



Anne Knapke

National Officer Journal

I'm currently sitting on my last flight of the year. I can hardly believe what I just wrote. It seems like just yesterday I was nervous, apprehensive, and jittery with butterflies about the upcoming national convention—almost one complete year ago. It is very overwhelming to think about the experiences I have been blessed to have in this past year. I wouldn't know where to begin in reflecting on those experiences that have piled up without me even realizing it. But one thing is for sure, I am a much better person for having had them, and I thank God for that.

The past two weeks have gone by fast. The last I wrote, I was getting ready to start another week of convention planning in Indianapolis at the national center with my teamies. I can't even explain how wonderful it is to walk into the hotel and see them. When our time came to a close that week, it was a bit bittersweet. As much as we made great progress in putting together an awesome convention for next month, we realized that our nights together causing havoc and being crazy, were coming to an end very quickly. I've grown with those five individuals in the past year more than any other group of people I've worked with, and I might venture to say, I may ever work with. May our time together as a team end with a bang in a few weeks in Louisville, Kentucky! From Indianapolis, I flew out to the Big E in Massachusetts. The Big E is formally known as the Northeastern States Exposition. It's like the state fair of all of the New England states combined.

I was greeted with a wonderfully refreshing visit from some of my home chapter members and Mr. J, my advisor. They were out there to compete in the Farm Business Management CDE—which they ended up getting second overall team in, by the way! I am so proud of them!) They came down to my room the night I arrived and we just hung out for a while. It's so good to get a taste of home. Congratulations Emily, Alicia, Christina and Sarah. You make me proud.

The next day was Saturday, and there were lots of FFA CDEs happening, as well as stars judging. See, in the Eastern Region, they award regional stars and top CDE teams, and they hold the judgments and contests there at the Big E. So the top teams and stars from all the Eastern Region states are invited to participate. It was so wonderful to see so many familiar faces there! I spent the afternoon with state officers from Maryland and Delaware. I just absolutely love these guys. They are such good, good people. We walked through the buildings of the states. Each state has their own "hall" on the fairgrounds, and in each one, are the products of that state. The building is treated as the property of that state too, so in some, there were no taxes, just like in that state. Each state even had their state police on patrol in their buildings!

That evening, we had the awards banquet at the Sheraton hotel. The interns in charge of the program, Mike and Mindy, did a wonderful job with organizing it all. It went well, and I said my goodbyes to all of my familiar friends from New Hampshire, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Delaware, New Jersey, Massachusetts, New York, Maryland and Virginia.

The next day, I departed from the Northeast part of the U.S., and flew to Northeast, Missouri for a week in Area III of Missouri's FFA Association. My week consisted of visits to several high schools and interaction with lots of good students. Some of the highlights of the week include visiting with the officers at Macon High School. It was so fun just to chat with the officers. They were so personable and so friendly.

By far one of my favorite chapters of the week was Knox County. It was good to see some familiar faces I had seen at WLC earlier this year. A group of nine of us spent the



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afternoon playing “Tarzan and Jane”, with the brothers, Jonathon and Paul, making us all laugh with their crazy animations! I spent that evening at Miranda James’ farm with the officers from Knox County. I enjoyed a beautiful evening in fellowship with Miranda, her parents Anita and Leon, her brother, Brady, and other officers, Josh, Paul, Roo, Latasha, and Cody. I hope I didn’t forget someone! We all played “Annie, Annie, Over!” until it was dark out.

One of the schools I enjoyed so much was Green City. I absolutely loved this class of Greenhands! They mutilated my oranges! They were so wonderful, and Mr. Ayers does an awesome job with his students. I really enjoyed their company. That evening I spent in Milan, Missouri with Miranda Leppin, who is the Milan FFA President, and also the Area III President in Missouri. We had dinner together and she showed me the town. We hung out at her house with her brother Derek and her parents. We discovered that her dog’s tongue is unusually long and neither one of us is a pro at playing pool! Now this is a family that’s crazy about their Mizzou sports! Derek’s bedroom is even painted to Mizzou. Quite stylish.

Wednesday night we had a leadership conference at Schuyler County, and I rode on the bus with the members from Atlanta FFA to it. Before we left, we hung out for a while at the high school. Josh and I swung on the swings, which I hadn’t done in quite a while. It was fun! The Area Officers did an excellent job at the conference that evening.

The next evening I spent with the Elson girls at their home. I had such a blast staying up with them and having “girl talk.” It was an evening I’ll remember for a long time. I was very impressed with the Salisbury FFA chapter. Mr. Fischer obviously does a great job with the chapter. That area of Missouri seemed especially beautiful too.

I headed home after my last week of really good interaction with students. My experiences in Missouri will stay with me for a long time!

After a weekend at home, and hanging out with some really good friends from high school I hadn’t seen in way too long, I flew out to Nashville. There I met Javier and we did a TV show for RFD-TV with Max Armstrong. Then Javier and I went out for an evening together in downtown Nashville. It was a much-needed evening with Javier to just enjoy each other. I’m so glad God brought his friendship to me through this team. With that, I’ll sign off for now. I hope the spirit of fall, the good weather, the beautiful colorful scenes of the tree lines, harvest season... I hope it finds you well and smiling. It’s a beautiful time of the year. Be sure not to miss enjoying it!

“Be faithful in small things because it is in them that your strength lies.”

-Mother Teresa

September 10, 2004

Okay, so it’s been a little while since I was in touch...but really, things have been on the down-low for me recently... which I can’t say I didn’t mind for a bit.

The last time we talked, I was on my way to our first week of convention planning. Being together with the team has become such a delightful event. It is so wonderful to cherish being with each other, and to appreciate each other the way we have come to. We spent a week working on all sorts of things—from our Reflections programs, to our walk-in songs, to our first drafts of our retiring addresses. And I am happy to say that a good month later, I am finally pleased with the direction of my retiring address! Being inspired



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by so many students this year, it's a bit hard to pretend I know a whole lot more about things than the students I'm serving do! Get excited if you are coming to convention though, because I am so proud of my team and what you have to look forward to this year. It will be a week never to forget!!

As I write this, I am in Columbus, Ohio, at a little coffee shop called "Cup O' Joe's." I've had a lot of time to unwind at home lately, and start to get my life a bit organized for what is going to happen in 50 days. I've spent time with friends back home that I haven't seen in a long time before they go off to college again. I've spent time watching my Soap Opera, "Days of Our Lives", with my Mama, among other things, cutting wood with Daddy, and catching up with my sisters.

I drove to Lansing, Michigan, one weekend to meet up with Christy and Casey and go to a NASCAR Busch Series Race for the Michigan/Ohio FFA Race Day. My sister, Sara, and Dad drove up for it too. Now, I must say, I've never been into NASCAR much, just because I get bored watching the cars just go round and round the track on TV, but being there in person made a fan out of me! The cars go SO fast! And there is so much excitement as they chicken fight on the track. There was an FFA Hospitality tent, where we had the chance to meet FFA members and supporters and catch up with some of the Michigan state officers we hadn't seen in a while. Then we had the opportunity to go down in the pits and see the cars being measured and weighed-in. It was definitely a cool experience.

A week later, I headed out to Omaha, Nebraska, for a week of Business and Industry visits with Javier. It was so good to see him! We had a good week, spending half of it with JR and half with Jason, who both work with the National FFA Foundation. We saw lots of Nebraska, Iowa and Missouri. Omaha is definitely the "secret" city of the midwest. It is super nice—and has kind of a young modern slash carefree atmosphere to it, which is probably why I liked it. While there, the visits I enjoyed the most were with Union Pacific Railroad, and with ConAgra. I had no idea how much is moved by railroad yet today. Agriculture is very dependent on it! At ConAgra Foods, we learned about current diet and nutrition misconceptions—facts that were just unbelievable... like the fact that the U.S. being the most obese society is really only true by a few percentage points, followed by European nations... and that as huge as the Atkins diet appears to be, it really only counts for about 5 percent of people that claim they are on diets, with the majority being self-created diets.

We drove to Des Moines, Iowa, for a visit at Meredith Corporation, which owns more than 100 magazines and several news stations. Then on to Missouri where we had a few visits around the Kansas City area. One night Javier, Jason and I decided to dine at The Rainforest Café. If you haven't eaten there before, allow me to fill you in that the place is just a bit bizarre. There was an interactive "storm" in the "rainforest" that we were sitting in during dinner, of course in-between the elephant sounds and monkey sounds. After that experience, we decided to see a movie. To kill time, we went to a sporting goods store—where I discovered that Javier should never be left alone. Enough said.

It was a week filled with "unique" experiences I won't soon forget. This past week, I've spent working on convention preparation, though I've also snuck in some time with friends and family. I said before that I am currently in Columbus, Ohio, home of my school, The Ohio State University. I actually got to go to the first game of the Buckeye's season last week, (when we stomped the University of Cincinnati Bearcats, in case you



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didn't know...) I've really enjoyed being back around campus and seeing people I haven't seen in so long! There is something about this environment—I just love this place!

I leave on Sunday for another week of convention planning with the team in Indy. I hope school years have started off well. I always got so excited for a new year of school... there is something about the hopes and promises for a really good year ahead. It can be whatever you want it to be. Fall is my favorite time of year. The weather is perfect, sunny but a bit chilly, the leaves are going to be beautiful before long, and convention is sneaking up! How much more could we ask for?! Enjoy the days ahead, and set your sights high now for the next year!

August 5, 2004

"I remind myself every morning: Nothing I say this day will teach me anything. So if I'm going to learn, I must do it by listening."
-Larry King

The drive into the Shenandoah Valley was by far one of the prettiest drives I've ever had the pleasure of taking. The Blue Ridge Mountains radiated a deep blue color as the sun peaked in and out of clouds, illuminating parts of the mountain ranges that fell on both sides of Christy and I. It was gorgeous! We arrived in New Market, Virginia on Saturday, July 31.

It was a wonderful surprise to be greeted by the West Virginia state officer team when we walked into the lobby of our hotel, as they were in the middle of their BLAST Off conference. Seeing Veronica's smiling face and just hearing Chris' voice was delight! Christy and I enjoyed a good night's sleep and a day of preparation on Sunday, before things kicked off on Monday morning. We welcomed the state officer teams from New Jersey, Delaware, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Virginia and Maryland. It was so good to be greeted by



smiles from the Delaware state officer team that morning. They hold a special place in my heart since I saw them get elected. They have some amazing potential this year, and I know they can make huge differences in student's lives. It humbles me to think about how far our influence reaches. I know they are up for that task.

But by the time the conference even started that morning, Christy and I were already obsessed with the "apple fritters" the restaurant in the hotel served. We knew that was a sign that it was going to be a good week. Over the next few days, these apple fritters became a very unhealthy addiction that spread from us to the state officers as well!



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We also had some other more healthy addictions through the week, one being “Hidey-hidey- hidey-ho!” and the other being, “Peak fun!” in response to that song! We definitely had more energy in the Jonathon Room than we knew what to do with at times! I can remember standing at the front of the room one evening, opening a new session, and there was such a craze of laughter and clapping, singing and even dancing—I couldn’t help but be excited myself when I thought about that energy lasting into their FFA activities over this next year as state officers.



Throughout the week, we had the opportunity to spend a significant amount of “down” time with the officers. I enjoyed one afternoon so much—getting to relax in good company. The West Virginia team and Christy and I went into town and got ice cream at the stand that serves 27 different flavors. It is such a blessing to be around people that make you laugh like this team does. Every one of them brings something essential to that team, and the promise they hold for this next year is so strong.

I saw growth in the Virginia team during our week together, and I could see them investing their time in everything they did. That proved to me that they are one dedicated team to working hard for their state this next year. One of the highlights of the week was having the opportunity to spend an evening in fellowship at Mrs. Cathy Hughes’ house. She is a huge supporter of FFA. The Virginia team was so welcoming for all of us to enjoy our experience in their state, and this night made our stay so wonderful.

It was a beautiful evening, in the middle of the country, surrounded by good people. We ran around like kids, which was oh-so-much fun, but I must say that I’m a bit bummed that I couldn’t break anyone in the “If you love me” game. I guess you have to be “skilled” to be good at that game! We enjoyed way too much food and ended up all sitting around singing to Jordan playing his guitar. It’s a night I’ll cherish for a long time. (I’m sure Mr. Brammer from Pennsylvania won’t easily forget it either, since he locked his keys in his car! Good thing the Pennsylvania team has got such kind hearts and helped him get it unlocked!)

That is one thing about the Pennsylvania team though—they care an incredible amount. Their hearts are huge and open. It was evident in all they did at the conference, and I certainly appreciate that about them.

