

## 2002-2003 National Officer Journals

### Seth Heinert

2002-2003 National FFA Secretary

E-mail: [sheinert@ffa.org](mailto:sheinert@ffa.org)

#### Photo Albums

[Arkansas - Jan. 6 - 10, 2003](#)

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

#### Where I'll be this week:

Indiana

#### Sept. 14, 2003

The 2003 National Convention will be here soon! And so, we are here in Indianapolis preparing scripts, retiring addresses, and ceremonies for one of the largest youth gatherings in the world. It's exciting, but challenging to think of how soon this will take place.

I'm excited about the events of the week. Keynote speakers, competition, career shows, talent shows, concerts, dances, and of course, tours of the beautiful Louisville area. This will be my sixth national convention with the FFA. And, each one continues to host something special and unique.

However, this convention planning time is also bittersweet. It marks the closing of an era serving with a group of the most dynamic individuals doing what I love. I realize it's time to find the next adventure in life. I knew when I began this was only a one year term, and should not be any longer. It still seems impossible that this time has passed so ferociously fast.

However, I am thankful for the time we have. The next six weeks will be no less intense than the first six weeks. We will finish strong. We remain focused, dedicated and enchanted with this organization, and its members. I pray for a good convention. I pray that lives would be changed as a result of our time together. I believe it will be that way.

And so, we plan, we memorize, we calculate. In the end, the week of national convention will pass by in an instant, much like this year. All we can truly hope for is to remember a few moments that catch in our memory, and change our lives for the better, forever.

#### Sept. 11, 2003

In addition to turning 22 this week, I spent time with companies such as Garst Seed, Cummins engines, Sports Turf Managers Association, DuPont, Pioneer, National Pork Board, ConAgra, DTN, Valmont, NC+, and past national officer Steve Zumbach.

Sunday began with the best game of golf I've ever had. My brother-in-law, Jake Fleenor, and I went out in Cheyenne, Wyoming and golfed in a downpour! And, it was incredible. We were drenched, but had a great time. We finished just in time to eat with my family Bill, Susan, Libby Pannell as well as my sisters, mom and dad and then race to Denver, Colorado to fly to Lincoln, Nebraska.

Lisa Nelson, a member of the state officer team I served on, met me in Lincoln. Without any hint, Lisa had planned a surprise birthday party for me complete with cake, party hats, people (most of whom I was just meeting for the first time- which made for an interesting and awkward situation when it came to saying "surprise" to the guest they had never met!) and country dancing. September 7 was the best 22nd birthday I've ever had!

Monday through Friday involved a whirlwind tour of businesses in Nebraska, Iowa, Delaware and

Indiana. Tim and I had many involved and beneficial meetings. It is amazing how excited businesses get about FFA when they understand how dynamic this organization is.

### **Sept. 7, 2003**

It's been great being at home with family and friends. This week has involved some fairly typical events for my family: getting supplies in town, working on a well, getting poison into poison ivy; well maybe that's just me!

In Wyoming on the Heinert place, as with much of the west the past few years, it's pretty dry. Consequently, one of our focuses lately has been to develop a secure water supply for our cattle. We tried to develop a spring, but it filled a little slower than a tree sloth crosses a highway (which is pretty slow in case you were wondering). Fortunately, we discovered a well that was dug already and located near power. The challenge now is getting a new pump, lines, tank, etc... to make this a functional operation.

Farmers and ranchers across America face many challenges. I'm thankful for those who are willing to take the calculated risk and stick it out through the difficult times. I have to believe things will improve. I have to believe we will see a stronger tomorrow. We have had droughts in the west before, and we will again. We cannot run away from these challenges, nor hope to change them. We can educate ourselves and be proactive about solutions for the future.

In the meantime, my thoughts and prayers are with my family and friends who are a part of this. Let's keep praying for rain!

### **August 31, 2003**

I have been at home this week. This time serves several roles. For the FFA, it's time to prepare for national convention. For my family, it's time to visit, catch up on stories, and get a little work done. For my own sanity, it's time to refocus on the things that matter most.

I would like to introduce you to Alva, Wyoming- population 50. It is home of a post office, mechanic, a few ranches and the gateway to the Black Hills. Our ranch is nearly 5 miles cross-country from this thriving metropolis. My nearest neighbor is over one mile away. I replace being wakened in the middle of the night by cars honking with coyotes howling.

Our house sits in a valley. On one side we are bordered by sandstone cliffs. The other is the Belle Fourche river; French for "beautiful forks."

My grandparents' home is only a mile down the river from us. My great, great grandfather Pannell moved there well over 100 years ago. From the start, it's worked for growing cattle and a lot of kids. Today, most of the cattle have been sold and most of the kids have moved away. However, the values learned stay with them forever.

I like my home. I like riding my horses. I like spending time working with my cattle. I like fixing fence, cleaning the barn and letting dirt fill my hair. I like waking up to the smell of coffee in our kitchen and going out to talk about construction with my dad. I like staying up late watching mom grade papers and talking about her students. It's my dog, my car, my dirty shoes from my dirt road, and a million other things that combine to form "home." If you've never had it be a part of you, I doubt you could understand.

And, this year, it's served as a sanctuary for my sanity. To all involved, thank you.

### **August 24, 2003**

There are some events from this year that are so spectacular they are tough to put into words. The weekend of races at the Michigan International Raceway was one of those times. This was followed by a week of business and industry tours not soon to be forgotten. The combination of time with my team, once in a lifetime events and flat out fun has made this a phenomenal week.

Friday evening the entire team drove to Michigan after some final work on national convention scripts. We arrived very late, were greeted by the foundation staff assisting with the event, and immediately went to bed. We woke the next morning at 4:30 to drive to the speedway.

