

July 10, 2009

Good morning everyone! It is our last day of VS here! As we are all a bit relieved because it has been a ton of work, and we are all burned out, we will still miss these kids a lot. The Youth made up teams where they chose certain kids they wanted to focus on; especially the ones who required a lot of attention. After VBS we are going to pack up and drive back to Anchorage tonight. We thought it would be better if we were closer to the airport just in case of any obstacles, and it would be nice to have the last night together for relaxation and any last minute souvenir shopping. Even though it is not over with, and I know today is going to probably be more challenging because it is the one month anniversary of the house fire, I have to say that I am more than proud of these youth kids, and I have never seen a more dedicated, willing, giving, loving, supportive, participating team playing group! All of you should be very proud of these kids! I'm going to go get set up because we have just a few minutes left, so bye for now!

Love, Melanie

July 9, 2009,

Wow! Hi everyone! This has been the day! Got emotions? Our group of VBS kids has shrunk as the swine flu has taken its course. We are trying to do everything we can to make sure none of us get it or bring it home with us. There are a few of us who do not have health insurance so please pray for us that we do not get infected. I being sick the other night make us think that maybe I caught a touch of the flu but obviously I don't have the swine. I'm finally feeling better and my voice is coming back (go figure the mission is almost finished). The bite on my neck is healing but I still have a lingering cough. It is so hot here and uncomfortable; the VBS kids are so sweaty and are probably a bit crabby from the heat. But the girl Jasmine who died in the fire was brought up as two little girls who were close to her started balling, "I miss Jasmine, I miss Jasmine." Crying hysterically. Robert had a hold of Sasha the whole day and Jake had Mary Jane. I cannot really express how bad these kids are hurting. I was in the kitchen preparing dinner and getting the raffle ready and when the girls started balling I couldn't take it anymore. I had to leave the room to cry a little, and then I sucked it up and went back out because I want to stay strong for everyone. This was the hardest day and our youth has been working very hard with these children. Well most of us broke down today, and things were hard for Robert afterward but that is completely understandable. It brought us all even more closely! I hope no one is jealous of our relationship when we get back because we're a pretty tight group! This youth are like my children now; this is my family. A guy named Al took us to the fishing wheel today, and when we got back we played more Mexican Train Dominos. These kids seemed to have loved my dinner which made me happy, and then we watched a movie. Now the kids want me to put the video on the television to watch what we made so far so I got to go now.

Love,

Melanie

July 8, 2009, (evening)

YES! We survived another VBS day! So after the ice cream last night we went back to the church to take a break and then we were going to go fishing because we saw the people coming in the river for the salmon run. I'm not sure what they called it but it is a time where the salmon rush by for a moment or something. I ended up passing out on my air mattress and the kids played some card games while they were waiting for me to nap. Apparently Maik said he tried to wake me up to go fishing but I did not hear him at all; they said I was snoring (guess I needed it). So once again the groupies took off without me to go fishing (think they are scared I'll be the lucky one since I'm having all the other bad luck). They did come back at 2:00 in the morning so I was not too thrilled because it woke me up. It is hard to fall back to sleep because it is day light here. Well since there is not a dog house here I made Maik suffer and sleep on the floor, and Audrey (Todd's oldest daughter) got the extra air mattress! Audrey wanted to stay a night with us so we took care of her. Putting Maik in the "dog house" back fired on me because I ended up making several uncomfortable trips to the toilet. Guess I'll just follow the Word and submit myself to my husband.

There was a smaller turn out at VBS today, and it was way too hot! I just don't get it, it was almost 98 degree and it was 88 in the shade. We are all taking 3 showers a day, and even when you're done taking a shower you instantly feel sweaty again. The VBS kids were all a little crabby from the heat. I spent the day walking around taking pictures and making a video of stations so the congregation can see what it was like, and because I was not feeling so hot still from the night before. So remember when I mentioned that one of the kids had the flu? Well it was a big secret from me, and I found out anyway that the kid who had the flu had to go to the hospital and she has the swine flu. Maik told everyone not to tell me because he new I'd freak out, but he still took me to the side and told me after the fact. Of course I said, "Oh great that's probably what I have, I have the swine flu now with the luck I'm having." Maik said, "This is why I didn't want to tell you because I knew you'd freak out." So I said, "Well why did you tell me then? Now I can be paranoid all day." Keep in mind that this is a close community and many of the kids here are related or live together (with cousins) so chances for this to spread are high.

