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Photo Albums

[Japan - Jan. 27 - Feb. 5, 2003](#)

Where I'll be this week:

Indianapolis, Indiana

October 8, 2003

FFA members, friends and guests,

I write this journal with mixed emotions. This journal marks the last week that I was officially on the road! The final four weeks of my year of service will be spent at home, and in Indiana with my teammates as we prepare for the 2003 National FFA Convention. I spent my last week on the road in the state of Kansas.

I have been very blessed this year in terms of ease of travel. Not once has my luggage been lost by the airlines, and I have had very few plane delays. As my airplane left St. Louis bound for Wichita, Kan/. I was thinking how blessed that I have been. Once we were almost half way to Wichita, the pilot came on and told us that we were experiencing difficulties with the airplane and for safety reasons we would have to turn around and head back to St. Louis. So we turned around and luckily landed safely in St. Louis. After a few hours in St. Louis, I boarded another plane and was on my way to Wichita. Where I landed at approx. 11 p.m. Lesson to be learned here, don't speak too soon!

The week in Kansas was kicked off with a greenhand conference in Ark City. The conference went well, and was a big success. Big congrats go out to Mr. Epler, Mr. Schweer and the South Central District Officer team for doing a phenomenal job in the organization of this event. Monday night I had a very unique opportunity as I was at the Kansas Junior Livestock Show the night of the auction of champions. I had the privilege of introducing each showman as they brought their steer into the ring to be sold. It was the closest to being an auctioneer that I will be in a long time. Following the sale Ms. Kane, KS FFA Executive Secretary, and I went to Manhattan, Kan.; home of Kansas State University. Tuesday I spent exploring the beautiful campus, I also had the chance to meet up with a friend, Erin Heinen, who is a past state officer and current KSU student. She showed me around Manhattan and even treated me to lunch. On Tuesday evening, Emily, a current state officer, and I traveled to Erie. Where the DeGeer's wonderfully hosted us. Wednesday was the Southeast District greenhand conference in Erie. This was one of the largest greenhand conferences that I have ever seen, almost 500 members!

Soon following the conference Lucas, a current state officer, and I went on a "road trip". We drove for five hours straight, to Dodge City. Needless to say we got to know each other really well. It was a fun trip. We ate, talked, sang and I even slept a little! Dodge City is very unique. It is commonly referred to as Cowtown. There are many feedlots that surround the city. I woke up on Thursday morning and walked out of the hotel and took a big whiff, and all I smelled was the "distinct aroma" of feedlots. Thursday was spent at the Southwest District greenhand conference. It was another good conference; I was especially impressed with their district officer team. Shane, Matt, Julia, Carmon and the gang were awesome! Following the conference Justine and Clint delivered me to the airport. But not before we were driving down the road talking and all of the sudden I heard a huge BANG. I looked behind us and saw hundreds of feathers flying in the air. We had hit a pheasant. Wow! It scared us all. Definitely a crazy moment.

My time in Kansas was very special, I couldn't think of anywhere else I would want to spend the week. Emily, Melissa, Clint Blaes, Clint Bryant, Justine and Lucas should be very proud of the members of their state, and should be commended on extreme dedication to selfless service to Kansas FFA.

From here I will be at home for about two weeks, as I prepare for the greatest show on earth! Am I talking about the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus? No, I am speaking of the 2003 National FFA Convention. As the week continues to get closer and closer I can't help but to be excited. I know my excitement is shared by all of my teammates. For those of you who will be at convention: I am excited for you, come with an eager mind and an open heart, because if you allow it to happen,

your life will be changed. For those of us who aren't going to be able to attend: I invite you to keep up with the convention via www.ffa.org because the action is brought right to your computer screen!

Friends, take care, and God speed!!

Romans 10:9 "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

September 22, 2003

After an exhilarating weekend in Washington D.C., I departed for the dairy state of Wisconsin. Steve Boe met me at the airport. Steve and I traveled to Barron, Wis., to meet all of the other state officers. We all stayed the night in Barron at Angie Kringle's house. We woke up on Monday morning and headed to the Jennie-O Turkey processing plant.

This was a fascinating business and industry visit, as we saw a live turkey being processed into retail meat. Following our B&I tour we went to the Sectional Leadership Workshop in Barron. Tuesday was much of the same as we went to Bloomer and participated in some more really interesting business and industry tours. Following our tours the state officers and I facilitated another Sectional Leadership Workshop. Tuesday night I stayed at the Woolever's house. We had a blast as their family and I stayed up just chit-chatting and watching ESPN! It was great to see Krista, whom I had met earlier in the summer. Wednesday was a "workday"; we went to Spencer, which is where the Wisconsin FFA Center is. We worked at the Spencer FFA chapter though. We had lunch with their chapter officers. I was delighted, that I was able to see a friend that I had met earlier in the year. Kyle Scidmore and I got to hang out and catch up. It was awesome; he is just a cool cat. Wednesday evening I headed to Jackie Mundt's home to sleep before we engaged in our final day of travel for the week.

Thursday morning we woke up and headed to a wonderful B&I visit, we went to a cranberry farm. I was blown away at the production process of growing cranberries. Definitely one of the neatest production agriculture operations that I have seen all year. Following our time there, we had lunch and then headed to the high school for the Sectional Leadership Conference. The end of the conference that night marked the end of our official duties for the week. Thursday night Chris, Angie and I headed to Angie's house to get some rest before I departed Wisconsin on Friday. Chris and I woke up on Friday morning and headed to Madison, to meet so he could take me the rest of the way to the airport. This week was another incredible week. I truly appreciate the Chris, Nichole, Angie, Steve, Jamie, Kayla, Jackie, they made me feel such a part of the group. This year, going to many different places it is easy to feel like an outsider, but the Wisconsin state officer team made me feel like I was one of them. I am glad to be able to call this outstanding group of people friends!

Romans 8:28 "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose."

Sept. 14, 2003

My week in Texas came to an abrupt end, as I was in the heart of Aggieland at mighty Kyle Field watching my Texas Aggies beat Arkansas State in the first football game of the year. I then drove home and caught a 5:30 a.m. flight out of Dallas en route to Boston. Joel met me in Boston and we headed to the very famous Fenway Park to watch the Boston Red Sox square off with the New York Yankees. Joel and I thoroughly enjoyed the afternoon, as we witnessed history...this was the last time that Roger Clemens would pitch at Fenway. Following the game we went and explored Boston and Harvard University. We learned that Boston was a BEAUTIFUL city, and we both decided that this wouldn't be the last time that we would visit Boston.

Sunday night we drove down to Providence, Rhode Island and got a hotel. Monday morning, which was Labor Day, we woke up and continued on our journey to New York City to begin a weeks worth of Business and Industry Visits. Once we arrived, we drove down to Times Square and enjoyed a meal at the ESPN Zone, then afterward we engaged in some friendly competition as we played numerous videogames. Tuesday morning we began our business meetings in New York, we visited Mitsui, ABM and Pfizer. They were all interesting visits in their own right. After a little mishap, which included missing our bus stop and having to then catch a cab to our hotel after a real long bus ride, we began to drive a little further south to Washington D.C.

We arrived shortly after midnight and headed straight to bed. Wednesday and Thursday were simply incredible. As if being in one of my favorite U.S. cities wasn't enough, we had some pretty neat meetings. We visited the National Rifle Association, Senator Sam Brownback, Senator Larry Craig, Past National Officer Darren Coppick, and past National Officer Fred McClure. We talked about everything: FFA, agriculture, politics, college football and everything in between. Another reason these were a great few days, is because Joel and I were able to work together. This was the first time this year that we were able to work exclusively. I learned a lot from Joel that week, perhaps the

biggest lesson was a lesson in living life with passion!

Friday morning I took Joel to the airport, as he headed back south to Georgia. That evening I was able to hook up with some of my Aggie friends and enjoy a fun meal, as we caught up on what's been going on. Saturday after a full day of working, I was able to cheer those Aggies on with the Washington D.C. Texas A&M club as we played the University of Utah. It was so neat to be thousands of miles away from College Station and still feel the Spirit of Aggieland with hundreds of people. Sunday morning I boarded a flight bound for Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Romans 10: 9 "...that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved."

August 31

Can you feel it?? Feel what you might say...I'm talking about the National FFA Convention fever!!! WOW! After a weeks worth of meetings and planning I am more excited than ever for the 2003 National FFA Convention. This past week was really nice. It was relaxing as our team spent the whole week together and just worked on retiring addresses, reflections and scripts. The excitement of the week culminated as 5:30 on Friday arrived. This is when we departed the National FFA Center and left to go to East Lansing Michigan. Saturday was FFA Race Day at the NASCAR Cabela's 250, it was a Busch Series Race. We woke up at 4:30 a.m. on Saturday and headed to the track. This day was a very unique experience as we hosted a FFA hospitality tent before the race for all FFA members and parents who bought tickets. We had Bill Davis (race team owner), Scott Wimmer (NASCAR driver), Richard Childress (race team owner and owner of Dale Earnhardt's number 3 car), and Sam Pardon (race team pit crew member) all of these fine gentlemen came and spoke to us.

Two things stood out to me: 1) The life lessons that they shared through their messages, all were men of extreme character and integrity 2) Their knowledge, appreciation and passion for agriculture.

After they spoke, we gave away some FFA paraphernalia and closed the silent auction, because it was race time. Four of our teammates left shortly after the race began en route to their next destination. Seth and I hung around for what ended up being one of the coolest experiences of my life. Two of our teammates were given the opportunity to be a member of Ward Burton (drives the #22 Caterpillar car in the Winston Cup race on Sunday) pit crew on Sunday. By drawing out of a hat, Seth and I were the two that were fortunate enough to have this opportunity. The CAT crew gave us an official crew shirt. I am talking OFFICIAL with all of the sponsors on it and everything. So we showed up with all access passes on Sunday and dressed just like a pit crew member.

