

Riley DI: Inside Dimension @ d2k.6 archived blog...

(The original blog was posted daily from May 22-28, 2006 along with daily photo galleries)

Monday, May 22: 11:27 p.m.

Dr. Steen: Welcome to the first report from our trip to DI Global Finals 2006 (d2k.6)! Here you'll find the latest news from the team: Kesi and Crystal in grade five, Brandon, Tyler, and Larisa in grade four, and Cecilia in grade three. We also have several siblings and parents making the journey with us. We are about three hours into our trip to Knoxville with our bus driver Kevin at the wheel. Kevin will be driving us for the first six hours of our trip.

Unfortunately, our adventure did not have the happy beginning we expected. Just a couple of hours before our departure time, one of our team members, Brandon, had an accident at home that resulted in a trip to the emergency room. The lower half of his front two teeth were chipped off. His doctor informed us that he would need follow-up care within the next day so Brandon could not go with us to Knoxville. It was very hard to tell Brandon this news and not have him join us after so many months of work to get to this point. We are wondering right now if perhaps Brandon's medical needs can be taken care of so that we could fly him to Knoxville later in the week. Brandon was able to come into our bus and honk the horn to send us off. We also have his DI pin book so we'll work to get him fabulous pins from around the world. We hope he is feeling okay and we really wish he was here with us.

Right now we are watching our second movie of the trip, Spy Kids 3, which is what prompted me to pull out my computer to start this first entry. Alexis, Kesi's first grade sister, is wanting to write a little bit now, so I will turn this over to her...

Alexis: I'm watching Spy Kids 3. I am getting tired. I am too full of pizza flavored Pringles. Hi to Miss Lyon and all my friends!

Crystal: Right now we just passed Worlds of Fun in Kansas City, Missouri. I'm having a great time watching the flashing lights go by and writing in my journal about eating snacks, watching movies, and just having fun. Even though I'm having such a great time, it would be better if Brandon were here. I hope you're able to come Brandon!!!

Kesi: Hi guys! It is really great out here. Before we left I was writing in my journal about that I couldn't believe that we have gotten this far and we hope Brandon gets better so he can come out and we are going to trade his pins for him if he doesn't come or if he is late. Tomorrow I hope we can go swimming and look around. I will talk to you guys later in a little bit I am going to try and get some sleep.

Tuesday, May 23 at 1:23 p.m.

Tyler: Right now we are in Kentucky at a pit stop. The Bus drivers switched at almost 2:00 a.m.! All of us couldn't sleep while we were in the bus! It was a huge mess to get to sleep. Finally, all of us got to sleep. I woke up around 6:00 a.m. when we were in Illinois. Around 10:00 a.m. we ate at Perkins and the food was delicious! Then we left and Dr. Steen told us that we would each come up to the front of the bus and be interviewed on the bus intercom. So all of us got to the front of bus and Dr. Steen asked us questions and then the team managers (Mike and MaryLou) came up and we asked them questions. Finally the bus driver, Andrew, said that we already been to seven states! Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, KENTucky, and Tennessee.

Larisa: We are still driving to Tennessee. Andrew just said that we are about three to four hours away from Tennessee. We are now at the next pit stop. "That is such a great sight," I said to Tyler and others. There are so many great sights on the way to Knoxville. So far I have seen rugged cliffs and groves of trees, we just passed a really big grove of trees with a tiny city right by it. We are watching Cheaper by the Dozen, it is a really, really, really funny movie. Back to the sights, some of the groves of trees look like Hollywood, except for without the big Hollywood sign. It is almost 2:30 pm and we just passed the biggest grove of trees yet, and we are approaching a very small city. Now that we have passed the small city we are approaching another really huge grove that is super long and tall. We are driving right by another small city. We are getting closer to Knoxville every step of the way. There are many tourist attractions along the way that we are seeing. We are in Tennessee but still not yet to Knoxville.