Saturday morning was spent on the grounds in front of the track. FFA had three tents next to the other vendors. There was a silent auction, we heard from speakers, and had a hotdog lunch. Anyone with a ticket was welcome to come enjoy the festivities. The event peaked for Dustin and I when the

representatives from Lincoln Electrics and Cat Racing presented us with Ward Burton crew shirts.

After Joel and Tim were presented with the sponsors check from Lincoln Electric, Dustin and I spent Saturday afternoon in the pits with the "Stacker" which is part of Bill Davis racing. It was interesting being surrounded by fans who thought we were part of the pit crew that evening!

If Saturday at the Busch series was good, Sunday at the Winston Cup race was nothing short of incredible! Now, I have never been much of a NASCAR fan, but after attending the coaches meeting and a church service with most of the drivers; going to Ward's team meeting on the trailer; standing on the line with the entire pit crew while LeAnn Rimes sang the national anthem and then slapping high fives with them in front of nearly 180,000 fans, I was sold! They even put Dustin and I to work in a highly technical job- yep, we got to pull the generator away from the car before it started! It was tough to leave the race halfway through while Ward was in the top fifteen drivers!

Monday was spent at Toyota doing a presentation for the community leaders and management for the Kentucky Toyota plant. That afternoon we visited Holly Hill, a girl's school. It was a great day of visits and community service!

On Tuesday JJ, Julie and I drove to Chicago with Jason Givan, an employee of the FFA Foundation. There we met with Kraft and several of their associates. We also saw the top of the Sears tower, the Navy Pier, where we saw a 3-D movie and ate at Bubba Gump's, and had a lot of time to make each other laugh- a lot! It has just been an incredible week! Thank you to all involved!

### **August 17, 2003**

National Convention is just around the corner! Or so it seems. This week we have been in Indianapolis working on scripts, RA's, outlining reflections, picking music and working on some surprises for the 2003 National FFA Convention. The closer it gets, the more excited I am for this huge event!

In addition to revising our session scripts, JJ and I were put to the task of developing a reflections pitch. After some late nights and creative brainstorming sessions with the team, I believe we have developed something that should be impacting, and fun at the same time!

We also traveled down to Trafalger, Ind., where the ALD/MFE/EDGE staff were doing a summer training. It was great to see some old friends like Lisa Nelson, Amber Haugland, Mark Jewel and Darcy Vial. Those trainings are very intense, but you learn SOO much at them. I did not envy them for the test they had to take that night! However, I know that it's because of their willingness to go through that sort of intense training and grow as facilitators, our organization's members will be better off! That's exciting!

Next it's off to the races this week! Check out TNT- we will be hanging out at the Cabala's 250 and Michigan 400!

### **August 7, 2003**

How much can you fit into a week at home? Well, I found it necessary to give it a try this week! It's amazing, now that I look back.

My experience began with my mother and sister picking me up and driving quickly to Sundance, Wyoming, home of the Sundance Kid and the Crook County Fair. There, I was put to work clerking at the youth livestock sale. That night, I slept in my own bed for the first time since I had been home last, right after Easter!

The next day included rest, a bit of cake that my niece, Baxter, had baked, and some relaxation. However this trend would soon change, as I was escorted to our corrals where my father had a horse saddled waiting for me. That night, the horse was well broke. The next night, the three year old I rode, while VERY gentle, had never been ridden before. I was proud to be the first!

The next morning began at 4:30 a.m. Our challenge was to chase 202 head of yearling heifers into corrals so they could be shipped down south. This was not an easy chore because yearlings don't stay together, and my horse was out of shape (I was too for that matter). Nevertheless, we got everything together, and by 10:30 they were on the trucks.

From there, I became an amateur archaeologist with my aunt Kelly, uncle Jim and sister Noelle. It was cool because we saw some hieroglyphics that were carved on the cliffs near our house. The sad news is, I may have gotten a slight dose of poison ivy! I also floated down the river on inner tubes with my niece, mom and sister. This is a big pastime at our household because the Belle Fourche river runs right next to our house.

The Hulett Ham and Jam was going on during the week, but I managed to skip most of it. However, I did see the Sturgis Harley Davidson Bike Rally on my way to the airport!

On a sad note, our dog, Patsy, had a tragic accident, and died. I am glad that all of the good things that happen at home outweigh the bad. It was a much needed time with family, who help to keep things in perspective!

### August 3, 2003

Thursday, Friday and Saturday brought a dynamic close to State Presidents' Conference in Washington D.C. Washington is a city marked by history. It is virtually impossible to walk the streets of this powerful city without feeling national pride and a sense of reverence for the people who have served before us and the monuments that now stand to testify to their contributions.

And so, we took the time to do just that. Saturday, after a short morning workshop, we were set free to explore the city, on our own. I was very blessed to be joined in D.C. by my mother, Mary, and sister, Noelle. We had lunch at the Hard Rock Café and toured the holocaust museum. Perhaps it was the dynamics of that museum, or having my family joining me, but this was an extremely powerful day.

After an afternoon at the park, which basically turned into a water-fight and an overall rip-snortin' good time, we headed back to the hotel for reflections, a conference slide show, and final evening entertainment. We had an early morning flight the next day, so the good-byes that night would be the last to see nearly everyone until the 2003 National FFA Convention.

As the plane departed, I left with my body weary, my eyes bright, and my heart filled by the blessings that only a life of service to a fellow human can bring about. Thank you to my team, to Seth Derner and Tami Lamar, to the state staff, and to the 102 participants who gave of their time, expertise and sheer heart.

