

## 2002-2003 National Officer Journals

### Joel McKie

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#### Photo Albums

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

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

Indiana

October 19

As I sit down to write this journal entry, I realize this will be my last weekly update as a national officer this year. In less than two weeks, my term will be concluded and a new group of officers will be installed. Having had a wonderful year serving FFA members, the time feels right to unzip my FFA jacket for the last time.

Our last "hooray" as an officer team, will occur at the 2003 National FFA Convention. Consequently, we have been busy this past week preparing for convention and looking forward to the exciting next two weeks.

On Monday and Tuesday, I was at home putting final touches on session scripts and my retiring address. I did take a break on Monday to go dove hunting with one of my good friends. Unfortunately, I was not very successful that afternoon because there were not many birds flying. Tuesday, my break from memorizing came in the way of working with the cows. One of my cows was suffering from a challenge that was related to her newborn calf. Most recently, my dad has told me that the cow and calf have overcome their challenge.

On Wednesday, I flew to Indianapolis to meet my teammates at the National FFA Center. This was our last day at the center, so we said our goodbyes and packed up any things that remained in our workstations and lockers.

Thursday morning our team headed down to the Indiana FFA Center to begin intense practice and rehearsal for national convention. For the rest of the week, we enjoyed the natural beauty of the facility as we continue to work on session scripts, retiring addresses and reflections. On Saturday night we visited with Greenhand FFA members who were participating in a conference on the grounds.

Convention will be here by this time next week. That is unbelievable! This year has been one incredible ride and I think God from blessing me with so numerous opportunities to meet so many amazing individuals. I have enjoyed capturing my experiences in this weekly journal. I hope something I have shared has touched your life. This year, this organization, and its members have certainly changed mine.

With this journal conclusion, I simply say, "may God bless you!"

#### October 13, 2003

In a mere *two weeks*, FFA members from across the country will join together in Louisville for the 2003 National FFA Convention. That is simply unbelievable! This past week, I have been super busy preparing for the hectic, but exciting weeks ahead.

Much of my Monday and Tuesday was spent preparing to return to college in the spring semester. As convention nears, it becomes increasingly important that I have a plan in place to transition back into college life. My time on campus at ABAC on Monday and at the University of Georgia on Tuesday were well spent as I put some of the final touches on this transition plan. I now know tentatively what classes I will be taking starting in January; that is pretty exciting! I was also able to have lunch with two of my mentors on Monday and Tuesday: Mrs. Jennifer Cannon and Mr. John K. Wilkinson respectively.

All day Wednesday was spent memorizing my retiring address and working on other things related to convention. I did take a break from it all to go visit the cattle; our calving season is in full swing starting this week. While the calves are being born, it is crucial that the herd is checked on regularly.

I took the two-hour drive down to Colquitt, Georgia, on Thursday morning. This is where I found an excited group of Miller County FFA members. While playing with toothpaste, whip cream, and a football, I shared about FFA's life-changing possibilities. Meagan, the chapter FFA president, did a terrific job organizing the day's activities. I was also able to visit with some of Mrs. Long's middle school members.

On Friday, it was back to convention preparation. While still working on the retiring address, I also spent time finishing up my part in the reflections program. After a busy day of preparation, that evening meant it was time for a break. One of my good friends, her roommate, and I headed up to the Georgia National Fair in Perry. After buying tickets to a concert, we quickly headed over to the hog barn to visit with some FFA members and old friends. I was excited to see my brother Philip, who I had not seen in almost a month. It was also fun to be back in a hog barn that I had spent so many hours preparing my swine project in when I was younger. After a fun, but rainy night at the fair, we headed back to Wilcox County.

After sleeping in on Saturday morning, I packed my bag for a quick trip to Florida. After meeting one of my past state officer teammates, Abby Spruill, down in Tifton, we headed to Gainesville. You may recall in one of my January journal entries that a friend of mine and past Florida state officer, Ryan Rimmer, passed away in a car accident earlier this year. Many of his friends, including past state president Lindsey Land and past national officer Barrett Keene, organized a benefit semi-formal in his honor. The proceeds of the "Gator Gala" will benefit the Ryan Rimmer Memorial Scholarship Fund. The night was tons of fun as we *celebrated* the life of one incredible individual. For more information about the scholarship fund, please e-mail me at [jmckie@ffa.org](mailto:jmckie@ffa.org) and I will pass your question along to the appropriate person.

After sleeping in Sunday morning, I caught the late, and only, service at my home church. Sunday afternoon, I was pleased to discover that my Bulldogs had moved up to number four in the Associated Press College Football Poll after their 41-14 win over the Tennessee Volunteers. After the evening church service, I spent Sunday night back at work preparing for national convention.

Up until Wednesday of this next week, I will be home in Georgia. On Wednesday, I fly up to Indianapolis for the last time to complete work on the 2003 National FFA Convention. Until next time, may God bless you!

### **October 6, 2003**

This past week I have been in the land of cold temperatures and warm-hearted people. Wisconsin FFA provided me with a wonderful experience as I concluded my next to last trip as a national officer. I traveled throughout the south central and southwestern part of the state visiting with business and industries and helping conduct the **S**ectional **L**eadership **W**orkshops in section four, five and six. Chris, Jackie, Angie, Jamie, Steve, Keith, Kevin, Kim, Kayla, Christine, Nicole and Beth surely showed me a great Wisconsin time.

Arriving late Sunday afternoon at the Madison airport, Christine and Beth picked me up at the terminal. We picked up supplies and headed to Keith's house for Sunday supper with most of the state officer team.

Monday was our first true day on the road. After meeting again at Keith's house for breakfast we headed to our first visit of the morning—a local cheese factory. After enjoying an in depth tour of the facility and tasting some of the favorite cheeses, we headed to our second stop—a local ethanol plant. This was a particular fascinating visit; the plant produces 40 million gallons of ethanol each year. Ethanol is a cleaner burning fuel than petroleum and the production of ethanol increases the demand for corn in that area. That afternoon, I participated in my first SLW at Monticello High School. Almost 200 hundred students were in attendance. Later that evening, the state officer team and myself hung out with area chapters to watch the Bears-Packers game on Monday night football. Of course, most of these Wisconsinites were happy to see that Green Bay won the football game. After meeting for breakfast at the home of the Monticello advisor on Tuesday morning, we drove up to Sauk City to

meet with the leadership of the Culver's Franchise. Culver's is a restaurant famous for its frozen custard that is located mostly in the Midwest. After leaving Culver's, we visited a local meat processing plant that is operated by a former FFA member. We ate lunch at this farmer's owned meat market. After lunch, we headed to Kevin's home high school at Sauk Prairie. This was the site of our second SLW. After the workshops, the local FFA chapter treated us to a nice dinner.

On Wednesday morning, it was off to the World Dairy Expo in Madison, Wis.. We were charged with running the foundation exhibit, but during our breaks we were able to take in some of the sites and sounds of this huge event. I was able to watch some of the Guernsey and Milking Shorthorn Shows. Needless to say, there were some pretty spectacular animals on display. I was also able to visit with many FFA members who were participating in judging events or attending because of it being "Youth Day at the Expo." That evening, the Black Hawk FFA chapter treated us for dinner.

Nineteen degrees is a little cold for this Georgia boy, but that is what temperature it was outside Thursday morning when I woke up. After breakfast, we began the drive over to the corporate headquarters of Lands' End in Dodgeville, Wisconsin. The Wisconsin FFA Foundation partners with Lands' End so it was a neat opportunity to learn more about their nationwide mail-order business. Our second visit of the day was at Trelay Farms, a regional seed company. Trelay grows, processes, and sells corn, soybeans, and other seeds that farmers need in that region of the state. They also grow popcorn and sell their brand in the area market. We actually enjoyed some of their popcorn when we stopped at their local store and taste tested some of their favorites. I especially enjoyed the K'Nuckles flavor. Soon, we started our drive back toward Black Hawk High School. Kim, who was the host state officer for this SLW, quickly informed us of our room assignments as we prepared for our last Sectional Leadership Workshop. This last SLW went absolutely awesome! After cleaning up, we congregated in the ag room to enjoy a wonderful meal that Kim's mom had prepared.

Friday morning, we headed back to Madison. Most of the state officers went to enjoy their second day at the World Dairy Expo. Chris, the Wisconsin State President, and I headed to the Wisconsin FFA Foundation Board Meeting. I enjoyed watching as these very passionate men and women engaged in conversations that will certainly benefit the members of their association for years to come. On Friday afternoon, Mrs. Zimmerman took me to the airport. After slight complications, I managed to book another flight that placed me in Atlanta a little later than expected. Brett, my college roommate, picked me up at the terminal and we headed to Athens for the weekend.

After sleeping in Saturday morning, Brett cooked a late breakfast for us. We quickly cleaned up and headed to campus to see the Bulldogs play. Luckily, our bulldogs won 37-23 over the Alabama Crimson Tide. It wasn't necessarily pretty in the second half, but it was a win. Brett and I drove back to South Georgia after the game.

On Sunday morning, my family and I headed to church. My mom cooked a wonderful Sunday meal and then we all took our afternoon naps. I spent Sunday night catching up with some of my friends over the phone.

I will be home for the next twelve days preparing for national convention. Until next time, may God bless you!

### **September 28, 2003**

Greetings from Music City! As I write this week's journal, I am sitting in a hotel room in Nashville, Tenn., relishing one of our nation's most famed and historic cities. This week began for me at home and concluded with stops in Murray, Ky., and Nashville, Tenn.,

Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday were spent at home with my family and friends. I was able to enjoy some time on the farm baling hay and working cattle. I also visited with some of my relatives who live about an hour away from my home. On Thursday morning, I finished packing for my next to last trip as a national officer and flew from Macon, Ga., to Nashville, Tenn.

Once in Nashville, Kristy and Daniel of Murray State University (MSU) picked me up at the airport. We then drove the two hours to the campus of MSU. After checking into my room, Clint Sanders, a former Tennessee state officer, took me over to the equine center where the Collegiate FFA Chapter hosted a cookout for the Nelson County and Central Hardin FFA Chapters. I later enjoyed a tour of the campus with members of the Nelson County FFA Chapter.

On Friday morning, Racer Round-up officially began at the Curris Center. With more than 400 members in attendance, there certainly was no shortage of energy. I enjoyed meeting members from throughout Kentucky and parts of Tennessee, Missouri and Illinois. I gave a keynote address and put on two separate workshops.

After Racer Round-up, I headed down to Nashville to meet up with one of my former college

roommates. He is now in school in the Nashville area, so we hung out and played laser tag with some of his friends on Friday night.

After sleeping in Saturday morning, we headed to the Opry Mills Mall. That evening was capped off with a college football game on the campus of Vanderbilt University. Josh and I watched as the Georgia Tech Yellow Jackets defeated the Vanderbilt Commodores 24-17 in overtime. My favorite team, the Georgia Bulldogs had the day off on Saturday.

This next week I will be a part of Wisconsin's Sectional Leadership Workshop. Read next week for all of the details. Until next time, may God bless you.

### September 21, 2003

With the 2003 National FFA Convention a little under six weeks away, our national officer team spent last week intensely preparing for this year's big event. The National FFA Center in Indianapolis has become a "hot bed" of activity as the convention nears. Our team was fortunate enough to spend last week at the center watching as the convention comes together right before our eyes.

Monday was filled with meetings that were meant to update our team on the convention preparation process. On Tuesday, our team took a road trip down Louisville to meet with some of the people who make convention happen. We visited the backstage area in Freedom Hall to gain a mental picture of what convention will feel and look like. That night we were treated to a production of "My Fair Lady" at the Derby Playhouse.

