

New Dawn 2005-06 Journal

Date: 9/20/2005

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

HELLO, GOODBYE

People are a blessing in my life. My friends, my family—my family of friends—all are blessings. A month of training allowed several close relationships to form. I met amazingly talented people throughout the weeks of intense preparation. Now we are apart. Hello, goodbye.

Training for team ministry ended with a commissioning service. Family and friends were present to witness the sending of all Youth Encounter teams. Familiar faces surfaced among the waves and rows of people. Separate-past lives merged together in oneness. I was surprised to see four wonderful friends I had worked with at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp. A reunion with friends from college took place the night before. And I couldn't help but notice my father and sister sitting in the second row, front and left (they were wearing bright complementary colors of pink and green). Joy filled my heart as I laughed and made eye contact with each.

After the program, I had 20 minutes to visit before our departure. I was so overwhelmed. Standing in a circle—a mix of two worlds in one place—emotions ran wild. I greeted my visitors and I said goodbye to those I just spent a month of my life with. Hello, goodbye. It wasn't enough.

Two lives became one through prayer. I stood and held hands with my sister and Michelle, a friend from camp. Each took a turn praying as we went around the circle. Love and support filled our gathering. It was wonderful to pray with my friends again, but hearing the words of my father and sister solidified this unconnected grouping. Praying with friends is normal, but praying with family is not. We were connected, complete and whole. I cried (a little). It was beautiful.

After our prayer, we hugged and quickly went our own ways—becoming lost in the sea of faces (the title of one of our program songs) and crowded chaos. I waved to my friends, family and other teams as they left. Goodbye. I hopped inside my home (a 15-passenger van) and said hello to a new group of friends, an extended family—my team. Hello, goodbye.



Chase Chisholm

Date: 9/22/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Random Acts of Life

Day Five of our year-long road trip, and I am continually amazed and overwhelmed at this experience. In the last twenty-four hours, our team has been a witness to the awesome diversity of the people God has created. We have been invited into the lives of five-year olds who giggle over everything. We were able to hang out and chat with some teenagers who need a lot of help, guidance and many prayers. And tonight we were brought back to a time of fun and homecoming festivities with a group of high school seniors, celebrating a volleyball victory and the freedom of senior year again (even though it definitely was not our senior year).

The generosity of our host churches and families is a blessing for me to see. Too often we hear only the bad things that people do to one another, and we forget that there is good in the world also. However, it's wonderful to see that good is still alive. I have felt so welcome in all of the host homes so far, like one of the family, really, and this amazes me continually. Even at the detention center, there was not the big feeling of disconnect that I was anticipating. The media teaches us to fear what is different; it teaches us that there is no good out there, only gross things. And yes, that stuff does exist, but it's not all there is to life. What I've been seeing so far on the road is that, even



Kristin Rice

through rough patches and mistakes in life, there remain the potential for good and the good itself, despite circumstances. I thought that this was a lesson I'd already learned, but I guess I needed a reminder in a big way.

Until next time, God bless!
Kristin

Date: 9/24/2005

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

"Chocolate Milk"
Oconto, WI

In the Midwest, everyone seems to be somehow connected to everyone else. People have much less than the average six degrees of separation. My teammates from the Midwest have some kind of relationship with several people in the congregations that we have been visiting in this area. I guess it comes in part from so many small town environments. I have not spent so much time in small towns before. Dunkirk is a small town in Calvert County. However, I do not feel like it is a unified town. Most people do not interact with each other regularly. Besides Calvert County, I am used to Washington, D.C. and Miami, which are on the opposite end of the spectrum from small town. Since I have been in Minnesota, Michigan, and Wisconsin, I have seen numerous small towns, and they have a very different energy about them. In Oconto, I was with a group of people for the Homecoming parade and then went with my host family to dinner. When I rejoined with the other group later that night for the Homecoming game, they knew where I ate and what I was doing before I told them anything. I could not have survived in such a town as a kid. However, it does have its pros as well. Parents find out what their child is doing all of the time. You can't get away with much in a town like that. The town had a general cohesiveness and fun traditions such as "decorating" the whole town for Homecoming and eating caramel apples from a certain store before the parade. I definitely enjoyed these traditions.

More than their closeness though, I was extremely impressed with the effort our host families put into making us a part of the town. One host dad took pleasure in finding some form of participation for us in the Homecoming game. Darrel played the bass drum with the marching band during a song. Kristin was given a cheerleader's pom-poms to do a cheer. Finally, I got to sit in the little speed car that drove the school's flag back and forth in front of the stands. I wish I could have driven it, but oh well. I have great pictures.

My favorite memory of Oconto was that my host sister called me "chocolate milk" (she is only six years old and did not know about my chocoholic nature). She wanted to call me "mom," but I said that she should save that title for her real mom. Then she looked at her chocolate milk and said to me, "I love chocolate milk. Can I call you chocolate milk?" I answered, "Of course." I love how children are open and honest. Their thinking is logical, in some way, and sincere. No wonder God wants us to be more childlike in our faith.



Corine Bell

Date: 9/27/2005

Submitted by: Darrel Patton

Journal Entry:

WOW CRAZY!

Hello, this is Darrel (DC to some of you). Writing to you from the UP of Michigan. Our first weeks on the road have been amazing! Amazing food, amazing people, the tangible view of God's work in the world. In the past weeks, we have encountered many wonderful host families that have made their homes ours. Their amazing hospitality has been a great encouragement. Just the other day Chase, Deron, and I stayed in a home in Appleton, Wisconsin. Deron is a volunteer staff member who was on the road with us for a short time to finish some training. He left us this morning for home. We will miss you, Deron!



Darrel Patton

Back to Appleton, where a wonderful family whose names all began with "C" took in all three of us guys for two nights. We greatly enjoyed their company! They treated us so well with great food (thanks for cooking Cal!) and a great time watching Monday night football along with making paper airplanes with the four amazing kids. Not to mention Molly, the four-month old Spaniel-puppy who was excited easily (and still potty training). It's hard to leave sometimes. We have found that people are so generous and are very willing to accommodate us in any way possible. I am thankful for that.

New Dawn is beginning to mold into a team and it's great to be a part of. It's becoming evident that God placed us together for a reason. The many people we've met and the many ways God has worked in our lives in the first few weeks is amazing. I am excited to see what God has in store in the coming weeks.

May God bless and keep you in all that you do.
In nomine Jesu,
Darrel "DC" Patton

Date: 9/29/2005

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Chocolat

Willy Wonka has nothing on our host family from Escanaba, Michigan. Seriously—flowing fountains of chocolate goodness. We finished with our program on Wednesday evening, and our host dad asked us if he could have anything waiting for us when we got home. We of course proceeded to ask for some sirloin steaks and escargot. I think Corine requested some sort of chocolate, because she is obsessed. (Truly obsessed; she can't really think of anything else if chocolate or something in the chocolate family is mentioned. Cocoa, fudge, milk, dark—these are all words that make her head turn because of their relation to chocolate.)



Cassie Woodard

Anyway, we told him that we were fine; we didn't need anything except a rousing rematch of Catchphrase. We arrived at their home about an hour later. I walked into the kitchen with my armful of books and awkwardly stumbled to set them down in my room. As I was walking by, my eye was drawn to this three-tiered fountain with a warm brown liquid flowing from it. I threw my books down and ran back to the oasis. It was true—my eyes had not deceived me. It was a fondue fountain of chocolate, with strawberries and pretzels and dried fruit and Nilla wafers set out for our dipping pleasure. I think I heard Corine crying out of sheer joy somewhere behind me. The three of us girls crowded around the fountain, and I don't think our host family heard from us for the next half hour except for "mmm." Our host mom had to replenish the strawberries at one point. I think I remember someone having the good sense and courtesy to ask if our host family wanted any, but they told us that they had already had some earlier. I think this was a lie, I think they were mostly just afraid to try and break through the wall our bodies had formed around the chocolate. It was a pretty shameful 30 minutes for the girls of New Dawn.

However, this demonstration of gluttony did not affect our host family's view of us—they were still incredibly generous and loving. This has been true in so many of our host home experiences. God has blessed us with people who love to provide food and shelter for us, and the love that we feel from the people who have housed us is incredible. We have been blessed by their love and hospitality.

Date: 10/1/2005

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

CHERRY SALSA

It's sweet, spicy, delightful and abundant—it's cherry salsa. And it's overflowing in Sutton's Bay, Michigan. What a concept—sweet and spicy, hot and cold. Two extremes stirred into one. It's kind of like life. One moment you're munching on some salsa, the

next you're putting cherries on a chip. More cherry salsa, please!

We've experienced a few moments of having no idea what to expect. Something tells me to expect more of these instances, although I really have no expectations for this year. And that's okay. It seems random moments create prime ministerial situations. Earlier this week (as in Saturday), we were taken in by Immanuel Lutheran Church in Sutton's Bay. And by "taken in" I mean we were given an unplanned place to stay.

Sutton's Bay is a wonderful community filled with cherry and apple orchards. Wineries dot the countryside. And the surrounding area rims Lake Michigan. An immediate welcome upon our almost-surprise arrival suggested the people were just as beautiful as the place. They were. Immanuel Lutheran was asked to host us only days before. No one really knew what to do, not us, not them—God did.



Chase Chisholm

Kristin, Darrel and I stayed with a wonderful cherry- and apple-growing family. Cherry salsa was waiting on the table when we arrived home. I had to sit down and gorge—as is custom for me to do. The night was wonderfully complete with food, conversation, a doctor's checkup from Cali—the youngest member of my temporary family, waddling like a penguin with Dora (a popular children's television show), racing and snowboarding via a handheld controller, as well as Barbie's bendable knees and head-twisting capabilities. Need I say the night was mostly spent with two young girls and Kristin? It was great. I laughed so hard. We loved it.

The next day was equally grand, regardless of our early rise. We sang in both worship services, helped with Sunday school and enjoyed a delectable afternoon banquet with instant friends. The people of Immanuel Lutheran were entirely hospitable and graciously generous. Their willingness to bend and accommodate five "outsiders" was inspiring. One moment we had no idea what to expect, the next we were eating cherry salsa with wonderful strangers.

We left just as quickly as we came, with the hope and invitation to return. I left with a new outlook on life. Add in some tartness to regular tastes and expect to "unexpected" the outcome. It's like adding cherries to salsa. If we don't, God will—cherry; if we do, God does—salsa. I look forward to our hoped-for return to Sutton's Bay, Michigan.

Date: 10/4/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

"Let's go to that little café for awhile," someone uttered on our day off. So we trekked into "downtown" Reed City in hopes of spending some time just reading or writing in a coffee-type shop. However, our host family recommended a more pricy establishment, cringing at our original idea. After checking that place out (and checking out our wallets), we elected to walk down to the tiny café. Along the way, our eyes caught a cute bakery/coffee shop. Excitement surged through Chase's and my java-deprived veins, while Cassie and Corine thought it looked interesting; that is, until sadness ensued when we discovered it was closed on Sundays and Mondays. Dejected, we kept walking on to the café. Alas, again we were thrown into the pits of despair to find that this place was also closed, and that we had missed it by five minutes. Hearts and stomachs empty and lonely, we turned around, our heads heavy at the prospect of spending more on a coffee than originally planned.



Kristin Rice

After we settled down at the non-team-budget-conducive restaurant, I tried to think about this most recent moment of God in our life on the road. This incident took place in the middle of a week where we have been subject to complete trust of the Lord and the office in finding us places to sleep and hopefully to have some programming. As of the previous Friday, we have been floating like dust in the wind throughout Lower Michigan without a sign of where we'll be in the next 24 or 48 hours, thanks to total last-minute bookings and host homes.

In lieu of this perspective, we could see a blank schedule as doors closing, missing the boat of what God needs of us. But there is always an open door, a kind heart waiting that we might not otherwise meet. It is through the wanderings that I personally have been learning to trust the Lord

wholeheartedly with my life—that is the only way to have a peace of mind in this new lifestyle. If I try and maintain control over every aspect of my life, I will go crazy because it just is not possible. But knowing that God has it all taken care of, that He knows what is utterly best for me, even when I don't see it or understand it immediately; this has granted me peace of mind and a serenity I have not experienced before. Oh, the lessons we learn while wandering through small towns in Michigan.

God bless all-ways!

Kristin

Date: 10/6/2005

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Everyone at training was right—life is difficult on team, but the effects are well worth the effort put into it. I see how our program is beneficial to the audience members and people of all types can relate to some aspect of it. We had a program with the junior and senior high youth groups at Redeemer Lutheran in Interlochen, and they were our most receptive audience so far. They were dancing and singing to the songs and loved the puppet show, of course. We had great conversations with them and got to hang out with them more than most of the other groups we have met. The extra time with them enabled us to form a stronger bond and general comfortable feeling with the group.



Corine Bell

The next day we were blessed by the people at Community Mental Health. We had a great time singing with them, and they learned some of the sing-alongs better than any other group we have taught. We listened to their choir sing several songs after our program. They were great and had heaps of songs memorized, probably more than we have. We could tell they appreciated our presence and energy almost as much as we enjoyed watching them show us their talents with confidence.

Our host homes have been wonderful. At one home in Bay City, Cassie and I spent a good amount of time in a hot tub and also enjoyed amazing brownies (without nuts, yay!). I am extremely grateful that I have the ability to meet my chocolate quota everyday and that I continue to meet enablers.

I think, as a team, we are all learning how to act naturally with people from the outset so we can make deeper connections, especially with our host families. It certainly is much easier now than a month ago.

Lastly, I am excited for the tour to progress for several reasons, but the foremost reason now is that it has become very cold in Michigan and I can't wait to be in Florida! Call me weak, I don't care. I want over 70 degrees. Have fun everyone!

Remember; take every opportunity to praise God!

Peace and love,

Corine

Ps. 150

Date: 10/8/2005

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Feelin' the Love

On Saturday we stayed at a church in Saginaw, MI. Erik, the youth pastor there, showed us around the church a bit and then showed us the youth room where we would be staying for the evening. We were very excited—the room had a television and VCR, a pool table, couches, Nintendo 64 (with Mario Kart 64), and a stereo system with a CD library for the youth at the church. We were overwhelmed with the assortment of entertainment at our disposal and excited for a night of fun.

A few hours after we arrived, the sound of shoes squeaking on a gym floor echoed through the halls, and we began to hear shouts and laughter. Saturday was church league volleyball, and two churches were maintaining a friendly rivalry. After their game was over, we went into the gym to chat with the players. They asked us who we were (because it's not every day that there are unknown college-aged people just wandering the halls of the church at 10:00 p.m.) and what we were doing there. We filled them in, and they had hosted Captive Free teams before so they knew mostly what it was all about. When they heard that we were staying at the church, they immediately asked us if we needed food or extra sleeping bags or pillows...one man even offered to kick his kids out of their beds if we wanted to stay in his house. They gave us their leftover snacks from the game that night and gave us free reign of the church kitchen if we wanted to cook anything while we were there. We were showered with love and generosity.

It's amazing to me how much people are willing to give. We are out on the road this year with the hope of spreading the love of God and the goodness of Jesus Christ. I am continually amazed at how much people are willing to give. We have met so many people on the road already, and we have only been touring for one month! God has turned the tables a little bit for us. We go to new churches and homes each day hoping to shine with the light of Christ, and we leave in awe of the light that has shone through the people we have met. We leave humbled, touched by the love of God and His children.

Thank you to all of you out there who have shown love and kindness to the teams past and present. We are forever in debt to you. God's blessings to you all!

God's Peace,
Cassie



Cassie Woodard

Date: 10/11/2005

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Bowling Is Ministry

Strike! I forgot how much I loved bowling. It had been months—I got a strike on my first throw—perhaps a year since I bowled. I was back. Freshly oiled lanes, glowing pins, generic-dancing computer animated chickens, and cigarette smoke choking the air. Sounds like the perfect environment for ministry. Indeed it was. I was home.

I was raised bowling. Almost every Saturday morning for ten, eleven, twelve years of my life were spent throwing a three-fingered ball at some stationary objects. Most kids watch cartoons. I bowled. Both my siblings and I participated in a youth league which furthered our not-so-professional high school bowling team careers.

Bowling with youth of Trinity Lutheran Church in Midland, Michigan, brought me back to the Sunday evenings I once spent with my own church youth group. I was reminded of family and friends. I was also reminded of how important it is to spend time with friends and family. It's important to spend time with youth. It's important to spend time with God. A bowling alley is the perfect setting for relational ministry. Try it.

We'd go bowling for fun when I was in grade school. I witnessed the change from manual to automatic scoring systems. My youth group held pizza and bowling parties. Bowling gave us something to do in college. Then there was "Cosmic" bowling. Bowling was a huge part of my life. Bowling is part of who I am. A part I had forgotten.



Chase Chisholm

They reminded me. The youth did. I needed it. I needed to remember. I wanted to learn. I learned ministry can take place anywhere. It happens in the bowling alley and continues outside in the parking lot. It thrives in conversations about school, musicals and movies. Ministry lives in pool, foosball and volleyball games. Ministry is everywhere and in everything. Bowling is ministry.

Date: 10/13/2005

Submitted by: Darrel Patton

Journal Entry:

Hello again from Darrel "DC" Patton. Sadly, I am writing to you for the last time. I have decided to go home for personal reasons. Tonight is my last night with New Dawn and in a host home before I make my way home. I must say that my time on team was amazing! The way God is working in the lives of the people I have met, and the world, is unbelievable. Words can't describe what I have seen in my short time on the road and in training. I will forever remember this experience and the amazing impact it has had on my life. God is working in the lives of all teams and His people in the church. I have witnessed this myself. I am very sad to go.



Darrel Patton

To all I have met and encountered: God has truly blessed me! Because of all of you, I have witnessed the tangible work of God in the world today. I will forever hold all of you in my heart and in my prayers. May God bless all of you in all that you do! Thanks to Youth Encounter, all teams, and all of you who have supported me in this ministry. I have learned more in the past months about life than ever before, and I couldn't have done it without you. Thanks to my family. God has truly blessed me with a wonderful family. Without my family I wouldn't have had this experience. And thank you to my father, whom I love very dearly. Dad, I love you and thank you for everything.

+ In nomine Jesu +
Darrel "DC" Patton

Date: 10/15/2005

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Yesterday, we served at a homeless shelter in North Aurora, Indiana. We were able to fill several roles throughout the evening including servers, babysitters, entertainment, and companions. During dinner, Kristin, Cassie, and I were singing oldies to the people in line and received quite a few laughs (we choose to believe they were out of enjoyment). We had tons of fun playing with the kids there, even though we were saddened to see them there at all. There was one boy who stood up with us while we were singing and repeated every line that we sang five seconds after us. It was great. We also showed several of the kids how to use the instruments and they were excited to learn. I taught one girl another part to the classic, "Heart and Soul," and I heard her practicing it later. Then, I played cards with an older gentleman from Mississippi and we had a great conversation. We packed lunches for the following day and sang songs from "Sister Act 2" throughout the whole process. However, the best part of the evening was yet to come. Everyone was going to bed in their respective areas, and there was a separate room just for families. Several of the parents asked for a volunteer to watch their kids while they went on their last break before the doors locked for the night. I went down to the room and was in charge of two boys, probably eight and ten years old, while groups of other boys sat sporadically around the room. My boys were asking me questions about Team and Youth Encounter and one boy fell asleep. The other boy continued to ask questions until I got one in. I asked what kind of music he liked and he said "Catholic and rap." I asked if Catholic meant the songs he heard at church, and he said "yes." I asked him if he remembered any of the songs and if he would sing it for me now. He did. We were in the dark basement of a homeless shelter, and this young boy sang a hymn of praise to our Father. I just sat and listened. It was amazing.



Corine Bell

After that interlude, the group of guys to the side of us starting freestyle rapping and that was awesome as well. The entire experience was eye opening and unforgettable. Out of the mouth of

babes...

Corine

Praise God!

Psalm 150

Date: 10/18/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

ONE PEOPLE, INDIVISIBLE

It's been a great weekend. We got to play with kids and pumpkins in Aurora, Illinois. We hung out on Sunday morning with high school students in Evanston, Illinois. And then we went to a candlelight prayer service at Valparaiso University, anonymous Christians celebrating in word and song the glory of God. It was wonderful being back on a campus, feeling familiar in the mood of college life without the stress of studying and drama that is ever-present on college campuses.

We were staying with a wonderful couple while in Valparaiso, Indiana. He was a man with the gift of gab, and she was a woman who just loved life and emanated that in all she did. They reminded me of my own parents and what they will be like when they are at that stage of life. Well, maybe Dad won't have the gift of gab, but he does now when you get him on the right topic, such as the Civil War or license plates. (Love ya, Pops!) When we were preparing to leave after spending a couple nights at their house, saying good-bye was hard to do. It was how I imagine leaving my own grandparents would be like. I never really knew my dad's parents; they lived far from our house and we saw them only a handful of times before they passed away. My mom's father passed away when I was a toddler, so I've really only known and grown close to her mom. So, staying with this couple made me see a little of what it would have been like to have the grandfather figure in my life.

Tonight we had a mini-worship service with some people at an assisted living place in Dundee, Michigan. I'm pretty certain that it's these facilities that are in my top favorite places to be. I loved sitting with some of the women and hearing their stories and seeing my own family in those stories. One woman was so adorable; if I closed my eyes, I saw my Grandma talking. It's seriously awesome at how alike humanity is despite all the differences that we have. I'm seeing it more and more, the farther away from familiarity we get. The diversity of it all just falls away the deeper we get into each other's lives. God is definitely showing me that it's okay to go deep, even though we're in a place usually no longer than a couple days. Give your heart to everything you do, every person you meet; this is my new mantra. Love like there's no tomorrow, because in this lifestyle of Team, there really isn't a "we'll do it later," there's only a "Let's do it now."

God bless, all-ways!!!

Until next time, Kristin



Kristin Rice

Date: 10/20/2005

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Could I get a coffee?—cream and sugar

I feel refilled—spiritually. I really needed it. Refills on coffee are important, too. And free is even better.

Planning a getaway to Chillicothe, Ohio? Make sure to stop by Crispie Cream (not Krispie Kreme) donut shop—the original recipe since 1929. I did. So did Kristin. There you'll get a cake donut and an endless cup of coffee for barely over a dollar. I don't know the exact price—Kristin paid. She owed me. Regardless: It wasn't much. And it was great. "You can sit for hours and drink coffee," a nameless, faceless voice rose above the rest, "...if



Chase Chisholm

you want." I think people do. The place was packed!

A small table sat in the corner. Two chairs kept it company. It wasn't good enough. Kristin and I wanted to sit close to the action, near the heart of the café—the coffee stand. Donuts lined the wall behind, showcased and shown in an assortment of colors, styles, sizes, looks, and taste. "Why even bother," I thought, "I wasn't going to have a donut." We sat in two bar stools placed in front of us. Perfect.

We were formally welcomed with a smile from our server. "What kind of donut can I get for you?" A cup of coffee was already on its way. "You can come around here and have a closer look." I looked at Kristin. We followed without hesitation. I pointed to a chocolate covered cake donut. "Would you like double chocolate?" I nodded in tempted agreement—yes. Kristin ordered hers and together we made our way to our seats near the door.

It was perfect. I began to fully observe, appreciate and take in the ambiance. Cigarillo smoke lofted in front of my face (what could be better at nine o'clock in the morning?). I followed the trail to find a burly man rightly seated. We smiled, "Good morning." The conversation ended. A business woman dressed in the appropriate attire walked in—rushed. "Could I get a coffee?—cream and sugar." I watched. A man seated diagonal my post got his usual. "There you go, Bob." Our server (on top of her day) greeted him with a donut. I listened. Children stumbled in. Why weren't they in school? I began to think. The room froze.

Everyone had a different reason for coming to the donut shop. Everyone had a different destination to go after their routine or not-so-routine visit. What was it? Where? Everyone looked different, ordered different, talked different—everyone was different. And everyone lived different lives. Yet, for a brief moment all of us were in the same coffee shop at the same time. Why? I continued to think as Jared continued to talk.

He shared his life with me, with Kristin—with us. Jared did. Jared Bartley. He introduced himself as we did and shared his love for art. He was wearing a knitted hat, had glasses and a calm contemplative voice. My own passion for the artistic in life began surfacing with his. He sat to our left. We all agreed art was beautiful; it allowed different people to interpret works in different ways. I wondered how the different people in this seemingly ordinary café would interpret art. Did I?

Photography was the next topic of conversation. Painting and drawing followed. Being a missionary and building a church was what Jared hoped to do—it was his passion in life. He continued to share. And after he shared I noticed my coffee cup sat empty. It didn't matter. My heart was filled. I am inspired each time I ask the question. What is your passion in life?

It was time to leave. We exited the Crispie Cream donut shop like every other. Would anyone notice? Did anyone care? Perhaps we inspired Jared's life as much as he did ours? One can only hope. In any case we gave and received God's blessings on our way out the door. Jared looked away as we left and went on with his morning. Kristin and I walked back to the church and went on with our lives. I felt refilled—spiritually. I see God in conversation. I see God in people. And seeing God is free, just like refills on coffee. Sometimes you don't even need to ask.

Date: 10/22/2005

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

A New Tune, An Old Hymn

This morning the pastor led our team's devotions, and we sang the hymn, "Be Thou My Vision." Now there are many times when I am touched by music—I think that music touches the heart in a way that nothing else is able to, but there aren't many times that a hymn in a church service setting has moved me to tears. But on this morning at this particular church for this specific devotion, my heart jumped into my throat. The words spoke to me in a way that they hadn't before. I think that is just one demonstration of the power that music has. It is a different language, every individual translating the words into the language of their own heart. The words of a song can mean different things to different people, and a song that you have heard ninety-nine times can mean something different the hundredth time



Cassie Woodard

you hear it. "Be Thou My Vision" is a hymn that I have sung many times, but this time it meant something more. "High king of heaven, my victory won/ May I reach heaven's joys, oh heaven's Son/ Heart of my own heart, whatever befall/ Still be my vision, O Ruler of all."

Is God the Heart of my heart? Is He my vision no matter what? Despite struggle and frustrations, is He the rock I stand upon? Do I trust that the Ruler of all is victorious, even in my own life? Not all the time. I stumble and make mistakes and expose my weaknesses repeatedly. I continually fail to remember that God is bigger than anything I will come up against. Time after time I rely on my own strength to fix things. My foolish heart believes that it is a sign of independence and self-sufficiency to do things on my own; when in reality, "my own" doesn't even exist. God is our strength, and He doesn't desert us. He is the one who gets us through. Our weakness has no power over us, because God is bigger than sin and human weakness. The grace of God is abundant, and is all we need. "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Corinthians 12:9)

I have not yet come to the place where I can boast about my weaknesses (as Paul says in the latter half of this verse in Corinthians), but I am learning more and more that God is a loving and gracious God, and His grace is enough for me. As long as He is my vision and the heart of my own heart, I will continue to learn about His grace and love, and most of all, His power that is made perfect in my weakness.

In His Grip,
Cassie

Date: 10/25/2005

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Marching to the beat of my own drum

"We are marching in the light of God...we are marching in the light of God..." These lyrics to a favorite song of mine say it all. And I agree. It's what's important. Marching for God—it must be what I do. It's all I can do at times. I would like to think so, anyway. Perhaps I really am marching to my own beat? Why? How will I know if it's God's rhythm or my own? It's comical at times and discouraging at others. I can't seem to get it right.



Chase Chisholm

It's like I'm in my own world. The team laughs at me (not with), and I laugh with them. We laugh at each other. It's only healthy. I tend to hold the words I sing too long, which inevitably disorients the team. I struggle to play an instrument and sing at the same time. "You've got to get syncopated," they say. What does sync-o-pat-ed mean? It means nothing to someone who can't even read music. Strumming patterns don't come natural, and I most certainly can't keep the right beat on a drum—yet. I am working on it and trying to stay positive. It's daunting.

As each of us continues to transition into our own molding on team, we are faced with the challenge of being a four-person acoustic band. We lost our lead guitarist weeks ago. Thankfully Kristin stepped in and took over. Each of us has our own musical talent. Kristin can play the guitar. Kristin can also play the piano. Kristin plays the drum. Just the other day she paraded around with her clarinet. Basically Kristin can sight-read and play about anything—except brass instruments. She is allergic to them. Severe facial swelling will occur if she can't hold back from playing one. Part of me is curious to see if it would actually happen. I can tempt. Is it wrong of me to think this way?

Corine has the ability to sing and pick out harmonies in everything with sound. Cassie has the amazing capability to blow us away with her loud, beautiful and full noise. How does she do it? I want to know. Perhaps I will learn. I'll work on harmonies as well. I might as well. This year is one of learning. Isn't it? What can I do?

I can talk. I can speak well in front of others. I still can't figure out why people ask if I'm from another country. They tend to do so. In every place I go. It makes me laugh. I laugh a lot. I can laugh! I love to encourage. And I enjoy challenging people in their beliefs and assumptions—philosophizing, if you will.

Everyday I am reminded of why I am here. I need to be reminded. It's not for me, it's not the music or how I (we) sound. It's about the people. People like Alex, an amazing teenage guy with a passion for philosophy equal to my own. I stayed with Alex in Charlotte, North Carolina. We talked for hours the night I arrived. It was so refreshing to discuss God, faith, girls—everything with a Socratic mindset. I was highly impressed and happily jealous by and for his seemingly premature observations, thoughts I hadn't thought until last year. Alex greatly inspired me.

And then there's his mother. Lois. Right down and to the right. Lois is woman passionate about words, using them to articulate and convey a message. Her demeanor was eloquent, her voice—soothing. I learned from her as well. I hope they learned from me. It's what I always hope. I hope for an equal exchange.

I enjoy thinking of all the people I've met on this journey and thank God for crossing our paths. Alex and Lois are one, two, of many. Still, each is individual and will always hold a different way of inspiring my life apart from all the others. I would imagine Alex—Lois too—marching to the beat of his and her own drum(s). We all do in ways. Yet it seems sometimes we get stuck in mindsets of reverting to the way things always were or how the song once sounded. I always do. Why? It's comfort.

My challenge for you and for me is to break out of the norm and dance to the beat of our own drums. Let's beat the drum! Get into your world. Why would God want us in any other place? I am in my own little world in many ways—like grooving (when singing during programs) to a different beat than what's actually being played. What happens? I have no idea. It just happens. And it's out of control. God moves. I move. Let the Spirit move. Let the Spirit move you. Be free.

What is the Spirit and why is it capitalized?

Date: 10/27/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Sunshine on My Shoulders=Happy!!

Clermont/Orlando, Florida—Wow, this has been a pretty nice couple of days. We finally made it to the warm and balmy south, after much anticipation and prayer. We weren't sure if we were coming down here thanks to Hurricane Wilma hitting most of Florida. But praises to Him, the church we're heading to wasn't hit and there were no serious injuries or deaths within the congregation. So here we are, in 78 degree heaven.

Knowing that we were coming to Florida, we elected to save our day off for today, a Thursday, to allow for time to sight-see. I was totally stoked since this is the first time I have been to Florida and Orlando. We decided, with our hosts (who are an awesome family that Cassie has known for awhile) to visit the Downtown Disney Marketplace. It's not quite what I expected; I didn't realize that



Kristin Rice

Disney World is HUGE and that the park is spread out, not all in one tiny cozy and easily maneuvered space. So we didn't see the castle or Epcot, which was kind of disappointing for me. However, it was still a pretty good time. We spent a good chunk trying to get a new, temporary team picture.

We also went to the Rainforest Café for dinner at four in the afternoon. That was entirely too overly-stimulating for me; I actually was dizzy in there because it was dark and too much stuff going on. It took me at least 20 minutes to finally be able to look around the restaurant. Even then, I was still completely overwhelmed: all the different people, the store, the mass quantities of décor to give the rainforest feel. I wonder if God is ever overwhelmed by all the stuff on His earth. Seriously, with over six billion people, even six billion different languages (think about it, no one ever really talks the same) and countless animals and insects and plants. I can't even imagine how overly stimulating that must be for our Creator. And He's been doing it forever—I went nuts after twenty minutes. Just another reason to be in awe of the One who holds it all in His hands, I suppose.

P.S—there are only five more weeks of this Fall Tour for us—where is the time going?!

God bless all-ways!! Kristin

Date: 10/29/2005

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

The Gateway Experience

I'm so glad to be back in Florida! I am finally warm again. We were even able to have a program outside in the evening. The entire weekend was hilarious, inundated with mishaps and tons of fun. We met this crazy youth director, Keith, and the even crazier pastor everyone called "PK". PK had another daughter born the morning we arrived. Congrats, PK!! Friday, we were thrown into a pumpkin carving night with the youth at Gateway Trinity Lutheran Church. We met another energetic congregant, Ray (right on!). His family and he helped us in many ways throughout the weekend. They also housed Chase. I helped transform a plain, drab pumpkin into a vivacious, spunky piggy. We ended the night with a few songs. Saturday, we watched part of our host brother's (Cole) soccer game. Yay Cole! Then we set up for "Trunk or Treat." For those of you who don't know what this is, let me fill you in. People bring their cars to a parking lot and decorate them, some had very elaborate decorations. Then kids come and get candy from each of the trunks of the cars. Cool idea. The team played during part of this time and ran carnival games for the other part. It was a hectic night with the bass dying and it being too dark to go through with the planned program, in addition to us being in costumes (see pictures), it was a recipe for fun. There were also large, inflatable Halloween lawn ornaments, need I say more? I ended Trunk or Treat running around like a "wild woman" because I was playing tag with my host sister, Brianne, while I was in the 80s running outfit. We finished the night with Keith leading us in an awesome devotion. Sunday, oh Sunday. The team helped out with the two morning services, while our computer decided to go on strike. We have yet to negotiate for a reasonable contract with the union for it to work on OUR schedule. We ran errands (attempted to get bass fixed) and had a great dinner with our host family and watched "Jurassic Park". Monday, we went to Keith's gym!! and then we met Steph Kirkman (from Training staff) at the beach!!! Yes, it did take us a while to get there, but we made it eventually and we had a great time.

Gateway was full of amazing people with generous hearts who left a wonderful impression on us. I was also impressed with their plentiful supply of chocolate at all times, including a 10 lb Hershey bar. The whole weekend was quite a unique experience. I'm afraid I may never see such a great dance routine to a Justin Timberlake medley from a youth director again.

With His peace,
Corine



Corine Bell

Date: 11/1/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Pieces of Team

In route from Fort Myers to Tallahassee Florida—oh, the fun we have when we live in a van, live in a van, live in a van (insert your own melody here). Today we drove and sat in the van for nearly nine hours. What a jumble of goodness. More embarrassing pictures of me while sleeping were taken as well (no, you will never see them). We had deep conversation and laughed a lot. Overall it was a good time, relaxing and free.



Kristin Rice

I am really thankful for this team. No matter what we do, it's always fun and exciting. With any other group of people, eight hours in a tiny space would not be appealing or desired. But with these crazy kids—I'm cool. We know our limits, we finish each others' sentences, and sometimes we speak for each other without hesitation. It's quite amazing as to how this team has come together in the very small amount of time we've been together.

It is hard because we know we aren't complete. Our hearts miss Darrel, and we're anxious about who will be joining our team. We've gotten comfortable with the situation now, but it seems we're holding back. We want to dive in, but we're waiting for the missing piece.

We ask you to pray for our new teammate to come in and join this crazy group of people. A group of people on a mission to laugh with the world in every situation we find ourselves.

God bless all-ways, until next time!! Kristin

Date: 11/3/2005

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Beauty in the Rubble

Photographs. Partial dollar bills. Pieces of playing cards. A VHS tape of *Dirty Dancing*. A vase. A spoon. A teddy bear. Shingles. A window pane. These are all items that we found amidst the rubble in a home in Biloxi, Mississippi today. Today was our first day on a work crew in Biloxi, which is about 85 miles east of New Orleans on the Gulf Coast. We were at a home that had about four feet of standing water in it after the surge of Hurricane Katrina. When there is standing water for 5-6 hours, there is water damage to the house after the water recedes. So the task in most of the houses is to completely gut it out—furniture, carpet (if the storm hadn't torn it up already), walls, ceiling, insulation...a lot of the houses look like they are in the process of being built instead of being taken apart. Some were lucky enough to still be standing on their original foundation and have the frame of the house still intact. It was like being in a war torn ghost town. Streets were empty, save for a determined few adding to the garbage piles at the end of their lawns, faces worn with exhaustion and grief. The clean up process seemed endless. Every shovel of debris we threw into a wheelbarrow uncovered another layer of scattered belongings. It was so surreal. It was hard to comprehend the reality that these were people's homes—their lives. The deck of cards belonged to a family—maybe they played cribbage when relatives and friends came to visit. The teddy bear used to make a child smile. And the photographs were memories that people wanted to preserve. There were photographs that we found from 1935—a group of people sitting around a bonfire at a beach, four men in uniform smiling at something said before the picture was taken. These things that we were cleaning up, these photos that we were finding used to belong to someone. These pictures were in a drawer or box somewhere, stored away for future opportunities to reminisce. These things, these possessions, these objects that represented people's lives, were now just rubble. [\(Click here for a picture.\)](#) Looking around at the wreckage was sobering. It was depressing seeing the destruction and wondering how it will ever resemble a neighborhood again.



Cassie Woodard

But then I talked to the people who have lived through it, and listened to their stories. One woman simply said, "God got me through it." Someone else told me that as the water was rushing out of her house, she was holding onto the door frame with one hand and her dog with the other. Another survivor had little left of their house, but she said that it didn't matter because all that really matters was her family, and they were all okay so she couldn't complain. These people really know what is important. Because they have nothing anymore except each other, and that has to be enough.

We live in a world of materialism; society has taught us that things are important, stuff is something you want more of, and possessions are extremely valuable. We measure life by quantity, not quality. We assess worth according to financial success and social status. But when it comes down to it, none of it matters. When every "thing" you own is literally washed away, the love of the people around you is all that you need. I have seen true beauty in the hearts of the people down here. They are wondering why this happened, and why this happened to them, and where they are supposed to go from here, and how God could let this happen to them. Yet regardless of these heavy questions, they trust that God will get them through. They believe that He will speak to their hearts, that He will do and say something real, something that pertains to their lives directly. They look at the devastation and see the potential beauty that lies in creation. They see the beauty that God has promised, and they have hoped that God will answer their questions and help them to believe in beauty again.

"I started wondering if life was something different than I thought it was, if there was some kind of raging beauty a person could find, that he could get caught up in the 'why' of life. And I needed to believe beauty meant something, and I needed God to step off His self-help soapbox and be willing to say something eternally significant and intelligent and meaningful..." (Donald Miller, "Through Painted Deserts")

Date: 11/4/2005

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Waffle House

We've started a little tradition on New Dawn. We are keeping a running tally of Waffle Houses by state that we see as we travel through the South. So far, Florida is winning with a whopping 54. It is not unusual for one of us to stop whatever we are doing and scream "Waffle House!" when we spot it on a sign and wait to see the navigator (person in passenger seat) mark it down on our designated sheet of paper. Today, as we were driving down the coastline in Biloxi, Mississippi, this same group of boisterous and vocal young people fell silent when we saw the Waffle House sign with a few letters missing and the entire building blown away. ([Click here for a photo.](#))



Corine Bell

Living at secluded camps during training and having a busy schedule allowed us to be naive about the damage that Hurricane Katrina had caused to our brothers and sisters in the South. Now it is in front of our faces full force and it is breath-taking. We have come to this area over two months after the storm hit and they are still finding bodies; some houses have not been looked at yet for damage assessment, let alone cleaning.

Then we come to Christus Victor Lutheran church. Here they are housing volunteers and running a distribution center for people who need food and other necessities. I see the church that Jesus had in mind for the world and I'm inspired. God gives people incredible faith and hearts to help each other.

We are doing so little here compared to what needs to be done. The storm itself is horrible, but the aftermath is a storm unto itself. Some people are volunteering here for five months. Many are retired and they are moving furniture, giving everything they can. I am in awe of them. "We"(not just New Dawn) give a few days and we leave. For the people that live/lived here, this is their entire life. This is their questionable future.

At least I know I will not leave here the same. I will not forget the stories, the "We Are Strong" song, and I will not forget the casino barge that was lifted and carried by the water and placed on top of a Holiday Inn. Most of all, I will not forget the worship done in this place in the midst of the chaos, in the midst of the storm.

Corine

Date: 11/4/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Mississippi Dreams Part 1

Ocean Springs, Mississippi—It's quite an interesting experience being here right now, helping clean up after Hurricane Katrina hit over two months ago. As much as the helper in me is glad to have a part in the aftermath and the flood of people wanting to bring this area back to "normalcy," I am seriously questioning why we do it. So many volunteers are taking time off of work and away from families to do work, to help a couple people get back on their feet...but for what? We don't know these people except they were hit and everything they own now resides in a pile on the side of the road. What do we have to gain but purely personal satisfaction and the internal hope that these good deeds will square us with God when we meet at the pearly gates?

And yet, having met quite a few people who were seriously affected by Katrina, seeing and hearing their gratitude as to the generosity of people who do come down, who send things when they cannot make it down themselves...then the moral strings of my heart are tugged again. I was so excited to get down here to help out, and I would have been very disappointed if we had been down here without the chance to do it. However, why would that be the case? What right do I have to be excited about coming to do good for someone else? It's doing "good deeds" for others that ultimately come back to my selfish need to feel like I make a difference. It's feeling that somehow my life does matter because back in 2005 I helped gut a man's house and helped him purge all of his possessions and memories into a pile for others to pick through.

I'm not saying this hasn't been a completely worthless experience. I have been having fun getting to know the other volunteers, including people from Michigan and running into an old friend I haven't seen in almost six years. And I've really enjoyed hearing the stories and knowing that together, with all the Red Cross and Salvation Army volunteers, along with the hundreds that do commit a week or two, we are slowly bringing southern Mississippi to a new and fresh start. But in the end, after a hard day of work is done, we come back to this awesome church that gives us too much to eat and a bed to sleep on. The people we leave at their houses? I don't know where they go, whether it's to stay in the house we are close to demolishing or if they sleep in their car down the street. And when it comes down to it, we leave on Wednesday. We get to walk away from this with a pleasant memory, a handful of laughs, and a few touching photographs of people's destroyed lives. No matter how hard it is for us or easy for that matter, we can walk away from it. We don't **have** to do anything...we're just volunteers choosing to experience this for what we want of it.

And so the dilemma of my mind continues...

Kristin



Kristin Rice

Date: 11/5/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Mississippi Dreams Part 2

Ocean Springs, Mississippi—The other day we were completely cleaning out a man's house. It had been closed up since about three days after the storm in August. When



we walked up and opened the door, the stench of mold and the death of a family history overtook me. I was thankful for the respirator mask to help disguise the pain my face was showing as I thought of what we were to do. **Kristin Rice**

While dismantling the house, Corine and I found a TV stand filled with three drawers worth of VHS tapes. As we hauled them out to the exponentially growing trash pile, I couldn't help but look and see what movies were lost. Much to my chagrin and utter irony of life, on the top of each drawer was a movie seemingly fitting to the disaster we were cleaning up: "The Hurricane" with Denzel Washington, "Gone with the Wind", and "Night of the Twisters". ([Click here for a photo.](#))

I like to believe that I am an observer and can see a lot of things most people cannot. Some days my team would argue otherwise, especially when I can't really understand a word they are saying purely because I'm tired and misinterpret everything. But in all seriousness, I truly do spend a good chunk of my life just watching people and seeing the little things that most others graze over or don't understand.