I landed in Sacramento on Sunday to spend a week in beautiful Fulton, California with the Hammerichs. The past few days have been filled with wake boarding and water skiing (I invented the "jumping face plant" move- don't try it at home kids!), county fairs (whoa! Check out the floral exhibit if you are in Sonoma County!), a Dave Mathews concert (I am becoming more of a fan), a close encounter with a wild seal (but that's a whole other story!), seeing some of the most beautiful country God has put together (Bodega Bay and Goat Rock- whoofta!), and spending time with some of the most amazing families I have ever met. Mr. and Mrs. Hammerich, the Brownings, and the Parkers redefine "family". I simply can't express my gratitude for opening your doors, your kitchens, your beds, and your lives to me. I leave tanned, sore (revisit the wake- boarding story), and anxious for the time I can come again.

### July 27, 2003

Can you imagine being part of a conference where a cross section of leadership from across the United States of America combines their passion, enthusiasm and focus on one mission in the nation's capital? Well, if you could imagine it, it would be simply called the State Presidents' Conference, or SPC. SPC is a conference where the presidents and one other representative from each state's associations, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands combine in Washington D.C. Both the preparation and delivery of this conference are a great bonding time with my team and some very amazing members.

Immediately following the board meeting we flew to D.C. to begin preparing for SPC. Scripts were written and memorized, materials were purchased, hair was cut and clothes were washed. It was great to work with the entire team. SPC is one of the few events where the entire team works together.

Finally, the big day rolled around where members would arrive. We began the conference with a play off of "Street Smarts" where we were visited by "Big Worm", "Billy Bob" and "Tommy Schoolboy" in addition to our host "Sat Payjack", our producer and "Penny", our intern. It was a great way to begin an outstanding week!

Throughout the week we had the opportunity to meet the leaders of our country. Congressional visits promoting agriculture education and Perkins funding was an important part of the week. The Wyoming representatives Brittany Westlake and Tara Bolgiono visited with Senator Craig Thomas, Senator Mike Enzi and Representative Barbara Cubin. A definite highlight for everyone for the week was when we heard from the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Anne Veneman, who was followed by the president of the United States, George W. Bush! Both spoke briefly to our group about the issues concerning American agriculture and global security. Few times in my life have I felt so blessed and humbled to be an American as at this conference.

### July 20, 2003

One of the greatest privileges, and responsibilities, of this year is to serve as a representative on the board of student directors for the National FFA Organization, or more commonly known as the board of directors. This is the group that helps make the vision for the future of FFA a reality and develops policy accordingly. The entire board is comprised of the six national officers, representatives from each of the four regions across America, C.Coleman Harris and Dr. Case. We also have many consultants from FFA's allied organizations such as AAAE, NAAE, Alumni and Foundation.

The first day is designed as a "retreat" where we discuss pertinent issues affecting the future of the organization. For example, at this retreat we heard from a representative from *Scantron* who brought information on using a PDA to "grade" CDE's more efficiently. We later discussed how FFA could be marketed more effectively and how *New Horizons* could better serve the members. These "retreats" are always informative and usually lead to action for the organization.

Following the "retreat" is the formal board meeting. Here, the entire operation of FFA is discussed and any items requiring action are voted on. Reports are heard, debates take place, votes are counted, and because of this, the direction of the organization is again refocused and, hopefully, improved. It is extremely exciting to think that you can leave a positive mark on the policy of this organization for years to come.

### July 10, 2003

American culture is fascinating and diverse. While there are tremendous variances from east to west, north to south, there are so many things we have in common. It is this cultural diversity I have enjoyed this week.

Dustin and I parted ways on the 3rd. He headed back to Texas and I stayed in Idaho to celebrate the 4th. On Saturday, Matt (Idaho V.P.) and I drove to a small town in Oregon where we were met by Dan (Oregon Pres.) and two of his friends. We drove to a small reservoir where we TRIED to wake board. After several failed attempts, and a near drowning experience, I decided the inner tube was more my style. Don't think it's an easy task! The waves that were created cause your tube to jump several feet in the air while turning. Mega G-forces were put on my body! We left sunburned, tired, and had a great time.

Sunday took me back to Jackson, Miss., to the Southern Leadership Conference, or SLC. My formal functions were to do a workshop on the "Magic Formula" and give one keynote. However, my duties were far extended past a "formal" place yesterday. You see, they have a nice little series of events simply called "Ag Olympics". However, when I heard the words, "All right! Go put on something you can get 'extra dirty' in." I knew I was in for something different. It was somewhere between the "cooking oil slip 'n slide", the "bobbing for carrots in Kool-Aid" and the helping of spaghetti dumped over my head and mixed with various other table condiments (mustard, ketchup, honey, syrup) that I realized just HOW agriculturally related they were going to get! I have to admit, while very smelly and slimy, this has been one of the most incredible experiences. It has been so nice to sit back and watch the success of these state officers in the front of a room. To connect on a casual level is simply humbling.

I'm looking forward to seeing the team in Indianapolis on Friday for the board meeting. It has been WAY TOO LONG since we've all been together.

### July 6, 2003

It is with an extreme mixture of emotions that I write this journal from our final NLCSO. These past three weeks mark some of the most intensely fulfilling and insightful series of events that an officer can be part of. I am humbled and blessed for this opportunity. I have truly witnessed the amazing heart and soul of this organization in it's greatest form as the leaders of Alaska, California, Oregon, Idaho, Nevada and Washington came together at the Cathedral Pines Baptist Camp in the Saw Tooth Mountains in central Idaho.

Dustin and I certainly did not retire without speed and fashion. Waiting for us in Boise was a silver Ford Mustang convertible. Unfortunately, we rode with the top down for a bit too long on the way up to the camp. We both looked liked baked lobsters by the time everyone arrived on Sunday evening.

