

**Dickinson College**  
**Alabama Service Trip**  
**May 2012**

**EAT. SLEEP. SERVE. REPEAT.**  
**Team Journal**

**Sunday May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – Austin MacDougall '15**

As with many service trips, the first day (Sunday) was quite hectic. I packed most of my stuff the night before, but I still needed to pack some things and pick up a few last-minute supplies on Sunday morning. Finally I left home with my dad, arriving at Carlisle about an hour early. After I said goodbye to my dad (but not without a quick tour of campus) I packed my stuff in the van and waited for everyone to arrive.

As soon as we got on the road I was co-piloting one of the vans with Chloe driving. The time seemed to fly as we chatted and joked while many of the others in the van napped. Finally, we arrived at our dinner location: Chipotle! Needless to say I was pleased to get some good food for the remaining few hours. The rest of the ride went well too, and before long we made it to our hotel in Salem, VA.

After we waited for the other van and checked in, we got into our rooms and unpacked, showered, changed, and then gathered for a brief meeting. We ended the day sharing our ups and downs and thankfully the ups outweighed the downs for most of us! I look forward to seeing what the rest of the van ride has in store for us but more importantly, I can't wait to get to Alabama to start working.

**Sunday May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – Eddie Edinberg-Luks '13**

Today, Sunday, was an absolutely gorgeous day. I got up early with my roommate Oscar and went to graduation. There were so many people in the Academic Quad and in front of Old West it was a bit overwhelming, but I enjoyed hearing some of the speeches and seeing my friends descend the steps of Old West. Hard to believe that will be me in one year. We got lunch in the HUB and then scrambled and got our stuff together to leave for the trip. Finally, we were going to hit the road! I'm glad I have the opportunity to be on this trip, it is my first service trip and I think it is a great way to end the school year and begin the summer. Even though I can't wait to be home, I'm excited to travel, meet new people, and to do meaningful work. We left more or less on time today, which was good and didn't run into much traffic on our way out of Carlisle. I enjoyed having conversations with people in the vans, watching the scenery fly by, and reading my book. Bring it on summer! One of the highlights of this first leg of the trip was going to Chipotle! Good job Austin and Peter for finding it. We got into the hotel in Salem, VA around 10:30pm.

## **Sunday May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – Chuck Steel**

Like everyone else I had a long day on Sunday. I had done most of my packing on Saturday so I only had to take a few minutes to finish up and make sure I had everything that I needed Sunday afternoon. I was glad that the team was willing to be flexible and come to Gettysburg to pick me up after my concert. Once we got my things in the van we got back on the road (with only one wrong turn!) we were on our way.

The time went by quickly and it was soon dinner. Since there were only seven of us we stopped at Subway, something that you can't do with twenty or thirty people because it would just take too long. After dinner we got back on the road and Sofie and I had a nice conversation about a wide range of topics. Before we knew it we were at the hotel and met the other group, got our rooms, had a brief reflection/meeting and got to bed, ready for the next day.

## **Sunday May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 - JT Stoner '15**

I arrived at Dickinson at 3:45pm with five other people all excited and ready to go. I checked the vans and realized that one of them is missing backseats. That's ok because we now have more time to meet one another. We get on the road and everyone continues to converse and sing "Call Me Maybe," fifty times. Everyone makes it to the hotel safely and we all meet to discuss the day. Everyone is excited, yet tired. One of the most memorable moments of the day was, Chipotle and Peter's "flea collar." I'm just excited to start working at the Underwood's and learn their story.

## **Sunday May 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – Alyssa Young '14**

I arrived late with Oscar and Eddie to ATS panicked and out of breath only to find that several others were late as well. The van ride didn't seem so long, especially since we stopped for dinner- YUM. When I asked Peter if his neck pillow was a "flea collar," someone thought I said "slave collar!" Awkward, yet funny. At our meeting tonight they asked us what we were excited for. I said I was excited to see what our site looked like and to settle in tomorrow.

## **Monday May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012 – Lauren Amoros '12**

Today was a good day, a lot of settling in after the long drive. We just drove a lot, honestly, and then slept while Megan and Peter went grocery shopping after we got here. Everyone was super friendly when we go into town. They all waved at me. You can definitely see some of the houses with new roofing and some with damaged roofing. It's so quiet though that it's hard to think of a storm running through this place, especially a huge tornado. There is a lot of sporadic rain and I like that. It's so refreshing. Dinner was great! My team cooked tacos and they were so tasty! So far the day's not too bad, and I'm really excited to see our worksite tomorrow!

## **Monday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012 – Jamie Leidwinger '15**

It kind of an early start today...Awesome. Looking forward to a longer ride than yesterday. Everyone is kind of in their own little worlds during the ride, making things seem longer. I was relieved not to have

driven though those vans are at least three times bigger than my own. Driving one with eleven people for the first time yesterday made me really nervous. My hands were actually sweating at the wheel. Cassidy, Kayla, and I had no seatbelts in the back of the van, so we looked at each other and then linked arms! One car splashed us with a puddle that completely covered the windshield. Sophie powered through like a champ though. Between the rain and Sophie scraping the side of the van on a guard rail, the ride was kind of awesome. On the bright side, it was funny listening to Peter snore like a champ. I really wanted to draw on his face with a sharpie, but didn't think to ask Alyssa, our sharpie queen. When we pulled into the front area of where we were staying, I was kind of confused. I was expecting something a little more remote than a building on the corner of a road with houses. Peter and Megan went to Walmart and everyone collapsed. There was a lot of snoring going on. It was funny watching people wake up, half looking around to see if anyone else was up, then going back to sleep. When Peter and Megan came back, we taco-fed the group and got pumped for the week. I'm really excited for the small group service experience and I'm glad to see the group finally starting to gel after a very quiet ride down. I hope we split crews so we have more time to share our experiences. Let the fun begin! 'Bama love!

