

Dickinson College
Alabama Service Trip
March 2012



Team Journal

For the past ten years, many Dickinson students have dedicated their Spring Breaks to service by participating in service trips. One of the programs, Alternative Spring Break (ASB), has brought teams of students, faculty, and staff to serve various communities across the country. This past year, ASB piloted a new location which focused on community development issues in the Appalachia region. A team of fifteen Dickinsonians travelled over 1000 miles to serve with Upper Sand Mountain Parish in the Northern Alabama area. The Upper Sand Mountain community is one that has faced many hardships including poverty, drug addiction, and natural disasters. Despite these hardships, members of this community have come together in extraordinary ways to rebuild after the April 2011 tornadoes and to bring wealth back into the Upper Sand Mountain. Throughout the week the ASB team was welcomed into this community where we worked to address these needs.

The first day was spent at Upper Sand Mountain Parish where we worked in the food pantry. We organized the pantry shelves so that there was space for more food, prepared 200 backpack lunches for the children in the local schools, and counted bags of seeds to distribute to members of the Parish churches. These seeds were meant to be planted by the church members to supplement their diets with fresh produce and allow them to spend their income on other products.

The rest of the week was spent at our project manager, Joshua's, house repairing his roof. The roof hadn't been replaced in 20 years so normal wear and tear in addition to the tornado winds had caused many sections to leak. The entire team worked together to tear up all the old shingles, replace the rotten boards, and re-shingle the roof.

But the story of the work with USMP is more than just these few projects. The work our team did impacted hundreds of people, and eyes were opened about community needs. Close friendships were formed between team members, as well as neighbors and community partners. Although we began this trip as strangers, we ended it as a family. Thank you for dedicating your spring break to give back and to be a part of something greater than yourself. Your passion for service was greatly appreciated and noticed by more than you think. Read on to learn how one week changed perspective, opened eyes, and brought hope to those in need.

Saturday, March 10, 2012

When I received the email from Mira saying that I was going on this trip I was filled with excitement and could not wait for the day to come. But, as the day got closer I began realizing how different this trip was going to be compared to my previous adventures I have had. I was very nervous and even though we had weekly meetings, did I really know them well? I didn't think so. Before being able to sort out my mixed feelings, we were already on the vans, on the way to Virginia. I would not consider myself shy but I found out through this trip that it's not easy to be yourself right away around people you don't know very well. I think it is a slow process and a challenge that everyone was facing.

So now, I think, getting to know each other little by little, through chatting in the vans, singing and dancing to the songs, and sharing feelings, is ok. I realized that the best part of these trips is the fact that we will know each other better tomorrow than today and the next there is so much to learn about each other and the more time we spend together, we get closer to becoming a team.

Looking back to today, we had brunch, walked around a beautiful town, toured University of Tennessee and finally arrived here at the Upper Sand Mountain. The moment that hit me when I got the chills (in a good way) was when we were all sitting in a circle on our mattresses, reflection time. Hearing each member's thoughts and sharing what they felt, I was thrilled that our adventure with this team was starting. When this trip comes to an end I know we will be glad and proud that it was this team, each one of us, that came together and that worked together for the people here and ourselves too.

Saaya Imura

Saturday, March 10, 2012

The market square and the U. T. campus were amazing! Considering it was the first trip down to Alabama, we (Me and Kendra) were worried about finding a good place for the fun day before coming down to Tennessee. However, these places were incredible and the weather helped us out too. It seemed like everyone had a good time, particular having a good meal and walking around. We even “accidentally” watched a spelling bee contest. Overall, it was a good day!

About ten minutes before we arrived at the host site, we listened to “Sweet Home Alabama” in the car, while watching cows and horses outside. It felt so real. Joshua was kind, helpful and understanding and it seemed like everyone enjoyed and loved the lodge. At the triple-R BBQ restaurant, we had one of the best southern foods and I decided to brew my own iced tea! It was so good!

Anyways, I have a good feeling that this week is going to be a great experience, where we can have so much fun while learning great lessons. I’m really looking forward to seeing how this service trip will turn out and I’m excited to get to know my team members better! We are going to have so much fun!

Sun Lee

Saturday, March 10, 2012

Alabama! We are finally here. The stop in Knoxville was awesome and the city was so cool. I really have enjoyed the energy of folks on the way here. The University of Tennessee reminded me so much of B.G. and big schools. All the orange and the bookstore were like being home. It was also great to talk to the students about the differences of large college and Dickinson. I was also so happy to share that experience with Taylor my soon to be Higher Ed buddy. I don’t think she realizes how of a good professional she is going to be.

