

# Rainbow of Promise 2005-06 Journal

**Date:** 9/21/2005

**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin

**Journal Entry:**

Hey everyone!! Welcome to the first edition of life on the road with ROP (Rainbow of Promise)!! I, myself, Corie, will be your personal story teller and tour guide while you engage yourself in the wild ride that is our lives!! (Well, for this first one; the position of journal writing will switch each week so you get to hear from all of us! YAY!!)



**Corie Alsin**

Imagine yourself at an amusement park you have never been to before. You give your ticket to the lady, walk through the spinny thingy that counts how many people go into the park in one day, let the guy take a picture of your group, and then you're off into this park full of crazy people, rides, games, and food. That is what our life is like! Training was wonderful, and we all successfully survived! The first week consisted of hanging out at Christ the King in New Brighton, MN, while going through that awkward phase of "getting to know each other" and figuring out how to joke around and be with people, while listening to Larry Johnson talk about circles and squares!! This is most like the part of the park where you take it all in and check out the map and try to figure out where you want to go and do first (well, it's more like they tell you what you are going to go and do!). Then we headed out to Camp Luther Dell! Amazing!! Beautiful!! I loved camp and was sad to leave it. Here we actually got to ride some of the rides!! We had many rehearsals learning our music and getting our program together. Enjoyed getting to know people better. Playing games like Frisbee Golf and Cowboy Golf, while also listening to Dana Petersen inform us of the difference between waffles and spaghetti (guys and girls)!! This was like the ride in the park where you stand against the wall and you spin around and around in circles and the floor drops out! Because when you talk about stuff like that you go around in circles until you drop out as to not dig yourself in a hole! We headed off to Rally Day in Palisade, MN where we enjoyed our first host home and worship service! Wonderful people, wonderful food (the best bread ever!), wonderful church! We even got to take a tour of the farm and see the little piggies at our host home! We led four songs in worship, did our puppet show for the children's message, and then led Sunday School! It was fun and felt successful, just like the Fun House at the amusement park where the house is in all weird conditions with the floor all different levels and the lighting making your eyes see weird things, and all kinds of weird mirrors reflected different things at you! It's fun and you feel successful when you make it to the end! We then headed off to Camp Wapo in Wisconsin for cross-cultural training! Amazing week, even better than those spent at Camp Luther Dell! We learned about cultural shock, stereotyping, and how to live in another country! Fun times! We also got to watch all of the other International Team programs, which was awesome! (Only the International Teams came to Wapo; the National Teams stayed at Luther Dell for another week.) We also learned how to play Cricket and played soccer and Ultimate in the mud!! Amazing! Another team, Crossmark, joined us for this last week of training. They are former staff members of Camp Wapo and are going to do a service missions trip for five months to both Brazil and Malawi. They were great to hang out with and get to know, and I can't wait to hear about their trips in May!! This last week was like the best roller coaster in the park full of fun rides, exhilaration, excitement, and anticipation, but also a week of up and down emotions with be excited about going on the road, but sad to leave other people on other teams. Definitely the best week so far! We came to Saturday--Commissioning! Families and friends came from all over, including my parents and my beautiful, amazing roommate whom it was soo incredibly great to see! I miss you Janet!! Then it was good-byes and off on the road!! YAY!!! We finally made it! This was like the feeling of standing in line for two hours to go on a ride at the park, and then you finally get there and are sooo ready and excited!!

Our first booking was Word of Peace Lutheran Church in Rogers, MN where our friend Dain works as Director of Youth. What an incredible first three days on the road! We led Sunday School music for the kids, three different ones for preschool through about fourth grade. Fun times, sing-alongs and puppets! I love it!! Our host home was amazing! We totally felt at home; they had two kids, a six-year-old boy and eight-year-old girl! Fun times swinging, building a make believe candy treehouse, chasing Brownie, their enormous chocolate lab, trying to get the Frisbee from him, Tara teaching

the girl "Rhandi" (one of our songs), watching "Hitch" outside on a big sheet at our own homemade drive-in theater! It was incredible, and I can't wait to come back for prep before India!! Dain was awesome too! We watched "Lagaan," a very popular Indian movie about cricket and taxes on Sunday, and then got to eat dinner at an Indian restaurant with some of our Indian contacts who were in town! That was so great to meet them and talk to them and hear about their initial feelings of the States! They told us about India, too! And, they just kept giving us food to try...it never stopped!! It was soo good! It will be so great to know some faces when we get over there!! This was like those times at the park where you are eating a funnel cake or dip-n-dots and just can't stop laughing because you are having so much fun with your friends, or like the Rock-and-Ride ride where you sit in the cars that go up and down and around in a circle really fast while blasting rock and roll over the speaker, both forward and backward!! It's just so much fun you can't stop laughing!!

Now we are headed to Austin, MN (home of SPAM!!) for a youth night! Fun stuff! It will be fun, and I am really excited about the crazy ride that is our lives right now! I was thinking about it yesterday, about our life, and thought..."Who does this? Who goes from church to church and lives in different people's homes every day? Who does that?" And, my answer is, we do!! And we're excited about it! God is amazing and has definitely shown his face everywhere we have been, and I'm excited to see what he has in store for us the rest of the year! Thanks for your prayers; you are in ours, too!

Love, Corie

P.S.--Would you rather sleep on a bed of chocolate or have footstools made of gumdrops?

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**Date:** 9/24/2005

**Submitted by:** Erin Meier

**Journal Entry:**

Howdy everyone! We were in Spring Valley, Minnesota the last couple of days, and we had an amazing time. We had such great host homes that were so welcoming. Last night we all had dinner with our host parents at the place where us girls stayed. It was fun to sit around the dinner table and talk and hear great stories from our host parents. Then we went to the house where the boys were staying to watch a movie, but before the movie we all gathered around and sang while our host dad played the organ. That's right, they had a real organ in their living room! It was beautiful. Tara got to play the organ a little, too. We had a wonderful time. We have really been blessed with such amazing and welcoming contacts and host homes. The people in Spring Valley were really appreciative of us being there and really want us to come back. They were so encouraging. Today we arrived in Eyota, MN. We are staying with Elissa (who was on team last year) and her family. We did a Family Night Program tonight. When we started, we looked down and saw a baby lying in the aisle. She was just lying there on her back in the middle of the aisle. It was so cute and so funny and so unexpected. Later in the program, we were visited by a pesky fly who enjoyed flying around all of our faces, landing on peoples' lips, and even flying in Tara's mouth while she was singing. It brought new character to that song. Tonight us girls had the chance to hang out with Elissa and her parents and talk about team life and Elissa's experiences from her team last year. There were many great stories and laughs shared. Every time I looked at Elissa during our program, I felt encouraged and supported. It has been a blessing to be here. I pray that people are blessed with God's love through us as much as we have been through them. Oh, one last thing before I go...would you rather have a fly fly around in your mouth or up your nose?



**Erin Meier**

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**Date:** 9/28/2005

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

Hey gang! This last week has been silly. That is why I would like to call this journal entry: your week may be silly if...these three things happen to you. Truly the Lord has been throwing the Rainbow team plenty of surprises and blessings left and

right. You just never know what the Lord has in store for you. Let's begin.

1. Your week may be silly if you end up at the SPAM museum in Austin, MN. That was just the start of our week. I never thought SPAM could be so cool. We enjoyed the extensive history, not to mention looking at all the SPAM merchandise. The girls learned a new jingle from the Hormel girls, and I personally liked to see what SPAM cans look like from all over the world. You can't say enough about the SPAM museum. That is why I'll stop there. You'll have to go there and see for yourself someday.

2. Your week may be silly if a person randomly gives you \$20 to pay for your gas. This happened to us in Plainview, MN. We were getting gas when I saw the lady **David Strussenberg** in the car ahead of us give my teammate Josh \$20. When Josh got in the van, I asked, "What was that all about?" Josh said the lady asked, "Are you that team that played music at our church the other night?" After Josh said, "Yes," she replied, "Here's money for gas." What a random act of kindness, and a rarity in today's world. Which makes me laugh and find it rather silly.

3. Your week might be silly if you have a hymnfest accompanied by an organ in the living room of another person's home. In one of our host homes in Racine, MN, the Rainbow team sang many hymns with an excellent host dad who could play the organ amazingly. The sound lit up the whole room, and it was a fantastic time for worship and fellowship. Which made it tough to let the evening end. Yet seriously, for that to happen? How silly.

I have been loving this last week. The hospitality has been nothing short of amazing. I will keep you posted on all of the silliness that occurs. I have to go, but before then I have one question.

Would you rather build a castle out of SPAM, or a barn out of cheese? You make the call.



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**Date:** 9/29/2005

**Submitted by:** Joshua Vandercar

**Journal Entry:**

God is so good! I've been brought to simple tears on countless occasions...through joy...through sorrow. He has shown His many blessings in ways so wonderful. Praise God for the calling He has given us this year...to reach out and share with others who we are and how God is faithful in His love for us. Praise God for the fellowship He has given us this year...unique children of God genuinely loving one another. Praise God for the joy He has given us this year...the laughter of children and teammates. Praise God for the relationships He has given us this year...meeting one another as we each live this life. Praise God for the stories He has given us this year...for those we hear and for those being written every moment. And praise God for all His goodness!



**Joshua Vandercar**

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**Date:** 9/30/2005

**Submitted by:** Mark Huber

**Journal Entry:**

Oy!

Greetings from the road! Life in a van is good...We've been traveling in Wisconsin for the past two days and are heading back to Minnesota tomorrow. This morning we played at a nursing home in Amery, Wisconsin and met some truly incredible people. It seems as if meeting incredible people is going to be the theme for our year. Well, an additional theme to "Stand on the Rock." Between the host families, congregations, nursing homes, college ministries, and Lutheran grade schools we've visited, we have been blessed with an amazing diversity of stories, generosity, and friendships.

On a side note, we've also had no opportunity to stop eating. I'm pretty sure that half the places we've been have sent us on our way with twice as much food as we came with, and that's saying a



**Mark Huber**

lot since we seem to have a never ending supply of grocery bags and Diet Coke rolling around the van.

Aside from all being exhausted at the end of the day, I think it's safe to say that the year is off to an incredible start. I know I speak for all of us when I say we're incredibly excited for India, all the people we have yet to met, and the incredible opportunities that seem to arise regularly when living in a van for a year. It's definitely hard work, and some long days, but it would be hard to imagine doing anything else. We're also looking forward to sharing our experiences with all of you who are reading along this year...It can be difficult to write and/or post our journals as often as we would like to, so bear with us as we do our best to put all our adventures into words!

God bless, and we'll write again soon!

~ Mark

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**Date:** 10/2/2005

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

### **Even the Ligers...**

A little over two weeks. Some words to describe these past two weeks for me could be: unbelievable, hilarious, stressful, bonding, stretching, growing, fun, sad, awkward, comfortable, relaxing, hyper, surprising, joyful, confusing, purposeful, humbling, encouraging, and a million more. I still can't believe I'm doing this. It hits me often as I'm riding in the van through yet another corn field (who knew there were so many in MN!?) or as I'm in the middle of a program leading a whole congregation in worship--"How in the world did I get here? What is God thinking!? I'm not the right person for this..." yet I feel the joy of God resting on us. Don't get me wrong, I'm extremely excited for this year, but I often struggle with feeling inadequate. I guess that's typical for God's people...God delights in using our weaknesses for His glory...imagine that!



**Tara Kent**

Two short weeks have seemed like two months with all the places we've been and all the people we've met. I think the greatest blessing I have experienced so far has been God's people we have had the privilege to meet and gain access into their lives for a couple of days or moments, at least. It's been so amazing to get to know so many new people, but it's also been hard to say goodbye to people so frequently, as well. One little girl I met at one of our host homes expressed my feelings exactly when she said, "Will you write about me in your journal and never forget me?" I think people have had much more of an impression on me than I will ever leave.

I must also share with you just a few of the funny happenings since we started this crazy year in our 15-passenger van. I think the funniest quotes have come from children we've met along the way. One little girl told me I should be the first lady president because I'm nice. This same little girl told me I resembled a little Jewish boy in her class, as well. The best bursts of randomness have definitely come from a little song called, "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." You may have heard it before, but you've never heard it the way we sang it these past two weeks. One of the verses includes animals suggested by the kids. I must say the most unexpected and hilarious was from a boy at a chapel who shouted out, "LIGERS!" So, although I've seen the movie "Napoleon Dynamite" and am quite familiar with this "animal," it is my job during the song to assign actions for each animal. If anyone has any suggestions for liger, bobcat, zebra, or triceratops, let me know. Until then, I will be forced to make strikingly similar actions (usually consisting of my arms flailing as I waddle or jump around) for any animals that I've either never seen, or can't imagine what in the world they do. I'm pretty sure God uses small children to laugh at me.

Love,

Tara

P.S. Would you rather: swallow a fly during a program or actually say to a group of boys, "Clotheslined. Is that like a TERM or something??" (Sadly, both are true stories.)

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**Date:** 10/7/2005  
**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin  
**Journal Entry:**



**Corie Alsin**

Wow! What a fun couple of weeks!! So many things I could talk about...from nursing homes to Family Night Programs to confirmation nights to college coffee houses! They have all been a blast! We were even in the Marshall, MN Independence newspaper! They made sure to mention that afterwards bars would be served in the fellowship hall! Bars are desserts such as rice crispy treats, brownies, Special K treats, and such! Tasty, and in Minnesota, they are called bars, not just cookies or desserts!! They are tasty!! All the food is definitely a perk to Team ministry! Along with all the wonderful, amazing people we get to meet! We had lunch with a sweet beet farmer the other day, so it was fun to learn all about farming beets. I also got the opportunity to see some amazing art work today from Mark's host mom. She paints abstract paintings, and her recent ones are based off of African-American spirituals, and they are so incredible! It was so interesting to hear her explain the paintings and point things out and know the meanings. It really does draw me into the paintings more. I'll have to buy some paintings from her when I am decorating my house!! Also, we stayed with a cute couple out in the country on a lake in Donnelly, MN where the pastor's wife is from India. She made us a great Indian meal and told us all about India! Pastor Luther also gave us some tips on what to bring with us to help with homesickness, such as granola bars or energy bars, fruit leather, and peanut butter! Mmmm...I love peanut butter, and the couple we stayed with had this amazing honey roasted peanut butter which was awesome!! So, I think I'll have to take a couple jars of that!! We also watched Bride and Prejudice, which is a satire of Pride and Prejudice that takes place in India. "A quality film," according to Mark! Sarah enjoyed this and informed us of all the things that were misrepresented in the movie! We definitely enjoyed our time with them and their daughter, Karena, who always wanted to play with us and laugh! It was great!

The church in Raymond has the coolest Sunday School program set-up, too!! There are five different rooms, each decorated in a different way! One is like a movie theater with movie theater seats and a popcorn machine! One is an activities walk with different things to do on the road. One is a story telling room with a tent, pillows in a circle, and a fake fireplace!! One is a computer room named Fishing.net. And the final one is another activities room where you could paint or tell stories or dress up and such. It's called D.O.C.K...Disciples of Christ's Kingdom! It was awesome!! I was actually a bit jealous that I didn't grow up going to this Sunday School!

Last night we played at the campus ministry center at Southwest Minnesota State University in Marshall, MN. It was great, relaxed and fun to hang out with the college students. We played some songs and then had coffee and sat around with them and talked for a while. Then, we sang worship songs together! It was a night full of laughter, worship, and learning about wheelchair dodge-ball!

We are headed to Morris, MN, where tonight we will be playing at the Common Cup Coffee house for a couple of hours and drinking some excellent chai tea!

All is well, and wonderful and I am continually amazed at the way God works through many different people! God definitely has shown his face in many different forms! I do miss all my peeps at home and at school and in Idaho, so here's a shout out to you! And to all you Kansas folks...we'll be home in three weeks!! I can't wait to see you! Love ya and miss ya!

All God's love,

Corie

P.S.--Would you rather walk up to the sanctuary for church or watch it from the TV in the playhouse?

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**Date:** 10/14/2005



**Submitted by:** Mark Huber  
**Journal Entry:**



Greetings from...(where are we again?)...Stephen, MN!

Sorry for the delay in writing, but we've been pretty busy during this past week! Life on the road is still going well. We almost made it to Canada (we were five miles away), but the fog was so thick it wouldn't have looked much different than Lancaster, MN where we were staying. We've played three Family Night Programs, a nursing home, a youth night, and an afterschool program in the last three days alone, and we are certainly not at a loss for things to do!