It was wonderful to see the New Jersey crew again and catch up. They did an awesome job with their reflections, which obviously took a lot of preparation. I’m excited that they have plans already set in motion for the dedication they will have to their state this next year.

I also admired Maryland for the hard work they put into their flag ceremony. There is so much to be excited about with this team—it’s a group of unique individuals that, because of their hearts for FFA, will have awesome synergy this year. They have the power to accomplish so much.

Christy and I headed out Thursday afternoon to Indianapolis. But I drove and she flew. Needless to say, she got there a bit sooner than I did! The drive that afternoon was one I thoroughly enjoyed though. Even though it took me four hours to get through the



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mountains, they were gorgeous. I made a pit-stop at home in Ohio for the night and drove into Indy early the next morning to meet up with my team, and kick-off convention planning. Yes, I said convention planning. I know, it's craziness to think about for me too.

July 31, 2004

"Wo-o-o-o-oh... We're at SPC! Wo-o-o-o-oh... In DC! Wo-o-o-o-oh... We're on a mission! Wo-o-o-o-oh... We're Leading the Tradition!"

Sound familiar? If you spent time with me last week in Washington, D.C., you may know these lyrics all too well! My teammates and I have just finished up a phenomenal week of State Presidents' Conference 2004. What a week it was!

It all started for the National Officer team on Friday, July 16, at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in D.C. Well, actually, for me, it started when I had to drive into D.C., and got lost. (Mapquest doesn't always pull through very well for me...) So after I finally found the hotel, I reunited with my team, and we started working towards final preparations for the following week.

That Sunday was my birthday (yay!) and I couldn't have asked for a better day! It was beautiful outside, and the team enjoyed a lazy afternoon together as we headed out to Wolf Trap, which is a huge outdoor amphitheatre down in Virginia. We had a picnic and then went to see the Broadway Musical "Oliver!" at the amphitheatre. It was a close-to-perfect day for me.

And SPC participants started arriving the next day! It was so good to see some familiar faces come into the hotel and have the opportunity to reconnect with them, like Jamie, Justin and Casey. And of course I got a big bear hug from Cliff! I also started meeting dynamic state officers from other states including Tyson, Becky, Lucas, Brendan and Jeff. SPC is a unique time for the national officer team too because our families get to join us for the week. So my parents arrived in D.C. that day as well. I was excited to share the experience of the week with them.



I enjoyed dinner that night and catching up with Jamie and Rose, two of my favorite Buckeye girls. It was so good to see them again and hear stories about Ohio's FFA camp. I think Ohio FFA can be proud that these two represent them! That evening we enjoyed reflections on the East lawn of the Capitol building. It was a beautiful evening, and there is nothing like the sight of our Capitol dome illuminated so brightly against the dark sky. I won't forget that sight too soon. The next morning began a very big day for the state officers—one filled with lots of exciting things to do as leaders of the organization. They spent the good half of the day on Capitol Hill making congressional visits. That afternoon there were lots of good reports to share of successful visits with Congressmen and Senators that were very supportive of Agricultural Education and the FFA. Spreading the good news of what we



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are proud to be involved in and setting a good example as a young leader for others to measure our organization by is an awesome responsibility.

We enjoyed dinner on the back terrace of the hotel that evening—true cookout style. I ate too many pieces of chocolate cake with the New England crew. That evening, we headed out on a night tour of the city. Stacia and I headed up the “Rainbow Bus”, which to much discretion, was definitely the coolest bus of them all! It was so fun to share the experience of my parents seeing the monuments for the first time with them. I found that I actually know quite a bit about the monuments too. Did you know that the Washington monument stayed a third of the way built for a good 50 years? ...hence, the discoloring of the bottom third. And did you know that the Pentagon is the largest office building in the world?! We also discovered that the Reflecting Pool is drained and cleaned after the 4th of July celebrations, in particular for 2004, on July 21. (Guess what day we went by

it...) President Lincoln haunts the White House too. We ended the night at the statue of Iwo Jima, the U.S. Marines Memorial, with reflections.

The next morning we started early and headed to Arlington Cemetery for a Wreath Laying Ceremony. It was an honor to share the experience of laying a wreath on the Tomb of the Unknowns with the other ladies on my team. I have so much respect for the men that guard the tomb and visiting the cemetery again gave me mixed feelings of respect and sadness for those who've lost their lives, while at the same time, feelings of pride to be part of this country and all it stands for.

We started really digging into working on setting up the delegate process for National Convention that afternoon. I'm really excited about the issues that will be discussed in committees this year, and definitely for the leadership that will work in

these committees to make sure productive work is done. That evening, I enjoyed listening to my teammate, Stacia, address the group at the banquet and talk about the important things to “pack” in life. I know I learned a few things from her words.

The next day we started out with a good American breakfast—McDonald's! I had the chance to sit down and catch up with Davis and Matt from Alabama- who are always too entertaining! And with the Mississippi girls, Riley and Kristi, who are some of the queens of girl talk—which I enjoy way too much! We headed across the street afterwards to USDE, where we spent the morning in a session learning about LifeKnowledge, and also hearing from Dr. Sclafani and Mrs. McKay, who work with different programs in USDE. I enjoyed lunch that day with Dusty and Malcolm from Utah. I also enjoyed conversations with Bre, Marcus and Janette. Members have good things in store for them with these leaders.





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That evening we headed out for a night on the town! The coolest bus, #324, was rockin' the whole way to the FDR Memorial. I will never forget Tyler teaching us the baby shark song—probably because I had it in my head all day for the next week! By the end of the conference, everyone knew it! Probably the most entertaining song I learned during the week was Kevin's Pizza Man song. It was highly unique. He's hilarious. Ginger from New Mexico taught us the Moose song too, which I'd been wanting to learn forever! We spent the evening, shakin' it down on the Spirit of the Potomac, with a dinner cruise down the Potomac River. Attached is a picture of my dad, mom and me on top of the cruise ship. After dinner, we danced for hours, and there were no wallflowers allowed—not even my mom! I really appreciated Travis trying to teach me how to look smooth dancing too. But as much as he tried, I still just couldn't look as smooth as him. I'm still working on those moves he tried to teach me though.

To end the evening, my teammates and I shared a wonderful reflections with the officers on top of the cruise ship. I remember feeling so blessed to be there, in that moment, with such incredible people. The whole week I found myself constantly being reminded of the important things in life from these state officers. We were in this environment of integrity, which is just incredible to be in, whether it was just talking about life with Wade on the bus, or seeing Miss Melissa's caring, compassionate heart come out through her words. It was good to know too that whenever I needed a smile throughout the week, I could always find one if I looked for Grace from California, Levi from New Mexico, Monica from Arkansas or Jamie from Colorado.

The next day, everyone had time to go out and enjoy the city on his or her own. My mom and dad and I enjoyed some quality time together. We made our way up to the National Cathedral, which I really enjoyed. That evening, everyone headed over to the National Zoo. Anita and I were lucky enough to catch the sea lion being fed. The trainer made him do tricks for us and told us all about him. I love the zoo! We had a picnic dinner, and sang one too many songs all together—but it was a blast. We made our way back to the hotel, via a skinny walkway through a car tunnel... I don't think that was intended to be part of the route! The second picture with this entry is of us doing just that. Though seriously dangerous, it was really pretty humorous. At the hotel, we had our closing session, complete with Mo's video of the week, (which was awesome!), and with a surprise program from the national officer's parents, affectionately calling themselves the "NOP's." Dear oh dear.

After we concluded the conference, we all just stayed up way too late and enjoyed each other's company for the last night we were all together—and what wonderful company it was.

"Whatever the mind can conceive, you can achieve if you believe."

"An open mind is more productive than an open mouth."

The above quotes come from my time spent at Camp Tulakogee outside of Tulsa at the one and only Oklahoma FFA Alumni Camp—one from a state officer during reflections, and the other during random conversation with an FFA member. The above words are just a few





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of the many things I gained during my time there.

“Grandma” and “Grandpa”, as they were affectionately referred to, picked Christy and I up at the airport and entertained us with stories the whole way there. I was so excited to get there because of all the wonderful things I’ve heard from others who have had the chance to attend camp in the past.

I wasn’t disappointed in my expectations, to say the least! The next few days were some of the best of my officer year thus far. It all started with getting to be in disguise the first day of the conference. Christy and I snuck into camp the back way, and were assigned fake names. We hung out with students for the entire first day without any one knowing that we were National Officers. This provided such a unique experience to just get to be ourselves for a bit. It was so enjoyable to hang out with students in that element, though at times, I caught myself not remembering the fake town I was from when they asked about it, and several times I had to think on my feet and come up with some really good “fibs” in order to hide my identity. I pretended to know someone I really didn’t know—I have a best friend named “Sarah”, and I could hire an entire new high school with all the names I made up about my high school teachers in Waynoka, Oklahoma! (which is a real town, by the way....)

The theme the state officers picked for camp for the year was “At Full Throttle.” The camp not only featured awesome speakers like Bill Cortes and Dr. Rick Rigsby, some crazy Small Group Leaders (aka SGL’s), a hypnotist show with the one and only Dr. Al Snyder, and a dynamic group of state officers, but it was an *incredible* group of students. All of us were divided into “small groups”, and I had the pleasure of spending time with quite a few of them, although small group #7 with Cortney will always be my home group. I saw the group go from being hesitant to get involved the first night, to bonded very tightly by the last night. Listening in to the other small groups, I learned that some people have some awesome goals. Alex, in group #13, wants to travel the world as an archeologist and Lilnita wants to be a pediatrician. A girl named Tammy Jo and I have a lot of similar views on things and we talked about our futures for a long time. I hope she pursues her dreams in the future, because there isn’t a doubt in my mind that she will be successful. I shared a wonderful session with Cale’s small group, as we all talked about our personal heroes. I still have my piece of yellow yarn.

I played water Olympics with group #22. They really enjoyed throwing water in my face for some reason! It was hilarious to watch person after person slip in the mud hole in front of the line and fall down! I always found good entertainment with Austin and Chance, and somehow we always ended up in the same place. It’s crazy to think these two rascals didn’t even know each other before camp. I have to thank Lucy for letting me give a Power Buckeye up on stage!

One of the best memories I made has to be randomly jumping in the pool with all my clothes on with three new friends. We decided that it would take too much time to go back and change into swimsuits, and we wanted to cool off, so we just ran and jumped in!

Every session we were rockin’ the auditorium with music and everyone was on their feet singing along. The energy that flowed during that camp was absolutely contagious, and a wonderful thing to catch! I believe that a lot of that energy and success of the camp was due to the dedicated group of state officers





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Oklahoma has serving them this year. Travis, Shawna, Bethany, Cale, Clayton, Cortney Mike, and Whitney are a sharp group of individuals. We all stayed up together one night of camp and shared a lot of laughs. I know their hearts are in the right place, and their minds are focused on serving this year. They are a sharp, dynamic team and I am excited for Oklahoma FFA members—that they have the opportunity to be served by such a team this following year. Good things are to come for Oklahoma FFA for sure. I spent the next 24 hours or so at home, then I hopped in the car and drove to Indianapolis for the July Board of Directors meeting. It was a good time to spend catching up with the team and with the Board. They are good people. We also had the chance to spend some time with the new COO Mr. Doug Loudenslager, which was very good for our team.

I hit the road after the meeting and drove to Ripley, West Virginia, to the WV State FFA Convention. It was held at their camp in the middle of the hills, which made for some beautiful sunsets and sunrises. The weather was perfect too. The first day, I enjoyed watching some Parliamentary Procedure events. Marion County and Roane County and Hundred all did wonderful jobs in the contest. I got to meet back up with my Jefferson FFA crew that I had met earlier in the year. It was so good to see them again! And Chris got a state office! Congratulations!

The second night of convention we had a pool party, with enough watermelon, hot dogs and ice cream to go around. I'm counting my blessings I didn't end up in the pool unwillingly, though DJ and others tried awfully hard. The state officer team plus me almost won tug-of-war that night... okay, maybe not really. I had some good conversations with the Clay County girls and Hannan FFA. Hampshire FFA kind of adopted me, and I really enjoyed hanging out with them. And I won't easily forget Charlie, the past state president, who took care of me time and time again. I learned quickly to trust my instinct with him, as I could never tell what was truthful under that sly smile of his. Even if that's just the West Virginia way, I didn't mind at all. He's a good guy.

There were so many dedicated members running for state office. My heart is with all the candidates—they did an outstanding job during convention, as did the state officer team. I was so fortunate to get to spend some time with Amy, the state president, the night before she retired. At the same time, Patrick, another state officer, was getting my car prepared to hit the road in the morning. It was such a kind thing for him to do. I couldn't believe it when he handed me my keys and said he had taken care of a squeak I was nervous about, as well as several other things.

