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The 2001-2002 National Officer Journals

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"As you journey through life, choose your destinations well, but do not hurry there. You will arrive soon enough. Wander the back roads and forgotten paths, keeping your destination in your heart like the fixed point of a compass.

Seek out new voices, strange sights, and ideas foreign to your own. Such things are riches for the soul. And if, upon arrival, you find that your destination is not exactly as you had dreamed, do not be disappointed. Think of all you would have missed but for the journey there, and know that the true worth of your travels is not in where you come to be at the journey's end, but who you come to be along the way." - Anonymous

As much as I enjoyed South Carolina, it was already time for another amazing experience, an international experience! Barrett and I flew to Salt Lake City, home of the 2002 Winter Olympics – gearing up to begin in just a few days. The Olympics business didn't really click with me until we were on that flight ... with the entire Norwegian Olympic team! When we actually arrived, our luggage did not, so we filled out the lost luggage forms with hopes to get our luggage before leaving for Japan. Unfortunately, the airline didn't think that would happen, but told us they would do everything they could to try and have our luggage meet us in Japan. So Barrett and I held our breath during the 14-hour flight to Narita (and I think so did the people sitting next to us since we had been in the same clothes for nearly 3 days! J). When we arrived we were met by our luggage. I don't think I've ever been so nervous, happy and thankful all at once! After grabbing our luggage, we met our tour guide, Hiro, and went to the Narita Airport Resthouse.

Day 1: The day began with an agricultural visit to a muskmelon farm/co-op. Cooperatives were something that I found to be very common throughout the trip because of the small size of Japanese production abilities, and I was very impressed by the fluidity that they worked by. There were numerous different greenhouses on the farm and each one had melons in different stages so that every house was always in production. Very efficient. The producer, a friend of the FFA for many years, explained to us the careful packaging and labeling of the melons, because fruit is a very precious and expensive commodity, and explained how through a farmer number system, any fruit can be traced back to the source. Then we got to try some of his melons and they were AMAZING! He and his wife then shared with us the scrapbook they've been keeping for close to 10 years of different National Officer teams that have visited their farm. It was neat to see how important our visits have been to them all these years! From there we went to a tomato farm where two-thirds of the tomatoes are raised by hydroponics. Then it was off to our first Japanese school experience.

We went to Narita Seiryō High School and it was very fun. After a formal presentation with a majority of the students, Amber, Barrett, Elio, and I participated in a kendo exhibition. Kendo is a type of Japanese traditional fighting with wooden swords. Then we had lunch with the FFJ (Future Farmers of Japan) students, played Japanese

games, and even sang a couple Japanese songs. They gave us a quick tour of their school and then we went to a flower farm. The farmer raises flowers for flower gardens and arrangements, but told us the market is decreasing and to maintain, he also raises rice.

After that, our last visit was to the Tani Fish Farm – aquaculture at it's finest. *Koi*, known in America as carp, bring in quite high dollar amounts – one we saw was worth \$20,000. For a fish! But it really shows how highly these koi are valued as an aesthetic piece of this culture. Mr. Tani also dabbled in some other ventures on his farm, one being a strawberry u-pick, and he let us have about 20 minutes to pick and eat as many as we wanted! It was very good! I couldn't believe in one day we had already seen five very different types of Japanese agriculture, so I couldn't wait to see what the rest of the trip had in store to teach us! That night we got into Tokyo, went to a *yakatori* (kabobs) grill and had a very interesting experience trying new things!

Day 2: Today we started with a visit to a major garden and Shinto shrine. It was our first experience into the realm of Japanese beliefs and was very interesting. The gardens were very beautiful and tranquil – I could see why many people would come here to reflect. Then we went to the South Tower Observatory and from here we could see all of Tokyo. It was pretty amazing – so many buildings in every direction, no city planning, people everywhere, and the constant haze. Hiro explained to us that the haze was because garbage is incinerated to conserve space. From here we went to a Buddhist temple and little street vendor area. They were arranged in little booths that very much reminded me of a county or state fair when you walk through the carnival and there are different booths on either side of the walkway.

Then we changed into official dress and went to Toyota. We met with some of their executives and learned about the company's objectives and breakthroughs. We shared with them about the FFA and its role in preparing students to be successful, and then they turned us loose in the Mega Web showroom. We got to look at new models, ones that aren't even offered in the States, drive prototypes, and I went on a virtual ride with Elio and Barrett. We wrapped up the night with dinner at the Hard Rock Café – Tokyo, and during our dinner we got to sit through a small earthquake. The first for a few members of the team so it was fun to see their reactions!

Day 3: At 6AM we met three Mitsui Company representatives at the Tsukiji Fish Market and I was stunned. It was enormous! It reminded me of Pike's Place Market in downtown Seattle, but multiplied by about 50! I've seen the fish that come through there quite a few times, but we walked through the market and I saw fish and things from the sea that I've never seen or heard of before! I even saw an 800-pound tuna! There are 10,000 employees there and over 30,000 people go through the market daily. There was also a fresh produce market attached that added to the magnitude. It was unbelievable – very cool!

After we got back to the hotel and cleaned up, we went to Victor's Pearls. Another stop many officer teams before us have made and it was very interesting, especially to a female! Diamonds may be a girl's best friend, but pearls are nice too! Mr. Victor taught us how a pearl is formed, both naturally and when cultured, and how we could tell the difference when purchasing them. I got hooked being surrounded by all the wonderful jewelry and got myself a small necklace for a keepsake.

Then it was off to Mitsui headquarters. We spent the rest of the afternoon and the evening with the Mitsui representatives, the major sponsor for our international opportunity in Japan, learning about their trading company and how the Japanese economy works in relation to agriculture. Mitsui is the number one (*ichiban*) agricultural trading company in Japan, as well as a world leader. They gave us formal presentations on the different divisions of the agricultural component to Mitsui and then we had a dinner reception.

In Japan, they say you don't know a man if you only know him in his tie ... and we really saw this. The Japanese have a very high work ethic, so work is very professional, at all levels, and to really get to know someone in this culture, you must get to know him after-hours when he loosens or takes off his tie. At the reception the Mitsui employees who attended did loosen their ties, a little, and we had *sushi*. I found I love it! No kidding! I was not really enthralled with it to begin with, but I found it to be very fresh and enjoyable here in Japan. After the reception, a bunch of the younger Mitsui employees took the six of us out to a karaoke bar and it was so much fun! You pack into a fairly small room with a TV and 4-5 microphones, dial the song you want via a remote, and then get down with your bad self! I had such a good time that I even lost my voice a little from laughing so hard!

Day 4: Our first stop of the day was the U.S. Embassy ... American soil, technically. I think that meant a whole lot more to us by this point after the time we'd been spending in the culture thus far. We were briefed on numerous Japanese issues ranging from politics to economy and walked out of there with not only a greater appreciation of where we're fortunate to be from, but also of the Japanese culture.

Then we took a train to the Tokyo Engei High School, probably one of my favorite experiences. There were beautiful grounds, gardens, bonsai, roses, and even some flowering dogwoods that were a gift from some Americans. Two of the bonsai there were over 500 years old and it was strange to think that these two trees were older than our whole nation. Six other agricultural high schools came and then the fun began. The National FFJ president gave some remarks, we gave remarks, and then they whisked us away to different activities. Dane, Barrett and I were taken to a kitchen and we made strawberry shortcake rolls – very yummy! Meanwhile, Robin, Elio, and Amber made soap. Then we all came back together and tried our hand at pounding *mochi*. This is wet, hot rice pounded into a paste and then something is added to it in a roll; it is a snack equivalent to a Little Debbie® roll. We all tried pounding, until Robin broke the mallet and then we all lost it laughing! Despite the language barrier we experienced here, I was able to connect with many students and that was a cool feeling!

Day 5: The *Shinkansen*, or bullet train, was the first experience of today and we were headed to Aichi. On the way we got a beautiful view of Mt. Fuji, unfortunately as close as we ever got to that Japanese icon. An American icon that I did notice plastered everywhere was my home state baseball player, Ichiro, from the Seattle Mariners. He was in the train on stickers, posters and even on billboards! We were met at the train station by three bubble vans (our affectionate term for the vehicles in Japan because they were all very small and round and reminded us of bubbles) that took us to the Anjo Norin Agricultural High School where we would be meeting our host families. The meeting at the school was pretty much the same as the last few, except for the blonde English-speaking guy sitting among the staff. It turned out he was from Canada and was in Japan teaching English for three years. We took a tour of the school facilities complete with numerous greenhouses, a dairy barn, poultry barn, various animal barn, riding arena, as well as various pieces of equipment. It was pretty impressive for an agricultural high school. After that we had a welcome party with the students and host families and got to watch one of the students do a traditional fan dance.

That night we all went home with our host families and Amber and I were paired together with the Hachisuka's. Mr. Hachisuka, Kikoyoshi, is the PTA president in Aichi and has two children who are FFJ members. While he drove us to our home, we listened to his favorite, the Monkees, and the kids rode their bikes home – a good 30-minute ride. The house was a normal Japanese home ... cold, with tatami mat floors and the Buddha self shrine just inside the door. Amber and I slept on *futons*, but not what Americans think of as futons. They are simply a light mattress on the floor, with lots of blankets piled on top. We had a big feast with the family and had to sit traditional-style, with our feet tucked under us (think of sitting on your knees), and my toes lost feeling numerous times from lack of blood. That is not an easy way to sit, and yet they sit that way all the time! Finally they saw my and Amber's lack of comfort and allowed us to sit with our feet stretched out under the table. We spent a great deal of time trying to converse and it was often a challenge, which would lead to frustration, but we also found unique ways to connect and reach understanding.

Day 6: A whole day with our host families! To start our day off, Amber and I got to sleep in! Then we went to the family hog operation, right in the middle of town. There was no real smell and we learned that it was actually one of the top ten in Japan. Kikoyoshi feeds leftovers from the cafeterias of 5 major companies in the area and saves a great deal in buying feed. From there *poppa-san*, Akiyo – our host sister, Ichiro – our host brother, and Nozumi – our little host sister, took us to a local Shogunate castle that was built by the Tokogawa family. We went to a ramen soup restaurant for lunch and then went to a Buddhist temple where our family goes occasionally. We had dinner at Billy Bob's Steakhouse, which I found ironic in a funny sort of way, and then we went back home and had a grand gift exchange. This is very important in Japanese culture to show appreciation, as well as hospitality. We gave our family various gifts from both our home areas, and then they gave us gifts, the most cultural being a porcelain geisha doll in a glass case. It is beautiful, but it was too kind of them to give us such a large gift on top of opening their home to us! That night Amber, Akiyo and I stayed up talking (girl talk) and really got to know her a lot better!

Day 7: Akiyo, Ichiro, Amber, Kikoyoshi and I all went by train and met the rest of the group in Nagoya and then we all went to the Nagoya Castle. It was another Shogun castle, but unfortunately was destroyed in the wars by fire and had to be rebuilt. Akiyo, Ichiro, Amber and I spent the day together and had a fun last day hanging out, sharing stories, and Amber and I even did an interesting rendition of a rodeo to the amusement of most onlookers! This was the day both Ichiro and Akiyo really opened up so we capitalized on the opportunity to really get to know them before we had to go our separate ways in life. Finally it was time to go, so many pictures were taken, hugs exchanged and we all waved as we walked in separate directions. This was my third homestay experience in a foreign country and each time I am amazed at what close connections can be built between people when hearts and minds are open to experiencing the culture of one another. I think it also makes an individual truly appreciate the family they have back home, as well appreciate where you come from and the wonderful privileges we enjoy as Americans. We boarded another *shinkansen* to Hiroshima and then took a break for the night.

Day 8: A day of pure sightseeing! We first went to the floating shrine at Miyajima – the biggest and most famous *torii* gate ... big, orange and in the middle of a little inlet. It was snowing just a little so we were a bit cold, but it increased the beauty of the little island we ferried out to immensely. On the ferry over, we saw a few floating docks and Hiro explained to us that those were where they were culturing pearls. Once we got to Miyajima, there were “wild” tame deer everywhere and they would walk right up to you, but they were pretty potent smelling! Phew! J We learned that they are believed to be messengers from the gods and so they are protected and even taken care of. The shrine on the island is over 800 years old and while we were there it was some sort of festival and the monks performed a couple rituals involving coals.

After that it was the peace park. This was probably my most anticipated part of the trip and it was incredible. The first thing we saw as we stepped off the streetcar was the Preparatory dome which is still standing, hollowed out, just as it was the day the atomic bomb hit.

Hiroshima was an industrial and military stronghold that had not been hit previously during the war. The bomb exploded 580 meters above the ground with the force of 15,000 tons of TNT. It hit at 8:15 AM on August 6th, 1945. It looked like a blue flash from far away, but was yellow-red at the hypocenter, which reached 2000° Celsius instantly. Survivors called the bomb “*pika don*,” pika for the flash of light and don for the onomatopoeic reference to a thundering sound. The shock wave traveled 11 kilometers in 30 seconds and 80% of those within one kilometer of the hypocenter died that day, the rest within the week.

The whole time we were there I kept wondering things like, what would the destruction have been like if the bomb had exploded on the ground? I tried to imagine seeing all the B-29's in the air, seeing THE one, the flash ... I couldn't. It really brought to reality the history we all learn in the classroom, but never truly understand. Hiroshima has done a beautiful job capturing the enormous destruction of an atomic bomb, but does so in a non-blaming way, but instead in a way to educate people that those weapons should never be used against another human again. This is a city now dedicated to peace and the end of nuclear testing and weapons.

After the Peace Park, we hopped another bullet train and went to Kyoto, our last stop.

Day 9: Today was one big industry visit! First we went to Lake Biwa, home of Yanmar. They produce different engines and even custom-produce. We went to their small engine plant and then they took us to a wonderful lunch. Following that, we went to the diesel engine plant. It was pretty interesting to see how they machine and piece together all the different engines. Then we took the train back to Kyoto, had some free time, and went to dinner, a *pachinko* parlor, and also a little street vendor fair. Dane and I had a blast at the pachinko parlor where we put our hours of watching “Friends” to use – we “lurked” in true Phoebe-style! It was hilarious!

Day 10: We saw some beautiful gardens today at Nijho castle and the Golden Pavilion. They were very simplicity based (traditional Japanese style) and incorporated lots of moss where we would normally put grass. There were also rock gardens that were equally serene and beautiful. We boosted our love-luck at a temple where, if you drank from a certain stream of water, you would be luckier in love. Sure! J The afternoon was pretty much free for us to shop and find little things to take home to family and loved ones. I had a great time doing that! Then we spent quite a bit of time packing because the next night it was time to hop a plane that was headed

home. We grabbed dinner together and then the six of us got crazy and went karaokeing again! It was pretty wacky and wild, but a great time for us to grow together as a team!

Day 11: My last day in Japan and one of two days in my life I can say I've lived twice! It also happened to be Valentine's Day! We got to meet a wonderful Japanese family and share some special quality time with them and then we finally got to eat a Japanese beef bowl. We'd heard about these since before we left the states and to this point hadn't found a place to go. I was sad we had to wait so long to find this place, because it was good! Then we went to the Panasonic research and development building and got to see many of the latest and greatest things Panasonic is coming out with, as well as some really neat and innovative things that won't be on the market for a few more years, but will be HUGE! Then we had to say goodbye to Hiro, who had become a regular part of our group, and we caught our flight home.

Day 12: Still February 14th thanks to the international dateline which gave us a full day to enjoy the beauty and beaches of Hawaii, where we had to connect through! We all bought Hawaiian beachwear and played in the surf and got some rays! It's February, so you'd better believe we burned! Oh well! The boys and I had dinner at Planet Hollywood and then we each spent the evening by ourselves. It was a wonderful break to our trip and really helped us adjust to the time zones back in the states.

Day 13: We had an evening flight back to the mainland so we spent this day playing tourists again! We went to Pearl Harbor and saw the museum and went out to the USS Arizona ... both very poignant historical sites. I was enthralled again. To think of what had happened here and how it might have been at that moment. If you want to understand and see what it looks like for yourself, watch "Pearl Harbor." I saw it before I left and it captures it beautifully. After that we headed up to a north shore beach that my good friend from high school, Jaime, had recommended. It was wonderful! The six of us "jumped" the waves, goofed around together, and even built a sandcastle and village. We had a great time just playing! Then we went to a local high school to shower and change and after that, we met with some Hawaii state FFA officers and members. They had a wonderful dinner for us, taught us about Hawaiian agriculture – I learned that pineapples don't come from trees – and even taught us some island dances. We had a great time with them. Our chaperones drug us away, we got to the airport, and then left our international experiences officially behind us as we touched down back in Salt Lake City.

Day 14: We arrived in Salt Lake and the airport was bustling with Olympic competitors, Olympic guests and eight weary international travelers. I flew to Denver, sitting next to an Olympic gold-medal athlete, and then spent some time with my little sister who is going to school there. I got a little dose of family when I saw Liz, and it was wonderful, but also made me want to see everyone else. So then I said goodbye to her and flew to Spokane where my mom, stepdad and Chuck were waiting!

I love traveling, especially when I get to learn so much. Yes, I can say I've been around the world, but what is more important is that I can say my worldview is expanded. Because of this experience I will always be able to better understand Japanese culture, economics, and politics, all because I lived them. I was a part of them. This journey changed and shaped me. Take journey in your life, learn about and experience things outside of America, and if the opportunity never presents itself for you to need a passport to do that, immerse yourself in one of the many cultures we have right here in the United States. Be willing to learn, gain a new perspective, and to try new things. That is how you will truly grow.

This has been a wonderful and amazing trip that I will never forget, but I think Dorothy put it best when she said, "There's no place like home!"

February 3, 2002

Our lives are but a journey ... filled with paths we each will take. Our joys are found in the love we give and the friendships that we make. - Anonymous

Experience State – South Carolina, baby! J Wahoo! What an amazing time filled with wonderful members, lots of learning, and great memories!

The week started with dinner hosted by Indian Land FFA and were joined by 10 other

chapters from both North and South Carolina. It was a great time for me to get acquainted with South Carolina FFA, southern agriculture and also see the friendships being built between two FFA associations! Barrett and I had a great time team-teaching for the first time, but the real fun came from meeting all the members – whether they were teasing me about a goldfish fry, learning about volunteer firefighting in the area, or hearing about the dreams members were willing to share.

That night we stayed at a beautiful Victorian-style bed and breakfast and got up early the next morning to head down the road to Pageland for breakfast. After a yummy breakfast, we traveled on to meet with the Cheraw FFA chapter. What a fun time! Not only did they have their whole chapter present, but also some city officials, Honorary American degree recipients, and their mayor ... who presented Barrett and me with a key to the city! They told us only three other people have been presented with that honor, so we were very appreciative!

We didn't get to spend too much time there, but thankfully most of the Cheraw members came to a workshop Barrett and I did later that night. Then we met members of the Chesterfield FFA chapter. We had just a few minutes to visit with them about the opportunities in the FFA, and they were kind enough to present us with corncob tractors and "Best Friend" awards.

We hustled down the road to one of the homes of NASCAR, Darlington, South Carolina. We had a great lunch with the FFA, school staff and administration there ... and I had my first authentic southern fried chicken! It was great, but when I told them I'd never had it before, they about fell out of their chairs! J Thanks for the wonderful memory, Darlington FFA – "too tough to tame!"

With our bellies full and smiles on our faces, we went on down the road to the Manning FFA chapter. As we pulled up, we saw a driveway lined with FFA members in official dress holding blue and gold balloons that they released as we drove by. To live up to that wonderful welcome, Barrett and I gave them a fun and challenging workshop that made them think about themselves and the "Lion King" in a whole new light. But little did we know, Manning's mascot is the Monarch lion, so later when they gave us a Monarch in a mini-FFA jacket ... it was a special treat! The members at Manning were brimming with energy, talent, and a passion for the FFA that really jazzed me up for the rest of my week in South Carolina ... not to mention the vocal stylings by the 4 Corners and Andre!

That night we went to the PeeDee Research Center and gave a workshop to about 75 students, some of whom we had seen early that day and were able to get to know better, and some that we were able to meet for the first time! After our workshop we hung out for a while and learned about South Carolina peaches, and my favorite ... about individual members. Melissa shared with me how she had been competing in high school rodeo, but now she was stepping up into a new leadership position in her FFA chapter, and Andy from Cheraw hung out a little longer. Both of you are going to do great things – best wishes!

The next day we started with a meeting at the Clemson University Livestock Poultry Health Division, Diagnostic Veterinary Clinic with Dr. Jones Bryan, the South Carolina state veterinarian. After that, we spent the day in Columbia, on the South Carolina capitol, meeting with legislators, senators, and the Lt. Governor. We had a nice lunch and met a few important South Carolina FFA sponsors in the Capitol City Club, where we could see nearly forever in every direction. It was a beautiful view of this beautiful state I had the opportunity to visit!

After our visits wrapped up, we had a southern stew dinner hosted by the Gilbert FFA chapter. Another culinary first for me, but man, was it good! J From there, Nic, the Sandhill Federation Sentinel, escorted me to the Lexington Technology Center (TC) where Barrett and I put on another evening workshop. On the way, Nic shared with me his love for America, his childhood in South Africa, and his dream of becoming a state officer. His passion was very heartwarming and contagious – it gave me juice for the presentation we gave that night. We were also able to meet Eric Hill, South Carolina State FFA Secretary. Thanks for driving down to join us, Eric!

The next day breakfast was put on for us by the Union FFA chapter, marking another first on the cuisine list – grits! After breakfast and learning all about South Carolina hunting, they zoomed us around their large school campus in a couple of golf carts – zoom zoom – and took us to see their school garden and barn, which is under construction, but should be finished by the end of the year. Very nice facilities! The

unique part of this chapter visit was that each member had invited a community mentor to attend, not only to recognize and thank them for their influence, but to help them better understand the total FFA program. What a great idea!

Then we hot-footed it to the Daniel Morgan TC where we got some more breakfast snacks and just hung out and visited with members about the FFA, opportunities and career possibilities in agriculture. We also got to help them unveil their brand new chapter banner! For only a second year program, they are doing great things with great energy ... keep it up! J

From there it was off to lunch with the R.D. Anderson FFA chapter where we saw another great partnership happening. For this lunch, they had contracted the HOSA chapter to cater, something they work on in their class, and also invited the VICA officers. It was great to not only spend time with the great FFA members who are full of courage and love for wildlife and agriculture, but also to meet with other youth organization members who had no idea about the great things offered in the FFA. It was a great chance for Barrett and me, as well as the FFA members, to realize that the FFA organization is a wonderful gift and needs to be shared with MORE students!!

After a long drive, we arrived at the Traveler's Rest FFA chapter for a BBQ and then went on to the Hillcrest FFA chapter with the state Vice President, Ashley Granata. We had a blast traveling with her, sharing stories and joking around. Then we presented our last official workshop. Mr. Scott, the South Carolina State Executive Secretary, had to drag us away because we were both just hanging out visiting for the longest time afterwards with the Hillcrest FFA members, but we had a long drive ahead of us to Clemson.

