

Dear Friends,

We have been receiving emails from many of you who have been praying for Matthew, Joshua, and Anna as their homeschool team represented Tennessee at the National High School Mock Trial Competition in St. Paul, Minnesota a week ago, asking how they came out. The following detailed report is for those of you who are really interested. Everyone else, skip to the last paragraph for prayer requests!

Miracle of miracles! The kids won! Thank you Lord!

Thank you to all who prayed for them. It was so exciting for our family to be there to watch the entire competition. The case was a recreation of the famous and mysterious sinking of the *Edmund Fitzgerald* on Lake Superior in November, 1975. With the help of two wonderful lawyers in Chattanooga, Jeff Atherton and Matthew Hargraves, our three and the other five homeschoolers on the team had spent five weeks preparing both sides of the case. Matthew, Joshua, and Amber Gruber served as attorneys, while Anna, John Poston, Daniel Wilkinson, Beth Coleman, and Andrew Jones were witnesses (Anna had a part on both sides). Forty-two states plus Guam and the Marianna Islands competed.

On the first day our team was assigned the plaintiff's side for the trial against Rhode Island and the defendant's side against Alabama. The next day, in both the third trial against Michigan and the fourth trial against Indiana, we were assigned the defendant's side. Besides incredibly persuasive and dramatic opening and closing statements, Matthew, Joshua, and Amber capped the trials with "killer crosses" of the opposition's witnesses. I was glad I wasn't on the stand! Our witnesses were consistently steadfast in portraying the characters and providing the dramatic testimonies they had practiced for so many weeks.

All the state's teams were assigned a two-letter code for identification throughout the competition to prevent any bias by judges for or against a particular state. When the announcement was made after the fourth trial that AO (Alpha and Omega?!) was the first state in the championship finals, our team, parents, and siblings roared with excitement and then quickly thanked the Lord. The final trial was against Pennsylvania and we were assigned the plaintiff's side. Anna was at her best as both the weeping bereaved mother and meteorologist that had warned the ship about the storm.

Between the finals and the banquet that night, team after team that we had competed against, or gotten to know, came up to various team members and said they hoped that we would win because the kids were so nice! It was interesting because both kids and judges made various comments about our team that they were "different" and "classy". When the Texas team made similar comments to me, I was able to say, "Do you know why the young people are so nice?" They looked at me quizzically and said, "No, why?" "Because every one of them loves the Lord Jesus." People were seeing the Holy Spirit in the team members without really understanding that He was making the difference.

At the banquet that night, the preliminaries seemed interminable as we waited for the decision. The tenth through third place teams were announced, and then we prepared for the second place announcement which would "tell the tale". The team held hands around the table, their heads bowed in prayer. When Pennsylvania was announced as the second place team, our team began chanting "Penn-syl- vania! Penn-syl- vania!" This really touched the Pennsylvania coach and team who came up to thank them. "Family Christian Academy Homeschoolers" of Tennessee was then announced as the winner. What a marvelous evening of celebration we had as we gave thanks to the Lord who has had His hand on these young people this entire year as they first won the regional competition as FCA Red, then in the state finals to become "Team Tennessee", and then in the national competition to end the season as "Team USA".

We learned later that our team had won fifteen of the seventeen ballots of judges in the five trials, losing the other two by only one point each out of 110 (or 220 for both teams). The press they have received has been amazing – from newspapers all around the Chattanooga area to the Wall Street Journal! The team, led by Matthew, has been consistent in their effort this year to honor the Lord in all that was done and to give Him the honor and praise for all that was accomplished. What a blessing and privilege to have had this incredible experience.

Thank you again to all who prayed and wrote encouraging notes and emails. Sorry for the delay in getting this to you. We spent the rest of the week with my sister and her family in Minneapolis and returned last night.

**We would be grateful for your prayers for three upcoming conferences** the family will be doing in the next month. We head to White Oak on Friday to speak at the Carolinas CBMC Family Conference. The first week of June we speak twice to the Advanced Training Institute Conference in Knoxville. Then Father's Day weekend we speak at the CBMC Family Conference in Cannon Beach, Oregon. We praise the Lord for the privilege of ministering in His name!

In awe of His goodness,

Susy for the Downers