Cecilia: posted at 10:07 p.m. WE ARE HERE! When we got here we went to find something to eat. The information we had was wrong. So we went on a great big walk. After we were done eating we went to trade pins. I felt scared when my dad helped me trade my first pin. Now I like it a lot. The pins are like a souvenir. You collect pins from all over the world. You do it for fun.

Dr. Steen: Great news regarding Brandon - he will be flying out tomorrow morning and we will pick him up at the Knoxville airport when he arrives. He was able to get his teeth repaired at the dentist today, and got the okay to travel. I am pretty certain this is his first flight so should be a good experience for him. It will be interesting to hear his story tomorrow.

I have been so proud of the kids. They traveled very well, and have stayed positive despite little sleep last night on the bus. We actually arrived around 3:30 p.m. Eastern time. Our bus driver's cousin is the Sheriff of Knoxville County so we actually got an escort to the University of Tennessee. Very cool - made us feel quite official. The kids posed for pictures with the sheriff and gave him two Riley Rocks wristbands as a thank-you.

The kids are VERY into pin trading already, having met teams from Singapore, Guatemala, Minnesota, Mississippi, Arkansas, Colorado, and many more that I can't

recall right now. Tonight several of them took a dip in the outdoor pool at our hotel. It will be nice to get some decent sleep tonight and be fully rested for our first full day in Knoxville. Tomorrow is Opening Ceremonies. We'll write more news tomorrow. Maybe one post in the afternoon and one at night, but we'll see how things go. New pictures will likely just be posted nightly. See you tomorrow!

Wednesday, May 24 at 11:22 a.m.

Tyler: Today we got a surprise, a cold surprise. We went out to the hotel swimming pool and it felt like -20 degrees.

Dr. Steen: The pool is cold, but if Tyler would have actually stayed in for more than a minute it wasn't too bad. Crystal is definitely the fish of the group and will swim for longer than anyone. The team and siblings are also busy making welcome signs for Brandon. After lunch today we are heading to the airport to get him.

Breanna: Dear Redbirds (one of our kindergarten classrooms) - I miss you. I am having a lot of fun in Tennessee. I have had fun going to the pool.

Cecilia: Brandon gets to come!!!

2:37 p.m. after returning from the airport...

Brandon: I got up at 5:00 a.m. today and I had to get my stuff ready and we drove to the Lincoln airport and then I had to check-in. I flew to Minneapolis. From there I went on another plane to Atlanta, and then finally to Knoxville. I was fixin' to sleep on the plane but didn't because the plane was about to land. On my airplane there was one of the DI appraisers. When I got out of the gate in Knoxville I was led to all 17 people from Riley who were waiting for me! My teeth feel really good. I have to be a little careful with what I eat right now. I am not tired.

Larisa: At the airport I got pins from Texas and Colorado.

Cecilia: We couldn't wait until Brandon got off his airplane.

Tyler: We made posters to welcome Brandon to Knoxville. While we were waiting at the gate, we saw tons of other DI teams coming off their flights.

Dr. Steen: Such a turnaround from Monday's news about Brandon. It was awesome to pick up Brandon at the Knoxville airport. He looked a little worn-out coming out of the gate, but he is pretty much right into the DI Globals experience already. It was so cool that every single Riley person wanted to go meet Brandon. Our very kind bus driver again was able to get his sheriff cousin to escort us.

Now we are back at the hotel and I'm sitting here typing this as the **WHOLE** team is working on a challenge from the 3M Corporation. They received a big bag of various materials and have to create something that represents our state. They discussed creating Car Henge, the Capitol, and Chimney Rock and selected Chimney Rock. Tomorrow they will take the creation to the 3M booth and get a special pin from 3M.

This afternoon is their last opportunity to practice. They have made some changes to their presentation since State and actually just finished their final revised Side Trip last week.

So, they'll run through their play a few times today, and then at 4:00 p.m. a prop shuttle is taking all their stuff to the holding location. The kids compete tomorrow at 10:06 a.m. (checking in at 9:06 a.m). Tonight after the props go away, we will shuttle over to campus to eat (and pin trade!), plus get ready for the Opening Ceremonies. Everyone is so happy that Brandon is with us - it makes the team complete again. A big thank-you to Theresa, Carol, and Ruth Ann back at Riley for doing the extra work it took to get Brandon's flight arranged.