In my head and my own little world, I see "The Hurricane", "Gone with the Wind" and "Night of the Twisters" as almost a cruel joke. Now, I do know that neither "The Hurricane" nor "Wind" really have anything to do with the nature the title implies. However, cinema and media play a huge role in how we view the things that happen to us. We believe that nothing too disastrous or horrible will happen, because as the movies tell us, it will all end up all right in the end. The guy will get the girl, the family will be reunited after 38,000 years of separation, and the Cubs will win the World Series (sorry to all you Cubbies out there, I do love them too). We live in a fantasy world, perpetuated by what the media tells us and doesn't tell us. We are desensitized to reality. I would be the first to admit that. Before coming down here, I really had no idea how bad this was. I knew Biloxi had been hit extremely and that the news didn't really share that after New Orleans. But never in my wildest dreams did I truly imagine the toll this storm had on the lives of those living here and on the lives of those coming to help out. Unlike the movies, bad things did happen to good people. No segregation or discrimination of damage: rich, poor, citizen, visitor, men and women and children alike were all sucked out of their categories and placed into one: Survivors of Katrina.

Unlike the movies, the good characters, the ones we cheer for the loudest, they were injured, killed, emotionally scarred. They didn't make it through without a scratch, with a giant smile on their faces and pleasant music floating in the background. They suffer and don't know what tomorrow will bring. However, despite all that, they have a hope that is never portrayed realistically in the movies. They hope for a brighter tomorrow, for their children to stay strong despite circumstance, for a chance to start over, and for someone to come from across the country to spend time with them and help them. They hope for love above all else. They will not forget this. And neither will all the volunteers who have come and seen with their eyes and heard with their ears and smelled with their noses. We will not forget.

Date: 11/7/2005

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Observed Conversation

"We were told everything was covered. Come to find out—nothing [was covered]."

Margaret and Charlie Marchelos lost almost everything. Traces of an upstate accent remained in Margaret's speech. They had no insurance. The misfit duo moved from New York to the area about five years ago. They were pessimistic about what would come. Charlie wore a bright yellow shirt. Margaret showed off a purple baseball cap. The ensemble caught my attention. I decided to sit down.

"Did you just arrive today?" I asked as I set a bowl of baked beans next to my slice of chocolate cake.

I came late to dinner. At least there was coffee. I had some. Another couple sat to my left—Bob and Zina Lillard. Charlie in all his sunlit glory sat directly across the table. Margaret sat crossways from Zina. My question was intended for them all. I assumed they had come to volunteer for hurricane



Chase Chisholm

disaster relief. The temporary relief shelter we were in was filled with volunteers from all around the country. All in one place with one mission: to help victims of hurricane Katrina.

Both couples were victims. I was a little surprised and needless to say—excited—for the opportunity to hear their stories. Margaret and Bob stayed in their house during the storm. Hurricane Katrina "wasn't going to be that bad." Bob and Zina left to stay with loved ones further north. They came home a few weeks after the disaster to find their home a mess. Maggots and mold infested the basement. Zina wanted to spare me the visual but I insisted she tell. Anything could be better than what I've already seen in the few short days here.

Margaret lost her organ. She must have played. Margaret could have lost her life. Six feet of water rushed into the Marchelos' home. Margaret was submerged three times before Charlie pulled her to safety. Or so the story goes. I was intrigued. Charlie lost his walk-in closet. He joked it was larger than his bedroom. Margaret agreed, "He even had a desk in there." Margaret reminisced and complimented how beautifully she had the house decorated—complete with white furniture.

Both couples concluded they were too old to start a new life. "Starting a new life doesn't look very attractive."

Are we ever too old to start anew? I hope not. Perhaps I would think differently if I was in the mid to upper seventies like them.

"You don't know where to go," Charlie commented.

"What do we do?" Bob questioned.

"We don't want to go through this again." Margaret furthered.

"Life isn't in control." Zina offered.

I mainly observed the conversation and mostly facilitated topics of talk. Insurance was discussed throughout. A new social awareness resulted. None of them actually had insurance.

"We got six thousand dollars—that's it." Margaret laughed.

"Cheer up!" Zina joked back. "We got five."

Imagine losing everything and getting between five and six thousand dollars in replace. I can't.

"We were told everything was covered. Come to find out—nothing [was covered]." Margaret and Charlie confessed their anger toward their insurance company. "We're taking them to court."

Bob and Zina remained very optimistic. I wanted them to be my grandparents. Perhaps they were positive about the situation because their home was left standing. They lived right off the coast near Biloxi, Mississippi—a highly devastated region. Most homes in the area were gone. Regardless, their home was undoubtedly destroyed. The differing attitudes made for excellent debate.

"Where could you go?" Charlie continued to ask. "Where else could you afford to live?"

Both couples are living off social security. Charlie and Margaret divide twenty thousand dollars a year. It's the same case for the Lillards. What will they do without insurance? Take out a loan? Bob and Zina were recently given permission to do so. Margaret and an impatient Charlie sat waiting. "I've only got a few years left, I can't be patient."

How could this happen? Were they deceived? Who is to blame?

"Be patient." Zina soothed.

"They bulldoze the old people." Margaret continued. "Insurance companies do."

I want to know where God is in all this. What is God? Who is God?

"Cruel." Margaret finished my statement—"God is..."

"God is cruel."

I wonder how others would finish this statement. I'll find out. How would you?

"God is still in control." Bob and Zina passionately fought back. "I have a roof over my head, food to eat—I'm happy." Zina kept going. "I have my grandkids and my family [that's what's important]."

"There's nothing wrong with blaming God." Charlie proposed.

Bob added. "The worst thing you can do is blame God."

"I won't forgive anyone for this." Charlie told. "Not God. Not the devil [no one]."

Charlie reverted to a past comment and added to it. "There's nothing wrong with blaming God—it's ignoring God that's wrong."

I found this thought very interesting. What do you think?

"You can blame the government, the mayor, Republicans or Democrats [all you want]." Bob kept trying. "But blaming God makes your soul shrivel up. It will make you sick."

This wasn't good enough for Charlie. "Who's to blame for other natural disasters... war?"

"The heart of man is sin," Zina referred to Charlie's war comment.

"Who created man?" Charlie asked.

The conversation ended as the loudness of the room increased. It was almost time for new volunteer orientation. I think it was good for the two couples to talk about their similar experiences amidst their differing outlooks on life. And I'm glad I was present to observe. Bob and Zina left me inspired. Zina finished. "Life goes on and I'm going to live every minute."

I left Margaret and Charlie, encouraged. What will they do? Where will they go? Will God provide for them all?

Date: 11/8/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Mississippi Dreams Part 3

Ocean Springs, Mississippi—We leave tomorrow, off again on a whirlwind adventure of being perpetual transients. I'm leaving Mississippi a changed person. It's been only one week, and somehow I feel more prepared for this year than any other time. We've been able to do some amazing things. We've been trusted with stories, with the judgment to know trash and what isn't, to lead many styles of worship that is pleasing to God. What have I learned about the real Kristin through this week? First, that I ask myself way too many questions. I might drive myself crazy because I do believe I'm worse than a three-year-old.

I've learned truly what it means to be a church for the Lord. Christus Victor has done an amazing job doing what I firmly believe a church should do: opening it's doors to thousands of strangers, no questions asked; trusting in the Lord's guidance; being "Sempre Gumby" (always flexible) about life's little quirks. This church is so alive, it's busting at the seams, and not just due to some hurricane damage. If Jesus were like a subway station, this is a perfect example of what the main terminal would be. Christus Victor is focused on the outside world so much that I know its internal world is benefiting over tenfold. The parishioners we have met, especially on Saturday night and Sunday morning for worship, are people so alive in Christ, so willing to serve their fellow children. There is an energy here that is so hard to describe, all I can do is plead that you check it out for yourself.

Come down for a week: I guarantee it will be a vacation unlike any other. Yes, you will work your tail off because there is a lot that needs to get done here. You will sleep like no tomorrow. And you will walk away refreshed at the good humanity is still capable of doing. You don't see this side of life on CNN—you have to find it for yourself. This one's it, my friends.



Kristin Rice

God bless all-ways,

Kristin

Date: 11/8/2005

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock."

"Who do you think the rock is?" I ask the large room filled with about ten preschoolers, two teachers, one staff person and the four of us. Whispers filled the empty space. I give them a hint.

"It was a man in the Bible—God in human form."

One teacher added, "It's God's son," as the other whispered the ultimate, never-wrong answer to Will. He was sitting on her lap as he shy-fully smiled and suggested, "Jesus."

What does this mean? I don't know. "How do you found your life on Jesus?" Haley questioned. It was too easy to imagine her personality fifteen years from now. She already had one and liked giving a piece of mind. It was a good question. How does a person found their life on Jesus? Explain this to a four-year-old. It's tough enough.

We were helping welcome the preschoolers back to class. We sang songs, did a puppet show and an interactive Bible story. They became the story. Our theme for the year of ministry comes from Matthew 7:24-27 (NRSV). It was their second day back. What wonderful children. Each had their own story to tell—stories about living through a storm. Only their storm was real.

"The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock."

It seemed a familiar sequence of words to these insightful observers. All of them lived through hurricane Katrina. The Bible story began sounding like their experience. It was eerily similar. I sat and listened. We all listened as they began processing. I was apprehensive to continue.

"And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand."

What would this mean to children who lost their homes? Did they lose everything? We will never know. I imagine they lost most of what they had. Will they ever know? Will they ever comprehend? The soil in Mississippi is very sandy. And many people lived along the coast—all sand. Were these kids foolish? Did these people not listen? Is this what they thought? Is this what the Bible means? I hope not.

"The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall."

How do you explain a metaphorical story to children who, two months before, experienced a hurricane? How do you explain a figurative parable to kids with families who built their house on sand? How do you tell a symbolic tale to preschoolers who may have lost everything? Tell them to found their lives on Jesus? No. You can't explain it.

All you can do is listen to their stories. They told the story. God spoke. It was through them. God truly is our home. God is our foundation. God is our rock. Will they ever know? Will I ever know?



Chase Chisholm

Date: 11/8/2005

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

What does it mean to build your life on Jesus?
Ocean Springs, MS



Cassie Woodard

There are moments when you are with children that you would give everything you own to have a video camera, or even a pen and piece of paper to record what they are saying. Today I experienced one of those moments. We did a puppet show based on our theme, "Stand on the Rock," which is from Matthew 7:24-25. *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rains came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."* One of our puppets gets a little confused about the metaphor in this parable, and I have to explain to the puppet that it means is that we should build our lives on the solid foundation of Jesus Christ.

After the puppet show today we were talking with the 4- and 5-year-olds about how we can show others that Jesus is our Rock. The puppets had given examples like "pray," and "read the Bible," and "tell others about Jesus." So when I asked the children for other ideas, I expected things of the same nature. One boy said that he could help others whose houses were blown away by Katrina. There were a few other answers like that, and while the children were talking over each other, I noticed Haley, who was in the front row. She was staring at nothing in particular, and I could tell that something was cooking inside her head. She looked at me and inquired, "What does it mean to build your life on Jesus?"

I was floored, speechless for a moment. What an excellent question! What *does* that mean? And how in the world are children with only three or four years of life experience understanding it and giving me examples? I mean, they understood that they should be doing what Jesus would do and what Jesus wants us to do, but Haley asked a very real question. What does it mean to build your life on Jesus Christ?

I don't know what I told Haley, but I know that her question impressed me and has stayed in my mind for the past few days. Building my life on Jesus Christ means that I am living for Him, and using Him as a model for everything that I do and say. It means that I am trusting in God's plan and His goodness; that I am spreading the love He has given to me and passing it on to every single person I meet. Saint Francis of Assisi said, "Preach the gospel; and if necessary, use words." Building your life on Jesus Christ means that you are doing everything for Him, and living by His example. People should know that I am a Christian without me having to open my mouth.

I would like to thank Haley for asking a question that I would normally answer without thinking, spouting out an automatic response lacking sincerity and intentionality. May we all dig deeper to those questions we think we have answers for.

Date: 11/9/2005

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

The End of Mississippi

I took away so much from Ocean Springs. These are just a couple of things: I left with flat iron and hammer skills. I'm really dangerous now.

It is amazing how many skills one can learn in a short amount of time. We tore up floors and dry wall, took down crown molding...things I had never done before. I thought about how easy it is to tear down a house; building one takes much longer, involves many more skills, and much more hard work. The same is true with our walk with God. It is difficult to become more Christ-like, even in one small area. It is something we have to work at diligently, but sinning takes almost no effort, ripping apart our relationship with God again and again.

I was left with a sense of community among strangers.

People had an automatic connection with each other; you knew you could ask about the house they



Corine Bell

worked on that day or make a joke about how dirty you were and how good a shower felt, and it was always received with understanding and a smile. We had a group of friends our age who were so fun. Hello to Joe, Lauren, Joel, Sara, Jim, Chuck, and Scott--our jamming crew! We were included in each other's evening plans. We always wondered where other members were if they were missing. We didn't know each other very well, but we showed love and called each other friends. I was sad when we parted. I saw just bits and pieces of amazing hearts, integrity, and servanthood, and I wanted to see more.

Overall, my time at Ocean Springs left me with an unsettled feeling, and it's a good thing to feel. We did so little in the grand scheme of the disaster. I realized this happens all the time in my life. Every day I could be doing more for the kingdom in tangible ways. This experience has spurred me to do more, to have a new attitude. I wondered how my church at home could be involved in this ministry, and I sent an email immediately. We can give so much more than we do often times. It is not that difficult to give to others; however, we make it an ordeal. We ask too many questions before doing and let the uncertainties take over. I feel that God asks me rightly "How can you NOT do that for your brother or sister?" Faith without action is dead. (James 2:17).

What have you done for Him lately? ("ooooooooo yea")

Corine

Date: 11/10/2005

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Niceville, Florida

We were thrown back into program mode! I'm grateful it happened with such a fun youth group filled with love and Team alumni who understand our lives. We had lots of fun at dinner, laughing about everything, and ended up playing hand games I haven't played for years. During the program the youth stood up, clapped, and jumped around, all without us asking. My favorite line of the night came out when we were teaching "Ingat, Ingat Itu," (which for those of you who don't know, it is a cultural song from Malaysia in Malay and is accompanied by groovy hand movements). One junior high guy was jumping up and said, "Yes! This is my jam." We ended up pulling him up on stage. We saw them praising God in all they did. They actively included the other youth group that came from a different church. They were not the typical teenagers who stay with their friends and are nervous to talk to outsiders. They went across the aisles to dance. We saw the excitement spread from stage, what a nice glimpse of the gospel being enacted. They got really into "Share the Well," so we gave out the hand percussion instruments, and they found very creative ways to use them. After the program, and undoubtedly one of my favorite parts because it involved chocolate, a bunch of the youth went with us to Hershey's Ice Cream bar. I got an awesome Moose Tracks Milkshake, and we had a ton more laughs. The next morning I went for a run with my host-sister, Heather. We had a lot in common. I saw myself back in high school in her stories. It is amazing how people in different places and situations can have such similar experiences. I love seeing people search for where they want to be and not knowing exactly how to get there if they figure it out. It makes life fun.

Having fun in His name,
Corine



Corine Bell

Date: 11/12/2005

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Faith like a child
Hilton Head Island, SC

I tell you the truth, unless you have faith like a child, you will never enter the kingdom

of heaven. – Matthew 18:3

In the past few months I have had the opportunity to witness many children praising God, and have been blown away by their faith. Children are more Christ-like than most adults I know in their ability to love. It amazes me how ready and willing they are to love. They are just bursting with joy, eager for the chance to let that overflowing love pour out onto someone nearby. The other day when we were at a preschool, all of the children wanted to give us hugs before we left. They sheepishly waited in line to give all four of us hugs, and they couldn't wait to show us how much they loved us. My heart melted at the sight of their happy faces looking at me, expecting nothing but my acceptance of their love. They were full of joy and couldn't hold it in any longer.

Somewhere along the way, between puberty and college, between real life and full time jobs and raising a family, that joy gets lost. That child-like exuberance fades, and we get "practical." Our busy lives get in the way of our joy, and we fill our days with meetings and business and "necessary" errands. And often times, it isn't until people retire that they slow down and try to recapture that joy that they had when they were young. Days slow down, the calendar becomes less full, and a re-evaluation of life takes place.

A lot of the people I met here on Hilton Head Island know what it means to let loose and have fun. They fill their days with the things that they think are important. Some played golf, some met with friends, and some went to the beach and read a book. And tonight, some of them came to a program that we put on. There were only about 10 people under the age of 15 there, and most of the people in attendance were retirees. It was amazing to look out into the crowd and see many wonderful people dancing and jumping and smiling! They were enthusiastic and excited, and their excitement rubbed off on us. It reminded me of some of the elementary school programs we have done where the kids can hardly contain themselves because they are so pumped that we are there. It was so great to have that excitement to feed off of! I hope that when I am in my 60s, I have as much energy as they did tonight. I was moved by their faith and their openness to sit and listen to a bunch of young adults sing and talk about Jesus Christ--when I know that they could teach me so much more than I could teach them! Who knew that one of those things they have to offer is a lesson in childlike faith?!



Cassie Woodard

Date: 11/15/2005

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Looney Tunes

Saturday night, we joined a banquet that the Christ Lutheran Church in Hilton Head, NC, was giving for a golf tournament. The golf tournament benefited a children's program and, to my surprise, I was sitting with the winners during dinner. It was one of the most fun meals I have had with a congregation. I was the youngest at the table by at least 30 years, but one of the older men had a quicker wit than I could ever have. He asked me what discipline I was in and I replied Psychology. He said "Psychology and singing songs, hmm, you could start a business called 'Looney Tunes'." I laughed so hard and said that I might use that some day. He said "You can have that one. That's my graduation present to you." So if you ever hear of a business called "Looney Tunes," you'll know from where it came.



Corine Bell

After the dinner, the crowd, composed predominantly of retirees and a handful of young children, joined us near the stage for some music. It was a short program with some extras sing-a-longs we usually do not include in our regular program. This audience was one of the liveliest I have seen. The puppet curtain holders and the volunteers for the skits were hilarious. They added their own jokes into everything. The best part, however, was at the end when we sang "Every Move I Make" and everybody started jumping at the "na, na, na" part. I was so impressed to see the crowd jumping and equally glad no one injured themselves. The entire stay in Hilton Head was amazing. We were constantly showered with love and treated as friends. I think this comes because so many of the families are solid and loving.

Cassie and I stayed with such a wonderful family. They have four amazing children, Kira, Esther, Nathaniel, and Leah, all with beautiful, blonde hair and gorgeous, blue eyes. On Sunday night, we went on a family walk to the beach, which included Hootie, the dog. We raced on the beach and

sang "Ring Around the Rosy". The whole family has a tangible love for each other, and Cassie and I felt blessed to be included.

Finally, our time at Hilton Head ended perfectly with me being able to catch up with my friend, Andrew. We biked on the beach and saw a gorgeous sunset. I was reminded once again how God created everything beautifully and that I need to stop and appreciate it. One of the most beautiful things He has created is the family, even if an appropriate title for some of them could be "Looney Tunes."

Singing His praises,
Corine

"From the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same, the name of the Lord is to be praised." Psalm 113:3

Date: 11/17/2005

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

At Home

Where do you feel at home? Is it at home? Define home. Really think about it. What is home and where is it? Is it where you were born? I see—it's where you're living now. No? Is home a house or a specific place? Perhaps home is a person? What about God?

I used to be content with calling home my family's house. Not anymore. It was recently sold. I moved home from college, packed to live as an intern in Chicago while helping my family move, and unloaded my baggage from Chicago when I returned before immediately jetting to Montana for several weeks, only to return once more and gather what I left at the house I was moving from to bring on Team— all in one summer. Home has a new meaning.

Home is in all for the person who has no "home."

I was reminded of feeling at home during our two-night stay at Lutheridge, an ELCA affiliate camp in Arden, North Carolina. It's one of few Lutheran camps serving the entire southeast region of the United States. Lutheridge reminded me of my camp—Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp in Montana. It was large, set in a wooded paradise and focused on many outdoor activities. All camps seem familiar in ways but to each its own uniqueness. I was at home.

No longer surprised, yet still excited; I seem to find connections with someone from each congregation or place we visit. A few weeks ago it was in Fort Myers, Florida. Several of the congregants attended my college—Waldorf College—a place unknown to most. Cassie and I both have friends serving with Young Adult Global Missions in Kerala, India. I chatted about Kathy Kastilahn, a section editor of The Lutheran Magazine—not to mention a favorite person of mine—while driving to church with a host family in Chicago. And Tim, camp director of Lutheridge, recently hosted a visit from my camp director.

Home is relationships—a true friendship—one never changing no matter how long away or far apart.

Connections are abundant and home is ever present. Being a Christian also means belonging to the same family. Learning someone else is Christian creates an instant relation. I am astonished and inspired by how hospitable and generous people have been to us while on the road. We stay in different homes almost daily. And never do I feel out of place. Host families go above and beyond to make us feel at home.

I should have guessed Tim's son was on team a few years ago. He was. Matt was, that is. We had a great time visiting with him about the Team experience. It amazes me how many people are connected with Youth Encounter. It was Leroy and Jessica in Niceville, Florida. Elsa and Doug in South Carolina were parents of a past "Teamer." Soon we'll spend a few days with Marybeth's (Captive Free South Central) family in Franklin, Tennessee. Over Thanksgiving I'll reconnect with a past youth director and his wife in Arkansas—both have been on Team. There have been and will



Chase Chisholm

continue to be many more links.

Home is within Team as well. I feel at home on team. Kristin, Corine, Cassie and I have created a home for ourselves. The van is also home. I feel at home with the staff. I feel at home with other teams. All of us are part of something much bigger than we can imagine.

Home is in God. And God is in all things. God is my home. I feel at home with God. May you too find home in God.

It's comforting to know I'm (we're) never not at home.

Date: 11/19/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

To Wheeze, Perchance to Breathe

Powell, Tennessee—I wish that my memory of Powell was all wonderful and good. Not to say that I had a bad experience, the people and the church are amazing. But that is not the crux of my memory.

Instead, I will only be able to recall the frustration of my own experience, tainted by the one thing in life I really can't control: asthma. Again, it has reared its ugly head to render me powerless, left to hack and wheeze and panic at my own circumstance. Rather than go to a doctor for some medicine that would help me instantly, I stubbornly spent all of Friday sitting quietly, working hard on breathing while my Team laughed and played and ran around in the beautiful autumn air. I couldn't blame them; I would have also taken part of the frolicking. But chronic illness took over, exasperated by a simple cold that had knocked me out a couple days prior. In retrospect, I probably should have sought medical assistance. However, I know what they would have said and done, without fail. And why waste my time and energy hearing what I already know? I've lived with asthma's attacks for over twelve years, I know more about how my asthma works and what kicks it in and out than any professional. Just give me the prescription pad, I can almost guarantee the medicine and dosage.

Throughout the entire ordeal of two days of not-perfect breathing, I maintained that I had control over it, that I didn't need help, that I would be fine. It was stupid of me, I realize. I put more strain on myself than necessary, and I also put the Team in more of an awkward position too. In a world where I feel powerless already, having a chronic illness that is semi-unpredictable is the icing on the cake. And like everything else in my life, I forget that I am not in control, that whatever is in my head as what I feel needs to be done and dealt with...this is not necessarily what God wants for me. I have a hard time remembering that I do not control the weather or when my bronchial tubes will tighten up. What I can control is my ability to give up that control to God—He does know what is best for me, even when I can't see it myself. It's a crazy Catch-22, losing ourselves to find ourselves again. My stubbornness continually gets in the way of God's will, because I don't need professional assistance when it comes to living my life. Oh, Kristin, how wrong that is. We can't make it through this life without help and aid from God. We're lost in the maze and muck of the world, where listening to Satan is usually a lot easier route than the one God needs for us. We take advice and seek answers that are not God, losing our sense of stability that only comes from God. When we close ourselves off what God is trying to tell us or where He is leading, we tighten the reins and find it that much harder to let go and let God. It's the moment of absolute necessity that we finally remember and recognize that our help is from the Lord, allowing Him to take over. But it's the letting go, the final sigh of concession...that's the hardest step.

So whether it's a simple asthma attack or an even bigger mound of trouble, I will continue to remember to just let God and earthly professionals know what's best.

God bless all-ways,
Kristin



Kristin Rice

Date: 11/22/2005

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

No Hyenas

After little rehearsal, the youth service at Powell Presbyterian went very well. The kids had their parts in the service, and they took ownership of their role and wanted it to be perfect. I was impressed with their focus on Sunday and their musicianship. I was especially drawn to the part of the service where the creed was recited. However, the creed on this day was written by an African church in terms that were very different than I have heard. They received Christianity and adopted their own creed that sounded similar to the Apostle's creed as far as stating they believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, but they used language that was obviously more appropriate for their lives. One line said after Jesus died the "hyenas did not touch him". Different from our customary creed, but it makes complete sense and has a great deal of importance in another region of the world. I enjoy seeing how people take initiative in their faith and make it relevant for them in order to worship their Father in a better-fitting way. It is amazing how God has created people differently, to worship and glorify Him in various ways, and He delights in all the praises of His people.



Corine Bell

At the end of the service, when we tried to sing "Happy Trails" but, of course, everybody only knows the first line to that song, so we just 'trailed' off and everyone had a good laugh. It was a fun, energetic youth group with several potential teamers. However, it reminded me again of how quickly we enter and exit people's lives. We did not have a chance to talk too many of the congregants that Sunday, but we were involved in leading their worship service. People came up to us after the service and told us how they appreciated us and they wished us well on our travels.

Then we made a hurried exit to make it to Franklin, TN for an evening program. We stayed with the Smiths, who are the family of a current teamer, MaryBeth. We did not know that fact before we got there. It felt like I was in a detective game when I was putting the pieces together, which took far longer than it should have. They were such a fun family. Also, we finally had the opportunity to go to a Cracker Barrel. Cassie has wanted to go to one for a long time.

I have only been to this part of Tennessee once. I forgot the area was so beautiful, and I enjoyed being outside even though it was cold. (Cold for me, not cold compared to those in Minnesota. I'm not looking forward to going so far north for winter training and going back there after Christmas.) It was wonderful to have a day off in this setting. We were able to relax and even saw some of Nashville. I loved hearing live music that wasn't us. Of course, we still made our presence known with Karaoke at Wanna B's.

Date: 11/24/2005

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Thanksgiving Mix

I live in two worlds—sometimes three or four. Separate lives.

What happens when separates mix? It's something I try to avoid if possible. I'm learning not to. There are times it's inevitable. Regardless, it's one situation (out of few) where I feel uncomfortable for all parties involved. Why? It's awkward. Not awkward in a humorous sense, but awkward in a "what's happening in my life right now" way.



Chase Chisholm

I have different groups of acquaintances and each group or individual enhances—brings out—a specific quality within my being. Ingrid refreshes my laughter. Friends from camp convey a love for the outdoors. Jon helped me become a man. I learned to cook with college housemates. Cassie, Corine and Kristin challenge me to grow musically. And Reid and Christine inspire me to be a better person.

Who I am is parts of all these people and experiences with them. Not from or with anyone else. What I am is a combination of challenge and inspiration from differing sources. Why mix? Our personalities are already the outcome of these unconnected occurrences. I've known Reid and Christine for years. Reid was my youth director in Forest City, Iowa, when I was in high school. Christine has always been at his side—equally influencing my life. With them, I saw earth from

above—in a plane, slept on a train, hiked mountains and tasted the salty-smell of the ocean for the first time. Those days have since passed, but the impact of these "firsts" remains. Because of them I will never stop traveling. Because of them I joined Youth Encounter.

I was blessed to spend Thanksgiving with them and their wonderful family in Fort Smith, Arkansas. So was my team. We felt at home. It's ironic. How God works. We spent hours laughing at old videos and listening to stories about life on Team. Ten years ago Reid and Christine were in my place—in our place—on Team—and had much to offer as advice. Times have changed. Now they are married and have three beautiful little girls. Drinks were served. Turkey was had. And games were played by all. The holiday stretch was made complete by hanging out with youth of Saint Luke Lutheran Church, as well as worshipping together with their congregation through a Family Night Program. Darlene's homemade gingerbread cookies were also a nice addition, as was waking up to Elsa, Josephine and Greta's smiles (Reid and Christine's girls).

I never imagined I would spelunk (explore a cave) and eat lefse (prepared by Reid's father—Vic) on the same day. I also never thought such differing worlds could mesh so well. I thank God for and look forward to more crossing of paths with people I've known and the mixing of people I've yet to meet. God has shown how separate lives can combine into quite the Thanksgiving mix.

Thanks to the Matthias family for inviting us to share in their Thanksgiving traditions and memories.

Date: 12/1/2005

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Listen, God is calling

Dubuque, IA—oh boy, where do I even begin? First, it's awesome being back in the "North", well, Midwest at least. I never believed I would actually miss Iowa, especially after spending four years here and never being a huge fan of the state. The people are great; don't get me wrong, but seriously...Iowa? Who misses it?

Well, as we crossed the border and traveled from Albia to Dubuque, Chase and I reminisced about what it is we do like about Iowa. It's not just plain flatness like everyone thinks. Closer to the Mississippi are some gorgeous rolling hills that glisten in the autumn, with crisp, clear skies that don't hide a star or planet. It's peaceful, friendly, and like home. We spent the night at Wartburg Seminary, which was a kick and a half for me. Cassie and I were able to meet up with a mutual friend, Jeff (she worked at camp with him, and I went to school with him; and we share the same birthday). He's a junior (a.k.a. first-year) seminarian working for his Masters of Divinity. I was extremely excited to get here. Seminary is something I am in the process of discerning for my future, and Wartburg was a place I have wanted to visit for a couple years. What better way to get a glimpse of the place than from a source I trust and actually know! Jeff shared the ups and downs of seminary life and gave us a tour of the building (yeah, Wartburg is one building). His classes sound amazing, and I love the library. This is a very important part of any education institution: if you don't have a good library, a comfortable space for studying, then you got nothing.

I'm in love with the place. Well, perhaps not that far, but I really enjoyed being there and missed the academic society. For awhile my heart was aching because I wasn't doing it; instead I'm here in a van with three wonderful people doing awesome and fun things. It's a battle of wills, really: me vs. God. While I never doubt His call for me to be on team this year and do this thing, being at Wartburg made me really start to question my search for His will for my life after team is done. Is seminary really what I'm supposed to do? If so, for what? And where? Often I have felt perhaps that a divinity, non-denominational, seminary is where I'd fit best. But after talking with many friends in various ELCA seminaries, maybe that's where I should go. In any case, being at Wartburg really opened up something within me, and I'm not sure what it is. I'll keep you posted.

God Bless all-ways,
Kristin



Kristin Rice

Date: 12/27/2005
Submitted by: Corine Bell
Journal Entry:

Prepared to Come Back

I had a wonderful time catching up with family and friends and enjoyed slightly warmer weather than exists in Minnesota. I took a short trip up to western Pennsylvania to visit my grandparents and several cousins from Texas. I had not seen these cousins for several years, so it was great to see where they have been led in life so far. My grandparents were in great spirits. My grandfather laughed harder than I had seen him do for a long time, and my grandmother can still beat me in candy consumption. In Maryland, I met with friends in DC for a really fun night. My sister had fun showing me the ropes of Alexandria, and we saw "The Chronicles of Narnia," conjuring many memories from our childhood. Finally, and maybe most importantly, I played with Julia a lot. She's grown so much, and we were able to have long conversations about stars and kitties, all the important things in life. She also said that Jesus died on the cross and asked us all "Why?" She was preparing me for coming back on team and reminding me of the reason for the hope I have.



Corine Bell

Date: 12/27/2005
Submitted by: Kristin Rice
Journal Entry:

What I Did Over Christmas Break: An Essay by Kristin Rice

Well, let me begin by saying that it was nice to have a couple weeks to drive wherever I wanted to go, whenever I wanted to go. I love driving, and it's been kind of hard relinquishing that control this fall not being a driver.

I spent a good chunk of break moving out of my room. It's something that's probably needed to be done for a lot time, and I just never was able to be motivated until now. I ended up cleaning out many drawers filled with junk that I'd found valuable at one point in my life. The pack-rat in me was complacent to throw things out, despite the nagging feeling of "I could use that in a scrapbook someday". I was able to donate two giant plastic bags of clothes, a huge box filled with shoes, and a couple paper bags of toys to Goodwill. That was a relief, I must say.

I also was able to spend some time with friends I haven't seen in awhile. I caught up with friends from high school (so long ago!), camp (not so long ago), and college (seems like yesterday). I didn't sleep much, but I was just filled with energy of things to work on. The teamer in me didn't rest either. I was involved in five of the six worship services I attended while over break: playing piano for Christmas Eve, playing one spontaneous Saturday service while awaiting the pastor, Sunday school program, lessons and carols on guitar with a rockin' pastor. To say I rested would be an overstatement. But it was a good break, filled with many things that kept me occupied and helped me to remember that I am an individual person sometimes, not always part of this New Dawn group collective.



Kristin Rice

Date: 12/29/2005
Submitted by: Tysen Bibb
Journal Entry:

On the Road Again...

Have you ever thought that you heard the literal voice of God? Have you ever had a time when God felt so close you expected to see Him when you looked over your shoulder or around the corner? He is all around us, all the time. He is in all of the big things and in the smallest particle. There really is no place God isn't. So why then can we not see Him? I heard a wonderful answer that just totally held captive my heart. God is visible to those who really truly seek Him and to those who would rather ignore Him...He allows Himself to be invisible. Does this mean that believers can literally see the physical presence of God? Not necessarily. Matthew 5:9 says, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God."



Tysen Bibb

Seeking God is something that all believers should do. I mean hey...Jesus is like...everything. Purity in heart is something that only God can do. You want to know the cool thing though? He already did all of the work. Jesus' life, death, and resurrection conquered death, conquered Satan, and set our hearts free. Praise God for His grace. God wants to be in relationship with us, to be our Father and King, to be *our everything*. Is there anything that is keeping you from seeking the one who is seeking you? Seek Him...just try it. Really put your heart into it. I know...putting your heart out on the line is dangerous but you can trust Jesus. After all, He did make you.

In life one goes through ups and downs, highs and lows. Being on the road with a team is no different. It is not always easy to do what we do, but regardless of whether you are on team or not, seeking God, I mean really seeking God, gives you strength, peace, patience, clarity, and the will not to just carry on with life...but to really thrive. I could go on and on, but I think you get the point...seek God. Who knows? Maybe you'll look around the corner and discover the truth that God has been seeking you the whole time.

Till next time...this is Ty signing off. One God, one faith, one love, one way.

The proud new member of the coolest team on earth (New Dawn),

Tysen Bibb

Date: 1/3/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

A Larger Story

In his book *The Sacred Romance*, John Eldredge talks about life as a story. God is the Author, we are the characters, the earth is the setting. The Story is one of adventure and love, of action and comedy. God calls to us with the promise of a larger story, one that we can lose ourselves in. A story that is bigger than ourselves, bigger than we could make it. As humans, we long for something more, something that is outside of ourselves. We think that we find a larger story in things of this world, mistaking those temporary gratifications for true meaning.



Cassie Woodard

Eldredge says, "The central belief of our times is that there is no story, nothing hangs together, and all we have are bits and pieces, the random days of our lives. Tragedy still brings us to tears and heroism still lifts our hearts, but there is no context for any of it. Life is just a sequence of images and emotions without rhyme or reason. So, what are we left to do? Create our own story line to bring some meaning to our experiences. **Our heart is made to live in a larger story; having lost that, we do the best we can by developing our own smaller dramas** . . . Desperate for something larger to give our lives transcendence, we try to lose ourselves in the smallest kinds of stories."

I am guilty of losing myself in the smaller story every day. I get caught up in what I think is important, what I think matters. On Christmas Day I came home from church and got a call from the bank. They were calling to alert me of suspicious spending on my check card from Christmas Eve Day. Somehow, someone had duplicated my check card and spent almost \$500 at Publix and Winn Dixie somewhere in Florida. Luckily, I am volunteering for a non-profit organization for the year, and I had less than ten dollars in my account at the time! So I really had nothing to lose. However, it was a big hassle to spend an hour on the phone with a banker on Christmas Day while my extended family was walking in the door and preparing food and enjoying each other's company. And although it really wasn't a big deal, I was thrown off on Christmas Day. On a day when I was supposed to be celebrating the arrival of a Savior, I was stressed out by my own smaller story. It makes me sad to think of how often I get caught up in my own stories, in my own life. Too often I don't stop to step back and get perspective.

This weekend I was able to get perspective. We led the church service at my home church in Moorhead, MN. I saw people that I didn't expect to see, people that weren't even members at my church, but knew that my team was going to be there so they came to support. I had some amazing conversations with people who I hadn't seen in a while. They showered me with love and support, and I was reminded of the larger story. The story that the Great Author has written, with love and compassion for His characters. He lays out the plot with the hope that every twist and turn will bring His children closer to Him. That we will cry out to Him and long to be near to Him. He has

written a story that I am a part of, which He includes me in because He loves me and longs for me to seek Him. He places people in my life that perpetually remind me of His love and provision. Parents of old friends, members of a childhood congregation, pastors who never had me in their confirmation class, family members; these people showed love in their supportive presence. And I drew nearer to God.

Thank you to all of you who encouraged my teammates and I this weekend. God used you in many ways, and I am grateful that I was a recipient of His love through you.

God Bless,
Cassie

Date: 1/5/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Knocked on the head with a double-necked guitar

I had been sluggish in regaining enthusiasm for coming back on team from winter break until tonight. We were housed in Poplar, which was our very first booking on rally day back in August. This visit, we stayed in the empty parsonage across from the church. It was a great house, and we christened it with a dance party in typical New Dawn fashion right away. The first evening in Poplar, we had dinner with Pastor Greg and Audrey, our host from August. We were told a few youth were coming later to hang out with us, but we did not know what to expect out of that time.

Three middle schoolers, Alex, Chris, and Chelsey, arrived decked out with electric guitars, amps, and a double-necked guitar, which I had never seen before. They were awesome; however, we did not know many of the same songs. I realized I'm on the cusp of being too old to know what is cool. They are drawing back to Led Zeppelin, Leonard Skynyrd, and older rock groups that were a little before my time and are coming back in style now. None of us were able to sing along or add too much to their sound, even in all of our acoustic glory. I see why Zeppelin didn't use the Djembe much in his music. We were able to play several songs together because the kids were talented and nice enough to learn some of our worship songs on the spot such as "Trading my Sorrows" and "Grace like Rain."

Throughout all this time, I was wondering if we were boring them and if they could tell our ignorance about their music. However, after we ended in prayer, they thanked us for letting them play with us. They were so excited and did not really want to stop. How humbling. I know I was not near their level instrumentally, and they thought we were doing them a service. It shows, once again, that God knows what He's doing when He brings people together. Our perceptions of a situation are so often not His reality. He's working in ways that we do not see and we may never appreciate. Last night we made a great connection with people we would have otherwise had no reason to meet except that we love to play music, in God's house, for His name's sake. I was there to appreciate them and the wonderful creations God has made in them.

Before this night, I was missing home and asked: is God really using me in some special way here that I couldn't do at home? These kids reminded me that there is great purpose in this ministry, whether I choose to be humble enough to fulfill it or not. This year is really about showing love, the love from Christ, to everyone we meet. Alex, Chris, and Chelsey probably do not realize how they affected me, but I'm grateful for how they allowed God to use them. They are also involved in a great ministry and I pray that we are all true to our calling.

Keep the praises going up, up, up,
Corine
Ps. 113:3



Corine Bell

Date: 1/7/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Say Yah to da U.P, eh.

Kingsford, MI—it's so nice to be home right now. Granted, I was just here a couple weeks ago, but this time is different; this time things are okay.

We have a jam-packed weekend in store for us: three services, a program, Sunday school, and chapel at a nursing home, all in about 16 hours. It is also my dad's 56th birthday, which I am very excited to actually be home for. It's been over five years since I've been able to say that (thanks, college).

Normally, being home means a lot of different things to me. I usually hide out in my house and avoid the world. As proud a Yooper I am, I don't like being home. To me, this is a place that represents someone I don't recognize anymore. Coming back feels like a reversion to that former self, and that does not make me very happy.

I'm also very reserved about mixing worlds. I think Chase wrote a journal about this phenomenon around Thanksgiving. I agree totally. The circles of people and the lifestyles should probably never really mix. I am a different person with my team than with friends from high school, camp and college. It's not a wholly bad thing; in fact, I'm convinced it's purely because different people bring out different things inside of us. Needless to say, coming home with friends from the non-Yooper world usually makes me a little anxious, and I'm never quite sure what to do about it.

This time, thankfully, it was great. I actually liked it. It was fun showing the team around my town, laughing at how things are up here (i.e. Trenary toast, pasties, and the ski jump). My grandmother came up for the weekend, and she was able to meet the team, and I'm pretty sure she approves. My church saw a little taste of what I've been doing and what they've been supporting. It was a great chance to minister to my congregation and give back a little bit of what they have done for me in the 22 years I've been a member. The support of so many people was overwhelming for me. I saw people that I haven't spoken with in years; kids I baby-sat for when they were tiny are now second-graders, freshmen in high school.

This community has meant a lot to me, and it's only in the last couple of years that I have really grown to appreciate it and the impact it has had on me. You can take the girl out of the U.P, but you sure can't take the U.P out of the girl. And I'm okay with that, because I have definitely seen what it means to live up here and what one becomes when they let that happen. This is a good place, filled with good people. I'm proud to say that this is part of who I am.

In Him, Kristin



Kristin Rice

Date: 1/10/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Frances with an "e"

I almost cried looking into her eyes. She cried. I could tell it meant a lot to Frances, having someone interested in her life and hearing her stories. I truly was. I was drawn to her immediately following our musical program. It would have been hard not to be.

Frances spoke of an exciting past. Of her days spent canning on the farm near Moscoe, Michigan. She spoke of learning to cook at a young age. "It's a dirty, rotten shame that girls aren't learning to cook anymore." I agree with her statement. It seems no one really has the time. Everyone goes for what's fast and easy: Chicken Mc Nuggets or frozen potpies. Frances reminisced on how good the food used to taste when it was home-cooked. I could taste it with her.

Ninety-two years old. I wouldn't have guessed. She looked mid-eighties. Chocolate-colored eyes stared into mine with every word she spoke. Teeth strangely perfect—suggesting falseness—smiled back at me every time I spoke. A wheelchair temporarily housed her broken-healing body. Frances broke her hip just five weeks ago. "It actually broke before I even hit the ground. That's why I fell."

"Rosie the riveter," that's what she referred to herself as. It's a familiar slogan-type. After high school she worked hard to make a living. I imagine she was among the first to do so—around the time of the Depression. Working in a factory putting rivets on planes and other metal contraptions earned her the name. All this work must be the cause of her worn bones, we joked.



Chase Chisholm

Pointing to a ring on her hand, Frances described her travels to Arizona. Her and her husband would hike and collect rocks. And Native American Indians would make jewelry out of them—both Navajo and Apache. "The Indians made such fine jewelry," she thought as I took her hand to have a closer look. It was beautiful. "They would come and mow my lawn, and I would feed them after." She assured me of their kindness and compassion for others.

"Those days are over now," a silence in our conversation whispered. The days of being able to walk next door and ask for flour, the days of caring for ill neighbors, the days of loving families and safer homes—all are gone or, it seems, soon will be. Frances commented on her inability to have children as I shared how important it is to take care of those children already in need. She concluded in her way, "It's a dirty, rotten shame how children are abandoned these days."

Frances with an "e" reminded me of a time I never lived, an age I'll never experience and only dream too. I now realize the importance of taking time to talk with those "more experienced" citizens of society. I believe they may hold a key to unlocking a life worth living once more.

