

An Experience I will never forget...  
Written by Abel Lopez

## Chapter 1 - July 7, 2002 - Spending the Night...

I left my grandparents house in the evening so that I could spend the night at the Varner's Home. Diane, Willie, Tristan and I were the only 4 people going to D.C. for the Mesa sentencing. We all had to get up early so that we could catch the plane to Washington D.C. MY EXCITING ADVENTURE BEGINS!!!

## Chapter 2 – July 8, 2002 – Departure and Arrival...

I had to get up about 5:00am so we could go thru security checks and the baggage checks and stuff. We all picked up breakfast at the airport and waited for our flight. I was a bit nervous since this was my first flight that I will never forget. I was on flight 333 to Baltimore departing at 7:45am. I was supposed to arrive in Baltimore at 1:00 in the afternoon, and I thought the flight was going to be over 6 hours, but the actual flight was 2 hours to Nashville, Tennessee and then 1 hour to Baltimore Airport because I crossed a time zone and forwarded my watch 1 hour ahead and that was 1 hour off of my flight. Overall, to my surprise the flight was about 3 hours!!! If I were to drive in a car, I would get as far as Killeen, Texas in 3 hours!!! COOL!!! The Plane arrives and they board the preflight people with disabilities or kids, it wasn't long before I was able to board my flight. I presented my ticket and ID to the ticket taker and got my receipt. I walked down the hallway that is headed towards the plane and when I took my first step on the plane it felt like getting in a van with a noisy engine. I sat at the end on the aisle seat on the right side of the plane, Tristan took a window seat there was an empty seat between us. I took out my key chain that my grandfather gave me prior to leaving the house, and held on to it because if anything happened for the duration of the flight, God would always be with me no matter what. I kept this in my hand for the duration of the flight. The plane was almost full, so someone took the seat between us. It was a black woman that was getting off at Nashville, Tennessee. She was headed to Jacksonville, Florida. I didn't talk much with her because I didn't know what to talk about because my attention was focused on the flight and the take-off. After all of the people were in their seats and their seat belts were on. The attendants checked each and everyone of us to make sure we were ready for the flight. After that one attendant stood at the center of the plane and I at the front making announcements about emergency procedures just in case. I read the entire thing on the card that was in a small magazine rack in front of me. Another interesting thing I found in there was a BARF BAG. Luckily, I didn't need it at all. The plane was ready for take off and I could feel the plane moving and saw some people outside of the plane directing the plane to the take off section when we were ready to take off. I could feel the speed increasing and increasing and felt pressure on my back as the plane was gaining speed and I felt the plane moving at an angle nearly 45 degrees as it was taking off and heading for the air. I even looked at the window and could see we were taking off and went past the roads and the stores so quickly. I could see that I was getting higher and higher and then about 20 minutes later the attendants were taking the passenger's orders for drinks. I didn't have anything at that time because I was busy thinking of my first flight and feeling the pressure in my ears as I was going up and then maintaining an altitude of an estimated over 20,000 feet in the air. I just relaxed and could see the Clouds below the plane and then read a magazine with a lot of interesting merchandise in it to get my mind off of the flight. It helped BIG TIME, and 2 hours later, I felt the plane descending and the ear pressure returned and then the plane turned at an angle to turn around and started heading to the assigned