

Johnny Wise's Reflections for Leg 7

Day 95 – Monday, October 18, 2010 – Patience is a Virtue

We have been docked in Biloxi, Mississippi for a dreadful week now. We had to head in to port early because our transmission broke. We docked Monday afternoon – everyone was sad and gloomy about the whole event. The next day, Capt Bob and I uninstalled the transmission and everyone helped to get it out of the engine room, onto the dock, then into the trunk of Dr. Wise's car. He then left with Sandy to drive it to South Carolina, where it would get fixed (a 12 hour drive). This seems like a lot of driving for someone, but Dr. Wise has a history taking long road trips. Last fall he and I drove from Portland, Maine to western Ohio (can't remember the town now), then from Ohio to Raleigh, North Carolina, then back home to Portland – all in the span of one week!

We said goodbye to Monique and Jane, as they would be unable to wait out the unknown amount of time for the transmission to get fixed only for another two week leg. With them gone, and Sandy driving to SC with Dr. Wise, that leaves the first full male crew on board since we started – myself, Matt, Shouping, Bailey, First Mate Ian, and Capt Bob.

The days have passed by slow. Nowhere to go, and not a whole lot to do on board. Shouping and I have spent a lot of time fishing, learning from Ian and a couple locals. Today we caught almost a dozen catfish, all at least one foot long. Bailey and Ian have spent most of the time mending the jib sail (not a big problem, but something to do). Capt Bob tended to boat maintenance. Matt and I filled our time with school work and work work (finally) – we have some work from home that we are able to do on the boat.

Also, there just happened to be a small music festival on the dock Friday and Saturday night. Foghat headlined (their single hit is "Slow Ride"). We enjoyed the free music and fireworks while we could. Time has passed by so slowly that it seems like the music festival took up hardly any of the time we've been here.

Finally, today we receive news that the transmission is on its way home (to the boat). We were all beginning to lose hope here that it might never return. When it arrived in SC, we were told Friday – which came and went without any indication as to when it might be back. We are thrilled to have it coming home, and will speedily reinstall it and get on our way for our final leg!

Day 97 – Thursday, October 21, 2010 – Bittersweet Day

We departed Biloxi, Miss at around 7am – I was still asleep. It was kind of my plan to wake up to us sailing. Dr. Wise woke me up an hour or so later insisting I don't sleep in

and get back to the regular routine. My only argument was that the AC turned off at 4am, so I didn't get much sleep – I woke up to my room being 85 and me being drenched in sweat. When I got out of bed I found the air to be brisk – a promise from mother nature that I had not missed fall, it had just been postponed for me. Everyone was very excited to be headed back out to sea. It was bittersweet to think about...I have grown to love the sea even more than before, but I have also grown increasingly homesick as we get closer to the end of the 2010 voyage. Dr. Wise has been working on proposals for funding for voyages in 2011 and 2012 – I understand that these are complete (or very near complete), and are due Nov 1 – very exciting. I also understand that USM (our home) is planning on using our voyage as part of their new marketing plan – also very exciting, as that means we have a very strong support from our university.

Midmorning, Matt and I were given the pleasant opportunity to collect dolphin blows. A large bottlenose dolphin was riding our bow, and was joined by another smaller one. I successfully caught a blow in my petri dish for the large dolphin, but not the smaller. When the smaller of the two did arrive, I started focusing on that one and was very much surprised when the larger surfaced for a breath directly underneath me and drenched me with its snot.

We were all given a little bit of a scare in the middle of the day today. Bailey had just come up from the engine room to check the temperature of the engine(?); 60 seconds after he came back up it had overheated and we started drifting. NO!!! To avoid thinking about what this might mean for us, Matt, Shouping, and I started collecting critters as they drifted past – comb jellies, shrimp, sargassum weed, and a Portuguese man-of-war. Mixed in with the Sargassum weed we found a large sea slug, some juvenile planehead filefish, lots of krill, and some eggs of an unknown species. We kept most of everything for samples (including the man-of-war). By the time we were losing light and couldn't see anything in the water – Capt Bob had fixed the problem, and we were off again. I must admit I became a little grumpy while we were drifting – I did NOT want to turn around.