Needless to say, I'm starting to feel better and my bite is healing. We narrowed it down to a "Noseeum" because Kim got a bite today just like it behind her ear but it is not as bad as mine; of course I had to have the bad reaction. If you're not familiar with the Noseeum (which I wasn't until I was told) it is a little tiny black fly that you can hardly see, that is where they get the name; no-see- them.

So right after the VBS the church has a "youth night" until 8:00 PM. I thought the kids were going to die when they heard they had to participate, only because we were already burned out. We had to cook for them as well so we made spaghetti. Anyway, we are on another journey today with the kids because they deserve some time out for all their hard work. Jenna came up with a brilliant plan to drive an hour and a half to watch the bears catch salmon in the waterfalls. I'm writing this journal in the car. We are going nuts right now because the mountains are super awesome, and there is a lot of snow and glaciers. Amazing that snow can sit here where it's not that cold. I'm glad I brought a sweater though because it's getting very chilly up here in the mountains. OK I'm out of here

because Maik is doing some off roading, and if I'm going to die falling down the mountain I at least want to capture the moment.

Melanie

July 8, 2009

Hello again from the "book writer"

So it is an hour before the kids will be here so I thought I'd write a little. Last night I asked the kids if they wanted to go get ice cream again since I missed out last time they went. Liz and Carrie stayed back. Liz wanted to finish her journal and emails; I must say we have that in common (as if you didn't notice that I like to write). I had the wild berry hard ice cream which was crowberry and raspberry made with real Alaska berries. Wibbs made it her treat which I thought was a very nice gesture; that is something I do a lot so I can say that girl has some class!

I took a few more pictures of the river that was next to the ice cream shack, and this time the water was blue. I took video of men, who were in the river fishing, and we all watched a man catch one and pull it in; it was funny because he just dragged it across the ground, plopped it on top of a wooden table and started gutting it immediately. He was throwing the guts and stuff out to the birds that were swarming around for their dinner snack. OK this made the boys crazy as I watched the drool roll off their bottom lips. When I told Maik he could go again he was like a little kid, and it was so funny because Jenna was teasing him because of his accent.

I'm telling all of you that you are going to want to come to the youth dinner so you can hear our stories, see our pictures, and watch my super duper video (sorry I am not a professional by all means, in fact I made my mother ill with my Germany videos; however I'm doing my best not to make this one similar to the Blair Witch Project). Right now we are bleaching everything because one of the kids from yesterday has the flu bad. "Please God not that after all the other bad luck I've been having." I did mention that I have a crazy bite on the back of my neck! Everyone is examining it like I'm a freak show; even the villagers around here never seen that before. I told them that they should cut a piece of my skin off for testing because maybe it could serve a purpose for a cure of what ever it is. I woke up this morning and it was very sore and I was very dizzy; I felt like a drunken zombie. So I looked at it in the mirror and literally watch it shrink before my eyes; this mean the poison or infection is now running through my body, and I know this is true because of my odd physical feeling. After I took a shower I walked down to the river and lay out on a log and passed out to the sound of the rushing river as the shimmering sun sparkled across my face. After an hour Maik came looking for me for breakfast and when he called out my name I almost had a heart attack and fell off the log. The nature is breath taking and it can take you away. So now it's time to go pick up the kids so I better sign off for now. Be back tonight if I have the opportunity!

Peace, Love, and Christ,

Melanie

July 7, 2009 (evening)

