



## Justine Sterling National Officer Journal

**September 28, 2005**

**Where I'll be next: Leadership Conferences in Virginia**

Wow, yet another month has flown by! I'm sitting on the airplane right now thinking about everything that has happened in the past month, and I can't believe the national FFA convention is just around the corner. I left you all last when I was in Orlando for our team retreat, and from there I went home for a couple of days, and then was off again, this time for some serious road tripping with Jackie and Mr. J.R. Peterson for business and industry visits. When I say serious road tripping, I really do mean it, because from Sunday to Friday, we were in 12 states, and traveled 1,420 miles in a car. Starting out in North Carolina, we drove all the way up through Maine, and made many, many stops in between. It was great though—some of our businesses included Wrangler, Novartis Animal Health, Carquest, Smithfield (huge hog producers), Delta Consolidated (they make all of those toolboxes on your trucks), and Timberland. In North Carolina, I think we ate the very best meal I've eaten all year—it was at this extremely nice restaurant and the name of it was the address! Something like 223 Elm..... Anyway, I had a good ole rib-eye and it absolutely melted in my mouth. And I'm from Kansas, I've had a lot of good steak! But in between our visits, we drove along the coast (which was beautiful—they have some of the prettiest seaside houses in New Hampshire), we had a breadstick eating contest (Jackie the great ate 12 Olive Garden breadsticks—she's amazing), we ate lobster, and I got to attend my very first Broadway play in New York City!

Some of you might not know about my Broadway obsession—I've always wanted to be a famous actress and be on Broadway, but I had never seen an actual play. Well we went to "Rent" and it was life-changing—you definitely need to see a Broadway play in your lifetime. But probably the best part of the week was meeting with those top business executives, and telling them all about FFA. I love sharing FFA member stories, because businesses are always so impressed with what you all are doing! And we invited them all to convention so they could really see what it's all about. It was a quick week, 12 states in five days, and we bonded like no other, spending all of that time in the car, but I think we really got some strong supporters for the FFA.



From New Hampshire, I flew home for what would be the longest home time I had all year—2 whole weeks. But it was well-spent, because I got to finally catch up on some work, write my final draft of my retiring address, visit my beloved home FFA chapter, and spend some time in Manhattan at K-State with my College of Ag friends! I was home for the first week, and I did sleep some, to charge up before convention, but I also got a chance to go to my brother's football games (he is a sophomore starting on varsity, so he was pretty pumped). Then after some good work time on the national FFA



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convention, I went up to Manhattan and visited the FFA office, the College of Ag, and hung out with some college friends (it was so nice to see them after being gone so long!). Then my friend Sandy, who is student teaching in the spring under my ag teacher, Mr. Gillig, at South Barber High, rode home with me to visit our program. I got to have a long chat with Mr. Gillig, who is one of my biggest role models, and I hung out with my FFA chapter (who, like always, made fun of me—they definitely keep me humble!). It was so nice to be home and spend time with the people who support me the most—it's just hard to put into words how much I love all of you guys! Oh, and I also visited my mom's 3rd grade class to tell them about my trip to Japan. You know, you are never too young to learn about the FFA—I definitely did some recruiting!

Then it was time to head back to Indianapolis for our next week of national convention planning. Although I had had a lot of time to work on my retiring address and prepare for everything else, I was still a little overwhelmed since this would be our last week to prepare together before our pre-convention meeting in October. But we made a lot of big decisions that week—we picked out all of the music for convention, we handed in our final retiring addresses and session scripts, we finished up reflections, and we prepared for our last month or so out on the road before convention. I just can't believe how fast this year has gone—it seems like only yesterday that we were standing on stage in Louisville last year wondering just what this year would be like. And now we were planning National Convention! Anyway, it's going to be a good one—I can guarantee you that.

From Indy, we all split ways. The four girls were headed to Missouri for a week of leadership conferences and chapter visits in all different areas, Brian was headed to Wisconsin for State Leadership Workshops and Jay headed out to the Big E. I flew into Kansas City (pretty close to home for me!) and met Lisa Evans, the Area 5 and 6 state coordinator, and after some supply shopping at Wal-Mart and a quick dinner at Chipotle, we headed out to Carrollton, where I was staying with the Dobbin family for the night. I was honored to sleep in their little girl's room, complete with a pink bedspread, dolls and a pink nightlight! Then the full week began the next morning with a visit to the Carrollton FFA chapter where I talked to the whole eighth grade class, and then headed to Malta Bend. Now I do have an interesting story for you about good ole Malta Bend—I was



presenting an all-school assembly (they had about 50 students total in 7-12th grade, so it was pretty small) and we were getting ready to do an activity when all of a sudden, my heel slipped and I completely wiped out on my face! And I do mean I wiped out—I ripped my pantyhose, cut up my knee and had a huge bruise on my leg, it was absolutely horrible! But I stood up and started making fun of myself, so they all laughed with me. And they were so sweet—I met another



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Justine there (one of the very few in the world) and she ran home and let me borrow a pair of pantyhose! Then I had lunch with them and headed on to Sweet Springs. Since I got there a little early, I had time to get a tour of their new ag building and football field, and hang out with one of the advisors, Mr. Hill, and then it was time to do another all-school assembly. They were a lot of fun, it was 7-12th grade again and we had a little class competition going on in every activity (they are an extremely competitive school). From there, Ms. Dobbins, took me to Marshall and we ate dinner, then headed to the FFA meeting. I decided right then and there that we definitely need to go to more FFA meetings. It was great—they were deciding on chapter t-shirts and got into it through parli-pro, and then they made the decision to donate to the Seeds of Hope campaign. It was just good to be back at a regular chapter FFA meeting—I didn't want to leave! But I met up with my host for the night, Mr. Haley, an advisor at Eldon, and he took me to his beautiful house. I have to admit, I was definitely ready for a good night's sleep!

The next day was full too—a visit to Eldon where I spoke to a couple of classes and then stopped in to say hi during the rest of the classes. They have an awesome chapter, with 3 strong advisors (Mr. Biddle happened to go to high school with my mom!) so I had a lot of fun there. Next was Camdenton, a unique chapter because they just opened up the chapter to freshmen and sophomores—it used to be only juniors and seniors. So I told the younger classes all about the FFA and they were awesome. Mr. Kitchen and I had a good talk on the way to meet up with Ms. Bloss, and it was on to Russellville! I did workshops for a couple of classes there (those eighth-graders and freshmen were crazy, but we had a blast!) and then hung out with Ms. Bloss after school until the Tipton FFA meeting. Again, it was nice to hang out in an ag room—I have definitely missed that! That night was another FFA meeting, my favorite, and those Tipton kids, they are awesome—we did some teamwork activities and they really had a good time with them. And then I stayed the night with Ms. Bloss—we got some Sonic and girl-talked for awhile. She is such a sweetheart, and I know her students are lucky to have her. The next morning I met up with Ms. Evans again, and we started our road trip for the day—a visit to Versailles where I spoke to 50 eighth-graders and then got to check out their tractor restoration class (they got their tractor while I was there, so it was pretty exciting!). Ms. Evans and I then had some goood BBQ for lunch and did one more visit at Cole Camp where I talked to 10 freshmen, who I just think the world of now. That night was my first leadership conference in Area 6, and the area officers did a wonderful job. All chapter officers were in attendance, and they got some great training from state officers Zach and Amanda (one good workshop, I might add) and then went to some mini-workshops with the area officers. We had dinner, I spoke for a few, and we called it a night! I met up with my co-pilot for the next few days, Ms. Jessie Murry, the Area 5 State Vice President, and her grandparents were kind enough to let me stay with them for the next two nights (I got to stay in one bed for two nights in a row!).

After a good home-cooked breakfast, Jessie and I started our visits for the day. We road-tripped it to Osceola, where we got to hang out with a couple of classes, and then on to Rich Hill for a quick workshop—I think we even recruited some new FFA members



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there! Lakeland was our last chapter for the day, and I did a workshop for the whole FFA chapter there before we headed to Area 5 Leadership Conference. All chapter officers and chapter degree recipients were in attendance, and I did a couple of really quick workshops there, but mostly got to hang out with some cool Missouri FFA members. The area officers did a great job—they were extremely polished and professional on their opening ceremonies, way to go guys! Jessie and I headed back to her grandparents' house for a night of some good home cooking (man, they know how to cook in Odessa) and much-needed sleep.

Friday was my last day in Missouri, and I do have to say that the week was a crazy whirlwind of visits, but I definitely enjoyed spending so much time with FFA members again. We started out on an army base at Knob Noster, which was unique for me. I learned all about the regulations they have for organizations on army bases, and how they were working really hard to get their FFA chapter off the ground. They were good people though, and I know that they are going to build a strong chapter. Then it was on to Leeton, a brand new first-year program, where I told the freshmen all about FFA. It's so fun telling new members about it—they are just amazed at all of the opportunities we have! And my last chapter visit of the day was at Concordia, where I had a very fun group of mostly guys, and they had a blast with all of the activities. Jessie and I then spent the afternoon with her advisor, Mr. Angel, and she gave me a tour of her school before we headed to Richmond. To end the week, I got to attend an FFA tailgate, and I



couldn't have been happier! Not only do I love football, but I love FFA too (did you all know that?) and I got to enjoy both! They were so good to me, and that was the first night I wasn't wearing official dress, so I kind of got to be normal for a night! Then I had to say good-bye to Jessie and her dad when they took me back to Kansas City. I met up with Brian, Emily, Jackie and Rach and we spent the weekend together, one day in Manhattan at the best ag school in the county, Kansas State University (that's where I go to school). We went up to the football game, and I decked my team out in purple, it was a beautiful sight. Then we headed back to Kansas City on Sunday and we all flew out to Tennessee. Jackie and I were headed to RFD-TV for FFA Live (yeah!) and Brian and Rachael were going to a Tractor Supply Company golf tournament.