Our morning was filled with incredible events. First we toured the garage area and saw every car that would be racing. All of the famous drivers cars were there. Next, we met with and spoke to Ward Burton for about 15 minutes. Then it was time to go to the drivers meeting. This is a meeting that every driver and crew chief is required to attend. So we saw everyone from Jeff Gordon to Dale Earnhardt, Jr. Following the drivers meeting we attended chapel. Seth and I were very impressed that on race day how many drivers and their families took time to worship the Lord. Shortly after, we had lunch and then it was time for the CAT team meeting. We stepped into the trailer and attended the team meeting with the crew chief, Ward Burton, and the entire Pit Crew. Following the meeting it was time for the race to start After Seth and I unhooked the generator from Ward's car, we wheeled it back behind our pits. Now it was time to line up for the national anthem. We lined up with the whole pit team and it was a hair raising, spine-tingling experience. Then the famed words "Gentlemen start your engines," were spoken. The race was 400 miles of down and dirty racing. Ward and "our team" finished 14 th . Overall it was one of the neatest experiences of my life.

Seth and I departed Michigan en route to meet up with our team in Cincinnati for a meeting with Toyota on Monday.

Monday was a great day as we spent a majority of the day meeting with the senior management of the Toyota Motor Manufacturing Corp. The day concluded with a visit to Holly Hill. This was an establishment for young girls that are removed from their permanent home for various reasons. We thoroughly enjoyed spending time with them and getting to know them. Tuesday morning I flew to Dallas to enjoy the longest time home that I have had since the beginning of our year. I will be home for 10 days.

Mark 13:31 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

August 10, 2003

Saturday, I left Dallas/Fort Worth airport non-stop to Kansas City for three days of Business and

Industry meetings. I was excited because I was going to be traveling with my teammate Tim. Tim and I haven't had the opportunity to work exclusively with each other very much this year. Over three days we were scheduled to visit companies: Dairy Farmers of America, DeLaval, NCIS, DeBruce Grains, Excel, Kansas Livestock Assn., New Dominion Farms, FarmHouse, and a few others. The excitement that I was feeling was surely fulfilled. Our three days was filled with very informative meetings, good food, lots of laughs, and great Kansas weather. But I can say that I have a newfound respect for my teammate J.J. who is from Kansas... there is just not a lot out in his great state. It is beautiful though. Seeing all of the corn and beef production made me miss home. When we left Kansas Tim and I headed for the National FFA Center in Indianapolis.

Seth, J.J. and Joel joined us there. Friday was a guy's day out. Us five guys decided to take a day off before we got real serious about national convention planning. The day began on the golf course, and it was, well, a whole lot of fun. I'm not ready to sign any of us up for the PGA Tour yet but hey maybe one day.

After this we headed off to the Indiana State Fair. With my background in showing cattle, I quickly made my way to the cattle barns and looked at the cattle. Then we made our way to the FFA Pavilion, where we saw some friends...the Indiana FFA state officer team. We had a wonderful time as they showed us around and we engaged in casual conversation. All of them are wonderful people. While we were there I was done dirty by Seth and J.J. To make a long story short they tricked me into tasting the HOTTEST hot sauce that I have ever tasted in my life, and being from the south I have eaten some hot stuff. I was brought to tears and after an entire bottle of milk my mouth was still feeling like a furnace full of flames.

The rest of the afternoon was just a blur. But, what I do know is that we left there and then we went and saw a movie. That marked the end to a very relaxing day, now we were ready to dive into a week worth of national convention planning.

2 Timothy 1:7 "For I have not given you a spirit of fear, but a spirit of love and a sound mind."

August 2, 2003

Living the Legacy..... this week was full of signs of legacies that certain individuals have left behind. Legacies of: Excellence, Liberty, Selflessness, Integrity and Promise. While I was in Washington D.C with my teammates, two state officers from every state plus Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, my parents, and a whole host of state staff I had the experience of a lifetime. You see the event was State Presidents' Conference 2003.

Tuesday it began with a bang as we had the conference kick-off and highlighted what else would happen throughout the week. Wednesday July 23, 2003 is a day that I will always remember, for one reason it was my 21st birthday. I can honestly say that it was the best birthday that I have ever had. Some highlights of the day included meeting with two congressmen, going on a night tour of Washington D.C, introducing the United States Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman, and meeting a fellow Texan and the President of the United States of America, George W. Bush!!! President Bush addressed all of the State Officers who were in attendance. If you would like to read more about our time with the President then go to: <http://www.ffa.org/news/index.html>.

That is a day that all of us will cherish for a long time to come. The pinnacle of Thursday was going to Arlington Cemetery and visiting the graves of thousands of people who have given their lives while serving our country. This is where the eternal flame of John F. Kennedy is as well. Also while we were there we were blessed to be able to lay the wreath on the tomb of the unknown soldier. It was quite a humbling experience. Saturday we spent some free time just touring the area. My parents and I visited the Holocaust Memorial Museum. I was astounded at the horrific events that were led by the Hitler regime, as millions of Jews were persecuted. Seeing this led me to realize just how fortunate that we, as Americans, are to enjoy being a free people. Saturday night we all went to a public park and ate barbeque and played some carnival games, which were hosted by the state staff. Our national officer team was a bit surprised to learn that they planned us into the games by making us be involved with the sponge toss. Needless to say, by the end of the night we were literally sopping wet. Following our rendezvous at the park, we headed back to the hotel and had the final reflections and then we celebrated a wonderful week with a dance.

SPC was an incredible time. I was fortunate to see my teammates in action. I promise you that every time that I am around them I am constantly amazed at how the good Lord has surrounded me with such hard working, super talented, fun loving, God fearing, Christ loving people. I truly could not ask for more! As I said before having all four of my parents and three of my six siblings in Washington was a blessing because they got to share in what I have been experiencing all year long. Plus our parents played a little trick on our team, which we will get them back. The state officers who were there showed a true passion for growing the National FFA Organization for the future, so that we can have another 75 awesome years of leadership through agricultural education.

From D.C. I travel home for a few days to catch up on some "busy work", then I am off to meet one of my favorite Californian's (Tim) in Kansas City for some business and industry meetings. Until next time be safe, take care, and Godspeed!!!

Mark 1:17 "Then Jesus said, follow me and I will make you fishers of men."

July 20, 2003

Some call it the Lone Star state, I call it home! My fourth of July was spent with my family, it was a pretty traditional celebration for the Clark household. Dad, Samantha and I went to the firework stand and loaded up on fireworks, in great anticipation of a night of fire. We stayed up until 11 p.m. popping off firecrackers. Boy was it a good time!

Sunday, after going to church, I left Waxahachie to go to Houston, home of the 75th Texas FFA Convention. Monday was full of pre-convention activities. The highlight was a tour of the newly constructed Reliant Stadium, the home of the NFL franchise Houston Texans and the world famous Rodeo Houston. The facilities were incredible. We were on the floor of the stadium, on the catwalk that was near the roof, and everywhere in between. The day was highlighted with lunch in the players dining room which was bought by the Houston Texans owner, Mr. Bob McNair.

Tuesday opened convention, and I was more excited than ever. When I walked into the convention hall, I felt as if I was at my first state convention all over again. There is something magical and mystical about your home state convention. All day I ran into FFA members and advisors whom I hold very dear to my heart. It did this Texan some good, to reconnect with all of these people who are very near to me. My workshops that I facilitated were on Tuesday afternoon and the coincided with some past state officers from Oklahoma. They had the crowd rocking and rolling, I was blessed to get to know them. Their heart of service was evident in every move that they made, they definitely added positively to the Texas FFA Convention.

My keynote address was much anticipated. It was the last time that I would deliver a state convention keynote as a national officer. It was the last time for a while that I would address the Texas FFA. I was at home in front of family and friends. No pressure huh? When I was backstage and about to be introduced, they said, "now help me welcome to the stage your 1977-1978 Texas FFA First Vice President Mr. Cleve Clark. I said to myself, "why in the world did they introduce my dad? They messed up, I am the one delivering a keynote!" But then my dad took the podium and proceeded to introduce me. I can't think of anyone who knows me better, so I guess it was rather appropriate. It was a very moving introduction, and I was so thankful that dad would do that. It is something that I will always remember.

Some great Aggie friends came in for that evening, so after the session we went out to eat. Kinder, Wes, Kimberly, Jacqueline, Holly, Mac, Allison, Trent, Brandon, Gara and others had a wonderful time just catching up. Friday morning I had to depart Houston and head to Indianapolis to meet my teammates as we embarked upon the second of three FFA Board of Directors Meetings. My time in Texas was so special that I can hardly put it into words. The current state officers did a phenomenal job to give Texas FFA members a memorable state convention experience. Because of Shannon, Ashley, Lindsey, Brison, Stacy, Meggan, Jessica, Charles, Coy and Raymond lives were changed this week! I am honored to be able to call these 10 people friends.

The board meeting lasted approx. four days, and it was a great experience. Some major issues were debated and discussed. FFA members you would be proud to know that the board values and considers your thoughts on issues. Our team is blessed to serve on a board that is so passionate about the future of agricultural education. All in all, the board meeting was another huge success! From here, we are on to the 2003 State Presidents' Conference.

Phillipians 4: 4-7 "Rejoice in the Lord always...The Lord is at hand. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer in supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

July 6, 2003

Seth and I left Cincinnati, headed for the mountains of Idaho. We arrived in Boise on Saturday afternoon and we met at the airport, we went to the car rental counter. I was half way joking when I said do ya'll have any convertibles? The lady at the counter said as a matter of fact, we do. I then knew that it would cost way too much, but then the lady said, actually it is one of the cheapest cars that we have. So, you can guess what we drove off of the lot... a 2002 Silver Convertible Ford Mustang. We were riding in style.

