have for ambience or something to symbolize the presence of the Holy Spirit with us all the time. So, this Monday, I went into my closet with my candle, Bible, clipboard, pen, pencil, highlighters, and journal, and was ready to go. I began reading our section for the day, and it was amazing. We were reading Philippians chapter 2, verses 5-11. It just really touched my heart because it was talking about how God sent his Son here to earth and how he became man and died for us. I was really enjoying these verses this particular day, and I just got this spark in my head to start writing, so that's what I did. I was going to town, just writing away. I was having one of those "brainy" God-moments where I felt like I understood so much, and I was just tearing up the pages of my journal with all that I was writing.

All of a sudden, I saw this great light, and it shook me out of my hysteria and I looked up, expecting some huge God-Beckie communication time, and just as I raised my head, I realized that it wasn't Gabriel or anything huge like that, but that my Bible had caught on fire! Apparently, my candle was too close to my Bible pages, and the heat had caused them to curl, just enough to catch on the flame and ignite. Well, needless to say, I started



freaking out! I was slapping my Bible with my clipboard, blowing on it to get the fire to go away as ashy chunks of Ephesians were flying through the air. It finally went out. As I sat and looked at my Bible with the missing pages of Philippians and Ephesians slightly charred and smoke-stained, it was then that I got my God moment.

So often, we look for these grand scale "God speaking to us through a cloud or a burning bush" moments, and neglect to see that He is always there, speaking to us and guiding us each and every day. It's so easy to think that, "Well, God has never spoken to me directly, so I must be doing something wrong," or, "What's wrong with me that God will speak to other people but not me? Maybe I'm not a good Christian." That isn't true at all!!! Our Father in Heaven speaks to us each and every day; we just neglect to hear Him. I know that I struggle with things like meeting these people with these stories of great depth and grandeur about how God spoke to them in a very real way. Many times, I find myself caught up in the "why not me" of the whole thing. It says in 1 Kings 19:11-12, "The Lord said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper." Even Elijah looked for these huge vast sightings of the One Most High, but after all of that, there was still that still, small voice.

I urge you, brothers and sisters in Christ, to seek out that small voice. God, though He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and mind bogglingly huge, He doesn't play His "big" card all the time. He takes the place even as a small baby, innocent and fair, and came into the world not to scream at the top of His lungs how He is the Messiah, but lead by example and showed His regality in everything he said and did. We, as Christians, are called to be just like that. So, in the process to make ourselves that person about whom everyone asks, "What does he/she have that I don't?" we also need to look in the details and see the truth behind the things we preach. It is then, and only then, that we will be able to sit and be in the presence of the Lord, and finally hear it; His loving, caring voice whispering into our ears, "I love you, my child. You are mine." Take care, God bless, and keep on rockin' for Him!

In His Grip,

Beckie

CFSC 04-05

CFWL 05-06

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**Date:** 2/23/2006

**Submitted by:** Shari Trotter

**Journal Entry:**

Solitude, ooh, I love it! When you spend almost all of your time talking or singing, a few moments of quiet is simply amazing. My team got a chance for an hour and a half of quiet time for ourselves the other day, and I decided to go outside because I am craving spring so bad. I went outside, and I was planning to just walk around the church, but then I saw a lake with geese and a bench. It was calling my name, and so I knew I must obey. I walked across the yard towards the lake and headed towards the bench when I noticed a sign. It said "NO TRESPASSING, ONLY RESIDENTS OF WILLOW CREEK NEIGHBORHOODS MAY USE LAKE." I was so disappointed. I wanted to watch the geese slide on the ice, and listen to the fountain hit the surface of the lake. Then I got a little mad. They can't tell me not to enjoy this lake. It does not belong to Willow Creek neighborhoods. It belongs to God. Everything on earth belongs to God. When will we as the human race realize that nothing here is ours? One day we will leave this place we call earth, and we won't get to take any of our possessions with us. After being mad for a few minutes I realized I don't need a bench to enjoy God's surroundings. So I stood by the sign as a kind of protest, and I watched the geese slide across the ice, and I listened to the fountain hit the surface of the water, and it was awesome. God is great; if only we could let him own that.

In him,  
Shari



**Shari Trotter**

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**Date:** 2/23/2006  
**Submitted by:** Todd Ebling  
**Journal Entry:**



**Todd Ebling**

I was so tired, all the time. I felt like I had been running on E for the last month. It becomes so hard to just give and give in this ministry and rarely see the results of our work. So I was just falling into this weary rut that was just killing my attitude. I was getting sick of being on and around people all the time. I was getting sick of everyone's different ideas of God and answers for life. So many churches have so many different views on faith. How does anyone know what to believe? All I saw was a confused state of people who didn't seem to fit into my ideas. But a few days ago at our Dells Quake, we had a break after dinner for about an hour and a half. And I got completely rejuvenated—physically, mentally, spiritually, and in every other department in that short amount of time.

I walked, something similar to that of a zombie, into the ballroom and there was surprisingly no one else there. No Event Directors, Event Crew, hotel staff, other musicians, or speakers, or most surprisingly, no junior high kids. The lights were even off. I plodded up to the stage and without really thinking, grabbed my guitar. I started picking some notes out and kind of just messed around with my amp. Nothing was sounding good. It didn't sound musical or good or even in tune.