On Wednesday while remaining at the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center, we continued working on session scripts. That afternoon we road tripped back to Indianapolis. Much of Thursday and Friday were spent working on retiring addresses and reflections. We worked on completing the music and lighting cues. It is hard to believe how much work goes into creating that special atmosphere inside Freedom Hall.

Friday night, our team took a break from it all. We headed to the circus at Conseco Fieldhouse (site of the national FFA convention beginning in 2006). It was actually my first circus, or at least that I could remember. I think my favorite part of the show was the acrobats.

Saturday, I continued catching up on some of the work that needed to be completed before I left Indianapolis. I also watched in agony as my Georgia Bulldogs fell in defeat to the LSU Tigers 17-10. That made it much harder to focus after the game.

After going to church Sunday morning, I caught a 12:35 flight back to Atlanta. I will spend the next four days at home before flying out Thursday morning. I will be attending the Racers' Roundup at Murray State University in Kentucky on Friday. Until next time, may God bless you!

### September 14

While spending the last week in the *central* district of Missouri, I learned that Area V and VI FFA members are truly at the "center" of a good time. I met hundreds of members as I visited 18 chapters and two area conferences in a little over four days.

I flew from Atlanta, Ga., to Kansas City, Missouri on Monday morning. Mrs. Lisa Evans, the central district area supervisor, transported me from the airport back to Jefferson City. I was able to grab a taste of KC while eating lunch at the famous Arthur Bryant's restaurant. My first chapter visit was with the Simonsen and the Nichols FFA Chapters in Jefferson City. For a little over an hour, I presented and talked with some pretty excited FFA members.

After spending Monday night in Eldon, Mo., I began Tuesday morning at the local school. That day also included visits with the California, State Fair, Eugene and Cole Camp FFA Chapters. On Wednesday, Sarah Muri, Missouri state officer escorted me around in the corn van. We had a great time at the Versailles, Pilot Grove, Otterville and the Booneville FFA Chapters. My time in Area VI concluded with the Chapter Officer Leadership Training in Marshall.

Ryun Morris chauffeured me around on Thursday and Friday in Area V. With stops at the Lexington, Higginville, Warrensburg, Chilhowee, Lakeland, Crest Ridge, Concordia, Knob Noster and Holden FFA Chapters, Ryun and I certainly kept moving. I also helped with the Area V Chapter Officer Training on Thursday night. When my trip concluded near Deepwater, Mo., Mr. Young (the local advisor), his wife, and his son volunteered to take me back to the Kansas City airport area.

Even though my trip was extraordinarily busy, I had a great time meeting and hanging out with Missouri FFA members. It is amazing to see the quality individuals that are so active in this

organization throughout the "Show-me-State."

I caught a flight out of Kansas City on Saturday morning. By that afternoon, I was back in Indianapolis with my team watching college football. (I feel obligated to tell you that my Bulldogs won 31-7.) Later that evening, I began working on some of my national convention responsibilities.

After attending church Sunday morning, our team continued national convention preparation. We will be in Indianapolis for the next week preparing for convention. So until next time, may God bless you.

### September 7

Can someone say "road trip?" Dustin and I certainly enjoyed a "road trip" this past week down the eastern seaboard of the United States. Beginning in Boston on Sunday and concluding Friday in Washington, D.C., we pleased in the sites and sounds of these big cities.

On Sunday morning, Dustin and I met in the Atlanta airport to catch a flight to Boston. Once arriving in Boston, we quickly retrieved our rental car and headed to Fenway Park to see the Boston Red Sox play the New York Yankees. The Yankees easily won and gave Roger Clemens his 100th victory at Fenway Park. (He pitched for the Red Sox for many years.) It was really neat to see the history-filled, ninety year old park that is noted for the "green monster." After the game, we headed downtown to experience some of the classic culture of Boston. Before leaving the city, we visited the campus of Harvard University.

After spending Sunday night outside of Providence, Rhode Island, Dustin and I drove to New York City for Labor Day. As one might imagine, the traffic and weather was atrocious. We caught some of the day's sports highlights at the ESPN Zone right off of Time Square. We were forced to pay \$34 to park in Manhattan for a little more than three hours on the evening of Labor Day.

On Tuesday morning, Jana (a foundation staff member), Dustin and I bussed into the city for several business and industry visits. We first visited the company that sponsors the national officer trip to Japan, Mitsui & Co., USA. It was certainly interesting to learn more about their perspective of the global nature of the agriculture industry. Later in the day we visited with Pfizer Animal Health and the American Business Media. That evening we made the five-hour plus drive from New York City to Washington, D.C. This was somewhat longer than expected because we missed our bus stop on the way out of Manhattan and then later got lost just north of Washington as we were trying to find our hotel.

Wednesday and Thursday, we were busy visiting with former national officers and other supporters of FFA in the Washington, D.C. area. We visited with the American Landscape Contractors Association, Animal Agricultural Alliance, the National Rifle Association, the Grange, the American Farm Bureau Federation, and the United States Department of Agriculture. We also visited with past national officers Senator Larry Craig (ID), Senator Sam Brownback (KS), Mr. Fred McClure, and Mr. Darren Coppock. These two Senators made one of the most powerful statements that I have heard all year; they both said that they would not be in the United States Senate if it were not for their FFA experience. That reiterates the life-changing power of this organization.

On Friday, I flew to Atlanta where my dad picked me up at the airport. We headed to Athens for a University of Georgia College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Alumni Association banquet. I enjoyed visiting with old FFA and 4-H buddies and meeting many of the Georgia leaders of the agriculture industry. That evening I spent my first night at my new college home.

On Saturday morning, my next-semester-college roommate and I headed to the UGA campus to prepare for the Bulldogs home opener against Middle Tennessee State University. While sitting with my brother, Philip, and one of my high school friends, Candice, I witnessed the Georgia Bulldogs win 29-10. My soon-to-be roommate and I drove back to South Georgia after the game.

On Sunday, I headed to church with the family and then began packing and preparing for my next trip. I will leave tomorrow (Monday) for Missouri. Stay tuned for details of my adventure in the "Show-me-State." Until next time, may God bless you!

### August 31

Greetings from Georgia! This past week I have been at home preparing for national convention and catching up with family and friends. This week was a part of my longest trip home all year—12 days.

After attending my home church last Sunday, I headed to Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC) on Monday afternoon to visit some college friends. As a student at ABAC, I was active in the Baptist Student Union, so anytime I can visit with those fine people, I am excited to do so.

On Tuesday morning, I began mowing some of my dad's Coastal Bermuda hay grass. It certainly was a scorching day to be on an open cab tractor. Later in the week, dad and I were able to bale the hay. This was the first hay we had all summer that had not been rained on after it had been cut.

Thursday, I was also able to finish up the first draft of my retiring address. Needless to say, this farewell speech is not in final form yet.

Friday night, I returned to my alma mater to watch the Wilcox County Patriots lose 7-6 on a rain drenched field. With less than ten seconds on the clock, the Patriots missed a field goal that would have won the football game.

My mom, my brother and I traveled to a family reunion on Saturday. It was great to see so many of my relatives that I had not visited with since well before my national officer year began. My Saturday was capped off by an awesome win for my Georgia Bulldogs.

I hit the road next week for business and industry visits. Until next time, may God bless you.

### **August 24**

When we last left off, I had just met Ms. Helen Donaldson, community relations manager for Toyota Motor Manufacturing North America (TMMNA) and Ms. Allison Bruchhaus, community relations intern also with TMMNA and former Louisiana state officer. On Monday, our officer team enjoyed a wonderful day with these ladies at Toyota.

First on our agenda Monday morning was a visit to Toyota Motor Manufacturing Kentucky. Our team enjoyed breakfast with the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and then a tour of the Kentucky plant. It was incredibly fascinating to see how every 55 seconds a completed car comes off the assembly line.

We ate lunch at the Erlanger, Ky., office of TMMNA with some of the influential leaders of Toyota. Directly after lunch, our team made a presentation to the managers at TMMNA, which culminated with a captivating discussion period. We ended our day at Holly Hills Children Home. We visited with the girls of the facility for almost two hours. Our experience was incredibly rewarding as we inspired hope in these youth.

I flew home Monday night, arriving back in Abbeville a little after 1on tuesday morning; I enjoyed sleeping in Tuesday morning. Over the past week, I have spent much time catching up on e-mails, visiting with friends and family, and simply enjoying life. As I have said throughout my travels this year, being on the road has certainly made me enjoy my time at home more.

I will be home all of next week. I will be tackling the task of writing of my retiring address. Wish me luck! Until next time, may God bless you!

### **August 17, 2003**

Bright lights, loud music, great speakers and more than 50,000 blue and gold jackets—that is the picturesque scene of national FFA convention. This past week our team has been working hard on making the 2003 National FFA Convention the best yet!

Most of our week was spent making some pretty tough decisions and brainstorming ideas for retiring addresses and reflections. Now I could share the "inside skinny," but that would take away all the SUSPENSE surrounding this year's October spectacular. Please know that our team is pumped about our speaker line-up, a totally cool theme, and of course, the closing of the time capsule.

Scattered throughout our week, we also had several meetings at the center updating us on the happenings of our organization. Our team especially enjoyed a lunch with Ted McKinney of DowAgro Sciences. Besides the great relationship that FFA has with DowAgro Sciences, Mr. McKinney is also playing an instrumental role in preparing the Indianapolis community for the National Convention in 2006.

On Friday, after a busy week at the center, our team headed to Michigan for FFA Day at the races. Arriving late that night in Lansing, I slept for about three and half hours before we continued our trip to the Michigan International Speedway (MIS). Once at the speedway, Mr. Carl Peters with Lincoln Electric gave us a tour of Winston Cup garage. Once back at the hospitality tent, FFA members and alumni were addressed by car-owners Bill Davis and Richard Childress. Racecar driver Scott Wimmer and crewmember Sam Pardon also took time to visit the FFA tent. Right before the start of the race, the President of MIS presented FFA with a check in victory lane. Needless to say, our visit to the races

was quite a memorable experience.

Saturday afternoon, JJ, Julie and I headed down to Columbus, Ohio. After such a long day, we were quickly off to bed. On Sunday morning, the three of us headed to the Ohio State Fair. We enjoyed worship service on the grounds and then JJ and I visited some of the sights and sounds of the fair. That afternoon we headed down to Georgetown, Ky., to meet another incredible sponsor of the National FFA Foundation. Ms. Helen Donaldson and Allison Bruchhaus, both of Toyota Motor Manufacturing North America, met us for dinner in a Lexington area restaurant. It was quite an enjoyable evening with these two fascinating ladies.

Please stay tuned for more interesting facts about my visit to Toyota in my next journal entry. Until next time, may God bless you!

### **August 10**

Work and then play, or play and then work? That was the question that I had to ask myself this past week. And well, to be honest, I did more play than work, but I would at least like to think that they were in correct proportion. I spent the first part of my week at home and then headed to Indianapolis preparing for 2003 National FFA Convention.

Upon arriving home late Monday afternoon, I began catching up on some work and visiting with my family. Soon I was off to bed to obtain my necessary "beauty rest." Everyone knows that I need it!

After a quick hair cut, I spent much of Tuesday visiting with friends and past mentors in my home county. I even played a little golf with a college friend. Our time on the green was a great time to plan our upcoming living arrangements when I return to the University of Georgia in the spring of 2004.