After we checked into our hotel, we went and a pizza in downtown Boise. Following dinner we were

cruising around when we spotted a carnival, we decided that there was nothing better to relieve some stress than to go and ride some carney rides. We were just like little kids again. Rides, cotton candy, giggles, the whole bit. Sunday, we left Boise to head out to the beautiful Sun Valley, Idaho. As we drove up into the mountains we were just taken aback by the breath taking beauty of God's creation. It was one of the most beautiful places that I have seen all year. Sunday evening Alaska, California, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada and Washington state officer teams showed up. It was our final NLCSO.

The next three days were filled with nothing but incredible devotion to growing personally so each of the state officers respective states could grow. The final night of NLCSO was absolutely remarkable. After reflections, amazing things happened. God was definitely there and moving. Teams grew closer, relationships between state officers were formed, and life-changing decisions were made. I owe a great debt of gratitude to each and every state officer that was there for making a supreme commitment to excellence through service, that week was a defining week during my year of service.

That night after everyone had went to bed, Seth and I sat up and returned thanks for an awesome week and for three incredible NLCSO's. The next day Seth and I went back into Boise as I caught a flight to Dallas, so I could spend July 4 with my family.

Proverbs 28:6 "Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, than one perverse in his ways, though he be rich."

July 1, 2003

And we've begun yet another week of National Leadership Conference for State Officers. This week our travels take us to the Hoosier state of Indiana. On Sunday I flew from Lubbock, Texas to Cincinnati, Ohio. Seth's flight did not get in until really late on Sunday night. So, I met up with Allison (who is a good friend of mine). She is living in Cincinnati for the summer while doing an internship. We went and had a great Italian dinner, then went to a park right on the Ohio River and just chatted. Then it was time to go and pick up Seth from the airport.

Seth and I set out on Monday morning to head on what should have been an hour and a half hour drive to Clifty Falls, Ind. Well, about four hours later we showed up. I won't place any blame, I'll just say that we were directionally challenged!!! Once we arrived, we spent the whole day setting up and readying ourselves for a great conference.

WOW, what a great conference it was! We were blessed to spend the week with state officers from Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Kentucky and Tennessee. Indiana was a tremendous host and has a very classy group of state officers. Illinois put on a stellar reflections that just took my breath away. The Michigan state officers are on fire for serving Michigan FFA and truly showed it all week. The Kentucky state officer team blessed us with a very purposeful and patriotic Flag Raising, one that they should be very proud of. Tennessee lived their week with the true kindness and compassion that the volunteer state is known for. The conference ended on Friday and Seth and I drove back into Cincinnati. We took some back roads, which enabled us to see some of the countryside. It was awesome. We saw all kinds of agriculture from corn to cattle to tobacco to hay. Friday night we had a much needed night of relaxation as we went to Jillian's and had dinner and played lots of videogames.

Early Saturday morning to travel to Boise, Idaho for the third and final NLCSO!

Mark 12:30 "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment."

June 22, 2003

Fast paced, fun, emotional, exhilarating, inspiring, exhausting, different, fulfilling all of these are words that I would use to explain the State FFA Conventions that I have visited thus far. It is for those reasons that it is bittersweet that state convention season is over. I am a little sad that I only have one more, but glad to experience a change of pace at the same time. This week will kick off Seth Heinert and I's back to back run of National Leadership Conference for State Officers, or commonly referred to as NLCSO.

I was warmly welcomed at the Jackson, Miss., airport by Mrs. Amy, Dana, John Adam, Cory, and Meredith and we rode back to the Mississippi FFA Leadership Center. Which by the way is a beautiful facility. Friday Seth arrived in MS and we began getting ready for NLCSO. Saturday what we thought was going to be a "little break", quickly turned into a near death experience. Seth, Tiffany Sanderson, Mrs. Amy, the Miss. state officers, and myself set out for an excursion of canoeing down a river in Mississippi. The trip included roaring rapids, two person canoes, lots of paddling, people falling out of canoes, HUGE bruises, profuse bleeding, ruined clothes, lots of yelling, plenty of laughing, Seth crying like a baby, and me, well, being a hero. Okay, so maybe the last two were a bit switched around. But nonetheless it was definitely a great way to relieve some stress.

We kicked off Father's Day with a visit to local church, and then resumed preparations for the conference. Monday through Thursday was spent with the state officer teams from Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama and Arkansas. These state officers made their states proud by showing a true desire to grow by developing their raw talents into skills. I witnessed a first by seeing the interstate arm-wrestling and belly flop contests. It was an absolute riot, we laughed so hard! I guess when you work hard you must play hard.

The week was ended with a flight into Lubbock, Texas to be in the wedding of two great friends Brandon Hill and Gara Travis. This weekend was incredible since it was the first time that I have seen my Aggie friends since early spring. I was honored that Brandon, whom I have the utmost respect for, would ask me to be in his wedding. Once again, I was reminded of what awesome friends God has blessed me with. I was glad to spend time with Kinder, Jarrod, Trent, Casey, Casee, Katy, Paula, Kimberly and all of my friends and mentors from AgWorkers Mutual Auto Insurance.

John 8:32,36 "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. Therefore if the Son makes you free. You shall be free indeed."

June 15, 2003

Madison, Wis., was the home of the 74th Annual Wisconsin FFA Convention and my home for the week. The week began by meeting Matt, Laura, Ron, Chris, Brooke, Amanda, Nicole, Larissa, Jeanna, Amber and Peggy. They were the 2002-2003 state officer team. They were a riot! I was totally impressed with their desire to serve as well as their talents. All 11 of them took one year off of college to serve the WI FFA members. One of my highlights of the week was the close relationship that we were fortunate to obtain. I love those guys and gals.

The first night of convention I was invited to have dinner with the East Troy FFA chapter and Mr. Holle. WOW, did we have fun? We went to downtown Madison and ate at Noodles and Co. Following dinner we took a stroll over to the state capitol, the building was magnificent. Then we went walking down State St. and into a few shops. After shopping, I had Wisconsin cheese curds (um um good), a Wisconsin Badger T-shirt, and an OFFICIAL Wisconsin Cheesehead (courtesy of my new friends from East Troy). I owe a huge thanks to Margaret, Pete, Kayla, Marc, Kevin, Sherry and all my friends. Another neat thing was that Barrett Keene was a keynote speaker at convention. This meant that we would room together and get to hang out. As always, it was great to see him. He constantly models the way to "live and love". Tuesday night after the dance Barrett and I met up with Kathy (a past state officer from Iowa) and Erin (a past state officer from Kansas) and went downtown again and ate pizza together. We had a ball just laughing and having some crazy conversations. The next day was full of convention activities in which I met some great folks. The Menomonee and Independence FFA chapters are two of which that I had a blast hanging out with.

Wednesday night I met a man who served as a WI state officer in 1933!!! It was great to talk with him and hear his views on the FFA since he had been an active member almost 75 years ago. Also during the week I became good friends with Suzy, Cynthia, Heather and Dan from the Bowler FFA chapter. Thursday marked the end of the convention, which set a record breaking attendance of more than 3,000 people. It was a sad farewell because I had become such good friends with the state officer team as well as many other FFA members. Wisconsin will always have a special place in my heart!

As I was sitting in the convention hall I realized that this is my next to last state convention to visit... this caused mixed emotions. Happiness because it meant that I get to begin working with Seth Heinert as we facilitate NLCSO for many new state officers, but it fostered sadness because of the wonderful times that I have had at all nine state conventions that I have visited so far. From here I journey back down to Mississippi for our first NLCSO! Stay tuned for some pretty crazy stories, which I am sure will follow.

Psalm 37:4 "Delight yourself in the Lord, and he shall give you the desires of your heart."

June 8, 2003

Where there are more pick-up trucks than cars, where they eat biscuits and gravy for breakfast, and where you can say ain't, fixin, and ya'll all in the same sentence and not be in the wrong. The place that I am speaking of is the "deep south".

I arrived in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, on Saturday afternoon. The state convention didn't actually begin until Monday. Saturday and Sunday were spent preparing for convention. I enjoyed a true southern dinner with the current Mississippi state officers: Christy, Jason, Meredith, Crystal and Buzz. I met Christy in November at the National FFA Convention, as she was the chairman of the nominating committee. It was great to see her again, and talk about everything that has been going on with us. Also at dinner was Ms. Amy Green, who was an FFA advisor in Texas and now is the Mississippi FFA Coordinator. I was elated to spend time with a fellow Texan, mentor, and dear friend. We swapped

stories of the past few years of our lives. Sunday I spent time with three other great friends who were there as well: Lindsey Calhoun (current Ohio FFA president), Elio Chiarelli (past national officer) and Barrett Keene (past national officer). All three of these individuals were at the convention helping out in different capacities.

The first night of the convention was truly exciting as I witnessed an excellent reflections program followed by "FFA Idol." Wow, was there some awesome talent! Mississippi has a very strong Jr. FFA program, and I witnessed 7-year-old students standing up and singing their hearts out! Tuesday was a day full of activities. It began with an Alumni auction, followed by a morning session with my keynote address. I was absolutely shocked following my keynote when I was presented with a Bible. That gracious exhibition of love was definitely appreciated, a gift that I will forever treasure. That afternoon I met some really awesome folks as Barrett and I combined our workshops and presented together. The day concluded with an evening session. Regretfully I had to leave Mississippi early on Wednesday morning to go to another southern state, Arkansas. Although I was glad to be going to the natural state, I was extremely sad to leave perhaps the most hospitable state in the entire nation. Congratulations to Meredith, Dana, John Adam, Cory, Kristy and Daniel, the newly elected state officer team. They are superstars!

