

Ft. Stewart Graduate – Missionary in Lithuania



[Michael as ChalleNGe cadet at Georgia Youth ChalleNGe Academy at Ft. Stewart]

"As a teenager, I lost sight of the future that I had once dreamed of," said Michael Graybeal, a 1998 graduate, "but ChalleNGe gave me another chance and a way out of my confusion."

Michael was born in Ogden, Utah, then raised in Georgia. The fifth of six children, his father left when he was two, leaving his mother to raise the children alone. Says Michael, "Only the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and God Himself have been there to support us."

"As a child, teachers were fond of me and appreciated my ability and zeal to learn, Michael recalls. "But more and more they became frustrated as I neglected my school work. By the time I was a teen, I began seeking alternative sources of gratification through drug and alcohol abuse."

Michael's mother, Diane Graybeal, remembers, "I was worried about my smart boy with no direction, concerned that he had no real father figures. His friends were helping him get into trouble. He was not serious about anything and didn't seem to care where he was going or what he was doing."

Michael said, "Not long after starting down that path, I realized that was not what I really wanted. But numerous failed attempts to stop my habits proved that my life had gone beyond my control."

I heard about ChalleNGe through a friend who had the same struggles. I saw the opportunity to change and took it, enrolling in the Georgia Ft. Stewart ChalleNGe program.

"I really liked the challenges I found at ChalleNGe. It wasn't easy, yet it felt good to know what you want to do and then do it. A few times I felt like quitting when things got difficult and I felt out of control of the situation. But my stubbornness kept me going."



Diane said, "After he enrolled in ChalleNGe, I saw an enormous change. He became really focused and wanted to excel. When he came home for Christmas, he said he was not going to do anything to get kicked out, but now he wouldn't mind going back to high school because he knew how to do his best and make the grades.

"I saw change in Michael that was incredible for the short time he was in ChalleNGe. He actually understood what he had been doing wrong and wanted another chance.

"Soon after graduation, Michael and several other graduates were invited to speak at our local country club. I was so proud of all of them and the maturity they showed. I could not believe the maturity that teens could have."

Michael said, "After graduation in 1998, I worked to help support my mother. I worked for a year at Domino's Pizza, then was offered a position as assistant manager. ChalleNGe had opened my eyes to my natural skills and those I lacked. There I was given leadership opportunities that helped prepare me for this management position. I already knew my strengths and weaknesses as a leader.



[Michael with other Mormon missionaries in Lithuania]

"In 2000, I had the opportunity to serve as a Mormon missionary for two years in Lithuania—the greatest thing I've ever done. I learned so much about God, other people, and myself.

"I found myself applying skills learned throughout those short 22 weeks in ChalleNGe. As a missionary, I served as a leader to my peers and felt very confident in this role. Most important, I found I was able to gain the respect of others.

"I exercised the self-discipline I had learned at ChalleNGe. Missionaries in my church live by strict standards, including bedtime and wake-up time requirements."

Michael recently returned to this country and plans to continue his education. He has applied to Clayton State and Brigham Young Universities, expecting to enroll this year. He wants to study business and become an executive. "I hope to be able

to change others' lives," he says. "Good bosses have great potential for helping others. I found that principle to be true at ChalleNGe."

"I want to express my thanks to the program that gave me a second chance. I would also like to encourage any prospective cadets to use ChalleNGe for its intended purpose: To give you another chance to realize your dreams."

Michael's mother agrees. "If Michael had not gone to ChalleNGe, I believe he would have been without direction. Maybe he would have gotten his GED and a job, but I doubt he would have aspired to higher education. At ChalleNGe, he really learned how to use his intelligence. Some great teachers inspired him and helped him realize his potential.

"Today Michael is very active at church and a great example to many people," she says proudly. "He always has a smile for everyone and makes us laugh all the time! He is quite a success story to old friends whose previous impression of him was simply that of a kid with purple and green hair.

"He has become such a great son. My happiness is so important to him. He keeps in touch and helps me anyway he can. He loves to take me out to eat or to the movies. I am happy that he is so self-sufficient, and his church work and service to others makes me proud!"

Michael's life exemplifies how ChalleNGe continues to salvage young lives by teaching them how to actualize the core competencies emphasized in the program.