Synopsis

A real-life testimony about the potter and the clay, metaphorically, of course. After a lifetime of brokenness, Hannah comes to the realization that all that God allowed to happen in her life was and is for a purpose. As the potter, the Lord, shaped her and molded her into what she is today, the clay, Hannah, learned to walk in obedience to bring Him glory despite all the heartache, pain, and brokenness. God shapes the clay every time molding her into something more beautiful than before.

Outline

Chapter 1: Her Smile fades

-Ash commits suicide.

-My mom forces me to move to California for the summer.

-I go back to school for senior year

Chapter 2: December 9, 2016

-I go to school as usual.

-I get taken to hospital and receive the diagnosis of a severe nervous breakdown and AMS (altered mental status).

-Flashbacks to parents' divorce and grandparents' death.

Chapter 3: The Return and The Graduate

-I went back to school. I met with the counselors and my teachers and got a 504 plan.

-The spring semester was hard. I dropped almost all my advanced classes. relearned to read, write, talk, and eventually graduated high school.

 -Audition for OBU

-Rico and the day he came over (possible flashback to papas abuse)

-Disney (March)

-Graduation day

Chapter 4: Blast Off

- I spent the whole summer with John and Marie.

-I started college at OBU. I switched my major and accepted the call to ministry.

 -freshmen year

 -the summer after freshmen year

- Sophomore year I attempted to commit suicide. That summer I went on a mission trip to Peru.

Chapter 5: Sickness Defeated

- Junior year and that summer I applied to SkyRanch and got a job as a photographer.

-I caught COVID towards the end of summer. COVID led to pleurisy, then mesenteric lymphadenitis, then colon cancer, then endometriosis. (this was all 1st semester of senior year)

 -winter break in Virginia

Chapter 6: The Final Straw

-I graduated college and moved back home. My dad said he wished I was never born. I went back to SkyRanch. I came home to work for a startup private school. I started working at Church on the Rock.

-Left Church on the Rock to go be a Director of Children's Ministry and moved out on my own. I totaled my car and went on my first ever date and that spiraled into the worst anxiety I had ever experienced.

-I was having at least four anxiety attacks a day. Depression was my best friend.

-I resigned and moved back home. I went back to Church on the Rock.

Chapter 7: God’s Redemptive Power-December 9, 2024

-Being delivered from anxiety and depression.

-Receiving spiritual gifts.

-As I looked back on everything, I have been through in this life, I can finally see God’s hand in it all. On this day it has been 8 years since I lost my memory. I substituted today and wrote the date down many times never realizing what today was. It was like every time I wrote it, the Lord redeemed it. I realized at 11:48pm, that today is the anniversary of the day that the Lord grabbed a hold of me and brought me back to Him and though this has not been an easy life, it’s a redeemed life. It’s a purposeful life. It’s a well-positioned life for the Potter, my Lord and Savior, to sculp something beautiful that tells the truth of His love, mercy, and redeeming power. A life molded and shaped to bring Him glory.

Preface/Introduction

Ever since the accident happened, everyone has told me to write a book. As I often brushed them off, the Lord began to grow in me the vision and message for this book that retells how the Lord never leaves you nor forsakes you. Though the names have been changed, the story being told is real.

Three years ago, I was at a women’s conference with my oldest sister. During the conference one of the speakers talked about the biblical account of the potter and the clay, Jeremiah 18. She spoke about how everything we have been through has applied pressure in a place to mold us and shape us into who God has called us to be. As I retell you my real-life experiences leading to the accident and all the events following, I am telling you them from the new, blinders off, perspective of how “God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them” (Romans 8:28 NLT). He has molded me and shaped me into who He has called me to be, just as the potter does with the clay to make a useful piece of pottery. I hope as you read you are able to see how all the little broken pieces are mending back together.

I want to be honest with you though. The retelling of the events before March of 2017 are not from my own recollections of my personal experiences, or my memory bank so to speak, but the combination of journals I kept growing up, friends who lived them with me, and family members who stayed by my side. All those things combined; have come together to create what I know to be my memory of how things happened. However, I don’t consider them memories at all, more like recalling scenes from a movie I have watched. The events that follow March 2017 are completely from my own memory and my new found personality and voice, Hannah 2.0.