Wednesday I found myself on a 6 a.m. flight bound for Little Rock, Arkansas. Upon arriving in Little Rock I was picked up and delivered to Camp Couchdale. When we pulled up to the convention site I saw a snow cone stand as well as a funnel cake stand. Upon seeing this I knew it would be a great time. I could go on and tell you about my daily schedule while I was in Arkansas, but I don't think that it would do justice to what I experienced in this great state. I met some incredible people during my stay. What made them so entirely incredible in my eyes was the love that they possessed for others. I felt so much at home in Arkansas. It was because of people like Mr. Thompson from Dewitt, advisors like Mr. Embry, Mr. Jones, Mr. Gipson and Ms. Priest, FFA members like Cassie Bacon, Holly, Chris, Desi, Jordan, Bobby, Amanda, Rhonda, Leigh Ann, Colleen, Josh, and the list can go on and on. These new friends of mine went out of their way to make me feel welcome. They showed me how to put others before us. Then there was Amber and Audra, who helped me out tremendously by bringing me two cds that I needed to use in a presentation. They didn't have to help me, but they did. Wow...this is humility.

I have not even mentioned the state officer team: Tory, Jameson, Kristin, Amy, and Caroline. Two things impressed me about them: 1) Their love and respect for each other and 2) Their actions were not done out of selfish desires, but instead out of selfless service. Then the Ola FFA chapter invited me to go and eat at Burger King with them. We had a blast riding in their van the Golden Nugget. Cody, Jessica, Tim, Jason, Corey and Allyson, the newly elected state officer team should be very proud to represent such an amazing state association. On Friday a good friend Rene Durham delivered me back to Little Rock. I appreciated Rene sacrificing her time to take me to the airport.

I was en route to Amarillo, Texas to witness the marriage of Ben Pigg, who was a state officer teammate of mine. I was met there by Mac and Clay two other teammates. On Saturday Clay drove me down to Star, Texas to the Texas FFA State Leadership Conference. I owe Clay big time. Clay, I love ya bro! I was honored to be in the presence of such amazing area officers who are charged with leading 58,000 FFA members throughout the year. It felt really good to be at home at a Texas FFA event. Something else that made it special was seeing my oldest sister Jessica there. While I was there I saw the state officer team, it was neat to see the growth that they had embraced over the past year. Sunday I headed for the Green Bay state of Wisconsin!!

Romans 10:9 "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

June 1, 2003

This weekend I was honored to be at the wedding of one of my past National Officer mentor's Doug Kueker. I came from New Jersey to Columbia, Mo., for Saturday and Sunday. It was also a great chance to see a dear friend of mine, Trent McKnight. Following the wedding I hopped on a plane bound for Lincoln, Nebraska.

I was en route for the third session of COLT Conference 2003. As I was walking through the St. Louis airport I called Tim, because he was just leaving the second session of COLT. He told me to expect a great time, he told me that it was a wonderful conference. Well, after spending three days at The Leadership Center in Aurora, Neb., I can honestly say that Tim wasn't lying to me. I was picked up at the airport on Sunday evening and taken to Aurora where the state officers were preparing for the week. I experienced a first in my life...the first time I have eaten at a Runza. Runza is a fast food place that is special to Nebraska. I must admit, I really liked the food. Also, another first that I had this week was "pickled asparagus". I am here to tell you, that stuff is good. If you ever get a chance to eat it, do it you won't regret it.

Monday, which was Memorial Day, the conference began. The conference theme was "Now Showing" so as you can guess it was a movie theme. Jill, Megan, Beau, Adam, Miranda, Ryan and Becky, the

Nebraska state officers, were masterful at incorporating the theme into principles of leadership, teamwork and chapter officer responsibilities. Perhaps what was more impressive to me was the amount of passion that they had for serving others and the amount of respect that they had for each other!!! While I was there, a good friend Andy Osten, was interning at COLT. Andy and I were fortunate to get to spend some good quality time just visiting and catching up on the latest events of each other's life. While at COLT I met some pretty amazing people and FFA chapters. One chapter that I was particularly close to was the Superior FFA chapter. I thoroughly enjoyed COLT as it reminded me of my first ever FFA leadership camp. One of the most memorable times of my FFA career was my first FFA leadership camp. After being at that camp, for the first time I felt a true purpose in my life. I will always remember this experience, and it is for that reason that I love going to FFA leadership camps today. This concluded my week at COLT!

Proverbs 15:1 "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh answer stirs up anger."

May 25, 2003

From the beaches of the Atlantic Ocean in San Juan to the wonderful Garden State of New Jersey. As flight 1940 arrived into Newark, New Jersey, I was greeted by a good friend, Greg Babbitt. Greg took me to Rutgers University, the site of the 74th New Jersey State FFA Convention. It was neat to be in the state that was the third state association in the nation to be chartered 75 years ago. Interestingly enough, it was only their 74th convention because during World War II they were forced to skip a year.

When I walked into the convention hall, I saw Brian D., Jenifeur, Kati, Brian E. and Bobby practicing fervently for the upcoming convention. Tuesday afternoon I addressed two different groups. The first of which was the New Jersey Agricultural Education Advisory Council. I really cherish the times that I get to address the people who are responsible for providing direction and support for FFA members. The second group was the nominating committee. This was neat, solely because they controlled the destiny of 11 state officer candidates, 40 FFA chapters, and 2,000 FFA members. Needless to say, they hoisted a huge amount of responsibility this week. Tuesday night was the opening session of the convention. Before the session began, I spent several minutes talking to the New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture, Charles Kuperus. New Jersey FFA is blessed to have a supporter like Secretary Kuperus. He is one of NJ FFA's biggest advocates. During the session we heard from him, Andrew Mc Crea (past National FFA Officer), and a few retiring addresses. Following the session the entire convention gathered for an ice cream social. It was neat to be on a college campus again, everyone at the convention slept in the dorms at Rutgers and ate in a college cafeteria. Now normally I try to avoid "dorm food" at all costs, but I'm here to tell you, this food was good! Especially the watermelon frosties, wow I bet I had ten of them before the week was over.

Speaking of college, on Wednesday I met an advisor, Mrs. Sopchak who went to school at Texas A&M. It was so much fun, to fellowship with a fellow Aggie. Also, I had breakfast with the Camden Tech East FFA, they were leaders in the field of innovation. They were an example of simply "making things happen." Their program had improved 150 percent over the past four years because of their relentless pursuit of excellence. Jessica, Catherine, Jessi, Cybil, Travis, Dane, Steve, PJ, Rebecca, Erica, Ben, Danielle, Dan and Vanessa were some more NJ FFA members that I had the privilege of hanging out with over the week. There is not a chapter that has more pride in NJ FFA than Allentown. The guys and gals of A-town were definitely proud of where they came from, and were a ton of fun to be around. The last moments of convention were unbelievably exciting as the new state officers were elected. Jen, Cynthia, Kati, Jenelle, John, Heather and Jay were all elated and it was awesome to share the moment with them.

When I left the convention, Greg, Brian E., Jenelle, Jen and I were headed for the Bronx, New York. We were going to do something that I have wanted to do all of my life.....go to a New York Yankees baseball game. Yankee stadium has been the site of so many historical moments in baseball, I just had to go and be in its presence. The weather was less than favorable, it was 39 degrees and raining, but nothing could dampen the experience that we all shared. I can not thank the four of them enough for their kindness of coming to the game with me, it made the experience two times better than it would have been if I was alone. Following the game, I bid my friends farewell outside of Yankee stadium as I hailed a cab and headed for a hotel near La Guardia airport in New York City.

Friday morning I woke up and headed to Manhattan to meet my aunt, who lives in New York, for lunch. It was incredible to get to see her and catch up on what she has been doing. Later on that afternoon I boarded a flight bound for Missouri for Past National Officer and good friend Doug Kueker's wedding.

Psalms 46:1 "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

May 18, 2003

Christian, Doel and Pollito met me curbside at Luis Munoz Marin International Airport to welcome me

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to Puerto Rico, Isla Del Encanto (Island of Enchantment). From there I had my very first ever Puerto Rican meal, (Burger King.) Here they informed me that we would be traveling to their home in Orocovis. Corazon de Puerto Rico (the heart of P.R.) We arrived in Orocovis at 11 p.m. and Doel took me to his house. Doel was the past state treasurer. I quickly laid down and went to bed. The window in my bedroom was open, and I fell asleep listening to the sounds of the Puerto Rican mountainside, it was one of the most relaxing sounds I have ever heard.

The next morning we headed off to school and to spend the entire day with the Botijas Numero Uno FFA chapter. This chapter was nothing less than amazing. They had a project that was called "Agriculture in Harmony with the Environment". It was an organic farm, planted on a beautiful mountainside, which grew plantains, papayas, tomatoes, celery, lettuce and beans. They also made compost. Jose, Francisco, Manuel, Elcie and Jacqueline invested a considerable amount of time in showing me the project and their school. Their advisor, Dalma, took me to lunch and we had a great conversation about her students and the Puerto Rican culture. I expressed my appreciation to her for allowing me to spend the entire day with her chapter and told her that it was a rare occasion that I was able to do anything like this. After school was over, Christian, Doel, Pollito and Orlando and I took a journey to the Torro Negro rainforest. WOW! It was AWESOME. God's creation doesn't get much more beautiful than this. Words cannot describe the beauty that the center of the island possesses. I couldn't thank my friends enough for taking me here.

That night at 10:30 there was an eclipse. Before I went to bed, I went outside laid down in the driveway and stared into the sky and just was awe struck. Friday morning Doel delivered me to Arecibo to meet Senor Nolla, advisor of the Garrochales FFA and Senor Jimenez, the State Executive Secretary. Also I was surprised to see that Kevin Keith, National FFA employee was there as well. The four of us spent the day visiting three FFA chapters. One of which was Mr. Nolla's wife's chapter. They are both great people who have outstanding programs. I was also privileged to meet their daughter Paula. Before I headed to San Juan, we visited the Observatory. This is the largest radio telescope in the world. People come from all over the world to study the solar system here.

