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**The 2001-2002 National Officer Journals**

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Our Japan trip began in Salt Lake City as we headed to the Salt Lake International Airport at 5:45 AM. I was, unfortunately, really sick and could hardly even move! I have no idea what came over me. After several hours of a long plane ride, we finally landed in Nakita. The airport is very large and just like what we saw in our training video. I was surprised to see so many Northwest Airlines planes and had no idea they had such a large market in Japan. Customs was not difficult at all. We all managed to make it through with ease and did not have any complications.

We then ventured to meet our guide, Hiro. We all attempted our excellent Japanese skills by introducing ourselves. The laughs and smiles from Hiro let us all know we needed some work. Hiro took me to a doctor in the airport to get some medicine for me and through the translations I walked out with 5 different prescriptions. I am still not sure what they were all for!

After gathering our luggage we got a hotel shuttle and rode to the Nakita Rest House where we stayed for the evening. Our first Japanese dinner adventure was in a small restaurant back at the airport to keep things simple for the first try. Not very soon after arriving at the Rest House everyone was off to bed and tried as quickly as possible to overcome the jetlag!!

Our first stop was the Higaki Melon Farm. They grew wonderful melons and even gave us a sample! It was the best melon I ever tasted! I was amazed that the melons in Japan sell for anywhere between \$60-\$100 per melon and packed in their own little box!

Next was a visit to Higaki to a tomato farm. It was a hydroponics operation that has been there for 18 years. It was really neat to see a totally new style of growing a high quality tomato. After the visit they loved the FFA hats we presented them!

The first school visit was Narita Seiryō High School. At this visit, we were able to see Japanese students excelling in agricultural education and looking forward to careers in science, technology, and business. We presented the administration with a gavel to commemorate our visit. We also got to eat lunch and get to know some Japanese students. Finally, we went to the floral design area, where we made Valentine's Day gifts

and origami. I really enjoyed the Narita Seiryō visit!



The Tokahashi Engei flower farm was our next stop. We learned about the markets of Japan and how the economy affects their production. Also a very cool site!

Up next was the Tani Fish Farm. The Koi were absolutely huge and you can see a picture of Barrett and Dane feeding a monster!

The next day started with the Meijing Shinto shrine gardens. Getting there was an experience on its own. The subways

are packed with people and everyone was moving so quickly. The gardens were beautiful and symbolized nature in many ways. Afterwards we went to the North Tower Observatory to see a top view of Tokyo.

After lunch and a few more stops we arrived at Toyota. We were taught about the challenges, creativity, and structure of the corporation. I was impressed with the environmental focus of everything they produce. Seeing all the new cars in their show room was pretty awesome! Our day ended in the Beatles section of the Hard Rock Café in Tokyo!



Ah, the U.S. Embassy was a real treat! We learned so much about Japanese agriculture and trading life. We had the opportunity to ask a panel of people all sorts of questions about agriculture, the economy, and trade. It was really a large highlight of the trip!

The afternoon was spent at Tokyo-Engei High School. We were welcomed warmly as an American flag flew alongside the Japanese flag on top of the building. We met the National FFJ President, and the other national officers as well. We learned that Japan has 120,000 FFJ members in 400 schools across the country. We split into two groups, and half of us made soap out of lavender, rosemary, soap powder, and honey. The rest of the group made fresh strawberry shortcake rolls that were very tasty! We also got to pound rice into some really interesting treats! One of the funniest things I have ever seen happened when Robin was asked to give the rice a try. She reared back and swung as hard as she could only to miss the center of the bowl and hit the side of it. It made the loudest sound and rice flew everywhere!

It was really neat to see the students and how nice they were. They only wanted us to have a great time! Although we could not communicate in their language, one student stood up and showed us that words are not always the key to communication by saying, "Our eyes showed that our hearts really cared." As we left, we knew we had made many great friendships that will last for many years to come!

Next was my homestay with Barrett! Meeting my host father and brother at the school reception was the beginning of an amazing experience. My host family was great! Although there was a huge language barrier present, we were still able to communicate through our actions and feelings. The house was beautiful and very large. I was expecting the typical smaller Japanese home. I found myself using most of the ethics Tracey taught us, which showed me the strong traditional base of our family. Most of the house except for the living room was very traditional. That evening we were served cake and tea as Barrett and I gave our family the gift we had brought. Through the gift exchange we met the entire family, whom were all super nice but very formal in the greetings. They seemed to really like the gifts we chose and created some really good conversation. Finally it was time to take a shower and get to bed. I remember laughing at myself several times as I tried to figure out the Japanese bathing system! In the end, it was very relaxing. Our bedroom was really nice and was already prepared for Barrett and me. The futon's were comfortable and the 14 inches of blankets were sure to keep us warm.

Waking up the next morning reminded me much like camping. You are really warm and cozy inside all the blankets but the room temperature is freezing. Barrett and I knew when we had to get up by our host family pacing outside our door. Breakfast was really good and very traditional. We had salmon, rice, miso soup, and fruit. It was really different but very good. Afterwards they took us to their family farm of beef, rice, and wheat. We had the chance to see all of their equipment and rice transplanter. It was really awesome to see a totally different side of agriculture that affects millions of people. I really enjoyed learning about their styles and practices.

DenPark was our next adventure. It was named after Japan's sister country, Denmark. Denmark was one of the world's most technologically advanced countries in terms of agriculture. Angio City was also the most agriculturally advanced city in Japan, therefore acquiring its name, DenPark. It was a beautiful horticultural park. Large indoor conservatory's added to the beauty. We ate lunch at a small restaurant in DenPark where a picture of the beef producer we visited was in the lobby of the restaurant. It was a Mongolian Bar-B-Q style eatery. I got beef and shrimp with a small salad. The shrimp came to the table still alive and I had to ask my host mother how to prepare it. It was a different experience when your food can blink at you. It made for some great bonding time and a true cultural experience!



The next adventure was bowling! Our host brother and several of his friends took us bowling where we had a chance to show off some amazing skills. I bowled a record 53! It was a good time to try to get a little deeper in our conversation with our hosts. Barrett and I had such a great time! The evening ended up at home playing Othello and enjoying a dinner with the whole family and all of our hosts brother's friends. Dinner was traditional as well. We had sukeaki with beef, leeks, fish eggs, noodles, wheat gluten, and other vegetables. We also had rice and miso soup to go with it. After dinner, I shared pictures of my home, hobbies, and

friends. Translating through our little pocket dictionary I was able to share a little about my hometown and life with them. They found Pennsylvania to be quite different than Japan! After the pictures the whole family came out and gave Barrett and me gifts they had prepared. They were amazing and very thoughtful treasures. The evening ended with a closing snack of tea and oranges.

Sunday morning we left bright and early in order to catch a train to meet the others at a local castle. We had a slightly different breakfast, consisting of many other traditional foods. Meeting the others at the train station was really nice and we immediately started sharing our experiences. The castle was beautiful and very historical. All host families took many pictures and loved our companionship.

The next morning we took a 30-minute train ride to catch a ferry to the floating Shinto shrine. The scenes were amazing and the Miyajima Island was incredible. We had the chance to see oyster nets where they are raising the oysters for pearls. Once we arrived on the island, there were deer all over the place and you could just walk up and pet them at any time. The deer on Miyajima, are believed to be sacred and messengers from the gods. The Tori gate we saw was built about 130 years ago and the shrine on the island was about 400 years old.

After lunch we went to visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial. A very somber feeling set in as soon as we saw the preparatory school dome that was the only building left standing the day the bomb hit. In that instant everything we'd ever learned about World War 2 was real! Words cannot describe the horror and sadness that came from that place. It showed the power of war to the fullest extent.

The days in Japan were running short but the group's enthusiasm to see and experience more was growing stronger. The morning started off great with all of us taking advantage of a wonderful Western Style breakfast at some nearby French bakeries. The first train ride was very nice and our arrival was blessed with a fresh blanket of snow. Our first visit of the day was the Biwa Yanmar plant located on the shore of Lake Biwa. The lake was named after a musical instrument, the Biwa, because it takes on the same shape. It is the largest lake in Japan with over 15 million people using Lake Biwa as a water source.

Yanmar had 7 total plants around the lake, so environmental safety is one of their top priorities.

Yanmar was the first company to meet all European environmental standards with their diesel engines and was also the first to meet all of California's standards for engine emissions and plant production. It was very impressive! The main function was to produce high quality diesel engines at a low price and still clear the highest environmental standards. One of the most unique features is their production system that can ship engines or parts at any stage of production with extreme efficiency. Another feature is they can process all liquid and fuel waste in house, earning many world wide environmental awards.

The Yanmar Corporation produces hundreds of models of agricultural equipment that meets the needs of all its customers. Nearly 60% of all the engines produced are for exports. From large farm implements to small hill producers, to aquaculture and fisheries Yanmar is leading the way. The plant tour was amazing; they had four types of production lines that only takes one person to operate. Some of the lines did not even require humans and were completely automated. The automation was another amazing feature. Lasers, cameras, and robots ran the lines. They were able to detect the smallest change in environment or part defects and react instantaneously. Small laser driven carts that played cute musical songs and would run you over if you got in the way!

Our lunch was served at a wonderful hotel overlooking Lake Biwa. The meal consisted of several courses of traditional Japanese seafoods.

Our next plant visit was the Yanmar Kinomoto plant. The buildings were really nice and had several tractors on display. This plant assembles tractors and golf carts for Yanmar and John Deere. Their annual output is about 20,000 tractors per year in 120,000 sq. ft. building with 330 employees. Target daily production for that particular day was 35 tractors. The most unique thing about that plant was the production line can assemble several different types and models of tractors on the same line.

We had dinner at an all-you-can-eat multi level Japanese restaurant that was delicious! Hiro, our guide, once again amazed us with his ability to find an excellent restaurant!

Our first stop was the Nijo Castle that was a 400-year old building, which was once used as a temporary residence for the emperor. The palace itself is a five-house chain; the house farthest back is the most private. It was stunning to see the detail and learn about the ways of the different Emperors. We also learned that a Ninja was an outcast and actually slavery.

Next was the Golden Pavilion. The original structure was built in the 14th century, but it was rebuilt in 1953 after it burned town. In the garden were many carp, which is a symbol of power. We met some really cool Japanese students along the way who stopped and talked to us for quite some time.

Our final stop was the Kiyonizu Temple, another Buddhist temple in Kyoto. It originated in a spring that separated into three. Drinking from each would grant health, wealth, or love, but if you drink from all three, you get nothing. The landscape around the temple was gorgeous and so powerful!

We enjoyed a nice dinner that evening to wrap up our trip, and then we had a blast in the karaoke room!



We left Japan at 10:30 PM on Valentine's Day and arrived in Honolulu at 8:30 AM on Valentine's Day. It was really strange to cross the International Date Line and have two of the same day! Hawaii was gorgeous and the weather was perfect! Not long after arriving we headed to the beach. We swam and walked along Waikiki beach for hours. We were so fortunate to have the opportunity to be in such a gorgeous place.

Later that night Barrett, Dane, and I headed to Diamond Head for the sunset.



We hiked up the mountain to see the sunset from a higher elevation! It was very cool to have some good masculine bonding time with the guys. We really had to work together to get to the top and looked like complete tourists.

Later that night, Barrett, Abbie, and I went to the hottest nightclub in Hawaii. It is called the World's Café. It turned out that the hottest nightclub in Hawaii had no one there! For quite some time we were the only ones there. Later about 5 others joined us but we still had so much fun dancing ourselves!

The next day we went to the North Beach to check out Pearl Harbor. It was a really interesting contrast to Hiroshima. We once again felt the terror of war and saw the destruction of so many lives. The Arizona memorial was very humbling as you read the names of the men still inside the hull of the ship. The only hope is that we learn from those experiences and never allow it to happen again.

Later that day was a trip to the North Beach to see the 8-foot waves! The only other people on the beach were the surfers out in the ocean. It was really nice to relax on the beach one last time before we had to go. It was so beautiful and so much fun!

That night we headed to meet the Hawaii FFA at a beach house. They served an amazing dinner and we had a blast! We even got a pineapple, dancing, and stomp demonstration. Our time was limited so we could not stay long but the short time we did spend was so much fun! I really hope to make it back someday soon! Thank you for a great time Hawaii FFA!!

Finally, we were back in the mainland arriving in Salt Lake City. Barrett, Robin, and I had to take a quick cab ride downtown to visit the Olympic village and see the Mormon temple. We were hoping to see more; however, everything was not quite open yet. We can still say we got to see some of the Olympics though!

Overall the trip to Japan and Hawaii was a life-changing experience. After traveling to many countries I have really started to get a glimpse of what the world around us is really like. It also makes me proud to live in America and proud of our American agriculture system. I will never forget the great times in Japan and I look forward to sharing more stories with you!