Choking back tears as we ended our conversation, I asked if she had any advice for my life. **"Live and be happy," she said, "Always be happy." I couldn't agree more. And it seems so simple.** We hugged and wished each other well as we ventured our own separate ways. Frances wheeled down the hall and I walked out the door. Our lives crossed for a moment. A moment I'll never forget.

Date: 1/12/2006
Submitted by: Tysen Bibb
Journal Entry:

God's peace, this is Tysen. Have you ever so taken for granted something beautiful that it seemed to fade from your consciousness? I think that we all do that so much that we don't unplug and step back and really look at how much of a gift life is. Recently, I had the opportunity to just sit back and take things in. Every person's face I saw was a work of art. Like an intricate painting or sculpture that seemed to remake itself with every influence of emotion, light, sound and motion. Watching light filter through a window illuminating every particle of dust as though it were snowing golden flakes of memories held aloft by an unseen breeze. Trees appear as foreign objects drawn on a landscape by an artist with more than just a good eye for detail. Every intricate detail of life painted, sculpted, shaped, and willed by the loving hand of one who with a whisper spoke it all into existence.



Tysen Bibb

The next time you have the time...or ya know...maybe when it would seem absolutely crazy, check out of the normal grind for five minutes. Take a look around. Think of the absolute beauty that surrounds you everywhere. The sky, sunsets, leaves in the breeze, light reflecting off of snow...God everywhere...in everything. You might think, "How can there be beauty in a world so fraught with bad things?" My answer to you is this...the shadow proves the sunshine. There can be no shadow without an even greater light shining on the objects and reality of life. God is...and always has been and always will be...God.

"Why did God make all of this beauty?" you ask. For you...that's right, it is for you. God wants you to see Him in everything and praise Him for who He is. Why does God keep people around if they do so much bad stuff? Love...He loves all people and wants all people to know Him in and through His son Jesus. He gives us time, He gives us grace, He gives us free will. We can by grace love Him or in our sinfulness reject Him.

All of these thoughts bombarded me one weekend in Iron Mountain, MI. It's funny how when you least expect it, God delivers a gift. If you're not living life with your eyes open they can be easy to miss. Seek God...seek His truth and love. Till next time, this is Tysen. God's Peace.

Date: 1/14/2006
Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

A Life Worth Loving

Amery, WI—I have to say that nursing homes and assisted living places are among the top favorites of mine so far this year. Each one is so unique, not only in how they are run, but the plethora of personalities and life experiences contained inside never cease to amaze me.

Today we were extremely blessed to spend time with the residents of Willow Ridge, here in Amery. Now, first off, it was great being back in that town after our week of cross-cultural training back in September. I felt like I knew things about it and was able to relate (sort of) to the residents who had lived their all of their lives. For example, the Stone Hearth makes the world's best homemade pies; well, the best pies that don't come from my own mother's oven (wink, wink). And there is a sweet coffee house that we didn't visit, but have heard great things of, including some live music.

Well, I digress. So, we're at Willow Ridge. The residents had already had a pretty exciting day—they had ordered food of their choice from many restaurants around town, and had invited friends and family to join them. By the time we got there, many residents were a little too worn out to join us. However, we were not discouraged because the people who did come to worship with us were high in spirit and love.

After the program, I was very fortunate to talk with Geraldine Louise Swanson Clawson, an 87-year-old woman who had so much energy and life in her that I was lifted up just being in her presence. It just so happened that yesterday was the one-year anniversary of her husband's death, and his birthday had been a week prior (the same day as my own father's, I might add). I was so impressed with her love for him; she wasn't weepy or distraught, but she talked of him fondly and with a hope in her face that said she would see him soon. She had put herself in Willow Ridge so as not to burden her children, but she had visits from them, her grandchildren, and her two adorable great-grandchildren often. She told me about all the places that she had lived and many stories involving friends and places past.

Forty-five minutes later, I didn't want to part with Geri—I felt as though I could have listened to her forever, and I know she would have talked with me that long. Instead, I helped wheel her to the coffee hour, promising to send a message from our travels. I often wonder why it is that God puts us in the places and situations that he does. Sometimes the answers are pretty clear, many times they are not. But today, in our last stateside program, I trust that God brought me here with the team to experience Love. It's not that we needed a reminder of love, but it's always good to have an extra kick. And that's exactly what we got. In talking with my teammates after the program, it seemed that we had each had an experience with a resident that will forever touch us. What an amazing reminder of the family of Christ we have here as we begin to prepare our meeting the family of Christ in Hong Kong, Singapore, and Malaysia. I can't wait!

In Him, Kristin <><



Kristin Rice

Date: 1/22/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Well friends, our journey has begun.

It is 2 a.m. on Sunday here in Tokyo (11 a.m. on Saturday in Minnesota), and my teammates and I have found ourselves sitting in the NWA business class lounge in Tokyo's Narita Airport. Tysen and I discovered this wonderful place about an hour after we found out that our connecting flight to Hong Kong was delayed 'indefinitely'. We walked in and felt like kids who were at Disney World for the first time. Can I really sit in those cushioned chairs? Can I really help myself to those snacks and beverages, without paying? (That's what we were thinking, not the kids at Disney World.) The answer is no, of course, because we're not business class. In any



Cassie Woodard

case, I promptly helped myself to some pretzels, Japanese cheese, and Oreos. God bless the business class! However, our illegal inhabitation of the business class lounge will hopefully slide, because the unlucky employees here at Narita Airport have bigger things to worry about.

Our flight tonight was cancelled, along with about six others. The culprit? Snow. That's right. Tokyo had received two whole inches of snow. This 'snowstorm' is the cause of the cancelled flights. We flew into the airport around 5 p.m. local time (3 a.m. MN time) amidst flurries of snow. I have to laugh--I'm looking out the window, and I can still see the ground. That's how much snow there isn't. There can't be more than two inches on the ground out there. Unfortunately, Tokyo is not prepared for what is everyday Minnesota weather! In any case, we are here for the night. Hopefully the nice employees let us stay camped out up here. We blend in, right? Two men over 6 feet tall, three women, two guitars, and a laptop in a case that looks like it could carry a bomb...I'm sure no one will notice us.

When we found out that we weren't going to be arriving in Hong Kong when we expected to, we had the pleasure of trying to get a hold of our contact in Hong Kong. We tried calling the AT&T world access number a few times, and we tried to use several different international calling cards. We then resorted to asking people in the airport to use their cell phone to call Hong Kong. Two men were really nice about it, but they only had domestic calling--so if we had anyone in Tokyo to call, that would work. We were almost ready to try a new avenue, but decided to approach a group of people. We asked a man who had just put his cell phone away if he spoke English, and he said he didn't, but pointed to another woman. We told the woman our situation and asked if we could pay her money to call Hong Kong on her phone. She told us her phone wouldn't work to call Hong Kong, but she had this international calling card that Korean Air had just given her, and she wouldn't need it, so she said we could have it! Just like that! We thanked her and were able to call our contact to let him know we wouldn't be there.

I know I shouldn't be surprised, but it was a little crazy to have prayers answered so perfectly. We are across the world in a country that none of us have been to, and where none of us speak the language; and yet somehow, we are able to communicate. In preparation for this journey, we have talked about cultural barriers and language barriers and prejudice and stereotypes and just about everything else that should be addressed when traveling internationally. And we keep coming back to the fact that Jesus is the bridge. Even when we aren't in a church or a Christian setting, Christ's love can be a bridge. Christ's love can shine through us, and it is His love that makes the difference. It is His love that comes through when we are too tired to love. May He sustain you and give you the strength to love and communicate when you are unable to.

Peace,
Cassie

Date: 1/23/2006
Submitted by: Chase Chisholm
Journal Entry:

A cross-cultural beginning

People are beginning to disperse. It's been nearly twenty hours since our arrival here at

Narita International Airport. We will have been here over twenty-four hours before departing on our finally-booked flight to Hong Kong. If you haven't guessed—our flight was cancelled. The indefinite haze of last night eventually cleared once our cancellation was confirmed. I was a bit thankful.

God provides abundantly; yet, I feel like a complete mooch. We managed to sneak our little way into the business class lounge along with many other trapped travelers. I would be lying if I said it hasn't been fun. And no one has said a word. There are too many other issues to deal with like obnoxiously-demanding frustrated people. We mind our own way, keep to our own area and take food only when hungry. Basically we've moved in, made friends and eaten constantly.



Chase Chisholm

I have remained awake and alert from a steady diet of crackers, little wrapped balls of cheese, water and café lattes. I slept maybe two hours total. I drooled, too. I'll take drooling as a sign of deep sleep. And it was Kristin's pillow that she so graciously offered. Maybe I'll tell her? Still the experience has been a blessing. I've had plenty of time to work, think, reflect and observe. Time I wouldn't have had otherwise.

Earlier this afternoon a Japanese man requested my help on using a phone card. His gestures spoke aloud a desire for my assistance. Unknowingly to him I had already failed on my own attempts to use the phone. I would still try with God's help, of course. The man handed me his card and I punched away.

A Japanese speaking woman kept talking to me over the phone. I could tell her words were denying my try. Finally I was forwarded to an operator standing by. Next I was told—in English—to wait for the prompt and then follow what was said. Apparently I neglected to mention I don't speak Spanish. Thanks to two years of Spanish class in high school I was able to decipher needing to press "uno" for access to "los Estados Unidos."

It was then I realized I helped a Japanese man connect to the United States from Tokyo through the Spanish language. I now know the reason for my being here in the business class lounge. It's too bad the rest of the team can't say the same. Just kidding! In all honesty and jokes aside I like to think God does have a purpose for all of this. Or perhaps I'm just trying to justify my scandalous ways.

Date: 1/24/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

America the Beautiful

Tao Fong Shan, Hong Kong—What a great start to the first full day here in HK. I didn't know how breakfast would work at TFS, the retreat center we're at for the first few days. I walk in, and the tables are labeled by your group, and sure enough, there's a table with five place settings, the only English label of Ms. Cassie Woodard (thanks, Team Leader). I sat down, and just observed the others dining at the time I was, mostly to see what was the thing to do, but mostly because this was the first glance I had at fellow retreaters. Upon figuring the proper way to get breakfast, I got my toast, cheese, fresh egg and corn flakes, sat down, and enjoyed a truly British breakfast. Lo and behold, though, halfway through my first piece of toast, an alarm blared. A few glances went up to the smoke detector, but most everyone just kept eating despite the obnoxious loud honk that was resonating behind us. Thank goodness it finally stopped after a minute. Cassie later joined me and while we were sitting there, in burst three Hong Kong firefighters in full gear, rather perplexed why they ran up here to find everyone calmly eating breakfast. It turns out the toaster went a little beserk, burned one piece, and set the whole thing off. Oh joy.

Now, normally this would be enough to set one in a jovial mood for the day, but the minute Corine walked into the dining hall, the muzak that was coming from a nearby stereo decided to spurt out a nice reminder of home: "America the Beautiful." The three of us burst into giggles; I was actually



Kristin Rice

trying to keep from spitting my food. Nothing says welcome to a foreign country like a patriotic hymn.

Today we also met Chim, this awesome woman from HK who was a counselor at Camp Wapo in Amery, WI. She helped us with some of the Chinese songs we learned earlier this fall, courtesy of New Dawn 02-03. Chim also taught us a few new songs for our repertoire. She's a riot. She laughs a lot and was very patient with us attempting to sound out exactly what she was saying to us in a language filled with tones and vowels our mouths are not quite equipped to form.

I've found that with most of the people we've met so far, they are so willing to help us understand and fit in as best as we can. Last night's dinner with Jackie and Patrick and chopstick lessons, today's fun music time with Chim, even Pastor John, Noel (his son), and others who've been here have been so patient with us, explaining time after time that which we don't understand. We probably all ask the same question seven thousand times, and they answer every time like it was the first they'd heard it. It is so refreshing to see Christ living in this community that is the top of this mountain. I will be interested to see what life ends up like when we move into our flat and are not in such a Christian community. I've never really spent time in a place where Christianity is not part of the mainstream. It's really making me think about a lot of things, especially the role of evangelizing, while being in this country where Christianity is so far from being a dominant religious practice. This is a true first for me, and I look forward to seeing what God actually has in store for us as a team, and me as a Christian with questions.

Do je Ye soh, Kristin ("Thank you, Jesus" in Cantonese)

Date: 1/25/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Neh Ho! Well, today was eventful! We started out our day with a British style breakfast of hard boiled eggs, tea, cheese, toast, and cold cereal; something I have become quite fond of, I must say. The weather here is beautiful. We're situated on top of a grand mountain overlooking the Sha Tin area of the New Territories, north of Hong Kong Island. China is gorgeous! No offense to the purple mountains' majesty of the good ole U.S.A., but the view up here is breathtaking and the air is cleaner than I have smelled anywhere. The tropical trees and plants, the morning mist, and the quiet atmosphere of the Tao Fong Shan retreat area we are in take the cake in my book.



Tysen Bibb

After sharing some laughs and lots of eggs at breakfast, we made our way across to the Lutheran Theological Seminary, just across the mountain from Tao Fong Shan. There we met with many students for morning chapel. It was a blessing to get to worship alongside our Chinese, Laotian, Cambodian, Japanese, Indonesian, and Indian brothers and sisters in Christ. The service was in Cantonese Chinese, and we followed along by way of interpretation via headphones. We were warmly welcomed, and we all feel we made many new friends. Most students speak their native tongue but all speak limited English...better than a lot of Americans, I might add. God is amazing in how many different people groups, languages, and cultures He individually tailored for His good pleasure.

Later on that day, we had the opportunity to share lunch and fellowship with our new Asian friends. The team took turns trying the new foods, and I think we all left with sore faces from laughing and smiling so much. During the fellowship time, we sang praise songs, prayed, and learned a little on how to celebrate the Chinese New Year. That reminds me—"Kung Hay Fat Choy!" or "Happy and Prosperous New Year to you!" We learned the traditional way of writing Chinese New Year blessings with ink and brush and shared our creations with one another.

In the afternoon, following our time with the students of the seminary, we had some much needed solitude time...time to just think, pray, read, rest, and soak up all of the rich experiences we have all gone through the past few days. God really calmed my heart and mind as I had been thinking about a number of things: friends, family, school, money, our ministry, this, that, and the kitchen sink, too, it seemed. Just like the old hymn says, "Take it to the Lord in prayer." God is good.

We have been so spoiled here, it is unreal. Our contacts John and John have been absolutely amazing! We don't know where we would be without them. They have taught us so much about living and ministering in Hong Kong, finding our way around town, and even a little Cantonese and Mandarin. Praise God for people who love and care for us when we feel overwhelmed.

The evening found us with a craving...but not just any craving...this was strong, deep, and it seemed to pulse from our very cores...this was an ice cream craving. So we walked down the mountain (about a mile or so) and found ourselves a beacon of light shining through the masses of people pushing and coursing their way through the mall. The sign beamed forth with an ethereal glow that seemed to draw us, nay, beckon us closer and closer and closer until we were swallowed up by its magnetic power and delicious meaning...Haggen Dazs. We sampled flavors, debated flavor combos, and then partook of the cold creamy goodness that is ice cream. Praise the Lord for such simple pleasures. It should be a sin to have this much fun and still be ministering.

Well, after eating our treats and making our way back up the mountain, albeit a little slower than coming down, we talked and shared moments outside discussing life, God, and team, and then laid our then tired but content bodies down for a long night's rest. A simple day...but a good one none the less. Praise God for new friends, His handcrafted beauty this is China, and ice cream. Till next time, this is Tysen Bibb towering so high above the local population I could be doing a traffic report, signing off.

In His Love and Strength,
Tysen Bibb

Date: 1/26/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

"Beware of your head"

This phrase was a common sign on short ceilings at Tao Fong Shan. How true it is on several levels. For Tysen, this sign needs to be a constant caution for living in Hong Kong. In another sense, how many times does our "head" lead us into bad situations? I know I should take this sign to heart.



Corine Bell

With some sorrow, we said "Joy gin" (goodbye) to TFS today. I loved the cross overlooking the city, the peaceful chapel, and the prayer labyrinth. We went to chapel this morning. It was fun for us to listen to the translated English through headphones, plus we looked really cool. We had lunch with the seminary students for the last time until April. I decided to sit with new people today, yet I did not feel the apprehension I would feel normally when asking strangers if I could sit with them. I knew I would be welcomed. Not only would whoever I approach welcome me, but they would also be excited to have me sit with them, show me what the food was and how to eat it, and keep up a lively conversation. The willingness to help and general excitement have been differences I have noticed from social norms in the U.S. Our final time at the seminary was spent with an English class. We all enjoyed talking with a group of students individually. The best part was what they took from our conversation to share with the entire class. Mistakenly, one of Tysen's group members said Tysen had two girlfriends. We all had a good laugh while Tysen laughed and turned three shades of red.

We moved into our flat--yes. flat--in Sha Tin. It is an amazing flat, and we all feel extremely blessed to be here. We are in the midst of the city, yet we see the lush mountains to the south directly off of our balcony. Once again, our Father's creation is astounding. I'm so excited to be here for Chinese New Year. Although most places will be closed, there should be lots of festivities taking place. I plan to be involved in it all!!

Another blessing He has bestowed is that we can still see the cross of TFS from where we are in the city. I can always look to the hills from where my help comes from and remember the peace He gave me up on the mountain.

Kung Hai Fat Choi! (Happy New Year!),
Corine

Date: 1/27/2006
Submitted by: Cassie Woodard
Journal Entry:



Cassie Woodard

Home sweet home

Throughout our lives, many places take on the meaning of the word 'home': our childhood house, our college dorm, our hotel when on a vacation, a family member's house during a visit. No matter where we are, or where we come from, we habitually have a place that we call home; *somewhere* that we want to return to or claim as our home.

Yesterday, we moved into our flat in Sha Tin, a city in the New Territories of Hong Kong. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong has a flat for its long-term missionaries, and as the ELCHK is sans missionaries at the moment, the flat is ours for the next three weeks. It was nice to be settled in, relatively speaking. I had to laugh when I was down at the grocery store and thought to myself, "I should get home.." How quickly I had adjusted to my surroundings and made myself a home!

Being in a home has been comforting. It allows for some routine, and provides familiarity. This morning I was able to go for a run. I ran along the Shing Mun River, which used to be the harbor of Sha Tin before they filled most of it in with land to build more high rises. It was wonderful to get exercise and work my muscles back to life after months of inactivity in the Minnesota cold. It was great to run and feel alive. I passed people walking their dogs, business men and women on their way to work, people out for a leisurely morning stroll, and other runners (likely training for the upcoming Hong Kong marathon). But my favorite sight on this run was the twenty-some men in their seventies doing Tai Chi in the many gardens alongside the path. I have never seen anything like it. They were focused on their practice, oblivious to the passersby, very calm and peaceful in their activity.

It was inspiring to see these men. I like to think that it is a routine for them, spending 30 minutes each morning before heading off to work at the market, or before visiting grandchildren, or before heading to the local bakery for breakfast. I believe that this is something that they have found that centers them. How much I can learn from them! I was inspired to see so many people take time out of their day to center themselves and find balance and peace in the rhythmic activity of breathing and controlled movements. They have a grasp of what it means to be alive. To celebrate life by finding a peace right away in the morning, before daily activity has the chance to distract. They know how it feels to feel alive.

I pray that God continues to provide me with visions of what it means to be alive. Jesus did not come down for us to continue to walk around dead inside. Jesus did not give His life for us to live as if we are slaves to sin. He came so that we may have life. He came so that we may *live*. Live in the fullest sense of the word. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul writes: "But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions – it is by grace you have been saved." (2:4-5) God's grace covers our sin, and we no longer have to live dead in our transgressions. May you find the peace that God offers in His gift of salvation. May you feel alive today; freed by the blood of the lamb that was sacrificed out of love for you.

In His Grip,
Cassie

Date: 1/28/2006
Submitted by: Chase Chisholm
Journal Entry:

Yuen Long Lunar New Year Fair

It is tradition to visit an open flower market as part of the New Year celebration. It is a custom many still hold--especially the youth--seemingly rare in a culture ever changing and always influenced by western societies. Chinese New Year is a holiday filled with the wishing of luck, good fortune and financial prosperity for the year ahead. A fun, colorful, flower-filled and loud time is had by all here in Hong Kong.

All types of flowers in every size, shape and smell poured out the makeshift market stands. Cheap instruments, generic toys, necessary junk and enticing food cluttered the remaining scene. Each plant and every color, all matter and useless wonder had a different meaning; boldly advertising what New Year blessing it would bring to the buyer. Chinese culture is beautifully symbolic.



Chase Chisholm

We spent the afternoon at Tin Yiu Life Church, a congregation part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Hong Kong (ELCHK). It is where Reverend John Peterson (our main contact while in Hong Kong) has spent most of his missionary life. The church is housed in the ground floor of a residential complex located in the outwardly lying community of Tin Shui Wai, Hong Kong. It's about an hour transit from Sha Tin Central.

Through a teeny metal door, around the corner and in a small room-a time of worship and fellowship was held. Games were played, songs were sung and conversation heard. Time spent with the youth was rich and full, inspiring for all involved. We parted with the promise of meeting at the evening's flower market.

And we did. Nearly 20 of us added to the already completely packed bazaar-Yuen Long Lunar New Year Fair. Being herded through the gates like cattle was the not-so-open experience we had in the claimed open flower market. It didn't matter. It only added to the awe of being part of this holiday routine.

A large (as tall as me) pink-flowering and potted bush was brought to my attention. It was covered with pinky bows and wrapped with pinkish garland. Apparently pink is the color of love during this time of celebration and hope. They say the bigger the bush the better. And it appeared to the youth of Tin Yiu Life Church that I needed all the love-luck I could get for the year ahead. I was teased.

I felt like I was at home with friends as we laughed the night away. Most of the youth were around our age--some younger, others older. It turned out my and our ignorance of their language and culture was a way for us to unite in mild sarcasm, innocent joking and continued teasing. All directed at me, of course.

Hugging and other forms of physical touch are not normally part of Chinese culture. And words of affirmation and encouragement are rarely spoken. People here show their love and affection through gracious serving and generous giving. It is a kind of pure hospitality-the kind given without the expectation of something in return. And I definitely felt purely served all day.

I feel served every day in Hong Kong. It is all I can do to accept it sometimes. I am here to serve but am served so much myself. I guess serving can also be allowing oneself to be served as well. I am learning.

I am thankful for the youth of Tin Yiu Life Church. They have given me an experience I will never forget. When will I ever be back to celebrate Chinese New Year in Hong Kong? When will I ever be blessed to spend it with native celebrants-new friends again? I probably won't. But I'll never forget rattling the night away with my purchased handheld drum, now a souvenir.

Date: 1/29/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Shout to the Lord!

On Sunday morning, the team worshipped with Pastor John, our contact, and his congregation at Tin Yiu Lutheran Life Church. Before church, we had a traditional Chinese breakfast of noodles and dumplings, which was extremely filling. The service

began at 10:30, and we were prepared to sing several songs, perform a skit, and give a sharing all centered on Thanksgiving. We were not prepared for God's outpouring of His Holy Spirit on that place. Our team and the congregation worked to serve each other with music that could be sung in Cantonese and English. While singing the different languages at the same time, I felt that we were blessed with another possible glimpse into heaven's gate. The service lasted more than two hours, on a major holiday, but it felt much shorter than many one-hour worship services I've sat through. The crazy thing is that I think the members would have been willing to stay however long God wanted, even if that meant all day. In many of the churches I've attended, if the service runs more than an hour, there are complaints to the pastor afterward. What a difference.



Corine Bell

However, what brought me to tears was that these 40 people sang louder than some churches I've visited in western countries with congregations of 400. They were singing with all of their hearts, truly shouting to the Lord. They hunger for the Word and appreciate any chance to praise God and worship with other Christians. Most of the youths' parents were not Christians, and it is difficult for me to imagine what a struggle that must be daily. They have faith that God will work His good plan in their lives, in whatever shape that may take. I told the congregation that this experience is something we would take back to the U.S. and share with others. I hope that's true, and I pray that hearts are receptive.

With renewed passion,
Corine

Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob! Ps. 81:1

Date: 1/30/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Let our Prayers Rise Up

I tell ya what, wow. I am exhausted. It's not that I'm tired out from too much programming; in fact, right now it's more of an overwhelmed "where am I, what am I doing" thing.

Today being Day Two of the Chinese New Year celebration, there was no programming scheduled. John, our contact, suggested that we go up the road to Che Kung Temple, where many people would be gathering to offer incense, money, and food to the local god. I admit to not knowing really anything about the place, or the tradition. But it was amazing to be there and see this ritual.



Kristin Rice

We walked from our flat to the Temple, a good twenty minute hike on the hottest day since we've been here. Before we got there, we saw masses of people walking to and from it, carrying giant prayer wheels. The story behind the prayer wheels (many, many pinwheels attached to cardboard and bells, all tied on a stick) is that bringing them into the temple and then carrying it in front of you, all of the bad spirits will be "winded" out and will not harm you. Well, this may be a rough translation of the Kristin variety. There were so many styles and sizes, the only similarity being the colors of red and gold, which signify much luck in all of Chinese culture.

There was also a big pillar of smoke emanating from the temple's open courtyard. Not to worry, it was just the mass quantities of incense being burned. I should also mention that the incense was not just your everyday, buy it at Shopko little stick of incense for fun. There were some seriously huge incense logs and spirals, like I have never seen. If we had smelled bad before entering the temple, we sure didn't at the end thanks to all the incense and campfires going on.

It was quite an experience being there during this time. Many people in Hong Kong are not especially religious, and this tradition of going to the temples may be the only sense of religious obligation they have all year. There were so many people bringing offerings to the local god, as a way to appease the god for the development happening all around the mountains, and as an extra measure of luck, I suppose. I wondered if we were perhaps the only Christians in the place. How many of us go to church as a sense of obligation rather than pure joy and desire to worship the Lord?

Despite not knowing a lick about this tradition (which makes me feel rather ignorant, especially as a religion degree holder), I can't help but marvel at the wonder of our God. He loves us so much that he came to be **with** us. We do not have to spend time appeasing ourselves for him; he's done that for us. God takes care of literally everything for us, and all we have to do in return is love him. What that all means truly lies with the believer and the beholder of God's heart. But our love is enough for God. That's all we have to do. It's so simple, and yet perhaps the most difficult thing for me to remember and to trust. But it's something I am reminded of more often than not here in Hong Kong.

In Him, Kristin <><

P.S. We also watched the most amazing fireworks over Hong Kong Harbor tonight and spent much more time with Loren, John, Noel, and Corissa.

Date: 1/31/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Greetings in Christ,

Well, today is our tenth day in Hong Kong. So far, way blessed! Today we had the privilege of meeting with many leaders and missionaries in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong (ELCHK for short). We played a blessing game for Chinese New Year, sang songs, and shared stories of how God has been moving and working in Hong Kong for over 35 years. The different nationalities represented were Chinese, Finnish, German and American; four different languages, four different cultural backgrounds, all in one place with Christ as the bridge. It became evident to us all how big God is, how deeply He loves all people, and how He wants to be loved and praised in all languages and by all peoples of the world. Some say math is the universal cultural bridge, others music, but I believe that Christ is the only One that can truly bring all peoples of the world together.



Tysen Bibb

After our worship and sharing time we went out to lunch and the fellowship continued. In the middle of laughing at a joke from one of the missionaries from Germany, it hit me that this felt like family. This small group of people sold out for Jesus, spread out across three separate tables sharing a Chinese Dim Sum lunch...was family. We never knew we would all be here. We never knew we would all be sharing lunch and trying to understand broken English through thick accents from our respective homelands. We never even knew each other existed before today...but God did...and He knew all of this was going to happen, in fact, He orchestrated it. Christians are a global family of broken people, put back together by grace and love, resting in the arms of a God who in the middle of our mess...came and gave everything for us...even though we thought we could fix ourselves.

Later on that day we decided to take a little time and goof off as a team. We meandered our way to a local park and played on a large concrete slide which was covered, much to our disappointment, with vulgar images. We soon forgot the pictures when a couple of boys, mostly likely 7 to 9 years old, started playing with a soccer ball nearby. Amidst the laughing and running we found ourselves playing an impromptu game where we had to kick a ball into the large holes on the back of the slide. Much fun was had as we ran, kicked, and slam dunked the junior sized soccer ball into the holes of the large concrete slide. Just as the game started to lose its luster, three girls aged 6, 8, and 10 joined us and we had a party on our hands. It was not long before we discovered that the girls all went to church and knew who Jesus was. Even 15 years ago, this would have been rare, but the Word of God has taken root in Hong Kong and the Gospel is spreading at a fairly fast pace, considering the two thousand year-plus grip of Taoism and Buddhism.

God is moving here, and everywhere we turn we are greeted by reminders of why we are here, what we are doing, and who we are doing it for. In such an itinerant ministry such as this, it can be hard to know if we are having a lasting impact. God seemed to hear the question on all of our hearts, and we were reassured through a friend we met here from the United States. He is a member of one of the first Cross Fire teams to Africa. He reassured us that when people hear of five young Americans traveling halfway across the world to talk about a man named Jesus...He must be important. Just our presence is affecting people. We had never thought about that. I had never

thought about that. God uses us when we least expect it and in ways we could never see or understand. Keep your focus on Jesus, seek first the Kingdom of God, and love...always love. Till next time, this is "that 6'7" American kid sticking out of that group of Asians over there."

In Him,

Tysen Bibb

Date: 2/1/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Youth Leaders

This evening we had dinner with Loren, the director at Camp Wapogasset, and several other missionary families. We ate pizza, which was our first U.S. style meal since we have been here. Then we had a long session singing. We started off a cappella with random songs, but we eventually broke out the guitar and song books. We sang many classic hymns and camp songs, some of which I was unfamiliar with. We ended with Loren leading us in a devotion and starting the chain of blessing the person next to you. We said the words "_____, child of God, marked with the cross of Christ, sealed with the Holy Spirit" and made the sign of the cross on our neighbor's forehead. It is always refreshing for me to hear again that I am sealed with the Holy Spirit. It is a guarantee I can trust.

As a whole team, Loren completely amazed us. When he spoke, we were attentive. He had incredible stories from his time on team and knew exactly what to say to our team to inspire us. He is one of many amazing youth leaders who need to be appreciated more often. He has a visionary heart and boldness for ministry. His words continually confirmed that his heart was centered on Jesus and encouraging Christian faith in youth. He has terrific ideas for new programs and ministries to reach out to young people who may slip through the cracks. He has left a great impression on us, as I am sure he has impacted many lives for the good of the kingdom.

I felt humbled in his presence, especially due to his humble demeanor. I pray that the church produces more people like Loren. If we start attaining that goal, Satan will surely lose much territory He's gained in society. Praise God!

With thanksgiving,
Corine

"Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith" -Hebrews 13:7



Corine Bell

Date: 2/2/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Strangers

"Keep on loving each other as brothers. Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it." – Hebrews 13:1-2

Within the past few months, I have had the incredible privilege to be in the presence of many of these stranger/angels. Being on team has opened the door to a host of heavenly beings here on earth. Those who were strangers cease to be so after the Spirit moves within the heart and a connection is made. There is a good possibility that the strangers I have become acquainted with will never cross my path again. Some I may meet again, and some I will keep in touch with regularly. Regardless of what happens, we were all strangers once. I can't help but think of the people close to me in my life, and wonder if we were ever strangers. That bond in Christ is stronger than failing memory. My brothers and sisters in Christ will hold a special place in my heart and in my memory because our bond in Jesus is different than any other bond or shared



Cassie Woodard

experience.

This past week – and throughout my time on New Dawn – I have been in the presence of many stranger/angels. Last night we ate a good American meal – Pizza Hut – for a going away dinner of sorts. Loren, a camp director from Wisconsin, has been here in Hong Kong working with youth leaders and building relationships between Camp Wapogasset and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Hong Kong. He is an amazing man, and we were very encouraged and inspired by him. We also ate with the Petersons, who came here from the U.S. about 20 years ago; and the LeMondes, who spent 20 years in Taiwan before moving to Hong Kong about 10 years ago; and a man named Don who used to live here in Hong Kong but moved to Nan Xing to teach at the seminary there. We sat around the living room last night and sang hymns and bluegrass songs for over an hour. Loren read from the Bible, and we marked each other with the sign of the cross. I couldn't stop thinking, "my cup runneth over." My heart was light and warm!

What a blessing to be in a place where I can worship Jesus openly and in community with my brothers and sisters. What a blessing to be surrounded by other believers. What a blessing to be in the presence of former strangers, whose grace and love convince me of their angel-dom.

May we open our hearts and our homes and our minds and our arms to the angels that God sends to us in the form of strangers. Thank you, Lord, for your divine plan and for your beautiful children.

Peace,
Cassie

Date: 2/3/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Breakthrough

Carrie is about my age. She recently finished school and is back, living in Hong Kong. Sydney, Australia was her place of study. Four years of her life devoted to mastering the performing arts. Like many young adult leaders at Breakthrough Youth Village, Carrie searches for her vocation. She looks for God's calling. And I have found breaking through language and cultural barriers reveals similarities among people, societies and life.



Chase Chisholm

"Breakthrough makes use of a variety of channels such as multi-media, counseling service, group activities and integrated training programs to stimulate youth to reflect on their directions and values in life, and develop positive and proactive attitude."

Overlooking what was once a small fishing community—Sha Tin, the new facility sits high on a mountainside—invisible to most. Founded on Christian principles, the organization targets school-aged youth of Hong Kong. It's a place offering a refuge from stress and pressure felt from the educational system as well as developing young leaders.

Carrie was one in a group of about twelve youthful adults attending a training workshop led by our team. This is the first time Breakthrough and Youth Encounter have had any relations. A lasting connection has been formed. Not only were we able to share about our ministry and organization, Breakthrough was allowed to share as well and both benefited and learned from the experience.

A time of sharing was had at the end of our example program and youth ministry workshop. Vivian shared about the history of Breakthrough. Patrick did too. Kitty told us of her experience working with the Hong Kong based "Hour of Power." Coco didn't speak English. Her touching story of learning about Christ was translated to us by Bruce. Hillary was there. And Kiki explained the script she is writing for the group to perform. We were among designers and teachers, students of chemistry and drama, new graduates and old—all people asking the same question.

Where is God leading me and how far will I go?

Carrie's story stays in my mind. I learned it is hard to break into the performing scene here in Hong

Kong. It is not like the supportive community base in Sydney. The one Carrie left behind for bigger and better places. I imagine it is hard anywhere. She has nothing to show for her work. A few videos are not enough. And they were left in Australia, anyway. She is lost. What will she do? Her soul is wandering. Pray for Carrie and the others.

Life is difficult. We all struggle with looking for our place in this world and hearing God's call. I know I do. Don't you?

Date: 2/4/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

One More Minute

Fanling, HK—You think you know how to barbecue? You have no idea. Silly United States Americans, charbroiled is not the answer. It took us a trip around the world to see the light about the true way to barbecue.

The ingredients of a real barbecue in Hong Kong: two big fires in tin buckets, lots of cooking forks, meats of every variety (beef, chicken, seafood), honey, and time. The beauty of this method is the whole event. Unlike a "traditional" barbecue during the summer at home, everyone cooks their own food to their liking. I preferred to vary between shrimps and chicken, while others had beef and little mini-hotdog looking franks. But this a Chinese barbecue does not make. Instead, the real party happened around the fires. We all sat on little stools, crowded around the fires, sticks in flames; laughter ringing out, the occasional advice from one of our new friends of how to really cook. Andy, our contact with this church, was fond of the "one more minute" method: "Andy, how does it look?" "One more minute."

After my first charbroiled chicken being yelled at by everyone, and when I say yelled, I mean shocked expressions and concern from all of the Hong Kong people: "That's not healthy! You'll get sick!!" Their intentions were good, and I'll admit, all that carbon probably is not too wonderful for my internal system. However, we have now realized a new cultural difference, aside from language and food: the willingness to share concern for another, even a person that is not normally a part of one's social circle.

More often than not, the people we are around care for us more than we even know. It is not that they come out and say, "Hey, I think you're swell, I want you to be okay." It is more subtle ways of showing love for this sister from a different mister. You probably know by now that most of us did not pack for the chilly weather here in HK, and thus I normally wear t-shirts and a skirt, which brings much protest and curiosity from the locals about my body temperature. More often than not, they offer to lend me a jacket or sweater numerous times in a matter of minutes. This is love at its most basic level: genuine care for others outside of yourself. This was what I found in our friends up in Fanling, that despite the lack of history among us, they were caring and wanting the best for me, and the rest of my teammates.

Throughout the evening, whenever we were not cooking any food (including honey toast and marshmallows near the end), we were talking, laughing, dancing, and learning a little kung fu. I kid you not. One of the guys at this party, Neon (true name), does performance kung fu, and had just done a show that day for an elderly persons' home. He showed us some of his moves and offered to teach us a few. I will never go as far to say that "I know kung fu," but I know that there are people here in Fanling, HK, who were showing me a part of God's Spirit that I had forgotten existed: true agape, love driven by God, through us and for us. Maybe I'll be able to remember that lesson for one more minute.

In Him, Kristin <><



Kristin Rice

Date: 2/5/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

WAA!!!! (That's "wow" for you Westerners, haha.) What an amazing day! I'm still excited even though I'm thoroughly exhausted. It was so...busy, fun, blessed, hilarious, tiring, long, short, and well, I'll do my best to recount it to you. Note: Some details will be left out for the sake of sanity, such as when I inhaled and exhaled.

First, we started out at Halleluiah Lutheran Church in Fanling, China. Pastor Andy has a large and fun congregation that we shared music and stories with. It is such a blessing to get to attend a worship service in Cantonese Chinese...when you have an interpreter. It was a fairly traditional Lutheran worship service, but it was obvious that everyone was worshipping God with all they had...something that, honestly, we in the United States churches could learn a lot from. God is worthy...and that should be all the motivation we need. We seem to sometimes get stuck on whether worship is entertaining to us instead of whether or not it blesses God. At one point at the end of one of our songs in English, the congregation continued to sing even though the song was over...it was beautiful to experience. God is moving and active, praise Him!



Tyсен Bibb

After worship, the youth group from the church took us to lunch...at McDonald's. It was different to experience Western food in Eastern culture. I have to say though, the McDonald's over here is quite different than at home. You are seated by a server, order from a menu, and your food is brought to you, just like a sit-down restaurant. Also, there are more fresh food choices instead of the deep fat fried contents of the Western menu. Anyways, we got to sit and talk with the youth group, and I discovered that, just like we had experienced before, it is not unusual for the youth to be Christians and their parents not. This, as you can imagine, is quite stressful. Chinese culture does not have its roots in Christianity like the United States does. Even though that heritage is not as embraced as it used to be in the U.S. due to growing religious pluralism and atheism, it's nothing like it is here in China. Many young Christians are met with hostility from parents and elders because of their faith in Jesus. Your faith in Christ actually costs you something in Hong Kong, whereas the most flak you'll get in the U.S. is usually some comment about how being a Christian means you're Republican. Please pray for the Christian youth of Hong Kong. Pray that God keeps their faith strong, that He sends positive spiritual mentors to them, and that God softens hardened hearts to the Good News of Jesus.

Once the meal was over and after a hasty goodbye, we rode the train to the other side of Hong Kong to sing songs, play games, and put on a puppet show for a group of children at Diamond Lutheran Church. We were blessed to have two wonderful interpreters who helped us lead the games, music, and laugh along with us during the puppet show. God refreshed us with the smiles, laughter, and energy of the beautiful children we got to work and play with. The highlight for me was watching them glued to the puppet show and laughing hysterically at what seemed like random moments.

As if that was not enough, the next (and final) stop was at the Tao Fung Shan Christian Retreat Center that we stayed at the first few days in Hong Kong. We were greeted once again by lush scenery, the beautiful classic Chinese architecture, and perhaps best of all...silence. Silence is a rare thing to find in a modern city of seven million people, and, with me being from a small town in rural Missouri...it was all too welcome. Shortly after arriving we met with our contact, John, who was one of the pastors that picked us up from the airport. He is a quiet and reflective man with a warm smile and deep eyes. He seems to always be contemplating something serious, even when he is telling a joke. I hope to have the opportunity to really sit down and pick his brain about God, faith, and life sometime. Before we knew it, it was time for worship to start. This time the service was in English and we sang hymns called Taize songs. These are simple songs with simple melodies repeated several times. The intent is that you focus and meditate on the words that you are saying; not just singing because everyone else is or because if you do not sing that "really spiritual" lady that sits behind you at church will bug you after worship. Okay, I'm done preaching. The worship service was so great! Very old school compared to what we are used to. From the layout of the liturgy, the songs, and just the overall tone of the service...yeah...God was praised, it rocked my face. After worship, we had fellowship with everyone there and ate supper in the main hall of the retreat center.

Well, we thought the day was over, but no way, man! It was only 8:00 p.m. at this point, and we'd been on our feet since 7 a.m. There is a place called the Ascension House located on the same mountain and property as Tao Fung Shan. It is run by international volunteers for one year at a

time. They house visiting missionaries and those seeking peace and quiet. Think of it as a Youth Encounter team that travels to a destination, takes over a house, and then maintains it for a year while hosting people. Instead of traveling all over to meet people...the people come to you! Cool, huh?! Well, the group of international twenty-somethings invited us to check out the Ascension House and hang out. How could we refuse?! It was such a blessing. What was a simple tour turned into two hours of great fellowship and impromptu worship. We made so many new friends this day and God is the reason why. He is everything to everyone whether we realize it or not. The air we breathe is His, the food we eat is from His hands, the friends and family we love are His blessings to us, and this eternal life we have is from His Son. Amen. Praise be to God!

Date: 2/6/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

"Sometimes you just have to deal with certain things"

I don't realize how much of my grandfather is in me until sentences like this one pop out of my mouth. The first time it came out was when I went to rest my head on Kristin's arm on the subway and I missed and ended up with my nose on her tricep. I was too tired to move it, though, so when she said, "Hey, your nose is in my arm," I said, "Sometimes you just have to deal with certain things." I'm glad my teammates can appreciate this humor.



Corine Bell

It is a true enough statement, though, and it can also be applied to the day we had today. Today was our "day off," which consisted of trying to figure out plane tickets for most of the day. Kristin and I navigated the transportation system of downtown Hong Kong by ourselves, without getting lost, thank you very much. We had fun except that the trip took a long time without much accomplishment. Our goal was to buy plane tickets. We ended up going on a wild goose chase and not much closer to purchasing tickets. We had to go through the process of being shuffled to different airlines and offices. We just have to deal with certain things and go through the steps.

However, the real low of the day was I felt nauseated all day and had to cut our trip short. Kristin took care of me, and I saw God's message to appreciate my teammates more. In order to help my recovery, Kristin even performed a dance routine in our living room. That little number made me feel much better. However, I was pretty incapacitated all day. I could not figure out what made me sick. We actually had eaten Western food the day before--maybe it was all the grease. But I knew I just had to wait it out, you just have to deal with certain things sometimes.

It amazes me how much our health affects everything else we do. If we are not well in body, not many other things happen efficiently. Everything stops when you get sick. Sometimes I think it is God's subtle, or not so subtle, way of telling us to slow down and take better care of our temples. Our spirits and our bodies are so closely intertwined, like a marriage. They can **affect** each other for better or for worse. These situations remind me how powerful prayer is for the believer. This medicine is so potent that it can keep our spirits healthy and help our bodies to be healthy.

A more rested sister in Christ,
Corine

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body."-1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Date: 2/7/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Excellent!