### **Monday, May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012 - Oscar Monge '13**

We arrived to our location on Monday. Not going to lie, when we got here, I felt my heart stop for a second. You know how it feels when you have said your goodbyes to a place you think you might never see again? Or people you're pretty sure are only memories? That's how I felt. It was an interesting feeling stepping into this house again. I'm extremely excited to see how the group develops. I'm also excited to see our projects, to get them done, and to see the people we are helping. Taco night was good too!

### **Monday May 21<sup>st</sup>, 2012 – Peter Wright '12**

I sit outside, a college graduate, awaiting an experience that, on the surface, asks little of the intellect I've honed over the past four years. Tomorrow we are headed to the Underwood home to paint, rebuild, and hopefully, begin to make an impact. Despite the apparent disconnect, I can think of no better capstone to my Dickinson experience. I have the privilege of helping to lead fifteen wonderful students on this trip. I can share whatever experience I developed in Guatemala, my memories of, and advice about Dickinson, and my thoughts during a monumental transition in my life. I will always remember Alex Smith saying that we don't need a reason to do service; we need an excuse not to do it. Without school, without the burden of finding a job, without the spectacle of graduation and limited time with my friends, I am out of excuses. This is already so fulfilling, I wish I hadn't made so many before.

### **Tuesday May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 – Xinyi Chen '15**

Today is the first day of our actual work. We split into two teams in the morning. The task of my team was sheet-rocking. The house we worked on was greatly destroyed by the tornado last year, except for the basement. Our job was to cut the pre-built walls and put them onto the ceilings and the sides of the rooms. This sounds easy, but it was not. Luckily, we had Chuck, who has some first-hand experience in construction, to instruct our team. My personal challenge was to hold the drill vertically to the ceiling and push with the right

strength. Otherwise the screw would either stick out or go too far in. It took me many unsuccessful trials until I finally mastered it. At the end of the day we finished half of the ceiling of the major room. Hopefully we are going to get it done tomorrow. It was tiring but it was fun!

### **Tuesday May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 – Chuck Steel**

Today was one of the best first days I have experienced on a service trip. We were able to get started very quickly and got a lot of work done. Our home owner worked with us almost all day and we got to know her a little. She even knows where Carlisle is because she was a truck driver. It was funny when she complained about people walking into the street there.

Our work went well and our team got a lot of drywall hung. I expect that by the end of the week we will see a big change in the house as we convert studs to walls and rooms appear.

It's also great to see the team getting along so well and people spending the time with everyone. We began a game of "word assassins," today and I got Xinyi to say "Christmas tree," on the road home. Unfortunately Alyssa got me to say "Pangaea," once we got here so I am out. Oh well. Now I can sit back and watch the fun without being concerned.

### **Tuesday May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 – Molly Joyce '15**

Today was a long but efficient day. It took us thirty minutes to get to our worksite and at first we weren't quite sure what to do. From the outside it didn't look like we would have much work to do. However, once we walked into the house it was apparent that we would have a busy week. We focused on painting the exterior for today. We got about ¾ of the house done and we left with a sense of accomplishment. The highlight of my day was when Roger stopped by during lunch. He sat down with us and told about his life for the past decade. I was so amazed and inspired that he went back to school just because he wanted to. It made me realize how lucky I am to have the opportunity to go to school right out of college. The fact that he had a stable (at the time) job, yet still wanted to continue his education and worked hard was inspiring and made me want to work harder in school next year. I was amazed at how open and honest he was with a group of complete strangers. His gratitude for the volunteers and his passion for the job were evident. I hope that I get to hear more inspiring stories over the next few days.

### **Tuesday May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 – Chloe Canetti '14**

Today, when we got to see the house we were working on for the first time, I was surprised to pull up to what appeared to be a fully completed house, save for some missing yellow paint. I was almost a bit disappointed that the house looked so complete, as if us being there was more to add some finishing touches than too really, "make a difference." However, when I walked through the front door to see an interior with no furniture, no electricity or plumbing, and not even a floor, it really hit home that his house was built from scratch just a few months ago after a tornado literally obliterated the old one. The experience was quite grounding and reassured me of our purpose on this trip.

One other eye-opening moment for me today was when, around 3:15pm, the previously crystal clear sky suddenly became dark with clouds. While at first I thought of nothing more than some showers, or a thunderstorm at most, it suddenly struck me that the inhabitants of this tiny town were probably never too assured. Tornadoes don't give warning. They don't call ahead and they don't knock before they enter. It suddenly ran through my mind that just because we are the volunteers coming from out of town to rebuild after a disaster, we are not immune to these same disasters ourselves. Nothing is keeping another tornado from storming through tomorrow and destroying the work we did today. This is a vulnerability that I've never been forced to feel before, and I cannot imagine living with it every day. I have met some amazingly resilient people already and I hope to meet more during my stay. Their willpower to continue on with their lives is truly inspiring to me.