We experienced BBQ down here tonight which was great. I really enjoyed learning about Jamie at dinner. She shared that she was a bit unsure about what she wanted in the future. I really wanted to tell her to not worry and that life will unfold as it should. Seeing the group come together is exhilarating.

I’m not quite sure what I was expecting Alabama to be like. I think I did come in with some worries but so far it’s going great. Joshua is so nice and people have been so nice and open...I have to admit the more time I spend in the south the more I could see myself living there. Very excited for Church on Sunday morning! I feel so blessed to be on another trip with such a diverse and fun crew.

Pavan

Saturday March 10, 2012

After a restful sleep near an altar in a Virginian church, I was SO excited to start our day. We finally landed in Knoxville, Tenn. Of course, our first stop was food: an adorable French crepe—what a great meal!

From there we made it to Market Square, through a park with blooming trees and metal sculptures. We danced to the soulful music coming from a saxophonist, and visited all the shops along the square. Here I wandered off alone, to explore the city and feel as much culture as I could. The river, with its row boats of crew teams and cliffs, was beautiful!

It was incredible to see the University of Tenn. with the group I already love! Of course our visit was filled with antics—scaling the deceptively tall Univ. sign, almost crashing a spelling bee, interrupting some Southern Belle sorority rush thing. I loved it.

Once we were in AL, the tornado damage was clear: trees bent over in forced deference, roofs ripped from their houses. But still, Alabama pulsed with life and friendliness. Houses ran into fields, and the locals we met were so nice, especially Joshua.

We went on a walk after we settled into the house, picking flowers and making pyramids in the middle of busy streets.

And the food! I LOVED THE BBQ at the restaurant (I just had to get the combo dinner, complete with ribs, pork, chicken, shrimp, and catfish). But what I appreciated even more was the conversation, getting to know more about Oscar and Sun.

I'm just so excited to get started on the trip; I can't wait to bond with everyone, to meet locals and talk, and to do good deeds! I know this week will fly by so fast, but I hope I savor every second. I wouldn't want to be here with anyone else.

Christopher

Sunday, March 11, 2012

It has definitely been a great experience so far. Bonding with the group has been great. Everyone is respectful towards one another and all their smiles bring something truly special to this group. After the long trip we finally got a taste of the culture here and let me say that it has been very heartwarming to hear the pastor at church talk so closely about the community. I have realized how much religion plays a big role for people here in the Upper Sand Mountain, Alabama. It has made me think a lot about my own religious beliefs. On another note, hiking was also a great experience. I am just in love with the dynamics of the group and how they all just respect each other and the culture around us.

Ale

Sunday, March 11, 2012

Since my time here I have already learned so much about the land, region, people both in our group and those from around here. Today, Sunday, we all woke up and went to the service at the church. I was not sure how the service would be; I have been to various different church services. I found the people here to be so incredibly welcoming, honest, and genuine. I never felt awkward or uncomfortable as I have definitely felt before. I enjoyed being a part of such a beautiful community. I loved feeling the openness of their arms and intentions that came with everyone there. As weird as it sounds, I felt more comfortable, safe, and free from judgment here than I have at school sometimes.

Anyway, the second part of our day we spent hiking, bonding, and having dinner. The hike was amazing and although it was only two hours we all became even more of a unit by the end. I tend to notice very small details of what is happening. Just to give an example of our bonding, I remember seeing Saaya having trouble, being somewhat nervous coming down the huge rock. Kendra was at the rock's base encouraging her and Saaya made it down successfully! These small moments are what allow each of us to gain trust and respect for one another. To me it was clear by the end of the hike how much closer we had all gotten. Not that we weren't goofy before but by the end of the day we were all being crazy and relaxed with each other. This is by far one of my favorite feelings to feel and notice. Dinner really pushed the day even further in terms of its greatness—we had lovely pasta and salad prepared. It was so delicious and really turned the meal into a hysterical story time. I think everyone really enjoyed being together in the moment and going to sleep content with the trip and all we have learned.

Juliana

Sunday, March 11, 2012

Ok, so much about today was jovial (I know we will never forget the : "best tactile experience," washing our faces in the river, hermit crabbing down a boulder face, or the chilling wipe-outs in the stream followed by sun naps in the company of bikers), but this is only the surface of what was igniting deeper. Although I have not spent time in Appalachia Alabama, (I have spent a fair amount of time in Alabama and different regions of the South). During reflections I was shocked to realize how comfortable all of this was for me and how different the culture/people were from the stereotypes our team expected. I literally felt like I was watching hearts unfold as our team expressed wonder, joy and warmth in recounting the hospitality and community we had encountered. It was strange to hear the preconceived notions. They were stereotypes I hadn't considered and some were uncomfortable for me to hear, but in the next moment I felt change in the way everyone was articulating their experience in the church! It is crazy, but it is real that after 1 full day in the Upper Sand Mountain all of us are in some way changed.

