

2002 Youth Tour



Sixty-one of Oklahoma's brightest young adults set out for Washington, D.C., in early June as winners of their cooperatives' Youth Tour contest. *Oklahoma Living* armed each of them with a task of keeping a journal of their thoughts and experiences. This is the journal of Lacy Tatroult, who was sponsored by Cotton Electric Cooperative, Walters.

Friday - June 14

As I rounded the second corner to the atrium, I saw them, Oklahoma's best and brightest, looking very nervous and a little apprehensive. After checking in and receiving a bag of free stuff from the sponsoring cooperatives, I panned the faces trying to match them with the pictures and names in my Youth Tour agenda. I finally introduced myself to the girl standing next to me. I put out my hand and began my first conversation of the trip with a new friend, Annie Farris.

Our parents were called into their special "parent meeting" where they were informed about all the goings-on of the trip. This gave us a chance to circulate and find out who everybody was and to meet our roommates. And with roommates, I could not have been more blessed. Elizabeth Pletan and Maggie Harrison were the girls that I would be spending the majority of the week with. Lizzie, I came to find out, is an outgoing, fun-loving blonde with an enormous love for life and the most innocent and adorable sense of humor! When I first approached Maggie, she was very shy and reserved, but that didn't last long. Maggie was just as crazy as Lizzie, and I was crazy about both of them! We then had the special "student meeting" where we were instructed of the rules, given our room

keys and food money for the week, and then released to dress for dinner.

The banquet was nice with everyone and their family, and their respective co-op representatives present. After the hugging goodbyes and taking LOTS of pictures, we went back to our rooms. I would say we tried to get to bed early, but we were way too anxious.

Saturday, June 15

We woke up at 2:00 a.m. (yes, in the morning) and left for the airport around 3:45 a.m. I slept every time I had the chance - on the floor of the OKC airport, on the flight to Dallas, and on the flight to Baltimore. (Who wouldn't have slept after the marathon we had to run due to the teenie tiny layover we had at DWF - it was at least 6 miles. Phew!)

Baltimore weather was wonderful when we arrived. We went straight to Baltimore's inner harbor area and the minute we stepped off the bus - downpour! Lizzie, Maggie and I ran to the Harbor Place Shopping center, walked around a little, and then quickly grabbed a bite to eat before jogging to the bus.

The drive to D.C. took about an hour, but it seemed like 5 minutes - I slept. Luckily, I woke up right in time to look out my window and see the Washington Monu-

ment and the Capitol building's dome. After stopping at the hotel, we left for dinner at the Old Post Office Pavilion. We had a quick bite, and then it was off again to Ford's Theater. We saw "Hot Mikado," an exciting show with a Japanese-Swing style twist. But it was not "hot" enough to keep me from shivering in the 40-degree theater; still damp from earlier, I was freezing! By the end of the show, we were all thoroughly exhausted and ready to get to the hotel.

Sunday, June 16

On the bus by 7:00 a.m., our first major stop of the day was Arlington National Cemetery. Kyle Johnson gave us a short devotional before we began our tour. I can't even begin to describe the amazing site of looking out and seeing nothing but beautiful green trees, lush grass and a sea of endless white headstones. Headstone after headstone, each engraved with a different name, but all present for one cause - freedom. Having left my extra film at the hotel, I tried to ration the photos I took between John F. Kennedy's gravesite and eternal flame, next to him lay his wife and young children, and the tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where we witnessed the changing of the guard. Never in my life had I experienced such a dignified ceremony. It was performed with precision and respect, the way all America's servicemen should be honored.

We quickly toured Robert E. Lee's house at Arlington Cemetery and then boarded the bus to head to the Smithsonian Museums. The Smithsonian should actually take you about two to three days, if not a week to look at completely...we had two hours. Luckily, the group of girls I was with that day was able to cover parts of the Natural History Museum where we saw the Hope diamond, an art museum (we wandered in accidentally), and the American History Museum - very cool!

After the Smithsonian, we visited the Lincoln, Vietnam & Korean War Memorials. They are all grouped together in the same general area, adjacent to the reflecting pool that sits at the base of the Washington Monument off in the distance.

Our next stop before dinner was back to Ford's Theater to tour the museum in the basement, and the Peterson House across the street, where President Lincoln died. We were able to go into the bedroom and stand less than two feet from the bed where they originally laid him and where he later died. A picture taken the day Lincoln was removed from the room was sitting next to the bed. It was a black and white photo of a bed with messed up bedding, the same bedding that was now smoothed out right next to me. It was an extremely eerie feeling.