Hi,

VBS went great, and we doubled our kids today! I managed to handle it quite well, probably because I knew what to expect this day. I finally fell in love; I have a little 3 year old they call Junior, but I call him fire cracker, or fire bug; he is all over the place. I just grab him and put him in my arms and he clings to me like he is my own (tears). He kissed my cheek. The boy Shawn who was saved from the fire is very clingy to all of us, but I felt special when he ran over to me to sit in my lap. He kept wanting me to pick him up but he is enormous for a 5 year old and I think he could pick me up instead. Another girl wanted to go home and started crying, I think she's about 8 years old. I got her to stop crying by talking about her pretty hair, and let her in on a secret so that made her feel special (the secret was that Carrie went out and bought a huge bag of candy for us to pass out to all the kids after VBS). Jake made a lot of connections and he is happy because he said that he cannot wait to be a dad. Megan is super awesome with the kids, she seriously has that for a gift, and I can see her with 10 kids of her own (look out Jean and Jeff)! She makes me laugh because she has such a touch that all the kid's listen to her. I think one of the boys Zack (we call him "Z") has a crush on her, so now I get to tease her a little. It was so funny, there is a drum set in the corner in the room and we cover it up with a blanket because it is a huge distraction to the kids, and one of the kids went over there to mess with it and Megan said, "No we are not playing with that right now, that is why it is covered," and he actually listened; if it were me, the kid would bang on it harder. So as he was walking out of the drum set he knocked over a section and it fell on Megan, and when she went to pick it up it was like a domino effect. Megan said, "see this is a good reason why the drums are off limits," and that boy "Z" helped her up and dusted her off, and was saying, "are you alright, your Ok Megan?" How cute! But he may be too young for her. I like her style!

Wibbs and Jenna passed out on the floor immediately after the kids left! Maik called them old ladies! I just said it's because they stayed up too late. There is a lot of bad parenting here. Maik said that when he went to pick up some kids, one said to him in the car that his mother got a new boyfriend and he's gross, and that he can hear everything they are doing in the bedroom (saying that lightly). When Maik drove him home, the boyfriend came out the front door and looked like total trash and he was so drunken. I feel so bad for these kids. Another kid said that her mother tells her to go away or go to her room because she wants to do drugs now. I mean what the heck? Really you couldn't be too sensitive to do this job, but it is normal for us to get a little teared up as we are more than thankful for our lives. It really makes you thankful for what you have at home (not that I'm not satisfied already). None of the girls wear makeup here, but they don't need to because they have a natural native beauty. I'm pretty sure that more will come out as the kids get more comfortable with us. I think they are more than happy just to have this attention and to see that complete strangers love them.

OK, it is hamburger time, and once again, I am getting teased, and Wibbs is giving me the "are you done yet, are you done yet" so off I go. Oh before I forget, I ate moose chili

two times so far; good and different, but I don't think I'll be eating that anymore after I heard it was road kill; that kind of freaks me out; processed is more comforting!)

Maybe I'll be back tonight if there is something interesting to share! Keep us in your prayers please!
Melanie

July 7, 2009

Yes you guessed it; I did not get the sleep I desperately needed for the day! I'll be working today on about 2 hours of sleep; even coffee cannot cure that! Sometime after VBS they will be having a women's Bible study group here at the church, so all of us girls will be attending, and we are shipping the guys out to go FISHING! I made a clear, stern point to Maik that if he wants to do anymore night fishing that he will be bringing the kids back by midnight and not 3:00 in the morning because we do need the rest to do our most important work here. Keep in mind that I'm still sick so the very minimal rest is not helping me at all. I feel a little that no one is being a little sensitive to the fact that I have not been feeling well since day one, but lucky for everyone that I don't have my voice back yet :0

No matter what, I know that the Good Lord will provide me with the strength that I need today, and I am ready to rumble!

I'll be back to tell you how the day went. By the way, I sincerely admire what Todd and Kim are doing; they have very much patience and a passion for their work; they are AWESOME!

Peace, Love, and Christ,
Melanie

PS: I have a huge goose egg on the back of my neck; what in the world bit me??????
Please pray for me and the rest of us because I just realized that I have been forgetting to say my nightly prayers; I guess there is so much going on, not that it is an excuse, but I feel bad for that. Thanks!

