

Launch, Day 0: Saturday, July 17, 2010

First Email to the Wise Laboratory

Dear All,

Well, I can hardly believe it but we launched. We expect to be sampling whales tomorrow so tonight I will be brief. Thank you all for all of your hard work this summer. I leave on this mission with excitement for the work ahead, but also with regret that I cannot be there to work with all of you. I am torn between two needs.

In the end, the voyage won out - not because of the glamour of the trip. Already 4 people are sea sick and I am awaiting my turn. Plus I know literally live in the lab as my bunk is 4 feet from the cell culture hood and two feet from the microscope. I will spend the next three months with a 4X6 personal space. I am told that one quickly learns that work at sea is hard. The student on board, will rotate 1 hour shifts up the mast watching for whales from sunrise to sunset and then will take some shifts at the helm in the evenings. It will be long busy days. At the same time, I am sure when we do find whales it will be breath taking.

But for me this expedition is not about the romance of studying whales at sea whether one considers it hard or pleasurable. To me, it's a calling to respond to a toxicological crisis the likes of which we have never seen before. This Gulf crisis is the worst environmental disaster in US history and may become the worst ever. As one of the very few marine toxicologists in the world I cannot sit idly by and do nothing. I suppose it would have been possible for me to send a team on the boat without me. But the reality is that we are sailing into the largest toxic spill site in the world and we are doing it during hurricane season and it is in the Gulf of Mexico during the height of summer when temperatures will be dangerously high. Given these dangerous conditions, I simply would not send one of our teams into this situation without me there to guide them. So I am here and not there. Nevertheless, you are all important to me and so is the work we are doing there in the lab. This project is just one I need to see to personally at this time.

I leave you in good hands, Sandy, Hong, Chris and Jill will keep you all well and safe. I will interact with you via email and phone and Skype as I can. You should not hesitate to contact me with any questions of any sort and I will do my best to answer.

There will be much work to do on this project both here and there. If you want to participate let me know and we will discuss what you might be able to do.

If you want to come on the boat- there are some possibilities for that. Bunks are few. But we can try. There are some rules. You have to pay for your own transportation to and from the boat. Schedules are imprecise so you have to allow 2-2.5 weeks or so to be at sea. You have to allow a few days to wait for the boat to arrive. You have to have

health insurance. You have to sign a liability waiver. You have to have a passport (in case we have to out run a hurricane) You have to be willing to do anything necessary on the boat. You have to pass a swim test or wear a life jacket on deck. Undergraduates have to volunteer. Then there is the whole seasickness and heat- you have to be willing to endure those. You might have to take 40 hours of hazwhopper training. We have all done or are in the process of doing this list.

If you are interested in some boat time. Please email me (James, Amie and Ryan do not need to). I will see what I can do. We plan to arrive in Fort Lauderdale about July 30. Kellie will get off then and Cathy could use a roommate so there will be a bunk for a female student then.

That's all for now.

John