The other day, one of my new friends here taught me how to say 'wonderful,' or

'excellent.' It is "tsang!" We took several pictures together with both our thumbs up and smiles screaming 'tsang!' (Somehow, none of these pictures ended up on *my* camera...I wonder who has ten pictures of the two of us!)

There have been days when I haven't felt 'tsang;' days when I have felt much less than excellent. There are days when have to get up early and take all our instruments and ride the bus for an hour, or switch trains three times to get to a church or school. Not so bad, right?? But at the time, I am annoyed and exhausted, just wishing for a nap or time to myself. In these times, I am **far** from excellent.



Cassie Woodard

Some of these times, there is something inside me that clicks. *Why do you complain? Look at where you are! You are in Hong Kong. You are meeting amazing people who have done nothing but serve and love you. You wake up to palm trees and magpies singing and get to gaze at mountains surrounding you.* These times, I thank God for reminding me that life is more than my frustration. Satan loves it when I give in to my negativity, when I don't have the wisdom nor peace to see the Light; when I fail to see beauty in everything around me. God provides us with little reminders every day; we only have to open our eyes and our hearts to the beauty and wonder of His love.

I pray with all my heart that I see with eyes of love and appreciation. I pray that my heart will be open and fixed on God's excellence.

"Finally brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things." (Philippians 4:8)

I pray that I think of things that are excellent and wonderful. Think 'tsang'!
May God show you His beauty today in a way that you didn't expect. May you witness His excellence.

Cassie

Date: 2/8/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

A lighthearted peek ahead

Food is everywhere in Hong Kong. It is almost a trademark and definitely a landmark with catchy signs advertising the stuff, pointing every which way. The technologically advanced city is known for featuring cuisines from all around the world. Some of the best, I might add. For an introduction to Asian food, one would need to travel no farther than the now Chinese country.



Chase Chisholm

Restaurants are a familiar sight on every street corner. Eating establishments can be found upward flights of stairs, floating on water or down long alleys—anywhere. An all vegetarian Indian eatery in Tsim Sha Tsui was our final destination tonight. Curry flavored bites and fried yogurt covered bits were enjoyed among other flavorful treats. Thoughts of what our children would look like if we mated cross-culturally were discussed. And I am beginning to realize my journal entries have taken on a food and child theme.

Seemingly few other places are known so much by the food it has to offer. Two of them happen to be Kuala Lumpur and Singapore—our next destinations. I am told Kuala Lumpur, the capital city of Malaysia, is best. I will have to be the judge of that. We leave Hong Kong for Malaysia in one week. It is hard to believe. Our time here has been good, full of life, needed struggles and newness. I am already looking forward to coming back toward the end of April.

Date: 2/9/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice
Journal Entry:

Somewhere, Someone Is Laughing

Sha Tin, HK—Today we had our first experience of school ministry. John, our contact, invited us to share in the morning message during assembly at Yuen Long Secondary School. There are actually two assemblies, since the student body is pretty big. The first one was for sixth through eighth grade students (roughly, since I'm not sure as to how that translates to this system). It was a tough crowd, with them laughing throughout most of our serious skit, and the inhibitions enough to not jump and sing. A learning experience for us; we definitely modified the program before the second assembly. The ninth through thirteenth grade students were more responsive; at least they sang and a good crowd of them jumped and down with us during "Cast your Burdens" and "Trading My Sorrows".



Kristin Rice

I was most excited about seeing old friends at the school. We were able to meet up with many of the people we had met at Tin Yiu Life Church, back during our first weekend here in HK. Some of them are still students at Yuen Long, but a couple of them were just helping out with the technical aspect of plugging in our usually acoustic team. Did I mention that we went to Pizza Hut? Oh yeah, we did. However, do not be deceived, my friends. This was a classy Hut, with really great decorations, a calm atmosphere, and the option of what probably amounts to a three-course meal. We had three side dishes of rice and pastas and soups before the most amazing pizza of my life landed on our table. I can't even begin to describe the goodness of pineapple, chicken, and crab on a pizza crust with cheese on top and a sauce of what I believe was Thousand Island dressing.

I'm not going to tell you that exhaustion may be sinking in, causing me to get a little too giddy and overzealous in my efforts to be the class clown. I'm not going to tell you that this evening I fell off the couch in a fit of extreme laughter, and ended up rolling around the really dirty floor of our apartment. I'm not going to tell you that Chase and I had a fake fight that is on video on someone's digital camera. And I'm not going to tell you that I have never laughed as much or as hard as I did tonight, and purely out of being over tired.

Throughout all that was today, God is really showing me, and us, I would venture to generalize, that He is humorous; that He has bigger plans for us than we know; that even when we think we can not go on, He's showing us that things are not as bad as they seem to our limited minds. Basically, God is great, and I love that reminder every day, even in the little things such as Thousand Island pizza and laughing myself off of a couch.

Grace and Peace, Kristin <><

Date: 2/12/2006
Submitted by: Cassie Woodard
Journal Entry:

We carefully weaved our way through a cloud of sweaty bodies. We could hear excited chatter; the jittery, elated sort that inevitably accompanies exhaustion and accomplishment. People were clapping, encouraging each other and loved ones; there were smiling faces and tired faces. The finish line of the Hong Kong Marathon was electric; we could *feel* the energy in the air. There is something about accomplishing a goal, something about seeing something through until the end that sparks emotion. It intensifies everything. Especially when the goal is to run a marathon. Not only have you worked mentally to prepare yourself and convince yourself that you can do it, you also have undergone rigorous physical training. I can't imagine the adrenaline and many other hormones and neurons that are overactive when you finish something as epic as a marathon!



Cassie Woodard

We witnessed one couple get engaged. The woman was waiting on the side for her now-fiance, and he showed up with a bouquet of flowers, got down on his knee, and pulled out a ring from his pocket. We all cheered, feeling the energy and excitement run through us.

We scanned the runners for our friend Heather, who was running the half marathon. Heather is an ELCA Global Missions volunteer, and she has been here in Hong Kong for a year and a half; she will

be in Hong Kong for another year and a half before she goes home to Alaska. Finally we spotted her down the road, waving her arms over her head. (She spotted us first of course, because at 6'7", Tysen doesn't exactly blend into a crowd. Especially not an Asian crowd!)

Heather came toward us, walking now, arms at her sides and shoulders rising up and down with each breath she took. We congratulated her and took some pictures and showered her with praise at the great thing she had accomplished. "I wasn't sure you guys were going to make it--I would have cried if you hadn't been here!" she told us. Now, I'm not sure that she actually would have cried, but it's very possible. You never know what could happen after running 21K (about 13 miles).

I have never run a marathon, and do not plan on losing my mind any time soon and attempting one. So I cannot comprehend the mixture of emotions swimming around--relief, exhaustion, elation, self-respect, confidence--that come with the success of completing a difficult task. A task that has taken hard work, determination, perseverance throughout opposition, and lots and lots of sweat. Not only would one need a strong will and inner strength, but also support and encouragement from others. Heather was not just speaking from her adrenaline-rush of emotions; she understood and knew in her heart that she needed support from people who loved her.

The whole scenario reminded me of Paul's letter to the Hebrews:

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross . . ." (12:1-2a)

Jesus is our goal and our strength. He will give us the strength to overcome the obstacles and the sin that hinders. God will provide us with people to love and support us through it all--a cloud of witnesses to surround us when all we want to do is quit. When we keep our eyes on Jesus, He will bring us a joy that we cannot fathom. He will perfect our faith. Completing an earthly goal is exhilarating and brings us joy and satisfaction. How much more joyous will we be when we reach our Home and receive the prize of eternal life? It's like getting engaged times ten thousand! (Maybe it's more than that? I've never been engaged, so I have nothing to compare it to!!)

Praise God for joy and happiness, and also for the need for perseverance and determination. May He be blessing you as you run your race.

With eyes fixed on Jesus,
Cassie

Date: 2/13/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Today was a day off. For me...it was *really* a day off. The flurry of activities and general travel around Hong Kong had finally caught up with me and I was beginning to feel sickness coming on. God programmed our bodies to deal with sickness naturally, and well...my method is sleep and lots of it.

At 12:30p.m. I woke up and thought about life...for almost four hours. Over the past few days, I have had just enough of a respite to think about life beyond team...ha... after three years of team ministry, you kind of wonder what real life is like. I have so many dreams and aspirations. Some seem so lofty and others just seem downright selfish. First I need to, nay, I *want* to finish school. For school there are so many choices, so many interests I cringe to think of picking even two sometimes. Then there is where to go to school. I am blessed with many options here as well...both in and outside the United States. My guiding questions here are what, where, and when does God want me to go and do what only He seems to know at this time. Shall I be a pastor, worship leader, missionary, ethnomusicologist, photographer, journalist, teacher, or musician? Of course, any one of those choices will have me also being an indentured servant of the U.S. Government till I pay off my loans.

I know people that have always known what they were going to do. Either they received the blessing of knowing their calling early, or they took up the "family business" out of joy or



Tysen Bibb

obligation...usually a mix of both. For me, I do not know if I have deafened my ears to my calling for some reason or if God just has yet to reveal it to me. If I am deaf, I would imagine the cause is fear, either of not enjoying it or of enjoying it so much that I think that, "this can't be God's will...it's too fun." I do not know if that is sad or just flat out true. God, help me find the way.

I think one of my greatest fears in life is being caged, but not in the way you might think. I fear being held in a dead end job, being held back in opportunity, being closed in by lies, holding myself back by believing lies, being cut off from excelling, being chained to the ground by mediocrity, the mundane, and overwhelmed by opposition from those who want me to forever fit in their box instead of being the man God made me to be. Above all else...I fear a cage.

I also fear myself. That somehow I will let myself down and my best will not be good enough. Though modern humanist psychology would have us believe that the best we can do *is* always the best, life shows us different. Sometimes, though we grimace at the thought...our best really is not good enough. Praise be to God though...even when, by legalism and "good deeds", we thought we could save ourselves God sent us *His* best in Jesus Christ. God came to earth and healed our imperfection with His perfection. When we are weak, He is strong.

Many call faith in Jesus a "crutch" to better cope with life. Well, my response to that is everyone falls...in fact everyone who has ever lived, lives now, and will ever live has fallen short of perfection. If you say no you are deceiving yourself. No matter how rich, famous, good looking, talented, wise, generous, or important to people you are, that will not make you perfect. After all, how can a world full of imperfect people even begin to know first of all, what perfection is, let alone attain it? The answer is found in this: while we were lost in our imperfection (sin) God sent His one and only perfect Son, Jesus, to die in our place to save us from that imperfection. Jesus is the answer...not a crutch. And watch yourself if you say, "...well, you have your way and I have my own way." Jesus says He is the only way to God and heaven...that cannot be ignored. He either is...or is not.

Many religions in the world claim to have the corner on truth...they cannot all be correct. All religions are not the same. Do some real research for yourself and you will discover many differences. These differences should not settle your mind. They should make you wonder which one, if any, is true. At this point you can do one of two things: totally dismiss Jesus and gamble with eternity (which I DO NOT recommend) or do the research. Two books I recommend, if you are open to learning, are *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis and *I Don't Have Enough Faith To Be An Atheist* by Norman L. Geisler and Frank Turek. Both books take a logical approach to religion, faith, and God and how they fit into life. My prayer is that God will lead you to the Truth. Till next time, this is Tysen, NOT like the chicken. God's Peace.

Date: 2/14/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Long Day's Night

HK--This is day three, or four, of not enough sleep in my life, as well as that of my teammates. We had another wrong bus adventure tonight, this time in the other direction. Thankfully, there was a really nice person named Wing who helped us sooner rather than later. She got off the bus with us at her stop (very lucky) and showed us the way to the bus stop to head back to the way we came. At least this time we avoided China again.



Kristin Rice

Earlier tonight we spent time with the wonderful folks of Ascension house, the hostel that is near Tao Fung Shan. They invited us up for a barbeque, a good ol' fashioned American one. But it rained for the first time our entire month here. Grr. But we were able to still enjoy an amazing evening of fellowship and singing and lots of food.

It was so fun, and what I imagine life would be like if I were to live somewhere for a long time. It was such an impromptu night of friends just chatting and drinking coffee. For all of you back in the "real world", I hope you are having nights like ours; and if you are not, I highly suggest you do it. At any given time, although there were 14 of us, there were at least four conversations going. In this rag tag group of strangers, there were five countries represented. Five cultures that normally aren't grouped together; fourteen people who would not have met had it not been for this building and the vision behind it decades ago. It is yet another reminder of how big this world is, and yet despite the grandiose feeling that encompasses, we are not that different.

In this time of mistrust, anger, and violence, I hope that we can take the blinders off and see that we are all people just trying to live up to the best possible potential we see. There is not one right way to live, although I will venture that love and peace perhaps should be the prevailing emotions and goals to work for. God shows his face in so many ways, through different people and situations. If we actively seek that, genuinely wanting to see God, all we have to do is look at the hearts and souls of our brothers and sisters, next door neighbors, and strangers across the world. I personally do not feel that it matters if we see eye-to-eye on anything or everything--as long as there is an honest attempt to understand and feel empathy, we will be a lot better off that we are now. God, help us.

Kristin

Date: 2/18/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

They were the most beautiful children. Their big dark-brown colored eyes and naturally tanned skin captured my love. Indian, Asian and Malaysian kids—both boys and girls of all ages—mixed and living harmoniously (save the occasional slap or two) in one special place. Rumah Hope. Supported by Good Hope Lutheran Church, part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Malaysia (ELCM), the facility is a prayer answered for many. It is a setting for children to safely dream and aspire.



Chase Chisholm

"I want to be a building engineer," said 15 year-old Calvin, a young well-mannered and obvious leader among the home's youth.

And Doris at age 16 already knows she wants to be an interior designer. We chatted about what colors she would use to decorate a room. I later learned she loves to draw. And a sketched gift she left with us illustrates her talent. Thoughts of these innocent and pure-hearted being mistreated are hard to comprehend. How? Why? I am glad they are where they are—a place unlike any other I have seen

Petaling Jaya, an area of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, is where one finds this haven of "love, joy and peace." Rumah Hope is a home for neglected and abused children. It began as an outreach program in 1994. Today it cares for, feeds and loves over 50 youngsters, ages 3-17, in its newly expanded facility.

These intelligent children, so eager to learn and teach have blessed my life. Hand games were taught, hugs were given and received, food was had, songs were sung and prayers were voiced during our time spent together. I even learned words in the language of Malay. Most of the kids can understand if not speak two or three different languages.

During the youth-led evening prayer, a little Indian boy awkwardly positioned his tiny six year-old body toward me. All the other children were somewhat sitting in an orderly state, on the floor and facing front. Not Gary. While singing songs he stared, seemingly looking to see if I knew the words too. Or was it his wanting to receive my smile? I gave it and he replied with a big one of his own. My heart melted.

And I have never before heard children sing so loud—or beautifully. Each having their own uniquely accented voice adding to, and creating loud shouts of praise. The sound must have carried far outside the buildings confines. They sang words so simple and true, words I tend to neglect and ignore—even despise at times—of hymns I have always known. Why haven't I listened to these familiar words before? Perhaps it takes the voices of children for me to listen.

I wonder what will become of them. Where will they go? Will they remember living at Rumah Hope? How could they forget? I won't. Some of them have lived behind hope's walls for five, six—even seven years. I spent a few short hours. Will they remember me—their "brother?" Perhaps they will remember my blonde hair? The feeling of small fingers tugging at my golden strands is a memory I cherish. They were enthralled with my hair!

"Brother" was what they called me. "Brother" is what they called Tysen as well. And each of the girls was formally referred to as "sister," of course. Yet another reminder of how all of us are brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. My mind repeats their phrases and remembers their voices. "Brother, look, or "brother, come here," "golden hair," and "when will you come back?" Sadly—I could not answer. I do not know if we will return. This golden-haired brother can only hope.

Date: 2/19/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Petaling Jaya, Malaysia—All it took was a smile and a hug for me to know that this was where I was supposed to be.

I have been sick for the last couple of days; just a head cold, but this morning I woke up feeling pretty junkie. If I was at school or working somewhere, I would probably just call in sick and try to sleep it off. But we're in Malaysia, it's a full day of programming coming up, and I don't want to miss a thing. Besides, part of me was hoping that this new bump in the road was due more to the fact that it was 6:00 a.m. on a Sunday, and that once I got moving, I'd be okay. Not quite the case, but at least I was hopeful.

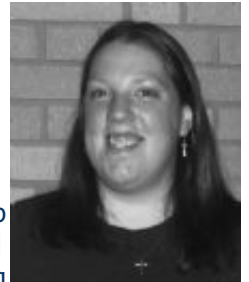
By the time we got to the church, things were not looking good. Standing was generally not an option, and we were leading songs and doing a puppet show this morning. Did I mention yet that we were back at Good Hope, the church connected to Rumah Hope? This is the place we were at last night with the amazingly cool kids. The minute they started pouring into church and filling in the spaces beside and between us, I knew that I had to quickly put myself on the back-burner; probably something I should have done earlier. The children were all smiles, in their Sunday best, excited to see us again. I was thankful that three really small kids chose to sit by me so that I could hold the hymnal up while still sitting.

We did our part of the service, and when it was done, Josephine (a 12-year old) came up to me and gave me a giant hug. We had bonded last night through a few rounds of joke-telling. It was this minute of reconnection that I was reminded why we are here. Despite our faults and our sickness, God is using us to connect with each other through the heart. We might not speak each other's language, we might not understand each other's jokes, but we know a smile and what it means. We know that to show one another love, it is first through God. Last night while we were spending time with the kids at Rumah Hope, Josephine asked me if Cassie and Corine were my sisters. I laughed a little and explained that no, we were friends but not related. But Josephine corrected me saying that yes we were sisters, "Sisters in Christ". How silly of me to forget this, and how amazing that this beautiful sister was able to remind me.

Even though I still was not feeling well throughout the rest of the day, when I thought back to the morning, I know I saw God. I know He's here; I will get better, and I have family every place I go.

Other highlights from today include a puppet workshop with some really funny young adults and semi-crashing a wedding banquet for dinner. We were invited by some of the people at the workshop (it was the wedding of a church member), and even though we didn't know the bride or the groom, we went and cheered on their new union. We did end up being introduced after the dinner, but I'm pretty sure they were confused why five people who definitely did not fit in (we were not in sarees nor any sort of Indian attire, and we're slightly paler than the rest of them). It was perhaps the most random fun I have had in a very long time.

Many Blessings! Kristin <><



Kristin Rice

Date: 2/20/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Thoughts on Life

Lately I have been thinking a lot about the creativity of God. This is something, I think, that is easy to take for granted when always surrounded by the same people, places, and general circumstances. The devil would really like us to think life is nothing more

than a mundane daily grind that happens over and over again till you die. The following, I hope, will influence you otherwise.

When you wake up in the morning, you do not think about it, but you are breathing. Did you know that this planet, all pop-science and pop-philosophy aside, is the only one in the universe that can sustain life...that's right....the ONLY one. God made it that way. There is just the right mix of oxygen, nitrogen, carbon dioxide, and trace gasses to support life. Even a little tiny adjustment would lead to all kinds of calamity.

Now that you are awake, let's fast forward a little. You are clean and dressed and ready to eat. Did you know that in order to be dressed and clean, things like indoor plumbing, clothing manufacturers, hygiene product companies, electricity providers, hot water heaters, and all kinds of other endless things had to be imagined, created, patented, built, and delivered to you? For you to take a shower and clothe yourself, thousands of people work day in and day out. Wow...are you tired yet? God created all of the raw materials that make all of that stuff. Not to mention the people with brains that imagine and bodies that strain to change those raw materials into the finished product.

Okay, now you are eating. Think about this...God did not have to give you tastebuds. That's right, God did not have to give you the ability to taste and enjoy food, but He did. Think about that the next time you put your favorite treat in your mouth. Every texture and sweet or salty sensation...God gave that to you. Praise God!

Now you are on your way to work. Did you even think about the birds, grass, trees, flowers, rocks, sunshine, or breeze? God made all of that! He spent time designing all of it. Every color, twig, feather, petal, and blade. Oh yeah, God made light, too...you kinda need that to see. The same thing with your eyes. You may not know it, but the human eye is incredibly intricate and advanced in design. Look it up for yourself. Creation is incredible!

All right, the day is over now and you look up at the sky. Did you know that there are more stars in the universe than there are grains of sand in the WHOLE WORLD?! Even more astounding as that, God knows each star by name! Think the moon is just a cratered rock? It is essential to make things function on Earth as they do. A little closer or farther away in orbit and that "little round rock" up there would be the cause of our demise. Everything is SO intricately designed...even one little modification to more than 120 things about the way the Earth is put together, and there would be no people at all...no life at all.

God is creative. God is personal. God made you and me and all that we see. He did not do this because He was bored one day...He did it because He loves us. The next time life seems boring, just open your eyes and look at the miracle of life!



Tysen Bibb

Date: 2/21/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Go crazy for God, why not?

We arrived at Rumah (Home) Bethany, where we would be spending several days. The home is a school for children with disabilities. I had been looking forward to this time at Bethany Home because I hope to pursue a career in this exact field. I have also been wavering in my enthusiasm for child psychology and all the work it entails. However, I knew as soon as I stepped on the property and was met by the first smiling child saying "Hello" that my passion for this work had been renewed.



Corine Bell

We started out by having lunch with our contact and the director of Bethany Home, Mr. Jayasingh. He is one of few people I could listen to for hours without saying a word and keep my attention very focused. He spoke about the children, the staff, Christianity, and its role in the home. Somehow everything flowed smoothly and every sentence struck me as an important life lesson. I could see the fire he has in his heart, which seems as if it could materialize and consume him at any moment. Ironically, he had resisted taking his position, but now knows that he is exactly where God wants him. We could tell his love and dedication to the purpose of Bethany in the faces of the students. The children are joyful and confident, which is an amazing feat. It was explained to us that many people in Malaysia consider individuals with disabilities as worthless or a lost cause. Therefore, the people who choose to work with them are putting themselves in the same category. They are

performing miracles everyday with this staff that is overworked and underpaid. They could have a better salary working at a grocery store, but they choose to be with these children. Mr. Jayasingh appreciates the staff, and we could see why after spending a short time in their classrooms. They are innovative and invested in each young life that comes through their doors.

I was privileged to sit in on a class of 8-year-olds. They were learning about the Malaysian coins, which helped me because I did not know them. The children are so bright; they were able to identify and classify the coins much faster than me. Then I went to a room called the Snoozelen room with the class. This is the best perception training room I have ever seen. The room was completely dark and had various activities throughout the room involving lights, movement, and texture. They played music and did not have a specific objective for the students to accomplish. It was relaxing time mixed in with exploration. The kids would pull me this way and that to show me what they can do. They are so proud; my heart almost burst. That was the first of many astounding experiences with the amazing children at Rumah Bethany.

We also met one of soon to be good friends, Arasu. What a sweet person. Chase interviewed him so please refer to Chase's article for more details. One of our other friends that we met that day was Martin. He is a volunteer at Bethany for several months and is from Australia. Whenever I meet an Australian, I have to remember to suppress my urge to tell them all about my semester in Australia. Although it did come up by coincidence several times.

Our first formal programming was leading a devotion for staff in the afternoon. The staff is composed of Christians and non-Christians, although the school is founded on Christian principles. We tried to make our devotions applicable to everyone. Tysen spoke about perseverance, of which these caring people are in desperate need. Their work is hard and in this country they are treated with disrespect. So sad. Yet, they express more love than I thought possible for humans.

We also had a Family Night Program that night. We went crazy. Jumping, screaming. Why not? We had so much fun going 'crazy' with these kids. The youth with disabilities are able to worship God in such a free way that it makes me think I miss the point of worship way too often. There was the cutest little boy named Frederick who kept going up to the pulpit and pointing at a crease in the wood. He would just go up and look at it. I got several pictures with him after the program. Then we went to eat again. The day wouldn't be complete with at least six large meals.

I really treasure my time at Bethany. It rekindled the fire for me to work with children with disabilities, and I am now more confident that I want to follow a path that leads to God using me in this way.

Loving all God's children,
Corine

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well." Psalm 139:14

Date: 2/22/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

A Day In the Life

7:30 a.m. - Meet and pray as a team.

7:55 - Lead devotional for Bethany Home staff.

8:30 - Breakfast.

9:30 - Lead games for all students.

12:30 - Lunch.

1:30 - Help/participate/distract students in classrooms. Prevent any work from being done by students.

3:15 - Lead fellowship time with Christian staff members at Bethany Home.

5 - Prepare for program.

5:45 - Get picked up by someone we've never met before to bring us to the



Cassie Woodard

program.

7:30 - Program.

9:30 - Eat dinner at the home of three girls who attended the program.

Everyone else in the house has already eaten; they are just serving us and making sure that we have everything we need. They even took one of the plates of bread away, because they said it wasn't good enough to eat. They made a 'better' batch right away and served that plate to us instead. Would I do this? Would I start from scratch and make another batch of something in order to provide my guests with the ABSOLUTE BEST I have to offer?

9:45 - Listen to Tamil (Indian dialect) song sung by our hosts and hostesses. The home we are in is an orphanage of sorts . . . the mother has taken in many children over the years, and they all call this home. We are surrounded by about 10 children and young adults singing a song about Jesus Christ in their native language.

9:47 - Be amazed by the incredible rhythmic ability of the 6-year-old children with the tambourines.

9:50 - Dancing. Smiling from ear to ear, and can't stop. The uncle who lives in the house makes tambourines. He doesn't speak a word of English, but he is grinning and playing his tambourine along with 'Cast Your Burdens'. MY CUP RUNNETH OVER!!!

10:03 - More singing.

10:10 - More dancing.

10:30 - Pastor arrives to bring us home.

10:31 - Say good-byes.

11:02 - Actually leave.

11:30 - Arrive back at 'home'.

11:35 - Discuss evening and next day's plans.

12:14 - Go to rooms.

1:00am - Go to sleep.

A day in the life of a New Dawn team member. I cannot explain with words how full my heart is, nor could I explain how tired my body is!!! Praise God for His strength that sustains us and gives us the energy to dance at 11 o'clock at night!!

In His Grip,
Cassie

Date: 2/23/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Rumah Bethany

Although new awareness of physical and mental disabilities has surfaced and attitudes toward people with them have changed, some still hold past-traditional mindsets. Malaysians keeping these superstitious thoughts believe handicapped persons are cursed, demon possessed or diseased. And people associated with those who are physically or intellectually challenged can feel disrespected. Still, Christian and non-Christian, male and female as well as young and old staff members and volunteers at Rumah Bethany work together for children and adults with disabilities.

My life has been blessed with the opportunity to spend time at Bethany Home. It is a home unlike any other I have seen or known. Rumah Bethany is a place offering education and training to children and adults with epilepsy, physical and intellectual disabilities, cerebral palsy, autism and many others. Bethany's Mission Statement is as follows:

"To improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities and their families. People with disabilities



Chase Chisholm

should be able to achieve their full potential and enjoy their maximum opportunities to determine every aspect of their life, encouraging rights and opportunities within a supportive environment."

Founded on Christian principles and values, the home continues to exist in a predominantly Muslim (by law) country and in a society that traditionally looks down on people with disabilities. Forty years strong this facility has served and loved people of all ages and conditions. And many years more, I am sure.

Mr. Jaysingh Rajiah, director of Bethany Home, comments over lunch on his dedicated staff. They work hard, long, and pay is minimal. I learned many are paid less than workers in a marketplace for example. Yet, they remain committed to their job and the people they serve. Mr. Jayasingh believes "they would have more piece of mind," if they worked at the market.

His creative and direct way of telling stories would keep anyone listening, wanting to know more. So, I paid attention as he shared much about life, Christianity and Bethany Home. Stories of events personally witnessed by him were shared, as well as stories told to him—tales of people being locked in cages or small rooms for years. Some found covered in their own urine and feces, scabies and worms. Others chained or tied to chairs, underfed and suffering from malnutrition. I trust and rely on the truths told to me by several at Bethany.

Ignorance in how to properly care for a challenged person is a large contributing factor and reason why parents treat their child as mentioned. Thankfully, Bethany Home exists. Mr. Jayasingh supports educating not only disabled people, but also their family and the community. A parent must fully commit to seeing their child develop to their highest potential. Otherwise the child is released from Bethany's care. He feels families need to work together with staff to ensure the child is not only cared for while at school, but also at home. This tactful method prevents parents from using Bethany as a daycare.

The government of Malaysia recognizes Bethany Home as a leader among organizations supporting the handicapped. Because of Bethany, new awareness of physical and mental disabilities has surfaced and attitudes toward people with them have changed. Thanks to Bethany, challenged people are living healthy, long and happy lives. And as a result of my experience at Bethany, I learned how to live by faith in following Jesus Christ.

Date: 2/24/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Taiping--I can't believe we've already been in Malaysia for one week! This time sure is passing quickly; it helps that we've been so incredibly busy with programs and play time.

It was hard saying goodbye to everyone at Bethany Home today. I cannot recall a place where so much pure, real love flows so freely. It's a community of truth, patience, understanding; and it's a place that truly allows all of its members to grow at their own pace. I feel very fortunate to have had a small taste of this sanctuary. I would seriously consider returning to volunteer for an extended period, and I encourage everyone to check it out (www.bethanyhome.org/my).

We travelled more north today, pretty close to Thailand, actually. This country is so beautiful--lush, green mountains and palm trees of every variety. It was great to see more of the landscape on the ride up.

Our bus stopped in Ipoh, and we were granted a three hour reprieve from buses as we waited for the bus to Taiping. We took shifts of eating lunch and sitting with our massive loads of luggage. Cassie and I found a "food court" where each stand sold pretty much the same thing. I don't care that I never know what I'm eating. All I know is that curry rocks my socks off and I'm stoked to eat it at every meal, every day. While we were gone, somehow Chase managed to befriend a group of school boys.

By the time we finally arrived in Taiping, the daily rain was over and we were again picked up by someone we'd never met--Victor, this incredibly nice man who drove us to our host home (and pretty much everywhere else the whole weekend). Hooray for host homes in Malaysia! Rajan, our "dad," was so neat--he had many stories to share with us from his life and anecdotes that really



Kristin Rice

have taught me a lot about what I want in my life. He has a wife and three daughters who live at home, and one son who is in England.

Tonight we were invited to a prayer meeting at a church/chapel in Matang. It was a service very different that ones I'm used to--free flowing prayers, music, no inhibitions from anyone. Children up to grandparents, all praising the Lord through hands, feet, and face. Most of the music was in Tamil, the Indian language most Indians speak here, but it was with a "romanized" version for us to attempt to read. However, I must say that pronouncing the words, extremely fast tempos and rhythms, plus being a little overwhelmed by five year olds with better tambourine rhythm...it was not a pretty sight. Most of us New Dawners resorted to clapping and dancing.

I have to tell you that when we first got to Taiping, I was not that excited about being here. Within the first hour, it seemed as though a lot more was going to be expected of us than I felt prepared or even called for. But gradually throughout the evening, those worries left and I was able to enjoy and feel the presence of God in this place. It was another in a string of late nights for us (up till 2 a.m. easily). But you do what you have to do in Malaysia. Since the people here really like quality time, as do I, one must occasionally forsake things usually held pretty sacred; in this case, bed time.

Grace and Peace, Kristin

Date: 2/25/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Fire and Light in the Jungle

Greetings in Chirst! Today we had to HUGE privilege to take part in the first ever youth night at Matang Lutheran Church in Taiping, Malaysia. In order to understand this congregation a little more, I will give a brief history. In the 1960's Swedish Lutheran missionaries came to Taiping to start a church. An area that became available to them was in the middle of a rubber tree plantation in a rural part of Taiping. With the help of some faithful brothers and sisters from other churches and new believers, Matang Lutheran Church got its humble start in the middle of a farm. A lot of love and hard work went into starting this little church in what would seem like the middle of nowhere in a rubber tree plantation in Malaysia.

Fast forward to today after many years of continued hard work, weathered storms, more love and faithfulness, and Matang Lutheran Church is a healthy congregation where you know you are family as soon as you walk in. The congregation still meets in the small chapel among the rubber trees, but the numbers are not what is important. In this small gathering of one hundred plus disciples of Christ, there is just as much kindness, boldness, love, and spirit as a church of one thousand in the United States. The people here love with seemingly no limit, and they praise the Lord with every ounce of their being. There is no question Who these people belong to when you meet them.

So it was tonight after sharing a Family Night Program with the youth and adults of Matang Lutheran Church that we were given the honor of lighting the first ever bonfire for the first ever youth night at the church. To light it, all five of us held up a single torch that lit a cloth ring suspended on a type of zip-line cable the started at the top of the overhang outside and led down across the front lawn area to a large pile of wood stacked in a pyramid formation. Once lit, the ring raced down the cable and upon landing in the wood a pillar of light and flame pierced the jungle night, pushing back the darkness. The atmosphere was festive and joyous as we got to try even more wonderful Indian cuisine while sharing stories and laughs with youth and adults alike. A conversation I had with the pastor had me so focused I forgot to eat the remainder of my meal. It was listening to the passion in his voice and seeing the fire and joy in his eyes that made the evening for me.

Something I have seen so many times already on this overseas tour and, I have a feeling, I will continue to see is a deep down to the core passion for Jesus Christ. It is not just an admiration for his moral teachings or for religious order in life or a tired going through the motions of looking spiritual...this is true deep nitty gritty love for Christ, a love for the Son of God, the King of the universe, the Creator of everything, and the Savior of humanity. These people love Jesus, and it shows in all they do. On top of that, these are Christians that live in an Islamic state who will be arrested if they try to evangelize an ethnic Malaysian. It is inspiring to be in an environment like we were tonight, among brothers and sisters celebrating Jesus Christ, having fellowship, and sharing a meal...makes me wonder what Heaven is going to be like. Grace and peace to you from our Lord



Tysen Bibb

and Savior Jesus Christ...and may we all shine brightly for our Risen Lord and King.

Date: 2/26/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Taiping

I'm amazed at how much we eat. People constantly have meals and tea times that are full of food. I am pretty sure I'm still full from Hong Kong two weeks ago, but somehow we all find places to put more food. We must have seven meals a day. At least it is healthier food here.

On this beautiful Sunday, we were greeted in the morning by rain. The rain usually visits in the afternoon; however, God wanted it to come early today to cool everything off for the day. We had breakfast with Mr. Rajan. Unfortunately, we did not have a chance to have a long conversation as we did the day before. We were involved in the 9 a.m. service at Gethsamene Lutheran Church where we had a huge BarBQ the night before. We sang some songs and did a puppet show and then, of course, ate after the service.

Then we went to Brother Alex's house and ate again with his family. There was a Tamil movie on the television. It was funny. They sang and danced like it was a music video. It was nice to be in a family's home, though. Alex's wife is an amazing woman. She has a very inspiring story of faith and is very strong because of her circumstances. I'm glad that we have chances to get to know people better and that they feel comfortable opening up to us.

Then we went to Rapha House for a 4 p.m. service. We actually left Alex's home later than 4 and then when we got to Rapha we somehow still had time to have tea (or milo) before the service. I think the beginning of services are ambiguous because somehow we were still on time for the service at 5 p.m. I think there was a period of music and prayer before the formal service. Although, we often do not actually know what is going on. The service was in Tamil. I really enjoy the rhythmic drums and minor keys of Tamil songs. Hopefully, we have learned some that we can bring back. For our portion of the service, we shared testimonies. I feel like I learn the most about my teammates at these times. The testimonies sometimes end up being what we would like ourselves to be whether it confirms reality or not. I like to think of people in this way. This is how they want to be, their ideal. God is not done with us yet, but maybe we can see where He is leading sometimes. We also had the puppets teach the sing-along "Cast Your Burdens." That was fun and different. One of the puppets could even raise its hand if jerked in the right way.

It was pretty emotional for me after that service. We left Rapha House for good. We had built a relationship with these kids over just a couple days. Everybody is extremely giving and kind. They want to help us with everything and stay with us until the last possible minute. One of the girls, Sumytha, had been with at several events and she gave me her necklace. She wanted something to give me something to remember her by, but I told her that I would never forget this experience no matter what, although that did not dissuade her from bestowing a gift. Then Alex's wife gave us her hair clip for the same reason even when we protested. It is very humbling. These people are far from rich but they have the right spirit of giving. Just to give and not caring about the consequences. Why am I so reluctant to that idea? I don't know if I feel like we are really giving them something valuable. It does not feel like any sort of sacrifice to be with them and sing and have fun getting to know them. Does there need to be sacrifice in giving?

Finally, we went back to Mr. Rajan's and ate again. I was able to use the internet for a few minutes and I found out that one of my friends, Joe from the University of Miami, is touring with Fort Minor, a hip hop/rock group that is led by Mike Shinoda of Linkin Park. This band is number one on the charts here, and when I asked the youth about the group they got very animated. He was telling me that they were in Kuala Lumpur doing a show. More on that little excursion later...

Still exploring the heart of giving,
Corine

It is better to give than receive...



Corine Bell

Date: 2/27/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Today it is official. I am sick. My body aches all over. My brain reacts with about as quickly as it takes water to freeze in Malaysia. Everyone seems to be screaming and moving really fast. It's like watching a movie on fast forward. If my head moves quicker than it takes you to read this journal entry, it causes me pain. The common cold is rough!

Just yesterday we listened to a message given by our host father, Rajan. He reminded us that one of the greatest blessings God can give us is our health. It really is my own fault that I am sick. We *have* been busy, but I have also been neglecting my body with inadequate nutrition and lack of sleep. And the more I think of it, the clearer it becomes how dangerous it is. When I am tired, I am more likely to snap at my teammates. I am less likely to have energy to meet new people and engage in conversation with them. When I am sick, Satan jumps on my already-weak state and capitalizes on those weaknesses. Being sick prevents me from being able to spend time with the host family, from helping my teammates carry luggage, from being 100% for God's ministry. Abusing the body and health that God has given me is a way to open the door for Satan to hinder this ministry. Fortunately, God is stronger than I am, and He is stronger than Satan! He will give me the strength to do His work!

May God be strengthening you wherever you are, and may you do all that you can from allowing Satan to come in and hinder the ministry that God is calling you to!

In His Strength,
Cassie



Cassie Woodard

Date: 2/28/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Take time to rest

"The east coast is better," said a random man at the bus station, "here it's polluted." Go figure, I thought, as we waited in the heat for our ride to come.

Regardless of what some locals say, I think Port Dickson is beautiful. Situated a few hours south and west from Kuala Lumpur, the coastal city offers food, rest and spectacular sunsets. Following a week of intense and wonderful 15-hour days, one day to "just be" and contemplate life is a blessing. It was arranged for us to have a day off at the beach. For this, I am thankful.

As usual, the day did not go quite as planned. Living with four other individuals and being exposed to new experiences every day leaves plenty of room for feelings to change and moods to swing. Aside from the random man's comments, the generosity of our pastor-contact left us discouraged. It seemed he felt obligated to take us out for lunch. And all we really wanted to do was head straight for the beach. Graciously, we accepted his offer—unwillingly—and spent most of the afternoon inside eating food. What was to be learned by this experience?

During the course of our meal, I began feeling guilty for my own selfish thoughts. Partly because I really enjoyed my Chicken Curry, but also because I felt all of us were being ridiculous. Remembering the words of a friend who experienced life on team, I realized volunteering for a year with Youth Encounter really does make one learn how to be selfish. Needing and asking for personal time is perfectly fine. It is healthy. Feeling entitled to a day of rest, and complaining behind the façade of happiness is not.

The beach was still in the same place we left it, beautiful and inviting. And a few hours were plenty of time to spend in the sun. Especially when taking anti-malaria medication (the risk of sunburn is greater while on the nasty stuff). I was reminded patience and people are much more important than anything waiting for me in my time alone—even the ocean. Still, I do cherish my personal time and look for it whenever possible. I am an extroverted introvert and any beach is a favorite place of mine.



Chase Chisholm

Tiny crabs scampered away from my steps, giving the illusion of moving sand. Waves rolled the tide in, slowly and unassuming. Soon, what once was hot, sun-soaked sand was now murky, warm water from the Strait of Malacca. It was a sight to see and I am glad I saw it. Swimming, floating and chatting with Tysen spent the afternoon as our new fishy-friend kept us entertained. It was exactly what I needed.

Sipping a sack of iced-coffee watching the sun begin to set consumed my early evening. Life does not get much better than this, I thought. I like not doing anything, too. Years of schooling, work and months on Team have not allowed for many chances to "just be." I am sure whoever reads this can relate. I like sitting thinking only about how much longer the sun will take to set and watching the condensed water droplets on my bag of coffee grow. Life is short. Take all opportunities given. Be thankful for and show appreciation to the people met. And do take time to rest.

Thanks to Pastor William and his family at the Lutheran Retreat Center, Port Dickson. The food, rest and place to stay were greatly appreciated.

Date: 3/1/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Port Dickson and Kuala Lumpur--Happy Ash Wednesday! I like Lent, and I'm exciting to celebrate with new people and a new country. I'm not going to lie, Ash Wednesday is my favorite service of the Christian calendar. Augustin, our contact, invited us back to his church for the service, and we were more than excited to say yes. This meant returning to Rumah Hope to some of our favorite kids.

I was so stoked to see them again and eat dinner with them before the service. Chase, Tysen and I took the train to the nearest station and walked about 10 minutes to the house. There was some incredible lightning and thunder going on above us, as a major downpour was threatening to bust open on us at any minute. But we made it to the house dry (well, sort of, since it's so hot and we sweat so much, we weren't really dry). I would have welcomed some rain since the humidity and heat were out of control.

When we arrived at the house, it was a welcome home as some of our little friends came and greeted us with hugs and smiles! Most of them remembered our names, even the little ones who hadn't really spoken to us the last time we were here. They continued to just shower us with love; God is definitely moving in that house. The minute I would sit down to rest, another child would climb around me screaming "Sister! Sister! Sing the 'Na na' song!" (also known as Every Move I Make). Pretty much the entire hour and a half before church, I sang and danced Every Move, Psalm 25 (To You Oh Lord), and Cast Your Burdens. Oh what fun, especially when the kids would join in with me, at least on the actions.

The service was great also, albeit different from most of the Ash Wednesday services I am used to attending. Augustin preached on the practice of Lenten devotion and sacrifice, and it really spoke to me, as I have been contemplating what to "give up" for Lent this year. A couple weeks ago I decided to stop drinking coffee until Easter (a pretty big deal since I usually would have at least two grandes a day). However, it's hard to stay motivated when it's just about me. After hearing the sermon, I realized that a sacrifice should not be about Kristin. Jesus' sacrifice and his life was never about **him**; it was about living for God and dying for us. Lent is a great time to remember this and to learn from this. My life should never be about **me**, but about God and about others. Thus, I have elected to not just stop drinking coffee, but for every day I think about drinking coffee, instead of walking the five minutes to Starbucks and buying a grande Latte with soy milk, I will put that money aside. At the end of Lent, I will anonymously donate it to a few of the places we've been at this year. I will also be spending the time I would take to go to Starbucks as more time with God in word and prayer. I would highly encourage all of you to actively sacrifice something this Lent, not just to do it because you always do. Do it with conviction, with a purpose. Make this season about others, make the world a little better if you can while still striving for the same within yourself.

Other highlights of the day include Attempt #2 to go up the Petronas Twin Towers. This time, we missed getting tickets because we had to be somewhere when they were offering tickets. Some day, Towers, some day. Wild horses couldn't keep New Dawn away from you; we are not easily discouraged. We also met with Bishop Paul today, who is the head of the ELCM (Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malaysia). He's been working with us so far in Malaysia and just wanted to



Kristin Rice

check in with us and see how we were doing. What a great guy; I wish we'd been able to chat with him more about life and church here.