runway for landing. The landing was a bit rough, sort of felt like jumping in a ball pit for kids, an exhilarating feeling, except for 1 more part of the plane that needed to land before braking, the front wheels. A few seconds the front wheels finally touched the ground and the pilot applied the breaks and then turned to the nearest boarding area and finally parked in one. I felt a major sigh of relief and relaxed for a second, then the woman next to me got off the plane. After all of the people that were getting off at Nashville. Diane and Willie moved and sat in the seats on the left side of us. Diane got the window seat, and Willie sat next to Diane. After the Attendants checked the seats to assure they were clean and ready for the next group of passengers, they started boarding them and there was an empty seat next to me and the plane was almost full so there was another woman sitting next to me. After everyone was on the plane and the door was sealed and the cabin pressurized, we were ready for another ear pressure and brief headache flight from Nashville to Baltimore. The Plane takes off and it took about an hour and a half of flying to arrive in Baltimore. I arrive in Baltimore On-Time and finally got up, stretched and headed for the terminal to go get my luggage. Unexpectedly, Willie and Diane went to get some coffee at the Starbucks in the airport. I got a tall Hot Cocoa, my favorite. After we got our drinks, we headed to the terminal to go pick up our luggage, and we waited for like 5 minutes until they started putting the luggage on the conveyor belts and down a chute onto a circling mechanism so that we could get our luggage. We finally got out luggage and headed to the terminal, then we went to this counter and had a shuttle pick us up and take us to our hotel, so that was another hour of riding from Baltimore to Washington D.C. and we finally arrived at the hotel. Holiday Inn on the Hill is the hotel we were staying at for the duration of the trip. After we left our luggage and had someone take our luggage to the rooms, we immediately went to the District Attorney's Office and went to go see the D.A. It was an interesting walk from the hotel to the office of the D.A.'s office because the streets was loaded with vendors selling hats and shirts 3 for \$10.00, REAL CHEAP, as well as beggars asking for \$\$\$, more beggars than San Antonio. When I arrived, I was surprised to see that security was so tight I had to wear a specially designed name tag so I could get in. We arrived at the D.A.'s Office that was handling our case and he explained what might happen when the courts begins. I tried my best to stay awake but I was too tired and comfortable that I nearly fell asleep. Luckily I didn't, I understood what was going on and cannot reveal the information regarding this. After this we left the office and picked up some snacks and took it back to our hotel room. After walking for a while we finally arrived at the hotel, picked up our keys and looked for our rooms. We were Located on the 8th floor room 835. Willie and I shared rooms while Diane and Tristan was in a different room, just right next door. There was even a door in our room that allowed us to go into theirs if they left it unlocked. Willie issued me my Hotel Room Key and I decided to get some ice to keep our drinks cool. I got the Ice Box with the top and got my Hotel Room Key and Went down the hall to get the ice from the machine. I got the ice but 1 problem. I HAD NO IDEA WHAT ROOM NUMBER I WAS STAYING IN!!! I did the best to find it. I started at 835 and tried me card, WHEW it did work so that number is now in my head for the duration of the trip. I went back to the hotel room, got my luggage and started unpacking. I unpacked my shirts, pants and other necessities and then relaxed on the bed watching the hotel TV. A couple of minutes later I went with tristan to check out the Hotel Swimming Pool on the roof and checked out the

