

Dickinson College

Alumni, Bonners, and STW
Service Trip



May 23-30th, 2010
Reflections

by the French, then the English settlers and then by our government. They don't get to be content. They constantly live with race, class and culture. I would expand on this but I'm writing on the front of a receipt. Good Day.

-Anisah

Crying Smiles

Why am I here?
Who is that girl?
What did she say?
Where did she go?
When did she leave?
WHY did she hurt?
Causing a crack in the hearts and debris and dirt.
Swaying trees, crashing houses
Dazed heads, tearing eyelashes.
Families loved lost and dead
I promise I'm here to lift your head.
Shovel and paint, I'll do what I can
Turn your crippled soul to a strong man.
Intertwined fingers, I'll try and lead the way
Just promise to see the silver lining everyday
But I'm only one body so take me as I come
Because no matter what I do, I can only try to fix what she has done.

For spring break, 25 Dickinson students and 4 administrators gave up a week of sleep, catching up on work, and bonding with family, to go and serve in New Orleans. But why go? It's been 4.5 years since Hurricane Katrina, it is far from home, and surely the people have to be back to "normal" already. But as we have learned, it's never that simple. Yes, the work in the past 4.5 years has been tremendous. For UMCOR alone they have worked with 21,340 clients, hosted over 82,000 volunteers, repaired 3426 homes, and have 75 more in the works. It has been busy, but even in an affluent neighborhood, where one team was placed, the reality of New Orleans confronted us. Only 55% of those people have returned to their homes. In the city, only 65% of the population has returned and many are still trying to piece together the funds, strength, and ability to rebuild so that once again NOLA can be home.

What about service inspired this group to go without warm showers, loved ones, and a "fun" spring break to endure 22 hour car rides, see Carver High School, dry wall for hours, have paint in their hair (that still hasn't come out), and cook with teams for every dinner?

It is about service, but it's more about just getting a good feeling. Throughout the week the answers varied. This hands on experience provided opportunities to learn about ourselves and learn about others; to be confronted with our values, and challenged by our previous beliefs. Service is about coming together as a team to help others, without regard to if we will "feel good," be thanked, meet the recipients, or know the task required. It was evident throughout the trip that service was about journeying together to explore a new culture, providing hope to those we met, and relating to our peers (whom we may not have met before on campus), but who share a passion for service. Additionally, it is about understanding New Orleans, a city that continues to struggle to rebuild and answer the question, why?

Friday, March 19th, 2010

We have returned home, but the memories, pictures, and reflections will continue to remind us of this time in New Orleans. Four and a half years after Katrina, they are still in need of help, hope, and a hand-up. Twenty-five students and four administrators traveled to New Orleans and experienced a culture of life, hope, community, and service. Thank you for going and serving.

Thank you for serving:

*Finishing the trim work for Mr. Francis, enabling him to move in and call
1680 Agriculture Street home again*

Dry walling many rooms, so that one day soon a fresh home will be vibrant at 1901 Congress Street instead of a trailer

*Dry walling the ceiling and moving tons of "stuff" for an elderly lady at
1737 Oriole Street, even if she had trouble realizing the change you
were making in her life*

Thank you for caring for those you did not know, but coming to serve willingly. My greatest plea is "Don't Stop Now"! New Orleans, here in Carlisle, and your home communities are in need of people who are willing to serve. Every area needs people who are willing to speak out about injustice, fight against inequality, and work beside people who (if only for a little while) you can call a neighbor. What are you passionate about? Do it! Reach beyond your comfort zone. Listen to a neighbor. Share your stories. Engage the community and world through service...you will be changed. Read on, and find out how...

Today was our last day in New Orleans and on our site, which was actually one of my favorite days. We got up early and got a lot done that morning, working really well together. It was awesome. We decided as we were putting in new ceiling once again that we hated Ms. Lilli's house..hahaha. We accomplished a lot though and it felt great to really come together that last day. We then were able to visit the French market for a bit and see more of the spirit of NO and buy souvenirs. It was a gorgeous sunny day and a perfect ending. As we begun our drive home it was awesome because we all knew each other at this point and could sit with whoever and have actual meaningful conversation with each other instead of the getting to know you type of questions. I really appreciated that. Also, the Paper Plate Awards were great and everyone was so supportive of each other's awards and understood them all. I think that shows how well we all came together as a team and really bonded as NOLA spring 2010. I look forward to the rest of the drive and getting to see the rest of my new friends around campus. It will always remind me of our trip and how we made a difference in only a week and grew together as a group. Thanks for everything guys! It was a pleasure spending my spring break with you all and I'm grateful for what I've learned from each of you. I look forward to continuing passing the peace :)

-Kim

My mind is basically divided in four. I lived in two of my past lives today because I got to speak in other languages besides English. In the French Market, I went around with Liza, asking vendors if they could speak French, and all of them could. One of them even spoke Urdu with me. It reminded me of the years I lived in Pakistan and the months I spent in Morocco when switching language was normal. I never used to be able to do this, but I've pushed myself to get here. The other day, we talked about the language requirement at Dickinson and some people resented it because either they already spoke another language fluently or none at all. I think it's a necessary component of our education because without it we'd maintain the cultural walls we surround ourselves with.