RFD-TV was quite the experience—I had never been in a TV studio before, let alone actually being on TV, so it was a very exciting time for me. We got our own dressing rooms, and a lady did our makeup (lots of it), and then it was time to go on live. Let me tell you, it's a lot harder than it looks to be on TV—you definitely don't look like yourself, and I had to keep smiling the whole time, but not too big because I didn't want to look cheesy, ahh, it was stressful! But it was a good night because we heard all about our Seeds of Hope campaign and how it's going, we met with Ashley, a past Missouri state officer who went to Costa Rica on the Proficiency trip, and we updated everyone on





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national FFA convention plans. We had a good time—it was quite the experience to be on TV, but I'm not too sure if it's in my career plans or not!

From Nashville, it was back home to Kansas for me, to prepare for the national FFA convention. Thanks for reading this incredibly long-winded journal, and see you all soon!

**August 20, 2005**

**Where I'll be next: From North Carolina to New Hampshire and everywhere in between for business and industry visits with Jackie.**

Well, I'm sure you all are extremely busy starting school at about this time, but I do want to catch you up on my recent travels. Last time we talked, I was headed out to Washington, D.C., to spend a couple of days at the Washington Leadership Conference. Now I never had the opportunity to attend this conference when I was in high school, but all year I've heard story after story of people who absolutely loved WLC. So I decided that I was going to experience it with my own eyes. I arrived in D.C. and my friend and WLC presenter Tyler picked me up at the airport. Since I arrived on Tuesday and the conference hadn't started yet, I got to hang out with the staff and help set up for registration, only after a much-needed trip to Starbucks with my good friend Alyson Johnson. And then the students started pouring in—my job was to hand out water bottles so I was able to meet a lot of the students that way. It was so neat to meet everyone, and to know that they were about to experience one of the coolest conferences FFA has to offer, and they didn't even know it yet. Over the next two days, I didn't wear official dress a single time, and sat in on all of the community groups like I was a WLC participant. I have to admit, it was kind of nice to meet people and talk to them person to person. I went to the park and played games, I ate some good meals at the Rosslyn hotel, and I even made a quick stop over at Eisenhower. But I was barely there for two days and then I had to leave again—I really wanted to stay the entire week, because from what I hear, that's when the WLC "magic" begins, but I had to meet my team to prepare for State Presidents' Conference. So I said a quick goodbye to my WLC friends, and headed across town to the Omni-Shoreham Hotel for another FFA conference.



SPC is a little different from other conferences though, because the only people who attend are the state presidents, vice presidents, and some secretaries from all 50 states and Puerto Rico. We all meet in D.C. to prepare for the delegate process at the national



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FFA convention, to do some major touring, and to meet a couple of very special people. My teammates and I spent a lot of time planning the conference, from reflections at various memorials across the city to training for the state officers on meeting with their state senators and representatives, and our theme for the week was "Cultivate the Experience". We wanted to put an agriculture spin on SPC, because we are a pretty big production ag-oriented team, but we also wanted to make sure that the state officers there realized they were there for a bigger reason—to take everything they learned back to their fellow state officers and FFA members. I have to tell you, I think we have some of the most talented, well-mannered, genuinely sincere state officers this year, and every single day I was more and more impressed with them.

The week started off with the extremely impressive Sunset Parade, a performance by the U.S. Marine Corp, and even though it was unbearably hot and we were all in official dress, everyone braved it like champions and I think really enjoyed the parade. The next day included delegate work and the beautiful night tour, and Brian and I had reflections that night at the Thomas Jefferson Memorial. The reflections are all really special, because they tie in to the memorials and to the job that the state officers have this year.

But our third day of the conference pretty much topped off this year for me. First off, we started out the morning with a visit from Secretary of Agriculture Mike Johanns, who, by the way, is a past FFA member. He was honestly one of the most real and down-to-earth people, and he truly believes in what the FFA organization has to offer. After some mini-workshops with USDA employees, we headed to the White House. This year at SPC, we had the honor of meeting with President George W. Bush in the White House! Oh my gosh, it was absolutely unbelievable—I had to keep pinching myself to remind me that it wasn't a dream! Every year the President is invited to SPC, and he usually meets with the state officers at the Eisenhower building for a couple of minutes, but this was the first time in quite a few years that we actually got to go in the White House. We had to go through quite a bit of security, and I guess it's a requirement when meeting with the President that you get there 2 hours or more in advance so when he stops in, you are ready to meet with him. Once they let us in the actual house, they basically opened up the top floor, including the Green Room, the room where the First Lady has tea, and many others, and we got to tour around and see for ourselves just where the President lives. Then we went into another room and they set us up on risers. We were told that President Bush would come in, take a quick picture with us, and maybe talk for a couple of minutes. Well, after more waiting and lots of setting up for the picture, we looked out the door and in walked none other than George W. Bush. It was amazing, I really couldn't believe that we were in the same room as him! He came over and shook our





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hands, and he was so nice, so real. Then he stood in front of all 100 of us FFA members, and he asked us, "How many of you have ever asked the President a question?" Well, of course no one had, so for the next 35 minutes, we asked him all kinds of questions. He was very casual, and he answered them like a real person would—he talked about his wife, his farm in Texas, how he got to be President, etc. And we laughed, I think some of us even cried, and we were absolutely in awe. Talk about one of the coolest moments in your life! Then he took a picture with us, and thanked us for being some of the top leaders in the country, and he was gone. I really can't imagine living his life—he is on all of the time, taking pictures, answering questions, making decisions, and I think we all take for granted being able to live our own lives without people telling us what to do and wear to go, and what to say when we get there. It was just incredible to meet such a leader, and to think that being in the FFA got all of us there.

The rest of SPC was just as cool though, because we ran all over D.C. on our 3 buses (Rach and I of course had the coolest bus), toured all kinds of places, and even experienced the Changing of the Guard and a Wreath-Laying Ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery. We did more delegate work, we decided on the committees for National Convention, all of the state officers took an entire morning to meet with their senators and representatives on Capitol Hill, and we ended the week at Six Flags. I got to hang out with my teammates, my family (this is the only conference that our families get to see us present, so it's pretty special), and some of the coolest state officers across the country. This week was definitely one of my very favorite weeks this year—thanks to all of the cool people around me.

After SPC, we all went home for a couple of days, and then I met back up with Brian and Jay in Indy for a Toyota visit. We spent a day at King's Island with girls from Holly Hill, a girls home in Kentucky, and then met with some of the top executives from Toyota. We had a blast, because Toyota is one of our biggest supporters and we got to thank them and tell them a little more about the FFA.

Then the three of us headed back to Indianapolis to begin our first week of convention planning! I couldn't believe it, August was already here and it was time to get ready for the 78<sup>th</sup> National FFA Convention. It was really good to spend some time with my team—we had to do a lot of planning and make some decisions for convention, but as always we found time to make fun of each other, get into a little trouble, and make some serious memories in the FFA Center. We started working on our retiring addresses, we heard the first version of the FFA theme song (you all are going to love it—it's awesome), and we began preparations for the last event of our year as national officers. The week was a little rough for me, because I spent three days cooped up in my room with tonsillitis and strep throat (oh yeah, I couldn't just get one, I had to get 100% sicker than a dog). But thankfully, my loving teammates took care of me, actually I think they liked it because I couldn't talk, and after some good strong antibiotics, I finally got better. JUST in time to go on our team's fall retreat.....to Disney World!



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We headed down to Orlando, and then it was all play and no work. We ate our first meal in Florida at the Olive Garden (a team favorite) and then stayed our first couple of nights at the lovely Florida FFA Center. When we first got there, all of the Made For Excellence and Advanced Leadership Development (MFE and ALD) presenters were there so we hung out with them. We got our own cabin, so we spent a lot of good quality time watching movies together. Then the next day, we went on a boat ride to find some alligators (but we only found a baby one), we went on a fishing boat (and Jay was the only one who caught a fish) and we went to on another boat ride that night. It was so nice to relax and hang out with my teammates and our manager, Mr. Wilburn. We definitely caught up on some much-needed sleep and team time. And then, it was time for Disney World. Jackie, Jay and Brian planned one day there, and Rachael, Emily and I planned the other, and let me tell you, I think we hit almost every good ride there is to go on. It was a blast, especially since earlier this year before the Florida FFA Convention I went to Disney World by myself! It's definitely a lot more fun when you go with your friends!

So anyway, that's what I've been up to for the past month—time is winding down and convention is getting closer. I hope all of you are doing great, and I can't wait to see you at convention. Take care until next time!

**July 14, 2005**

**Where I'll be next: Washington Leadership Conference, then State Presidents' Conference in Washington, D.C.**



Last time I talked to you all, I was finishing up in Florida with my last state convention, and headed to NLC SO, the conference we present for state officers. Well, I guess I really didn't know what I was getting myself into, because the past 4 weeks have been some of the most amazing, tiring, stressful, rewarding, and memorable weeks of this year. One of my big struggles as a national officer has been the fact that as soon as I meet people and get to know them, it's time to leave again. That was probably the coolest thing about NLC SO for me—I was able to spend some real quality time with state officers across the country, and I left each conference feeling like I truly made some new friends.

But one thing I haven't mentioned about NLC SO was the fact that I got to travel with one of my teammates, since we present in pairs, and I was lucky enough to be



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paired with the talented Jay Kelley. After spending the past three months traveling to state conventions by ourselves, it was so nice to have someone to fly with, eat meals with, and just to hang out with. And Jay and I definitely bonded over making flipcharts, hanging decorations, and of course, presenting NLCSO. This was the first year that the national officers together presented 10 conferences, and Jay and I got to take four of those. And our four conferences in Nebraska, Tennessee, Utah and South Carolina just happened to be back-to-back. So like I said, we have barely had time to breathe in the last 4 weeks!