## **Tuesday May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2012 – Sofie Anderson '15**

Today was the best so far. I woke up and felt ready for the day. I was happy and I didn't have to set out breakfast, but Peter's team did a great job. We did a great job I have to say though, with tacos the night before. It reminded me of the taco night from home. I liked it also because it helped bring our group closer together. Today we went to our work site for the first time. Walking onto the property our leader, Roger, warned us that "Shirley is a little...different." We ended up putting sheet rock in the house and Shirley the homeowner, worked with us the entire time. I have to say, Shirley is awesome. Bonding with her and hearing life stories, not only on the tornado but on her life in general, made the building of the house and the necessity of our being there so much more real. It was also entertaining because Shirley is a wonderful and hilarious storyteller. I definitely gained some construction experience in just the first day and I am definitely expecting to be sore tomorrow. Meeting with Shirley's sons after her stories about the tornado and keeping everyone in the basement impacted me even more. They even started helping a little with construction and were completely adorable. Shirley's dogs were equally precious as well. This group is great and going from not knowing anyone to bonding to what I can call a family is a great feeling. I'm happy I applied, got accepted and decided to come and I can't wait to hopefully do more of these in the future.

## **Wednesday May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Eddie Edinberg-Luks '13**

Today was a great day overall. We started a lot more quickly than yesterday and made progress on putting up more drywall on the ceiling. It's been great getting to know Shirley, our homeowner, and listening to her various stories. She has four kids, four dogs, a parrot, a cat, and chickens. She is very nice and has a good sense of humor. Today luckily wasn't that hot and we had time outside again with the little Chihuahua Casey giving us company. I had the chance to drive the van back from the house to where we are staying and I enjoyed the landscape and the rolling hills. The farmland reminds me of Carlisle, but the scenery is different, especially with patches of destroyed trees and areas that look like graveyards, which were affected by tornadoes. When we got back I put on my shoes and went for a run. My legs were tired after standing all day and it was a little hot, but I had a great run and got chased by some sheep dogs and a little jack Russell! Another highlight of the night was dinner. Xinyi made a fantastic meal and afterwards Oscar and I looked for firewood and made a fire. To my surprise it actually lit with the help of our brown paper bags. Everyone had S'mores and Sydney came by and we talked about various things; her community, her high school and other small talk. However, Chloe and I asked her about the tornadoes and it was interesting hearing about the extent of the damage that was

inflicted on so many people's lives throughout northeast Alabama, and the troubles people had to deal with. Schools were destroyed; houses, electric lines, power generators, a bank, and even its vault were lifted into the air by the force of the tornado and flung through the sky. In this rural setting without electricity it must have been extremely difficult to contact other people and function. She told a tragic story about her cousin who died in the tornado and had to be buried quickly because there was no electricity in the morgue to preserve his body. Hospitals didn't function, it sounded like a nightmare. I take it for granted the home in which I live and the security I feel. Rarely do I think that such a safe place like my home could be destroyed or affected. Shirley has been rebuilding her house for over a year now and I'm glad we are able to help.

### **Wednesday May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Austin MacDougall '15**

I was really happy with everything that we did today. We started out by finishing most of the paint that we had to apply to the exterior of the house. While we were painting, some of us worked on applying the hardwood floor and the floor of the attic. Although I wish we had one extra ladder to work with (not to mention more paint), I am still quite pleased with the progress we made. One of my favorite parts of the worksite was interacting with the neighbors, especially Cole. He was so funny and enjoyable to talk to. I also enjoyed meeting his parents and getting water at their house where we talked about sports and life in general.

After we finished work, our crew left for a nearby Walmart to pick up supplies. For whatever reason, I don't think I've ever had so much fun grocery shopping in my life! We got all the groceries we needed in about fifteen minutes. Afterwards, I caved into peer pressure and ate my first Reese's Peanut Butter Cup. I don't know why, but apparently going eighteen years without a Reese's makes you kind of a horrible person. Either way, we returned to the house where Xinyi and the rest of Megan's crew made an awesome dinner. Finally, we all went outside and had a cookout. We had a great time roasting marshmallows, making S'mores, and chatting with a couple of our neighbors. In all, this was probably the best day of our week so far. I'm really excited for the rest of the week!

### **Wednesday May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Molly Joyce '15**

Today was another interesting day. We got to work right away. Half of us began to put down the wood floors and the other half went outside to continue yesterday's work. At first I was inside, but after we hit a lull I went outside to help paint. During the morning I switched between putting down floors and painting the back of the house.

I was really excited about learning how to lay down floors and I'm happy I learned. I didn't realize how difficult and time-consuming the process is. I have a whole new respect for people who lay floors for a living. I was inside for about thirty minutes before I went outside to continue painting.

I spent the rest of the day painting the back of the house. We had gotten so much painting done yesterday yet there was so much left to do. I spent hours painting and touching up the paint. I felt so accomplished until I stepped back and saw how much I had left to do. I was hoping to finish the painting today, but unfortunately we ran out of paint.

After we left the worksite we went to Walmart to get food for the rest of the week. We split into “teams” to get the shopping done faster. It was nice to have the opportunity to spend time with a smaller group of people than usual.

Dinner and the bonfire were really fun. The food was great and the conversation was interesting. I feel like we’ve gotten closer as a group. After the bonfire and reflection Jamie and I made cookies for our homeowner, Mr. Underwood. We are hoping that he will appreciate them and open up to us a little bit.