I headed out very early the next morning, just as the sun was coming up over the hills, and the fog hadn't settled in the valley yet. It was a beautiful drive that morning as I headed east toward our nation's capital to meet up with the rest of my team.

Enjoy the pictures! The first one is of Christy and I with the officers in Oklahoma at the camp banquet, and the second is of some crazy West Virginia folk!

July 13, 2004

"This is your time.
This is your dance.
Live every moment.
Leave nothing to chance."



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(The above are song verses from the music used during Illinois' NLCSO reflections)

Do you ever feel like time is just flying past without you even realizing it? It seems like



just yesterday I was writing about Louisiana. I had such a wonderful experience there that I didn't want to leave! Now I can say the same about two more places. One of them is Lake Barkley in Kentucky and the other is Camp Tulakogee in Oklahoma.

After I left Alexandria in such a rush on the morning of Saturday, June 26, I arrived in Nashville that

afternoon with a rental car that had my name on it. Having only spent a brief amount of time in Nashville before, I decided to take advantage of the afternoon and see some of

the heart of the Music City. I walked around down on the main strip, had some good food and good entertainment for dinner and settled into a wonderful, cozy little coffee shop up in what is called "the village" right across from Vanderbilt University. I worked for a while until it was time to pick up Christy from the airport. Her flight came in late, and we had quite the ride in the dark to Lake Barkley, which was about an hour and a half northwest of Nashville. We arrived and quickly tucked ourselves into bed in our cabin room. The next morning we awoke to the light of our surroundings. We walked out onto the balcony of our room and discovered a huge, blue lake before us. It was an absolutely beautiful place, and we were excited about the work ahead of us, and the week to come.



State officers from Georgia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Illinois, Indiana and Michigan soon joined us at the lake resort. Christy and I started an incredible learning process all over again. We quickly realized that there was an awesome level of talent in the room. Each team did an outstanding job with their duties. From the reflections done by Illinois, that helped students really understand their significance to their team, a flag raising done by Kentucky that brought chills to me as I thought about the true meaning of democracy and the choices it gives us, I was inspired by this group of talented young people. You could say that Georgia's team kept us laughing, or at least a few select individuals, and Kentucky's team kept us suspicious with their "aardvark business". I was so impressed with the p

But who would have known that state officers were vandalizers too? Just kidding. Maybe they aren't convicted ones, but the rental Alero I was driving definitely got plastered with flipchart paper that renamed it to the "Lewanda Magic Mobile." Who is Lewanda you may ask? Obviously the state officers had whoever she is confused with me. Silly officers!



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I think it is also safe to say that we all walked away from the conference with several more pounds on us between the delicious buffet at every meal, to the endless helpings of the best banana pudding I know I'll ever eat, Lake Barkley was definitely good to me! Christy and I packed up to leave for Nashville on the afternoon of the 1, and wouldn't you know that as lucky as we are, it rained again as we had to pack everything into the car! Rain just really likes us! We got into Nashville that night and searched out a place called The Bluebird Café. What an awesome evening we had! The place was not very big, but by the autographed star photos covering every inch of the walls, we realized it was definitely a diamond in the rough. There were three guys sitting in the middle of the room playing acoustic guitar rounds. Everyone in the place was attentive to his or her every word—there were no other conversations going on. The singers were cutting up, being really casual, and playing some amazing songs. I just loved sitting there listening to them play. They had beautiful voices. I couldn't help but sit there and think that this, right here, was what being passionate was all about. Talk about following your dreams no matter where they take you, doing what you love to do every single day. They were truly living life with no regrets. We slept tight that night after an inspiring evening with people we didn't even know.

The next morning I flew to Kansas City to meet up with some really good friends for the weekend. Kim Newsom, Michael Burns and Grant Groene went to Europe with me on ILSSO (International Leadership Seminar for State Officers) two years ago when we were all state officers in our respective states. Kim is originally from Tennessee, but is doing an internship in Kansas City this summer, and Michael and Grant are from Kansas. So after a wonderful reunion afternoon of shopping and gossiping, we headed to Manhattan, home of Kansas State University, to meet up with the boys plus Michael's roommate Brady. To my complete surprise, they threw me a surprise birthday party (as my birthday is the 18 of this month) complete with cake, silly birthday hats, and a tiara for the birthday girl! We spent the entire weekend in relaxation, hanging out and watching the race, cooking yummy food, and playing in a creek all afternoon one day. It was just what I needed. I am extremely fortunate to have friends like them. God certainly blessed my life the day my path crossed with these people.

The first picture in this entry is of the entire crew that was at the NLCSO... and the second picture is the Alabama state officers and I.

My next destination was one I had been anticipating all year long: The Oklahoma Alumni Camp.

To be continued....

"Opportunities multiply as they are seized."

-Sun Tzu

Monday, June 21, had finally come. It was the day we kicked-off our first NLCSO (National Leadership Conference for State Officers.) I felt like Christy and I had worked really hard to prepare for the conference. Our set-up was done, our flip charts had been made, and our curriculum learned we were ready to go! As ready as we thought we were, we had no idea what we were in for! We spent the week with 22 of the most talented individuals I've met all year long. The state officers from Mississippi, Louisiana



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and Alabama really came with an attitude of servitude. They constantly put themselves out there for their team and for the students they really wanted to impact this year. I could tell from their first reflections when Amber from Mississippi stood up and talked about “enthusiasm” and how it’s “caught not taught”, to when Mississippi’s state officer team walked into the side room and gave an amazing dissertation of their state officer team’s purpose statement for the year. They were an impressive group for sure. One of the things that was definitely an unexpected perk of the week was the yummy Cajun food I enjoyed. Now Louisiana folks know how to eat! I started my adventures with good ol’ Louisiana food at Tunk’s in Alexandria the first night I got there. Then, all week long, we ate at the Louisiana School of Agri-Sciences right next to the conference center, which is a school completely dedicated to teaching through agriculture. What an awesome concept! Ag. teachers from around the area came in all week long and prepared our food. I definitely felt like I left Louisiana having eaten the foods of the area and having eaten well.

The week was filled with memories for Christy and I. We said we should have kept a running tab of quotes of the week, because from Michael in Alabama and his “This is a bird!” to Trae from Louisiana’s “Straight up!” lots of quotes will be remembered. I really enjoyed spending time with Katie from Alabama, who’s spunk is one the boys on her team will have lots of fun with this year. And Cody from Mississippi is on the opposite end with a team full of girls, but I know by his attitude that he’s up for the challenge. From the moment I met Lindsay from Louisiana, her cheerfulness was contagious, and you could feel Riley from Mississippi’s presence without her even having to say a word. Christy and I really enjoyed spending quality time with these individuals and getting to know every single one of them.

Christy and I packed up our bags in the rain, which was quite comical, and headed “out of Bunkie”, back to Alexandria on Thursday. We spent the afternoon eating donuts, drinking chocolate milk, laughing and napping in our rental car as it poured outside. We were both in need of some sleep for sure! With that Christy got on a plane, and I spent the evening in Alexandria before flying out in the morning. The last evening I spent in Louisiana was such a blessing. Tyler, a state officer from Louisiana, invited me along to a Catholic/Christian celebration called “Steubenville South”, and so I spent the evening with 5,500 other excited teens in awesome worship. It was a wonderful note to leave Louisiana on.

I’m Nashville-bound, on my way to Christy and my second NLCSO conference to be held at Lake Barkley State Park in Kentucky, an hour and a half northwest of Nashville. Although I won’t miss the “skeeters” of Louisiana, or the humidity, the Louisiana people I met and the laid-back, hospitable, friendly atmosphere holds a special place in my heart.

June 21, 2004

Some nice thoughts to tuck away as you start your week:
“Embrace the richness of life. Let your dreams touch the sky. Love the true and wonderful you. Experience the world with amazement. See the wisdom in others. Respect where you are and never forget where you’ve come from.”



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I spent three days in D.C., hanging out with students from all over the nation and an incredible conference staff for the first week of Washington Leadership Conference. After going on the night tour of D.C. and the famous monuments, listening to a moving reflections at the FDR Memorial, and participating in the service learning project on Saturday, I felt a renewed feeling of incredible pride in our country and in the young people who are the future. The afternoon I arrived, I immediately had a new group of friends called the "Radio" group. Maria and Sandra were a blast and we kept talking, even when we weren't supposed to be!

I met some girls from Hillsboro, Ohio, and I won't easily forget miss Kaylesue's energy. I'll be visiting the boys from Knox and Clark Counties in



Missouri again here in the fall, so it was wonderful to meet them. It was so nice spending time with Paul on the bus on the way to the service learning site, and Eric and the other



boys kept me laughing the whole night on the bus tour. The Oklahoma crew was there that first week too, and I remember meeting outgoing Hannah and friendly Austin in particular. What a great group of people.

The night after all the students left Washington, the staff and I went out to eat at a crab shack place. I've never experienced anything like it before! They seriously just dump a bunch of boiled crabs on the table and you take a hammer and pound their shell, pull the meat out and that's dinner! What a crazy experience!

I left D.C. the morning the city found out about President Reagan's death. I sat on my hotel balcony, looking out over the city and I could see the National Cathedral. I couldn't stop thinking about what would happen there at

the end of the week.

I flew that day to Raleigh, North Carolina, and to their State FFA Convention. Miss Belinda picked me up from the airport. She works with the state staff and is a wonderful lady! We arrived at North Carolina State University in time for me to enjoy the evening catered dinner for state officers and parents. It was a wonderful way to start the convention, and gave the state officers, Holly, Neil, Camber, Lendy, Caroline and Jason, a stress-free couple hours before the convention madness began. The next couple days, I had the opportunity to watch some really good sessions and listen to some incredible retiring addresses. Their reflections were all about making the most of our time here on earth and investing in the most important things in life. They did such a great job! I had some really good workshops, and hung out with two awesome students after my last workshop.

The state officers and I had a great time all crammed in Belinda's van—especially miss Camber! We giggled the whole way to the proficiency dinner!



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The last night I spent in North Carolina was filled with fun. First, three past state officers and I road-tripped up to Chapel Hill to see the University of North Carolina. We saw the campus and ate yummy ice cream. I love Chapel Hill and the environment there! It reminds me so much of my hometown of Oxford, Ohio. The rest of the evening I spent with my friends Kim and Caleb. We stayed up way too late, laughing and telling stories. It was so good to be with them.

The next morning, I flew to South Carolina and to Clemson University for the South Carolina State FFA Convention. I made it to the auditorium just in time for a session, and watched how strong and proud the state officer team was on stage: John, Lauren, Allison, Rachel, Bryan and Alex. You could just see how much they cared about each other as they ruled the stage. It was wonderful! I heard the state officer candidates give their speeches to the other students from the main stage, and got excited for the following year in South Carolina FFA because every single candidate was impressive. We had a wonderful evening at the first ever Awards Dinner, which went very well with lots of guests and students, and some wonderful food! The state officers were so kind in presenting me with a basket full of canned fruit jams and vegetables, among other things. They were so incredibly good to me!

I got to know "Dolores" pretty well, which the boys, Alex, John and Bryan would know all about! I had a good time with the boys. What a wonderful group of individuals they are. We ended the convention on a very good note as we celebrated the new state officers with a luncheon. That evening, new state officer Jennifer and I, joined past state officer Ashley and her friend for dinner at a funky place called the Mellow Mushroom. We had some yummy pizza. Then Ashley drove us around Clemson a bit more. We saw "Death Valley"- their football stadium- and other parts of campus. Then we went out on a speedboat on the local lake and enjoyed a beautiful evening in South Carolina, talking and relaxing. I couldn't be more thankful for that evening.

I left South Carolina in the morning, homeward bound. I arrived in Cincinnati, and after a little tiff with my luggage, headed home to the "Knapke Valley". It felt so good to hear the cicadas outside! I headed up to visit my sister, who just moved into her new apartment in Marysville and started her new job with NRCS, and I stayed with her for a few days. I just love spending time with her... no matter what we're doing. I headed home for the last few days in Ohio for a while, and I spent them soaking up time with my mom and dad. Mom and I, of course, made a visit to Cold Stone Creamery one of the evenings (which if you've never heard of, is the best ice cream place ever!) It was so good to wake up in the morning and drink a cup of coffee together out on the porch. When I get home next time, I'm due for a trip up to see my other sister, Lizzy, and her husband, Shawn. It will be good to give her a hug.