If I haven’t scared you off by now, you will see throughout the stories I share with that my life is a real redemption story, a personified new creation, one with I aim to please God with by the power of the testimony He has given. One though I wish on no other person but am finally in a place where I can say, to God be the glory, I am glad it happened because it had to happen.

Her Smile Fades

"Good morning! Good morning! It's great to be awake!" I sprung out of my bed singing. Not really, but I was definitely dancing around as if I was waking up the whole neighborhood on Christmas Day. Except, it's not Christmas time and it's just me that needs to get ready for church. I found the best outfit for the best day. It's Sunday and I woke up in plenty of time today. After I got dressed, I told my mom bye and that I'd see her later, I was going to church.

 Once I got to church, I parked the car and put on my biggest smile. I walked through the front building just to say hello to the door greetings. My destination was Sunday school, well youth group, and it's in the second building behind the first. This walk is usually filled with joy and singing, and today was no different. Until suddenly, I feel my phone vibrating in my pocket. No big deal, it's just a call from a girl from school, Em. We are on Drumline together and sometimes she wants to come to church with me, however it's been a while since she has come with me, so I'm perplexed as to why she is calling me.

I answer the phone, "good morning!" I say just a chipper as kid in a candy store.
"Good morning. I need to tell you something, where are you?" Em asked, sounding worried.
"I'm at church, what's up?" Now I'm more confused than before.

"It's Ash, she uh...um... well she was found this morning." Em tried to get the words to come out, but I could hear tears falling from her eyes. "Ash killed herself, she's dead." Em bluntly blurted out.

As I slipped down the brick wall outside the second building I couldn’t say a word. Tears started flowing from my eyes. I had just talked to Ash days before, everything was fine. It wasn’t expected. I couldn’t believe it.

 Ash and I met in Sixth grade beginner band class. She was a natural. She even had the look of a drummer. She was a hard dedicated worker, in music and in sports. She loved tennis and softball. She was always smiling, spreading her infectious laugh. She was also a food connoisseur so to speak. She always knew what to say and when to say it, making for the best hype girl.

I cleared my throat and blurted out, “Thank you for the call I’ve gotta go.” I hung up the phone and walked into Sunday School to find my best friend, crying, almost as if she already knew.

“I was going to call you,” Mae said sincerely. “I just found out from my mom.”

“Em called me.” I managed to speak.

I ran to Mae; we hugged for longer than socially acceptable. The news spread quickly. By the end of the day all of drumline met at the local park to grieve together. We talked about our favorite memories with Ash and relived the glory days with her on drumline. When we all left we had a game plan for a memorial service for her at my church. It was nearing the end of the our Junior year of High School.

The memorial service took place not too long after the day in the park. Three of us from drumline were chosen to give a speech, Mae, Jac, and me. I went last. Honestly, I didn’t know if I was going to make it through without crying. At least by me going last it just appeared as though I was touched by the other speeches instead of like I couldn’t control my emotions about the whole situation.

“Ash had the brightest smile, and the most contagious laugh,” I began to speak. Tears seemed to stain my face and the words I had written on a page were getting harder to see. Although I don’t remember what the rest of the eulogy said, but I know that Ash was a beautiful soul and we had a lot of great times together in the five years we knew each other.

The memorial was beautiful, but we weren’t ready to say goodbye forever. On the last day of school, we had our annual band picnic. This was a time to eat junk food, play games, and celebrate all we had accomplished during the year. This year’s picnic was different though. We all dearly missed our band mate. After we ate and played games, everyone went outside and grabbed an orange balloon. With a black sharpie in hand, we wrote notes to Ash on each of the balloons. On the count of three we all released them into the air.

“Heavens gained another angel,” echoed throughout the church parking lot as the balloons released into the air. I know we don’t become angels when we die, but I couldn’t help but wonder where her soul went. Sure, we had serval conversations about God; she seemed to always enjoy them. However, she never said rather she believed or not. My curiosity wasn’t too focused on her belief or not, it was more focused on the way she died. I guess I wasn’t the only one because her suicide brought up a lot of questions amongst all our friends. It even affected conversations in my home. However, now was not a time to question my own beliefs. It was a time to be there for our friends, to encourage and comfort them.

My mom didn’t feel the same way. “Your nana is going to California, to stay with your sister, for 6 months while her husband is deployed. I think it would be best if you took this time to get away from this town and all the drama going on. You are going to live with your sister and nana for the summer.”