**Mark Huber**

It's hard to believe that it's been almost two months since we all met and embarked on this crazy adventure, and I for one can't imagine doing anything else. We've met so many amazing people, been blessed with everything (and more) that we could possibly need, and stayed with gracious families every night on the road. It's a truly humbling experience to rely on other people for all of your most basic needs, and we are constantly reminded that God provides.

We've been having a lot of fun learning how to speak Minnesotan, but now that we're starting to get good at it, we're heading down south. Just in case you find yourself traveling to rural Minnesota, here are a few helpful words that you might need to know:

Bars (a universal Minnesotan word) = Any baked good served after a church function

Lunch (from the northernmost reaches of the state) = Food eaten before the "noon meal," after the "noon meal," as a late night snack, etc.

Uff-da = a word indicating surprise

Jeepers = depending on the inflection of the voice, this term could be used to describe a multitude of emotions: surprise, fear, sadness, concern, etc.

There are many more, but that should be a good foundation in case you find yourself being invited to a lunch of bars after finishing your program at 9 p.m. Uff-da!

~ Mark

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**Date:** 10/14/2005  
**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg  
**Journal Entry:**



Hey everybody! I'd like to take you back to Memory Lane and share with you an experience we had in Marshall, MN about a week ago.

It was a windy day, as are most days in Marshall, and we got permission to park our trailer in the church parking lot before we headed out to our host homes for the night. Our host homes were fantastic, and we met at a pastor's house the next morning to do devotions and rehearse some songs. When it was time to go and get ready to leave for our next destination, us boys decided we better get our trailer while the girls could finish up some last minute work.

**David Strussenberg**

So we arrived at the church and realized that a funeral was taking place. There was not a single empty parking space in the whole parking lot. And, amidst all those cars was our trailer. You would think we could just drive up next to the trailer and carry the trailer back a bit to latch it on. That would be too easy. There were so many cars our van could not fit down any of the aisles. We decided to park our van by the church entrance, a good 30 yards from our trailer.

While realizing that the funeral was going to end any minute, our only solution was to unload the

whole trailer and carry it 30 yards to our van. Josh and I lifted and pulled from the front while Mark hopped aboard the back to make the front end easier to lift. We weaved our way amongst the cars, stopping every five yards to gain some strength. Eventually, ten minutes later, we made it and hooked the trailer back to our van. Only to discover that we needed to collect all our stuff (five totes, six instruments, and five suitcases) and take it back to our trailer.

Now while this whole thing was going on, I can only imagine what the people at the funeral thought, due to the fact the sanctuary has glass windows leading out to the parking lot. I wonder if while friends and family were honoring their brother in Christ, they saw three fellas carrying a trailer across the parking lot, stopping and starting every so often. At least we made the deadline and got the trailer hooked up before the funeral ended.

I look at this story and can only laugh. The good Lord has a sense of humor, and I am sure glad this funny event happened to Rainbow of Promise. Who would want it any other way?

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**Date:** 10/20/2005

**Submitted by:** Erin Meier

**Journal Entry:**

### **Team Is Like Omelet In A Bag**

Howdy everybody! We have been moving around a lot lately, and this week we are finally going to a different state. Actually, we are in four different states this week. We have been staying at Corie's grandparents' house for a few days. Today we are going to Iowa for a couple days where we will be playing at a tailgate party (yep! You read it right, a tailgate party) and going to a high school football game. Then we go to Nebraska, and then we'll end up in Kansas. We're all excited about going to Kansas and then down to Texas. So, I titled this journal *Team Is Like Omelet In A Bag*. You are probably thinking, "Erin, what is omelet in a bag?" Well, don't worry. I'm going to tell you. Last week when the three of us girls were staying together at our host home, we were introduced to the beautiful idea of omelet in a bag. All you do is put your egg and whatever else you want in your omelet (cheese, ham, etc.) in a Ziploc bag, squish it up a little to mix it, put it in boiling water for about 13 minutes, take it out, and you have an omelet. It just comes out of the bag like an omelet! Cool, huh? So, I got to thinking about it and decided that team life can be like omelet in a bag. God is the boiling water. We are the ingredients. During training and continually as we go along this year, God is forming our team (the omelet). He gives us a solid purpose, and he keeps us unified under this purpose. And I think maybe the bag is the van because it transports us where we need to go. So think about it. Ponder it. Love the omelet.

Thanks & Gig'em,

Erin Meier



**Erin Meier**

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**Date:** 10/23/2005

**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin

**Journal Entry:**

Hello all you Rainbow of Promise readers,

I come to you today from Humboldt, NE, the southeast corner of the state near Iowa and Kansas! Rock on! We will soon be headed to my home!! In fact, today we are going to arrive in Topeka, KS at 4:00 p.m.

It has been a pretty low-key week with lots of traveling, meeting new people, and some programs! On Friday night we stayed in Sergeant Bluff, IA and were able to attend the last home high school football game! We first ate dinner and sang a few songs with and for the wonderful people of Spirit of Life Lutheran Church which is located in a shopping mall! After talking to these amazing people, it is very evident of God's work in this mission congregation! God works in and



**Corie Alsin**

through all of us and that is just awesome to see and be a part of! Before heading to the game, we were "auctioned" off to the houses we were to stay at! (Well, they drew our names out of a hat, which was just a great laugh!) We headed to the football game after dinner and enjoyed a shivery night of cheering and explaining the rules of football to our very own Tara Kent! It definitely took us back to high school, while we were able to visit with some of the families who offered their houses to us overnight. It was a fun filled night and also quite inspiring! The next day we also got to help put up a drop ceiling for a while in their new addition! That was great fun!!

Today we head to Kansas, and I am super excited to spend a week and a half in my home state!! Oh, how I miss the wonders of Kansas and the people who live there!! Have fun, God bless, and may the Lord go with you!  
Love, Corie

P.S. Would you rather play the 80's board game, Crossfire, or follow the Yellow Brick Road?

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**Date:** 10/24/2005

**Submitted by:** Joshua Vandercar

**Journal Entry:**

These past few days have been quite full of joy. I have made random connections with past teamers, stayed with a family that had a pet cat named Tortoise, talked with family and friends, had Corie's mom offer to do my laundry (thanks!), watched the White Sox take the first two games of the World Series, enjoyed the sounds of piano and voice with Tara and our host mom, been skillfully challenged to a few games of ping-pong by my host dad and host brother, and have finally found opportunity to purchase Andrew Peterson's new album, *The Far Country*.



**Joshua Vandercar**

*I'll open up my eyes on the skies I've never known,  
In the place where I belong  
And I'll realize His love is just another word for Home. – AP*

May we know ourselves as strangers on this earth...setting our eyes on the things unseen...living with a longing for Home.

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**Date:** 10/27/2005

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

**There's no place like (Corie's) home, there's no place like (Corie's) home...**

That's right, we're in KANSAS. It's a first for me, and I must say I pictured it quite differently. For starters, it's definitely not flat, there are no tornados, and I haven't met one person named Dorothy yet. It's been wonderful being able to relax at Corie's home and to meet people who have meant so much in her life. (It's also great fun to look at pictures of her from when she was little!)



**Tara Kent**

On Monday we had a day off in Topeka, and Joshua and I stayed with a wonderful family who challenged us with intense ping-pong competitions. As Joshua and our host dad duelled to the death (not quite, but almost!), I slipped upstairs and had the opportunity to play through a couple new worship books of mine on the piano for hours...heaven. My host mom, who is a talented musician, joined me and sang with me! It was such a great worship time... Music is such an amazing gift, and it's wonderful to be able to share it with others!

Although I have been sick with a cold for a few days and haven't participated as much in the last couple programs, I have been blessed with time to get to know my teammates more. I had the privilege, first of all, of watching my teammates minister at a preschool and then a nursing home. I got to watch kids' faces as they lit up watching the puppet show I'm normally part of, and I had the wonderful privilege of hearing Mark do an amazing impression of my puppet's (valley girl) voice! I



also got to see the faces of the mentally disabled in the nursing home as they listened to my teammates' music and then gave them hugs afterwards, telling them they were loved.

Another joy has been simply laughing together. One subject that is always the source of laughter is my lack of knowledge of any sports. As many of you know, the World Series just ended as the Sox beat the Astros... Being from Chicago, I supposed I should try and learn the rules of baseball so I could understand the games as we watched them. Joshua was patient with me as he explained all the basic rules I didn't already know (basically everything except "three strikes you're out"), and I got really excited by the end (mostly because I just understood what was going on!). It was a lot of fun watching as there are two Sox fans and two Astros fans on our team... however, one of the Astros fans (AKA Erin) as Life Encourager made me go to sleep before game 3 was over because I was sick... See Mom, I'm being taken care of. Go Sox!

Love,  
Tara

P.S. Would you rather set off the smoke alarm at midnight at your host home or forget to call your sister on her birthday... (sorry to both my host home and sister!) Happy birthday Dad and Kirstin!!!

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**Date:** 11/14/2005

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

"It's a beautiful day in George Foreman's neighborhood, a beautiful day in George Foreman's neighborhood..." Howdy y'all! As the song goes, you may have guessed we spent sometime in the Humble, TX area where we were at a homestay which was right in the area of where George Foreman lives. We pondered the thought of knocking on his front door, inviting him over to go swimming, and seeing if he could bring his grill along, but we just never got the chance. That was okay, however! We had a wonderful time hearing stories from our homestay, Roy.



**David Strussenberg**

Well everybody, the last week has been really exciting. Yesterday alone we had three church services (2 in English, 1 in Spanish), a potluck, a couch scavenger hunt, a mini program followed by dinner, and a Texas BBQ. What I've noticed on team is that you never do go hungry. Some days, like yesterday, you may just get two dinners. I must say there is nothing quite like Texas BBQ. While BBQ in Minnesota may mean Sloppy Joes, and in Upstate NY hamburgers and hot dogs, BBQ in Texas means exactly that. The other night we had chicken, a brisquet, BBQ beef, two kinds of beans, and a BBQ sauce which has been kept a family secret for many years.

So you may be asking yourself, with all this food how do you keep in shape on team? Some of us choose to run and play with kids for hours, others bench press chairs in the church's fellowship hall, while yet others keep some pretty strong arm muscles by doing puppet raises. I personally haven't followed a steady exercise routine and can adopt the phrase of gaining the Youth Encounter Twenty. So, if you have any tips to help me out on how to stay in shape on the road, please feel free to email me at [rainbowofpromise@youthencounter.org](mailto:rainbowofpromise@youthencounter.org). I would appreciate it.

One random thought, have you ever got into a conversation and found yourself puzzled as how to end the conversation? For example, you meet someone and you have an awesome chit chat, but you both run out of things to say. So what happens is that you both make a desperate attempt to end the awkwardness and keep the conversation going while both of you are thinking, "How do I not be disrespectful and yet end this conversation?" I have not figured out how to smoothly accomplish this task. I've thought of saying a random joke getting the person to laugh and then say, "Thank you very much. You've been great! That's all for me! Goodbye now!" You may have seen a similar episode of Seinfeld. I'm still waiting to try that. I'll let you know how it goes.

Which reminds me, have you ever faced the same situation with writing an online journal? Wish I had a funny joke to insert here. Well hey, have a a good day, that's all for me!

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**Date:** 11/18/2005  
**Submitted by:** Mark Huber  
**Journal Entry:**



**Mark Huber**

Howdy! (That's what they say down here in Texas...)

We're back at College Station, home of Texas A&M, and have had quite an interesting week. We've worshipped in Spanish, eaten some real Texas barbeque, and even had the opportunity to hang out at a deserted amusement park on the Gulf of Mexico. All in all, things have been pretty busy and full of surprises.

Perhaps the most notable adventure we've had this past week (which Dave alluded to in his earlier journal) was the honor of participating in the great couch race. In case you've never experienced a couch race, I'll fill you in on the details.

First you arrive at the church and ask your contact, exactly what *is* a couch race, anyways? Then you're given a driver with a truck, a driver with a mini-van, and a handful of youth groupers who know how seriously competitive a couch race should be. In this case we had two teams, and half of us went with each group. The next part of the process is to choose your couch. Unfortunately, the extraordinarily long and heavy couches wouldn't fit through the youth room door without significant reconstruction, so each team instead reached for a loveseat and away we went.

The goal of this particular couch race was to transport the couch and the entire team to various places around Friendswood, TX that met certain criteria. Once arriving at said location, every member of the team must pile onto the couch and a picture must be taken proving the successful completion of each item on the list. A few of the possibilities included a drive-thru, a pharmacy (extra points for a smiling pharmacist), in a tree, and with an airplane. All in all, there were nineteen different items on the list, and I believe both of the teams came close to getting them all.

Our team had an incredible time, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank the wonderful people of Friendswood for allowing us to amuse ourselves so in their friendly town. Special thanks to the couple in the black Jetta, who patiently waited as we sat on a couch in the What-A-Burger drive-thru. Also, thanks to the unnamed pharmacist at the Friendswood CVS--you have a wonderful smile. Congratulations are also in order for Robin, the church's new youth director, for receiving "Lawn of the Month" from her housing developer. And finally, thanks to the Friendswood Junior High School choir for creating a truly memorable picture "with as many random people as you can find."

I hope this finds all of you well, and that you one day have the chance to participate in a similar race of couches...

~ Mark

P.S. In case you're wondering, there *are* pictures and they *have* been added to our photo album on this site. Enjoy!

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**Date:** 12/2/2005  
**Submitted by:** Erin Meier  
**Journal Entry:**



**Erin Meier**

Howdy ROP journal readers! We'll start off with a somewhat short summary of what we have been up to lately. I think the last journal talked about couch races in Friendswood, Texas (if not, just go with it). So since then, we stayed with my parents for a few days where we had amazing food and a great time. Tara had brisket for the first time, and the team met some of my relatives. Then we went to Bridge City, TX. The kids there were great. They were so excited. We were singing a song in Telegu (a language spoken in the southern part of India), and they were clapping and jumping along with us even before we taught them the song. It was great. We had a really great time hanging out with and talking to the older kids too. Next, we went to College Station. It was great to be back in Aggieland. We did a program during the Sunday school hour for all ages. It was so awesome to hear people WHOOP when I said I am from Texas. What a beautiful sound! We were in Kansas for

Thanksgiving. We stayed with Corie's parents. It was good to be with one of our families for Thanksgiving. Then we stayed the night in St. Louis, Missouri with Pastor Krueger and his wife Sally. Rev. K was my pastor in college. We had such a great time with them eating amazing frozen custard and getting a tour of St. Louis. Next we moved on to Ohio where we stayed with Mark's parents and visited their church, Trinity Seminary, and Wittenberg. Mark's parents took good care of us, and it was great to meet his family and friends. We went Christmas caroling at his neighbor's house to invite them to our program. We were going to go ice skating for our team outing. Our ice skating plans fell through, so we bought chai, brownies, ice cream, and the game Balderdash. We had a great time with our team inning instead. Next we moved on to Indiana. We did a program in Kendallville last night and had a wonderful time with our host homes. Mark, Tara, and I stayed at the same home. Mark played guitar with our host dad while Tara and I had fun playing with the two little girls. We took a picture of them, and after that they just wanted to pose for picture after picture. They were so cute. Now we are on our way to Michigan City, Indiana. After that we go to Bartlett, Illinois, and then mid-winter training starts in Minnesota. I can't believe mid-winter is already here!

Well, before I go I would like to leave you with a few more thoughts. Not too long ago, when we were riding in the van one day, I was kind of sad and just really hurting inside. I started to cry, but the cool thing is that I wasn't crying because I was hurting. I was crying because I was in such awe of God. I was sitting there hurting, but at the same time I felt so comforted too. The hurt didn't just magically go away, but a comfort of God and His love overwhelmed me. I started to think about how incredible it is that I am just one person just riding along in a van, and our big God still finds me important enough to always be there with me, wherever I am. How beautiful and wondrous is His love that He gave His Son Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. He makes us new, and He promises to always be with us. So I guess the message I want to leave is that whether you can feel Him right there with you or you sometimes wonder where He is, trust in God's promises. He loves all people. Our hope comes from God through His Holy Spirit.

"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."-- Romans 15:13

I would also like to share some verses that I really enjoyed the other day. Rev. K shared these with us during our devotions the other morning.