The conference was filled with many opportunities to form great relationships. Immediately the group came together to form one cohesive and responsive unit. This allowed for a group that could be creative, VERY funny, and above all, grow. Thank you to Washington for providing ZIP BONG, and California for giving me "The Power". Alaska- thank you for insightful message of the stones. Nevada and Oregon- thank you for providing more creative energy than we knew what to do with. Idaho-

thank you for hosting this incredible event in a way that no one else could have!

I spent the weekend of Independence Day in Boise. We went to the horse races and watched the fireworks on the evening of the 4th. I am about to go wake boarding. Thank you Matt and your family for providing so much positive entertainment. I pray God continues to bless you and your family!

As I look back on the days before us, with reverence and pride, I thank each day that we've been blessed with, and thank each other for the ride!

### June 29, 2003

What makes us strive for more? When are we as leaders satisfied? What sort of motivation does it take to make us desire to become more? Answers will vary depending on whom you ask, and even I have different theories. However, after a short stay with the Hauglands in North Dakota and a leadership conference in Indiana later, I have seen the face of those who want to make it happen. Those faces are going to inspire, respire, and sometimes perspire. Above all, I KNOW what's behind those faces are brains, hearts and souls working in coordination and harmony for the improvement of their surroundings. In the words of JJ Jones- " Now if that doesn't light your fire, your wood is wet!"

A series of missed flights and delayed connections finally led me to northern North Dakota- home of the Divide County Fair by invitation of the Hauglands. While I missed most of the formal activities (that's what happens when you miss your flight!), I was able to spend time with one of the most amazing and active agriculturally rooted families I have met. It was a refreshing weekend of celebrating the anniversary of their county fair, auctioning, riding a camel (random, I know), and visiting our Canadian neighbors. Thank you!!

If the intensity and dedication of the officers and crew at the Indiana National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO) could be bottled and shipped to anyone needing a powerful dose of influence, the outcome would be limitless. Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan and Tennessee are under the leadership of talented and selfless leadership. There was not a day when Dustin and I did not feel humbled by the sincerity and sheer *heart* of these select few. The week was highlighted by some of the most creative and moving flag ceremonies, reflections and banquet. However, the real light shone forth from these leaders in their day-to-day solid willingness and dedication to seek growth.

### June 20, 2003

Life seldom gives you exactly what you want. I wanted a leadership conference full of enthusiastic members ready to learn the finer points of workshop development and teamwork. I wanted a setting that offered functionality, class and beauty that would soften the even the most calloused hearts to a point of inner reflection. I wanted a supportive and helpful staff to assist in any and all functions requiring their attention. Life seldom gives you exactly what you want, but in Mississippi this past week, it gave us more!

Imagine a river that on the surface seems calm and serene. Now, put a dozen crazy young people in aluminum canoes, don't give them any directions on how to operate their vessels, and then send them down the river! The combination is somewhere between the adventure of "Indiana Jones" and the humor of "Dumb and Dumber!" No sooner had we begun than boats were tipping, life jackets and various other articles were being lost, and, lives were hanging in the balance! Needless to say, by the time we finished our three hour tour down the river with the Mississippi state FFA officers, we were wet, exhausted, shins were scraped, and we had laughed until our bellies were to the breaking point.

Now, picture a conference center in the beautiful forests surrounding Jackson, Mississippi. Now, picture them filled with the leaders of Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi. The outcome is a bit like riding a carnival ride. You can plan and prepare. You can go through the peaks and valleys. The scene will pass you by extremely fast. And when you are done, the exhaustion and exhilaration that ensue simply cannot be described.

There are times as a National Officer I get tired. I feel discouraged. I don't turn my expense reports in on time, and then I feel broke. I wonder why we put in the time and energy. However, after our first NLCSO in Mississippi, I know. I feel unbelievably blessed, privileged, humbled and above all, certain. Certain that the FFA and America will be in secure hands, and we will continue to be an organization who thrives on and is graced with, the strongest servant leaders in the world! Thank you to all who made this week a success!

### June 15, 2003

I have seen beauty beyond compare: beauty in both land and people. This week has been full and

Search [ffa.org](http://ffa.org)

fun. After an amazing tour of South Carolina, I have spent an amazing week in State College, Pennsylvania, for the final state convention of my term.

Franklin Davis from South Carolina and I toured nearly the entire state of South Carolina, and parts of North Carolina, in a two day stretch. We started with some waterfalls in North Carolina. It was a beautiful area and so we decided to walk to the lower falls; a 30-minute hike down steep terrain. Let's just say the trip up was a bit longer and more eventful! I'm just glad no one had to rush in with oxygen for either of us out of shape boys! Thankfully, there were rocks all along the way to rest on!

After the falls we headed south to Charleston, where we saw historic sights. Then it was off to Myrtle Beach where we spent the night and then went swimming the next day. After swimming in the Atlantic, we headed north and spent the evening with a past state officer, Nic Stratton and his family. Nic is from South Africa and, in addition to being from an amazing team and tremendously funny himself, has some very good stories of South Africa. His family was incredible and very fun.

Since Monday I have been in State College, Pennsylvania. This marks the end of my state convention tour!! AND OH, WHAT A STATE TO LEAVE IT ON!! These people have more enthusiasm for FFA than I knew what to do with! Thank you so much to the state officers, state staff, and definitely the members, who made this a tremendous experience! You are amazing. Oh, and any time you want to play "Thumbbo" or a nice round of "Monkeypox" please let me know!! Thank you for making this a great convention to end on! Your enthusiasm inspires me!