3:26 p.m. Kesi: Hi once again! I am having lots of fun. I have been pin trading and we went to the airport to pick up Brandon a little bit ago and we are practicing our skit. We just got done with an instant challenge. I can't wait until tonight because that is opening ceremony. We looked at some pictures of last year's and they had laser light shows and fireworks so we think it is going to be fun. Now Crystal will type to you...

Crystal: Hello again everybody =) We are in Knoxville right now in Dr. Steen's room practicing our script and doing instant challenges. And we just got walked in on by some D.I. kids who thought this was their room. Earlier today, Kesi and I went to breakfast at 8:15 a.m. and met up with Cecilia, Tyler, and Larisa. Afterwards, we all went down to the pool to take a dip. Even Dr. Steen came down! We all swam a little bit but I swam the most (Dr. Steen calls me a fish). Later on we went to eat lunch down in the hotel lobby.

9:39 p.m. - team has just returned from Opening Ceremonies - a quick group entry...

Larisa: At Opening Ceremonies they had fire explosions, a laser show and all sorts of stuff. Before going to Opening Ceremonies we did tons of pin trading. Today I met two different kids named Kaitlin - one from South Dakota and one from Texas. I am having fun and I hope my class back at home is having fun too.

Kesi: We could feel the fire all the way in the back of the arena on our faces. The laser show displayed all the different challenges from this year.

Tyler: I got to help hold the Nebraska flag as I was representing our team during the Opening Ceremonies. When I was eating, Dr. Steen told an Ohio team not to give me a Roller Coaster pin because he wanted to selfishly keep that cool pin for himself. Luckily, I was able to get one anyway!

Brandon: I saw a South Carolina team at Opening Ceremonies. I was born there. I sat in the very front row at the ceremony. I liked the fire and light show and hitting beach balls around the crowd. I hit two of the beach balls over to the South Carolina section. Thank you to Miss Crum and Theresa for helping find a flight to get me here today!

Cecilia: Third graders at Riley - how did things go today in Bethany Park for our class picnic? It is hard to describe Opening Ceremonies. You kind of just have to be here to know what it is really like. Today I fell on the rocks when I was walking and it felt like my wrist broke, but it didn't, it just hurt. I got ice on it and it feels better now.

Crystal: I almost have all of my MUDDI Waters pin set. I am still looking for Montana, Missouri, and Illinois. For supper tonight I had fish again and chocolate ice cream for dessert.

Dr. Steen: The team is now being sent off to bed. They have an early day tomorrow and will be leaving our hotel at 7:30 a.m. to head to their competition site. They did their final Central Challenge performance rehearsals this afternoon and are very ready to go! Kesi and Crystal are hoping for a huge weight total for what the team structure can hold!

Thursday, May 25 - Central Challenge Day - A Team Stronger Than Any Structure!

7:21 a.m. Mike: We have a few hours before we compete. Cecilia awoke ebulliently this morning. Ebullience is not a term that we often assign to Cecilia in the morning. That is the effect of DI. DI through the process of challenge and accomplishment DI instills confidence, character and joy in team members and team managers. I feel blessed to have been involved in DI this year. I have seen children grow, develop and mature. This process enriches me and makes me a better parent. DI started months ago and has been possible through the wonderful commitment and time from the teaching staff at Riley Elementary. I know that this blog's primary focus are the days that we spend in Knoxville but this time would not be possible without the dedication of all those who make Riley a community.

That is all for now. Later, I will comment directly about the events at DI.

10:35 p.m. Team meeting following a HUGE day...