That night we met up with our dear friend and fellow national officer candidate, Franklin Davis, who gave us a night tour of Clemson – including Death Valley, and an update on how he's been. It was very special to get to spend time with a good friend on our trip!

The final day we had breakfast with West-Oak FFA, gave a mini-workshop for them, and then tripped back up to Clemson where we spent the rest of the day. We had a nice reception hosted by the Clemson Collegiate FFA, with faculty, students and administration. We were able to not only share what the National FFA Organization is doing currently, but also find out about a collegiate program and what college faculty seek in former FFA members. Then we went casual and pretended to be college students (it wasn't too hard J) and got a quick walking tour of one side of the university. Then it was off to the airport to fly to Salt Lake City and meet the rest of our team, so we could hit the skies for Japan.

South Carolina is a beautiful state full of beautiful people and FFA members. I am so happy that my journey in life took me there and I sincerely hope that I will be able to visit there again someday! I learned so much about the south, cooking traditions, agricultural traditions, and about dreams deeply held by FFA members in South Carolina. If this week was any indication of the wonderful journey that national office is going to be the rest of the year, I can't wait for the journey to really get underway!

Enjoy your journey in life, because it's not the destination that matters, it's what you learn and experience along the way!

January 27, 2002

"Do whatever comes your way as well as you can. Think as little as possible about yourself and as much as possible about other people and other things that are interesting. Put a good deal of thought into happiness that you are able to give." – Anonymous

What should my message be? What do members want to hear about? What if I make a huge cultural mistake? Am I going to be able to communicate? How can I possibly know what is going to be best for the future of the FFA organization? Will we make the right decision? Will these adults really want to hear what we have to say?

These were all questions that entered my mind at various times throughout this past week, but each time I had any of these doubts or fears, I read this quote and trusted that things would all be fine. I want to experience every little bit that life has to offer

this year, but I also want to be certain that other people are enjoying the year as well. So, that was the thought that guided me. What is the best for the people around me? It seems like a pretty simple question, but how many of us are really convicted by it and strive to live up to the answer it requires?

After a long day of flying I got into our nation's capital – Washington D.C. That evening we had a hilarious dinner! We went for a quick bite and left almost two hours later with watery eyes, sides aching from laughing so much, and full as can be! I love those kinds of meals!!

The next day was mainly spent on individual work, especially on the start of what will eventually turn into the speeches we will be giving at state conventions. I love writing speeches, but man, I was having a hard time convincing myself that whatever I picked would carry the message that you FFA members want to hear. I found an inspiration and started to work with confidence – remembering that I wanted to share happiness and inspiration to others ... was going down the right road!

We followed that workday with another, but this one was a little bit different. This one was spent in the Capitol Children's Museum ... studying Japanese culture! This museum was so cool – and I'm 20 years old! It was hands-on, colorful, interactive, playful, and EDUCATIONAL! We were there because within it there is a scaled Japanese exhibit including a tatami room, a kitchen, school classroom, market, and a display of traditional clothing. For all intents and purposes, we were in the culture – they even brought in Japanese food for lunch ... eel, seaweed, tempura ... yum! I'm not kidding, either! We learned about culture, sights, sounds, proper things to say, and common customs, all so we can make the best impression possible and have a good experience.

The rest of the week has been spent working on and with the National FFA Board of Directors. Now, we had heard all about "the Board," and studied all about the policies and responsibilities that the Board has, but now we were a part of it and I know I was slightly nervous. Our first encounter with the board was at the United States Department of Education where we spent quite a bit of time just discussing issues. Then we had business, committee meetings, and more business. It has really been a blast getting to know all the members of the Board, sharing jokes, making sure everyone got on the Metro, and of course, the meals! J It wasn't anywhere near what I expected – it was so much better and so much fun ... especially for business meetings! Now it's off to South Carolina with Barrett for our experience state ... well, experience!

Think about the things you are doing or the opportunities that come your way. Do you think of the good of those around you when you act or do you just do what is good for yourself? When you are guided by thinking of others first, you will never have to question your actions ... they will be the example for others. Try to do the things that will make you happy, but that will also bring a smile to another.

January 20, 2002

"The secret to life is to have a task ... something you bring everything to – and the most important is that it must be something you can always improve at." – Henry Moore

This year my life's task is serving FFA members and helping people have a clearer understanding of the agricultural industry. It is something that I very easily bring my whole heart to and work at very ardently ... but, each day I learn a new way I can do those things better.

This past week was filled with learning and improving what I came into this position with. We spent the week at the FFA Center learning more about presenting and how to do that the most effectively, as well as discussing National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO), and briefly, State Presidents Conference (SPC).

Improving isn't always easy because we want to stay where things are comfortable, but I learned things can be so much better if we simply try.

We also got to have dinner with another staff couple – it was full of laughter, music and great food! Then we spent a neat dinner at an authentic Japanese sushi/steakhouse. We had a really talented hibachi cook who did all sorts of tricks and really

kept dinner interesting! A highlight of the week for me was seeing three wonderful Washington FFA staff that were in Indianapolis for meetings! It was great to be able to connect with peers from home, find out how things were going, and show them what I've been up to.

We wrapped up the week by going home for the three-day weekend! What a treat! I spent Saturday just lounging around and catching up with my family, but Sunday was packed! Remember striving for improvement? Well, I tried – out on the ski slopes. My little brother Sam, my friend Chuck and I all went skiing for the day and it was a blast! I had been itching to go the whole time we were in Indianapolis last month, and now I had my chance. Problem was, I hadn't been in a pair of skis in over a year and, well, it's not quite like riding a bike for me. After a few rough runs, I was back in the groove – and even got a little tricky in some of the deep powder! The other exciting part of the day was that Pomeroy FFA was up there for their annual ski trip, so I got to hang out with some of their members! Pomeroy has always been like my second chapter – so it was very special for me to get to see and visit with Mr. Baser, J.J., Joel, and the rest of the gang! Hope you all had a great day! J

Whether it's learning new techniques or just trying a new spin on something we've done forever, that risk leads to self-improvement and that improvement can change everything! It enhances our whole life. Challenge yourself to constantly improve the "comfortable" areas of your life and watch to see the new light those things have!

January 13, 2002

"One cannot learn anything so well as by experiencing it oneself." - Albert Einstein

This is a quote that I've had for a long time, but it was never as dear to my heart as it is now, following the Missouri greenhand conference. I had everything prepared, my speech, my workshop, my Gabby Gail part in our skit ... but I couldn't know how it would go until I just was finally able to do it! It wasn't quite what I expected, or quite what I planned, but it taught me so much in getting through it.

The week started off in Kansas City, Missouri where we stayed at an incredible hotel (the bed was so comfortable J) and got to have dinner at the awesome Hereford House! The next day we had breakfast with a sponsor and then headed off to Warrensburg. This was the unveiling of "Gabbin' with Gail," the Loopyville FFA members and their advisor/SuperFFAman, as well as our first workshop. Everything went pretty well, but it was trial by fire. We quickly found out the little hitches and unexpected curves that would come our way that we had to always be prepared for – and were able to learn so much through our experience in Area 5 & 6. I was even more excited for my experience there because I have the opportunity to return for the Area 5 & 6 Leadership Camp ... and hopefully I will see many familiar faces!!

From Warrensburg we traveled to Paris and put on our presentation again. The change and improvement was already obvious to us and so things went very well! I also gave my speech here and was able to share with the members about my Mr. Potato Head experiences! J We hung out with the area officers for a bit – Lee and Kara did a great job being organized and on top of things so we had a few free minutes afterward, then it was off to Rolla.

I lost it laughing during the skit here because Cat Man Dane started naming his cats and he said my name and then had this funny face and I just died ... I busted a gut in the middle of the skit and it took a good couple minutes for me to recover. I don't know why it struck me as so hilarious, but it did and it felt so good to laugh that hard!! My workshop here taught me so much about large audiences, crowd control and connecting to keep attention. It wasn't my finest hour of presenting, but what I learned really helped me on my workshop the rest of the tour. So for that, thank you to all the members in my Rolla workshop!

At Rolla we hopped the Missouri State Highway Patrol airplane, a little 8-seater that we used to travel around the rest of the state and flew to Cape Girardeau, MO. This presentation I thought went really well, but it was thanks to what I learned from the FFA members at the first three stops. I also learned that Rolo's are more fun to refer to as Rolio's and that some things are "prettiful" – more than pretty, but not quite beautiful! This was also the first presentation when a member came up to me afterward to let me know what he thought of my workshop. Joseph, you made my day and I look forward to hearing about how your dream of running for state office goes!

From there it was off to Springfield. The first presentation there was amazing! The audience was huge – tons of greenhands who were full of energy, excitement, and who willing to get involved. I had a great time being neurotic Gail, playing name that tune, watching members strut their stuff in some mad hats, and balancing brooms! Plus, after the workshops were finished ... I met a cousin of a cousin of mine – Traves – who is simply awesome! Missouri was not quite where I thought I'd bump into family, but it is a small world and I had a great time hanging out with my boy, Traves! That day we also did two more presentations, as well as getting to go to Bass Pro Shop for lunch and hanging out with the Marionville FFA boys – Gary, Greg, Chris, and Kody. They helped us out all day, took us to the airport, and were a real treat to get to know.

We then flew off to stay at Platte City prior to our stop in St. Joseph. This was our final stop and it was great! I love finishing things on a good note, and we were definitely able to do that in St. Joe. There were nearly 700 greenhands present and every single one of them was in official dress – it was very impressive! J After our final skit, I took on my greatest learning experience by having nearly 200 students in my workshop. It was by far the largest group I'd ever had and they were great! They were excited, involved and at the same time taught me new things about large groups. They can be as much, if not more, fun than small group presentations

After that great ending, we headed back here to Indianapolis where we were treated with a weekend off. A weekend that I used to catch up on some R&R, some emails (keep 'em coming!), and of course, my online journal! J

I am a person who loves to prepare, but this past week has taught me that you can only be so prepared – the rest of the time you have to just jump in and go with things and be ready for anything that life brings your way. Those curves are what help us become better and become stronger, and I just hope that you all are able to find that out just as good ol' Einstein and I were!

"Life is not a having and a getting, but a being and becoming." - Matthew Arnold

This short week was spent traveling back to Indianapolis, the FFA center, the Finn, and back to training and preparing. We had a few meetings about convention, some dealing with idea generation, others with the inner workings of how, when and why so we can be thinking throughout the year and gathering feedback and new ideas that may be feasible. The rest of the time was spent working on our Missouri greenhand skit, workshops and speeches. We are all very excited about this experience and want it to go really well for the Missouri members so extra time is being put into our preparation!! I spent some time reflecting back to my practice experience at Shenandoah high school and how well it went there and how to still make it better, but just wanted to tell the Shenandoah members thanks for all your help!! We also had very nice, relaxing, and fun dinners with the Schesckes, as well as the Saldanas! We watched Shrek ("Not the gumdrop buttons!"), played pool, shared hilarious stories, and had some awesome pizza and homemade Mexican food! The best treat of the week was the snow we woke up to on the 6th! Then it was off to the airport to fly to Missouri. I was searched three times ... must have looked suspicious with all that FFA attire! J

January 6, 2002

"Home is where the heart is" - Anonymous

Happy Holidays – and they are even happier when they are spent with the people you care about most! This past week I was able to spend Christmas and New Year's with my family and friends, connect with things of home, and all in all, relax a bit! It was great!

I got home on the 23rd, the day after my sister's birthday and unfortunately, instead of going straight home, I had to wait for two hours for my luggage which got lost – and then never came in. I love the movie "Meet the Parents" but until that night I never really understood how Ben Stiller felt when his luggage got lost ... all the Christmas presents for my family, papers, clothes, pretty much everything! It was frustrating, but the airline assured me that I would get my stuff by the next day, just in time for Christmas! Wahoo!!

I was able to spend Christmas with both my families, as well as my boyfriend Chuck's family – who are so great...crazy just like my family and that made things even more fun! We had tons of great food, lots of laughs, and a wild gift grab game! It was sharing all those wonderful things that truly made me feel at home during this break ... plus, my luggage got delivered!

For New Year's I went to my second home – Pomeroy, Washington, and rang in the new year with my closest and dearest friends ... Chuck, my best friend Annie, my old roomie Kristine and her boyfriend Blake, Callie and her boyfriend Santora, Steve and B.J., and Angie and her boyfriend Jeramy (whose house we were at). It was so great to see all of them and spend such a special time with them! We spent most of the evening playing games, guys against girls, to see who really knew the most – indisputably the females won! J Happy 2002 everyone!

I've always loved the holidays – spending time with my family, no school, presents, and a plethora of food ... but this year was different. All the components were the same, and yet they were completely new and different to me. This year I really saw the things that make our holidays special – the little things my mom did to prepare food, make sure the laundry got done, and just keep the house clean, spending time with my brother and sister and really appreciating it, and going over to my dad and stepmom's for some hot spiced cider and buzzing around in the Luv ... mashed potatoes and green bean casserole, the after-dinner games we play ... pinochle, Cranium, Liverpool, whatever ... the simple things of the holidays that are now even more special to me!

I was talking to Annie the other day and I told her that I've always loved people, but after only a month away from home, now I realize how much – and how much my family had contributed to that. Home is where the heart is, and my heart truly lies with my family and my dear friends. Where is your home? Where is your heart? Never take that place for granted!

December 23, 2001

"Learn as if you were to live forever; live as if you were to die tomorrow." - Anonymous

This was an incredible week of learning. Don't get me wrong – this whole month has been a time of learning and I have been trying to take in as much of it as I possibly can – but this past week has been a lot of learning about how to create and present the workshops that we will be sharing with you members throughout this year. It was incredible how much of it we had covered way back when - in our state officer days, but now we had to truly learn it and DO it!

Our trainers graced us with their presence and knowledge again, and undertook the task of preparing us with workshop magic. My mind was whirling 90% of the time because there was so much great information coming at us so very quickly. As a result, I think I must have asked a million and one questions trying to get it all straight and understand it. Thank goodness for the patience of our amazing teachers who wouldn't quit or give in until they were certain we understood, especially me! J

Prior to this week, we had each written a workshop. As we went through all this training, we revamped and improved what we arrived with. We also worked it so that it would be ready to go for the Missouri Greenhand conference that we are all excited to be attending in mid-January.

Some of our highlights from the week was dinner with the Small's again – this time Leslie was home so we had the opportunity to visit with her a bit about her officer year and she had a few tricks of the trade to share with us! They had also contacted our families without us knowing and requested a piece of each of our family traditions that could be shared with our whole team in a stocking. It was a neat way for the six of us and the Small's to get to know a little more about the other's families and at the same time, share in the Christmas spirit. This week we also went to a Pacer's basketball game. It was great!! It was my first NBA game and I loved it

This week wrapped up with Dane's night of passion – going to see his home via the movie "The Majestic" with Jim Carrey, and then he and I trying to cook spaghetti for the team. Don't let him fool ya – he is an awesome cook! Then we lounged at our own slumber party watching movies, telling jokes, and even at one point a small pillow

fight. Then the following day we had our coaching sessions, packed, ran any last minute errands before going home, and that evening our coach took us to dinner at the Hard Rock Café – Indianapolis. We then ended the night with a team Christmas exchange. Sunday morning we had a quick meeting, after which we each hopped our planes home for the holidays.

During this holiday season, I've come to realize that learning is a gift. We are fortunate in America to have the opportunity to learn so much. I hope you never take that for granted – learn as much as you can because it will help make you a stronger, better person that can truly live the fullest life you dream of having!

December 16, 2001

"Per ardua ad astra ~ By striving we reach the stars" - Royal Air Force motto

Striving isn't always easy. It often challenges us a great deal . . . but more often than not, it results in something more than we could've ever imagined. This week was spent striving – for personal growth, team growth, and a solid vision for the future.

We started this week with speech work. We learned voice warm-up, projection, and mirroring. Some of it was really frustrating . . . I thought I already knew so much of it, but when pushed to strive for even better – it got tough, it got personal. But I went with it and boy howdy! There is a tiger in my voice that I never knew about! J Then we worked with the speeches we all prepared over the weekend. Staging, voicing, every little thing you could think of – we hit it! It was so helpful, especially the one-on-one work because then we really got down to the nitty-gritty.

On Wednesday we started work on what was called "Team Development Training" on our schedules. We got to move out of the center for this and it was a nice change of scenery. We took our time and wrote a team vision for the year, as well as a team mission!

We dedicate our year of service to instilling a passion for excellence in all people by sharing our hearts and leading by example as a role model, advocate* and friend.

*Advocate for Agriculture, a term coined by the 2001-2002 national officer team

Sprinkled into this week, we had dinner with Tammy Meyer at Buca di Beppo, this funky little Italian restaurant in downtown Indy, an afternoon of decorating the center (you can see the tree and wonderful staff on the home page), a night out to an auction with Amber, dinner with the Staggs, dinner at the Stallers with some of the division directors, Christmas cookie decorating and dinner with the Doerforts. Finally, Elio and I had to make some remarks at an Indianapolis Chamber of Commerce function held at the national FFA center. The biggest and most fun part of the whole week was by far the center Christmas party on Friday night!! It was a blast! We had a little informal reception and then dinner. Following dinner, our team thanked the staff for a wonderful time in Indianapolis and at the center with a couple of Christmas carols. It was nice, but then the fun really began. The DJ busted out some 80's retro music and everyone started tearing up the dance floor . . . oh yeah, baby! We were all out there shaking our groove thang! J We did line dances, we did swing dancing, slow dancing, fast dancing, and even the hokey-pokey! No joke! J

Then a true blessing – we got the weekend off to work. We couldn't have been happier if they had told us we'd won a million bucks! We all got to sleep in two different days, work on so many little things we'd been missing in the shuffle of things, like calling home to check in, Christmas shopping, and just relaxing! I even got to work out for a while – it was great!

We are looking forward to this last week of training and being together, but we are also getting anxious for Christmas with our families! I hope you all get to spend some time with your loved ones during this holiday season as well, and never forget the things that may seem hard, may actually only be catapulting you into the stars!

December 9, 2001

"Who I am is what fulfills me and fulfills the vision I have of the world." - Audre Lorde

"Self-realization would not be achieved one by one, but all together or not at all." – W. E.B. DuBois

This week has been full of self-discovery, team growth, and increased understanding of our role here in the National FFA Organization. I have spent a lot of time getting to know who I am, realizing my strengths and weaknesses, my true talents and really learning to trust. Some of what I've found out I already knew, some of it I thought, and some of it I just needed to believe in. Most of it, though, I wouldn't have found and/or understood if it hadn't been for my five wonderful teammates. This past week we have truly grown together and it is through that growth, trust, and understanding that we have each achieved our own self-realization. This is an amazing group that is going to do wonderful things!

The week started with an ending. Monday we wrapped up with an awesome weekend jam packed full of BLAST OFF training. We were fortunate to have a group of the best trainers around who were excited to share with us this year's theme (can't tell, sorry! J), new curriculum, and help us grow together as a team just like a new state officer team would be doing as they go through BLAST OFF. Then Monday night, it was my night of passion. Each one of us gets a night from 6 pm on to share with the others something that we enjoy, love, or are passionate about. I took the team to *Dark Armies*, a paintball facility here in Indianapolis, and it was a blast! We had an acre and a half to unload paint all over each other under black lights and we had so much fun! We found out just how sneaky Elio is (he was the champion of the night), and how tough Amber can be – she is awesome with a paintball gun! After two hours of running, shooting, sneaking, and laughing, we headed back.

Tuesday started with health training, which included yoga. We all got a good stretch and hearty laugh out of it – anyone heard of the 'panting dog stretch?' Then we introduced ourselves, formally, to all the national staff and after that got a little time to do some work before a great home-cooked meal with the Small's.

Wednesday we spent really getting to know the inner workings of the center. We each had a job-shadowing assignment with different teams and I shadowed the Foundation. I met Margee at nine and we went over what the Foundation's function is, the staff and their different responsibilities and then she took me to meet everyone. I met with Karen, who helped me better understand the Sponsors Board, Janet and Teri who really explained to me how we get and keep givers, and then Glenda took me out to lunch in downtown Indianapolis. After an awesome lunch, where I learned all about the new individual giving program that will allow past members and individual givers to support the FFA through the Foundation, Glenda took me on a personal tour of Indy. It was a great time! Then they gave me the rest of the afternoon off to work on some of the business we had pending, which was a great gift, but I have to say they were a great group to spend the day with and I look forward to working with all of them in the future (as should anyone else)!

Thursday has been one of the highlights for me since we've been here in Indiana because after another day of training, we got to spend dinner and an evening with a local FFA chapter! Members ... the reason we're here, a recharge to our FFA batteries, a true blessing! Robin and I went with Mr. Frank Saldaña to Pendleton Heights FFA Chapter where we were greeted warmly by about 25 blue cordouroy/class ring-bearing Arabians. Most of them even had shoes on (HAHA Willie!). We had a great time just mixing and mingling. Then we presented them with a team picture that we had all signed and, without any warning, they gave us each two pads of stationary that they had designed themselves for us! It was such a treat! We got to see their awesome facilities and hear about their great dreams for the future. I look forward to hearing about many of them coming true!

Friday we also got another dose of National Officer reality when we went on a Business and Industry visit to Dow AgroSciences. It was great to finally understand what our role is in that capacity and find out how we can really help to ensure the future of the FFA! That night, Barrett took us on his night of passion – to Chuck E. Cheese's!! We got to hang out together and at the same time touch the lives of some local children. Barrett really has a servant's heart that wants nothing more than to help others. He is a true blessing on our team.

What is a virtue? Saturday we found out all about it! It was probably the biggest day of growth for me individually, and I think also for our team. It was very powerful and I hope the year continues to grow like that. To wrap up the night we went out to the

Crabtree's and had an authentic Mexican dinner. It was yummmmmmy! J I never realized how much I love home-cooked meals until I didn't get them for nearly a month!

Sunday was a day off, sort of! We all went to worship as we wanted. Dane, Elio, and I had a really interesting experience and ended up getting some Christmas shopping done – yes, Sam and Mom, I got you two taken care of! Then we all kind of split up and had individual coaching sessions, but got back together in my room for a "Sleepless in Seattle" picture party.

This coming week we are working on speeches, having a couple more nights of passion, and doing some more team growth training.

Look inside yourself, find out who you are, but also ask others what they think. We can't truly find out who we are without the input of those closest to us who often know parts of us better than we do! Challenge yourself to grow . . . and you will find out, as I am, just how wonderful that feels!