And thus, such is life on this crazy team of New Dawn.

Grace and Peace, Kristin

Date: 3/2/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Greetings in Christ! Well, it was another hot day in Malaysia. It truly is nothing for it to get up to 93 degrees here everyday. Honestly though, we are getting used to it. When the air conditioner is turned to 72 degrees in our rooms...it's cold. Today was full of more new blessings and experiences. I am glad it is Lent season once again. I really enjoy the renewed focus on all Christ has done for us even though we did not deserve it. We travelled to the Theological Seminary in Malaysia today. The honor of leading the chapel service was given to us. It is so wonderful to be in a seminary. For us the atmosphere has always been one of eagerness, focus, joy, and excitement to begin ministering to the church. This seminary was one unlike any I have ever heard of. Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and Lutherans all training for pastoral leadership in one school. The spirit of unity was thick and tangible and yet, between the students, no distinction was made between denominations. The only identifier used was "brother" or "sister". It was a small but beautiful picture of the body of Christ working together under one banner...Jesus. If only it were possible to be this unified in the United States. I realize that this unfortunately is a pipe dream given all of the different theologies and doctrines within the global church. I believe in my heart of hearts what the truth is, and it is that of the Lutheran Confessions...which would probably be better labeled as the Christian Confessions because the theology and doctrine is that of the Word of God...no strings attached. Unfortunately, for many, many reasons which I will not dig into, the church is very divided on theological and doctrinal details. This saddens me as it is a poor reflection of what we are called to. I do not mean to come off as negative, but there is a positive side as well. The great truth is that the church is unified, although we may not see it unless we close our eyes and remember the words of the Bible...that all believers are unified in Christ. Though we have our disagreements, those that follow, love, and put their faith in Jesus and His words are, by grace alone, saved and sanctified by Him, in Him, and through Him. We are one body made up of many parts with one head...Jesus. Praise God for his Son. Let us all take time to reflect on His life, passion, and victory this season of Lent. Amen.



Tysen Bibb

Date: 3/3/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

From bad to good

I just saw how God can take our bad and turn it to His good. I started out today in a bad mood. I was greeted with another "You look tired" from a person I was meeting for the first time and several other minor annoyances added up to steal my happiness. I tried to fight it, but apparently it came across in my actions anyway. It is so easy to be negative. However, God knew what to do to cheer up His child and for some reason, which must only be love, He decided to bless me above that.



Corine Bell

The team participated in a Christian Fellowship in a secondary school. First, we had a short question and answer session with a class. The students asked us about the U.S. and different aspects about life there and how we were finding Malaysia. After this time, the Christian meeting started with several worship songs and then our segment. We performed a short program for about 40 minutes.

The songs the praise team played were mostly by Hillsong and PlanetShakers, which are groups that I was introduced to in Australia. I put one of the PlanetShakers' albums on my iPod, and I listen to it frequently. My teammates had never really heard of them, but some of the tunes are familiar. It was great to hear these songs again. It reminded me of many good memories. In addition, I loved seeing how enthusiastic the youth are for God and singing His praises. They jump at every song,

even if it is 95 degrees outside with no air conditioning. After the meeting, some people stayed around, including most of the praise team and we had a spontaneously worship session. It was a fantastic time of worship and my bad mood was forced to break. They completely turned my day around, and I was singing joyfully all day.

This group of young people in particular is amazing. Their fellowship has been shut down by the government twice in its 15-year history only to come back stronger again and again. They live under the constant threat of being told they are not allowed to meet anymore. Yet, their resolve is incredible. This group raised money on its own to purchase instruments for their worship time. Not only did they buy the instruments, but they also learned how to play them and learned the music their peers would enjoy for worship. It shows how much we can do when we set our whole heart on something. God will bless that passion for His name. The group has definitely been blessed. Their attendance for camp has increased every year and they have seen 23 people in one year alone accept Christ as their Lord and Savior. Hallelujah! God is doing a great and mighty work with these youth. I am glad that we were able to witness to His love. Praise God for the miracles He does everyday!

God's joy,

Corine

"I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory. Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you. I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands." Psalm 63:2-4

Date: 3/4/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

We had a day to get 'team stuff' done today. It is the first time we've been able to do that since we have been in Malaysia. We spent some time rehearsing and some quality time building our relationships and some time in devotion as a team. It's surprising how much we got used to "our time". I didn't know what to do with a full, empty day to schedule! We don't have three programs? We don't have 8 meals with four different churches? I don't understand . . .

It has been such a blessing to be as busy as we have been. It is a good reminder of our reason for being here. We are here to love God's children. We are here to meet His followers and spend time in fellowship with them as much as possible. Everything else should be secondary to that. Rehearsals and team time for evaluations are helpful, but God works regardless of whether or not we have rehearsed a song enough. He works regardless of how well our program 'flows'. I thank God that it doesn't rest on my shoulders! I thank God that He moves hearts. That He is the power behind any moving experience anyone may have.

May I remember that when I start to think about how much "team stuff" we have to do! May I remember that God will move regardless of what I do. May you remember that God is present in all you do, and will move through you no matter what!

In His Power,
Cassie



Cassie Woodard

Date: 3/5/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

A spike-filled time

Christ Lutheran Church (CLC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, is on fire and alive for God. Honest. An early morning began our day-long adventure with new friends from Christ Lutheran's youth group called "Footprints." My recent thoughts—negative ponderings—

about organized religion somewhat subsided following a two hour worshipful experience. A refreshing new outlook on life began this exciting, tiring, spike-filled day.

Adrian How, accompanied by Natalie Chew, greeted us at the train station, early. Both youth leaders were bright, awake and excited about what the day had planned. Adrian, 22, is studying civil engineering. More importantly, he had amazingly spiked hair. Happily jealous were my feelings as I reminisced on the days I had spikes. Early morning thoughts are always random. And Natalie, 20, was beautiful, youthful and aiming to be a doctor. Lively conversation was had as we ventured on the light rail together, heading for the church.



Chase Chisholm

A quick car ride with Natalie and her brother Arthur had Cassie and me laughing hysterically in the backseat. A baby with enormously spiked hair sat on his mother's lap inside the car stopped next to ours. Feeling somewhat sorry for the unknowing child, we chuckled and waved as the baby peeked out the window at us. His hair was standing at least four inches off the top of his head—seriously. How it stood so tall, I do not know. It did not matter, either. It was funny and our ride to the church was filled with short glimpses of the spiky-haired infant.

Recent thoughts—negative ponderings—have occupied my mind. Thankfully, these silent brain-protests against organized religion halted as my body woke from its morning trance. Dancing, singing and praising began this morning's worship service. And Senior Pastor Philip shared his message titled "Three Ingredients for a Healthy Attitude." I mulled over the main points of his speech and concluded a positive mindset is always best.

Feeling refreshed I joined with my team in a time of leading games, fellowship, more singing and fun. Christ Lutheran's English speaking youth group, "Footprints," invited us to take charge of their usual group meeting. We continued as more and more people poured into the room. CLC is a congregation of mostly Chinese. Conducting services in both English and Chinese as well as having separate youth groups is the way order is kept around the church. It was fun to see some of both groups together during our program. Christ Lutheran Church in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, is on fire and alive for God.

Sitting on the floor around a long table began our afternoon meal with youth from CLC. They took us to Cannes Tea House, a Japanese style café. A new experience was underway as we ate, laughed and played games. Meals are an event here in Kuala Lumpur as they are in Hong Kong. Hours past before everyone was ready to depart for our next adventure involving spikes.

Durian fruit is a local favorite. With its spiky shell, potent garbage smell, the strange fruit draws people from all around the city to small hawker-stands at street corners. The exotic treat is a bit challenging to find when it's not in season. Yet, hunting for the snack ended with a mouthful of pasty, fleshy and onion flavored substance. Durian fruit tastes like onions. And I was happy to find out eating too much is bad for ones throat and could cause a fever. I am also happy to report the taste of onion remained in my mouth (and on my breath) for the rest of the day.

A plump, tame monkey sat perched on a cabinet next to where we sat for another cultural and not-so-appetizing snack. Our new friends laughed at our fascination with the monkey. No matter. The furry creature was so cute. His belly was big and his fingers, humanlike. Watching others allow the little beast to check their scalp for insects enticed me to do it as well. So, I did. The monkey pawed through my hair, giving me a new spiked hairdo.

After a long sleepy ride in the car during an afternoon rainstorm, we thanked our hosts and said our goodbyes. A refreshing new outlook on life began this exciting, tiring, spike-filled day. And a thankful, exhausted feeling ended the afternoon as I kept wondering how Adrian got his hair to stay so spiky. It did not budge all day! Anyway, God is in our time and working through the people we have met in Malaysia. I am grateful for this experience and blessed to have had the opportunity.

Date: 3/6/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Petaling Jaya--I admit that I had actually written a very different journal for today. It

was a day off, pretty much our first true day off since arriving in Malaysia two weeks ago. Not much happened, and I was inspired to write some fiction about a monkey stealing my iPod and then dancing to "I Like to Move It (Move it)" much like the lemurs in the movie "Madagascar". However, my conscience got the better of me, and I remembered that I am not here to write stories about things that only happen in my imagination. I am here to tell you how it is, and my thoughts and feelings therein. True, it was a day off, an exciting prospect since we've been extremely busy (and loving it) for the first couple of weeks. A day to catch up on sleep, relaxation, and rest sounded unbelievably good. A couple of us are just worn out and have been sick, and a day out of the sun, to just lay low proved to help us feel a little better.



Kristin Rice

I'd like to tell you that I slept until noon, read a good book, and went to bed early. However, this is not the Way of the Rice--I have never been prone to sleeping in, and as such I was promptly awake at 8:30. In a fit of protest, I sweated in my sleeping bag for a few minutes before realizing that I was awake for the long haul, and got out of bed. Walking into the living room region of our bungalow, I saw before me the Laptop of Doom, and remembered the tasks I needed to catch up on and work through concerning the Treasury of New Dawn. After fixing a peanut butter and banana sandwich (they still tasted good at this point), I sat down in front of Laptop and proceeded to spend the first four hours of my day attempting to reorganize and balance our financial affairs. Realizing that this would take more work than I thought, I took a break and set out for Starbucks with a couple of the Teammates. No, I did not drink coffee (you will kindly recall 3/1's admittance to a Lenten promise), but I had some lunch and fresh air. We went to the internet cafe for an hour, a good chance to read many e-mails and respond to a few in return. Cassie, Corine and I wanted to return to Sentral Market for some souvenir/gift shopping. We got there in time for an awesome thunderstorm to hit KL. Unfortunately, I am not much of a shopper, and once I had found what I was looking for (this sweet tea set!), I was ready to go home. The other girls wanted to go the distance, so I wandered around for awhile and just looked at things. We returned home after a while, and there was Laptop, and so I went back to work for another two hours. By the time I was finished, I was really finished. I have not felt as drained as I did that night, and rather collapsed on the table with the letdown that happens when you've built up a lot of adrenaline and energy, and then realize you don't need it anymore. I have mixed feelings that this was a day in the life of Malaysia. I realize that our time here in Asia is much different than the other International Teams around the world, and I admit, this is not quite what I expected our time over here would be. The two weeks of multiple programs per day was what I thought we would experience more than we have. Now that we have a much more relaxed schedule, I find myself yearning for that busy-ness that is incomparable to the little tasks I set before myself. I know that I did a lot more work on money stuff today than I actually needed to. But I felt that I needed to occupy my time with something that was not just for Kristin, and if it meant paperwork and time-consuming menial tasks, then so be it. Yet I can't help feeling a little guilty that this is a "rough" day for me, because I put it all on myself, and it's hard to see the immediate "good" that I did. Much like this short-term ministry thing we're doing, I suppose. We go in, do our thing, and leave. It's hard trying to maintain relationships with people we meet once. We do not see the immediate "good" that is done with our presence here. A few people are bold enough to tell us up front, but generally, we do not know what effect we are having here.

Grace and Peace, Kristin

Date: 3/7/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Reminders

We have only two weeks left in our time in Malaysia. Blessings have abounded here. We have felt a little guilty at times because we feel we are served more than we serve. We trust in God, though...that the seeds we plant will come to fruition in His timing. We will not necessarily know the results of our time here, but that is how God works sometimes.

In the blur of program after program and new face after new face, you can start to wonder who the people are that you are serving with. If you are not careful, the busy times can serve to separate you from your teammates. It is at these times that a day of rest is in order. Today



Tysen Bibb

we had a work day, which can sound busy, but compared to two programs and staying out till 1 a.m. with a youth group of twenty-somethings, it's light. We spent a large part of the day taking one on one time. This is where each one of us pairs up with a teammate and spends intentional time just finding out how the other is doing and having fun just being friends. For me, days like today can be some of my favorites because your teammates are the only people in your life that know exactly what is going on. It's a chance to catch up, have fun, relax and improve a friendship. I spent time with Corine, Kristin, and my favorite teammate...God. (Because our team has an odd number of members, one person always has a one on one with God)

Living with people day in and day out, you come to know them pretty well, but the rest of their life you have not been there for...now, that is interesting. God has us all on different "roads," so to speak, and it is so fun to find out where your teammates came from. Newlyweds can attest to this. Sure, you have known the person for quite a while, but not their WHOLE life. Learning something new about someone can be great or, well...not so fun, but within the family of God you always have Jesus as a common bond to see you through. Do you know your spouse as well as you think you do? How about your friends, brothers, sisters, parents, aunts or uncles? God gives us family and friends for love and support. Do you know them? Really, though....do you know the people that matter most to you and have the biggest impact on you? How many of you thought of how well you know Jesus? How well do you know Him? You know what...I'll say goodbye so you can get back to Him. It's okay...He always listens.

In Him,
Tysen

Date: 3/8/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

His arms are reaching

Our team has been visiting Lutheran churches primarily in Malaysia. Today, we had the chance to have lunch with a youth worker, Wei Shen, from a Methodist church and his girlfriend, Melis. A friend whom I met in Australia, Edward, introduced us to Wei Shen and suggested we share at his fellowship. We went to a very nice café where we had our favorite banana leaf meal. We were a little disappointed that we were not able to use our hands, but it was delicious. I guess we should not get too out of practice with using utensils. Lunch was a great time of fellowship and informing each other about the ministries with which we are involved. We know some history about the Lutheran church in Malaysia, but we did not know about the Methodist church. Wei Shen also described his fellowship meetings on Fridays called Live Wire. This meeting is specifically designed to appeal to younger people, although people of all ages are welcome. They have been meeting for about two years. It sounds like a very welcoming, loving group. We informed him about Lutheran Youth Encounter and Team Ministry. We are very excited to have a great new contact and friend who is so passionate about youth and seeing the Gospel spread. We are going to perform a program at the Live Wire meeting this Friday. We are eager to branch out into other churches and share in God's love with all of our brothers and sisters. Hopefully, this will lead to an expanded relationship between other churches and Youth Encounter. Making connections is an interesting part of the ministry that we have not done much up to this point. Praise God!

Meeting more and more family,
Corine



Corine Bell

Date: 3/9/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Today we had a chance to have a Bible study as a team. We looked at several passages where Jesus and Paul talk about the kingdom of God, and we discussed what the kingdom of God is, as well as heaven and our ideas of heaven. It was a wonderful

chance for us to get to know our teammates better and dig a little deeper into our own beliefs and opinions.

Tonight we went to a Christian fellowship of teachers in training; young adults who are going to college to be teachers. These future teachers were from many different places in Malaysia, as well as many different walks of Christian faith. We had people from Sarawak (East Malaysia), from Melaka, from KL. There were Christians from Assemblies of God churches, from Presbyterian churches, and from Catholic churches. There were people who had gone to church all their lives and people who have been Christians for less than a year. I was reminded of the diversity of the body of Christ, and just how *big* the Church of God is!



Cassie Woodard

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis talks about Christianity as a hall which many doors are present, opening into different rooms. The rooms represent different denominations of the Christian church, and he tells us what our responsibility is once we've entered the great Hall.

And above all you must be asking which door is the true one; not which pleases you best by its paint and paneling. In plain language, the question should never be: 'Do I like that kind of service?' but 'Are these doctrines true: Is holiness here? Does my conscience move me towards this? Is my reluctance to knock at this door due to my pride, or my mere taste, or my personal dislike of this particular door-keeper?'

When you have reached your own room, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still in the hall. If they are wrong they need your prayers all the more; and if they are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. (1997, xii)

We are called to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ, regardless of their background and denomination. I am thousands of miles from home, in an area of the world that I have never been before. Maybe you are reading this from a place just as far from home. Maybe you are comfortable in your living room or desk chair. No matter where we are, we are called to love. Above all, love others the way Christ did. It is by loving that people will know we are Christians, and in experiencing this love may come to know the love of Christ themselves. I think C.S. Lewis had it right when he said, "If I can bring anyone into that hall I shall have done what I attempted." (1997, xi)

May you experience the love of Christ from someone in the Hall, and if you are in the Hall yourself, may your life be an invitation for others to join you.

With love and joy,
Cassie

Date: 3/10/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Christian Fellowship

Bangsar—an area of Kuala Lumpur known for its cool cafes and various coffee shops, spicy Indian "restorans" and happening nightclubs. Businesses spill out their storefronts and onto the streets and sidewalks. This area is home to the Christian Gospel Centre, a place thriving and alive.



Chase Chisholm

From the outside, it looks abandoned compared with its neighboring shops. With windows covered, only a small door invites people inside. Once in the building, one could walk up the stairs and visit the kindergarten. Or, take a left and enter the multi-purpose room, an area used for meetings, fellowship and worship. It's small and ordinary.

The simple space soon filled with young adults. A wild game began the afternoon of fun together, followed by our program. It's not easy to start a church in Malaysia. Property is not widely given, and permission to build is difficult to obtain. Land used for Muslim practices seems more freely given. When a church is allowed a plot to begin, it cannot be within a certain distance of a mosque. To "work around" this dilemma, many churches "hide" in older buildings. Christians meet where they can.

A science lab of a public secondary school (high school) is not the ordinary setting for students to pack in and praise God during school hours. But, it works. Last week we witnessed nearly 100

students crammed into the medium size classroom just moments after class ended. "Christian Fellowship" (CF) is a popular term used for this time of worship. It happens here every Friday afternoon.

Pastor Jacob, club advisor, shares his concern for the group. It could be halted at any moment if the government desires—it has. In Malaysia, there is a secular governing body as well as an Islamic authority. They are separate. Both have power, and Muslim influence appears dominant. Reality is, Christian and other religious-minority programs stand no chance if questioned.

Worries aside, the group blew the walls down, the windows out and the doors open with their self-purchased instruments, worshipping God. It was amazing to join in and lead songs for the lively bunch. I guess they're not too concerned with what might happen, holding nothing back as they praise during school hours. Other students are still in class! Incredible.

Life in Malaysia seems very segregated, not only between ethnic groups but among differing religions. Buddhists have their temples. Hindus have their rituals. Muslims have power. And Christians hold strong to what they can get. It's inspiring to be part of this turning point in the society of Malaysia. These situations are two examples of the many God-filled meetings we've encountered. Hearts are changing, including my own.

"Seeing leaders rise up," is youth leader Joshua Chu's favorite part about CF. I hope they continue to, and I pray Christianity will prevail.

Date: 3/11/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Petaling Jaya--What a random day! After a late night with university students last night (we're talking out and about until 1:00 a.m.), we decided to sleep in a little today since our only programming was not until 8:00 this evening. We were not going to start official team stuff until 2:00. Corine and I were going to run to Midvalley Mall to check on guitar repairs (nothing major, just a guitar with a penchant for slipping out of everyone's hands). But everyone else had plans for relaxing and chilling. However, God had bigger plans for us, much more different than we anticipated.

At 10:30, Sivin showed up at the house with the option of doing a mini-program at 2:00, instead of the later gig we had planned. He had tried to call us the night before with this new development, but our phone was off during the program and we did not turn it back on. The Bishop had requested us to accompany him to the dedication ceremony of a new Home for the Elderly (Rumah Love and Care 2). The boys were still sleeping, and Cassie had already hit the internet cafe. Corine and I did some quick thinking, and realized that this would probably be a good thing to do. (FYI, the program at night was not specifically for us; Sivin just wanted us to join him and enhance a presentation he had already been scheduled for). After agreeing to the afternoon fun with Bishop Phillip, Corine ran to the internet cafe to tell Cassie, and I left a note for the boys. Then we ran to MidValley for our original plan. Promptly at 2:00, the Bishop arrived and off we went. The house was actually out of KL, and I wish I could tell you which state it was in (there are 13 in Malaysia, if you weren't aware...Petaling Jaya is one that is not KL). This house was the second on the street, and was to be reserved for elderly males, while the first house was to be for females. We were going to perform a couple of songs as part of the ceremony. It was intended to be outside, there was a tent and everything. But again, God had different plans.

As the ceremony started, the heavens opened up with a major downpour--thunder and lightning like none other. The emcees were barely heard over the roar of weather, and after awhile, the wind picked up and even us under the tent were pretty soaked. They relocated everyone into this house, and people were sitting everywhere--on the couches, beds, floor. There were speeches made by the Bishop and also an ELCA regional representative with the Division of Global Missions (Michael Fonner and his wife Leslie). Halfway through the ceremony, the rain stopped and we were able to return back to "nature". The ribbon cutting included many pastors and people involved in getting this project going. We sang "Taa see Juu (He is Lord)" and "Dalam Yesus (Jai Yesu Lee)", two of our cross-cultural songs which actually are in three languages, Cantonese, Mandarin, and Malay. It was great seeing many people sing along and appreciate our attempts at singing in languages they are



Kristin Rice

more familiar with.

My favorite part, though, was the harmonica ensemble after us. Three university students playing three different sizes and octaves of harmonicas performed the William Tell Overture, as well as a couple other numbers that are traditionally orchestral pieces (sorry Mom, I could not recall the titles). It was absolutely amazing, and something I did not know was even possible! At the reception following, we learned that they are part of a bigger ensemble in their university, nearly 30 students total. Apparently harmonica playing is HUGE here among music students, and they were a little shocked that we were so amazed. Back home, at least in the U.P of Michigan, no one really plays the harmonica unless they are doing a cover of Blues Traveller "Run Around". It was off the hook, and somewhere there is video of this phenomenon. Hey Mom, perhaps you should look at doing this as a new ensemble with the kids at your school.

What started off as a day we thought we had control over, God again proved otherwise. Proverbs 19:21 "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." How true it is. God was certainly laughing at our plans today, and I am very glad that He did.

Grace and Peace, Kristin

Date: 3/12/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

A taste of what is missing

Today we had the opportunity to go to lunch with the "young adult" group from Luther House Chapel in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. As with many things in a new culture, I did not know what to expect. Our time in Malaysia has been very random at times. After about five to ten minutes of conversation and organization, we were off to lunch. Luther House Chapel is blessed to have an active and vibrant group of young adults in the congregation. Their ages ranged from 20-26, and they interacted very much like a family. You could tell by their conversation and body language that they were not just friends sharing social time...they are brothers and sisters in Christ enjoying fellowship. This was inspiring and refreshing to me.



Tysen Bibb

It seems to me that in many Lutheran churches in the United States, this age group is, well...missing. During my two years with Captive Free teams, I had the privilege of visiting hundreds of mostly Lutheran churches across 17 states. In this time I noticed there was no shortage of junior or senior high students in churches, but when it came to college aged young adults there simply were none. In Malaysia, this age group can sometimes be the most prevalent in a congregation, and they take their faith very seriously. I ask myself, "Where is the disconnect? What am I missing?" There are no unimportant people in the Church; there is not one person that can be neglected without the consequences being large in the long term. How are the young adults of America falling through the cracks? College students value community and purpose, asking real questions and getting real answers. Who are the young adults in your congregation? How many of them are there? Do you know? This generation is crying out for truth, clarity, and reality that cannot be found on TV. The youth in Malaysia, and Hong Kong as well, have found it. We could learn a lot from our brothers and sisters here. By the way, they send you their greetings, love, and prayers. God's peace be with you all.

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." Hebrews 10:25

In Him,
Tysen Bibb

Date: 3/13/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

**No animals were harmed in the making of this journal*

I warned The Bird not to come around our place the next morning. We had already been awakened by The Bird with a high, long, loud call for an hour the past two mornings at 6 a.m. This could not continue. Today, I heard it through my earplugs. It positioned itself directly outside of our bedroom window. I let it call for five minutes, then I got out of bed...

I went outside and tried to find where The Bird was located, I did not see it. It continued to call though. I found some rocks on the ground and tried to hit the branches in the general direction and "SHOO"ed as loud as I could. After my barrage of projectiles (Tysen made me use that phrase), The Bird continued to call. I went into the house shoulders down, defeated. However, as I climbed back into bed only several minutes later... The Bird became quiet and stayed quiet for the rest of the morning. I was able to sleep. Victory!



Corine Bell

Later that day, we had dinner with Bishop Phillip of the Lutheran Church of Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS). He asked very good questions about the working of churches in the U.S., especially regarding youth programs. I found that our discussion closely resembled the Youth Leadership workshop that Tiger gave to all of the teamers at training. He knows what he is talking about. Bishop Phillip answered several of our questions about the church in Malaysia and its connection to Singapore. In addition, we all tried frog legs. It was quite an exciting night.

Sleeping soundly,
Slingshot

Note: The Bird has not returned.

Date: 3/14/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Tears for Human Stories.

I am a crier. I cry at books, I cry at movies, I cry when I see 'moments' (you know, those special kind that Hallmark tries to capture). I am a chronic empathizer. I think that I just **feel** the emotion of the characters or people that I am reading about/watching/seeing so much that it becomes real, and I sort of become them and assume the emotion as if it were my own. I cried during The Lion King when Mufasa died. I cried during Braveheart. I bawled during Titanic. I started a new book the other day, and Kristin said to me, "How late are you going to stay up crying with this one, Cassie?" I looked down sheepishly, and said "No later than midnight!" I was up till 2:30 and went through about half a box of tissues.

Today we had a day off, and Kristin and I went exploring. We went to Times Square (a giant shopping mall with a few rollercoasters inside), which had a movie theater and a Borders bookstore. We wanted to see a Western movie (not Western as in John Wayne, but as in Western hemisphere, not Asian), and were forced to choose Tristan and Isolde, which was the only one to fit our time slot. It turned out to be not so bad. It was a love story about an Irish princess and an English warrior, and it took place in a time when England was still divided into Anglo tribes and Ireland was still being invaded by the English. It was a Romeo and Juliet, star-crossed-lovers story including battles and ethics and loyalty and patriotism. The whole lot of it was bound to make me cry. I didn't stand a chance. I generally liked the movie, and cried through about 10 minutes of it (which is pretty good, considering the aforementioned recipe for tears).

The movie made me think about the things that we do unintentionally that hurt others; the things we do because of pride or what we consider self-preservation. Most of it is a lie. We tell ourselves that we are being strong, or that someone else needs us to be strong, or that what we've said doesn't have that much impact on other people. But that isn't true. Our decisions make a difference. We are not an isolated species—we live in constant contact with others, so why would we think that our decisions are without consequence?

Kristin and I stopped at Borders bookstore after the movie, and I picked up a book that is the third in a series I have been reading by Francine Rivers. (She writes Christian fiction, and I am obsessed. I highly recommend Redeeming Love if you haven't read it.) The series follows a young Christian girl who was in Jerusalem when the Romans conquered it in the first century A.D. She is sold to a



Cassie Woodard

Roman family as a slave, and the book follows her life and the lives of those she is with. The books are phenomenal. I cried through most of the first one.

I ordered a hazelnut mocha from Starbucks and sat down in the bookstore to start the third book. I opened the book to the epilogue from the closing of the second book, which I had read earlier this year. Just remembering the characters' painful journey through death and disease and hardened hearts and finally into God's arms brought on the waterworks—I was crying when Kristin found me to tell me the store was closing.

Now, you may be starting to think that I am a weepy sort of person who can't be trusted to stay calm about anything. However, I'm not a weepy person. I *am* enthralled by stories that illustrate how beat up and bruised our hearts can get, and how we can continually run straight away from God when He is waiting to take us into His arms. I am in awe of our capacity to give our hearts away to people and careers and things, when God has promised us a life of beauty and happiness if we entrust our hearts to Him. Proverbs 4:23 says "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life." (NIV) In The Message, the same verse reads: "Keep vigilant watch over your heart; that's where life starts." I cry at movies where the heart is being tossed around. I cry when a book's characters are heartbroken for reasons they could not have prevented.

I think that God grieves, too, when we are careless with our heart and give parts of it away. He longs for all of us, for our whole heart. "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:5) I pray that your heart is guarded and protected, that God shields your heart from harm from your own carelessness, from Satan, and from all else that threatens to bruise it!

With Love,
Cassie

Date: 3/15/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Out the front door of our bungalow-style home in Petaling Jaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, sits Luther House. The fully functioning church appears alive and well, hosting youth of all ages in a day care-type program. These youngsters are living as witnesses for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Many were born into and are still living in non-Christian homes. Some stay with parents practicing different religions from one another. Others are alone in their faith. Many people we have encountered share a similar story. They are first generation Christians, living as witnesses to their family, friends, Malaysia and me. Young witnesses.

Deric has many questions in life. I suppose it is necessary for a child living with a Christian father and Buddhist mother. He is good at asking them. I spent much of the morning talking to the mature child. He sat attentive, wanting to learn from the words I spoke. Hardly giving me a chance to finish a question, he would ask another. I thoroughly enjoyed the adult-like conversation I had with Deric. He wants to be a pilot. He has an older sister. His mother has been to the United States. And when asked what it is like living within a family of differing religions, Deric responded with a simple "okay."

No matter. He is a child of God. Brought to Luther House for a reason, Deric is one of several kids sharing what they learn. They bring home the sing-along songs, prayers, stories told and videos watched. One little boy had his mother purchase a Bible for him. Another will not ride in the car without saying a prayer first. It is inspiring to hear these stories.

Many of them witnessed to me without knowing. I continue to thank God for these experiences. My eyes are open to new ways of believing. I have always had Christ in my life. I have always known. These young children and many others have not. Still, I doubt every day, even as these people fight a government, laws, parents and friends to be Christian. They truly are amazing, these young witnesses and Christians of Malaysia. No longer will I take my faith so lightly.



Chase Chisholm

Date: 3/16/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Cameron Highlands, Malaysia—I think I finally understand what it might have been like to be an Israelite: being led to an undisclosed location, relying solely on the leadership of a person you barely know, and trusting that God is somehow going to show the way and His purpose for this excursion.

Let me highlight the situation for you. We were invited to go on a weekend missions trip with a youth group from 11th Mile Cheras Lutheran Church. Sweet, I like missions trips. Before the weekend even started, though, there were many discrepancies as to departure times, what we were actually going to be **doing** (our own programming as well as the whole trip's itinerary), etc. We started off knowing nothing, and this proved to be a theme throughout the weekend. Okay, we did know something; we knew that we were heading to the Cameron Highlands, a jungle mountainous region about four hours north of KL. We were able to start proper anti-malarial procedures (i.e., the doxycycline medicine) in enough time for it to hopefully work.

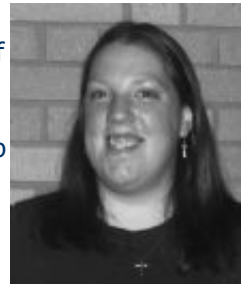
Now, I like spontaneity as much as the next person, but it is a lot harder to deal with when these factors are in place: a.) thirty (ish) youth types all on school holiday, b.) most people speaking a language you do not understand, and speaking it majority of the time, c.) the general clueless feeling that resonated throughout most people all weekend. It seemed that no one really knew the who's, what's, where's, when's, and how's. The only clear cut answer was the Why: to share in ministry and prove a support to congregations in the Cameron Highlands.

Despite the wandering nature of the weekend, especially on this first day, I could see God working through it and perhaps despite it. Four vans and a couple stops along the way, and we arrived at the first village. We were visiting the Orang Asli, groups of indigenous Malay people spread throughout the highlands. No village had more than 15 houses with in it, all built on stilts and out of palm and bamboo. But each village had a very sturdy, solid church building. This was probably with the help of many congregations throughout KL and surrounding areas that had come before us. The Orang Asli mostly speak only Malay, so our language "skills" were definitely lacking. However, the youth that we were with are fairly fluent in Malay (along with probably a million other languages), and were able to help us have a semi-easy time trying to relate to the kids and adults in the villages.

Like I said, God moving and working as always, despite my inability to see it or understand fully. As always, a lesson I seem to never quite grasp and always need reminding. Silly Kristin. By the end of our time at the village this first day, I saw my teammates engaging in fun hand-clap games (like we used to do on the playground in school), trying to learn Malay and Mandarin from the youth and the kids of the village, smiling and laughing with the adults. Despite our inability to use precise verbal language, the language of love and God's love shown through, as He should.

My only hope is that throughout this Israelite experience, we will not lose sight of God's will—and hopefully not build a golden calf or worship a bronze snake.

Grace and Peace, Kristin <><



Kristin Rice

Date: 3/17/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Living Stones

"There are tigers up here?!" I asked in wide eyed wonderment. "Yes," answered our guide, who was also a youth leader. We were in the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia. A place where the rainforest is ancient and the native people, the Orang Asli, live in small villages hidden in forests, hills, and on mountaintops. The youth group from 11th Mile Cheras Lutheran Church invited us to attend a three-day, two-night mission trip with them. This was an unprecedented chance for us to meet people who have always called Malaysia home, even before it was known as Malaysia.

We drove through the thick morning mist and made our way from village to village, encouraging the already established and thriving congregations there. We had been met with quite a language barrier at times in Malaysia, but this time was especially difficult for us. The Orang Asli speak Bahasa Malay, the official language of Malaysia, but they speak a dialect that even seasoned veterans find difficult at times. So we leaned on our Malaysian friends for communication much of the time. The Orang Asli people are beautiful. Their appearance was much the same as many Malaysians we



Tysen Bibb

had met, but there was something exotic about them; they were so full of life and beauty. These brothers and sisters were so gracious, so kind, so loving. We had little time to visit with them, but they always seemed to find time to feed us. Their love gift of food was always delicious. It was so evident that our native Malaysian brothers and sisters have a deep love, respect, and passion for our Lord Jesus. In all they did and said, I was continually reminded of Scripture. All of us on the team were especially taken with the children we met at each village. At first they were timid and shy at the sight of white people, but after spending some time around us, they opened up and were bursting with energy and curiosity.

The villages we visited contained as few as ten homes all the way up to twenty or more. To us Westerners, the daily life and living conditions appeared simple and relaxed. Homes constructed of bamboo, straw and floors of wood planks were the common sight. Although, we were surprised upon visiting one sister, because she had a relatively large television complete with a satellite dish. Most of the men traveled to larger towns nearby to work and the children would catch butterflies to sell by the roadside. Life seemed relaxed among our Orang Asli brothers and sisters.

One trait about all of the villages we visited stuck with us. It was something that was revealed to us as our journeys continued throughout our time among the Orang Asli. In every village we went to, the most ornate and well built building was the church. These people were so happy to have a place to worship and overjoyed to welcome us into it to share songs and fellowship. It was evident in every person we met. They belonged to Jesus. They were so joyful, so at peace, and Christ seemed to be the reason.

The time spent with the Orang Asli people taught me much. I thought, "How many Christians do I know that would welcome a whole host of strangers whose only common bond was Christ, into their church, home, and lives...would I?" Another thought I had was, "How many believers do I know that are so passionate about Christ that simply by being in their presence and watching them, you know they belong to Jesus...am I that kind of Christian?" It was also nice to see the church building so highly revered. But then again, are the not the people who fill the building the actual church? Is it not Christ living in us and through us that impacts people? Since our bodies have become the temple of the Holy Spirit, should we not be so ornate, so clothed with Christ, that it does not matter how many our sanctuary will seat, how big our church budget is, or how great our worship team sounds...so long as Jesus is having His way with our lives and He is seen in all we think, say, and do? He is worthy of that. Amen.

"you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."
(1 Peter 2:5)

"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders..."
(1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body."
(1 Corinthians 6: 19-20)

"Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature."
(Romans 13:14)

Date: 3/18/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

One goodbye is never enough

Today we left Cameron Highlands and the mountains of Malaysia for good. We were excited to have a reprieve from the oppressive heat in Kuala Lumpur, yet glad to return to our little house. When we were leaving the Lutheran bungalow, we gave hugs and said goodbye to all of the youth. We had been with this group all weekend as we had joined them for their mission trip. They were such a fun group and taught us so many



Corine Bell

things. On the very winding road back, we drove past rose gardens and stands that sold strawberries in every imaginable form. I'm glad my favorite fruit is strawberry! The most beautiful part of the mountains, though, were the extraordinary tea plantations. The hills were covered with perfectly manicured tea bushes that give the illusion of a maze. There was a small waterfall nestled in between rows of bushes, and the morning sunlight made the whole valley sing. We stopped to take pictures and the youth stopped with us, so we took plenty of pictures with them and the gorgeous background. We had to bid adieu again to the youth, though we knew we would see them again. We drove until a rest stop with a large fruit market. We tried several new local fruits and again were blessed to be with the youth we had grown very close to. Alas, yes, we had to say goodbye again... only to see them later that night for a full Family Night Program!

We made a quick stop at our house and headed back to the church. We had an amazing dinner with church members, where we ate venison of a local variety. The program was extremely fun with this group because we knew them well. They knew some of our songs, and we even brought a youth, Steven, up on stage to play guitar on the last song. It was a great night and unfortunately, we had to say goodbye one more time. We all knew it was coming, but it was still hard to face. Many of the youth lingered for a long time after the program. They introduced us to their family, helped us pack up every little thing, and gave and received contact information. We asked for their Chinese names written down, which is always amazing for us to see. We finally did part; however, we took away the joy of knowing that we are family and that we will keep in touch. Relationships are so important. Call a friend today who you haven't talked to in a long time! Tell them I say "Hi!"

God's blessings,
Corine

Date: 3/19/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

My cup runneth over.

I am so exhausted, but I am so happy!! I can't count how many times since I have started my team journey that I have thought to myself, *I can't believe how blessed I am! This is so amazing!* I don't know how much longer I can go with such little sleep, but God will provide, right?!



Cassie Woodard

Morning.

Today we were at Bangsar Lutheran Church with Sivin, who has been our main contact while here in Malaysia. It was so great to see the church that he played a big part in starting. At the front of the church behind the altar is a cross. The cross is made of white blocks that have a picture on the front. On the front of each block is a semi-transparent photograph of the sky. A vibrant, breathtaking snapshot of a sunny sky with big, fluffy, cartoonish, stark-white clouds. The center block of the cross has a white dove in flight. The sight is awe-inspiring.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. – John 1:5

Afternoon.

After lunch we joined some youth for a performance at the Kuala Lumpur Performing Arts Center. It was called Dialogue in Skin, a traditional Chinese choreographed percussion performance. It was unbelievable. I could feel the vibrations in my whole body, my heart beating to the rhythm of the giant animal skin tubs on stage. It was mesmerizing, watching a group of 15 people beating on instruments with sticks at the same time, using the same motions, one fluid entity moving with crisp, bold movements. I sat in the cushioned chair, in awe of the beauty of the human body and of the beauty it is capable of producing.

I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. – Psalm 139:14

Evening.

Chase and I spent some time at our beloved second home – Starbucks – before we headed over to Denise and Chee's home for fellowship time with some junior high youth. We played games and ate

food and sang songs and ate food and had conversations and ate food and ate food, and ate some more food. For the first time, I had Texas sheet cake, which was brown but to me tasted a little bit like sugar cookie dough. I'm sure I had twelve pieces. (Denise is American, so we had some Western *and* some Eastern food!) One of my new favorite songs is "A-roos-tish-a." It was one of my favorite songs at camp, and I had forgotten it until about two months into our overseas tour!! Thank goodness for memory. It is my favorite because it makes everyone look like fools! Tongues hanging out, knees stuck together, trying to speak while turning in a circle . . . and we often ask the pastors and teachers to demonstrate. It's great. I think everyone needs a little Aroostisha in their lives!

It is times like these that my heart is full. Seeing the joy of little children and the hesitant excitement of a teenager who reluctantly participates in the silly games puts a smile on my face! Praise God for those times when we can't help but smile! I pray that He brings a smile to your face today.

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life. – Psalm 23:5b-6a

Date: 3/20/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Unfinished Plans

Today was an eventful day. This is our last week in Malaysia, and we had a little bit of free time, so today we went to the soon-to-be-new administrative capital of Malaysia, Putrajaya. The concept of Putrajaya is that of a high tech city built in the midst of a beautiful garden. Clean and ornate with well planned roads and exotic flora, Putrajaya is very beautiful. We were told by our good friend and guide Edward that this new capital in the making is being built in part to impress foreigners and, well...it is definitely impressive.



Tysen Bibb

We visited lush botanical gardens, large well-preserved wetlands, and were treated to the architectural eye candy of complex bridges and futuristic building design. There is only one big problem with Putrajaya, though...it is incomplete! That's right...incomplete, as in not finished, not fully constructed. This would not have been such a shock to me if the funds for the construction were still on budget and contractors were diligently working round the clock to complete the pet project of the government, but that's just it...all the money is gone. Apparently, as was explained to me by more than one trustworthy acquaintance, because of a combination of factors, speculated to include corruption and money mismanagement, the city sits incomplete with tall empty cranes as the city's skyscrapers.

Upon hearing this I was blown away. How can this happen? How can billions and billions in Malaysian currency be spent over the course of almost a decade and then before the project is complete, the funds are gone? What happened?! The book of Proverbs has much to say about not jumping into anything without adequate planning, especially when large amounts of money, time, effort, and reputation are involved. I recommend you read it when you have time. Contained in this medium-length book of the Bible is practical advice for almost everything in life. Whether it is how to make a big decision in life like choosing a spouse, taking out a loan, or just how to make it through the day without looking foolish, Proverbs sets forth wisdom for life. Well kids, that is all I have for today. Continue to live for the glory of God in all you do and be thankful in all circumstances. He is worthy and He is good!

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."
(Proverbs 9:10)

Date: 3/21/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Petaling Jaya—I'm beginning to wonder if there's such a thing as too much of a good thing. We're getting ready to depart to Singapore in three days, and are so blessed to have been given the last few days to be free agents. Of course, this does not mean that we are all running around KL uninhibited and crazy, although that would be quite a funny sight. No, instead we are taking these days to sight-see and explore places we did not have time to before.

Today we went to the Batu Caves, a fairly famous Hindu site. Here's what I know about the caves, courtesy of the website (just Google, and you'll find it). The caves, which are situated about 11 km north of KL, were discovered in 1878 by an American naturalist, William Hornaday. The biggest of the caves, and the only one that costs nothing to visit, is called Temple Cave or Cathedral Cave. It is massively tall with a 100m ceiling. There are little natural holes in the ceiling, so it is not especially dark in the caves. To climb up, because the cave is definitely in the middle of a mini-mountain, one has to walk up 272 kind of steep stairs. All around us, as we traversed and slowly ascended, there were long-tailed macaque monkeys playing and fighting. The entrance to the entire temple is incredible. A large statue greets you in shimmering gold paint, with a couple smaller temple buildings in the classic multi-colored, bright paint on the side. When I finally made it up the stairs, taking my sweet time, before me was this expansive thing. Incense smoke was filtering out, enveloping me in almost a dream-like state. I know that I wished more than ever that I knew more about Hinduism, other than the random facts I pulled off of religioustolerance.org last night.