When I hear music, I think of God. You can go to any culture and there will always be two things in common. People will always smile when they are happy, and people will always celebrate music. Smiles and music are both gifts of God. They are just the spiritual and universal language of us all. I know our International Teams are really experiencing this firsthand. I am in constant amazement about this. God has created everyone with such uniqueness and so many differences, but we all share these common bonds.

If I were God, I would have given up on me a long time ago, because I can't comprehend that love. It is the love that gave itself to murderers to save murderers from themselves. It is a love that isn't conditional and never changes. It is a love that is so far beyond me. Why would God share this awesome love with me, a disgrace? I don't understand it, but I know that He loves me because He created me. He loves me because I am His, and nothing I can do will ever change that.

I play a C major chord, with the C, then the E, then the G. And to me, it sounds good. Our ears are capable of hearing these whole tones. So we make the things that sound pleasant to us the musical standard. But an infinite number of possibilities sit with each sound, and around that sound with other sounds that don't fit our musical standard. So to us, it wouldn't sound good. It doesn't fit the standard. And so much exists between each half step, and each note. There are things in which we can't even hear a difference, musically. But I imagine that to God, in every note, at every pitch, at every frequency, every octave, every volume, every tone, there is a perfectly beautiful symphony. Why? It's because God created all this sound, He made it all perfect, the way He wanted it. And when we use it to His glory, I know He is pleased. But this musical standard doesn't exist in God's eyes. In His name, music is so beautiful. Even that man in the back who is standing and clapping off rhythm, and even that woman who is singing firstly the words to the wrong verse, and secondly way out of key. That stuff doesn't matter to God. He doesn't have a musical standard, as we do. His love for the music He created is exactly like His love for the people that He created. And just like our musical standard, we often hold people to a standard as well. If they don't fit what we think "sounds good," we refuse them. But I imagine that to God, every person, despite our feeble minds in comparison, is a perfectly beautiful symphony. Why? It's because God created us all and loves us beyond us, and beyond our standards. God loves us even when we don't sound good. He loves the outcasts, and He loves the ones the world just loves to hate. I need to start sharing in this love.

And there, standing by myself, in this huge ballroom, with the little orange light from my amp glowing and reflecting off of my guitar, and like a reminder a huge feedback hissing at me from an overly sustained C major chord, I regained my sanity. I need to stop this conditional love and faith thing, and start loving how God loves. So I thought, hey, no one's here, it's time to crank it. So I just slapped up the Hiwatt setting and flicked the master volume knob higher than I think I ever have before and just started wailing. I got into that groove zone that I haven't been able to get into while on team, simply from our busy schedule. I don't even remember what I was playing or what squealing noises came out, it could have been "Twinkle twinkle little star" but it was the most shreddingly melodious version I've ever experienced. I was in the zone and it was sweet. I reached

that zone where you don't really hear the music, but you feel it, and you play in accordance with that feeling. Right then, Joel from Tangled Blue, the other band at the Quake, walked in, and needless to say I was pretty embarrassed at the strange noises coming from my guitar. So I stopped playing and he was like, "Don't stop dude, rock and roll!!!"

I kind of feel a renewed love. I really believe that that is God's view when it comes to music. "Don't stop dude, rock and roll!!! Whatever it takes. Just do it. Make a joyful noise to me, every chance you get!" It doesn't have to be perfect, or aesthetically appealing, just joyful. This new kind of related-to-music love is making me feel whole again. It is making me see the beauty in everything, no matter how different people act or think. I am so thankful that God is God and that I am not. Through this year I have seen God's Spirit move through our music so many times, and for that I am so grateful. Sometimes when you speak the language of music, you speak the language of God.

~Todd

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**Date:** 2/25/2006

**Submitted by:** Ester Nielsen

**Journal Entry:**

I am really tired this morning. I slept really well, but I'm still tired. There has been a lot of things going on lately, not that we have been super busy for our region, but there is much more to team than just singing for people and hanging out with kids/youth. Team takes all of you, your time, your engagement, yourself. You are constantly around other people or your teammates, there is always something to do or needs to be done soon, but then sometimes when I'm finally alone I need rest, I need silence, I need nothing, but I feel bad because I could have done other things instead of sleeping in. I could have written letters to home or my friends or my sponsors, I could have read about the university I'm going to, to find out what exactly I want to study, I could have read my Bible, I could have cleaned the van or done my expense report for the team....etc. Some days are like that. Other days are fun and you laugh all day because so many random weird things happen and you have your team to laugh with.

This is just one of the days where I realize how fragile and unstable I am, where I can see that I need something stronger underneath me. I need God. I need Him to balance things out because He is always the same. His days are not like waves with ups and downs. He is constant.  
-Ester\*

Translation

25. februar

Jeg er virkelig traet her til morgen. Jeg sov rigtig godt, men jeg er stadig traet. Der har vaeret en masse ting her paa det sidste,- ikke at vi har haft vildt travlt for vores region, men der er saa meget mere til team end bare at synge for folk og vaere sammen med boern og unge. Team tager alt af dig,- din tid, dit engagement, dig selv. Du er hele tiden omgivet af andre mennesker eller dine teammates, der er hele tiden noget at give sig til eller noget som traenger til at blive gjort snart, men saa naar jeg endelig er alene har jeg brug for soevn og hvile, jeg behoever stilhed, jeg har brug for ingenting, men jeg har det daarligt med det, fordi jeg kunne have gjort en masse andre ting i stedet for at sove laenge. Jeg kunne have skrevet breve hjemtil, til venner eller til mine sponsorer, jeg kunne have laest om det universitet jeg skal gaa paa, for at finde ud af hvad jeg helt praecist vil studere, jeg kunne have laest i min Bibel, jeg kunne have gjort bilen rent (invendig) eller opdateret team'ets udgifter...osv.