### **June 8, 2003**

The south has become one of my favorite areas of America after this incredible past week. The Alabama and South Carolina conventions have been some of the most impressive, cordial and memorable days yet! Thank you to all involved in making these so special; for not just me, but everyone involved.

Alabama started without my bag containing my black shoes and medicine kit. However, never fear, because the officers and staff take care of people in a great way! I was able to get the essentials and not skip a beat. The state officer team is composed of all high school juniors and seniors who perform at a very high level. This just proves one more time that age DOES NOT determine ability. Way to go guys and gals! Also, thank you for teaching me about "southern terms" such as "home grown" "ya'll" and especially "orgUNization" and also how to eat fried okra and corn bread! Watch out though! Even though they come across very sweet and innocent (which they are!), they may just kidnap you for some ice cream. Thank you for the fun, the beautiful music your state provides, and an experience I will never forget!

South Carolina's convention has been a wild ride. From the time my airplane landed and I arrived in Clemson, I laughed until my stomach hurts! If you want fun- try softball at 10 p.m., or some friendly competition in "big booty" (trust me, it's a kick!). The level of preparedness shown by this officer team and the warmth and humor of everyone at this convention leave me feeling blessed, filled and wanting to come back for more. There have been few teams that have impressed me quite so much as this one. Thank you and your leaders for the impressive work you do; as well as the dedication you show to being servant leaders. Watch out for these guys in the future! I have a few extra days, so I will be driving down to Myrtle Beach and enjoying the sights there. Barrett- thank you for the great talk and serving as my road map! Pennsylvania- you better be ready because I plan on finishing the convention season with a bang!

### **June 1, 2003**

The theme of this journal entry is "friends." I have been surrounded by great friends for the past week; both in Montana and Kansas.

I spent the weekend in Montana visiting some friends from college. They had all been part of the livestock judging team at the junior college I attended. Ryan, Heidi and Sara have been truly valued friends since college began and it was great to see them. In addition, there is just something about being in the country, sticking your head out the window, dancing to country music, singing along with the radio and looking at the mountains that sets a person's soul at ease.

Since then, I have been at the Kansas State Convention in Manhattan. Of course J.J., who is from Kansas, is here. It has been great to see him on his home turf and watch him with the people he grew up with in the FFA. With the heart he puts in to the people here, it's no wonder Kansas FFA loves J.J. Kansas is just one of those states a person in agriculture dreams of; members involved and thriving on production agriculture and the values that go along with that. It has been a great week meeting members who are excited to make a name for themselves in the FFA and the agriculture world, spending the week with my friend and fellow officer, and enjoying Manhattan.

Time is well spent when you're spending it with friends. I am very thankful this past week has been filled with that!

### **May 25, 2003**

The Maine state FFA convention and chapter visits may be one of the most rewarding events I have taken part in thus far. The two-day convention in Orono was a good celebration. After the final session, I hopped on a bus with the Caribou Chapter and rode for three hours north through some of the most beautiful terrain I've encountered. After several hands of cards (which I'm proud to say I won a few of, but lost most!), they dropped me off at my hotel in Presque Isle.

Saturday I encountered the Washburn FFA and red hot dogs. Hey guys, the rest of the world is missing out- these things are good. With beautiful weather and great help, they made more money than ever before to attend the National FFA Convention.

After church and some homemade moose chili (very tasty!), I was escorted on a tour of the area by the Easton FFA. These guys were a great time and can tell a good story with the best of them! That evening we had a barbeque with the state vice president Michala and her family. I was fed more chicken and Maine potatoes that night than should be humanly possible.

Monday began early with a visit to the Presque Isle and Ashland FFA chapters. Following the presentations, I was taken to the farm of Ms. Sarah Brooks who let me help hitch up a team of draft horses to a wagon. We then proceeded to drive the team to Portage Lake where several members and I swam (cold- the snow had only gone off the week before!), play ultimate Frisbee, play guitars, rope and eat barbeque! It was a very good evening!

Tuesday began at 2:30 a.m. when Jen and Alysha from Mars Hill stayed up all night to take me to the top of Mars Hill to watch the sun rise for the first time in the nation. We drove four wheelers to the top, and then had an interesting encounter with a man at the top who didn't welcome our company, so we had to go just a little lower than the peak to watch the sun rise! This was one of the most interesting and fun days to date! That evening I spoke at the Easton FFA banquet. Thank you to everyone there- it was a great event.

Wednesday was a full day with visits to Ft. Fairfield and Washburn- both extremely impressive chapters. That afternoon I drove three hours to the southern part of Maine to stay the night in Belfast. There is no way to describe the beauty of this place.

Thursday entailed a visit to the Waldo Vocational School. A picnic on the bay, a tour of a lighthouse and farm with rare breeds of livestock filled the day. That evening I was treated to a lobster dinner!

The beauty of the land and the people of Maine leave me feeling blessed to have taken a glimpse into their world. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

### **May 11, 2003**

What an incredible week this has been! I have not been to many places where the people are as genuine and courteous as the south. The adventures at the Tennessee convention and the hospitality at the Texas NLCSO training are unmatched and so appreciated.

While I was only in Tennessee for a very short time, every second was fast paced and full of adventure. From the time I stepped off of the airplane and got lost leaving Knoxville (thanks Leah!), I knew I was in for a great time I will never forget. The convention was held in Gatlinburg, which is in one of the most beautiful locations I've ever seen. The state officers were a fun, energetic, and thoughtful crew. Thank you! The evening I arrived provided some time to hang out with some of the state officers and state officer candidates. The event: a haunted house. A little creepy, a little twisted, but above all, a good time!