Kesi: Central Challenge we thought went really well, but not like we had totally expected it to go. The appraisers were funny and made us smile before we took out things on to the performance. Our structure today didn't do as well as we thought it would. We think maybe after check-in as we were putting it back into our storage case that something came loose. When we began weight testing it during performance, it broke when we were putting on the safety board. Some of the pieces snapped and one of the main pieces on the bigger structure fell completely. Crystal and I took the remaining part of the big structure off and attempted to realign them in different ways so we could get the safety board on to test the structure. Unfortunately, time was called before we were able to completely get the safety board in position. When time was called our stomachs got tight and we started crying. We felt better about things soon though as we visited with the friendly appraisers. We learned we had good perseverance.

Later, we went to the gift shop where I got a DI bag and a keychain. I stood in line for one hour to be able to buy things. In the fountains today, people would put a pop can in the fountain blast to see how far up in the air it would shoot.

Crystal: When we went to eat lunch today there was a huge water fountain in Worlds Fair Park. People can jump through and play in the fountains so Kesi, me, Alexis, and Dr. Steen got totally soaked as we played in the fountains. Kesi, Alexis, and I sat on the fountains and let water blast us. I actually didn't eat fish today. I ate pizza.

Larisa: I completed my MUDDI water pin set today and got a bunch of pins from Texas, New Jersey, and many other states. Tonight we had a team meeting to talk about our day and review some strategy for Instant Challenge. We took our 3M challenge of Chimney Rock to the 3M booth and got new blinky 3M pins of the United States and some Stretchy Tape.

Brandon: After we performed, a team told me nice job and I said thanks. I finally got to swim today! It was deep in the 8 foot part of the pool. My fingers about turned into icicles because it was so cold. I finally got the hang of pin trading. All I need is Jupiter and Uranus to complete my MUDDI waters pin set.

Tyler: When we were coming in to check-in for Central Challenge, the appraisers checked the structure and thought that it maybe had a coating of glue on it where it connected at the joints. After some discussion, they said that it passed though. When we were doing our performance we did a good job of projecting our voices.

Cecilia: One of the teams that watched our performance was so proud of how we persevered that they gave us each a pin. Tonight back at the hotel there was a kids' party for kids only! Candy was everywhere! They ordered 100 Dominos pizzas - cheese and pepperoni. There was pop, water, and a DJ. To Mrs. Heard and all my class - I have been having lots of fun, I wish you could be here, and I miss you!

Dr. Steen: Monday our trip didn't start exactly as we'd hoped when Brandon wasn't able to come with us, yet the team came together stronger as Brandon was able to join us two days later, and they made a positive experience out of what started out as a negative. Similarly, today in Central Challenge, the team certainly had hoped and expected to have their structure hold more weight than it ever had before. Unfortunately, that just didn't happen, but they have been able to stay positive, learn from the experience, and emerged as an even stronger team once again.

I was incredibly impressed (as were the DI Global Appraisers) at the poise, maturity, and perseverance of the team - Kesi and Crystal in particular. During the 8-minute performance time, as it was becoming obvious that things weren't going as intended with the structure, Kesi and Crystal continued to calmly analyze the situation, problem-solve, and make attempts to correct the structure so it could hold the safety board and be weight tested. They never gave up, never showed any signs of panic or frustration, and simply kept trying! Everyone was so proud of them. The large audience all felt the pain that the girls and rest of the team felt about the structure, and the team received large applause for their effort and presentation. The structure (actually a structure inside of another structure - combined weight of no more than 14 grams) is the main scored element and gets much of the focus. However, I must add that the performance portion of their challenge was very well done. The team received many positive comments from the appraisers and other teams. Their new airplane Side Trip was a nice new start to the play. The team showed fabulous stage presence and told their story wonderfully.

After the team came out of Central Challenge, they moved on to the 3M booth as Larisa wrote. After that, we had a professional portrait taken of the team and team managers. The group then proceeded to pin trade, pin trade, and did I mention pin trade? My favorite pin I got today was from Korea. After trading, we moved out to the lunch area - a feast under a tent on the lawn of Worlds Fair Park. With karaoke blaring in the background (I couldn't get any of the kids to sing) we enjoyed yet another big DI meal. From there the kids went with their families to various events: some watched more

challenges, others did more pin trading and souvenir shopping, some went swimming, and I, along with Kesi, Crystal, and Alexis took on the water fountains. Angela and Fred decided to be the dry, responsible adults and looked after our shoes, pin books, and cameras while we got 100% soaked in the fountains.