Nogle dage er saadan. Andre dage er sjove og man griner hele dagen fordi saa mange tilfaeldige og maerkelige ting sker og man har sit team at grine med.

Dette er bare en af de dage hvor jeg indser hvor skroebeligt og labil jeg er, hvor jeg kan se at jeg har brug for noget der er staerkere under mig. Jeg har brug for Gud. Jeg behoever Ham til at balancere tingene ud fordi Han er altid den samme. Hans dage er ikke som boelger med toppe og dale. Han er konstant.



**Ester Nielsen**

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**Date:** 2/28/2006

**Submitted by:** Eric Boerboom

**Journal Entry:**

So tomorrow begins March. Probably will be well past the first of March by the time you get to read this, but anyway, I was thinking about how I like March. There is no real reason. Where I live March still means winter; honestly it doesn't get warmer than 40 maybe 50 degrees. Still my heart finds hope in the month of March. After a long winter, to see that first day of spring on the calendar seems to give hope to my heart. There is the hope of summer days and warm weather, the hope of spending time at the lake and on the golf course. I realize when I think about it, how much this is like the hope we have in eternal life. I have been learning a lot about what it means to have hope in our faith and that we can hope in those things we do not yet see because we know it is coming. Right now I cannot see spring, it's about 20 degrees outside, but tomorrow is March and I know spring is indeed coming. In the same way I get a glimpse of the joy Christ has planned for us in eternal life. He gives the love of family, relationships, or the joy of sports, just so we can have a glimpse. How much more can we hope for in our life eternal. Well, the point is, if you find that this earth is cold and snowy and sometimes depressing, know that God gives us the little joys so that we can have hope in a warm, comforting and loving eternal life.



**Eric Boerboom**

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**Date:** 3/1/2006

**Submitted by:** Eric Boerboom

**Journal Entry:**

Have you ever thought, "Why is it that we are such competitive people?" We want people to see how big our house is, how many cars we have, or how popular we are. In sports we try to be the best and impress our friends and family, but why then don't we want to give our all when it comes to our relationship with Christ? He is the only one worth truly competing for; he is the only one worth giving our all to. He is worth all of our love and all of our heart. We can give 100 percent in life and in our passions, like basketball, but we can also play for the glory of God. We can give our all because God created us to love what we do and he created our talents to show us how he cares about our every small detail in life. We can also use our talents and competition to bring others to faith. When we impress others with our heart and passions for what we do, we can point the fingers back to our creator.

God's child,  
Eric



**Eric Boerboom**

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**Date:** 3/1/2006

**Submitted by:** Jenna Thompson

**Journal Entry:**

I'm walking at a slow pace, taking my time. I'm walking by myself. I take in the beautiful blue, clear sky, the fresh green grass, and the warm scent of the fresh country air. The birds are chirping, and I can hear the wind blow through the tall grass and through my hair. I take a deep breath, and the country air invades my lungs. This is the moment I've longed for since August. There is a man walking slowly down the same dirt road ahead of me, coming in my direction. He's of adult age, and by his brown shaggy hair and full beard I could tell he was a man. He looks old enough to be a father or a husband. As he continues walking towards me, I can see him looking around and enjoying the same beautiful scenery I am, but suddenly, we caught each other's gaze. He looked at me as if I had been exactly the thing he had been looking for and I stood there pondering who this man might be, that



**Jenna Thompson**

he would look at me such a way. He ran.

He started running so fast that I could see the dirt kick up behind him, and I was taken aback for a second. There was a man running straight for me! My feelings of being lost in this big open space and of wallowing in my loneliness suddenly melted off like a raindrop off a flower petal. He ran right up to me and scooped me up into his arms. It's the tightest, warmest, most loving, comforting embrace I've ever had. He didn't have to say a word. He just held me tight in his embrace. I wept. I wept because no one else of this earth could love me and show it the way that was taking place, right there in the middle of nowhere, America. I wept because I had realized this man was the man of my dreams. This man was my friend, my father, my encourager, my listener, my advice-giver, my shoulder to cry on, my prince in shining bright armor, and this man is my savior. This man is in love with me, a sinner, who has so much baggage. But despite all of my baggage, all of my sins, he loves me more that I could ever fathom. He's the buyer and occupant of my heart. He's my Jesus. As I stood there, weeping and sobbing in his arms, my makeup smeared across his chest and my face, His calming voice said to me "It's so good to see you! Where have you been? I've missed you so much! My child, do not be afraid of this world any longer, for I am always with you."

My feet gently came back down on the ground and I pulled back from my tender prince. His hands gently wiped the tears from my eyes and held my head in his strong hands and whispered "What a beautiful creation I have made!"