“But mom! I have plans with my friends!”

“This is not negotiable Hannah!”

By that tone, I knew my mom was not playing! She had already planned for me to ride to California with Nana and my sister as we went back for the summer.

We traveled in a white 2008 Toyota Matrix, filled with my sister and her Boxer, my nana and her Palmerian, me and all of our suitcases. To say the least we were beyond cramped. The drive was long and not filled with many stops. We may have stopped four times, each time swapping drivers. It was a 24 hour road trip. Driving through Texas was half the trip and once we passed El Passo the AC in the car could not keep up with the sunny blazing hot temperatures outside.

After finally arriving to California on base, I didn’t want to tell anyone I made it safely, there was no one in that moment I cared to talk to. I thought that feeling would go away, but it turned out I was just putting into practice what I had always been good at, pushing people away. Sure after a few weeks of being there the text came in from my so called friends, I never answered them. I was too busy being wrapped in my own head. My mom had goals for me this summer and they didn’t exactly include talking to my friends from back home everyday.

I came to the realization that I am really good at pushing people away. For so long I didn’t recognize that I did all the reaching out. That’s not to say my friends never reached out it’s simply to say, I know how to put myself out of sight and out of mind.

Throughout the summer my sister and I decided we needed to be healthier. Our plan was to eat better and exercise more. We took turns cooking and lugging the laundry up the hill. During the day we swam in the pool and went to a different beach every weekend. In the evenings we went on runs. Well, we would try to run but it soon turned into jogging which eventually led to walks. It’s the last week of summer and my attitude has become prideful. I started pushing my sister and nana away since I knew it would be a long time till I saw them again. My sister had been inviting a friend on our walks, and I became jealous that she wasn’t spending as much time with me. On our last walk of the summer, I decided to run up the hill and that’s when I decided to body slam the ground. It wasn’t a purposeful discission, but my feet sure thought it was. After an ER visit and some x-rays, the doctor told us I had severely sprained it. This was a relief, since the instant swelling and already dark green and purple indicated to us it was broken. The doctor decided a brace and crunches for a few weeks would be just the thing it needed to heal.

A week later I was headed back to Texas to start my senior year of High school. All seemed to be alright in the world. Both of my sisters moved out, my mom is remarried, and I have a part-time job. Health wise, I could be doing better. My relationship with God, kind of just exists. My friends and I started a new bible study group last year, and since most of them graduated I will be taking over. I am also a second-year business manager for the yearbook, section leader in band, and have great plans to take five advance placement class as well as three dual credit classes. Life was good, so my pride tried to tell my depression.

December 9, 2016

It’s a Friday, December 9, 2016. There is a football game tonight, an essay due in more than one class today, a test in college algebra, and don't forget finals are next week and my last chance to take the ACT for college acceptance is tomorrow. I go to band rehearsal early this morning. We made it to the playoff season. "It's going to be a shorter show since competitions are over." A band director probably announced. "A show a show no matter how short it goes," I most likely annoyingly reminded my section.

*It’s audition day for band. When I start sixth grade I will be playing the saxophone, so I think. My dad surprisingly took me to auditions. Maybe because he was finally in town for a bit before leaving again, or maybe because the other girls had nana and mom busy. Whatever the reason I was happy my dad finally took interest in me.*

*I had taken violin in elementary school most likely to bond with the middle child, however she quickly learned it wasn’t her thing. She had to stay with it for the whole year though. When she went to middle school she decided to follow our mom’s footsteps and play trumpet, however that wasn’t her thing either. She really enjoyed sports. By the time I was starting middle school she decided shed only do sports and I could do the whole music thing. I really did enjoy violin but was wanting to venture into the saxophone. I loved the way it sounded and looked. As we walked into the band hall I told the teacher I’d like to try out saxophone. She calmly asked, “Are you sure? You look like a tuba player.” She paused for a minute, “Or maybe a baritone player?” second guessing her gut intuition.*

*“She said saxophone, whatever that is.” My dad took up for me, probably the only time in my life. “Uhh yes sir. However there is someone currttly trying out the woodwinds. Would you like to try the Brass instruments while you wait?” She boldly responded. “Yes ma’am thatll be fine.” I quietly agreed.*