I am FILLED with hope at how open Alabama ASB is to be emotionally, mentally, physically and relationally presented here.

Ellie

Sunday March, 11 2012

Well, well, where to begin? Well clearly it beings Sunday/free day. It was a jam pack day with so many met expectations and then some. First off, although I'm not religious or spiritual I wanted to attend mass because religion is a "trade mark" of the south that I see as a cultural aspect. I'm glad I had that thought going in because the amount of the togetherness with the people here was one you rarely see, well at least in my parts. It really is a connected community, as we all saw with Jeff from down the road and the fresh made treats that his wife made. It truly is a type of kindness we lack and tend to avoid or better yet we forget this of the south. Although I've never been to the south, I understood that it is not this image that is given to it but I guess some of us just have to experience this to fully know. I guess I'm just rambling on now, so to move on the hike was amazing, and bought a new ocarina (sorry just had to mention it another time...) Dinner was fun yet odd to make but great nonetheless. Well I'll end it now because I don't want to keep you up or wake up all if I continue to write this late... Hope you like my next alarm, sorry if it is not to your like...Oh well, night.

Martin

Monday, March 12, 2012

Today was our first day on the worksite. Since it was rainy and cold we spent the day working indoors. Joshua showed us around the UMC Upper Sand Mountain Parish and told us more about the needs of the community and how they help address these needs. They had a storm shelter for people to stay in during the tornadoes, a food bank and thrift store where people could buy donated items and the profits helped pay the bills and buy food for the pantry. Between all the services they offer, they serve about 100 families a week.

In the morning, we made food bags for the backpack lunch program. The Upper Sand Mountain area has a huge meth problem and as a result there are a lot of children who go hungry. The side effects of meth include a loss of appetite and losing track of time. When parents experience the effects of meth they don't realize it is time for dinner because they're not hungry. UMC makes these "backpack lunches" for the kids in the school to take home with them over the weekend so they won't go hungry. The principal of the school even has a "club meeting" with the kids where they play games and have some mentoring where he distributes lunches so the other students don't see that they're getting this assistance. We made about 200 lunches this morning.

We spent the afternoon counting bags of seeds to distribute to different churches. Since spring is coming, the UMC was trying to have their members' plant fruits and vegetables so that they don't have to buy more produce and can have more money to spend on other things.

We got to meet some really great people today. This one guy, Robert, was telling us all about his travels and the different kinds of work he's done. One of the things that have really surprised me so far about this trip is how welcoming everyone has been to us. One of the concerns I always have when I go on service trips is making sure we don't force our culture on our hosts. I was pleasantly surprised to learn that our neighbors were excited to have us and actually brought us treats. They even helped us jump start our van and invited us to dinner.

I never expected to feel so comfortable in a new place so quickly, especially in a culture so different from my own. However, that being said I'm not sure how "different" our cultures really are. They're people who want to serve their community, just like us. They just live in a rural area rather than a suburban area.

Taylor

Monday, March 12, 2012

More than religious, (religious group) I see a community. I was stupid, still am, and still need to learn more. I failed to see that a community is made by its people not by its perceived privileges,

stereotypes, and other stigmas. Today I saw a self-sustaining facility that in addition to employing people from the community was also able to reach out to the rest and empower them as they were aided. (There is a store that collects donations to fix and restore and sell at reduced prices and there's the storage in the back with the food plus the pantry).

People that lead this organization must love their community. I love them for that. Every one of them is an amazing person.

Returning to my initial remarks about my stupidity and ignorance, every set of people have their own set of problems, for here it is the poverty but most importantly the tornados.

Also, in knocking down my own judgments about the community, they have completely disappeared. Just like I want to learn more about this community, I have also seen the community is interest in our group, love it!

Oscar

Monday, March 12, 2012

Today was a very important day! Meeting the people that work at the parish, learning about them, talking to them, working with them, this all set the feel for the rest of the week – a great feeling! So much about today made me think about what it means to be a community. Each person we encountered contributed a lot of time to helping the hungry/ the people in need, and they allowed us to be a part of it. They engraved in our minds that even though we weren't up close and personal we were making a difference and contributing to making someone's life just a little easier.