### **Wednesday May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Lizz Reese ‘15**

Today was a great day all around despite getting up earlier than I have in a long time. Breakfast and lunch were easy set-ups and a great start to an efficient day. We got to the site and immediately got to work in the same wall/ceiling teams as the previous day. The teams really seemed to come together into cohesive groups working like well-oiled machines. The wall crew has gotten an impressive amount of work done. We’re still working on the ceiling, but we’re making good progress. It is certainly much harder than it looks. Other than just the work, the social aspect is really coming along, at least from my point of view. I’m enjoying conversation and laughing with members on this trip who otherwise would have just been people I pass while walking through Rector or someone who makes my sandwich at the Quarry. Also, another great point of today was killing two people in the word assassination game. It’s kind of a made me start those awkward conversations which in the end turn into great, entertaining ones. There were just so many good things about today and everything so far.

One thing for today that has really been on my mind is that I’m actually making an impact. The sheet rock I’m cutting and drilling is a major part of someone’s house that they’ll be living in every day. It’s a good feeling. Sometimes I feel that the work I do has no purpose, but with this, I absolutely love knowing that helping a wonderful one-of-a-kind woman and her family come one step closer to undoing the damage they have had to live with on a daily basis.

To top off this day we made S’mores over an open fire, and I absolutely love campfires. It was really enjoyable to do reflections outside. We also got to talk to two teen girls near where we’re staying who were absolutely great and open about their experience here.

I’m definitely looking forward to a lot tomorrow. I hope we can finish the ceiling where we’ve been working or move onto another project. I also look forward to the cookout with some neighbors which will be fantastic. All in all, today and tomorrow should prove to both be incredible days!

### **Wednesday May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Megan Randall ‘13**

Day 2 on the worksite. I felt like we got a lot done today which was great. It was great to see how much the team had learned in one day. We were able to work pretty independently to get more sheet rock hung. Shirley was great to work with and it was fun to get to know her as we’re working together. After our workday we came home to cook dinner for the group. Xinyi did a great job of helping us all to make delicious Chinese

food and afterwards we made S'mores around the outdoor fire pit. Really fun evening and I'm so glad the trip is going well.

### **Wednesday May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Alyssa Young '14**

Today was by far the most emotional day for me. For the last couple days, I've been worried about my homeowner. He didn't really talk to our group at all, and I was really worried that he wasn't satisfied with our work. Everyone else has been so sweet and nice, that it made it even harder that he wasn't opening up to us. Then, when we were least expecting it our homeowner came out of his shell today. He brought pictures to the site, told us all about his family and his story, and thanked us for our hard work. It was so moving to hear what he had endured, and to learn of his strength and persistence. I feel like it was even more powerful to hear because we had stopped waiting for "the story." When we offered him the cookies the team made for him, we saw him smile for the first time. He accepted them with genuine pleasure! Even though they were burnt and from a can, he looked like we handed him a homemade pie. That was the most rewarding thing I've experienced for a long, long time.

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I'm sitting at the worksite with a lull of nothing to do so I thought I would add on to my last entry. We're waiting for Roger to bring us the tools we need so that we can continue working. Not having the proper tools to do projects has been the most frustrating part of the trip. We all feel guilty for not doing anything while we wait for a ladder or tool to free up.

Last night we went to the Monroe's for dinner. It was so nice sitting on the patio, eating good barbecue with our neighbors and team. After dinner a few of us walked over to the fence to say hi to the cows. I'm pretty sure the Monroe's thought we were crazy for being so fascinated with cows. We even tried to pet them and gave them names. They're so cute though! When we came back, I sat down to listen to Mrs. Monroe's story. She described her experience with the tornado in such a heartfelt way. I felt like I was there, seeing the destruction she told of and feeling the panic and heartache she felt. She didn't start to cry until she thanked us for all the hard work we did. When she started crying, so did everyone else at the table. We couldn't help it. She is such a wonderful, giving person. I still can't believe how she invited eighteen strangers into her home and made us feel like we knew her our whole lives.

### **Thursday May 24<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – JT Stoner '15**

Today was the epitome of efficiency. Although I can only speak for half of the people on this trip, I heard during reflections that both crews are doing well, but are slightly sad that we cannot finish the houses. As of today, we have completed the sheet rocking for the dining room, kitchen, and most of the living room in Shirley's house. It feels good to be making such progress, but it's an even better feeling doing it side by side with the owner. Shirley is a great woman who has been through so much in her life. I can only imagine the stress of rebuilding your house after such a horrific event, and how Shirley can be so optimistic and joking, only further enhances her great personality. The other great thing about this trip is meeting so many new people. This trip does a good job of bringing people from many states with varying personalities together under one cause. Because it is Thursday though, it means this trip is almost over. However bittersweet this may be, I will

leave Alabama with so much more than I came with: new friends, new experiences, and a new sense of self. I wouldn't change this week for the world. Thank you.

#### **Thursday May 24<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Sofie Anderson '15**

So many new things have happened since the last time I wrote, which was only two days ago. Wednesday, or yesterday, we made a lot of leeway with the sheet rock as a group. I still am not very confident with my drilling skills but I worked on them and hope to get it down by tomorrow. Last night was really fun though. Cooking Chinese food with Xinyi was great and the outcome was delicious. Then, to continue the already great day, we had an awesome bonfire and made S'mores. I love S'mores. The only thing getting on my nerves though are all the bugs! Anyway, today was a change because I helped to put up sheet rock on the wall rather than the ceiling. I liked the change, and each one was equally challenging. The wall was more challenging with measuring, and the ceiling more with the placement and positioning of the sheet rock. Tonight we had a great dinner with the Monroe family and a group of us really had fun with Sydney, the daughter. I can't believe tomorrow is our last day already. I'll miss this!