Wednesday morning I accidentally overslept. (oops.) But, that is really okay because my Wednesday was spent finishing up last minute details before I left on Thursday. My dad did allow me to spend some time on the farm fluffing hay that had been rained on the previous two days. That night, I enjoyed a classic movie remade—"Freaky Friday."

After packing earlier in the day, I caught a late afternoon flight from Macon to Atlanta. Unfortunately; however, I was delayed, missed my connecting flight, and ended up arriving in Indianapolis about three hours later. But, that was no real biggy, because I was bumped to first class for my later flight. It was good to see my team when I finally made it to the hotel.

Friday was our fun day in Indianapolis! First it was off to the greens where my game didn't fare so well. I was leading with a one-stroke lead after the 4th hole, but ended up in last place, nine strokes behind, after nine holes. After the game, it was off to the Indiana State Fair where our team enjoyed corn dogs, roasted corn, deep fried snickers, snow cones, the cattle and hog barns, and of course the Indiana FFA exhibit. We were even able to hang out with the state officers from Indiana for a few minutes. After a team meeting in the early evening, our team caught a late movie, which really culminated a great day.

On Saturday, it was time to "buckle down" and begin preparation for a wonderful national convention. In the next few weeks, we will begin deciding what the convention will look and sound like. That is pretty exciting for our team. I hope all the FFA members out there are as "pumped" as the six of us are about coming to Louisville.

Until next time, may God bless you!

### **August 3, 2003**

Family? An institution that God himself created, ordained as a support group for our innate needs. This past week, I have certainly experienced family, both in the literal and proverbial sense. Whether it was spending time with the FFA family or my biological relative, that time has been well spent this past week.

On Sunday, Julie and I arrived in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania in preparation for our last NLCSO. We caught up on some much-needed rest that evening and bought some of our supplies. All day Monday was spent setting the room up for the conference. We did, however, enjoy dinner with the West Virginia state officers.

Tuesday marked the beginning of NLCSO. After meeting everyone in the first session, state officers spent the next two sessions developing the workshops that they would present on Wednesday. It was certainly excited to see how this family of FFA members joined together to create and deliver some

pretty outstanding workshops.

On Thursday, we shifted gears into the teamwork portion of NLC SO. The respective state officer teams really began to understand their role in accomplishing the vision of this organization and the necessary choices that they must make during their state officer year. During the banquet that evening, Mr. Gary Swan, past national FFA president, inspired us with his true words of wisdom and experience. I was excited to have my brother Philip join me for the last night and day of the conference.

Friday morning was all about the "Law of the Price Tag." As leaders of our associations, it is imperative that we are willing to pay the price for what we want most—to see our team succeed and our organization prosper. As everyone said goodbye, it was certainly a bittersweet experience. It was hard to say goodbye to our newfound family, but it was exciting to wish them good luck as they embarked on a life-changing journey.

That afternoon, my brother and I headed to Lancaster, Penn., to witness a phenomenal, yet simplistic way of life. This is the heart of Amish country where horses and plows are the cornerstones of their agricultural practices. Their crops were beautiful and their way of life was simply encouraging. That evening, we headed to Philadelphia to see a Phillies game. Kevin Millwood pitched the home team to victory.

On Saturday morning, Philip and I visited the Liberty Bell and Independence Hall. While in these famous buildings, it was incredible to think that some 200+ years ago our founding fathers sat here ready to sign such important documents as the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution. Around lunch, Philip and I headed north toward New York City. After checking into our hotel and eating dinner, we enjoyed the Broadway show "Man of La Mancha." After the show, we enjoyed some of the sites and sounds of Time Square; it was certainly a happening place.

We woke up the next week morning ready to explore New York City. The subway transported us to lower Manhattan, where we caught a ferry to Liberty Island. Once on the island, we learned about the Statue of Liberty's rich history and its amazing persona. Once back in Manhattan, we walked to the site of Ground Zero. As during my visit in March, this site of horror brought a somber spirit over me. After a substantial amount of time there, we caught the subway back to Grand Central Station and then eventually back to Time Square.

That evening we caught a flight back to Atlanta. Philip drove us back to his place and we quickly headed to bed. Philip, who is a second year agricultural instructor, began pre-planning Monday. I headed home Monday to enjoy some time with my parents.

I will be home until Thursday and then join my team in Indianapolis. Until then, may God bless you.

### **July 27, 2003**

The past seven days have truly been one of the most memorable weeks of my life. The scene was perfect—arguably the most powerful city in the world, 102 amazing state officers, an extraordinarily important task, an exciting schedule, and well, some pretty incredible parents, all joined together to make this past week a resounding success.

On Sunday morning, our team headed to a local church. Missing Seth who had flown home for a wedding, we met up with Sarah (WLC counselor), Robin (WLC counselor), and Crystal (USDA intern) for an inspiring praise and worship session. After an afternoon full of preparation, we did a little tourism that evening. After visiting the site of the Battle of Bull Run (Manassas), our team and a few national staff members enjoyed a performance of "The Sound of Music."

Many of you may have heard of "Street Smarts." This reality television show was the basis of "FFA Street Smarts." Our team certainly enjoyed the filming of our episode on that Monday. (This required me to be Billy Bob, Seth to be Tommy Schoolboy, and Dustin to be "Big Worm"). That evening we enjoyed a night tour of the city and a fantastic meal at Georgia Brown's, a restaurant dedicated to Southern cooking.

Tuesday was the first day of SPC. The 102 delegates, the national officer parents, and the delegate coordinators all gathered for our opening session. We were especially grateful to the representatives of our sponsors Chevrolet and GMAC for their attendance. Our team was excited to begin the delegate process that evening. For the first time, the state officers learned the issues that could potentially be committees for the 2003 national convention. The Capitol lawn was the site for the first night reflections.

Wednesday was truly an excited day for me. We began the day with an early morning breakfast and a quick run through of the day's events. Then it was off to the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office

Building to meet the President of the United States. After clearing security, we headed to a pressroom in the middle of the building. Around 10 a.m. Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman arrived to address the group. She discussed the major roles of the USDA and the opened the floor for questions. She provided her insight about the future of American agriculture, the task of protecting our food supply from terrorists, and the severity of drought conditions that plague much of the country. After her remarks, President George W. Bush soon joined Secretary Veneman and us in a briefing room. After shaking his hand, we headed to the main room ready for his address. After Tim Hammerich, national FFA president, did a phenomenal job introducing the commander in chief, President Bush took center stage. He spoke of the war in Iraq, the need for compassion and love, and the extinguishment of hatred and violence. He spoke with sincerity and genuine compassion for the American people. He ended with a lesson of presidential leadership for Abraham Lincoln.

After the Presidential visit, we quickly departed for Capitol Hill. Sen. Saxby Chambliss (R-GA) in partnership with the National FFA Organization hosted a congressional reception. We were excited to have so many members of Congress join us to meet the respective leaders of their state FFA associations. After the reception, my parents, the two Georgia state officers Cliff and Hope, and I began a series of visits. Over a three-hour period, we met with two United State senators, two United States representatives and several key staff members. It was an excited time as we maneuvered around our nation's capitol. We concluded our busy Wednesday with a night tour of Washington, D.C., which culminated at the memorial that commemorates the United States Marine Corps.

On Thursday morning, the SPC participants headed to Arlington National Cemetery. State officers visited such somber memorials as the JFK eternal flame, the air and space memorial, and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. After lunch at Union Station, we headed back to the hotel to continue our work on the delegate process. It was determined that there would be seven delegate committees at this year's convention. Committee assignments were made and the initial committee meetings took place.

Friday was highlighted by continued delegate work, a special presentation concerning the time capsule, and a guest visit by Representative Charlie Stenholm, ranking minority member on the house agriculture committee. After enjoying a visit to the FDR memorial, we floated down the Potomac River during a dinner cruise. Some passed the night away with a little dancing, others with karaoke, and still others in enlightening conversation.

Saturday marked the end of SPC 2003. After a press release workshop in the morning, we all embarked on a trip to the Mall. Of course, this was no average mall; this is the historic collection of buildings that connects the Lincoln Memorial with the Capitol Steps. For the first time, my parents and I enjoyed the view from the top of the Washington Memorial. That afternoon was highlighted by a carnival in a local park. By the time I headed back to the hotel that evening, I was drenched from head to toe. That night during the dance many of the state officers were entertained by our parents interruption. They certainly did their best to embarrass us. Needless to say, it wasn't pretty.

State Presidents' Conference was truly an excited time for our team, my family and me. Next week, Julie and I will complete our last NLCSO. Until next time, may God bless you.

### **July 20, 2003**

When we last visited, my team and I were busy completing the work of the National Board of Directors meeting. It was truly an exciting work weekend as we accepted a record number of American Degree recipients, confirmed special recognition for some of our most dedicated supporters, and provided visionary leadership for our organization. The adult board certainly brings a great deal of knowledge and insight to the table and we as members are blessed to have leaders that are so passionate about our organization.

On Wednesday morning, us five guys caught an early morning flight to Washington, D.C. (Julie was at her last state convention in West Virginia.) As we began preparation for State Presidents' Conference, we did the unthinkable—that's right us five guys went shopping. But, we didn't just simply go pickup a few supplies, we went shopping for five hours. I know it was simply a mere lapse of all thought.

Thursday, Friday and Saturday, it was back to business. We bought supplies, worked on scripts, and simply prepared for the upcoming week. I really enjoyed the time that I had with my teammates. I feel very fortunate to be a part of such an amazing group of people.

Next week, I will still be in Washington, D.C. Until then, may God bless you.

### **July 13, 2003**

Influence! That has been a consistent theme this past week. From returning to a place that certainly influenced me to serving on a board that influences the over 450,000 FFA members, these past few days have been absolutely exciting!

I began this week back on the farm in south Georgia. Out of town for the week, my dad and brother left me with what turned into an almost insurmountable task. With grass hay on the ground over the weekend, we were in a hurry to place it in bales. On Monday, I 'struck out' on this chore, no pun intended. First, while fluffing hay (to assist in the drying process) around noon, the wheel of this ingenious piece of farm equipment fell off. Later, while preparing to put the hay in windrows, I broke a part of the hay rake. It gets even better. The last equipment casualty occurred when the hay baler caught on fire. Thankfully, no major damage was done from the fire. The fire had been started from a bad bearing. Needless to say, by the end of my Monday, I was a frustrated camper.

Tuesday saw some improvements. With the help of the neighbor's equipment, I was able to finally bale the hay. That was a victory within itself. On Wednesday, my attention turned to preparation for my next national officer trip. I packed up, ran some errands, and even caught a nap.

Thursday morning I headed to Indianapolis for the National FFA Board of Directors meeting. But first, part of our team met with national FFA staff in preparation for national convention. This was certainly an exciting time to see some of the plans being made for the 2003 National FFA Convention.

On Saturday, the board of directors meeting kicked off. This board makes important decisions about the future of organization. Some of the topics certainly have a direct impact on the members that we serve. On Sunday, the meeting continued after attending a worship service in downtown Indianapolis. The board meeting will conclude on Tuesday.

Until next time, may God bless you!

### July 6, 2003

At points during this past week, I have truly been "on top of the world." Whether it was at the 14,110 ft summit of Pike's Peak or watching as state officers excelled during workshop presentations, I certainly enjoyed the "breath-taking views." Starting last Sunday, Julie and I presented our second NLCSO in Colorado Springs, Colo. State officers from Utah, Arizona, Ohio, New Mexico and Colorado joined together to "try, learn, grow and share" for this five day conference.