Maybe what we need to do is look at that requirement differently. It's an opportunity to immerse yourself in another culture and look at the world from another perspective. That's what globalization should be about, not increasing the hegemonic influence of a world's superpower. Much of why we misunderstand each other is because we don't attempt to relate to other persons culture, background and beliefs. We are content with living in a culture of isolation and it breeds ignorance. Being in New Orleans reminded me of that. These people live in different realities and negotiate different identities. They were colonized

way, but I have so many insides passions which I want to discover better. One of them is doing something like this trip, but for a much longer time. I would love to go to a foreign country where volunteers are needed and spending time improving lives of others, not just my own, which I do all the time.

It's hard for me to make a decisions, a choice between my career and my passions. Family expectations also play a big part because I don't want to disappoint my parents. In Ukraine the way people think is so different. Most people would not understand why I went on this trip instead of enjoying my time somewhere else. Again, this is why I love the US. The New Orleans trip definitely complicated my thoughts. There are things which I would love to do and these which I feel like I have to do, the problem is to find a niche. There is nothing negative that I can say about this trip. I love it! Wait, there is one thing: I never got my Guinness....

-Arty

Today was definitely the most fulfilling work day. Because we knew we were going to finish, the day was very relaxed and enjoyable. Being able to look back at the house, seeing how much we've done was an awesome way to end the day. So many neighbors came by to thank us for doing work, even the ice cream lady was in awe. It's so weird to think that we're going home tomorrow. I'm not sure how I feel about it because I feel that there's so much work that can still be done and I don't know how I can contribute when I'm back at Dickinson.

I've definitely grown from this trip and realized that people can still change, even after/during college. I hope that connections with students and professors that I've made will stay the same for a long time.

I love NOLA!

-Morgan

Hi, Today was a really rough day work-wise. Sometimes it feels like the house is trying to kill me, either with a poisonous pool, the terrible stench, the sanding that actually never ends, or the ghosts I know live here. On the other hand, drilling screw into the wall was quite satisfying. I love working with my team because we have all gotten so close, so working together is all the more meaningful. I can't believe tomorrow we have to go back. It's been so nice just living in this temporary bubble of volunteers and greatness. I honestly love everyone on this trip and it will be strange going back to the Dickinson and not being able to see everyone everyday!

<3 Margaret

Friday, March 12th, 2010

I have no idea what to expect on this trip, but I am so excited about the ride down (major nap opportunity) and the week ahead. Although it rained the entire drive down to Virginia, it was a fun car drive with Mira and Denise. Seeing everybody's enthusiasm about the trip makes me excited to work with them and make loads of good memories.

-Liza

As excited as I was for the trip, I was a bit apprehensive that it might not live up to my previous experience. My last trip to New Orleans had been an amazing experience and the group was incredible. So with high hopes, I left Dickinson in Van #2 and it wasn't long before I was getting to know my fellow passengers and my fears were forgotten.

My experience had taught me 2 things- firstly, the ride down is the best time to get acquainted with team-mates (and so I proceeded to do so with great intent) and secondly- eating modestly and healthy ensures a problem-free and happy ride. In other words, eating two baconators from Wendy's is a terrible, terrible idea.

Several hours later, we arrived at Abingdon, VA after a trouble-free drive for a brief period of sleep in a rather cold church basement. However, I was much to amused by Cam's and Dad's antics to care. So far so good!

-Aniket

As a sociology major, I have taken a lot of classes that focus on race and the stratification that exists within society. I think New Orleans can be a perfect example of the current race relations that exist within the U.S. When we visited Courtney at Carver H.S., it was clear that as a white teacher, she was the minority during the school day. Although schools don't/aren't allowed to implement segregation that is essentially what is happening. Carver is in one of the poorest neighborhoods in New Orleans, so most of the residents are poor African Americans, so that creates the make-up of Carver's Students. Many white students are middle to upper class and can afford to attend private school, essentially segregating schools by class, which has a big correlation with race.

While race is still clearly a factor in New Orleans' schools, we also had the opportunity to visit First Grace, a church where race is clearly not an issue but is instead beneficial. One image I will always remember is in the back pew of the church, there was an elderly white woman, an elderly Vietnamese man, a young black teenage boy and a middle aged white woman. This image alone is

so self explanatory because the fact that people of different races were able to sit cohesively, and enjoy each others company, regardless of race, or in celebration of race, is a concept unknown to most of the country. This church can be a model for other institutions and communities about the opportunity and benefits of embracing other races and the ability to both learn from each other's backgrounds and to simply enjoy each others company.