#### **Thursday May 24<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Jamie Leidwinger '15**

Before today a shower never felt so good. Today was a very up and down rollercoaster of a day. After such a high yesterday with finishing a lot of the painting and a good deal of the living room flooring, I was hoping for another baller day. When we got to the Underwood's house there wasn't quite enough work to do. Kayla and I painted the lowest thing of siding and then proceeded to find other things to do. I ended up going around back to do some more painting. Time seems to pass slowly when you're out in the sun and feeling like you are never going to be done. We had been painting for two days but finishing the detail work got a little frustrating.

Roger came by around ten and we started asking him some questions about the area and his organization. He said his organization had been blessed by God. They had been blessed with two big grants, one for \$120,000 and a second of \$135,000, with more donations that just called in. The Alabama musical group gave benefit concerts to raise money for the organization. I don't know who this group is, but I will definitely be looking them up when I get internet access. I also asked about the house up the road that said "Keep out OR ELSE!" written across the boarded up windows and he said it had been that way for a year, if not a couple. He'd always figured it would end up on the system but it never did.

After a solid 45 minute conversation we headed out front and took our lunch break. Needing a change, we grabbed some hoes and shovels to clean some weeds up in Mr. Underwood's newly bulldozed backyard.

Around the time we packed up, Mr. Underwood came back and started to talk to us. Whereas he was reserved and seemingly cranky the previous day, today he opened right up. He told us about the day the tornado hit and showed us pictures of the rubble. Nothing was salvageable and seeing the pictures was hard. These were pictures you could see hundreds of times and still notice something new almost every time. That evening, Mr. Underwood had been visiting his daughter as the tornado came over the ridge. If he had stayed home or gone to pick up his truck in the repair shop, who knows where he would be?

Before we left, Molly and I gave him the cookies we had baked him the night before in an attempt to warm him up. He accepted them happily. We had tried to give them to Trish earlier that day, but she declined and took only one saying we could use them more. Peter promised her that we'd get Mr. Underwood to take them and we sure did.

We got back to the church to shower and prep for our BBQ with the Monroe's. We got to their house and it felt like home. Sitting on their back porch just talking, laughing, and sharing stories was one of the high points of the week. Food, good company and a beautiful evening: who could ask for more?

As the night progressed some people went off into the yard to moo at the cows or hangout while a small group of us stayed on the patio. Mrs. Monroe opened up to us and spoke about her experience. It is one thing to watch over your immediate family, but Mrs. Monroe also kept track of her mother. Afterwards, she told us how she bought pounds of butter and flour to make cobbler for other families. She also told us that volunteering to help out here when we could have been on a cruise or doing a fun activity meant more than we could ever know. Coming to help those people was something they would never forget. As she spoke, her voice thickened and her eyes glistened. All of us who were sitting at the table with her seemed to tear up right with her. Seeing her feel so strongly about volunteers like us gave me hope. It was frustrating spending a good part of the week worrying about finishing small tasks on the worksite, but after listening to Mrs. Monroe, my perspective changed, those little things that seemed so frustrating were exactly that in the larger scheme. No matter what we were or were not able to accomplish this week, it still made a positive impact on someone else's life and will not go unnoticed. There's honestly no better way to spend the first full week of summer. 'Bama love!

#### **Thursday May 24<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Kristy Holmes**

Today was by far my favorite day. I think my head is flooded with so many words to describe it and I'm still trying to take it all in and process it all. So let's start with the basics, the work done this week by my team. We've been working on the Underwood house and despite a shaky and somewhat awkward introduction to Mr. Underwood, our team has been working really hard. We've painted, done flooring, and put down the attic flooring, and it's so exciting to see the house become a home in which you can begin to picture a family coming home to everyday. It's exciting to see. But until today, it has been just that. Don't get me wrong, we feel the loss in this area, we see the still visible trails of the destruction from the tornados, but it feels like we hadn't felt it all until today. Each day, we've been driving to a home and working hard to help in the rebuilding process for a couple who lost their home. But, I think the emotional connection and the reality of the loss wasn't felt by all of us until today. At the very end of our day, Mr. Underwood walked over to his truck. Prior to this, he was helping a few of us on the attic project and we were just cleaning up, ready to head back for the barbecue. But when Mr. Underwood brought out his photos, everything changed in our moods, our perspectives, and our emotions. I know I can't speak for everyone on my team but the two words I used to describe the moment were moving and meaningful. It was so interesting to watch a man who previously in the week was a bit removed, a little crabby, and even a bit put off by us, become really vulnerable and share his story with us. It was very sobering. I really saw the pain and grief of it all and the impact this storm had made. He was shaken, and even a year later he really seemed shaken by all the storm had done, the alternative of if he and his wife had been home and his gratefulness to be alive. He is not an expressive man, but you could see it in his eyes and it really struck me. I think I really underestimated the underlying pain that was still there and I think I took the reality of it all a bit lightly and was critical of his actions towards us earlier in the week instead of being empathetic and