December 2, 2001

"Have a purpose in life, and having it, throw into your work such strength of mind and as much as God has given you." -Thomas Carlyle

National office. Something that I've always dreamed about, prayed about and worked toward. Now that it's here it's pretty unbelievable! I have the blessing and fortune to spend this year with 5 other amazing individuals that are already touching my life so much – I can't even imagine how much they are going to touch member's lives. This year is going to be truly awesome!! :) Get ready!!!

So what has been going on since the excitement in Louisville? After a week of getting to know one another, along with orientation, we all flew home and I spent two weeks wrapping up my fall semester at Washington State University. It was a rough time trying to cram 1/3 of a semester into two weeks, but fortunately I had great professors who were very willing to work with me so that I could jump feet first into my dream. Our College of Agriculture advisors (thanks Dr. Swan and Dr. Kleene) made my transition as smooth as possible. After that, I moved back home. (I never thought I'd do that again.) College brings a newfound independence, but this endeavor brings a new tie to that same, trusted place! Finally, I spent a great Thanksgiving with my family and loved ones, then hopped a plane here to Indianapolis.

Since arriving here, my team and I have thrown our hearts and minds into the roles we will be filling this year. We have a purpose, and boy, we are putting everything that we have in us into that purpose!! :) We have shared in many hours of training, eating and learning about one another and our shared passions, especially for agriculture and the FFA. Meanwhile, we have been kicking it up in the National FFA Center, hanging out with the awesome staff employed here (we like to think FFA has cornered the market on good people!) and getting to know this area of Indiana ... especially when you get lost for 2 or 3 hours in the Astro!

I look forward to a great and exciting year of service and growth - sharing my self with members, and, in turn, learning so much from you!

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The 2001-2002 National Officer Journals

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May 12, 2002

Presentation is nothing more than a human relationship. - Mark Reardon

This has been an amazing week of learning and growth and preparation down here in the Lone Star state! All six of us are in one spot again and the feeling of TEAM just can't be beat!

From Ohio, I flew here with much anticipation, not only to see my five teammates (who have been on the road to various corners of the nation), but because we were going to be training with a VERY respected and admired facilitation guru of sorts and then teaching the NLCSO (National Leadership Conference for State Officers) program to 120 excited Aggies. We had a very full 10 days ahead of us, and let me tell you what, it's been just that!

The first two days were devoted solely to working in our pairs. Barrett and I had a good time catching up, touching base and working out details, and finally, practicing our curriculum. The national staff who have joined us on this trip treated us each night to a home-cooked BBQ of pork, chicken and even good ol' beef. The second day here as Barrett, Elio and I worked/sunned by the pool ... well I got fried. Yup, crispy critter ... like a lobster ... could hardly walk the next day. It was bad news bears! I have recovered pretty well at this point, but geez - ALWAYS WEAR SUNSCREEN!

The third day we worked some in our pairs, but that evening we began our training with Mr. Mark Reardon. He has worked with various national FFA staff and done amazing things, so I guess they thought we were next. Hey, I'm always looking to improve in order to better serve members, so bring it on! That night we spent some time getting to know him and he to know us, and also started getting our brains into the right frame of mind. It was fun, interactive and had us all ready for the next two days!

After that it was nose to the grindstone and we went to work. We learned so many new things, reinforced and refined lots of little things, and practiced, practiced, practiced. It was intense and tiring, but also so exciting. It was amazing how, in such a short amount of time, we could learn and apply the concepts and techniques, and how they could so easily become like second nature. Sure, there's still a lot of room for growth and perfection, but just the small steps forward that were taken are incredible! We had a quick opportunity to meet the A&M "mini-mester" students that we would be working with and then, after two days of training ... we wrapped up and it was time to go to work.

The next morning, it was off to campus early so we could prepare our rooms and have everything in order the moment the students assigned to our conference arrived. A few last minute bumps and we were ready to begin! Barrett and I met our students (we got 40 of the 120) at the door and quickly realized what a blast we were going to have working with these Ags! Our group is upbeat, fun, and so willing to help Barrett and me grow. That's the purpose behind this trip, and so for that - I am very thankful! We had a great first day, and learned about a few of the many Aggie traditions. Barrett's and my group even took some time to teach me to Whoop. They made me

an honorary junior so that I could participate without getting beat up and we had a blast! A few of the football players are in our room and they add such a fun twist to things, and have taught me a few things – HAHA!

We had another fun day today and I can't wait to experience the last couple of days. Not only because it's such a great opportunity to be able to practice the conference once, but to do it in such a beautiful place and with such amazing people! I am also excited because when I have to leave here ... it's off to Washington for our state convention and I'm soooooo excited! Home sweet home, and the chance to see all the wonderful Washington FFAers – it's going to be wonderful!

One thing that Mark taught us was the quote at the top of this journal – a presentation is nothing more than a relationship, but that relationship is dependent upon the content. It's a catch 22, but what an opportunity we have in the FFA to get caught in that life-changing circle! I'm excited for the rest of Texas and then after, to see my presentations come to life ... and to build even greater relationships with the FFA members I am fortunate to encounter!

May 5, 2002

"The greatest reward for doing ... is the opportunity to do more." - Jonas Salk

This past week I was asked, "What has been your favorite part of this year so far, Abbie?" I answered, "Being able to meet members and share in the things they are doing and excelling at." The person then responded, "Okay ... now that you've made your 'official' comment - what's your real answer?" I was a little confused and taken aback. That had been my 'real' heartfelt answer. This year I have been able to do more for the organization that has done so much for me. Why was it so strange for someone to believe? As I thought about it, I think the lack of belief comes from the fact that all too often these days, we simply don't give back enough ... we don't say thanks, and we don't offer to do more. It's too easy to just go with the flow and rely on everyone else. Thankfully, based on this rather pessimistic viewpoint that was clouding my thoughts, I was able to spend this week with people who do give back and I even had the opportunity to do more for the FFA.

I started this week saying goodbye to the members of Region 2 FFA in Michigan and heading to Detroit to meet Dane and one of our Foundation staff members. We had a wonderful dinner that night with two of our contacts and after dinner, we returned to our hotel and spent awhile just catching up on what each of us had been doing/ experiencing on the road this month.

The next day we got to sleep in just a little and then went to meet with some of our sponsors. We had a great meeting with this very nice FFA sponsor and then grabbed a quick bite to eat before heading to our next meeting with another FFA sponsor. Here we encountered two former FFA members and got to learn about the background of another strong FFA support organization. Following this meeting we had to get Dane some medicine for a lingering cold he'd had and from there we went to a Detroit Tigers game! It was great! We spent some casual time with some FFA supporters and even got to watch the Tigers break a losing streak and beat the KC Royals!

Wednesday we started early with a visit to the world headquarters of yet another sponsor. We met with a variety of different representatives, who - all in one way or another from their different divisions - support the National FFA. After that, we got lunch in downtown Detroit, the Renaissance Center, and then went to a meeting with our final sponsor of the day. We learned about the company as a whole, and just how they fit in, and then got to go down the road to their agency and see how a TV commercial is put together. Very interesting to this communications major! Straight from the agency, I headed to the airport to catch my flight to the Ohio state convention.

Each of these Business and Industry (B&I) visits were unique and I learned something very special about each company, but what was even more cool was to see the level of respect and support these organizations show the FFA. They can do so many things for so many different groups ... and they choose ours as one of their priorities. The giving back they do to help our members have an even better experience and more opportunities in the FFA is amazing and to them, our future success is their reward.

From Detroit I took the bird's route to Columbus, Ohio for the much anticipated, and much regarded Ohio convention. I got in late, but former state presidents Matt and Sarah, met me and were kind enough to drive me to my hotel - in the middle of a severe storm warning (that I found out about later). I got to my room, visited with the 2001-2002 state president, Mindy, and following that, immediately crashed! The next day I woke up late because, well ... I could! I spent the day hanging out in my hotel room working and getting prepared for the convention. That evening Robin got in, and we stayed up way too late catching up and just talking about things and then

finally went to bed.

Friday morning rolled around early since we had gone to bed around 1:00 or 1:30 AM and then had to be downstairs and ready to go at 6:45 AM. We were ready to go, so we headed over to the Celeste Center with the state officers to start convention. We watched the first session kick-off and then gave our first of two workshops. I had one of our many coaches sitting in on mine, so the pressure was on – HAHA! Things went pretty well, so I was off the hook and went over for the next session. Halfway through, I had to leave again for my second workshop and this one went way better. I had a big group of members who were full of energy and passed Unique U. with flying colors! Especially Jason and the guys who filled the back of the room - Mr. Cook, they really were good. I also was privileged to have my dear friends, the visiting Kentucky state officers Lucinda and Rachel, arrive and sit in on my presentation. From there I packed up and went to the Foundation dinner to recognize all the various proficiency winners. I gave quick remarks and then the state officers and I walked back over to the main session hall for the evening session. I sat with the National Trail chapter, whom I had gotten to know a little earlier that day, and found that this chapter had not one, but TWO Abbie's! Oh man - three of us together was quite a handful. We watched the session and cheered on Robin as she presented her keynote to the Ohio delegation and then the girls (and even some of the guys helped) braided and fixed my hair up for the dance, which followed the session. It looked way cute! We changed and headed over to tear it up as soon as the gavel tapped, and I had a great time rocking to the tunes at the Ohio convention dance! The students, all of them, did the line dance to Cotton Eye Joe, did the O-H-I-O cheer (and even got me cheering, too!) and of course, YMCA'ed! It was a blast!

Today, Robin and I got to bed too late and up too early, but made another great showing! We were very excited when some of the Michigan state officers arrived – four whom I had just hung out with at camp, and Robin had got to know at their convention. During the first session I gave my keynote and then watched as all the Career Development Event winners were recognized. After the session, Robin and I went over to the past state officer reunion luncheon and got to meet many former Ohio state officers. Robin brought remarks about the example former members can serve as for current members and then we headed back to the main hall for the final session of the convention. I mixed and mingled with various chapters, sitting around through the awards and recognitions, until I ended up back with National Trail. We watched as 540 members received their State FFA degree and then as the new 2002-2003 Ohio State FFA Officers were elected. It was an exciting convention that was well done, a great combination of professionalism and fun! It was exciting to spend dinner with both the new and old teams, as well as their parents, before heading out. Ohio FFA is in for a real treat this upcoming year because - while these new officer members have done a lot in their FFA careers thus far – they now have the opportunity to do even more!

April 28, 2002

"Your people are your success. When your people succeed, you succeed. When you succeed, your people succeed. Be the person you would want to be around, work for, and look up to and you will find success." - Luther Parker II

P–inciples of leadership. I started this week at the Iowa State Leadership Conference for District Officers (SLCDO) and we learned about the principles of leadership. What things needed to be taken care of, how should one act, and what things does one need to accomplish in order to be a good leader and make a positive impact in their district? These were all questions I heard floating around the conference, but I think most were answered as we went "Under the Big Top." Principles: everyone has them, compromise is the only equalizer.

E–xpectations. Not only were district expectations set at SLCDO, but the officers set personal expectations for the upcoming year. Whether that was being a good officer or writing thank you notes in a timely fashion, the standards and goals for the year were clearly laid out for each officer present. I even learned about a temperature expectation that is necessary for PROPER presenting and conversation (thanks Rob, Jesse, and Miss Kim!) and the Q/A expectation that my roommates had! WE had some great conversations into the wee hours of the morning about being an officer, what my life back home is like, and some of the good girl talk! Also, MY expectations were greatly exceeded by the tremendous job that was done in putting on the conference, a harmonious combination of the newly retired state officers and the newly elected state officers. Expectations ... we need to establish them, set them, follow through on them, and constantly evaluate them in order to be a success.

O–bstacles. No matter what we do, there is always an obstacle that requires us to go up, over, around, or through something in order to achieve the original goal. They

strengthen our resolve and make success even sweeter. As I left Iowa and headed back for Oregon, I ran into my obstacle ... a strange gentlemen sitting next to me. Not only did he try to talk my ear off, but he also tried to convince me he was an expert at certain agricultural issues. Hmm ... now I am by no means an expert, but this guy, all in an attempt to try to impress me (and the poor flight attendant was also subjected to his rantings), picked bio-diesel and commodity subsidies as his area of expertise. Big mistake! Big! The five other national officers and I had just spent a day at American Farm Bureau getting briefed on these two very topics, as well as the fact that I had just read an agriculture journal that the six of us receive weekly which addressed those very topics. Well, the minute he started saying we'd be better off with minimal agricultural industry in America, it was over in my book! I let him know exactly what's going on (in the most level-headed and professional fashion, of course!) and just how important our industry is to him - especially if he enjoyed the pretzels and peanuts we had just eaten. He was an obstacle to the correct and clear understanding of the agricultural industry, but I think he will think twice about cutting into it in the future! Obstacles ... there is a learning experience to be had from each one we encounter!

P-Pride ... in self and in our organization. When I left Iowa, I headed to Oregon for the Crater FFA 50th Awards and Recognition Banquet. Let's talk about pride. First off, the advisors there are so darn proud of their students it's amazing! I've heard all about the achievements and hard work that these members accomplish on a day-to-day basis for nearly a week, but I suppose bragging rights are allowed since the advisor I got to hear all this from was my former Student Teacher! As life would allow, in its funny twists and turns, this year happened to hold a huge sense of accomplishment and pride for Crater, so Mr. Miller got a request in for me to be able to share in the celebration. Everything worked out and I saw just what he had been telling me about when I walked into the Crater High School gym full of nearly 400 people, all in attendance for this special event. The students wore their Blue and Gold impeccably. The parents, administration, teaching staff, community supporters and other friends of the FFA were gushing over the things these students have done and continue to do to bring pride to the communities that feed into Crater High. All in all, it was a room full of a sense of achievement, tradition, and most definitely ... pride. Carry yourself with pride, but never become stubborn because of it.

L-Live! Every moment we have a chance to truly live, but do we take it? I can honestly say that at the end of this week I did. After the banquet, I caught another flight, this one to Washington, but not home. I had a few short hours layover in SeaTac before my flight to Detroit and was so excited when one of the most important people in my life met me just to say hello! Very sweet! Then it was cross-country to Michigan where I was attending the Region 2 Leadership camp. I had heard a few things about this camp ... a few scattered comments on what to expect, but mainly that they had beaten up a couple past national officers who had attended. Makes a person a little nervous, but hey ... I'm tough (or at least that's what I told myself!). I got to the airport and was met by the newly retired state treasurer, Jeremy Glaspie, who even had a bouquet of flowers in hand. Talk about good living! Well from there we drove nearly 3 hours to the camp, which was well underway. I got there just in time to watch as the various chapters made their display boards and then it was the moment EVERYONE had been waiting for ... the KGB game! Well, after being told to go put on a white shirt/sweatshirt and meet back in 5 minutes, I gathered this may have been the dangerous activity that I had been forewarned about. I'll try almost anything once, so I was in! Live it up, right? Well, KGB turned out to be one of the most fun camp activities I've been privileged to be a part of - even the rain and wind didn't deter us - and I wasn't hurt ... too bad! We had a great two hours of playing and then a great vespers session by the regional officers who shared about their year. The next day was when I truly got to live though. We had an awesome flag raising (thanks to the quick and amazing help of my fellow teammate Amber (girl, you are awesome!)) and then spent time in various sessions. The sessions were broken up by some organized recreation and that's when I took on Goliath! Now in the story, Goliath is a giant that a small boy challenges and beats. Well in my story, Goliath is a 60-foot rock/plywood climbing wall and this shorty took it on like a champ and lived some pretty awesome moments of my life! As I geared up to climb, my wall guide, Lacey, asked me if I'd ever climbed before ... I said no, I've gone down (repelling) but not up. I decided to take the hardest face first - might as well start off right, huh? Well I got a little more than halfway and my fingers went numb. Not good enough for this X-treme chica, so I warmed up my hands and went again, this time on the angled face. I had a bunch of great coaches down below who helped guide me up and I got all but about 3.5 feet from the top when I simply couldn't reach, my leg wouldn't move and ... Goliath was still standing tall. As I repelled back down, I thought about how much I wish I could've made it to the top, instead of regretting - and decided to truly enjoy those moments of life that I'd just had. I cheered on a number of other campers who did best Goliath, all the while quite content with my climb. Live every moment you're given to the fullest. Don't waste a second, because it's one you'll never get back.

Sometimes living means not having regrets that hang over all the other amazing opportunities you have in life.

E-xperience. Whether that word means an awesome conference, camp, or banquet ... or things you've learned that now make you able to teach others, we all have experiences. Sometimes they are good, like time to oneself, seeing friends, or being serenaded. Sometimes they are not so good, like being so close to home and yet not getting to go there, or being a klutz and spilling a cup of cocoa-coffee on a poor, unsuspecting, innocent member like Tim (I'm so sorry!). Either way you learn amazing things and come away from those experiences knowing more and a seasoned individual. Look at all the experiences you've had and try to figure out what you've gained from them because I'm certain you can name something! My experiences this past week were great and I can't thank the members at SLCDO, Crater, or Region 2 enough!

April 21, 2002

Life is a succession of moments. To live each one is to succeed. - Corita Kent

This week's series of moments started at the South Dakota State Convention in Brookings, home of South Dakota State University (SDSU). I arrived late in the evening of the 13th and was met at the airport by Brian Cooper, last year's state vice president ... who was to be my keeper for the week, making sure I got where I needed to be and got to see everything at the convention. After our quick drive getting to know each other, we got to SDSU and dropped in on the state officer candidates who were already underway in interviews. They were playing cards, playing games, listening to music, hanging out, and just generally having a good time! Little did I know this was just the beginning!

The next day I got to sleep in a little and adjust to the time change, then went over to visit the candidates who were at it again. They got less sleep than I had and they were practically bouncing off the walls! They were working on coloring a run-through for the state officer's big session that night, so I got in on the "squiggle" business! Then it was off to change and greet the different chapters who were arriving that afternoon. I hung out near registration and met members from Lake Preston, played cards with Alcester-Hudson, and just was in awe of the huge amount of people that McCook Central brought.

I went to a BBQ for FFA members at the SDSU FarmHouse and then we all headed over for the opening session of the convention. I was so excited! I had hung out with the state officer team the night before and most of the afternoon and knew how much work they had put into this convention, so I couldn't wait to see it all come together for them ... and come together it did! They opened the convention by repelling into the auditorium to really set the example of "Livin' on the Edge" South Dakota-style. Then they did a Reflections skit and moments from each officer of what their challenging theme meant to each of them. It was a great start for a convention and I was so happy to see things go so well for them. After that it was more fun and games with the state officer candidates and state officers.

Monday kicked off with a quick advisors meeting, followed by the second session. I gave quick greetings and then business was taken care of. The session wrapped up early so I hustled to the dorm where I was staying, grabbed my workshop bag and went over to the student union where I put on Unique U. 101 for some very enthusiastic, awake and creative South Dakota FFA members! That afternoon was nearly 90 degrees, so everyone was really enjoying the sunshine and beautiful weather! The next big moment of the day was the afternoon session, which recognized people who had excelled in various areas. From there three of the state officers, Josh, Brad, and Jack, and I went to the state degree banquet to recognize those members who had achieved the highest award that South Dakota FFA could award them with. Then we hustled back to the convention hall where we caught the last of the state talent show and I found a seat for the evening session. I sat with some of the delegates, who weren't quite sure who I was or why there was nothing written on the back of my jacket. I left them in suspense and they finally figured it out when I got up and gave my keynote for that session. It was hilarious when I sat back down! After the session, FFA members filled bathrooms, buses, and dorm rooms to change as fast as they could so that they could head over to THE DANCE. Now I put that in caps because in South Dakota, the dance is not taken lightly. The whole time I'd been at convention, each time I'd engage in conversation with members ... it always came around to "The Dance." It was even listed in the program as such. These members were after my own heart and got down to the tunes that some of the former state officers, some who I had served with back in the day, blared through the speakers. They jitterbugged like no tomorrow and this was definitely a moment of the day that I really lived - especially when they had the state officers and me dance up

on the stage and speakers! Afterward the state officers, visiting state officers, myself, and a few other friends stayed to clean up and then we all went over to hang out with the candidates. These candidates were put through the ringer, but no matter what, they always had a smile on and were as energetic as if it were 1 in the afternoon, not morning! Once the nominating committee came to a decision they were free to go to bed, all night trying to go to sleep wondering what the outcome would be in the morning. Boy, did I feel for them. I even joked with Micah about it, seeing as he was on the nominating committee for our national officer team and had put us through that six months earlier!

The final morning of convention started off early, especially since none of us got much sleep! A few more special individuals were recognized, the state officer parents and advisors received special recognition ... something that always chokes me up. Career Development awards were given to the happiness of many members who were just waiting to find out how the contests they had been competing in turned out, and finally the moment of moments for many - the installation of the new state officers. I gave each candidate a hug and wished them the best ... I was so tore up wondering who it would be since I had gotten to know each of them and saw the potential that they all held in different areas. Finally six names were called and the future of South Dakota FFA was put into very excited, happy and for most, shaking hands.

I then took some time to say goodbye to the newly retired state officers that I had become very attached to and proud of throughout the course of my stay. They gave amazing retiring addresses that challenged members to "Live on the Edge" of their possibilities, they encouraged every person they saw and all in all, put on a very professional and successful convention. Saying goodbye is a moment that I don't ever like, but one that must always happen, and I feel as if it were a moment that I truly lived and lived successfully, just as these six state officers had done throughout their convention.

I got a ride to the airport and had quite the little experience/moment trying to get on my plane when the keys to the car that held my luggage got locked inside ... while it was running ... and I only had about 15 minutes before I had to get on my plane! We did get the car opened up, my luggage out and I made it on my plane to Oregon with no other problems.

Now from South Dakota I went to Oregon, and as much as I hated leaving the Black Hills Gold State (a personal favorite of mine!) I was so excited to be going home to the Pacific Northwest! Plus where I was going in Oregon was only 4-5 hours away from my home. I was pumped! Mr. Crawford, the Central Oregon district advisor and Culver FFA agriculture education teacher picked me up and took me to the hotel I would stay in – the last true mattress I would sleep on for awhile! The next morning after sleeping in again (these folks were being all too kind letting me catch up from the jetlag that would hit after flying back and forth across the US) three of the Culver FFA members – Jacob, Chris, and Crystal – picked me up and took me to the camp where we were staying. It was great! One big lodge, a few little cabins, a big recreation area and a freezing cold lake. All the components of a great camping experience!