At 6:15 Sunday morning, Julie and I began preparing the room. Quickly, stars were hanging, tables were set and the flip charts were placed. After a quick meeting with state staff, we kicked off our first session at 2:30 Sunday afternoon. The forty state officers soon were making new friends from the different associations. That evening we enjoyed an early reflections.

On Monday, the state officers continued preparation for the workshops they were to present on Tuesday. That afternoon was our first chance to visit some of the local sites. I was fortunate enough to make the treacherous drive up Pike's Peak with the Arizona state officers. Once at the summit, we enjoyed a tremendous view of the plains on the east and the Rockies on the west. At that high elevation, I also found it hard to breath; the gift shop actually sold flavored oxygen (It wasn't cheap).

Tuesday morning, state officers took center stage. They presented their creative, highly engaging workshops for us all to see. After enjoying an etiquette lunch ( the state leaders trained us 'what to do' and 'what not to do' at a formal meal function), the entire group headed to the Pro-rodeo Hall of Fame. This museum told the history of cowboys from the early days of rounding up cattle to such greats as Lane Frost and Bodacious (a bull). Later that afternoon we explored the first NLCSO session devoted entirely to teamwork.

On the fourth day of the conference, we furthered explored just what state officers must do to become "great" teams. This required the introduction of the "Laws of Teamwork" and some cool team time for the participants. That evening we enjoyed an outing at the "Flying W Ranch"! From learning about cattle brands to eating the "way cowboys did," it certainly was a laughing good time. We wrapped the day up with none other than . . . a dance. We were swinging, flipping, two-stepping, and just having a good time to wind down our day.

Thursday morning marked further exploration of how we could be successful as teams. The leaders of their respective associations sat down and made a plan of how they were going to accomplish their purpose of serving FFA members. We ended the conference with an exciting graduation ceremony. After saying our goodbyes, the Colorado officers hung around to help Julie and I pack up the conference. We decided to join the Colorado gang for lunch, after which I took Julie to the airport. Julie flew out that afternoon, but my flight was not till the morning of the fourth. So I headed back to the hotel to catch up on some much needed sleep.

On Friday morning, I headed to the Colorado Springs airport to catch a flight back to Georgia. That evening, my mom, dad, and older brother picked me up at the airport and we headed to my favorite restaurant—Longhorn's—for dinner. Afterwards, being it was July 4th, my family and I headed to a nearby fireworks show. The weather was perfect and it was truly a great evening to enjoy and give

thanks for my family during this patriotic season.

Now back in Georgia, I headed up to Athens of Saturday morning with a friend and his parents. I am in the beginning process of looking for a place to live when I return to college next spring. It was exciting to see what the next page of my life might look like. But, right now I am certainly enjoying my time of service to the FFA members of this nation. On Sunday, I joined my family in church.

Looking forward to this next week, I will be home until Thursday. I then head up to Indianapolis for the Board of Directors meeting. I hope all is well for each of you and until next time, may God bless you!

### **June 29, 2003**

The "Dog Days of Summer"—I have been experiencing just that during my visit home this past week. The weather has certainly been hot, sunny, and humid; but I sure have enjoyed it! From hanging out with friends to working on the farm, it was certainly a week of catching up and hanging out!

Once I arrived back home on Saturday, it was time to enjoy some delicious baby-back ribs (straight off my brother's grill) and some homegrown groceries from our family's garden. Later in the evening, I crashed and slept for, well, I don't really know how long.

Church, a game of baseball with my brother, a nap, and expense reports highlighted my very uneventful Sunday. Monday, I was able to catch up with some friends at a Bible study in my old college town. After dinner, it was a little billiards and a whole lot of in depth conversations for me.

Tuesday morning, I was able to experience the farm once again. I cut about 17 acres of Coastal Bermuda Hay. On Thursday, my brother and I rolled the hay for my dad's and our cattle. Wednesday was highlighted by a visit to see some friends at one of the Georgia State 4-H Camps. These college-aged counselors are influencing young people in such a cool way.

On Friday, I caught a series of three flights, the last of which brought me to Colorado Springs. Julie and I met up, ate a very delicious dinner, and began preparation for our second NLCSO. This week has so much promise as state officers from Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah and Ohio come ready to learn about how they can serve FFA members this year.

Next week, I look forward to being able to report to you about how this conference in Colorado has gone. But until next time, may God bless you!

### **June 22, 2003**

When you get a group of Jack Rabbits, Cornhuskers, Badgers, Cyclones, Gophers, Wildcats and Tigers together, you know that you are in for a good time. That was certainly the case at Julie and mine's first NLCSO in Aurora, Nebraska, this past week. It was certainly a GREAT time and so much more.

Julie and I arrived into Lincoln on Saturday to catch up with one another and begin preparation for the conference. After church on Sunday morning we began the one and half hour trek over to the conference facility. As we traveled through the miles and miles of corn and soybeans, we stopped to take some pretty cool pictures of the unfolding scenes. Once in Aurora, the rest of Sunday, all day Monday, and much of the day Tuesday were spent setting up the room and organizing the conference materials.

On Tuesday, state officers from South Dakota, Nebraska (they actually arrived Monday), Wisconsin, Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas and Missouri all arrived energetically anticipating the upcoming days. The conference "kicked off" around 6:00 p.m. and very quickly state officers began mingling and "getting to know" people from different associations.

Wednesday was an action-packed day of learning and growth for these 64 state officer participants. Besides creating and presenting some pretty cool and life-changing workshops, these guys were also able to share ideas of how to keep students engaged and active. We ended the day with a Nebraska NLCSO tradition—a watermelon feed.

The third day of the conference was all about the seven state officer teams that were in attendance. As the conference began to focus on teamwork, you literally saw what was before, simply a group of people, come together as a well-oiled, common purpose-driven machine. That evening we indulged in some much-deserved ice cream and the secret competition between the seven state officer teams. (I am told that I can release what exactly the secret competition is). After some of us sat up chatting for a few more hours, it was off to bed to get some rest before the exciting, last day of Nebraska NLCSO 2003.

Friday, the conference kicked off with “flag raising” at 7:30 a.m. Once in session, we continued our team focus and furthered explored how their respective teams will impact their associations and its members this year. After a quick graduation, we wrapped up the conference with the NLCSO banquet. Inspired by the words of Matt Wolters, past state officer and current BLAST-Off presenter, we all left motivated to continue the journey of growth and learning. After a sad farewell, all seven associations and Julie and I left Aurora. I have complete faith that these 64 highly qualified individuals will truly change lives this year as they serve their respective associations.

On Saturday, I caught three flights, the last of which finally took me home. Over the next few days, I will catch up on some much needed rest and look forward to visiting with my family and friends. Until next time, may God bless you!

### June 15, 2003

Greetings from the home of the 2003 National FFA Convention! That’s right. I am here in Louisville, Kentucky! Not in preparation for the October 2003 festivities, but rather for the 74th Kentucky State FFA Convention. This past week has truly been exciting as I returned to one of my favorite cities.

I arrived here Monday after a day flying. That evening, 11 excited state officers, 10 nominating committee members, 20 nervous state officer candidates and I had visited at “get-to-know-you” reception. Tuesday, I was able to catch up on some work and visit with some of the state officer candidates. Later, I enjoyed a delicious meal with the state officers in a restaurant overlooking the famed Ohio River. The surprise of the evening was when they all sang “Happy Birthday” to me.

On Wednesday morning, the convention kicked off with a blast! That afternoon hundreds of FFA members competed in a variety of career development events. At the evening session, the state officers—Holly, Stephanie, David, Chad, Gregory, Lindsay, Randall, Robert, Julie, Logan and Jay—all did an awesome job as they captivated the audience with their vespers entitled “Leaving a Legacy.” The night was complete after a little karaoke and some intriguing dance moves.

Thursday was another exciting day at the Kentucky State Convention. Highlighted by the very important work of the official delegates, more career development events, and the recognition of sponsors, this day marked the climax of the three-day event. In the afternoon session, I was able to deliver my keynote entitled “Our Promise”. That evening we watched as some of the most successful agricultural education students were rewarded for their accomplishments. Thursday, I was also able to visit with past state officers from both Michigan and Tennessee. Will, Scott, Clint and Brandon certainly are some awesome individuals.

After a very touching morning breakfast with the state officers and their advisors, we all headed to the final session. After conferring an amazing 399 state degrees, naming three outstanding state Stars, and being inspired by State President Holly Gilpin’s retiring address, the moment arrived that 20 nervous state officer candidates had been waiting for all week. Past State President Whitney LeGrande read the report that revealed the names of the 11 excited new leaders of the Kentucky Association FFA. After the session, I was able to visit with both the retiring and new state officer teams for a few more hours. Even though these two teams are at different points in their lives, they both exemplify servant leadership.

On Saturday, I boarded a plane headed to Nebraska for our first NLCSO (National Leadership Conference for State Officers). I met Julie (actually we met in St Louis) and we began preparation for this exciting next week. I look forward to giving a report in my next journal entry.

Until next, may God bless you!

### June 8

Fun in the sun—that has been my theme for the past week. I began my week in North Dakota, home of almost 17 hours of daylight. Later in the week, it was off to the bright sun of Arizona.

On Sunday when I arrived in North Dakota, I soon met the state officers—Kevin, Christy, Noah, Nathan, Elizabeth, Heather and Kayla. These guys soon introduced me to a new phenomenon—easy cheese (it is awesome, I even have some to take home). That evening we enjoyed an entertaining game of trivia at a local restaurant.

Monday marked the start of the convention. Members soon filled the campus of North Dakota State University. Monday was highlighted by the reflections session entitled “FFA Idol.” Together all 1000 members in attendance truly discovered the diversity of FFA.

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

Tuesday was filled with career development events and delegate business sessions. I was able to hang out with many of the state officers candidates who were wrapping up the screening process. Later in the evening, many enjoyed a huge dance and some late night conversations.

On Wednesday, the state association began recognizing its proficiency award winners, state and American degree recipients. Also, the state officers began delivering some remarkably inspiring retiring addresses. Our evening activities included a little karaoke at the student union.

Even though the North Dakota State Convention was not complete yet, I had to leave Thursday morning for Arizona. Once arriving in my first Southwest state, Audrey Denny and Ann Marie Deiner, past California State Officers, met me at the Tucson airport. We quickly arrived at the conference hotel, registered, and I headed to lunch with the Cheno Valley FFA chapter.

Thursday afternoon, I met some pretty enthusiastic FFA members at my workshop. After mingled with some of the delegates and state officer candidates, I headed to the evening session. With a theme "It's a Jungle Out There," the reflections session certainly was entertaining. After the session, it was off to the Thursday night dance.

Friday morning, I had a very entertaining breakfast with Gilbert FFA chapter. It was then off to the opening session and then to present two workshops. I enjoyed lunch at "No Anchovies" with the Yuma and Parker FFA Chapters. That afternoon I was able to hang out with the Arizona FFA delegates. It was a really cool experience to see how much they enjoyed their crucial leadership role in the association. After an entertaining evening session back in Centennial Hall, the 800+ members headed back to the conference hotel for another lively dance.

The members of the Peoria FFA Chapter and I had breakfast together at 6:15 a.m. on Saturday morning. Later in the morning, we watched the final session of the State Leadership Conference. It was highlighted by the state degree ceremony, the retirement of the 2002-2003 state officers and the installation of 2003-2004 state officers.