understanding. I think in that, I learned of the most important lessons in my mind about service. To really put yourself in their shoes and to also give them the time they need to figure it all out. It was like a small victory that he opened up to us, but it was also a lesson that you never know the true experiences and impact of the person you're helping, and no matter how they react to you or what they appear to be, you always have to come from a perspective of empathy and grace. You just never know the depth of what they have experienced of overcome. But I also kept asking myself the question this week: does service mean less if you don't know the person or plight of the person you're helping? I think it may be different for everyone, but I think for me, service is about the people and making someone's burden a little lighter. Building house is certainly not my talent, but knowing you're making something a little easier for someone else is what matters. I think I made that bond with the person I'm helping and I don't know if that's the wrong approach. But I know I can say I felt at home today after speaking to Mr. Underwood and knowing that every detail of our work this week was rebuilding something for someone who had literally lost everything, instead of just building a house. We were helping a family build a new home with more memories and a fresh start. And that for me is my favorite part about service: to give that gift to someone and work for better days ahead for a family who still has fresh memories of a difficult year before. Nothing will ever take those memories away or reduce the grief and loss of it all. But we're all part of their brightness for the future and making their burden a little lighter. What could be more satisfying in life than that?

Just a few other noteworthy topics for the day. I loved working on the attic project with Chloe, Peter (aka Petah), and Kayla. It was a great day and so satisfying to see the progress made. I'm so proud of our team in general and all the great work that everyone has done. Everyone goes every day and wants to work hard to make the house look amazing. Everyone has great attitudes and I love my team. Thanks guys for giving it your all every day. I'm excited about another day tomorrow.

The final topic is over conversation with Mrs. Monroe. Considering I have already taken up five pages, I won't go off into another tangent but it was moving. Again, to hear her go into the details of her experiences from the tornado and the impact it left, I think it just brought everything into focus and I just felt the "realness," to make up a word, of it all. The ironic thing is that I work for a disaster response non-profit outside of the college and know of the stories by a lot of people affected by disasters. It has always been more intimate for me than just the headlines, but at the same time, I have still always been removed from it. Hearing the stories today; the individual stories with a face and a name and the history, made the impact much more real and it brings me back to my question: does service matter more or less if you don't know the person you're helping and should it? And does the giver get more or less joy out of it? And should it matter? All evolving questions and answers for me...what do you think?

## **Thursday, May 24<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – Peter Wright '12**

Today was a day full of emotion and meaning. It started with a day of great work. The attic progressed to where I think we will be able to finish it tomorrow and our work on the painting is almost fully complete – the back of the house now looks as amazing as the front does. Around 3PM, Mr. Underwood showed up and off the bat seemed a little less gruff than in days past. He climbed up in the attic and along with Chloe and Kristi, we nailed in a 2x4 so that there was an edge on the far wall to attach sheetrock to. He seemed pleased with our work in the attic so far and the two of us walked around to the back to check out the painting that the other half of our crew had worked so diligently on all day. He was also happy with that work and somehow we got to talking about the storm and his kids. I asked if he had photos of the storm and he said that he did, in his truck.

We walked back around the house and met everyone in the front. He took the photos out and began to tell his story. It turns out that he just happened to be visiting his daughter and 17 month old grandson that day. He had planned to come back to Henagar to pick up his truck from the shop but his daughter, knowing that the storms that day were expected to be bad, talked him out of it. We stood there as he shared his photos with us, amazed by the magnitude of the damage. What had apparently been a house had become a shapeless, multicolored mass of rubble. He shook his head and trailed off as he told us that if he and his wife had been there, they wouldn't have made it.

Tonight, we went over to the Monroes' for dinner. Oscar met the family when he was in AL for spring break and they helped him jump his van and he wanted to make sure Dickinson had a chance to reunite with them. I really enjoyed grilling with Jeff Monroe and Chuck and chatting about education around the country and in our communities. The food was amazing too – burgers, cole slaw, chili, hot dogs (and naturally chili dogs), and some great cookies for dessert. After dinner, some of the team went out in the field to hang out with Sydney and talk to the cows (not joking). The rest of us stayed to chat with Mrs. Monroe. She shared her own story of that day, how she was grateful that she didn't know how bad it was out there, and her efforts to make sure her mother was in a safe place whenever another tornado came. She eventually broke down when she began to tell us how grateful she was for our willingness to help people we didn't even know and she added that she wanted her kids to seek to help people in the same way. It was a poignant moment for all of us, a reminder that our work is meaningful but that there is still much work and healing yet to come.

### **Friday May 25<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Lauren Amoros '12**

Today was a very rewarding day as the last day of work at the Crowley house. Our crew finished putting in the rest of the sheet rock from the huge stack that was outside Shirley's house. I can't believe it's the last day of our work here. Shirley brought us all peach cobbler she made and it was delicious! She also showed us lots of pictures of the puppies she breeds and let us meet her big dogs, the Rotts. It was an awesome day because of how much bonding we got to do with her, her husband, and her three sons. It was bittersweet too though because it was the last day with the family. It was awesome to give Shirley a hug and to feel like our crew really made a connection with her, though it's going to be tough to go back to PA and not miss working here so much. I can't believe I'll be home in a couple days. It's going to be difficult to explain how amazing this experience was to people who weren't on it. Peace out!