That night I stayed at the Embassy Suites Hotel in San Juan. This is where I would stay for the remainder of my trip, seeing that this was the site of state convention. Saturday was yet another mind-boggling day. Mr. Keith and I were greeted at 9 a.m. by Senor Rosario. Mr. Rosario informed us that we would be visiting El Junque rainforest as well as the beautiful beaches of Puerto Rico. El Yunque rainforest was really cool. As we climbed up the mountain Mr. Rosario would tell me the name of almost every plant that we would encounter. His knowledge was quite impressive, but his heart to help others I found was more impressive. Following the rainforest, we stopped at a roadside stand for refreshment. I bought a coconut. They chopped the top off of the coconut and stuck a straw in it and I drank coconut water. This was definitely a first for me!! From here we visited a world famous five star resort on the coast called El Conquistador, the architecture and golf course at the resort was astounding. This also provided us with a magnificent view of the beach.

This concluded our long day of experiencing the Saturday night I greeted the state officers: Christian, Eladio, Gladys, Sheryl, and Marie. Also a great friend whom I met at national convention last year Javier arrived Saturday night. He and I spent a few hours visiting that night. Sunday morning Javier and I walked to the beach of the Atlantic and spent time in worship and in prayer. That night marked the first session of convention. I gave my keynote address, and it was the most interesting speech that I have ever given. I had to give it through a translator!!! It was a blast. The entire convention was in Spanish. Following my keynote the entire convention went to the pool party. The next day was full of convention sessions, and ended with the convention dance. Dancing is a very important aspect in Puerto Rican culture, so important that on the last night of convention we danced until 3 a.m. I learned how to salsa dance and merengue dance. This Texan truly received some cultural lessons. After bidding farewell to all of my new friends I packed my bags and headed for the airport at 5 a.m.

My time in Puerto Rico will never be forgotten. I fell in love with their beautiful island, caring people and relaxed pace of life. Seriously, this is the most beautiful place that I have ever laid eyes on. If you ever get a chance to go, I would encourage it. This was truly one of the best weeks of my life.

Genesis 1:31 "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good."

May 11, 2003

I stepped off of the airplane to see the beautiful words..."Welcome to Aggieland"! It was wonderful to be back in my great home state of Texas. I had been anxiously awaiting the next ten days, because I would get to orient my five teammates to the state and college, which I so dearly love.

Saturday, I was able to attend the Texas FFA CDEs. I relished this opportunity, as I had the chance to reconnect with many friends, advisors and FFA members whom I had not seen in a long time. I also was fortunate to spend time with the Texas FFA state officer team, whom I consider good friends. Sunday marked the arrival of the rest of our team with the exception of Seth. Seth was still in Tennessee for their convention. We just spent the afternoon getting settled in and acclimated to our

surroundings. On Monday Seth arrived and we began our ten days of preparations and training for the 2003 National Leadership Conference for State Officers. The next ten days would prove to be intense, fun, challenging, rewarding and most of all, full of growth for our team. After five days of training we actually delivered the conference to 90 Texas A&M students. This was a great time to have an initial run-through of the conference. While doing this, I had the chance to be with several close friends: Kinder, Nikki, Allison L., Allison C. and Julie while also meeting some new friends as well. This week flew by and before I knew it I was leaving College Station, Texas and off to San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Proverbs 16:3 "Commit your works to the Lord and your thoughts shall be established."

May 4, 2003

After leaving Tiger Territory I found myself on my way to Reagan National Airport in Washington, D.C. I flew in during the afternoon so that I could have a dinner meeting with Dr. Jim Butler, the Deputy Undersecretary of the USDA. Dr. Butler is an amazing man whom I had met earlier in the year during a visit to USDA. Our dinner was great, and he continued to provide encouragement about faith, my year of service and my future career.

From there I jumped in my rental car and headed over to one of my favorite parts of Washington, D. C.... the Washington Monument. I stepped out of my car, grabbed my headphones and began walking and thinking. The sun was setting as I sat down in the grass near the Washington Monument. I just took a few minutes to sit and think about the blessings that we have and the liberties that we possess. I cannot explain the feeling of thankfulness that I was overcome with. The atmosphere of our nation's capital was so moving to me. The best way to describe my feeling is..."I was proud to be an American." As the sun set, I found myself walking to the Lincoln Memorial and from there to the Korean War Memorial. Once again, I was glad that I had the chance to slow down from the crazy pace that I had been living, and simply return thanks for the simple "blessing of being."

Later on that evening I decided that it was time for me to head up to Hagerstrom, Maryland. Normally it is a 90-minute drive. Well, let's just say that my not-so-keen sense of direction turned it into a 2 and a half hour drive. The next morning I met with the Maryland state officer team and the state convention began that afternoon. Everyone stayed in the same hotel that the convention was held in. This allowed for some awesome relationships to be formed. I met some awesome people such as Julie, Cheryl, Erin, Brandon and Chris.

Julie introduced me to a MD product, called Old Bay. It is a seasoning that they use on their food. It is actually pretty good unless you are conned into eating an entire teaspoon of it. I promise, I tasted Old Bay seasoning salt for three days! Also, I met some visiting state officers from Virginia. We had a good time getting to know each other while working with MD FFA members. Unfortunately, the end of convention came too soon and I had to drive to Baltimore to catch my flight. A bright spot of the day though, was the drive to Baltimore. The scenery was absolutely beautiful. The colors of spring were awesome. From here I was leaving on a jetplane to College Station, America!!!

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another."

April 27, 2003

The Show-Me State definitely showed me some lovin'!

I enjoyed a short trip back home to be with my family over Easter Sunday, and then our team met up in Indianapolis for the Blue catalog photo shoot. I think they were hard pressed for some models this year!

Then it was on to Missouri, where I flew into a small airport in Columbia that was surrounded by cattle grazing in the pasture. I was picked up at the airport by a past state officer and taken to meet the current state officer team that I would have the privilege of working with throughout the week.

Tuesday and Wednesday were full of work as the officers prepared for all of the convention sessions. But Wednesday night we celebrated the state officers' hard work and incredible year of service with a lovely dinner on the state convention stage. It was so neat to see the Hearne's Center so peaceful and empty, and you could tell how anxious the officers were to see it fill with thousands of other blue jackets in the just 24 hours!

Thursday morning started with some workshops, and I was able to meet some really cool people and see a few old friends. It was great to reunite with Dana and Lorin, who I met several years ago at the State Presidents' Conference. I was also thrilled to see my good friend Brad Mabry, a fellow Texan and state officer teammate, who made the trip from Illinois to Columbia. Thursday I also met Emily, an amazing girl from Milan, who was kind enough to help me out on Friday. Missouri is also full of a

lot of great advisors with a huge heart for their students' success, like Mr. Hoy from St. Joseph. It is people like him and so many others that drive our local programs and help us to succeed.

As an Aggie, I hate to admit it. But as I was trying to lead some Aggie yells on Friday, I didn't realize how far out of my own Aggieland territory I was, and how deep into the heart of Missouri I had landed. We had barely started to yell when Mizzou's own Truman the Tiger pounced me and threw me to the ground! Talk about a blow to this Aggie's pride!

The retiring state officers' put on an awesome convention and awarded so many people for all of their hard work and achievements throughout the year. But one of my favorite things was meeting with them 15 minutes prior to the opening of every session to come to the Lord in prayer. I was able to be a part of the special time that the old and new state officers spent together after convention, and after meeting with the new team on Saturday morning, I have no doubt that they will have an incredible year as they share their hearts of service with others.

My fabulous week in Missouri concluded with a few days visiting some special friends, and hanging out with "The Team". I also enjoyed a great evening on Monday with some more great people at the Bethany FFA Chapter Banquet! Thank you all for making me feel so welcome in Tiger Territory!

FFA members use the talents that you have been given...

Matthew 25:29 "For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he does have will be taken away."

April 20, 2003

After spending time with Tim, Seth, J.J., Julie and Joel on Wednesday I was off to the windy city of Chicago. On my way in I stopped at a friend's house in Newark, Ill. After eating a delicious home cooked meal of pot roast, potatoes and carrots we hung out and visited. Once it got late, I headed to bed to get ready for an early morning. The next day began by an early morning drive to Chicago to my first stop the Chicago Board of Trade. This was so incredible...I was standing on the floor of the place where all the world grain prices are set. This place was chaos, people were yelling, buying, selling, and trading. It was surely fascinating!!! My second stop was to the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago. After visiting there, I traveled to the TALLEST building in the United States. The Sears tower was really cool! It was awe inspiring to be 103 floors above the ground and to see the entire city of Chicago on the banks of Lake Michigan. From here I departed for the main attraction... Wrigley Field. That's right, I was going to a Chicago Cubs game. I was pumped; the taxi dumped me out right in front of the stadium. It was so surreal; I could not believe that I was standing in arguably the most historic baseball stadium in America. The Cubs played the Cincinnati Reds. Sammy Sosa hit a homerun as the Cubs beat the Reds. Following the game I returned to my hotel in preparation for my departure home for Easter on Friday. Before I left the city, I had to eat some world famous Chicago-style pizza. Boy, was that a great way to cap off a great two days. I now think that Chicago is my favorite large city in America!

Happy Easter!

Matthew 28:5-6 "But then the angel answered and said to the women. Do not be afraid for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen."

April 13, 2003

Twin Falls, Idaho to Decatur, Illinois... I don't know how much you know about these towns, but just for your information they are small! So to get from one to another it requires going through several airports. Once I finally arrived in Illinois on Sunday night I rented a car and drove to Wal-Mart. I love Wal-Mart, if you can't get it at Wal-Mart then I am thinking you really don't need it anyway. After leaving there I arrived at the Holiday Inn. Shortly after arriving in Illinois I hit the sack. A big day at the IL Farm Bureau Youth Conference lied ahead.

During the conference I was able to meet many people, all very much on fire for the FFA. Perhaps none more fired up than Mr. Wildman. Mr. Wildman is an advisor in Illinois. He brought fun, emotion, and passion to the conference. I had a blast with and was blessed to meet him. The day was concluded with a vespers program put on by Jay, Drew, Emily, Megan and Rebekah- the Illinois state officer team. It was the best part of the conference. They touched on our love for America, God and each other. Wow, it was powerful.