After lunch with the Willcox Chapter, I had a quick meeting with the newly elected state officers. These ten individuals have the unique opportunity to serve the 3,900 members of the Arizona Association FFA.

This past week has been tons of fun, but extraordinarily busy. I hope everyone is enjoying his or her summer break. Until next time, may God bless you!

### **June 1, 2003**

From the hay fields of our family farm to the cornfields of Nebraska, I have certainly witnessed a diverse agriculture environment this past week. This week was highlighted by wrapping up my home time in Georgia and attending Chapter Officer Leadership Training (COLT) Session number 4 in Aurora, Nebraska.

Thankfully, I spent my Memorial Day at home with my family. Besides baling some of our Coastal Bermuda hay, I also spent some much-needed time with my family and enjoyed some wonderfully delicious fried catfish. Tuesday was hectic as I completed my last minute preparation for my next trip. Dad and I also finished up the hay baling that evening. Wednesday, it was off to "The Leadership Center" in Aurora, Nebraska. Adam, Miranda and Meagan all met me at the airport. After these state officers and I made a quick detour to see Memorial Stadium (home of the Nebraska Cornhuskers football team), we headed west through the corn and soybean fields toward the center. I was amazed at the agricultural landscape. For this Georgia boy, it was amazingly flat and there were tons of pivots. When we arrived at the center, I soon met the other state officers—Jill, Becky, Ryan and Beau.

Over the next three days, I came to know so many wonderful FFA members throughout the state of Nebraska. These members went through some pretty awesome leadership training. But, don't be misled, these chapter officers also now how to have a good time. Whether it was the dance, the flashlight relay, or just some good ole football, there was never a shortage of FUN! I also enjoyed hanging out with the South Dakota state officers who were visiting the Nebraska COLT. Jess, Arne, Crystal, Jesse, Chelsea and Shane certainly know how to have a great time. I look forward to seeing them and the Nebraska state officers again at NLCSO in a couple of weeks.

My time in Nebraska was certainly a blast! I love the "down-to-earth" type approach these people take on life. I know that I will find similar people as I make trips to both North Dakota and Arizona this next week.

Until next time, may God bless you!

### May 25, 2003

Greetings from Georgia! I have been home enjoying time with family and friends for the past week. As many of you are wrapping up the school year, I am catching up with some college friends and seeing what it is like to sleep in my own bed.

After spending Sunday in and around church, Monday was a day of shopping for me in Macon. I had to buy some belated birthday gifts and even add to my own summer wardrobe. All day Tuesday and most of the morning Wednesday, you could have caught me in or near my house either sleeping or returning e-mails.

Wednesday afternoon, it was off to the greens. Brett (a college friend) showed me up pretty bad in my first round of golf in a month or so. Thursday I battled the rain and headed to Atlanta for a quick morning business and industry meeting. That afternoon I dropped by to visit a 4-H camp counselor and very dear friend of mine, Candice. Soon I was headed south again toward the thriving metropolis of Abbeville (please sense the sarcasm).

It was back to the greens on Friday morning. Josh (a former college roommate) and I played a less than poor nine holes of golf; I lost two balls in the water on the same hole. Friday afternoon, I went to visit my grandparents, aunt and uncle, and cousins. After taking a tour of the garden and chatting for a while, we all headed to a local restaurant for some "mouth watering" fried catfish. I made the trek home later that night.

My Saturday was highlighted by the commencement ceremonies of Wilcox County High School, the school in which I graduated. Several of the individuals who graduated were FFA members when I was a chapter officer a few years ago. Sunday was marked with morning worship and a restful afternoon nap.

Seemingly uneventful, these past few days have revived me, as I get ready to hit the road again. Until next, may God bless you!

### May 19, 2003

From 95 degrees and humid to 55 degrees and windy—this was just one of major differences between the two locations I visited this week. Beginning in Texas with NLCSO preparation and concluding in the Green Mountains of Vermont, the past six days have been totally action-packed.

On Monday and Tuesday, Julie and I finished up teaching NLCSO to some very spirited and energetic Texas Aggies. Our hope is that those four days with Texas A & M students was mutually beneficial for all. Tuesday night was highlighted by a celebratory dinner with some of the Aggie students.

On Wednesday morning, I took the earliest available flight out of College Station—6:15a.m. With connections both in Houston and Detroit, I finally made it to Burlington, Vermont about 3:30 p.m. Adam Donnelly, Vermont state president, greeted me and we soon made the quick drive to the hotel that was hosting the state convention.

The 74th State FFA Convention kicked off Wednesday night with the opening session, followed by committee meetings and a social-filled scavenger hunt. Soon I was meeting wonderful FFA members; I think I was able to meet almost everyone.

Several off-site career development events highlighted Thursday. I was able to "sit in" on the agricultural issues forum. The Virgerness and the Lake Region FFA chapters both did a terrific job preparing and presenting intriguing perspectives on controversial issues. Thursday night, most all of the convention participants went to Yankee Lanes for an intense, yet fun night of bowling.

On Friday, many of the leadership CDEs and interview-related awards were decided and I presented a second workshop to about half of the convention participants. The early afternoon session was highlighted by a visit from the governor of Vermont. He had tremendous things to say about what FFA was doing for young people; such encouraging words are always great to hear especially from policymakers and other people of noticeable influence. The grand finale—the Friday evening banquet—allowed the Vermont association to recognize some of its most outstanding members and supporters. The Green Mountain State FFA degrees and the announcement of the newly elected state officers were just a few of the many exciting highlights. Renee, Pat, Tyler, Amanda and Ashley will have an amazing year of influence as they serve the Vermont FFA Association.

On Saturday morning, I flew out of Burlington and headed south. For the next few days, I will be enjoying some home time with family and friends.

Until next time, may God bless you!

### **May 12, 2003**

Howdy! I never knew one simple word could have so much meaning to a group of people. But, my newfound Texas A& M Aggie friends certainly have proven that this word its just one of the many traditions that makes College Station a unique and spirited place.

The past week has been spent preparing intensely for the National Leadership Conference for State Officers. Our "stand & deliver" routines and some very constructive coaching highlighted the first part of the week. On Saturday and Sunday, we actually began presenting the conference to Texas A & M students. This was an excellent opportunity to "run through" the instruction materials before Julie and I facilitate our first NLCSO in June.

The past seven days have truly been a wonderful experience as our team has spent so much quality time together. Having been separate during the past several weeks because of state conventions, our team certainly had plenty to share with each other.

This week we will wrap up our experience here in Texas and I will hit the road headed for Vermont's State FFA Convention. I am looking forward to meeting some wonderful people during this, my first trip to any "true" New England state.

Until next time, may God bless you!

### **May 4, 2003**

Peaches? National Champions? Aggieland? Now one may wonder, what all these words have in common? Well, they are just a few of the common words that I heard during my past week travels in Georgia, Ohio, and now Texas!

Tim and I began our Monday morning doing some exciting business and industry visits in the Atlanta area. By the afternoon, we had completed our meetings and were ready to head south towards the thriving metropolis of Abbeville (please sense the sarcasm). After giving Tim a quick tour of my hometown and our family farm, we enjoyed some scrumptious southern food prepared by my mother.

Tuesday, I gave Tim a pretty in depth tour of South Georgia agriculture. We visited a neighbor who was planting peanuts and then took a drive through about ten counties pointing out both pecan and peach trees along the way. The day was concluded and highlighted by a visit to the Upson-Lee FFA Chapter parent-member banquet. The chapter officers--Jason, Bryan, Brandy, Alex, Christy, Josh and Ansley all did a tremendous job as they recognized the award winners for their chapter during the past year. This was my brother's first banquet as one of the Upson-Lee FFA Chapter Advisors.

On Wednesday morning, I headed to Columbus, Ohio, home of the 75th Ohio FFA State Convention. After quickly meeting with the state officers, Julie, John (PSO), and I took a tour of Ohio Stadium (also known as the "Horse Shoe"), home of the national champion Ohio State Buckeyes. As one might expect, Julie and John were quick to point out their recent success.

On Thursday evening, the convention begin with a very exciting, special "FFA at 75" celebration. With a past state officer present that received his state degree at the first Ohio FFA State Convention, one could expect historic festivities for the evening. Julie Tyson, your Eastern Region Vice President, wowed the crowd as she captivated the "past, present, and future" of our organization in her celebratory speech. The state officers also revealed the contents of the time capsule that had been sealed 25 years ago at the golden anniversary convention.

Friday was an action packed day complete with an opportunity to meet some awesome FFA members from throughout the state of Ohio. My workshop was packed for both the morning and afternoon time slots. On the convention stage, hundreds of award winners were recognized for their success during the past year.

Saturday marked the conclusion of the Ohio FFA State Convention. Most all of the state winning career development teams were recognized on stage during the morning session and over 500 Ohioans received the coveted golden charm of the State FFA degree in the final afternoon session. The final item of business for the convention was the announcement and installation of the 2003-2004 State FFA officer team. This team of fifteen will have an exciting year as they serve the almost 22,000 members in the Ohio FFA State Association.

Early Sunday morning, Julie's mom drove us to the airport. Julie and I were on our way to Aggieland. During the next ten days, our team will be preparing for the National Leadership Conference for State

Officers. It should be an exciting week here at Texas A & M University in College Station, Texas.

Until next time, may God bless you!

### **April 27, 2003**

Home, sweet, home! For the past six days, I have been in my fabulous home state of Georgia. I have truly enjoyed my time visiting with family, old friends, and new acquaintances.

After flying home from the Blue catalog photo shoot in Indianapolis on Monday, I spent the next two days in my hometown of Abbeville, Ga. I certainly enjoyed Tuesday and Wednesday on the farm and the opportunity to sleep in my own bed.

On Thursday morning, I headed to Athens, Ga., home of the 2002 SEC Champion Georgia Bulldogs and the 75th Georgia State FFA Convention. After eating lunch with the state officers, I spent the afternoon preparing for the evening session and meeting some incredible members in the registration area of the convention facility. This was an awesome time to see some of the members that I had met during my year of service as a state officer. Later that afternoon, I attended an awards dinner that recognized Georgia's Honorary State FFA Degrees recipients and the Georgia Electrification CDE winners.

Thursday evening, the convention kicked off in the main theater. The state officers--Bo, Kati, Rachael, Nathan, Brian, Ashley, Alex and Julie—did a tremendous job of building the excitement during this entire convention. Two of the highlights of the opening session were the surprise appearance at the convention by University of Georgia Head Football Coach Mark Richt and the inspiring keynote by Vietnam Veteran Clebe McCleary.

On Friday morning, I delivered my keynote during the second general session. The two morning sessions were marked by inspiring words of retiring state officers and the recognition of state winners in the 48 proficiency areas. After an exciting few hours in the career show on Friday, I was fortunate enough to reunite with several old friends in the past state officer, sponsor's, and judge's dinner. Past state officers from as far back as the 30s were there to testify to the impact that FFA had made in their lives. It was certainly amazing to recognize the life-changing contributions of this great organization. I was also able to see six of seven teammates from my state officer days. Friday night was an historic night for the Georgia FFA Association. With record attendance of 2,420 FFA members and guests registered, we joined together to commemorate our association's rich heritage of excellence and optimistically look toward our future. Georgia FFA was fortunate enough to have created a video that celebrated our past. A key highlight of the film was a special message from the 39 th President of the United States and former FFA member, Jimmy Carter.