-Amanda

Saturday, March 13th, 2010

The drive to New Orleans was nothing less than amazing. I never would have thought that a day long drive in a small van would have anything to offer. I was easily proven wrong. From the second that we left the great place of Carlisle, members of Serve the World were fun and inviting. It was easy to get to know the people in my van, and I quickly learned about people's stories and backgrounds.

I know that it is hard to believe, but I seriously enjoyed everything. From the car games that we played to getting the chance to D.J. Even when everyone was sleeping, I was still up because my excitement wouldn't let me sleep. In a strange way I didn't want to arrive in New Orleans, but so far the fun has continued.

But I can't talk about my ride down to New Orleans without talking about the sick van and David. When David first came into the car, I just didn't want to get thrown up on. But that quickly changed. When asked if I wanted to switch, I said no. It was here that I realized the meaning of Serve the World and teamwork, and being there for others. David was a fighter and didn't want to be a burden. He pulled through and when we reached New Orleans he played a song called "I made it". And I am proud because we all made it. I'm now ready for an awesome week!

-Chris Reid

Driving here was a very interesting experience in my life. We hit the road minutes after waking up from our 6 hour sleep to a gloomy, rainy day and a long way to go. Everything seemed to be in our hands for it was all about our abilities to drive, co-pilot, DJ, come up with games and ways to get to know each other and kill time, a lot of time. The waiting, the failed attempts to get some sleep, the re-re-positioning of ourselves, and all that fast food required a lot of patience. Yet in a sense it was making us more excited about the reward-(arrival)- and fulfilling out mission. We needed that much time to leave Dickinson behind, not only physically but mentally. We left ourselves behind and forgot about our own comfort, and nutrition, to ready to give back and essentially

Altogether this trip has been extremely rewarding for me. Thank you all for joining me on this journey.

-Cameron

Thursday, March 18th, 2010

The trip has been so much fun so far that I was beginning to expect that something would disrupt the ecstatic mood I have been in since arriving in Nawlins, LA. I have had one of the best weeks of my life so far. So great is the power of this city, the work we do and the "awesomeness" of the people of this trip that I only feel the effects of four consecutive nights of less than five hours of sleep for the first thirty minutes after waking.

Thursday started similarly, i.e., I woke up feeling like death. However breakfast with Stephanie, Mira, Lauren and Danielle was just the shot of energy I needed. Due credit must also be given to the video we watched of Cam and John's dance to Disturbia. Oh the hilarity.

My double shot of energy was completed when we "passed the peace" before leaving for the work site. How can you not feel like a million dollars? We finally got to the work-site after pre-ordering our po-boys for lunch from D&M (I later devoured it- absolutely incredible). I feel compelled to mention Christina's driving which made the trip rather interested (I love you Christina). We proceeded to put up dry-wall like our lives depending on it (how can you not be extremely productive with such great company and tune-age (that means music for y'all Americans J)).

Lunch was inevitably filled with great stories, laughs (Chris and I started rocking the port-a-potty back and for when Rick Raymond was in there), yoga and soccer. I love Serve the World! Thursday ended just as great as it had started and I couldn't help but feel a little sad that we would have to leave the next day. I love this city and I will always remember this trip.

-Aniket

When I got accepted for this trip, I had no idea what it was going to be like. I knew we would be building houses in New Orleans (or something like building) and that was about it. I definitely under estimated the experience. I love being able to do something meaningful and help the people down here, but even more I like the individuals on the trip, Meeting these people is absolutely great. Hopefully we all stay friends after the trip too. I usually get so stuck up and comfortable with my old friends that I don't feel any need to meet new people, but it is essential in order to understand your self better. The whole idea of this trip is what I like the most about America: friendliness, ability to be selfless, yet good organization and a sense of a common goal. It makes me think about what I want to do in the future. Being a business major kind of guides me on

times, I break from what I'm doing and just walk around the house to see everyone working and building new friendships. It's awesome. One pleasant surprise has been the reflections. On last year's trip, it wasn't taken as seriously. People are really opening up this year and sharing moving thoughts and feelings. I love it.

I think I'm starting to feel my physical limits. While the work is a great distraction from my injuries and troubling thoughts, it's also an in-my-face reminder of the broken body I have. It'll still be a long time before it stops me and I'll never admit I can't do it, but it's much more noticeable. Regardless, I still love it. The enthusiasm, soreness, heat, cold, sweat, bruises, cuts, frustration, and rigor of hard manual labor. On top of it all, I get to do it for the betterment of Miss. Solomon's life.

