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**2004-2005 YLC National Spokesman**

**“Reflection”**

Upon returning from Washington D.C. after the 2004 Youth Tour, I reflected upon my experience. At first, I was overcome with complete gratitude. I was thankful for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Florida Rural Electric Cooperative Association and my local cooperative – Talquin Electric in Quincy, FL, for giving me a tremendous opportunity.

I reflected upon the sites I had seen and how it affected me. Ironically something that stood out in my mind, something that I reflected on, was in fact, my reflection. I know what you're thinking, you see your reflection every day, but maybe today I can shed a different light on it.

As I walked down the glossy hallways of the Capitol building, or passed by the Vietnam Memorial wall, or stood between the Lincoln and World War II Memorials, I came face to face with my own reflection. Whether it was on a smooth wall or a placid body of water, the memorials in Washington, D.C. make a point of reflecting upon yourself when you observe the meaning of each memorial.

At the Korean War Memorial, I was in the midst of a 38-man platoon in the middle of a rice paddy somewhere in Korea. Standing beside 19 men of stone, the other 19, a reflection. Not merely a reflection to make the number 38 hold true, but a reflection that forced me to look at my own to see the whole picture. For in the days of the Korean War it was those 38 men, and thousands like them, who had fallen to give that 39<sup>th</sup> man in the reflection freedom, that 39<sup>th</sup> man is me.

The place where these brave heroes lay is Arlington National Cemetery. I looked across the acres of hollowed ground, the hills laden with white crosses. President John F. Kennedy was buried in this sacred cemetery, and some of his greatest sayings are engraved there. One of these sayings parallels the power that a man has to create change and the effect that a ripple has on a pond. To emphasize this comparison there is a shallow body of water near John F. Kennedy's grave, upon which my reflection lies only to be disturbed periodically by a slight wake across the surface.... A change in my reflection.

Change was what one man could incite. What better place is there to create this change than the United States Capitol building? Walking along its narrow corridors I stare down at the floor to find not only my own reflection but also the reflection of statues that honor people from every state. One of the newest of these statues comes from my home state of Florida, honoring the brave astronauts that venture to the unknown, into the great expanse we

call outer space. But one of America's most turbulent ventures was not outer space, it was Vietnam. To commemorate this, Washington D.C. erected one of its most distinguished memorials.

The Vietnam Memorial is a long wall, made of smooth dark stone, on which all the names of heroes lost in Vietnam have been etched. On any given day you can see hundreds of people scrutinizing it, looking into it with an eager desire to connect with their past...reflecting. All these people find the name they desire, but not all people see their reflection staring back at them. I happened to see my reflection. What a startling discovery to stand back and see my reflection composed and surrounded entirely by thousands of names that were sacrificed for my freedom.

Another memorial that stands out in my mind is that of World War 2. A memorial beautifully designed with every state written for every soldier's home. The most significant piece of the World War 2 memorial, to me, is the 4,000 stars. For each star represents 100 soldiers who died during that war. These stars hang suspended above an absolutely tranquil surface of water. In their reflection you can see 4,000 more stars, how countless are the people who died for this country. This memorial makes it all too clear; much was given for that man staring back at me in the water.

My reflection, once overlooked, now means so much more. As I stare into one of Washington D.C.'s many reflecting pools, I gaze at a reflection that stood beside the men fighting in Korea, a reflection that stood in awe amongst the names of those who died in Vietnam, a reflection that was humbled in the company of thousands of stars.

I now see the whole picture looking through my reflection, for those memorials were built to remind me of the greatness that is America. Land of the free. Home of the brave. Those memorials serve as a constant reminder of the price paid and the outcome of that sacrifice that ensures our freedom.

Thank you for this opportunity you have given me to see the memorials of Washington D.C. and to discover their *real* meaning. Now when I am asked, “What part of D.C. made the biggest impression on you ?” I simply reply, “my reflection.”

May God bless America, thank you.