

Day 33: August 18, 2010

Mobile. Interesting looking town- lots of waterfront industry. I cannot convey how enjoyable it is to have just a couple of days in port out of the pounding waves. Plus clean clothes are essential.

Today, we said goodbye to Greer and Ryan. They gave us their best and we enjoyed having them. We said hello to Juli and Rob. Juli is a doctoral student in the Lab and Rob is a summer researcher in the Lab. Both will be on for this next leg. All three have written nice and different perspectives on the Gulf crisis that are now posted on the website. They also brought the team shirts so we now have our "uniforms" for port. They look great.

Sadly, today we also said goodbye to Cathy who has been on since the beginning and was the one to successfully launch our cell culture lab. We will miss her smile and her hard work ethic and her willingness to climb that mast no matter the weather. Rick, our engineer, had many many good things to say to me tonight about Cathy and those very features. She will be missed by all.

Cathy is leaving us now as it is the start of the college soccer season as she is a key player on USM's team. The women's soccer coach was supportive of Cathy on this voyage and gave her a daily workout and dumbbells to use on the boat which Cathy diligently did. She was supported in her efforts by both Johnny and Matt who often did the workouts with her with me timing each required routine. They learned just how hard it is to do pushups on a rocking boat. One of the requirements for the team is that each player must complete 30 pushups in 60 seconds. Cathy did 39 in 60 seconds on the aft deck of a rocking boat- pretty good. I think she is ready. The coach did tell Cathy to pass those dumbbells on to me and is sending me my own workout- (thanks Lisa) - which has not yet arrived. But in the meantime, I guess I can do some curls with the weights.

We wish Cathy could have stayed, but, since I taught her how to play soccer and supported her as she made it a centerpiece of her entire life (she started playing at 3 years old), her decision is both expected and understandable. Nevertheless, it is still a difficult and sad thing to me personally to know that I will miss her entire season as I tackle this Gulf disaster. I have never missed any of her previous seasons before - attending her and her brother's games and events has been my hobby and something I simply enjoy doing. I missed very few over the last 17 or so years and that's been year round games. In fact, I was a sufficient presence at last year's games that even the USM coach felt this year would feel weird without me on the sidelines cheering. It was even one of the last things Cathy said to me before the cab took her to the airport, she noted how weird this season would be for her too. She said she was not sure what to do and I told her it was simple. Score.

I know Cathy will find a way for me to be there with her in spirit. There will be an orange shoe lace on her cleat or patch of orange on her shirt or an orange streak under each

eye or some small reminder of our soccer connection. Plus, as always, she will hear my coaching voice in the wind- whether I am actually speaking or not- we just have that many years of soccer discussions between us. Actually, knowing Cathy - the whole team might end up with those same orange shoelaces, that, or the USM President may just find Cathy in her office for a simple discussion about a change in USM's official colors! I also know, Cathy will score.

The upside for me in this matter is that I know Cathy knows why I am not there. She understands the magnitude of the problem and why we have to make this particular, very personal, sacrifice. I think her reaction to the oil crisis, which will soon be posted on the web (I think James will have it posted by lunchtime) makes very clear just how personally she is affected by the crisis. In fact, her very last words to me today were - "Dad, take care of those whales"- which indeed I hope to do.

It's funny as this voyage will now lead us into an ongoing family debate. Cathy has always worked hard to surpass her brothers. As a freshmen in college, Johnny wrote a proposal to NASA to fly experiments in the Vomit Comet, which he did during the summer between his freshmen and sophomore years, and the following summer. It was Maine's first team to do so and the data were interesting. It was a remarkable accomplishment and a tremendous experience. Cathy has now, during the summer between her freshman and sophomore years, become the first person to successfully culture mammalian cells on a sailboat including culturing the first cells from some specific whale species. I am sure when we all do sit down again as a family for dinner- it will come to discussion as to which one is the bigger achievement. The answer really doesn't matter, but the discussion will be fun. Oh and by the way, the NASA work is not done, Cathy will be writing this year's proposal - due in October- and Johnny will go along again too, but this time as ground crew.

At the end of the day, as you reflect on these experiences I tell you about, I hope that you will notice one thing- USM is a really remarkable place to go to school. It is a quiet gem in Maine, though we are making it louder!

It is remarkable, in part, because of the experiences you can gain as an undergraduate student. But it is also remarkable, in part, because of the quality of personality of the students we do have. These students I have had the pleasure of working with the past several years really do work hard. I am really proud and pleased with all of them.

You are hearing the stories of just the few who are on the boat with me, but I have a bevy of them in my lab who all bring their all to their work every day. Their work is also quite fantastic and important- it's just a bit more complicated to explain and slower to develop. I hear so much from other faculty at other universities about the failing work ethic of this next generation - and I am glad to say to you and to them that I just don't see it that way. I see excellent, hard-working students with exceptional work ethics. These students do whatever the work and I require of them. They do it well and thoroughly and usually with a smile. My colleagues at these other bigger schools agree with me that my students are indeed as I describe, as they have met and seen the work

of many of them, but they say that me and my students are simply out of the ordinary and we are simply the exception to this problem that everyone else is experiencing. Well, glad we are missing it!

Of course there is no way to know exactly what each year will bring, but we have a really dynamic faculty at USM (which does include me :)) and I think we also have strong and insightful university administrative leadership that supports high risk but important research. So that's my ad for USM for today- send your kids to us- we are out of the ordinary - we work hard and we make a difference!

So I end this day sad, but on a proud note. Proud of the work that Cathy did and will do. Proud of my student teams that have been and are on the boat. Proud of the progress we have made so far and the many lessons learned. Proud of my laboratory as a whole for doing such excellent work and working so hard each day (I do think about each of you and miss you all each day). Proud of my university for standing so tall in this difficult Gulf crisis when some many others seem to keep coming up so stunningly small.

We strive on and ready ourselves for the next leg.

John