As chapters arrived, I greeted many of them and started to get to know these chapter officers that I would be hanging out with for a few days. We all got our camp books, drew a number for activities ... and the person who matched would be our date for the next day's banquet. I was pretty special and lucky and got 2 dates! Then we played some icebreakers to get to know one another, and then I met with the district advisors and the newly elected Oregon state officers who were really putting on the meat and potatoes of this camp ... their first true endeavor as elected FFA officers. Later that afternoon we had some organized recreation of: sack races, volleyball, and horseshoe toss. I played on the Sentinels team and we were awesome! We won in the sack races, came up with an awesome cheer and then tore it up on the volleyball court. After everyone's games wrapped up we had a quick session on dinner etiquette and every tested for their "meal ticket." Now this was something I thought was pretty cool! For every meal, the officers had to test some type of FFA knowledge to earn their way to dinner. The whole team wouldn't eat until everyone had passed, so it really built team unity trying to help one another out and cheer one another on. The first ticket was the FFA mission – and bing, bang, boom ... everyone got to eat! As we finished up the meal, the advisors introduced themselves and laid down the rules and expectations for the camp. Then everyone went down to the Rec field for the flag lowering that the district officers put on. After we finished paying respects to the Red, White, and Blue, we went inside again and did a jacket swap. Everyone put their FFA jacket in a pile and then in a free-for-all, everyone had to grab a jacket of a chapter different than their own, find that person and then prepare a fireside introduction of them. I drew Ryan Feigner's jacket, the Madras FFA president and learned all about him. I shared what I learned with the whole group and when the introductions finished, we all knew about the people we were here with. It was a very fun and

growing moment for all of us – a highlight for many. Then we did a formal Q & A session, where the members got to ask anything to the new state officers and myself. Then we all headed for our bunks to try to rest up for the next day.

The next morning at 5:30 AM, the girls started getting up, trying to get into the showers - there were 5 for 30+ females and everyone knows this is NOT enough! Well, a small group of lucky girls got cleaned up, and the rest of us tried to hide it the best we could. Then we went out for the flag raising by the state officers. Breakfast was put by the Treasurers and I ate with them. We woke up the rest of the way and got excited for the upcoming activities. As soon as breakfast was over I set-up and put on the first of my two workshops. This was followed by some chapter time and I got to float around and hear about some of the plans that the different chapters were preparing for the upcoming FFA year. Then we had some more recreation and this time I kind of hung back and watched as the VPs challenged the Reporters at horseshoes, but got recruited to toss a few. Now, let me make it known that just because you grow up riding horses doesn't mean you have any skill at throwing horseshoes! This was very apparent as I tried to help out the Reporters. Then we went back in for lunch and I ate with the Reporters, still feeling bad about my terrible game showing earlier! Then we had some more officer sessions, and a final champions round of recreation and I played with the Secretaries. We made an awesome showing on the volleyball court, but had to tip our hats to the advisors who beat us in horseshoes. (You'd think I'd learn the first time, right?!) Obviously they had played this a little more than we had though ... that's how we consoled ourselves anyhow!

Following that was an hour of quiet time, but let me just say, this wasn't quiet - this was pure silence. While the members spent their time reflecting on things they had learned, ways they wanted to improve their chapters, and just got some work done, I took that shower I had missed! Yahoo - always a nice thing when you are camping! I cleaned up and got ready for the evening's activities of a District rituals contest and of course, the banquet! The state officers and I judged Rituals, and then we went downstairs to make our decision.

After we came to a decision, we went back upstairs where our dates were waiting for us. I was greeted by a wonderful gentleman, Tyler, and also Michelle. Since I had a male and a female date, Tyler lucked out and got to escort to wonderful gals - what a ladies man! We had a very pleasant dinner and then while everyone else walked down to flag lowering, Tyler escorted Michelle and me. After the flag lowering was completed, everyone broke to prepare for their skits.

I was with the VPs and we came up with an awesome skit (actually a favorite back home in Washington) – the lollipop store. All the groups presented hilarious skits that were wild and crazy and usually got some sort of joke in about an advisor, who took it in good stride! In ours, we got Mr. Papke and Mr. Tesconi to get up and be our store's "Pretty Flower," and store sign! After all the member skits wrapped up, the advisors put one on and it was hilarious! Captain Lactate even appeared as a Frenchman! Once the skits were over, it was another mad dash, like in South Dakota, to change and get back for a dance. The dance was fun, especially because EVERYONE was dancing! It was great! Then the state officers blessed us with a sampling of their musical abilities on the fiddle, guitar and vocals. Then it was off to the bunks for bed and I know I hit my pillow hard, ready to recoup from the great activities of the day.

The next morning was the annual meeting of the Polar Bear club and this year I was inducted. The initiation consisted of running from your bunk in a swimsuit and towel almost a quarter of a mile to the lake dock where you threw off your towel, then ran and jumped into the freezing cold lake! BRRRR!!! It was a ton of fun though and many of the FFA members participated. I was one of the first people to go and then hustled as fast as my numb feet would take me back to the bunks to try and get a warm shower to heat my hypothermic body back up.

A half and hour later, dry and mostly warmed up, we all went back outside for the final flag raising and afterward went in for breakfast. I sat with the Sentinels and filled out my last few Happy Grams, the camps opportunity to thank or commend other FFA members without having to tell them in person. It was a very fun way to brighten another person's day! At breakfast we also signed the Polar Bear scroll, the record of members of the club for all time! After this, while officers met for a final time, I had to pack up and get ready to hit the road again. Once I was packed and the session was over, we took a camp photo and then had a HUGE game of capture the flag. My team, the Odd's, had an awesome first game and won by a landslide! Way to go Eagle strikers! Then we got beat in the second round and when this round ended, it was time for me to hit the road. I was pretty sad to say goodbye, and they gave me a full camp bear hug and I even got a little misty-eyed. Then the Sherman County boys, who were also leaving, took me to the airport.

I had such a wonderful time in Oregon and while I'm headed to Iowa ... I can't wait to

come back to Oregon next week. From the moments I got to spend with these chapter, district and state officers, this state is in some great hands and is getting prepared to do wonderful things in their schools and communities. Definitely moments lived to the fullest, therefore great successes!

April 14, 2002

"When the journey is long, and the goal is distant, keep this in mind. Though you have a long way to go, what really matters is that you're on your way. Each day you move closer. Not only do you move closer, each step on the journey makes the destination that much more worth reaching." - Ralph Marston

This week was pretty intense! Our team came together in Indianapolis on Sunday night and on Monday we started National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO) preparation and practice. Our wonderful trainers came in to the center and helped us grow and continually learn ... I really don't know what we'd do without them. We tried to smooth out the new curriculum that we will be presenting this summer to the newly elected state officers. For some reason (I believe it to be the energy-high we were on from state conventions we had just attended!) the six of us were super antsy and could hardly sit still. Our teaching and learning journey was long, and the goal of successful conferences seemed to be forever in the future. But we were working and progressing and each new thing we learned, or small thing we tweaked, made us realize just how quickly the conferences are approaching, just how much work we have ahead of us, and what a difference we have the ability to make if we really perform at our potential!

On Thursday, after NLCSO stuff had wrapped up and most everyone had gone their own ways, I stayed in Indy to make the big announcement about the move of the national convention. Amber stuck around too, so she and I crafted the message I was to deliver on behalf of the team and then got to hobnob with some of the Indiana FFA members, state officers and business/industry representatives who were in attendance at the press conference. It all went very well and I got a bit of media experience out of the deal ... a good thing for a communications major! J The convention will in fact move to Indianapolis for the years 2006-2012. For more information, please check the main link which can be found on the FFA homepage (www.ffa.org).

That afternoon, I flew home for a day. Of course – got clean clothes, some better clothes because I think I was asleep when I packed last and forgot a ton of things! I ran a few errands, spent some time with my friend Angie on a girl's pampering afternoon, and before I knew it, I was getting on another plane, this time bound for the South Dakota State FFA Convention in Brookings at SDSU. I'm excited to see what this convention holds – if my first two were indications of what's to come! J

April 7, 2002

"When tillage begins, other arts follow. ~ The Farmers therefore are the founders of human civilization." - Daniel Webster, 1840

This week started with the Blue catalog photo shoot, which was a blast! J We got to see and try all the new products that will be in the catalog later this year and let me just say ... this stuff is great!

From Indianapolis, I flew to Reno for the Nevada State FFA Convention. I was met at the airport by an old friend, Joe Buffington, the NV state president last year, and Morgan Irwin, Washington's current state president. Then we went over to Jot Travis Student Union Building where the convention was being held, helped set-up and I got to meet and know the state officers. What a great bunch! That afternoon I got a little taste of how great this state convention would be. J That night I went to dinner with the Wells FFA chapter, met my roommate, a newly retired Oregon state officer, Darcy Vial – as well as a good friend and past national officer, Angela Browning.

The first day consisted mainly of Career Development Events, so Darcy, Morgan, Luke Browning (the visiting California state officer), and I went over to help out and watch the Nevada members in action. This day was so great for me ... all I really did was spend it meeting members, probably my favorite thing in the FFA world! I also got to help judge the Creed contest. Wow, was that tough stuff ... these Nevada creeders don't mess around! They knew the 5 paragraphs, they were ready for questions – it

was a stiff competition. Then that night I gave my keynote address, which was so much fun because the members in the audience were so excited, engaged, and into what was going on that it was pure pleasure for a presenter.

Day 2 started with an early morning workshop. I was happily surprised by the number of students who attended and the enthusiasm that they had for learning about their uniqueness. After that, Luke, Darcy, Morgan and I borrowed Haley – the NV state vice president's car and went to downtown Reno. We got pictures with the "Biggest, Little City" sign, got breakfast and picked up a few souvenirs. Then it was back to the convention to help with the Parliamentary Procedure contest and the evening session. Following the session that night, the whole state association went downtown to a roller-skating rink and had a blast! J I hadn't been on skates FOREVER and it was a ball. Everyone was out there at least trying to have fun and it was great!

Day 3 of convention started with another bright and early workshop, but this time I only had 5 members show up so we just hung out and visited and played hangman. We all had a great time getting to know one another better, and then the visiting state officers and I went out to breakfast again. Right after that we went to the afternoon session, which highlighted many awards. Later was another session that recognized state and American degree recipients/candidates. After it was over, Darcy and I went to dinner with the Ruby Mountain – Elko chapter in their fancy bus! We had a great time and got to know many of their members a lot better. It was a very fun meal! From there we all went back for the evening session, which was followed by the state dance. Just about everyone showed up shaking their groove thing and tearing it up on the dance floor. It was great – especially when we would "pass the hat" to get people to strut their stuff! J I even got a special dance with Zach – since he didn't save me a seat at dinner!

The final day of convention I was up EARLY! It was worth it though because I got to go to breakfast with the Diamond Mountain FFA chapter, who I'd had the pleasure of getting to spend quite a bit of time with over the past few days. We had a nice time, played some poker, and then all went back to pack up and get ready for the final two sessions. The first session had the majority of the CDE awards, as well as a keynote that involved me demonstrating my horrible acting skills. It was a good time though, especially since I sat with Rob and the Ruby Mountain chapter. Then I spent some time doing some business and then the final session rolled around. I think everyone was a little nervous! Whether they were still waiting for contest results, or waiting to find out who the new state officers would be, there was definitely a buzz of anticipation running throughout the crowd! The session went very well - the awards were handed out, the new slate of state officers was announced and there were cheers, tears, and even words of true appreciation for what the organization had done in a certain individual's life. It ended on as great a note as it started on – all in all a wonderful convention! J

I spent some time saying goodbye to all the wonderful members I had met - and hope to keep in contact with – and then helped the state officers and their state staff tear down the convention hall. With almost 4 hours of free time before my flight to Indy, Morgan, Luke and I loaded up into Luke's Sonoma and headed off to the "Ultimate Rush," an adrenaline rush that I just had to try after hearing the Nevada state secretary, Heidi Riggins' retiring address about facing your fears. Essentially this adrenaline rush was induced by getting into a harness, strapping ourselves together and then being hoisted 180 feet up into the air. On the count of 3, I pulled a ripcord and we plummeted straight toward the ground. Just as we were about to smack into the ground – the cord we were attached to caught its slack and we swung forward at nearly 65 MPH. It was GREAT! J

Well that was the ultimate way to end my trip to Nevada, so then Luke took Morgan and me to the airport where we caught our separate flights – he back to Washington and me back to Indianapolis. I had always heard about the Nevada State Convention when I was a state officer candidate, when I was a state officer and even until now ... but now – now I've lived it and I can understand why people would rave about how wonderful this convention is! It was a truly wonderful experience and I am so thankful that I had the opportunity to go, as well as thankful for the people who helped me and who helped make this convention the success that it was! Also, thank you to Mr. Clark for the quote I used this week! J

March 31, 2002

"Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." - Emerson

This past week I had the fortune to go to the 72nd Delaware State FFA Convention, held at the University of Delaware. This was my first state convention and it couldn't have been a better place to start my convention visits!

I arrived late in the evening of the 25th, but was able to see the state officers and find out how things were going. They were excited to get the convention underway!

The next morning, a wonderful past Delaware advisor (and essentially my guide and keeper for the convention J) Mr. Lawson, took me to pick up a few things and then I hung out and practiced with the state officers. It was a good thing too or I might've blown their walk-in! Then I set up for my workshop and got to know the Virginia State officers – Aaron, Mandy, Chad and Jaelyn – who were visiting the convention. Then it was off to something I thought was SO cool ... a state luncheon! Now to anyone else, this might not seem like anything out of the ordinary, but I'd never been to anything like this and I absolutely loved it! It was so warm, friendly and made things so close-knit! It was a very growing experience!

That afternoon I taught Unique U. 101 to many of the Delaware FFA members and they also got to go to workshops by the four Virginians, some of the Delaware officers, and Miss Jane Jenkins Herlong – who was also that evening's keynote speaker.

After that we all went to the afternoon session where most of the Career Development Event (CDE) outcomes were announced and the greatness that comes from enthusiasm was acknowledged. Also during that session, we were all impressed by State Vice President, Jeff Billings' retiring address. He encouraged each of us to control our own destiny. Then it was off to another state meal – this one was recognizing judges and supporters of the FFA. Delaware FFA members were fortunate to have National FFA Sponsors' Board Chairman, Mr. Jim Borel, attend and speak on the importance of the Board. It was nice for me to see him again after our pleasant weekend with DuPont! After dinner was the final session of the night. State stars and proficiency winners were recognized and Miss Jane Jenkins Herlong, a former Miss South Carolina and simply amazing motivational speaker, talked to the convention attendees about being a V.I.P. I had the opportunity to see her speak once before and was wowed once again! After that everyone flocked to the bathrooms and changed for the ... DANCE!! I got there a little late, but it was fun to hang out with everyone! I even got serenaded by some of the Lake Forest FFA members!

The next day I went over to the convention with Mr. Lawson and had lunch with Rachel, Jonathan, Amber and Ryan before getting ready for my speech. It was the last state meal and was probably my favorite because by this time I had gotten to know so many of the members! I practiced my speech a little and then sat with the Smyrna FFA Chapter. We all were moved by State Vice President, Jay Baxter's retiring address and then it was my turn. I had the opportunity to talk to the Delaware FFAers about Everyday Heroes and what it takes to be your own hero. Then, unfortunately I had to leave in order to catch my plane out of Philadelphia. I was bummed because I missed State President, Holly's retiring address and the announcement of the new officers, but was able to find out – congrats to all of you!

I flew home that night and have been able to spend the past few days at home in Colfax and Pullman. It was SO great to hang out with my friends – Annie, Vanessa, Kristine, Angie, Callie, Brian, and all the FarmHouse guys, not to mention Chuck! We all got together and went country dancing one night ... one of my favorite things to do, and then I spent time at home with my family. I wasn't able to be around for Easter dinner, but my brother and I both flew out of Spokane at the same time so we were able to hang out in the airport. It's always fun to have someone to spend all that extra time with while you're waiting! J

This past week I encountered so much enthusiasm and love of the FFA in Delaware that I can't wait for my next convention in Nevada, where I'm sure those members will be bubbling with enthusiasm, too! Thanks again to everyone who made my stay in the First State so enjoyable and thanks to all the Delaware members who allowed me to have such a great first state convention!

March 24, 2002

Agriculture is our wisest pursuit because it will in the end contribute to real wealth,

good morals, and happiness. - Thomas Jefferson, 1787 (painted on the wall of the American Farm Bureau Federation, D.C. office)

Washington, D.C. – our nation's capitol. This week was spent visiting more partners, as well as a two-day visit at the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Monday we went on four different visits learning more about the state of our nation and how FFA is already helping to positively impact the US. My key visit of the day was our stop at the American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) office where we met with President Bob Stallman. We visited about various agricultural issues and learned more about the Farm Bureau as an FFA support organization.

Following our meeting with President Stallman, we spent another hour and a half with different AFBF staff members who briefed us on the most up-to-date information on the most pressing issues in agriculture. It felt good to walk out of there with an understanding and solid concept of the things that are impacting our industry so strongly on a day-to-day basis. When we're on the road all the time it becomes easy to miss a headline story or not hear about something that just happened, so this was a great opportunity for me (and the rest of the team) to really catch up before state convention season.

Tuesday we spent the day at the USDA doing many different things. We started with a breakfast reception with many key individuals who work in different agencies within the department, and then had the great opportunity to meet with Secretary of Agriculture, Ann Veneman. We took pictures, talked about how she came to be where she is now, and how the FFA is creating the "leaders of tomorrow" for the agricultural industry.

Following our meeting, I met with Mr. Joe Walsh of the US Forest Service, Office of Communication, whom I would be job-shadowing the rest of the day. I had a great time learning about the Forest Service, their role in preserving our national parks, and how they handle communication issues. It was a fun peek for me into a communications job in an agriculture field!

Wednesday was a blast! We got up early and went back to the USDA where we prepared the workshops we would be presenting to inner-city D.C. 4th graders later that morning. We met two 4-H representatives who also put on workshops, and once the students arrived, Secretary Veneman addressed the children on the importance of agriculture. Following her speech and a proclamation signing, we spent a couple hours teaching about where food REALLY comes from and just hanging out with these bright, energetic students.

As soon as we were done, it was a mad dash to the Baltimore airport where I flew home! I've been thankful to have the past three days at home – but have been working hard to prepare for the Delaware state convention, as well as hanging out with my little brother and family, some friends from WSU, and of course, doing laundry!

March 17, 2002

"We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give." - Winston Churchill

Week two of Business and Industry visits for Robin and me, this week in beautiful California!

We left Michigan on Sunday and drove to Chicago where we had about three hours to hang out before we flew to San Francisco. Our plane was packed, and close to four hours later, we arrived in sunny San Francisco! It was quite a turnabout from the weather we had just become accustomed to in Michigan, but a very welcomed change. J I think I could be happy in 70-80 degree weather all my life! We met up with our Foundation staff member and the three of us hit the road for our hotel. We grabbed dinner at Texas Roadhouse, where I'd been really hoping to eat for quite awhile ... gotta love those rolls ... and spent some time discussing the week.

We went to a total of 12 various businesses and/or industries and I learned so much about some niche areas in agriculture that often escape my general picture of the

industry. We saw tomatoes, tools, tractors and footwear, and we learned about cattle genetics, small crop chemicals, as well as about the cotton and thoroughbred horse industries. I really enjoyed getting to travel down the state of California and see the amazing diversity in agriculture that this huge state offers.

One of my favorite visits was a quick stop to visit with a past national officer. He shared with us about his experiences, what the FFA was like during his term and we were able to share what the FFA is like today. His biggest piece of advice for us, and any member, is to be willing to be flexible in whatever you are doing. He said the more flexible you are able to be, the more opportunities will come your way. How true!

I also really enjoyed meeting all the past FFA members we encountered this week. Each one of them were so proud of their membership, most still had their corduroy jacket, and all of them still remembered their advisor's name. It was so encouraging to hear from these successful individuals how much they enjoyed their FFA experiences and how they attributed their current job and success to what the FFA taught them. They were all also very impressed to learn about how the organization has changed since they were members and how many different opportunities we offer students now.

We wrapped up the week in Los Angeles, where Robin and I had the opportunity to visit Mann's Chinese Theatre and see the hand and footprints of different stars, as well as spend an afternoon on Rodeo Drive while waiting to catch our flight. It was a blast, plus we got to see a couple stars! We met Jay Mohr, from "Jerry Maguire," and had lunch next to Ben Stein! J You could easily say we were star struck!

Then we hopped a plane to my house where Robin got to see some of the Evergreen state of Washington. I took her to see my dad's Highland cattle, the Snake River at Almoda, Pullman – home of Washington State University and some of my favorite spots around campus. Then it was a quick drive through downtown Colfax and back out to my house to hang out with my mom, stepdad and little brother. It was nice to be home again, if only for a day, but hey, two words ... clean laundry! Now it's off to Washington D.C. for half of a week and then home again!

March 10, 2002

"Success is knowing my purpose in life, growing to my maximum potential and sowing seeds that benefit others." - John Maxwell

This past week was our team retreat in Michigan. It was very nice and couldn't have come at a better time for me. We stayed at the Edward Lowe Foundation camp in a circle of 5 old boxcars that had been refinished on the insides, and worked at a conference center that was built to look like a building in the old west. It was so great! Plus when we arrived on Sunday, there was close to a foot of snow on the ground. That enhanced the beauty and tranquility of the place and really helped me spend some time catching up with work, myself, and our team.

According to what my opening quote outlines, this was a week of personal success for me. I was able to refocus what my purpose in this organization is and what my plans are after this year of service. I spent some solid, quality time preparing my speech and workshops for state conventions so I can utilize my full potential, and by doing so, help members the best I can.

As a team we spent time together, talking, growing and always learning from, and about, one another. We had coaching sessions for both our speech and our workshops and I got some great feedback to help strengthen both before I hit the road to state conventions beginning with Delaware. J

The second half of the week was spent learning about and beginning to prepare for the National Leadership Conference for State Officers (NLCSO) 2002! It was very exciting because the conference will be different, fresh, fun, and new! I had a blast when I went to NLCSO in Kalamath Falls, Oregon, and I can only imagine what it will be like for this year's new batch of state officers who get to go through the program! I know it will be very engaging, educational, and FUN!

Other than that, I had a lot of time this week to catch up on emails, letters, postcards, laundry (very important!), and my journal – as well as just rest, relax and enjoy being

in one spot for more than two nights! It was very refreshing and very necessary. Until this year I never realized just how much each of us need our own time to recharge and rejuvenate so that we can truly be the most effective and useful to others. Now I swear by that time!

This week was a success for me by Dr. Maxwell's standards. Was it for you? What purpose are you currently working toward? What is your ultimate goal? Are you growing toward your maximum potential or simply living in a rut, content with the way things have always been? Challenge yourself to think about your future and what you want to do and be ... then do what is necessary to achieve that dream. That's when you will grow and when you will challenge others to do the same.

March 3, 2002

"We are rich only through what we give." - Anne-Sophie Swetchine

I spent this week traveling with Robin and some of our wonderful FFA Foundation staff in our first week of Business and Industry (B&I) visits. We finished with our great stay and visit with DuPont by touring some of their research facilities, meeting with the president of the company, and then heading out in our different directions, with Robin and me off to Pennsylvania.

We went to Pennfield Farms, a feed company in the Northeast, learned a little about them and also talked with them about the National FFA Organization.