In the fifth and sixth general session on Saturday morning, our association continued with the awards recognition program and we continued to be inspired by retiring addresses and other special keynotes. Also Saturday morning, it was decided that Cliff, Hope, Shelby, Michael, Rodney, Ashley, Dathan and Cathy will lead our association as the 2003-2004 State FFA Officer team.

The final session of the 75th Georgia State FFA Convention was certainly a roller coaster of emotions. From the motivational retiring address of State FFA President Bo Dotson, to the excitement of the 277 members who received their State FFA Degrees, to the recognition of state officer's parents and teachers, this session was truly a proper ending to a tremendous convention.

After the convention ended, I spent some time with friends in Athens and then went to church with one of my mentors Mr. John K. Wilkinson (State FFA Executive Secretary) on Sunday morning. Sunday afternoon, I headed south toward Atlanta to meet Tim and begin preparation for Business and Industry visits in Atlanta on Monday.

I have thoroughly enjoyed my time here in Georgia. It definitely reminds of why I love my state and this organization so immensely.

Until next time, may God bless you!

### **April 20, 2003**

When you travel on a regular basis by yourself, it is always good to see familiar faces. During the first part of this past week, I certainly had a great opportunity to visit with some familiar faces—my teammates.

During the four days that we were in Indianapolis, we spent numerous hours preparing for the National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO). Julie (my NLCSO partner) and I were able

to work together for the first time specifically on the NLCSO instructional material. That was certainly helpful! I am totally pumped about the NLCSO we will be doing this summer.

During the evenings, our team spent so much needed "catching up" time together. We had some great conversations during our meal times and even were able to partake in a game of laser tag on Tuesday evening. I was even able to visit with my national staff mentor Mr. Kevin Keith over lunch on Wednesday and finally receive my national officer ring.

Wednesday afternoon I said my "goodbyes" and began my trek across the country headed for the Central Oregon Leadership Camp. Arriving late Wednesday, I "hit the hay" quickly in preparation for a huge day on Thursday.

The newly elected Oregon state officers—Dan, Tyler, Anna, Seth, Shannon Barrett and Shannon Becker—began our day with a very patriotic and reflective flag raising. Soon we were off to breakfast and then to my workshop. Together, we explored the idea of "Sharing the Treasure." After a few breakout sessions for the respective officer groups, we came back together for the rituals contest (opening ceremony competition) and an evening banquet. These chapter officers certainly new their stuff and the competition was extremely tough. We ended our day with some pretty funny skits and a central Oregon style dance. Throughout my time at the camp, the district officers—Russ, Cole, Kasha, Kara, Katie and Kellie—did a tremendous job of keeping the energy level high and camp running smoothly.

On Friday morning, I did something I probably will never forget. At the Central Oregon Leadership Camp, they have a tradition that a large percentage of all campers jump into the lake on the last morning of camp. They call this the "Polar Bear Swim." Let me paint the picture a little more clearly. It's 6:15 in the morning and 35 people are in their swim gear standing down by Suttle Lake. There is two inches of snow on the dock, the air temperature in 29 o F, and the water temperature is a balmy 41 o F. After taking a "before" picture, everyone goes out on the dock and jumps into the almost freezing water and then swims back to bank. Once on the bank, you grab your stuff and then run like there is a bear chasing you back to the shower. By the time I got back to the showers, I could not even feel my feet. Later, that morning I was able to sign my name on the scroll that lists all the "polar bears" since 2000. It was certainly an experience that I will not soon forget.

Unfortunately, soon after breakfast on Friday morning, I had to leave the leadership camp to catch a flight back to Georgia. I am pretty excited to get back home for a few days to celebrate Jesus' resurrection with my family. I too hope that you have a wonderful Easter with family and friends.

Until next time, may God bless you!

### **April 13, 2003**

When my last journal entry concluded, I was in the lovely city of Fresno, California, participating in the California State FFA Leadership Conference. The conference was in full swing and I was beside myself with excitement. As you might have expected the last two days at the conference were just as tremendous and amazing as my first five days in California.

On Monday morning, Tim and I headed to the business session to listen and better understand the issues of the California Association. After intriguing debate on committee reports and constitutional amendments, the delegate body was resolved and ready for their votes later in the day. In this session, we heard from 12 candidates who had made it through the nominating committee process and were now asking for the votes of the 500 plus delegates. There were some excellent speeches!

On Monday afternoon, Tim and I presented a workshop to 175 energetic, leadership-hungry FFA members. "Dawgman" as well as everyone in the audience learned how they could grow as leaders by establishing mentors. After our workshop, we headed to the general session ready to be motivated and entertained by the next group of presenters. The night ended with a dance, "west coast" style.

The final general session on Tuesday morning was exciting and bittersweet. Brian, Ann Marie, Amber, Mark, Audrey and Tyler officially retired as the 2002-2003 California State FFA Officer team. Even though this brought tears to many of our eyes, it was tremendous to see and know how these six individuals served FFA members with every ounce of their being over the past year. They demonstrated servant leadership at its finest. But, with their retirement, it meant there was an excited new team waiting in the wings. When the names of Nicolina, Collette, Erica, Lindsay, Meagan and Tommy were called, the crowd as well as these newly elected state officers went crazy. This group of five girls and one boy (just the opposite of our team) are truly excited about serving California FFA this next year.

Tuesday, after lunch, marked the conclusion of the state leadership conference, but it did not mark the end of my trip to California. Over the next four days, Tim and I hung out in Northern California

both with some of his college friends and at his parents. It was great time to relax, get some work done and enjoy some old acquaintances. I was able to play a round of golf, visit with past national officer Angela Browning and past California state officer Luke Browning, and even watch Barry Bonds launch #617 at Pacific Bell Park. I was able to enjoy some home cooked food prepared by Tim's mom and receive the grand tour of the Hammerich farm.

I am currently on my way back to Indianapolis for training in preparation of National Leadership Conference for State Officers. This should be an exciting time to catch up with my team and really prepare for this summer.

Until next, may God bless you!

### **April 6 , 2003**

When we last visited, I was enjoying my time at home. The opportunity to visit with my parents, brother, grandparents, aunt, uncle, and cousins was truly a highlight of my six days in Georgia. I was also able to hang out with some college friends and worship with my home church family.

On Wednesday, I began the long trek across this great nation towards Fresno, California, the site of the 75th California State Leadership Conference. Tim, who also attended the convention, picked me up at the airport and we soon met up to eat with the state officers. Brian, Ann Marie, Amber, Mark, Audrey and Tyler convinced me to order frog legs for my main course. They claimed that it tasted like a combination between chicken and fish. Funny thing is, after I ordered them, they all were very reluctant to taste this "delicacy."

Thursday and Friday, Tim and I had the wonderful opportunity to visit with FFA members who were competing in some of leadership career development events. Thomas, Abigail, Meagan, Gabriel and Jimmy were just a few of the many that I had a chance to meet. I was super impressed by the stiff competition that I personally witnessed in the prepared public speaking CDE. On Friday evening, we visited with the 61 state officer candidates who were preparing for interview rounds with the nominating committee. I left there totally convinced that no matter what happens next week, this association was going to be in great hands.

On Saturday night, the 75th convention kicked off with a huge, historic celebration, which included more than 100 past state officers. With almost 4,000 members in attendance, the energy of the convention arena was phenomenal.

Sunday was filled with excitement and anticipation. Several other presenters and I put on a series of workshop over on the campus of Fresno State. Afterwards, I spoke at the delegate dinner and then headed back to the arena for the evening session. Marked by a motivation address from Dr. Rick Rigsby and several award recognitions, the session left us all thrilled and proud to be FFA members.

As I write this journal entry, the convention is still in full swing. Please stay tuned for more details about the conclusion of the California State Leadership Conference. Until next time, may God bless you!

### **March 30, 2003**

There is no large city that I enjoy anymore than Washington, D.C., and there is no small town that I love more than my hometown of Abbeville, Ga. This week I was able to visit both.

On Monday morning, Tim, Seth, Dustin, and I meet Mr. Scheske (FFA Staff) at the Agricultural Education Headquarters in Alexandria, Va. We proceeded to our first meeting with American Farm Bureau Federation. For me, this is when it became really fun. For almost two and half-hours, we discussed major issues facing the agriculture industry. Issues included taxes, farm bill appropriations, conservation, trade, biotechnology, energy, and water quality. As an organization that prides itself on preparing future leaders of the agriculture industry, it is essential that we continue to understand the concerns and opportunities of our industry. Later that afternoon, we met with a former FFA member who is now the agricultural counselor in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This was a fascinating meeting.

On Tuesday, our first meeting was with leaders of The National Grange. We quickly discovered that The National Grange and the National FFA Organization had very similar values. After a fun-filled lunch with former National FFA President and current Washington, D.C., attorney Nels Ackerson, the five of us headed towards Capitol Hill. Our first meeting was scheduled with former national FFA officer Sen. Sam Brownback of Kansas. But, unfortunately due to the debate on the Senate floor, we were unable to meet with the Senator. We did, however, meet with one of his staffers. After the meeting I split off from Tim, Seth and Dustin and headed to several congressional meetings I had planned for that afternoon. I was fortunate enough to meet with Congressman Kingston and

Congressmen Marshall, both of whom represent heavily agricultural dependent districts in South Georgia. I finished my day by meeting with a staff member of Sen. Saxby Chambliss also of Georgia.

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) was our home for most of the day Wednesday. I had the opportunity to job shadow Mr. Gil Gonzalez, deputy undersecretary for rural development. Over the course of the day, I learned about how the efforts the federal government is taking to improve the economic well being of our rural communities. It was intriguing to see how funding has already been provided to develop an infrastructure capable of capitalizing on renewable energy sources such as ethanol or biomass. For lunch, we were honored to host the Secretary of Agriculture, Ms. Ann Veneman and several other dignitaries within the department. Our backgrounds and the future of American agriculture quickly became the lunch conversation of choice. At the end of the day, we had one last congressional visit. Dustin had set up a meeting with Texas Congressman Stenholm, a former FFA member and agricultural education instructor. Congressman Stenholm talked with us about some of the important issues facing agriculture and shared some of his past experiences in FFA and agricultural education.

On Thursday, I headed back home for the first time in six weeks. After a quick stop by Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College (ABAC) (this is where I went to college last semester, so I had to say hello to some friends), I headed to the Wilcox County Forestry Field Day. Every year my home chapter sponsors this practice event and invites chapters from across the south central part of the Georgia to attend. I was able to hang out with such chapters as Wilcox County High FFA Chapter (my home chapter) and Upson-Lee High FFA Chapter (the FFA chapter my brother teaches and advises). Finally, that evening, I arrived at home ready for some home cooking and sweet tea.

On Friday, I basically caught up on some much-needed sleep and work. It sure was nice to sleep in my home bed for a few days. I did find time clean a few fish that afternoon and curl up with a book that evening.

Until next time, may God bless you.

### **March 23, 2003**

Let me tell you, Utah FFA members love to have a good time. For the past four days, I have had the tremendous opportunity to hang out with these exciting members.

After five learning-filled training days in Indy, I headed to Logan, Utah, on Wednesday afternoon. Once I was checked into my hotel room, I quickly went to bed in preparation for a BIG day on Thursday.

Thursday morning, I awoke excited, yet a little nervous because today was the first day of my state convention season that will stretch over the next three months. After meeting with the Utah state officer team in the morning, I soon began preparation for my workshops that afternoon. For three hours, I presented to FFA members about the importance of being connected with those around you and how you can make those relationships more fulfilling.