fitness room. I went downstairs back to the room and then, I just freshened up and then went to Dinner with them at Union Station. I had a great time checking it out. I got some souvenirs and a Magnetic Puzzle Game for when I am bored. After that we went back to the hotel room to rest up for a FULL DAY of sightseeing. Back at the hotel, Tristan and I went swimming at the rooftop and the water was warm, but when I got out of the pool IT WAS COLD!!! AAGGHH!!!! I went back to the hotel room and showered and watched TV then went to bed.

### Chapter 3 – July 9, 2002 – A look at Washington D.C.

I woke up at about 5:30am and was bored since everyone was asleep so I flicked the TV on and watched some shows out of boredom. Nothing good was on out of the 10 channels that was in there, so I grabbed the video game controller and played an hour of video games for \$5.99 and they had pretty good Super Nintendo Games on there. After everyone was up and all showered up and all dressed, all 4 of us went to the Senator's Bar and Grille, a restaurant that was a part of the hotel and we had a breakfast buffet. I had me some eggs, bacon, hash brown, a Croissant, and some milk. I was full and set for the day. After we ate, we all went back to our rooms to let the food settle for a bit then we went sightseeing all over D.C. First Diane and Tristan went to the Union Station to pick up Tickets for the Trolley Tour, while Willie and I went back to the rooms so I could get my camera and my films so I could take some interesting pictures all over Washington D.C. When Diane and Tristan came back we all went across the street at the Hyatt Hotel, and waited for the trolley and the first stop was the Smithsonian Museum. We all got off and went into the museum and they had a lot of historical things. My favorite part was the section with the computers and the history of computers. I actually saw the first computer ever developed and it was huge, it's kind of hard to believe that the computer that I saw is downsized into the size of my computer processor. After that I walked around the other sections about World War I and World War II. They covered a wide variety of topics from Archeology to Current Events. I only spent 2 hours there and then we went to another Museum the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History. The Strangest thing I saw there was an Octopus that was in a huge container filled with preservative fluid. I went all over the museum and tried to cover as much ground as I could in 1 hour and a half. The coolest part was riding in the complete glass elevator to all 4 floors.....well the 3rd floor was restricted to staff members only. After visiting each floor of fun, I went to the gift shop and bought an Origami Kit and a Zen Kit. After that we went to the trolley and went ALL OVER Washington D.C. and stopped at a mall and had dinner there. I bought me an Arby's Sandwich and it was YUMMY! Once we were done eating, Willie went back to some coffee shop that was around the corner and picked up something, then we all came back to the point we were dropped off and then reboarded the next trolley. Funny thing that I saw was a river down the street and on the other side was Georgetown University. We resumed our sightseeing tour and headed back to the hotel. Once I arrived at the hotel I dropped off my camera and films and my other things and then went to get more ice and pick up drinks for the movie that Tristan and I were planning to order. Now we needed some munchies for the movie. I also needed to go on-line and let my family and friends know that I was doing ok and all is well. The catch was the internet service at the Hyatt Hotel cost me \$7.50 for only 15 minutes, geez they are so expensive, so I had to make it brief. I sent some e-mail messages and talked with a close friend of mine then had to go before 15 minutes was up. After that I went to the Hyatt's Gift Shop and picked up some snacks and headed back to the room. Tristan and I arrived at our rooms and settled down, changed clothes to something more comfortable and then both of us got on the bed while Willie was relaxing and we all had some munchies and watched the movie "Resident Evil." The sad thing about the movie was that it was not closed captioned but I did get to enjoy the action scenes and all of that. After that I relaxed, watched TV and eventually went to bed.

### Chapter 4 – July 10, 2002 – An Emotional Day...

Once again I woke up at 7:00am because someone woke me up so I could get up and get dressed. I got up in a grumpy mood but had to suck it up because it was going to be an emotional day. (yes it's the truth although I don't show it) I finally got dressed, and headed out the door with the family and once again went to the senator's bar and Grill for breakfast buffet. I just had some eggs, bacon, a croissant, and milk. I didn't want to be full that day because I didn't want to risk embarrassing myself by throwing up in court when I was emotional. After chomping down on this excellently delicious breakfast, I headed back to the hotel room where I had to finish getting ready for the courthouse, then we all went to the courthouse and arrived on time before 9:15am. I was really nervous and anxious since I was going to get a good look at Joe Mesa in the courtroom. I went thru security once again and proceeded upstairs with the family to the court room and we all waited out in the hall for a few minutes. We finally went into the court room where I sat at a row behind Diane and Tristan. Willie sat a couple of rows ahead so he can see it clearer and closer. When the court began, they were taking care of the other cases. I looked around and got a good look at the court room, detail for detail, so that I will design the entire court room with Build<sup>®</sup> and will take snapshots with a few improvised sections of the room that I could not get a good look at but by relevance. 15 to 20 minutes later they finally bring out another prisoner; his hair was shaven and didn't look anything like Joe Mesa. When the prisoner turned his head to look at the clock, a rage of hatred filled my soul when my suspicions were correct, it was Joe Mesa. I wanted to get up from my seat, run to him and beat him up for what he did to Benjamin, but something was holding me back. It was overwhelming depression, sadness, so much pain. I decided to let justice take care of everything while the only thing I can do is watch and mourn for Ben. I am reminded of a line from DMX "The Frustration, rage, Trapped inside a cage...", because this is how I felt when I looked at Mesa, I was in emotional pain, with a lot of frustration, and had so much rage and wanted to retaliate at Mesa for Ben. I was stuck in a "cage" because I could not move from my seat. I was too upset to do anything, so I could only hold Diane's left shoulder since I was seated behind her. She took my hand and I held it so that I could show that I support her completely. The judge asked the members of the Plunkett and the Varner family to say some words to mesa about their pain and problems since their loved ones has passed away because of this horrendous ordeal. I was surprised that Diane was able to get up and actually said some words. I thought she was going to faint or cry harder so I had to prepare myself to get up and go to her when she needed someone to help her. I was surprised she was strong enough to get up, say some words to mesa, and return to her seat. After this, something was going on and it turned out that Mesa took the witness stand and stared signing that he was trying to apologize to both families. He was signing and