As we worked in the storm room and in the warehouse today I couldn't help but think about how fortunate I am to be on this trip with 14 other amazing people. On a personal level I usually find myself in awkward and uncomfortable situations with large groups of people. I am glad to say that today on our first day working I didn't feel out of place; not once. Packing the snacks in the storm room and singing and dancing around while doing so was so amazing; it made me think about how great these next couple of days are going to be. I really liked this group and feel myself growing this non-forced, natural relationship with people. It feels great.

Something else I really enjoyed today was talking to Robert. That man is probably one of the most interesting people that I've ever met. I don't want to get into detail as to why I feel that way because my writing won't do him justice, but I feel like a handful of people today spoke to him and know what I mean. I'm just really excited to learn more about Alabama and the people. It's only been day one and I've learned so much. I really can't wait to see how the rest of the week goes!

Milka

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

Miles and miles of road stretched out across the Appalachian region. I am sitting here trying to convey how beautiful and blissful it is, but I feel like I can't find words to describe how at peace I feel. It seems so difficult to picture, or even think about, tornados coming through this area and destroying everything in its path simply because at the moment everything is so serene.

We haven't seen much of the damage the tornados caused and I can't even begin to imagine what this region must have looked like right after the tornados passed. I can't picture people's faces, their homes torn down, and all that they know torn to the ground. With all that aside, there is one thing I can picture after this destruction and that is the hope. The hope in our community to rebuild their homes and their strength as tightly knit as we saw on Sunday. Today has been beautiful with sun kissing our faces and laughter dancing all around us and I think that's where the hope comes from. After such devastation, like the tornados, hope comes from knowing that a day like today will follow not too far behind.

Wendy

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

Today was brimmed with a lot of anticipation. I'd say were all dying to get to some manual work today. And we finally did! The drive to the house was incredible. The fields rolled into shaded ponds; old

cows grazed alongside calves. The swirl of clouds framed the whole scene, a picture I never want to forget, a picture I struggle to imagine strewn with debris and uprooted trees.

Once we got to the work site, a rhythm fell into place and we all found a job to do. Milka takes up nails, Kelly angrily pounded nails, Ale always the perfect mom swept the roof constantly to make sure no one slipped on the gravel. Sun of course, did nothing.

After a lunch break and line of back massages, we got back to work. Singing “Home” while stripping a roof of shingles is a memory I’ll never forget.

Something else I’ll never forget is dancing to E.T. with Ellie, Kelly, and Kendra in the kitchen. That got all kinds of freaky and steamy. I’m not going to say that’s the first time my pelvis has gyrated all over the floor, but...

After our reflection under the stars I’m struck by how much we’ve grown as a family. Even more profound is seeing this growth through the lens of the Alabama community we’re a part of for this week. How are the people here so genuine, and friendly and welcoming after all they’ve been through? You’d think they’d have gathered together to mourn, to rebuild. But there’s still room for strangers, and soon these strangers become neighbors.

Christopher

Tuesday March 13, 2012

Where should I begin with my journal entry on this beautiful Tuesday? Well first things first, today was the official and hopefully not only day of absolutely sensational weather to match up with the sensational work our group was doing and the equally amazing people we were working with. One first thing that I really want to write about before I begin my reflection on the day’s work as a group was something that happened on a walk this morning with Oscar and Martin that just goes to further break down any preconceived notions about people in the South/Alabama—as we were walking this man in a truck drove by us and just a few minutes later he passes us from the opposite direction and asks if we needed any help. At that time we said no and he turned around yet again and continued on the way he was originally going. It took us a minute to realize really what just happened but I am pretty positive that the impact of a perfect stranger’s kindness will stick with me for a very long time to come. It is times like these that give me such hope for humanity even when there are so many bad things poisoning this world we live in. In a way this community of Alabama is a step out of the fast paced/self-centered world that we live in and a step back to the things that are really important in this world.

Now let us talk about the walk that we did as a group today. Although we may have not really had too, too much interaction with the community aside from those we were walking with, this project really caused me to reflect upon what is important in life and what we as people so often mistake to be of such great importance. I feel like this may have started on our drive and really getting a new in depth look at the poverty that plagues this region. It was really a reality check to see some of these run down homes that I couldn’t even imagine living in and then a few miles away seeing some beautiful homes that I couldn’t imagine living in for different reasons. In looking at this contrast I began to wonder why these people living in the beautiful houses were investing so much in the way things looked when they could be using that money to help our a neighbor – when thinking about this I realized that I am just as guilty as these people and it began to make wonder why material possession mean so much.