After dinner at the Hard Rock Café we went to the White House and took a group picture. Seeing the outside of the White House was very cool for me, though it wasn't as big as I'd imagined, but I guess I was expecting the hyped-up Hollywood version with intriguing lighting and all that. Not to disappoint anyone, but it's just a big white house. We then made one more stop at the Jefferson Memorial before going back to the hotel.

Monday, June 17

After a catered breakfast, we participated in NRECA's Youth Day at the hotel. For 3 hours we listened to various guest speakers, including Brian Birdwell, a survivor of the Pentagon disaster of September 11. We also had an open forum on problems facing teens in the U.S. today. It was all very informative and for a wonderful cause. After the program, we barely made Union Station on time for lunch and a little shopping. We then headed to the Library of Congress - "the most beautiful building in Washington, D.C.," as said numerous times by our tour director, Jennifer McCall. She was so right. Inside the Library of Congress is the

most elaborate, yet elegant interior design that one can imagine. There are marble columns everywhere. In fact, there are 16 different types of marble in that building alone. One artifact that I got to see in the exhibit of American Treasures was a handwritten journal by Walt Whitman.

As we were leaving the Library of Congress and waiting for our bus to arrive, Lizzie, Callie and I sprinted to the Supreme Court to snap a quick picture. I don't think there was ever a more obvious time to show we were tourists as when we were running up the steps of the Supreme Court. A lady passing by offered to take our picture. When we ran back down to grab our cameras she asked us where we were from. Breathlessly, we all said, "Oklahoma!" "Yeah, you are," she replied.

Our next stop was the United States Holocaust Museum Memorial. It was a self-guided tour and we were allowed to go at our own pace. Before beginning, each person is given a small booklet that contains the identification of a Jewish man, woman, or child. Through each floor it gives a rough summary of what was going on in this person's life at the time. Once you have finished the tour the last page states whether your person survived or perished in the holocaust. My little girl was gassed at the age of ten. What I will remember most is seeing the bunks they slept on, being inside the cattle cars that took so many Jews to their deaths, and standing on the same wooden planks. And I will never forget the one room with the gray painted walls and nothing but a layer of old dusty shoes covering the floor. There were hundreds of shoes that belonged to grandmas and grandpas, to little girls and boys, babies, mothers, brothers...families. As tragic an event as it was, the Holocaust Museum depicts the true pain and suffering so many innocent people were subjected to.

Everyone left the Holocaust Museum quieter than ever before. We drove back to the hotel and quickly changed for the cruise before driving over to Pentagon City to eat. We then drove to the docks and boarded our boat for the Potomac River Boat Cruise. The sun was just beginning to set when we left...sunset on the Potomac is beautiful. The cruise had to be one of the highlights of the trip.

Tuesday, June 18

Our first stop was to tour the White House. I was very anxious for that, but I think my expectations were higher than they should have been. I guess I knew they weren't going to show us the Oval Office or anything, but what we saw I could have settled for on TV. The most exciting thing happened when we were still standing by our buses. We heard some sirens start to become clearer and clearer from the distance. About five of us squeezed in between two charter buses and poked our heads out to see if we could see who it was. After the first set of motorcycle cops and a police car, a small black car was the first to pass by. We didn't recognize the younger man inside, but after the second set of motorcycle cops passed, we noticed an older white-haired gentleman that we swear was Vice President Dick Cheney. So that was pretty exciting for us.

After the White House tour we went to the National Cathedral by way of Embassy Row. Our bus driver Rodney pointed out all the embassies to us and even the Vice President's house. Once we were at the National Cathedral we took guided tours through the building. There were some really beautiful stained glass windows and statues adorning every inch of the inside.

After lunch at the Ronald Reagan International Trade Center, we headed to Mt. Vernon, the home of George Washington. When we first got there I was hot, and not really interested in walking around the old plantation,

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The Iwo Jima statue, or Marine Corps Memorial, is the largest bronze statue ever cast. The 78-foot memorial commemorates all of the Marines who have died in battle since 1775.



Lacy examining a sculpture at the Roosevelt Memorial.