The next day was full with the convention kicking off. I met several outstanding members (they love to hunt in Tennessee!). Sadly, all too soon, my time in Tennessee was over and I was rushed very, very fast (thanks again Leah!) to the airport where if it hadn't been for some neighboring tornadoes, I would have missed my flight. This was an exciting close to an incredible and unforgettable adventure in Tennessee. Thank you to all who made it so special.

The preparation for NLCSO in College Station, Texas, was intense and much needed. I am so thankful for the time with my team. I can't believe how closely we can work and still you find ways to amaze me!

Now, it's off to Maine for nine days!

### May 4, 2003

"Oh, the places you'll go," says Dr. Seuss. Well, he knew what he was talking about! Home time in Wyoming, leadership camp in Michigan, and state convention in Oklahoma have all been experienced in the past week.

Last Thursday I spoke at my hometown, Hulett, banquet. It was such an honor to be with those I was raised with. My advisor, Mr. Kennah and the officer team had an excellent night put together. We celebrated 50 years of excellence with a slide show. I am truly blessed to be from such a supportive and beautiful area of the world. Thank you!

The following night was the neighboring town, Moorcroft's, banquet. I spoke there and was surprised by some news. A young teacher, Ms. Werner, decided to continue teaching after some rumors she might be done. Even though she could make more money in other fields, she decided to do what she loves! Good choice.

Saturday through Monday were spent in Michigan for the region two leadership camp. I'm bruised, battered, tired, beaten and ultimately exhausted from it, but I can't remember when I have had as much fun in quite some time! Those guys from Michigan know how to put on a camp that will challenge, motivate, and showcase the outstanding accomplishments of their members. Thank you for an outstanding experience.

Oklahoma's FFA convention may go down as one of the most amazing experiences of the year. To all involved, thank you for making me feel welcome and connected with greatness. The convention is of the highest quality with great speakers, Zig Ziglar, professional video, great sound, laser lights, a career show, and is held in a beautiful setting in downtown Oklahoma City. However, all of this is overshadowed by the sincerity, professionalism, and true passion for life shown by the officers, members and state staff. I am humbled by the greatness of the people surrounding this week.

### April 16, 2003

Wyoming- my home sweet home! I am blessed to be from a state filled with amazing members, a loving (and understanding!) family, lifelong friends and some of the best members to wear the blue and gold! Thank you all for the magic that is created every time we get together.

To the "old crew" who keeps answering your call to duty- you make this thing fly! By stepping up to the challenge once again, you continue to show your integrity, love, devotion and traditions of service. As always a good, if not less stressful, time was had by all. I am humbled, thankful, and for the most part, better for you all being such a big part in my life. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

To the past state officers: Your year of service was brought to a formal close in great style and performance. I feel honored to know you and thank you for the time we have had. However, it does not have to end here. Rest up, eat up, catch up on homework, and then scoot back to the service that you performed so well!

To the new guys- get ready! It's going to be a year not soon to be forgotten. God Bless America! Wyoming members- Stay proud and honor our tradition of excellence!

A special note to my family- I love you and am so thankful for you all. I am just blessed to be part of the Heinert/Pannell line-up. Although I say it far too little, thank you.

### April 13, 2003

My cup runneth over! Two solid weeks of amazing conventions in Nebraska and Wyoming have put me on cloud nine! I can't possibly capture how amazing life has been in this short area, but I'll try to hit the highlights.

Nebraska's convention was filled with some of the most sincere, dedicated and enthusiastic members I've ever known! I was able to get to know the state officers who found time to make me feel welcome, host a tremendously well-run convention, and show their passion for the organization. The keynote from past national officers Donnell and Kelly Brown brought great messages. The back-stage crew kept the mood light and running smoothly. The members made the energy and atmosphere that helped create one of the most amazing weeks and experiences of my life. Thank you to Robyn and Lisa who tried to pick me up at the airport, twice, you are amazing.

Few times in my life have such an amazing group of people been combined to create something so

amazing. Whether it was past state officers, past national officers, FFA staff, or simply supportive parents, the goal was the same- support for our members. For your devotion and commitment, I am humbled. It was an honor to spend time with you all.

### **April 6, 2003**

Home sweet home. I spent Thursday evening through Monday at home in Alva with my mom and dad. It is amazing how good it felt to get outside and do something! I had a chance to ride my horse with dad as we checked for water in our pastures. We also worked with my small herd of cattle. One morning I went with my uncle Jim to look at a bull for sale and played basketball with my little cousin Katy. Jacy, her sister, was at a volleyball tournament. Mom was busy grading papers and working on some of her many projects around the house. Noelle and Sara, my sisters, weren't there to bother me (just kidding!). This is pretty much the life when I go home and I love it!

I came in a few days early to Nebraska's convention to do some preparation and spend time with one of my greatest friends, Lisa, who I served as a state officer with. It has been great catching up with her.

Next week I'll be making the trek back to Wyoming for a huge reunion with many friends at the state convention. This convention is even more special because another cousin, Libby, made it to the finals for creed speaking!

### **March 30, 2003**

Training in the Midwest, conventions in the Northwest, and adventures in D.C.

Last Thursday brought a close to our workshop training in Indianapolis. We had an opportunity to review some of the things we learned in front of the whole group. I can't remember when I've laughed so hard at some of the "creative" ways the Blast-Off and WLC crew reviewed- I give you all a "10".

Friday took me to Hermiston, Oregon for their state FFA convention. I was greeted by past National President; Dane White, and Joanna; an incredible past state officer from Oregon. I could not believe the professionalism and excitement that Oregon FFA puts forth. They literally rolled out the red carpet for the event. The excitement that each session brought just about blew the roof of the auditorium. There were plenty of memorable experiences such as log sawing, dancing lessons, "golf practice" and the genuine kindness you showed throughout my time there. My biggest thanks to all of you!