The next day we started with a great visit to CNH, formerly known as Case IH and New Holland. We learned about the company's scope, marketing and products. Many of the individuals we met with were former FFA members or had family that were members, which was very exciting for Robin and me, since the company is a great sponsor of the FFA.

Then we drove on down the road to Washington D.C. where we visited the Council for Biotechnology Information, a company formed to educate the public about biotechnology, what it is, does, and the science behind it. We learned a lot and saw a huge tie in the science that is taught in agriscience classrooms and that is necessary in field of biotechnology.

Then it was off to Memphis, Tennessee. Here, we first met with Micro Flo, a generic chemical company. Then we met with a representative from Jimmy Dean Foods and visited about the food processing industry – hmmm ... I'm pretty sure FFA dabbles in that! J Then we went to the Sparks Company and talked agricultural economics and found out just how vital they are to the success of any business endeavor. Since I'm not that good at math, I tried my best to stay up with what was being thrown our way.

Our last visit was with TruGreen ChemLawn, a turf/green company. I learned so much about that industry! I've been hearing and learning more about it each year and I really learned the magnitude of it during this visit. I was also proud that the FFA has already branched far into turf and landscape management because again, our members have the opportunity to be so far ahead of the game when it comes to job experience and knowledge!

The third day of visits I came down with a terrible case of food poisoning and was completely worthless for the whole day. I have never been so sick in all my life – and bless her heart, Robin went on to our visits without me, and they all tried to make me as comfortable as possible while we were driving down the road.

Thankfully I was feeling somewhat better the next day and I was able to go to the visits again. We started at Wrangler, which I enjoyed because of my rodeo background and their commitment to the tradition of Western life, as well as the FFA. Then we went to Syngenta, one of FFA's greatest supporters, had lunch with some of their executives and learned about what this new company, a result of the merger between Novartis and Aventis, is doing in the marketplace and how they are reaching and serving their customers.

Then we went to our final visit at Trone Advertising. They have recently begun supporting the FFA and taught Robin and me a great deal about the field we are both studying – communications – and allowed us to share with them more about the FFA.

It was a great week of being able to connect with people in industries that support and need our members, as well as teaching new FFA friends about our organization and the importance of the agricultural industry.

Now it's off to Michigan for our team retreat.

February 24, 2002

"Love the moment and the energy of that moment will spread beyond all boundaries."
- Corita Kent

I was fortunate to start this week out with a quick day-long visit to home after a month on the road. Let me tell you, those moments recharge me with an energy that I think surprised the Kentucky state officers and state staff that greeted me at the Lexington airport on Monday. I would be spending the week in Kentucky to help them celebrate National FFA week and after my time at home, and thinking about all the great people I already knew in Kentucky, and of course, the horse farms, I was so excited to visit this beautiful state.

I had the pleasure of traveling with state president, Whitney LeGrand, and state vice president, Rachel Richardson, for the majority of my visit and the three of us had a ball together. Whether it was sharing girl-talk time, question and answer periods, or goofing around together ... we had a blast! They are two of the sweetest girls and really helped make my visit comfortable and definitely memorable!

We started off the week by driving to Bowling Green, home of Western Kentucky State University and my friend Chad, who was a national officer candidate with the six of us. We were able to hang out, and all of us, including Chad, two more of the state officers, Billy Joe and Matt S., and one of Chad's fellow state officers, Brandon, went to dinner and just hung out together. The group gave me a driving tour of the university that included a stop at a dorm room – just in case they were different from Washington State's! J

The next morning we went to Christian Co. High School and met the FFA chapter at the recreation department's parking lot ... where they were waiting with 22 tractors for their annual tractor parade! It was so much fun! We had a police escort all the way through town to the school and as we drove along, people came out of their homes, work, and the Board of Education even stepped out to smile and wave at us as we rolled by. Once we got to the school Whitney, Rachel, Billy Joe, Matt and I spent the day with the chapter members putting on presentations for the local 8th graders about the opportunities they have if they take agriculture education classes in the high school. We all had a great time with the different stations, especially the farm safety station, "You don't want to be a people pancake!" as presenter Robbie put it.

After that we went on to Caldwell Co. where we were fortunate to have dinner and be a part of their degree ceremonies. They pinned 32 greenhands and 11 chapter members, it was great. They had a wonderful turnout of family, community, and administration and I was able to talk with them a little about their FFA career opportunities. That night after the awards ceremony we went to Billy Joe's house and I saw a frozen copperhead, a poultry barn (with a new load of chicks just in), and my first tobacco barn. It has been very interesting for me to learn about the tobacco industry and to see how it works. I think if I had to stand on those little 2x4's and put up tobacco like these students do ... I'd break my leg 8 different ways!

The next day we went to Carlisle Co. FFA and I was able to speak with their members for a little bit about the position of national office and what we've been doing so far. Then they had a chapter meeting to pin their greenhands and holy cow ... they have a school of just over 300 students. I was so impressed when 60% of their student body are FFA members and they had the whole degree ceremony parts memorized, perfectly. Great job!

After some quick remarks to them we hustled to Graves Co. FFA. While we were there, we again spent time talking to junior high students about high school agriculture classes during their lunch period.

Then Rachel, Whitney and I had a long drive to take Rachel home and head to our

final engagement of the day – the Jessamine Co. FFA Alumni meeting. What a fun time! We started out with a yummy potluck dinner and then I got to visit with a bunch of the members. I got to hear all about what the chapter has been doing, followed by hearing how much the Alumni supports the chapter. After the meeting it was down to business. That's right, the meeting was the formality – now it was time to get down and dirty ... on the volleyball court. All members, Whitney, myself and two of the student teachers all turned out to play 3 on 3 volleyball while the alumni watched and laughed at our antics! Way to go to my team of Sara, Chad, and Adam!

The following day Whitney and I got up early and met two more state officers, Brooke and Matt, and the 4 of us had a TV/radio interview on a Lexington station. It was pretty fun, my first TV interview! After breakfast at my first Cracker Barrel, yes – I'd never eaten there before, Whitney went off to some things she had planned and Brooke, Matt and I went back to Jessamine to visit with the whole chapter and witness their greenhand ceremony. It was followed by a nice reception with many community supporters, but we had to leave early for our next activity.

We went to the University of Kentucky (UK) to speak to a class there. Matt left us to go to a couple classes he couldn't miss and Brooke and I went to meet Scott Co. FFA. I was met with a hug from Mrs. Oldfield, as well as many wonderful FFA signs that welcomed myself and all the members, alumni, and community individuals that came to the special meeting they held to celebrate FFA week. It was a great meeting and I was fortunate to meet many of their great alumni members, who have even been recognized nationally for what they do for this chapter, and the Georgetown mayor who presented me with the key to the city!

I couldn't believe it ... but what was even crazier was later that day when Brooke and I drove through town, I realized I had been to Georgetown once before with my home chapter when we had driven to the Kentucky Horse park last year and we stopped on main street to look in some of their antique shops. Very ironic, but I guess it just shows how neat this community is ... you just can't visit once!

After the meeting, there was a FFA gathering at "Center of Town" a recreation center where the alumni had provided a great potluck dinner and then the members and I spent time just hanging out casually – playing pool, watching some crazy, funny guys sing country songs like "Plowboy" by Weird Al and even some Hank Williams, and of course there was basketball and dancing. It was a great time and I was sad to leave at the end of the night. I kept hanging out and hanging out ... I think Brooke probably thought we were never going to leave! I just had such a great time!

The next day I had to leave Kentucky, but what a wonderful time I had. FFA members, you all have the opportunity to see a little tidbit of this great state if you attend the National Convention in October! I encourage you to come and if you have the opportunity, spend some time touring the country and seeing for yourself the wonderful things that this state holds ... including incredible FFA members!

After I left Kentucky I flew into Philadelphia and met the rest of my team, who like myself, was bubbling with all the great experiences we had during FFA week. We loaded up and drove down to Delaware to the Hotel DuPont where we were staying. It was simply beautiful! Easily the nicest hotel I've ever stayed in.

That night we met with our Foundation Sponsors Board chairman, Mr. Jim Borel, three of his staff members and we all went out to a nice Italian dinner. We loaded up on the bus and we were on our way to the Billy Joel – Elton John concert going on that night! How amazing and fortunate we were. Two music icons together in one amazing concert. I was in utter amazement the whole night that I was there, but also because of the amazing talents that were present on the stage that night. These two men could write songs, they could sing songs, they could play the piano better than anyone I've ever seen, and then the bands backing them up – I was floored! If only each of us could capitalize on our talents like that ... this world would be transformed with energy and excellence!

The next day my team and I also spent time with Mr. Borel and his family touring the Hagley Mills museum, which is the site that the DuPont family originally settled. It was such a unique site ... the old stone buildings, waterwheels, and machinery that are all still in working condition, nestled in some very tranquil woods on the Brandywine river. I loved it!

Following the museum visit we had dinner at the Borel's and it was exquisite! Good

food, great company and lovely memories! It was a great night!

Today we had a jazz brunch, followed by a large reception with numerous FFA members, state officers, university affiliates, government officials, and industry representatives. It was a great chance for everyone to learn a little more about our wonderful organization!

This past week has been full of amazing moments that will never leave my memory ... and moments whose energy has definitely spread beyond boundaries. In many different moments I've had the opportunity to interact with amazing Kentucky members who have impacted me, but also shared with me their energy and passion for agriculture and the FFA, as well as moments with industry representatives who have gained energy in their careers through their interaction with our organization. Recognize and enjoy the moments in your life – and let the energy from them spread to help grow yourself as an individual.

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**The 2001-2002 National Officer Journals****Abbie Kammerzell**

2001-2002 National FFA Western Region Vice President

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Where I'll be this week:

75th National FFA Convention

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**September 29**

Learning, and then not acting on what you learn, is like plowing and then never planting. - unknown

This past week many seeds were planted as I traveled with the Kansas state officers around their state to various Greenhand conferences. These first year members were just starting to find out about the organization known as National FFA, what opportunities they have in it, and were taking their greenhand knowledge test. It was a huge learning time for them – if they opened their ears and minds to what they were experiencing at the conference they attended.

My week started out with a delayed flight which made state president, Jake Lauer, nervous that something had happened. I finally arrived and we had a good time catching up, stopping by the new Cabela's store in KC, and then driving to Manhattan – home of KSU. Jake, Kim (state ----) and I got dinner at a KSU special, Chipotle, and talked about the conference that was the next morning.

We arrived very early to the conference on Monday (hey, better early than late!), and then I quickly learned the routine of a Kansas Greenhand Conference. It was a whole new format to me, different than anything I'd experienced, but all-in-all it went well. At the end of the conference I even met a former Washington State FFA officer who is now an ag teacher in that district...Crazy! After it wrapped up, the three of us went back to Manhattan where we ate lunch at an Aggieland diner, Rock-a-belly's. After that I went to my hotel to change and get ready for the Kansas Jr. Livestock auction. Erin and I drove to Wichita and then mingled with the youth show people and potential buyers. They served awesome beef tip appetizers, which were followed by a delicious steak dinner! After dinner Ms. Kane, the state executive secretary, had me announce the Grand and Reserve animals that went through the sale. when I finished with that...I received a fun surprise. Jared and Jordan Williams, originally from Washington, but both going to college in Kansas, had drove to the sale to watch and say hi to me! Their dad is an advisor in Washington and I've had a good time knowing their family! The three of us caught up for quite awhile and then I had to hit the road again – this time with Dan and Craig. Well....I was worn out so fell asleep in the backseat and it was a good thing, because we ended up an hour and a half off track and got back to Manhattan really late.

The next day I had the morning off so I slept in (wahoo!) and then got ready and went to lunch with an old friend. Back when I was a state officer, I was on a national

committee with this great girl from Kansas and over time, we've kept in touch and while I was in town, Beth and I got together to catch up. We had a nice little visit, fellowship, and meal in a quaint coffeehouse and then she took me to see her house before I had to be at the hotel to meet Sandy and Dan so we could hit the road again. The three of us had a fun time driving to South Kansas and when we got to the first conference sight...we immediately had to get to work. The district officer team and hosting chapter were a blast to work with and we all had a good time laughing and joking! That night we stayed in an interesting Super 8 and it seemed like as soon as we hit the pillow for bed, it was time to get up.

The first conference went well and had great greenhand attendance...it just went really fast! I did nine presentations in about an hour and 20 minutes and then wrapped up with a short keynote. After it all wrapped up, the D.O.'s, Sandy, Dan, the two district advisors and myself all went to Applebee's for lunch. After the meal they all had to head back to their respective schools and we had to scoot to the next conference site – Dodge City!! I was excited because I knew all the old cowboy/Wild West stories about this town and I was gonna get to see it!! Well, it wasn't at all what I pictured...all historical significance was gone, but hey, I could still say I'd been there, right?! We checked in with the D.O.'s who were there and setting up and then went back to the hotel to work and catch up because it had been a long day.

When we woke up the next morning we felt rested and refreshed and were ready to conquer the world – or at least help some greenhands get more involved in the FFA! After grabbing some breakfast in the lobby and visiting with some sweet senior citizens who were down there also, we went out to the car which we found covered in paint-writing....courtesy of the District officer girls. At the conference I didn't actually put on a workshop, just did a keynote, but it went well – a new speech for me. There was a fury to get business and bio cards and then it was once again time to head out. We drove and rove all the way back to Manhattan, but stopped along the way at the Rolling Hills Refuge, a place I had called home for a time when I was much younger. Yup, I lived in Kansas for awhile – and on our way back I stopped and saw the old place. We arrived back at KSU just in time for Sandy and I to watch the brand-new season premier "Friends" episode. Perfect!! Then I called home to Washington to let my friends know that they'd better not miss it – I love this time zone thing!! Then I cleaned up a little, Jake and Sandy picked me up so their whole team, Ms. Kane, and I could go to dinner at the Little Apple Brewery. We had a great time visiting, talking football, briefing the conferences that week, and visiting about national convention.

The next morning was my final day and I had one morning conference with Jake and Erin that was gonna be tight...finishing it and then getting to KCI on time. The conference went all right, and we did end up having to duck out early so I could get going. We got back to Manhattan and I switched vehicles really quickly and was now riding with Kim, who had volunteered to take me to the airport. The team gave me a K-State T-shirt and a couple cards (I started crying...big surprise!) and Kim and I were off. We hustled because we were gonna be cutting close and I ended up getting there JUST in time!! Phew!! I caught my plane and after a brief stop in Minneapolis, I was back home in Washington.

I had an amazing time in Kansas, a state I once called home for a brief part of my life, and I REALLY enjoyed getting to hang out with the whole Kansas state officer team again. I told them and the Missouri team members that I worked with the week before; it is truly a blessing to work with people like them multiple times. So much of our year is going somewhere, working with members and then going somewhere else, more than likely not ever seeing those initial members again. So to have spent an awesome week in Nebraska with the Kansas officers as they were just getting ready to embark on their year and then to be a part of what they were doing now...it was really gratifying!! They were doing awesome things and to think, they are just beginning their year!! This team is probably always going to be near and dear to my heart and I can't thank them enough for the great memories – I wish the six of you, and all the Kansas Greenhands, the very best!! You are truly living all the things you have learned!!!

September 22

Pleasure in the job puts perfection in the work. - Aristotle

This week the great pleasure my team and I have derived from this year of service was funneled into the great work we were able to accomplish this week while in Indianapolis preparing for national convention.

We arrived on Saturday at various times and all went over to the Center to get online and get to work...we had scripts due, RA drafts to turn in, music to track down, Reflections to get more completely written, and so much more to get done. E-mails, thank you's, sleep, eat, exercise, call home....you know...the important stuff!! I was still getting better from the cold that I had in Missouri, but was definitely feeling a lot better. The first full day back we had a few short meetings, but most of us spent the day floating around the Center – saying hello to staff we hadn't seen in forever, asking questions, laughing, and just catching up at our home away from home.

Tuesday, we were all up early and we hit the road to Louisville (haha) for the day. First we went to KFEC to check things out and see what set-up looked like (since they were in the process of setting up for a show) and just really start to think about where our stage will be, where the audience will be and how we can use the different dynamics of the arena to our advantage. Then we swung by the ole Executive West just to see the place that will be our home for about two weeks and then it was off to the Derby Dinner Playhouse for lunch and "Seven Brides for Seven Brothers," my all-time favorite musical and that day's matinee! They did a great job!! After it was over we went down the street to the Ramada that had a ballroom floor that is the same size as our stage and we practiced parts of our RA's with Georgette, a fabulous woman who has an amazing talent at staging and creating a feeling. From there it was a quick stop at a gas station where I got my hand burned by the check-out lady's cigarette. That was rotten!!

The next day only truly consisted of two things: exit interviews with both our team coach and Mr. Staller. Other than that it was work time. Wahoo!! That night some interesting things happened all around the Center....chairs were changed, cows showed up in certain staff member's offices, phones stopped working, a bunch of mice were tracked throughout the Center, rubber duckies took a swim in the fountain, and "The Jokers" left Mr. Staller's office in disarray. It was quite strange!

On Friday the six of us spent the day filming different video clips needed for convention and had a fun time doing it...oh yah and not to mention nearly getting blown away by the tornado that just happened to blow by us (by about three miles). It was funny because a couple members of the team had never experienced a tornado and were enthralled...unfortunately it made us miss an afternoon meeting we were supposed to have. We did, however, make it back in time for the end-of-summer bash at the Center that was kinda our team's send off by the staff. We had a great time visiting for, really, the last time with many of the staff. They have been so great to us this year, so as you can imagine there were some tears shed by this teary officer and her team! We also had the chance to publicly recognize and thank our mentors, who have taken us under their wing all year and just really helped us grow leaps and bounds. After the party, the six of us stayed to work some more and ended up playing more than anything! WE had some intense games of Capture the Flag, watched old Reflections in the John Deere room and then crashed on the floor in there.

Saturday was another full work day – mainly for final drafts and music to be turned in, but also for us to run any last minute errands, etc. The next morning I went to the airport and headed to Kansas for my last trip of the year – holy cow!!

You know, Aristotle couldn't have been more right... when you enjoy what you're doing and who you're with...you really do a better job and this past week I really think my team and I have done our best job in planning national convention so that each FFA member who attends will be able to enjoy it – maybe as much as I've enjoyed the opportunity I've had this year!

September 15

"All I need to know I learned on the farm." - Comment overheard

This week was my final week of Business and Industry visits. I spent it with Dane and a fun, Foundation staffer.

The week started with arrival at the St. Louis airport, where Dane and I met and spent about an hour catching up. Then we went to our hotel and met up with two past Missouri state officers who were attending the Monsanto visit with us the next day. All five of us went to dinner and briefed for the visit, went on a quick Wal-Mart run, then spent the evening at the hotel on our own.

Wednesday, we started with a tour of the Monsanto Chesterfield research facility. We had a brief synopsis of the company and how it came to be in its present form. We walked through where the plant research and development is done, learned about some new products and received a good, working knowledge of the company and what it encompasses. This proved to be quite helpful throughout the day as we met with different groups of individuals, each of whom referred at one point or another to Chesterfield or the history of the company. Phew! We had a luncheon with the executive board to share with them a deeper understanding of the National FFA Organization and some examples of what FFA members are doing through their membership. We also met with a pair of ladies who work for the company who head the Diversity team. Monsanto is a big proponent of diversity and making a more common part of our everyday lives. They spoke to us about how they are helping to create this within the company and its employees, and possible ways that they can partner with the FFA, "Because," they said, "we feel that FFA does an excellent job of promoting diversity." We had one other meeting that was devoted simply to having Monsanto employees share tidbits of advice with the four of us that we could pass on to the general membership. Well FFA members, here's what these adults in very successful, respected positions had to say to you:

- Where you start, you probably won't end up.
- Pursue things that are the most fun.
- Get lots of experience so you can bring the most to the table later.
- Everything is about sales, internally or externally.
- People want to help you, don't be afraid to just let them.
- Ask yourself these three questions to help you find your perfect job. What is really sacred, do you really care about, or experiences do you want to have by the time you are 50 years old? What would you do for free? What environment/people take AWAY from you, your energy, your ability to be successful, etc.? Know that and stay away from it!

Never sacrifice these things!!!

- Always stretch and do things you don't know and might fail at.
- Stay true to yourself and your beliefs.
- Treat others with respect and like they've already succeeded.
- Be willing to move around early on in your career.
- Keep perspective
- Set long-term goals
- Network, network, network!!!
- Learn to lean on others; relationships are the key to life.
- Select two mentors who care about you that can help you grow in your personal and professional life.
- Stay positive and surround yourself with positive people.
- With freedom comes responsibility.
- Be eager to face the challenge of each day.
- Be afraid of conformity.

- Don't underestimate the power of the skills you are gaining/have right now from being in the FFA...they will take you far, but always keep growing.
- FFA is a great training ground for future careers – appreciate the early experiences you are getting.
- Don't coast on current achievements, put the same extra effort into everything you do.
- Your attitude in EVERY situation is very important.
- Success is not difficult, you simply have to do you best at all times.

Wow. What a lot of amazing advice from people who have been where we are right now, but have also gone on, learned a lot, made some mistakes, reflected back and wished they had known then what they know now. FFA members, they are giving you a golden opportunity here – take these words to heart. Use what they know and are sharing with you to step one giant leap ahead of so many others who will have to stumble and learn for themselves these things that you now have before you!

That night, after dinner, Dane, Jim and I went to the Cardinals baseball game against the Cincinnati Reds. We saw both Grand Slams and enjoy the game, but I must admit, the whole time I was nervously swatting and watching for mosquitoes. The West Nile virus had been confirmed numerous times in St. Louis, so I was a little nervous but left the game bite free. The rest of the week we visited a number of other businesses, ranging from Purina Mills (where I learned all about Deer Chow), Osborn & Barr, National Corn Growers, Brighton, and a lunch meeting with a representative of the American Floral Endowment. I learned so much about the field of communication that I will someday be going into, once again how diverse the industry of agriculture is, and how come Dairy Queen ice cream is different than regular ice cream.

After that last visit, Dane and I went back to the airport, where we hopped planes to Spokane. Yup, Dane got to come home with me to Washington to see my old stomping grounds, chill with my family, go to my county fair, and meet a lot of my friends. I think we both had a fun time, both relaxing and running around. It so funny how seeing a place where someone grew up and meeting the people in their life helps you better understand them. So that being said, I think Dane must understand me that much better! Dane experienced the farm where I learned so many of the things that make me who I am, and this week we learned about things that impact the farm and agriculture in general, as well as some of other things people have experienced and learned from life. What are you going to do with this gift of advice?!!

September 8

“Genchi-genbutsu” – Go and see

“Kiizan” – Continuous growth

The 18 and 19 were two interesting, busy days. On Sunday, the six of us loaded into “Turbo,” the mini-van, with one of our Foundation staff-persons and proceeded to drive to Georgetown, Ky., for a Business and Industry visit to Toyota North America. After a few hours (and some torrential rain), we arrived at our destination. We all unloaded into our hotel rooms, where we had nearly two hours to rest and relax before a dinner meeting. What a nice treat!!