*Im going to save myself some embarrassment and put it plainly, none of the brass instruments worked in my favor. Once it was my turn to tryout the woodwinds, the teachers came to the same conclusion, I didn’t have enough air in my lungs to fill any instrument that required air to fill them. Right about that time the Percussion teacher stepped out of the percussion room and gave me a look. One that I just knew in that moment we were going to spending a lot of time together and he was going to have great influence in my life. He walked over and asked my dad what I was there for. By the end of the conversation, I was trying out for percussion and by the end of the day I was walking out of the school with an equipment list for sixth grade percussion. “You have rhythm, that I can tell. Your coordination could use some work, but you’re a fast learner. I look forward to having you!” the percussion instructor told me before we left.*

*From sixth grade all the way to my senior year in high school it seemed like I always had to work harder then everyone else to get where I was. Honestly, it felt like I was always held to higher standards too. However, that work ethic, and drive to always be great and do my best that Mr. D instilled in me, is something I still carry today.*

 Band went by fast and now it is time for second period, Forensic Science.

Second period, check!

Now to enrichment. I mean UIL (Universal Interscholastic Leage) practice. My mom is my coach and this time being in her class has been a lot easier than the first go around, when I was a freshman in her English class.

 *"Get up girls! Come to the living room, we need to talk," yelled my absentee father down the hallway, the same morning his mother was pronounced dead. Dad never wakes us up for school, and plus I thought we weren't going to school today because we had just said our last goodbyes to Grandma, my dad’s mom, 3 hours prior. What could this possibly be about? I pondered.*

 *"Girls! Living room now!" Dad shouted down the hallway, as if there was an emergency. Once we all sat on the coffee table my dad stared at us and without hesitation said, "I've asked y'all's mother for a divorce."*

*The man that looked like my dad but could have never said those words, spoke the very thing, the only thing that could crush my world.*

*That's when it happened. My perfect normal life wasn't so perfect anymore, but funny enough it became normal. Almost all of my friends' parents were divorced, I had been the odd ball out all this time. And I was completely fine with that. In fact, it was a big thing that contributed to my perfect life! I prided myself on having loving parents. Who not only loved me but loved each other. They were going to grow old together. I mean sure, I never saw my dad due to whatever job he chose to take that would put him on the road or overseas at the time but still. They were perfect. So only pretty much I thought.*

 *"Your mom has already called the school and told them y'all's grandma died early this morning and has alerted them that she won't be there and most likely neither will y’all. But I told her it's y'all's choice. Your mom is going to our hometown today to plan y'all's grandma's funeral. You can go with her or go to school. It's up to you." My dad explained with little care as if he didn't just drop a whole bomb on my life.*

 *"I'll go with mom!" The oldest strunely stated. I got the feeling she knew this was coming.*

 *"I'm going to school." The middle child said, as if that's the better option. I think she just wanted to avoid all things death talk.*

 *"I'm going..... I'm going..... I'm going to band practice." I said as I stumbled across every word. I wasn't processing anything. I just knew I couldn't handle much talking about anything with my mom.*

 *"That's it then. Love y'all see ya later." Without a hug or kiss goodbye, Dad was already out of the door.*

*Mom took me and the middle child to school. "Try to have a good day," she exclaimed, trying not to hold up the car rider drop off line, with tears streaming down her face.*

*"Love y'all!" Me and the middle child yelled in unison. I'm not sure where the middle child went that day, but I walked right into the band hall, straight to a practice room, sat on the floor with my knees as tightly held to my chest as I possibly could hold them, bent my face down into my knees and cried.*

 *That was the whole school day. A few of my friends checked in on me throughout the day. But I didn't move. I didn't eat lunch. I didn't go to geometry, or whatever science class I was supposed to be in. I just sat. And cried. I didn't know if it was an A Day or a B Day and it didn't matter. I just sat and cried. I was already counted absent, since my mom called the school that morning, so it didn't matter and therefore I didn't care. I just didn't want to be with anyone, or do anything. I wanted a safe haven.*

*Things were bad enough with Grandma’s death and the divorce, but to top it all off two weeks later, my papa (my mom’s stepdad) died, and 40 days later my grandpa (my dad’s dad) died.*

*This may have been the sprouting moment of what had always been going on chemically in my head. The weeks following were miserable. My mom couldn't hold back her tears when I walked into her classroom. She'd hug me and sob, she couldn’t hold it together, as if I was her reminder of everything going on.*