So our plan for this final leg is to sail along the 200m line looking for Bryde's whales between Mobile and St Pete. When we get to St. Pete we will head out to the 1000m shelf for another take at the sperm whales, head back up to Mobile, then back down the 200m line for a second chance (third of the voyage) at finding the Bryde's whales. Our second time off of St. Pete we will head back out to the 1000m shelf and follow that to Key West where we will dock for the winter and resume next summer.

Day 98 – Friday, October 22, 2010 – Bryde's Whale? Day

Today started wicked early for me – 4am, back to my regular schedule. Helm watch and recording the voices of the ocean before dawn. With this complete, I didn't feel the urge to go back to sleep, so I stayed up to keep Capt Bob company. We made an

attempt at putting a painter's light over the side of the boat to attract, well...anything. We tried this once in the Atlantic and a whole bunch of little squid swam around in its light. I'd really like to catch some for samples.

Just before dawn it was light enough to be able to see whale blows, but there wouldn't be anyone on watch for another half hour or so. Realizing this, I decided to position myself on top of the pilot house. I started searching off in the distance. Within minutes I heard my first blow! But it was only a couple small dolphins coming to check us out. They had been talking to us (through the array) all morning, and much of the night.

Shouping was the first to arise for whale watch in the mid-level platform, ahead of schedule – he was obviously very excited. Around 7am, Matt clambered out of bed and climbed up to the crow's nest. With that, I returned to my room for a little light reading and ending up falling into a light doze. Some time later (not sure how long), the boat slowed down. There are four main reasons why we slow down; (1) whales, (2) macro-trash like buoys or Styrofoam boxes, (3) I'm taking a recording, and (4) engine repairs. Since I wasn't taking a recording and there was no call for whales, I hoped it was just trash, but dreaded it might be engine problems. Just yesterday the engine overheated and took a couple hours to repair – so it wasn't that farfetched. Luckily it turned out to be balloons. Phew!

Soon it became Rick's and my turn on whale watch. Rick relieved Shouping in the mid-level, while I relieved Matt in the crow's. Whale watches now are very much like when we started – completely visual, and no aural indications of when whales might be around. We are focusing on Bryde's whales. They are not well studied – no one knows what they sound like (or even if they vocalize), and there is an estimated population of 15-20. Estimated is a word that scientists don't like too much – so hopefully this is accurate. Since no one knows what the whales sound like, that it one of the tasks I hope to complete – recording the first Bryde's whale song. The sketchy plan is we spot a Bryde's whale, get a positive ID, get a biopsy, then First Mate Ian and I hop in the dinghy and zip out to where it was last seen – I drop in the hydrophone and start recording. That's the sketchy plan, anyway. We'll see if it works.

Now, since there are no aural clues, whale watches are that much more difficult. We must remain alert and awake at all times – something that can be hard to do when we're looking at a vast expanse of seemingly empty ocean for two hours. I'll admit, I did not bring my best game for this watch. Luckily Rick had. Towards the middle of our watch, he reported seeing a whale's back – but it might have been a “big-ass dolphin.” I was looking the opposite way, so I didn't see anything. That brought everyone else on deck, to help look for this whale. Dr. Wise was the next one to spot it – 15min later, to our stern. Next was Sandy, another 15min later to our port. Then Capt Bob, 15min later at 10:00 (remember, we use the clock system to give a heading for the whale, the bow always points to 12:00). After an hour or two of searching for it, I still hadn't seen anything. Rick and I were in position for a biopsy, crossbows in hand, but I hadn't seen anything. I had no doubt that there was a whale, but not seeing it makes it hard to

believe we were going to catch up to it. Then I finally saw it, and had all the faith in the world that we would biopsy it, despite its unpredictable whereabouts.