We walked through the field to our left, through the tall, wispy grass, to a spot which was cleared. I followed as my Jesus led me to sit with him, in this spot in the grass. I felt as if I was so unworthy to be there, in the presence of my Lord and Savior. Who was I to sit in God's creation with Jesus? This was the man who died on a cross, because of my sins, so that I could live eternally. But before I could further this though any longer, He said "You are my father's child. I love you very much. I loved you enough to shed my blood upon that cross, just for you."

As I gathered my thoughts as to what was happening, I said "My 'thank you's' could never be enough to describe my gratitude to you. How could I ever be worthy?"

*To be continued...*

His broken masterpiece,  
Jenna

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**Date:** 3/2/2006

**Submitted by:** Eric Boerboom

**Journal Entry:**

I don't think I have any profound words in this little journal, but I just wanted to tell you all a little bit about some cool things we've done. Recently, we got to take a trip down to southern Indiana, and for our region this is considered to be "the south". We got to spend time on the college campus of the University of Southern Indiana. It was one of the best days I have had this year. Being on the road doing this music thing, I realize just how much my life is dependent on being active and athletic. It was an awesome opportunity to go to the college and work out at the gym and play some basketball with a bunch of college guys I didn't even know. It just shows how in every opportunity there is a chance to preach the word of Christ. As I got to share some of why I was at their college and how faith is a part of my life this became apparent. Being back at the college and back in the gym had me excited to be back at UW-Superior and sharing the word of God through example to those who are in the gym regularly. Do you see any places where you are living that you can bring Jesus into the picture, not even through talking. just being an example to your friends in everyday life?

God's child,  
Eric



**Eric Boerboom**

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**Date:** 3/9/2006



**Submitted by:** Jenna Thompson  
**Journal Entry:**



**Jenna Thompson**

Today we went and did an early morning chapel/acousic show for a private Lutheran school in Stevens Point, WI. The kids were K through 6th grade. We did the usual sing-alongs and the interactive Bible study, and then after, like always, I went around to give "high fives" to the little kids, whom I think are always the coolest. So I was going down the line, got to the end, and all of a sudden I found myself with three five-year-old girls wrapped around my waist and both of my legs, and then a huge mob of kids jumping around me, asking me if I knew what their name was. So, with my teammates looking on, laughing hysterically at me, I played their game of guessing each and every one of their names. "What's my name? What's my name? What's my name?" And as weird as it was, I kinda liked it. Ha ha. I was just someone who was older than they were, singing some goofy songs for them to start their day of Lutheran private school for them. But they loved me! They wanted hugs and high fives and showed me what they learned in dance class the day before.

There is something about kids that I'm just in constant awe of...they have no inhibitions. They don't care if they dance crazy in front of a complete stranger, and they have no qualms about plowing me over with hugs. Their laughter, their smile, their missing teeth and all...they make me feel like it's something tangible that God has given us. A small, grain of sand glimpse into what heaven looks like. And for those days that you hate your situation, you hate your job, your car didn't start and you had to take the bus to work, and you got splashed by a puddle before your big office meeting...think of a smiling child, bubbling over in laughter and excitement. It's a guaranteed spirit lifter, and a small promise of hope that things will pick up.

His Broken Masterpiece

Jenna

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**Date:** 3/13/2006  
**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt  
**Journal Entry:**



**Beckie Petzoldt**

Good morning, all! I hope you are all doing well, and there is no such thing as a "case of the Monday's" to speak of! We just spent a weekend with 850 junior high students at the Chula Vista Resort in the Wisconsin Dells, and I don't think I can appropriately explain how absolutely amazing it was! God was totally present in that ballroom, in those Trek rooms, in the hallways, everywhere this weekend. I was stretched, pulled, questioned, and tested many times this weekend, and I am so very thankful for all of it.

Tiger McLuen was the speaker this weekend, and he spoke a lot of truths that touched the lives of those kids but really touched me as well. He spoke about what he calls the "4 P's" which are Personal Looks, Performance, Possessions, and Popularity. I have always struggled with self esteem issues and doubted how valuable I was, how pretty I was, how I measured up to this social scale that everything seems to be based on. I know that I've heard it a million times, but this weekend it really clicked in my head. Part of what Tiger talked about was that it really doesn't matter what you look like, who you hang out with, what kind of clothes you wear or anything like that. All the treasures you store up here on earth will get you no farther than the front door. Once you go out into the world with this shaky "sandy" (yes! The theme reference) view of what you're supposed to be, it's no longer up to you what people say, think, or do towards or about you. You fall into a pit of lions, waiting to tear you apart. But, we have a Father in Heaven who loves us so much and created us in

His image, so therefore, we are perfect in His eyes. I've realized that, when we hate how tall we are, whether we're a size 0 or size 35, what our hair looks like, that we don't have a boyfriend/girlfriend, and all those things that make us who we are right now, we in turn are telling God that He didn't do a perfect job when He created us. Every inch of us, every hair on our heads, and each cell in our bodies was created in love, care, and perfection by the one Father that, no matter what, will always be there to love us, care for us, heal our hurts, dry our tears, and stand with his arms widespread when we come running to Him. That is a truly amazing thing!

So, as you've probably gathered by now, I was truly touched by Tiger's words this weekend. He is an amazing speaker, but even more, he's an amazing man of God. I am so thankful that he could be there to share with those kids this weekend, and teach some of us "older" kids a thing or two, too!