After that short break, we were met by Doug Kueker (former national officer), who escorted us to dinner. We arrived at what was once an old church and was now converted into an Italian restaurant/pizzeria and met our contact from Toyota. The next morning, we started with a tour of the Toyota plant in Georgetown. We watched as cars were put together and learned about Toyota's philosophy, “Kiizan” meaning continuous growth. In everything Toyota does, they are constantly trying to better themselves. The employees live by this philosophy, especially when they are submitting ideas to improve their part of the line or improve their personal work times. It was very interesting to learn about, especially after our overseas trip in February. Seeing this side of Toyota brought full-circle all that we had seen at their Mega-Web showroom in Tokyo. We also met with individuals who work in Toyota to learn more about the North America branch of the company and help them better understand the

National FFA Organization.

Our team also put on a game show-style presentation on the FFA and some of its programs for the Georgetown/Scott County Chamber of Commerce. It went well and many of the community leaders walked away with FFA pens, mugs, and even a fleece! I was especially excited about this part of the visit because the Georgetown FFA officers and their advisor, Ms. O, came. I had visited their school and gotten to know them in February during my visit to Kentucky for FFA week. It was great to catch up with them and to see some familiar faces!

After our meetings wrapped up, we went down the road to the Hobby Hills Girls Home and spent some time doing some community service. We spent a couple hours hanging out and getting to know some girls who were living at the home. We had the opportunity to talk with them about some positive things they were doing within their school and what they could look forward to when they finished high school. We munched on pizza, a young teenage girl's favorite, and then played a photo scavenger hunt. We had a fun and creative time getting tons of required items in only a certain number of Polaroids. My team, Abbie's Angels (what a fitting name!), did awesome and we came in second by only a couple points. As soon as that was over, we had to say quick goodbyes because Barrett and I had to get to the airport to catch flights..... HOME!!!! Yes, in only a few hours I was going to be home in Washington!

Well, I made it and was met at the airport by my wonderful mom, who I had miscommunicated with. She thought I was arriving the night before, so she had driven the hour and a half from our house up to the airport the night before also. What a gal I got home and went right to bed, but was up early the next day unpacking, doing laundry and re-packing for a 5-day whitewater-rafting trip. Not to shabby for a fun activity while I was home, so I didn't mind the lack of catch-up sleep too much. That night I went to Pullman and met up with the crew that was hitting the river for the week. We got everything loaded and the next morning we set out for the Salmon River, Idaho. The day we put in it rained right up until dusk, but the rest of the time I was in heaven – it was 90-100+ degrees and I got to bask on the front of the rafts getting the tan I missed out on all summer. I also went swimming and floated in the river, and even rowed one of the rafts through some pretty hefty rapids! Since our trip was so late in the season, the water was lower than normal, making the rapids more dangerous, but we made it through just fine. A fishing pole was even brought along and I spent some time casting. I caught a couple little small mouth bass, and one big, fatty carp. It was gross!! Uggg!

Other than that, I spent my time at home with friends, family, working on those leftover convention assignments and getting things a little bit straightened out for the time when convention is all over and I go home for good. I was never so happy to be at home than these two weeks, and now realize better than ever what amazing blessings I have in the Palouse, both the life and the people.

August 18

"Your level of success and achievement depends on the level of challenge with which you're willing to live. Those who take on the biggest challenges are the ones who attain the biggest achievements. Welcome challenges, for they are truly what make the achievements possible." -Ralph Marston

This week was full of one big challenge made up of a lot of little challenges. This week was the beginning of National Convention planning. Whoa!! Is it really that time already? Has time really flown by that quickly?

As daunting as it seemed at first, as we talked through the logistics of the largest annual youth gathering, things seemed more and more manageable. We were given individual assignments to work on, assigned certain sessions to chair, started thinking about our retiring addresses, and also...about the new officer installation. Not to mention all the other events that are going on to capture the attention of nearly 50,000 FFA members who will fill the Kentucky Fair and Exposition Center (furthermore known as KFEC). Holy cow! Now, I enjoyed the convention from a student's perspective for two years, a state officer's point of view for one year, a volunteer for another year, and none of that time did I even have a glimmer of a clue what went into putting on something so huge or grand.

While at the Center working on the tasks set before us, we had a few meetings with

different members of the staff who helped us better understand certain areas of the convention. We, wrote scripts, worked on rough drafts of our speeches, and spent even more time together as a team. It went very well and, it seemed, very quickly.

On Wednesday, we had a luncheon at our neighbors, DowAgroScience. It was very pleasant and we learned more about them as a company, welcomed a new sponsors' board member and most of all, thanked them for the support they show our organization to help our members.

I had dinner with my mentor one night and we had an exciting ride to a very quaint, yummy restaurant on his motorcycle. Actually, he on the motorcycle...I was riding in the sidecar! We had a great time catching up since we hadn't seen each other all summer and then it was back to the Finn.

On Saturday we turned in all of our assignments, although we still had a few things to work on after that, but for the most part we had the first chunk done. Wahoo! We're trying some new things, taking on some big challenges, so hopefully it will result in a great convention for all those who attend!

August 11

"Time you enjoy wasting, was not wasted." – John Lennon

This past week I was able to enjoy the grand scenery and hills of Southeastern Ohio, surrounded by trees, trees, and well...a few grass hay fields. The five of my teammates and I, chaperoned by our team manager, got to spend a lovely week resting, thinking, catching up and just hanging out together. It was time that was always and never wasted – and let me tell ya, it was great!

Barrett and I flew from our final NLCSO in Delaware to Columbus, Ohio, where after an extensive wait in the airport, we managed to find Amber and then play fun cell phone pranks on our teammates who had yet to pick us up. Once they finally arrived and we loaded up, we hit the road for our cabin destination in the woods. Everyone was going a mile a minute, telling stories about their quick stay at home and Barrett and I told about our last conference. We arrived in Logan, where we found nothing more than a Wal-Mart and a sign pointing us in our general direction. We stopped to get the necessities at ol' WallyWorld and then, as night set, (not to our advantage, let me tell you...) we tried to find our cabins.

Thankfully they were right next to each other so unloading wasn't too terrible an endeavor, but I must say – I never pack very light so I was very happy to have the guys right there to help out! We all got kinda settled in and then it was off to bed.

The next few days we spent the mornings together working, and the rest of the time was for ourselves to figure out. We could go it alone, go somewhere as a group or spend time building friendships with one another – the main thing was that we didn't have phone or Internet access so we had to spend some time just for ourselves. We could work on any past projects that we still needed to get done, e-mails that were in our inbox before we arrived, but other than that, it was movies, music (well, any CDs we'd brought), or the great outdoors. It was all very nice after the incredibly fast pace we'd been living for the past few weeks, what with NLCSO's, SPC, and a few other things. In the mornings we got up, mosed over to the boys cabin (deemed "the kitchen") ate some breakfast and then found a comfortable spot in the living room. Each morning one of us had a coaching meeting and at that time, the other five would write the inscription for their end-of-the-year plaque. It was a great time to reflect on each member of our team and what they bring to truly make our team what it is, and think back on some hilarious moments!! After that wrapped up, we would each go our separate ways. One morning I stayed and Robin, Dane and I attempted yoga, which I quite enjoyed but couldn't talk them into again. Another morning it was an adventure into Logan to find more than just a Wal-Mart. After some searching...I found a whole little community! It was very cute and I enjoyed driving around it for quite some time. Another day I simply responded to e-mails – knowing that when I got back to civilization, a ton of people were going to be hearing from Abbie Kammerzell! I also spent a great deal of time working out, reading, writing letters, and simply thinking about things. It was wonderful.

One evening during our stay, Elio, Barrett, Robin, Amber and I decided to go out. But this was not just any night out on the town. Oh no! We had found an ad for a barn

dance hall in the foothills of Ohio, supposedly not to far from where we were. Well, it sounded cool, and definitely meant experiencing the local atmosphere so, hey, why not?! Well, when we left on this venture, the 15-passenger van we were driving had barely enough gas to keep the gauge out of the red. An hour and a half later, that wasn't the case...it was 11:00 p.m. and I can honestly say that the three of girls were getting a little worried. Thankfully, a few minutes after our greatest fears seemed to be happening, we saw the lights of a small town and found a gas pump. Phew!! Well, we gased up and then the guys set out once again, or should I say, Elio was bound and determined to find this place! It was hilarious after awhile and we only egged him on as the three of us sang "Heads Ohio, Tails Arkansas," with our own little in-the-moment twists to the verses!

After another hour of driving, we gave the front seats 10 more minutes before we had to try and find our way back to the cabins. Much to our surprise, and theirs, with three minutes to spare, we drove by the Uncle Buck Dance Barn sign and a minute later we were crossing the parking lot to see what awaited us. What was waiting was a large rough, wooden dance floor in the middle of what used to be a barnyard, with a small stage that had a few amps and pieces of music equipment. To the back of the establishment was a barn that if you walked around had bathrooms in the back. There were about 30-40 people there and it was immediately obvious to them and to us that some of these people were not like the others. We didn't mind...too much – and made the best of the situation. Barrett and Elio immediately went to making friends while us girls hung back a little. When we arrived there was no music playing because, we were told, the band had just taken a break. A couple minutes after we arrived, three old timers – complete with beards and caps – made their way to the stage. The three of them then began playing a type of bluegrass, or any song you wanted to request – in bluegrass style. We all danced after a bit, but didn't stay too long. The three of us girls slept on the drive back, but all in all it was a fun escapade!

Let's see.....what else. Hmm...the cabins had hot tubs so we got the chance to just soak and relax if we wanted, and oh yes, one of the days the six of us went on a fun and crazy canoeing trip. We drove into Logan and went to the Canoe Livery. Now I thought liveries were for animals, but apparently not in this case. We signed on for the hour and half trip, which was a total of five miles. We were armed with sunglasses and swimsuits, paired off and after a short drive, arrived at our launch site. We scooted into the river and then had a fun time of rowing, swimming, splashing, talking and tanning. All in all it took the six of us a little over two hours to complete the trip, thanks to all our antics tipping each other – well, mainly just Amber – and everyone came out sopping wet. Good times, happy times. We spent the rest of the afternoon finishing up last minute work and packing so that the next morning we could sleep in a little and then head straight to Indy.

A lot of time was "wasted," wasted watching movies and reading, but in actuality that time was being used to its best and fullest. I needed to rest, relax, and just catch up with me. Now that I've done that, I feel ready to get started planning national convention and attend my last few functions of the year!

August 4

"When there's a meaningful reason for what you're doing, then you can summon the motivation and the energy to get it done. Connect yourself with that reason, and allow it to push you forward. You have a very real stake in the outcome of your own efforts because you've chosen to make those efforts for a reason." - Ralph Marston

The National FFA Board meeting-important business to help set and determine the future of this great organization that we all love. A group of individuals, students, state staff, and Center staff that all have the members' best at heart. A pretty powerful reason to be doing what we're doing! On Saturday we had the board retreat and discussed issues that may be impending, but not imperative. We had a big dinner for everyone to catch up and get acquainted and then that evening there was an ice cream social that the national PAS and MANNRS officers, who were in Indy for their own training at the Center, attended. It was great to get to hang out with them for a time, learn more about their organizations and find out how well all of our visions for the future of agriculture align. The next three days were spent on the issues of the organization – we met both in downtown Indianapolis and at the National Center. On Sunday, Dane and Elio and I went to a beautiful and traditional Catholic church before the meetings, Monday was spent mainly in committee meetings and I was on the special committee regarding the new delegate process issues. Tuesday everything wrapped up and I spent the afternoon and evening catching up on some work before heading to our nation's capital. The board meeting was a great time to see the hearts

and minds of so many people coming together to try and provide the very best for the future of the FFA and it's members. FFA members, you are the wonderful reason for so many of our efforts!

July 17-28

I still find each day too short for all the thoughts I want to think, all the walks I wasn't to take, all the books I want to read, and all the friends I want to meet and see. The longer I live, the more my mind dwells upon the beauty and wonder of the world." - John Burroughs

I flew into Baltimore, where Dane and Elio picked me up. The next few days were spent getting ready for the State Presidents' Conference. We worked on a skit, planned workshops, and got some business taken care of. During the course of all the work, we also had some great team time. Whether it was our crazy trip to the nearby mall and my "almost" haircut, the amazing performance of "AIDA," a late night trip to Best Buy, church at the National Cathedral, a HUGE pillow fight (for all of you who are wondering...we girls whooped up!), or catching the baseball game - Baltimore Orioles vs. the Chicago White Sox.....we had a wonderful time combining work with fun. Thank you so much to our great staff that made it all possible! On the last night before the big hurrah began we got to take a limo to dinner and continue the "stretch" ride around to all the monuments that we would be visiting a few nights later with all the officers. I was so excited by the whole excursion because - believe it or not - it was my first time to ever ride in a limo! What a hoot!!

Saturday night my Mom and her best friend, Terry, arrived and the rest of the parents filtered in between then and Tuesday - my dad and stepmom arrived Tuesday morning very early. On Tuesday, all the officers checked in, we had a dress rehearsal of our opening skit, took 50+ pictures in official dress, and then got things going! "Scenes of America" got the conference started off on the right foot, or well...at least with a smile on everybody's face! That afternoon and evening was also a workshop on Local Program Success (LPS), S.A.V.E., and there was also a very special presentation made by Chevy Trucks. Mr. David Jones of GMAC gave an inspiring speech to the officers at dinner that night and we wrapped up with reflections on the Capitol steps. The trip to the steps was also the start of "DaBus." We'll get to more of that later, though. It was a great first day!

Wednesday was the USDE visit. We loaded a rowdy, lively, fun bunch on DaBus and all of Olga and Ernesta's dear friends had a detailed ride to the Department. Once we got there, Attendant Abbie directed all passengers to their seats and then things began. We had a speech by Dr. Richard LaPointe, followed by a bridging workshop before lunch. It was very handy to have that workshop when we did because lunch was very special...it was the annual Congressional Luncheon. Each pair of officers invited their senators and representatives for a lunch meeting. The hope of the luncheon is to build rapport, as well as foster a greater knowledge/understanding about the future leaders of the agricultural industry. The Honorable Jerry Moran - Kansas, hosted this year's luncheon. After the luncheon ended, the officers had most of the afternoon to call on their congressional leaders and truly experience the Hill. Both the Senate and the House were in session so a few officers tried to sit in on those. Early that evening everyone changed into their conference polos and it was back on DaBus to the Orleans House for dinner - an SPC tradition! After dinner was the night walking tour - past the Vietnam Wall, the Lincoln Monument, the Korean Memorial, and onto the Jefferson, and then finally Iwo Jima for reflections. It was incredible!

Thursday was the BIG day - American pride at its peak - we met President George W. Bush! Things started earlier than normal so we could get to the Old Executive building and get through security. Once we were in, we were escorted up to the pressroom where we waited for a little while. Then the President's staff member, J.D., came and took six very nervous, very excited officers into the hallway to meet the President of the free world. He swept around the corner of the hall flanked by about four staff members and a photographer, stopped and met each of us individually, visited with us briefly and then we presented him with a conference polo. After that, Dane remained in the hall as the rest of us went back into the pressroom ("glowing" according to one of the SPC participants) to get things in order to begin. Only a moment later, Dane and President Bush entered the room and the energy, patriotism, and sheer awe, was shared by all. After an eloquent introduction, Dane turned the podium over to the President and he proceeded to address the 100+ FFA officers, parents, and guests that were fixed solely on him. He shared a wonderful message full of his own background and history, insight into current national and world issues, positive challenges for each citizen to step up to in the future, and his appreciation and fondness for the

agricultural industry. It was...well, Amber, Robin and I were all in tears at one point. It was moving. After our precious time with this incredible man was spent, we heard from some of his special staff appointees and then had a fast and furious photo session with the Presidential seal that was on the doorway that President Bush had entered through. We left the building – everyone bussing about the experience of a lifetime that they had just had, walked by the front of the White House and loaded back on DaBus. From there we grabbed a bite to eat at Union Station. I had my meal with Elias (Ore.) and Eladio (Puerto Rico) and then the three of us got lost trying to get back and had to make a mad dash for the buses as they were leaving for Arlington National Cemetery. Once we arrived at Arlington, everyone headed up to the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and after a short wait – Barrett, Elio, Amber and I were able to participate in a wreath laying ceremony on behalf of the whole SPC group. It was incredibly moving, to be down on the marble pathway in front of the Tomb, honoring those soldiers who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country – and who in a way, go unrecognized for that. It was another awesome moment in what was a VERY patriotic day! After the ceremony concluded, we all filtered to Kennedy's Eternal Flame and down the path surrounded by small white tombstones. I remember so vividly from my own SPC experience, watching as a string of blue corduroy contrasted with the white marble and green grass – and here I was, once again able to experience that incredible sight. It really made me so proud, not only of our nation, but of the pride for America that each and every one of us, as FFA members, carry in our hearts. After that, we returned to the hotel, changed into casual dress and dove into the business of the conference—the delegate process that will occur at the national convention. This year is a whole new process, so a lot of time was spent on helping the officers understand the new set-up and what their role in the grand scheme of things was. Potential issues were discussed and prioritized. That evening Dane and I wrapped things up with reflection in the Galaxy Ballroom that had the most incredible view of the greater Washington D.C. area. It was dark outside, but the twinkle of city lights lit the skyline, national monuments were visible and even in this big city....stars glimmered in the night sky. It was a beautiful sight. Friday, the 26, we started the day with a visit to the U. S. Department of Agriculture and after a brief welcome, broke into nine groups that visited various agencies within the USDA. I went with the Food Inspection Agency group and we had an interesting time learning about food-borne illnesses, how the outbreaks are handled by the Department, and some other interesting facts about agriculture as a potential terrorist attack area. We went to the Ronald Reagan building for lunch and I had some yummy sushi!! Yup, I even got a couple of the state officers to try some sashimi and wasabi!

From there it was back onto DaBus to the hotel for a very special afternoon presentation by Dr. Rick Rigsby, who will also be speaking at the national convention in a couple of months. He made us laugh, made some of us cry, and challenged us all to make more than simply an impression – but to make an impact. After his motivational speech, everyone changed and it was off to visit the FDR memorial, probably my favorite, and then head to the Potomac. After visiting the memorial we boarded the Spirit of the Potomac, a dinner cruise ship, and had a great meal – I enjoyed eating and catching up with my family – and then the fun began. Both decks had DJ's so karaoke took place downstairs and crazy, funk upstairs. People also enjoyed the sights and sounds from the top deck (outside) and after some great antics – the mom's tearing up the dance floor, some of the dad's emulating Elvis, thesis of us serenading the officers, and even my dad coming upstairs and busting a move to "Country Grammar," – it was up to the top deck for everyone because Barrett and Robin were putting on reflections. They did an incredible job – I was bawling by the end of it...thank goodness for some sweet officers who handed me Kleenex and gave me a hug (thanks again Jonathan)! Then we bussed back to the hotel, I had a silly time with Lindsay and Coy, and it was off to bed.

Saturday – the last day of the conference. The morning was free to do what you wanted, see what you wanted to see, experience D.C. in your own way. Most people took DaBus downtown and went to one of the various Smithsonians. I went to the American History Smithsonian with Holly (Ariz.), and after we had seen a few of the exhibits (as many as our time constraints would allow us) we met about half of the group at the Holocaust museum and spent a couple of hours going through there. It was my second visit there, my first had been three summers earlier. When I went on ILSSO in January of 2001, one day of our trip was to the Terezin concentration camp and ghetto, so this second visit to the museum was even more emotionally touching. Some of the pictures in the building were places that I had been; I had stood in the very place where so many people had lost their lives simply because of their beliefs. It was an eerie and strange feeling, to think about those things, but made me appreciate our freedoms even more. After that it was time to change and go to the final activity of SPC – the BBQ/picnic!! Dance Party FFA was held on DaBus as we drove to the park, and even though it poured on the way there, everyone was so excited for the fun that awaited them! After some slide races with Mark and Kori (Neb.), singing the SPC

song, and eating our fill of BBQ, it was time for the fun to begin. An impromptu Pony game started and eventually had nearly everyone participating. The funniest part was when Amber, in her excitement, slipped and landed flat on her back – it was straight out of a cartoon! Then the delegate coordinators revealed their “booths,” ranging from a cone barrel race, a mini-golf activity, cakewalk, and even a sponge throw! Yes, a bed sheet was transformed into a backdrop with three face holes and the six of us rotated putting our faces on the block for the state officers to TRY and smack with a wet sponge. I emphasize the try part because it was hilarious – people would try so hard and miss, or the ones we didn’t think could get us would nail us right in the kissers. We all were laughing hysterically most of the time, and when we weren’t, the three of us girls were riling people up with our smack-talking. Eventually the officers wised up and started “accidentally” dropping their sponges in the dirt and by the end of the day, Amber, Barrett, Robin, Elio, Dane and I were covered in mud. Thankfully, when we got back to the hotel, we had time to get a quick shower before closing the conference. The six of us put on a final team reflections, which I got a kick out of because I had absolutely no voice, so I squeaked through completely breaking the mood by making a few people chuckle, and then we watched the awesome SPC video made by FFA’s video friend, Mo!! Once that ended and we recognized some very special individuals who made the week the success it was – everyone filtered out and some went to packing, others hung out and talked, and still some grabbed pillows and watched Shrek in the ballroom. I spent some time talking one-on-one with some outstanding officers who I simply think the world of, and then spent a while talking with my mom before she left.

Sunday, we all went our separate ways and so Barrett and I got to sleep in since we were only driving up a couple states to Delaware for our final NLCSO. The week of SPC was something we had all been anticipating all year, for some of us because it would be our second go round, for others to experience what all the hype was about, and for all...to work with all the new state leaders in our nation’s capital – and now it’s already done. Sometimes I think there isn’t enough time for everything we want to experience in life, but when I do think that, I have to remember that we should be thankful for the time we are given and live each of those moments to the fullest, creating as many memories as we possibly can!

July 29 – August 1

Passion does not trickle down but rather surges forth from leaders. *Richard Chang*

On Sunday, after Barrett and I got on our way – we missed on hotel shuttle and then had to take two airport shuttles to get to the rental car place, once we had the rental... got lost for about 45 minutes – we had another long drive up to New Castle, Delaware, home of our third NLCSO. Now normally, we are told, this drive only takes a couple of hours. It took us almost five. We’re not real sure what to attribute our lengthy time to, but we had a good time just the same, catching up with family and friends and even just sleeping – well I did, Barrett was driving so I discouraged that! Once we arrived we had dinner with the Delaware state officer team and state staff, then spent a good portion of the evening setting up and getting ready to start bright and early the next morning. We started with team photos and then jumped right into the conference. Workshopopoly was once again a blast and officers from different states worked together to create great workshops that each person will be able to use in their home states of Virginia, Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, West Virginia and Maryland this year. Over the course of the four days we were together these officers constantly impressed Barrett and I with their passion for growing and becoming the best officers they can be for their states. Whether it was their constant enthusiasm, fun discussions at meals, or downtime talks about life and what it really means to be an officer, I’m certain the commitment and dedication to serving is going to allow outstanding things to happen in that area this year.