Before this trip, I hadn't known of anyone still living in a FEMA trailer. Well, she does. It's only a few feet behind her broken house. Five years since Katrina and she still lives in a trailer, gets up everyday to the view of her broken home she can't live in and goes to work. It breaks my heart. She is nothing but grateful for us being there and working on her house. Time and time again, people of this city choose the road of hope and gratitude as opposed to bitterness and despair. Amazing. As many times as possible, I will come back to help the people of New Orleans. On a side note, I look forward to hanging out with my team members after this trip. The friendships built this week are ones I look forward to building and expanding. Seriously, my team rocks. HELL YEAH TEAM!!

-Nathan

Before I began this trip, I had a plan to graduate Dickinson and enter the work force. My goals were to get a job in banking and hopefully earn a lot of money. However, now I find myself torn between a life long goal and the desire to help others through volunteer work such as Teach for America. It's hard for me to choose between the two because of what the social standard has become. Do I follow the usual path to success in finance, or do I take the path less traveled in order to fulfill my passion to help others? During this trip I realized that what I thought was the right thing to do all my life, might actually be what I want to do.

On another note, I just want to say that I am extremely happy I was given the opportunity to join this group on this trip. I have learned so much and gained such a different perspective on life through this trip. Many of the things I have learned are worth more than the tuition I pay each year to attend Dickinson. I have also gained so many new friends on this trip. Because of Dickinson's social scene, I have not had the opportunity to meet people outside of my immediate group of friends. With that said, it has been extremely important for me to meet new people and create new bonds.

serve the world. It is not about us, individually, anymore, but about the power of all.

At the sound of the early morning wake-up call, we picked ourselves up off the cold, hard floor and set out on part 2 of our journey on wheels. I tested my own skills and nerves taking the helm of a large van, which happily went well, and I then took a seat and joined in the singing, napping and catchphrase playing of the rest of the crew.

After many physically uncomfortable, but surprisingly enjoyable hours on the road, we took an eventful pit-stop. While poor David, who my heart goes out to, endured through his violent sickness, the rest of us gathered around an eccentric old man on his way to New Orleans, with his puppy and his carnival.

We finally arrived at the church obviously more like a group than simply 29 individuals. I feel like our north-to-south trek really brought us together faster than I expected. We renewed enthusiasm, we bunked down and got a good long sleep in preparation for what I have no doubt will be an extraordinary week!

-Olivia

First Journal Entry Ever!!! After taking a tour of New Orleans and specifically the lower ninth ward, it puts things into perspective. Coming down here, I felt sorry for myself because I was so sick and miserable. But after seeing what people went through and are still going through, makes my bad day seem like nothing. I realized how privileged I am to have even the basic things like a house and electricity. Even just after 1 day, I know that I made the right decision to come down here for spring break.

P.S. Thanks to everyone in the minivan who helped me get through the ride down.

-David

Sunday, March 14th, 2010

Today was amazing on so many levels and more. I thought the day was really well planned for someone like me who had never been to New Orleans and was relatively uninformed. First of all, the church was an awesome experience. This was a way to literally get in the lives of the people from this city. The message was great, having mercy and grace are universal ideas that transcend religion in my opinion. The people were so warm and friendly and although the Reverend's story about the gun shots at the funeral was horrible, it was a very good illustration of his message. It also emphasizes the mercy peo-

ple of New Orleans deserve. They should not be condemned for not evacuating or not dealing with their homes, we should just rejoice when they do return. I can't wait to start some serious dry walling!!

-Margaret

Cam said something during reflection tonight that really struck me. He said that he hopes that our generations has dedication to service the way Jon described (in regards to the number of college students that do service during their spring breaks) continues to when we are the public officials creating policy and affecting change. Maybe we will maintain our social consciousness and implement policies that promote justice. I am not really an emotional person, but that idea really hit me.

It's really easy to get frustrated with the amount of injustice in the world, and sometimes I feel like there are too many problems to address that it's not even worth trying. Cam's statement and the ensuing conversation made me think that change really might happen. Through our work as civilians or as public servants, we can engender change. We just need to maintain hope and our dedication to make a change.

-Denise

During the tour today, I experienced a bit of a reality check with how bad things still are in New Orleans. When Katrina hit, there was coverage everywhere about it and how much destruction the storm left, but as time passed it seems as though people have almost forgotten how much more help New Orleans needs. I've been apart of many service trips prior to college, but none have brought me to a place as devastated as here. I know there has been a lot of improvement since, but as we drove, it's hard to fathom that it was once far worse than this.

It was sad to see newly rebuilt communities and then across the road there are houses that have yet to get attention. I think the spray paint still on many of the houses really got me thinking of how most people believe that disasters like this one only happens abroad and not here in the U.S., and it's really depressing and frustrating to think about and see how most Americans are always willing to help with the 'next best thing' almost when it comes to airing natural disasters but yet here's New Orleans, 5 years later, and they are still in need and are still struggling.