Inside the cave are about five or six mini-altars and statues of gods and goddesses. The thing with Hinduism, as I discovered last night, is that it is not technically a polytheistic religion, although it would appear that way. There is one supreme Deity, but the other gods and goddesses are actually different aspects and forms of that same Deity. This explains why so many of the temples we have seen are covered with what can only be hundreds if not thousands of different people and figures. We remained at the cave and surrounding area for a couple hours, amusing ourselves with the monkey antics, and enjoying good vegetarian banana leaf meals with roti canai, two classics I may maintain are my favorites in Malaysia.

Tonight we had a house party at the bungalow. We really wanted to see a lot of the people we have met since being in Malaysia, and knew that there just was not the time to see them all individually. So we invited them all over to the house and had a semi-American party for them, especially since they had been to nice and generous, showing us Malaysian culture. We had cheese and meat trays, veggies, Cheetos, Oreos, and PBJ sandwiches cut in quarters. Sixteen people ended up joining us, although we heard from others who were sad they could not make it. It was incredible and relaxed, with everyone getting to know each other since a lot of them did not know each other before tonight. I really hope that I will be able to stay in contact with a lot of our friends here—they have shown us the meaning of love and friendship in ways I did not anticipate. Nandri, Friends.

Grace and Peace, Kristin



Kristin Rice

Date: 3/22/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Bungalow party!

We've made friends in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. All around the city we've met wonderful people from churches, gatherings, through "friends of friends" or Starbucks. These acquaintances are bishops, pastors, youth, families—all brothers and sisters in Christ. Often (more than not it seems) we are visibly served more than we feel able to give. It's humbling. It's part of being a servant. It's hard. And it's becoming a struggle to accept genuine hospitality and kindness. Can't we do something nice in return? Yes! We can host a party in our bungalow-of-a-home.

It actually happened. We did it. We threw a house party in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. New Dawn had a house party in Southeast Asia! It was a blast. It has been a blessing to stay in our own home for the past three weeks, while working with the Lutheran Church of Malaysia and Singapore (LCMS). The home has its quarks, of course—toilets not working, broken beds, cold showers and right next to a busy street—but that's what makes it fun. And fun we had, especially on this night.



Chase Chisholm

We wanted to offer our newfound friends something from our culture. It's a custom to go out for meals in Malaysia. It's what one does for recreation. It's what families do on Sundays. It's what friends do at midnight. Anytime and on every street corner food is served. It seems no one hangs out in homes. That's all there is to do where I'm from, hang out at a friend's house. It's part of my culture. Great, party it is. What to do and who to invite?

With little time to plan, we left the get-together free from any sort of arranged programming. I believe it's best to go with the flow and see what happens. This gives God more room to work. My team mostly agrees. We called and e-mailed several of our main contacts from places we've traveled in "KL." Telling them to bring their friends was a potentially dangerous idea. Oh well. More people, more fun, right?

Without knowing who would attend, we arranged plenty of food on the small kitchen table. Using our special plastic and paper dishes we served Oreos, Doritos, fruits, Ritz crackers and cheese, Pringles, Chips Ahoy cookies and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches among an array of other treats. Our cultural party had to have mostly "American" food to give the effect. And hanging our map of the United States on the wall was a nice touch, we thought. So was using our puppets as decoration.

I ate so much of the snacks before the bash even began! Go figure. I'm always found at the food table for any event, just hovering.

People started walking through our door and soon the room was filled—and hot. I forgot to mention that our bungalow is not fully air-conditioned (almost unheard of in Malaysia). I was drenched in sweat, literally, like I have been every day in Malaysia. It didn't matter. I would casually excuse myself to use the "tanda" (toilet) and swipe my hair dry with a towel. Only, I forgot to close the door once and someone walked in on me performing my ritual—awkward.

The night was filled with food, people, chatting and God. It truly was a God-good gathering. Clean and innocent fun was had by everyone, save the not-so-scandalous dancing performed by Kristin and Wei Shen (brotherly friend from Trinity Church). The singing of three national anthems concluded the night as only a few remained, national hymns from Malaysia, United States and New Zealand. It was beautiful.

As the last of our new friends left, I waved them off with the realization of knowing I will probably never see them again. This is a thought I have often leaving places we've traveled. It doesn't seem to get easier. I thought it might. It's sure a lot easier, now, to zone out when someone's talking to me. Why not when saying goodbye? I'm glad all worked out with our Bungalow party. It was a joy to be the one filling cookies instead of being the cause of them needing a refill. Wait. I was. In any case, I'm thankful we were able to end our time in Malaysia, serving those who greatly served us.

Thanks to all our friends in Malaysia. Thanks for making our experience so rich a full. All of you are in my and our thoughts and prayers.

"Nandre," (meaning "many thanks" in the Indian language of Tamil) Malaysia. "Nandre," Malaysia. Many thanks, Malaysia. (Inspired by a song Tysen is writing).

Chase Chisholm

Date: 3/22/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

"Time keeps on tickin'...into the Future"

Greetings in Christ! Today was one of those long but good days. We leave for Singapore in two days, and we are trying to cram in as much as possible in the little time we have left. This morning we visited the KL Tower, which is one of the world's tallest communications towers. It was great to see the city we had lived in for five weeks from yet another new perspective.

After leaving the insanely tall tower, we made our way over to Sunway Lagoon for our



Tysen Bibb

team outing. Sunway Lagoon is a water-park set on the edge of Kuala Lumpur. It is kind of an amusement park/resort hotel/shopping center/tourist trap. We got to spend about four hours just being a group of friends hanging out and having fun in the tropical sun...something that we do not get to do often.

The highlight of my day, though, was dinnertime. We were invited to a congregation member's house to have authentic Hungarian Goulash. The family is German, and Wolfgang (one of our hosts) is a pastor. He is currently teaching and mentoring seminary students for future leadership. We had a wonderful time with Judith and Wolfgang and their two boys, Benjamin and David. The food was beyond excellent, but the fellowship won out with me. It was great to listen to our hosts tell us about how they met and much that has happened since then. Especially interesting and encouraging was hearing how God has used them over the years in their ministry in Papua New Guinea, Hong Kong, Australia, Israel, and Malaysia. It never ceases to amaze me how, as a follower of Christ, I have family all around the world and that many faithful have gone before me. I am part of a living, growing, global family of God that is moving and active. A family that, by grace through faith, is loving and living in Christ's love and teachings. Praise God for family!

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." (Hebrews 10:24-25)

P.S. Take some time today to pray for the global family of God. Please specifically pray for Judith, Wolfgang, Benjamin, and David, and their ministry in Malaysia.

Date: 3/23/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

One new country left

WE'RE GOING TO SINGAPORE TOMORROW!! I have to admit...I'm excited. I have been looking forward to going to Singapore for over a year, and it is finally here. I have friends in Singapore I have not seen in three years, and they have told me many wonderful things about the country and the people. However, it is hard to leave Malaysia. We have all fallen in love with this country over the past five weeks. We have made many good friends here, and it is difficult knowing we will not be returning. It was easier to leave Hong Kong, knowing that we would return at the end of the tour.



Corine Bell

Today consisted of seeing as many people as possible, sending packages, and going to all of the last minute places to get souvenirs. We went downtown to meet Veejay, a friend from our very first weekend in Malaysia. It was nice to see him and catch up on the churches we visited at the beginning of the tour. We all went separate ways for several hours and then met to go to tea with Bishop Phillip. We went to our long awaited tea time at the Secret Recipe. Bishop Phillip has only been in his position for six months and has three and a half more years to serve as bishop. He handles the pressure gracefully, and we know that God will use him powerfully to lead the LCMS. The team had a little time to pack, and then we met Reverend Augustin, his family, and a youth, Sunjay, for our last banana leaf meal in Malaysia. We returned to the restaurant where we ate our first authentic Indian meal. Ah, reliving memories. We ended this leg of our journey similarly to how we began. The night ended with meeting my friend, Edward, and Joyce, another member of a church we attended. The day was a great collage of fellowship and genuine love for people. We are blessed to have met so many brothers and sisters who care about us. Thank you to everyone we met in Malaysia! Please know that you are in our thoughts and prayers. We cherish our time with you and look forward to seeing you again someday. Feel free to come to the U.S. and visit!

with bittersweet anticipation,

Corine

"Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all" Titus 3:15

Date: 3/24/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard
Journal Entry:

A New Home.

Today, we came to Singapore. I cannot believe how smoothly the travel went!! We didn't lose any luggage, we didn't lose any teammates, the plane didn't crash, the hour long taxi ride to the airport gave us time to write on postcards last-minute, and even though there was a mix up with how many taxis we needed, it went well. (The lone taxi driver looked a little shocked and overwhelmed when he saw us with all of our luggage; his mind reeling, I'm sure, trying to figure out how to fit it all in. We eventually communicated that we needed three taxis.) I don't know why I doubted, but God was certainly watching over us!

We arrived at the airport and Pastor Sam was there to pick us up. Again, we received a look of "How in the world am I going to fit all of that in two vehicles?" Apparently we may need to do a better job explaining to our contacts that we have personal luggage with enough for about four months, as well as our team things!! J It's always a fun song and dance explaining what the giant "bomb-case" is for (our laptop and printer), and why we have such big bags (again, four months). And my favorite - "That's why you bring the guys along, right? So they can carry everything!"

We went to Jennifer's house, where the girls are staying, right away to have a nap. It was such a blessing. This wonderful woman just opened up her childrens' rooms for us to sleep in until Pastor Sam came back to bring us to dinner. I was again overwhelmed with the generosity shown to us!

We were treated to a fabulous local dinner - clay pot chicken rice. The rice and chicken and mushrooms are all cooked together in a clay pot, steamed with yummy spices and flavors. Some of the youth met up with us, and we enjoyed some fellowship time with people we would be spending the next week with.

God is good! We are exhausted after travel, but He sustains us! May He sustain you today.

In His strength,
Cassie



Cassie Woodard

Date: 3/25/2006
Submitted by: Chase Chisholm
Journal Entry:

Breakfast with Uncle George

Uncle George reminds me of my grandmother somehow. It's in his face. Seeing people from my past in faces of those I meet happens often. Perhaps it's a way to keep loved ones in mind, God's way. However, Uncle George is nothing like my grandmother. Uncle George is an Indian man living in Singapore.

His weathered face tells a story. As does his white hair and blue-brown eyes. It's unusual to see colors other than dark brown or black in the eyes of people we're encountering. It's not part of the culture's genetic makeup. Uncle George has a bright blue ring accenting his shirt and complimenting his worn-orange sarong (man-skirt).

I liked having breakfast with Uncle George this morning. We almost missed the opportunity. His kind heart didn't want to wake Tysen and me from a restful night's sleep (even though he said he would the night before). It was indeed a blessing to sleep, but even more so was a fellowship-full breakfast with Uncle George.

Seedless dates (imported from India), prunes, bread and cheese, banana cake and grape juice mixed with aloe vera made the meal. We ate around a tabletop of maps, discussing them at random. Natural morning light filled the diagonal-shaped kitchen from a small window to my right. It was a perfect scene.



Chase Chisholm

We chatted about a cross he created for Jurong Christian Church (his church and our first stay in Singapore). It's placed just behind the altar in the sanctuary. A simple cross it is, small and dark in color. Drawing no attention to itself other than the significance of why it stands. No one would expect it to have such an interesting story. I hardly noticed it was there.

"In those days," he began; much of the western side (our current location) of Singapore was swampy marshland. I find it hard to believe, experiencing the "fine" city today. The wood to make the cross actually came from this time, over 40 years ago. It was collected by Uncle George himself. Two wooden beams were fashioned together using bamboo bark-type material (similar to what is still used for construction scaffolding). It wasn't meant to last.

It did. Battling an always hot and humid climate the wood is without decay, simple, beautiful. Uncle George is still around to share the story. Jurong Christian Church stands firm. And Singapore continues to exist—independent—surrounded by predominately Muslim countries. I am reminded of the power God has through seemingly insignificant objects, simple people and around the world.

Uncle George is 79 years old and healthy. He wakes early every morning to walk and spend time reading the Bible. The Nescafe coffee drinker stays active in a variety of church and community events including the Singapore Bible Society. With children scattered around the world, Uncle George lives alone. His wife passed away two years ago. Pray for him.

All of us can learn from his humble, quiet lifestyle. I have.

In Asian cultures it is traditionally proper to refer to an elderly man as "Uncle." I really enjoyed calling him "Uncle George."

Date: 3/26/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Jurong, Singapore—This may come as a surprise to most, probably all. We have traveled halfway around the world, and never in my wildest dreams did I imagine that we would pick up a sixth teammate while we were over here. I was not quite sure that YE actually ever allowed that to happen, especially while overseas. However, it has happened, and now we're stuck with Rhonda for the next few months.

Okay, so maybe Rhonda is not a *real* new teammate—but she certainly has enough personality and her own introduction to be one. Earlier tonight, Chase and Tysen decided to get their hair cut (or shaved completely off in the case of Tysen). Chase, bless his heart, walked away from the salon with a dream haircut: oh yes, my friends, the Rat-Tail is our Sixth Teammate. A Rat-Tail is a haircut where most of the hair is cut short except for one tiny chunk in the back, shaped specifically to look like a tail. This is a haircut most commonly seen among the males of the human species, especially under the age of 12. Yours truly had a semi-Rat-Tail in second grade (yes, back in the early '90s, even girls sometimes had crazy hair). I promise that we will try and get pictures of Rhonda the Rat (Tail) up as soon as we can so everyone can bask in her beauty.



Kristin Rice

I should mention that this incident happened after an amazingly long day. Each day, it seems, holds more than we can ever anticipate, and today was yet another example of that. We held three workshops today at Jurong Christian Centre. The first was a skit workshop with the youth, in order to help them participate more in worship and evangelizing techniques. It was a blast, especially when we had them break into smaller groups and come up with their own in 15 minutes or less. Corine and I had a group that decided to act out a rather obscure version of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. Tysen's group acted out the Three Little Pigs and then brought it to the Stand on the Rock theme...very cool, I might add. Chase's group, well, I'm not quite sure what their central point was, but girls screamed at Chase, boys acted cool, and somehow he decided that people were too busy to make church look interesting.

Later in the afternoon we led two workshops for the Sunday School teachers: one on Praise and Worship, and the other on Interactive Bible Stories. Both workshops initiated much discussion amongst the teachers, especially voicing concerns about what to do to make the kids excited and actually want to participate. This is a problem I have seen often back home, and while I know that it

is not necessarily reassuring to know that the same problem exists everywhere, I hope that we were able to share in knowing that we want to *do more*. It was a lot of fun and pretty challenging for me to field questions about an area I am nowhere close to being an expert in. I was glad that I was able to talk with a lot of people and learn more about some of what is happening here in the Lutheran Church of Singapore. Did you know that they only have about seven church-related buildings in their entire organization?!

Let's see here. Highlights from the day include: dinner with our host Jennifer and some of her friends from church; a Fruit Feast in the church courtyard after the haircut fun-o-rama; and finally meeting our host little brother Cheng Kiat, who was with Grandma all weekend. Have I mentioned yet that I really like it here in Singapore?

Grace and Peace—Kristin <><

Date: 3/27/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

"This is for the Birds"

"Sir, would you mind standing here with your arms out the the sides?" I could not believe what was happening. I was about to have to two tropical toucans land on my arms! In a matter of seconds, I had two beautiful rainforest dwelling birds standing on my arms and eating out of my hands. That is a memory I will never forget.

Today we were taken to the Jurong Bird Park in Singapore. It's funny because it seems so many of my journal days end up being on more light and fun occasions. I'm not complaining, though. Our contacts took us just to show us around Singapore; it was a total surprise. We spent the day with Pastor Sam and two amazing youth from Jurong Christian Church. For almost four hours, we saw one amazing display after another of God-beautiful creativity in the bird kingdom. From the very tiny to the big meat-eating hunters to seed-eating jokesters, these birds were fascinating. We saw the world's largest indoor waterfall and went into a large open air aviary full of "Lories" or Lorikeets. They flew around us in hungry swarms trying to land on our arms and heads to eat the food we bought for them. It was quite humorous to see how far these little guys would go just to get a lick of the nectar cups we bought. We got to take in a bird show full of very well trained and loved birds. One bird in particular spoke three languages and wooed the whole audience with love songs and a cute rendition of "Happy Birthday" for all those celebrating that special day. Oh, and maybe you will see New Dawn in the Minneapolis/St.Paul edition of the "Metro Lutheran" very soon. We took photos that we sent into the newspaper as part of a random photo contest. All in all, the day was full and very, very fun. In the end, we settled down with our Singaporean friends and had Korean/Chinese/Indonesian food that was quite tasty. Praise God for new friends and the generosity of the church.

Singapore is a beautiful, well-planned city that is clean and very diverse. Coming here has been like stepping into "Asia Light," as one of my teammates commented. It is so Western here sometimes we have to remind ourselves we are not home. To our friends at Jurong Christian Church that took us to the Birdpark...thank you! And to the One who made the birds...not too shabby, God! Haha. He is amazing. Remember to continually pray to and praise our Lord Jesus.

In Him,
Tysen



Tysen Bibb

Date: 3/28/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

The new has come...again

I always get so excited when we do programs for very little children. We had two programs today with three, four, and five-year-olds. They are so adorable!!! Plus, they are still young enough to think that everything we do is cool and follow our directions. They laugh at Tysen's funny faces and give us high fives. We were once again amazed



Corine Bell

at how well behaved they are even when we ask them to "Go Bananas!" They go bananas and then calm back down. One interesting practice is the greetings exchanged between the teachers and students. The teacher says "Good Morning," and all of the students respond "Good Morning, *name*." I never had such a formal greeting in school.

We had lunch with two youth leaders, Mervin and Jason, and most of the girls' host family. Our host mom and brother, Jennifer and Cheng Kiat, wanted to be with us as long as possible, and we were grateful for their company. They showed us so much love as we took over their home. We were sad to leave them today. We were on our way to change locations while in Singapore.

I am awed by the wonderful way God makes everything new. Life is not boring. If I ever think life is boring, I know I am not doing something right. We moved to a new section of Singapore. We now feel newness all over again. We have new host homes, new families, a new church, new contacts, a completely new experience. I hope we enjoy every minute of it! Go enjoy something new today!

From a new creation,
Corine

"...Make the most of every opportunity." Colossians 4:5

Date: 3/29/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Mail Packet Day.

Today, we sent out the mail packet. These are some of the funniest days in the life of a team. On these days (and many others), I really wish that I was a spectator observing the sport of "send the mail packet." It usually involves a scramble for Kristin, our treasurer, to complete the expense report from the past month, and then purchase a money order (when we're in the States) to send back to the office. Her trip to the post office counter is trip one. Then, Chase will give us all the master list of items included in the packet and ask us to sign next to our respective job titles and include in the packet anything we need to send to the office. (While this is happening, assume that at least one person has gone off to the bathroom or to purchase a drink from the 7-Eleven, so we must wait for that person to come back before we can seal the mail packet shut and get in line again.)

Before moving on, picture a room about 10 ft by 30 ft. Now put in it several dividers and a few postal workers and a couple counters and then five New Dawn members.

While we wait, one of us has some personal box they need to send. That means wrapping, addressing, adding up value totals for customs forms, and then asking teammates how heavy they think it is. "Do you think this weighs more than 3 kg?" And of course, none of us have any clue, because we know pounds and aren't fluent in the metric system! "Sure, I bet that's lighter than 5 kg." The teamer sending the package is praying that it's not over five, because that means it's in the next highest price bracket, and ups the price about 40 Singapore dollars (about 25 USD). This teamer's trip to the counter is trip two.

After the teamer in the bathroom returns, we are ready to seal the envelope. But before I have had time to sign it and include my things, someone has called on the phone and I need to have a conversation about the unscheduled program tomorrow between the kindergarten and the elder care center. And then Chase goes to the counter to buy stamps as a souvenir for his mom, a post master. Trip number three.

All the while, Pak Meng - a man from the church - is waiting patiently to take us out to lunch.

Trip four involves Kristin and Chase getting in line to actually send the packet.

Mail Packet Day is hilarious and stressful and amusing and entertaining. I'm going to suggest we send one once a week for comedic relief for any passersby.

May God bless you with entertainment today! May you find joy and peace in the seemingly tedious



Cassie Woodard

tasks that your life demands.

In the Joy of the Lord,
Cassie

The joy of the Lord is your strength.
Nehemiah 8:10b

Date: 3/30/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Floating on the sea

We had the wonderful opportunity to spend time on Sentosa Island, Singapore's resort getaway. It's just off the coast of the island nation. I'm a little sunburned at the moment, as I write. My face hurts, as does my back and shoulders. It's a fair price to pay for a day at the beach, indeed (and for not lathering enough sunscreen on my body). Have you ever floated on the sea? I hadn't until today.



Chase Chisholm

I spent some time alone this afternoon, reading, thinking about life and peering out over the ocean as I lounged in a wooden beach chair. I've been self-reflecting much for the past several days. It's good and bad, but completely necessary for anyone to do. I would read some and then swim. This time I attempted to float.

It's easier to float in saltwater, I'm told. I suppose it is (one living in Iowa isn't exposed to such knowledge). Yet, it is more of a battle than I thought. Apparently I have too much muscle (isn't that a joke). I tried harder and realized what helped most was when I cleared my mind and concentrated. I will never forget the experience, a perfect moment with God. So, I wrote a poem:

Trust in God and float on the sea.
Resist.
Resist being told you will sink.
Do not listen to the lies, the waves, trying to pull you down
Or push you in.
God will not bring you away from shore.
God keeps you close.
Can you hear?
What do you hear?
Nothing.
That is right; you hear nothing as your ears are submerged from what is told to you
And distractions of the world are blocked.
Close your eyes.
And float.
Float on the sea.
You will.
Float.
Trust.
Do not fight or believe otherwise.

Tysen and I are currently staying in Bedok (eastern side of Singapore) with Mr. Tan Ngiap Liam and his wife, Siew Choo. They are a wonderful newly retired couple. It's fun to experience host homes in southeast Asia. I'm already beginning to reflect on all the amazing and different living situations we've had abroad. Whether in a flat (apartment) in Hong Kong, at a hotel in Brickfields (Little India), Kuala Lumpur, on a church floor high in the Cameron Highlands of Malaysia, in a Petaling Jaya bungalow or with a family in Singapore, God has provided for places to stay and rest. For this I'm thankful.

Mr. Liam writes beautiful poetry. I found out the day after I felt inspired to write a poem myself. Being around an imaginative person must have subconsciously encouraged my being. I'm glad to

know of his rhyming talent and passion for words. It's a new passion of mine as well. Tysen and I spent our late afternoon reading over some of his best works. I have chosen one to share. Here's some more poetry:

Gethsemane

'Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place calleth Gethsemane...'

Gethsemane
Tonight the calm and silence
Is oppressive;
The shapes of night prance about me
Mocking, derisive.

I am torn, racked with anguish;
Fears, deep nameless fears.
Every prayer is wrenched from my heart,
The enemy jeers!

I'm going to a lonely death,
It's my chosen path.
Tomorrow—friendless, forsaken,
Face my Father's wrath.

How can I face this onslaught,
This obscene horror?
Can I reject this painful choice,
Not die tomorrow?

Gethsemane,
How deceptive your serenity,
My path's inevitable, Calvary
Rests on me, and the world's destiny.
My choice is made, Gethsemane.
The curse has fallen on me,
Tomorrow I die that man may be free.

Abba Father, if only this cup,
Could pass from me, if I could give up,
Take another route, another means;
This obscene horror, mankind's sins
Crush me; Abba, I know no other choice.
This horror drains me, how can I rejoice
When You will strike me Your paschal lamb.
Alone at Calvary, I die in Your name.

Permission to share this poem was given by Mr. Tan Ngiap Liam. It was written March 8, 2001. I pray this poem helps you reflect as we prepare to enter into Holy Week.

Date: 3/31/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Bedok, Singapore—Oh how I love children. Today I was again reminded of that affection when we had two programs with a kindergarten group. Ages 2-6, these kids are all at a school within a church, and they are probably the cutest kids I have seen. (Of course, I say that every time I see a child, because kids are ridiculously adorable.)



Kristin Rice

We had two half-hour sessions, and I loved every minute. We had a theme of animals throughout the session, including Noah's Ark interactive Bible story, a variety of animal songs, and a

skit about how each person/animal has a part to play in God's creation. The kids were so loving and involved; I was so amazed at how attentive they were, especially the youngest children. While they did not catch on to all the words and actions, just seeing their smiles and hearing their laughter, especially during the puppet show, that was enough for me. Too bad my teammates won't let me take any children home. My backpack would be filled with the kids and youth and adults we have met.

In the afternoon, we stayed at the church, Bedok Lutheran Church to be exact, to do some team-building stuff (yay for actually having some time to do that!). Fortunately for us, Friday afternoons at BLC are the place to be. The entire church is involved in a major stain-glass project. Almost every member of the church is helping renovate the sanctuary with stain-glass. One wall will depict select Old Testament stories, including the Creation, the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and ending with a global picture. (I'm very excited that right now, Africa is the only major continent that is completed, and Ghana is easy to find!) The other wall will depict New Testament stories, the majority being from Jesus' life. Their goal is to finish the Old Testament by Easter, and at the rate they are working, and the prayer going into this project, I have no doubt that they will make it.

This evening, the family Corine, Cassie, and I are staying with took us out for dinner and a movie. Hui Xian and Hui Ming, our little sisters, really wanted to see Ice Age 2, which has just been released here in S'pore. So we had a "western" night: Pizza Hut pizza and good old fashioned animation. "Funny!" is what Hui Ming says the movie was...and boy, is she right! (This is a direct quote, she just told me, and Corine is a witness). It was not a bad movie, although definitely not as good as the first. But I had a lot of fun in the evening, celebrating life and living as one probably does here in S'pore. I felt like one of the family, and what a great family to be a part of. Bee Soon, our host father, is a really nice guy who is so generous and willing to help us. He has opened up his house to us for more than a week, and we are very grateful.

We have been in S'pore for a week only, and it feels as though we have been here for a month if not longer. I wish there was more time here to spend with all of the wonderful people we are meeting. However, God has placed us here for a short time, and it's for some reason. The hard thing is trying to understand that we probably will never understand that reason fully. But in the meantime, I need to learn to be in the moment, and live it for what it is. Perhaps our time here, real time vs. perceived "team" time, is a glimpse of God's timing. What are actually days to us may be weeks and months in God's eyes. Hmmm...or maybe I'm just trying to be philosophical in the midst of a coffee drought. In any case, think about it.

God Bless, Kristin

Date: 4/1/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

That's for the Birds

"Sir, would you like to stand up and be a volunteer?!" The question woke me from my half awe, half exhaustion induced daydream. We were at the Jurong Bird Park in Singapore, and I was being asked if I would let a pair of toucans fly and land on my arms and feed from my hands. I could not believe it! "Of course I will, duh, Bird Park man!" I thought. Okay, so maybe I didn't really think the "duh" part, but anyway. Before I knew it two beautiful birds flew to me and landed on my arms. At that moment a childhood dream came true. Not many people know this, but I love tropical toucans. If you cannot think of what these birds look like, think of the Fruit Loops cereal bird, Sam, he is a toucan. God was "wooing" me with His creation.



Tysen Bibb

You may be thinking, "God was what?!" Stay with me on this one though. God wants us to know Him and love Him. Why wouldn't He woo us? He is trying to get us to notice that He is there first of all, and that He loves us and wants to be in relationship with us. God is passionate about loving us,

saving us, and making sure we know how amazing He is, too. Ever since we (humans) went wrong in the Garden of Eden, God has been pursuing us and trying to win our hearts back to Him. He laid everything on the line, even becoming a man and dying for us so that we could, by grace, know Him personally. How much does God do for you that you take for granted? I know I take a lot for granted that comes from Him. Think about it, this beautiful creation we live in, sunsets, great tasting food, the intimacy of marriage, the times you wish never ended, etc.; all of these good gifts come from God and God is to be praised for them. He wants us to see Him, know Him, love Him, and glorify Him. How many times has God tried to woo you and you did not notice? The next time you think this world we live in is boring, ask God to open your eyes to all of the blessings around you. I will try to do the same.

Date: 4/2/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Today we split up to perform two skits in two services that were happening simultaneously. Tysen, Kristin, and I went to the traditional church service which had a cello in the music ensemble. It was fun and refreshing to hear familiar tunes such as "This is the Feast" and "The Old Rugged Cross." After our service was finished, we were waiting for the contemporary service to end. Two children and I played "London Bridge" and "Ring Around the Rosies" in the fellowship hall. By the end, we were all acting like monkeys. It was very fun.



Corine Bell

The rest of the day we went out with Darryl and other youth from Bedok Lutheran church because it was Darryl's birthday. First, we went to lunch with a huge group of adult members and youth. We crammed into three large tables at an outside restaurant. After we were stuffed from lunch, we were "kidnapped" by the youth. They took us to Plaza Singapura for a movie. We saw the movie "Ultraviolet," which we had never heard of and did not know what to expect. It was quite an experience. I don't think any of us will be buying the DVD.

There were many funny moments throughout the day. Chances to experience something new with someone and now only you and that person will understand that joke. They do not transfer into good stories to tell others because they lose the magic of the moment. It is a way to build a personal relationship with people. What a gift from God that we are able to have these experiences so often.

Speaking of exciting events, we actually had bagels and cream cheese!! I forgot how much I missed them until I spotted that bagel in Starbucks. Another treat! I hope everyone looks for that opportunity to share a special moment with someone.

Makin' memories,
Corine

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity"- Colossians 4:5

Date: 4/3/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Bring on the rain.

When I was young I used to think about rain and what it was in relation to God. Maybe it was God's tears, and something on this earth had made Him very sad. I used to think about rain as the earth's shower...humans immerse the body in water to get clean. Maybe it is the same way for the earth?

There are so many stories in the Bible that talk about water-God's presence in it and the power that people thought it had. Moses parting the Red Sea, Jesus turning the water into wine, the pool of Bethesda, Jesus talking about Living Water and being the Wellspring of life, and of course the flood in Genesis. Water is seen as healing, as powerful, as cleansing. It is what is used in



Cassie Woodard

baptism to represent new birth into a life of following Christ.

In Kuala Lumpur, it rained every day around four or five in the afternoon. (You'd think we'd learn to just plan on NOT being out and about at this time. But no, we successfully soaked ourselves to the bone a few times during these afternoon showers.) After the rain, the temperature cooled down considerably, and it was usually pretty comfortable. I loved those afternoon showers. Yesterday afternoon, it poured here in Singapore. Good, hard, fat rain. It was so refreshing! I went out onto the balcony and sang and spun around in circles. I stood still and let the water rush over me, feeling the coolness of each drop and the coolness of the air around me. I thought about how many times during the day I needed God to come and wash me clean. How many times I had made Him sad by something I had said or done. How many times His grace has washed over me and made me new. The song *Grace Like Rain* by Todd Agnew comes to mind . . .

Hallelujah, grace like rain, falls down on me

Hallelujah, all my stains are washed away, are washed away

I am thankful for water and its physical cleansing capabilities. I am thankful for the rain that replenishes the earth, and I am thankful for the water of baptism that brings new life to a dry and barren spirit.

May God cleanse you with His grace and mercy. May you feel renewed with the reminder that Jesus' blood has washed us clean.

In His Merciful Grip,
Cassie

Date: 4/3/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Western Food and Eastern Beliefs.

Tonight Pastor Rita took the girls out to dinner for Western food. Corine and I split a cheeseburger and fries and a breadbowl of soup. Then the three of us New Dawn femmes proceeded to finish off a Sticky Chocolate Madness Sundae and a Sizzling Banana Cobbler thingy. It was heaven, and I wanted to explode afterward. But food is not the point.

Pastor Rita was talking about spiritual forces and how Singapore's geographic location provides for a wide array of religions. A lot of the religions in this area of the world worship idols and multiple gods; the spiritual realm and spiritual forces are very real to people here in Asia. (I was told to pray over a bracelet that I got at a Buddhist temple. And why not? Not that I believe that a few stones hold any power over our God, but what could it hurt to ask God to keep me safe from whatever forces this bracelet harbored?) Back to my point.

A few years ago Pastor Rita was talking with an Indonesian member of her congregation whose sister was visiting. My understanding of the situation is that the church member (let's call her Sally) was worried about her sister (she'll be Judy). Sally was concerned because Judy wore an amulet around her neck, and Sally was concerned for Judy and for herself because of the contact they'd both had with the amulet. Sally asked Pastor Rita to see her sister. Judy came into the church office to pray with Pastor Rita and the senior pastor, and as they were praying Judy started to make noises, utter unintelligibly, and cough. At one point she actually slid right down off her chair. Pastor Rita called it a deliverance. God's presence through prayer brought out an evil presence that was dormant...

Being in the Eastern part of our world has opened my eyes to a whole separate realm of spirituality. People believe that ancestors are sacred and burn objects as an offering to them. People believe stones have power. People believe certain animals are sacred, or that certain people or plants have specific power. The God and Creator of the universe has a lot to contend with! (Not that the Western world is without its idols. Greed, materialism, pride, self-worship, ambition, money...these are idols of a different sort.)

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis describes the Christian view of this world and the war between good and evil spiritual forces: "It is a civil war, a rebellion, and...we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel. Enemy-occupied territory—that's what this world is." (The Invasion) Satan has occupied this earth, and will do anything to keep God's children from Him. The prince of this world will use whatever means necessary to keep his hold over us. To keep us from the One who



Cassie Woodard

loves us and wants us to dwell with Him. Good cannot dwell with evil; evil does not survive in the presence of the Lord. Darkness and light cannot be in communion with one another. In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul asks, "What fellowship can light have with darkness?" Evil cannot stand in the presence of God, and I am thankful for that. I am thankful that because of Jesus' death, we can call on God in prayer to cleanse us and deliver us from any evil that has a hold on us. He is our Deliverer and Protector.

May you look to God to deliver you from anything that has a hold on you, whether it is sin or Satan or something else entirely.

In His Power,
Cassie

Date: 4/4/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Twinkle twinkle little day

A random day like every day.

Tysen and I unwillingly woke from our sleep around 7:45 AM. A breakfast of Spam-like meat and hot dogs was served to us. Where's the cereal? I'm so ungrateful. At least there was coffee. Why do people eat so much meat? I am becoming vegetarian upon our return to the United States. I am thankful for the food provided; yet, I can't help but think that God didn't intend for us to eat processed meats. Who am I to judge? Still, it can't be too healthy for the body. I am trying to justify my attitude, I suppose.

Around 8:15 AM we were asked to have all our belongings packed and ready to go by 8:45 AM, plans changed. Of course! Chugging our coffee, we ran upstairs. At 8:50 we rushed out of the house. Perfect timing.

Arriving to the church shortly after 9 AM, we began saying our goodbyes, took one last photo with our wonderful host family, moved our bags out of their vehicle and onto the pavement, got a key to open a room with more of our things, moved those things into a new room, said some more goodbyes, made a few copies, moved our bags from outside into the new room and said goodbye again. Good morning.

9:15 AM, the girls arrived.

Cassie and I ventured to some hawker stands nearby the church around 9:20 AM. We were on a mission to find fruit. We knew just the place to go. With fruit in hand, we made it back just in time to start morning devotion at 9:35 AM.

The afternoon was mostly spent working on team business. A one-on-one lunch was scheduled for us to spend time with each other. Rehearsal filled the afternoon, as did team job evaluations. After ending our work day in prayer, Tysen and I quickly grabbed what we needed, helped clean the room we exploded in, and rushed away to meet a new contact by 5 PM.

We left the church around 4:15 PM, just in time to beat the rain. Thankfully a taxi pulled over right as it began to sprinkle. At 4:20 PM, we reached the MRT (subway) station and unloaded our baggage. We were boarding the train by 4:30 PM.

With one large backpack strapped to my back, a smaller day pack clinging to my front, another pack held in my hand, and a bag holding the drum and all our puppets at my feet, I stood for 16 stops (about 45 minutes). Feeling grumpy, I complained inside about my stupid backpack. Tysen had just as much, however. And we were quite a sight to see, two tall "Westerners" handling so much luggage. I had to laugh. We arrived to our destination station around 5:10 PM, not too late.

A smiley face and waving hand greeted us from a distance. We followed this stranger like we do almost every day. We see a nice looking person, and we get in their vehicle. Thankfully God always provides and keeps us safe. And Richard is no longer a stranger. He is our energetic contact-friend for the next few days.



Chase Chisholm

At 5:15 PM, we were wondering around with Richard, somewhere in Singapore with all our luggage, lost.

It started to rain at 5:20 PM.

We were running across the street around 5:25 PM.

At 5:30 PM, we found shelter under a bus stop and flagged a taxi.

Listening to Richard and our driver talk to each other in Chinese spent our ride in the taxi as we headed for our new host home. We were greeted by a cheerful woman and lively little girl on the 19th floor of a residential complex, our home for the week. We set our things down around 5:50 PM. What a relief.

A few minutes after arriving we were treated to a lovely song on the piano, played by Anna, our host family's six year-old daughter. "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star." It was heart-warming. At 6:00 PM, we were already out the door and clapping for the little pianist. What a gift from God she is.

Again, Tysen and I just followed Richard without a clue as to where we were going or why. It's always an adventure. We ended at a market of hawker stands around 6:20 PM. Go figure. It was time to eat again. Richard was so kind to treat us to dinner. We ordered noodles. Richard told us to sit down. I knew more than noodles would come. Sure enough, I was eating a chunk of hot dog with my noodles around 6:30 PM. I can't escape hot dogs, apparently. Thanks, God.

Departing from Richard for the night, Tysen and I began walking back to our host home at 6:45 PM. On our journey home we reflected on the long day had. God's timing is awesome, we both agreed; God had this entire day planned. How amazing it is to realize the gift of experiencing moments in life for the first and last time. Every minute we live will never exist again. Incredible.

We were back by 7 PM, just in time to meet David (United States citizen), our host father and sit to enjoy some fruit with he and Anna. Charita is Anna's caretaker and housekeeper. Anna's Down Syndrome calls for a little extra attention. We found out Rose, wife and mother, works as a flight attendant. She is not home often.

At about 7:30 PM, we had a quick devotion and prayer together. How refreshing to see a family take time to do this after dinner. More fellowship and sharing was had as the evening continued. When everyone turned in for the night, Tysen and I completed more work that needed to get done.

A little after midnight: time for bed.

What a wonderful day, a full day, and a random day filled with new people and fresh experiences. So much can happen in a few short hours. We are constantly exposed to new surroundings. It is tiring and exciting all the same.

I like realizing how truly perfect God's timing is in our lives. We were brought here to Singapore and placed on the 19th floor of an apartment complex, around 5:50 PM, just to hear a little girl play a song about a star on the piano. For this I am thankful. I will never forget the joy she brought to my soul that very random moment.

A random day like every day, oh twinkle twinkle little day.

Date: 4/5/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Indian Food, Chinatown, and the Western Invasion

Today was spent with two wonderful new friends, Richard and Yvonne. They are both from the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer in Singapore. We ate lunch at a hawker stall area, which is quite clean and modern; this is Singapore after all. We had Indian food, something that is a favorite for all of us, and enjoyed conversation before starting



Tysen Bibb

on a tour of touristy areas of Singapore that we had not yet seen.

The first stop was Chinatown, which reminded me a lot of a cleaner version of markets found in Hong Kong and with wider streets. The vendors yelled at random trying to get the Westerners (us) to come and buy their goods. Whether it was food, art, clothing, china, chopsticks, or knickknacks it was all, for us, "cheap, very cheap" or willing to be sold at a "special price." In the midst of shopping or being tempted to shop, we shared conversation with Richard and Yvonne about cultural truths and myths about the U.S. and Singapore.

When our time in Chinatown was done we went to Orchard Road, which could also be called "Western Town" or "Little Western Land." This was the most Western place I have ever seen overseas. It actually made me a little sad. It was like Imperialism done with expensive and trendy boutiques and stores instead of armies and war. We saw Burger King, McDonalds, Starbucks, Dairy Queen, Orange Julius, Borders, CK, Prada, Gucci, KFC, and on and on. Thankfully though, other than McDonalds, KFC, and Starbucks, most of these places stay on one road, in one area of town. After the flurry of activity on Orchard Road, we made our way back to the church. Thank you to our guides and friends Richard and Yvonne for sharing a day of fun and exploration with us.

Date: 4/6/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Many Places Singapore-Holy wah, what a day. We started off meeting at the Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, our new church of the week. We were asked to lead the staff devotions during their weekly staff meeting, and it was amazing.



Kristin Rice

There were six staff people and five New Dawn people. We led a puppet workshop and a skit workshop, but actually spent the majority of the time discussing what to do with the pressures kids in Singapore are facing, especially concerning school. Kids as young as 10 are in class the normal hours a day (about 6 here), but are carted off to tuition classes for extra work above and beyond what they are already doing. Overstressed children is a major problem here, and they don't know really know how to deal with it. Unfortunately, I do not think that we are much of a help since our school system is so different, and there really were not all the social and parental pressures concerning my education. It was good to hear about this, though, and get a better idea about the children we are working with and sharing Jesus with.

The most exciting part about today, though, was in the evening. It's my birthday tomorrow, and we planned on spending some time together as a team to celebrate. We were also going to be meeting some youth from the Jurong church (our first week's place of ministry) to party since they had heard it was my birthday. New Dawn hit Boat Quay, what we have also dubbed as "Little Western World". It was a street where most restaurants are open and right off the little harbor; Chase said it reminded him of Venice, except without the little boats. It was also where we have seen the most concentration of Euro-American types since we have left the U.S. But we had fun, and really enjoyed some rare Team time sans hosts or other people.

We met the Jurong crew at an MRT station; the whole event was really headed up by Jason and Mervyn, two crazy cool guys we met our first night in Singapore. Others were there, especially from their youth Praise Band. We went to Suntec City, a group of about five very tall buildings which house ultra-expensive shopping and businesses. There's a huge fountain in the middle of all the buildings, supposedly the tallest manmade fountain in the world. While we were there, they had a little laser show and a radio where you could request songs and dedications. Little did I know that Corine requested Sister Hazel's "Champagne High" for my birthday--my favorite Sister Hazel song! I was so excited I jumped up and down when it came over the speakers.

We went for dinner at a pasta place, because I kind of wanted Italian. Except, this place was called Pastamania. It was good, and we ended up almost being locked in the food court. I should mention

that it was right next to a bakery that specializes in durian baked goods. (You'll kindly remember that durian is the fruit of not-so-much goodness. Most of the people here like it, but usually foreigners have a hard time with it.)

Jason and Mervyn then took us up to the Esplanade, which is a theatre complex with an outer structure that looks very much like a giant durian (obsession!). We got there about 10 minutes before they lock the terrace on top, so we raced up the escalators, including a couple that weren't running anymore. It was gorgeous up there, with a great view of the downtown Singapore skyline. However, the biggest surprise was hearing that darn birthday song and seeing a very tasty-looking chocolate cake with candles coming towards me. I have no idea where it came from, and we were all together for the most part all evening. I was slightly embarrassed, but really, how often does one turn 23 in Singapore?

Now, I honestly am not that big of a fan when it comes to making a big deal about my birthday. I'm okay with the recognition, but going over the top is not exactly my cup of tea. But this was definitely a great way to celebrate--being with my New Dawn family and some new friends, especially when I can't be with my Rice family and old friends. Thank you, Jason, Mervyn, and all involved for an amazing birthday.

I should also mention that one of our friends, Jonathon, was leaving for the Singapore National Service the next day, so it was also a chance for the group to spend time with their friend before he began the two years of compulsory service. It's not quite like going for the U.S. army where you never see your friends while they are serving. After the initial training, it's more like the U.S. National Guard. Except not really. So it was a chance for us to bid him good luck and prayers for his time serving for his country. Please keep him and most of the Singapore males in your prayers--once they are 18, it is mandatory to put in two years with the National Service. Pray that they never have to go anywhere to fight, nor does anything come to this tiny island nation.