showing now remorse, no emotion, and didn't even shed a single tear. "What a bunch of CROCK" were the words that was running in my mind, after mesa has concluded his apologetic speech. After a while has passed, the judge has finally taken the weights off of all of our backs by announcing the life imprisonment that we were all hoping for. My sadness quickly turned to utmost happiness since justice has prevailed. I was so happy when I heard the 2 words that I have been waiting for, the 2 words are "Life Imprisonment." After the sentencing, the 2 detectives picked Mesa up and escorted him back to the holding room where he will go to a Maximum Security Prison, there to spend the rest of his natural life. We all got up and go together in a small room and the District Attorneys wanted to discuss something, there were no interpreters there so I don't remember what they said. We all left the little room a couple of minutes later and went into a hallway of waiting interviewers for several newspapers. It has been about half an hour for the short interviews, after that, we went outside and there was another group of reporters for several News on TV. Willie simply walked past them since he had no comment, but I did say a few words about me being Ben's close friend and told them how I felt about the Mesa sentencing. When I was done, I walked with willie straight back to the hotel room and changed shoes, and shirt as well as pants. Willie and I were ready and we headed back out and went to go eat at the Capitol Grille and I thought it was going to be just me, Tristan, Willie and Diane. I was wrong. We joined the Plunkett family for lunch to celebrate Mesa's Sentencing and we all had some wonderful food. I was full when we left the restaurant that I felt like I was going to barf. We all headed back to the front of the courthouse and waited for a shuttle because I was going to join the Plunkett family to a HUGE deaf event called "Deafway II" sponsored by Gallaudet University. The Varner family went ahead and did their things while I went to deafway for some loaded fun. I boarded the shuttle and found out that the Convention Center was FAR from my hotel room and I was going to have to walk a LONG way. The Plunkett family had a car there so they offered to bring me back from Gallaudet to my hotel room. I accepted and look forward to breaking my personal oath to avoid Gallaudet at all costs since Ben was murdered there, because Diane mentioned that Ben wanted me to go to Gallaudet and visit the campus. I had to do it for Ben, so I decided to go ahead and meet the Plunkett family at Gallaudet after the Convention was over. We finally arrived at the convention and there was deafies EVERYWHERE. Turn your head to the left, there they were, more deafies. Same for the right side, and before I knew it, I blended in pretty well. I followed Kathy, Eric Plunkett's Mother, to her table where she was selling some artwork to raise \$\$ for the Eric Plunkett Scholarship Funds. Kathy told me that I was free to look everywhere that I wanted to. I walked to each and every table there and they had so many very interesting items. I picked up a mouse pad, a block puzzle with the company's website on it, several papers with offers for pagers at a cheaper price, and an AT&T necklace with a key holder. Kathy was so nice that she gave me a copy of the Deafway II Program book so I kept it and put it asides for later reading. ESPECIALLY for the trip home, I was also able to check out a few computer software and internet sites that offered you to try out some relay services that will eventually eliminate the use of TTY's. I was also surprised to find a TTY Program available for the PC so you can use your computer like a TTY, you can have a conversation with either a hearing person, provided by the nearest relay service, or a deaf person with their home TTY. I talked to the person that created this software and told him that I would try the challenge of creating a TTY Program in Visual Basic instead of Visual C++. He chuckled and told me that it was hard to do something like this but it's possible. Oh well, never know. I shook his hand and congratulated him for this hard work and a great program. I wanted a copy of the program, but it was in the beta stage that was not ready to be released. I am looking forward to getting a copy of the software sometime in the future. I was also surprised to find an AOL Table where you could use your AOL account to check e-mails and get a copy of the software, so I signed on to my Screen name and Checked everything to make sure that all was well and talked with some of my friends, I was also able to get in touch with Jay, a friend at Gallaudet, and told him that I was coming to Gallaudet later. He gave me the building and room number he was staying in, so I kept this in my mind and looked forward to meeting him. I had to get off-line because another user was waiting and I tried to end the conversation as quickly as I could. I signed off and let the next user to use the internet. I was having so much fun that the time has passed quickly. When some of the lights went off, that was the signal that the convention was closing, so I returned to Kathy's Table where she was packing up and getting ready to leave, and head back to Gallaudet. I went with Kathy and 3 other people to the shuttle station and we all went to Gallaudet University and when I saw the University for the first time, I was in awe and interested to see the college that Ben and Eric went to. I got off the shuttle and looked around a little bit and then followed the Plunkett family to the Kellogg building where they had reserved a room for the duration of Deafway. I was anxious to meet this guy that I met through a dear friend of mine. I went to the building and turns out he gave me the wrong number, so I went to the front desk of that building and signed to the guy and mentioned my friend. He knew who I was talking about and gave me the right room number so I went to the second floor of the building and couldn't get in the hallway because I needed an ID card so I could get in and go to his dorm. I asked the guy in the front desk to let me in, but he can't leave the desk. Luckily a woman was leaving her room and offered to unlock the door for me with her ID card and I got in, I looked for the right room number and FOUND IT. I pressed this black button, which acts as a doorbell for the deaf and he answered it. I walked in and shook his hand and introduced myself, he was busy on-line talking to his girlfriend Casey. I talked to her myself, after the conversation was over, Jay took me around the campus showing me everything that Gallaudet University has to offer. I really liked it a lot and was thinking of attending, but the thought of Eric and Ben's soul that was taken on the property, I immediately stopped thinking of enrolling at that college. I resumed looking at the college, the new buildings that was nearly complete, and saw the dorm where Ben was staying. I went to the attendant of that building and asked him, with my voice, completely forgetting that it was a deaf college, to allow me access to the hallway where Ben's room was. He could not understand me because he signed that he was deaf, I had to sign my question again and felt embarrassed, since I am used to asking people for help with my voice. I just wanted to see the door where Ben stayed but my guide's ID card could not get me in the hallway. The only thing I could do was just see the hallway where Ben walked. I sighed and resumed my tour with Jay and walked to several other buildings and then went back to the Kellogg center and looked for the Plunkett family and went to the auditorium to look for them. I finally found Kathy and talked to her and the family was about to go see the scheduled show, so I said my good byes to the entire family and gave them my AOL Screen name so they can contact me anytime that I was on-line. I also thanked Jay for the tour of the campus and getting to know him better. I regretted that I didn't bring my camera to take these pictures and the only thing I can do is just remember them. Eric's Father took me