Daddy took me to the airport on Thursday, as I headed to Louisiana for my first NLCSO (National Leadership Conference for State Officers). I'm now enjoying some good Cajun food, preparing for the conference, which kicks off on Monday morning. It will be good to see my teammate Christy tomorrow evening.

I've attached pictures from WLC. Enjoy!

June 14, 2004



Anne Knapke National Officer Journal

Hello hot chile and dry, dry heat! Hello New Mexico! I arrived at the El Paso airport early last week and was cheerfully greeted by Chase and Elisa, two past state officers. We drove across the border to Las Cruces, New Mexico, the home of New Mexico State University. We made our way to the hotel, where I met the state officers and Jon and Jet, hanging out in the hallway, anticipating the convention starting the next morning. And so it did. Bright and early, on June 1, the students poured into the convention hall and the festivities began!



All day long, students worked hard competing in a variety of contests. I had the opportunity to listen to several competitors in the Public Speaking contest. One of the most interesting speeches I heard was from Olena Zorina, who is an exchange student from the Ukraine. It was wonderful to hear how she evaluated the importance of FFA to our nation. There are some bright futures ahead for public speakers like Zanessa and Lauren. That afternoon, I had a grand tour of New Mexico State University, courtesy of the state officers. I met students with their Agriscience Fair projects, which should all be commended for their work. As Morgan tried to explain his to me, I could tell these students are very intelligent and are taking



the opportunity to apply their skills through these projects. I met some awesome FFA members that I now proudly call “friends” from the Moriarty FFA chapter, Nina and Brandy. I called the ladies of the Moriarty FFA chapter my adopted “girlfriends” for the few days I was there. We had lots of fun.

That afternoon, I spent some time with an awesome group of students from all over the state in a workshop. A big thanks to the Los Lunas chapter, and Frank and Mace, for helping me with my entire workshop needs! We talked for a while after the workshop, and it was just wonderful to spend some time with the ladies and Paul and talk about what was going on in our lives.

We ended the day with a cookout and vespers/reflections. The whole underlying theme for convention was focused on “change”. Stuart, Coulter, Ginger, Tessie, Mia, Rachel, Ashley and Kassi did an outstanding job setting the tone for the entire convention with the reflections program. I could tell that there was a unique camaraderie here in New Mexico among the FFA members, and I was excited to be a part of it for the next few days.

The following day was to be one I will not easily forget. We started with breakfast in the morning as usual with the whole crew, state officers and convention staff. Things started rolling and members got excited. I played an intense card game of rummy with Jason, Chase, Mr. McAllister and Caleb—all boys—guess who won that game?! Me, of course!!



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And I didn't do too shabby in the card game with the Tatum FFA either! I sat with the Texico girls during one of the sessions, after I was inducted into the International Chile Connoisseurs Organization, which included me on stage, REALLY hot New Mexico chili, and firemen who know how to use a water hose! The girls had fun picking on me while my eyes burned!

It was quite clear to me that in New Mexico, you can have a graduating class of five seniors, like at Grady, or a class of over 250, like Artesia. And there is no in-between. Talk about diverse experiences! I met Rebecca and Amanda from Hatch, and the Tularosa girls. I can't easily forget Ruben and Corbin, two exceptional young men that have such a bright future!

That evening, we had a pool party, and after all the state officers and I had been forced into the pool against our will and were soaking wet in our clothes, the night ended with a short night of rest before my last day in New Mexico.

The craziest thing happened the afternoon I left. It started to rain. It was so hilarious to hear Stuart, the state president, tell the convention hall that it was raining outside and hear the outburst of excitement from the students. This Ohio girl is so used to rain, I didn't think a thing of it. But in New Mexico, it is such a blessing to get rain. Everyone was so happy. The rain made a beautiful scene for me to enjoy on the way to the airport, as a bright rainbow fell across the sky.

I flew out on my way to Washington, D.C., for Washington Leadership Conference full of smiles, thinking about how my year had just been so enriched by the members of the New Mexico FFA. Thank you for the experiences you gave me!

Photos are of the officer team, state staff, and myself, and of the ladies I ate dinner with at the cookout. Isn't the background beautiful?!

June 9, 2004

Sometimes I feel like I'm in a storybook—looking at scenes so beautiful, they could only be in a book—but then I pinch myself and realize I really am in these beautiful scenes! My latest adventure took me to Nebraska. I can't begin to explain how beautiful it is to see the blue, blue sky contrast the bright green rolling fields of wheat.

I enjoyed five days in Nebraska—the first three of which were in Aurora where the Nebraska FFA holds the annual Chapter Officer Leadership Training conferences. There were a little less than 200 chapter officers that came to the session I attended. I understand that the main set for the conference is a big deal every year, and the entire conference has a well-developed theme. The state officers had a set this year that took the participants from the depths of the desert to under the sea, to the jungle. They did a spectacular job of presenting a series of sessions that helped chapter officers better understand their role on their teams, what it takes to be a good team player, and their responsibilities for the upcoming year.





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We had a rockin' pool party on the first night of the conference, although Allison, from Mead FFA, and I opted to sit by the pool, chat, and make fun of the boys trying to do macho belly smackers. Throughout the next couple days, I enjoyed the company of officers from Fullerton, Tri-County, Mead, Freeman, Imperial and Central to name a few. I played a mean game of ping-pong against Wes—(let it be known that he lost 4 out of 6 games! Hee hee) I found out that there are some ambitious people in Nebraska! Ben wants to go to Germany, Spence to Africa, and Tricia to Spain. Adam and I made a stellar flashlight relay team. Derek, Jon, and Jake kept every minute interesting the whole week long, and I learned a new line from Ryan: "Talk to the left, cause you ain't right." Oh yeah.

One of the highlights of my time in Aurora was getting to be a sit-in Sentinel for an opening and closing ceremonies contest with the Broken Bow FFA chapter, who ended up getting third in their heat!!



To the state officers: Anita, Jon, Philip, Shelly, Lauren, Abby and Pam—with your hard work and continued dedication, Nebraska FFA will continue to grow and develop exceptional young individuals! I left Aurora and went to Lincoln, where I met up with my teamie Amy—yay! The next few days, I was on Rasmussen time—and it was wonderful! I saw the

campus of UNL and got a taste of some good 'Big Red' Husker football spirit! We stayed up late at night watching movies with the bro, Adam, and slept-in in the mornings. We explored the countryside and I saw some of the most beautiful scenes of the U.S. that I ever had. We played around on the 4-wheeler—driving fast on good ol' Nebraska dirt roads—I drove! (which was a big thrill of the weekend!) We woke up early to see a Nebraska sunrise. We visited the happenin' metropolis of Mead. We spent a Sunday morning in wonderful worship and good family time. We spent an evening in loving company of an incredible family. I met the new nephew, Cade, who is 6 weeks old now. We enjoyed the country, enjoyed relaxation, and enjoyed each other.

I left the mid-West behind and headed down South for my first experience in a true southwestern state- New Mexico!

The next few days held some of the very best memories I've made yet this year. New Mexico is incredible. I'll share details next time.

Until then, enjoy another blast from the past picture of my group of friends from Michigan, after Region I Leadership Camp. The second is a picture of the wonderful Nebraska 2004-05 state officer team and I enjoying the weather after COLT.

June 4, 2004

Quote to think about:

"Better keep yourself clean and bright, you are the window through which you see the world." –George Bernard Shaw

Okay, let's catch you up to speed. So I spent a week at the end of May in College Station, Texas—home of Texas A & M Aggies. My entire team met up there and spent time working on and getting ready for the conferences we facilitate for state officers,



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NLCSO. They occur all across the nation this summer. We didn't work the whole time though! We took time for a movie one night, a dinner with Casey's mom and grandmother, and ice cream another night. We fortunately had the chance to meet up with Dustin Clark one afternoon who set up a wonderful little tour of the campus for us... it was so much fun to learn about the crazy traditions of the University that is known by them! We spent valuable time together in the beautiful weather—it felt so good to be back with my teamies for a bit—even if they *did* throw me in the pool at the hotel one evening! Yes, I was the stupid un-expecting victim of a combined effort to pick me up and throw me in—fully-clothed of course.

I left Texas on my way to the East Coast and New Jersey's state convention. I arrived in Newark, N.J.—right across from New York City!

Greg, a past state officer, picked me up from the airport, and we headed straight to Rutgers University, Cook College where the convention was being held.

For the next few days, I had the opportunity to get to know leaders in the New Jersey FFA. I met Alex and the Union County crew who “adopted” me as part of themselves for the convention sessions. We had fun dancing to the pre-session music together. The Woodstown FFA is an awesome crew who had the best scrapbook I think I've ever seen. The girls and I had a good time. I ate lunch with Ashley and Tonya and some others who convinced me to eat way too much ice cream the few days I was there. Students from Cumberland Regional and Newton were impressive the whole convention long. My roommate was miss Heather, the exceptional young lady serving as a state officer. She was elected to serve as next year's state president as well. I'm so excited for New Jersey FFA with her serving in such a capacity. I look forward to working with the five new state officers at NLCSO and getting to know them better!



It was so good to be in New Jersey and reconnect with some really good old friends too. Mike Brooks was a state officer from New Jersey the same time I served in Ohio. We went to SPC together in the summer of that year and also went to Europe together on ILSSO that following January. The few days I was there provided great opportunity to spend some quality time catching up! I was sad to fly out after the close of convention, though my destination was home.

The next few days were filled with really good weather, really good friends, and really good memories. The evening I flew in, I went to a local chapter's banquet—the Liberty FFA, right over the border in Indiana. I have been friends with the teacher there for a long time as she went to a neighboring high school to me and we were involved in FFA a few years together. It felt good to be home. The banquet and the slide show reminded me of how good home is—how awesome county fair was every summer, and how good it felt to be part of FFA and to be close friends with the other members in my chapter.

The next evening I spent with my sister in her new apartment. It was the first night she stayed there—so we had a sleepover! The next day I went to Columbus, and to Ohio State. I stayed up way too late as I helped with a





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program one of the student organizations I'm in did that evening. We held a camp-out for students on this big grassy area we call "the oval." Students flooded the area and watched movies on giant screens, danced by the DJ, and played games. We had a blast!

I spent a few days at home, and spent some time at my home chapter and good time with my parents before I flew out to my next destination: Nebraska COLT conference 2004.

The first picture to this journal entry is of the new New Jersey state officer team, and the second picture is of the Risk Management Essay contest winners and me in Washington, D.C. Enjoy!

May 25, 2004

"Life... is haphazard and full of beauties which I try to catch as they fly by, for who knows whether any of them will ever return?"

-Margot Fonteyn

This quote greeted me this morning as I opened up my planner...

The pictures that accompany this entry are a few reflections on places I've been. The first is of the state officers in Montana after their convention ended. The other is of some of my good FFA friends as we presented a pirate-themed workshop altogether in Delaware.

I hit the road again at the beginning of May, and my first destination was wild, wonderful West Virginia! Everything was so green—rolling hills, horse ranches, the smell of country. I am in love. The Jefferson chapter officers and members greeted me at my hotel new Harper's Ferry, W. Va. They had a "hotel warming" gift for me that just made my day. I went to bed completely pumped for the following morning. I spent the entire day at Jefferson High School, visited the ninth grade complex, and then had a few hours to go down and see the historic area of Harper's Ferry. Harper's Ferry is historic for many reasons. It was a key town during the Civil War as it sat in the corner of where the Potomac and Shenandoah rivers combine. We hiked up to Jefferson's Point, where Thomas Jefferson once stood and proclaimed that the sight from this rock (which includes three states: Maryland, West Virginia and Virginia) is "worth a voyage across the Atlantic." The boys and I enjoyed some yummy ice cream, and headed on our way back to school for a pizza party with the rest of the members.



That evening I had the privilege of hanging out with chapters from all around the state. We had fun playing in the beautiful weather outside and playing one healthy game of "Captain's Coming"! It was one of the most enjoyable evenings I've spent with members



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this year. I felt so at home in West Virginia that evening, but sadly I had to head out to my next adventure, which took me to Washington, D.C.



As I rode into town, the craziest thing happened! My driver and I were talking, and I heard sirens go pass. Not thinking much of it, since we were in the city, I didn't turn to look. As they passed, the driver says, "By the way, that's the Presidential Motorcade." Whoa! I turned my head just in time to see the shaded car go past. Crazy! Over the next three days I spent in D.C., I saw the motorcade go past four times! FOUR TIMES! I told my mom on the phone that it was a sign. I'm supposed to

meet the President for sure!