After a rather entertaining dinner at A & W's with the Fremont FFA Chapter, I headed to the first general session. Stanley, Tanya, Leslie, Kara, Tamra, & Camille (the UT SO team) did a fantastic job of kicking off the convention. Former National Officer Matt Lohr entertained and motivated us all with his convention's kickoff keynote. He asked me to play a role in the skit in which I was an "ignorant" crewmember aboard a ship. It was tons of fun and lots of laughs.

On Friday morning, the South Sevier FFA Chapter treated me to breakfast. After eating way too much, it was time for my keynote in the second general session. Friday at lunch we celebrated the great accomplishments of the state degree recipients and had a special celebration for Utah's 75 th anniversary. A group of officers from the 1977-78 team returned to open the time capsule that had been stored 25 years ago. The 2002-2003 officer team began collecting items for inclusion in the time capsule that will be sealed this year. Also Friday afternoon, I had an opportunity to ride a mo-ped for the first time in my life. It was kind of scary, but lots of fun all at the same time.

Friday evening we had an action-packed general session in which Utah FFA recognized its proficiency winners. Afterward, it was off to the dance. Interestingly, they had a mechanical bull set up near the rear of the dance. No sooner had I told someone that I was NOT going to ride that THING, than I was up on top of this bull "holding on for dear life." I actually rode the thing TWICE. It actually became a source of adrenaline, but also a source of soreness.

Saturday morning marked the final day of the convention. After presenting awards to their State Star winners, it was the moment of truth for 23 state officer candidates. The nominating committee reported that Tiffany, Bill, Tanya, Cash, Sonrisa and Todd would serve as the 2003-2004 Utah state officers. These individuals will have an exciting year of growth and opportunity as they serve the FFA

members of Utah.

After telling the retiring Utah state officers goodbye and several other of the FFA members I had met, the Arizona state officers and I packed up and headed south. Brian, Patrick, Jamie, Holly, and Ray had acted as my wheels all week and on Saturday they dropped me off in Salt Lake City on their way back to Arizona. They are tons of fun and I look forward hanging out with them later when I visit the Arizona state convention.

My next stop is in Washington, D.C. Stay tuned for more details. Until next time, may God bless you.

### **March 16, 2003**

What a week! From the snowy fields of Michigan, to the sunny days of North Carolina, to the busy streets of New York City, to the tremendous learning environment of Indianapolis—this only begins to describe the excitement of my week during March 9-16.

Tim and I left the cold confines of Michigan on Sunday afternoon and headed for our second week of Business and Industry visits. For the first three days of our trip, we visited both current sponsors and potential partners of FFA in the Raleigh and Charlotte, North Carolina and in the Greenville, South Carolina areas. Besides some terrific and very enlightening meetings, Tim and Eric (the Foundation Staff member that accompanied us in NC) introduced me to the world of hockey. All I knew about the sport was from the occasional fight highlights I had seen on ESPN. But on Monday night, Tim and I had free tickets (two guys randomly gave them to us) to see the Carolina Hurricanes hang on to a 6-5 victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets. Also worth noting, while in North Carolina, my computer mysteriously crashed. Thankfully, it is all fixed now, but it was quite an inconvenience.

From North Carolina, we flew on up to the BIG APPLE—New York City. It was my first visit to our nation's largest city. For a small town Georgia boy, this place was huge. Honking taxis, crowded streets and subways, and a level of excitement unmatched by any place I had ever been. Tim, Jana, (Foundation staff) and I also took in a Broadway show. Now, of course, there was plenty of work to go along with all of this play. Tim and I visited Toyota, Pfizer, and Philip Morris—all of which are current sponsors of FFA. We concluded our week by visiting "Ground Zero." This was one of the most somber experiences of my life. I read several patriotic notes that our fellow Americans had left for victims' families and for all to see that visited this site. I left there with a new hope—for all that is wrong in the world, there is so many things that are so right.

On Friday evening (after being lost in NYC on the way to the airport), Tim and I flew to Indianapolis. Saturday morning began a six-day conference in which BIAST-OFF, WLC, and NLCSO presenters received training for their respective conferences. Even though the conference is just beginning, this will be a really exciting opportunity for me to grow. I am really looking forward to the next three days.

Until next time, may God bless you!

### **March 9, 2003**

This past week, our team has enjoyed the beauty of rural Michigan as we began preparation for State Conventions, planned parts of the National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO), and even visited a local FFA chapter. Our team continues to grow in so many neat ways and this week allowed us to learn about some of the cool experiences our fellow officers have had around the nation the past few weeks.

On Saturday, the rest of the team joined Tim and I (we arrived on Thursday) for an awesome evening of fellowship. After a brief worship service Sunday morning, our team worked Sunday in preparation for state convention keynotes and workshops. One of the coolest things we did this week was our Monday visit to the Cass FFA Chapter. Seth and Tim were not with us Monday because of state conventions in other parts of the country; so Julie, J.J., Dustin and I presented workshops to several classes. We met some amazing FFA members who were headed to the Michigan State FFA Convention that afternoon. While we were there we learned a new game and a few of the members even demonstrated the "gator." (Many of you may be asking what is this? It is a dance that requires a lot of kicking, rolling, and quick physical movement. It looks kind of like an aerobics workout.) It was a great visit!

Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday was mostly devoted to understanding the lay out of NLCSO. Our team is really excited about a pretty neat conference that we will put on for next year's team of state officers. We ended the week by continuing to work on State Convention preparation.

On a retreat the natural thought is "all fun, no work." We did have tons of fun, but we were able to accomplish a terrific amount of work. Until next time, May God bless you!

### March 2, 2003

When we left off, I was on my way to Nashville, Tennessee preparing to kick off our February Business and Industry visits. Once arriving in the "city of country music," we meet up with our team, some of the FFA Foundation staff, and our host for the weekend. Mr. Jerry Brase, Mrs. Gina Cochran and the Tractor Supply Company (TSC) hosted an incredible weekend of fun and learning. We visited such sites as the Ryman Auditorium (former home of the Grand Ole Opry), the Country Music Hall of Fame, and the Opryland Hotel. The food was amazing! Our team ate at the Loveless Café, a classic down home southern restaurant. I think I have several of my teammates hooked on sweet tea now. On Monday morning, we visited the corporate headquarters of TSC and learned some amazing things about how retailing business works.

On Monday evening, Tim and I (Tim is my B & I partner) departed for Atlanta. While in Georgia, we did not make it anywhere close to my home, but we were able to visit with Mr. James Woodard (GA State FFA Advisor) and his family as well as visit several key companies in the Atlanta area.

On Tuesday evening, Tim, Mrs. Jan Ferris (our Foundation staff member), and I headed to Raleigh-Durham in preparation for more meetings on Wednesday and Thursday. We visited several crop protection companies and we learned a tremendous amount from several business leaders who possess a wealth of knowledge about the agriculture industry. Tim and I shared several of the key messages of our organization. It is truly exciting to see how our organization builds partnerships within the agriculture industry.

On Thursday night, Tim and I caught a flight headed toward South Bend, Ind.. Today, Tim and I will head up to southern Michigan and settle in for our team retreat. JJ, Seth, Dustin and Julie will join us on Saturday.

The past week has been a learning and exciting experience for me. I hope everything is going great for each of you. Until next time, God Bless!

### Feb. 23, 2003

FFA Members are AWESOME! I have known this for years, but this past week in Wisconsin has reaffirmed my claim. As part of the celebration of National FFA Week, I was fortunate enough to travel more than 1,000 miles throughout Wisconsin while visiting with FFA members from 27 different chapters. On Friday, Feb. 7, my team and I left the National Agricultural Education In-service headed for home. After almost a week with my family, college friends, and my local community, I headed back to Indianapolis on Thursday, Feb. 13. Our team celebrated St. Valentine's Day at Elanco (an animal health company) as we trained for our upcoming Business and Industry visits. After a little team time and some last minute preparation, I went to bed Friday night ready to begin my experience in Wisconsin Saturday morning.

But, I had to wait longer than I had planned. I woke up Saturday morning to find Indianapolis covered in snow. Once I made it to the airport and boarded my plane, I assumed that a quick trip was in store for me as I headed to Eau Claire, Wisconsin. That was a bad assumption. My travel complications began when I sat on the tarmac/runway for four full hours waiting to depart from the snow-covered airport. We finally took-off and I soon arrived in Minneapolis for my connecting flight. Shortly however, I discovered that there was not another flight to Eau Claire for 4 more hours. So what was supposed to be a 4-hour travel day soon became an 11-hour saga.

Once in Eau Claire, I spoke to the Wisconsin FFA Alumni Association. Wisconsin has the largest alumni state association in the nation (almost 8,000 members). Sunday, Matthew Schleusner, the Wisconsin State FFA President, and I headed to his farm, which is located about an hour away from Eau Claire. After visiting with his family, we drove about eight miles to visit the Prairie Farm chapter. After a quick workshop, Matt, Laura (another state officer) and I played volleyball with the host chapter. I even took my first snowmobile ride.

On Monday, I set a new record for the lowest temperature I had ever been in—0oF. (the previously low was 15oF. We began our day with a radio interview with Bob Meyer and then headed to breakfast with the Spencer Jr. High FFA Officers. After a huge breakfast, we headed to Spencer to visit with those same members plus several other students from the school. After speaking with the chapter members about leadership and getting involved, Matt, Larissa (a WI state officer) and I were fed a wonderful meal by the Senior High FFA Officer team. Monday afternoon we headed to Mauston for an FFA assembly program and a wonderful pancake feed. Matthew and I even got into the action of cooking the pancakes. Chris and Amanda (both state officers) joined us for some touring of a meat processing plant and an Emu farm in the area.

On Tuesday, Mrs. Zimmerman (the WI FFA Executive Director) and Brooke, the state officer from that

section, joined us as we headed for a morning visit to Augusta High School. I enjoyed the opportunity to speak to more than 300 6th-12th graders about the importance of integrity. That afternoon the traveling caravan made a quick stop at Menomonie High School. After completing an exciting leadership workshop for the Menomonie FFA Chapter, we headed towards Chippewa Falls for our evening activities. I presented a relationship-building workshop for the Chippewa Falls Chapter and the Fall Creek Chapter.

The Tigerton Tigers were our first visit Wednesday Morning. I spoke to the whole school about the importance of "digging for success." We had a blast together! Amber and Nicole (both state officers) joined us for a quick visit to the Freedom High School Agricultural Education Department. We saw an amazing aquaculture lab and an attached food science laboratory. Seymour High was the next stop on the tour. The FFA members and I scored some leadership touchdowns together as we even played a little football. Wednesday night we headed over to Oconto Falls for an assembly of FFA members from the surrounding area. After some enthusiastic and hopefully educational time in some workshops, we made the walk to the newly renovated Agricultural Education. Here I meet the department cat, experienced a state of the art food laboratory and even kissed a piglet. Now that was quite smelly!

Thursday began with a visit to Waupaca High School. After a delicious breakfast served by the chapter, I had the fortunate opportunity to speak to the FFA Chapter, which has more than 100 members. We also toured their agriculture facility and viewed the hydroponics they were using in their greenhouse. After a nearly four-hour trek across the state of Wisconsin, much of which was along the scenic Wisconsin River, Matt, Mrs. Zimmerman and I arrived at Wauzeka for the Hot Winter Seminar. This gathering of FFA members and FCCLA members allowed me to do a workshop on role modeling six different times. Ron, Peggy and Jeanne, the state officers from this part of Wisconsin, also helped out with the presentations.