-Lauren

Today was the first day that I really felt as if I was in New Orleans. The dark drive into the city last night could have been any number of cities. Our first stop was the First Grace Methodist Church, something that I had a lot of apprehension about. I felt as though the service was more of a cultural performance

ment. But even more was that Cynthia remembered us, she knew faces and what we did on their house. She was so excited we were back and thankful. The joy of Amanda and Josh to see her again was wonderful.

I am also thankful for our reflections that here have been meaningful and the really open sharing that has occurred. Reflections have become one of my favorite times to hear how this trip affects each of us. From clarifying values on service and the importance of each person to challenging our concept of future careers and life direction. I am so proud of this team that it's not simply about from our privilege we can come help, but you are (and will continue to) grapple with the complexities and comforting that you are, or can be, the leaders on our campus and communities that will change things for the better. Thanks for sharing this journey in New Orleans.

-Mira

Today is Wednesday and I can't believe that it is mid week already. I guess the saying "time flies when you're having fun" is true. I never imagined that the 29 of us would have gotten so close. Prior to coming on the trip, I was very concerned about getting to know everyone because I didn't "really" know anyone. I quickly learned on the ride down here that every single person on this trip is warm and welcoming. Getting to know the people here has undoubtedly changed me. It seems that no matter how different we may be, we all have something to offer each other.

Some of my favorite memories of this week have occurred during lunch. My team never fails to have amusing conversation and laughter. Today, Rick tried to throw gummy starburst really high into the air and catch them in his mouth. He failed miserably until the very last one which he caught perfectly. There was also yoga time, which really helped relax us all and got us ready to tackle and spackle the rest of the house. DJ Aniket played some awesome music to keep us pumped up.

After a wonderful dinner of ziti from team Little Denise's Dad, I play 4 way spit with 2 decks of cards with Nathan, Olivia, and Chris. It was totally crazy but really really fun. I Love STW and team Nathan.

-Dani (D\$- thanks for the nickname Rick J)

So far today was our longest and most productive work day. We were able to put up so much drywall. I was especially proud of the sheet Olivia and I put up. We used an entire sheet to do a whole section of the wall from floor to ceiling. My team is great, everyone has clicked so well. Rick Raymond is hilarious. If he isn't teaching people how to dance, then he is leading us in yoga during our lunch breaks. Regardless of the little experience most of us have with dry wall, everyone pushes themselves to work really hard and efficiently. Some-

street and we've made a great deal of progress. Whether it's putting in insulation, drywall, or spackling, our team has really come together to work as a unit and get the job done. Speaking of my team, I feel like we have some real good chemistry. I've only known some of these people for three or four days and already I feel like I've known them for years, everybody is so friendly and eager to get the job done and make some really good friends along the way. I can already tell that this experience will have a huge impact on my life when I get back to campus. It's like we all took a step back, and realized what was really important to us as well as others. I feel amazing being down here and I already know that this will not be the last time. One Love

-Dan

A really neat thing that I've observed over the past few days is the development of my teammates. Nathan has really stepped up as a leader and helped us to stay on task. His patience with the team and difficult situations allows everyone to stay relaxed and enjoy themselves. Lauren has been a big help to everyone, taking on the little tasks everyone forgets about or is avoiding to do because they aren't big projects. Aniket and Dan are both taking a ton of initiative and a HUGE reason why we are about done with all of the drywall in the room. Chris and Priscilla have gone from helping whenever they were asked to taking on entire walls by themselves. It's incredible how much they've learned in a short period of time. Olivia is such a positive influence on the team. She has really opened up, but more importantly helped other people to open up and be comfortable with the whole team. Our team additions- Rick and Dani have been incredible. Dani has become the queen of spackling and has really come into her own. I've loved getting to know her and she is such a workhorse. I don't think she's ever stopped sanding. Rick has given up all words of wisdom and has imparted on us the vital knowledge of how to crump to Wu-Tang. But he's also able to keep everyone focused and on task when Nathan is busy with something else. It's such a neat thing to be able to watch everyone grow individually and grow closer with each other as a team.

-Christina

Each Trip has its special moments that real quickly become my postcard picture. Coming back to New Orleans is always comforting and just feels right. The people, the culture and the vibe of the city is a place I can easily call home. But this time my postcard was a picture of Cynthia, the sister of the homeowner on Agriculture, hugging Josh and Amanda. The reason? This was the house they both worked on last year in the gutting stage. Now the team came back to put the finishing touches on the trim. Next week the homeowner moves back in. Not too often do we see the beginning and end of the cycle. While being a part of the process is expected, it is nice to be here at this mo-

than a religious ceremony. The music, words, and people were so genuine and heart felt that it was a truly enjoyable experience regardless of one's denomination or lack thereof.