July 6, 2009

Hi everyone,

Before I get into today's adventure, last night was cool because Liz came up with some silly games for us, and I like silly games. After that I spent some time with Robert and we did some bonding which was way cool because it was something I've wanted to do for a long time. Robert is a wonderful guy and I think he is a lot of fun too. So we decided to go walk down to the river but first we snagged Megan and made her go rock skipping. Robert, the professional rock skipper was trying to teach me how to skip a rock across

this crazy rough river and it seemed impossible, I mean, come on, really I have never skipped a rock before in my childhood? So of course Megan caught on real fast and rubbed it in; now she's the professional woman rock skipper. They were both getting a kick out of me because they said I looked funny like I was trying to throw a Frisbee or something. Anyway, Robert had me laughing so hard that I became very slap happy like a little kid, but that is awesome because it felt real good (it could also be because we are only getting about 5 hours a sleep each night!) The days seem so long here like I've been here for 3 weeks already; so if you are sick of time flying by too fast, Alaska is the place to live. The cool thing is that it doesn't get dark so you have all day to do stuff, and you don't have to rush to get anything done; it does get a little hazy but you can still see and have to close the windows if you want darkness.

So because I was still so slap happy, Robert, Megan, and I came up with some silly pranks for the others. Got to have fun like that, and I just cannot resist. So after we set up our pranks, I asked Robert and Megan if they wanted to play a game I brought. We sat down and invited everyone who want to join in on some "Mexican Train Dominos", we are keeping score and will be going back to it when we have time because it's a long game; ha ha I am winning so far! By the way, before I forget, Robert never caught a fish; the boys were fibbing; so yes I still have a chance for the championship!

Ok so for our first day of Vacation Bible School, wow we had a pretty good turn out; around 46 kids. I have a feeling this VBS is a big highlight in these children's summer because there really isn't much for them to do here, and not to mention, our youth has put on a real great program. Man is it hot in here, and we thought we would be coming into 60 degree weather; wrong! It is hotter here than in Michigan, and most of us only brought one or two pairs of shorts. We are sweating and there is no air in this building. Just imagine our fellowship hall full of children from the ages of 2 years old and up with only two windows which are on the same side, not circulating air inside. I was making the kids laugh because I was saying that I had sweaty man pits! I'm not complaining but rather I'm trying to give you an idea of everything we are going through, and that this is not just an easy and ordinary Vacation Bible School. Several of these kids have a zero Christian background, and many of the teens who have volunteered do not either, but they are involved in our skits where they are actually hearing the Bible story for the first time. This is so cool because they are even getting a mental image of the story as they are physically a part of it. Also what was very cool, a kid came to me yesterday (teen), and said that we are the best group that has ever come here, and the groups that came before were so bad that he made up the excuse of "I have to work" so he didn't have to come. Knowing that he is looking forward to coming here made me happy. However; it is not that easy because we still have the kids who do not want to be here and think it sucks, but they are still here and they are still hearing the word. I can't wait to see if one in particular shows up today or not.

Everyone has to try to understand what it is like to have "these" kids here. It is a VERY big challenge because they do not have an attention span; maybe for 5 minutes if you are lucky. They are literally all over the place, and will not listen to you. I had some kids throwing their crayon disks (part of the lesson tool) up into the ceiling fans, others who

wanted to jump on top of the table while others are eating snacks, a hand full crying, some running away and hiding, etc. Three times I had to stop myself from crying, and I really don't want to admit that because I do not like to show my weakness, or tell you that I almost got to that point. I know it was a combination of the chaotic ness, me being overly tired, and me feeling so bad for these kids, and why they are the way they are. Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that I cannot handle it because I can and so can all of the youth; I just want to make it clear that these children do need us here, and there is a need for a return.

One of the boys (who Jake has grown much attached to) was one of the victims of the house fire I was telling you about. His mother was able to throw him out of the house first (very large 5 year old), so understand that even with all of the challenges we are facing, there are many, if not all of these kids who are grieving from this still, and don't even know what grief is. There is a lot of work and healing to do here in several different ways. I do have to say that these Native girls are so beautiful; there is just something about them that glows. I just adore Joy the second to youngest daughter of Todd and Kim; she is so cute and funny. She drew a picture of Jake (funny) and gave it to him; we were all cracking up; I know why they named her Joy because she brings joy into the room when she walks in. One of the VBS kids put me in my place because I was having them all draw a picture of something that was special to them that God has created. As I was looking over one of them, I said wow that is a good one; you have to go show Pastor Todd! She said, "He does not like to be called Pastor Todd, only Todd!" I said, "Oh, sorry, I didn't know that, and thank you for letting me know." Todd was there at the table and I said to him that I was sorry because I have been addressing him as Pastor, and he said it is OK, he just made the point that if there was an engineer we wouldn't call him "engineer Bob" so I understand more now that he makes this environment not intimidating for anyone. You have to understand that he has to start at an "elementary level" for these people here because they didn't have this Christian foundation before, and I'm not trying to call it elementary, but an idea if you were to compare it to what we have as our foundation.