Friday morning we made a stop at the Wisconsin FFA Foundation and the University of Wisconsin-Madison Collegiate FFA Chapter. The Foundation is securing some major resources for the students of Wisconsin and the collegiate chapter's passion for youth was almost unmatched. Soon I was boarding a flight on my way for the Business and Industry Kick-off in Nashville, Tennessee.

As we celebrate National FFA Week, our responsibility is to promote our organization to the general public. I trust you have had a successful week and truly enjoyed your experiences wherever you may be. I certainly loved my time here in the Great State of Wisconsin! Until next time, God Bless!

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

The past two weeks have been a whirlwind of activities—a 12-hour flight, a very engaging National FFA Board of Directors meeting, some new food, very informative agriculture tours and an amazing time with my fellow teammates.

When I finished my last journal entry, I was in Washington, D.C., preparing for the National FFA Board of Directors meeting. One of the responsibilities of serving as a national officer is the opportunity to serve jointly with the board of directors to set policy and purpose for the National FFA Organization. From January 24-27, our team represented the perspective of FFA members throughout the nation. This weekend allowed us to openly discuss the issues that currently affect our organization and provide input for the future direction of organization. It was an amazing experience!

On Tuesday morning, we boarded a flight headed to Chicago for the first leg of our Japan trip. After eating one last stop at an American McDonald's, I boarded a Boeing 747 ready for more than 12 hours of flying. We finally reached Tokyo, Japan at about 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday afternoon. (I know the math does not add up; Tokyo is 14 hours ahead of the Eastern Time zone). After attempting to overcome jet lag Wednesday night, we woke up Thursday morning excited about our visit to the United States Embassy. Our team learned about the Japanese agriculture industry, its impact on the culture, and how the United States provides key food and fiber resources to Japan. We finished up Thursday by visiting a local shopping area.

Friday began early with a visit to the Tokyo fish market. I saw a 300-pound plus tuna fish for the first time in my life. It was impressive! That afternoon we visited the foods unit of Mitsui & Co., Ltd., the company that sponsors the national officer trip to Japan. It was another insightful visit as our team attempted to understand the complexity of the Japanese role in the global agriculture economy. That evening our team and several Mitsui employees headed to the "Karoke Kan" for an exciting night of songs including a rousing rendition of "Sweet Home Alabama."

Saturday was filled with tours of some of the most innovative farms in Japan. We first visited a lettuce and Chinese chives farm that used hydroponics for production. The farmer had spent time in America and truly understood the importance of value-added agriculture products. Our second visit was to a strawberry and rice farm. This farm was one of the biggest in the region; the farmer had 50 acres of rice paddies (the average farm is 3.5 acres). This 51-year-old farmer produced his strawberries in greenhouses without the use of pesticides.

On Sunday, we headed to Kyoto, Japan on the bullet train, a 180-mile high-speed passenger train. We visited several historic sites within the city. On Monday and Tuesday we visited two other agriculture corporations in the Kyoto region. It was a tremendous opportunity to see how America imports some products, but exports an enormous amount of other products.

On Wednesday, we packed up and headed to the Osaka airport. Once we boarded our flight, we began the long trek back across the Pacific Ocean. Because of the time differences we left Japan at 3:45 p. m. Wednesday afternoon, flew through a period of darkness for a significant portion of the 9hour flight and landed in California Wednesday morning at 8:10 a.m. Yes, we actually went back in time. As much as I enjoyed my visit to Japan, it was certainly great to hear the customs officer say, "Welcome back!" By Wednesday evening we were back in Indianapolis preparing for the National Agricultural Education In-service.

As I reflect back on the past two weeks, I see how much I have learned about our organization and the cultures that exist outside the confines of our society. I look forward to sharing the experiences with FFA members throughout the nation. Until next time, God bless!

### **January 20, 2003**

As all my college friends headed back to school the third week of January, our national officer team also went back to the classroom. No, our "professors" were not boring like the average college instructor, but we sure did learn about tons of new and exciting information. The week of January 13-17 was filled with some neat training, intriguing discussions, and intense preparation for the days ahead. Julie, JJ, Seth, Tim, Dustin and I really enjoyed the opportunity to hang out together at the National FFA Center. We even watched a little NFL football during our breaks.

The weekend saw me headed back to the warm confines of south Georgia, but not without a little hassle. Friday night, I arrived at Indianapolis airport to find my flight had been canceled and I was stuck behind about 30 angry "wannabe flyers". I called the travel agency only to find that I had been rebooked for a flight the next morning and nothing else was available to Georgia that evening. I was not happy! So I called the airline carrier and spent almost 30 minutes trying to rebook for the late evening flight (the one that was supposedly unavailable), only to find out that this flight was only about half full. There were plenty of seats available! But, by the time I arrived home it was about 1:30 on Saturday morning.

I spent the weekend catching up on some much-needed sleep, spent time with friends and family, and attended my home church. When you don't see people on a regular basis, it really makes you value your close relationships. I only spent three and half days at home, but I certainly enjoyed my visit.

On Tuesday, I flew to Washington, D.C., in preparation for the National FFA Board of Directors meeting. Once again, my flight was canceled and I spent three hours in the Atlanta airport. When I finally arrived in Washington, I met the team and we headed to dinner. After a brief team meeting, I was in bed by midnight. (This is a rare treat).

The following day was a real opportunity for our team to learn from the employees of the United States Department of Education. We visited with the officials that directly impact how agricultural education is funded and implemented. Dr. Case and Mr. Harris were wonderful hosts. We finished the day with a dinner at Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington.

The past week has been tremendous and we are looking forward to an exciting week here in Washington, D.C. Until next time, may God bless you.

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

The past week and half has been absolutely amazing! After flying into Indianapolis on January 1, our team spent the end of the week finishing up preparation for our experience states. It is always great to spend some quality time with your teammates.

I was, however, saddened by the death of a very close friend of mine. Ryan Rimmer, a former Florida State FFA Officer and a MFE presenter, was tragically killed in a car accident. Ryan's passion for FFA and young people was unmatched; he loved our organization. He will be missed sorely and my prayers go out to his friends and family.

On Monday, January 6. Seth and I took off for a wonderful experience state in Arkansas. When we arrived, Mr. Fletcher, the National FFA Treasurer, was waiting on us at the airport. Soon we were off to visit FFA chapters throughout the natural state. Arkansas is blessed with some wonderful FFA

chapters. Seth and I visited with members from the Nettleton, Weiner, Rison, Brinkly, Sheridan, Lake Hamilton and Fountain City, to name a few. Throughout the week, we meet some wonderful members like Lara, Lindsay, Dessi, Whitney, Drew, and Ashten. So many of the members we came in contact with were so pumped about FFA.

Seth and I really enjoyed traveling with the state officers throughout the week. Tory, Amy, Jameson, Caroline, Carmen and Kristen truly added tons of fun to our drives through the rural scenery of Arkansas. Mr. Fletcher and Mrs. Collins planned a very intense, yet exciting week for us officers. Besides visiting with tons of amazing members, we visited the state capital, Riceland Foods, Inc, and the hometown of Bill Clinton. I even convinced Seth to try sweet tea and grits; I think I have him hooked.

Everyone needs to spend some time in Arkansas. The people are great and the scenery is breathtaking. From just one visit, I know I love Arkansas! Until next time, God bless!

### **Jan. 6, 2003**

I absolutely love Christmas! Not only is it a wonderful time to celebrate the birth of Christ, but it also affords us the opportunity to enjoy family, friends, and the spirit of giving. However, this year's Christmas was little different for me!

It was different because I spent the wonderful week before Christmas training at the National FFA Center. That last week before we went home was pretty exciting. We finally put some of our in-the-classroom training to work in the real-world. Julie and I had the amazing opportunity to visit the North Putman FFA Chapter on Friday, December 20. Those Indiana FFAers certainly knew how to make this Georgia boy feel at home—they gave me food. Also that Friday we hung out with our friends from DowAgro Sciences at an Indiana Pacers basketball game. We concluded our week by exchanging some pretty hilarious gag gifts over dinner Saturday night.

Sunday morning it was off to the races. No, not the Indy 500, but rather the rat race at the airport. Only three days before Christmas, Sunday was a pretty busy travel day. So many people just like me trying to get home for the holidays. Finally, I made it to my home airport where my parents and brother were nervously awaiting my late arriving flight.

The next nine days at home were great! After catching up on some much-needed rest, I dived head first into all my family's Christmas traditions. First, there was Christmas Eve at my grandparents and then Santa's visit came Christmas morning. One of my favorite traditions is visiting my younger neighbors on Christmas morning. Their toys seem to be more fun than my clothes. Visiting with my home church family was certainly a fulfilling part of my home visit.

Also on Christmas break, my dad, my brother, and I always work the calves. The holidays would not be complete if Philip, my older brother, did not have a few bruises from kicking calves. This year we also worked on fences together (I hope this is not a newfound tradition). Being with Dad and Philip was a treat, but the barbed wire and briars was a major pain. I also enjoyed celebrating my Mom's birthday the day I left to come back to Indianapolis.

Well, it is a new year now and things are looking exciting for 2003. I am sure I will set a few New Year's resolution and break them by the end of January. (Did you know that 64% of Americans actually keep their resolutions past January 31? That is courtesy Reader's Digest). But, I resolved today that I want to meet as many of you great FFA members as I can in this next year. Until next time, Happy New Year and may God bless you.

### **Dec. 15, 2002**

Wow! I hardly know where to begin. The past month and half has been utterly amazing! The 75th National FFA Convention in Louisville, Ky., was absolutely terrific and truly a life changing experience for the 51,025 in attendance. Dane, Robin, Elio, Abby, Barrett and Amber did an incredible job and truly made the kickoff for the FFA diamond anniversary a resounding success. Their leadership and influence is allowing so many members to enjoy "One Mission: Student Success."

We began our initial training in Louisville on Sunday, following our election at the tenth session of the convention. This was a wonderful opportunity to become more acquainted with my new teammates and some of the basics about my upcoming year. It was soon very obvious to me that passion for FFA and agriculture was going to be a hallmark of our new team.

On the Wednesday after convention, we headed back to our home states. You might say, "Georgia was on my mind." I was able to spend the next three and half weeks with family and friends. I played some pretty pitiful games of golf with some college buddies, watched my beloved Bulldogs, and simply hung out with friends. I also used this time to wrap college up before I headed home for

## Thanksgiving.

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays! I eat until I just can't eat anymore! It was wonderful to get to visit my parents, grandparents, my brother, and cousins during the holiday weekend. I am thankful every day for such a caring and loving family. After this brief weekend, I said my goodbyes and headed to Indianapolis, Indiana to begin my training.

On Monday, the first day of training, I walked into the National FFA Center for the first time in my life. As a greenhand, I learned all about the center, but it was so cool to finally see it in person. As I walked through the hall of achievement, I saw pictures of Henry Groseclose, Lesile Applegate, E.M. Tiffany, and others who were instrumental in shaping the traditions of our organization.

For the past two weeks, Tim, Seth, Julie, Dustin, J.J. and I have been involved in some pretty intense training, preparing us for our upcoming year. We have also had the opportunity to meet some wonderful members of National FFA staff and really explore the greater Indianapolis area. And this GEORGIA boy even saw snow!!! Twice!!! That has definitely been a highlight.

As we finish up our December training, I am really looking forward to heading home for the holidays. I hope each of you enjoy this time with the people you love. This truly can be a wonderful time of year. And just as I am looking forward to this Christmas season, I am anxious to really begin a wonderful year serving FFA members all across the country. For now, God bless and happy holidays!!

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