At one point while we were waiting for it to surface again, Dr. Wise came up to talk to Rick and I – we had the safety latches on, and the whale surfaced right in front of the boat! I mean literally, it was 10ft off the bow! Clearly, our presence was not imposing on this whale. Neither of us were able to attempt a biopsy, it had gone underwater again before we could remove the safety and aim. But we knew where it was headed! First Mate Ian was on the helm, and turned the boat hard to starboard. Bailey was in the crow's nest; the water was flat and clear, so he could easily track its movements. We were staying right behind the whale, and it was coming up again for another breath – but on our port bow! I was on the whale boom, so there was going to be no biopsy attempt from me. But Rick was ready, and was successful in biopsying the whale, with Sandy right behind him taking photos of the whale's dorsal fin and blowhole – two key places for identifying baleen whales. Matt was at the midship, net in hand and ready to retrieve the arrow. We had done it! We followed the whale for another hour or so, hoping to get some more photos and maybe a recording, but we lost track of it, and turned in for lunch.

Matt and I had an exam to do, proctored by Dr. Wise. After lunch, we set out to do this, but had a very difficult time with it due to slow and inconsistent internet. We were apparently in a bad satellite zone. After 4 hours of trying to take the exam online, Dr. Wise received PDF files from our instructor. Two hours later Matt and I had completed our exams. That was the longest exam I have ever taken, and hope it remains that way – 6 hours is too long for an exam. But I am thankful for the support and understanding from my professor and the assistance and problem solving of Dr. Wise.

Tomorrow we hope to find more whales! I simply hope to collect more samples.

Day 99 – Saturday, October 23, 2010 – Deja Vu Day

The early morning started out promising a decent day for whale watching – flat seas, a breeze that may be a little too much but was tolerable. By the time Matt and Shouping had been on their whale watch for an hour (maybe less), it was clear to me that we would see nothing today. The waves had grown to 4ft swells and the wind was blowing so strong I wouldn't be needing a hat or a bandana to keep my hair out of my eyes – but I might need it to keep my hair on my head. I reported to the boss my feelings for how the day was shaping up – conditions were getting worse and we were going to be lucky to see anything, forget about biopsying anything. He took a stab at my pride and told me to toughen up, that I was gonna have a chance to out do Rick (who found the whale yesterday in flat water and calm wind) by finding the first whale in choppy seas and high wind. It was a hopeless argument.

When it came time to switch watches, Matt hollered down that I should tell the boss we weren't going to see anything. I hollered back I already had. Matt's response... "well then tell him to get his fat ass up here and look!" The seas had grown to 4-6ft swells and the wind hadn't subsided in the least. It was a slow switch, as Rick and Shouping were a little uncomfortable climbing in these swells – understandable, I was in the same spot a few months ago. Matt and I have climbed up and down so many times and in so many different conditions that it didn't bother us any more. (I know that comment will come back to bite me in the butt)

When Rick and I started our whale watch, I considered climbing up to the crow's nest for a better view – I even packed for it. But as I was stuffing my binoculars into my little bag I started to really notice the rocking of the boat, and thought about what that might mean for getting into the crow's nest (which requires some unsteady maneuvers). A few of my friends (Brady in particular) would be proud to hear that I thought before I climbed – though this may never happen again... After about an hour of being in the mid-level platform, I saw the boss climbing onto the pilot house platform to join us on whale watch. By this time I was in my "ride-the-bull" position – that is, I was sitting on the railing with my legs holding me and one arm steadying me, I imagine I will be able to ride a mechanical bull rather well when I get home. After about a half hour the boss climbed down and called us down – I guess he understood where I was coming from (Matt had also talked to him).

The rest of the day we all spent reading, writing, chatting, sleeping, eating, or being seasick. There's not much else to do when the water's too rough to sample anything. Another thing I've noticed about this kind of water is that we don't see any kind of wildlife – no whales, dolphins, flying fish, jellyfish, not even Sargassum weed (we might see a bird). It makes me wonder if all these animals have some sort of instinct about this kind of weather – I wonder if it's just as uncomfortable or exhausting to swim in it as it is to sail upon it. I certainly wouldn't wanna be swimming in these conditions. These were the same conditions we were experiencing the first time we sailed through...some two or three months ago (has it really been that long??). Lots of wind, choppy waves, and too many whitecaps.

