



**NOAA Teacher at Sea  
Christopher Harvey  
Onboard NOAA Ship OSCAR ELTON SETTE  
June 5 – July 4, 2006**

**Date:** June 22, 2006

**Time:** 5:30 PM Hawaii

**Location:** Still en route to Maro Reef...

**Entry**

“If your mind and heart are true, the world is good.”

I have quite taken to the idea of including a quote at the beginning of every journal entry. Although it is rather reminiscent of my warm up assignment for my kids in class each day (yes, I did vow not to speak of class again on this trip), I find that if I start my day with a good quote, it helps to keep my thoughts a little clearer throughout the rest of the day. For this reason I drink a cup of green tea in the morning, and tend to heed the advice of the little slip of paper attached to the tea bag.

This morning was different, however, since I did not get out of bed until 12:30 in the afternoon! I messed up my routine with my daily quote and my hot cup of tea with breakfast, but the chance to sleep in was one I knew I must take advantage of. This is my summer vacation after all!

We had drills almost immediately after I woke up. This meant that the general alarm was sounded, ensuring that I was in fact awake, and we had to muster on the boat deck until our fake fire was extinguished. In this drill, I got to hold a fire hose and spray water out into the ocean. I think when I get back I am going to be a fireman instead of a teacher! We also had our “abandon ship” drill, which required us to muster at the lifeboats with our safety jacket, long sleeve shirt and pants, and our exposure suit (My favorite part of this drill came on our first day when we actually got to try on the exposure suit. I looked like a sunburned Gummy!). I always look at the people that are supposed to be on my lifeboat as potential meals when the dry rations run out. (This is, of course a joke. I am finding that my humor on the ship is often a bit too witty for the crew. And so my journal entries are becoming my outlet for my release of humorous energy.)

After drills I watched a couple of movies. The first is one I know my mother would enjoy on a Friday night, wrapped up in her four kittens with a bowl of popcorn and a wine spritzer (can I say wine spritzer in a journal entry?!) It is a British fairy tale of sorts, upon Amee’s insistence, called *Nanny McPhee*. Amee was confident that I would not be able to sit through the whole thing. Not only did I watch the movie from start to finish, but also I found myself with moistened eyes at its happy ending! (We watched *Hotel Rwanda* yesterday and I was in full-fledged tears. Do not expect happy feelings from that one.)

We then put in *Madagascar*, one of my new cartoon favorites! I have to say that if I were a kid again, which I am still at heart but not in outward appearance, most of the humor would have gone right over my head. As it is, the humor settled perfectly on my level and I am now in a rather cheerful mood. This is partly due to the fact that it brought back memories to a very positive classroom experience for me.

One of my students, a “favorite” if a teacher is allowed to have “favorites,” brought in the movie and asked me to show it in class one day. Unfortunately I did not have the creative capability to find a way to incorporate it into my curriculum (Boss, if you are reading this, can you find the creative capability to incorporate it into my curriculum?!). But she wanted to share with the class a song that best described her personality and outlook on life. Yes, even as a science teacher I dared step into the realm of exploring my student’s personalities and modes of expression. She shared with us the song “I like to move it, move it,” which is really very basic in terms of its lyrics. But put into the context of the movie, I found it to be very descriptive of this child.

The particular student, call her Sue for the sake of simplicity, had one of the biggest hearts that I have ever had the fortune to come in contact with. She struggled very hard with my class, but always came into my room with a smile on her face and asked me what she could do for me. I always told her she could teach the class for me so I could sit in the back and take a nap, and she always laughed (even though there wasn’t much funny about that comment). I would ask my students to keep track of what I call their “List of 5’s and 3’s,” which was a list that we would make every Monday at the beginning of class that would address 5 positive things and 3 negative things that the students did to/for themselves, and 5 positive things and 3 negative things that the students did to/for other people. I always stressed the things that we did for other people, which was always the hardest for most of the students. However, Sue never had any problems with her list because her life was so full of helping other people that each time she did something good for someone else, she was doing something good for herself. She asked me if it was OK for her to have both lists contain the same thing. I looked at her and smiled as I said that it was, because inside of me I had a particular jealousy over the fact that she could have such a heart.

In all my traveling I look for friendly faces in time of need. Whether I need directions to a particular location, or a place to sleep at night, I find that- although many times they are few and far between- friendly faces always emerge at just the right time to help me out of the situation. Finding a child like Sue in my very own classroom was a blessing to me because I did not have to go out and seek that friendly face among strangers. She made it a point to be so brilliantly kind and generous to every one of her classmates and teachers, that it was hard to have complaints after having her in class, even if it wasn’t the best of days. It is strange now to speak of a child with such high regard, but as I tell my students at the end of every semester before I let them go into the world, a teacher can learn a great bit more from his students than his students can learn from him, if he pays attention to them and takes the time to get to know them.

I say that I am hesitant to think about school while on my summer vacation, but it warms my heart to think about all of the positive things I have seen in and around my classroom as a result of my kids. Too often I find myself grumbling about how terrible and destructive students are for themselves and for others. And though I am reminded by others, especially my mother who is not only a great parent but also a colleague at school, that “children will be children,” and that I was no worse than they were when I was their age, I take great comfort in watching my kids progress through the months that they are in my classroom.

I spoke earlier on this trip with Ameer about a similar idea, and mentioned in some way that “kids these days” are... (I don’t remember exactly what I said, but the ... could be filled in by pretty much anything). She smiled and looked at me and repeated what I said. At that moment I realized that, perhaps for the first time, I was a “Grown-Up.” I had made the discrimination between myself and a younger generation, and I realized that I have moved onto a new phase in my life where I am often viewed with the same contempt by some of my students as I held some of my teachers. And on the other side of things, I remember how well I respected and adored some of my teachers for their instruction and for the way they seemed to care about me. This has been a truly revolutionary moment in my life, as an adult and teacher, because I see now how much of an impact I have on my kids- whether positively, or negatively.

So I think about the song from *Madagascar* and it makes me smile. I think about Sue and how she has probably filled her summer with chances to make the world a better place. And it leaves me out here in a moment of solitude and reflection, as I take in the scenery around me, wondering what the world would be like without such friendly faces among strangers.