This concept of values really hit me when we were walking together as a group and all the events and fun things we have been doing together all hit me at once. In reflecting upon these past few days and most specifically these hours on the roof, I have realized that I have not been this genuinely happy and carefree in a very long time. The real beauty and eye opening thing about this revelation is that not a single thing that has brought me happiness has been linked to having material possessions. What has been making me so happy is pure and genuine love through human interactions. It’s something so simple and so easily forgotten in the world. It just really makes me think about if I could hold onto this happiness and freedom from all the negatives of this world that are holding me back and really bring this mentality and outlook into everyday life, what if somehow this could eventually spread to the world. It’s hard to really express what I am feeling and trying to say without sounding super abstract and out there. I guess

one thing that really is standing out to me today is laughter, and enjoying those around you whether it's on a service trip or not.

Kelly McIntyre

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

When I first got out of the van on Saturday, I was blown away by the Alabama beauty! Never before have I ever thought that I'd find a place as beautiful as Vermont (or almost as beautiful.) While I processed the change in place, I looked around at the group members to see how they were adapting; I was already so impressed by them. Everyone had thrown down their stuff, big smiles on their faces, and was exploring the area to get a feel for the space that would be their home for the next week. I've had a lot of moments already that resemble that first minute in Alabama, where I took myself out of the picture to admire my new family member from afar. Every person on this trip is so beautiful and is already starting to fill a place in my heart. In every one of them, I see something I'd either like to try to locate in myself or continue to observe, just to remind myself of the wonderful complexity of individuals. While were up on the roof, hammering nails and soaking up the Alabama sun, I pause to look around at them, partly because I want to make sure that no one looks ready to pass out from dehydration but mostly because this group as a whole constitutes a vibrant, cohesive, dynamic portrait of community service.

Kendra

Tuesday, March 13, 2012

Today started out a little cloudy and foggy from the rain yesterday but turned into a beautiful spring day! We went to the parish center and then Josh led us to a neighborhood where we were set to re-do a roof. It is the missionaries' house but we were all a little surprised to find out that this was where Josh lived too. It was a little shocking but I am so glad that we can help him out when he spends all of his time helping others people. The drive over to his house was also great because we got to see a different part of the country side than we had; we saw trailers, beautiful houses, chicken farms, cows, schools and really got a better idea of the area we are staying in. I loved the ride because we could open the window and feel the breeze while also talking to everyone in the van and singing the (same) songs that came on the radio. I normally feel like a tourist or that I don't belong in a place until I have it mapped out in my head and the drive really helped me wrap my mind around what I am doing here and made me more comfortable.

When we started work on the roof (taking all of the shingles and tarp off to just leave the plywood) I was definitely hesitant at first of slipping or anything but found a great job pulling up nails and got more and more comfortable working up there. Josh, Ben and Robert were a great help and I learned so many construction skills it was ridiculous. I definitely went to bed thinking about the best way to pull up a tile at the edge of the roof or how to hammer in a nail with just a "tap, tap, and bang!" Also, this was my first real experience with bugs in 2012; they are alive in Alabama and not afraid of humans. We also killed some wasps at the house (but not all of them).

We had a great lunch outside by the parish (and I love reverting back to my elementary school diet again) and afterwards just laid in the sun, started a massage train and figured out that the little building next to the parish was a prayer room, open whenever to whomever (I don't think this is correct English grammar, don't kill me Kendra).

When we got back to the site we worked diligently again replacing plywood and putting black tarp on the roof. It was a great day and I was so filled with happiness it was like "woah."

When we got back to Holland's Chapel (which is the most perfect place for us to live for a week) we immediately snacked (so hungry all the time) and then played outside. I went on a run with Wendy which was so great! We saw puppies and a used auto lot and I again just found out so much about the area. When we got back it was time to make dinner. We were lucky that Elise, Pavan, and Sun made delicious appetizer flatbread because our pasta water wasn't boiling (apparently that burner doesn't work) but then we cooked delicious chicken with Ellie's help and the whole Italian feast hit the spot! After

dinner we took a walk to look at the stars which are so bright and beautiful in the dark down here. I got to lie in the middle of the road and stare at the little dots of light and appreciate their beauty. We then got to have reflection outside around the (soon to be) lit campfire after most of us were just laying down laughing as we looked through the trees at the stars. Afterwards we played one of my favorites, the movie game and I got another abs workout from laughing.

It was a day that was so fun and filled with learning, beauty, and happiness that I will always think back on it and smile. I am so lucky to be here and truly blessed to have met and make connections with the amazing people on this trip. They have each and every one of them, taught me something or shown me a quality in themselves that I admire greatly. It has only been a few short days and I can't wait for more!