February 3, 2002

The past several days have been truly awesome! I had such a great time in Wisconsin for Experience State. I must say I was expecting some pretty cold and snowy conditions, but what I received was beautiful winter days filled with FFA members overflowing with excitement and enthusiasm. The experience started out at the Zimmerman's house for a nice home-cooked meal. Robin and I were greeted there by three Wisconsin FFA State Officers: Eric, Courtney, and Crystal. After a wonderful dinner and good conversation about the week, the night came to an end.



First on the agenda the following day was the Granton FFA Chapter visit. The members were awesome and had some snazzy shirts made, as you can see in the picture. The next stop was the National Farm Medicine visit. It was really exciting to see strong supporters of the FFA, and the amazing facilities focusing on farm safety. Stratford FFA's leadership class added some additional enthusiasm to our day. They role-played very nicely and I can maybe see some future actors coming from that chapter ... or maybe just some bright FFA talent participants! The day ending with the Section 7 Leadership workshop which showcased some very strong leaders for the future of the Wisconsin FFA. I had a great time and had the opportunity to experience my first "Pot-Luck!" The officers were really cool and I enjoyed the time I spent at the workshop! You can see in the picture that Crystal and Erik kept things interesting the entire evening!

Wednesday started off bright and early with a live radio interview on WDLB. I was

impressed once again with the support the local communities show the FFA. Our first school visit of the day was the Tri-County FFA. It was a lot of fun working with the young members and seeing excellent growth within the chapter. Robin and I also posed for a milk mustache picture with some chapter officers! My digital picture did not turn out for you to see. L Later that afternoon, Melissa, Crystal, Rebekah, Kory, Shane, and Courtney drove us to Madison and got to participate in Ag Day at the Capitol and visit with legislators who play a key role in the strength of the Wisconsin FFA! The evening ended with a visit with the UW Madison Collegiate FFA Chapter. It was really nice to relax and meet some great people involved in the program!

Thursday we meet the rest of the amazing Wisconsin FFA Officer team. Matt, Leslie, and Troy met Robin and me at the Menomonie High School. Upon arrival, the Menomonie FFA officers welcomed us. The first activity was a high school assembly with 1,157 students. It was so much fun, with activities ranging from Kiss-the-Pig contests to the high school male dance team. We also had the privilege of visiting the Menomonie Middle School. Robin and I ate lunch with the officers and later visited the school for some leadership workshops. Ms. Fisher is doing an amazing job and all the members were extraordinary. The middle school chapter officers: Jon, Tom, Cassie, Paige, Jessica, Toni, Jenna, Kenny, Bailey, Matt and Kate did an excellent job organizing the event and I am excited to wear my new shirt!

The last event of Experience State was the Section 1 Leadership Conference. Yet another successful event that really showed a bright future for the Wisconsin FFA. I enjoyed getting to know the members and spending the evening in Barron. Then, Leslie showed off her mad driving skills and trekked us all around – even in the snowstorm ... go Leslie! Finally, Robin and I were officially crowned with the Official Wisconsin Cheesehead!



It certainly was a great week filled with many adventures I will carry with me throughout the year. I want to send a special thank you to Ms. Zimmerman and Courtney for traveling with us all week and to all the chapters we visited. I had such a good time in Wisconsin and hope to visit again soon!

Now, it is off to Japan ...

January 27, 2002

"Courage is fear that has said its prayers." – Karl Barth, Swiss Theologian

Every time I visit Washington DC, I have an extra sense of pride that comes over me. I always think back in history and think how much courage it took our forefathers, soldiers, and many other leaders to stand up and dare to be different! Between Dr. Martin Luther King Day and the March of Life, this city was flowing with people expressing courage and standing up for what they believed in.

The week started off with some time to relax and catch up on work I put off while I was home for a few days. Then Robin and I brainstormed and developed programs for our "Experience State" adventure. I am really excited to have the honor of spending four days in Wisconsin before we head off to Japan.

Wednesday was a cultural experience as our team trained for our Japan trip. It was really awesome to get a glimpse of what it will be like. The sites, sounds, and culture all look pretty interesting and I am really looking forward to it. After some intro videos and looking over the agenda, we headed off to the Washington D.C. Children's Museum to view the Japanese exhibit. I was really impressed with how the museum was able to capture the culture so well and display many aspects that are important for visitors to understand. We even had the opportunity to partake in an authentic Japanese meal. I liked just about everything except the eel and seaweed. I guess if I am hungry enough in

Japan, I will get used to the food ... hehehe. J

The rest of the week was the National FFA Board of Directors meetings. I had such a great time meeting all of the board members and consultants. I had never been to the National FFA or the Team Ag Ed headquarters, so it was nice to see those as well. The meetings were filled with fun and excitement. Call me strange, but I really like meetings and debating all sorts of issues. The past few days have really been our time to represent the membership on whole new level. I was really proud of the focus and attention the board puts on the members as they work through every issue to be sure it is the best for our organization.

Courage has always been really important to me. This week has tested my courage in many ways, and has shown me the importance of standing up for what you believe in. As a parting thought, understand that courage is not the absence of fear, it is simply challenging that fear and allowing you to become even better!

January 20, 2002

"No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he gave!" – Calvin Coolidge, American President

This last week in Indianapolis has been great! It is really exciting for us to dive into our year in full force. This week we were presented with many hours of training and the remainder of our schedules. I cannot wait to visit all the amazing places around the country and serve this organization to the max!

I did manage to sneak away in the beginning of the week for a wonderful hunting trip. A few staffers here at the center and I drove to Kentucky for a weekend filled with good friends, good food, great hunting, and a little twist of the south! It was so relaxing and so much fun! I forgot how much I really missed being in nature until I was actually out there enjoying the Kentucky scenery!

My next adventure is going to be in our Nation's Capitol for the National FFA Board meetings and then to Wisconsin for experience state! Robin and I are very anxious to be in Wisconsin and get started! As a parting thought, remember this week's quote and always give selflessly and with your whole heart. Hope to see you soon!

January 13, 2002

"Leaders manage the dream. All leaders have the capacity to create a compelling vision, one that takes people to a new place, and then to translate that vision into reality." - Warren Bennis

What a powerful quote to start a journal that ends such a powerful week! That quote was taken from an email I received from Jennifer, an area 8 officer in Missouri. From start to finish I enjoyed finally getting to put all our training to work. I was amazed at the enthusiasm and love for the FFA that the Missouri FFA members portrayed in their words and actions. The Missouri Greenhand Motivational Conferences went so well and I gained a host of knowledge that will be crucial throughout the year.

The week began with a business and industry visit that went really well. I enjoyed meeting and learning more about such strong supporters of our organization. It seems as if the FFA family just keeps getting bigger and bigger, as I meet more people involved or who have been involved in this organization.

Our first conference started in Warrensburg, Missouri. It was the true test of our work. All of the preparation and training was over and it was time to perform. Our skit went great and the members either really thought it was funny or maybe just made us feel good by laughing! J My workshop went pretty well except for my tumble down the auditorium steps. Yeah, it was a classic moment that luckily no one saw. I walked into a pitch-black room I was supposed to present my workshop in, and as I was waving my hands across the walls to find a light switch, I found 8 steps first. It is okay ... you can laugh now that it is over!



The second stop was Paris. The area officers were full of energy and made us feel really



welcome. We had dinner at a small place in Mexico ... Mexico, Missouri that is. I love the names of these cities. I can say I was in Paris and Mexico all in the same night!

The next two stops were Rolla and Cape Girardeau. They were so much fun and I finally started to learn about the state a little more. We also got to see the REAL Olympic torch ... well okay, at least we think it was in the truck outside the restaurant we had lunch in. You can see our only proof in the picture,

plus the two guys driving the truck promised it was in there but I would like to think it was! We also got to fly around in the Missouri Highway Patrol airplane. It was so cool to ride in such a small plane. I even got to sit in the co-pilot seat and fly it! Well, maybe I didn't really fly the plane, but I had the seatbelt sign switch figured out pretty well!



Southern Missouri State University in Springfield was day 4 of our trip! We had three conferences there that all went really well. Our skit just kept getting funnier and all my workshops went well. I had a chance to meet some amazing members through the day, like the area officers, Carlos, Jennifer, Serena, Lacey, Scott, some members from the Couch FFA Chapter, all the people in my workshops, and so many others! Thank you to everyone for such a great experience! The same day we also had the chance to visit the Bass Pro Shops world headquarters! It was so cool and I could have spent days in that store. I did have a pretty scary

encounter with a brown bear though.

St. Joseph was our final stop. Yet another cool group that made Missouri that much better! I was amazed at the impeccable Official Dress. There were 658 Greenhand students all in awesome Official Dress. It warmed my heart to see that commitment and they should be very proud. Just like all the other stops, St. Joseph was a great group of Greenhand FFA members! Thank you to the area officers for helping and making it such a positive experience!

Through this last week I grew so much and hope that others will see the power of the FFA. Just as the opening quote states, I learned that you cannot just teach material; instead you have to instill a vision into others for them to grow and make their dreams become a reality. Go out and make that positive difference in the lives of other people. You never know when someone will take your words and plant seeds of their own!



January 6, 2002

Well, I am back in Indianapolis once again! It is good to get back to the center and start finalizing our plans for the Missouri Greenhand Conferences! It has been a very productive week and I am learning so much.

One of the very first opportunities we had was discussing National FFA Convention. It seemed really early to start talking about it, but there are SO many things to take



care of and work out. We were so excited about all the discussion and cannot wait until the ideas are implemented.

Developing our skits, speeches, and workshops was also a lot of fun. The officers and I had a blast developing our skit and cannot wait till we present it! We also finally got some snow here in Indianapolis and the center was white with winter cheer. The end of the week was simply some relaxing time to catch up with friends and family at home. Overall, it has

been a relaxing but productive week.

December 30, 2001

This past week at home was very well needed! It was so nice to be with all my family and friends for the holidays. Christmas is always such a great time of year, the cheer and joy is constantly in the air and everyone is together. My family had it a little rough this year because in the spring my cousin was killed in a car accident and this was the first Christmas without him. It was hard, but our family pulled together in the greatest time of need and counted our blessings for what we still had with us. It is amazing how much we take for granted sometimes and never really miss something until it is gone. It was difficult but we got through and had a great time together!

Santa was really good to me this year and one my favorite gifts was a digital camera. I really wanted a nice camera to capture all the wonderful memories throughout this year. I have used it already and cannot wait to use it during my travel. Be sure to look out for pictures next to future journals!!

Have a great new year!

December 23, 2001

Well, it was our final week of December training in Indianapolis. The feeling of leaving is bittersweet. I am really excited to be finished with training because that means we get to actually get started with the bulk of our year ... woo hoo!! However, I also realize that 1/6 of our year is already over and I will not get to chat with all the great people in the center nearly as much and our team is going to be separated soon with the duties of our year. I guess maybe I read into things a little too much and I should just not worry about all those things and just move on. I know this New Year is going to bring so many exciting and cool things that I probably will not even think of anything else!

A few highlights of the past week were pretty amazing. First we had an awesome time at the Small's for a wonderful dinner. They had each of our parents send down a small Christmas tradition and place them in our stockings we had made for their mantel. When we got there each one of shared with the team a tradition our families share. It was so amazing to see each of us grow closer as the Christmas spirit filled the room. I also had a great time flipping through Leslie Small's National Officer Scrapbook to get a glimpse of what is coming!

The second highlight was a fun-filled evening at the Indiana Pacer's Game. I had a great time and enjoyed the relaxing time with my team and training staff!

Friday night was also another exciting event when our team went to see "The Majestic!" It was filmed in Dane's hometown so we got to see beautiful California on the big screen as Dane made sure everyone in the theater knew where the movie was filmed ... hehehe! Afterwards we camped out and watched movies till morning.

Our last night was spent celebrating success! Our trainers treated us with a fabulous dinner and wonderful gifts. Each of them put in so much time and effort for our time together and showed each of us the true meaning caring and compassion. They are

simply amazing people that this organization has been blessed with!

Finally it was home to McDonald, Pennsylvania for the holidays! I still must stand out in the crowd somehow because I ALWAYS get pulled out of line for a security check at the airport!

December 16, 2001

"Never...Never...Never...give up!" - Winston Churchill

This week was yet another great training adventure! Throughout the week we focused on the upcoming year by developing our team's mission and vision. I enjoyed spending the time brainstorming and creating ideas with the other officers. Having several common interests, views, and passions was very heartwarming and I know this year will be filled with joy and excitement!!