A blessing is that the time went by super fast because it was super busy because when it was done, we all filled up our beds to pass out. Maik made dinner, we had hotdogs, homemade French fries (look out Joe, Carrie wants to marry Maik now because of his fries; perhaps you could practice at home and surprise her when she returns ;) He also made currywurst which is German Brats cooked in a German curry sauce (I brought the stuff from home to make this possible). We kind of just hung around a little bit, and then everyone but me and Maik went in town to get ice cream real quick; I needed a nap and Maik needed a shower. My nap didn't work very long so I started on my journal, and then when Maik got out of the shower he asked me to help him with his.

The three boys went to the gas station because we needed gas in the cars as we pick up many of the kids from their home every morning (what service!), so then again I tried to take a nap, and as soon as I got in that "deep sleep mode" Maik woke me up (I wanted to strangle him). So the plan was for them to go, yes you can guess, fishing! I wanted to go

but I was frustrated at this point because it was almost midnight, and I knew it was going to be another 4 hour sleep night because when they get back I can hear them come in.

Goodnight, and please pray for us!

Peace, Love, and Christ,
Melanie

July 5, 2009

Hi everyone,

Ok, yes we did not know what to expect when we got here, and it is a good thing we are all flexible. Yesterday, we pulled up to the church, and headed in where Pastor Todd waited to show us around. This church is very small; it reminds me of camp Wallen/Salem. This church is shared with the fire department, so it is both under one roof. Everyone emptied the cars (tons of luggages) and Carrie and I were going to head into the kitchen to put food away. We both looked at each other and our jaws dropped. Carrie took over that job because I had no idea where to start. We found out that we would be sleeping on the floor where they hold church and the VBS so we have to set up and down everyday our beds and stuff. I made a "closet" for all of our stuff and put it behind this large divider so it would be out of the way (there is no way we could bring all that stuff in and out every day. We ended up moving things around 3 times but finally we are settled in a place Kim said would work out the best.

For those of you who are not familiar with our missionary family, well they are an awesome team, and what a great gift they have to do God's work. They are so nice. So the boys went to the store last night to get our fishing licenses, and Megan helped me out because I sent Maik with my ID and said to get mine for me, and I guess I had to be there because it is a little different here. You have to fill out this green sheet which describes you physically. So guess what? I actually weigh 120 lbs (sweet), and I am a young girl with dark brown hair and brown eyes; you can call me Megan now. Its OK guys, the man suggested that we do that because he said it didn't matter, they just want the money for the license. I told Megan to go fishing and try it out because she'll probably have good luck!

The river is right behind the church, so we can just walk back and fish; however, this is not an ordinary river; this river will take you down (makes me want to go white water rafting). Anyway, we tried to fish, and we didn't have luck last night because it was hard to do, in fact, I felt like the river was fishing us! It was a bit chilly so I was done with it after a few minutes, and I was sick of the misquotes biting my face. Yes Mr. Johnson, I brought good bug spray, but it doesn't work here! I forgot to mention that in the beginning of the trip I started to feel like I was coming down with something, so with my luck I've been sick the whole time. I think I have tonsillitis since I have no voice. So the cold wind off the river did not feel good. I'm not letting this set me back though because

I already know the devil is there to try to make things difficult for us, but it won't happen and it won't work for me! The kids are making fun of me because my voice sounds so silly; I think I sound like a manly mouse. Jake is picking on me the most, but that is OK because I get him back once in a while.