A late night flight brought me to Washington, D.C., Monday morning to meet with several business, members of congress, and the USDA. On the 26 we "job shadowed" several people from the USDA and had lunch with the Secretary of Agriculture, Anne Veneman. It was a great learning experience. Once again, my belief that there is a bright future for people in agriculture was reinforced.

### **March 23, 2003**

What a tremendous week of training in Indianapolis after the second week of business and industry tours. I have a deeper appreciation for the partnerships we have that support our organization. Julie and I spent a week visiting partners in Detroit, Chicago and southern Wisconsin. We even had an opportunity to travel to Canada one afternoon! I proudly drove while Julie navigated the streets to some of our biggest sponsors.

Then, Saturday began our Spring Training Academy in Indianapolis. We combined with Blast Off and WLC facilitators to hone our workshop skills. It was a great opportunity to visit old friends, such as Marty Tatman; a member of my state officer team, and meet new friends too. It is just hard to describe the feeling when you combine so many talented people all focused on one task. The heart and devotion they put in to the members they serve is tremendous. That passion for perfection in the practices they perform just adds to the greatness of this organization. It was indeed a blessing to spend time with the trainers, the trainees, and my great partners; the officer team.

I am now on my way to the Oregon state convention feeling revived and focused. I believe even stronger than ever that we live in the best and freest nation in the world. That privilege rests on the security brought to us by our armed forces and supported by the strong backbone of agriculture. My hat's off to you.

### **March 16, 2003**

Aloha! After a brief stay in southern Michigan for a team retreat, I took off for my first state

convention, held in Oahu, Hawaii. It was two degrees above zero in Michigan when I left Monday morning March 3. When I landed in Honolulu it was nearly 80 degrees! The Hawaii state FFA event coordinator, and a good friend of mine, Melvin Jadulang accompanied by Braxton, Scott and Anna Lisa from other CTSSO's picked me up. That evening we stayed in a hotel right on Waikiki Beach, where the convention was to be held. Braxton and I took a little time to walk down to the beach and get oriented on island life.

Tuesday morning, after a brief tour of Hawaii's department of education, I was met by the Kailua FFA Chapter who took me to the University of Hawaii and an aquarium. Hello Angela, Ronnie, Brandon, Rance, Mr. Kobashigawa and everyone else who made the morning so great. They introduced me to kona coffee- great stuff! The Hawaii state officers- Jameson, Chris, Cherie, and Godfrey were great and helped to make the event one to be remembered.

I rose at 5:00 a.m. on Wednesday in hopes to try my hand at surfing, but all of the shops were closed, so I wandered the beach and swam a bit before the day's events including workshops, keynotes, and a flight home at 11:00 p.m.

This was the first year Hawaii held a state CTSSO convention, combining DECCA, FCCLA, and FFA. Their theme of "Today's Leaders, Tomorrow's Hero's" set a great tone for the whole event. It provided some interesting insight into other youth organizations and brought them together for some common interests- leadership, citizenship, meeting new friends, and hey, simply enjoying being part of a great organization in a beautiful surrounding!

### **March 2, 2003**

Hello "Music City", Dallas, Amarillo (by morning) and Arkansas. It's week one of business and industry tours. After goodbyes on Friday from my new friends in California, I headed to Nashville where most of the team was already busy with an important task-line dancing lessons! Saturday morning was the final training for our visits.

The afternoon was a tour of the beautiful and historical downtown Nashville area. We visited the Ryman Auditorium, the former home to the Grand Ole' Opry. We just about didn't get in, but our hero, Mr. Gerry Brase from Tractor Supply Company (Gerry is the president for the FFA sponsors board this year) talked with the managers to the auditorium. We walked in and John Michael Montgomery was warming up on stage! We sang with the music so we could claim we had sung with John Michael Montgomery and tried to get his autograph. While we were doing that, John had gone out to his tour bus which was right by ours. Tim and some of the foundation staff members saw him and took their picture with him! What are the odds! We also rode on a riverboat, "General Jackson" where we saw another live performance. I love bluegrass music, so this entire time was right up my alley. That evening we visited with the Tennessee state officers, who are a lot of fun, at an arcade. I'm looking forward to heading to their convention!

Monday was a tour of Tractor Supply and then off to Dallas. When Julie and I landed with the foundation staff, we had to sit on the airplane for 2 hours due to ice. It was snowing ice balls! The next morning most of our visits were cancelled because of the weather. We visited those that were still open- Gufstason LLC and Rabobanks and then flew to Amarillo. There we met Mr. Tom McDonald from Contibeef who took us to a reception with his family, members of Contibeef, and around 30 members. It was a great evening to visit and find out about sheep showing in Northwest Texas. We visited AQHA and Texas Cattle Feeders Association the next day and flew to Northwest Arkansas, where I am now.

### **Feb. 16, 2003**

This has been an invaluable week at home, catching up on sleep, visiting family and enjoying many feet of Wyoming snow. I am very thankful for a family who is willing to let me lounge on the couch and then feed me afterward!

Sunday my family and I went to the Broadway musical "Grease" in Casper, Wyoming. This was my sister Sara's Christmas present for us; a little late. It was a bit out of the ordinary for me, but I actually enjoyed it. The show was quite a bit different than the movie, but still like "Greased Lightning."

I had some time this week to reflect back to when I was first starting FFA. I took out my old chapter jacket, looked at some plaques on the wall, and thought about the memories that those "objects" represented. They were memories of early mornings going out to feed my steers so they could have "just the right hair". Late nights filling out applications, because we had put it off to "a better time". They represented county fair shows, state fair dances, and nationwide friendships. A better portion of my hopes and dreams are tied up in those few items.

