

2005 WORLD YOUTH DAY EXPERIENCE

World Youth Day Experience by Crystal Norville

Thank you first for your Financial and Spiritual Support When I reflect on my journey to WYD Cologne 2005, I think about all that happened from the moment I went to the first gathering in Toronto where I met many of my fellow pilgrims to this present moment, as this experience has yet to end. Now before I continue I need some participation from you. Don't worry it's nothing embarrassing but throughout this sharing of my experience at certain points I'm going to say, 'But no matter what I tell you today' you'll join in and say 'you had to be there'. (Let's practice that).

So the number one question that I've been asked is "What was it like going on a pilgrimage?" and after putting some thought into that question I've come up with a simile. A pilgrimage is like going on a rollercoaster. Now, I want you to keep this simile circulating in your mind because hopefully by the end it will all make sense.

Going to WYD Cologne 2005 was an unforgettable experience, but no matter what I tell you today, (everyone joins in) you had to be there. (Good, or wake up). Feeling excited, anxious and a bit scared was just some of the many feelings I had going into this pilgrimage. First of all, I was excited to meet new people, people from all around the world, people that were traveling with us, making new friends and just excited for this whole experience. Secondly, I was anxious to see the Pope, to deepen my faith, to become closer with God, to not only travel to Germany but to Rome as well, to observe and absorb different cultures and to also have an opportunity to bond with my mom. Lastly, of course I was a bit scared.

Scared of having to take a total of five different air flights to get to our many destinations, and worried that my luggage would not get to the right airport even though Fr. Tobin blessed it before we left. I was also scared of getting lost in a foreign country and not knowing the language or being separated from my group.

I was even scared of what people we're going to think of me believe it or not. These feelings and more were very common amongst us all. However, in Joshua chapter 1 verse 9, the words "Be not afraid" was a constant reminder that whatever situation or obstacle I may encounter I should face these challenges head on and to not be afraid. To not be afraid of experiencing new things for God is with me and this is what gave me strength and courage to overcome anything.

So now the time for us to depart Toronto has come and at the airport and we encounter our first line of our pilgrimage. Throughout our pilgrimage lining up for breakfast every morning to lining up to get to and from a long full day of WYD events was a daily routine. Now in Europe their subway lines are nothing compared to our rocket (the TTC) and by this I mean there are over 10 different subway lines that before you know it you can end up in a whole other country much less city. The time frame for waiting in lines varied anywhere from waiting a few minutes to umm....9 hours. Yes, you heard correctly 9 hours. I know you're probably wondering "What could take so long that one would have to wait that lengthy period of time" and well my answer to that question is to picture this....over 800,000 pilgrims all in one place, all trying to get home after Sunday mass with limited organization of lines and all trying to get onto limited amounts of buses. Now remember, Germany's population is small compared to the Greater Toronto Area. But nevertheless, we turned a really messy situation into what could have been an even worse situation by engaging in conversation with the person beside us, to the front of

us and behind us. This and singing hymns helped to keep our sanity because trust me, after sleeping overnight in a field with over 800,000 pilgrims, experiencing a week full of WYD events that required you to get up early you find yourself really testing your patience and compassion for others. By the end of this journey my new friend Roselle and I were walking Christian juke boxes. I could stand here and go into more details about my line experiences and the countless of stairs we ventured but no matter what I tell you today, you had to be there.

So hopefully you can start to see how this experience is similar to going on a rollercoaster from start to finish. "Expect the unexpected", words of wisdom given to us by Neil McCarthy, OCY director, which held true throughout this pilgrimage. Comparing this quote to a rollercoaster ride is that on any rollercoaster ride you expect to feel your heart stop, you expect that your stomach will drop at certain points of the ride, you expect to scream your lungs out and of course to have a fun and thrilling time but then all of a sudden the ride stops and you are just hanging there upside down. Now what do you do? Well, on our pilgrimage, "Expect the unexpected" became a daily occurring event for me as well for others. You see, day in and day out our group would come up with a game plan of what we were going to do for that day. Whether it was how we were going to get to certain places and for what times? Or where we wanted to go and how we were getting back and so on however, this became a mission. Being in a place with thousands of Catholics one would think that you're in the best of hands but then you're thrown a curve ball and all of a sudden you realize your plan has just gone out the window. Everything has just changed for whatever uncontrollable reasons and the people who claim to be Catholic or God's children aren't quite demonstrating expected behaviour. At times I found myself in these situations having a few words with God and let me tell you it was all good at the end of it all.. So now that we've gone through the ups and down, twists and turns and the excitement of WYD has worn off comes the hugs, tears and goodbyes. As I look back to this experience not only will I remember our WYD theme "We have come to worship him", or the stories we've shared about our experiences but most importantly I will always remember the relationships I've created. I know that what I have taken away from this experience is more than I could have imagined. When I look at my fellow pilgrims I see in them what I see in myself ...peace and tranquility. This opportunity was given to me by my mom as she was the one who encouraged me to go. She also covered my expenses to which I will always be grateful for as at the time we had to give in our deposits and then the balance I was in university. As many of you know university students have very little money. So, if you know you are interested in going to the next World Youth Day which will be in Australia 2008, which by the way I will definitely be attending don't wait until 2 or 3 months before it's time to go. Start saving now, start working out a budget with your parents, become active in our youth ministry where you will find out all the information about the steps needed to take to ensure that to you will be apart of WYD 2008 in Australia and isn't just an invitation to young people it's open to God's children of all ages. I definitely recommend that you attend at least one WYD in your lifetime because no matter what I tell you today, you had to be there. Thank you!