In the evening after supper, several of us attended the Improv Fiesta. There were three stages of various improv games and performances, plus thousands of people pin trading! The whole team ultimately ended up back at our hotel for a kids only party. And DI really meant kids only. I had to beg to get in for like 20 seconds to snap a photo of the team and then was directed right out again (although the nice DI door lady did give us pizza as she booted us adults out).

Following the party we had a team meeting to discuss the day, read emails from many of you, prepare for Instant Challenge, and write this report. Tomorrow they'll have their Instant Challenge, perform their Ta-Da, and make their mark on the Really Big Duct Tape Thing (or the RBDTT). Thanks again for the emails - tomorrow night (Friday) is our last chance to read emails sent to the team so if you'd like to send a message do it today!

Friday, May 26 - Instant Challenge Day

10:10:10 p.m. (we were very precise with the time for our Team meeting tonight!)

Kesi: Our Instant Challenge went well today. Sorry, but we can't tell you details about it until after Global Finals is done. I learned how to do a watermelon in the pool. It is where you are like in a cannon ball at the edge of the pool and you fall in and do a flip! I also learned that no one can hold their breath under water longer than Dr. Steen! My dad taught Brandon how to do a flying watermelon.

Crystal: Tonight Kesi and I went to our Elementary DI Graduation ceremony. We received a certificate and ice cream bars. We also got to shake the hand of the President of DI, Bob Purifico. Tonight in the swimming pool I learned how to do a run and dive into the water.

Brandon: Today when I went swimming I did like six flips. Bruce started copying me! My favorite pin I got today was a South Carolina pin from Dr. Steen. Kesi helped me trade tons of pins. Now I only have 8 Nebraska pins left and I have my complete MUDDI Waters pin set. Now everyone on our team has completed that pin set.

Tyler: Before Instant Challenge we went to the Really Big Duct Tape Thing. We taped some of our PVC pipes on to the wood and spelled ID for Inside DIimension and then DI for Destination ImagiNation. We also signed all of our names. The wood used for the RBDTT will eventually be used to build part of a house. Pin trading today went great. I traded like 20 pins in one hour. The favorite pins I got today were my Washington State pins - they are five fish that each have a challenge on them.

Larisa: After Instant Challenge was done, we did our Ta-Da. A Ta-Da is a way at Global Finals to have one last quick performance as a team and it officially ends our season. Today in pin trading I finished trading all of my Nebraska pins.

Cecilia: For our Ta-Da we made two pyramids and shouted, "D2K-S-I-X, D2K-6!" This afternoon we went to the pool and I picked up Crystal, Larisa, and my dad and Brianna and Jo-Jo in the pool (not all at once!). Tyler and I each held a foot of Larisa and pushed her up out of the water.

Dr. Steen: The kids had a fun Instant Challenge experience and felt they effectively worked together as a team. It was a long and humid walk to the Instant Challenge site, but the appraisers did some invigorating warm-ups with all the DI kids to get them pumped up. Then the parents were asked to make a tunnel for the kids to run through as they entered the Instant Challenge building. Instant Challenges are secret so we can't discuss the details until after Global Finals. The kids wrapped up their DI season with a Ta-Da following the Instant Challenge. You can see photos of that in the gallery. Mike also got pulled out of the crowd to do a parental Ta-Da while we were waiting for the kids.

Tomorrow we have our field trip to the Great Smoky Mountains and a Cavern Spelunking tour. We'll go to Closing Ceremonies in the evening, attend the final DI party, and then board the bus for home. The kids cannot believe how fast this week has gone. Crystal asked if we could just simply stay here! (They also aren't exactly looking forward to a long bus ride home). Since we will be on the bus late tomorrow night, we won't be able to get new reports or photos posted until Sunday night after we return. The kids will still be writing reports on my laptop and I'll be taking photos, but without Internet access we can't post them until we get back. Thanks again for the many emails - the kids have really loved reading them.