Thinking about this right now, I just met so many amazing people this weekend! Seriously, I can't get over it! I can't remember if I have written about this before or not, but Todd and I lead the Junior Guide Treks, which are leadership workshops for high school students that attend the Quakes with their youth groups as junior leaders (go figure, right? Junior Guides, junior leaders, duh, Beckie!). I think that I can honestly say that this was one of the most mature groups of Junior Guides I've ever had. We had such intelligent conversations that sometimes I forgot that they were all between 15 and 19 years old! On Saturday, we have two Trek times and at the end of the last one, we open it up for kind of an open discussion time where the kids can ask questions of us as Captive Free, ask questions to each other, share stories and experiences, just kind of where the Spirit leads things is where things end up going. We had some awesome questions and topics of discussion, but then we ran out of time and I told them that we had to go because there were between 25 and 55 "Quakers" (a.k.a. junior high kids attending the Quake) waiting outside the room because their next Trek was in the same room that we were in, but I encouraged them to talk to each other or, if they had questions, to even ask Todd or me, and that we would be more than happy to sit down and just talk and hang out. So, after we prayed and as people were leaving, one of my Junior Guides came up and asked me if she could talk to Todd and me, and so we left the room, and we sat down and talked with this girl about some faith struggles that she was having. I was so awe-struck by the fact that A) this girl was only in high school and B) that she was so curious and wanted so badly to know why. She shared that with us that, because of the fact that she was struggling with this, that she felt like she was living a lie and that she didn't know if she should be there with all these people. She told us that she sang the songs with all her heart and she truly believed what she was saying, but just this one thing was hard for her to grasp.

I know that we all struggle with trying to really grasp all of Christianity in its vastness. And, I know that we all struggle with trying to grasp God and all the wonder, and yet all the mind-boggling aspects of Him and his love for us. There are things that we cannot explain and, no matter how hard we try, it's just not possible or feasible to attempt to comprehend exactly how something works. But, there is something called faith that we just have to rely on. We used air as an example in our Trek when talking about the presence of God and how some people just don't get it. Air is there, it helps us to live, but we cannot see air itself. Sure, we can see our breath when it's cold, but unless it's below 45 degrees outside, it's impossible to see it. We can't see God and, no matter how hard we try, it's just now possible. But, we can see Him through things in our lives, in nature, and in an innumerable amount of ways. We just don't tend to view things like that. God is everywhere, all round us, and we can't explain Him to the entire extent, but all we can do is trust and have faith that He is there. Todd always says that Christianity and God is either one of two things. It is either the biggest hoax in the entire history of man kind, or that it really is true. I don't know about you, but I'd like to believe in the truth that is on that cross; that God is so amazing and huge and vast that we cannot even begin to understand or explain him. But, hey, if we could, then what would be the point

in faith?

There is a verse in the Bible that says something like faith is trusting in what we do not understand and cannot see. I know that isn't exactly what it says, but it still rings true in so many ways. No one can explain God, just like no one can fully explain love, or happiness, or life in general. All the possibilities that we are given and all the knowledge we have are a gift from God, and I know that he gives us just enough insight into his awesomeness to keep us curious and wanting to learn. So, I'll tell you all the same thing I told my Junior Guide: never stop asking questions and never stop striving to know more, because in those times of doubt and curiosity is when God reveals Himself to us in such a real way. People say that "curiosity killed the cat," but who says that is such a bad thing? Take care, God bless, and always keep rockin' for Him!

In His Grip,

Beckie

CFWL 05-06

CFSC 04-05

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**Date:** 3/15/2006

**Submitted by:** Ester Nielsen

**Journal Entry:**

I guess you don't really know what freedom is until you've lost it... Sometimes I feel that I am being held captive in this van we are driving around in,- that we can't just go anywhere we want to. But imagine that you are locked up—not in a van, but in a cell. You can never do what you want to, you don't have days off, and other people decide what you do every single day, and every single day you do the same thing. And the day after, guess what...the same thing.



**Ester Nielsen**

Yesterday we were back at the Lincoln Hills School in Irma, WI, which is a detention facility for teenage guys. We were all really excited to go back because we had an awesome experience the first time, and I don't think we got disappointed this time either. It was sad to see that a lot of the boys were the same, but it was awesome to see that they all came to worship with us again. They were so excited for us to come because it was something different—they actually were allowed to jump around and stand up and clap and dance!!

Growing up fairly traditionally Lutheran with no clapping in church, no drums, no dancing around, etc., I guess I can see the comparison. Not that things haven't changed at all, but this year has taught me that it's a natural thing for a Christian to worship God in any way with your whole body and soul. If that means that I need to jump or dance around for God, then let me do it.

Why hold back—worshiping God is between you and Him, not other people. Let's dance like David danced!

- Ester\*

Translation

15.marts 2006

Jeg tror ikke rigtig man ved hvad frihed er foerend man har mistet den... Nogle gange foeler

jeg at jeg er blevet holdt fangen i den bil vi koerer rundt i,- at vi ikke bare kan tage derhen hvor vi vil og goere hvad vi har lyst til. Men forestil dig at du er laast inde – ikke i en bil, men i en celle. Du kan aldrig goere hvad du har lyst til, du har ikke fridage og andre mennesker bestemmer hvad du skal hver eneste dag, og hver evig eneste dag laver du det samme. Og dagen efter,. Gaet hvad?! Samme ting.