 *Thankfully I always knew what we were going to do in her class. She'd run it by me when she made lesson plans, always asking, "you think y'all can do that?" I'd always respond, "yes of course mom, you're a good teacher."*

*And so it was, I'd stand in front of all my friends and classmates, make an excuse as to why my mom was sobbing at her desk, and proceed to give instructions for the day.*

*I couldn't be sad. I couldn't be the one who was crying at their desk. Someone had to be strong, and it wasn't my mom.*

*By now my oldest sister was engaged and practically lived at her future in-law's house since my future brother-in-law was at boot camp. The middle child was nowhere to be found anytime I needed her so there it was, just me and my mom. Both of us sad. Both of our worlds were falling apart. And yet when you looked at us, only one of our faces showed the signs of the bomb that blew up our whole world.*

UIL practice went normal as usual. I hug my mom bye and tell her of my afterschool plans, which consist of getting on a bus and traveling to the playoff game. The bell rings, and I am excited because it is lunch time, my favorite time of the day. At lunch I get to sit with my friends and talk as much as I want to. What I have never looked forward to is the food that probably tastes like plastic, but it hits the spot. A short thirty minutes pass and the bell rings, it is time to start walking to my favorite class, College Algebra. Just as I stand up to start my trek to the class, my head starts pounding. Instead of walking to the nurse I continue the course to get to my class. As I march up the stairs in the math and science building I start thinking I am going to faint, but nevertheless I push through and go to class. Upon arrival I sit my bag at my desk and approach my favorite teacher's desk.

 "My head is pounding." I say while holding my head in my hand.

 "What would you like to do Miss. Terry?" My teacher asks in frustration.

 "What are my options?" I question, slowly remembering we have a major test today.

"Lay your head down and get a zero for the possibility of cheating, go to your mom’s room and get counted absent, but you can take your test later, or take your test now and lay your head down after you turn it in." My teacher calmly explains.

I stand there and stare as I carefully but quickly think through each option. I have perfect attendance and it's my senior year; I don't want to ruin that. Why would I lay my head down and get a zero on a major test when I know for a fact, I could ace it in my sleep! I was coming up with an excuse for all of them except for taking my test. There isn’t a real choice to make here, I actually only have one option.

"I'll take the test." I say in a moan, knowing all I can hear is the pounding of my head.

 She hands me the test and I go down. I start by putting my name on the front page then I carefully answer every problem. Finally! I think to myself, it’s done. I turned it in and as I am returning to my seat to put my head down, I glance at the clock and notice there are twenty minutes left of class. My head is still throbbing! I feel like it can explode at any moment. I had high hopes a twenty-minute nap would cure the ache, when all of a sudden, a loud noise echoes throughout the room, as if it was set off right next to my ears. I finally acknowledge that the resounding sound is the bell, so I stand up to start my venture to my next class.

I always take the long way around to avoid major social interactions with the big crowds, and plus it is a Friday, I don’t want to be caught in the middle of yet another stupid fight. Much to my dismay, not from lack of trying though, I ran into one of my mom’s students who also happens to be one of my classmates' little brother, we call him Little Fun-Chips.

 "Hey Hannah! Your mom said you signed to a college, but didn't say where. Where will you be in the fall?" Fun-Chips asks with eagerness to learn of my college choice.

As much as I want to tell him I signed to Ouachita Baptist University with a music and academic scholarship offer, I can’t speak. Instead, I just stare at him, as if I should know him, but my brain tells me he's a stranger. I start to shout and try to run away. It was in this moment when my feet don’t move the way I want them to and my face heads straight towards the ground, when suddenly Little Fun-Chips hurries in my direction, stretches out his scrawny arms and catches me. The Lord has perfectly placed us to be right behind the freshmen building, the exact stairs that lead right to my mom's class, though no one was allowed to use those stairs as an entrance, Little Fun-Chips, carried me up those steps and banged on the back door. To his surprise my mom is the one who hears the banging and comes running.

 "What are you.... HANNAH! Little Fun-Chips, what's wrong?" Her voice slowly rises as she hears nothing but screams coming from my mouth.