A rushed lunch led us to Jon, a Dickinson alum who I only knew by name and reputation from my freshman year. Jon provided a lot of insight into the life of a volunteer, and the difficulties of rebuilding New Orleans. What I especially appreciated about meeting Jon again was seeing him 'engage the world'. It was really something to see a Dickinsonian using his education to help others.

Visiting Courtney at the Carver High School showed us how important education is in the process of rebuilding, but also how easily it can be overlooked. Between dinner, football in the streets, card games, board games, talking with each other, and our reflection period I feel like the group is really coming together as a cohesive unit. I am enjoying this opportunity to get to know other students who I wouldn't usually get the chance to interact with. Tomorrow is our first day of work, I can't wait to get out and start helping rebuild some of the destruction we saw today.

-Drew

a.k.a. Dad

At 9 am chaos ensued... the bathroom exploded into life as elbows pushed their way to the sink. It's remarkable that anyone was able to brush their teeth or apply a thin layer of makeup in the mirror, looking over people's heads. We were getting ready to go to church and it was a first for some of us. For me, it was the first time I was able to connect with a church ceremony.

Voices moved around the room, popped up in hidden corners, and crawled beneath the seats. Everyone was involved, not a single person was silent. We sang together even if we didn't know the words. The jovial tunes were somehow familiar and warm. I had a spiritual experience that day for the first time in a while. I felt more at home with every smile I received. Even the sermon spoke to me. We all left feeling full.

But this feeling didn't last the whole day. In the 9th ward, there was nothing left to say. I felt slightly paralyzed. It was difficult for me to make sense of the devastation and the sense of loss surrounding me, looking at the plots of land that once held homes. Even the green grass seemed torn and worn away.

I carried this feeling over to the High School, but it was greeted by hope. I couldn't help but feel relieved when I read the paintings on the wall. They held messages to prop people up and push them forward. They made the portable classrooms more livable and inviting. It contrasted starkly with the remains of their old school resembling the ruins at ground zero. What amazed me most was how they make due and keep fighting every day.

-Anisah

Sundays were always tiresome and monotonous for me growing up, Get up, get dressed, go to church, zone out for an hour, go home. The church I used to go to was extremely rigid and plain. So this morning, I got really excited at the idea of going to a lively, joyous and fun celebration- and I definitely wasn't let down. What a way to start a day. Christina commented how much happier people would be if they started out every day like that, and I completely agree. It is incredibly uplifting to gather with a diverse group of people, strangers no less, and rejoice at humanities true connections- grace, forgiveness, love and hope. It really makes you realized how alike we all are, and gives you an extraordinary sense of family with the world we live in. For me, what would have seemed like forever at my old church, seemed like only minutes at Grace Baptist.

After the church, the day continued in the wake of that good mood. We got to see this beautiful city we came to help, and learned so much about the disaster, it's causes and effects. It make me that much more pumped to get started on a house. Learning about individual's stories about their home, seeing the completely empty blocks near the levee, and comparing a beautiful old school to the new, oddly place set of portables just kept me thinking on thing. What if this had been us or me? It's hard to imagine your life any different than how it is now, but if you can actually start to do so, it becomes impossible not to act. What if I had been washed away from my house, didn't know if my dad was alive or dead, and after the water went away, had no one on my side? It becomes hard to imagine not doing something for others as an occupation, because for me it's really the only thing that makes sense.

5 years after the storm, people are still in great need, and I can't wait to start paying it back.
-Elizabeth

The sermon today at Church reminded me of the power of healing and joy of grace. To give is to receive- and that has nothing to do exclusively with God or religion and everything to do with humanity. That said, it was incredibly powerful and empowering to hear this message among people who do have a God-based faith because it was a way to revisit an institution that has excluded or pressed against me as a woman and a lesbian queer person. But now I feel a renewed faith in love and humanity.

-Stephanie

So far it's turning out to be a great trip, The drive was fun, I got to play some songs that I like and got to know some people on the trip better. I wish, though, I would not fall asleep all the time. A car drive is like a lullaby to me. Getting to the city of New Orleans was exciting. I was never sure how much

speaking up when we see injustice. You have the power to fight sexism, homophobia, classism and racism in your own life by not perpetuating it. By not using oppressive expressions or not allowing others to exert their own oppressive power. Try it. Step outside of your comfort zone. Make a difference at Dickinson even if you have to shock the community. We all have a voice that deserves being heard. I also hope we continue to work with each other and cultivate the friendships which started. Don't be afraid to sit with me at the caf or go on an adventure with me. I would like to continue these relationships and develop ones that I didn't have time to develop on the trip. All of you have made a difference in my life and I hope you can do that for Dickinson as well. Example of things you could do: sit at different cushies, help end caf segregation, don't allow people to get sexually assaulted and take a class with Gilmore! J