Jamie Bugel

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

What a day! One of my favorite parts of Dickinson has been the experience these trips offer but you would be very hard pressed to re-create or come close to the special day we all shared together.

It all started around 7:00 AM with a great breakfast and we were off to the worksite. We managed to finish one whole side of the roof. Everyone pulled together and worked as a unit and went incredibly quickly. Then we needed to run to Walmart and received a call from Jeff and Becky the wonderful neighbors who had helped us out with the Van. They let us know they had prepared dinner for us and we would be eating around 6:15 at our stop. One quick Walmart stop later, we arrived at our place at 6:00 PM and prepared an amazing outdoor dinner setting and had cleaned up so fast. I was so happy to share dinner, flowers and friendship with Jeff and Becky. I honestly believe it to be one of those nights that we will always remember and tell our kids about. It felt like right out of the movies.

After that we shared some time with Sidney, their daughter, and had a great game of charades which my team won by the way. Sidney is such a sweetheart and definitely reminds me of Becky.

Finally our Reflections really got deep as we shared the folks who we would most want to share our experience thus far. I felt so honored and impressed with the group. Everyone, including the trip leaders, Taylor and the students have been phenomenal.

Some laughing, crying, hugging and hand holding later and it was bed time.

Pavan

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Becky and Jeff were people that became more than just neighbors. Having dinner with them has really made this experience like no other. Just learning how humble and helpful humans they are really inspired me. Having them over really made the team extremely excited, I had never seen people this excited in a while and it was just so warming to see all their smiles of joy. Becky and Jeff are two people I will never forget; they have helped me view the U.S. in a very different perspective and gave me the hope to continue giving to everyone a chance and not judging people right from the start. What a service trip ☺

Ale

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Today was "PERFECT." Everyone worked so hard during the day, had a wonderful lunch with the community at the parish, an amazing Wal-Mart run and a five minute table setting drill, dinner (the best meal ever) with Jeff and Becky, and hung out with Sidney. This list of events might not mean anything to others, but to us, it was a life-changing experience. Authenticity and hospitality that Jeff and Becky showed us throughout this week was incredible. When I grow up, I'd like to be like them in every way possible.

Sun Lee

Wednesday, March 14, 2012

Today was a very, very special day. As usual we left our home at 8:30 and instead of our yoga/stretching for 14 minutes we began our day with incredible stories from Joshua. His words were powerful for me. Personally, they motivated me to work harder. As time passed under the hot and bright sun I realized something so valuable. I got up to get some water and I saw a "team" working together. Wendy was nailing with both hands and everyone was cheering, and when Joshua said "go, nail it," we were all in a straight row hammering the nails together. Chris and Sun were doing the usual, everyone was singing along with Kelly's "Home"; every member of this team had to be there side by side in order to complete the roof. We were looking out for each other, making sure we're not dehydrated, forming assembly lines for shingles, handing out nails and simply enjoying everyone's company. I felt that all our uniqueness was filling in each other's gaps. For lunch the parish invited us to join the Lent luncheon and there we had many more great encounters. We were all so eager to hear their stories and they were more than happy to share them. The room was filled with warmth and laughter. After the worksite, we went to Wal-Mart to get more goodies. I remember this moment so vividly still when we got off our van, Christopher came running, panting and screaming that we are having dinner with Becky and Jeff at 6:15. All of our eyes were sparkling as one group cleaned the house, another set up the tables outside, and others prepared the yummy salad and brownies. The dinner was too much to handle. The meal Becky prepared for us was wonderful. Their daughter Sydney joined us and she fit in our group, and we all loved every moment of it. For a second, I wanted time to stop so we could enjoy what was happening but I realized with this group every upcoming minute, hours and days were going to be special. Sydney stayed after dinner and played games with us. It was great to know she was having loads of fun as well. Then it was reflection time. I actually cannot write down what exactly happened or how it did or describe it in words. All I can say is that I never knew I could meet this many mind-like, passionate and amazing people and am so grateful.

Saaya Imura

Thursday, March 15, 2012

After work we were sitting in the kitchen, journaling, listening to Madonna, snacking and cooking. I was having difficulty writing to Robert/ Josh/ Ben for several reasons. 1.) Where do you even begin in explaining the impact they have had on our group? So many conversations, emotion packing moments, and skills have been born from our interactions with these men. How do you explain to someone he has changed a piece of your being? He has altered your heart. A card cannot fully communicate what I feel, what we all feel. 2.) This is home. Tears well up as I just feel this place. This wacky but loving family makes this place work. It feels right to sit by an open window, singing whatever comes on the iPod speakers, watching Chris bust around the kitchen. It feels right to laugh so hard our lungs don't fill. It feels right to walk in the middle of the road under the brightest stars and it feels right to wake up in the middle of the night to panic snores. Welcome home ASB.