But what took me to D.C. was even cooler than the Presidential Motorcade. I spent time with the Tyler, Kari, Krista, Waco, Wiley, Colin, Jordan, Kristi, Andrea and Jeff—the 2004 winners of the Risk Management Essay Contest. These individuals worked hard, and reaped the benefits with a trip to D.C. I was lucky enough to get to spend the weekend with them! We had the chance to spend a morning at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and they met Secretary of Agriculture, Ann Veneman! I think their weekends were all filled with memorable experiences, some it being their first time to fly, and/or first time to D.C. We spent the weekend together, then I departed for Texas.

First I went home for a day to celebrate my sister's graduation with my family. She graduated from Wilmington College in Ohio. We couldn't have asked for a prettier day to spend together. I'm so thankful for my family. Although my parents had to tease me and ask when I was going to get a college diploma, as it seems I keep putting off working on my degree!

After a night at home, I flew into College Station, Texas, the home of Texas A & M University. I spent a week with my teammates with lots of work to be done on planning for the NLCSO conference we'll put on this summer for state officers.

Hello nice weather. Texas was beautiful with nice weather. I'll tell you more about it all next time. Summer is approaching fast. I'm sure you all are more than ready for it. Let me know what your summer plans are! Send me an e-mail.

May 10, 2004

"Love is that which holds us together, and love is also that which liberates us all."

Maya Angelou

The first few days of my first significant amount of home time since Japan, I soaked in the good weather. I spent the evening with my sister, Liz, on my way back from Michigan, and as I showed her pictures of the last couple months, we discovered that there are mysterious figures in two of my pictures!! I think they are ghosts! Seriously! Take a look yourself and see! They're shady little figures of people in front of a barn I photographed in Pennsylvania that caught my eye from the highway. I don't know what to do with the photos! Do you think they might be ghosts??! Let me know if you can figure it out!



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So, I went home and actually laid-out in my front yard one afternoon, working on stuff all the while, of course! It was wonderful to not have a schedule to follow and just catch up on some things! On Tuesday the 20, my mom and I went down to Cincinnati and met my sister, Sara, for lunch and a little bridal dress shopping. No, not for me silly, for my sister! We went to

Bridal and Formal, and she ended up buying one! She looks absolutely beautiful in the dress, and I can't wait for the wedding next June. It was way fun to dress up and try on brides' maids dresses too.

That evening, I gave a presentation to the Butler-Tech Career Technical Center Board of Education. My high school FFA program at Talawanda High is piloted out of the CTC, so their board of education oversees our program. I gave them an update on what's going on with me, and in return, they presented me with this beautiful engraved clock plaque. I can't wait to hang it in my room next year at school!

I spent the next few days in Baltimore and at Dupont's Chesapeake Farms visiting with the Dupont's Crop Protection Team. I'm excited to see the new possibilities with science education and agricultural education Dupont and FFA are exploring together. After visiting them, I flew home for a few more days.

On Saturday, my whole family headed up to northwest Ohio to my sister's, Liz, house to celebrate her birthday and to help her and her husband get their house ready to put up for sale. It turned out to be a perfect day outside! We had the music cranked up and the house opened up and we worked outside and hung out as a family all afternoon. From there, I drove to Columbus and back to Ohio State University for a while. It was absolutely awesome to spend time with friends for the next four days. I stayed with some close friends at my old apartment, and spent time hanging out on campus. It was the best feeling to be back home.

I stayed up late and girl-talked until the wee hours of the morning with my dear friend, laughed so much I thought I'd cry with another, and watched O.C. with my roomies for next year, had plenty of coffee at Caribou, stomped through the rain puddles with a buddy and shopped til I dropped... to name a few of the simple delights of home. Yep, that's the stuff life is made of!

The week culminated to the 76th Ohio FFA Convention. The state officers were ready to go with a week of practice and a hotel floor decked out in streamers. Amy flew in to join me in my homeland, getting bonus points for leaving me a voicemail singing "Hang on Sloopy"! (If you don't know what that song's meaning is in Ohio, I'd be glad to fill you in!) I love that girl. So convention went wonderfully. The state officers were pumped, the new officer team is rockin', and awesome chapters from all over the state showed up with enthusiasm for all. Lindsey, the state president, did a wonderful job on-stage, and the team of officers showed so much heart in what they did last weekend. Mike, Todd, Ryan, Ben, Rose, Trish, Abby, Pete, Becky, Whitney, Cassie, Andrea, Dan and Jeremiah—congrats on a wonderful year, and welcome to a new family of PSOs. Rose was selected as the new president, serving with five other exceptional individuals. I can't wait to see what Ohio FFA has coming their way next year! Be careful in the corn car, Rose!



Anne Knapke

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I spent time with members I've known for years, like Laken, Eric, Bryan, Meredith, Darlene, Amanda and Rich, as well as many many more. I can't forget Craig and Brett, my buddies from Cory-Rawson. It was good to reconnect. Congrats to Meredith for winning the Anniversary speaking contest, and to our fabulous Stars! We had over 500 state degree recipients this year. Go Ohio!

I celebrated my sixth month anniversary of being elected with my Ohio FFA family—my support network. What a wonderful way to be able to give thanks.

April 22, 2004

Where I'll be next week: Home, Washington, D.C., Ohio's FFA Convention

"Your mind is like a parachute—it's best when it's open!"

—offered by one of Michigan's Region 1 Officer Candidates

Spring is here! Spring is here! And summer is coming! I arrived home yesterday, Sunday, April 19, and the day was absolutely beautiful. It was actually hot enough to lie out outside and I definitely took advantage! I soaked in the sun all afternoon as I worked on things. I certainly hope you have had the same opportunity recently too because it felt wonderful. This past week or so has been full of activity for me. This year just keeps getting better! I arrived in New Hampshire on a late flight the 9 of April. I spent the next two days being amazed by my surroundings, and by some very talented, special young individuals. I drove up into the White Mountains the next morning from Manchester. It was an awesome drive. The mountains start as green-rolling hills covered with trees, gradually turning into snow peaks, and full of rocky creeks and pebbly streams running through them. I passed moose caution signs, yes, moose caution signs! I even saw a waterfall along one of the roads that led to the ski resort the Granite State FFA Convention was being held at.

I was welcomed with open arms to the Granite State! We had a packed day ahead. The students were excited to be there—students from the chapters of Dover, Winnisquam, Seacoast School of Technology and Pinkerton, to name a few—the sessions were enthusiastic. The dance was a blast. I also learned new vocabulary word—"Wicked"! I'll use that out on other states this year for sure. The most memorable experience of my stay in New Hampshire was hanging out with the state officers. We stayed up way too late eating Ben and Jerry's, Oreos, and E.L. Fudge's! We talked girlie talk until early in the morning. I was in need of some good girlie talk, and we just had a blast. Melanie, Jen, Carrie, Nicole and Joe—I'm never going to forget the laughs we shared that night! Thanks for the memories.

I made it home to be able to wake up in my bed on Easter morning. It was a good day at home with my family. The next day, my mom and I drove to Indianapolis for the photo shoot of the Blue Catalog—(the FFA clothing merchandise catalog.) We had a good time posing for pictures—although it became way too obvious way too quickly that I'm not a natural model. It felt so weird to have to carry on conversations while they just snapped pictures of us! But the members of the National FFA staff we worked with for the shoot were so awesome. They are so dedicated to making the catalog good.

I came home for a day before I headed up to Parkway FFA Chapter in northwest Ohio for their annual chapter banquet. It was so wonderful to see Ohio on the backs of FFA



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jackets. One of the girls, Lucy, who was on my state officer team with me, was at the banquet, as Parkway is her home chapter. It was nice to catch up with her. The banquet went very well. Parkway is one of the best chapters in Ohio with great student involvement and dedication, and wonderful school and community support. It was fun to catch up with members like Amanda and Seth, whom I had spent summers with at Ohio FFA camp. Amanda, the retiring president, gave us some wonderful life wisdom as we finished up the banquet. I'll carry my key with me! It felt good to be in Ohio.

I spent the night with my oldest sister, Liz, and her husband, Shawn, who live nearby in Delphos. The next morning I headed up to near Kalamazoo, Michigan, to the Sherman Lake YMCA Camp for the Region 1 Leadership Camp. I had no idea how much fun was in store for me. I spent the next three days hanging out with some of the coolest FFA members I've met. The first night we got down at the dance. I met lots of awesome members already that first night, like Grace, who had on the cool T-shirt, and Jessica, Sarah and Amanda. Then, Aaron, the Region 1 President, grabbed my hand by surprise and whipped me around the floor for the next few minutes, swing dancing. How much fun! The vespers ended the night as we heard inspirational stories from the officers. We woke up the next day and started with an enthusiastic bunch! Right away the energy was high with this group and I knew we were in for a ride! The regional officers always seemed to have something up their sleeve though... today for lunch, much to my surprise, it meant that every table had to "serenade" me before they could get in line. Their renditions of "She Thinks My Tractor's Sexy" and "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling" (performed by the officers themselves) were topped by none! We spent the afternoon enjoying the good weather with Ag. Olympics. Beth and I enjoyed laying in the grass, and Brandon was the crazy one that got the frozen T-shirt on first!

The evening settled in with the banquet, a good round of winning euchre, and then with the high-energy activity referred to as KGB. Where do I even begin with KGB?! It was an hour and a half of running around in the woods, hiding from people and looking for others. It was the ultimate hide and seek game!! Braidie, Jeff, Kallie and Adam stuck together through it all! For lack of better words, Adam and I bonded as we fought off our opponents. We succeeded.

Vespers were held at a campfire ring that night, and I felt right at home with these members. A few of us walked down to the lake afterward and I'll never forget the laughs we shared as we laid on the dock and made animals out of the stars. It was a clear night and we enjoyed it for sure.

The next day we finished up with the camp, with the election of the new officers—Justin, Amber, Rebecca, Greta and Sarah have an exciting year ahead of them! Afterward, some of the regional officers, some of the state officers, some friends and I all went out to eat. Following Danielle, one of the regional officers, is something I vow never to do again. We had a train of five cars doing u-turns like crazy.

I leave Michigan with wonderful memories. It felt so good to be a part of a group as much as I was the last couple days. Thank you to all the members who made me feel so at home. You reminded me of what the FFA is really all about—memories of moments with friends—laughs and simple joys that make our hearts richer. Thank you!

April 1, 2004



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“Pure and simple.... Any person who is enjoying life is a success.” –William Feather

This past week has been an amazing ride for me! Allow me to catch you up to speed. I left off in Washington, D.C., where the officers and I spent three days visiting various government agencies and legislators to talk about the importance of Ag. Ed. It's always so awesome to see so much support of our organization. We spent one morning job shadowing at the USDA. Agriculture certainly is an exciting thing to be involved in right now.

It was wonderful to spend some time with the team as well. Amy and I had a chance to go see the movie “The Passion.” It really brought things into perspective for me, which I needed at the moment.

After we parted our ways again from D.C., I headed home for one day to my home chapter banquet. What an awesome day it was too! It was so refreshing to see so many of my friends and supporters that night as we gathered together for what I believed to be the best banquet yet. Over 500 members and guests! Talawanda FFA is just a wonderful wonderful family and I am so proud to call it my own! I love you guys!

I flew out of Cincinnati way too early the next morning to Indianapolis for what is called “Spring Academy.” The team spent the next four days working on our NLCSO conferences. We spent the weekend in training with the Washington Leadership Conference presenters and BLAST-Off presenters. It was awesome to see a preview of what state officers and members have in store through our leadership conferences this spring and summer. Get excited if you are going to WLC or are running for state office. Some great conferences await you!

From Indianapolis, I flew to my first state convention in Great Falls, Montana. Aside from my home chapter banquet, this has definitely been the highlight of the month.

I was greeted at the airport by the state officers—in a limousine! They had rented one to celebrate their year—but I was sure glad I happened to fly in while they still had it rented! The convention started out with a bang. They had almost half of all the members of the Montana FFA at the state convention! Throughout the weekend, the officers continually impressed me with their maturity and dedication to the organization. What an exceptional team of young individuals! Amanda, Patrick, Brandon, Kenny, Halsey, Tyrel, and Darin—you rock!! Good luck this next year... I'm so excited to hear what's in store for your futures!

But Montana is left in good hands as they retired their offices. The incoming team came from a pool of high-energy, passionate, outgoing candidates that kept the convention hall on its feet the entire weekend long. FFA chapters showed up with energy and enthusiasm for agriculture and for each other! Outstanding chapters across the state shined this weekend—from Richey to Sheperd—who had a friendly competition during pre-session) and from Red Lodge to Cascade, Missoula to Joliet, and Park City to Shields Valley. The Stevensville chapter welcomed me with open arms and even bought me Dip 'n Dots! I watched Big Timber rock in state parliamentary procedure. And there is such promise in the upcoming team—I can tell by watching them—Josh, Steven, Hailey, Eddy and the rest—I am so excited for you!