Friday night we celebrated success with the FFA Christmas party. I had an absolute blast dancing and creating wonderful memories. I also participated in my first choir ... yep, the six of us sang four Christmas songs to the entire staff. I enjoyed using a talent that I never knew I had (although I still would never sing alone ... hehe). Barrett, Dane, and I also busted out our karaoke skills and sang "King of the Road." It was so much fun!

The weekend was a nice break from training and I spent most of it relaxing and shopping. Hope everyone is creating many holiday memories as well.

Keep smiling ... Christmas is right around the corner!

December 9, 2001

"People do not care how much you know until they know how much you care." - John C. Maxwell

This past week has been very hectic. It started off with BLAST OFF training by some amazing people! The state officers are in for real treat with BLAST OFF this year. It was filled with lots of fun and exciting fall décor to spice up team training. Then our team decided to celebrate our successful completion and relieve some stress by playing two hours of paintball! The six of us took over a huge indoor paintball facility and planned out our strategies to get one another. My favorite part was the final showdown between Amber and me in a one-on-one shoot-out. That girl is crazy with a paintball gun!

We also had a wonderful opportunity to get to know the staff better through a staff reception and a job shadowing day. I got to shadow the Information Technologies team and the Finance and Human Resources team. They were so much fun to work with and I enjoyed the time they spent with me.

On Thursday night Dane and I had the wonderful opportunity to visit the Whiteland FFA Chapter here in Indiana and had a blast! We got to play some games and did some swing dancing. I was excited to have the opportunity to meet all the great members and definitely wish them well!

The weekend was mainly work time for me to try and get caught up on my "To-Do" list.

We did get to sneak in a visit to Chuck E. Cheese's[®] for a fun team dinner. I know there will be a lot of first's for me throughout the next year but that was one I can now put on the list! I did not think I would like it since we were the oldest "kids" in there. However, it was a lot of fun and we saved all of our tickets we earned and gave them away to all the other little kids playing the games. It was so much fun and all worth it to see the smiles on their faces. It really brings this week's quote to life.

December 2, 2001

"Preparation makes for leadership, and leadership is service to man." - Dr. Douglas Southall Freeman

This first training week has been simply amazing. I felt Dr. Freeman's quote really touched on exactly what I am doing here in Indianapolis over the next few weeks. I am

learning and preparing for my year of service! Arriving here in Indianapolis was very special for me. I walked into the national FFA center for the first time and became mesmerized by its beauty and deep history. Everyone at the national FFA center is so awesome. I can say with complete confidence that the FFA has cornered the market on passionate, caring, and amazing employees! I have also been blessed with five other really special people who are going to be my support and teachers this next year. When I look back on this week I cannot help but look forward to the months to come. I am so excited and feel extremely honored to have the opportunity to serve the FFA. I simply cannot wait to see what happens next!

November 25, 2001

Leonard Ravenhill in "The Last Days Newsletter" tells about a group of tourists who were visiting a picturesque village. As they walked by an old man sitting beside a fence, one tourist asked in a patronizing way, "Were any great men born in this village?" The old man smiled and replied, "Nope, only babies."

"Leadership is developed, not discovered." - John C. Maxwell

The past month of my life has changed more than I could have ever hoped and dreamed. I truly thought running up on that stage at national convention after my name was announced was the single greatest moment in my entire life. The energy, excitement, and enthusiasm was simply amazing! However, over the past few weeks I have grown to realize it was not the final election announcement that represented the greatest significance. The greatest accomplishment lies within all the little goals and obstacles I have met along the way. Just as John C. Maxwell's story above explains, an elderly man taught a naïve tourist that no one is born a leader – it is the result of a multitude of work compiled over many years of success, obstacles, and mistakes. Everyone who becomes successful had to start somewhere! Yes, being elected a National FFA Officer was a true gift from God and is one of my greatest accomplishments, but I feel the very best is yet to come throughout the next year!

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The 2001-2002 National Officer Journals

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2001-2002 National FFA Eastern Region Vice President
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May 5, 2002

"People won't reach for the future until they have touched the past." - John C. Maxwell

This week at the New York State FFA Convention I had a blast! The convention was held outside Albany, New York, at a local high school. All the members were great and had a lot of enthusiasm. The convention really played true to the quote I chose for this week. The entire convention was based on a true patriotic theme that gave me chills several times. The state officers did an excellent job at reflection on the event of the past but encouraged their members to look to the future for brighter days and stand for who you are. It was a true blessing working with those 15 state officers and I learned so much from each of them. Congratulations on a good year, officers!

The first day of the convention was really awesome and I had a great chance to meet a lot of members and advisors. I also had the chance to ride a mechanical bull! I always wanted to ride one but never had the opportunity. I did not do too bad and stayed on for about 35 seconds. I kind of hurt myself and could not walk the same for the rest of the day, but it was worth it. Later that night the first session started and it was really cool! I enjoyed seeing the officers in action and the reflections program was very moving. Afterwards the evening came to a close and I had a chance to hang out with Valerie, Jess, Amber, Xaxia, Justin, Mark and Theresa a few of the New York Officers.

The following day at convention was another fun-filled adventure and this time I stayed off the mechanical bull! First thing on the agenda was my workshop. I had a really good turnout and enjoyed all the members who participated. Afterwards was the delegate business session where the new officers were elected. It was a very exciting time and different than most elections I have seen. I gave my keynote address at the evening session with the help of Christina from the Pioneer FFA chapter. When I was finished, all the officers ran out to hug me just as they did after each retiring address given by the line officers. That was really special! Thank you guys so much for making me feel like a true part of your team. That session also included a visit from the New York Governor, which was an experience in itself. Hehehe!



After the session came to a close it was time for the New York FFA Dance! Ginger drove Theresa and I to the dance which was another interesting experience ... let me just say that I will not be surprised to see Ginger qualify for Nascar, hehehe! Just joking Ginger! It was so



much fun, and I learned some new reggae dancing techniques thanks to the John Bowne FFA chapter!

The next morning I had to fly out early to head to College Station, Texas. I was excited about Texas, but did not want to leave. Thank you, everyone, for making my experience in New York an extra special one! You folks were great and I hope to make it back some day

soon! Please keep in touch!

When I arrived at College Station, Texas, I was met by lots of heat and humidity. Amber picked me up from the airport and we grabbed a quick something to eat and had a chance to catch up on all our convention experiences. Afterwards I met up with one of my dear friends, Britina Robinson (a past Pennsylvania FFA State Officer) and her really awesome friend Natalie. We went to dinner at Freebirds World Burrito, a college station classic, and then to a country dance club. I had such a blast catching up with Britina and learning how to Two-Step - Texas style! Thank you, Natalie, for having the patience to teach me, you are too sweet. All the people there were so nice, it was cool!

Well, now it is time for some serious NLCSO work. Have a great week everyone, and I cannot wait to get back on the road for conventions! Take care!

April 28, 2002

After many exciting journeys around the country, and even the world, it is always nice to come back to my home state and visit the people who made my time in the FFA extraordinary. This past week I had the opportunity to come back home and visit with a few local chapters and attend a few other activities on the Penn State Campus. It sure was nice to see everyone again and catch up on what was new. On Thursday, I was invited to the Penn State Agricultural Extension and Education Department (AEE) annual awards banquet, where the Collegiate FFA, Collegiate 4-H, and the Graduate Student Association give out their awards. Danielle, a Collegiate FFA member and really close friend whom I had not seen since I was elected, drove me to the banquet located in the Pennsylvania Furnace. And yes, that is an actual little town here in Pennsylvania. It is located right outside the Penn State campus and has traditional country scenery with beautiful mountains in the background. I truly enjoyed addressing such an important group of individuals that will play a key role in agricultural education. Now, since PSU and AEE are my alma mater, I may be a little biased but they are such a wonderful group of people! I also got to see Paul, Sharissa, Holly, and Becky (a few of the state officers from Pennsylvania) and enjoyed visiting with them. You folks really lifted my spirits and thank you so much for everything you do!



The next day I stayed at Penn State for a few other events in the morning and then enjoyed my afternoon with some good friends at PSU. I first visited Carolyn, whom I met at a summer agricultural program this past summer. She is such a sweet girl with a huge heart who lives and works on really nice vegetable farm outside of Pittsburgh. I really do hope to visit her farm someday this summer! She and I caught up what was new and exciting in our respective lives. It was great to see you, Carolyn! I then decided to go mountain biking at Shingletown Gap in the Tussey Mountains of Pennsylvania. It was a well-needed adventure and something I had not done since I was elected. Lance and Parveen are two really great friends I went with. You can see in the pictures that we had a blast! The ride was challenging for me since I was a little out of shape from not biking in six months. However, Lance and Parveen tore up the winding trails, difficult rock gardens, and long climbs. I loved every minute of the adventure though! Thanks, you two, for a great trip we will have to go again soon! That evening I also visited with

Diana and her roommate Hiroko. Those two girls sure do keep things alive on the Earth House floor and I sure missed seeing them. Good luck on your finals ... hehehe!

After returning home Saturday I was quickly put to work by my family. Our house is always pretty busy and there is never a dull moment. As soon as I walked in the door of our Pizza Shop, we were really busy and I had to help deliver some pizza for a little while. Then, I went to my house to say hello to my father and brother and was recruited for shoveling gravel and clay around some new buildings we are constructing before the heavy rains come. I loved working though, and it felt good to help out!

On Sunday my father and I went to pick up some lambs and hogs that we finish out each year. It was great to be back in the fields again working with some livestock and getting

ready for the growing season! Later that evening we had our traditional Sunday Italian feast as a family and relaxed. Now it is time to get back to my national officer duties and next week is going to be awesome! I am headed the New York State Convention and I can hardly wait for the time to arrive!

Have a great week everyone!

April 21, 2002

"Success requires the vision to see, the faith to believe, and the courage to do." - God's Little Instruction Book on Success

I arrived in Columbia, Missouri, on Tuesday this week with an excitement to begin the convention and start meeting all those FFA members who attend! When I arrived what I found was a true blessing. I did not know it at the time but I met 14 individuals with a true heart for service and such a strong focus on the heart of our organization ... our members! I felt the 2001-2002 Missouri FFA state officers

displayed the actions of this week's quote to a tee! They had the vision for the best state convention ever and such a strong faith in one another's ability to accomplish anything. They also had the courage to step outside the norm and try things never done before! You have truly served the Missouri FFA Association well! I also want to thank you each of you for making my stay in Missouri one I will never forget. Oh, I wanted to insert a quick picture of the Missouri FFA officer team's finest! Jason you are a truly unique and fun individual!



After preparing for convention on Tuesday evening and grabbing some dinner the officers invited me to their nightly reflections gathering. There I learned how special they really were and it was nice to feel part of the team for an evening. On Wednesday final convention preparations were prepared and everything was falling into place! The simple basketball arena turned into an exciting FFA convention hall that will honor all the accomplishments of the Missouri FFA members. That night the officers, state staff, a university representative, and I had dinner on the convention stage! It was one of the coolest dinners I ever had. Sitting there on the stage looking out to all those empty seats focusing on what was important and imaging all the people was breathtaking!



Finally, Thursday morning came and it was time for the convention to get started! All morning the nearly 10,000 that attend the Missouri FFA convention started to roll in and started competing in CDEs and filling the arena for the first general session that afternoon. I walked around for a little while before my workshops began that afternoon to start meeting some FFA members. I also got to talk with the new state officers before their final interviews. After a good morning of mingling, my workshops began and I had a blast. Thank you so much to all of my workshop participants for being such a good audience and taking an active part in all the events! Also thank you to my courtesy corps

members, you ladies were awesome!

When the workshops had finished, the first general session officially kicked off the convention with great speakers, community awards, and chapter recognition. Later that evening was the second general session. The officers presented a vespers program great humor, remixed FFA songs, and one powerful message about being and believing in who you are! Kudos to you officers! I also wanted to say that all the talent participants in every session were awesome! Missouri has some pretty talented FFA members! The session also awarded all those outstanding FFA members with over 500 proficiencies in 50 award areas. Way to go Missouri FFA!

Friday, the final day of convention was another action packed day! All morning and afternoon the members participated in judging CDEs and attending workshops. I also wanted to apologize for giving my second workshop in the wrong room, thank you to those who attended. I heard everyone was waiting for me to arrive. It was my fault for not paying attention to the signs, sorry! The final session that evening was my favorite one! Before the session I walked around meeting more chapters from Missouri and came upon one interesting one! As you can see from the picture they found their own way to be entertained in the pre-session. What you see there is 30 straws attached together for one long drink! Yeah, I guess

you had to be there! Anyway, the arena was packed! The chorus started off the session with a talented performance. Then I had a chance to address the convention with my keynote. I had so much fun and the crowd was great. I also want to thank Sarah from the McDonald Co. FFA chapter for helping me out on stage. You did great! Thank you everyone for an enjoyable speech! Afterwards was some more of that FFA talent and then installing the new officers. Finally the State Degree Ceremony awarded 618 members with their degree! Later that night when the convention was over the new and retired officers got together for a little "initiation" process and some final dancing by the MO FFA Sisters! I love you gals, you were so much fun!