back to the hotel room and said my good-bye's to them and wished them luck in the future and shook their hands. I got out of the car and headed to my hotel room, very tired and ready to collapse because of the eventful day. I finally arrive at the room and see Willie and Tristan in each of the beds watching TV and relaxing. I went to the gift shop, picked up some additional munchies and had a good evening snack, before showering and going to bed for the long trip home.

#### Chapter 5 – July 11, 2002

I woke up really early about 5:00am and had to get dressed and make sure I didn't leave anything behind. I left the room with Willie, Tristan and Diane to the front of the hotel so that our shuttle could take us back to the airport so we could catch our 8:30am flight back to San Antonio. A slight problem was traffic that was slowing us down, due to an accident ahead of us. We arrived at the airport in time to drop off our luggage and get our boarding passes and have breakfast. I haven't had a French toast sticks from Burger King in a long time and glad to have had some at the airport while waiting for our flight. The plane was ready for boarding and I noticed some people wearing Red Cross Disaster Relief coats and I thought, what was going on in San Antonio? I boarded the plane and sat in the same area where I sat when I was coming to Washington D.C., only I sat 1 seat ahead along with Tristan. I got the aisle seat and Tristan took the Window Seat. 3 hours and 45 minutes of reading magazines and pamphlets that I picked up at the convention we were finally turning and descending into San Antonio and I was surprised, that I COULD SEE FIESTA TEXAS FROM THE AIR and it was AWESOME!!! We finally landed in San Antonio and got off the plane and then picked our luggage. We took a cab back to the Varner's House and I thanked Diane and Willie for this wonderful experience and was not able to thank her enough. Willie dropped me off at my grandmother and said my hellos to my family and talked all about the trip that I would never forget. God Bless the Plunkett and the Varner families for the wonderful things they did and the experiences that I will never forget.