"In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word." -- Hebrews 1:1-2

Have a safe and merry Christmas as we celebrate the birth of our Savior!

Peace and Joy,  
Erin

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**Date:** 1/11/2006

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

I just know 2006 is going to be a great year. With a mission trip to India and Nepal, with the chance to visit a lot of new and exciting places in the United States, not failing to mention a new commitment I just made after team to join Americorps, 2006 will be exciting. Yet I know amidst so many commitments and all these new adventures lies the need to be thankful for each new day. It is so easy on the road to be in a town and forget to take the time to appreciate the people you're with, and the program that awaits, when you know there is so much to do in the future.

While that has been one struggle I face this year, it has been a blessing to realize that for tomorrow. The people everywhere we have been have touched my heart and especially the people of Woodville, WI. While only a town of 1100, the family Josh and I are staying with love life, love helping others, and just love who they are, who God made them to be. Isn't that what we are called



**David Strussenberg**

to do, take off our masks, love who we are, and love everyone around us, trying to get to know them and becoming a strong community? At times I wonder why it is so difficult to embrace others we don't know. I admit, I face a lot of anxiety when it comes to meeting new people. Yet, I can say that despite anxiety, I know it is my obligation to go outside my comfort zone, and let Jesus lead the way. For the times that I let Jesus be my guide the rewards have been great, and those times I don't, the knowing that there is always another chance to grow is wonderful. One thing for sure in 2006, I've learned over the last four months how to love people, and submit to a God who will never let his people down.

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**Date:** 1/23/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

Namaste from India! We're finally here after over five months of anticipation as a team! We flew in to Hyderabad, India on Saturday morning around 1a.m. (although it is 11 and 1/2 hours ahead of U.S. central time) after 23 hours of flights/lay-overs. We've been in Hyderabad since we arrived, and we are staying at a seminary with a wonderful family who has been incredibly hospitable and generous to us. It has been so humbling to constantly be the guests and be served, but it also a blessing.



**Tara Kent**

The first day here seemed quite long, beginning at 1 a.m. at the airport. Here's a little run-down from then on... 1 a.m.: arrive in Hyderabad, India. 2 a.m.: finally find all of our luggage (and experience the first bathroom...it will get better:). Our contact meets us with beautiful flower garlands placed around our necks...they smelled AMAZING. We hop in a jeep (yes, all seven of us plus three bags/items each) and have our first experience of Indian driving. It's a good thing I had been warned beforehand...that's all I can say. I kept reminding myself, "everyone said you think you're going to die, but you never do" as we would swerve into oncoming traffic and barely miss large vehicles. It was actually kinda fun. 3 a.m.: we arrive at our home, meet more people, drink CHAI. 4 a.m.: to bed. 7:30 a.m.: breakfast. Begin to feel a little sick and exhausted from jetlag. After lunch I'm definitely sick to my stomach and have to miss our first Indian wedding that night! However, during the seven or eight hours I was very sick, I experienced so much love and grace from our host mom. She brought me into her room, gave me a place to lie down, assured me even through my tears, "Do not worry...I will take care of you...you will be fine. I will be like your mother here and this is your home. Do not worry!" She stayed with me the whole time and assured me she was a nurse, as well. I know God is really going to teach me a lot while I'm here about trusting Him. He already has. I feel much better now and actually have an appetite!

Church sunday morning was a highlight for me... we got to spend time with the "youth group" which looked like they were our age, and they were wonderful. We sang both English and Telegu (the language spoken in part of Southern India) worship songs together, and they taught us a few of their own! Later on, our host family taught us some more Telegu songs which we sang together until we got it right...a LONG time... It was wonderful! Well, there's much more I'm sure I could share, but time is limited, and we're off to go shopping soon. Hopefully I'll come back with some Indian clothing! God bless you all in the States and thanks for your prayers! ~Tara

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**Date:** 1/27/2006

**Submitted by:** Mark Huber

**Journal Entry:**

So my favorite thing about India are the car rides. Seriously.

We don't actually have a car; we have a jeep (think Wrangler with a permanent top) which we manage to fit nine of us into multiple times per day. We jump in, roll all the windows down, and suddenly the heat is broken by a rush of wind as we hop off down the road. I say hop because the gear the jeep is shifted into rarely matches the speed at which we are traveling. This is no fault of our driver (who would make any stunt driver envious), but rather a natural concession to make when changing speed so dramatically and



**Mark Huber**

spontaneously. You see, when you drive in India you honk and hit the gas. Or honk and swerve. Or honk and hit the brake and then the gas. Or just honk. Twice. Driving involves lots of honking. You honk when you're turning, and when you're changing lanes, and when you're going in a straight line, and when someone cuts you off, or when you're cutting someone off. You honk at trees and with your knees, during the day and without delay. Honk, honk, honk. But I love it.

There's a perfectly logical reason for all the honking: you can pretty much do whatever you want if you're driving a vehicle. Driving into oncoming traffic? No problem. Driving through a red light with cars coming both directions? No problem. Swerving around a bicycle while pedestrians fling themselves out of the way and autorikshaws swerve even more in response? No problem. In fact, if you didn't honk you would get in lots of accidents. But you honk, and then it somehow all works out.

While driving we can really see India. The people and the colors and everything else that whizzes past in some sort odd snapshot of what this country is truly like. The cool breeze and the smells just add to the effect.

We drive a lot, and I love every minute of it. It's going to be hard to come home and quietly drive in a straight line. Where's the fun in that?

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**Date:** 1/29/2006

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

How can you put an experience like this into words? Hyderabad, India has left me with new eyes that I hope to carry with me for the rest of my life. Our team has been well received, and the opportunities to share God's love have been plentiful. The only downfall has been to see the poverty and find out a cat pooped on my bed while I was away for the evening. The people of India are the hardest working people I have ever seen, the kids are very well behaved, and the people we meet from the seminary we are staying at, as well as the people from surrounding church communities, have so much faith. They are so active in reaching out to the slums and taking on this very important mission to spread the word of Christ.



**David Strussenberg**

I want to give you an idea of what it is like to be white in India. We are treated in three very different and unique ways. Number one, we get a lot of looks wherever we go, almost like celebrities. As we drive by the crowded streets scrunched together in our car, everyone stares, the kids wave hello, and people come out to see us. Not many white people have made it out this way. I was trying to find an American equivalent to this, and the best I can come up with is seeing a nun. There are not many nuns where I come from, so everybody stares and follows them with their eyes wherever they go. However, when we get out of the car, a new view of us can be taken.

I have noticed that we have been looked at as money bags. When we do see a tourist attraction, it is not odd to see the same people every corner. They are pickpockets, looking for the best opportunity to steal from us. We are very well protected by our friends who take us around. They make sure to get our front and back. Nothing has been stolen yet. Apart from them, there are sales people and beggars who walk up to you. At times the beggars do not leave your side; as sad as it sounds, the best thing to do is ignore them. Some have kids concealed in their clothes, and they reveal them to you to ask for money from you. They are harmless, but it is sad and depressing to see this take place.

Thirdly, to be white in India we are seen as guests of honor. The hospitality has been absolutely wonderful. I find myself having a full stomach most of the day, and the conversation is great. It is not unusual to be offered a chair, thumbs up soda, tea, and food wherever we go to do our program. Everybody wants us to be happy. It is a greeting in India to receive a necklace of flowers when you arrive at certain stops. Everybody is so gracious, and the thank you's are unending.

I do love it here in India a lot. This journal is just a snippet of the things that I have learned already. I can only wonder what else God has in store for us as we continue to our next destination. God bless!



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**Date:** 2/9/2006

**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin

**Journal Entry:**

We went to the beach on Monday! That was a blast, and we swam in our clothes!! Yes, I went into the Bay of Bengal in my skirt and shirt! It was crazy, but all women swim in their clothes because of modesty. Some even swim in sarees, which really doesn't sound appealing to me in anyway because I feel like my saree is going to fall off of me when I'm just walking around, let alone when there are waves knocking me over!!



**Corie Alsin**

Sadly, we had to leave the orphanage/boarding school in Bapatla on Thursday morning for Chennai. Wednesday night for the final function, they dressed us up in beautiful sarees (which I really actually hate wearing, but it was still nice) and these hair flower things that they actually sewed into our hair!! It was so heavy! Apparently this is what they do to women on their wedding day! It was crazy!! So, we walked down to the function and the kids would say, "Very beautiful, sister, very beautiful," and "You Indian, sister?" It was great! All night, though, they would say, "Tonight I'm good, sister, but tomorrow I'm sad." It broke my heart. I really just didn't want to leave. I hope to really go back someday!!

We were in Chennai for two days and got to see some things. Chennai is the capital of Tamil Nadu, so it's a large city! We went to the beach and also to see the cathedral where St. Thomas (Doubting Thomas) is buried. They built a chapel with his casket as the altar and then a church above it. It was pretty neat to see! He brought Jesus to India!

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**Date:** 2/13/2006

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

"A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?" - Proverbs 20:24

I live each day in India not knowing who I will meet, what places I will go, or what food I will eat. I only know that where I am is where I am supposed to be, who I meet is who I am supposed to meet, and what I eat may cause tummy aches or diarrhea, but it still gives me the strength I need for the day. The only true way to cope around this is with a sense of humor, learning to be flexible, and relying on the grace of God.



**David Strussenberg**

My latest trial on team has been saying goodbye to Bapala. We stayed at an orphanage called REACH in Bapala. There are 220 kids from various slums who live there, ages ranging from three to 16. Everyday we spent time with them, thumb wrestling, playing cricket and volleyball, learning a new game called King, singing songs, telling jokes, and dancing. All the kids would ask, "How are you, brother?" I would say, "Great, how are you?" They would soon reply, "I am fantastic!"

They would also always crowd around us individually and say "Your name, brother?" I would say "David," and they would respond "My name is.." such and such. The tricky part was after they knew my name they would approach me and just say "David, my name?" You think I would remember, but then again, it is tough to learn two hundred and twenty names in Telegu.

Sometimes we would hop in on their classrooms, and teach them some English songs while they would show us some Telegu songs. In India, there is always sharing of songs going on. By the end, all I can say is that they were all my brothers and sisters.

Our last day there, the kids threw a goodbye celebration in our honor. There were many songs and dances learned and presented just for us. They also had a person come in and take our measurements, to fit us each with our own personal outfit. The kids loved it. They would say, "You look beautiful, brother," or "Brother, that is a nice dress."

I failed to mention we met Anna from Wisconsin. She is doing an internship there for six months. It was nice to see another American. Our team became good friends with her.

Once again there is so much I can say, but not enough time or space to write it. On a closing note, I was able to go away from that place with a smile because Pastor Victor Paul and Kusama, the head of the orphanage, raise these kids up with the strong foundation of Jesus Christ. Every morning and night was spent in prayer, singing, memorizing Scripture and learning Bible stories.

This is one place in India I would love to return to. I am still sad to have said goodbye. While I would have loved to stay, it was time to go. The Lord has a new path for our team to follow.

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**Date:** 2/15/2006

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

At Kodai Kanal International School, you will find students who are Christian, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, a religion other than just mentioned, or students who claim to have no religion at all. These are students who come from all over the world. While many of the staff are Christian, a strong majority of the students are not. We have been warmly received by the student body, yet the many religions have created a major impact on myself and our stay. One thing that makes our stay a challenge is that it is not like these students are lost; they challenge our beliefs, feel we are crazy for thinking Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, and wonder why they accept our religion, yet we must challenge theirs. Most of them have been born and raised in their current religion.



**David Strussenberg**

These last two days have been a great struggle, as we visit six classes a day, as well as doing devotions at night and assemblies in the morning. During the class sessions, we play a couple songs, but it is mostly a discussion format. We allow them to ask questions about our mission, who we are, and what we believe. The questions can be very difficult. Our team has done a marvelous job about answering these questions with care, yet we are always tested. A big debate that comes up time and time again is students asking, if they don't believe in Jesus, will they go to hell? Also, students wondering why Christians come across so egocentric and not willing to accept other religions.

Amidst these challenging debates, I know we can only be the vessel, while God is the captain. While some students do not accept what we believe and think we make up fairy tales, I know our being here is planting seeds and perhaps watering other people's faith lives.

I urge people in the United States to brush up on understanding world religions. If you show no respect or no understanding towards them, they will not respect you, and never believe a word you say. The only way to build a bridge is trusting in God and understanding where the other person is coming from.

My faith has not wavered in a place where our mission is questioned. I do not doubt God will make an impact in these students' lives. This has truly been a place to grow.

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**Date:** 2/20/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

It's a day off! Ahhh... and what a beautiful day! Sometimes I forget that it's winter at home. When it dips down to the 50's or 60's at night I say I'm 'freezing' and bundle up with more blankets. And compared to the plains of India right now, it is quite 'cold' up here in the mountains. When we leave here on Thursday, I'm sure we will receive quite a shock when all of a sudden it is 80 and 90 degrees. By April and May it will get up to 115 degrees...yikes. Enjoy the snow back home.



**Tara Kent**

Well, this past weekend we had the opportunity to do one of my favorite things...CAMP. The six of

us, plus our driver squeezed into a little jeep with all of our instruments and luggage, drove for two hours twisting and turning around mountain corners, and bumped along the rough, rocky terrain until we finally arrived at camp in Poon Di. There were times I was sure our jeep would flip over backwards when we drove up rocky inclines that seemed to make us almost completely vertical! When we arrived, we met the 8th graders from Kodaikanal International School who had been there on a retreat for a day already. We got to talk and hang out with them, which was a lot of fun, and I somehow found myself competing with some 8th grade girls (and a stray 8th grade boy who either really did love hula hooping or just wanted to be by the girls...) in a hula hoop contest shortly after arriving! Turns out that all my athletic ability was given to me in the form of hula hooping!

I'm amazed at the challenges and opportunities God has already given to me while being here. Even at camp, within the first hour or so, the director of the camp came over to Erin and me and just opened up and started talking about his beliefs about God and life! He's still searching to find truth, and we had to prayerfully decide what to respond to with truth and what to simply listen to, knowing we wouldn't change all of his skewed beliefs in one conversation. It was so strange that he would just start sharing all of his personal thoughts about life with us, and he seemed to be asking us about our beliefs as well, so we just shared with him our experience of how God has given us new life in Him. Since I hate debates, I was so relieved and refreshed to be able to simply have a real talk about God without feeling one person was trying to convince and force things on the other. I loved how honest and relaxed it was, despite the great significance and depth of the conversation. I pray our friend continues to search for and finds Truth, and in turn, affects those kids with the truth of Christ.

I miss camping SO much. I grew up camping regularly with my family and had a lot of 'firsts' while camping, including: learning to ride my bike, potty training...hehe, spending my own money for the first time (yes, it was on Airheads at the canteen, which at the time were only 10 cents apiece!), learning to dive, etc... So, I guess I had to do something of a 'first' this weekend as well. I decided to try ziplining, since I hadn't before, and it was so much fun! Another 'first' I experienced at camp was playing CRICKET with the boys! Now, there have been other opportunities over the past month (ys, we've been here for a whole month! Crazy, huh?), but being the athletically challenged girl that I am, it was only at camp the other day I found the courage to try... and I actually hit the ball! YES! I may have a cricket career in the future, if not hula hooping...

The highlight of my camping experience in India was definitely sitting at the campfire, singing songs with the kids, and looking up to the AMAZING sky full of the brightest STARS I have ever seen!!! I wish I could have somehow captured that moment in its entirety and posted it on this journal. That night we were introduced to "doughboys," which are basically pieces of bread dough wrapped around the end of a stick and baked over the fire. Then you fill it up with peanut butter, honey, or any other topping desired. MMMmmmmm. The three of us Rainbow girls slept in a tent together that night, bundled up with blankets and sleeping bags, and woke to the sound of random 8th grade girl screams (no doubt over some insect they had come across) and a call to a pancake breakfast...ahhh.... Gotta love camping. In the afternoon, we hiked a bit over the rockiest terrain that the buses couldn't handle until we got to where the busses were waiting for us. Then we rode the buses with the kids the two hours back to Kodai. What scenery! God is so creative!

P.S. On the way over to the Kodai campus this morning, I bravely walked by myself and avoided being harrassed too much by the street vendors and taxi drivers, only to find myself looking straight on with a cow who started chasing me with its sharp horns! I jumped/swerved into the middle of the street, got honked at by a car that would have more probably stopped for the cow than for me, and suffered only slight embarassment as I looked around to see who'd seen the close call with India's sacred cow.