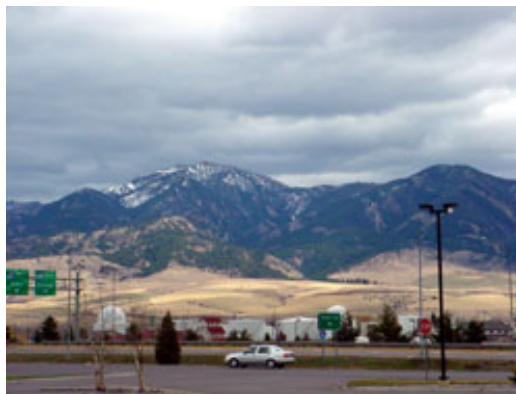
The next morning I had a chance to speak with the new 2002-2003 FFA state officers. I truly enjoyed talking to them and I believe the Missouri FFA Association is in for another great year! They are some pretty cool officers, good luck this year! Unfortunately, I had to fly out that afternoon and head back home for some in-state banquets. Missouri FFA - you were amazing and I was truly blessed to get to attend your convention! All the members I talked to were so nice and everyone made me feel at home! I hope to come back sometime soon! Take care, Missouri, and I will see you all at national convention! THANK YOU!

April 14, 2002

After spending a few days in Indianapolis at the national FFA center it was time to depart for the Montana State FFA Convention. My excitement level was very high! Ever since I was young I wanted to travel to Montana to see the Big Sky Country! Let me tell you - Big Sky it was. Upon arrival the welcoming committee, Dane Dugan and his sister Stephanie, picked me up. I wish I could have flown in during the day to see all the mountains but I got a chance to see that on the way out!



The first day full day of the convention was pretty awesome! Waking up and walking outside of my hotel in Bozeman to see all the mountains was a site I will not forget! The day began meeting lots of enthusiastic FFA members such as Kassie, Jermei, Elizabeth and Chris! In the afternoon was time for my first two workshops. I had a really great time and the Montana FFA members have so much energy and participated in everything! Thanks everyone for a great workshop experience! The most creative award goes to group 1 in the first workshop. Dannette, Emily, Josh, Casey, Loni and Walter certainly came up with a pretty abstract piece of artwork. You were awesome!



That night's session was jam packed with the exciting action of retiring addresses from Theresa Lemmon and Shaina Hofeldt, plus scholarship presentations and one amazing patriotic reflections! For the reflections, the state officers put on a skit and then dropped red, white, and blue balloons from the ceiling as a huge American flag drop on the side. It was really cool! Great job officers!

Friday was no exception to the fun. In the morning and early afternoon I was in my workshops once again. During the few breaks I did get to sneak into a few other cool activities such as the swing dancing workshop

and the Prepared Public Speaking finals. Throughout the rest of the afternoon I had the opportunity to meet more Montana FFA members and attend the State Degree Dinner. At the third general session that evening, we got to hear retiring addresses from Tyrele Schaff and Dustin Mielke, as well as cheer on all the amazing accomplishments of the Montana FFA members! In the middle was also the keynote by Andrea Lohr. She had such a strong message to deliver to the members. I even got to participate in a small skit on stage! After the session concluded, I had a chance to chat with the state officer candidates in the Hot Box. I really enjoyed getting to know them and they were all really wonderful individuals to talk to! Thanks you guys for all your hard work and remember ... your time has only just begun! The evening ended with the hip hoppin' FFA Dance. You just have to love the state FFA convention dances! It took a little while for some people to recognize me out of official dress but I did have a great time learning how those Montana people dance.

On Saturday, the final day of the convention, the morning session was pretty exciting! Seth

Broesder and Logan Braaten gave their retiring addresses and the new Montana FFA state officers were announced! I truly do love the officer announcements! Let me tell you ... they did as well! After a short break was the final convention session where Katy Sparks and Austin Mapston gave their addresses and the new officers were installed. I really hated to see the session end and the convention to come to a close. That afternoon I enjoyed some time at the retiring officer gathering and said goodbye. You know, one of the bad things about being a national officer is once you just get settled in you have to fly back out L.

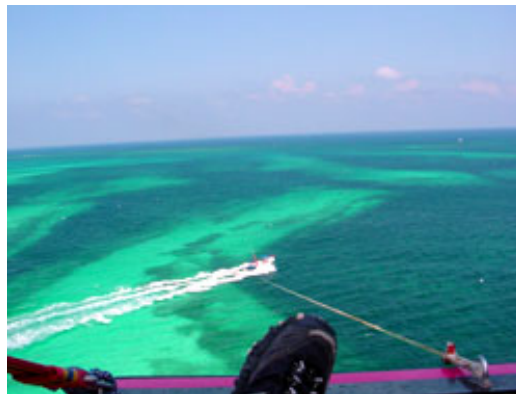
The next morning, I took a short walk out to the foothills of some of the close mountains to take a few more pictures of the Montana landscape. Thank you to all of the Montana FFA Association for a wonderful convention experience. I hope to stay in touch with many of you! You guys sure do know how to have a convention up there in Big Sky Country! Also, thank you for making this Pennsylvanian feel right at home!



April 7, 2002

This week started out at home once again in good ol' McDonald, Pennsylvania! It was a chance to gear up for the next several events I am going to attend. Some close events are the Montana State FFA Convention, Missouri State FFA Convention, and the New York State FFA Convention. I am really pumped about going to all three!

On Thursday I fly to Cancun, Mexico to attend a Westfalia-Surge International Dealers meeting. I had such a great time and had the opportunity to spread the word of FFA to many from all over the country and world!



I even had an afternoon to myself to hit the beach! I have always wanted to go parasailing and once I got to the beach I could not pass it up! You can see in the picture ... it was well worth it! I also rented a Jet Ski for a little while to cruise the Caribbean at high speeds ... hehehe! The trip was a lot of fun!

Flying on the way back to Mexico City I looked out the window of my plane and captured some pictures of the volcanoes Popocateptl and Ixtaccihvatl. They were awesome!

Now it is off to Indianapolis for some good wholesome NLCSO training! I am looking forward to seeing everyone at the conventions!

March 31, 2002

"The universe is full of magical things, patiently waiting for our wits to grow sharper." - Eden Philpotts

As I was reading through a small quote book that was given to me by Abbie, I came across this quote and really found such power in the message. The environment in which each of us lives is certainly full of "magical" things that provide us with so many opportunities. Whether we are intelligent enough to see them or not is another story. Now, the intelligence I am speaking of does not come from a book or classroom. You cannot take a test to find out if you "qualify." This type of intelligence comes from taking time out of your busy life and finding some simplicity. The overwhelming array of options in the busy lifestyles we lead as young people can convolute our thinking and force us to pass right over the magic in everyday life. Why rush through something so precious and exciting?

I have really enjoyed this past week at home. It has really provided me the energy to continue on my journey as a national FFA officer. I had a really good chance to catch up on some work, enjoy the company of my family, and start to bring my "magic" back in focus. Since I love the outdoors so much and I was blessed with perfect weather many of the days at home, I decided to spend a lot of time sitting outside or in the woods on my farm. I

reflected on my past several months and really took time out of my life to appreciate what God has granted me, and the exciting times that lie ahead. I also had a wonderful Easter Sunday and enjoyed some traditional Italian cuisine my family makes every year!

Take time out for a few moments in your life and define your "magic!" It will really allow you to refocus and keep that positive attitude which makes life so much simpler and easier to deal with. No, it will not solve everything, but it sure will fuel your fire to take on the challenges and obstacles that lie ahead.

Have a great week! Smile! J

March 24, 2002

Well, my very first state FFA convention finally arrived! I have been waiting for convention season to start since the day I was elected. My flights to Utah were not too bad at all. As always, I enjoyed the gorgeous scenery from the plane. I flew a rather small plane from Salt Lake City to the HUGE airport of Cedar City, Utah, located in the southwestern part of the state. I arrived in the one and only gate they had to meet Mr. Evans, who greeted me with a sign made by the state officer girls: Abby, Sara, Tiffany, and Shirley. I had such a great time my first day at their convention. The weather was warm, the mountains were amazing and the people were so nice! After some practices and setting up the stage we all went out to dinner with the visiting state officers. It was a lot of fun to get to know everyone and I was very excited to start the next day when all the members were due to arrive!

Wow, the first day of the Utah State FFA Convention was really awesome! The excitement for



FFA just filled the air. My day started off with a New Mexico luxury ride with Dal and Quentin to the convention hall in Quentin's all-wheel drive Corolla! You guys are a blast! It was a true treat in itself! After arriving and setting up my workshop room, the members started rolling in! I had an opportunity to chat a little with a few chapters such as Delta, Dixie, North Summit, Paxton and a few others. After getting lost for a little while in the convention center I finally made my way back and started some workshops. They were so much fun and I had a chance to really get to know some members. I could not have done it without the help of my courtesy corps members. Thanks, Roxy and Jeremy! I grabbed a quick dinner

and headed to watch the finals of a Career Development Event. I had the opportunity to sit in on the Creed Speaking finals, which was awesome! Shayla from the Dixie FFA chapter placed first and did an amazing job. Good luck at Nationals, Shayla! I wish I could have seen more events but I simply did not have the time. All the creed speakers did so well delivering the foundation piece of our organization. I know I got chills from many of them just sitting in the back. You could feel the energy and passion each contestant had while saying the creed. Congrats to all the creed winners!

It was finally time for the evening session to begin and I was anxious to see the state officers in action. The session was filled with enthusiastic members. I also enjoyed the state officer candidate questioning. I have never seen anything quite like it before. They had all the state officer candidates line up on stage and introduce themselves. However, after the introductions, they were each asked a question that had to be answered on stage. The questions were different for each person and were so bizarre. One question I can remember was, "If you could be any cartoon character who would it be and explain?" I was mighty impressed with many of their answers. Reflections came at the end of the session, where the state officers did a "Not So Wild West" skit that was GREAT! They played and fit the parts so well. Everyone loved it!

The rest of the night I spent with the Arizona state officer guys: Kevin, Bill, Bryan, and Danny. We chatted a little while during a movie and some pizza. They were a lot of fun to hang out with! Thanks for the pizza, gentlemen! Man, those visiting state officers sure did take good care of me.

The next day was another great time at the convention. It started out with an action packed

session. Shirley gave her really cool retiring address about "dreams" and Andrew McCrea gave a keynote. We also enjoyed some great talent and awarded FFA members with some outstanding achievements. After the session I got a chance to see all the chapter displays before I headed to the State Degree luncheon. The luncheon was held in a beautiful room on the Southern Utah University Campus. Some extremely vocally talented FFA members entertained us while we ate. (You girls need to sign up for the National FFA talent show!) I was honored with the opportunity to bring some remarks and congratulations to the degree recipients. Codi, from New Mexico, also shared a few remarks. She talked a little about the trip from New Mexico to Utah and gave the degree winners some excellent words of encouragement! About mid-afternoon it was finally time for the session where I gave my keynote. I was pretty excited about it and waited anxiously for my first-ever keynote address at an FFA convention. I must say I did get a little nervous before I got on stage, but after I was up there the audience was great and I had the best time. Brandon, from the Copper Hills FFA chapter, helped me out on stage for my last point. He was so awesome and played as a shining example for other FFA members to follow. I was so proud of his courage and enthusiasm. Thank you, Brandon! I am excited about giving more at the upcoming conventions. I have some new ideas that I am going to test out next time! Abby and Jeffery gave their retiring addresses at that session as well. They did such an amazing job and have really key messages to tell about finding true happiness and believing in yourself. I also had the privilege of shaking the hands of all the Utah State FFA degree recipients during that session.



My dinner plans were extra special for the evening. Utah FFA has an "Adopt a National FFA Officer" program during their convention, where a chapter takes the national officer out to dinner. I was lucky enough to have the Dixie FFA Chapter take me out to dinner. We had such a blast and I even got to see the entrance to Bryce Canyons. The steak house was really good and overlooked a collection of mountains that was magnificent! During our dinner I learned so much about the Utah FFA and will always remember the laughs, the questions and the members! A special thanks goes out to the Dixie FFA for spending the evening with me. You guys are the best! We managed to make it back just in time for the evening session where the Utah FFA was honored with the outstanding retiring addresses of Tiffany and Steven, a special tribute to September 11th, and proficiency awards to Utah FFA members. That evening was concluded with a really fun dance! I had the best time dancing and meeting FFA members from all over the state. I tell you what ... those Utah people really know how to dance and have a good time!