For now, I'm watching the sunrise on Day 100 with Capt Bob. Day 1-0-0!!! We can hear dolphins on the array chatting, but really sound like they're farting. The seas are calmer, the wind a little bit, and the sky above the sunrise is starting to turn orange...

Day 100 – Sunday, October 24, 2010 – Nature's Answer Day

So I left off on my last log wondering if the seas are just too rough for any animals or sea life to show up (other than the occasional bird). As if in response to that thought, nature and marine life came around in style yesterday. Shortly after sending the log for Day 99, a pod of dolphins came up to our boat. Bailey and I enjoyed watching the dolphins ride the waves around our boat. About 10 minutes before we started sailing,

the pod of dolphins moved to our bow – as if they knew we were about to set sail. I know dolphins are considered to be a smart species (maybe even smarter than humans), but this is something I cannot explain. Setting this thought aside for the moment, I dropped myself over the side, dangling, to attempt collecting a dolphin blow. This would be my first attempt in any kind of waves – all our other dolphin blow collections were collected in calm water. Soon after getting over the edge, I was dunked into the water. The dolphins moved aside as I came into the water, but remained on the bow. I needed a new dish (it's considered contaminated if the inner side is touched or gets soaked with sea water instead of dolphin snot). Sandy exchanged dishes with me just in time, a dolphin was swimming close to the surface right below me, looking like it was coming up for a breath. Though the distance was further than usual, I was certain I caught the dolphin's blow in the dish. After attempting to collect more blows for the next 10-15mins, the dolphins left and I clambered back in the boat.

After a quick change into some dry clothes, it was my turn on watch. It was very windy and gray – clouds completely covered the sky – and I was not looking forward to the watch. This watch was uneventful, and led to Rick and I growing very restless by the end of the watch. We did see a frigate – a frigate is a large sea bird that has an extraordinary shape and beautiful black and white feathers. We saw nothing else. On our second watch of the day, we saw another frigate, and HUGE stretches of Sargassum weed. Sargassum weed has become an important piece of our science puzzle – it harbors lots of small critters including shrimp, krill, juvenile fish, and the occasional sea slug. Since Bryde's whales primarily feed on krill, I realized this would be an important place to collect some krill – that is, in Bryde's whale territory. I radioed down the word, and within a minute Shouping, Dr. Wise, and Sandy came on the bow deck to collect some Sargassum weed. After awhile they asked if they had enough – indeed they had a lot, but I was not convinced it would be enough to collect enough krill for three samples (one for petroleum products, one for chemical dispersants, and one for heavy metals analyses). When I felt they had enough, they proceeded to pick through the Sargassum weed, shaking off all the critters, putting them in buckets, and leaving them for me to sort through after my watch. Rick and I didn't see anything else on our watch.

It took me about 2 hours to sort through everything – krill, crabs, shrimp, and fish. We had four species of juvenile fish – Sargassumfish, Planehead Filefish, Ocean Triggerfish, and another juvenile that I wasn't able to identify. It's smaller in length than a pen cap. We had barely enough krill, but I was content with how much we had collected – it should be enough for analysis. As I was sorting through all the little critters, another pod of dolphins came to our bow – Matt's turn to get dunked, I mean attempt a collection of dolphin breath. Indeed he did get dunked...more so than I did, but was unsuccessful in collecting a dolphin blow. We have discovered that it is much more difficult with waves than without.