We started out in Nebraska, my home conference, and it was good to be in the midwest. The conference was in Aurora, Nebraska (a tiny little town) at their leadership center. Jay and I arrived in town a couple of days early, so we could prepare ourselves for the first conference. And I also turned 21 in Aurora, so Jay was nice enough to take me out to eat for my birthday! Finally the state officers started arriving—the states attending this conference were Nebraska, Kansas, South Dakota and Minnesota, and after the first session, we knew we had some pretty cool people on our hands. It was one awesome conference—we couldn't have asked for a more hard-working, dedicated, open-minded group of people. And just so you all know, NLCSO is a tough conference. There is a lot of information to learn in a short amount of time, and they set the bar high in Nebraska. From quoting Anchorman to making fun of each other (they were mostly making fun of Jay and I) to singing random songs at lunchtime, we made a whole lot of memories in those four days. And not only that, but those state officers left even more ready to serve their respective associations.

The South Dakota officers came in with a lot of heart, and they had such an incredible work ethic throughout the week. They learned a lot about themselves, and I know that together, they will serve to the best of their ability. Then there was the Minnesota team—talk about some enthusiasm and energy! They added life to the conference, and Jay and I were so thankful for that. They have a big team, but they do a great job of including everyone and utilizing their different strengths. The Kansas state officers blew us away with their sincerity, and belief in each other. They were solid—they knew why they were there, and they were always right with us in every session. And the Nebraska team—what a complete state officer team. They have just the right mix of humor, reflection, support and work ethic. I have to give a shout out to them, because they helped us set up and take down, and were always there to lend a helping hand.



Jay and I were so lucky to start out with such a great conference, and since it went so well we decided to celebrate our success in Lincoln before we headed out to the next conference. We watched a couple of movies and ate at Famous Dave's, and then went shopping! It was a nice break. Then we headed out to Paris, Tennessee.



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Now getting to Paris was quite the fiasco. We flew into Nashville and walked around the Grand Ole Opry Theater, ate at this very cool restaurant called the Aquarium, and then started our drive (in our gold Monte Carlo rental car—we talked them into giving us a cool car) to Paris. Well, it turns out that Paris is in the middle of nowhere, and when you are trying to find a place in the middle of Tennessee when it's dark outside. It was quite the adventure! We finally found the place—it was actually a state park. After experiencing a few small challenges when setting up and making several trips to Murray, Kentucky for supplies, we were ready for NLCSO #2. The states attending were Tennessee, Kentucky, Michigan and Florida, and it was amazing how much the personality of the conference changed with the difference in state officers. This was our toughest conference, mainly because we had to cram it all into two and a half days. Thank goodness for those state officers though, because to have learn all of that so fast really takes it out of you. And even though our duct tape didn't hold up because of the humidity, we spent a lot of hours in a tiny little room, and there wasn't a lot of spare time to enjoy the park, we still had a good time. We laughed, we made fun of each other, and we drank a lot of sweet tea (even at breakfast)!

The state officers, oh they were characters. Tennessee has a team of eight girls this year, and they were a ball! Those girls are so close as a team, and I was so impressed with their desire to serve this year. We did a lot of girl talking, and they were great hosts for the conference. The Kentucky state officers, wow, now they are a crazy bunch. When we needed a laugh, they were there, when we needed a break, they were ready, and when we needed someone to yell at us and tell us we were going to fast, they were there. But really, they were real people, sincere and doing their best to come together as a team. The Michigan team probably grew the most during those 3 days out of all of our conferences. They have a huge team, and they had been elected the longest, so they had some challenges to overcome. But talk about commitment—they always spend extra time in the team challenges, they talked to Jay and I about how to better their team, and plain and simple, they worked hard. The Florida officers are talented, professional, aware, and supportive of each other and of Jay and me. We were thankful to have them there, incredibly thankful—they are close knit and I can't wait to see how this year goes for them.

After Tennessee's conference ended, we had to rush out in a hurry to our next conference. We took a really early flight to Las Vegas (where Jay gave me a short tour—it's a great city!) and then drove out to another place in the middle of nowhere—Bryce, Utah. We had a good ole Chevy Classic this time, and while it had a little trouble climbing the mountain, we did make it. The conference was near Bryce National Park at a little resort there, and it was absolutely beautiful. I had never been around mountains and canyons like that, and it just took my breath away. Tiffany Sanderson, the lady in charge of NLCSO, was there, and she treated us to a Sunday morning airplane ride over the canyon—what a good way to start off the conference! (Did I mention that the theme of NLCSO was "Dare to Soar" with airplanes and aviator glasses?) Then that day, with a lot of help from Tiffany setting up, we got the conference started. Again, the conference



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was completely different than the first two because of the different personalities of the state officers, so they kept it interesting for us. And they impressed us right off—they were focused, full of energy, and their attitudes were amazing. We had 5 states at this one—Utah, Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico and Colorado. Even though we came in a little worn out from the first 2 conferences, there is no way we could have stayed that way. This was one crazy conference—it was five whole days long, and we did everything from taking a hike down in Bryce Canyon and up through the mountains (where the Arizona officers about died because of the altitude!) to spending the Fourth of July at a rodeo (where several of the state officers entered the bull riding competition—no kidding—and we ended up with a broken arm and bruised shoulder) to taking dance lessons to yeah, learning a little NLC SO! We had a good time, and we definitely got to know everyone really well at this conference.



The Arizona team brought their A-game, hands down, and continued to amaze me with their professionalism, yet fun-loving attitudes. New Mexico kept the energy level high—they know so many songs! They were always wanting to help us get everyone up on their feet—their enthusiasm and unique way of looking at things was very helpful. Then there was the Nevada team—the smallest team, yet a team full of heart. And most definitely committed to their role as state officers—I think they truly got something out of NLC SO. Colorado was a rowdy bunch—they got along great, they kept things in perspective, and they kept us smiling. And Utah, our wonderful hosts, now they were characters! The girls were so sweet, the guys cracked me up—I think they will have a great year. Jay and I definitely have some hilarious and.....interesting memories from the Utah NLC SO. It was hard to say good-bye—since the conference was so long, we all got really close, kind of like one big family. If you ever get the chance to go to Bryce, Utah, definitely go, it's quite the experience!

Finally, from Utah we headed to Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, for our last and final conference. Now Jay and I had a plan for this one—we decided since we were going to



be on the beach, then we needed a cool rental car. So I talked the Avis people into letting us drive a convertible at the same cost! It was awesome—rolling with the top down in central Myrtle Beach, we felt pretty cool. The conference was held at a hotel right on the beach, and this Kansas girl was in heaven. Jay and I had to remind ourselves that we were there for NLC SO, not to tan on the beach! No, just kidding, this was a great conference to end on. It was a lot smaller than our other three—only three states—North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia, so it also



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had a completely different feel. Very relaxed, very personal, very real—the state officers took in the information that we gave them, talked about it as a team, and then put it to use. South Carolina was a wonderful host—they thought of everything, and we appreciated that so much. One special thing about the S.C. NLCSO was that we got to take in dinner and a show at the lovely Dixie Stampede. And Jay and I even got to take part in the show—we rode in a horse race! (Ok, it was a stick horse, and the state officers will probably make fun of us for the rest of our lives.....) We had reflections on the beach, we drank even more sweet tea, and we closed out NLCSO with a bang. The South Carolina officers came in ready to work and ready to serve. They brought their optimism and their sense of humor (yeah, you all are going to get it for that alarm clock), along with the North Carolina officers, who grew so much during the week. They were open to improvement, which is one of the best things we can ask for in state officers. And the Georgia team, they were solid leaders, for each other and for the rest of the conference. They demonstrated character and values for all of us—so we had an all-around good NLCSO!

Jay and I did make it through our four back-to-back NLCSO's, and we decided to celebrate our success by staying an extra day in Myrtle Beach to relax. Of course, with our luck, it rained all day, but we still had fun on the beach. It was actually my first time to swim in the ocean, and I have to say, it was a little different than swimming in the Hardtner Swimming Pool!

Anyway, we returned our little convertible and flew into Indy to meet up with our teammates—who we hadn't seen for almost two months! We were all in town for the Board of Directors' meeting, our second one, and it was definitely good to see everyone again. We got to have some pretty important discussions and flex our parli-pro skills, and of course hang out with Dr. Case! Our team always enjoys the board meetings, because it's really our chance to let the board know exactly what FFA members are doing, and all of our opinions on things. So we spent three days in retreats and committee meetings and we spent the rest hanging out as a team. Then the time came for everyone to split again. I'm now headed to Washington Leadership Conference for a couple of days, where I'll meet up with the rest of my team to start planning for State Presidents' Conference! I'll talk to you all again soon!



**June 17, 2005**



**Where I'll be next week: Nebraska NLCSO, then Tennessee NLCSO**

Wow, convention season is over—I can't believe it. Since my very first state convention last March in Michigan, I've been traveling all over experiencing

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the different personalities of each state at all of their state conventions. And I think I can honestly say that I have made some of the best memories of my life in the past three months. It amazes me how unique each state is, from the accents to the food to the people to the state officers and state staff to even the weather, it's always a surprise when you land at the next state convention. But the kindness, the open arms, the sense of family that comes with each state is what truly amazes me. Coming in as a complete stranger, you expect that you will get weird looks and lots of stares, yet instead you get hugs and gifts and quality time with chapters—it doesn't get much better than that! Anyway, as you can tell, I have loved my state conventions, and my last three in Kansas, Louisiana, and Florida put the icing on the cake.