"Something's wrong with Hannah! I'm not sure what. One minute we are talking, the next she is running and screaming, she almost fell, I caught her, I didn't know what to do so I brought her to you." Fun-chips went on and on trying to describe the indescribable event that had just taken place moments earlier, as he helped my mom drag me to her classroom.

"Alright, thank you fun-chips, I'll take care of her. Here's a note for class." My mom, somewhat confused and scared, manages to blurt out.

She finally sat me in a chair that was right in front of her desk. She tried to make conversation and figure out what was wrong, but my gaze was transfixed on the things of her classroom walls. A cowboy with a gun, Romeo and Juliet, The Raven, and other English literature characters. They were moving.

As I looked over to the cowboy, I can tell that He was getting ready to charge after me. Then within seconds he is running towards me as if I am his opponent in a duel, I am unaware I signed up for. He has his Gun ready to pull the trigger.

"Stop! Help! Stop!" I yell in agony catching my breath in between crying and screaming.

"What's wrong Hannah? What's happening?" my mom questions me in confusion.

"They're trying to kill me!"

 "Who? Nobody's here but me and you. You are safe."

"Them!" I raise my pointer finger in the direction of the cowboy. "Ahhhhh! It hurts! Make it stop!" I scream holding my shoulder believing I have been shot. “He’s going to kill me!”

The yelling turns into sobs and indistinct chatter.

"What's happening now?"

As I hold my arms and rock back and forth, I yell out, "The birds! They hurt," tears continuously flow down my face. And the gaze is not broken.

"Hannah, there are no birds in here! What is happening?” my mom is frantically thinking through all her options and responsibilities. She knows I need to go to the hospital, but she has to get her class covered first.

“Ahhhhhhhh!!!” The screams continue without stopping.

“We’ve got to get you to the hospital, to see what's wrong.” My supposed mom tells me.

At this point I have regreased so much so I have no idea who she is, where I am, or who I am. She begins to ask me questions about my schedule, as she tries to figure out which of my teachers she needs to call to let them know what's happening. She starts to dial for her principal first but it's too late. He heard the screams down the hallway and came to the door.

“Mrs. Terry, what is… why is Hannah not in class? Why is she screaming? What is…”

My mom interrupts him, “something's wrong with Hannah. She's hallucinating and Little Fun-Chips brought her to me. She can barely walk and she is not talking in full sentences, just a word here or there. I need to take her to the hospital.”

“I'll take care of things here for you, go. Take her to the hospital now.”

“Thank you!” My mom gathers what she needs to take me to the hospital.

It takes a little convincing and some restraint, but something in me decides to trust her. She hoists me out of the chair and hangs my arm around her neck, tucks her arm around my stomach and begins to carry me to the car.

Streams of screams follows me wherever we went. Once we got to the car I screamed for my nana, so my mom went to get her and then we went to the hospital. When we arrive at the local Emergency Room, my mom doesn’t park the car in the parking lot, she just pulls up to the door and gets out. She runs and gets a nurse; they bring out a wheelchair and take me inside. Then mom moves the car. Everyone is frantic. Even the hospital nurses seem scared, to the point that they take me directly into an ER room.

The level 2 trauma crash room is not lonely. It’s anything but. It’s confusing, and overwhelming, and a bit much for someone who has no clue who they are or where they are. It was terrifying.

So many people rally around. A sister and brother-in-law whom I have forgotten. A father and his nurse of a girlfriend or whatever she is to him now. A mother, whose face is as serious as a momma bear protecting its cub from their prey. And a nana, whose tears next to mine could fill the whole room. Of course that is what I've been told.

In between being taken to and from the crash room and the testing rooms, MRI room, lab for blood test, I am perplexed with the thought of my best friend. Though I cannot pick her out in a line up, my lips are fixated on asking the same question over and over, “Can I talk to Mae? I want to talk to Mae?”

My mom takes my phone and calls her, no answer. So she calls Mae’s mom, she answers. “Hey Hannah is asking to speak to Mae. Is she with you?”

“Mae is right beside me and says she wants nothing to do with Hannah. She says she has nothing to say. I am gravely sorry, and I am praying for Hannah. Please keep me updated with her situation.” Mae’s mom reluctantly blurts out.

“Will do, thank you.” My mom replies and she hangs up the phone. Looking down on me with a sorrowful face, my mom says, “I’m sorry Hannah, Mae doesn’t want to speak to you.”