I gaar var vi tilbage til Lincoln Hills Skole i Irma, Wisconsin, som er et faengsel for teenagedrenge. Vi glaedede os til at komme tilbage fordi det bare var en super oplevelse den foerste gang vi var der, og jeg tror ikke vi blev skuffede denne gang.

Det var trist at se at de fleste af drengene var de samme, men det var skoent at se at de alle kom for at lovsynge med os igen. De var saa glade for at se os igen fordi det var noget anderledes – de fik endda lov til at hoppe rundt og staa op og klappe og danse!!

Taget i betragtning at jeg voksede op rimelig traditionelt luthersk hvor man ikke klapper i kirken eller spiller trommer eller danser rundt, kan jeg godt se sammenligningen. Ikke at tingene slet ikke har aendret sig, men dette aar har jeg laert at det er en naturlig ting for en kristen at lovsynge Gud paa enhver maade med krop og sjael. Hvis det betyder at jeg behoever at hoppe eller danse rundt for Gud, saa lad mig da goere det.

Hvorfor holde tilbage – at lovsynge Gud er noget mellem dig og Gud, ikke andre mennesker. Lad os danse som David gjorde det!

- Ester\*

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**Date:** 4/25/2006

**Submitted by:** Ester Nielsen

**Journal Entry:**

FOR SOME REASON THE COMPUTER KEEPS TYPING CAPITAL LETTERS. EVEN WHEN I TRIED THE CAPS LOCK KEY, IT'S LIKE IT DOESN'T QUITE GET IT. SO THIS JOURNAL IS GONNA BE ONE BIG EXCLAMATION MARK.

I GIVE TO YOU THE VERY FIRST SPRING POEM FROM WEST LAKES:

SPRING HAS COME – ALLELUIA

THE WEATHER IS NICE – (AT THIS POINT JENNA SAID I AM OUT OF CONTROL)

THE GRASS IS GREEN

THE LEAVES ARE BACK IN BUSINESS

I HAD AN AWESOME BREAK – JUBIII

I LIKE AMERICA

SEND MORE LICORICE.

YOURS TRULY: ESTER\*

TRANSLATION

25 APRIL



**Ester Nielsen**

AF EN ELLER ANDEN GRUND BLIVER COMPUTEREN VED MED AT SKRIVE  
MED STORE BOGSTAVER,- SELV DA JEG PROEVEDE CAPS LOCK TASTEN ER  
DET SOM OM DEN IKKE HELT FORSTAAR. SAA DENNE JOURNAL BLIVER ET  
STORT UDRAABSTEGN. JEG GIVER TIL JER DET ALLERFOERSTE  
FORAARSDIGT FRA WEST LAKES:

FORAARET ER KOMMET – HALLELUJA

VEJRET ER SKOENT – (JENNA HAR NU FORTALT MIG AT JEG ER UDE AF  
KONTROL)

GRAESSET ER GROENT

BLADENE ER TILBAGE I FORRETNING

JEG HAVDE EN FANTASTISK FERIE – JUBII

JEG KAN GODT LIDE AMERIKA

SEND MERE LAKRIDS.

JERES ESTER\*

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**Date:** 4/25/2006

**Submitted by:** Ester Nielsen

**Journal Entry:**

When you're on the road, you learn to be thankful for a lot of things. This past day off right after a Quake in Chicago with 600 youth, we stayed at a church in West Allis, near Milwaukee, WI. We all slept in an abandoned youth room with couches for the girls...the boys slept on the floor. The church had provided some food for us and furthermore a pass to the local YMCA, so that we could take showers. And we were happy. We were exhausted and needed rest, and we were thankful for a place to be just by ourselves. Not to mention the free showers at the Y!! Shari and I even found a Starbucks Coffee, a goodwill store, a post office, and a place where I could get my hair cut. It was all set up to be a good day off.

Somehow we heard that another team had just done a Quake at Coco Beach in Florida with only 200 kids, and the hotel was on the beach. On their day off, their hosts were buying them tickets to all four parks at Disney World in Orlando, Florida...

My point: When you're on team, you learn that everything is a gift. You learn to be thankful for things that you would normally had taken for granted.

- Ester\*



**Ester Nielsen**

Translation

25.april 2006

Naar man er "on the road" laerer man at vaere taknemmelig for en masse ting. Denne sidste fridag efter et ungdomsevent i Chicago med 600 unge var vi i en kirke i West Allis, naer Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Vi sov alle i et forladt ungdomslokale med sofaer til pigerne.. drengene



sov paa gulvet. Kirken havde soerget for noget mad for os og endvidere havde de givet os hver et pas til den lokale YMCA (det danske kfum&k, maaske, bare mere et fitnesscenter), saa vi kunne tage et brusebad. Og vi var lykkelige. Vi var udmattede og havde brug for soevn og hvile og vi var taknemmelige for et sted hvor vi kunne vaere bare os selv. Ikke at forglemme de gratis brusebad hos YMCA!! Shari og jeg ovenikoebet fandt en Starbucks Coffee, en genbrugsforretning, et posthus og et sted hvor jeg kunne faa mit haar klippet. Det saa ud til at blive en god fridag.

Paa en eller anden maade hoerte vi at et andet team lige havde haft et lignende event paa Coco Beach i Florida med kun 200 boern, og hotellet var lige ned til stranden. Paa deres fridag havde deres vaerter koebt dem alle billetter til alle fire parker i Disney World, Orlando Florida.