From the Nebraska COLT conference, I went home to Kansas for the good ole Kansas FFA Convention. Now I was a little nervous, because I had heard from past officers that your home crowd is the hardest crowd to speak to, because they have such high expectations for you. But really, there is no place like home! I got to Manhattan (that's where Kansas State is, and our state convention is held on campus every year) a few days early to help out with any last minute details. I got to help the state officers some with their retiring addresses (Dan, Sarah, John, Jarrod, Leah, and Blair—I love you guys!) and run errands for our convention crew, and it was definitely good to catch up with my state officer team over some Famous Dave's BBQ. And then I had the privilege of driving to Kansas City to pick up the other keynote speaker for convention, you may have heard of him.....Mr. Brian Hogue! That's right, Kansas was lucky enough to have Brian come this year (he had some home time so he decided to spend it in Kansas), and it was a blast showing him what Kansas was all about and introducing him to all of my family and friends. So we were the Dynamic Duo all week, because we actually did a lot of speaking together during convention. From speaking to the candidates to presenting a couple of workshops (which went great, thanks to some very cool Kansas FFA members) to sharing our thoughts on the National Amendment and bringing a National FFA update to the delegates, we kept ourselves out of trouble that week. And of course, we both gave our keynotes during convention. Everyone in Kansas absolutely loved Brian (how could you not?) and it was so nice to be in front of my home crowd, because they were so supportive—I almost started crying during my speech! There are so many Kansas FFA members, chapters, and advisors who I credit to getting me here, and there they were again, cheering me on and giving me all kinds of love and support. Thank you all again—I don't know what I would do without you! Kansas also had an extremely cool addition to state convention this year—we had lasers! Exactly like national convention (ok, maybe a little smaller) before the sessions started, it was crazy in McCain auditorium. I was so proud to be from Kansas. And let me tell you, our state choir and band also did an amazing job—there are some extremely talented musicians in our state! So, can you tell that I'm proud of my home state? Anyway, Brian and I had a great time in Kansas, and we even had a couple of days afterwards to drive down to Southern Kansas to my hometown so he could take a little tour and see where I grew up. Brian also got the privilege of eating at my grandparents' restaurant, Yur Place, which if you haven't heard me talk about, is an



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entire journal entry in itself! All in all, our week in good ole Kansas was unforgettable—there is truly nothing like being surrounded by the people you love.

From Kansas' convention, I headed down south to Louisiana, and boy, was I in for a



treat! Now I had heard that the Louisiana convention could get a little crazy at times, and some people were even worried that a Kansas girl like me wouldn't be able to handle it down there, but I'm pretty sure I held my ground. Honestly, Southern hospitality continues to amaze me—from the minute I stepped off the plane in Monroe, La., to the minute I flew out, they took care of my every want and need—I didn't know what to do with myself! Blake was my "escort" and talk about a nice guy—he introduced me to this amazing chicken strip restaurant, where all they serve is chicken strips

(and I can't think of the name—it's driving me crazy) but they are goooood stuff! Mmmm! I arrived early enough to help with some set-up and preparation, although they really didn't let me do too much. Louisiana has an awesome state convention, and a lot of it is credited to their hard-working state staff—Mo, Nick, Tiffany, Sam, Cory and Kelly, I love you guys! The state officers also did an awesome job—talk about some talented speakers who truly loved the FFA members they served—Tyler, Shawn, Amanda, Cade, Chris, Lindsay, Trae, Nikki, Danielle, and Emily, I was so proud of you. There were a lot of extremely talented individuals put together to serve Louisiana, and I think they did a stand-up job. Their convention is basically a mini-national convention. They had a huge career show, with some awesome chapter booths (Springfield—that strawberry jam was to die for), in half of the arena, and then the actual sessions were in the other half. As far as my role throughout the week, basically I had two workshops and a speech, and then I was free to hang out with members and chapters the rest of the time, so it was pretty much heaven. I had one of the best workshops groups I've had all year—thanks to all of you! And the staff even let me help out backstage some, after I begged them enough, so I had a very well-rounded week.

One of the most special things I've done all year happened in Louisiana with 2 different FFA chapters. These two chapters do one of the coolest things—every night after a full day spent at convention, they gather together and review the day. Their feelings, thoughts, things learned, people met, just anything, and they share with each other. It's such a bonding time for the chapters, and the Springfield and Ponchatoula FFA chapters both let me sit in on this special time. Let me tell you, the unity, the support and the respect that goes on in those chapters just amazed me. Thanks to both of you for letting me take part—it was one of my favorite nights all year!

To top the whole week off, I was able to go out to eat with the state officers and state staff and eat some true Louisiana southern food! Gumbo, frog legs, raw oysters, shrimp,



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you name it, I tried it! It was so much fun, and it made me feel even more like family down there. I honestly didn't want to leave—if you haven't been to Louisiana, you need to go, because there are a lot of good, good people down there. Thanks guys—you are absolutely wonderful!

From Louisiana, I headed to my very last state convention, Florida. Now while I was sad to leave Louisiana, I was very excited to go to the land of palm trees, sunshine, and.....Disney World! I had two whole extra days before their state convention started, so I decided, why not go to Disney World? I had never been there, and it had secretly been my dream ever since I was a little girl, so even though I was by myself (kind of sad huh), I bought my ticket. I opted for the Magic Kingdom, and while I was by myself and my team made fun of me for going to Disney BY MYSELF (and riding rides, no less), it was a truly magical time. Just like the commercials.

But then the fun really got started as everyone began arriving for state convention. For once, I was one of the first ones there! Florida's convention was different from any other convention I had been to, for one because the state officers campaign for office. The two candidates for president, Brady and Hannah, were some of the first people I met, and I have to admit, I immediately fell in love with Florida FFA members. I met all of the candidates for state office, and I'm glad I wasn't a delegate, because they had a lot of tough decisions to make. But probably the best part about Florida's convention was the fact that the first thing the state staff told me when I got there was to spend as much time as possible hanging out with FFA members. I presented two workshops and also gave a keynote during one session, but other than that, my time was well-spent eating at Boston Lobster Feast with a couple of chapters (thanks for teaching me how to eat lobster guys!), talking about Vera Bradley purses with some Florida girls, spending an entire day at the mall with some incredible middle school students, chatting with some past state and national officers from Florida that I know and love, and having a ball.

And the sessions, oh the session, they were amazing. Ronnie Simmons, a past national officer, constructed the stage and backdrop to look exactly like the national one, and with their awesome sound system, you just got chills up and down your spine in that convention ballroom. About 3,000 members attended the convention, and talk about a pumped up crowd. Of course, it was easy to do with Melissa, Tori, Erin, Hunter, Alonda, Jenna, Hope and Evie leading the way. Their excitement, passion, and incredible love for the Florida FFA was written all over their faces, and honestly, Florida was lucky to have them serving as state officers.

Now one thing you have to know about Floridians is that they LOVE to dance. I mean love it. And I was lucky enough to give my keynote in the session right before the dance. So everyone was so pumped up that I could hardly get through the thing, they were cheering and yelling so much! It was great, it was exactly how a state convention should be. And then, I was educated on the art of the dance. I'm not exactly the greatest dancer in the world—we just don't learn how to do that in Kansas—so they tried, they tried hard, to teach me, and I thank you all very much! It was fun though, just being there and



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seeing the excitement on everyone's faces. Florida has a huge middle school membership, which I hadn't been around much this year, and it was so neat for me to see a younger crowd getting introduced to FFA.

One other cool thing I found out while I was in Florida was something actually very special for me. Back in October, when I was home after national convention, my chapter was collecting goods to ship in a FedEx truck to the Florida hurricane victims. Well I was able to meet the FFA chapters that those items went to, and I realized the power of service in our organization. It was so special for me to meet those advisors and FFA members who had benefited from my chapters' help. That pretty much topped off the week. Finally, the new state officers were elected at the end of the week, and with Brady, Hannah, Erin, Becca, Kevin, and Andrea as the new leaders of Florida, there is no doubt in my mind that this year will be a good one.

Thanks again to everyone in Florida for a wonderful week, and for a very special last state convention! I'm now headed off to begin an NLCSO (National Leadership Conference for State Officers) tour with my good friend Jay Kelley. I'll let you know how they all go!

### **May 27, 2005**

Where I'll be next: Kansas FFA Convention, then Louisiana!

Well, a few weeks later, and I'm back—as always, I hope you are all doing great and enjoying the beautiful months of summer! Last time we talked I was in Maryland partying it up at their state FFA convention, and then I headed straight to Maine, but not without some serious traveling troubles. It turns out that when you want to go to Maine, you have to work pretty hard to get there! I attempted to fly out of Baltimore, but unfortunately my flight got cancelled, so I hung out in the airport for 4 hours, and then flew to Philadelphia. After a little time and a lot of caffeine, I headed to Boston. Let me tell you, the Boston airport and I got to be good friends—after 2 flight delays, they finally let my little puddle-jumper depart to Presque Isle, Maine. Immediately, I could tell that Maine was going to be a little different than anywhere I had been, because even the flight attendants and everyone on my flight was already like one big family, joking with each other and having a ball—it was great. I got there, only 10 hours later than I was supposed to, and I had the privilege of being picked up by Mr. Marquis and Brandon. They took such good care of me—carried my luggage, bought me dinner, took me to Wal-Mart to get workshop supplies, and then even helped me check in to my hotel and proceeded to carry my luggage straight to my door! I don't know what I would have done without them. That's when my crazy week in Maine began. My time in Maine was different, because instead of just flying in for the convention, speaking, and flying out, I got to see the whole state and visit several chapters. It was awesome—I miss the chapter level so much, and it took me right back to my high school FFA days.