One thing is absolutely for sure—there are good, good things coming from Montana. I am so pumped for the Montana FFA in the next year!



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With that, I leave Great Falls, and head across the nation to Delaware for their state convention.

May you be enjoying good weather wherever you are!

March 15, 2004

Next week I'll be in: Washington D.C., home for a day, and Indianapolis

"Keep your face to the sunshine and you can not see the shadows." –Helen Keller

It's Sunday evening, and I'm sitting in a little coffee shop in Washington, D.C. The above quote is in the spirit of spring and hopefully lots of sunshine in the next few weeks. The past few weeks have been very enjoyable—filled with lots of different experiences. Starting with leaving Alabama and arriving in Pennsylvania for a week with my teammates. We stayed at the Strawberry Patch Bed and Breakfast outside of Lebanon, Pennsylvania—which is a story in itself....

It was so good to be in the country again—with rolling hills and more land than people. I thoroughly enjoyed the week. My teammates and I had lots of fun working on state convention workshops and speeches, and exploring NLCSO curriculum. We also took some time to relax too. We had a night at the movies and saw "Miracle." I'd highly recommend it! We had dinner one evening in downtown Lebanon at a Puerto Rican restaurant, courtesy of Javier. We even made it into Hershey and spent one afternoon at the Hershey Chocolate World! Before we went to Chocolate World, we spent the day at the Milton Hershey School. They have some awesome facilities in their Agricultural Education classes. Students are doing amazing things at this school. Perhaps my favorite part of our time there was getting to sample some of their homemade ice cream from one of their labs. Yum!

After we all parted our ways from a good week of getting work done, my destination was Greenville, South Carolina. I immediately fell in love with the absolutely beautiful weather and green trees everywhere. I spent my first night soaking in the atmosphere of the classy little downtown neighborhood of Greenville. The next few days, I traveled with Jan Ferris and J.R. Peterson, who both work with the National FFA Foundation. We visited with sponsor companies including Wrangler (which, by the way, has an awesome new line coming out soon), Bayer CropScience, Syngenta and BASF. These visits took us across the entire state of North Carolina. We spent a lot of time in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, which is a fascinating area, centered around large research companies. Being there just made me think about all the things our future will be faced with, and how the research that is happening right there in that little area, will effect so much of it. We also visited with Murphy-Brown and Smithfield Foods. It's always good to spread the message about FFA and what it's doing for students in the classroom. Highlights of the week included eating McDonald's ice cream after practically every visit we did, having a pseudo "mom" for the week in Mrs. Ferris, and probably most awesome was leaving at 5:30 one morning to drive to the shore at Virginia Beach, jog along the shore, and watch the sun break the horizon and rise all the way. It was absolutely breath taking. I'd never been to the east coast either, so it was quite the early morning experience for this Ohio girl.

We sadly left the warm temperatures behind, and drove up here to D.C. But we had a beautiful day yesterday, and hopefully we'll be blessed with more of those this week. (I



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love spring!) But I'm certainly not complaining, because D.C. is one of the coolest cities in the world, and I get to be here this week! Hope you have a great one too.

March 4, 2004

“Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; Teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime.”

HAPPY NATIONAL FFA WEEK!

What an awesome, awesome week I had! As you all celebrated National FFA Week all over the nation, I had been anticipating some good Southern hospitality and good Southern cookin', like everyone always tells you to expect in the South. But my time in Alabama exceeded any previous expectations I had in so many ways!

Mr. Small, who is the Local Program Success Manager at the National FFA Center and traveled with me for the week, and I started our adventure with a reception at Auburn University, hosted by the Collegiate FFA chapter there. What an awesome group of individuals pursuing careers in Agriculture! It was so much fun to be back in the university setting for a bit too. That evening we dined with the Lee County FFA chapters at Opelika High School. The officers did such an awesome job with opening ceremonies! After dinner, we had a good time in a leadership workshop.

The next day we started out early and headed to Enterprise for a breakfast sponsored by the Coffee County FFA chapters. Some of the boys from Enterprise played guitar all morning, and if you know much about me, you know I love guitar music! I was so excited when the mayor made me an honorary citizen of Enterprise, and the chapters gave me a “boll weevil” ornament. Yes, there is a story behind the boll weevil, and it's a crazy one! Thanks Coffee County! It was a wonderful start to the day. After breakfast, we journeyed to Ozark and to the Carroll High School Career Center, where I had the chance to speak with students informally in one of the classes. We talked about all kinds of things—and I really felt like I got to know them well. It was a great experience for me, and I hope for the students too. We filled up our bellies at the Midland City Town Hall, where the Dale County FFA chapters hosted me. Now, this was an adventure. The town hall is this awesome old building, that the officers informed me, is supposedly haunted. So of course, wherever there is haunting, there is exploring! I haven't giggled as much as us girls did making our way through the dark, creepy basement and hearing the stories about suicides and voodoo dolls, and to top it all off, being scared by the one boy officer. Goodness gracious! The afternoon was spent at Ariton High School with Dr. Snell and the FFA members. I absolutely loved my experience here because I was part of a chapter meeting. It reminded me so much of a meeting back home in the good ol' Ag. shop at Talawanda High. It was a wonderful memory to experience again. That evening, we went to Wetumpka High School, where the Elmore County FFA chapters sponsored a delicious meal, and I conducted a leadership workshop afterwards. It was hilarious when the fire alarm started going off towards the end of the workshop. The students were full of energy and lots of fun. Wetumpka FFA gave me this beautiful clay eagle figure made from Alabama red clay. The students and teachers are top-notch at Wetumpka.

I was pumped to spend the next day, Wednesday, with the Alabama State Officers. That morning, Brittany, the Alabama State President and I woke up early and went to a news



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station. We had a brief interview live on the air to talk about National FFA Week. It was so cool to be on television! And of course, even more so because I got to talk about FFA. It was an early, early wake-up call, but well worth it! We joined up with the rest of the officer team and went into downtown Montgomery. Highlights of the day were visiting the capitol and meeting the Secretary of State and Governor Riley. We also visited the Alabama Cattleman's Association and Alabama Farmers Federation. It was a great day to spend time learning about Alabama agriculture and all it and Alabama FFA are doing for their state and for the nation. The evening was spent hanging out with the rock star Alabama State Officers! I had one of the most enjoyable times I've had yet this year hanging out with Hannah, Joanna, Brittany, Whitney, Ashleigh and Alex. They are some girly girls, and I loved it! (Except for Alex of course, but he fits in pretty well.)

The next day, I headed to Moody High School for breakfast, and met with the St. Clair County FFA chapters. I had been anticipating the next meal every day, all week long, but this breakfast made a strong run at the prize for best meal of the week! It was sooooo good! I chatted with the girls about Prom and dresses and girly things, and it was just such a relaxing morning. We arrived at Jacksonville High School, which is just an awesome school, didn't slack in awesome members either. The county chapters came together after a land judging event in the morning, and joined me for lunch. It was great just to hang out in the shop for a while. After school, they had the county speaking contest. Two very talented speakers competed. After we left there, we headed to Hokes Bluff. I spent some time with the members of the Hokes Bluff FFA chapter in the afternoon. The group of boys that showed me around their facilities were too fun! We ate some of the best-cooked meat I've ever tasted, all marinated in different ways, at Etowah High School that evening. I was in good company in Etowah County with lots of members from all over, and plenty of school and community supporters too. The entertainment was the Bailey family string band, the father of which, is an ag. teacher. Talk about a musically talented family! I left with a lasting impression of the agriscience students in Alabama, which I'll carry in my memories with me all year long.

The next morning, we met with individuals at Alabama Poultry and Egg Association and also, educational supporters at the Alabama Department of Education. And this is where I ended my week. I'll head to Pennsylvania next week to spend some good time with my teamies and get some work done for upcoming state conventions and such. I hope spring and good weather are starting to arrive wherever you are!

February 21, 2004

Where I'll be this week: Alabama

"Don't ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

I came across this quote this past week by accident. I needed a break from working on things, so I signed on to AOL Instant Messenger. My friend, Mary, back at Ohio State, had this quote on her profile. It instantly struck me. It made me think about how people try to be the person they think they should be for other people, and how that usually leads them into being something they are naturally not. This quote seems to speak to



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that and makes a statement about how we all need to be exactly who we are in our hearts. This past week I've been working a lot on my state convention speech, and this quote was very appropriate to what I was trying to convey in my writing. It's an important message for us all to realize as we go about our daily activities. I know it helped me reflect and refocus when I took some time to think about those words.

Besides preparing for state conventions and FFA week next week, I spent the week on my first Business and Industry visits. What an adventure! It was a quite a new experience for me, and I'm learning so much.

We started the week in Indianapolis, where we did a few days of preparation for the following week. We then flew to Denver, and I saw the Rocky Mountains for my very first time. They were absolutely beautiful! By the time I left Colorado, I was absolutely in love with the Denver area. So you Colorado members, keep your eyes open for career opportunities for me!

We spent the weekend in wonderful company with Mr. Rakestraw, who is the chair of our FFA Foundation Sponsors Board. The Sponsors Board is a group of 40 executives from across the nation representing all different areas of industry. They willingly give of their time to help our National FFA Foundation continue to seek support for the programs the National FFA conducts. Mr. Rakestraw definitely left a lasting impression on me of what an amazing group of successful adult we have rooting for us.

We spent one afternoon skiing up in the mountains, which was undoubtedly one of the coolest things I've ever done.... (even with my still semi-sprained ankle from Japan.) The surroundings were just humbling. We explored Rocky Mountain National Park too and saw some elk, among other things. I loved the clean air, quaint little towns at the tops of the mountains, and peaceful atmosphere.

Our Valentine's Day was spent in the best company I've had yet on any February 14. We dined at a wonderful little fine dining restaurant with the officers of the St. Vrain FFA Chapter...

By the end of the weekend, we were refreshed and ready to rock and roll in Business and Industry visits the next week. Amy and I were paired up for this first week of visits, which turned out to make for one good adventure! We spent the next two days traveling Colorado, and even had lunch with Brandon and Melanie. It was so great to see someone else in Blue and Gold besides Amy! (No offense, Ames...) We talked over a lunch meeting and Amy and I learned that Colorado has one sharp group of young people leading their association. I'm pumped to hear about their trip to Brazil too, which they'll be taking in a couple weeks!

After we parted from Denver, we flew up to Detroit, Michigan. Now, this may not mean too much to any of you, but for me, I had to get prepared. A Buckeye in Wolverine territory can sometimes get sticky. So I bit my tongue, and endured the U of M flags hanging everywhere. Ask Amy—I was a good-spirited Buckeye I promise! (I was even good when we stopped in Ann Arbor for lunch!)

We met up with our staff member from National FFA, Mrs. Jan Ferris, and started our experience in the Motor City of America. We had a wonderful few days visiting people at Chevrolet/GMAC, Dodge, Ford and Carhartt, all of which were followed by ice cream courtesy of Mrs. Ferris! We only had a few mishaps, and a few (too many) U-turns! (Just ask Amy about those—they are her specialty!)

It was an eye-opening experience to see how many people care about making FFA possible and vital. It was such a great chance for Amy and I to share the message of the



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awesome things going on in and outside of the Agricultural Education classroom. So many people support and care about the success of each and every one of you. Amy and I hit the road Friday afternoon—Chicago bound. Neither of us had been behind the wheel in a while, so it was way fun just to cruise and turn up the music obnoxiously loud! We really didn't know exactly where we were going—we just kept following signs that said Chicago. When we crossed the Indiana line, Amy freaked out. She couldn't understand why we were in Indiana if we were going to Chicago, Illinois. I had to explain to the dear girl that you had to go through Indiana before you could get to Illinois. What can we say—the whole officer team is getting lessons in geography this year! We received a wonderful surprise phone call from Kenan, Illinois State Vice President. He offered to take us out to see the town on Saturday night. So Amy and I worked all day on Saturday, and then spent the evening having dinner in downtown Chicago with Kenan and State President, Ryan. These two guys are way cool. We listened to some good tunes—Amy and I are now Maroon Five fans—and practiced Japanese on the street, while looking at the Chicago River—(yes Kenan, you were right.) I think this was the highlight of both Amy and I's week. Kenan and Ryan are just two awesome, passionate men of character—and it definitely was wonderful to spend time with them before we headed to FFA week. So now I'm looking forward to hopefully what will turn out to be one of the most memorable weeks of the year! Alabama, here I come!