P.S I can only hope someday to be a part of another graphic ET moment. Christopher, you must be present.

Ellie

Friday, March 16, 2012

Today was the last day in Alabama. It started off really early waking up around 6:30 and this was after staying awake until 1:30 packing (my least favorite activity). While we were packing Ale made us a HUGE pot of arroz con leche, basically rice pudding, that was great right when she made it and also great the next day for the road! I have learned so many new dishes this trip it has been fantastic! Anyway, we packed up and ate breakfast and finally when everything was cleaned out we got to listen to Sun play the piano again which entranced everyone. Then we listened to "Home" (Ellie's suggestion) one more time and made a huge laughing chain. I thought this really showed how much our group connected on a deeper level with each other and the area but also how we all enjoyed laughing and having a good time. It was a great way to end our time in Holland's Chapel.

Then we drove to the worksite. It was a great day again and we were all eager to get up to the roof and finish the last part of the shingling. We got to meet Josh's girlfriend who we found out more about life in Alabama from and she even made us some grits! That was one southern food we hadn't gotten to try yet and it was delicious. Sprinkle, our gray kitten, showed up again and was just as lovable and fun to play with as always. Finally as we neared the end of the workday Christopher and Wendy hammered in the last two nails on the top of the house. It was so fulfilling being able to start and finish a project within the week that we were there. Josh said something that will stay with me forever, which was that every time it rains, he will think of us. That really hit home and made me feel even happier about the work that we were able to do this week. Then we climbed down the ladder for the last time (not without taking a few souvenir nails in my shoelaces along) and said goodbye to the roof.

We then went to the Parish to say goodbye to Robert and Tanya and everyone else there who had helped us throughout the week. These people really showed us what it was to work for the good of others and taught us so much and we really enjoyed our time with them.

Josh then took us on a tour of the F5 tornado damage. He had amazing stories about what the area looked like right after the tornado and you could still see a lot of damage. A few of the churches were hit but had rebuilt, but the area around them was still shocking to see. I was amazed that weather could cause this type of damage.

Finally, we drove back to the ministry and said our final goodbyes and set off on the road to Knoxville. It was a beautiful drive and when we got to our hotel we then went out to dinner and we all ate until we were bursting. We all didn't get to eat at the same table but being in the same room all together, in the real world, was such a great feeling it was a perfect way to leave behind the state that brought us so close together and bring everything we had gained back to Dickinson.

(Unknown)

Friday March 16, 2012

So today (Friday) was our official last day of work. It was quite a day of mixed emotions for our group as the harsh reality of the real world began to set in. This morning was honestly one of the most memorable moments for me during this whole trip because for a minute I removed myself from the activities in the house and just gave witness to our community. What we have as a group is something really special that can never and will never be able to be created again. Just watching the way that everyone worked together and really enjoyed the company of each other was something to admire. I don't know any other time in my life where I have had such a fantastic time doing mundane chores and I don't know if that will ever happen again even say another service or another community based experience such as this one.

There were several moments during this day that really summed up everything that I was feeling and probably what many of you were. The first of these was when we finally finished packing up the car and gathered one last time in our HOME. This place that felt more homes to me than many places that I call home but don't mean it in my heart. In this moment Sun played the keyboard to that same song that we heard at the beginning of this week. Personally, I could feel the love flowing through every being in that room, a love that is so unique and so under-appreciated in today's busy world. In this moment time moved so fast and so slow it is really hard for me to explain but I was appreciating every second being aware of this feeling deep in my heart and soul. It was comforting but sad at the same moment. When we stepped out of the house for that final time and looked back at the chapel something felt so entirely wrong about leaving but at the same time I think that we all knew that it was time to use everything that we have learned and experienced and take that back to the Dickinson community that we came from.

This is not to say that bringing back this mentality and state of being will be an easy task but neither is the physical labor that we did nor the letting go of barriers to let us get to the emotional level that we reached. It is going to be something that we are going to have to work at but I think that just knowing that we have each other will be comforting and helpful in spreading the goodness and importance of community that we became so aware of.

Another piece of this day that sticks in my mind is while we were driving back from the worksite to the parish to say our final goodbyes to Josh, Robert and Ben. During this time everyone was really appreciating that one last beautiful drive and an Adele song came on and Ellie changed the lyrics slightly to say, "Who would have known how bittersweet this trip would taste?". How much more fitting could that have possibly gotten?