Min pointe: livet er uretfaerdigt, men naar du er paa team laerer du at alting er en gave. Du laerer at vaere taknemmelig for ting du normalt ville have taget for givet.

- Ester\*

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**Date:** 5/23/2006

**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt

**Journal Entry:**

I've heard it said that "war is hell." There are times in life when, no matter how hard you try to avoid a bad situation, things seem to come down around you and all you can do is look in wonder, amazement, and confusion as to how things got to the point in which they now exist. Sometimes, you can stop them, and sometimes, they come barreling at you like a freight train, and with a deer-in-the-headlights look across your face, you're forced to take things head on.



**Beckie Petzoldt**

Eric, our teammate, left for home today. Returning to Superior, Wisconsin, he has to go back to work and to school (not to mention get married next January). It's so weird that, even when you've been expecting something for such a long time, how surreal it is once it actually happens. Yesterday, we had a campfire with him as our last "hoo-rah", and it was so unusually typical. Granted, Todd had already left for Paris, so it still was like nothing was different on our team as far as normal life was concerned. Then, the next morning, he was gone, just like that. I've had mixed feelings about it over the past little bit. I didn't understand why he had to go, and then I did, and then I did, but I didn't want him to go, and the list just goes on and on. But now, looking back, I see that, despite whether or not I understand, it is not going to bring him back on the road with us. All I can do is pray for him and his life and ministry elsewhere.

I learned so much from Eric over the course of his stint with us, things that I will not soon forget. Eric showed me what it meant to be dedicated and really intentional about his faith and the one-on-one faith of others. He showed me how to examine my own personal beliefs and know why I believe what I do, which is hard to understand sometimes. So many of us have "our parents' faith," that we neglect to explore our own faiths.

Each day, I pray for guidance and direction, but I also pray that He works in Eric's life and the lives of all of you. This is such a precious gift that we have all been given, and I think there is no other way to praise Him than the best way we know how. Remember that as you continue on your walk with Christ; may he strengthen you and give you his peace, mercies, and joy beyond your wildest dreams. Take care, God bless, and keep rockin' for Him!

In His Grip,

Beckie

CFWL 05-06

CFSC 04-05

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**Date:** 6/10/2006

**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt  
**Journal Entry:**



Greetings to you all from Danforth, Illinois! I pray that these next summer months bring you all good weather, great friends, and blessings in abundance! It is just so great to be back here at St. John's! I love returning to places that we've been and catching up with old friends and making some new ones along the way. This week, we've had the chance to do our first VBS with close to 65 kids, and I can't explain to you how much fun it's been! We're housed in trailers outside the church, and there are kids that live just next door, always waiting for one of us to come out and play with them. They are so much fun and have so much energy!

I've gotten the opportunity to get to know one little girl very well. Whitney, at age 8, is one of the most inspiring kids I've ever met. Her fervor and zeal for life is just so touching, and I've had such a great time playing, laughing, and sharing with her. She asked me a question the other day that struck me like a load of bricks, one that I will never soon forget.

**Beckie Petzoldt**

We were picking these little red berry things off of this tree in the Pastor's yard (we liked to call them the "red berries of fire"...don't ask, I think the name came from the fact that they were red) and then putting them in an upside-down Frisbee, and once that was full, we deposited them into a hole in the tree's trunk. We continued about our busy work, chatting frequently about nothing in particular, and then Whitney said with curious eyes, "Beckie, can I ask you a question?" Ready for almost anything, I said, "Sure, Whit! Ask away!" Not even looking up or missing a beat, she asked me, "Do I annoy you? Am I an annoying kid? Because if I am, you can just tell me. Sometimes, Captive Free people would come, and they would just ignore me or roll their eyes and walk away when I tried to talk to them. So, if I'm annoying you or anybody on your team, will you just let me know?" I sat, stone faced, in shock as she rattled off this question that boggled my mind. As I sat catching my breath and regaining composure, I said to her, "Whitney, you're just a kid! You don't need to be worrying about anything like that. You are an amazing kid, and I feel so lucky to have the chance to hang out with you. Don't you ever worry about being annoying, okay? You just keep loving life and being a kid, all right? Can you promise me you'll do that for me?" After a pause, she looked me in the eyes, a smile across her face, and said, "Yeah, Beckie. I can do that! Come on! Wanna play Evy-lvy-Over?"

We so often overlook our position as members of Captive Free. At this point in the year, some of us may be tired, some of us may have lost our fervor and zeal for this lifestyle that we've adopted for the year, and some of us may just be ready for a change. In this anticipation for transition, though, I think that we lose sight of the reason why we're here NOW doing what we're doing right this very second. I remember a devotion that Amber, one of the office staff, did with us all at training in August. She read us this book, and I'll never forget this part of it. It said, "The most important place is where you are right now, the most important people are the people you're with right now, and the most important thing is what you're doing right now." How true is that, and how often does that get overlooked or swept under the rug during some quick mind "spring cleaning"? We have been so richly blessed by the opportunity to be right where we are right this very second, whether it's at Vacation Bible School, at work, at home, or wherever we may find ourselves. I encourage you to find the blessings in your life today. Say "thank you" for one thing that God has blessed you with that you may have overlooked in the past. Looking at where I've come from and what God has blessed me with, the blessings are innumerable. These kids that we get to share in the good news of Jesus Christ with are a blessing in and of themselves. Each one of them are gifts from God to so many people, and I pray that we do not forget that, and that we don't sweep them under the rug because we're tired, or irritated, or too preoccupied with what's to come for us that we miss out on our chance to show them, and others, Christ.