Robert had his finger slammed in the van door by accident, so mommy Mel came in to help with the first aid kit. He is fine now but it hurt for a while. This morning was interesting, yet disturbing, as things at church happened while we were gone (how fast news spreads). We are all a little bummed out but again we are not going to let anything distract us on our mission. A very sweet elderly couple came in and started setting up tables for Bible study. The kids went on one side of the room while Kim taught them their Bible study/Sunday school; it was cool because she had them all singing songs while she played the guitar. She is an amazing woman with many talents. Our Bible study was based on a "Life Light" book on Revelations. It was nice to hear the people speak because you can see and feel that they have learned a lot from Pastor Todd; in fact they told us that we cannot have him back. Church service followed after the Bible study, and it was real neat. It was very laid back, and Pastor Todd has a very good touch with the way he communicates the Word; he had all of our attention and it was very easy to follow. I really like his style. Communion was cool; he had all of us stand in a circle and he went around and passed out the body and the blood, and his cute little daughters followed to collect the cups. During the prayers he keeps the floor open for people to just mention anything we want to pray for; so we prayed for many people, including my request for the waiter we had back in Anchorage (I didn't forget about him, and what I said about praying for him). The last prayer was made by Pastor Todd for our church, so that is nice that they will be keeping us in their prayers as well.

Both Robert and Maik did the two scripture readings, and I am very proud of Maik! Maik did an awesome job reading English; I thought he was going to be nervous, but I did notice him reading it over and over ahead of time so he wouldn't mess up (how cute). Of course after service everyone asked where he was from, and following that, how we met (we get that all the time). The people here are extremely friendly! They had a pot luck fellowship after service, and I looked at Carrie and said, "I didn't know they were having that, what should we do?" Because we had zero time to make something, not to mention we don't have much to work with because we planned our meals on a strict budget: we don't want to over spend. So luckily I had picked out a watermelon from Sam's club, and Carrie said we can cut that up for our dish. PERFECT! The watermelon was a hit! (See things happen for a reason right? The watermelon idea). Anyway I have to say this; there was Salmon for a dish one of the people brought (go figure), and it looked so good; I do not like Salmon at all but it was calling out my name, even more so because it was from the river out back. It was the best piece of Salmon in the world, and I was more than impressed. I tried to get Maik to try it, but it was not going to happen; he missed out!

Maik's been good use because the refrigerator had issues, one of the toilets wouldn't flush, and the fire station garage restroom was not working. Maik fixed everything in a snap! Again, like I said we are all here for a reason and have a gift, and I know that stuff has nothing to do with it, because we are here for the mission, but it is still cool.

The boys went fishing, and we girls are working on some stuff for tomorrow. I let Robert take my fishing pole so he could have fun; I'll go later. An older gentleman said he will take us wheel fishing when ever we wanted so we are excited to check that out. He said that is what most people do around here, and we'll have better luck (I wonder if that is considered cheating though). I'm getting pretty close to all of the kids, and I like that because that was a concern of mine before I left. We are a great team and I have confidence (or I should say faith) that everything will work out better than we think. Oh great, Jenna just got a text message from Robert that he just caught a huge fish; I knew it, I knew if I let him use my pole he would catch one, and darn, that was suppose to be my fish, but hey, we know what dinner is tonight; sorry you have to miss out!

Ok, I'm done now because the girls are making fun of me again because I am writing a story. "Are you STILL writing your journal Melanie?" I can't help it because 2 days before we left I had my last day of school, and I can't tell you how many papers I had to write; I think it formed a habit, but this is WAY more enjoyable than school work.

Peace, Love, and Christ,
Melanie

PS: I hope I didn't bore you too much this time. They'll get better because our mission starts tomorrow.

July 4, 2009

Hi again and Happy 4th!

I hope we get to see some fireworks or something tonight because I know I'll miss that; however, since it's daylight here for 24/7 I highly doubt it!

So yesterday we drove all day to look at the nature and still I am amazed! It was cool to see a natural spring-water fall coming down the mountain, and we stopped so Robert and Wibbs could drink some in the palm of their hands. Robert said it tasted pretty good! The kids were funny last night and I can't believe how much energy they have because they stayed up late having a huge pillow fight. We have discovered that Jenna absolutely loves ice as she challenged the boys on a "toss in my mouth and catch game" for a long time; she makes us laugh, she's so funny.