Our last moments in Alabama were not the easiest to get through not only did we have to say goodbye to some amazing people but we also really got to see the damage of the tornadoes and soak in what really happened but not even fully because this was a year later. I think that seeing this damage really made us become even more aware of the importance of community and how it can make people stay in a place where they are risking their lives by being there but they feel so at home there that they could not imagine being anywhere else. I think that this mixed with the goodbyes was a lot for everyone to soak in and made us leave on a note of mixed emotions.

Overall, we were all saying how much we did not want to leave this place and how much we are not looking forward to going back to Dickinson and facing the real world again. I know I said this just as much and if not more than everyone else but having reflected upon this I don't want us to be anxious or unhappy. I want us to take this challenge of returning to the not-so-nice real world and just remember what we learned this week... how to be good people. We need to challenge ourselves to always act in the way that we did this week and never forget how to love and treat others.

Kelly McIntyre

Friday, March 16, 2012

It's crazy how close we all got in only one week. We all took a risk, opened our hearts, voiced what we felt. Even in the quiet times, there was no silence. We are all caring people. Considerate of what others are feeling. We all worry when one member is missing (we make search teams).

I hate saying goodbye but I always promise I will come back. It's amazing how close my attachment for this community became. Honestly, I lack the words to describe how I feel. (To be continued...)

Oscar

Friday, March 16, 2012

Today we left the house which was a little sad. Our neighbor stopped on her way to school to say goodbye. We packed up the van & then headed to the worksite one last time. Josh's girlfriend, Rachel, was there today & she was up on the roof helping us finish it. She was anxious about being up on the roof so I spent some time talking with her to distract her. She was telling me about the effects of the tornadoes & how her best friend's house had been hit. Her friend & her friend's family were all fine but she had lost all her pictures from her childhood which was really upsetting to her. However, the community made a Facebook page where people could post photographs of the pictures they had found & people in that group could comment on it if it belonged to them. Rachel was telling me how someone had found her friend's senior portrait & she was able to get in contact with Rachel's friend via the Facebook page. The person who found it took the picture to be retouched, framed it & mailed it back to her with some Walmart gift cards. I was so touched by that story but after spending the week in AL, I wasn't surprised to hear that. The people here are so generous & the best part is that their motives are completely genuine. They help each other because they care about one another and because of this, they've created this amazing community.

When we arrived in Knoxville, we did one last reflection where we talked about all the things we appreciate about each other. While doing that I realized just how fortunate I was to have gone on this trip. I think our group really was able to come together & create this same sense of community for ourselves that we experienced from our time in AL. We all have such a great appreciation for each other & all the qualities that we bring to the group. I truly believe that every single person on this trip was a leader in some capacity, whether that meant giving instructions, working behind the scenes, or even just keeping

people's energy & spirits up, working together we were all able to accomplish any task given to us. Everyone's encouragement & teamwork was what made us finish shingling the roof, or making the 200 backpack lunches. I'm looking forward to returning to campus & seeing how we can bring what we learned back to the Dickinson community.

Taylor

Friday, March 16, 2012

Our last day in Alabama! Today was incredibly meaningful for me. I got that spooking, goose-bumpy feeling when I realize that everything is coming together. I mean that literally, like when Wendy and Christopher hammered in those last few nails. I almost teared up (surprise, surprise), just considering how hard Wendy had worked all week and how positive and willful she had remained the entire time. So there was that moment, and then there was the one where we all took a picture on the roof, and Ben, Robert, and Josh thought they weren't supposed to be in it. You could tell they were pleasantly surprised when we demanded that they join us. Isn't that telling? I've had this vague feeling all week that these guys have never really met a group like us before. We're never going to forget them, so I hope they remember us too.

There were other, less literal moments too though, like the one when I pulled a misshapen nail out of my shoe. When I say misshapen, I don't mean by anything we did; I meant that they nail was literally made incorrectly. HOW PERFECT IS THAT?! I thought back to the first day when one of the men in the workhouse (was it Josh?) related people to broken, dented cans. We are all broken; that's what makes us human. The statement takes on immense force when considered in light of the week we have spent together. Never before have I been a part of group that allows it to experience vulnerability so fully. We shared so much this week about ourselves, crying and comforting, crying and comforting. This place, this church, the week's emphasis on "home" and one's roots, one's core values, all of these things made Alabama so unbelievably conducive to the growth we all sought to experience here.

I am going to put that broken nail, my little can of green tomato jam, and a dented can on my shelf as soon as I get back to Dickinson.

Kendra