February 11, 2004

"Don't worry about the world coming to an end today. It's already tomorrow in Australia."
-Charles Schultz

Konnichiwa! ('Good day' in Japanese) I'm at home again right now, soaking up the time I have here, and sharing the fond memories I've just made on my ten-day trip to Japan! We landed in Japan at 3:05 in the afternoon. We had left D.C. at around 11 in the morning on Tuesday, January 27, and when we landed, it was the next day in Japan. So we were supposed to get a whole night of sleep on the 13-hour flight over, but that didn't happen since we were all so excited about going! Japan is in a time zone that makes them 14 hours ahead of the Eastern time zone of the United States, so when it's day in Japan, it's night here, and vice-versa.

We learned some basic facts about Japan before leaving for the trip, and learned more when we met Hiro, our awesome, honest and humble tour-guide/interpreter, on the first day. Japan's population is about half of the U.S.'s, with 126 million people. But Japan is only as big as the size of Montana, and when you take away all the land that is uninhabitable from mountains and such, you have an area the size of Indiana. So take half the population of the U.S. in the state of Indiana! Whoa!

I'm really interested in international relations and especially international politics, so visiting the U.S. embassy was an awesome way to start the trip. We visited the embassy on the first full day in Japan and learned about Japanese agriculture and our agricultural industry's relationship with the country. We spent the rest of the day at Mitsui and Co.



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who sponsored our trip and has been a longtime sponsor of National FFA, as an international agricultural trade company.

The next morning, we woke up at 4 a.m. to visit the Tsukiji Fish Market. What an experience! This market is the largest seafood market in the world, covering equal to 22 football fields of space. We watched 300 lb. tunas be auctioned off, and walked through the market walkways that had every kind of creature from the ocean imaginable. It was an absolutely amazing site to see! Some of the frozen seafood that was there was from the west coast of the U.S. In Japan, it is very important that the seafood be extremely fresh, so the fresh catch of the morning is sold at the market the same day and to the restaurants. Seafood is extremely important to the diet of the Japanese people. Seeing how vast the operation of just seafood is to this country and to other countries that export to Japan, gave me a newfound appreciation of the agriculture industry as a whole. It made me realize how important agriculture is to every single person in this world.

We went to a Nosan Metropolitan Agriculture High School in Tokyo as well. The students were so excited to meet us and show off their facilities. Students had facilities from greenhouses, to plot fields, to a cannery, to a bakery. We learned more about the FFJ, modeled after our FFA organization. It was formed 55 years ago and they have more than 110,000 members. They have competitions in different areas as well. We enjoyed spending time with the students and learning about what they were interested in, in agriculture and as a youth in Japan.

That evening, after a reception at Mitsui and Co., we went karaokeing with some of Mitsui's young employees. It was so interesting to hear them sing Japanese, and to see what American music they knew. Amy and Christy brought the house down with some renditions of pop songs, and we all ended singing an American song together.

The next city we found ourselves in was Kyoto. Kyoto is considered to be the most culturally authentic city in Japan, and is the seventh largest, I believe. We did some sightseeing when we arrived and visited a castle, a shrine, and a temple. Japan's primary religions are Buddhism and Shinto. Learning about religions that are so different than mine of Christianity was very interesting. It helped me to appreciate the Japanese culture even more, and begin to understand why they believe in what they do and do what they do sometimes. I think it is so important to be open-minded and seek to understand cultures different than your own. Learning about other people in the world only broadens your perspective, and may also lead you to appreciate what you have and where you are from even more.

The next day, we visited Chita Futo, a grain manufacturing company. We went up on a huge ship vessel that had come from New Orleans, full of Pioneer corn. It was neat to see how our export of corn was important to their agricultural industry. We took a tour of the facilities and saw how corn was broken down into different by-products.

That evening we had a good amount of time to go shopping and soak up the culture of Kyoto. The two adult coordinators that accompanied the officer team to Japan were Anna Melodia and Jana Jaure, who both work at the National FFA Center in Indianapolis. So if you do the math, that means there were us four female officers, plus the two adult coordinators, equaling 6 females, and Casey and Hiro, our guide, as the only males. They were obviously outnumbered! Girl power! So the majority ruled, and we had some good shopping time in Japan.



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By the time we made our way to Tajima, we were nearing the end of our trip. In Tajima, we were welcomed at Tajima Agricultural High School, and split apart to spend the night with our host families. My host sister was Yui Ohbayashi. She has an older sister named Chinatsu, and her parents are Harumi and Takao. The host family stay was a wonderful experience for myself.

I was naturally a little worried about staying with a family whose culture I didn't fully understand, let alone whose language I didn't speak. In Japan, literally every building you go into, you take off your shoes, and put on a pair of slippers. Finding a pair of slippers that fit my huge feet comfortably was probably the biggest barrier I ended up facing with my host family! It was a wonderful experience!

The older sister spoke English pretty well, which became very important. It made me feel pretty silly that most of the people we met with spoke a decent amount of English and could understand me fairly well, when I knew only a few words of their language. Yui and I spent lots of time reading out of our English/Japanese phrase books and giggling. Their house was pretty western, at least in my opinion, and compared to the other officer's host houses. The family obviously loved Disney, because their bathroom was decorated with all Peter Rabbit stuff, and their living room was decorated with Mickey Mouse and Winnie the Pooh. I absolutely love Disney too, so we found a common ground very easily. For dinner we had sushi rolls and what seemed to be beef rolls. They were delicious! They insisted to watch American television in English, so I found myself watching "Dawson's Creek" and American music videos. It was so bizarre! In Japanese houses, it is rare to have a strong heater, and much more rare to heat the entire house. In my host stay, the living room/kitchen was the only place heated. We sit on the floor as well, to eat, to socialize, and to relax. So when I got there, I was directed to a low table in the living room to sit at. It had a comforter-type blanket coming from the side of it and I covered my legs with the blanket. Underneath the table, there was a heater of some sort. It was toasty warm, and having half my body under there kept me warm.

I showed them pictures of my family and friends and of where I'm from. Gift exchanging in Japan is very important to the culture, so I gave them a book filled with pictures of Ohio in it as well as some other items from home. I think they liked it! Soon after, we grew tired and I headed to the bed they had prepared for me. I was sleeping in the tatami room in the house, which is a traditional room that most Japanese houses have. It is an empty room with no furniture, and is used for special occasions, that could include a special dinner or could serve as a guest room, as was the case with me. It has a floor woven of a material much like palm leaves, and there is a place in the corner that has a religious or seasonal display. I snuggled up in comforter blankets and an electric blanket on the tatami floor, and smiled. I was thankful for the blessings I had in my life: the opportunity to be there, the amazing experience I was having, and the support base I was so grateful for back home.

We spent the next day learning about the Japanese agricultural education system at Tajima High School. We saw some amazing learning facilities and visited some local agriculturalists as well. My particular favorite was the strawberry farm we visited. The strawberries in Japan are much sweeter than in America. You can taste the sugar in them! And believe me, we did taste the sugar in them—in many of them! The owner handed us a little plastic container and let us loose in his hydroponic strawberry greenhouse, telling us we had 10 minutes to eat all the strawberries we wanted to. It was heaven! We filled our plastic containers with strawberry stems. Yummy!



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We left Tajima after spending another night with our host family. As we parted ways, we headed to Osaka—our final destination of our trip. When we left Tajima though, we also left Hiro, our faithful tour guide. We were a little nervous to be without him! Luckily, we made it through the last afternoon in Japan with only a few mishaps of getting lost on the subway.

Since it was our last night in Japan, of course, the ladies had to end our trip in the only proper way we saw fit—by shopping! Our fearless, shop-aholic leader, Miss Jana, managed to find two more 100 yen stores that evening. If you aren't familiar with Japanese currency, (as I definitely wasn't before this trip!), 100 yen approximately equals 1 U.S. dollar, thus the 100 yen shop is like a dollar store here in the states. We had been introduced to the 100 yen store early in the trip, and we had sought them out in practically every town thus far!

We left Japan on February 6, and were welcomed back into the United States. We had flown into D.C. that morning, and took the opportunity to road-trip and visit Javier that afternoon. It was the most wonderful thing ever to spend some time with him. We all miss him dearly!

We headed home the next morning. I was greeted at the airport by parents and one of my sisters, Sara. I had been anticipating spending some much-needed time at home, and so my weekend was a blessing. My other sister, Liz, was able to make it home for a day too. I spent time working on things, but most importantly, relaxing and laughing. We are now back in Indianapolis, preparing for a full week of Business and Industry visits next week. I'm eagerly anticipating this leg of travel, which will take me to Alabama for FFA week after Business and Industry.

Good wishes to you in this next week. Please keep Javier in your thoughts and prayers!

Where I am next week: Japan

January 26, 2004

"One by one we can be the better world we wish for."

-Kobi Yamada

This past week was spent in our Nation's capitol, Washington, D. C. What an experience! Normally, people who don't travel to D.C. often, tour the many exciting and popular attractions of the city. But this week, I got quite a different taste of D.C. We flew into town on Tuesday and found our location for the week in Old Towne Alexandria, Virginia. Alexandria is an area that, while still very much connected to the city and historic, is more relaxed without much tourism attention. It is a beautiful part of the city defined by little "hometown" pubs on every corner, cobblestone streets, and a D. C. character all it's own.

The first night we arrived, we spent some personal time together as a team. We became aware of the details of Javier's unfortunate serious incident and his condition. We reflected on the events that had surfaced in the last couple days and how we would move forward from them as a team. We've found ourselves missing Javier more each day. I would ask that you keep him in your thoughts or prayers as his recovery continues to prove Javier's ambitious attitude to get better so he can serve you this year.



Anne Knapke

National Officer Journal

This weekend, our task at hand was our first National FFA Board of Directors meeting. We have some very insightful adult professionals representing different facets of agricultural education from around the nation currently serving on the board. I gained a better perspective and appreciation for the many groups of individuals that have a hand in caring about the students studying agricultural education in the classroom. So many people sincerely care about our success and the success of this fine organization. It was such an enlightening experience for me to see how the process of governing and making changes on a national level is done within the FFA. This is certainly a view I didn't think about previous to coming to D. C. It was a pleasure for me to represent the student membership as we talked about the issues facing our organization this weekend. With the conclusion of the board meeting, we look toward our international experience abroad! We will be departing for Japan tomorrow morning. We can't contain our excitement for what the next several days hold for us, and I can't wait to share all of those memories with you when we get back. Here is a taste of what our schedule will look like, so that, if you wish, you can follow along as we go.

- Jan. 28- arrive in Tokyo- have information session
- Jan. 29- visit U.S. Embassy and Mitsui and Co. (sponsors of the trip)- sightsee
- Jan. 30- visit Tsukiji Fish Market- visit Tokyo Metropolitan Nosan High School- reception at Mitsui
- Jan. 31- visit two farms- one of Korean lettuce, Japanese pears and chives; one of strawberries and paddy rice
- Feb. 1st- travel to Kyoto- sightsee
- Feb. 2- travel to Asakura- visit Chita Futo and Meinan Food Industrial Complex- travel back to Kyoto
- Feb. 3- travel to Tajima- stay with host families (I will be staying with the Ohbayasi's)
- Feb. 4- full day with host families- visit Tajima High School
- Feb. 5- depart from host families- travel to Osaka- sightsee in Osaka
- Feb. 6- Fly home

I look forward to writing when we get back in the states. Until then, take care, stay warm and I ask that you keep Javier in your thoughts or prayers!

Where I am next week: Indianapolis

January 11, 2004

"Every one of us has in himself a continent of undiscovered character. Happy is he who acts the Columbus to his own soul." – Sir J. Stevens

Today, as I sit back and think about all that has happened since I last wrote to you, it seems only appropriate to share a quote about growing. The past few weeks, it seems I have been discovering new continents inside myself everyday. Through training in early January to a weeklong experience in Georgia, I've learned so many things that I'm so excited to share with you.



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National Officer Journal

New Year's Day we started training again at the center. We intensively prepared for our next week to be spent in Georgia. We were working on speeches and workshops that we would present all of that next week. Before we left we had the opportunity to travel outside of Indianapolis and meet up with members of the Western Boone FFA Chapter for a good ol' barn dance! I met several enthusiastic FFA members that night, including Kasey, who is excited for lots of FFA activities in her future. It was such an enjoyable night to get to relax with students and be back out on the farm. Soon enough though, we were leaving at 5 a.m. on Monday morning for Georgia. What an early flight! But we made it to Georgia, not knowing what an amazing week we had ahead of us.