The final general session on the last morning of the convention was exciting and emotional at the same time. It started with some more awesome talent and the state start announcements. Then Sara delivered her retiring address. I enjoyed listening to her speech talking about the "Roads Less Traveled." Finally it was time to announce the 2002-2003 Utah State FFA officers. It was truly an emotional time for so many. It brought me back to my convention when I was sitting there waiting for the names to be called. It has to be one of the most exciting times we have in the FFA. Congratulations to the new officers, and I look forward to working with you at NLC SO!

Well, the convention came to a close and everyone gave his or her last goodbyes. I did get a chance to grab a quick picture with the new celebrities before they left though.

The Utah State FFA convention was truly a remarkable time in my year of service. To see the FFA members in action and doing what they love is really cool. So many memories come from the state conventions. I hope everyone had a wonderful state FFA convention and I wish you all the best at the 75th National FFA Convention! I also wanted to thank Katy and Holly (from Arizona) for driving me around everywhere during the convention. I could not have made it through without you. It was really nice getting to meet you two. I know Arizona is proud to have you as officers!

THANKS UTAH FFA!!!

March 17, 2002

"No person was ever honored for what he received. Honor has been the reward for what he

gave." - Calvin Coolidge, American President

The second week of business and industry tours has come to an end. This week was pretty hectic traveling in three different states. I flew to Nashville, Tennessee, to start off the week. I got in a night early and had a chance to get everything ready for the week. Monday I had the privilege of joining Kim Newsom, the Tennessee State President, for some of the meetings. Since Barrett was in Massachusetts for their state convention, it was really nice to have another person to work with. She was awesome and did so well representing and presenting the FFA to business leaders. Go Kim!

Tuesday and Wednesday was spent in Atlanta, Georgia where we meet with many companies around the city. The weather was so nice in Georgia! The foundation staff also really makes things interesting. They are a whole lot of fun to work with on these visits. We shared some great times!

On Thursday and Friday we were in Raleigh/Durham, North Carolina where I finally had my B&I partner back ... Barrett! I sure missed him in the beginning of the week. We had a good chance to catch up and share our experiences. He could not stop talking about how awesome the Massachusetts State Convention was! I was also so impressed with the beautiful state of North Carolina. Everywhere we went was really nice and there were so many awesome nature scenes.

The week ended with a trip into Washington D.C. to prepare for National Agriculture Week and some legislative visits. We had the weekend free which was really nice to get some great work done! I also had a chance to touch base with some of my really good friends back at good ol' Penn State! J After being away from school since November, I really started to miss them and chatting for a little while was what I needed to reconnect.

I am getting really excited to head out to Utah for my first state convention! It is going to be so much fun and it is what I have been waiting for since the December training. Well, it is time once again for me to quit procrastinating and get back to work. Have a great week everyone!

March 10, 2002

"The trouble with life in the fast lane is that you get to the other end in an awful hurry." - John Jensen

I really feel this quote fits my year as a national FFA officer. It seemed like only yesterday I ran across that stage and began a new chapter in my life. One-third of our year is complete and now we are stepping into a whole new part of our year. The great part is this component is pretty exciting. I cannot wait to get out to all the states for conventions, conferences, and other visits. I have been waiting for this part forever! However, before we can begin to dive head first into the next two-thirds of our year we have to take some time out and really begin to focus and prepare.

This week has been spent in Michigan at the Edward Lowe Foundation. It is located in Southern Michigan and is in a really remote place. Upon arrival it snowed about 12 -16 inches, which made it a perfect retreat atmosphere. We stayed in the coolest little train



boxcars that are gorgeous inside. Here was the guy's boxcar. This week we really got a chance to catch up on all our work and get ready for the upcoming months. The people here are SO nice and the hospitality is second to none!

Preparing for NLSCO was another big part of our time here. Our team is absolutely thrilled about the new curriculum and cannot wait to get out and share it with all the new officers. Each night we also spent some quality reflection time, sharing our thoughts and feelings as a team. It was sad to realize our

days of traveling together are running thin. From here on out we will either be traveling in pairs or alone, except for a few special events.

However, now that the week is over, I am so excited to get out and start the convention season tour. The states I will be going to for their conventions are Utah, Montana, Missouri, New York, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania. So, if you know you are going to be at any of those conventions, [drop me an email](#). I would love to hear from you and I cannot wait to see you there!

March 3, 2002

The past few days have been really motivating to me in many ways. This week began our annual business and industry tour. We, as the national FFA officer team, traveled for several days in many locations to visit business and industries that provide the support for the National FFA Organization. It really began to open my eyes to the amazing reputation and support this organization has gained over the years. Not only do the industry folks get so excited about the FFA, but they also many times hold it as a passion and priority for the company. The even more surprising factor is that many people we visit have never been FFA members and still take such a strong hold to the organization and want to be a part of it! I can assure you that our organization has a solid foundation because of the amazing people we have on both our sponsor's board and in the business world!

During this week, the six of us officers paired together and split up to visit different regions of the country. I had the honor and privilege of working with Barrett as we visited lots of places along the northeast coast. We had so much fun together and got to see some beautiful countryside. One of the many highlights of the adventure was New York City. We got to see Time Square, Rockefeller Center, St. Patrick's Cathedral, Central Park, and Phantom of the Opera on Broadway. The picture is in Time Square! We also had a chance to visit Ground Zero. It was very different than I ever imagined. The sites of the streets lined with memorabilia and the sounds of all the construction made it very real. It is one large gap in the financial district of New York City that truly changes everything.



On a more positive note, I am now off to Michigan for our March retreat!

February 24, 2002

"Learning to do, Doing to Learn, Earning to Live, and Living to Serve." – National FFA Organization Motto

I decided to use our motto for a quote this week because it was National FFA Week! Our motto is an extraordinary example of true service and the purpose of our organization.

I had the amazing opportunity to spend my FFA Week in the Hospitality State of Mississippi! That name really held true and I enjoyed every moment I spent there! Flying there was a little rough with a few canceled flights and rerouting but I finally made it. Brad Lowery, one of the state officers, picked me up at the airport and we headed to Ms. Amy's house. There I



met Ms. Amy and Crystal, the state sentinel. We stayed up and talked for quite some time, and I was briefed on the fun-filled week to come!

The next day I had the privilege of joining two of the other officers, Brian Dunn and good ol' David Busby! The five of us, and Ms. Amy, headed out for some chapter visits. We visited the Edinburg and Carthage FFA chapters in the morning and had a lot of fun with the members! For lunch we joined the Forest-Scott FFA Officers at a really good Mexican restaurant in the area. It was so nice to relax and hang out with the officers. They also gave me a really nice FFA birdhouse to remember them by. Later that night we met up with Christy, the state vice president, and the junior officers for a dinner and practice for the next day's activities at the hotel.

Day three of National FFA Week was a pretty exciting one as well. We started off bright and early with a Legislative breakfast run by the junior state officers. They did an amazing job and impressed the over 300 people in

attendance. The Mississippi FFA had a huge amount of Legislative support that carried throughout the room. The state officers did a Patriotic Salute to the FFA and September 11th that really moved the room into an attitude of reflection. They did such a great job! I also announced at the breakfast that I had never eaten catfish, turnip greens or grits, and I think everyone in that room was bound and determined to get me to try some. Later in the day we visited the House of Representatives and the Senate for a few presentations and saw even more support for the FFA! The evening was very relaxing as we all hung out at the Mississippi FFA Center. It is such a gorgeous facility that was very impressive! We even managed to catch a few photos in the woods!

That night we ate dinner at the Roadhouse where they always wish you a happy birthday with a good southern YEE HAW!! After dinner I had a shoe-flinging contest and almost took out a few cars. I know, it was a little strange but a lot of fun! I even had the privilege of riding with David and listened to some "Busby" music. You will have to ask him about the selections. Before bed I got to hang out and watch the stars, and simply reflect on our day and realize how lucky I was to be in Mississippi and have the opportunity to serve this organization. Christy also expressed how great it was to serve and always have the members at heart!

The last day in Mississippi was fun as well! We went to two different federation contests where I met some great people and saw the Mississippi FFA members in action at their CDE's. In the picture are Jonni and Angela. They were a blast and made me smile the whole time!



Then, after being promised the whole time in Mississippi, I finally ate catfish for the first time at Papa's Place! It was really good! Then, to get the full catfish experience I even had to wear the restaurant's official mascot ... the picture says the rest!

I was really sad that my time in Mississippi was coming to an end. Everyone was so nice and caring. National FFA Week was one of the greatest experiences I have had as a National Officer. Thank you, Ms. Amy, the Mississippi state officers, and the entire Mississippi FFA, for a great week!

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The 2001-2002 National Officer Journals

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2001-2002

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Where I'll be this week:

75th National FFA Convention

October 20, 2002

Well, I have been slacking a little on my journal duties so I am sorry about that...hehehe The past few weeks have been filled with so many mixed thoughts and emotions. Wow, what can I say but my time in office is coming to a fast close. The last few events have been so exciting. After several days at home, to get all my convention stuff in order, I headed out to Quincy, Illinois for the John Wood Community College Leadership Conference. I spent two days there and the students were so wonderful. I had the best time giving my speech and presenting a few workshops. I meet some awesome people who were the TLC's and did a tremendous job conducting the small groups and creating energy in the conference. I also really enjoyed hanging out with a few FFA officers from Missouri, Crystal Matthews and Lee Megruduer, and two FFA officers from Illinois, Jay Kelley and Rebecca Yandell. I had an absolute BLAST hanging out with you four and thank you so much for making my experience so very special. I will always remember the stop at the mini-golf course and the driving adventures in the Corn Van!! You all rock and I cannot wait to see you at convention!

After my time in Ill., I headed down to Jacksonville, Fla., to hang out on the beach and memorize scripts. It was such a cool time to have some time to get away and work. Also, Barrett tried to teach me how to surf...well the key word there is "tried." I was able to get up on the board once or twice but fell pretty quickly. During our time out there in the water we did get to see dolphins and even a shark...yes, I was terrified when I saw the shark!! After some great time on the beach, we headed to Gainesville, Fla., home of the Florida Gators where we spent the evening watching the football game. It was so cool to be on campus and meet so many of Barrett's friends and see some old friends that I knew from FFA. I must say thank you to Chris Vitelli and Marshall Baker for letting me stay in their home for the evening. Also, I want to say thank you to Jodi Rupell for being just a wonderful person!! It was also very cool to have the opportunity to attend Chris's Church with Britt, Emily, Amber and Barrett. What an amazing morning spent with God and great friends. It was really nice to meet you Emily!!

After church Amber, Barrett, and I headed to Plant City, Fla., home of the Famous... Barrett Keene – National FFA Southern Region Vice President...hehehe! It was a blessing to see B's home and spend time with his awesome family! Thank you Mr. and Mrs. Keene for your wonderful hospitality, love, southern cooking, and time! It was so nice to be at a home away

from home!

The next evening we had to head back to Indianapolis for a sponsor presentation the next day. It was my very last FFA event, besides national convention of course, as a national officer, so I was a little sad to be finished. The past several days have been spent in Indiana practicing with my team for the big show! It sure is exciting to see everything come together! Wow...it is the 75th National FFA Convention in just a few weeks...WOO HOO!!! Cannot wait to see you all there!

September 22, 2002

Yep, another week of convention planning had come to an end. You know what that means... national convention is that much closer! It sure is exciting to see all the pieces fall into place for one amazing show. This week was filled with script work, session planning, kick off planning, retiring address work and finalizing our year. It still has not quite sunk in yet that I will be one of the officers at national convention. I have always gone to see the sessions not conduct the sessions! I am sure it will hit soon enough...hehehe.

Sunday I had the opportunity to head down to the Indiana FFA Center for a banquet. It was really exciting to see all the state officers again and also to meet some new members! Thanks for a great time and thank you for the grand tour ladies!!! Have a wonderful week!

September 15

It sure has been an eventful few weeks but certainly rewarding. All this week Robin and I had the opportunity to do another week of sponsor visits. They were awesome. To see the support our organization has from the industry we serve is amazing. Not to mention, working with the Foundation is fun as well! We started in New York City on Monday, and continued our visits into Tuesday. Also, if you just so happened to be watching the Today show on the morning of September 10 then you would have seen Robin and I waving in the background! It was really fun to be a part of that experience. NYC was really in such an awesome state of patriotism and pride...it was refreshing! That evening we flew down to Washington D.C. for more visits the next day. We spent almost all of September 11 in our Nation's Capitol. The pride, commitment, and honor that were displayed in that city were breathtaking. I have always loved Washington but it sure was extra special on that day. God Bless America! The week ended with our final visits in the beautiful state of North Carolina.