Tuesday the conference was over and I flew to Oklahoma City. My dad picked me up there and we geared up for a big two days of burning up the roads of OK. We had a ball, as we covered nearly the entire state on just one of our many cattle buying excursions! It was everything that I had anticipated and more. We saw good cattle and just enjoyed each other's company. The end of the week took me

to College Station. My sister, Jessica, drove me half way and my friend Nikki met us and picked me up and drove me the rest of the way. Friday night I arrived, and hung out with friends., It was a joyous time for all as several of my friends received their Aggie rings. Saturday was filled with the Aggie Spring Football Game, the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Convocation and the Agricultural Economics end of the year banquet. All three events were awesome because I was able to see many friends, and professors that I have not seen in several months.

My weekend was concluded by Dustin Kinder delivering me to the Houston airport en route to Indianapolis to meet up with five of the coolest people that I know.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that we may not perish but have everlasting life."

April 6, 2003

Greetings everyone, I hope that everyone is enjoying this crazy spring weather. I know that I was glad to finally not have to pack my big overcoat. State conventions are currently in full swing! And I love it. Wow! There is just something special about all state FFA conventions. The feeling that you walk away from state convention with is incredible, and like nothing I have ever felt.

My recent trip to Idaho was absolutely no different. I flew into Twin Falls one day early. Cody Park, Idaho state vice president, picked me up from the airport. On Tuesday night, the state officer team, Mrs. Shively, Dr. Ledington and myself went out to eat. This was a neat chance to interact with each other in a very informal setting. The convention began on Thursday morning. When we left the hotel to go to the convention center, I walked outside and was covered in snow. I could not believe that there was snow in the middle of April! It was mad crazy! Christine, Cody, Casey, Mindy, Kimmi and Boone started convention with a bang. The night before convention started we had a great conversation and I felt so connected with them. I was blessed to spend so much time with them and blessed by the fact that they took me in as one of their own. Thursday was packed full in between interviewing National Chapter Award applicants to delivering one of my workshops. Friday was a day of non-stop activities. I delivered a keynote and a workshop, spoke to the Idaho student teachers, the "experienced" teachers and the Twin Falls Chamber of Commerce. Whew, was it a full day. Perhaps the best part of my day was on Friday night... I was blessed to have dinner with the state officers and their parents. It was amazing to see the appreciation that the state officers had for their parents, and the pride that the parents had for the state officers. Saturday marked a new era for the Idaho FFA. The new state officer team was elected. I was privileged to have a small part in the ceremony...I ran the newly elected Vice President, Matt Woodington, to the stage. It was such an adrenaline rush!!! John, Matt, Katie, Jason, Trent and Michelle were elated. I have full and total confidence that they will lead Idaho FFA to successes never before imagined.

All in all, my year of service just got better because of my short time in Idaho. The relationships that were built while I was there are incredible. I cannot say enough about the true and caring hearts of Christine, Cody, Casey, Mindy, Boone and Kimmi. You guys truly made this Texan feel welcome. It meant more to me than you will ever know. I am off to Decatur, Illinois, until next time I'll see you down the road.

Proverbs 13:20 "He who walks with wise men will be wise, but the companion of fools will be destroyed."

March 30

WOW, there is something to be said about arriving on a plane into our nation's capitol. As you look out the window below and see the White House, Pentagon, Washington Monument, and Capitol Hill, it is just breathtaking!

Upon entering Washington, D.C., on Sunday night, Joel and I had a wonderful dinner at Joe Theisman's Restaraunt. I thoroughly enjoyed our meal, as we had a great thought provoking dinner conversation. Monday began an incredible week of meetings. Our first meeting was with American Farm Bureau. We were briefed on all of the issues that continue to face the agriculture industry. These issues included: conservation, energy, international trade, and estate taxes. Following this visit we took the Metro (which is the subway system) to the Environmental Protection Agency. We had the neat opportunity to meet with Jean Marie Peltier, who is the Agricultural Counselor to the administrator of EPA. The impressive thing about this meeting was that Mrs. Peltier was entirely farmer friendly. She brought great ideas to the table that will help farmers to continue to be the best stewards of the land.

Tuesday was FULL of meetings with partners of the FFA. We met with: the National Grange, America's Promise, former National Officer Nels Ackerson, Senator Sam Brownback's office, and the Society of American Florists. Tuesday night Tim, Seth, Joel, Mr. Scheske, and I went out to eat in Pentagon City. All of the events of the week so far led up to a capstone day.

Wednesday was an incredible day. At 8 a.m. we arrived at the United States Department of Agriculture. The first thing that we did was to go with the people that we were job shadowing. I had the blessing of shadowing Dr. Jim Butler. He is the deputy undersecretary for the FSA, FAS and RMA. He is also a fellow Texas Aggie. We had a wonderful morning together as I learned about him and about his position with the USDA. As the noon hour struck I left his office to go to the Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman's office. We proceeded to her office to take a quick picture with the secretary. Then the four of us followed her to lunch. To know that we were having lunch with one of President Bush's cabinet members was truly a humbling thought. Following lunch I returned to Dr. Butler's office and finished my day of job shadowing. The final order of the day was to meet with Congressman Charlie Stenholm. Congressman Stenholm is a fellow Texan who is the ranking minority of the House Agriculture Committee. Our visit included an invitation to him for State President's Conference. This signaled an end to a wonderful week of partner visits in Washington.

My flight left D.C. en route to Dallas-Ft. Worth at 8 a.m. Thursday. Thursday brought extreme joy to me as I was able to see my sisters show steers at our county show. I was so proud for my oldest sister, Jessica, she had the Grand Champion Steer of the show. It is something that she has been working at for many years. I was glad that I was able to be there and experience it with her. Amelia and Samantha also showed. The weekend was very relaxing as I visited with family and a few great friends. To be close to these people was truly a blessing. From here I am off to the great potato state of Idaho! Farewell friends until next time...

Phillipians 4:13 "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

March 23, 2003

Reno, Nevada is a place that I will always remember. This week I experienced my first state convention of the year. The week was nothing short of incredible. The biggest little city in the world hosted the biggest little state convention in the world. As my friend Dustin Hurter, state president in Washington said, "dynamite comes in small packages". The week began on Wednesday as I flew from Indianapolis to Reno. My good friend, Andrea Paris, picked me up. From there we went straight to the convention. On the way to convention we learned that the war in Iraq had begun. That night I simply reflected on how blessed that we were as a nation and I prayed that God would guide our troops and our leadership through a time such as this.

When I arrived at the hotel, Luke Browning, a past California state officer, greeted me. Luke was in Nevada helping with their CDEs. Hanging out with Luke was a great time. Thursday night, following my keynote address the entire state convention went roller skating. Yes, you read it right roller-skating. I have not done this since I was in the sixth grade. It was GREAT, oh so much fun. Friday was a special day for me because I was fortunate to spend some good quality time with two different FFA chapters. I had lunch with the Wells chapter; we went to Arby's to eat. It was a great lunch as we visited about FFA, sports, and life in general. Then later that evening I ate dinner with the Sierra Nevada FFA chapter. Wow, you want to talk about a great time with great people, you should have been here with me. Saturday marked the end of convention. It was a very bittersweet day, all good things have to end, but it was tough to leave all of the new friends that I had made.

The past Nevada State Officers deserve huge congratulations for pouring their heart into making it a memorable experience for everyone there. The newly elected state officers deserve a big "high five" for their awesome accomplishment in being elected to serve the Nevada FFA for the next year. Rachel, Leslie, Lauren, Garrett, Dylan and Casey, you are going to do great things for the great state of Nevada. My week concluded on Saturday night with Andrea, Jon and I going to see the majestic breath taking view of Lake Tahoe and having a very enjoyable dinner. Andrea picked me up at 5:00 a.m. because my flight left Reno at 6:20 a.m. Sunday morning en route to our nation's capital.

As our nation has entered a time of conflict, I believe that we as the future of America have a responsibility to support our noble service men and women through prayerful affirmation.

Phillipians 4:6 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God."

March 16, 2003

John Deere, Hormel, Gander Mountain, Torro, AMPI, Land O'Lakes, CHS, and the Minnesota Twins foundation are just a few companies that J.J. and I met with during our second week of Business and Industry visits. We began the week driving from Indianapolis to Moline, Ill.

On Monday, after we spent a major part of the day with John Deere, we had the chance to visit the Williamsburg FFA chapter. It was a great chance to meet many people. We were honored that the Iowa State President Rob Rudolphi joined us; as this was his home chapter. On Tuesday we had an

unforgettable morning. Hold your breath.... J.J. and I went to the SPAM museum. You would not believe the rich history that SPAM has. We were definitely taken aback. Following our visit to the SPAM museum, we made our way up to Minneapolis. This is where we would spend the rest of the week. On Thursday night we went to the Mall of America with some of the Minnesota state officers. Adam, Andrew, Kristie, Beth, Suzzane and Jillian showed us a great time while we ate at the Rainforest Café. Wow, those guys and gals are awesome and we were blessed to be able to spend quality time with them. Friday afternoon marked the end of a very intense week of B&I visits.

We arrived in Indianapolis at 1:30 am and went to bed in order to be ready for a big weekend. This weekend was the begging of the "Spring Training Academy". This is a training for WLC staff, BLAST-OFF presenters, and our team. It should be a great time of learning and fellowship.

1 Corinthians 8:1 "Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies."

March 9, 2003

To places never before seen...this sums up my week. This week was spent in Cassopolis, Michigan. This is the first time that I have ever been in the state. We held our first team retreat. This was a time where we were able to complete work. The place where we stayed in Michigan was really a neat place. We all stayed in actual box cars. The scenery was beautiful, there was several inches of snow on the ground. It snowed on and off all week. When we weren't planning conferences, writing speeches, sending letters, making phone calls, and having team reflections, we were playing snow Frisbee, card games, having our own version of "The Amazing Race", and catching up with each other's lives. A highlight of the week was when the six of us worshiped together as a team. We sat around a fireplace while Seth and Tim played guitar and we all sang and worshiped. This was followed by a devotional; it was simply awesome to engage in a most simple yet very pure form of worshiping together.