It was also exciting to get to spend the week not only with the cool new state officers, but also with the state staff, two of whom were officers the same time as Barrett and I. It amazing where life’s paths will take us and how those paths end up coming together again. Matt and Matt, it was great to see you both again!

On one afternoon of the conference, we had a special treat. We all loaded up in various vehicles and drove to Filasky’s Farm. We had free time to play Big Booty, volleyball, and even horseshoes, and those activities were followed by a pig pickin’ BBQ! There was some more recreation and visiting, then the Dairy Princess and committee brought ice cream out for everyone! YumYum!!

Throughout the conference, each officer team performed opening ceremonies and

either did morning flag raising or nightly reflections. Each team did a great job – reflecting professionalism, as well as inspiring and challenging each person there to reach his or her full potential and not take this opportunity of service for granted. On the last night, there was a banquet dinner that the Secretary of Agriculture for Delaware attended and spoke at and later that evening, an awesome DJ'ed dance and time to hang out and just visit.

On the morning of the first, as we brought the conference to a close...Barrett and I were both overcome by the time we had shared with this amazing group of officers. We took pictures, continued to challenge them to have an outstanding year (as if they wouldn't!) and finally wrapped up to hit the road and catch our flight to Ohio.

Whether it was in Delaware, Nebraska, New York, Michigan, California, Wyoming, Florida, Arkansas or New Mexico – I know that the FFA is in incredible hands for the year to come. The officers that I had the opportunity to get to know and work with all have the members at heart and that's the key to leadership in this organization! A passion to serve will help build up others and create even more leaders...a worthy gift to give the world! FFA members – I hope you are as excited to get to know your new state officers as I am to see the great things they are going to do! Send them an e-mail, letter or just introduce yourself to them and I'm certain you will make an incredible friend! FFA officers – here's to a one-of-a-kind year that will change your life...I wish you all the best and am certain you will be marvelous!

July 14, 2002

"I woke up this mornin', Texas on my mind...thinkin' 'bout my friends there..."
- Pat Green

My last state convention, the end to one of the biggest components of the year I've been experiencing...and what a way to wrap up! I was able to hang out in the Lone Star state with almost 9,000 wild and crazy FFA members and really end this piece of my National Officer responsibilities on such a high note.

I arrived into Dallas/Fort Worth from Denver and was met by the state FFA excursion. After a nice little drive with one of the great state staff members, we arrived at the vespers program only one or two minutes late. We snuck in real quiet and experienced the spirits of past, present and future for an FFA member who needed to decide what he wanted to do with his membership. The state officers did a very nice job and I was so glad that I had made it in time. Then it was check in followed by dinner with friends. We went to this Mexican restaurant that only had two things on the menu, cheese quesadillas or fajitas. It made for an easy ordering process, but I don't know how well it ranked against FreeBirds or the Chicken.

I made it to the first session to see what the Texas FFA convention is all about! There was music, smoke, screaming FFA members, cheering area delegate sections, lasers and the most amazing atmosphere of energy! I had a great seat down on the floor and took it all in! There were some awards and a speaker, who also happened to be a former Texas FFA state officer, and from there it was off to the leadership luncheon. I gave short remarks, most people were busy eating, but it was neat to see and get to meet a bunch of the members who attended. Then Barrett and I got ready for our workshops—we had two to present that afternoon. The first one we team-taught was "Unique U 101," and then it was all about "The Strength of a Lion." It was fun to teach together again, but a little rough around the edges. Oh well, it was a good time all around and really just gave us the opportunity to get to know a small portion of the membership attending convention. After our second workshop, the Tomball FFA chapter took us to dinner at the Fort Worth Stockyards. It was great! The atmosphere down there was so cool—Old West meets the modern western lifestyle. I could have stayed down there floating through shops for hours! But time was not on my side. Instead we ate and hustled back to the convention center so Barrett could get ready for his keynote that evening. I found another key location to watch him from and was once again simply amazed by one of my teammates. Barrett's speech was outstanding. It was passionate, personal, funny and convicting. I was so proud and so excited of and for him! ~

After that session, there was a hypnotist show....and well.....I was in it. I was crazy, according to Barrett. I was hot, it got cold and then....I was a backup dancer for SmashMouth – hot pink feather boa and all! When it was all over, I was hot, had pink feathers all over, and Barrett was laughing at me. After getting put back together and cleaning up, a big group of past officers, Barrett and myself went to IHOP and had a

hilarious time! A late night, but sometimes lack of sleep only contributes to the hilarity of the moment!

The next morning I was able to hang out and visit the state officers and a few of the new officers. It was a nice time to really get to know them before the pressures of another day of convention kicked in. They were doing such an amazing job, but it was so great to see them relaxed! Then it was over to some more sessions. I spoke at the Agriscience luncheon and then walked through and enjoyed the large career show that the convention had onsite. The afternoon session was very long, but full of so many cool things. There was a guest speaker, numerous awards and scholarships handed out and then the Texas candidate for National FFA Officer was named. After that I went back to my room, worked for quite awhile, caught up with a good friend and then went to the fun night session.

Texas is full of talent, humor and wackiness! It was so cool—I'd never experienced a session like it and I think it brought so much to the convention! Toward the end, everyone was getting antsy though, because in a few minutes they were headed to what was probably the highlight of the convention for most....Pat-dadgum-Green, LIVE in concert! After the fun night session wrapped up, people milled about and tried to get to the concert site. A DJ played for a while and then it was showtime! I was also able to visit and spend some time with a past state officer and former National Officer, Cory Rosenbush. He happened to have visited Washington—and my chapter. It was fun to catch up, compare stories and fill each other in on the way things have grown and changed over time. After that, I enjoyed Pat Green.

Boy, do those Texas FFA members love this guy. They were nuts! Everyone seemed to have a good time and then it was back to the hotel. Guys and girls were everywhere in the lobby, hanging out the very last night chatting, joking and enjoying the fun spirit of the convention. I stayed up laughing and visiting before packing and going to bed for a few short hours since I had an EARLY morning flight.

The Texas FFA Convention was everything that I thought it would be and yet, so many little things that I would have never expected. It just enhanced the wonderful time created for FFA members. I was able to enjoy the atmosphere, persona, and energy the Lone Star state is known for and also spend time with dear friends, meet outstanding members with huge potential, and end my convention season with the experience I could have only dreamed of! Texas FFA....you'll be on my mind for awhile!

July 7, 2002

"Summer nights are exquisite. Drenched in moonlight and alive with activity, they are best spent taking walks on beaches or sitting on porch swings listening to the steady whir of crickets. Under summer's starry skies, conversations turn introspective and dreams become tangible to the senses." --Calgon Ad

White Lake, North Carolina – cypress trees, cabins, FFA members, a hot sun, and our nation's birthday. What an amazing week!!

I started early (after a late night arrival) at flag raising and went straight into a workshop after breakfast. I presented all day with a former N.C., state officer, Josh, who I had also had the privilege to travel to Europe with last January. Through the first workshop there was an air of anticipation, nervousness and sleepinessbut after the first workshop that all changed and it was so relaxed!! I don't know if it was me, them, or a combination of both...but from there on, I couldn't get enough of hanging out with these awesome members! For me it was a special treat to be able to wear shorts and flip-flops with the camp T-shirt (and even a beach bum cowboy hat), especially since it was so hot and humid while I was there.

There was lots of free time, so I not only got to know the members, but played too! We went swimming in the lake, played water volleyball and beach volleyball, there were horseshoe pits, tanning (oh yeah, I tried to catch some rays), and a wonderful feeling of no pressure. At one point I was even serenaded by some of the guys, "You've Lost that Loving Feeling," and the rest of camp had to let them know if I'd lost it. The Jones High Sr. boys also kept me in line...or tried to get me outta line a couple times!

I was also in charge of the Green Giants small group – man, what a handful!! Just kidding!! HAHAHA – Nah, they were great!! A whole variety of individuals and they

were my "gatekeepers" – totally helped me get to know even more members! This group of members was one of my highlights of the camp and I was so glad to have the opportunity to get to work with them – even if I was called "Harriet." I had the chance to catch up with an old friend, Tara, and see some people I had met during various times throughout my FFA career. It was so cool to see things come full circle.

The night of the third there was a special showing of "Wednesday Night Live" and it was so dang hilarious. I hadn't laughed that hard in a long time! Mickey Mouse was there, as was Elmo, the Crocodile Hunter, Mr. Peeps, and there was even a musical interlude of "Lunch Lady Land."

On the Fourth of July we woke up to the "Star Spangled Banner" and "God Bless America," had a beautiful flag raising and really started that special day in such a way that all day, I was constantly thinking about why I was proud to be an American. That night there was a very patriotic reflection during which everyone sang "God Bless America" and then we all went out on the docks to watch the town across the lake's firework show. After the fireworks, there was a dance in the courtyard. A lot of people danced, some had ice cream, watermelon, or just enjoyed the wonderful summer night and talked and hung out.

The next day it was Blue and Gold for me. I addressed the whole camp, challenged them to take the leadership and managing skills they'd gained at camp to improve their home chapters and communities. I also urged them to remember that they have an obligation to be a representative for both FFA and agriculture to everyone they meet and know. There was a flurry of pictures, a great end-of-camp slide show and then I was off to the airport again.

I spent quite a bit of time at this camp on the docks or in a swing on the shoreline just thinking. It was something I had not had much time to do and here....it was one of the most peaceful, centering experiences I've had this year. There's just something about sitting in solitude, listening to the sound of the waves lap up on the shore, watching the sun shine and set, people laugh, talk and be happy together...that truly makes you appreciate all the gifts in your life. You can capture this magical mood and feeling at your whim. This summer surround yourself with dreams and you may discover the power to transform your hopes into reality!

From North Carolina, I had the chance to stop at home, grab some clean clothes and then go to Denver. My little sister is going to college there and so I had the opportunity to spend 24 hours and six minutes with her (as she had calculated), her friends and see the University of Northern Colorado where she goes to school. It was nice to catch up with her since we've been apart so much this year! Then I hopped back on another plane and headed south!

June 30, 2002

"We strain to renew our capacity to WONDER, to shock ourselves into astonishment once again." - Shana Alexander

NLCSO – week 2, New York. When I initially found out I was going to New York for one of the NLCSO conferences that Barrett and I would be putting on, I thought, "Wow....I'm finally gonna have a chance to see the Big Apple!" Pretty cool for a girl from the Apple capital of the U.S.! Little did I know that I was in for a big surprise. New York City is just a small, albeit highly populated, part of the whole of this gorgeous state that I was going to have the chance to see.

I arrived late on the night of the 25 and on the 26 Barrett and I struck out to find Camp Oswegatchie. We flew into Syracuse and, according to the directions, we were driving a good two hours northeast of there. After a quick stop at Dunkin' Donuts (my first experience....YUM!!) and a couple brodies (four to be exact) later, we found ourselves in the forest area that surrounded the camp. Barrett and I stopped to take pictures at a cute little waterfall and then drove the rest of the way into the camp. Camp O is 1,200 acres of ponds, forest, ropes courses and cabins...rustic, remote and yet, with some great conveniences. After we settled in, we had lunch with the camp staff, all of who were past FFA members from various Northeast states, and then began getting ready for the conference. Victor kept giving me a hard time about being a naive Midwest blonde girl – bring it on honey, I'm from Washington! ~ HAHAHA

As we started unpacking the six boxes that UPS had delivered us, we realized they

weren't the supplies we needed. They were the leftovers from our last conference. Well, we were creative and thankfully, the next day all of our stuff arrived. On the 27 we welcomed the state officers from New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island-, and Maine and started "Creating the Wonder" in the Getman Lodge! Workshops were built by combining the creative genius of different state officers, and then Barrett and I got to see the results and participate in some wild and crazy workshops! There were costumes, handouts, and energy that charged up everyone who was participating. It was a blast!

In the afternoons we had rec time and the first day I went canoeing. I was by myself, which proved unfortunate when I had to try to paddle away from attacking/splashing Connecticut and New Hampshire officers. That evening I went on a night hike with the officers from New Hampshire, Vermont and some camp staff. We made a campfire, played the Animal game and then I went back to the lodge for bed.

The third day at Camp O was a full day of ropes course. I hooked up with the New York team and we spent the morning going through low rope challenges. We had a ton of fun and it only got better after lunch because that's when we took on the high ropes! The first element was the "Flying Squirrel" and they volunteered me to fly. It was crazy – I was on one end of a rope and they were all on the other and on the count of three we started running opposite directions and they flew me in the air 40+ feet. Wahoo! Everyone else took turns and then we split to take on elements individually. My next obstacle was "Indiana Jones," then I took on the "Heebie-Jeebies" with my birthday buddy as my relay partner and I successfully completed it! Oh, yeah baby! My final element was the "Zipline" and it was by far my favorite. I climb a tree about 65 feet in the air, hooked up to a steel cable and then jumped off the platform to zip down a cable through the trees, across a pond and back up into the tress on the other side. We had a bunch of free time that afternoon, but most of us were so tired that we just lounged on couches and bothered each other when someone would fall asleep during conversation. Ah.... the funny moments you can create with a straw!! That night Barrett and I met the "Grand Master" and his "conductors" and had an interesting time with them. OogaBooga WallaWalla!! ~

The next morning we wrapped up our conference and had quite the time saying goodbye to everyone, but had to run to catch our flights to our next engagements -- I was headed back down south to North Carolina. I had a great time up in New York, but am looking forward to going back someday and getting to see the City!!

Count your luck by happy times, your days by sunny hours. Count your nights by stary skies, your garden by the flowers. Count your joys by laughter and your age by loving friends. Then count yourself the lucky one for the blessings that life sends.

These few days I had the opportunity to relax a little, reflect and bask in many of the blessings I have been fortunate to have, especially this year. Now, one of the HUGE selling points of our great organization is that every member has the opportunity to meet a ton of new people...and that's usually where it gets left. Not many talk about what happens after you meet The reality is, often after you meet someone really incredible with goals, dreams, experiences, and a background like yours, the chance that you will see that person again is very slim. This is something I've experienced many times. I have kept in touch, via e-mail or regular snail-mail, with many of these people because I truly value the dynamic they bring to my life, but only a small percentage have I had the added blessing of encountering again. These last few days I had the chance to hang out with a bunch of those individuals and this became one of my many happy times. It was a time when I came to really realize how very blessed I am.

From Nebraska, I flew to Roanoke, Va., and was met at the airport by a good friend, Austin—a former Virginia state officer, who I had traveled to Europe with during January 2001. We drove down to Blacksburg, home of Virginia Tech and the fightin' Hokies, and went on a quick night tour of the campus, which was to be the home of the Virginia State Convention that I would attend in a short day and a half. From Blacksburg, we drove down to Fries, Va., and hung out at Camp Dickenson. We went four wheeling, walked some of the grounds, had a crud fight, floated the river with the counselors and just hung out. While down on the river, I had some time to just think... completely removed from the rest of the world. The only sounds were that of the water running over the rocks, some birds in the trees, and the wind in the forest. It was completely serene and I had a chance to think about just how much I've been given in this life. My wonderful family, amazing and loyal friends, the chance to see the world, gifts and talents that have shaped my life and an abundance of things like clothes, food and even money. Some people have never known these things, or have

been able to experience the peace and beauty that I wallowed in that sunny afternoon.

That evening we had a barbeque and then saw the movie "Sum of All Fears," a movie that is frightening only because the fiction of the movie could so easily be reality.

On Sunday, I attended church with Austin and then we headed back to Blacksburg and hung out. I spent the evening working of FFA stuff and preparing for the convention. The next morning bright and early, I went to the Tech campus, met with some of the state staff, and met the remainder of the state officer team that I hadn't had the chance to know when I was at the Delaware State Convention. I greeted arriving FFA chapters with them and then spent some time catching up with Johanna and Andy, two other former officers who had also been on the trip to Europe. I also saw the "Historical Room," that houses the table that the National FFA Organization was signed in to existence on, as well as many other historical remnants. After some rehearsal time, I spent dinner with still two more former officers, Laura and Becky, who I had the chance to get to know and respect on our awesome ILSSO trip. We reminisced about the trip, caught up on life since National convention when we last saw one another and just how the convention was going to go. From there we went over to the first session/Reflections of the 76th annual Virginia State FFA Convention. After a few awards, I emptied my pockets and heart about the "Joy of Corduroy," and after that got the chance to hang out and briefly get to know the members from former national officer, Dana Fischer's, chapter. Then I chilled for a little while before headed to bed.

Tuesday consisted of getting up, packing, taking a little self-guided tour of the beautiful campus that the Virginia Tech students enjoy, and then grabbing lunch, some souvenirs and scooting to the airport.

I really enjoyed my time in Virginia, seeing the beauty that the state holds, having some time to just clear my mind and appreciate so much that I too often take for granted, and the opportunity to spend time with individuals that I had a life-changing experience with in Germany and the Czech Republic.

FFA members, take some time in solitude this summer to think and reflect on the things you are fortunate to have and to experience. If we truly count up the sum of our life by the wonderful things, I believe each of us would find that we are rich beyond our wildest dreams. Remember how fortunate you are and be thankful at all times for the many blessings you have been given!

June 23

"In every age there comes a time when leadership must come forth to meet the needs of the hour. Therefore, there is no potential leader who does not find his or her time."
- John C. Maxwell

Lincoln, Nebraska...home of the Huskers, a super-Wal-Mart, and me for a few days! I arrived the afternoon of the 13 from the Wisconsin state convention, picked up our rental car...a really cool Alero, and then proceeded to get myself lost for nearly three and a half hours trying to find the hotel where I had reservations. Finally, after I grabbed some dinner, dropped some film at the Wal-Mart and purchased a map... I found my hotel and got all checked in and squared away. I kept myself busy with work and the third Harry Potter book, until Barrett called to let me know his flight had been cancelled and he was coming in the next day.

Well, on Friday I ran some more errands, did some more work, read some more Harry Potter and then went back to the airport and picked up Barrett. There was a conference call between Barrett and I, the rest of our team and some of the National staff to make sure we were all on the same page as far as our upcoming NLCSOs were concerned. After that we met Andy Osten, a former Nebraska state officer who had also served on our nominating committee, for dinner at a great little Italian buffet place and just caught up with one another. Then it was off to bed so that we could be fresh for a day of NLCSO work.

On Saturday, Barrett and I spent the day planning and preparing and reviewing the conference...and then he had to catch a flight back to Florida to be there for the day before his home convention kicked off. I, meanwhile, stayed in Lincoln and that night went roller-skating with Andy, Jonie (another former Nebraska officer who is a real sweetie) and her roommate. Afterward we went out for ice cream and then it was back to the hotel for me.

Sunday morning, Andy picked me up and we went to church. I spent the rest of the afternoon working. Gosh, it seems like you can never quite get done with all the work that a person needs to accomplish, but I was making a heck of a go at it! J I also finished up the Harry Potter book and mailed it back to my little brother, who had been kind enough to loan it to me. Late that night, Barrett arrived back to Nebraska and so I went and picked him up.

Bright and early Monday morning, we loaded up our little white zip-a-dee-do car and hit the road, bound for the Nebraska Leadership Center, home of NLCSO 2002. We arrived in the afternoon to find that we had received the supplies for nearly all three traveling teams, figured things out and made sure the place was ready to go for a conference! J Tuesday was mainly the same...getting ready and states arriving. That night we got underway.

Seven states were represented at our first conference: South Dakota, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas, Wisconsin and Iowa. For the next three days these officers spent time getting to know one another, as well as building a stronger bond with their team. We learned things about workshop planning and presentations, laws of teamwork and had a great talent show (a tradition at this conference). It wrapped up with Iowa taking home "the bone." We were able to spend time getting to know these amazing, dynamic officers who will be leading their states and helping members achieve their best.

There is no doubt in my mind that they will do an outstanding job. There were also some great volleyball games, a near dunk in the pool and an interesting dance the final night. I don't want to give away too much since there are still so many conferences yet, but overall I had one of my most memorable learning experiences of the year. I can't begin to tell all of you members what amazing leaders and role models you are going to have this year in the central part of the nation. There are some great people with hearts of service out there, ready and willing to help you grow as a person and as an FFA member!

We wrapped up the conference with a banquet and slide show. Then it was time for everyone to say their goodbyes and wish each other well on the upcoming year. It was hard to end (ask our coach Ms. Kane...we were way late trying to pack up!) but finally we had to hit the road to head on to our next adventures. Thank you so much to all the officers who were at NLCSO....you all truly made it the awesome conference that it was and I wish you all the best this year – thing is, you all are going to do great things anyhow!

June 16

"Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude." - Denis Waitley

This week I spent an awesome time at the Wisconsin State FFA Convention. It was held at the Alliance Centre in Madison and wow, was it full of energy, enthusiasm and pride from the FFA!!

I arrived a day early and so had the gift of time to work on some e-mails, NLCSO stuff and just catch up with my family and some friends. I also met the state officer team and went with my roommate, Tara, to get supplies for the week, including sticker-certified Washington apples to munch on!

The next afternoon I was supposed to put on a workshop, but only nine members showed. So we just hung out, talked about some FFA questions they had and did a few fun activities. One such activity was learning the card game, Euchre. Thanks Montello! It was fun and I was even able to play it again later during the convention. That evening there was a beautiful, incredible thunder and lightning storm that I watched from my hotel room until it was time for the Convention Reflections session. I made my way over to the Centre and ran into a friend of our officer team, Brandon Lupp, a fellow national officer candidate. We had a good time catching up and he told me about cheese curds and told me I'd get to try them and experience the "squeak." The Reflection program was outstanding...it was about everyday heroes and at the end, there was a very special flags ceremony that nearly brought me to tears. They had a true everyday hero in between each flag pair, starting with a Marine, a firefighter, a nurse, doctor, two FFA members and a business professional. It was very moving.

The convention kicked off the next day and I went to the sessions and hung out with the visiting state officers from Minnesota. Then I had a workshop that the VSOs from there and Missouri sat in on. Then we all went to lunch. We caught the other sessions that day and I went to the foundation dinner that night with some of the state officers. Wisconsin FFA recognized some of its outstanding sponsors and had a very special recognition of its blue and gold club, which are sponsors of at least \$10,000 dollars over three years! I was able to visit with some of them. Their love of the FFA and passion for agriculture was amazing! What an incredible group of sponsors, but more importantly, friends. That night the association had a Hawaiian dance, complete with leis and beach balls. Halfway through it, the Nebraska visiting officers arrived. It was great to catch up with both of them!