During the Congressional Breakfast, students have the opportunity to meet with delegates from their state. Here, Lacy shakes hands with Congressman Wes Watkins.



Above: The Washington National Cathedral is a spectacular 14th century Gothic cathedral. It is the sixth largest in the world and second largest in the United States.

Left: The Lincoln Memorial is a simple, but grand memorial to the 16th president. It overlooks the massive Reflecting Pool on the National Mall. The walls surrounding the 19-foot statue of Lincoln contain some of his most famous speeches.

Washington D.C. Memories



Lacy Tatroult at the Smithsonian Institute

Youth Tour

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but the real fun was in Washington's backyard! The back porch was lined with rocking chairs for people to rest. His house sat on top of a beautiful hill that sloped down to the shoreline of the Potomac River. After taking a couple pictures, Adam Scheve, I think it was, came up with the brilliant idea of playing freeze tag. We thought old George

would've been happy that there were 'young folk frolicking in his backyard.' Later we stopped at Old Alexandria to eat and shop. Most of the stores were pretty pricey, but then again everything was pretty pricey up that way. We loaded the bus and went to the Iwo Jima Sunset Memorial Parade. Two different military bands played and their drill teams performed as well. They were all very talented. We took a couple pictures and then got back on the buses to take a leisurely night driving tour of Washington, D.C. That was a lot of fun, just getting to visit with some new friends I had made. Washington, D.C. is a beautiful city.

Wednesday, June 19

Getting ready for the Congressional Breakfast was a blast. Lizzie, Maggie and I had fun getting all "dressed up." The catered breakfast served was really good; it was one of the best meals on the trip. Sporadically during the breakfast, different Oklahoma dignitaries would drop by and talk to us. Wes Watkins was able to stay for a couple pictures. It was a very nice start to the day.

Once we were done with breakfast we walked down in front of the capitol to take our Youth Tour group picture. Next we toured the Botanical Gardens. They had about every plant you could think of, and it was really nice to be somewhere with so much greenery and fresh air.

We ran back to the hotel and changed clothes before going to Pentagon City to eat. We then went on a tour of the Pentagon. The tour was interesting and we were able to see the Official Press Room which is not usually on the tour. From the Pentagon we drove to the National Zoo. Then we went back to the hotel and got ready for the Youth Tour Dance which included every state at the conference. THAT was lots of fun! My toes and feet kept getting stepped on - some people just really don't know how to do the Cotton Eyed Joe - how sad!

After the dance we had a private party of our own in a meeting room. We had pizza and birthday cake to celebrate all the birthdays on the trip. Once we were done, we gathered in a circle and were asked to say one word that described the trip - no one was allowed to use the same word twice. My word was "special." And that's exactly what this trip was for me - special.

That night in our room Lizzie told me what a wonderful time she had had and that she was glad to have me as a roommate and then came the tears again! If anything, I was blessed to have two such wonderful girls as roommates.

Thursday, June 20

We all gathered down in front of the hotel before leaving for "The Awakening Man" statue. Jessica, Maggie, Amber and I took a picture by his foot with Jessica resting on top of his big toe. We then loaded back onto the bus and drove to Baltimore Airport. Adam and I talked the whole way back, and that's when I realized how much I was really going to miss everyone. I had met some of the brightest, most intelligent, fun and sweet people in the state of Oklahoma, and now we all had to go home.

We had a little extra time once we got to our gate so we got something to eat at the food court. That is where we saw Chris

Burke. He played Corky on the TV show "Life Goes On." (I actually won \$10 because I remembered the theme song!) He kindly signed an autograph and took a quick picture. I was very anxious on the flight to St. Louis, but to OKC - I slept! I woke up just as we were pulling into Will Rogers. It was nice to be back in Oklahoma - sort of, but I was really sad about having to leave everyone. After getting our luggage, and lots of hugs and pictures, it was finally time to go home.

My trip to D.C. was one of the most memorable and rewarding experiences I have ever had. Larry Watkins, the General Manager & Executive Vice President of OAEC, said to us the night before we left, "Parents, hug your children, because they will not be the same people when they return." He was right. I cannot express enough my gratitude and overwhelming thanks to the individuals throughout Oklahoma that make this trip possible for students like myself. Never did I imagine that writing an essay could take me on such an incredible journey. I was able to explore the history of a nation that I am so proud to be a part of. But most importantly I have formed cherished relationships that I know will last me a lifetime.

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