### **Friday May 25<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Lizz Reese '15**

Today was the last work day and was overflowing with ups. We did get some work done, but we also had a lot of socializing with Shirley and her family. Shirley had been great all week, but today she opened up in a different way. She brought out her pictures of her puppies during lunch, which were adorable. She also surprised the crew with her delicious peach cobbler. After lunch she introduced us to "the Rotts," and we got to play with all the dogs and see all their tricks. It was a really fun time and it continued through the rest of the day. It was the first time I really got to talk to Shirley that didn't include asking for the T-Square, being able to hit the wall with a hammer and a 2x4, or a pretty circle. She opened up and talked about her family and childhood. And the best thing about Shirley today was that she said "thank you," and told us multiple times how much she appreciates our work. Although I thoroughly enjoyed the work, after hauling in 130 12x4 foot drywall sheets, it was so refreshing to hear her talk. Last but not least, when we left the work site Shirley told

us all that if we ever happen to be around there again we're more than welcome to stay and we better come visit. She then proceeded to hug each one of us as we left.

The ups continued as we went to a nearby gorge with the Monroe family. It truly was a beautiful place, and as corny as it may sound, it is so nice to see such beauty in nature in an area that was also devastated by nature. It was a great experience.

Of course, I can't forget to include the breakfast-for-dinner-feast cooked by the other crew. I'm pretty sure it counted as an up for everyone.

Overall this experience is really just indescribable for me. It was defining, eye-opening, amazing, fulfilling, etc., but none of them fully describe this trip for me. It's an experience I'll take with me, one I'll build off of, and one I'll never forget.

### **Friday May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – Kayla Muirhead '15**

Today was a great day. We got up early again to make it to our last day on the worksite. As we arrived we approached a group of men and women (but mostly women) dressed in assorted tank tops and Alabama gear. We were told to help clean up the pile of "devastated scraps," that had surfaced from the tornado, and had landed onto Mr. Underwood's lawn. As we attempted to bag what seemed to be the small pile of construction leftovers we discovered the reality beneath the illusion. Each layer revealed more history, more trauma, and more loss. Beneath the wood scraps and tar paper were small kitchen spoons, an old embroidered blanket, barbed wire, a personalized pillow, and fragments of once-whole hand-painted flowered dish plates. As we bagged this so called "trash," (which took many people and over twenty bags) I realized that it wasn't really trash was it? Those plates and that tiny pillow once belonged to someone. A family served Thanksgiving dinner on those plates in the warmth and comfort of their own house. A house that could have been perfectly okay or complete rubbish at the flip of a coin (although a few hundred miles per hour coin at that).

I was amazed to see the turnout of local volunteers. All different kinds of people were helping out. It was simply inspiring (something I never thought I would say about a pile of "trash"). When the maximum amount of waste was piled onto the sum of three pick-up trucks there was still left over waste. These extras were shifted to the side of the new yellow house where a fire was then set, and they would burn it to ash, left behind and diminished.

What was not set aflame was the yellow house behind me. This beautiful yellow house that had been given a second chance. I know it will withstand the challenges ahead. By the end of the day, with one lost sharpie and one severely damaged power saw (totally not my fault), the attic of the garage was finished. I felt satisfied, or content at the very least.

Mr. Underwood's face was different today when he pulled up and got out of his car. I couldn't quite put my finger on the change but if I had to I would say it was a look of both sadness as well as joy.

At the end of the day all I hope is that we all touched his life as much his story and embodiment of strength and hope touched mine. Before we left, our team gave Mr. Underwood a blossoming pink dogwood to replace the maple that once stood in front of his house. I thought of it as a new beginning. Parting from that house made me happy because I felt like our team really did make a difference, but sad because I wish I could have done more.

When we got back from the worksite I tried to absorb everything I had seen today; the bent trees all over town, the burning fire in the midst of the hottest day of the week, and the crumbled houses along the way home still untouched (whether uncared for or unable to be repaired). Every place has a story, a different meaning. This tornado clearly brought together the worst and the best of people simultaneously, I now know that. My best to everyone, thank you for a wonderful day and trip.

### **Saturday May 26<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Chloe Canetti ‘14**

Meeting the Monroe’s really gave me insight into the idea of “southern hospitality.” I hadn’t been much of a believer in it until they invited us over for a barbeque at their home after they only knew one person in our group. They were all so welcoming that I began to feel like I’d known them for years. Mrs. Monroe opened up to us about the tornado and I was surprised by her raw honesty after knowing us only a couple hours. She also told us that our service was important to their community and broke down, saying how much she appreciated our work. Even though we had done nothing for her specifically, she struck a chord with us and had everyone tearing up at her gratefulness.

Throughout the trip, I found people’s openness refreshing and the sense of community was much greater than anything I had previously experienced. When the Underwood’s showed up for dinner at our little church on the last night, I realized how much our work has meant to them and it made me feel like our week of hard work (lots of it) and sweat was totally worth it. This trip has made me want to continue to do service and to get closer to my own family.

Thanks to everyone who went on this trip and made my last Dickinson experience unforgettable. Stay in touch!

### **Saturday May 26<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Xinyi Chen ‘15**

Today is a fun day because we have finished our work and are going for a hike at national park. The creek is beautiful. I wish I could have written more but I’m in the van and it is really hard to write.

### **Saturday May 26<sup>rd</sup>, 2012 – Unknown**

We started the day working together to leave Holland’s Chapel cleaner then we found it. We then went hiking at Desoto State Park. There was a river where many of us took off our shoes and walked through the water and on the rocks. I may have slipped and fell into the water! After the hike we went to a restaurant in Chattanooga, followed by a drive to Virginia. It was a day full of reflection on this wonderful experience.