On Monday we spent a good part of the day with the Cassopolis FFA chapter. We met some really neat friends. Ray, Ashley, Allison, Danielle, Shakara, and many, many, more. Our trip to Cass was truly unique as we learned the "gator dance", played mafia, and ate lunch together. When the week was over we headed out for our second week of B&I visits. I am really looking forward to another great week with J.J. FFA members, don't forget to slow down and enjoy the things that we have been blessed with! If we cannot enjoy life, then we must ask ourselves what are we doing here then?

1 Corinthians 16:14 "Let all that you do be done with love."

March 2, 2003

LIVE FROM THE COUNTRY MUSIC CAPITAL OF THE WORLD!!!

I hope that as you are reading this that you are enjoying the waning days of winter. This past week we definitely experienced some spring like conditions. The week began in Nashville, Tenn. Our entire team gathered in Nashville on Friday night. The country music capital of the world showed us a good time.

This weekend was intended to kick-off our business and industry visits. WOW, was it ever a kick-off. The weekend was laced with fun and excitement. It began with some final B&I preparations on Saturday morning. During breakfast we met with Jim Wright, who is the president of Tractor Supply Company. Saturday afternoon we started our "Nashville experience." From Saturday to Sunday we went to music row, the Grand Ole' Opry, the Opryland Hotel, Ryman Auditorium, Opry Mills Mall, the People's Church, and on a riverboat cruise. Following all of these events we were exhausted. The weekend was a total success. The weekend events were hosted by the chairman of the 2003 FFA Foundation Sponsor's Board, Jerry Brase of the Tractor Supply Company. Our team was truly thankful for the hospitality and kindness that he showed us.

Also, on Sunday we ate dinner and played arcade games with the Tennessee State Officer team. Our team was honored that their team would take time out of their schedule to be with us; especially considering that they had just had a hectic National FFA Week. This was a total blast, although I was pretty awful at all of the video games. After spending Monday morning at TSC, our team split up into our B&I pairs and hit the road for a week full of meetings. J.J. and I headed to Memphis, then to Cleveland and on through Ohio. After leaving Nashville I had a newfound respect and appreciation for country music.

Luke 1:37 "With God all things are possible."

Feb. 23, 2003

O-H-I-O! The buckeye state was AWESOME! The people of Ohio are extraordinary folks. My week was a smashing success. It started out with a bang. I was picked up at the Columbus airport by Ohio FFA President Marlene von Stein and Dave O' Diam. I arrived one day after a large snowstorm. Dave has a four wheel drive truck, and that was the safest way to get me from the airport. We arrived in Columbus and they took me to show me where Dave lives. He lives in the Alpha Gamma Rho fraternity house. As we were driving past the house, suddenly Dave hammers the gas pedal and jumped over the curb into the front yard of the AGR house! I was in shock. We were driving in the front yard in almost a foot of snow. Then suddenly we start spinning around and going in circles. It was CRAZY, I was laughing hysterically!

The second day of my week, snow forced all of the schools that Marlene and I were going to visit to shut down. The highlight of Tuesday was having a meeting with the Director of the Ohio Department of agriculture, Fred Dailey. Director Dailey was an incredible man; he is a man of passion, integrity, service, and values. Our visit centered around the current state of our nation's and Ohio's agriculture.

He is champion for FFA and agriculture. That night I had a wonderful dinner with Ohio FFA executive secretary Mr. Gratz and his wife Andrea. It was a great meal consisting of ham loaf, sushi and apple pie. Wednesday, Marlene and I were able to hit the road. We visited Madison Plains and West Holmes. Ms. Chenevy, the advisor at West Holmes wore her official dress to school, since it was official dress day. I was honored to have lunch at Ohio State ATI; a college that several Ohio State Officers attend. I was fortunate to spend time with state vice president Lindsey Calhoun. The time that we spent catching up was great, it really reminded me how blessed that I am to have such good friends. State officer, Bethany Frew also traveled with us on Wednesday. That evening we went to Hillsdale FFA, home of the National FFA Eastern Region Vice President, Julie Tyson. Hillsdale hosted an ag olympics for numerous chapters in the area. This was a great event; the organization of the Hillsdale chapter officer team was impeccable! Way to go Todd, Jill, Jillian, Michelle, Mandy.

Thursday was a FULL day. It began by visiting two very unique chapters. Toledo Natural Science Tech Career Center and Sylvania Southview were very urban chapters. The members here were a blast, Toledo FFA specialized in small animal production while Sylvania FFA specialized in Horticulture. I saw everything from snakes, to ferrets, to plants. It was a prime example of the diversification of the agriculture industry. We stopped in for a quick home cooked meal at Marlene's parents house. It was great food and more importantly great people! Later on that day we visited the Apollo FFA. My visit to Apollo was a special experience. They had the neatest greenhouse that I have ever seen. It was a beautiful example of landscape design. Apollo FFA, thanks a million for a great afternoon. Thursday night the Ohio State Officers held a regional leadership night at the Delphos FFA chapter.

Lindsey, Karen, Kisha, Kim, Marlene, Joy, Jill, Ashley and Chris did a tremendous job with several leadership workshops. The workshops were followed by some COOL games. Games such as human joust, a fake "Bucking Bull", boxing with oversized gloves, etc. I am not sure that I ever made it a whole 8 seconds on the bull. It was truly a night that will always be remembered. Friday morning led us to Bloom Carroll FFA, I could not think of a better way to end an outstanding week in Ohio. Mrs. Amy Moore and her students did an immaculate job of coordinating an event that included Bloom Carroll as well as Amanda Clearcreek and Canal Winchester FFA. We spent the entire morning together and it was followed by lunch.

As Marlene took me back to the airport, I thanked her for a great week of getting to know her and for the awesome job that she did in organizing the events of the week.. Regretfully this signaled an end to the best National FFA Week of my life. I hopped on an airplane and headed to Nashville to catch up with our teammates.

Proverbs 4:26 "Ponder the path of your feet, and let all your ways be established."

Feb. 16, 2003

On Saturday I flew home after a great trip to Japan! I spent all day at my Mom's house, in Mansfield, hanging out with my Mom, John my two brothers and one of my sisters. That afternoon I was able to see John Davis (my oldest brother) play basketball. It was great, I love watching John Davis and Jameson play sports. Saturday night, a very good friend of mine dropped by to see me for the weekend. We had a wonderful time just catching up, doing what friends do. Sunday morning we went to my Dad's church. Following church we spent the entire afternoon at home with my Dad, Susan and three of my sisters. We worked with my sisters' show steers and looked through my cowherd at the baby calves that were born in the fall. The time I spent with my family and my cattle was much needed!

Monday and Tuesday I spent at Texas A&M in College Station (where I go to college). It was GREAT to see friends that I had not seen since November. While my time in Aggieland was short, all of these people made it great to be back. Most of my time was spent visiting with friends, while some of my time was spent meeting with professors and advisors on campus. Following my short time in Aggieland, I drove 2 and a half hours back home to get ready to fly back to Indianapolis. Before my flight left on Thursday, I ate breakfast with my cousin. Derrick and I had a wonderful breakfast, and it was a great chance to talk and catch up on each other's lives. Our team arrived back in Indianapolis safely and just in time for Valentine's Day. I love Valentine's Day. We spent half of Valentine's Day at Elanco, going through some Business and Industry Visits. We used the rest of the afternoon to

complete our preparations for National FFA Week. Next week I will be celebrating 75 years of FFA in Ohio!

1 Corinthians 10:24 "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well being."

Feb. 3, 2003

"Ohayou gozaimas, hajimimashte yorosku onegai shimas." This is something that we said a lot of this week! This means... "hello, how are you and it is very nice to meet you."

Words cannot describe our experience in Japan. Our team took part in events that are way beyond my realm of imagination...such as going to a real live Japanese Fish Market, meeting with the United States Embassy, going out for a night of Karaoke with Japanese friends that were our age, visiting Japanese farmers, and seeing the beauty of God's creation half a world away. Let me tell you a little bit about our time in Japan!

Our adventure began with a 14-hour flight from Baltimore, Md., to Tokyo. Talk about a serious case of Jet lag!!!! The first day was highlighted with a trip to the United States embassy in Tokyo. This was an awesome way to begin our trip. We learned about the economic situation of Japan, the political situation, as well as meeting with the agriculture attaché to the ambassador and learned the intricacies of Japanese agriculture. On Friday we got up at 4:30 a.m. to go to the Tsukiji fish market. This was one of the most interesting things that I have ever in my life seen! We saw fresh fish, frozen fish, live fish, eel, octopus, squid and any other type of fish that you could imagine. The latter part of this day was spent at Mitsui, a Japanese agri-business company that specializes in importing products that are used domestically. This was a great look at how dependent that their economy is on our agriculture and vice versa.

Friday evening was one of the most memorable parts of the trip... we were hosted by some Mitsui employees that were our age, they took us to Karaoke Japanese style. We went into this tiny room and all 20 of us had the room all to ourselves to sing our hearts out. Some of our teammates are a little easier to listen to sing than others, if you know what I mean. A vivid picture that I have in my mind is when our entire team and our new Japanese friends ended our great night of bonding and singing by standing together arm in arm and sang "Imagine". Although our cultures may be a world apart, I suddenly realized that we are really no different. That was truly an unforgettable night.

The weekend was spent visiting farmers and traveling to Kyoto. Since I grew up on a corn, cotton and wheat farm, the farm visits were one of my favorite parts of the trip. Talking with the farmers made us feel very connected to their agriculture. I learned that they are having the same difficulties that our American farmers are. They are being forced to exploit new and innovative ways to be profitable. Our next stop was Kyoto, it was an incredible city, due to it's historical beauty and importance. This city was the only major city in Japan that was not bombed during World War II. The mystique of the city was breathtaking. Our team was able to spend good "bonding" time while we were here. Regretfully we had to leave on Wednesday to come back to America.