The next day there was the LifeExpo, more workshops, a great state degree luncheon, and some more outstanding sessions. A highlight was during one of the afternoon sessions when we were graced by the musical talents of the Soggy Prairie Boys – they were hilarious and good! It was a great talent. Both days the officers had some great inspirational moments and the sessions went very well. I had the opportunity to speak at one of the sessions, the session that followed former National Officer, Corey Flournoy. I had never really known him previous to this year, but had a great time getting to know him better and receiving some great insight from him. That night there was a Leadership dinner for the outstanding Wisconsin FFA chapter leaders and I put on a workshop. It was followed by the evening session where Guy Rice Doud spoke. (I always like hearing him...and he had an incredible day that day). There was the Basement Bargain Bash and the craziest, loud, awful outfits were styled. It was a blast...and for my first time, I was "Takin' Care of Business" with the group!

The next day I left early for the airport and hopped a plane to Nebraska to meet Barrett and prepare for our first NLCSO. The association announced their new officers the night before, so before I left I got to meet quickly with the new officers...and knew I would be seeing them right away in Nebraska. I was also told before I left that they would bring me some cheese curds since none could be found while I was on-site.

This convention was an absolute blast and truly demonstrated to me the pure happiness that these Wisconsin FFA members live and breathe. Whether it was the fun times playing cards, the crazy MULLET cheers, any of the antics that occurred trying to win the "Super Spirit Stick" or the FFA pride I experienced from each member I met, the Wisconsin FFA was truly happy!

June 9, 2002

*The contest lasts for moments though the training's taken years.
There wasn't the winning alone that was worth the work and tears.
The applause will be forgotten and the prize will be misplaced,
But the long hard hours of practice will never be a waste.
For in trying to win you build a skill,
You learn that winning depends on will.
You never grow by how much you win –
You only grow by how much you put in.
So for any new challenge you've just begun...
Put forth your best and you've already won.
- W.A. Yennen*

I know, I know....that's a really long quote to start my journal, but ever since I first read it my senior year of high school following the District 6 FFA CDE day, I've always thought it was perfect for FFA and all that our members do.

This week I was fortunate to visit three state conventions: Mississippi, Louisiana and Connecticut. I had a great time at each and at all three, got to interact with various CDE competitors, see and hear how preparing for those contests had impacted them, and then see these members recognized in front of their whole state for their achievements. It was great. There were many moments when I drifted back in my memory to my CDE days: the anticipation, competition, and excitement that were rooted in my gut the whole day, the friends I met and goofed around with in the holding rooms, and the personal sense of achievement I felt after I would leave the competition room – finished with another round. Those are some of my greatest and fondest memories in the FFA and I couldn't believe how nostalgic I got at these conventions – just from visiting with members who were doing the same thing I once had.

69th Annual Mississippi State Convention

I arrived in Jackson and the Magnolia State and was then taken two hours north to Starksville, where the convention was being held. I checked into the Alumni House at the Mississippi State Convention and then had some time to settle down. Apparently, as I was settling in, the state officers were unaware that I had checked in and stayed up until midnight waiting for me. Well, we finally all got connected and then went to bed. It was an early morning the next day, as we all met and walked arm-in-arm (Southern-style) to the Alumni Awards breakfast. I gave a few short remarks and then sat with the state officers through the auction that followed to raise money for the Alumni.

After that I visited with the state officers for a bit before heading to my workshop room to set-up. My first workshop went well...the room was packed and I got to know a good size group of the Mississippi FFA members. They were a blast to spend an hour with and I ended up seeing and talking with a lot of them throughout the rest of the day. After we finished, all of us went to lunch and I ate at my first Chik-Fil-A. It was good, although the state officers and members I sat with couldn't believe I'd never eaten there before! That afternoon I put on another workshop and it was bigger than the first and had a TON of energy!! There was even a bona-fide photo session during the FFA Mad Hatters fashion show, a first for my workshop, and I was excited to get to know even more of the great members from down south. Then I got to just hang out for awhile and meet some members down in the bookstore before the session started. The officers had put on a Reflection the night before, but the convention really kicked off with this first session. It started on a patriotic note with a Flag Ceremony that honored three special flags, the American flag, the Mississippi state flag, and the FFA flag. The convention hall was filled with a sense of pride and respect that was as thick as the humidity (that I was definitely not used to!) and I loved it!! I gave a keynote following some awards and managed to bust a bottle of nail polish on their stage. Blunder of the year #2 for Abbie! That session also had a retiring address by Junior State Vice President, Jonathan Beard and I was so amazed by how awesome Mississippi's Junior Association, not only gauged by Jonathan's RA, but by the younger members I had been encountering all day! The level of professionalism and pride that I saw in Mississippi was great – the only thing I saw all day was FULL official dress and I mean knee-length skirts on the girls, black slacks, socks and shoes on the guys – it was outstanding! The members were great as were the state officers and staff who did an amazing job on the convention, my only regret being that I wished I could've stayed longer. I definitely learned why they call this the Hospitality State and look forward to seeing what amazing things Mississippi FFA is going to do in the future.

73rd Annual Louisiana State Convention

From Mississippi I flew to Alexandria, Louisiana for their convention. I got in early and had some time to get settled in before everything started, but even before that...I went incognito in jeans and a t-shirt...and met the state officers. I was immediately informed that Louisianan's like their food and I would be fed well, then I was handed a praline treat. I spent the afternoon working and getting ready, and then was astounded by an amazing and moving Tribute to America Reflections. The whole delegation of nearly 1200 members joined together singing "God Bless America," and I was once again SO proud to be an American!! I also excited by the warmth of these members ... I had only been there a few hours and they were all taking time to stop me and introduce themselves. It was really great! That night I went with some of the state staff and Tony Small, one of the National Staff members who was also speaking at the convention, to a local restaurant – Tunk's – and we had some Louisiana cooking. I ate alligator and crawfish and I loved it! From there we went back to the convention where the state officers were hosting a state gathering with a DJ, fireworks and a fun dance.

The next morning started with a session. I spoke (and emptied my pockets), watched numerous members get scholarships, and Jeff Guidry, the state sentinel gave his retiring address. After the session wrapped up, I went on a lunch adventure with state vice presidents Evan Earl and Denver Robinson, and well it was just that, an adventure! HAHA guys! We got back about 5 minutes late but no one noticed and so we started eating...and a few minutes later the guys were in disbelief when I was finished and they were barely through their 1st half. It was hilarious!! And they thought they liked to eat!! The afternoon session consisted of 142 state degree handshakes, Evan and state reporter Robyn Hunter's retiring addresses, and another moving moment when the whole group sang Alan Jackson's, "Where were you..." with a guitar soloist talent. It was beautiful! As soon as the session wrapped up, my workshop began. It was packed with people even standing in the back. We had a great time and the Louisiana members were so much fun to work with! That evening Louisiana had its first annual proficiency dinner. It went very well, especially for the

first time. So many exemplary members were recognized, Denver and state treasurer Ty Istre gave their final addresses and things wrapped up much earlier than most people anticipated. After it was over, the SO's and I changed and then a bunch of us and the staff (consisting of past state officers) went to Taco Bell for dinner, pop and a ChocoTaco! I really enjoyed the time visiting, telling jokes, and just getting to know each other better!

Thursday morning there was a Stars Over Louisiana breakfast and I got to eat a Washington apple and visited with a bunch of younger members. We talked about misconceptions we all had – they about Washington and me about Louisiana. It was pretty fun and we all had a good time. Two of the other state vice presidents, Samantha Bell and Nicki Johnson gave their final addresses and then I had a break for awhile. I worked on a few things and then returned for the afternoon session. It was a long one, but that meant no night session, just a long dinner break! We heard the winning prepared public speech, the state officer elections were held, state parliamentarian Kyle Chandler and state secretary Adrienne Miller gave retiring addresses, and then a highlight for me...the "Advisors" performed. Yes, it's what you think, a group of advisors that once a year get together and pick through a few tunes on the guitar, piano, accordion, and even the triangle, yes triangle - this was a Cajun band remember!! While they were playing everyone threw money into their guitar case and they money gathered went to the Foundation. I thought they were great! hey played a Cajun song, the Soggy Bottom Boys, God Bless the USA, and then they and the whole group sang Happy Trails. I LOVED it!! There was even so much fun had, that a pair of pants got ripped! HAHA

After that excitement, honorary degrees were awarded, a guest speaker came and spoke and then the final elections were held and the new officer team was announced.

That night the officer team and I went out to Tunk's again and I had a blast goofing around with the guys and bonding with the girls and Miss Shelly. From dinner...it was off to the DANCE!! It was off the hook! There was of course Cajun music and these members wasted no time in making sure I learned to jitterbug Louisiana-style, everything else...country, slow songs, hip-hop, and well, about every other song these folks had a line dance for the song. I tried to keep up but most the time was a lost cause! After the dance I hung out again with the past and current state officers and got to hear lots of stories of blunders and other experiences during their years of service. Sounded very similar to things I encountered back in Washington and I think our state would have a grand old time if they ever got together!

The final morning everyone was tired so things started out with the state officers and I doing a wake-up cheer. It was kinda cheesy, but fun. That was followed by a few awards and then the meat and potatoes of the final session...state president Leanna Becnel's RA, state officer advisor and parent recognition, and then the end of the year slide show. The team let me sit with them and join them in their final huddle. I shared with them what a privilege it had been for me to be there and get to know them and what a great job they must have done, just based on my few days experience with them...and for only the second time this year – started crying. The last thing that happened was the installation of the new team and then a blur of flashes as pictures were furiously taken to capture the convention moments! I said my goodbyes, went back to the hotel and packed, said a few last words to the new team, a few more goodbyes and then went to the airport to catch my flight up north...Connecticut to be exact. I had an amazing time in Louisiana and will definitely never forget it! I told an FFA staffer that I felt things went a little backward in Louisiana. I'm supposed to go to a convention to make an impact, get members fired up and help them realize their potential ... but really I felt that's what these Louisiana FFA members did for me. Thank you so much.

72nd Annual Connecticut State Conference

I got to Connecticut late after a long day of flying and stayed with state sentinel Jessica Blythe's family. I checked in with my family and then went straight to bed, still tired from my late dance night in Louisiana. That night was followed by an early morning since it was nearly a 45-minutes drive to the high school, Northwestern Regional, where the convention was being held. We arrived early and I got to know the state officers and then things got started. Almost right off the bat I gave my keynote and I was surprised by the warm welcome and cheers I got from these members who I hadn't even had the chance to meet yet, but were so excited to have me there. It definitely put me in a great mood and my speech went very well. After the session finished, I had about an hour and a half to work and meet members and then it was time for yet another workshop. My room filled up and another class passed "Unique U 101." That afternoon there was lunch and a career show/silent auction. It was very good considering that many larger associations don't even host such an

event. I was very impressed. After another couple of hours, the second and final session commenced and all state awards were given out, state president Heidi Stearns gave her retiring address, the state officers recognized their parents and advisors, and finally the new officer team was elected. After everyone left, we cleaned up the building, the officers gathered their things – one of the coolest being a journal full of quotes and pictures that they had left at the doors of the auditorium for members to sign and share memories and thoughts in for that particular officer – it was very cool! After everything was packed up, we all headed to the new state vice president Stephen's house for a BBQ. We had a good time, but most of us were awfully tired so things didn't last too long. Jessica, Becky (the new state president) and I headed for home and I spent the rest of the evening packing. Connecticut members kept asking me if I enjoyed such a small convention and I can honestly say that a small convention is great because it allows the opportunity to get to know more members on a personal level. Plus, it's fun to not always get lost in the crowd!

All in all, the last week has been very busy and jam packed with very different and wonderful convention experiences and I just hope that each member who was able to attend any of these three had as much fun and grew as much as I did from the experience. Whether you compete or not, FFA gives each of us as members the opportunity to learn and grow, the CDEs simply allow us to test the skills we gain. FFA members, always remember to put forth your best in whatever you do, and take every opportunity you are given to try even more!

June 1, 2002

"Determine to live life with Flair and Laughter." - Maya Angelou

This week was spent at home with my family and friends. I got to do laundry, stay in my own room and just relax for a few days....it felt great!!

I also got to be home to celebrate my younger brother Sam's 16th birthday, as well as my own birthday. It was a great time to recharge and refocus on what has been going on in my life as I've been traveling around the nation meeting amazing leaders everywhere I go, and at the same time build and strengthen relationships at home that have been put on a back-burner while FFA has been my focus.

I can't thank my friends and family enough for their love and support, especially this year. You all have been wonderful! I truly loved and treasured my time at home with all of you ~ it did my heart good! Thanks for your flair and laughter and helping me find mine again!

May 19, 2002

"Home is where life is the sweetest." - Anonymous

Things wrapped up in Texas on a wonderful note ... I had such a great time in the Lone Star state with the wonderful students we had the good fortune to work with. I learned so much from them and once again, it was an experience and visit that I never wanted to end. A&M is a great school and I can now understand why it is so respected among land grant universities – and I now personally understand the importance and prestige of the traditions that are so deeply held there. The last night we were in College Station, the class as a whole, took the six of us officers out and we had a great time. We had dinner at the Chicken Oil Co. (a funky little greasy burger joint) and then they took us on a campus tour. From there we all went and saw "Spiderman." All in all it was a wonderful time to hang out casually and really get to know one another. Before we left Texas, we had the opportunity to hang out and have lunch with Dr. Rick Rigsby (who, coincidentally, is one of our national convention speakers), the character coach for the Aggie's football team. He visited with us for quite awhile and also gave us a tour of the locker rooms and the stadium ... it was great!

From College Station, Elio and I flew to Houston where we played a few good rounds of the Worst-Case Scenario travel game and Battle of the Sexes travel edition. We had some good laughs (as did the people sitting around us in the terminal) and then caught our flight to Minneapolis. We had to run to our gate and when we got there the flight was overbooked. We were nervous about getting bumped off the flight and then they called my name over the loudspeaker. GREAT! I thought ... I'm not going home tonight. But, to my great surprise - and Elio's and my pleasure - we got bumped to first class ... WAHOO! As I moved to my seat, I found myself sitting next to a Cougar ... President Rawlins in fact! He gave me a hard time since I was wearing a Texas A&M t-shirt at the time, but we spent the flight visiting about my experience thus far, his

memories of being an FFA member, and just whether or not I would be returning to Washington State University. It was great, and I was excited when he shared with me that he would be speaking at the Washington state convention in just two more days.

Elio and I got an early start the next day at the convention, mainly just hanging out, me seeing old friends, members and advisors, and Elio meeting many individuals that he will work with during the State and National Officer Tour in September. I met with and helped out the state officers and we got them ready for their first session that night. They even asked me to be a part of their walkdown, by playing an FFA Charlie's Angel and driving a MAD black, tinted out, chromed up, brand-new Chevy Tahoe©! I was pretty excited! I also got to see some members of my state officer team, Des and Atiya, and it was so great to see my girls again! I caught up with them and met the visiting state officers – most of whom I already knew, but a couple I met for the first time. The visiting state officers (VSO's) was always one of the things I loved the most about convention when I was a member and Washington has always been so fortunate to have so many great neighbors come be a part of our convention. This year we had Jennifer from Alaska, Gabe from California, Seth and Dustin from Montana, Clint and Cory from Idaho (and unfortunately for them, they came from the second best school on the Palouse ... but I think they learned their lesson staying for a few days in Cougar country), Brian from Oregon, and Shay from Nevada. It was great spending time with all of them during convention. We definitely had a ton of fun!

The following day I met with the state officers again and then the VSO's and I put on workshops. Over 200 students turned out, so Elio and a few others helped me with my workshop and we had a blast! I had a good time just getting to see and work with members that I had gotten to know back when I was a state officer – and see how they've grown and the great things they are doing now. My mom even came by and got to sit in on my workshop, which was really cool because she got to see firsthand what exactly it is that I do as I travel around the country this year. Then she and I snuck off for a couple hours and got a pedicure ... a treat for my feet, since they are always cooped up in my heels! It was a fun time for the two of us to catch up and for me to just relax before the real craziness of convention kicked up. When I got back, I worked on memorizing my new speech (that I had written the night before) and also did two run-throughs with the state officers. Then it was time to go. The session got going and a few minutes into it, I was up. Elio helped me out side-stage just to make sure everything happened as it was supposed to and I had the best time speaking to my home crowd. They say that can be the toughest, but it was by far one of the best speeches I've given to date and I just flat out enjoyed myself! All my family made it, including my little sister who was in from Colorado, but my little brother missed it. I gave him some slack though since he was up in Spokane at the HOBY conference – yup, that makes two of us Hobsters in one family, so I was actually glad he had to miss it. He'll be at nationals, so we'll call it even! After the session, the VSO's, myself, and a few of my close friends tore it up at the first of two state convention dances. We all had a lot of fun!

Saturday was a busy day of going to sessions, helping the state officers some more and even getting my Honorary state FFA degree. That night I was a special guest to the state officer's parent/advisor dinner and it was such an honor to be there. This team has been so near and dear to my heart that it really meant a lot to me! That night I sat and watched the session and was so proud of them and the great job they were doing. After the session I caught up with a bunch of our state advisors and then went to bed to nurse my swollen ankle (don't ask ... a silly blonde moment involving a pizza box).

Sunday was the big day for 10 anxious individuals and 6 current state officers. The session went really well, the last two RA's were presented, the end of the year slide show was a hit, and then the officers took their final walk. After that the new officers were elected and I got to spend lunch with the new and old teams, as well as their parents.

I had an amazing time coming home for a convention that means the world to me and they really pumped me up for the rest of this year! Washington FFA – I've missed you all a ton and I can't thank you enough for the amazing experience and memories from this year's convention. You truly are my Joy in Corduroy!

[Entries from 11/25/01 to 02/17/02](#)

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Abbie's Photos





experience2sc

experience3sc

experience4sc

experiencesc



indianlandffasc



[Click on any photo for larger view](#)

Abbie's Photos 2



B & I California '02
- Robin, Hercules & I at the Golden Gate



B & I California '02
- California Agriculture



B & I California 2002
- Robin and Abbie in Hollywood!



The handprints @ Mann's Theater
Bring it on, Arnold! :)



Our 1st star sighting....
Ben Stein!
We didn't win any money...



Home of the 2002 Delaware State Convention
- My first of many!



Delaware State Convention
- The State Officer Team



Delaware State Convention
- Keynote Speaker Jane Jenkin Herlong



Delaware State Convention
- The Lake Forest FFA Chapter...
T-R-O-U-B-L-E! :)



Michigan Team Retreat 2002
- The boxcars we stayed in...so very cool!



Michigan Team Retreat 2002
- Loving the old west & snow :)



Reno, Nevada
- Home of the Nevada State Convention



Nevada State Convention
- The visiting state officers & Abbie after her workshop as..."Mad Hatters"!



Nevada State Convention
- State Roller skating Party!



Nevada State Convention '02
- Dinner with Elko FFA



Nevada State Convention 2002
- Cutting loose!

More of Abbie's Photos



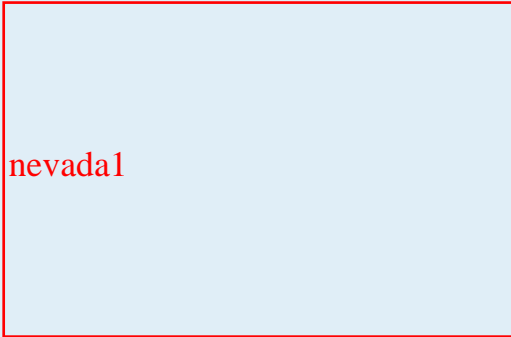
Iowa SLCDO 2002



Under the Big Top - Iowa SLCDO

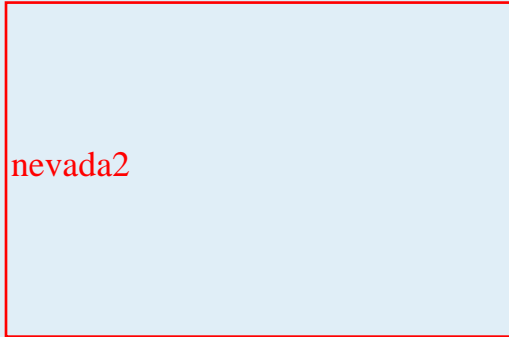


Game Night - Iowa SLCDO



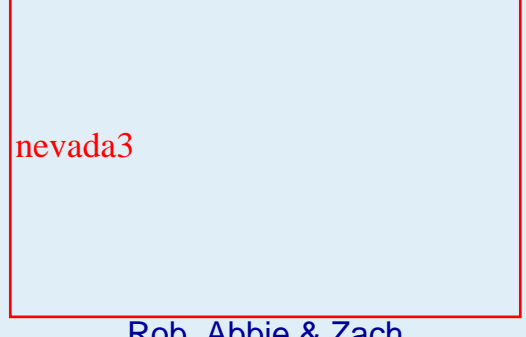
nevada1

Diamond Mountain, NV FFA



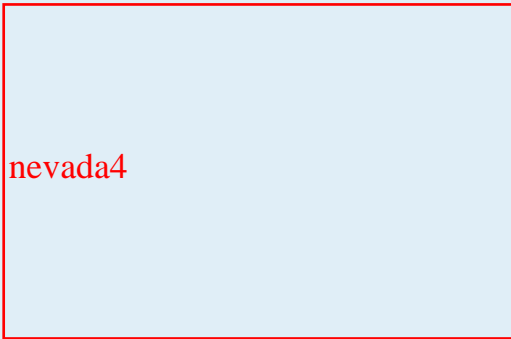
nevada2

Abbie & the NV State Officers



nevada3

Rob, Abbie & Zach
Elko, NV FFA members



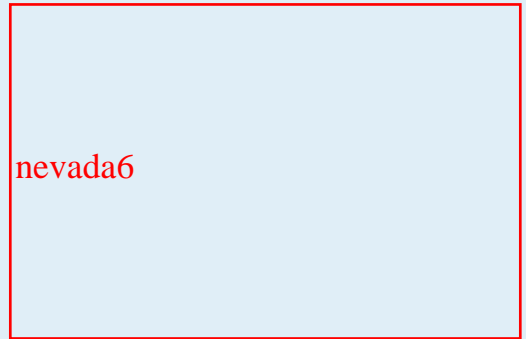
nevada4

The Ultimate Rush
Reno, NV



nevada5

The Ultimate Rush!



nevada6

Morgan Irwin, Abbie
& Luke Browning



Central Oregon Leadership Camp



Central OR Leadership Camp
The new 2002 OR State Officers
present our nation's colors



Crook County, OR FFA



Culver, OR FFA



Central Oregon Leadership Camp



Power Push-up - SD State Conv.



Abbie & the SD State Officers
Jack, Kim, Micah, Abbie, Josh, Brad,
Lavyne