When I finished sorting all the critters it was time for me to go back on watch. I was late. Rick wasn't up there, he had moved to the pilot house platform. As I started to

climb up, he had moved to the bowsprit to watch the dolphins. Matt was behind him taking some pictures. As I pulled myself into the mid-level platform I glanced down and saw Dr. Wise climbing into the pilot house platform. We exchanged a look that said, "We're not giving up yet, no matter how crazy everyone thinks we are." Crew morale was low, as it was the end of the day with no whales and we had been sailing in uncomfortable seas for the last 3 or 4 days (I lost track now). I was instantly pleased to have climbed to the mid-level. It was getting close to sunset, but we wouldn't see much of it because of all the clouds – that also meant that there wasn't much light and what little there was...was fading fast. Even if we did spot a whale it was questionable whether we would be able to biopsy it and retrieve the arrow. But for the moment, there was that pod of dolphins frolicking on the bow. We were only going 2 knots (very slow, you could walk faster), but the dolphins seemed to be enjoying our presence as they cruised around our boat among the waves. It was very interesting to watch their behavior. Sometimes two dolphins would swim belly-to-belly, with one completely upside-down. They were also jumping out of the water, slapping their tails, somersaulting and rolling under water. It did wonders to boost our morale. At one point I realized something, and hollered it down to the boss..."the monkey brethren is at large!"

Just when I thought everything was over, a huge leatherback sea turtle came cruising by the side of our boat. I've never seen a turtle move so fast – or we were really just moving that slowly. It swam up from our stern, to our bow, turned around and swam 90 degrees off our port beam – i.e. even with me. It had two or three suckerfish attached to its back and another following it. The way it swam seemed to say, "You see me, Johnny? I'm not phased at all by these waves!" And with that, my day pretty much came to an end.

Day 100 (True) – Monday, October 25, 2010 – Point Break Day

I have to apologize for this log being two days late. I hit a low point on Monday of feeling simply burnt out. A few days ago Dr. Wise told us if these waves continue for a few days, we will simply put in at St. Petersburg and end the voyage. This news brought about thoughts of home to a whole new level – I might be seeing loved ones at home that I haven't seen in over 4 months! As the days passed by, Dr. Wise was still adamant about finding a whale and continuing – despite the wind and the waves. It seemed easy for him to say, as he didn't have to climb up to the mid-level platform every day to look at an empty ocean. The grind had gotten to a point of almost being completely unbearable. Today it became apparent that Dr. Wise had no intention of putting in early – we were a day or two out of St. Petersburg, and he instead decided to turn around and head in the complete opposite direction. Looking back at the literature, he realized that Bryde's whales are found about 100 ft deeper than where we were looking, he felt we must make up for that. Dr. Wise has joined us on some watches from the pilot house platform, but not staying up for the two hours that Rick, Matt, Shouping and I do, and not switching for 4 shifts a day. With it clear that we are not

cutting the voyage short, I was able to get my head back in the game and have found a second wave of energy – something that I was afraid I might not recover.

I have also been working on some facts & figures about the voyage these last few days – i.e. days at sea vs days on land, hours spent looking for whales, etc. I realized while doing this that somewhere along the way I lost track of days and got ahead of myself. So Monday was really Day 100.

The day ended on a bit of a high note for me. Just before my last watch, a few bottlenose dolphins started riding the bow. I clambered over the side, and found a large dolphin swimming a few inches below the surface. As I rose and fell above the surface with the waves, ranging from a few feet to a few inches above the water's surface, the dolphin remained where it was. It also occasionally swam on its side as if to check me out. Despite my best efforts I did not catch a dolphin blow, but getting that close to a wild dolphin and looking it straight in the eye was truly remarkable. Wild dolphins seem to be care-free, playful, and majestic.

Day 101 – Tuesday, October 26, 2010 – Krill Bath Day

No whales today, some dolphins, and LOTS of krill. Towards the end of mine and Rick's second watch, we spotted a couple large patches of Sargassum weed, and had the boat turned to collect some samples. I climbed down to prepare us – setting the cast net and hand net in place for quick access. As we got close, I started collecting with the hand net until we came up to the biggest patches. Shouping and Dr. Wise each used hand nets, while I used the cast net. In a matter of 15 min, the deck was completely covered with Sargassum weed. After finishing our collection, Rick, Sandy, Dr. Wise, and I spent the next couple of hours poking through the Sargassum weed for any fish, crabs, sea slugs, and other by-catch. To get the krill off the Sargassum weed, we shake pieces of it in a bucket. We each had our own bucket. By the time we were done, the deck and our bodies were covered in krill. SO MUCH KRILL, that I hardly knew what to do with it all. We put our best efforts to collect everything and I walked away with about 2 gallons of krill, crabs, sea slugs, fish, shrimp, and small bits of Sargassum weed that we couldn't separate. Then I began to sort through everything. I realized very quickly that I would not be able to complete this task by the end of the day – even if I received some assistance.