Saturday, May 27 - Field Trip Day and Awards/Closing Ceremonies

Kesi: Today we went to the cavern. We drank the water that flowed through the cavern. It was crystal clear and our tour guide said that it is o.k. to drink it. I saw an orange salamander on a rock. When we got to the biggest room in the cave we sat down and shut off all the lights. It was so dark that we couldn't see our hands in front of our faces. Then one at a time he turned the lights on and showed us the different formations. After that we went back to the hotel and packed all our things into our suit cases so after Award Ceremony we could put things on the bus and head home. We didn't win a trophy or anything but oh well their is still a chance next year. At closing ceremony there was a laser light show and fire again.

Brandon: Today we went to the Heritage Center before we to the Cave. Crystal bought 6 arrowheads. And she gave me 1. On our way to the Heritage Center we went passed the Tennessee river. In the Cave I saw a salamander and a bat. When the tour guide turned off the lights I made an evil laugh.

Crystal: Hello! Today we went to the Heritage Center, and I bought 6 arrowheads but I gave 1 to Brandon. I also got in a half hour of swimming before we had go to eat and leave for closing ceremony. When we got to the caves, I saw an orange salamander and filled my canteen with the running water from the spring. I still have some left for my mom and sister to try. At closing ceremony, They had a light and firework show. The fire was so hot, I could feel it on my face even in the back of the room. We found out at the hotel that we got 40th place. But we're not crushed. We're just happy we made it to Global finals.

Tyler: Today we went to Tuckaleechee caverns to explore the caves. The cave had a room called the big room. The room could fit a half of a football field! The tour guide told us about one of the pillars that was twelve feet tall! We didn't believe him so he went next to that pillar and then we believed him! So after that we went to the award ceremony. At the awards ceremony three teams from Nebraska placed at Global Finals!

Cecilia: We went to the Tuckaleechee Caverns and we went 400 feet down into the cave and then the tour guide turned all the lights out. It was very dark! Before the cavern tour, we went to a pioneer museum and learned about the Great Smoky Mountains. We learned how people washed their dishes, tasted home made corn bread with butter. They were also cooking beans on the stove. We played a game like hopscotch, a game with a stick where we pushed a hoop along the ground, and a game where we tried to drop clothespins into a jug. They also had arrows made out of corn and three feathers sticking out of the end. We threw them like arrows to see how high they could fly. We played a game called Drop the Hanky - it is kind of like Duck, Duck, Goose. The Awards Ceremony at night was really cool and it had lots of fun things to do. A few teams from Nebraska placed.

Larisa: Today was really busy. First we went to the lobby at the hotel, and waited for our bus. When our bus finally came we headed for campus to get on the bus field trip. Now

that we were at our field trip we were having lots of fun by playing old day games. I even beat my dad at a race with a wheel attached to a stick in my hands. Finally we were waiting in the heat outside waiting to get our lunch. Then we left once again on the bus to the caves. The caves were a little scary but not too much.

Dr. Steen: Congratulations to the Back at You team from Plattsmouth for placing third at Global Finals! Their team manager is our friend Wanda Wiemer. Also, before the Closing Ceremony began, the entire DI crowd set a new world record for the largest group ever photographed wearing milk mustaches. They also shot video (with multiple takes) of everyone yelling, "Got Milk?" "Moo," and just plain screaming and being wild. The video was shot for potential use in a National Dairy Council TV commercial - so maybe you'll see us all on TV someday! The kids loved our DI shuttle bus driver whose singing made the ride to and from Closing Ceremonies fun and entertaining.

Sunday, May 28 - Traveling back home

Kesi: Today we are heading home. We are almost there and I can't wait to see everyone again. Only three more days left of school and the last three days left of school for Mrs. Walbridge before she retires. I am really bored sitting here on the bus. Yesterday we left at 11:30 p.m. I am sitting here with Crystal and Brandon watching Chicken Little. Oh, before I forget, I would like to thank our sponsors for donating money to get us here. I am going to hand it off to Brandon now.