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**Date:** 2/22/2006

**Submitted by:** Mark Huber

**Journal Entry:**

It's sad to be leaving Kodaikanal. We've had such an amazing two weeks here, and it's so hard to say goodbye to the students, staff, and teachers at KIS (Kodaikanal International School). In the past two weeks we've done programs, gone camping, led church services and dorm devotions, walked more than I've walked in a long time, and

met more amazing people with incredible stories than I can possibly count.

Kodai is not really India. It's more like India-lite. You can walk across the street and buy pringles from a street vendor, order hamburgers at more than one restaurant, and there's even rumor of a pub somewhere around here. It's also mountainous and cool, which I have a feeling we'll all miss as soon as we hit the plains. In Hyderabad, where we started our tour, we just saw that temperatures have hit 99 degrees, and summer is still two months away.

The one thing that has hit me being at Kodai is how incredibly diverse our tour has been so far. We've seen mountains and plains, cities and villages, people from a wide variety of countries and social backgrounds, and traveled by every means of transportation one can take. Our programs have ranged from playing a few songs in a hospital waiting room to playing an hour and a half of music with a spontaneous accordian player on a brightly lit stage.

As our team celebrates six months of ministry together, it's amazing to see all that we've done, how far we've come, and all that we still have to do. I hope and pray that we continue to be blessed so richly in our travels and encounters, and am excited for all that the next six months holds in store.



**Mark Huber**

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**Date:** 2/24/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

Village outside of Tiruchy, Tamil Nadu, India

What a dream-like day. We were taken to a village outside of Tiruchy in two cars, and we were told that it would be about an hour drive. Well, after about an hour and a half, we had stopped at least four or five different times to ask for directions. This process, as far as I can observe, consists of stopping the vehicle to yell out the window to anyone in sight until they yell back what I assume to be directions of some sort (I don't know for sure because they are speaking in Tamil, of course), yet if they were directions, I'm not sure why it is always necessary to stop five more times to confirm. Anyway, about two hours after we had begun our journey, we arrived at a small village as the giant, orange sun was setting on the horizon. We were welcomed into a church and brought whole coconuts for us to drink from, for the first time! They simply drilled a hole in the top and instructed us, while laughing at our attempts, to simply lean our heads back and gulp down the coconut milk. Interesting. Fun experience, but I'm not so sure I enjoyed the somewhat sweet, somewhat sour-tasting milky coconut water substance. They walked us through their village and showed us where floods had completely washed away their homes, yet they sang so joyfully with us! Next, we drove close by to a boarding school where the children were waiting up for us. By the time we finished eating dinner there, it was about 10 p.m. We did an hour program with the kids. They were amazing, as usual, and they sang for us, as usual, too. My favorite part of the night was while we were singing "Cast Your Burdens" with the kids outside, the power went out, which is not unusual in India, and for about five minutes, we were in complete darkness, except for the stars above our heads, which were amazingly bright and beautiful! Seeing only the stars, all I could do was praise God, hearing the beautiful sounds of the children singing and jumping with us in the darkness, "Higher, higher, higher—lift Jesus higher!"



**Tara Kent**

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**Date:** 2/26/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

Tiruchy, Tamil Nadu, India

What a long day. We began our Sunday morning eating a typical Indian breakfast of Dosai, a huge, thin and crispy bread, rolled so that it looks like a hollow cylinder. Sometimes they are filled with potatoes or served with sides to dip in. Not the typical light breakfast I'm used to, but hey, we never go hungry, that's for sure! We took two auto rickshaws to a church where we weren't quite sure what we would be doing. We walked into the church late, as is not uncommon for many in India, and they "paused" the service to welcome us and bring out the ever-famous plastic seats of honor for us to sit in. After being in Kodaikanal for two weeks, it is a bit of an adjustment again to be back in "real India" where we are stared at for our white skin. The children never fail to bring me great joy, though, and they give me such hope and encouragement. After sitting through the church service, completely in the language of Tamil, we were served tea and cookies, and then began our longest program ever. I think it began around 10 a.m. and finished around 2 p.m., full of songs, puppet shows, and interactive Bible stories. They also shared traditional dances with us as well as songs. We were all exhausted, but the kids and adults were so enthusiastic and receptive that it was a joy. Before we started, we were each introduced and greeted with the traditional flower garlands around our necks. They smelled so incredible! At the end, we were all thanked individually with the traditional towels put around our shoulders. At one point, during the program, they stopped us to hand out Operation Christmas Child gifts through Samaritan's Purse and India's Gospel Mission, and they had us help. It was so neat to be on the other end, seeing those gifts accepted with excitement and joy by little Indian children. After about an hour or so of rest, it was on to our next program. We walked in the church, which was actually empty, and were beginning to set up when we heard drumming and singing outside. I peeked outside through the church window to see girls dancing as boys played the drums. Soon, they appeared inside and let each of us try different kinds of Indian drums! It was so much fun! We just played with them for about half an hour before changing locations and setting up our instruments in another building. We walked into the Shalom House, where about 150 kids and 50 or so adults were waiting! We spent at least two and a half hours there, singing with the kids, teaching them songs, and watching them dance for us as well. They even performed a stick dance for us—my favorite! At the end of the program, we were asked to make a cassette of our songs so that they could keep singing them and never forget us, ever. They tell us we will be in their prayers, and we tell them they will be in ours. It's so great to see the bigger picture of the unity of the Church around the world, and to be called "sister" by my brothers and sisters in Christ in India! Please keep them in your prayers as well!



**Tara Kent**

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**Date:** 3/1/2006

**Submitted by:** Joshua Vandercar

**Journal Entry:**

11°05.970 N

079°38.758 E

Mayiladutharai, Tamil Nadu, India

*Come and hear, all you who fear God, and I will declare what He has done for my soul. [Psalm 6:16]*



**Joshua Vandercar**

These have been trying times. India has not been trying me ... this thing we affectionately call Team has been trying me. I have been tried to the point of timidity, to the point of temptation, to the point of bitterness, to the point of tears. Still, I am taken by the grace of God.

Tonight we are staying at the home of the TELC (Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church) pastor here in Mayiladutharai, only miles from the sea. He and our contact/friend, Edmond, related stories of the tsunami of 26 Dec 2004. They told us of the streets that were lined with so many 'sleeping' people. They told us of having to take the street lights and having to stand a top bodies as they



installed them in the hospitals. And they told us of great faith ... of a Christian fisherman, rejected by his community and neglected by his government, who owned a home on the shore. When the great wave came, he and his family were worshipping in the safety of their inland church; however, his small child was still at home in the bassinet. After the waters hit land, all the houses in his fisherman community were washed away--all but his own. One lone home standing in the midst of great destruction. And his child, too, was safe and sound.

*You have caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water; but You brought us out to rich fulfillment. [Psalm 66:12]*

What wonders our God continues to work. The waves and billows shall surely come, but the Word of God is our rock and sure foundation. I shall not be moved. I shall not be moved. I shall not be moved, but by You.

*Come and see the works of God; He is awesome in His doing towards the sons of men. [Psalm 66:5]*

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**Date:** 3/2/2006

**Submitted by:** Mark Huber

**Journal Entry:**

Time is moving so quickly. I can't believe it's already March, and we're a month and a half into our Indian tour. These past few weeks have been absolutely amazing and incredibly exhausting all at the same time. We're now more frequently having multiple programs per day, and the summer heat is starting to become oppressive. We're still in southern India, and the weather here is hardly temperate. Summer started on March 1, and we can definitely notice a difference. The mosquitoes are ridiculous, too. Up until now I didn't really realize what all the complaining was about, but just in the past few days I've been bitten more times than I have in an entire summer in the U.S.

The ministry, however, is amazing. We've been in countless villages and congregations that have such a powerful witness to what God has done for them that it's hard not to be moved by what they have to share with us. It's been really fun to play for schools and boarding homes these past few days, and the way the kids light up when the puppets come out makes it all worthwhile.

I've decided that most of what we experience here won't really be appreciated or recognized until we're long gone. There's just far too much to take in visually, sensorily, and intellectually, to be able to process it all on the fly. There are plenty of challenging things (the heat, the food, the mosquitoes), but there are also so many amazing stories and images that just have to sit a while before their full effect can be realized. The joy of the people we meet, and the excitement and enthusiasm with which they greet us, make all that we do worth all the differences and difficulties we might encounter along the way.



**Mark Huber**

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**Date:** 3/3/2006

**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin

**Journal Entry:**

Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu, India

We're in a tsunami-affected town right now, right on the Bay of Bengal. We walked along the beach listening to the ocean waves! It was beautiful! But, along the beach was tons of rubble from the tsunami. A brick wall, which once surrounded a temple, is crushed and split, and the water from the waves continually runs over it. As we walked, we saw a Hindu temple that had been crushed as well. The whole thing was in pieces piled at the base, and only a few larger pieces with some of the statues of gods remained. We walked through a close neighborhood, where many houses had been taken out, some being rebuilt; others, all that was left was the



**Corie Alsin**

foundation. Goats were all over the place.

It was a crazy feeling, walking through all that knowing that all those people's lives had been so hugely affected. It's also another thing that India and the U.S. have in common. We are different, and yet, I am reminded every day of the similarities. We are all people, live, breathe, laugh, play, and we are all brothers and sisters in Christ!

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**Date:** 3/4/2006

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu, India

A day off in India may mean three things. It may mean traveling in a crowded bus, train, or auto all day to get to your next destination. It may mean you have been granted a day off, but due to last minute scheduling, the contacts would like you to do just two programs while you're relaxing. Lastly, it may mean you go sight-seeing to a bunch of unfamiliar locations that seem very random. Our last day off resembles the third meaning.



**David Strussenberg**

Like all days off, sleeping was like any other day. Our contact, Edmund, said we could sleep in for as long as we wanted, but we had to wake up for breakfast by 8:30 a.m. We took a tour of the first Lutheran missionary church that morning. It was being renovated. Tranquebar, where we were, is on the coast and is filled with history, as well as being struck by the tsunami on December 26, 2004.

It was during the night we saw the tsunami memorial, which was conveniently next to a flower show. A flower show to remember for a lifetime, and a show that would not end. We were jam-packed in line to see a wide variety of floral magnificence. A magnificence that was half dead due to the lack of water all the flowers received. From my experiences, it seemed like the Lawn and Garden section at any friendly neighborhood Wal-Mart, but more stunning, because this hour walk ended with a cow that was fenced in and not walking in the middle of the street. I must also say I did love a car that was completely covered in moss. That was fun!

Afterwards, we grabbed a bite to eat and headed back to our living space. Before I close this journal I forgot to mention one thing. Mark has had a bad cough. So, our friend Edmund, without telling us where we were going, took us to a doctor. There was a huge line, but because we are white, Mark got in right away. That happens a lot in India. People are always giving up their seats, just because of where we're from. We get the star treatment a lot. It is nice, but I don't prefer it. I would rather serve than be served. However, while it is being offered, I need to accept the love. It's important to let people serve you, because they want to, and it's a necessity to accept God's love when offered.

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**Date:** 3/5/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

Tranquebar, Tamil Nadu, India

I can't believe it's already March! It's also hard to believe we've been in India for a month and a half! Although there are always changed plans or surprises, I'm starting to feel like we have adjusted enough to India to feel moderately "comfortable" in the culture here. There are still rough days, especially now when it is beginning to heat up in India, being the start of their summer. It's very humid and very exhausting to be outside and doing multiple programs a day, but



**Tara Kent**

God gives us unexpected strength many times to teach sing-alongs and dance around with the kids.

This morning we played one song and gave one testimony in the three-hour church service here in Tranquebar. The entire service, besides our part, was in the language of Tamil, so it was a long morning! We had communion for the first time since being in India, though, so that was a neat experience. Even though communication is difficult, it's amazing how God's grace and love are evident in the people here. After the service, and after a short tea (chai) break, we had a program with the church youth. They sang a song for us at the end of our program about the tsunami that came in 2004 and devastated much here. We are right by the Bay of Bengal, and we saw much of the damage to homes and monuments. Many of the children who sang about the tsunami also were directly affected by it. Many of their homes were destroyed, and many of their parents and family members were taken from them. It amazed me how much joy they had, in spite of all this, while singing about God with us.

While I have moments where I am overjoyed and am in disbelief about the experience I am able to have for almost four months, I am starting to miss many things from home. I would not trade this experience for anything, but I find myself thinking a lot about people from home, food from home, facilities from home, beds from home, etc. Today during the three-hour church service, my mind went back home and rejoiced over the fact that my good friends Krista and Eli were at their wedding reception, enjoying their brand-new marriage! I'm sad to have missed it, but all at home are on my heart and mind and are in my prayers! Congrats to Krista and Eli!

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**Date:** 3/7/2006

**Submitted by:** Erin Meier

**Journal Entry:**

Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu

We had a long day of traveling yesterday. We went from Tranquebar to Trichy, and then we met our new contacts Joseph and Lazarus. We said goodbye to our old contact Edmund and traveled for hours with Lazarus to his home in Nagercoil. We ended up getting to bed around two in the morning. Lazarus let us sleep in for a while, and we had a late breakfast. During breakfast we heard loud noises coming from the boys' room upstairs. The boys informed us that they had slept on foam mattresses on the floor last night, and there were people upstairs building beds for them. Yep. Indian hospitality is amazing. We had time to rest up some and relax from the long day of traveling the day before. We did a program in the evening at a girls' hostel. The girls were great! We had dinner there and then did our program. They seemed to really enjoy it.

I love looking around at the people we meet and seeing people who remind me of people I know in the U.S. It's fun and makes me smile. I saw several girls tonight that reminded me of people I know. After the program, there was not enough room in the car of all of us to go back at one time, so we had to make two trips. The boys ended up going back first, and us girls waited at the hostel. While we waited, we started talking to the girls. They ended up bringing chairs for us to sit in and the three of us were scattered in the crowd of girls, each of us surrounded by girls looking up at us asking us all kinds of questions. They asked all about our families. When I was telling them about my brothers, I told them that one brother is married and has a son. They misunderstood me and thought I said that I was married and had a son. I laughed and explained that again. They wanted to know what our favorite things are, like our favorite color, dress, food, etc. They asked our favorite hero. None of us really had an answer, but they definitely knew their favorite Indian heroes. They wanted to know my favorite friend's name. When I answered "Joshua," they looked confused at first. Then they started



**Erin Meier**

dancing and put their hands up to their faces, making gestures to refer to facial hair. I realized that they were trying to ask me if I was talking about Joshua on our team because he has facial hair and was dancing in our program. I told them "yes." They were happy, but this answer did not quite satisfy them because they wanted to know my favorite girl friend's name. It made me laugh. We enjoyed talking with these girls so much and were sad to leave. I think we are really going to enjoy Nagercoil.

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**Date:** 3/8/2006

**Submitted by:** Mark Huber

**Journal Entry:**

We're officially in the southernmost tip of India. We arrived in Nagercoil on Monday to an incredible reception by a wonderful host. The person who we're staying with, Lazarus, is leasing one of his houses to the government as an orphanage for tsunami victims, so we're always mobbed by small children everywhere we go. We're currently working with the Indian Evangelical Lutheran Church, and have played programs at several hostels and churches so far. Lent is a busy time of year in the church, and they have services every night of the week here.



**Mark Huber**

Lazarus is also committed to having us try a new type of food for every meal, so it looks like our next week is going to be quite the adventure. I have to admit, it's nice to have the variety and experience of trying so many new things. I think my favorite thing about southern India so far are the bananas. There are green bananas, red bananas, yellow bananas, and within those colors more varieties than I can count. They all have a distinctive taste, and I haven't had one yet that I didn't like.

India is definately heating up, too. I have a feeling that we'll get back to Minnesota in May and summer will feel amazingly cool compared to our next two months here. The heat makes programs a little tiring, but the excitement of all the people we meet keeps us going. The one thing that we've decided, though, is that we never want to be famous. There comes a point where a hundred reaching hands all wanting to be touched becomes a little too much to take.

We're still pushing ahead, and even though the heat makes the days feel a little slow sometimes, there's still such an overwhelming flood of experiences everywhere we turn that keeps things interesting!