I guess each day we get to live a portion of a memory. And if we live it well, we get to look back, from time to time, and let a little shiver run down your spine.

Then quickly put that away, and gear up, because there's plenty more memories left to be made!

### **Feb. 10, 2003**

Konichi Wa! We just got back from an amazing trip to Japan. We visited everything from the U.S. Embassy, fish and fruit auctions, aquaculture farms, shrines, temples, agriculture businesses such as Mitsui and Chita Futo to more casual things like singing Karaoke and eating new and exotic foods (I'm a new fan of sushi!). In our lives, we have very distinct and defining moments.

This trip was one for me. Even in our very limited time and view of the culture, I learned two very important things. First, we live in the most amazing country in the nation- the United States of America. It is made that way by the spirit of Americans. We must take pride in the tremendous things we have, and never, never take them for granted. Secondly, people are people wherever we go. Regardless of where we are born, what we look like, what clothes we wear, we are all humans.

We all have worries, we all have plans, we all have questions, and passions, and dreams. I am blessed to have a family who loves me, and to live in a nation where we can enjoy freedoms and opportunities like nowhere else in the world.

### **Jan. 20, 2003**

Howdy from Washington, D.C.! We are in our nation's capital for the annual board meeting. Washington D.C. is such an amazing area with a great history. I really can't help but feel just a little patriotic simply by being here!

We spent an amazing weekend in Denver, Colo., with JJ and Dustin at the stock show and rodeo. We even went skiing on Monday.. My old state officer team, Christina, Janet and Dan, greeted me at the airport. Then, Lisa, Codey, and many other friends met us later.

While at the stock show, we saw my sister Sara and brother-in-law Jake and work with some of the LCCC show team's cattle. It was an interesting time. Especially when JJ led a heifer that tried to run away with him. He claims he has rope burns and splinters from the ordeal!

The stock show is just a great time to see old friends and be reminded of the tremendous industry we serve. I feel so proud when I see a young person in the show ring or working with their animals. It represents a heritage that we as Americans can cherish!

We arrived on the slopes around 11 a.m., because we ate breakfast with part of my family. Hello and thanks for breakfast Jim, Kelly, Jacy and Katy Pannell! Skiing at Winter Park was tremendous. It was warm, about 50+ degrees and very few people around. This was a great thing if you have ever seen us ski! It wasn't exactly the Olympic speed skiing that one might expect. However, I do love to ski, so being there was exhilarating. We were the last ones to leave the top of the mountain.

I'm excited about our time in Washington D.C. at the board meeting. I am blessed to work with this team that will hopefully continue to improve this great organization. I'm also looking forward to our trip to Japan next week!

### **Jan. 13, 2003**

Life has been busy! I spent an amazing Christmas with my family home on the ranch. It was great to see them, spend time with my church family, and of course be out of doors for a while. I received a set of golf clubs for Christmas and spent part of that morning teeing off from our back yard into the pasture behind our house!

Then, it was back to Indianapolis on the 1. Ahhh, nothing like spending New Years day in Indiana! I arrived late on the first because my first airplane wouldn't start! We spent the next few days in Indianapolis going over workshops, speeches, and making plans for Arkansas, where Joel and I would go for our Greenhand Experience State.

Sunday morning was spent at Traders Point Church with the team, and then finalizing workshops.

We flew down to Little Rock, Ark., VERY early Monday morning. I knew we were in good company when we walked down to get our luggage and there is a statue of a hog dressed in Hawaiian clothes- very cool.

Our week in Arkansas was busy traveling, doing workshops, speaking, visiting business and industry, and spending time with members. I was so blessed to spend time with Mr. Marion Fletcher-the Arkansas State Advisor, Ms. Angela Collins-the Arkansas State FFA executive secretary, Tory Hodges, Amy Howell, Carmen Albright, Caroline Carpenter, Jameson Deene and Kristen Glass- the Arkansas State officers. They are a tremendous group! I also met amazing members such as Desi, a Freshman from Nettleton High School who joined FFA to become a better leader for African Americans.

More to come later...

**Dec. 15, 2002**

Whew! My life has turned into a whirlwind! The anticipation, expectation, nervousness and anxiety before convention have been replaced by.... well, anticipation, expectation, nervousness. Since we were elected, things have happened at an unreal pace. I wrapped up school in Laramie, said good-bye to friends, family, and my dog for a while, packed my bags and departed for Indianapolis. I have undergone a roller coaster of emotions during this time: unbelievable excitement for five new amazing people I get to serve with over the next year, yet sorrow for having to leave my friends and family for the most part of the next year. But the biggest emotion is joy at the thought of serving the organization and people that I love.

Our time from the 1st through the 22nd of December in Indianapolis has been incredible! It has been filled with training, adventurous evenings, and even a trip to Ohio. The staff at the FFA center is amazing. It is so apparent that they hold value in serving members. I have been so blessed to spend time and learn from them. The time spent getting to know the officer team is invaluable. I learn more about life, agriculture, and interesting foods from these individuals than I thought I could ever know.

I am looking forward to getting home and spending time with my family over the holidays. We have so much to be thankful for during this holiday season. I am thankful for a family that loves me, friends that harass me, and a country that gives me the freedom to take a part in the things that I really love—people and agriculture!

Well, before long we will be getting back to Indianapolis after the first of the year for more training, the board meeting, and the trip to Japan!

More to come later...

[Home](#) | [Students](#) | [Educators](#) | [Supporters](#) | [News](#) | [Index](#) | [Contact FFA](#)

National FFA Organization 2003©

[Website problems?](#) Contact: [Webmaster@ffa.org](mailto:Webmaster@ffa.org)