Nightfall came and I was still working on the krill – about 3 hours later. Sandy was pointing a spotlight over the side of the boat, and was seeing squid every now and then. I told her how we put a painter's light over the side to attract them at the beginning of the voyage. After she did this, I grabbed a couple nets and started catching a total of 6 squid – the largest being about a foot and a half long. With the first squid, Shouping had a VERY big grin, and was commenting on different ways we could eat them. Alas, we would not be eating these squid – they would be saved for science. After an hour of squid hunting, I returned to the krill. Shouping had been working in my

stead, and continued to work alongside me. Around 11pm I decided to call it quits for the day. I intend to continue in the morning, until we have three samples of everything (or as close to that as I can get).

Day 102 – Wednesday, October 27, 2010 – Samples Day

No whales today. Just wanted to clear that up right away. Instead the samples were just about everything else. Whale watches were reduced to rotations between myself, Shouping, and Rick. Dr. Wise took Matt off watch, because he feels Matt is burnt out and needs some time to cool off. So the three of us are now doing 1h up and 2h down – giving us a somewhat easier schedule. Two hours in the mid-level platform during the last few days has been exhausting due to the swells. For the better part of the day, I spent my time off watch sorting through all the organisms in the Sargassum weed we collected yesterday. 24hrs after we collected it I was finished. Just about everyone pitched in somewhere to reduce how much work I had to do. We had so much of everything that I was sometimes overwhelmed. I am convinced no one has ever collected as much krill as we did – we were told at the beginning of the voyage that no one can catch krill, they're just too fast. With those samples completed, I took a nap. Rick, our whale-whisperer, said he was feeling the presence of whales today. With that, he was adamant about staying on watch an extra hour to find his whale. That pushed our watches back so my last watch was taken by Shouping – a relief for me, as I needed a nap.

I woke up a half hour or so before dinner. The sun was below the horizon. Rick and I played a few card games to wait for dinner, and continued during dinner. Right when we were finishing up, Shouping started getting excited. "*Johnny! Johnny! Squids!*" Apparently during dinner, he had set up the painter's light so we could catch some more squid. And catch some more squid we did. Last night we caught 6 before the moon rose and dominated our painter's light. It seems that when the moon is up, the squid are no longer attracted to our light – not sure why. Tonight was marvelous. It started as a moonless sky, giving us a fantastic view of the stars. Since there is no light pollution on the open ocean, we can see more stars than back at home. On the horizon across from us, a thunderstorm was brewing, giving us some flashes of lightning every now and then. It was a warm, humid night, and we were fishing for squid. I use my favorite line to sum up the night – "Life is grand." When the squid start to come into view, they look like ghosts in the water. They're completely white and swim slowly in and out of the light. Perfect for the season, with Halloween a couple days away. Same thing with jellyfish, only they look more like a white blob – squid are more elongated. Flying fish look like angels as they drift or swim into the light. Shouping and I caught a total of 20 squid. We had a blast, Shouping always talking excitedly when the squid arrived and shining a handheld spotlight on the squid to give me a better view of them. He was adamant about catching a big one. "No, no. Too small." He would say every now and then, but I would try to catch them anyway. Finally we landed a big one, almost the size

of my arm! With this he said we were done, but I pointed out that the moon wasn't up yet and we still had time. So we continued. Marvelous night.