To sum it up, the trip was something that I would not trade for anything. I gained a "bigger picture" view of everything from culture, economics, food and agriculture. This week was tremendous, it was a trip that I will be grateful for forever and full of experiences which I will never forget. I am sure to always continue to learn and grow from our experience! It was awesome to be in the presence of God's beautiful creation on the other side of the world. If there is one thing that I could tell anyone.... "We are blessed ultimately to be Americans, but we also can respect and learn from other cultures throughout the world."

Genesis 1:31 "Then God saw everything that he had made, and indeed it was good."

Jan. 26, 2003

Monday you would have thought that J.J., Seth and I were Olympic snow skiers! We were "tearing it up" on the slopes of Winter Park, Colorado. On second thought, maybe the mountain was tearing us up! Either way we had a blast tumbling down the mountain. It was a great opportunity to combine two of my passions in life: friends and athletics! After we were skiing on Monday, our team met on Tuesday in Washington, D.C., for the National FFA Board of Directors Meeting. The rest of the week was consumed with preparing for and going to the board meeting. I really enjoyed the board meeting. It was a great time to meet with the adult leaders of our organization as well as serving with them in directing the movement of our organization. On Thursday morning I met a college friend from Texas A&M, Joe, and we were able to have breakfast. Joe is currently serving as an intern to Congress. This was a very action packed week as we were heavily involved in the board meeting, while still trying to get ready to go to Japan. Currently our team is in Japan, experiencing agriculture from a global perspective. I can't wait to be home to share our experiences! Sayonora... until then!

Romans 12:8 "...he who leads, lead with diligence..."

Jan. 19, 2003

This week was what I like to call a "week to unwind". It began by all of us going and having an eventful dinner at Steak 'n Shake in Indianapolis. We had all just arrived from our Greenhand Experience States. That meant that all of us had plenty of stories to share! It was a fun time to spend as a team and just reflect on the wonderful events of the prior week. The early part of the week was filled with training, and the latter part of the week was a little bit different. Thursday we went to downtown Indianapolis to look at the National FFA Convention site for 2006-2012. It was really neat. We toured Conseco Field House and the RCA Dome as well as many fine hotels. We actually stood in an NBA locker room in Conseco Fieldhouse (where the Indiana Pacers play). After being behind the scenes at Conseco, we toured the RCA dome (where the Indianapolis Colts play). We stood on the 50 yardline in that HUGE dome. Being the sports fanatic that I am, I was in a state of awe! This was a lot of fun. The week concluded with J.J., Seth and I departing for Denver. Julie, Tim and Joel departed for home. Denver was great as I was able to spend valuable time with my Dad at the National Western Stockshow. I also was blessed to spend a little bit of time with some dear and faithful friends: Sarah, Ryan and Megan made my trip to Denver that much more special.

"The just shall live by faith"

Jan. 12, 2003

The land of 10,000 lakes was great! I never knew Minnesota hospitality could be so wonderful. The highlight of my year so far was this week that Julie and I spent together. Our week began by being greeted on Monday evening by Mr. Larsen, Mr. Ertl and Minnesota state officer Kristie Ploehn. That night we spoke to the Belle Plaine FFA chapter and their chapter pet... Monte the Snake. Monte was a boa constrictor. It was the first time I have ever held a snake. I guess there is a first time for everything. Beth Lauwagie joined us for our second day of traveling. I could not believe how much that Minnesota reminded me of the blacklands of Texas. We were truly amazed with all of the FFA members that we met during the week. Jillian Becker, Adam Stegemann, Rachel Wulf and Dawn Luhman are all Minnesota state officers that we had the privilege of being with. They showed us a few of the fine chapters of their state. The chapters include: Sauk Centre, New London Spicer, New Ulm, Marshall, Russell Tyler Ruthton, Tracy, A.F.S.A., Lake City, Plainview, Waseca and Long Prairie. This week was also first time I have ever been ice fishing. I never would have imagined that I would walk on a frozen body of water. Get this, they were driving trucks on this ice, plus they had houses on the ice. I felt like an Eskimo. It was the neatest thing in the world! (Thanks Long Prairie FFA) While in the twin cities I was glad to reconnect with an old friend. Mark Jewel took us to the Mall of America. This is the biggest mall in the world! It was cool to hang out with Mark and be at the mall at the same time. Our week concluded on Friday with a trip back to Indianapolis. While Julie and I were riding back, both of us agreed that this was the absolute best part of our year, so far. Thank you Minnesota!

1 Corinthians 1:4

Jan. 6, 2003

The last week that we were in Indianapolis was great way to end our time of training. The best part of the week came on Friday. J.J. and I went to Eastern Hancock High School and visited with their FFA chapter. They made us feel so welcome and were just an awesome group. We were there for two hours during the morning. That Friday night we celebrated our hard work during December, with a trip with several National FFA Staff to the Indiana Pacers basketball game.

Whew!!! What an awesome time I had while I was at home. It was non-stop excitement. Following a sad departure from Indianapolis and my beloved teammates, I flew into Dallas and immediately drove to Throckmorton, Texas, to go hunting with a group of friends. Trent, Kinder, Jarrod, Brandon and I had a wonderful time of just catching up on each others' lives and doing a little bit of hunting as well. I left Throckmorton and drove home on Christmas Eve. Christmas Eve is my favorite day of the Christmas season, because it is when I see all of my family members. This Christmas Eve was perhaps the greatest ever... my youngest sister and two brothers were baptized on Christmas Eve. I could think of no greater Christmas gift than this. Christmas day came and was spent just hanging out with family once again.

The day after Christmas I decided to return to manual labor. I spent the day feeding my herd of cows and working in the barn with our families show cattle. Man, I miss showing cattle! But spending a day in the barn with freezing temperatures will soon make you miss it a little less. That weekend I was incredibly honored, Chance Kornegay, a dear friend got married and he asked me to be in the wedding. The wedding was in Oklahoma, so Friday and Saturday was spent in Oklahoma with Chance and his new bride. They are great people and I am just fortunate to have friends like Chance and Becca. The weekend was concluded with taking my sisters to a steer show and going to my home

church.

My break was concluded with bringing in the New Year. Brad Mabry, Dustin Kinder, Casee Bailey and Ryan Kinder several of my closest friends came to Dallas to celebrate the New Year. We went to a murder mystery dinner theater. It was a total blast! Following the murder mystery dinner there was a countdown to 2003. I could not have asked for a better, more fun evening than what we had. On January 1, I left home to rejoin our team in Indianapolis. This week Julie Tyson and I are in Minnesota for our Greenhand Experience Week. This promises to be a phenomenal week as we get to meet many Minnesota FFA members and share the wonderful message of FFA.

FFA members, Let your light shine in 2003!

Dec. 15, 2002

WOW, where does one start? The 75th National FFA Convention was a tremendous experience. The reason that it was so great is because it was no different than any other FFA function that I have ever been to. I made friendships and met people that will forever impact my life. When the tenth session of convention came to a close, I felt a mix of emotions that I had never felt in my life. Following a short time of media interviews and debriefing after the final session, we had the evening to do whatever we wanted. I had a wonderful evening, it consisted of going to dinner with my parents and friends who were in Louisville. I dearly loved this night because I was around the people whom I hold dearest to my heart. After dinner, I said goodbye to all of my friends from Aggieland who made the trip to Louisville. The next morning kicked-off a wonderful week of training...our first team function was a time of team worship, which we all thoroughly enjoyed. This was a wonderful beginning to four days of orientation and training. The next four days flew by as our team had a great time just getting to know each other. Before we knew it, it was time to fly home.

I arrived back home, and then drove to College Station on Friday. It was great to get back to school and see some friends that I had not seen in several weeks. The last three weeks in November were primarily devoted to wrapping things up at college. While I was doing that, I took advantage of hanging out with some amazing Aggies' that God has blessed me with who I am proud to call friends. The time that I was able to spend with them before I had to leave was priceless. Also, while I was at college, several friends from out of state came and visited me. We had an absolute blast together just hanging out and enjoying time together. Before I knew it, Thanksgiving week was upon me. The Wednesday before Thanksgiving I drove home to spend the holiday with my family.

Thanksgiving was a great day, especially since it is my favorite holiday. I love spending time with my family, eating lots of food and watching plenty of football. The opportunity to set one day aside and just be in a state of thankfulness for all that we have been blessed with is just awesome. Spending time with all six of my siblings was truly a highlight of the holiday. Jessica, Amelia, Samantha, Jan, John and Jameson (my 4 sisters and 2 brothers) are the best siblings that a big brother could ask for.

Thanksgiving weekend was brought to a close by stepping onto the airplane to fly to Indianapolis to begin our official training. When I arrived in Indianapolis, Julie and I rode to the hotel together where the rest of our team was waiting on us. We all stayed up late just talking and catching up on each other's lives over the past month. The next day was our first time to go to the National FFA Center for our team. The sense of pride, humility and honor that we felt as we walked into the Center was almost indescribable. Just to be at the home of our great organization was incredible. Intense learning and tons of fun have marked these two weeks that we have been in Indianapolis. I am beginning to realize just how fortunate that I am to be able to serve with Tim, Seth, J.J., Julie and Joel-all five amazing people whom I have a lot to learn from! One of the neatest things that we have done is take a road trip to Ohio; the home of Julie Tyson. After spending the weekend with her family, we stopped in at the Ohio state officer team's Christmas party. This was so cool. Meeting all of the state officers was the high point of the weekend. Going and visiting the football stadium of the Ohio State Buckeyes concluded our weekend.

That brings us up to date. We have one more week in Indianapolis and then we are off to home for Christmas. I hope that everyone has a wonderful Christmas and a Happy New Year.

Luke 2:10-11...And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

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