-Anisah

Wednesday, March 17th, 2010

Half a week into the trip, I already feel like the group has bonded so much, especially our team. We have nicknames like Darkness, No-mad, hybrid and D-Money for each other (Don't ask). Being able to take a week off from work in order to do community service has turned out to be an ideal situation for me. I have been somewhat stressed out and struggling with building upon and figuring out my exact career path. Faced with a decision of making a good living and achieving a financial status where I can aid my parents in their financial woes or going into a non-profit sector where I can consistently do meaningful work that makes a difference in the lives of those in need. While in college, I was extremely active and involved in community service, however, ever since graduation, my involvement has dramatically decreased. This trip has allowed me to remember why I was co-president of every student group on campus while at Dickinson. I am an extreme extravert and an absolute people person. Also, I am a huge believer of karma so I know that I should be selfless for selfish reasons. If I wish to live a happy and healthy life I will undoubtedly be able to do so by "passing the peace" or paying it forward.

Overall, I am glad I was able to be apart of this wonderful group of people and add each and every one of them to my list of friends. I was able to internalize and do some self reflection over these past couple of days and it has been an amazing experience. I would like to thank everyone for allowing me this opportunity and for having open minds and hearts so that I may be welcomed and accepted into this family.

-Rick Raymond

Just finished up our second day of work on our house on Congress

ers and make a difference is enough to bring together and become almost like a family.

Being on this trip has also made me realize that I can do so much to help others if I just take a step back and be a little more selfless than I have been throughout college. Instead of going to New Orleans to party, I am proud to say that I spent my spring break of senior year helping others. I really hope that I can continue to give back to other in need even after I graduate. Even if it's only for a couple of hours a week, those are a couple hours I can spare, not focus on myself but focus on others who need and will appreciate my service. It feels good to be here, doing what we're doing. I only wish everyone could be as privileged as we are to experience something this rewarding.

-Susanne

Today was definitely an awesome day. I really felt that our team had ton accomplished, probably because I/we had to get on the roof to finish the trim. The sun obviously makes everything more enjoyable and I felt that I bonded a lot more with my team too. I feel that within our group we're all open to letting people in on the events of our lives which is really important to making strong memorable connections.

The home owner's two sisters came by today too. I spoke with Elaine for a while and I could see so many emotions in her eyes: pain, gratefulness, awe and nostalgia, like she was looking for something that wasn't there. Just watching her, let alone talking to her made me want to help her family in so many ways. It hit home because I can't imagine going through what she's been through and watching people redo/remake her brother's home. I feel like Elaine is such a happy person yet when she saw us working she became sad because we reminded her of what she's been through. But I couldn't have been more happy to hear how grateful she was. I didn't want to stop working and am so sad that we would see Ronald move in.

I've realized making a difference in people's lives is so important to me, almost a high. I don't think I would have come to this conclusion if it weren't for this trip.

P.S. French Quarter was sickkk!!!!

-<3 Morgan

So I was going to write about Tuesday's events but I feel like we experience a lot as a team and whatever we didn't all see, we talked about during reflection. I really got a lot out of our discussions and I'm blown away by all of you. What I really hope for is that we apply our ideas from our discussions to our everyday experiences. If you ever thought you couldn't make a difference, your actions and words from this trip proved different. We are all capable of making changes in our lives. Not only by changing the way we see things, but also by

damage exactly Hurricane Katrina has done. I thought only some areas, especially the poor ones, got affected, but when I saw the center city- it seemed so empty. I have never been to New Orleans before, but I had an image in my mind of a city full of people, music and liveliness. That is probably too idyllic, but it is obvious that now it is not the same as it was. I hope to do my best to help restoring the life in the city.

-Arty

Monday, March 15th, 2010

Today was my fifth "first work day" and it's only the second time that I'm dry walling. I think that's interesting because it shows how many different jobs there are to do when we come down here. The house that we are working on looks very nice from the outside, but as soon as we opened the door, the smell of must and mildew was almost overpowering. Miss Lillie's house was not flooded, but her roof was damaged in Katrina and she only just had it repaired recently. She is now living with her sister in Baton Rouge, after losing her job at the convention center, and it just now occurred to me that she might have been living in her house since then.

It's hard to imagine someone living in conditions like that until I think about my own stubbornness and then I realize that I would probably do the same thing. I supposed that the one major difference is that I am still blessed with my health and facilities that I could put the time and effort into changing the situation for myself. Thinking further about this I realize how fortunate I am to be able to spend my time and efforts to help someone that can't do the same for themselves.

Blessed is a word that I have heard many times the past few days, sometimes in a voice I did not expect. How blessed we all truly are to be here in this place today.