After the moon had risen high enough and was brighter than our painter's light, we called it a night. It was after 10pm. We had collected 2 jellyfish, 3 flying fish, and 20 squid. Now we had to process and label them. Since we only just added squid to our collection, we don't have a procedure for processing them. For jellyfish, we save each of the oral arms, the mouth, and the bells (gonads). For fish, we save three filets, three gill samples, and brain, liver, and gonads (if we can find them). I looked up a picture of squid anatomy and discussed with Dr. Wise what we might want to save – gills, liver, gonads, maybe some mantle and tentacles. He said he wanted to look into the literature some more to figure out what other researchers had done. So I split the squid between science and bait – 10 for each. I processed one squid and stored 9 whole – we can dissect them at home when we figure out what we want to do. Matt and I set on our mission to process and label everything. When I was done processing and sorting the samples, I took over labeling for Matt and let him go to bed. It was 2am by the time I finished labeling, and still had to clean all the dissection tools – long night. Good thing I got that nap in earlier!

A storm is headed our way, so we are headed to Pensacola, FL to wait out the storm. We'll be headed back out to sea sometime on Saturday.

Johnny

End Reflection/Returning Home

Hey Everyone,

The 2010 Gulf Voyage ended last Wednesday, when we docked in Key West for the winter. Many of us were eager to get home and had our bags packed upon arrival. My flight home was scheduled for Friday, giving me an evening and a day to enjoy Key West. The majority of that time would be spent packing all the lab supplies to be brought home. Matt, Shouping, and I flew home on Friday; Ian, Bailey, and Capt Bob remained at the boat to prep it for the winter; Rick's girlfriend flew down for a vacation; and Dr. Wise and Sandy drove a rental car from Key West to Portland, ME to bring back all of our supplies -- their car was PACKED. The fact that they drove might shock some of you, as it is a very long drive -- but understand that our family is known for doing long drives, and this is just another excuse for one of these long trips.

Coming home has been exciting and disorienting. We missed all the fall foliage (by a week is what everyone tells me) -- correction, we got 30sec of fall foliage as we were landing in Charlotte, NC for our layover! Stepping out of the Portland Jetport into the cool brisk November air actually felt VERY good. It felt like November was supposed to feel like, and I filled my lungs with the icy fresh Maine air as I walked to where my

brother was waiting to pick me up. When I got home I realized I didn't have any food or supplies in my kitchen (I live in my parent's basement with my own kitchen and bathroom) -- so I would have to run some errands on Saturday. My first stop was Walmart, a very busy Walmart at that -- instant culture shock. This was the first time I really had to do any kind of supplies shopping for myself since the beginning of the summer -- that felt weird. Then there was all the people that were in the Walmart. I'm so used to being around 10 people that it seemed like there were a couple thousand people in this Walmart, even though there were really only a hundred or so. The other thing that struck me was distances -- I've become accustomed to a 100-ft boat with 10 other people, and only going to places within walking distance while we were docked. Coming home, it felt like I was driving here, there, and everywhere just to get to three places. Shocking.

Sunday my brother flew out to Oregon for a conference, and my sister returned to the university dorms -- leaving me alone in the house for most of the day. Wow that was shocking. On board the *Odyssey* I would occasionally get a room that was roughly 6ft x 6ft to myself, or I could hang out in the crow's nest by myself -- not a lot of space. Now I was in a big empty house -- needless to say I felt small.

Monday was my first day back to USM. I had nothing planned to do, and decided to take the day slowly and just get used to how it felt to be home. For the first half of the day it felt strange, which was uncomfortable to think that home feels strange. I had lunch with my sister, who has lovingly nicknamed me "Sunshine" because of my tan and long, sun-bleached blonde hair. Dr. Wise and Sandy arrived a few hours before dinner, and the four of us went out for sushi and discussed some highlights of the voyage, Cathy's soccer season, and what was coming next. I always enjoy these dinners/conversations because our family is involved in so much of the same stuff, adding to the excitement of simply doing what we do. Cathy described me during my first day back as "a ray of sunshine, wandering around campus looking lost."

Today things feel back to normal, and I'm ready to start digging in to classes, USM clubs, and all the research and presenting that is still left to do. Soon I will be sending you all a reflection of the whole voyage and how it has affected me. I will also be working on a video to sum up the voyage --- I hope to have it done by the lab's Holiday Party.

Johnny