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**Date:** 3/8/2006

**Submitted by:** Joshua Vandercar

**Journal Entry:**

08°10.859 N  
077°24.777 E  
Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, India



We have recently come to the tip of India ... to the southern end of the Western Ghats mountain range. We've encountered a few short, but great, showers during the past several days ... a welcome break from the heavy heat and humidity. We are now working with the IELC (Indian Evangelical Lutheran Church), a church body initiated many years ago by LCMS missionaries. Our program schedule seems as if it will be less demanding during the coming days. The schools are also now administering public examinations, which limits us from spending much time during our visits to the students.

We are now nearing two months spent in India. I have quickly become accustomed to some ways of this culture. From the beginning, but now especially, it is difficult for me to pinpoint what things might be most striking for those of the States. Even so, let me try and address a few of the very apparent things one would encounter when first stepping into this culture. (Many of these may very possibly have been mentioned by my teammates in other journals and/or blogs.)

- Flowers are fresh, fragrant, abundant, and graciously given as a garland or showered upon us as a welcome.
- Tea time is given high priority both in the morning and afternoon. Hot tea or coffee (w/sugar and milk) is provided by many streetside vendors. If it's too hot to drink, you will see it being cooled by pouring from cup to bowl and back again, again and again.
- The majority of trees produce some kind of fruit ... many of which we've had opportunity to take ... orange, banana, lemon, coconut, goa, jackfruit, pomegranate, palmyra. A banana is taken with nearly every meal.
- Many meals are served on banana leaves. They are abundant, eco-friendly, and foldable ... giving opportunity for us to more discreetly signal that we are satisfied and we can take no more food.
- Power switches must be flipped down to turn current on and up to turn it off.
- Large panels of light and fan switches can be found in nearly any room. We were recently at a palace museum, walking down an outdoor hall which had a panel at each end ... one consisting of 45 switches and the other of 35.
- Horns, bells, and chimes daily remind me of the Doppler Effect as we travel, windows down, at top speeds of about 60-65 km/h ... very, very nearly passing and meeting large trucks, buses, auto-rickshaws, cattle carts, motorcycles, bicycles, pedestrians, and a variety of animals.
- The advertising strategy of frequent choice seems to be either yellow paint or half-naked babies. The place at which I recently had my head shaved had hanging on the front door a Heinz food poster featuring nothing but a half-naked baby, in all his stages of development ... crawling to toddling.
- We have often heard children asking, "My name is?", when, in actuality, they want to know what my name is.
- I am able to greet anyone, whether on the street, in a hotel (i.e. restaurant), or in a village, with a simple and subtle head tilt to the left or right (the right is more natural for me).

I could continue, but if I were to do so, it would soon be time for me to write my next journal. Truth is, it can take me up to ten sittings over several days to complete these entries. Uninterrupted time is rare.

All in all, India is beautiful. The people, the land, and the habits are so intriguing. And, as I wrote earlier, we are only now at the tip of this grand country and this grand culture.

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**Date:** 3/10/2006

**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin

**Journal Entry:**

Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, India

Our contact's name is Lazarus! I love it! One thing I appreciate about India is that people have names like Lazarus! Our Bible names in the States are always like Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, etc. But, in India all Biblical names are an option!



**Corie Alsin**

Today we went to a Lenten service. After we finished praying, I realized I had taken off my shoes. I was thinking, "Oh no! I need to put my shoes back on! Why did I take them off? Is someone going to be offended by that?" Ha ha! Silly me! We always take them off before we enter the sanctuary! It shows respect!

We ate red and green bananas! There are hundreds of different types of bananas! Small, big, fat, skinny, soft, hard! Mmm! So good!

I've decided that high fives and blowing kisses are my favorite, and the kids', too! They love it when I hold my hand up really high and make them jump to hit it!

The kids are the best! They're so joyful!



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**Date:** 3/12/2006

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**



**David Strussenberg**

Every time we leave Lazarus's house, we are swarmed by children. We usually leave his house to go eat, go to a program, or go sight seeing, and each time the children do not disappoint to surround us, hold our hands, and find out who their new friends are. You see, Lazarus, his house is part of an orphanage, and for the last week we have been the main entertainment. One day our power went out, and we opened up all the windows to the house, being well over ninety degrees. All the children surrounded us from all sides to watch us, watch us, well, sit and do nothing, just relax. When we talk to them, they get all giddy at first as if they see a movie star. Eventually one girl spoke up and said "I like you!" Then she wanted me to sing her a song, so I had Josh and Tara come out, so we could give them a little music. It was like a mini-program in the middle of Lazarus's living room.

Yesterday we played soccer and frisbee with 40 boys at a hostel. We also shared songs with each other. That was not unusual. What was unusual was after the program.

We went to Lazarus's brother's house for a birthday party for his 4-year-old granddaughter. There was a professional photographer, and many family members who attended this special occasion. Now in America, we well know a birthday consists of receiving presents, having a party, and going out to doing something fun. In India on a birthday, the person who has a birthday usually gives the gifts. In this case, it was different because she was only four, but we did have a worship service. Lazarus gave a message, lead music, and read Scripture, to talk about the wonders God has put in his life, one of them being the birthday girl. I was touched by the whole thing.

I was reminded at this time, that in America, birthdays at times can be about the individual. The birthday boy or girl is treated as a king or princess, receiving plenty of new toys, clothes, or electronics to celebrate. Which is all very good, but what about thanking God? Here is a family who took time out to thank God for another blessing, and another year of life for an adorable four-year-old girl.

Many times during my birthday I get caught up in the gifts and the hullabaloo, forgetting about the one who put me there. Last night reminded me to not leave God out of the party, but take him along, and thank him for his amazing love and guidance throughout the years. Forgetting to invite God would be like leaving all the Oscars home for the Academy Awards ceremony. How silly does that sound, but it happens on birthdays where the guest of honor is left out of the celebration. I urge everyone to never forget this.

With that said, the worship service ended with cake. In India, the person who cuts the cake and eats the first slice is the one who has the birthday. At the age of four, they share their piece of cake by hand feeding it to their mother and father. Then everyone gets a slice, which takes place before dinner. A lot of sweets and desserts in India are served and supposed to be eaten before the meal. Who knew?

Well, I have to go, perhaps to ride an elephant somewhere or eat some rice and curry. But before then, remember to thank God at all times, for he cares for you.

Dave

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**Date:** 3/13/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, India

Certain things in India are beginning to seem very natural and normal to me. For instance, cramming eight people and their bags into one "Ambassador" car/taxi is just a part of life. Now it is not just our white skin that is drawing

attention when we're driving through villages...it's also arms and legs hanging out windows and faces pushed up against the glass. Okay, so maybe it's not THAT crowded, but almost. Another occurrence that has become part of life for me is having tea or coffee breaks throughout the day at least four times a day. I notice myself getting restless when we do not have it that often, and I wonder about what life will be like in a few months when Indian tea will only be a sweet memory.



**Tara Kent**

A few months ago, plastic chairs only were patio furniture to me, but now, as soon as I see them, I am drawn to them and must sit or else be strongly encouraged by swarms of children, "Sister, please sit, please sit." The next natural step is to be stared at in the plastic chairs. This too has become so normal that I don't think I will know what to do with myself when thousands of wide eyes aren't staring at me.

Although you may have thought that nodding was universal...not so. Here in India, when a person understands or agrees with what you are saying, they do not nod their head up and down, but rather they tilt their head side to side. Picture someone being unsure or trying to make a decision and thinking, "I don't know..." Then picture us forgetting that this is how Indians say "yes" with their heads, so we continue explaining something over and over, waiting for them to nod the "right" way. Quite humorous. Sometimes without realizing it, I nod like an Indian, and then I laugh as I remind myself of a bobble-head. While I'm not necessarily the most graceful eater while using my hands, it is now second nature to dive into a pile of rice and curry with my fingers. It's funny to hear our parents' voices in our heads from when we were little saying, "Don't play with your food" as we mix our food together with our fingers before putting them in our mouths. There will be so many adjustments when we come home that perhaps what was once normal to us will be a little unusual and awkward. Normal is so relative.

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**Date:** 3/15/2006

**Submitted by:** Joshua Vandercar

**Journal Entry:**

08° 10.753 N

077° 24.844 E

NAGERCOIL, TAMIL NADU, INDIA



**Joshua Vandercar**

... And though my windows got a view,  
The frame i'm looking through seems to have no concern for now  
... And all the people in the street  
That i'll never get to meet if these tracks don't bend somehow  
... You keep on rolling, put the moment on hold  
The frames too bright, so put the blinds down low  
And i need this old train to breakdown  
O, please, just let me please breakdown  
i wanna break on down, but i can't stop now.  
- *Breakdown*, Jack Johnson

Has Jack Johnson ever brought you to tears? Have you ever truly come to know the depths from which a song comes? Team trials have been finding healing, but these past days have tried me in new ways. You would think leaving the United States, we might leave the rush of life. However, I can't find a moment in the midst of a day. Not a moment to stop, to embrace, to breakdown. These tracks demand discipline and distance.

As we began our ten-hour train ride, I sought retreat sitting at the door of our car. If just for a moment, I thought I might be alone with my thoughts, while so many faces and places we passed on by. Might I find some peace, some comfort in the distant mountains, the setting sun, the soon

shining stars, and the rising moon? What if I were to jump train and escape it all? But I can't do that...even but a moment. Discipline and distance...and so this old train rolls on.

Be still and know that I am God ... - *Psalm 46:10*

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**Date:** 3/17/2006

**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin

**Journal Entry:**

Tea and Coffee

I drank five cups of coffee/tea today! We had it at breakfast, after each program we did, and at tea break in the afternoon! What will we do without tea breaks at home?

So, the cutest thing about today was a little kindergarten girl at one of our programs had purple flowers encircling her entire head. They started at one ear and went up over the top of her head to the other ear. It was the cutest thing I've ever seen! Then the headmistress walked across the front row and hit the children who weren't doing the actions. The saddest thing for me in India, and the hardest thing for me to deal with, is seeing the teachers physically discipline their students. My culture teaches me that this is not okay; I know that this is a cultural difference I do not understand. I have talked about it with one of our contacts and learned that it is something that happens in all schools, even the Christian ones. All I can do is pray for the children, the teachers, the schools, and for my own understanding. Would you please do the same?

God bless all of you! Happy St. Patrick's Day!



**Corie Alsin**

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**Date:** 3/19/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

Melpattambakka, Tamil Nadu, India

Our day began as a typical Sunday morning for us in India...walk into a new church as strangers, sit awkwardly in the front of the church (but not before joining the pastor in the processional up the aisle), sit through at least two or three hours of a church service in another language, and try to eat all of the cookies ("biscuits" in India) and tea served to us up front. It's probably pretty funny to watch us as we try and stay awake through the sermon in Tamil until hearing a random English phrase, which abruptly opens our eyes for a few seconds until the pastor continues in Tamil. We sang a couple songs during the service and then led Sunday School with the children, during which they sang an adorable song in English for us called "Telephone to Jesus."

Later this afternoon, we hopped in our bumpy bus and drove at least an hour to a village where, when we arrived, we found them pushing a large generator in to the compound for our program. Walking in, we soon saw a stage to the left, which was also in the process of being decorated and lit up for us. All around outside there were gardens, around which they had wrapped those colored plastic lights that remind me of camping... I'm pretty sure they were in the shape of chilies, those peppers they are so fond of putting in all of our food to wake us up a bit! The children were so much fun as we sat in the crowd with them, took pictures with them, and asked them the English questions they learned in school. They told one of the adults there something in Tamil, and he told us, "The children have much affection for you." Precious. The evening ended with a meal on banana leaves and another bumpy ride back to where we were staying...I still can't believe this is my life!



**Tara Kent**

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**Date:** 3/21/2006  
**Submitted by:** Erin Meier  
**Journal Entry:**



**Erin Meier**

So there is so much to write about today. First we left the cool place we were staying at, and got on the road for a couple hours. Our first program was at a school for kids affected by the 2004 tsunami. We had to do a totally secular program. We didn't really like the idea of doing a secular program, but we ended up having a lot of fun with it. We weren't sure which songs to sing, so we just changed the words to some of the songs we usually sing. We changed "Allelu, Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia, Praise ye the Lord" to "How are you, How are you, How are you, How are you, I am fine." It was so funny to us because when you ask anyone here how they are doing they usually say that they are fine. It is like the auto response or something. At the beginning of the program, when Dave was introducing himself, he asked the kids, "How are you?" and they all responded with the typical, "I am fine." When we did the puppet show Dave and Mark switched roles. Dave was the lion puppet. The lion puppet is a little different to hold than the rest of the puppets. Dave had the lion floating up in air, and Billy Bob (Mark's puppet) commented on his flying. We got some of this on video tape. Then we had lunch. The people brought so much food, and then they all left while we ate. Finally we were able to eat a meal without a bunch of people standing behind us watching! We talked about how much food they made for only six people to eat! We had chipati (a really good flat bread) and rice. After we ate, we had another long bus ride to our next program. This one was at a school. There were about one thousand kids at the program. We really enjoyed this program. At the beginning of this program they put garlands around our necks as is their custom. We have gotten all kinds of different garlands. We had gotten this kind before. I call it the Mr. T (which makes me think of Sean) garland because it is big and has a lot of gold stuff on it. After our program we got on the bus to leave. Some of the kids came up to the door and the windows to shake our hands. This one girl came back to shake my hand five different times. It made me laugh. Then there was this boy who was a little confused on his English. To ask my name he said, "My name is?" and then to tell his name he said, "What is you name," and said his name. It was cute. Next we went on another long bus ride to a place for leprosy patients and did another program. It was interesting because they weren't really responding to any of the action songs, but then they asked for more action songs. Then we ate dinner there. We had a fun visitor during dinner. I was eating my banana after my meal when this unusually large cricket, that seemed to fall from the sky, jumped on my plate and started eating my rice! Good thing I was done with my plate. We all laughed so hard. Then we had another long drive to the place where we are staying now. It is a girls' boarding school. We met the lady who runs it at a dinner we had at an Indian restaurant in Minnesota right after training. We have a big room and a bathroom with two toilets, two showers, toilet paper, and a trash can. Tonight when we were in the bathroom getting ready for bed, Corie told me that there was a trash can. I replied with much excitement saying, "This place has toilet paper and a trash can! Wow! This place is so nice!" I am easy to please these days. So on our long bus ride today I finished reading *Blue Like Jazz*. I enjoyed it. There were several chapters that I read tonight that really spoke to me. During the last chapter the author, Don, talks about what he thinks Jesus would do if He was sitting at a campfire and Don walked up to Him. He talked about how Jesus would listen and want to know his story. He talked about how Jesus would speak truth to him. Jesus would share His love with Don, but He would also rebuke him. Jesus would tell him of the gifts and blessing He had given Don and how he should use them. I enjoyed thinking about this for myself. It really made me self-evaluate. Well, I pray that everyone back home is doing well. We appreciate the prayers and are encouraged by knowing that there are a lot of people praying for us and the ministry God has called us to do here.

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**Date:** 3/22/2006  
**Submitted by:** Joshua Vandercar  
**Journal Entry:**

11° 58.806 N  
079° 11.156 E  
TIRUKOILUR, TAMIL NADU, INDIA



Then Samuel took a stone...and called its name Ebenezer... - *I Samuel 7:12* **Joshua Vandercar**

...And these stones shall be for a memorial... - *Psalms 46:10*

I was reminded of these verses today as we traveled through the rocky countryside...boulders rising from the ground looking like captured clouds. And I was reminded of them as Erin and I walked across the dry riverbed. I picked up five small stones. I then shared these thoughts tonight at church, remembering the reminders I carry with me...an anklet from Honduras (friendship, faith, and tea) and a white-bead necklace (identity, value, and purpose). I danced with a little girl named Joyce and kept the flower that fell from her hair, placing it among the pages of my Bible.. a memorial to the spirit of joy and a night in India.

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**Date:** 3/24/2006

**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin

**Journal Entry:**

Junior Ministers

We headed up a mountain to do a Junior Ministry Leaders' retreat, which is similar to Boy Scouts but more focused on God. What fun all the participants were! Besides being asked by a few people if I like Indian men, the discussions and praising God together were super fun! (Everyone says "super" here in India about everything we do or wear!)

We're back in the mountains, and that is wonderful. We did do a short program for the boarding school boys. There was a boy there named VijaKORYALSIN! How funny is that? We almost have the same name! I took a picture with him.

Well, that's all the excitement of today! I'm excited for the rest of the weekend! How great it will be to be with people our own age!