The weekend was another adventure up to the Eastern States Exposition or my favorite abbreviation...The Big E! The New England State fair has an FFA day where FFA members from all the Eastern Region States come to participate in many Career Development Events. It was such a good time to see some old friends and make new ones. Between the Stars Luncheon, Stars Award Ceremony in the Circus Tent (Yes, there was Circus music and everything), and the Banquets I was kept on my toes. Oh yeah, the FFA Parade was also a blast...I just had to be sure I was always in line or else. I have to send a special thanks to Lee McMillan from Connecticut for saving me from the Airport and to the Twin Valley FFA crew from making sure I was always where I needed to be. Thank you to everyone at the Big E for adding another amazing milestone to my National Officer year. I LOVE YOU GUYS! Have a great week.

August 24

"The most wasted of all days is that on which one has not laughed." -Derived from Proverbs 15:13

The following quote is one in which I have always cherished and believed in with my whole heart. Laughter can always brighten a day and make others around you feel the same way. It is contagious and necessary and it is something that has occurred a lot in the past month. After the State Presidents' Conference our team went on fall retreat in southeastern Ohio. What a cool few days we had in a few small cabins placed in the woods. That week was a time to reconnect with each other and talk about our end of year plans. It truly was a realization of just how far we came and how close our time is quickly ending. With evening devotionals, we grew closer as a team, if that was at all possible. It was a time where we talked together, laughed together, and even shed a few tears together.

Between brainstorming for convention, catching up on all our backed up work and developing our post year plans we managed to still have some fun. The first activity was Barn Dancing!! Oh yes, after much convincing Barrett and I managed to navigate our way to a small-secluded dance barn in the woods about 110 miles from our cabin. Actually, it should have taken us 45 minutes to get there but hey, it was dark and we may have gotten turned around a little bit

not to mention we were running a little low on fuel. It only took us two and a half hours instead! Let me tell you once we saw that Uncle Buck's Dance Barn sign there was some serious celebration in the van. When we finally arrived, there was a live bluegrass band playing and a few other sitting around the dance floor listening. Of course they were only sitting until we decided to get up and start dancing. Did any of us know how to dance to bluegrass...NOPE...but that was the best part! After a few songs, we had the whole place up there dancing. It was a blast!

The next adventure a few days later was rock climbing and rappelling!! Woo Hoo! This activity was right up my alley and was very excited to find a place to go. After telling the group about this adventure, Amber, Barrett, Robin and I loaded up in our trusty van and headed for the rocks. What an awesome experience to share with my teammates. We rappelled of a 70-foot cliff and a 90-foot cliff. We also climbed a cave crack that was about 60 feet. The rock and woods were gorgeous and it was a good day to be in nature! After the retreat, we came back to the FFA center for our convention-planning week. That Sunday before we started our week Dane, Robin and I went to the Indiana State Fair. When we arrived we of course went straight the Indiana FFA building. It is such a cool place! We saw all the Indiana State Officers, District Officers and some Indiana FFA members. Amanda even gave me the personal tour of the place. Thanks Amanda. Afterward, we headed back to the center to finish up our work.

The next week was convention planning. What a cool time of year to see all the pieces of convention start to come together. It is going to be such an awesome 75th convention! Not that we are bias or anything...hehehe. Right now, I am at home for the longest time since I was elected. It is nice to finally be at home for a little bit and work at my own pace. It sure was a needed few weeks of laughter and good work time. Always remember to laugh often throughout your day and watch how it changes the attitudes of the people around you. Have a great school year.

July 28

State Presidents' Conference

Wow, what a true and honest blessing it was to work with such amazing leaders in our organization. This past week in Washington D.C. at the State Presidents' Conference was truly a one-of-a-kind experience that I will cherish forever. As the six of us planned and prepared for the week, many thoughts were running through my mind. Thoughts of excitement, energy and anxiety. I was excited that I would see many of the officers again that I have meet throughout this year. I was filled with energy to kick off this phenomenal experience. The anxiety came from simply knowing the power behind the gathering of the great leaders in the FFA from 51 associations. The only other time that happens is at the National FFA Convention. I was also a little worried about how the officers were going to like it. What will they think? Are they going to learn and accept the new delegate process?

Well, let me tell you, all those thoughts and feelings were there all week long except for the worrying. As soon as the officer began to arrive, the roller coaster of SPC began. The attitude of the group was so cool and their willingness to learn rocked! Thank you officers for bringing your best to the 2002 State Presidents' Conference.

The conference began with our officer kick off. It was a wonderful display of "Scenes of America!" Our theme for the conference this year was "Lighting the Way." We had the best time making up those skits and setting the tone for the week. After dinner, we headed to the Capitol for the first reflections. On the lawn in front of the Capitol building we overlooked the beautiful and patriotic display of the city and talked about our day..."The Power of One!" Ending it with the singing of "God Bless America!"

The next day was a new focus with the same power, "Sparking Hope!" As the officers visited the USDE, they had the opportunity to ask important questions to prestigious education officials. This sparked hope for the future of agricultural education. Afterward we attended the SPC Congressional Luncheon where congressmen from around the nation gathered to talk to the leaders of FFA to fully understand the true hope our organization sparks every day! That evening we took a breathtaking night tour of the city and finished at Iwo Jima for reflections. Those six soldiers at Iwo Jima were the perfect example of the ultimate sacrifice for freedom and individuals who risked their lives to spark the hope of America during a time of war.

Thursday's theme, "Illumination," focused on how important it is to illuminate the FFA and he potential we all possess. The day kicked off with a pretty unique, humbling and honorable event. The President of the United States, George W. Bush, addressed the SPC participants with such care in his heart and sincerity in his words. The only word to describe it is

"Awesome!" What a great example of someone who will always be sure that America and American agriculture is illuminated! The next adventure was lunch at Union Station and then to Arlington National Cemetery for a wreath laying ceremony at the Tomb of Unknown Soldiers. Laying the wreath was a very special time at SPC. It was in honor of all the men and women who died so America can be free and a true illumination of the world. It sure was a powerful morning and afternoon! That evening we kicked off the new delegate process and all the officers decided which topics will be discussed at national convention and how our organization will be governed for the future. They all did such a great job and represented the FFA so well. Thank you for an amazing process, officers!

Friday was yet another action packed day of adventure. Represented by the title "A Timeless Beacon," we began the day with a visit to the USDA. There the officers had a chance to tour and understand many of the departments of the USDA and see how it ensures that American agriculture will always remain the "Timeless Beacon" of our nations heritage. That afternoon we had the opportunity of listening to an electrifying presentation by Dr. Rick Rigsby! He was such an awesome speaker and really motivated and challenged the officers to always live with true character and "Make an Impact!" Dr. Rigsby will also be featured at the 75th National FFA Convention this year. The evening ended with a dinner cruise on the Potomac. What a great time. The evening was filled with good food, lots of dancing, karaoke and good times! That evening, Reflections was on the top of the boat overlooking the city.

Saturday, the final day of the conference, was a time to relax and enjoy the company of the group. In the morning and early afternoon we all had the opportunity to do a little sightseeing of the city. I hung out with a group of officers and we toured the American History Museum and the Holocaust Museum. Thanks for a wonderful tour you guys!! Later in the day we headed out to Burke Lake Park for a Bar-B-Q and a FFA Carnival. It was a blast as we all tried to earn the most tickets. I also had the pleasure of being a National Officer target of wet muddy sponges! Oh yes, the National Officers placed our heads through a lovely decorated sheet as officers threw sponges at us. I had to wash my hair like three times when I got back to get all the mud out. After the carnival we played the ultimate relay race where a team of ten had to chew bubble gum, eat 10 saltine crackers, tie a cherry steam with their tongue, recite the FFA Creed, do 30 yards of cartwheels, chug a bottle of tonic water, spin in 30 circles before running, and crab crawling to the finish line. Yep, it was a blast! Congrats to group # 8 for the win! Upon returning to the hotel we closed out the day theme "A Craklin' Corduroy Campfire" with our reflections and conference wrap-up. Then we just hung out until early hours of the morning talking and saying good-bye.

I am not sure how to sum up such a breathtaking week of enthusiasm, learning and leadership. All the officers from all 51 associations were simply amazing. I want to send a special thank you to all the delegate coordinators for all your help and support. To my National Officer team...you are the best friends and teammates anyone could ask for! I know this past week I have made some true and special friendships. I hope we can stay in touch and continue to build our relationships. I will remember and cherish this conference for the rest of my life! Always remember to serve this year with true integrity, character and passion. Continue to "Light the Way" for our FFA members!

July 14, 2002

Oklahoma FFA Leadership Camp

After flying into the Tulsa International Airport I was greeted by Grandma Dean and Lori. They were both so nice and made me immediately feel at home! After getting my luggage we headed off to the camp. Upon arrival to camp I received my undercover assignment. I was Elio from the Slapout FFA Chapter in the panhandle of Oklahoma. I joined one of the small groups and completed all the activities. As the evening went on, I think people started to figure out I was a National FFA Officer. I did look a lot older than most of the campers and I did talk a little different than most. Some of the first to figure it out were a few members I was standing in line with to go to the session. Cale, Jennifer, Chelsey, Gary, Tuff, Meghan, Michael, Cameron and Becky, thanks for not letting the secret out! I had a blast at the general session that evening and was interested in all the traditions of the Oklahoma FFA. Everyone was so enthusiastic and ready to have fun. It was awesome! After the small group leader (SGLs) and state officer meeting that evening I got to know the SGLs and the officers a little better by playing an intense game of "Cork" in the pool. It was so much fun and everyone managed to walk away unharmed!

The next morning I presented my workshop to the group and no one lost the enthusiasm from the day before. Oklahoma FFA ROCKS! After the workshop, we broke out into the small groups to prepare for the water Olympics that afternoon. It was so much fun joining a group and playing the different events. Later in the afternoon I played sand volleyball and went for a swim. The camp has a really cool swimming pool with a water slide and everything! After dinner we had a general session beginning with the ever-famous Hot Spots and focused on Mind Over Matter! The vespers program by the state officers finished the evening and it was

time for bed.

Day three began with the flag raising and then the ropes course. It was so much fun traveling to the groups and participating in the events with the members. That afternoon we had some recreation time where I hung out at the pool and participated in the newest of pool adventure games...not sure what it was called but...they threw me in the air and I landed on my back... very interesting! I guess you just had to be there! I also got to hang out with Becky from the Morris FFA Chapter. She was really nice and I truly enjoyed getting to know her. That evening was the camp banquet. I felt really dumb at the banquet because I left the room when they announced the special guests for the banquet. Guess whose name was called during that time...yep, me! It was quite embarrassing. The breakout sessions that evening were really cool. We talked about the role models you had in your life. I listened to so many touching stories and the SGLs did an excellent job facilitating the groups. I remember talking to Tracy (one of the state officers who is totally awesome) on the way back to the main building and she was so happy with her group and how they supported and respected everyone! Reflections and vespers ended the evening. Since it was the last night I stayed up for a while with all the SGLs ? and had the absolute best time. We played the funniest game of Chubby Bunny and then went out to a dock in the woods for a while. Thank you everyone for a great memory to add to my national officer year! You SGLs are the best!

The final morning, I was sad to have to leave before it was over. I would like to send a special thank you to the state officers for making me feel like a true part of your team. Your team is awesome and you all did so well. Oklahoma is truly blessed to have Jonathan, Tracy, Issac, Adam, Kelly, Jordan, Katie and Colby serving the association. I wish you all the very best this year and be sure to let me know if I can ever assist you in any way. Thank you OKLAHOMA FFA!!

July 7, 2002

New Mexico NLCSO

Albuquerque, N.M.! Ever since I watched Bugs Bunny Cartoon when I was little, I wanted to go to Albuquerque...so I could make a wrong turn. I remember when I was younger and found out that it was a real city I was pumped!! Okay, you can laugh at me if you want but N.M. is a long way from Pennsylvania.

My flight here was a little less than ideal. Dane and I were flying out of Flint, Mich., on different flights to Albuquerque, N.M., for our next NLCSO. His flight made it out okay but my flight was delayed due to mechanical problems, which caused me to miss my connection in Minneapolis. Therefore, I had to fly to Minneapolis and then get a hotel there for the night until the next flight out to New Mexico. On the bright side I did get to stay in a really nice hotel for free and I flew first class to Albuquerque. So, there was something positive that came out of all that confusion.

When I arrived. I met up with Dane and we went shopping for some of our supplies for the week. All the officers from New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Colorado began arriving that evening while Dane and I were setting up the room. The next morning the Four Corners NLCSO began! Everyone was so willing to learn and very flexible with all the schedule changes. That evening we heard a reflection from the reflections committee, had some team time, and ended the first day.