-Chuck Steel

Today was our first day on our actual work assignment which was exciting because we didn't know quite what we were getting into, and we were joined on our project by half of Arielle's team: the Chuck Steel team, or the "Little Mermaid" team, merging into the Little Denise Dad Team. We were expecting, after yesterday and going to the lower 9th ward, to get a run-down neighborhood that had a bunch of damage in and surrounding the house. Turns out we ended up in a very well-off neighborhood that appeared to not need help at all as it was flowering and beautiful lawns with mansions or very nice houses attached. That said, we went inside and saw that we did actually need to help,

as there was water damage, holes in the ceiling. Priming and painting to do... and a giant mess everywhere.

We also learned that our home owner was living in Baton Rouge with her sister and we probably wouldn't get the opportunity to meet her, which was disappointing. I felt that especially at the end of the day as we were all reflecting about our housing projects and homeowners. However, we've already started making up stories about her and what kind of person she is in relation to all the clothes and papers she has lying around the whole house. We've imagined her to be a friendly little grandma who has love affairs and all sorts of outfits for different events. It's great. We made some good progress today though, but we aren't sure there will be enough to do for all of us throughout the week. Maybe we'll get reassigned? Haha. Oh also, there is definitely a sea monster and/or dead person living in the bottom of the outdoor pool. We learned a lot of skills today and had a lot of fun. I'm definitely excited for the week- more music, more laughing, more re-patching an old house for someone in need.

-Kim

Today was meaningful, busy, and interesting. Dickinson College, Simpson College, a group from Michigan, and other groups all meet in the sanctuary of the united Methodist church. There, Mr. Carter gave everyone in the room encouragement and inspiration by giving us statistics of how many people have volunteered to help in New Orleans through the church and details on how and who would be affected by the projects we would get done this week. Personally, I made two Chinese friends in the sanctuary, Charlene and Vicki. Soon enough, each team got their folders with details on the house number, directions, accident papers etc within it. After each team got all their supplies we all boarded the vans. I am on Nathan's team and I love my team! Like Mira said maybe everything won't be in the houses like they are supposed to be, so my team and I spent 3 hours getting to know one another which was very valuable to me. We discussed insects, relationships, yoga, bugs, India and international experiences.

After three hours we got to work when our supplies got here at our 1901 house on Congress street. Our job was to pit up dry walls and mudding. Later our team made dinner for everyone. We made hot dogs and hamburgers, pasta and salads and I loved it! After everyone ate I made friends with the Simpson students and left to the sanctuary once again. I love that we have reflection there because sanctuary actually means a holy and safe place. It makes sense that we would express our feelings there. Everyone shared a high and a low and talked about our day and headed back to the kitchen area. There we played two truths and a lie, and then followed by a massage line. After writing a letter to Barack Obama and having a one on one talk with Simon, I laid down on my top bunk and appreciated the time I had to experience today.

-Peace and Love
Priscilla

Today= best day so far, hands down. After our inspirational introduction to what we would be doing here, by Mr. Carter, we set out to find our houses for the first time. I successfully maneuvered the van through New Orleans streets (in spite of a very confused GPS) to our house on the corner of Congress. Due to our lack of key supplies, our team (Nathan's team) spent a few hours engrossed in conversation. This time was so valuable to our team dynamic- it brought us together before we finally got down to business tackling the bare walls of the house.

The greatest moment of the day for me was meeting our homeowner, Evera. We started off introducing ourselves. Lauren began by shaking her hand. As I extended my hand to do the same, Evera (essentially a stranger to me) just pulled me close in a huge hug. The hugs to the rest of the team and the tears that soon welled in her eyes spoke even louder than any of her words of gratitude could.

Upon returning to the church, our team had a black cooking up hot dogs and burgers for everyone. Reflection time, after dinner, was wonderful. Hearing everyone's individual perspectives really enriched my own experience. It is so great that everyone can share in this open and welcoming way that is so rare in most parts of life. Fun times including sundaes, games and a much appreciated massage train closed out a fabulous day. I only hope the rest of the weeks is just as good!

<3 STW Love
Olivia

Tuesday, March 16th, 2010

Today was our second work day in New Orleans. It's funny how I feel like I've been here for weeks; that's how settled I feel here. I really feel like our group made a lot of progress in our house today. We have nearly everything primed, we finally got the part of the ceiling dry-walled, and we finished mudding. During the middle of the day, the owner Miss Lilly and her sister stopped by. Miss Lilly had been staying in Baton Rouge with her sister so it was a nice surprise for them to stop by. They seemed nice but unfortunately they only stayed for about five minutes, so we didn't get to talk to them too much. Even though it is only Thursday, I am starting to develop some true friendships with people I wouldn't otherwise have. It is amazing how we all come from different backgrounds, or social/academic groups at school, yet we are all getting along so well. It really goes to show how our common ground of wanting to help oth-