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I started off the week with Mrs. Jones of the Fort Fairfield FFA where I presented workshops for an 8<sup>th</sup> grade class and a workshop for some of the chapter officers. They also treated me to some good ole school lunch, and a tour of their school! Their energy and dedication to stepping it up in their FFA chapter just amazed me—I was so proud of them! Then, I was off to Easton with Mr. Marquis (Kevin) for the afternoon and night, and boy I didn't know what I was getting myself into! They showed me just what Maine was all about! I spent some time at the school, touring and meeting administrators with Amy and Tessa, I presented one little workshop, and then after school let out, we were off—on our official tour of Easton. First it was a tour of a local saw mill, then a potato house, and at 5:00 p.m. on the dot.....the fire station! The volunteer fire department in Easton is extremely strong, and there were several FFA members (go Kyle!) who were part of it, which I thought was very cool. I got to take a ride in the prize fire truck, and I learned all about the gadgets firemen use to save lives. By that time, we were getting hungry so we headed down to Ferris' Gas Station for some of the best pizza I have ever had. And it was there that I found.....pocket duct tape! Who knew? Well, we got into a conversation about school projects and Brandon (current state sentinel) told me about his project of reconstructing Lincoln's casket. He said that I needed to take a picture in it (I admit, I was a little weary), but we ran to see it, and it was very neat (and yes, I took a picture in it). It was starting to get dark, but we still had a lot of country to see! I got to step across to the Canadian border (I was pretty excited) and take a picture, then drive around on some country roads in the yellow school bus just hanging out with my Easton friends. We ended the night at a real-live potato farm, complete with numerous potato houses (which intrigued me to no end). All in all, it was one unforgettably "wicked" night (Maine people LOVE the word wicked), with jokes (you know what kind Easton), duct tape talk, Maine slang words, and just a good time.



After recovering from my wild night with Easton, Mrs. Perry picked me up and drove me to Ashland for another full day of chapter visits. I found out that Ashland is the northernmost town in Maine before it turns into pure trees, which I thought was interesting. When I got there, I presented to a very pumped-up freshmen class about what the FFA has to offer, taught the 8<sup>th</sup>-graders all about FFA, and then spent some time training the older leaders of the FFA chapter and other organizations on leadership and teamwork. They also treated me to some school lunch, and then Taylor Putnam came to shuttle me to Mars Hill. While I didn't get to spend a lot of time presenting to classes, I did meet some cool people, and I also got to attend the school Talent Show! That was something I hadn't been to in awhile, and it was very refreshing. For the next



few hours, Taylor showed me the true countryside of Northern Maine, and we started our never-ending moose hunt. See, my entire week in Maine, I was determined to see a moose, and everyone was on the lookout for me, but I still haven't see one. Don't worry you guys, I will be back up there someday, and I'm going to see a moose if it's the last thing I do!



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That night we went out to eat at the Blue Moose (how appropriate) and had some goooood food, complete with Maine-grown potatoes. After some more unsuccessful moose hunting, we all went home, and then the next morning it was time to head down to Bangor for state convention. I was honored to ride down with the Presque Isle FFA, and we just had a ball. We played cards, talked some girl talk (Erica and Danielle), looked for moose, and toured a U.S. Air Force base and fire station. It was so nice to just relax and hang out with FFA members (especially such cool ones)—I love Maine!

Once we got to Bangor, it was convention time—the Maine state convention was small, but mighty. Brittany, Britney, Blake, Nichelle, Darick and Brandon did an awesome job with the sessions, and we did get the crowd pumped up! I was also honored to help out with the creed contest, meet some incredible greenhands, listen in on CDE's and hang out in the student union getting to know all of my Maine pals. The Easton FFA chapter surprised me with a gift during convention—I had commented on their duct tape wallets that everyone had, and they made me one! I was so excited—they autographed it and everything. The last session was by far the biggest one, and something extremely cool happened—the Governor spoke! It is always so important to let government officials know about the FFA, so I was very impressed that he took the time to come and speak. A bunch of awards and scholarships were handed out, and the new state officers were elected—Darick, Brandon, and Matthew, and I just know they are going to do a wonderful job serving Maine this year. After that session and many good-byes, I went out to eat at Olive Garden with one of the ag teachers and his family, and then spent my very last night in Maine in the good ole Bangor Motor Inn. My time there is simply irreplaceable—I met so many good people who sincerely care about each other as well as visitors, and I thank all of you for that! Don't worry, I'm coming back to hunt for that moose!

From Maine, I spent an entire day traveling to my next destination—College Station, Texas for NLCSO (National Leadership Conference for State Officers) training with my beloved teammates. But not without MORE travel troubles—I arrived to find my backpack missing, which the airline still hasn't found! I have all the luck, don't I? Brian picked me up, and we began our week and a half of intense NLCSO training/dress rehearsal. To kick off the week, we had a few days of training/coaching with Mr. Mark Reardon, one of the most talented workshop presenters I have ever met. If it wasn't for his help those first few days, we would have probably been eaten alive in our classes! You see, we put on the entire conference for a college class at Texas A&M to prepare for the real thing with state officers. They enroll in the class for





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credits (it's a leadership elective) and then play along like they are state officers so we can get the feel of the conference. And let me tell you, Jay and I had the most wonderful class—they were so understanding when we messed up, or got confused, and so supportive of why we were there. I have to admit, I was a little nervous going into it because most of them were older than all of us, and I wondered how in the world we were going to teach them! But we learned so much—not only about the conference and facilitation strategies, but most importantly, about the Aggie World! Their mascot is the Aggie (they are a HUGE ag school) and they have all kinds of traditions on campus, which we found very interesting. They have an absolutely beautiful campus, and although the weather was sooo humid, it was nice to enjoy some warm Texas sun! Not to mention, we got some much-needed team time. We grilled out almost every night by the pool, had some water fights, made lots of Sonic runs (yes, I was in heaven) and of course, got ourselves into a little trouble. While it was a pretty stressful 10 days with not much sleep and with a lot of information to learn, we left Texas MUCH better facilitators, pumped up and ready for NLCSO, we were refueled with enough team bonding time to last us until our next gathering. Although it was hard to leave each other (good-byes are just horrible aren't they?), I was headed home for a few days, and I couldn't argue with that! Thanks again Texas A&M for a wonderful stay—I'll see you all at the K-State/A&M football game in the fall (Go Wildcats)!

After some always-needed time at home to do laundry and hang out on the farm, I flew up to Lincoln, Nebraska for their COLT (Chapter Officer Leadership Training) conference. Being from Kansas, I had heard great things about COLT, so I was pretty excited to be a part of it for a few days. Let me tell you, they get down to business up there in the Cornhusker State. Dillon and Laura picked me up at the airport, and once we arrived at TLC (The Leadership Center) in Aurora, NE, I met the rest of the crew—Tony, Kyle, Jaci, Ryan, and Rob, as well as PDA (state staff Pam, Donnie, and Anita). My duties weren't too difficult—present two workshops, bring greetings at the banquet and spend time with Nebraska FFA members. I couldn't argue with that! So I did just that—I sat in on sessions, cheered the state officers on in their WONDERFUL skits about the theme, Mission: Serve, played a little sand volleyball, ate a ton of Hot Tamales and just had a great time. Honestly, I think I can say that this was one of my best weeks as far as meeting and hanging out with FFA members. Everyone was so welcoming (except for all of those K-State comments.....) and I was privileged to eat meals with a different chapter every time. They took me in as one of their own—I learned how to seriously swing dance (it was a little rough at first with a fall, but I got the hang of it!) and experienced a very powerful reflections session put on by the state officers. A bunch of us played a pretty vicious game of Catchphrase, and I even got to catch up with some of my good past state officer friends from Nebraska. It was one incredible week, and like I said, probably my best as far as connecting with FFA members. Awesome job you guys, and thanks for letting me be a part of everything—you better come visit me in Kansas!



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Well, I'm going to end this novel of a journal now before I drive you all insane, but don't worry, I'll be back! Thanks so much for letting me share my year with you—I do appreciate it!

**May 1, 2005**

**Where I'll be next: Maine FFA Convention**

Well, I hope you all are having a great summer—I apologize for not getting these journals posted sooner. It has been crazy lately! I think I left off last time on my way to South Dakota, so I will catch you up.

Let me tell you, I was pretty excited to go to South Dakota because they were fellow members of the central region, but it ended being so much more than that. I got there before convention started, and I was able to stay until after convention was over—that is definitely the best way to go. It's so much easier to get to know everyone and have some time to relax and hang out. When I arrived in Sioux Falls, SD, Chelsea, a past state officer picked me up, and after some lunch, we headed to Brookings where the convention was held. I walked into the South Dakota State gym and immediately got that excited/nervous/anxious convention feeling. The state officers were practicing on stage, so I quickly introduced myself. I already knew Becky, Jason, and Etta, so after I met Nick, Alex and Crissa, I felt like family! Chelsea and I then decided to go check on the state officer candidates. Now there were some dedicated people! I found out that in South Dakota, the state officer process is pretty grueling. They don't start interviews until the actual convention starts, and they don't interview during sessions, so what that means is extremely late nights (3 to 4 in the morning) for those candidates. There were 25 of them, and honestly, every single one deserved to be there. I spent almost every night of convention hanging out, playing "Big Bootie" (it's a long story), eating pizza, and doing anything possible to help them stay awake and full of energy for interviews. And they really had an impact on me—my time in South Dakota was simply incredible because of those 25 FFA members.



But don't get me wrong, the rest of convention was awesome too—this was by far the most production agriculture-oriented, good ole cowboy, everyone-wore-belt-buckles-and-loved-country-music convention I have ever been to, and it was so refreshing. The theme for this year was "Nothin' to Lose" and they couldn't have picked a better theme for their state. Everyone just loves the FFA, and they are in it because they love and support agriculture, and you just don't see that everywhere. The state officers did an awesome job on their retiring addresses, and it was one of the most, if not *the* most well-organized state convention yet, which I loved, because you know how much Justine





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loves organization! I guess I can honestly say there is nothing like the Midwest charm (which I'm kind of partial to anyway) because every single FFA member, advisor, past state officer, state staff (Mrs. Eide, Brad, Jessie, and Jared—you guys rock), candidate, and parent asked me how I was doing, if I was enjoying myself, if I needed anything to eat, and what they could do to help. From their crazy energy and enthusiasm during my keynote, to their patience in my workshop, (it was really hot and no one had eaten lunch) to Matt and Rob teaching me all about the history and sites of South Dakota, to THE DANCE (South Dakotans loooove dancing and they taught me the West River Slide, is that the name?) with Nick and Noelle, I left Brookings absolutely and positively full of energy and passion for the FFA. I was able to be myself and they accepted me, and there is nothing more comforting than that. Thank you South Dakota!