### **Saturday May 26, 2012 – Kristy Holmes**

Although I didn’t mention it in our last reflections last night, my snapshot for the week was the exact same as Kayla’s...giving Mr. Underwood the dogwood tree. It was a special moment, and there was something

symbolic about it. It will be their first tree for their new home, and to me, it's like a fresh start for them...a symbol of a new beginning. Prior to the storm, the Underwood's had several trees in the front of their home. But along with everything else on their property, they were completely uprooted, including an old Maple. Its roots had spread underneath the house, which may have contributed to the destruction of the house, but who's to know. But one thing is clear, Mr. Underwood definitely has no interest in ever having another Maple! It gave us all a smile when he confirmed, "it isn't a Maple, right!?!". It was a perfect moment when the students handed over the tree, and my impression was that he was very touched. And for me personally, it was my best high of the week. It just made me smile to bring that symbol of newness to their home, and to see the soft side of Mr. Underwood. There is something about a Dogwood too. It's a beautiful and calming tree, and they'll get to watch it grow as they settle into their new home and make new memories. Definitely, my snapshot of the week and favorite moment. Austin even has a great picture of it too 😊

It's hard to sum up the week in just a few paragraphs of the journal, but I think a few words to describe it are touching, sobering, inspiring, hopeful, encouraging and grateful. It was a shaky start to our relationship with the Underwoods, but it turned out to be a very warm goodbye. I genuinely think that Mr. and Mrs. Underwood were happy to have us there working on their home and share their story with us.

On Friday morning, when we were cleaning up the trash out front, I went into it thinking that we were cleaning up the remains of the new construction, but we soon discovered that there were still pieces of their destroyed home. It caught me off guard. As Molly put it later, "It's so sad; it's these people's lives that we just picked up and put in a trash bag." And Chloe followed with, "we were cleaning up things you didn't even think could be destroyed...Christmas ornaments..." It was another sobering moment of the week. I couldn't believe that over a year after the storm, those reminders were still out in their front yard.

In the non-profit for which I work, they respond to disasters in the immediate stages with heavy equipment, and one of the things they do after roads are cleared and power is restored, is that they begin to help homeowners clean up their properties. They do the heavy lifting and take away the debris so homeowners can rebuild. Something the guys always say is that homeowners always feel encouraged when the debris is taken away. They have responded to 48 disasters, and without fail, every time, a common theme among disaster victims is that after they have salvaged what they could, and gathered those photographs, important documents or other mementos that they could save, homeowners feel more hopeful when the pile of their destroyed home and the pieces of a life before is finally taken out of sight. It seems to be that it's almost like they can't move beyond it until they see it all gone. To see that an entire year after the storm, there were still belongings, broken dishes and glasses, a destroyed cable box, melted cassette tape, a knob to an oven, and many other items, it brought the reality of it all front and center. And I just kept thinking, how do the Underwood's visit this house every day and see in their front yard, the broken belongings of their life before the storm. Do they look at them every day and get sad? Do they picture where the stove was or picture their family eating on those plates? I'm not saying at all that they are not surrounded with daily reminders of the storm and how it forever changed their lives. But to me, there has to be something harder about moving on when they drive into their driveway every day, see the walls going up to a brand new house and yet see the broken pieces of what they had before.

At one moment while we were cleaning up the piles, one of the women from the community who was helping us, dug something out of the dirt that was metal. She soon realized it was a cluster of measuring spoons...the tablespoon, teaspoon, etc. It was fully intact, but bent in many places. I stood there watching her, and she cleaned off the dirt and straightened it out where it had been bent. She handed it to someone else to lay down in the garage for the owners. At first, I couldn't figure out if it were because they didn't want to throw something out that was usable. "Why buy a new one if this is still good," type of thing. But I can't help but wonder too if it is more reflective of the mentality, "here is something we can save." I don't know for sure, and I never will. But I found it very perplexing as to why she felt so determined to clean it off, straighten out the handles where they had been bent and put it aside and save it for the Underwoods instead of throwing it out with everything else. Does it represent something to her, to the owners...an attachment to the past, a memory from the past, remnants of their lives before the storm... I'm not sure, but it was one of those moments that stuck out to me from the week.

During all that clean-up though, the comic relief of it all was by far the other community members there leading the charge. Peter seriously describes it the best and I can't do it justice in painting the scene of the "professional scavengers with their cigs" separating out the piles. At times I just stood there in amazement at how they were just going from one bag to the other, one pile to the other to clean up the area. In the sadness of it all, you couldn't help but just laugh at the entire scene. And then the fire to burn the remaining pieces capped off it all off. Who knew you could burn a fire right next to the road with metal and plastic and wire!?! But hey, "whatever doesn't burn, they'll just throw away." Just make sure it doesn't go out! ☺

As we leave this week, we had to pick one word on our evaluations that sums it all up for us. And that word to me is meaningful. From working with my team every day, to talking with Mr. Underwood, to sharing and hearing reflections with you all every night, to spending the evening with the Monroes and seeing Mrs. Monroe break down with us and seeing the rawness of the storm, to its effects on this community, to having the Underwoods visit us on Friday night, to laughing with you all, to contributing to a brand new home for a couple who had everything taken away in an instant, and to hearing the softness in Mr. Underwood's voice when he mimicked his grandson saying pop-pop..., it has been a meaningful week. It has been a pleasure to spend the week with all of you and I'm so proud of the Dickinson students you all are. It was a great opportunity to watch you all work, hear your reflections this week, your views on service and why you wanted to be a part of this trip. It has meant a lot to me to hear you all and share this experience with you. I hope to cross paths with you all again in the near future. But in the meantime, thank you for the opportunity to serve this community with you this week and be a part of your team.