**Corie Alsin**

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**Date:** 3/26/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

Kalryan Hills, Tamil Nadu, India

Today was Day Two of the Junior Ministry Leader's Conference that we led up in the mountains. It's so beautiful here, and the climate is a lot nicer than it's been down in the plains. It's been so refreshing to be with these young people about our age who are doing what we do with kids, only in India! We had a chance over the past two days to get to know them a bit and encourage one another in the ministries we are a part of.

We had so much fun with them, leading Bible studies on servant leadership, teaching English action songs for their kids, and teaching games to play with their kids as well. It's always fun when we run into people who have been affected by past Rainbow teams and tell us stories of their fond memories. Three years ago, the last Rainbow team led this same conference, so a couple of the junior ministry leaders remembered them and their songs. They say to us, "Do you know Dain? So funny!" Their favorite song was one the previous team had taught them called "Jesus Loves Me/Rah-Ah-Ah." I guess Dain left quite an impression. It's amazing to think that in three years or even six, when another Rainbow team comes to India, they may see pictures of us or hear stories of when we sang some fun songs and washed each other's feet for the leadership Bible study. Who knows? It's amazing how God works in hearts all over the globe, and even more amazing how He can use me, of all people, on the other side of it!



**Tara Kent**

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**Date:** 3/27/2006

**Submitted by:** Mark Huber

**Journal Entry:**



Have Jesus-bus; will travel.

We arrived at the Melpattambakam boarding home almost two weeks ago now, and even though we've moved on from there, the stories are too good not to share. We were working with the Arcot Lutheran Church, and they did an incredible job of keeping us busy and exhausted.



**Mark Huber**

I think I should start with our bus, which I affectionately dubbed the Jesus-bus. There was a huge sticker right in the middle of the front window that said "Jesus: Coming Soon," and between our driver and the condition of the roads, I believed it. I can only imagine what it looks like to have the Jesus-bus hurtling towards you and your herd of goats at 50 km an hour while swerving and honking nonstop. I know 50 km an hour doesn't seem that fast (around 30 mph), but when there are animals, people, rocks, hay, and the occasional pile of coconuts strewn about the road, it's a whole other story.

Our programs there pretty much covered every possible thing that we can do, from leading a youth leaders retreat in the mountains to playing a secular program at a government school for tsunami victims. We were also working with an organization called Lutheran Partners in Global Ministry, which sponsors several boarding homes with hundreds of children each. It's absolutely incredible to see first-hand what \$17 a month from the U.S. can really mean for one child here: education, clothing, food, and a chance to find a sustainable living for the rest of their lives. In India, where millions of people live in a hopeless condition of poverty, that is a true miracle.

The kids were amazing, and it was incredible to see how a very small number of adults can support a boarding home with upwards of six hundred kids. We went out from the boarding homes to a few villages, and that was also an interesting experience. We played one night program on a stage made from all the benches from the local school, which were tied together in the middle of the street and lit by a generator because the power was out. That led to the interesting experience of drinking tea in the small local church by candlelight, which was a little surreal to say the least.

The secular program at the government school was especially interesting because, well, we're not really a secular group. We realized a few days beforehand that we don't really have an hour's worth of non-religious material, and quickly scrambled to change songs like "Allelu, Allelu, Allelu, Alleluia; Praise ye the Lord" to "How are you, how are you, how are you, how are you?; I am fine." That one was a particular hit because all the children in India are "fine." I'm pretty sure the English workbook lesson on "How are you?" just taught the response "I am fine," because only one of the thousands of kids we have met has been "fantastic!"

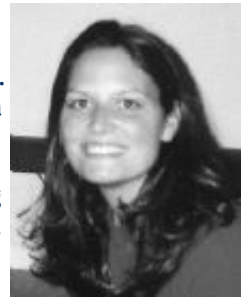
Speaking of thousands of kids, we had a few programs that were ridiculously huge. It started with 650 girls at one of the boarding homes, and then grew to over 1,000 at a Danish mission school where they gathered all the kids together in the local church for the first time because of our program. The culmination was close to 3,000 kids at the Danish mission high school in Tiruvannamalai, where of course we were given one mic... (we'll give a program in a village church that seats a hundred people and have four or five mics, and then play for 3,000 kids spread out over a huge athletic field and get one...)

After those programs we meditated by candlelight at an inter-religious dialogue center, led a two-and-a-half day retreat for all the youth workers in the church at a school in the mountains, and then took our last ride ever in the Jesus-bus.

After we finished our time with the Arcot Lutheran Church, we boarded a train back to Andhra Pradesh to return to the church we started our time in India with. We got off the train at one in the morning, only to be met by two land cruisers the bishop had sent, complete with DVD players and more chrome than anything moving should be allowed to have. We've never ridden in anything remotely close to that so far, and we were quite surprised to be whisked off to suites at a rather nice hotel. The surprises just keep coming, and by the looks of it, our next seven days are going to be quite interesting.

## Journal Entry:

Today was such a hard day. We did a lot of traveling yesterday. Our train arrived around 1 A.M. or so this morning, and it was probably after 2 A.M. when we finally got to bed. We stayed at a hotel last night. They told us they would pick us up at 8 A.M. to take us to the bishop's house for breakfast. We got downstairs and just waited for people to pick us up. We were all so tired. Then this lady (we called her Sue) came and called the bishop's house. They were going to pick us up in 10 minutes, which ended up being much longer. I think we ended up eating at about 10 A.M. I know this is "India time," but I was so frustrated because I was so tired and just wanted to be sleeping. At breakfast, I think they toasted about two loaves of bread for us. They also gave us potato chips and lollipops, and we watched Charlie Chaplin. They talked about how we were just going to go visit some schools today because we were tired and needed to be able to rest, and then tonight we would be singing at a service. Then they had us send someone back to the hotel to get our instruments in case they wanted us to sing at the schools. The first couple of schools that we drove to would not let us in because they were doing government testing. Then we went to a Christian college. We talked to the principal and some of the staff and sang a couple songs for them. Then they gave us a "small memento," which was a huge plaque! Oh, the gifts we have been given. Then they took us for a tour around the campus. By this time I was so tired and frustrated. I needed sleep, and I did not feel well. I was trying to act normal, but on the inside I was in such a bad mood. I did not want to have these feelings. I just wanted to cry so badly. Then we went to a nursing school. We sat around and looked at pictures and talked to some ladies at first and, of course, everywhere we went wanted to give us tea or "cool drinks" (Coke). Then we went over to see the students. They gathered the students, and we sang some songs for them. It was cool because some of the girls knew the songs and would sing along. I could see the blessing of being with these girls and appreciated that, but I was just overwhelmed by this mood I was in. Then they took us back to the hotel for about fifteen minutes, and then we went to Sue's house for lunch. We ate so much! She just kept bringing out more stuff. We looked at her picture albums for a while, and left to go back to the hotel about 3:30 p.m. We could rest until we had to be at the bishop's house at 5:00 p.m. Sue decided she wanted to take us bangle shopping at 4:30. We went downstairs at 4:30 and waited in the lobby, but she never showed up. When we got to the bishop's house, we were told to go upstairs and wash our face for prayer (the church service we were going to). We all went upstairs and washed. Joshua and I were the last ones left up there, and so we got a chance to talk for a couple of minutes. I told him how I was feeling and that I had been praying for release from it. I cried, and then we went downstairs where they served us tea and we looked at more picture albums. We were in these pictures because they were from the ceremonies we had attended when we were here in January or February. Our faces looked pretty funny in the pictures because in most of them we were in the background on the stage where we had been sitting for hours listening to people talk in Telegu and having no idea what was going on the whole time. I started feeling so much better after I had the chance to cry and talk a little. I was still so tired, but I felt free from the frustration and anger. Praise be to God! Then we went to a long church service in Telegu where we sang a few songs. Then we ate dinner, and finally went back to the hotel. Aaaahh, sleep! It was quite a day full of exhaustion, but God was definitely there holding us up and working in and through us. Blessed be His name!



**Erin Meier**

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**Date:** 3/31/2006

**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin

## Journal Entry:

Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh

What a crazy week it has been! We are definitely experiencing some of the things previous teams told us about, like waiting for our contacts and having no idea what's happening next. It seems like we do a lot of waiting in our hotel lobby or sitting in front of a church, listening to people talk in Telegu. The first day, we continuously retraced our steps, going somewhere and five minutes later returning to the same spot. We aren't really doing any programs, only singing "So Much" and "Dance Like David" at these conferences. I just have to remember that God works through us no matter where we are or what our contact decides to do with us. We've met a few people who totally made our day, and we made theirs! One was even from the U.K.! God has also used this week to work personally in each of us, as we have had the chance to read Scripture during all of the Telegu talking.

Every minute is a surprise with the Bishop. Tonight after the Lenten service, he took us to Cheers, where they serve fries! What a treat! We ate and had a chance to relax as the Macarena played



**Corie Alsin**

loudly over the speakers. If only we could have seen Indians doing the Macarena! It was a great night off in the place where everybody knows your name!

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**Date:** 4/2/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

Visakhapatham, Andhra Pradesh, India

If patience is a virtue...

So, I was just telling my teammates the other day how our time so far in India has been different from how past Rainbow teams had described. For example, we haven't gotten to walk much at all, we have never had more than four programs a day, and we really have never had to wait for our contacts! We were told, "Oh, you'll have to wait for people all the time because they'll tell you a time and then show up much later." A couple weeks ago, I laughed at that in my head. Now I sit here, waiting for our contact, and I laugh to myself again. For the past week, I have had lessons in patience. A day might go something like this: "So, tomorrow, 7:30 a.m., be prompt." So we get out of bed, hurry to get ready, and sit in the hotel lobby for two more hours waiting. Then someone will show up and say, "Come, come!" Hilarious. Sometimes for fun, it works the opposite. We were told one day, "9 a.m. tomorrow morning, take rest until then." A day to sleep in! The phone rang at 8:40 a.m. "We are ready to leave now." We were still sleeping! So, the other teams were right. People just think about time differently here than I do.

It's the first few days of real summer here in India, and it sure is getting hot! It's also so humid it feels like you're breathing underwater! They say April and May here are almost unbearable. Should be a good time! While I am ready to come home in a lot of ways, I know that there is still much for us to do, and I'm still excited about God's work in those places. He truly is my strength each day! Only a few more weeks in India...I'm trying to savor every moment, knowing it will be gone in the blink of an eye. God bless you all, and see you in a blink!



**Tara Kent**

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**Date:** 4/5/2006

**Submitted by:** Joshua Vandercar

**Journal Entry:**

23° 17.78 N

081° 22.626 E

SHAH DOL, MADHYA PRADESH, INDIA

Ni zaan je dhaa Jesu koinaa  
Baan daamoo dhaa gaargada haanya baa  
Ni zaan je, ni zaan je

i must go with Jesus anywhere  
No matter the roughness of the road  
i must go, i must go

*Nigerian Missionary Sending Song - Hausa*

So, I notice today's date is 4.5.06. Though, here in India we must wait just under a month to reach that same date. It is actually now 1:30 a.m. of the 6<sup>th</sup>. We have just arrived at our destination in Madhya Pradesh, completing bus and train travels that began evening of the 4<sup>th</sup> at 5:30 in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh. Yes, a few hours can be accounted to waiting at the train stations. Tonight, as we ended our travels with a five-hour rough bus ride, I was reminded of this song we sang while on Cross Fire ... no matter the roughness of the road! I must go! The train rides are most often our smoothest travel.



**Joshua Vandercar**

I have again left my guitar for the good of the church and the youth. May this gift be a blessing to many. As, William, the gentleman to whom I gave it, wrote in my journal ... "Music is an instrument that reaches every heart more speedy than an elegant message."

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**Date:** 4/11/2006

**Submitted by:** Erin Meier

**Journal Entry:**

Today we went to Kanha Tiger Reserve National Park in Madhya Pradesh. It is the place that inspired Rudyard Kipling to write *Jungle Book*. We rode in two different vehicles. We were in jeep-like vehicles that had two bench seats that were kind of raised (like stadium seating) in the back. We had a driver and a park guide with us. We went out in the morning and then again in the afternoon. The park was closed for a few hours in between since the animals are not out as much in the heat of the day. It was really fun driving around in the forest/jungle (in Hindi there is only one word for both). I think it was yesterday that we had a conversation where we were trying to explain to Sanjay David the difference we thought there was between a forest and a jungle. I'm not sure that any of us really knew what we were talking about. In the morning we went out early. In the first vehicle was Mark, Corie, Tara, Dave, our contact Sanjay David, and a guy from the place where we were staying. In the next vehicle were our drivers from Shadol, Joshua, and me. When we first started out around the park our guide was just pointing out little birds to us. We had been so excited about seeing monkeys and elephants and tigers and such. We were starting to think, "Is this it?" Then our guide and our drivers got really excited about something they heard or saw. We stopped the jeep and backed up and guess what it was...a hen! That's right folks, a chicken. Joshua and I just kind of laughed. It got much better, though. Pretty soon we were seeing monkeys, deer, bison, wild boar, and peacocks. It was great! Riding around was so beautiful and so relaxing. To see the tigers you have to sign up, and then if the tigers are spotted (they track the tigers), they take people out to see them on elephants. We were really excited for the elephant ride. So after we saw a bit of the park, they took us to this area that had a muesem and stuff. We ate breakfast in the parking lot and went to the bathroom in the bee-infested bathroom.

Finally they said it was time to go see the tigers. They had called our number. So they drove us out to where the elephants were. There were a few other jeeps out there too. A group was coming back on the elephants. It was a group of young boys. They were all swatting and freaking out. The park people got the boys off the elephant really quick and threw a towel up to the driver to cover up with. The boys had run into a swarm of bees, so they decided that route was dangerous. All the park people were gathered talking. Our guide got back into our jeep and we turned around. We didn't know whether we were going a different way or we weren't going at all. We found out later that they closed the elephant rides for the rest of the day because of the bees. We drove around for a while more, and then we went back to where we were staying for lunch. Later in the afternoon we went back to the park. They didn't do elephant rides in the afternoon, but you could see the tigers by jeep from far away. A tiger had been spotted and a bunch of jeeps had gathered to see it. At that point you could only see it with binoculars. We didn't have any in our jeep. Tara had joined our jeep and we had gotten separated from the others. Another jeep let us borrow their binoculars, and we got to see the tiger. While we were looking the tiger got up and started to move, and then it could be seen without the binoculars. It was so cool! We were so excited! We really enjoyed this day driving around in God's creation seeing beautiful wildlife that His hands have made. What a blessing. I started to tear up as we were driving around just thinking about how all creation sings of His glory.



**Erin Meier**

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**Date:** 4/14/2006

**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin

**Journal Entry:**

"Make new friends but keep the old, One is silver and the other's gold."

A wonderful, familiar tune from my childhood! I'm sure many of you are singing it right now, at least in your heads! You're either thankful because it has brought up those childhood memories, or you're completely annoyed because now it is stuck in your head! Or, maybe you are experiencing a little of both!

This saying is on a poster in the rooms we are staying in. I have experienced both



**Corie Alsin**

emotions as I have walked past this poster several times a day for the last three days! The first time I read it, I got a huge smile on my face and sang to Tara! The next couple of times I just got annoyed and wanted it to be out of my head. And, now I am writing a journal about it! What a progression!

As I thought about this quote more and more, I realized how much it applies to my life on Team. Every day I meet multitudes of people and make new friends, exchanging addresses and emails in hope to keep in touch. This is such a blessing that comes with Team! I now have new friends all over the world! This truly is silver to me! But, where is the gold? The gold is the first prize in competition and the more expensive jewelry. In India wealthy people wear gold in order to show off their wealth to those around them. Personally, my gold is in my old friends! Being on the road, especially in India, I don't have much time to talk to those old friends of mine who I love with all my heart, and who I know love me. It's definitely hard at times to be away from them and not hear their voices or their laughs for weeks or months at a time. It's hard to know they are living life in the place they are, and I have no idea what is going on in their life or how they are growing. It's hard to miss those people who are my gold and not have them around to cheer me up. But, they are still my gold!

The wonderful thing about friends is that they can change from that silver to that gold; it just takes time! I have also experienced some of this on Team, as well, whether it be within my team or with members of other teams. And, in this case too much gold is a good thing!!