The next day started off with a flag raising and the morning session. Afterward the officers went to the Albuquerque Zoo for the afternoon activity. The evening session started up with the second half of NLCSO and ended with another reflections. That day I really had a cool opportunity to sit in on a few states discussion of their mission, vision and purpose statements. I was so impressed my all the though and heart that went into the creation of them. Thank you for all the time and effort you officers put into those!

Day three was a continuation of the workshop piece and then a visit to the Indian Pueblo Cultural Museum. All of the Pueblo's in the northern part of New Mexico were represented there. At the museum we had the four corners NLCSO banquet. The dinner was traditional Indian tacos and chili. It was really good and very different than anything I have ever eaten. The entertainment was a storyteller who shares stories of children's books and turns them into life lessons! Afterward was a keynote speaker and the banquet awards where I received an "Elio the Great" lion and a really cool Chimayo blanket. After the banquet we took some group pictures and Dane and I did an Indian Dance outside. Later that evening the recreation committee set up a NLCSO dance and a Piñata. I had the best time dancing and watching people swing at the Piñata.

The next day was the 4th of July! I must say that is was very unique. Before the fireworks

display, we rode the World's Largest Aerial Tram to the top of Sandia Peak. Albuquerque is about 5,200 feet in elevation and the tram took us all the way up to 10,687 feet, about two miles high! It was 90 degrees at the bottom and 52 at the top! It was one of the most spectacular and beautiful rides I have ever taken. It was also the highest I have ever been. The ride up was breathtaking and the mountains were so enormous. When we got to the top we stayed up there for several hours. I hiked a few of the trails with Marci from Colorado and took some amazing pictures. Thanks Marci for a great hike...it was fun! Afterward we headed to see the fireworks show. Due to all the wild fires out here in the four corners (Utah, Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado) they canceled many firework shows and had light and laser shows instead. Therefore, I thought I would not see any fireworks. BUT...we all drove out to a large parking lot on an Indian Reservation and saw a real fireworks display. There was a Sugar Ray concert in the background, blinking casino lights everywhere, and hundreds of people. Yes, a little bizarre but it was the company of all the officers that really counted! While we waited, we played some pretty interesting games and had a little tailgate party. When the fireworks show concluded, we were stuck in a huge traffic jam and did not move for an hour. However, we made the wait very fun.

The final day was very bittersweet. Dane and I were very excited that the officers grew so much and we were finished with our final NLCSO. But, we had such a great time and did not want the officers to leave. I wish all the officers in the four corners the very best this year and thank you for a great week! You are all awesome. Keep in touch!

June 30, 2002

Washington Leadership Conference Week 3

After a long flight in from Cody, Wyoming, I finally arrived at Reagan National Airport. The next adventure was loading all my luggage onto the metro to get to my hotel! I stayed at the Eisenhower Holiday Inn. Upon arrival I settled into my room and headed down to dinner. All the members and the wonderful WLC staff greeted me. After dinner was the evening session and then reflections by the staff. It was really cool to be at WLC again since the last time I was there was four years ago. Everyone seemed to be having a blast and was very excited for the next few days.

The next morning I was able to sit in on the character development sessions and head out to the Smithsonian with the members. While in D.C., I met up with my good friends from college, Lance and Parveen. It was really ironic that they were in D.C., the same time I was. We spent the early afternoon together touring the Natural History Museum. I later meet back up with one of the umbrella groups and headed back to the hotel for the evening activities.

The next day we headed to Mt. Vernon for a tour and I hung out with several members and walked through the estates. Thank you to all those who let me hang out with them during the walk. I had a blast. That evening was the WLC banquet, I had the honor of speaking at both hotels. After the Eisenhower banquet, Brady drove me to the West Park Holiday Inn for that banquet. I was even able to spend a little time at the their dance. Afterward we drove back to our hotel to finish out the evening. I had so much fun that evening and met so many really cool members. Sarah Barron from Texas was even brave enough to let me flip her around while swing dancing!

I had an extra day in D.C., after the Washington Leadership Conference was over and used that time to tour the city a little bit and had some much-needed resting time! Later that evening some of the WLC staff—Kevin, Brady, Carrie, Abby and I went to dinner and a movie. It was so much fun just to hang out with them and get lost a little while driving in D.C. We went to see *Minority Report* with Tom Cruise...good movie! Thank you to the Eisenhower WLC staff for making me feel welcome. You are the best!

Michigan NLCSO

My Michigan NLCSO experience was yet another milestone in my National Officer year. I simply had a blast at the conference and I was so pleased with all of the officers' growth. They were so willing to learn, and I am excited to see what they are going to do this year!

The conference was held in Frankenmuth, Mich., which is a little German town close to Lake Huron. It is very different and its claim to fame is the world's largest Christmas store. They were not kidding either. It was seven-acres of Christmas store with Christmas tunes playing and all kinds of decorations. It felt a little weird to be in that atmosphere on a hot summer day in late June. It was a sight to see!

The hotel we stayed in was very German as well. All the people who worked there were wearing lederhosen and had funky hats on! It did have this indoor fun center that was pretty

cool. There was an indoor mini-golf course with seven indoor pools. I was too busy to utilize them but still...you do not see that everyday in your average hotel. Our hotel is in the background of this picture of the Tennessee officer team before their reflections one evening.

The first day we all went sailing on Lake Huron to get to know one another. It was nice to enjoy the lake and visit with all the officer teams. Later in the evening we started with NLCSO and finished out with reflections. Each morning began with a flag rising and each evening ended with a reflections. It was really awesome to see all the creativity each team had to offer. Great job everyone!

A special thank you to the Kentucky, Illinois, Tennessee, Indiana and Michigan officer teams for your dedication and commitment to your members!

June 16, 2002
Wyoming NLCSO



Well, the time I waited so long for finally arrived, and now it is over. I can't believe how fast it went. NLCSO (The National Leadership Conference for State Officers) was so much fun and more than I ever expected! It was held at the Northwest College Field Station in the Northwestern corner of Wyoming in some amazing mountains. Dane and I arrived a day early and headed to Yellowstone National Park. Ever since I was young, it has been a dream of mine to visit Yellowstone. We drove to the park from Cody, Wyo., which is about 60 miles away. Upon entering the park we just had to pull off to the side of the road and get some pictures by the entrance sign. The drive

through Yellowstone was so beautiful! The combination of mountains, valleys, plains, streams and lakes was phenomenal. About 50 miles into the park we began to see some wildlife the first being American Bison. Dane and I just had to pull over and get some pictures. There was one Bison about 10 feet off the road lying down in the grass. Many people were stopped along the road about 50 yards away taking pictures from their car. Being the brave and courageous individuals we were, we decided to get out of the car and take some pictures close up! We managed to get about 10 feet away. After we got back in the back we noticed a little flyer in our material we received as we entered the park that read, "Do not approach the buffalo! Many visitors are gorged by wild buffalo each year, please stay 300 feet away!"

Yeah, well that was the average person...hehehe! Dane and I were professionals...hehehe! The next stop was Old Faithful. As we approach the parking lot to the geyser we saw the top of the water blasting from the ground. By the time we got there we missed it by like five minutes. Due to the lack of time we could not wait for the next eruption. We moved along to the next attraction, which was Grand River Falls. It was just spectacular and the huge yellow rock canyon on either side was very unique. The falls were one of my favorite sites in the entire park. Before we left, we stopped to see the mud volcanoes and then headed back to Cody. Thanks Dane, for a great trip to Yellowstone.



The next day we headed up the cabins we were staying in for the NLCSO conference. We had to take the St. Joseph Scenic Highway up to the site. I can assure you that it sure was a scenic trip. It was among the most beautiful 22-mile stretch of road that I have ever seen. The cabin and main building was set off in the woods overlooking the mountains. Dane and I unloaded our supplies and set up the room for the conference. The Stratman family, who owns the field station, were super nice and took really good care of us throughout the entire stay, Thank you to the Stratmans!! Later that evening we picked up Andrea Lohr at the airport and met the Wyoming Officer team for dinner in Cody at a nice steak house. Andrea came in to help Dane and me for the week since it was our first NLCSO. After dinner we headed up to the cabins for



the night. The next morning the Montana and North Dakota Officer teams arrived and the conference began. Throughout the entire conference the three officer teams continued to impress Dane and me with their ability and commitment to growth and learning new skills. Each morning there was a flag rising and each night ended with a reflections. All the officer teams did an amazing job! You Rock! One morning a few of us took a horseback trail ride through the mountains, which was the first time I have ever ridden a horse. My horse, Cherokee, was really nice and made the rough steep trails seem easy for a first-time rider. It was a great time. I know when conference

ended the last afternoon, we were sad to leave.

The personal connections we made, and the confidence we had in those officers was really sincere. The NLCSO conference is such an amazing way to touch the lives of FFA members all over the country because the state officers are the true front line of leadership in our organization. Thank you, Wyoming, Montana and North Dakota, for your dedication to service.

Dane flew out to the Indiana State FFA convention that afternoon and my flight did not leave until the next morning. So, the Wyoming state officers were nice enough to let me hang out with them for the afternoon and evening. We decided to go swimming in Thermopolis, Wyo., at the world's largest hot spring! It was a really cool experience. I was not expecting the world's largest hot spring to have 2 pools, 4 hot tubs, and 2 water slides. The water was really warm and people go swimming there all year long. Afterwards, the officers and I had some dinner at the local Pizza Hut. That Wyoming officer team sure does like those breadsticks. Thank you for taking me to the hot spring and making me feel welcome to your team.

Pennsylvania FFA Convention

Wow, to come back to my home convention was one of the coolest experiences ever. Being back on the Penn State campus made me realize how much I appreciate everything I left to become a National FFA Officer. As I travel around the country, it is so easy to lose sight of where it all began. The first day of convention was great, seeing so many of my FFA friends that I have not seen since National Convention! I also got to hang out with the state officer candidates for a little while as well. I was so proud of them as I watched many of them throughout their FFA Careers develop into who they are today. It is so amazing to see this organization in action! That afternoon was one I will not forget. Out of the 10 officers on my state officer team, six of them came back for a visit. That just made my whole experience that much better. I missed all of them so much and it did my heart well to see their smiling faces! Thank you Bill, Sarah, Adam, Maria, Bart and Amy. It sure was great to see all of you. After having dinner with them, the evening session started and the officers did so well. Congrats to the 2001-2002 PA State FFA Officer team for a job extremely well done! In that session I also gave my keynote address. All the members, advisors, and guests were so supportive and I thought I was never going to get to give my speech because everyone was screaming so much! Thank you Pa., FFA for all your enthusiasm. You have no idea how much that meant to me.

The next day was also filled with more fun and excitement as we headed into more CDEs and other events. For the first time since I was an FFA member, I was able to go around to several contests and see what they are like in Pennsylvania. I have always been so busy with other things every time I went to state convention. Great job to all the CDE participants, I know the future is bright because of members like you! In the afternoon I gave a workshop to the delegates on defining your own layers. We had a blast and they were so into everything we did. Thanks delegates for making the important decisions of the Pennsylvania FFA Association. Later that evening at the session we awarded some very special people who helped out the association and all the state officer parents. Afterwards, was the FFA dance. I had so much fun dancing with everyone and enjoying my last night in Pa., for a while.

The next morning I flew out early to make it to Wyoming and had to miss the last session. I sure do wish I was there to see one incredible officer team, who overcame so many changes this year, retire their jackets. Paul, Karrie, Jeremy, Rebecca, Sherisa, Isaac, Amanda, Lisa, Holly, Cody and Lance, you all served the organization well and I will not forget the support you provided me! Thanks for a great year! I also missed the new officers being elected as well. Sorry I missed that exciting time and best wishes to the 2002-2003 Pa., FFA Officers. Thank you once again Pennsylvania for making me feel right at home! You are the best! Have another amazing year!

June 9, 2002

After those few relaxing days at home it was time once again to head back on the road to more FFA Events! On Monday I flew into the Louisville, KY airport for the Kentucky FFA Convention and was soon reminded of national convention and all the memories I had. After walking a little while to the baggage claim I was met by Amanda Applegate, last year's state treasurer. She greeted me with her Kentucky smile and a big sign that read "Kentucky FFA Welcomes Elio!" It was really cool! I also had the privilege of experiencing her amazing driving skills on the way back to the Galt House Hotel in downtown Louisville where the convention was held. When we arrived, the really nice hotel and my wonderful room took me back! They sure did treat me good there in Kentucky! After settling, I was able to meet the state officers and the state staff for the first time. They were all so much fun and the only thing I have to say is, you officer gals are CRAZY!! You get Whitney, Tiffany, Brooke, Lucinda, Susan, Rachel, and Jennifer together in one place and there is never a dull moment! That evening I had the privilege of being treated to The Old Spaghetti Factory for dinner and then we attended a short reception with all the state officer candidates before their activities got underway. Afterwards I helped out with some final convention details and then I headed in for the night.