I flew out of Sioux Falls horribly early Wednesday morning and headed for Indy. I was meeting Jay for the Local Organizing Committee meeting, which consists of all the people who are making the convention move to Indianapolis happen. We were kind of nervous about it, because we knew there were going to be some very important people there, and our job was to explain what the FFA was and get them excited about convention, and to thank them for all of their hard work and dedication to the FFA. Well, it ended up being pretty cool. We had so much fun being a part of something so revolutionary, and our job was simply to represent the FFA members. The interesting thing was that most of the people there had no clue what FFA was, so our communications department showed a convention clip video to give them an idea of what they were getting into. Part of the video showed our team getting elected and there were people crying right along with us! Yes, they are definitely excited to have us come to Indy!

After catching up with Jay for the rest of the night and celebrating our success at the meeting with some dinner at Max & Erma's (our favorite restaurant in Indy), we both headed out the next morning. I was lucky enough to fly back home for my much-anticipated chapter banquet! I was so thankful that my schedule allowed me to go home for it, because my chapter and advisor just mean so much to me, especially since I never get to see them.

Since I was home for a couple of extra days, I also did some presentations for other South Barber classes. My mom is a pre-school teacher, so she wanted me to come and talk to her class about my trip to Japan. Oh my gosh, they were so adorable! After always presenting to high school students, it was actually really challenging to present to such little kids, but they really taught me a lot about presenting—make everything very simple, always ask for questions, because people love to ask, and most of all, have fun with it! They were so cute—I taught them some Japanese words and they absolutely loved it. Then I gave another presentation on Japan for the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> grades, where I taught them even more Japanese words, about the tradition of wearing slippers everywhere, and my favorite, how to eat sushi! I gave everyone chopsticks and gummy fish so they could truly experience it—it was hilarious. Then I did a recruitment workshop for the 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grades, and it was a lot of fun because I knew everyone



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and they asked a ton of questions about FFA—hopefully our chapter is going to have a huge freshmen class next year!

Then it was time for my chapter banquet, and let me tell you, it was good to be home. Banquet time is pretty big for our chapter (my advisor, Mr. Gillig, really gets into it)—we have my grandparents' restaurant cater it (mmmmmm, good, good food) and a big slide show, lots of awards, and all that jazz. The chapter officers did a great job—Haley, Amanda, Brook, Emily, Scott, and Lucas, you made me proud! I gave a speech, and I have to admit, I was pretty nervous because I think that they were my toughest crowd to speak to this year! They are all very supportive, but I felt like I had to do REALLY good because I knew everyone. It was also a pretty exciting year because usually, we have a majority of girls on the chapter officer team, but this year we elected 5 guys and only 2 girls! Mr. Gillig just won't know what to do without all of those girls to whip him into shape—Emily, Brook, Chance, Lucas, Scott, Austin, and Justin, you will do a great job this year—try to keep Mr. Gillig out of trouble! It was wonderful being home, and whether or not my speech was perfect, I was reminded again of how much support my chapter and Mr. Gillig have given me. I wouldn't trade you guys for anything! (well.....you DO make fun of me a lot....)

From home, I flew all the way to Baltimore, Maryland for the Maryland FFA Convention. Coming off of my chapter banquet, it was hard to leave home, but once I got to Maryland I knew it was going to be a good week. Convention week started off with a "birthday breakfast" at IHOP with the state officers and Mr. Koerner. The reason it was a birthday breakfast was because they told the waiter it was my birthday and the whole restaurant sang to me! (I'm still going to get you guys back for that!) Then we headed back to the hotel to decorate for convention. The state officers, Bud, Oscar, Julie, Jeana, Katie, Luke, and J.T., came up with a really cool idea to tie in their convention theme to the chapters. The theme was "Another Link On the Chain" and so all year during chapter visits, they had FFA members write their name on a link, and then at convention they linked them all together to hang around the ballroom—it was pretty awesome. When all the members arrived, it was time to kick off convention. That night I just got to hang out with everyone while they prepared for state CDE's, and then the next morning the actual convention began. There were about 300 members in attendance, and it was so much fun because they were like one big family. Besides doing some workshops, judging the



Ag Issues CDE, and bringing greetings at a couple of the sessions, my time in Maryland was primarily spent chatting it up with FFA members—my very favorite part of this year. I also spent some serious time with all of the visiting state officers which included Delaware, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and West Virginia (who were obsessed with sugar packets—also a long story), and we deemed ourselves "The Missing

Links" (because of their convention theme), complete with shirts and all. Another



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highlight in Maryland was their hypnotist. Every year right before the dance, they bring in this hypnotist, a lot like national convention, and they pick out a bunch of members and all the state officers to be hypnotized. Well, I tried my hardest to hide because I was hypnotized at national convention in high school and it was slightly embarrassing, but of course, they found me. So I got up there, with all the Maryland and visiting state officers and a bunch of chapter members, and although I didn't make it to the end (for some reason I am a really hard person to fully hypnotize—I'm not sure why), it was pretty funny. Then we all got our groove on at the dance, where I was honored to sport an Easton FFA shirt and also my Missing Link shirt.

Another cool thing I learned was that there is a chapter in Maryland that is made up of primarily students who speak English as a second language. They enroll in the ag program to help improve their English, but they also benefit from being in ag class and FFA as well. Oscar, the state vice president, and his brother and sister, Fernando and Ava, are all from there, and it was so neat to have students from another country getting so much from the FFA.



I had a blast in Maryland, because everyone was extremely down to earth, and they were just there to have a good time. They all knew the state officers really well, so when they gave their retiring addresses there were always lots of tears—I know it's hard to believe, but I cried a little too. Before I had to leave, the old and new state officers and I went out to eat at Mr. Koerner's very favorite restaurant—Texas Roadhouse. We ate a ton of those amazing rolls, and stuffed ourselves full of good food. That night I kind of had a hard night after I heard some news from home, and I want to thank the new state officers (5 girls, by the way) for taking such good care of me. They came to my room and brought me this special Maryland spice so I would remember my time there, and then we girl-talked for awhile—it really took my mind off of everything. Thanks girls—that meant a lot!

After I did a little speech training with the new state officers the next morning, it was once again time to hit the road and head to my next state convention—Maine! I will fill you in on all the details as soon as I talk to you all next. Until then, take care of yourselves, and have a great summer!

**April 15, 2005**

**What's coming up: South Dakota state convention, my chapter banquet, and the Maryland state convention!**



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Hello again! Wow, this year is going so fast—I can't believe it is April already. Pretty soon school will be out and my favorite time of year will be here—summer! As always, I hope you are doing well and taking care of yourselves during this busy time of year. Last time I talked to you I was getting ready to start Ag Week in Washington, D.C. We had a great time there—Rachael, Jackie, Brian and I met with some legislators, job-shadowed at the USDA (I shadowed in the Department of Communications and received a good taste of what I want to do after college), visited the American Farm Bureau office and talked to President Bob Stallman (what a cool guy), among other visits around the city. It was a crazy week, becoming pros at traveling on the Metro, walking around in pouring, and I mean *pouring*, rain, meeting with people who were big supporters of FFA and then meeting with others who had no clue what FFA was, and just enjoying our time together. I have definitely learned to cherish my time with my teammates, because with state conventions and a thousand other things going on, we don't get to see each other very often. We made sure to order pizza one night and kick back in a hotel room together to catch up!



Anyway, from Washington, D.C., I flew across the country to Oregon to visit a friend over Easter break. I was sad that I wasn't at home for our big town-wide Easter Egg Hunt, but it was nice to relax and prepare for state convention season. From Oregon, I flew back "home" to Indy for.....the long-awaited Blue catalog photo shoot. I have to admit, I love taking pictures of other people, but I'm not crazy about being in all of those pictures, so I was a little nervous for the photo shoot. My teammates and I are no Cindy Crawford (ok, except for Brian), but we decided we would just grin and bear it and model those FFA clothes with pride. Well we ended up taking more than 2,000 pictures (I know, I about fell over when I heard that!) so hopefully they can find some decent ones to use in the catalog! Please don't laugh too hard when the catalog comes out.....ok, we'll probably be laughing at ourselves too!



Right after the photo shoot, I headed out to Reno, Nevada, for their state convention, but not before a little trouble at the airport. I missed my flight out to Reno, so I took another one and had a 4-hour layover in Los Angeles! This small-town Midwest girl was not prepared for that city—even the airport was quite different from what I'm used to. Everyone was in such a hurry and no one smiled or said hi, I was ready to get to Reno! So, finally, I made it there and was met





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at the airport by two of the state officers, Jessica and Ashlee, and then we headed to the University of Nevada-Reno, where the state convention was held. That afternoon there were a lot of CDEs going on, so I went and watched some extemp speakers and then met up with the visiting state officers, Katie from California and Greg from Washington. We met up with Tim and Callie, two state officers from Virginia, and grabbed dinner before the session. Convention kicked off that evening with the first session and then one incredible reflections presentation by the Nevada state officers, John, Molly, Lauren, George, Ashlee, Jessica, and Jessie. The Nevada FFA members were an extremely close-knit group—there were only 334 at the convention, but I had a blast with all of them. One of the coolest things I have seen this year was when we all (the whole convention and I) went roller-skating! It's tradition every year for the whole crew to go, and they even let me in on it. And while I'm not the most coordinated person in the world, everyone was so helpful and patient while I made my around the rink holding onto the wall!



There were some special people in Nevada---they were truly a family, and every day I spent in Reno at the convention, I became closer to them. Let me tell you, I have never had more participation in my workshop than my Friday group in Nevada. In particular, the Sierra Nevada FFA chapter took me under their wing. Shyla, Taylor, Greg, Sammie,



Austin, Mr. Buffington and the gang took me and the visiting state officers to lunch one day, and I have never laughed so hard!