As I think back to all those silvers I have met, a smile comes to my face! Tonight, an 83-year-old woman became a silver and gave me more joy than I have experienced in the last week! All I did was shake her hand and tell her "Dhanyavaad," which means "Thank you" in Hindi, and she got the hugest smile on her face! She told me how thankful she was to God that she could make it to the church tonight to hear our music! I've never seen so much excitement in all my days in India! Just thinking about it makes my heart jump with joy!

The silvers are such a blessing, and I learn so much from them! I would never give up all those silvers and the ones to come, but it is still those golds who I miss the most! They help me grow and give me such love that no one else could!

And, the greatest gold is Jesus Christ! He is someone to show off! Someone to help other people discover to become one of their golds! Never stop appreciating Him and all He does for you!!

To all my golds out there, I love you and miss you!

To all my silvers, I appreciate you and thank you for the chance to get to know you and I hope to get to you more!!

To all of you, thank you for all you've done for me and for loving me!! In this world, I have won both first and second prize through all of you!!

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**Date:** 4/15/2006  
**Submitted by:** Tara Kent  
**Journal Entry:**

Only three weeks left! I can hardly believe it. Last week was Palm Sunday, and we got to share it with a church congregation we had the chance to get to know a little bit for about a week beforehand in Madhya Pradesh (in Northern India). We arrived at church in the morning and found everyone excitedly gathered together outside decorating their palm branches with little flowers! They handed us our own palm branches, stuck some pretty white flowers on the ends, and everyone formed a line in which we processed out into the city streets with all of our palm branches! We then joined in singing a Hindi (language in North India) song, "Jai Jai Eeshu" which means, "Praise Jesus" over and over! It was so amazing! I watched people in the streets staring at us (not unusual because of our skin color, but this time it was for another reason) probably wondering about what we were doing. As we processed



**Tara Kent**



into church and laid our palm branches at the altar, I sat down and opened my Bible, reading along with the passage in Matthew 21, the triumphal entry. As I read it, it hit me that what we had just participated in was a witness to those we saw in the streets, just as it had been when Jesus was carried on a donkey so long ago.

In verses 9-11 it says, "The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, 'Hosanna to the Son of David!' 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' 'Hosanna in the highest!' When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, 'Who is this?' The crowds answered, 'This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.'"

I thought about how the people we had seen observed our seemingly strange processional and must have thought, 'Who is this that they are worshipping and why?' We have observed many different Hindu and Muslim festivals here in India as the people sing, shout, dance and participate in seemingly strange activities themselves. Now we have a chance to show our joy about our Savior who has chosen to die for us, so that we may live! With the percentage of Christians here at only 2.5% of the population, it is so much easier to see how they are truly lights in the darkness. They truly show the joy of the Lord, and it has been so encouraging to see their faith in such a different circumstance/culture from ours. The body of Christ is such a beautiful thing!

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**Date:** 4/19/2006

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

It is amazing what 20,000 people can do in 22 years, and what one man did for his wife. Although for having six children and eight miscarriages (14 total) maybe she deserved a gift such as the one we saw today. Today we saw the Taj Mahal, which was nothing short of stunning. It took my breath away, and I never ever thought I would be so lucky and feel so blessed to have been given this opportunity. It was a great day, and I am sure my other teammates will write plenty on that subject, so I will talk about a different subject.



**David Strussenberg**

I think cricket is an amazing game. I have had many opportunities to watch India play England, and tonight they are playing Pakistan. When India plays, families crowd around the television sets, and the whole nation is glued to find out the final results. I have actually played twice, and the 12 and 13 year old boys think I am a fine batsman. I cannot write a journal discussing all the rules of cricket and won't dare to try. I will just say, watch the movie Lagaan. An awesome Indian film about the British playing against an Indian village in cricket where much is on the line. I think America would like cricket. Just ask Dain, a previous Rainbow of Promise team member. He would agree.

I have enjoyed these last weeks staying with a host family for a whole week, in fact they still remember the last members they hosted three years ago from Rainbow (Dain and Jason). Just shows what a wonderful impact and joy this ministry brings all over the world. We spent Easter with them, and they took me shopping to find a very nice Indian outfit to wear on such a special occasion. We had church on Easter at 5:00 a.m., a graveyard service at 9:00 a.m., and a music Easter concert at 7:00 p.m. It was a very long day, but a wonderful experience. That night Corie and I made India television, and the next morning Tara and Erin got their picture in the paper. That was exciting.

While our trip to Nepal has been cancelled, many great adventures and ministry opportunities lie ahead. On a train to Delhi I actually got the chance to meet a model from India who is on the television commercials. Our conversation was short, but truth is, in India you never know who you're going to meet.

Bottom line, the Lord is providing for us, keeping us safe, bringing us lots of joy, and stretching us at every opportunity. What a ride it has been, and only three weeks left. You must stay posted for my next journal. It is a schedule of the craziest scheduled day I had in India. Happened on April Fool's Day of all days. With limited Internet we'll see if time permits. Have a good one!

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**Date:** 4/21/2006  
**Submitted by:** Tara Kent  
**Journal Entry:**

Hello all! Just wanted to let you know that as we continue to post journals, some of them may be from earlier dates, since we handwrite many of our journals and mail them to the Youth Encounter office for transcribing and posting. So look carefully for the "approved" date to know if the journals are new! Thanks for supporting our ministry!



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**Date:** 4/23/2006  
**Submitted by:** Mark Huber  
**Journal Entry:**

It's been an interesting week.

After much prayer and difficult decision-making, our team will now not be traveling to Nepal for our last two weeks of ministry abroad. The political situation in the past two weeks has reached the point where the U.S. Embassy has closed down all non-essential operations and sent their own families back home. The tension between the King, political parties, and Maoist rebels has reached the point where demonstrations and violent repercussions are common occurrences. Violence and conflict have reached new peaks this week from the unstable but relatively safe condition of the country over the past two years, and things appear to be reaching a breaking point right as we would have been flying into the country. God is good, and He has guided us safely so far in our travels. We are grateful and feel blessed that the timing of recent events has occurred in a way that spared us any interaction with the dangerous nature of things in Nepal, and at the same time have great empathy for the people who are currently living through such trying times. It seemed so easy for us to look at the facts before us and modify our plans, and I can only begin to imagine what it's like to live, work, and worship in a country going through such turmoil. Please keep the people of Nepal in your prayers; that God may continue to show them peace and love amidst division and violent action.

You might be wondering what we're doing since Nepal has fallen through. We went to Delhi as planned and soaked in the Taj Mahal and other famous sights around the city. It was truly incredible to see one of the wonders of the world, but we're all agreed that we're not big fans of 'tourist India.' You don't appreciate what you have until it's gone, and we definitely realized during our few days in Delhi how incredible and amazing it has been to experience India with our brothers and sisters in Christ showing the way. After escaping the tourist traps and amazingly persistent vendors, we hopped on a train bound for Hyderabad where we first started our tour.

We're now safely back with our friends at the Andhra Christian Theological College in the middle of Hyderabad and had a great day off (including a Harry Potter on the IMAX and Subway) yesterday. Today we participated in worship, Sunday School, and a youth meeting at a Pentacostal church, and tomorrow we're heading off to stay and minister in villages for the next week. We're incredibly excited to get back out into some villages and learn more from the people, and we were just reflecting the other day how that is one thing we wish we could do more of. I think God always has an ear tuned to our many conversations in life...

After our continued ministry in the villages of Andhra Pradesh, we'll be coming back to Hyderabad for a few days, and then heading off to Bombay for our flight home. God has consistently guided our feet and held our team in safety throughout our entire time in India, and these recent opportunities for continued ministry here is a testament to His sometimes mysterious yet powerful plan for all of our lives. We are so thankful for all of your support, encouragement, and prayers during our ministry here. Of course at this point, we're looking forward to the many things awaiting us at home, but we're also encouraged and comforted by the work put before us and the blessings that are revealed to us every day. May you see all of the blessing that God places daily in your own lives, and continue to lift up the churches in India and Nepal in your prayers. I hope that everyone had a wonderful Easter, and we look forward to sharing all of our adventures with you in more detail in a few weeks!



**Mark Huber**

**Tara Kent**

**Date:** 4/23/2006  
**Submitted by:** Tara Kent  
**Journal Entry:**



**Tara Kent**

So, unexpectedly we find ourselves in Hyderabad once more due to God being in charge and not us. Although things haven't always gone as we planned (that's life), we knew when Nepal fell through that God would use us somewhere else. As I walked into our old room where we stayed our first night in India three months ago, an overwhelming smell of familiarity (probably nothing more than Indian dust...) came over me. I remembered our first few nights in India, nights when I was scared to death, uncertain of my ability to stick it out for three and a half months, and wondering if it would life here would ever seem "normal" to us. It also is the smell of the third day in India, after overcoming culture shock stage 2...(something about NOT dealing well with the culture change...) and realizing, "Hey, with God I can totally do this!" So, as I smell that smell going to sleep now, I am comforted by God's faithfulness once again. Seriously, why in the world do we doubt Him???

Tomorrow we head on an yet another overnight train to the villages to stay there for a week! We're so pumped! We've visited many but never stayed there with them...should be interesting...and fun with mosquito nets! It's getting hot here...up in the upper 90's lower 100's...crazy!

Today we went to a church where Dave preached a 45-minute sermon and Joshua 15 minutes on top of that! They sure do like their long sermons here... the rest of us led Sunday School for two hours until the "youth meeting" (people our age) for a couple more hours of singing, etc. It's strange thinking about the fact that we only have one more Indian church service before coming home to our seemingly incredibly short services!!! Not complaining. Well, please keep us in your prayers as we finish out our tour here. It has been the trip of a lifetime! Thanks for all your support!

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**Date:** 4/24/2006  
**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin  
**Journal Entry:**



**Corie Alsin**

The Taj Mahal. Magnificent!

Hyderabad. Wonderful to be in a familiar place!

Villages. I'm so excited to go stay in villages all this week!! We haven't had the opportunity to stay in villages yet, just do a program, talk to the people for a short while, and leave. How wonderful it will be to stay and really get to know the people!! We have an opportunity to really experience India this week, and we leave in 20 minutes!!

As we approach the last two weeks in India, I have mixed feelings. I am soooo ready to go home back to all those things that I miss so much, but I also know that when the time comes, I will be sad. This has been my home for the last three months, and only God knows when I will be back in this beautiful country!

We were asked to think about the things we will miss when we leave this place. There are so many! I don't know where to start!

1. People. The people we have met here in the church in India are so amazingly wonderful and hospitable. I have never experienced such hospitality. Also, they are so joyful and on fire for Christ! They depend so highly on prayer! God's Spirit truly dwells in these people!! I will and already do miss so many of them!

2. The Driving. Oh, how I will miss those almost-death moments of driving down the road in India!! No laws, no stopping at lights, the honking of the horn!!

To be continued....We must head off to those villages for the week!! Can you guess what the other things I will miss are? I will let you know next week!!

All God's Love!! Corie

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**Date:** 4/30/2006  
**Submitted by:** Tara Kent  
**Journal Entry:**



**Tara Kent**

It's our last day of programs in India! This morning we participated in the church service in Bhimavaram, Andhra Pradesh and were whisked away halfway through the service to lead the Sunday School. It was so much fun singing with the kids! They were so energetic and joyful! Meanwhile, Mark continued to preach for a whole hour at the church service at their request! We returned to hear Mark finish his sermon, sang a couple more songs in the service, and then were surrounded by individuals coming to us to pray over them. We had the amazing opportunity to pray over at least 30 people each and spend some time with them...even if that meant listening to them speak to us in Telegu for 20 minutes while we simply smiled. Have you ever been exhausted from praying? It was a hot one today, and after the crowds slowly disappeared, I thought of Jesus' ministry and how patient and loving He was with those who followed Him and came to Him for healing and prayer. Even Jesus had to rest sometimes, and afterwards that was just what we did. They brought us some "cool drinks," and we simply smiled at one another in the empty sanctuary reflecting back on the morning. Supposedly it had been around 110 degrees this past week in the villages where we stayed! What a shock it will be to return home in a week to 60 degree weather! Now we're just trying to reflect on our experiences so far and soak up the last week in India! This coming week we will be spending time with the wonderful family who hosted us for the first ten days of our stay in India, and putting together our return program for the States so that we can share our experiences with many of you when we come home! Thanks so much for your prayers and support!

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**Date:** 5/3/2006  
**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg  
**Journal Entry:**



**David Strussenberg**

Have you ever taken a bath with a water buffalo? I can say that I have. I took a bath with many water buffalos. Some family members of one village took me down to a river where kids, adults, and water buffalo alike can cool off from the days heat and get clean. While you lather, rinse, and repeat, hundreds of little fish circle around you and at times bite you, mistaking you for a meal. It is quite exciting, and there is no other experience like it in the world--not the fish, but taking a bath in a village river. I can only imagine what the people thought as they passed by and saw a white guy dipping in their river. Being such a remote place, I am sure they haven't recieved many foriegn visitors.

We have finally met our match with the Indian heat. You can sweat gallons just by standing around, and I'm sure I have lost more weight by spending a week in villages than my whole time in India just because of the heat.

There is one thing that I am just in awe as we travel from village to village. For one, we are usually kept as a surprise to the village by the pastor, yet despite planning a last minute program, we always play to a full church. They ring the church bells, make announcements over the loud speaker, and people show up an hour or two later. When the people have arrived, that is when it is time to begin the program. It is far different when I think of the churches in America where announcements have to be placed in the bulletins a few weeks in advance for anyone to know about it. Plus if a small turnout occurs by the starting time, it usually means not many other people will show up at all, and it will remain a small turnout. There is no need to wait an extra hour or two for more people to show up. Fascinating!

Well, this journal is short, but I have to go! God bless!

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**Date:** 5/5/2006  
**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin  
**Journal Entry:**

Handmade dryers....that's the key!! Mine was autorickshaws!! I washed my clothes after swimming in the ocean in them!! That's right, we swam in the ocean in our clothes!! It was super fun, and the waves were so strong!! I very much enjoyed Nimmy, our host sister, who came and played in the waves with us!! So, after washing my clothes, I had to sleep in the shirt that night, so it was still soaked as we headed to our programs. I decided the wind was the best option!! I took the shirt with us and held it outside the rickshaw as we drove down the road in order for it to get some wind and dry!! It totally worked!! It was the best homemade dryer I've ever used!!

What an incredible week in the villages! This is just one of many stories that have come from this wonderful, heart-touching week spent with the beautiful people of India!! One of my other favorite moments was dancing with the children!! After one of our programs in the morning, the children came and sang all of our songs with us as we sat outside the house we were staying in!! They were super cute, dancing for the Lord!! Divya, one of the young girls, even gave me a necklace! I love it and I can't believe she would just give it to me. It is so beautiful and had to mean a lot to her, and she just gave it to me a complete stranger. It's truly amazing!!

Our last week of ministry and programs here in India was fulfilling and will never be forgotten!



**Corie Alsin**

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**Date:** 5/5/2006  
**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin  
**Journal Entry:**

So, back to those wonderful things about India that I will miss!! So many more have surfaced since we went to the villages!

3. THE CHILDREN: Wow!! There really just are no words for the children!! I love them and will miss them the most!! The joy they share with those around them through their smiles and laughter is contagious!! It makes my heart jump!! The way sing so passionately and love to jump up and down and dance!! They all have truly touched my heart!!

4. THE SIMPLE LIFE: Here in India my life has been so much simpler. I don't have many decisions to make about my day to day life. There isn't much television or radio to watch or listen to. So many of the little things about my life here in India will be missed.

5. THE MARKETS: How much fun it is to walk down the road and see a hundred different shops all selling the same thing!! Here in India, all the shops that sell jewelry are together. Those that sell saris are together, and so on. Also, there are always so many people around!! I will no longer be able to go out and buy a whole chicken freshly cut to eat!!

6. THE FRUIT: The fruit here has so much flavor, and the oranges are so juicy!! I love it!! It is so fresh and tasty!! Plus, there are hundreds of different kinds of bananas!! CRAZY!!