Tuesday morning I helped out a little more getting things prepared and spent some time with all the state officer candidates in between their interview rounds. I think I was supposed to be the entertainment or something (hehehe). I also learned all about the tobacco issues here in Kentucky for Stephanie! They were a lot of fun and all you state officer candidates out there should be glad you are not one here in Kentucky, because they enslave those poor people all week long!! Just kidding, but almost, right candidates?? We ate a light lunch in preparation for the BIG pre-convention dinner I kept hearing about both days. I ate with the FFA interns here at convention, Amanda, Josh, Mark, and Jonathan. Afterwards I helped Amanda a little with registration as some chapters slowly rolled in. It was exciting to see convention really start to get interesting! Then of course the moment everyone talked about Dinner in the Flagship! The Flagship is a restaurant there at the Galt house, which is up on the 25th floor and rotates as you eat to overlook Louisville and the Ohio River. I decided to eat dinner with the two Matt's, Julie, and Amanda because the girls would have definitely got me in trouble in the fancy restaurant (hehehe). I swear it was the longest meal I have ever eaten. It was very good and the view was awesome, but it took us about three hours to eat. They just kept bringing out more and more food! You all have to try it sometime! I also got a chance to talk to the officers a little bit before everything got hectic the next day. That evening I took a wonderful walk along the Ohio River and checked in for the evening.

Wednesday morning was finally here and all the FFA members started arriving to the convention. I met several members and chapters as they came in and registered. The opening session was really cool and I enjoyed the officers' walk-in. One of the coolest things about traveling to the different state conventions is to see all the creativity put into the sessions. During the pre-session I met some more members as I walked around saying hello, such as the Bourbon County FFA, members from the Licking River Region, the Big Sandy region, and the Bluegrass region. I also brought greetings and a welcome during that opening session. Afterwards I was attending the Judges' Luncheon where all the judges for all the CDE's and other events were recognized for their true service efforts. Thank you to all those that helped out the KY FFA!!

That afternoon I walked around to several different contests and saw the skills and talent the Kentucky FFA members had to offer. Some of the contests I visited were Prepared Public Speaking, Parliamentary Procedure, Impromptu Speaking Greenhouse (Kentucky FFA has many impromptu speaking events in 13 different areas, I have never seen that before and it was really cool), and Creed. It was really fun to listen in! That evening was a nice dinner and the evening session. During that evening session I had the wonderful opportunity to be hypnotized on stage. I do not really remember a whole lot except falling off my chair in the beginning, falling off the back of the stage, and the very end of the program. I am willing to bet you can ask those KY FFA members for the full details. They were sure to tell me all about my dances, my lack of strength lifting some balloons, and my thinking I was naked! I also understand there is a video out there somewhere. I am a little concerned (hehehe)! After the session was some good Karaoke fun! I had a great time dancing with people and singing, "Bust a Move!" It was a blast and reminded me of the Karaoke rooms in Japan!

Thursday was another action-packed day at the convention. The morning started off with an officer's breakfast and continued into some additional CDE's and the KY FFA Alumni convention. I had the opportunity to speak at the Alumni convention and really let them know what a vital role they play in this organization. Thank you to the KY FFA Alumni for everything you do for the members! That afternoon session is where I gave my Keynote address and just had so much fun! Thank you to all the members out there for teaching me the proper way to say, I am fixin' to do something! You folks were awesome. The rest of the afternoon I helped out Jonathan, Amanda, Christy, and Mark a little in the FFA headquarters getting some things ready for the evening session. Dinner was another high-class meal for the sponsor's dinner. I had the wonderful opportunity to sit next to Bill, one of the KY FFA State officers, who just arrived that day to convention. He was hospitalized a few days before convention and I was not able to make it the first few days. While talking to him I was so amazed at his

perseverance and positive outlook on life. GO BILL and know that you are a role model for many to follow!

Later was the evening awards session and I got to help out with some awards. In Kentucky they give out trophies to the winners, which was really cool. They were awesome! Congrats to all the award winners! At the end of the session I went and sat with the Meade County FFA chapter to cheer their members on! Next was the ever-famous FFA Convention Dance! It was really cool and I had such a blast. At the dance I met Amanda Harrell from the Marshall County FFA who was so much fun! I hung out with some of the state officers and many others throughout the dance. At the end I even had the chance to test out my swing dancing skills!

Friday morning started off with the state officer advisor recognition breakfast. It was really touching to hear the many stories about how the wonderful FFA advisors we have in this organization continue to make a positive difference in the lives of our students! GO ADVISORS!! Afterwards was the final convention session! After the Star Awards program was the election of the new state officers. That is always such an exciting time at conventions! I normally do not get to know that state officer candidates all that well but since throughout the convention I got to hang out with a lot of them it was even more exciting to hear those names called! CONGRATS to all of you and I look forward to seeing you at NLCSO in Michigan! After the session I had to hurry back to the airport for my flight back to PA for my home convention. Amanda, my personal driver, took me back in time for my flight.

THANK YOU KENTUCKY FFA for such an extraordinary convention experience. Everyone was so nice and showed me nothing but that true southern hospitality! I will miss KY and cannot wait to see everyone at national convention! I am now Fixin' to finish this journal entry! (How was that for my southern dialect??) TAKE CARE!

June 2, 2002

This week I had the opportunity to head out to the McKean FFA chapter in Delaware for their banquet and really loved it! It was really cool to see all the accomplishments of the McKean FFA members. It was also a unique opportunity to talk to FFA members at the local level. Before the banquet I took a tour of the chapter and got to see the greenhouses and animal facilities. I even met "Bacon" the pig! Afterwards I went to lunch with the officers at a local country club. Then, Kristin took me to Winterthur, one of the many DuPont estates, and we toured the old DuPont house and the many gardens. I really enjoyed spending the afternoon outside and seeing the beautiful landscape of Delaware! Thank you, Kristin, for a wonderful tour.

That evening the banquet started and was attended by the New Jersey state officer team. It was really nice to meet the new officers and hear them speak. The banquet was really fun and everything ran smoothly. The McKean FFA chapter is really unique, and is a perfect example of how the FFA can expand to adapt to urban setting with the many areas of agriculture. I was so proud of all members for the amazing work they did throughout the year. Congrats everyone for a job well done! Good luck to all the graduating seniors. I am sure the skills you have gained during the past few years in FFA will apply to all aspects of your life!

The rest of the week was spent here at home getting ready for the Kentucky FFA convention. I am really looking forward to going! I also had a chance to work outside with my animals and in the fields. It was a true taste of summer! Finally Saturday was my birthday and I enjoyed a relaxing day outside with my family. It was good to see everyone again and catch up! Have a great week everyone!

May 26, 2002

This week I had the pleasure of spending several days at the Nebraska COLT Conference in Aurora, Nebraska. Upon arrival at the Lincoln airport I collected my luggage at the baggage claim and waited for someone to pick me up. After a little while no one arrived so I did the normal procedure of calling the contact numbers I had to be sure they knew I was at the airport. Since there was not an answer at any of the numbers, I tried calling Barrett for a cell phone number (he was there at the prior COLT session). I did get a hold of him and he told me he just got home, and that they did not think I was arriving until later that night (about 5 hours later). So I found myself a little spot in the airport and was going to wait patiently until my ride came. Little did I know Barrett, Chris, Jared, and Sarah (three state officers) were planning this the whole time. As I sat there, three individuals came up to me and started asking me all these weird questions about their champion bull-riding cousin from Texas. Then I saw Barrett walk in behind them. I knew from that point on I was going to be in for a fun week!

Barrett flew out the next morning and that night Chris, Jared, Sarah, and I all drove to the booming metropolis of Aurora where the Nebraska FFA Leadership Center is housed. However, more fun was in store on the ride there when we encountered 5 tornadoes during a HUGE thunderstorm! Well, okay I exaggerated a little - and there were not actually any tornadoes but it sure looked like the skies on the movie Twister, and driving across the flat lands of

Nebraska made this Pennsylvania boy a little concerned. Sarah was driving and she assured me we were not in harms way! Thanks Sarah!

After arriving at the beautiful Leadership center I was greeted by Josh, Kori, Ryan and Mark, which was the rest of the very cool state officer team! I also got to see Andy again, whom I had not seen since national convention. That night we kind of took it easy and settled in.

The next morning we all got ready for the members to arrive, and soon that afternoon they did. I was in casual clothes helping members to their room with their luggage, and saying hello to as many people as I could. No one really knew who I was, which was kind of fun! Then, the opening session started and "The Amazing Race" began. The state officers did an outstanding job in their breakout sessions and I was just so impressed with the skills and level of presenting they were performing. I also got to meet some more members as I participated in the workshops with them.

Later that afternoon I played some sand volleyball and football with the guys. It was just so much fun and I really enjoyed playing sports again. The Leadership Center also had some paddleboats that I took advantage during the recreational time. I am telling you that this conference was a blast!

The next morning was the flag rising performed by one of the chapters. It truly set the tone for the rest of the day as the students continued on the race and traveled around the world! The weather was pretty cold that second day so everyone was bundled up as we went outside for a few more activities. That evening I got to participate in the activity each chapter officer team had to complete. I got to be from the Island of Fiji and people had to limbo for points! It was really fun!

Next to the last night there is a banquet that I had a chance to give a little speech. It was a fun banquet with some pretty random awards! Afterwards was the COLT dance. I had so much fun dancing with all the members and wearing myself out as much as I could. The last event of the evening was reflections. It was held around the indoor pool and was truly one of the most unique reflections I had even seen. Kudos to the officers for that one!

The final morning I gave a few workshops before I had to leave very quickly for the airport. Overall, the Nebraska COLT conference was awesome and I enjoyed getting to spend a few days with some Nebraska FFA members and really getting to know the state officers. You folks are truly blessed to have such powerful state officers! Thank you to everyone for making me feel at home in the Cornhusker State! Hope to see you all at convention!

May 19, 2002

The Washington State FFA Convention was really awesome! It was really nice to go back home with Abbie and experience the world of FFA that she grew up in. The first day I got to jump right into the "Joy of Corduroy" by judging some contests, which was really a cool experience. Then I gave a few workshops that afternoon to some very excited FFA members. Actually all throughout the convention I noticed such an incredible amount of love and excitement for the FFA ... it was awesome. The officers could barely get through opening ceremonies without the crowd going crazy! The Washington FFA Officers were really fun to get to know. I had met Tawna at the Montana FFA Convention and loved meeting her teammates Morgan, Jesse, Becky, Dan, and Justin. You guys did an incredible job! Congrats on a great convention!

While there I also got to spend some time with a few visiting state officers. We had so much fun sitting together at session, visiting the bears, dancing at the CRAZY Washington FFA Dances, and just plain hanging out. Thanks for a great convention experience officers!

Thank you to Washington FFA for making me feel at home! You guys ROCK and should be very proud of your accomplishments. Now I can see why Abbie is so cool!

Take Care!



May 12, 2002

"A presentation is nothing more than a relationship." - Mark Reardon



I am not sure I can describe in words the growth and learning that took place while our national officer team was in Texas. We started off the week with a little anxiety and not sure what to expect, but after we got involved and met all the wonderful people it was great. Mr. Reardon came to work with us for a few days on presentation and facilitation skills. The quote above was from him and one I remembered the whole week. He was absolutely amazing, and I've never met anyone with his ability to educate others my whole life. His sincerity and service-heart shined through in all he did and helped me grow so much. Thank you, Mr. Reardon, for your time and wisdom!

Each night in the beginning of the week we also got to enjoy some home-cooked food from Ms. Kelly Horton. She is an awesome cook and made us feel at home. We also spent the week with her father, Louie, who always made sure we had everything we needed!

Later that week (and throughout the weekend) Dane and I presented NLCSO to the Texas A&M leadership classes. The students were so awesome and made us feel right at home. They even introduced me to a Texas A&M tradition ... "hissing." Yeah, they do not boo in Texas - they hiss! I kind of jokingly made fun of their English class and they hissed at me ... I guess I deserved it. It was only in good fun though! I had so much fun meeting the students and feeling like a college student again. I also wanted to thank Kelly, our "Room Mother," for helping us out so much. You were great! Dane and I learned so much and many officers will benefit from this experience. I know I will not forget the Aggie cheers you all did for us at the end, and I can officially say I know how to "whoop!" (I think so anyway; they still kind of laughed at me when I did.)

During our stay we also got to eat at some of the Aggie Land signature places such as Freebirds World Burrito, Double Dave's, The Dixie Chicken, Jason's Deli and many more. The last night some of the students took us out to eat at the Chicken Oil Company, which was really fun. I know I did not want to leave Texas A&M. Everyone was really awesome! Thank you everyone for a great experience!



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