Brandon: Today we are going home. Before I came to type this letter I was listening to my CD player. I was the last one to fall asleep last night. Thank you to our sponsors for helping make this trip happen!

Crystal: O.K. Brandon. Short but sweet. Right now I'm sitting here with Kesi and Brandon eating Fruit Gushers (with special blue chill pieces that make your mouth feel cold), beef jerky, and candy watching Chicken Little. I can't wait to get back home and see everybody (I'm getting really sick of this bus)! Thanks to our sponsors! Well, I'm all done for now.

Tyler: Today we're sitting here watching Chicken Little and Daddy Day Care. This morning after breakfast at McDonalds we were going over our scores and some people were still sleeping. When I woke up we were already in St. Louis! Right now we are somewhere on the western side of Missouri.

Cecilia: In a few hours my grandparents are going to pick us up at a stop before we get to Lincoln and take our family to a family reunion. We ate breakfast today at McDonalds where our bus drivers switched out. I had pancakes and hashbrowns. My favorite thing at Global Finals was pin trading. It was fun to see all the other pins from around the world. Thank you to Steve and Pam for sponsoring us! We had a DInamite time!

Larisa: I enjoyed our trip and am sad and happy all at the same time because we are leaving Global Finals and are coming back home to Nebraska. We may not have won a trophy, but we still won inside our hearts. I can't wait to see my friends. Dear Miss Dunkel, I have finished my state flag and just need to get a poster board plus finish typing my report. Also did anybody in your class get 100% on the CRTs?

Tristan: I liked doing backflips into the swimming pool this week. Trading pins was fun. I liked getting cool pins. I liked going spelunking yesterday and being able to drink the water and being in the big room with all the lights turned off.

Alexis: Right now we are closer to Kansas City. This week I had fun swimming in the pool and trading pins. My favorite pin is the cell phone I got from Kesi. We went in a cave and we saw a salamander. I like the bus ride because it has TV's. Right now we are watching Daddy Day Care. I am going to go back to watching it now. Bye!

Breanna: This week my favorite thing to do was watch TV on the bus. I also liked reading books with my dad. I read Shark Tales. I liked bouncing on the bed in our hotel room. I bounced from one bed to the other.

Dr. Steen: Everyone slept far more easily on the bus last night than we did coming out here last Monday. I guess we just needed a week packed full of competing, swimming, pin-trading, walking, splashing, eating, talking, cheering, and playing to wear us all out. We woke up this morning to a close-up view of the St. Louis Arch - see <http://www.gatewayarch.com/>

The kids are enjoying a last chance to watch some movies, play some games, and relax. We will all be happy to get home though and off the bus. We had our final team meeting this morning to review the team scores and reflect on the whole DI year. While the difficulty with the structure at Globals definitely impacted the team's overall placing, the team did nicely in Instant Challenge - coming in around 29th place for that (scoring higher in IC than the overall third and fifth place teams actually).

We had a terrific experience at Global Finals and I am quite sure the kids would like the opportunity to make it there again in future years - I think they've learned much this year about what it takes to make it to and compete at that level.

Thank-you to Mike and MaryLou for serving as the Team Managers. Thanks to all our other Riley Team Managers, Riley DI kids, appraisers, and other supporters from throughout this entire DI season. Thank-you to the parents and siblings who came along on this trip to cheer on the team: Fred, Angela, Bruce, Alexis, Bradley, Chuck, Breanna, Stacy, and Tristan. You were a fun group to travel with and I enjoyed getting to know all of you better.

Finally, I again want to extend a big thank-you to our sponsors Steve and Pam Kiene! Your generosity helped give these kids an experience that has provided them with wonderful memories, and will hopefully inspire them to also make a Difference in the lives of others.

Right now, we are just crossing the border back in to Nebraska and looking forward to being home very soon. Until d2k.7 then - this is Riley DI, signing off!