I thought about many things last week and this week as we spent our last days here in India. Soon it will be back to the States, where all those things I have been missing and thinking about in my mind will be back. I wonder what that will be like. It's so hard to imagine right now. So many mixed feelings as we approach the day that plane leaves. I can't believe it. It seems so unreal. Will I ever return to India? I hope so, but only God has that answer! I will leave you with my favorite quote from India:

"We must eat lunch. It's good for our existence!" Lazarus Bright, Nagercoil, Tamil Nadu, India

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**Corie Alsin**



**Date:** 5/5/2006  
**Submitted by:** Mark Huber  
**Journal Entry:**

Well everyone, this is my final post from India. We're leaving tonight for Bombay, and from there begin our long trip back to Minnesota. It's hard to believe that almost four months of ministry here is coming to an end, and I don't even know where to begin to process it all.

Our impromptu trip to Hyderabad was actually the perfect way to end our tour. It was like coming home when we arrived back to the same beds at the same houses with the same people that we began this crazy adventure with. Our ministry in the villages was a great taste of what much of India is really like, and at the same time, it's strange to think of living an entire life there. So much of our trip has been quick in and outs: seeing a place, meeting some people, and then off to the next stop without looking back for too long. It's really odd to be back somewhere we've left, and it's great being able to see the difference between our first time here and the last. This is the place I experienced my first morning in India, unsure of where we could go or what we were going to do, or for that matter who the people were that we were with. This time round we were greeted as longtime friends, and I suddenly realized that I knew my way around the culture and even parts of the city in ways that I never would have predicted in January.

Our experiences in India have been incredible, challenging, and probably more formative than we realize, but I can't even begin to give them justice at this point. I hope that as we continue to journal during our return tour, we'll be able to pass on all of the insights that can only be gained in retrospect.

All of our ministry here wouldn't have been possible without your prayers, financial support, words of encouragement, and all of the things that we take for granted all too often. I want to say thank you again for helping to make this part of our lives possible, and for supporting and caring about the church in India. We're so excited to share our experiences first-hand with many of you, and for those of you we're not able to see again, we'll be journaling for three more months! U.S., here we come!



**Mark Huber**

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**Date:** 5/13/2006  
**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg  
**Journal Entry:**

It has been five days since we left India. I am sitting at home in Pittsburgh, PA with a cool drink, and yes, I have ice in my glass and yes, it contains no fruit, but it doesn't say so on the can. In India we never had ice with our sodas and each soda bottle had the words contains no fruit. I never did find the soda where there was actually fruit in it.

So, you may be wondering what is it like to be home after three and a half months? I was super excited to see my family and friends. I was also happy to be reunited with my mom's meatloaf, ice cold milk, and American ESPN. Yet, it is not India.

The people I met in India, the children and their big smiles, and the strong faith they carried, I miss and will never forget. I want to go back someday. India is worth going back to and has taught me the true value of commitment, family, and prioritizing life in such a good Christian way. People are happy there based on friendships and are content with what they have. There is not such a strong emphasis on basing self worth on money and being famous. There are of course exceptions to that, but for the most part in the Christian church, the leaders and congregations of most churches carry a Christ like attitude. Never had I ever been surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses before. Well, perhaps at Youth Encounter training. Anywho, my life has been changed, and my only wish in the months ahead is to be able to declare the wonders God has been working through us and in India.

There is a need in India for American support in the church, as in the rest of the world. There is also a need in American churches for support from our brothers and sisters in Christ from around the world. Sometimes in the church I feel like we have forgotten who the rest of our family is. As brothers in sisters in Christ, we must work together to spread the Gospel together in all countries, not just our own. I was lucky to be able to meet just a small number of our family that I plan to work with throughout the rest of my life. These next few months I am looking forward to visiting the churches throughout the United States to share with them the love that God has brought to all



**David Strussenberg**

of us and how he has been working in India. A country before last August, I knew nothing about. Now it is a country that I will never forget.

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**Date:** 5/30/2006

**Submitted by:** Tara Kent

**Journal Entry:**

On the road again... but it's home sweet home for me! After a couple weeks of debriefing and getting to catch up with the other International Teams at VBS training, we head out again to travel and share our experiences from the past four months! Our first stop: my house in good ol' CHI-TOWN. Being overseas, I really began to appreciate my family a lot more, so it's been great to be home with them for these past few days. What a blessing it was, as well, to be at my home church family and get to share our return program with them after they have supported and encouraged us all year! I realized being there on Sunday morning, through watching the faces and seeing the tears of my church family, that God has truly brought me far this year! I know they could see a change in me because of God's power working. I remember getting up to share with my church in August about what I'd be doing this year, while shaking terribly and wondering what in the world I had signed up for, knowing that I get so nervous being up in front of people. Well, God has proven himself faithful, and He has never let me down. I can see how He has stretched me and used me despite my weaknesses, and He has given me much more confidence in Him. All glory be "to HIM who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us!"~Eph. 3:20



**Tara Kent**

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**Date:** 6/11/2006

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

I was selling Youth Encounter merchandise last night after our Family Night Program in Eyota, MN when I witnessed a remarkable event. A grandmother was browsing over our duct tape wallets and CDs when a little girl, probably 4 years old, approached her and gave her a little tug on the sweater. She had a dollar in her hand and said "You can have this, if you want to buy something." It was the only dollar she had, and she wanted to give it away so quickly because she knew it would help someone in need. Me and the grandmother looked at each other in disbelief and gave a big smile to one another. Once again, God's perfect love is shown through the faith of a child.



**David Strussenberg**

I always notice God's love mostly in the children we meet on the road. I've had random children come up to me and give me a big hug for no reason, or a child after a VBS opening run up to me and say "I really like your singing voice. I like the way you sing." And I think, what did I do to deserve this? The answer, absolutely nothing. I didn't have to prove a thing to any of these kids to earn their love, they just loved me for who I was.

So often this past year and throughout my life I've worked so hard to get people to notice my talents so that they would like me. On team I've wanted to give the best sharing, or play an amazing bass guitar, just so someone would notice I had worth. I felt if I could just show people I had something to give, they would love me.

Then it dawned on me; God's love does not work that way, we can't earn anything. He made us, he gave us every gift we've ever had, and he loves us no matter what. Jesus has already died on the cross out of God's love for us, and there is nothing we can do to earn that love.

We just need to respond the same way that we respond to the loving actions or words of a child, accept it and say thank you. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God.

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**Date:** 6/19/2006  
**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin  
**Journal Entry:**



Short, blond, curly hair. A gigantic smile made of tiny, spaced out teeth. A high pitched voice telling me that sometimes she smiles REALLY REALLY big, as she proceeds to show me that gigantic smile! She's only about three feet tall and four years old. Her name is Lexi and she has an older brother, Devin, who she thinks is six.

Lexi is a preschooler at the VBS we are helping with this week. As a team we are only in charge of music, so we see the kids for about 25 minutes while we sing songs with them. It was our first day, and there are 260 kids signed up!! Lexi sat in the front pew at the closing today with her personally made maraca in hand. She walked up to me as I sat close to her and said, "You did really good singing today!" My heart couldn't help but jump as I looked into her big blue eyes! I told her thank you (even though we all know that I can't sing worth anything!) and that she did such a great job, too. I said, "I can't wait to see you tomorrow!" She said, "Me, too!" About a minute later after I stood up, she ran up to me and wrapped her little arms around my legs and hugged them so tight!! I bent down down and hugged her back, told her I loved her, and continued to talk to her until her mom showed up to pick her up.

**Corie Alsin**

Lexi made my day! It is children like Lexi that make VBS such a blessing in my life! She has no idea what she did for me today. She gave my life purpose. God works in the strangest ways, but that's how I know it's God talking! His love was shown so abundantly today in so many ways, through so many people! Way to go, God!! Never underestimate the power of children!! God tells us to let the little children come. He also commands us to have faith like a child!

Faith Like A Child  
Jars of Clay

Dear God, surround me as I speak,  
the bridges that I walk across are weak  
Frustrations fill the void that I can't solely bear  
Dear God, don't let me fall apart,  
you've held me close to you  
I have turned away and searched for answers I can't understand

*They say that I can move the mountains  
And send them crashing into the sea  
They say that I can walk on water  
If I would follow and believe  
with faith like a child*

*Sometimes, when I feel miles away  
and my eyes can't see your face  
I wonder if I've grown to lose the recklessness  
I walked in light of you*

*They say that love can heal the broken  
They say that hope can make you see*

*They say that faith can find a Savior  
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**Date:** 7/2/2006

**Submitted by:** Joshua Vandercar

**Journal Entry:**

We have been in Pittsburgh this past week ... leave for familiar Camp Lakeview tomorrow. Yesterday was a long day, as we took a trip to the strip district, a walk to the waterfront, and a bus to the fourth of July festival at the rivers and the Incline. The strip district was a strip of street-side markets with fresh food and sidewalk vendors. I came across some Fourth of July fun from the past ... the little white poppers, the snakes that grow when you set them on fire, and a cap bomb. For some reason holidays have held little significance for me this year. The Fourth of July is upon us and will certainly pass us before I give it much thought. Strangely, they've all been passing the same.

At church this morning, I fumbled over my words. I was convicted of often disrespecting God's Word. How often must I share some message and then feebly tack on His Word to make myself respectable? Or how often must I read His Word and then speak too soon? Oh, Lord, when I speak Your Word, may I not mar it with me.



**Joshua Vandercar**

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**Date:** 7/5/2006  
**Submitted by:** Tara Kent  
**Journal Entry:**

We're just outside Nashville now after a little blunder on our part... We were supposed to arrive tomorrow. Oops. Well, anyway, we're looking forward to helping out at EDGE!-- a National Youth Event by Youth Encounter this week. I'm on security. Yep, you read that right, and I'm pumped about it.

I can't believe how fast this past month has gone by! We've helped with three Vacation Bible Schools already with only two to go. With only one month left on the road, I try not to worry about what's to come after that. While we have been told it must be difficult to participate in a year on the road like we're doing, for me it will be another step of faith when it's over. Right now I know exactly where I'm supposed to be and what I'm supposed to be doing. Now I have to trust that God will, as He always has, lead and guide me to what's next. I'm becoming okay with answering "I don't know" to the question asked multiple times daily, "What are you doing after team?" Prayer for guidance is certainly appreciated, though.



**Tara Kent**

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**Date:** 7/22/2006  
**Submitted by:** Mark Huber  
**Journal Entry:**

Alright, I know, I know... I haven't written one journal since we've been back from India! I apologize for this ridiculous delay in hearing my reflections about what we're up to. For some reason, it's a monumental task for me to just sit down for five minutes and write about things, and so I'm fairly certain I'm doomed to be a poor journaler for my whole life.

In any case, things have also been moving so fast since we've been back on the road that I never expected to wake up this morning and find myself at the end of July. We've been in nine states since last I wrote, helped with four Vacation Bible Schools, worked at EDGE! which Tara wrote about earlier, and have done more in two months than I've ever accomplished in an average year. I love the busy schedule, though, because it forces you to have a lot of energy. If we were sitting around not doing anything, I think I would be writing a much different story right now.

Our last VBS included six hours of day camp, frequent trips to the beach on Lake Michigan, and a severe storm that cut off our host home from power for almost three days. It was an incredible week, and I've decided that I wouldn't mind living next to a beautiful lake in a quaint town if that's what I end up doing in life. Good things always make way for new ones on team, however, and right now we're in Indiana on our way to Wisconsin, which will lead us to Chicago, Iowa, and finally back to good ol' Minnesota. I hope all of you are having a wonderful summer, and we'll think of all your stationary homes as we hit six states this week. Blessings from RoP.



**Mark Huber**

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**Date:** 7/24/2006  
**Submitted by:** Corie Alsin  
**Journal Entry:**

Lake Michigan was my home all last week. Up in Whitehall, MI to help with VBS/Day Camp, I lived at the beach at night time. There wasn't one night that I didn't spend looking out into the huge blue waves, listening, laughing, enjoying the sunset. Often times on this wonderful journey of Team, I have thought about and pondered over how I experience God the most. I have come to realize that each person experiences God in different ways. He speaks differently to people, he reveals himself differently, and he even teaches each person differently. How is it possible that we can all know God and know the same God and yet feel him in so many different ways? So often we want to put God in a box and tell people how they should relate to God, but aren't we all different? Don't we all do that in different



**Corie Alsin**

ways?

I believe we do. After many conversations with people, I have found that even though I don't experience God in the same way as other people, that doesn't mean we don't experience the same God. This past week, I truly found that I really do experience God the most when I'm next to or on the water. It doesn't matter if I'm swimming or on a boat or sitting on the beach or a dock, as long as it is there, I'm looking at it and listening to the soft (or loud) crashing of the waves, I am at peace. God talks to me there like no other place. Maybe that's why I love it so much. I feel God's presence there so strongly. I see so much of God's character there in the water. It's the one place I can go and truly spend some quality alone time with God. I want it. I desire it. I love it.

The second place I experience God the most at this time in my life is through children. They truly make my life better! Day Camp this past week was my favorite VBS I have ever helped with. This church was amazing! They found the need of their congregation and they met that need, whatever it took! The children spent the afternoons doing service projects either at the local horse shelter or recording books on tape to help integration students learn English. It was neat to watch these children help out in their communities and enjoy it! What a perfect idea to get those kids involved at such a young age! There were even kids coming up to me telling me that they are going to go back and help out at the horse shelter with their parents later on! How great that they have such a desire to help out these animals that need such love and care from being mistreated before.

Children bring to life so many questions and answers that I would never think of otherwise. They have such a faith that I wish I could take hold of and keep forever. They find joy in the smallest of things. They love me for who I am and no other reason. They would eat ice cream with me all day and not even have one thought that it wasn't very healthy. They would enjoy it!

I love children. I will miss seeing children everyday. Children fulfill my life.

How do you experience God?

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**Date:** 8/4/2006

**Submitted by:** David Strussenberg

**Journal Entry:**

I remember what it was like before the first day of Youth Encounter training. I was opening up the newest chapter of my life. I remember leaving my WalMart vest in my closet, and finding new and creative ways to pack so many of my belongings in a compact suitcase so I could travel the world for a year. Truth is, I was nervous, excited, but especially nervous. And now, the year is up, the chapter has ended, and a new chapter will be in the works. I'm sure just as good as this original masterpiece God has woven just for me.



**David Strussenberg**

The truth is God has painted a masterpiece for all of us, we just have to make like Mary Poppins and leap out of our own personal boxes into the painting. You never know what you will find there.

I found a trip to the SPAM factory, the world's tallest weather vane, and India all in the same year. I also found a call to be a pastor, and the inner strength to defeat some pretty tough weaknesses. Also ignited within me was a love for the world and a desire to meet more of my brothers and sisters in Christ from whatever countries God chooses to lead me next. None of which would be possible without stepping into the painting.

Next year, if you want to find me you will find me in Columbus, OH. Every year after that, good luck, I may make like Carmen SanDiego. I won't be committing any grand thefts, so it may be tougher to catch me. You will have to follow the good deeds that God gives me the strength to do in order to discover where I go.

But, before I go, thanks for coming along for the ride, whoever reads this journal out there. One word of advice before I go. God is real, Jesus Christ really died for our sins, and the moment you realize that and decide to go wherever he will take you, you will not regret it. How do we know what that calling is? Talk to him, wait for him, and all will be revealed over time. Just be

patient.....still there?.....be patient. Later!

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**Date:** 8/9/2006

**Submitted by:** Erin Meier

**Journal Entry:**

God calls us to live in community with Him and with each other. As I think back over this year, I think about the community of Christ that we had the opportunity to worship with and experience here in the U.S. and in India.

In India, a sense of strong community was very evident in the churches, villages, and boarding schools that we visited. We could see it in the way that people took care of each other and each other's children. We could see it when the pastor would get on a speaker and call people to the church before our programs, and then children would sing over the speaker as people gathered. Once when I was sharing during our program in a church at night in a village, the electricity went out. As soon as the lights went out, the pastor said a couple of words, and the entire congregation as one body burst forth in song immediately while some men got a table and a lamp so I could finish my sharing. We could see the love and community among the children at the boarding schools as they played together and sang together and loved on each other with so much joy.

We have seen this same community here in the U.S. among church congregations, youth groups, Bible study groups, and VBS children as they share their lives and their hearts with one another. It has been a beautiful and encouraging thing to see and experience the community of Christ around the world. We will now be moving from our team community to connect with new people, build new relationships, and each become part of new communities, always mindful of the fact that we are a part of a global community as a part of the Body of Christ. We thank you for your part in and commitment to this community through your prayers and support. We pray God's blessings upon each of you as you continue to seek God's will for you as a part of the Body of Christ.

This is ROP, signing off.



**Erin Meier**

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