Date: 4/7/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

HAPPY BIRTHDAY KRISTIN!!!

We started the day with several hours of training with the staff of Lutheran Community Care Services. We presented the workshops on puppets and skits. There was a lot of sharing and learning on both sides. We helped them create a puppet show for a primary school about stress. It greatly saddens me that such a puppet show is needed for students and especially for primary students. Even worse, stress is such a widespread problem that everyone we have mentioned it to agrees and has his or her own stories. The children are under such pressure from parents, teachers, and the government to produce desired results that they don't get to be kids. They have to structure in "fun time" because it is not guaranteed. They have to talk to 10-year-olds about time management. I don't know if I even knew what that meant when I was 15. They have class from 7 a.m. until 5 p.m. in addition to extracurricular activities such as dance or music lessons. In addition, they have tuition, which are supplemental classes focusing on school subjects. They can sometimes have these sessions from Tuesday until Sunday. Please keep this situation in your prayers. After the training, we had lunch with the staff which was a great chance to get to know each other better. What wonderful people who have given their lives to the Lord by helping His young children.

This evening we had quite an extravaganza in Kristin's honor. Bee Soon hosted a BBQ at his home. He invited his cell group, friends, pastors, and youth leaders from Bedok. The night before Bee Soon and Ling Mei, our host parents, had gone out at 1 a.m. until 5 a.m. looking for specific prawns (shrimp). They came back with the biggest prawn in the world. There was one prawn who took up half of a plate. We took pictures. They also made a dish that is normally reserved for one day a year, Chinese New Year. We played never-ending Uno games that New Dawn members rotated in and out of. There were two chocolate cakes, which made my day. I don't know about Kristin. Kristin was also given several exotic presents from distant lands.



Corine Bell

The most fun part of the night was dominated by several young children there: Dorothy, Caleb, and Gabriel. It was Gabriel's birthday as well, and Kristin kept calling him her twin. We went crazy with them. We were chasing them around, making animal noises, and tickling. It was so fun. They stayed until the end, and it was hard to see them leave, but we were exhausted. At one point, Chase was running after two little kids, and when they stopped he said, "You guys must be getting tired, right?" Of course they said, "No." We were the ones who were feeling tired. We will never forget Kristin's birthday in Singapore and the generosity and love of the people here. I can't wait for my birthday in Hong Kong!

In Celebration,
Corine

"The whole community of Israel must celebrate it."-Exodus 12:47

Date: 4/8/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Unexpected.

Tonight, God surprised me. We had a program with a youth fellowship. The youth (and adults attending) were a little reserved at first, but a little jumping up and down and singing "We're Gonna Dance for the Lord" will get 'em riled. By the time we got to the song, "For the Moments I Feel Faint," by Relient K, there were people singing along. I love it when people sing along to songs that we don't have the words presented. It encourages me to see mouths moving along with the lyrics, and makes me feel a sort of connection with strangers that live oceans away from me!



Cassie Woodard

There are certain people I'd expect to feel a connection with. Girls, music-lovers, athletes, people who like cheese and ice cream (separately, of course; anyone who ruins ice cream in such a way would not be my friend). I certainly did not expect to have anything in common with an engineering major who graduated from Baylor University in Texas.

He approached me after the program, and told me, "I have struggled with what you were talking about earlier." That night we did the song *Beautiful* by Bethany Dillon. My favorite lines are these:

Crying myself to sleep 'cause I cannot keep their attention . . .

Sometimes I wish I was someone other than me,

Just fighting to make the mirror happy.

After the song, I talked about times in my life that I had fallen into the trap of comparing myself to others, instead of looking to Jesus and comparing my ways to His. In my mind, this song and topic are things that I had always associated with the negative self-images that most teenagers wrestle with. But God moved in a way I never expected. He spoke to a man my age who I had virtually nothing in common with, except for Jesus (and maybe the uncomfortable and sometimes painful memory of adolescence!).

God used fishermen and taxpayers to spread His Gospel. He befriended women and parted seas and fed thousands with a handful of fish and bread. I suppose I should start expecting the unexpected—our God is a God who works wonders!

I pray that you may see the awesome wonders that God is working in your life.

*Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you – **majestic** in holiness, **awesome** in glory, working **WONDERS**? – Exodus 15:11*

*How great are his signs, how **MIGHTY** his wonders! – Daniel 4:3a*

Date: 4/9/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

I wrote these thoughts on the back of a church bulletin as the moment was lived.

Waving palm branches brings joy to my soul. Memories of childhood emerge with each sway. A doorway to a series of other thoughts, emotions and feelings opens. I miss my family. What am I doing here? I want my friends. What have I done with my life? I really like coffee (I just added this one).

I am inspired by the churches here in Singapore. Members seem so passionate about worship. They grow together in faith, love and Christ. Individuals want to attend church, they choose to come. Worship leaders worship instead of putting on a show. Two girls behind me are singing in loud unison, all for the glory of God.

I want to sing as well, but I cannot. My voice is too tired from lack of sleep. I need to give it a rest. So I concentrate on the lyrics of these old, favorite hymns and familiar tunes. They speak to me every time I listen.

A streamer breezes by my face. I can feel the trailing wind as it moves about. Two young girls add to the morning's celebration at Lutheran Church of our Redeemer, Singapore. They dance to the beat of the music, bang on tambourines and twirl around with streamers and flags. It is candy to the eye and a gift to our Lord. It is beautiful. Tears of joy pool in the corners of my eyes and soon turn to sorrowful sobs.

I recognize the next song. "How Great is our God." Immediately I am transported to the funeral of my friend, Tamara. She passed only months ago. I have not given my being a chance to grieve her loss. There is no time. Now is the chance, I guess. I try holding back the gates. Only a few drops squeeze past and run down my cheek.

I choose to follow the Christ she so passionately adored. I choose to live like Christ, the way Tamara lived. I want to know the God I once knew as a child. I long for the God these people are praising. More trials will come, I know, but I am ready and armed for battle.

Today I died to myself. My spirit feels restored. It is indeed a Palm Sunday to remember.



Chase Chisholm

Date: 4/10/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Kristin

Yishun, Singapore-I love Holy Week. Not only does it mean that I am that much closer to drinking coffee, but it's all of my favorite services and traditions all rolled into one. Thanks to the extra palms from Palm Sunday, we had a definite task today, our first with Yishun Christian Centre (this church has Tamil, Mandarin, and English services, all while being a Lutheran church and an Anglican one at the same time).



Kristin Rice

We were invited to join the Woman's Fellowship, as a surprise "special guest" appearance. They were taking the palms and making them into crosses, which is something I have always wanted to learn how to do. Pastor Allen Su, our main contact for the week, thought they would enjoy a little surprise of a couple songs, in appreciation for their work and dedication. Not only did we sing a few songs, in English and Mandarin, but we helped make the crosses, ate some really good homemade carrot cake, and went to lunch with this amazing group of women.

Most of them at this Fellowship are homemakers who meet once a week for an extra ounce of support and strength in their lives. There's another Fellowship for women who have office-type jobs as well, but we were only able to spend time with this group of "mommas" (as Chase called them at

lunch). They were an inspiring collection of stories and hearts, with much to share and a willingness to listen.

We also went to a kindergarten/childcare center that was a few blocks from the church. We were scheduled to do two programs, one for the younger children (2-5 year olds), and then another one for the older children (5-8 year olds). I don't know if we were just really tired or not on our A-game, but the first group was very difficult. Perhaps it was just that we are five very large not-typical-Singaporeans (we're actually five very large not-typical-Americans). Whatever the cause, it was near impossible for us to get them to crack a smile, even with puppets. The teachers, bless their hearts, were helping the kids move to the actions of the songs; however, most of the children looked bewildered, tired, and semi-afraid. Thankfully, the second group was a much easier crowd. They were responsive from the beginning, laughing at Tysen's animal impressions and Chase's high-five chaos. They giggled at the puppets, danced with the music, and acted like children. It was wonderful.

At this point, I must mention the truly wondrous present from God that is the Milo Dino. This is a drink completely foreign to me until Singapore. Now, we know that Milo is pretty much manna from above (don't worry Mom, I've already sent home a huge bag of it). What the Dino is defies all reason. Imagine if you will, since most of the folks back home might not quite understand Milo; imagine your favorite chocolate milk drink being made with sweetened condensed milk and water and ice cubes. Then imagine dumping a lot of the extra powder on top and plopping a cherry in the middle. That is the beauty of the Milo Dino, except tons better than perhaps your favorite chocolate drink because, duh, it's Milo. Milo, being the single most enjoyable chocolate drink ever, with extra Milo-goodness on top...and it just so happens that this heavenly creation was served at the 24-hour hawker stand right across the street from the house we are staying in.

The End. Kristin

Date: 4/12/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Yishun Elder Care

I started talking with an older man who had some difficulty with English but knew enough so that we could communicate. Then he introduced me to his friend who spoke even less English. We said a few greetings and had the usual small talk. It was about 10 am and time to have morning tea, so I sat down with these men at a table with several other people. Then a worker came and asked me to move to another seat because she thought the people I was with did not speak English. Instead, she wanted me to sit with a man at the other table who spoke English. I was reluctant to move at first because I had been having a nice conversation with these men and I was afraid there would always be the tendency to neglect non-English speakers. Then, I sat with Mr. Aw. He is 57 years old, speaks English very well, and is almost completely blind. He knew where he wanted to conversation to go and quickly showed me he was more updated on the news than I was. He listened to the BBC every day and asked me very probing questions about politics and economics. I have not had a stimulating conversation in these areas for a long time, so I enjoyed it. He got to the heart of issues. No beating around the bush with Mr. Aw. He was willing to ask everyone. I met up with him in a later session that day and heard him asking Chase about his opinions on certain topics. We also did an activity with a letter board that Mr. Aw had memorized. I started timing him and he laughed. He finished the puzzle in less than two minutes! One of the assistants gave me a different kind of puzzle and I couldn't figure it out. Save puzzles, I learned more than I expected to learn from Mr. Aw and I was grateful to have the time with him.



Corine Bell

God can and will use every situation to His glory. I realized it did not really matter where I sat. Wherever it was, I would have learned and been inspired. Be open and expect God to move.

Blessed by senior saints,
Corine
"They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green." Psalm 92:14

Date: 4/13/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

You knew what was coming
You knew how it would end
You knew where those feet would go
You knew where they had been
yet You took them in your spotless hands
and washed them clean

You know every thought of mine
You know when i will turn from you
You see my faults
You know the darkest corners of my heart
yet You take it in Your hands of light
and wash me clean

i don't know why
and i don't always know how to accept it
but You fed the men who would desert You
and show Your love
and mercy to me
by washing me clean
by Your hands i am clean
by Your blood i am saved

So he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

John 13:4-5



Cassie Woodard

Date: 4/14/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

God is like really good Dim Sum

Dim Sum is a type of meal. Hong Kong is famous for it. Yum Cha is another name for this family-style dinner. Yum Cha is usually served in the morning and Dim Sum in the afternoon. I love Dim Sum and look forward to having it when we return to Hong Kong. "God is like really good Dim Sum," according to "Doctor" Nyo Yoke Lin. "The kind you get in Hong Kong."

Dim Sum is served around the world. Even in Chinatown, Chicago. But most would say Hong Kong is best for this variety meal. A table littered with dumplings and fried chicken feet, fish and gelatinous rice balls or miniature meat-stuffed bread puffs is a sure sign of some serious Dim Sum eating. Small empty wooden containers may accompany the scene. I am not sure why, but I would agree, Hong Kong does have some darn good Dim Sum.

The same can be true for God. After two hours of hardcore badminton, Bryan, Tysen, "Doctor" and I visited over a late meal. Aside from laughing at candid badminton moments, we discussed life, God and the recent happenings in our favorite Korean television sitcom. We also shared favorite God-experiences. "Doctor" told of several mission trips to Cambodia. I talked about my days as a FLBC



Chase Chisholm

camp counselor.

Nothing has since compared to the awe and wonder of my life spent at the Montana-based retreat. I tasted true fellowship and friendship at camp, if only for a moment, and I want more. "Doctor" agreed nothing has quite matched his trips to Cambodia. Both of us felt comfort in knowing someone else understood. "God is like really good Dim Sum," he said. "The kind you get in Hong Kong."

It seems the best Dim Sum is found in one place, Hong Kong. Once savored, the taster constantly longs for a similar bite elsewhere. We go through life eating good Dim Sum and living a good life, all the while wanting Hong Kong Dim Sum and hoping for another sample of what life with God will be.

Date: 4/15/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

All Over Singapore-Hooray for a day off! Since I'm not really sure what everyone else did, I can only give you brief highlights before plunging into my own story about the goodness that was today. Corine and Cassie skipped the country on a ferry down to Indonesia for the day. Chase spent a lot of time catching up on his journaling in Starbucks, Tysen...well, I'm not sure what Tysen did.



Kristin Rice

What I do know, is that in the afternoon, Chase, Tysen, and I along with three of the guys from Yishun took part in a traditional Chinese tea ceremony. It was insanely cool. Bryan (the boys' host), "The Doctor" Yoke Lin, and Daniel (youth director at Yishun) had invited the guys to this tea thing. I had heard about it, and since I had no real other pressing matters to attend to on the day off, invited myself. Do not worry, it was okay.

We got to the Tea Chapter, in the middle of Chinatown, and had the option of sitting Japanese style (on the floor) or semi-not-Japanese. What I mean to say is, we were all sitting on a platform with the table reaching barely above our navels, yet our feet were under the table. It is difficult to describe, just go with me on this.

We chose the latter of sitting styles, and ordered two types of tea, Jasmine and Oolong, the traditional Chinese tea that we get in the restaurants at home. One of the staff workers came and explained the entire process to us. Now, to the untrained eye, tea is simply boiling some water and pouring it over a bag with a Lipton tag. This, thankfully, was not the case. Tea is quite an art, as I am now aware. I will not go into the major details of this experience-that's for the novel I will write when I am done with Team. There were two different tea pots, one for each type so as not to contaminate. There was the fair pot, a separate canister without a lid that was used to cool down the tea between the fermenting pot and the fragrance cup (different from the drinking cup). Once the tea is poured in the fragrance cup, there are three distinct smells that the tea produces: a hot one, which you sniff while the tea is still in the fragrance cup. There is the warm scent, which you smell immediately following the pouring of the tea into the drinking cup. And there is the cool scent, (this is my favorite) which is produced after one rubs the cup in his or her hand for about 15 seconds or so to cool the cup down. Who knew?!

More so than the actual tea-ness of this afternoon, it was a great chance to really relax and spend time with some of my teammates and also with some really good people. I giggled when I realized that finally, a situation I had created as a child (the infamous doll tea party) had actually come true; except this one was with five men when my former self would host tea with horses, Barbies, and my blanket Bubby. Our group laughed and shared stories, and I felt very blessed and honored to be a part of this community.

Nothing could really top this experience--it was one of the best ways I have spent a day off

yet. Normally I will just go off on my own and explore by myself, which is good in some ways, but lonely in others. I liked being able to share this with some of my teammates, an experience none of us would ever dare try alone, but together created a memory and a lifetime experience.

Grace and Peace, Kristin

Date: 4/17/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

High/low to High/low

Today we left Singapore to return to Hong Kong. We all enjoyed our time in Singapore very much. We appreciate the cleanliness of the city and the concern for the citizens from each other and the government. It seems as though there is a national goal to keep Singapore safe and clean. All of the citizens are proud of those qualities and work to keep them stable. Also, as always, God has blessed us with incredible brothers and sisters throughout our stay. I was blown away by how many people showed up to see us off at the airport: Jason and Mervin from Jerong Christian Church, Daniel and Brian from Yishun Christian Church, and our friend, Michelle, who came all the way from Malaka, Malaysia. What generous and loving people. Michelle is even sending a package for us from Malaysia because that is a cheaper option for us. I really question whether I have this much love for people who I just met, to go so far out of my way and take time off of work. I think I have been inspired to answer this question differently than I would have four months ago. That is the best gift people have given me and a recurrent theme I wish to pursue. Give more, love more. More than you think you can. More than you want to.



Corine Bell

After another feeling of heartache from leaving people, we had a great airplane ride where we acted silly, of course, and had a good time to reflect about our time in Singapore. We arrived in Hong Kong quickly; I didn't nap nearly as much as I had hoped. We picked up our massive pile of luggage from baggage claim and headed for the bus stop that none of us remembered then...we saw John Peterson! We did not think that John, our contact, would be meeting us since we knew how to get to our flat and had keys. What a nice surprise! We were grateful for a familiar face. We are also excited to be back in a place that is familiar. We know this place and how things work, for the most part. We can take care of ourselves here, for the most part. Being back in Hong Kong also reminds us that our tour is almost over. Only three weeks left now!

In our team huddles, we tell each other what have been our "highs" and "lows" since the last huddle. If you know our team, you know that we enjoy talking A LOT. But our huddles have been getting longer and longer. There are so many highs and lows that accompany everything we do. It's a low that I haven't loved as much as I can, but that has turned into a high because I have a new goal for life. We were excited and sad to leave Singapore as well as returning to Hong Kong. In addition to all of the highs and lows related to starting the last leg of our overseas tour. Knowing that God cares about our every footstep and puts all of these people and experiences in our paths is always a high. Just think of what He can do with tomorrow...

In Christ,
Corine

Date: 4/19/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Glad to be back

It feels different. We just arrived back in Hong Kong. The people, the air, the lighting and coloring all feel foreign; yet, familiar. I never thought I'd be able to distinguish differences in the way people look from one Asian region to another. Not all Asians look

the same, I just haven't noticed such distinctions. We're not in Singapore or Malaysia anymore. We're in Hong Kong, and I'm glad to be back.

A delicious barbecue highlighting Malaysian and Singaporean foods ended our final evening in the city island-nation. Friends and ministry partners from several Lutheran churches in Singapore gathered. Seven chocolate chip cookies and a plate of baked beans (our addition to the meal) gave me an additional boost of energy to pack. And an exquisite, unexpected lunch was consumed with the Bishop just hours before our departure.

A surprise farewell was also in store as we rushed about Changi International Airport. Jason and Mervyn from Jurong Christian Church came to say one last goodbye. So did Michelle, our new friend from New Zealand (we met her in Malaysia at our Bungalow party). Bryan and Daniel from Yishun Christian Church, Singapore, were also present. Looking back to see their faces pressed against the glass, waving one last goodbye, is a memory I cherish. Once strangers and now friends, all brought together by God in one place.

A rush of memories surfaced as we landed and left the plane; thoughts of good times already had in Hong Kong. The name of our flight was China Airlines, flight number 666 from Singapore (SIN) to Hong Kong (HKIA). A bit ironic, isn't it? I found myself praying extra hard for safety. God continues to bless our travels and grants us journey mercies. For this, I'm thankful.

We haven't had much time to reflect on our experiences. Everything seems a blur. Were we really gone for two months, or was it a dream? I woke disoriented this morning. BEEP, BEEP, BEEP, went the alarm. I panicked and thought we were late. Late for what? I looked around the room for a moment until it registered. We were no longer at Bryan's place in Singapore, we were in our Sha Tin flat, safe and sound in Hong Kong. Hitting the snooze I felt comforted and glad to be back.



Chase Chisholm

Date: 4/20/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Kristin

Yuen Long, HK-Back in action, Jack (and Jackie). Today was our first programming back in Hong Kong. It is so crazy to think that I can say that this is not my first trip to Hong Kong; I am so used to saying that about all the places we have been and it's not true here anymore.

Allow me to take you through a rough sketch of this day, in my eyes and my shoes. We were leaving our flat at 6:30 since it takes a long time to get up to Yuen Long. I had set my alarm for 6:00, giving me enough time to wake up and be prepared. Well, 6:30 rolls around and Corine pops her head in to my room: "Kristin, it's actually 6:30 right now." Woops. Panic sets in as I scramble and stumble trying to pack my bag with the things I'll need to freshen myself up on the bus since I had no time. I was able to brush my teeth, but that was it. I hate being late to things, and I hate making others late elsewhere. P.S., I also get extremely crabby when I wake up not on my will, so my teammates loved me this morning. Thank goodness there was an hour-long bus ride before we got to Yuen Long.

We were scheduled to spend today and tomorrow with Yuen Long Lutheran Secondary School, for their English days. The very first activity was being introduced over the schools closed-circuit television broadcast. We had no idea what was going on, and when they shoved us on the set, the students split, and we were left hanging without a clue what to say. Oh, the joys of spontaneous ministry.

We spent most of the day split into two groups, visiting many classes of Form 1-3 students. Corine, Chase, and I were together and sang lots of songs and did a couple skits. Cassie and Tysen were together, and Cassie broke her first guitar string AND guitar pick. She's pretty much a professional guitarist now. We did join together for the recess time. However, recess was a time for Form 2



Kristin Rice

students to practice English conversations with us. They had prepared topics such as "Why are green plants important?" and "What would you do if you landed on the moon?" I heard a couple good answers, including one to the moon question: "I would look at the earth and see the Great Wall. I would feel a lot of pride because I am Chinese." Not something I would think about ever, and this 15-year-old was excited at the prospect of witnessing the only manmade object seen from space, built by people he identifies with.

Lunchtime was spent with Form 3 students, to give them a chance to speak English with "native" English speakers. I sat with a group of kids who were very eager to discuss music, life, and a little bit of Jesus. It was a lot of fun, and I even got the names of a couple of Chinese and Japanese musicians to look up.

In the afternoon, we were invited to spend time with Form 4 students (16-17 year olds) who had prepared some presentations for us on Lau Fau Shan. Lau Fau Shan is a fishing village in the north of Hong Kong, and the students were taking us around that village to share some of their culture. It was the day of the Tin Ho Festival, a local remembrance that most fishing villages celebrate. So there were lots of decorations and a Lion Dance (I missed it). Lau Fau Shan is famous for its seafood and "fresh" oysters; I say "fresh" because the pollution is out of control. It was so bleak and actually depressing seeing all of the discarded oyster shells and the air being so utterly smoggy. This was mostly due to the fact that a large city in mainland China was right across the harbor. Yeah, we saw China. Couldn't get there, but we saw it through the smog.

It was such a great chance to actually be with students and really be able to get closer to them. I loved hearing what they knew about the village, even though some of them had not been there before our day's visit. They were excited to share an aspect of their lives with us, and liked hearing some of our stories as well.

We were completely worn out when we got on the bus to return to our flat. It was a great feeling though, because we had been busy for the better part of 12 hours without much of a chance to breathe. We'd been thrown into this school ministry, encountering many students who were Christian, but also many who were not. We were able to share with them some of our faith and some of our questions as well. I don't know what will come of our time at Yuen Long School. All I know is that it was an absolute blast, and I can't wait to see what God has in store for us tomorrow.

Grace and Peace, Kristin

Date: 4/22/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Have to keep practicing

Unfortunately, Cassie stepped in dog waste this morning. It had quite an impact on her, but I'm not going to write about it anymore.

Tonight, we shared a Family Night Program at Grace Lutheran Church. We came to this church in February and we were glad to be back. We were able to see what has changed in people's lives in just two short months. I know our lives have changed dramatically. It was an exciting night, full of surprises. During the program that night, we made a few mistakes and it was tricky to feel the flow at times but we all still had fun in Jesus' name. We played a game, took lots of pictures, and then went out to a very nice dinner with Pastor Josephine and a couple of the girls who attended the program, Sarah and Iris.

It is funny how even when we are doing programming of some sort almost everyday, we can still get rusty. We have not had as many Family Night Programs as class visits and school assemblies. There are so many factors that go into a Family Night Program that are not always present in the



Corine Bell

school programs. It shows me that we cannot be happy working on just one facet and being proficient at that; there are always other aspects to practice. We also cannot expect to be perfect at everything we do.

I find this principle is true in my spiritual life as well. In my faith walk, I need to make time for God in many forms. Even if I pray often, if I do not meditate on the Bible, I cannot expect to feel satisfied. Likewise, it does not further the kingdom to read the Bible and neglect loving people. They all are interconnected. God has created such an amazingly complicated world! It is difficult to find the balance, yet so easy to tell when I am unbalanced. I need God's strength to follow through on my hopes and not depend on my own abilities. I pray that we are able to hear what God is telling us and how He wants us to use the time He has given to us.

God's peace,
Corine
2 Thessalonians 3:5
May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

Date: 4/24/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Hong Kong has an amazing transit system. We use it a lot. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and Singapore did as well. Most of the time I have no idea where I am being transported. I get in the bus and go. I prefer longer rides. It is a time I look forward to, a time to sit, breathe and reflect on what has been and will come. Try it sometime. Get in a bus and go.

I am reminded of the three-, maybe four-hour (already beginning to exaggerate stories) bus ride to Simpang Empat, Malaysia. Bethany Home. No air-conditioning, a broken seat, actually wondering if the back of Kristin's head was the last thing I would see. What a ride!

All the random cars we hop into. Strangers (new contacts) do not even need to offer us candy. Just a simple wave and a nice smile convince us to get in their vehicle. God provides.

I felt like first class flying economy on Singapore Airlines from Singapore to Kuala Lumpur. The seats were huge and had the bendable head-rest flaps, so cool. Each seat was also equipped with an emergency life jacket (the real kicker being personal television screens). Plus, the flight attendants were beautiful, all dressed in batik fabric uniforms. I am not sure about the food. We did not get any, our flight was too short.

I loved the MTR rides in Singapore. Not to be confused with The MRT in Hong Kong. Or is it the MRT in Singapore and the MTR in Hong Kong? Observing lethargic people going to or from work—seemingly hating life—really got me thinking about whether or not I want an office job. I think I will be a fisherman in Alaska, sounds fun.

I am still hoping we can all pile into the same taxi one more time here in Hong Kong. They allow it.

We usually took two "teksi" in Malaysia. Drivers would not let all five of us in at once. One driver let it slip. I think he wanted a big tip. Everyone has to make a living somehow, I guess. At least he did not rip us off. Be careful. Make sure the "teksi" has a meter.

Even though Singaporean taxis have the most room, not all of us rode together. Too bad. They even have a few Mercedes-Benz taxis for the person wanting to look special or something. I would rather try out one of the vans.

Having to take a combination of travel options is always fun. Transferring rail lines is fun too, especially when running late or having to switch from the KCR to MTR at Tsim Sha Tsui Station in



Chase Chisholm

Hong Kong. We honestly have to walk/run a mile underground through a series of tunnels, dodging hoards of humans (including elderly ladies eating cake) and forging across people-moving sidewalks as well as escalators. Did you know Hong Kong has the largest escalator in the world? I did not.

The long bus rides in Hong Kong are still my favorite. They are so relaxing. In the morning they give us more time to prepare for the day's events, or more time to sleep. At night they give us a chance to talk about the day, time to write and individually reflect—or—more time to sleep.

It is not unusual for us to travel an hour (one way) every time we have an event. This equals—on average—about two hours of travel time each day, including other various trips (coffee) and travel from one country to the next. Four months overseas. We have spent approximately 240 hours on buses, trains, airplanes, taxis, boats and other random modes of transportation. Ten full days is unbelievable!

I do not think we quite matched as many hours of planned ministry. That is just fine. I would not change our overseas experience for anything. Well, maybe a tuna melt sandwich from New Town Plaza, Sha Tin. I love them. Beat \$16 HKD (about \$2 USD).

Seriously, God has blessed our time in Southeast Asia abundantly. The people we have met, the sights we have seen—all incredible, life-changing. I will miss our lives overseas. Praise God for good times ahead and great times had via the marvel of modern transportation. I pray for continued safety as we and all the other international teams prepare for our return flight.

This entry is dedicated to my wonderful friend Ingrid. She loves public transportation. Get in the bus and go. You never know where you will end.

Date: 4/28/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

I am a fan of Fanling Lutheran Secondary School, Hong Kong. We enjoyed four full days with students and staff. It was cultural exchange week. New Dawn was what they got. More than just a swapping of cultural experiences occurred. God was at work in the hearts of many, including my own. The high school is Lutheran, yes. The student majority is not. Most have no religion. All seemed curious.

Behind teaching facts about the United States, besides helping students practice English and other than learning more about Hong Kong, we shared our faith and beliefs within everything and all activities. Even our presence was a testament of God. Many found "giving" a year of life, making no money and traveling around the world—just to spend time with people and talk about this Jesus guy—hard to believe. I guess it is a little strange. Yet, others were inspired and wanted to know more.

"Hong Kong people are too focused on money," a wild-hearted Karen shared. Her frizzy hair matched her personality. We were meeting to evaluate the week's events. We had nothing but good things to share about Karen's organization. As our main school-staff contact, Karen worked extra hard to schedule programs around student exams, convince teachers to allow their pupils to miss class and made sure we were well cared for. She went on to say our volunteering is something almost unheard of in Hong Kong. I had never thought about this.

We had several opportunities to share our mission, praise and worship with students during televised lunch programs, while visiting classrooms, throughout the hallways and within five small cell groups. Each of us led one. This was my favorite event. A chance to work individually is unusual. We are always together as a team. It was a nice change for me and a chance to spend more one-on-one time with youth.

Joey. I could not help but focus on him during group discussion. My eyes would gravitate toward his, hoping he would say anything, knowing he would say something. I thought I would have the most difficulty connecting with Joey. I do not know why. I just assumed. I was wrong. After the first day



Chase Chisholm

he thanked me for what I taught. It was refreshing to know someone appreciated my being there. I never look for compliments; however, it was nice to hear it—especially from someone I least expected.

At the beginning of the week students were a bit shy, our lunch "concerts" were empty and small group conversation was quiet. By the end of the week it was hard to say goodbye, lunch programs were packed and group time lasted long after the time allotted. God is amazing. It was incredible to see how much God was at work in this school, within the students. I asked Joey to pray our third day together. "I do not know how to pray," he said. I encouraged him to try, "praying is talking to God." I will never forget his simple, short prayer. Neither will God.

Ida. I enjoyed spending time with Ida, talking with her individually whenever I got the chance. Ida shared her desire to be a journalist. We related well. "It is my ambition," she commented during our discussion on the topic of ambition, "that everyone would know the love of Jesus." This statement was nestled between other student's goals to make money, ironic. I pray Ida can stay strong to share the love she wants others to feel. Ida inspired me.

Olivia. "I do not know how to get closer with my brothers." She asked for help during our cell group conversation on relationships. Ida immediately offered a few suggestions. Others piped in too. It was beautiful to see them helping each other, working together. Ida suggested she give them a gift. If Olivia gave her younger brothers a gift like she and Kathy gave me, I am sure their hearts would change.

The detail and time Olivia and Kathy put into making a birthday card for me meant a lot. Kathy was in another group; yet, she felt connected to me enough to spend hours making a gift. Would I do this for someone I just met? I do not know. I hope I would. This is what Kathy wrote:

A direct quote.

Happy Birthday! I wish that your dreams come true and you'll HAPPY forever. God must help you to overcome the difficulties! **(Although I have no religion) whenever I meet a new friend, I will treat that relationship as a fate and a present from god. Yes, I'll treat our relationship as a god's gift, too!** No matter we may lost contact in the future, I enjoy these days and I believe so does you! I know you are very busy, but remember take a rest when you feel under pressure!

Nothing more needs to be said. God is incredible.

Two hours of photos and a four hour farewell party concluded our time at Fanling Lutheran Secondary School. It seemed we had a few fans as well. It was an equal exchange, this cultural exchange week. God spoke to me through their words. I pray God talked to them through mine as well. My heart continues to change because of experiences like this.

Date: 4/29/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

Today I was reminded how much of a burden we can be to our contacts and event organizers. It is true. We add to their already filled schedules of things to do. We are an extra, sometimes unexpected expense at meal times. We arrive late for programs. We get lost. We talk fast. We look tired. Yet, God continues to use our dragging feet, strained voices and various other shortcomings. I am humbled. I am amazed. I am thankful.

Hong Kong is very polluted. We only add to the mess with our piles of garbage and constant use of public transportation. Sometimes the beautiful mountains surrounding this high-rise forest of a city are barely noticed. Thick foggy smog slithers its way from factories in China, combines with eight million other contributors, and lingers, slowly constricting its prey. Some days it can be a challenge to see God's beauty in everything or anything.



Chase Chisholm

Tiredness, frustration, sin—anything separating us from God—is like soul pollution. It weighs us down and makes it more difficult to see clearly. If the deafening noise from passing buses was not enough, internal contamination bogged our attitudes this afternoon, as we tried navigating the way to meet Belinda. Somehow we managed to get off the bus five stops too soon. Belinda was our evening contact. She sounded stressed on the phone, trying to decipher our whereabouts.

Just as I was about to collapse from exhaust fumes, a breath of fresh air came in the form of Belinda. She was indeed a bit frazzled, and attempting introductions over the noise pollution did not help. Neither did just missing the next bus toward the church. A taxi came to our rescue, getting honks as it blocked the bus path. More noise, more pollution and more fun. The night was off to a good start.

Smiles and a new beginning greeted us upon our late arrival to the third floor worship space. Aberdeen Lutheran Church is located on Hong Kong Island, in an area famous for its floating seafood restaurants. A rushed setup was the unplanned strategy, as several fellowship attendees were already present to watch our every move. I needed a quiet moment, free from all distraction-pollution to focus. I went in search of the toilet, a place I often converse with God.

Even my quick washroom-prayer was disrupted by the rattling walls and vibrating floor. The loudness of construction came from beneath. Another example of how rapidly Hong Kong changes. The mirror also provided something else to set my eyes on. Me. I tried not to peek, but the temptation to make sure my hair looked alright seemed too much to handle. I gave in, again, and shifted my focus.

I smiled to the group waiting, just like I practiced in my reflection. Worship was about to begin. Noises and temptations from the outside world began to fade as my energy increased with every completed handshake. We started. The young adult cell group consisted of around 15 energetic and smiley faces, ages 18-25. Some just finished secondary school, most in university, others looking for jobs with the majority interested in short-term mission work. The room filled with music, laughter and praise.

For the first time I felt like I worshiped with my team. I listened to the story we were trying to convey. It was a specially tailored, mission-oriented message of Jesus Christ, struggle, encouragement and love. We fit their requests as best we could. I blocked out whatever waste hindered my past experiences, even the constant and present sound of a power drill. I heard the words of my teammates and the lyrics we sang. I belted them with all my heart and half a voice, with a roomful of passionate and beautiful people. It was incredible.

God continued to work throughout the rest of our time with this group. It seems all of our programs become four hour events. Tonight was no different. We moved conversation and sharing to the dinner table, a large hot pot restaurant near the church. Hot pot is a meal promoting fellowship among large groups. Take a thin slice of meat, throw it in the boiling pot, talk about God with a new friend, check the meat, talk some more and finally eat. It was quite delicious.

It was like Samuel and I had always known each other. I sat to his left. Food is a big distraction in my life, pollution. I tend to focus entirely too much on what I am eating and not who I am eating with. Talking with Samuel was different. We related. We shared the same passions. We dreamed about places we would like to travel. We connected. I did not realize how little I ate until on the bus heading home.

A quick goodbye had us running to catch the bus. Exchanging waves was all time allowed. The night ended abruptly. I felt ripped from my family. The bus peeled away. My attitude sank as I did in the seat. Fake lights filled the night sky. Bright reds, greens and blues whizzed by. I remained quiet, frustrated. Pollution is inescapable.

Look for the beauty in everything. Cherish times of fellowship surrounded by loved ones, new friends, old and young. For these are the glimpses God offers as reminders of the life we were meant to live, the life promised to us. Fight distraction and temptation; do not fill this life with things that add to our already over-polluted world. Be a burden to someone else. Travel around the world to spend a few short hours and share the Gospel with them. Or stay at home and do the same.

I pray God takes us burdens and makes us blessings.

Date: 5/2/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

As if there weren't enough reasons to celebrate...

It's my birthday! I bet not many people can say they celebrated their birthday in Hong Kong (besides the people who live there). We are staying at High Rock Christian Camp for several days to help out with some programs. Today, we got to help with a boys' secondary school English day camp. The five of us were split into groups and led the activities for the day. The whole day was incredibly organized and ran smoothly. We made a net out of string to hold each one of the group members and throw him or her in the air. We led a blind-folded group around the camp and made outfits out of newspaper. We had lots of fun. The day was set up so that the boys could practice their English with us, but I felt like they were a little reticent to talk with me. First, I think talking with a native English speaker is intimidating for them, which I would feel if I were to speak in another language. Second, it seems as though most males with whom we have interacted with have been less likely to open up to a female, especially an older female. So I had several things against me to really connect with these boys. It was a challenging day but we had a great time and everyone started to participate in discussions by the end.

In the evening we met with our favorite contact (and only) and his family in Hong Kong, the Petersons. We went to an Italian restaurant. We had not had Italian food since being overseas, so we were all very excited. The food was amazing! What caused me worry for the night was that at the beginning of the meal they brought me out a piece of chocolate cake with a candle in it and sung "Happy Birthday" in Cantonese but then....they took it away! I was really concerned about the destination of my cake until they told me that it would be brought back later, after dinner. It was funny and we all enjoyed a great night of fellowship and most likely our last meal together. Then we got to run to the station in the pouring rain!! It was nice and warm. What a wonderful birthday. I will remember it for a long time and thank God for His continuous blessings.

With gratefulness,
Corine



Corine Bell

Date: 5/7/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Our last night

This time tomorrow we will be in different places enjoying our week of vacation before heading back to the United States. Kristin is leaving tomorrow for Minnesota and I am going to Singapore. So we decided to go to the airport together at 4:30 am. That sounds like fun, right? Cassie and Tysen are staying in Hong Kong for the week, although with different schedules. Chase is leaving Tuesday for Vietnam. I'm only a little jealous. We have been overseas for about four months now. We have gotten to know each other better than I thought possible. We have met thousands of people and hopefully shared the love of Christ with them all. We have received love in abundance from countless sources. We have been showered in grace and God's protection. No words will be able to describe this experience or how we all have changed. We have new goals for ourselves to make us more Christ-like. I've taken a lot of hints from the loving people I've met about how to show that Jesus is my life and to have a positive influence on others. I've also learned how to imitate a minor bird call and make a great monkey face--invaluable skills. I hope you all look through the pictures and see the joy in the eyes of our friends and us. I pray that even if you don't engage in ministry in this way, that you make your whole person a ministry to others. You never know who will be passing through your life. But God does and He did it on purpose. I believe one of the reasons we're here is to make an impact on



Corine Bell

others. Will I make an impact for His glory?
Praising with every breath,
Corine

Date: 5/16/2006
Submitted by: Chase Chisholm
Journal Entry:

I finally get it



Chase Chisholm

I finally get it. I have so little with me on the road, to live with; still, it's too much. I can do without most. What's important?

Living with teammates heightens my need for pride and brings out horrible sides of my personality. **I get it.** All my shortcomings are seen. I don't have much left to hide. I see this as positive, a way to change.

I'm thankful to be a Christian after witnessing other worldly religions. They seem pointless, rule-filled and followers appear trapped and unhappy. My life is blessed, and free. For this I'm thankful. **I finally get it.**

I can know who Jesus is by reading the Bible. Whether divinely inspired or not, its words remain an accurate account of history. It's time to stop battling. **Get it.**

I'm no good at music. It's okay. Not okay is the fact that some days I convince myself to stop learning. I feel I haven't learned much. **But I finally get it.** I came to learn, selfishly. God has used me otherwise and taught me many lessons.

This is a year for reflection, a year to learn and a year to give unselfishly. Two have occurred, the last hasn't yet. I can't let go of my own. **Finally, I get it.** Knowing, hoping and realizing I will be a better person because of this year is humbling. I pray God gives me a servant heart in the months to come.

What an incredible journey!

Date: 5/28/2006
Submitted by: Chase Chisholm
Journal Entry:

Shirley



Chase Chisholm

Sitting halfway back on the left side of the sanctuary sat Shirley, smiling. Other faces seemed blurred. Hers did not. Maybe it was her smile or perhaps I met her before. It was entirely possible. We were visiting First Lutheran Church in Ewen, Michigan for the second time.

It is people like Shirley that keep me going. It turns out I had met the 70 year-old young-at-heart.

Who could forget a face so bright, smiley and loving?

"Have you ever thought about going into ministry?" she greeted me.

I answered sheepishly, walking closer to where she stood. Shirley was at the edge of a counter, serving coffee. The tiny basement room was filled with life. It was time for morning fellowship. I realized this was the same place I conversed with Shirley the last time we met.

"You should go into ministry," she continued as I grabbed a cup. "The Holy Spirit was there every time you talked."

I did not know what to say. I never do. But I listened to her words. Moments spent with people like Shirley are gifts from God. Listen and learn.

It was time to go. I chugged my coffee and gave Shirley a hug.

"I like hugs," she said as tears filled her eyes.

Wanting to cry myself, I replied, "Me too." Hugs are great.

In the van and on the way to the next church I thought a lot about Shirley and what she said. Our time together was not long, but enough, cut short with the needing to be at another service.

First Lutheran is one of two churches Pastor John preaches at every Sunday morning. This seems to be a regular occurrence in rural settings—one pastor spread thin over two or three parishes. We sped our way to a second church, just in time to lead the service.

I will not forget Shirley. She warmed my heart and encouraged my being. She and her husband will celebrate 50 years together on the second of June. Please pray for Shirley and her family.

Date: 5/30/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Tonight we had our first full program here in the U.S. We also were treated to a potluck before and a bonfire with s'mores and hot dogs after the program. It was such a treat to visit with people we had met in the fall, and a privilege to participate in two great American traditions—potlucks and bonfires!

Before the program I got to play with Aubra, a 4-year-old girl whose creativity makes Dali look ordinary. Aubra taught me the game of 'find the gorilla,' where we walk around the outside of the church and find gorillas. Did you know that the upper peninsula of Michigan was populated with gorillas? I sure didn't. The baby gorillas at this church are sleeping most of the time, the mommy gorillas are nice, and the daddy gorillas are mostly mean. Luckily, we only saw one daddy gorilla, and we ran from him. One time I thought I spotted a baby gorilla, but Aubra said, "No, that's just my pet tiger!" Silly me. Chase and I were both on this gorilla hunt, and Tysen joined us as we rounded the corner to the back of the church, where there was a field of tall grass and a fallen tree. Across the field was an abandoned building, and Chase and I were sure that we saw a mean daddy gorilla in there. We both thought that Tysen had better go check to see what it was. Tysen gave us a look, and then started to trudge through the tall, tick-infested grass to check on the gorillas. Chase and I continued on with Aubra, trying to contain laughter. It was so much fun to just *play*! And of course, to pick on each other by making outrageous suggestions to Aubra. Luckily she didn't think it was necessary for me to climb the tree (in my skirt) when Chase suggested that I check up in the top limbs for gorillas.

What a wonderful gift God has given us in imagination! We can escape to worlds where we create our own fantasies and creatures and stories. God bless children, with their endless ideas and innocent honesty. May God bless you with a healthy dose of fantasy today—whether it is a fantasy you have created or a glimpse of the fantastic eternity that He has promised us.



Cassie Woodard

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has set eternity in our hearts.

- Ecclesiastes 3:11

Date: 6/1/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

"I am looking forward to dying," he said without hesitation. How does one reply to such an honest, harsh statement? Good question. I do not know. I hope God spoke through me tonight, God spoke through him.

I am staying in a familiar place—a home—with a familiar face. I have stayed here before and it is good to be back. Only this time a casual evening chat took an unexpected turn. I found myself alone, in the room with a stranger. Ben.