Georgia was picked this year as the Experience State for National Officers. This means that we would spend a week in Georgia practicing speeches and workshops that we had written during training thus far. Tiffany traveled with us all week long, as well as Mr. Ben Lastly and Mr. John Wilkinson who work with the Georgia FFA.

We started our week off landing in Albany, Georgia. In an airport far smaller than any one I have ever previously had the pleasure of visiting, with the luggage check, luggage claim, ticket counter, waiting area, and boarding area in the same small room vicinity. But, for some reason, I seem to think that it will certainly not be the only small airport I visit this year. We started our week in Georgia with a visit to Monroe High School. We were greeted by a group of very well mannered, polite high school students. We spent some time discussing the importance of a strong FFA program in their high school. It was a wonderful reception to start off the week!

That evening we spent at a South Region Greenhand Night. We first were treated to dinner prepared by state staff themselves, and then spent the rest of the evening on the campus of Alexander Baldwin Agricultural College, a branch of University of Georgia, conducting workshops and speeches for students from the southern region of Georgia. I loved the girly time I had with the Shelby and Ashley, two of Georgia's state officers that joined us for the evening. And one of my teammates later confessed that a young man I had met named Nathan had told them that I reminded him of the character Dory in the movie "Finding Nemo". I have yet to see that movie, but my teammates indicated that this was a compliment. Thanks Nathan!

Tuesday morning we departed for Irwin County High School. The thing I found most intriguing about this school is that they have what's called the F.A.R.M. Project, and a young man who is a senior student at the school, is one of two farm managers. It just provides awesome opportunity for members to have direct contact with so many different facets from research on with livestock or crops, to agribusiness/management in the daily tasks of the operation. The student shared with me how much he enjoyed his work and experiences with the farm. That afternoon, we arrived at Jeff Davis Middle School. Now this was quite a big deal for this Ohioan. See, in Ohio, we have absolutely no middle school FFA chapters. So Jeff Davis was my first encounter with middle school FFA members. And I was blown away. Their classroom made me want to be their age again! They had computer modules set up with each station focused on a different aspect in agriculture. The room was colorful and bright with fish tanks here, and student-made posters there. It excited me to see how many awesome things these students had the opportunity to be exposed to at such an early start. Good for them.

That evening we drove into Athens, Georgia, which is the home of the University of Georgia. It was so exciting to drive through campus, as it made me think about Ohio State back home. We enjoyed a wonderful evening, dining with state staff and state



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officers, Cliff and Kathy. We just HAD to go to the Varsity for ice cream afterwards, and if you are from around Athens, Georgia, I bet you know what I'm talking about. So we are there at the Varsity fattening ourselves up with ice cream, and Mr. Wilkinson gets this crazy idea for us all to put on paper hats that proudly say "Varsity" and pose with various staff members for a picture. What an entertaining evening! If you've ever slept with a feather comforter, you can imagine our delight to find out that the hometown inn we stayed at that night, indeed had feather blankets as well as feather pillows! We got a good nights' rest!

The next morning we head to Carnesville, Georgia, and to Franklin County High School. We were greeted by a wonderful group of students, the officers of their high school FFA and their middle school FFA, who had made us breakfast. The day started out great. Franklin County is a very successful chapter, and I had the opportunity to see some of their agriculture facilities. Among several facilities, the most interesting to me was the aquaculture program with several thousand tilapia fish. The students actually run a business selling the fish, and some are conducting research with the fish as well. What a cutting-edge program!

Our day continued as we had lunch with the Stephens County High School FFA. I met an amazing young lady named Kathleen, who is a senior this year. She has some awesome goals in front of her. It was so encouraging to see how ambitious she was about the future. The officer team was so enthusiastic about what was going on in Stephens County. We traveled to the middle school, but first stopped at the county's public cannery. It was definitely the first one I had ever seen. It was also one of the coolest things I've ever seen. Since it's deer season, they can a lot of deer, but they also do a lot of fruit and vegetable canning throughout the year. This cannery has been a part of their community for years. It was so interesting to see how the cans are feed to the steamer and then automatically lidded at the end.

Right down from the facility was the middle school. We spent the afternoon hanging out with the Stephens County middle school FFA officer team. What a bright, energetic group of individuals! Alex, Jordan, Taylor, Clayton, Jay, Bo and Heath spent the afternoon entertaining us and telling us tales of their adventures at national convention. Ladies beware!

That evening we arrived at the FFA/FCCLA Camp. What amazing facilities. Georgia FFA members have an awesome summer at the tip of their hands! From putt-putt, to a ropes course, to a beautiful dining hall, to an assembly hall, to an auditorium. Georgia FFA knows how to do an FFA camp! We spent time with chapter officers from the area that night. Patrick, Ward and Jessica had enough energy in the workshop I put on to fill the room! And how could I forget the "Ding Dong" girls, led by the curly-haired miss Caroline?! I'll be looking forward to your performance at national convention!

Thursday morning we spent in Atlanta. I'd never been before, so it was very exciting to be downtown. We had the opportunity to attend the first part of a State Board of Education meeting, where all of Georgia's finest FFA members were recognized for their national accomplishments. Included were individuals from Brantley County, Franklin County, Morgan County, Perry High School, Wilcox County, Miller County and Clinch County. Way to go members! We then spent some time in the state's beautiful capitol and had lunch with some Business and Industry leaders including the Commissioner of Agriculture, Mr. Tom Irvin.



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In the afternoon, we spent time at Mary Persons High School where Stacia conducted a workshop. We then arrived at Camp John Hope for a chapter officer activity for the evening. I was kind of nervous by this point as I was giving the keynote address this evening. I had never given quite as long of a speech as I was about to present, so naturally, I had some butterflies. The encouragement from my team, and my focus towards my speech helped me be successful. One of the coolest things about spending this entire week with my teammates is that we could be there for each other. As we learned how to improve ourselves, we were there for each other all along the way. It meant a lot to me that evening.

We journeyed back to the FFA/FCCLA Camp for the evening and woke in the morning to a camp filled with Ag. teachers. The Mid-Winter Teacher's Conference started that morning at the camp, so we had the opportunity to meet many of Georgia's teachers and to spend some time getting to learn more about the awesome programs all across the state.

One of the many things I learned from the experiences I had in Georgia, is that there is a bright, bright future for Georgia FFA. I am beyond excited that my team and I had the opportunity to kick-off our experiences with students there, and I can't wait to meet more incredible people like the ones I spent time with last week.

Where I am next week: Georgia
January 4, 2004

"Life is to be fortified by many friendships. To love, and to be loved, is the greatest happiness of existence."

I journeyed home for the holidays and spent some quality time with my family. We always have a small Christmas with just the immediate family. So my mom and dad, my oldest sister Liz, and her husband Shawn, my sister Sara, and her fiancé Sam, my friend Ben and myself celebrated together. We opened presents on Christmas Eve after we had eaten all afternoon. I love the feeling I get when I think about it. The wood-burning stove fills the living room with warmth, and I'm surrounded by love and laughter. It encourages me everyday that I have such an amazing group of people to love and to be loved by.

Somehow Santa brought all the boys of the family FFA socks. I had nothing to do with it—I promise! Okay, so maybe I did, but they'll wear those stylin' FFA socks with pride! It was a very nice Christmas for everyone.

My mom probably received the best present of all. We have about 15 cats that live in our barn, and one of them is this adorable little orange and white kitty. We always bring it inside, knowing we have to put it back outside soon enough. But on Christmas Eve, she brought it inside and this time, Daddy gave her permission to let it stay inside! So we washed it really good, and blew dry its hair. I don't think the other three cats that already live indoors were as happy as we were about our new kitty, which we named Molly Jo, but they'll learn to get along. She's adorable cute!

We also have some heifers getting ready to calve, so we'll have some belated Christmas presents to come within the next couple days.

While I was home, I had the chance to visit with one of my Ag. teachers, Mr. Zimmerman, (we call him Mr. Z.) It was so nice to get to share with him everything that



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had been going on. I spent some quality time with some of my friends that I hadn't seen for way too long as well. I also stopped in at the hardware store in town, which is where I worked for three years during high school as my job placement SAE program. It was good to see everyone. I even had time to eat some Skyline Chili! If you are from Ohio and know anything about Cincinnati, you know that Skyline is the best place to eat. After spending the holidays at home, the team gathered back together for New Year's Eve. We spent the evening at Tiffany Sanderson's house. We caught up on how everyone's holidays were, played a mean game of Catch Phrase, ate lots of food, and of course, watched the ball drop. It was an enjoyable New Year's for sure. Today we begin preparing for a week in Georgia. More to come soon!

Where I am next week: Ohio

December 19, 2003

"525,600 minutes. How do you measure a year? In daylights, in sunsets, in midnights and cups of coffee? In inches, in miles, in laughter, in strife? 525,600 minutes. How do you measure a year in the life? How about love? Measure in love."

-from a song in the Musical, RENT

It's been 36 days.... Or approximately 864 hours—or in minutes, that would be about 51,840—since I was blessed to be one of six standing on the stage in Freedom Hall, Louisville, Kentucky. What this means to me now is that I only have 320 days, or about 7,680 hours—which would be about 460,800 minutes—left in my year of ultimate service!! I can't wait to live every moment of it sharing how awesome FFA is with every single person I have the opportunity to meet!

So, you ask what I've been up to the last 36 days? I returned to Columbus, Ohio and to a "Congratulations" reception courtesy of the Ohio FFA Association. Now that I was back, my task-at-hand mainly focused on finishing up my fall quarter classes at The Ohio State University. I had a few weeks to gather things up and get ready for our December training. I finished up assignments that still needed to be completed and spent quality time catching up with friends. I spent a weekend on a retreat with some of the people I am most fond of—my fellow members of a university-based service organization called Ohio Staters, Inc. I was able to enjoy two home football games, which was absolutely wonderful. Not many feelings compare to the ones I share with my friends in Ohio Stadium, cheering on my Buckeyes and singing our Alma Mater, "Carmen, Ohio". Although I know my journeys will be far from Ohio State this year, I am excited to carry my Buckeye pride along with me!

I spent Thanksgiving with my family back home in Oxford, Ohio, which is about two hours away from where I go to school. We live in a little valley surrounded by woods, which always provides the perfect escape for me. My two older sisters came home for a while and we did what we do best at the Knapke household: Ate lots of yummy food. We welcomed in the holiday season by watching "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation," as we do every year.



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I soaked up as much home atmosphere as I could before I left for Indianapolis for our month of training at the National FFA Center. My dad and I went up to Columbus and moved all of my stuff out of my apartment. I stayed my last night in Columbus and headed to Indianapolis the next evening. But first, I spent the day hanging white holiday lights in the trees around Mirror Lake, which is a lake on the campus of Ohio State. The student group I am involved in, Ohio Staters, gathered that day and hung almost 10,000 twinkle lights around the lake for holiday atmosphere. Two weeks prior, there had been thousands of students, including me, gathered around the same lake jumping in amid the chill of the night in Ohio State tradition for good luck against beating our rival school Michigan in the upcoming football game. We gave the lights a test run before I left and they looked so beautiful. Driving away from Columbus, I smiled, thinking about Buckeye memories, and anxious to discover what the unknown of my National Officer year had in store for me.

And so I am here, in Indianapolis, in the third and final week of our team's training for the year ahead. I thought I was excited before I got here, but now I am beyond excited! Our team has been through some awesome training—all to prepare us for an even better year. We've had the chance to really get to know one another. We each had a night to take the team wherever we wanted for dinner and we could choose any activity we wanted to for the evening. Stacia treated us to an evening at Monsters, Inc. Disney on Ice. Amy took us to a sports complex to bring out our competitive side as we played volleyball and basketball. Javier cooked a traditional Puerto Rican meal for all of us, which was "Moy Bien!" Christy took us to a traditional Italian restaurant where we enjoyed a wonderful evening of Italian atmosphere. Casey treated us to an Indiana Pacers game. It was crazy to see how much our team got into the game! I took the team to Ballet Internationale's performance of Nutcracker. No one on the team had been to a ballet before, so it was a cultural experience for us all.

On Sunday, we'll depart our separate ways and head home for the holidays. Javier, Christy and Casey are probably ready to get back to warmer weather down south, whereas Amy, Stacia and I all live in the northern half of the U.S. and will spend the holidays in the warmth of our homes with the cold outside. Now that's Christmas to me! Friends, family, yummy sweets, blankets, white fluffy stuff outside and wood to keep the fire going inside! Home sweet home.

Hoping you and yours have a wonderful holiday season filled with joy and peace.