After listening to some amazing retiring addresses by the state officers, hanging out at the dance and eating enough Tootsie Rolls to make me sick (Tim), watching Napoleon Dynamite with the delegates (and George—nice dancing by the way), and encountering the Awful-Awful Burger in downtown Reno with the past state officers, the Nevada FFA Convention came to an end. But my time in Nevada didn't end quite yet. John, the state president, Tim, Callie, Greg, and some of John's friends and I took a road trip up to Lake Tahoe. It was absolutely beautiful, just breathtaking, and while the water was very cold, it was some of the clearest water I have ever seen. We actually drove around the entire lake, and after a quick dinner, we headed back to Reno. While we had a few spills (Callie), drove without headlights for a few minutes, ate a thousand more Tootsie Rolls, and laughed A TON, it was a wonderful end to my time in Nevada.

I took a red-eye flight to Indy to meet my team for our test pilot on NLCSO (national leadership conference for state officers). As always, it was wonderful to hang out with my team, and although we were pretty busy learning the conference material, we did make time for fun. For some reason, when we are together we always get ourselves in



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trouble.....let's just say Mr. Wilburn had a lovely surprise waiting for him in his office on his birthday!

From Indy I went to one of my favorite places in the United States—Kansas! And since I haven't seen a lot of my Kansas State friends this year, I spent some time in Manhattan. I went to an agriculture policy debate (I know, I'm a nerd) and saw one of my favorite professors, visited the Little American Royal and ate some good food, and saw many of my good friends. I have definitely realized how important your friends are, and sometimes, even though things are really busy, you just have to take time to hang out and have fun! Anyway, after a few days in Manhattan, I went home for some spaghetti and broccoli (my favorite meal every time I go home) and to spend some time with the family. Besides the normal lack of cellphone coverage and Internet (ok, we do have Internet, it's just really s-l-o-w), I had a wonderful and relaxing time at home. Next up, South Dakota state convention! Take care of yourselves, and as always, e-mail if you need anything!

**March 19, 2005**

**Where I'm at this week: Washington, D.C.**

I hope this finds all of you having a great spring and getting ready for state conventions! I have been happily busy since I talked to you last after National FFA Week. From California, I traveled with my team (yes, we were reunited and it was a happy day) to Cassopolis, Michigan, for a team retreat. But this wasn't just any old retreat place; it was the Edward Lowe Foundation. Edward Lowe is the man who invented kitty litter! Anyway, he started a campsite, if you will, where young entrepreneurs can get away from their busy lives and experience a week in the country. We stayed in remodeled boxcars and ate some wonderful home-cooked meals. We basically had the whole place to ourselves, and while we were there with about six feet of snow, we accomplished a lot of work and had a lot of snowball fights too! The first of the week was spent working on state convention speeches and bonding with our teammates, and the second half was spent learning the material for our National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO) and planning State Presidents' Conference (SPC). I have to say, it was one of the most productive weeks of the year. We were cut off from most communication, and we had the help and advice of our fellow teammates, but there were also separate workrooms so we could all split up and study our speeches. All in all, it was relaxing, productive, and lots of fun---exactly what we needed before busy state convention started!





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After a quick trip back to Indy to grab our luggage, Emily and I headed off on business and industry week #2 with J.R. to Louisville and Chicago. It was a crazy week, because after Tuesday, Emily had to leave for home and I had to leave for the Michigan state convention. Then I joined back up with J.R. on Friday for some more visits. But that week in Louisville we met up with Charlee Doom, the Kentucky state president, and Christi with the Kentucky Foundation, and visited the Mayor, Fifth Third Bank, UPS, Paradise Tomato (where the pizza sauce for every pizza place except Papa John's is made), Hosting.Com (where ffa.org is housed) and the Louisville Convention Bureau. We also went to Fastline Publications and visited with a sponsor's board member, and he gave us a ride in his incredibly fast car! Everyone in Louisville was very excited to see us, but definitely sad that our convention is leaving. Before going on those visits, I guess I never realized how much Louisville enjoys having us there for convention. Everywhere we went, they told us how nice and respectful all the "blue jackets" always are and that they love when October rolls around because they get to meet all of us! I think that says quite a bit about our organization.

From Louisville, I flew to Lansing, Michigan, for my very first state FFA convention. Let me tell you, I was so excited and nervous and anxious, all at once. I didn't really know what to expect, because all I knew was how we had state convention in Kansas. Scott (the convention director) and Ryan (Michigan state president) picked me up at the airport and since it was late, I went right to bed. The next day we started bright and early with some convention practices and then the CDEs

began. I watched some of the Ag Science presentations, along with a different contest they have in Michigan called Demonstration, where they explain with props how to do something (like how to build a dairy barn or a deer feeder). I presented my workshop



that afternoon to some very cool FFA chapters, Mason, Blissfield, and Vicksburg, and had a blast. I also experienced something that took my breath away...the biggest FFA jacket ever made! It was 5 feet tall, size 100 and made by the official distribution center, complete with real emblems, actual pockets, and everything. The Springport FFA had it made in honor of their national chapter award, and they had it on display at convention. I was so impressed!



That night we had another session and the Michigan FFA was fired up, thanks to some very talented state officers. Ryan, Matt, Nathan, Doug, Aaron, Jake, Nicole, Melissa, Dustin, Jeff and David, you guys rock! I gave my keynote that night, and I couldn't have had a better audience. They were so pumped up, and truly listened to what I had to say,



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which meant a lot to me. I was so impressed with the Michigan FFA during my time there, and they deserve huge congratulations for such a successful convention.

The next day, all of the delegates got on buses to go to the Capitol where they met with legislators and were introduced on the House and Senate floor---talk about something very cool! I was so honored to be a part of it. Then we all headed back to another session, where we awarded the outstanding junior and state degree recipients, and then I spent my last few hours at the state degree banquet. Although I was only in Michigan for two days, I became so close to the FFA members there. They really took me in as one of their own, and it was very hard for me to leave them! Thank you Michigan, from the bottom of my heart, for being an amazing first state convention, and keep in touch!

After tearing myself away from good ole Lansing, Michigan, I caught a quick flight to Chicago, where I met back up with J.R. and two Illinois state officers, Rich and Cliff. We spent the next day visiting businesses in Chicago, including Rhea and Kaiser, Nufarm, and Toyota (where we got to drive, really drive, the new Hybrid Priuses!). Rich and Cliff kept me laughing all day, and we had some really good visits. Those visits are so important because they are what keep our organization running, so thank you to Rich and Cliff for doing such a great job!

From Chicago, I was able to go home for a couple of days, which couldn't have come at a better time. My mom was directing a play in our community theater, *Oliver*, and I had been hoping I could get home to attend. I grew up around a lot of music and theater, so our family really gets into plays like this. We have a fancy little dinner theater where my grandparents' restaurant cooks the steak dinner and then everyone in the community gets to have a night on the town! Then, I found out the next day was movie night for our FFA chapter, so I went to the Chieftain Movie Theater (definitely a small-town establishment) and watched *Hitch* with my FFA chapter. It was one good weekend at home!



On Monday I flew straight to Albany, New York, for the PAS (Postsecondary Agriculture Students) National Convention. PAS is an organization for college students that is very similar to FFA and there are a lot of past FFA members. They compete in different events, just like we do, and there were sessions and speakers and tours, but mainly, the difference is that they are there to build a career. The whole point of being

in PAS is to focus on your career goals in agriculture with internships, career skills, and networking. On Tuesday, before the convention started, I traveled with 600 PAS students to New York City and toured Times Square, Ground Zero, the Empire State Building, the Statue of Liberty, and a few other NYC sites. One of my dreams has always been to visit NYC (I think it's the actress in me) so I was extremely excited. Then I spent the rest of the week helping out with the convention—running buzzers in the College





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Bowl, helping out with the livestock contest, attending the dance, and representing the FFA. It was a great week for me because I was there with students from colleges across the United States, all my age, and I met some very cool people. The National PAS Officers put on a great convention, and to Lavyne, Sara, Carl, Lance and Mike, thank you for letting me be a part of your convention, and way to go on a successful convention!



Now I sit, in Washington, D.C., preparing for Ag Week in the Capitol. Brian, Jackie and Rachael will join me soon and then we will be on our way to visit with legislators, job shadow at the USDA and promote agriculture education and the FFA. It should be a good week! I hope all of you have a great week, and thanks for taking the time to listen in on my stories. Please let me know if you ever need anything at all, and see you next time!

### February 25, 2005

Hello again! Since we had so many stories and experiences from Japan, we decided to combine them and make one online journal, so the link is below if you would like to read about our trip to Japan.

After a quick trip home to Kansas after an amazing, but exhausting trip overseas, we all returned to Indy for a little more of our most favorite thing in the world—training! We were preparing for business and industry visits, so we visited a current sponsor, Elanco, and they helped us get ready to meet with some very important people. Then the six of us took a little road trip to Ohio for our business and industry kick-off weekend with our Sponsors Board chair, Dr. Dwight Armstrong. It was one awesome weekend—it started off with lunch at the Purdue Ag Alumni Fish Fry, where they don't serve fish, they serve pork! (A few years back, the pork industry was struggling, so the alumni decided to serve pork to support them, but didn't want to change the name because it would confuse people—isn't that a great story?) We listened to Tim Russert speak, and then got back on the road to head to Dayton.



That night, we finally met Dr. Armstrong and his wife, along with his co-worker and his family. After eating some good Italian food, we got the honor of attending a Dayton Bomber hockey game! That was a first for some of us, so we were pretty excited. We sat



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in box seats, ate a TON of food, and even met their mascot! Jackie was especially excited and even bought a jersey. It was a great night.

The next day we attended church with Dr. Armstrong, then visited the official museum of the U.S. Air Force, which was pretty amazing. We watched an I-Max film on fighter pilots, and I truly felt like I was a real-life fighter pilot...wouldn't that be scary? To finish up our kick-off weekend, we made a visit to Dr. Armstrong's business, and then headed out in pairs for our first week of business and industry visits.