We had a nice devotion hour together. We sort of forgot to plan that for the first two days so luckily enough Carrie had her Portals of Prayer book, and we read the recommended scripture from that; real neat how it applied to what we'll be doing. After the scripture reading I asked everyone to speak on their own on what they hope to accomplish at the Bible school, and it looks like everyone is right on track! After speaking about that it was apparent that each of us has something special to make this happen, and for sure we are here for a reason. The most important thing is we all have to remember that it is not us who are doing this and we cannot take credit for it, but rather it is Gods work, working through us, and that he doesn't need us to do this because he doesn't need help with

anything, and that we are doing what we are supposed to do on earth; spread the word and share Jesus with everyone! Maik and I were cool enough to walk the kids out for a midnight snack at Mcdonalds, but it worked for us because it helped them get sleepy because we had to get up early, and I thought they would never go to sleep.

So anyway, today was a journey even only a few miles away from the hotel. As we started to pack all the luggage in the two cars, we realized that we do not have much room, and we still have to go get all the food that we plan on eating while at the church at Copper Center. So we are driving all around trying to find a place to eat breakfast on the way to Costco and Walmart and every place is either shut down or closed for the holiday! Costco was closed for the holiday, but before we panicked I noticed a Sam's club where luckily I have a membership. Carrie and I did the mom part and picked up all the food and planned meals. We finally found a nice place to eat breakfast though before we went shopping, and everyone ordered a pretty big breakfast (real hungry after driving around). A real awesome thing, and I am very proud of Liz for doing it, is after the very nice waiter dropped off the food she told him that we were about to pray and asked if he would like us to say a prayer for him. He paused for a moment, and said, "Well yes, I'm actually going to court on the 30th because I'm getting divorced." So of course when Liz asked if someone would like to lead the prayer there was an uncomfortable silence. I said that I would, and I did, and I think that was appropriate. After we paid the bill everyone went outside to the car and I went back up to the waiter and told him, "good luck with everything, and I understand that it is a difficult thing to go through, and good things can come out of something that is bad because I was married before and now I am married to the love of my life, and I have never been happier." He explained that he had a very young son, and that they are going through a custody battle. I told him that he will be in our prayers. So as you can see, we are planting seeds throughout.

We were having issues with the computer so I was not able to finish this day, and now I have a lot of catching up to do. So now it is actually the 5th, and I'll end this one and begin my new entry, and try to remember everything that I was going to say about yesterday. See above for new day- Thanks!

July 3, 2009

Hi everyone,

I'm going to combine yesterday and today since it was pretty late last night when we got in. First, poor Jake got picked on by the security so we had to wait a while for that; funny too that he mentioned at the last minute that this trip was his first time ever flying. I said a prayer for him, and also added that he please do not throw up on me. He didn't sit by me; we were all pretty much split up, so I had to switch my prayer to, "Please God don't let Jake throw up on that nice couple he is sitting next to." Anyway, he was only two rows in front of me so I checked up on him a lot. Jake did great, and managed not to get sick.

I think it is amazing how God works or makes certain things happen because I was arranged to sit in the middle of two very nice ladies. I say this because the elderly lady that sat next to me looked exactly like my dear grandmother who is now with the Lord.

She wore the same glasses, same hair style, same body weight and size. I really felt like I was talking with my grandmother. This was the first time I was already able to speak about our mission. The other lady next to me was moving to Alaska because she is a chef in the army and was being transferred there for three years. My grandfather was the chef in the navy so I was able to think about him too.

When we were about to land we had the most awesome view of the mountain tops and the enormous ocean. This is where my next prayer came in; "Please God don't let us crash in the ocean!" Then we landed safely and there was the worse smell that came through the whole aircraft. Funny, it was the first time that I experienced people exiting an airplane so quickly.

We made it to our hotel, and it was pretty cool; I thought I was staying at the Ted Nugent Palace. Alaska really has something for stuffed animals, and man are the bears BIG here. The kids went in for "hot tub time" because there is not a pool here, and we all had the feeling that we couldn't go to sleep because it was still daylight at 11:00 P.M. Michigan time. We all finally had the urge to go to sleep around midnight, which was 4:00 A.M. Michigan time (yikes I stopped that years ago). I think Liz fell asleep first but I had to chuckle because she was talking in her sleep. She was agreeing with someone, probably following instructions and plans in her sleep. I woke up at 5:00 A.M Alaska time so I'm running on 4 ½ hours of sleep. It's kind of crazy staying in the "land of the midnight sun."