Chase Chisholm

The 20 year-old has been living here almost a month, under the care of my grandfatherly host. Last night he spoke only a word, never making eye contact and barely acknowledging my presence. Tonight was different. I listened.

My host left the room for a moment, in search of something to show me. It was late. We were visiting in the comfort of a simple living room, a place we end each night. The space is dim, lit by a lamp, and the centerpiece—a fireplace. I sat in a low loveseat. Ben lay on the couch. I sensed something was wrong long before he said a word. I could tell by his actions.

He twitched, looked ashamed and never really smiled. When he spoke, his eyes would get real big. They scared me. So did his answer to my question. Ben is deeply depressed, miserable. "What are you looking forward to?" I asked, trying to keep positive.

Silence and a brief, chilling grin followed, "I am looking forward to dying." Emptiness consumed the air.

I learned of his troubled life, of his drug and alcohol abuse and his fascination with religion, especially the topic of death. Ben commented on a book he was reading about Hell. He fears dying.

Our conversation ended as our host reentered the room. My mind remained on Ben, now playing a keyboard off to the side—loud—as if crying for attention, for someone to hear and listen.

I thought back to a conversation I had earlier in the day, one I had with my host. It was about Ben. "He is somewhat disabled," my host said as we shared a meal together. "He doesn't really want me to talk about it." All right, no more questions. Curiosity remained. Who is this guy and what is his story? Ben was not around last time. Why has God placed me here again? I had to talk to Ben.

Ben asked if I could drive. I said "yes" and soon found myself transporting him to Seven-Eleven for a midnight "slurppy." It was an opportunity for us to be alone. Ben got his treat and I got more stories.

"My mother lives there," he shared, pointing to a house. I missed our turn, perhaps for a reason. We kept driving. Memories surfaced.

Ben was born addicted, hooked on all life seemed to offer. He told of his parents' drug use. An innocent child was sitting next to me. "It's not fair," he continued. "Why couldn't I have been aborted?"

It is not fair.

Ben cannot work. He is mentally unable. A brain injury (caused by his father) combined with years of substance abuse leaves him with nothing to do but sit around and contemplate suicide. 20 years

old. He hardly sleeps; nightmares do not go away overnight. Ben needs help.

"Do you think I will go to Hell if I kill myself?" Ben asked, now sitting in the comfort of our host's den. A basketball game flickered on the television. A cat lounged on the coffee table in front of us, bathing in our touch. I sat next to Ben on the couch.

I believe God will save every person.

Ben did not agree. He fought my universal idea and was theologically correct. I could not disagree with his disagreement; yet, I stood firm on my belief and challenged him to wonder, why not? We discussed. Attempting to persuade his suicidal thoughts, I offered little comfort.

Life is a gift from God. Hell is anything preventing us from living it, including death.

Life is a gift, so is forgiveness. Ben does not seem to get it. He is blinded by what he has done. He accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, is truly religious and knows much more about the Bible than me—big surprise. Yet, his negative attitude, the demons consuming his flesh tell him otherwise. Ben feels grace is not enough. Sometimes I feel the same.

We held hands and prayed together, ending the night.

God brought our lives together for a reason tonight, if not for Ben—for me. God spoke many truths I needed to hear through him. I hope he experienced God through me as well. It is all I can do.

Pray for Ben and the people in his life.

Date: 6/3/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

When can I stop?

Nursing home programs have become one of my favorites. I can't believe how much life experience, knowledge, and fun are within those buildings. We visited the Rutherford Home in Fremont, Ohio and found amazing souls waiting to share their lives. The facility was for high functioning elderly who did not need medical assistance. When we began to play music, a woman in the front row, Marge, covered her ears with her hands and stuck out her elbows. We laughed. By the end of the session, she had put her hands down and was enjoying the music. After our program, I sat with Marge for a while. She was slightly disoriented and couldn't remember if she had dinner that evening. Marge has dementia. We talked about Ohio and children, but she became concerned about dinner again and starting walking. Several other residents stopped and talked with her and patted her hand. One man in a wheelchair asked how she was doing and gave me a wink, knowing what was going on. He comforted her and left. The team had to leave, and I said 'goodbye' to Marge knowing she was in good hands. Other teammates met people who had spouses across the river at a different residence because they required more medical attention. They would help each other to visit their spouses as some people could drive and others could not. I left with such an amazing feeling of community. People were showing the love of Christ to each other in a way I had never seen. They were taking care of each other and not bringing up the negative things that could pull others down. They adjusted themselves to what the other person needed. That's what our team tried to do overseas in our ministry with so many different people and cultures. Here, the same ministry was happening in another form. It shows me once again that we are constantly in ministry. As long as we are alive, God can use us if we let Him. We won't even have a break in our nursing homes!! Praise God!

In awe of Him,
Corine



Corine Bell

Date: 6/5/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Fremont, Ohio—So here we are, our first week of VBS in lovely Fremont. It is Day Three, and wow. I continue to be bowled over with the incredible amounts of energy children have. I have been helping out with the 4-5 year olds. They are just go-go-go all the time. Plus, they're just plain adorable.

I admit, though, I may have enjoyed commandeering the three-year olds as well. Gavin, Grant, and Christa somehow became integrated in our class during Day Two. They joined us for snacks and games. I found myself being the entertainment for Gavin and Grant, best friends at the age of 2 and 3, respectively. While the rest of my class "tried" to pay attention to the games my teammates were teaching, I ran around with Gavin and Grant in search of lions, hippos, and monkey. When we caught them, we put them under the barn next to the church. If the lion saw us, we growled and ran around like lions. You don't actually have to see the monkey to know it's there. The same with God, a lesson that I continue to learn even after learning abstract thinking.

Oh my word, they are the cutest children. All that mattered to them was running and feeling loved. After game time was video time, and I would have two or three children scrambling for my lap. How awesome it is to have the faith of a child.

The basic need for any child, beyond food, water and shelter, is love. They understand love not in that complicated big kid way that includes a lot of gray. Love for a child is someone who will play with you. Love is knowing that you can run to Mom and Dad's arms, or the equivalent of a big person who you just played with. And as an adult, the basics of love turn into wanting someone to run to you, and knowing you can do the same.

This is what love should be for us as well, especially in terms of our relationship with God. All He wants is for us to run to His arms, to know that He likes to play with us as well. I know in my own life, I often have a one-sided relationship with God—asking Him for things, wanting **my** way to be His way. For this relationship to truly work, I have to remember that God also likes to be heard, that He wants **His** to be my way. As much as I can turn to Him, I want God to turn to me as well.



Kristin Rice

Date: 6/8/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Ohh....VBS

It's that time of year again. I never thought I would be doing VBS again on a Youth Encounter team, but here I am. Where we are right now is a place called Fremont, Ohio. The people here are awesome. Chase and I are staying in a host home with an amazing boy named Josh. The setting is in the country and the church is small. This is a portrait of the average VBS for a team; great kids, excited congregation, and lots of unknowns.

For me personally, this week has been quite trying at times. I love kids and VBS is a fun experience, but this far into the year...I am tired. I feel bad because at times my temper is ready to break, but by God's grace I do not lose it. I have to remind myself what it was like being a kid; that they just do not always understand how adults think. Add to this the fact that I am an introvert at heart and well, sometimes I just need a break.

Thank God for our host home. Chase and I are staying with Gerald, Becky, and their son Josh. Coming home to them at the end of the day is great. They are such a warm, loving, and laid back family. Chase and I especially like playing with our six-year-old host brother Josh. For his age, Josh is quite intelligent and fun to hang out with. Already a favorite past-time for us is playing dinosaurs, which involves making lots of fun sound effects as the small plastic dinosaurs we hold trudge across the jungle of carpet stalking prey.

All in all it's good to be back "in the saddle" doing VBS once again. When times are trying, God sees my team and me through it and we try to have fun. When times are already good, we try to remember to give thanks for them and serve and love the best we can. May God give us all our daily strength, faith, and love to live in His will.



Tysen Bibb

Date: 6/10/2006

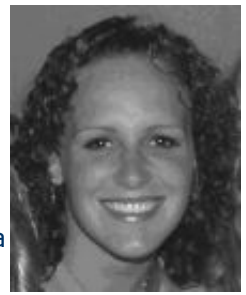
Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Cake Walks and Consistency

We got to be a part of an end-of-the-year school picnic today. We witnessed a pie-eating contest, which I have never experienced before. A young teenage boy won the contest, as you could probably safely assume. We also saw a few cake walks. What a great American tradition. Walk around in a circle until someone stops the music and then if you're on the lucky number, you get to take home Grandma's best cake. It's like roulette for people with a sweet tooth. Sort of. I happen to have a sweet tooth, so I am thrilled whenever I see the wonderful pastime of The Cake Walking take place.

After the pie-eating contest and The Cake Walk, and the grilling and the bean bag toss, we did our program. It was different than the programs we did overseas. I don't recall any bean bag tosses or cake walks in Asia. It was refreshing to come to a place that I had never been to before and feel like I was at home. Some things don't change. I praise God for His consistency. Even in small things like school picnics and cake walks. I hope that the American tradition of school picnics and carnival-type games continues so that someday, my children can experience the joy that is cake walking. Maybe there will be a Youth Encounter team at their picnic—who knows?!



Cassie Woodard

Date: 6/13/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

"One day at a time" was our motto for the week. Mine, ours and that of Pastor Kathy and Vicar Elaina at Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd, North Aurora, Illinois. We arrived Saturday evening. I felt unprepared, nervous and disappointed in myself and our team. Thankfully God uses us where we are, prepared or not. One day at a time.

It would be our second week helping lead Vacation Bible School (VBS), and the first to experience the "Fiesta" curriculum created by Group Publishing. It would be the first time Good Shepherd hosted a Youth Encounter team during VBS, and the first to support such a large program. Four churches from the community were invited to participate. An estimated 160 kids and 40 volunteers would come Monday morning. Expectations were high for all involved.

It was clear from the very beginning; everyone was being stretched to ensure a successful week. Pastor Kathy and Vicar Elaina shared a meal with us and our hosts the night we arrived. Chatting about the past six months spent the time. We stopped by Good Shepherd in the fall and looked forward to this reunion. We were honored to hear how hard they tried to book us for the week. Having learned this I felt more ashamed. At least we had one day to get ready.

Following Sunday morning's worship services we planned on learning most of the music, words and actions for the week. Then we found out we were not expected to know everything. We were asked to lead songs along with a DVD provided by Group Publishing. The DVD already had everything needed. God provides relief. I could breathe again.

The week's schedule also allowed time to focus on learning songs and parts for the three more fiestas to come. What a blessing. Instead of learning all of it in one afternoon, we took it one day at a time—planning and rehearsing for the next day's theme. We were even able to add a few live songs in place of the DVD, somewhat exceeding our expectation. It was a blast!

I learned how to take life "one day at a time" in North Aurora. I tend to look at the big picture and constantly think ahead. This is important and necessary, but making the most of every moment, every day is even more so. Life seems too much to handle sometimes, God calls us to do a lot. But if tasks God sets before us are taken one step at a time, even a small church like Good Shepherd can do anything.

I am inspired by what the people of Good Shepherd, Pastor Kathy and Vicar Elaina have done in the Chicagoland area. Here was this church, no bigger than someone's home, putting on such a large



Chase Chisholm

event. Four huge circus tents were used to accommodate the occasion, a bold visual example of a congregation reaching out to the community. Here is this church, talking of closing its doors just five years ago, now having 85 percent member involvement and partnering with area organizations like the local homeless shelter. What is their secret? Take life "one day at a time" I guess.

Date: 6/15/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

North Aurora, IL

VIVA!

I'm sure all of you out there who have led or participated in a "Fiesta" VBS know what I'm talking about. When we say a daily Bible Point such as "Jesus is our Savior" or "Jesus is our leader," the kids shout "VIVA!"

So it has been another amazing day at this incredibly organized, Spirit-filled Vacation Bible School. I am working with the preschool this week, which besides my niece, I have not had too much experience with this age. I am having such a great time. They amaze me everyday with how much they remember. They can do the actions to the songs and they know that "Jesus died on the cross," which turns into the answer for every question sometimes. They are all about playing and sharing it all with you. I was floating around to a couple classrooms, and when I came into the story-telling room and sat down, they all came up to me and showed me what they had made. "Look at this! I made a pancake with Play-doh." "Can you make me a ball?"

I love how children want to share everything with people, except toys. When they create something or when they dance and sing, they want others to be involved. They take joy in it and they want others to have that joy. I wish we were all excited to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the same way. Why do I dread it so much when I talk with my friends? Why do I get nervous and back away from certain topics because I know where they will lead? Are those reasons really so powerful that they compel me to act against the God-given truth? I guess they are, because that's what I do. However, that doesn't mean they should be able to take that powerful position. Why do children not have the same inhibitions or fears? They are so free and when they have something to share, they share it. Maybe that's why God wants us to have faith like a child.

Trying to become more child-like,
Corine



Corine Bell

Date: 6/17/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Boswell, Pennsylvania—What a crazy weekend. Yesterday we had our Final Fiesta Finale in North Aurora and now we're in Pennsylvania.

I had such an amazing time in Illinois. I was inspired by the pastor and the intern very much, and I cannot wait until I am able to return to this church. This week, I really felt like part of the family, something I have missed about being in a church since we're never anywhere too long. I really felt as though I found a mentor in Pastor Kathy and Vicar Elaina, two incredible women who are associated with the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago (LSTC). I am currently in the process of relaxing about the "non-plan" of post-August, but am searching out the possibility of going to LSTC in the future. Just being around Kathy and Elaina really touched me and I felt I could trust them, that I had known them for years. It reminded me how much I miss having that mentor or person to challenge me and understand me. After a hard good-bye to the insanely awesome North Aurora people, we hopped in the van for a nice 10-hour drive to Akron, Ohio where we would be crashing on a church floor for the evening. We did not get to the church until nearly 11:30 that night, and were very grateful for the people who waited for us (although they knew we'd be getting in late).

Today we had another big drive to Boswell, Pennsylvania. Our contact, Lucy, was on the New Dawn team that also went to Hong Kong and Malaysia (they missed out on Singapore because of SARS, a



Kristin Rice

huge bummer). It was awesome hearing her stories and seeing her pictures. We recognized so many people! Lucy has just started her internship year, and is a student of the Lutheran Seminary at Gettysburg, also a place I have thought about looking at for seminary. Again, I was incredibly moved by Lucy and her stories and presence, as well as advice about the future.

I am seeing growth within myself as I reflect on these three women. During college, I had an unofficial mentor in one of the campus pastors, and valued her ideas and opinions especially concerning future goals. I looked to her for guidance and advice often. Since graduating over a year ago, I realize that I have not had the opportunity to find a new mentor and that I miss this former pastor's role in my life. Yet here I am, making decisions (rather, holding out on decisions) and preparing for an unknown future, virtually all on my own without the secure or safe advice from someone who's been. If you asked me a year ago if I thought I would be able to handle making life altering decisions by myself, I would have laughed at your face and said, ha ha ha. Me? I think not. Yet here I am. Behold, world, Kristin Rice is on the prowl (well, by on the prowl I mean I am content with waiting for God's advice rather than that of an external voice).

God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each of us. Acts 17:27

Kristin

Date: 6/20/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Kindred Spirit

"You like World War II stuff?!" Zach asked with excitement in his voice. I laughed and said, "Yes I do" as I set my pack on my bed. I had just arrived at the Garmoe house in Bowie, Maryland. My host parents Bill and Cindy had three boys: Ben, Zach, and Sam. Honestly, it had been a long time since I felt this at home with a host. I found myself among a family that just felt like home.

Cindy reminded me a lot of my own mother and I saw a lot of myself and my brother in the boys. Ben and Zach are musicians and Sam plays baseball. As the week went on I had many good talks well into the morning with Ben. He will be a senior in high school this year and is one of the most spiritually mature young men I have met. He is intelligent and quite the guitar player, and by the end of the week I felt like I had a new brother.

Zach and I share a love of World War II history and strategy games. It was so much fun talking with him about period aircraft, world leaders, and our battle plans while playing Star Wars Risk. He reminded me a lot of myself at his age. Sam is an active athlete and full of energy. I enjoyed watching him roughhouse with Zach and the family dogs. It is hard to explain, but I just connected with the Garmoe family in a way I did not expect. They are one of those families that you leave team remembering with a smile. God never ceases to amaze me with His provision. He didn't just give me a place to stay; He gave me a family to belong to. Thank you God for the Garmoe family.



Tysen Bibb

Date: 6/23/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Today's theme for VBS was "Jesus is our helper!" I had the privilege to be with the preschoolers all week, and their answers are priceless! Today especially, though, came an answer that resonated with truth for people of any age. I asked my group of 3- and 4-year-olds to tell me about times that they have been scared. This is how my conversation with Kaylei, age 3 years, went:

Kaylei: "I'm afraid of the big shadows!"

Cassie: "Do you think that if you prayed to Jesus, He would protect you?"

Kaylei: "But I always can't see Him."



Cassie Woodard

Cassie: "You're right, Kaylei, sometimes it is hard to hear and see Him. Do you think that He's there even if you can't see or hear Him?"

Kaylei nodded, wide-eyed and serious.

My heart filled with understanding for this young girl. So often, I wonder where God is, or when He will answer my questions, or where I can go to see Him and feel Him working. I should know by now that He is there always, no matter what.

Yesterday, Chase and Tysen and I went into Washington, D.C. The three of us had never been there, and it was a hot, sweaty day of walking and sightseeing. It was incredible to see our nation's capital, to see historical sights and stand in places that great men and women have stood. It was bizarre to think that the foundation of our country, its laws and judgments and ideals and goals, often come to fruition here. I have never been, never seen any of these sights, and yet it has been active and alive long before I was born, and will continue to be so after I am gone.

Now I am not trying to imply that the U.S. government is like God. But I was touched by the atmosphere, the presence of something bigger than myself, something *more* than my own little world. I felt assurance in the permanent existence (albeit only a relative semi-permanence) of this large entity. It exists even though I don't see it and don't always hear it. God is infinitely more than that. His presence is constant, He is faithful. He is there carrying us when we can't walk, protecting us even when we don't know we need protection. We can trust in His faithfulness, and His provision. We can even trust in protection from the Big Shadows.

May God sustain you today, and may you feel His presence even if you can't hear or see Him.

Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Hebrews 11:1

Date: 6/24/2006

Submitted by: Chase Chisholm

Journal Entry:

A heavyhearted glance back

I am reminded of a past journal entry from Hong Kong. In it I "peeked" ahead at what was to come on our overseas tour. We had just begun. The excitement of new places and faces and tastes filled my thoughts. Now it is over. Back in the United States for more than a month, less than two months with Youth Encounter remain. It is hard to believe. I glance back with a heavy heart as I continue to process our experience in Southeast Asia.

I miss the people. I hear them laugh and talk. I see them smile. In my mind a slideshow plays—beautiful faces of teens with wacky hairstyles and mismatched clothes and chubby children with baby toes. I catch sight of new friends, people who have taught and encouraged. I remember others in need of prayer and help. The collage repeats throughout the day, especially at night before I sleep. Will I see them again? I do not know, so I thank God for our meeting and pray they are well.

I miss the culture. Large open markets filled with colorful produce and other goods are not common here. It is no longer normal to hear four languages spoken. British accented Asian English cannot be heard. Most people live in large houses with spacious yards, not small vertical flats with teeny balconies. Tropical trees are missing. Fresh fruit juices too. Barbecues are done using massive steel contraptions instead of over an open flame. Fellowship around food seems not the same.

I miss the food. We ate a lot. Where are the chopsticks? So much of what we experienced revolved around food. Much of our ministry took place at the table. Meals lasted hours, often late at night and food was served with sides of fellowship and sharing. Save eating jellyfish (twice) and the ever-present chicken's feet treat, Southeast Asian cuisine was delicious. Move out of the way, American Chinese Buffet!

Heavyhearted I glance back, reflecting on our four month journey and thanking God for the people, the culture and the food we experienced in Southeast Asia. Be encouraged to make the most of



Chase Chisholm

every opportunity. Do not wait for another day, a second chance. It may not come. Enjoy the people in your life; let them know they are loved. Fully take in the sights, sounds and smells of another culture. Taste what life has to offer.

Lighthearted again, I peek ahead excited for what is to come. I am thankful to be back with a new appreciation and look forward to life after Youth Encounter.

Date: 6/27/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Life called out to me

I was wrapped in grave clothes and laid in a tomb today. Until "Jesus" called me out. It lasted about 15 minutes. There were spider webs with live spiders in them right next to my head. I do not like spiders.

I was actually in a preschool room on Hilton Head Island and wrapped in streamers to portray my character of Lazarus. A female Lazarus, I know, it confused the kids too. They understood the story, though. They were surprised when my teammates moved a rolling whiteboard that had a sheet on it to reveal me walking out at Jesus' command. I bet Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were surprised too when it really happened years ago. Everyone in the surrounding area was probably shocked, in fact. Who's heard of a man coming alive again? And yet it would happen again in the not too distant future.

Little did the preschool children, with whom we were teaching, know that just two days later we would tell them about the greatest rising of all. Jesus Christ rising from the dead to set us free and give us victory. Lazarus was only a foretaste of the feast to come. Life (aka Jesus) called out to him in the grave, and he had to respond. What an amazing concept. I think about all of the times Jesus has called out to me, I was dying spiritually, but He made me live again. How many times do I not respond to His life-giving call? How many times could I have let Him use me to call others from the darkness?

I wonder what I thought when I first heard this story. These preschoolers and elementary school children understand it in one way and yet will probably understand it differently when they are older. We ask them questions along the way or at the end of the day to see if they understand what happened in the story. "How many days was Lazarus in the tomb?" "Who called out to Him?" "What did He say?" "Why could Jesus make Lazarus alive again?" I am floored when they really do understand "Because He is God."

Yes, He is. That's all I need to know.

Alive in Christ,
Corine



Corine Bell

Date: 6/29/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Hilton Head Island, SC—I'm reading a new book. This should not be surprising since books are pretty much second in line my greatest love. Sorry, Dave, it is not "Dorian Gray" like I promised to have read by the time we got to Nashville. Whoops. Instead, I am taking a break from the latest fiction flux and returning to Christian inspiration. I am a big fan of Max Lucado, although I have never actually read one of his "grown-up" books, only the children's stories. So I am excited to be reading "A Love Worth Giving" right now.

This book is decoding, in a sense, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. You know that one, almost everyone does. "Love is patient, love is kind..." Yeah, I thought so. He starts off the book asking the reader to replace the word 'love' with 'reader's name', i.e. "Kristin is patient, Kristin is kind..." I will be the first to admit that neither of these is true even 25% of the time. Lucado then says to insert Jesus' name instead: "Jesus is patient, Jesus is kind..." Reading the Gospels, we know this is true 100% of the time.



Kristin Rice

I have only read through Chapter 2, which is all about patience. This is definitely a struggle of mine that I cannot seem to overcome. And it seems to get worse, especially as this year is winding down. My teammates are definitely receiving an abundance of impatience from me, and every time it comes out, I get even more frustrated that I cannot display patience. This week, though, I have witnessed patience at its best. Lori, the VBS director, is an incredible example of Christ. She and her husband are raising four incredible children, hosting a niece for a couple weeks, and hosting two of my teammates as well. She is running this VBS, the first one the church has had in nearly five years as well as being the first joint effort with another church. Lori has been working harder than I have ever seen even possible. I do not do nearly half of what she does, and it is a minutely struggle to be loving and patient and kind. Yet she is able to always put others first and is constantly thinking of what others need. It would be so easy for her to say "Hey, I've worked hard enough, figure it out for yourself, leave me alone." But she does not.

I am learning a lot from Lori's example. Patience is a characteristic I will have to work on my whole life. But I have seen the fruits that prosper when that is an ingrained part of someone's life. Christ above all was patient—with his disciples and their inability to understand wholly, with those who needed his help, and with God above all else. My head knows that God works in His own timing, and that is not **my** timing. My heart has yet to fully comprehend this. But knowing God is patient with me, that I am always a work in progress; and seeing it in my life is helping me to realize that I can be patient with others as well. Work in progress; I am so thankful that God is not done with me yet.

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8

Kristin

Date: 7/1/2006

Submitted by: Tysen Bibb

Journal Entry:

Fiesta!

This past week we had the privilege of serving with Christ Lutheran Church in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. This was our third VBS using the Fiesta curriculum made by Group Publishing. The week was filled with celebrating, learning, and yelling "Viva" at the top of our lungs.

We had the privilege of leading the Bible stories for the preschool aged children, and at Christ Lutheran, they were at no short supply. Out of the more than eighty children attending VBS that week, more than thirty of them were preschool. It was a joy to see their smiling faces for five days.

There was one boy that week that stuck out to me. I could not help but watch his reactions, listen extra closely to his answers, and smile every time I saw his full little face. He would listen very eagerly during lesson time and laugh and play with all he had during opening and closing.

I was taught an important lesson that week by this little boy named Brody. He reminded me of how simple faith should be and showed me what Jesus meant when He said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." I pray we all take the example set forth by children and approach God simply by the grace given us through Jesus.



Tysen Bibb

Date: 7/4/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

INDEPENDENCE DAY!

There are certain sights and smells that stay with you no matter where you are. I know that the smell of fresh markets in Hong Kong will stay with me forever—fresh meat, fish (dead and alive), dried seafood and fruits, cigarettes, body odor, and a myriad of other

smells that I couldn't name.

Tonight I was brought back to countless Fourth of July celebrations of my childhood. We sat in a big open field in Norris, TN, with hundreds of other people from all over the county. People were selling glow bracelets—red, white, and blue, of course—and Frisbees and ice cream. The smells of sugar from cotton candy (pink and blue), hot dogs, coated nuts, lemonade and more sugar in various forms permeated the air. It felt like home—except for the Southern drawl, of course.

This holiday has always been about grilling out and enjoying summer and watching fireworks. But this year, the meaning of Independence Day sunk in a little bit deeper in my heart. I witnessed lack of freedom when I was in Malaysia. I saw the Flight 93 memorial in Pennsylvania. And I saw Washington, D.C. My appreciation for our country and our freedoms has grown, and I thank God for the opportunity He has given me to see alternative ways of life.

I am actually watching *Gone With the Wind* as I write this, and the people of the South are worried about Yankees getting past the Georgia border. What's funny is that I just re-read Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. It inspired me when I visited the Lincoln Memorial, and I am again moved by the dreams and aspirations of a great man and the people he led.

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure . . . It is . . . for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us . . . that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.

I pray that this Independence Day has brought you a new sense of patriotism and loyalty to God and the country He has called you to live in, wherever that is.



Cassie Woodard

Date: 7/8/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Nashville, TN
EDGE!!

It is very exciting to be involved with the first National Youth Event for YE. The three acoustic International Teams have been talking about this for a long time, and it is finally here. Today is the second day of the event and it has been a blast already. The kids were pumped to be here and showed it in worship last night.



Corine Bell

This morning, our team led devotion, also called First Word, for a group of 60 people or so. Thirty minutes may seem like a long time, but it flies by and we did not have time for all of the things we planned to do. We sang a couple songs with them and then introduced the theme for the day. The overall theme for EDGE is being "Reckless" for Christ. The theme for today was the Truth of the Gospel. I had some difficulty thinking of what to say. What could I present to this group that they haven't heard a thousand times before? The point I kept coming back to for myself was, I may never be able to "prove" that something is true, am I still willing to stand by it? I posed this question to them: "Does it matter if what you believe is true or not?" I got some interesting answers, some surprised me with how well they were articulated and some caught me off-guard. (If you want to talk more about this subject, feel free to e-mail). Above all, I was glad the youth were thinking about these things and were delving into the reasons behind their faith in Jesus Christ. After First Word, there was a large group worship session with all of the hundreds of youth. We were blessed with awesome bands like Foolish Things and Joel Engle. Then we were cracking up with the Skit Guys, who are hilarious and still give an awesome message through their unique ministry. As with every morning, there is a speaker who gets us thinking about the theme and gives us some motivation from the Spirit. During this time, I was at the information booth in the back of the convention center. I figure I was assigned there because I'm so informed (ha!). It was fun, though, and don't worry, we or I danced like crazy.

Workshops began after the large group session and ran through until lunch. Meals are pretty difficult

to squeeze into the schedule, but we found some fun places where we could eat. The afternoon was almost a reverse of the morning. We had sessions and then a large group worship after dinner.

I think the best part of these Events is how the youth get so excited. The majority are here because they want to be here. They have done the car washes and other fundraisers to get here. They want to do service projects to help others. They want to sign up for yoga devotions in the morning although it happens early in the morning. They want to play in the fun house. They want to sing and jump around to praise God. They are positive and energetic. I can't imagine what the world would be like if Christians normally had this much enthusiasm. I pray these kids spread the love of Christ and the truth that we know in His name.

With wonder,
Corine
Acts 1:8

Happy Birthday Andrea!

Date: 7/11/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Nashville/Oak Ridge, TN—EDGE finished today. Wow, that went fast! I can't believe how exhausted we all are, and yet I feel so refreshed as well. It was incredible seeing the youth and adults in action all week, as well as catching up with other teams and staff people.

Today we drove back to the other side of Tennessee to Oak Ridge, close to Knoxville. Our hosts met us and saw instantly the exhaustion in our eyes. The girls were together, and the boys were together. The girls' hosts were pretty incredible. Both had lost a spouse to cancer in the last 10 years and met five years ago. They just got married last September. Currently now, he is fighting cancer as well.

I am reminded just how fragile and amazing life can be. Here I am, moaning and groaning about a sore wrist (tendonitis, by the way...definitely not a guitarist's best friend), and in the grand scheme, there are things that could be worse. God has made us bodies of precision and near-perfection. To be alive each day is such a miracle. I saw in our hosts that despite the rocks and valleys of life, we don't need to be bogged down by them. God offers us every chance to love and to live, and it is our choice to take it.

Funny how the stories and lessons in life happen especially when we're not prepared for them.

Kristin



Kristin Rice

Date: 7/15/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

New Blessings

I woke up to rain pelting the van from all angles. We were going about 45 miles an hour on the interstate because the rain was so heavy. Corine was hunched over the wheel, concentrating on the road and the barely visible white lines defining the lanes. Luckily we only had to drive in the storm for about 15 miles. We arrived at the church and set up for our program. The program was an interesting juggling act for us because we had left Chase at a Greyhound bus station in Nashville. We were only four for the weekend while Chase attended a friend's wedding back home. But we had fun anyway, and were blown away by the generosity of the congregation of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Marion, IL.

It is easy to feel a little indifferent at the end of the team year. Programs run together, and



Cassie Woodard

although I don't forget the people and faces, I do forget names of churches and where in the country the churches were located. We have been on the road for eleven months, and that is a long time to be doing similar things. Because of this, it is always refreshing to be at churches we haven't visited before. Our faces, our stories, our program is new to them, and their energy and excitement in something new and different is encouraging to us. It was a wonderful renewal to be at this church, where four families became mission partners with us. What an amazing display of God's faithfulness and provision. He rejuvenated us and reminded us that our work for Him is never finished.

I was reminded that God is not through with me, nor with New Dawn. He still has things for us to do, people for us to love, even though we are coming to the end of our team year. I am thankful for this reminder, and pray that God is reminding you of His plan for you!

Date: 7/20/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

CAVE DAY

Our last FIESTA VBS!! We are starting to mark 'lasts' on team. Our last team outing... Our last time learning a new VBS curriculum... But we know that these "lasts" will lead to other "firsts." Our first day of sleep off of team...Our first "real" jobs...

I have enjoyed this week immensely. We started off in a large mobile home, but after some technical difficulties, we moved into the church's youth room. We have had amazing children in VBS. They are interested in the stories and volunteer all the time. Cassie and I have been leading the Hot Bible Adventures, a session where we act out the Bible story for the day. Today was the best day. Today was...Cave Day. The story was about after the resurrection when Jesus' followers were hiding from the Romans. It is amazing how Christians were and are persecuted, but it is still a foreign concept to most people in this society and especially our children. The Christians in Jesus' day and for centuries thereafter were tortured and killed for their faith. And people greatly underestimate how often it happens now. I do not know if I could be that strong. If my life were threatened, would I preach Christ crucified and risen as Lord? I pray that God equips us all for those times. We did not go into too much detail with the kids for this story, but the kids were imaginative and played along well with the scenario. We had dripping sounds playing in the background and one child named Tristan said "Hey, I just got wet!" They kept whispering because they did not want the Romans to hear us. And when Cassie pretended that she did not know what happened after Jesus was dead for three days, they were quick to chime in "He rose from the dead!" "That was Easter!" The children understood and put the events together themselves. Their Pastor and Sunday School teachers should be proud. These kids knew that Jesus loves them. We asked them how they could deal with being afraid, they answered "Pray to God, He'll help you." From the mouths of babes...

We have had so much fun this week and tonight made it even better. As a team, we have started to watch our videos from overseas. They are a riot. We can't believe some of the things we said and did. As Chase's rat-tail is bobbing in and out of the scene, or we are performing a skit too quickly and all of the students are staring at us blankly, we are praising God for these opportunities. We kept saying to each other, "I can't believe we were there. I can't believe that was our life." However, we are very glad that it was our life. God blessed us with those experiences. We are able to encourage each other and spark each other's memory in a way that no one else in the world is going to do. Each of us can remember different names of people as we catch a glimpse of their faces on the video. We each remember different stories associated with people and places. I treasure those memories and how together, as a body, we help each other remember more. There is such a deep purpose of having a team and knowing each other's lives. In a couple of weeks, we will separate and there will only be four other people in the world who knew what it was like to go to southeast Asia on New Dawn '05-'06. I pray that we continue to cherish these times. Also, I pray that everyone enjoys exactly where they are at right now and the people with whom they are sharing their life. Praise God!

In Christ,
Corine



Corine Bell

Date: 7/21/2006
Submitted by: Kristin Rice
Journal Entry:



Kristin Rice

Shannon, Ill./Racine, Wis.—We finished out the final Fiesta VBS yesterday. It was CRAZY fun. We had the opening up in the sanctuary as usual, but after the first class session, we had to move everything downstairs because there was a wedding rehearsal that night. Originally, VBS closing was supposed to be outside, but the weather said no. Off to the fellowship hall we went. Tysen and I carried both of our tables of stuff downstairs (not fun, by the way, with a giant brace on your wrist). And the rest of us had a break as well to move the instruments and plug ourselves in properly.

The final program itself was hilarious. We did a week review, adding in random songs that the kids knew (sort of). And there was ice cream. Lots of ice cream. If ever there was a group of kids who should never have ice cream, this was it. Yet there it was. The saving grace for us was that parental units were available and ready for action, so we didn't have to really partake in the over-sugared mania that spread.

And now tonight we are in Racine, at a church we visited back in January before going overseas. We did a full program for about twelve people, but it was so much fun. And again, there was ice cream. Oh, plus those giant bakery cookies that have more pure sugar frosting on top than actual cookie. It was a glorious night. This church is actually connected to a mansion. So we slept in the apartment section of the church, which was really fun.

At tonight's program were three young adults about our age or so, and it was so much fun getting to know them and really befriend them. It made me realize (again) just how excited I am to really spend time with people. The good thing about this year is that I have learned how to connect quickly. But the challenge will be now to form a connection and keep it going. I have to remember that for the most part, the rest of my life will be spent meeting people that I **will** see again, repeatedly. Good-bye will not necessarily be forever. "See you later" actually does apply. Am I ready for this? I sure hope so, because in less than a month, that's life. One month from today, incidentally, is the one-year anniversary of meeting my teammates and starting this adventure that is rapidly coming to a close. I think this will be an occasion that should call for ice cream as well. Tons of ice cream. And maybe a cherry on top.

Kristin.

Date: 7/25/2006
Submitted by: Tysen Bibb
Journal Entry:



Tysen Bibb

Life

This past week we served at Trinity Lutheran Church in Roselle, IL. We had a wonderful week full of "Treasure Cove" pirate lingo and laughter. We had amazing hosts, and I cannot thank them enough for their generosity and hospitality. The VBS ministry we have been able to be a part of the past seven weeks has been encouraging.

During this week, I had two opportunities to travel into downtown Chicago. The first trip was a tour guided by my host Carroll, and the second trip was on the "L" train system that winds and snakes through Chicago. This was awesome to me as I was able to see Chicago in a very broad and real way. Carroll showed Chase and me the "rough" parts of town as well as White Sox Stadium, Millennium Park, Giordano's Pizza, Wrigley Field, The Sears Tower, and of course, Lake Michigan. It was not the buildings that were most striking to me, though. Chicago is home to over seven million people, and they were what captured my interest.

While in Chicago, I saw dirty, raw, real life, and I did not know how to react. I saw some of the things we saw in Hong Kong and Malaysia: poverty, homelessness, and what seemed like guarded

apathy towards those experiencing it. The thing was, though...you could not get away from the people in need. I was forced to come to grips with what Jesus would do. In the same day I saw a man, a street preacher, yelling the Gospel at the top of his lungs. I paused and asked myself why I am not like him. What is it that holds me back from fearlessly, no, joyously proclaiming Christ on every street corner? In my time in Chicago, I was forced, quite uncomfortably at times, to ask some hard questions. I know our ministry this year was good, but it was safe. At no time did I honestly fear for my life. Many would say, "Awesome, praise God!" to that truth, but I wonder if that is more a reason to be shocked than relieved. If the people on the streets are not hearing of and also experiencing God's love from Christians like me, then who will show them?

I hope the new Community Based Teams get opportunities to do urban ministry. I am not saying that ministry outside of the city is worthless--all people need Jesus--but it seems to me that God's heart for the homeless, oppressed, downtrodden, and poor is clear. As Christians, it is our responsibility to reach out, to love, to go, and to take risks. At EDGE, the National Youth Event, the week concentrated on being "reckless" in faith. I want to be the change I want to see but not want to be the only one. I think there should be a movement of Christians all over America and the world reaching into the urban centers in defiance of fear, crime, apathy, and evil. Those are just my thoughts about life right now. Continue to seek God about where He would have you go and love.

Date: 7/27/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:



Cassie Woodard

Today our host mom Louise took us to Eli's Cheesecake Factory. It was awesome. It was a wonderful interruption to our work day. We hadn't planned on being gone for three hours over lunch, but I welcomed the idea as soon as Louise mentioned cheesecake. Too bad the boys couldn't join us!! It was a great girls' outing. We had lunch at the café, and then took a tour of the factory, where we saw the two-ton mixing 'bowl' held up by a crane. The factory produces 12,000 cheesecakes a day, and during busy season (October to March) they produce over 25,000 cakes per day. We got to see the 24-foot spiral conveyor belt where the cheesecakes cool, which takes two hours from the top to the bottom. The factory room where everything is made is kept at 110 degrees Fahrenheit--can you imagine that being your work place?? I can honestly say that I've never thought about the production of cheesecakes before...I just like to eat them. If there's chocolate added, great! Ice cream--pile it on! Who'd have thought that so much thought and planning goes into a simple cheesecake?

Here's where I draw God into the picture. The cheesecake = the earth. The difference is that cheesecake is relatively simple compared to the complex earth. Profound, eh? In all honesty, though, I really marveled at the beautiful complexities that must have abounded during the creation of the earth. Cheesecake has five main ingredients. The earth has at least seven. Times infinity. I love cheesecake and would take great care if I ever made one. So I have to believe that God must love His children a whole lot to create the earth and everything in it with such ornate detail and design.

Can you tell that I've been with elementary-school children all summer? Analogies are fun!

I pray that God shows you His wonders today, that the beauties of His creation are revealed to you in ways that you never expected.

Date: 8/1/2006

Submitted by: Corine Bell

Journal Entry:

Last journal

Wow. Well, this is a big entry. The final journal entry of my year of ministry with New Dawn. We are in Green Bay, Wisconsin on our final trek to the Twin Cities where we will

have debriefing and our last programs, then goodbyes. I wish I had words of wisdom to share, but words seem to escape me. What replaces them is an overwhelming feeling of gratefulness. I am so grateful to God for placing me on this team, with Cassie, Chase, Kristin, and Tysen (and Darrel), and for sending us to Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore. I am in awe of His plan for us to meet so many amazing people that inspire, challenge, and refresh us. I have met people in various walks of life that I do not think I will ever experience. Riding on the train in downtown Chicago, I think, "Look at all of the lives being lived, how different they all are. I wonder if I have done enough this year, if I could have spent more time with these people, or learned how to play instruments better, or loved people more." But all that is gone, no more "What if's."



Corine Bell

I want to commit to the future. I want to keep in contact with people that I have met this year. They are not just 'experiences,' I want them to know they have changed my life. I pray that God molded me this year to love more and be bold with His truth.

Thank you for reading, thank you for your prayers.
In the service of the King,
Corine

Date: 8/2/2006

Submitted by: Cassie Woodard

Journal Entry:

Fare thee well.

It is time for us to say good-bye. We have tried to watch several video tapes from over the course of our year, and it has been a sweet blessing to see the people we met months ago and remember fun times and awkward experiences and funny faux pas and silly faces and team memories...I cannot believe the number of people God has placed in my life this year. Thank you all for your support and prayers; I could not have made it through without you all. God has given us a family here on earth, a family we belong to in Christ, where we are bonded by His blood and supported by His love. His family is everywhere, and I have been so blessed to meet hundreds of brothers and sisters around the world!



Cassie Woodard

I have loved being a part of this journey and learning more about God, His children, and His love. I will not leave unchanged! I wish I could have a tally of all of the incredible people I have encountered. My mind may not have record, but my heart still has imprints of those who have touched it. Again, thank you for your prayers and Christ-like love and support. "Mercy, peace, and love be yours in abundance." (Jude 2)

It's so clear that you have to cherish everyone....that every soul is to be cherished, that every flower is to bloom.

- Janis Joplin

Date: 8/3/2006

Submitted by: Kristin Rice

Journal Entry:

Finale

Do you remember the "Game of Life", the board game where you could earn \$1 million plus just by rolling the spinner and moving a car? I loved that game as a child, and I admit to playing it by myself...often. I would rig it so that I did earn the max, had the most children, and a successful husband. I realize now that my "game of life" is not exactly what Life actually is about. I can't do everything by myself (thank God), and I will likely not earn anything remotely close to seven figures. This has been a year of intense learning, loving, and living.



Kristin Rice

I should be used to the Big Good-bye, after graduating college and leaving camp every year. But this time, the Finale is a big one. It's the end of an experience that can and should never be matched. It is leaving a family of five that has been shaped and changed only by the hand of God.

Right now we are in Green Bay, Wisconsin, spending our last time in a church by ourselves; and we are watching some of the videos from the last year, most of which constitute being in Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. I look around at my teammates, my family, and I am overcome with love for them. We've laughed, cried, had a spat or two; but when it comes down to it, no matter anything else, at the end of the day, all I can do is love them. What will it be like to not have them around all the time, whenever I need them? I cannot answer that now. Nor do I want to. We have four days left as just Us. And then it's debriefing week with the rest of the teams who have grown in their own ways. In eleven days, a new life chapter begins. I am no longer a student or a volunteer. I qualify now as a certified resident of the Real World. Scared? You bet. Hopeful? I hope so. What will life hold for me? What does God want of me? I have no idea, and I am generally okay with it. For now, all I know is that I feel so blessed to have been given this opportunity to spend a year with God in places I never thought I would be, with people I have grown to love.

Thank you to everyone who has been praying for us and keeping track of us. Your support has meant the world to us, and it has been an immense pleasure to meet you and enjoy life with you, wherever you are. Each person we have met has left an impact in our memories and hearts. You will be in my prayers and thoughts for years to come. And in the immortal words of Porky Pig, "Abadee, abadee, abadee, that's all, folks."