My lucky partner was Ms. Emily Horton, and we were headed to Texas with Jana from the Foundation. We didn't know it then, but we were in for a treat. First off, we met Brandi, the Texas state FFA president, as she would be traveling with us for the week. The week was pretty busy, with visits to Justin Boots (where we got to bring home an authentic pair of Texas Justin boots!), Allflex, CiCi's Pizza, King Ranch, the State Fair of Texas, Toyota, and many others. We were in



Dallas, Austin, Houston and San Antonio, bouncing from one city to the next. One night we had dinner with Chad Hennings, a former Dallas Cowboys football player, and he impressed Emily and I very much. The first two questions he asked us were, "What is your opinion on crop subsidies and how do you feel about COOL?" It turns out he grew up on a farm in Iowa! You gotta love it when you meet people like him who care about agriculture.

One of my favorite parts of the week was when we met with a past national FFA officer, Mr. Jim Prewitt. He is a big supporter of the FFA and he is someone I will always look up to. I have to tell you, we were visiting with him in his office at Landmark Nurseries (the business he owns) and he showed such passion and love for the FFA that I shed a few tears right there in front of him! Now that is not always encouraged when meeting with sponsors of the FFA, but then he started crying too and all was good in the world. Sometimes I just can't help myself!





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I will always remember our time in Texas—we met so many kind people who love the industry of agriculture and LOVE the FFA. It's really refreshing to meet people like that, and Emily and I were lucky enough to meet a lot of those people in the great state of Texas. We finished off our week with a quick night on the town in San Antonio, where we attended the Stock Show and Rodeo, and even went to a Clay Walker concert! After a visit to the Riverwalk and Hard Rock Café, we spent our last night in Texas dreaming about Tex-Mex food, the romantic Riverwalk (it was very romantic for Emily, Jana and I) and Clay Walker.....

Emily and I got back to Indy Saturday afternoon and had a day of rest before.....drum roll, please...National FFA Week! I was headed to California for the week, and they had one amazing schedule ready for me. I was traveling with Mr. Small, a member of the Local Program Success team at National FFA and fellow Kansan, and we arrived in sunny California on Monday afternoon. That night we ate a wonderful dinner with the Galt FFA and the California state officers, and it was a great start to the week. I was able to relax and chat with everyone, which is my favorite part of my role this year.



Tuesday was one of the busiest days, with Mr. Small, Ms. Landeen, a regional director, Katie, a state officer, and I, visiting five high schools! Turlock, Pitman, Ripon, Linden and Ponderosa—what a day! It was so much fun for me though, seeing all of the different ag

departments and school farms, and meeting all kinds of FFA members. I even had the chance to attend the Ponderosa FFA chapter meeting—it was so nice because it's been awhile since I attended a good ole chapter meeting.



Wednesday was also very busy, with us traveling to the beautiful Napa Valley (wine country). We visited the East Nicolaus chapter (which reminded me so much of my home FFA chapter), Esparto (where I had so much fun—they welded me a sign and an

exchange student from the Republic of Georgia, Guga, even sang me a song!), Armijo, a





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chapter in downtown Sacramento with a great ag farm, Vintage (smack-dab in Napa Valley), and then headed back to Sacramento for the State Executive Committee meeting and Winter Regional Officer Conference. I ate at Joe's Crab Shack with all of the regional officers, and then chatted with them for awhile, and although I slept great that night, Wednesday was a good day.

Thursday was the big day, the day of the groundbreaking of the California FFA Center! It was so exciting being out there for such an important day in history. First, I made a visit to the Florin FFA, another HUGE chapter, and then Mr. Small and I traveled to the site of the center. Under a big white tent the ceremony took place, complete with remarks from the California Secretary of Ag, CDE presentations, an incredible presentation of the creed from a family generation of creed-speakers, and a ceremonial groundbreaking with gold shovels. I was so impressed with everyone and everything there, and I was so honored to be a part of the day. To top it all off, I traveled with Jesse, Marcus and Grace (3 more state officers) for two more chapter visits, Elk Grove and Nevada Union, both very impressive FFA chapters.

On my last day in California, Mr. Small, Carey, Colleen (both state officers) and I were in Rio Vista bright and early for some workshops, and then finished off the week with a visit to the Delta FFA chapter, where we saw their neat little school and met some great FFA members. Then it was back to Sacramento for one last lunch with the state officers and state staff. It was so hard to leave—although it had been one packed week, I felt like family out there in California. Everyone was so kind and welcoming, and I met more FFA members in one week than I had ever dreamed of meeting. Thank you California, for making that week so special for me, and I look forward to seeing all of you at national convention!

That concludes FFA Week and this journal for you! See, I tried to keep this one a little shorter this time! Take care, and best of luck with state CDE's and conventions coming up. As always, e-mail me if you ever need anything at all!

### **January 25, 2005**

Read all about our trip to Japan! [http://www.ffa.org/students/documents/no\\_japan.pdf](http://www.ffa.org/students/documents/no_japan.pdf)

### **January, 12, 2005**

**Where I will be next week: Washington, D.C.**

Well hello everyone! I am excited to say that this is my very first online journal. Let me tell you, since being elected at convention on October 30, it has been absolutely crazy. My teammates Jackie, Emily, Jay, Brian, Rachael and I took the city



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of Indianapolis by storm after we were elected (which means we got incredibly lost numerous times while driving around in the minivan). We spent a few days in Indy and then flew home for three weeks to finish up school, pack up, say our goodbyes and get on the road. OK, the road was straight back to Indy for training, but it felt like we were beginning our travels!

Training was in store for the next few weeks, including an extremely exciting addition to national officer training, an agriculture tour in California to experience agriculture diversity. While in sunny California, we visited artichoke, strawberry, cauliflower and citrus farms, a lettuce processing plant and many, many others. But I have to say, my favorite part of the trip was visiting FFA chapters. We had the opportunity to visit the Tulare FFA chapters' dairy farm that they own and operate, which was pretty amazing. It



was so great to finally spend some time with those people we love most, FFA members! Then we had the chance to tour the East Clovis FFA chapter and see their amazing facilities. But while the facility was awesome, it was the members who impacted us. Talk

about some passionate people. Visiting those chapters made the trip for us. Not to mention, on the very last day we were lucky enough to eat dinner with the California state officers, Grace, Marcus, Colleen, Katie, Carey and Jesse. There couldn't have been a better finale for such an awesome week.

After the ag tour and some more training at the FFA Center, we spent Christmas at



home and caught up on some sleep (for some reason, we have too much fun together when we should be sleeping), then traveled back to Indy for.....a little more training! But this was different. We had a couple of days to prepare our workshops and speeches and then found ourselves in the lovely state of Georgia for what is called Experience State. We spent the week presenting our workshops and speeches to chapters across the state, and also had the opportunity to visit with



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some top agricultural leaders in the state of Georgia.

The week started off with a night at the FFA/FCCLA Center, which is extremely cool by the way, and then the following morning met with Governor Sonny Perdue at the Governor's Mansion. It was quite an experience! We presented him with his Honorary American Degree because he wasn't able to attend convention, and then chatted about Georgia agriculture and his own agricultural background. He is so supportive of the Georgia FFA, and that is something I wish every state had. That night we traveled to Plains, Georgia, home of President Jimmy Carter, and presented to several area chapters in the historic high school. We also stayed in one cool hotel where each room was decorated from a different decade in the life of President Carter.

Next came Rachael's own stomping grounds, Wilcox County FFA, where she gave a keynote to her entire school and then we all attended a reception with real Southern food. I have a new addiction to sweet and spicy pecans! Wheeler County FFA was our second stop of the day where we hung out with the chapter officers and then I spoke to some potential FFA members in the eighth grade. They were



kind enough to give us each a chapter T-shirt with John Deere plastered on the back! (Emily was pumped—she is definitely a Deere fan) To end our chapter-filled day we presented at the Toombs County Multi-Chapter Leadership Activity and spent some quality time with members from all over central Georgia. The chapter officers there took good care of us and I experienced something great at the dinner table...sweet tea! I did develop an addiction for this too by the end of the week. That Southern food gets to you! Wednesday we had breakfast with the Effingham County FFA officers and administration and once again presented to some very cool FFA members. I had a blast in my workshop there, and want to give a shout out to the Agriculture Technology 2 class for being such great sports! Not far down the road was our next chapter visit to the South Effingham FFA where we were treated with low country boil (another Southern specialty that includes a mixture of shrimp, corn, sausage, and potatoes). Thank goodness



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Paul taught me how to eat it because we don't eat a lot of seafood in good ole land-locked Kansas!

The last part of our Georgia trip was pretty fun-filled as well. We stayed one night in the beautiful city of Savannah and ran in the freezing water of the Atlantic Ocean. We also met with some top agriculture leaders in Georgia and expressed to them our appreciation of their support of the FFA organization. Our last chapter visit was to the Luella FFA where our time was short, but the members were great. We ended our trip at the FFA/FCCLA camp and attended a few sessions of the Mid-Winters teachers' conference where we met some crazy FFA members from the Jackson County FFA chapter (they kept us laughing, that's for sure). We then did our best at conquering the incredible challenge course while covering ourselves in mud at the same time. Sadly, it was time to leave the deep South and head back to Indy, home sweet home. Our week in Georgia was an experience of learning, presenting, laughing, admiring, and appreciating the amazing members that make up our organization. I want to thank everyone who helped make our week in the beautiful South a success; we really do appreciate each and every one of you!

Finally, to end this extremely long journal (I promise they will be shorter in the future), we are currently in Indianapolis for meetings and preparation for the Board of Directors meeting next week in Washington, D.C. From D.C. it is off to Japan for our international experience, and I'm sure I will have some stories when we get back. It should be an interesting next few weeks! I will keep you all updated, and please know that I am always here to help and/or listen, so shoot me an e-mail if you need anything at all!