I have to say that we have an awesome group here, and I am very happy that we were all able to get closer even in our little travel time. Seems that I have learned a lot about everyone, and it's funny because in some cases I thought the opposite up until we all had a chance to talk a bit. I love these kids!!!!

So this morning Maik and Carrie went to get our car rentals, and after that we drove to a small café for a light breakfast. After breakfast we journeyed to the church Ruth Zellar was staying at for a short meeting. Ruth is such a nice woman, and I was very grateful that she took time out to explain the situation with the children we will be working with, and what we need to keep aware of. Did you know that Alaska has a very high percentage of children who are sexually abused? Well the stats are 95% of the children are or were sexually abused at one or more times in their lives. I had instant tears (as I am again writing you this part) and I tried real hard not to cry because that is a weakness of mine (children who are being hurt). I really do not understand why people hurt children, especially in a sexual way. I have learned a lot about it in my psychology and criminal justice courses, but I still cannot understand it. Children are so helpless, and that is not fair! I cannot tolerate child abuse! Ruth also mentioned that the majority of the children that will be at our Bible school suffer from fetal alcohol syndrome. These children will have a very little attention span, and can be a bit hyper. Also there is an extremely high percentage of suicides that occur here, and sadly, one of the kids committed suicide last year at the bible school gathering (very sad, and yet I am grateful that we were not there to experience that). There is a lot of alcohol and drug abuse where we will be going (Copper Center), and many people are on welfare there. Another piece of bad news is that

we will be coming in on a grieving time because there was a house fire, which I believe Ruth said two children died. So we have to be prepared to support everyone there at the church. Ruth also mentioned that we have to be very careful what we say and do with the children, and no one is allowed to be alone with any of them. Alaska, like I said has a serious issue with child abuse. She said that there was a time where a group made crosses, and one person on the team wrote on one side "Jesus loves you" and on the other "And so do I" and it was reported for abuse. So this is where we have to be careful on what we say or do. We are though allowed to hug the children, and I am happy for that because I have a feeling we will all be doing a lot of that there.

Ruth also was nice enough to give us some ideas to do today, so after our prayer we drove to downtown Anchorage. It was nice walking around and looking in the gift shops. Yes most of you will be getting a gift or two as some of us walked back to our cars with large bags full. It was cool when the ice cream man passed by on his ice cream bike because he let me take a picture of him, and we talked a little with him. Here is where I had another chance to talk about our mission. It was cool when I told him we were going to Copper Center because he replied, "Oh your going to God's country." I asked him to explain that, and he said that the scenery is so amazingly beautiful that it looks like God hand painted it. It was nice to hear that.

We took a lot of funny pictures, and the kids are so much fun; it is so nice to see that everyone can have some good clean fun. Maik of course is a big kid again; he just loves playing and teasing with the kids (sometimes I think he is the biggest kid here 😊). I am very happy that he is enjoying being a part of this team, and I am very happy to see that he has grown so much as a Christian since we first met (see I told you God does amazing things). Maik really didn't have too much church background in Germany as he explained how corrupt the churches are there; sad because all those people are missing out, perhaps that should be a future mission; however, Germans are a bit stubborn so it would be a challenge (I'm allowed to say that because I'm half German myself, and Maik has admitted it as well); nothing's wrong with a little challenge though! So again, Maik came into my life for more than one good reason, and I am happy I was able to bring him closer to the Lord.

Man, I think I am about to write a book, and the kids are bugging me for their turn, so I guess I'll wrap this up. We are taking a break at the hotel for a moment, and then we are going to drive to a glacier we are able to see for freeeeeeeee (got that from the movie "bed time stories"). In Copper Center some of us are planning on doing some super fishing where we hear is an awesome place to fish. I am going to say already that I will catch the biggest fish! We were also told that the bugs were very bad there; in fact the moment we leave Anchorage we will be entering the bug life (good thing I brought the spray). Well I am very excited to go work with these kids, and it is even more exciting now that we found out we will be having around 90 kids now instead of 30; just more hearts to touch, so I'm all for it!

Talk to you later, and please keep us in your prayers, mostly that we do more than a great job teaching these children about our loving Christ Jesus!

Thanks everyone,
Peace, love, and Christ,
Melanie