Whitney is a truly amazing little girl, one that I will never forget. Just before we left, we had dinner at her house with her, her sister, her dad, and her dad's fiancé. We were looking at some pictures that her dad's fiancé, Megan, had taken over the course of the week of us playing during and after VBS and just other fun things we'd done (like the water gun fight that we surprised the neighborhood VBS kids with. The pictures are priceless). As we were flipping through, we found a picture of me with Whitney sitting on my knee in the churchyard. She took the picture out, ran over to Megan and whispered something in her ear. After getting an "ok" from her, Whitney came back over to me, sat down on my lap on the couch, and handed me this picture and said, "Here, I want you to have this so you'll always remember me. Thank you for being my friend." With tears in my eyes, I hugged that little girl and simply said to her, "Anytime, sweetie, anytime." May God bless us with thanksgiving that is just a fraction of what that small girl showed me that day. And may we always remember our impact on the people we meet. You never know, you may be the only "dose of Jesus" they ever receive! Take care, God bless, and keep rockin' for Him!

In His Grip,

Beckie

CFWL 05-06

**Date:** 6/19/2006**Submitted by:** Beckie Petzoldt**Journal Entry:**

Hello, everyone, and a warm greeting from Merrill, Wisconsin! We are on week number three of VBS for the summer, and, let me tell you, we've had so much fun! We just finished a week in Marion, Wisconsin at St. John's Lutheran Church. The kids there were phenomenal, and my host home was one of the coolest places I've stayed! I stayed on a dairy farm with over 600 head of cattle on it, and I got to help out a little bit. I got to help feed calves once (and I dumped the milk all over the ground...clearly I'm a farmer girl reject!) and I got to see and help a baby calf be born! They even named it after me! It's a cutie; I'm not going to lie! Anyhow, it was a great time!

**Beckie Petzoldt**

This week, as I said before, we're in Merrill, Wisconsin at yet another St. John's Lutheran Church. We just started our VBS today, and it went very well. We're playing games with the kids, so that's a cool change of pace from teaching music for three hours a day to just playing with them. It's a Treasure Cove VBS, so it's even more fun for me, being that I love pirates and we're dressing up for Water Day as pirates! It'll be super fun!

I've had the chance to be housed by myself for two weeks straight, and this host family that I'm with now is really great. We've had a lot of fun together already, and it's only Monday! We've got until Friday, so I can't wait to see where things go! Yesterday, my host family asked me to go boating with them on the Wisconsin River. As some of you know, I'm not quite the swimmer, and also as a result of recent "semi-traumatic events", I'm still pretty afraid to swim, especially in rivers. But, I went along for the ride anyhow. As we were going, both my host sisters and my host dad went inner-tubing, while Deb, my host mom, and I sat in the boat and watched them have fun! It was so funny! This is a really great family that's truly full of love, fun, and many memories.

As we were pulling in for the night, my host dad, Todd, decided that he wanted to take me on a tour of the river a little bit before heading in for the night (it was about 9ish, so it was starting to get cooler and the sun was beginning to set). So, as we rounded this corner, it opened up to this dammed portion of the river, so it was wider there along with deeper and more room to roam. I don't really know why, but the beauty of God's creation really struck me that day. How each beautiful tree, bush, fish, plant, and cloud in the sky were all part of what made the scenery what it was at that moment. If there had been even one tree that wasn't there, it would not have been what it was. In a way, that is kind of like a skit that we do during VBS. Ester is this inventor, and she builds this amazing machine, complete with the "blink" at the end. While she goes out to get the newspapers and news stations, two parts of the machine decide that the "blink" isn't necessary, and they don't need it. In the end, Ester goes and finds the "blink" and reassures her that the machine isn't complete without it; that it can't be all that it is intended to be without her.

God sees his creations just the same. Without any one of us, the world would not be what it could be, just as the shoreline of the Wisconsin River would be less without even one bent tree or a machine wouldn't be complete without its "blink". Each and every one of us has just as much value and importance as the next person; it's how we utilize and realize that importance that really makes a difference in our lives and the lives of others. We could just sit around and not put our talents and gifts that God has given us to use at all, and then people may miss out on the opportunity to see how amazing this God, that made all of us different, is. It blows my mind that there are currently something like 5 billion people on earth right now, and there have been people here since the beginning of time, and there will continue to be people here until Christ comes again. And, to think that there never has been, is not, or never will be anyone in the history of time that has the same face as you, the same hair color as you, the same DNA as you. God made each and every one of us individual, and each one of us brings a different gift to the table. He's just waiting for some of us to realize them and be willing to share them with others, because some of the most amazing people in history started out just like you and me.

I pray that you remember your uniqueness and feel blessed to be who you are. No one can ever be you, and you, no matter how hard you try, can never be anyone else. Embrace your individuality, and know that you are who you're supposed to be. God doesn't make mistakes, especially when it comes to his kids! Take care, God bless, and keep rockin' for Him!

In His Grip,

Beckie

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