I turn over in my hospital bed and let out a loud whale of tears. This was all that was needed to send me over the edge.

The doctor comes into the room to tell my mom all the tests they have ran He tells my mom to ask me a series of questions, ranging from the answer has always been the same to recently new things, just to see where my mental state really was. I think he wanted to know if I was faking it.

She began, “Who’s your best friend?” only screams and cries come out for a response. “What’s your favorite color? What’s your sister’s name? What instrument do you play? Who’s your percussion teacher? Where do you go to school?” Her voice starts buffering as she tries to hold in her tears, “What’s your favorite subject? Where do you go to church?”

It feels like the questions are continuing forever while I hear them, do not process them, and only respond to them with crying and screaming. By now I am rocking back and forth in the corner of my hospital bed with my knees crunched up to my chest and arms wrapped around them.

The doctor calmly explains, “That’s enough, that’s enough. Maybe some of those blood test results have come back. It’s obvious there’s nothing going on in her mind.

“Wait! Wait! Wait!!! Hannah, do you know who Jesus is?" Shouts my supposed mom in anticipation, and hope that I know the answer.

 Popping up from a nervous ball and having paused from screaming, I turned to her with a blank gaze on my face and no personality in my voice and stated, "Jesus is my Lord and Savior."

"Hannah, do you know who I am?" My supposed mom responds in desperate hopes that since I remember who Jesus is then I have all of sudden just remembered her. Much to her dismay, I return to my previous state. Scrunched in a ball, rocking back and forth, releasing nothing but screams, at the top of my hospital bed.

I say supposed mom because that's who they say she is. At this point I still don't know who she is, honestly, I don't even know what a mom is. And who is this Hannah they keep asking me about.

A few hours pass and the doctor returns to explain what he has found out. “Your daughter’s test all come back normal with a few exceptions. She is chronically depressed and anxious. Her brain scans show chemical imbalances causing depression and anxiety. Her blood tests show she has little to no iron, little to no vitamin C, D3, and B12, most likely due to her being in her menstrual cycle the past 36 weeks. All these things mixed together has led us to believe she is having a…” before the doctor can finish my mom interrupts, “No! NO! NO! She can’t be depressed, she has everything she could ever need, she has nothing to worry about! I want a second opinion!”

“Yes ma’am, we can fly her to Dallas or Little Rock children’s. Which would like?

“We can go to Little Rock; we took my other daughter there when she was having black outs. We will go there.”

“Yes, ma’am I’ll put the call in right away.”

As time passed, we learned the helicopter was not the best choice as an ambulance would be here sooner. As I was being rolled out for the ambulance, a friend of mine from school, Zynmari, walks up to me. My mom interrogates her to see if she knew if I had been drugged at school. Zymari has no idea what she is talking about. She just wants to see me and check to see if I am okay. She finally reached out to hold my hand and tells me she loves me and is praying for me.

After she left, they put me in a strait jacket and strapped me in so tight, I can only wiggly my toes. I can’t move my head, and my breathing is questionable. They’re treating me like a psych patient. My mom hops into the front of the ambulance while the paramedics load me up. My nana and step father follow behind us in the car and everyone else who was there, goes home.

Throughout the ride, of course there is no talking, however, I feel the safest and most scared I have felt all day. No one tries to talk to me or make me think. In the same breath, I cannot move or see where we are going. I fade into oblivion to escape. Before I know it, we are in Little Rock and I am being unloaded at the Children’s Hospital.

Upon arrival I am sent to a holding room to be evaluated. When the Psychiatrist comes in my mom and nana exclaim the situation and get her caught up. By now my mom has posted some of what was going on, on Facebook and has thousands of people praying for me. Their prayers have to of been working, since by the power of the Holy spirit and the grace of God I am able to answer the Psychiatrist’s questions. Well, to some extent. The answers come out robotic and consists of one answer mainly, “I cry.” Whatever the question is, that’s the response I was able to give out. The diagnosis from her is pretty much the same answer my mom received back at our local hospital, “She is suffering from severe untreated depression and anxiety. She needs to go to a counselor for 6 months at least. If we hear back, she is not in counseling, we will court mandate her to be admitted to a psych ward for 6 months. In addition, we’d like to give her a blanket what’s her favorite color and thing to do?”

“She loves music and the color pink,” my mom responds while still in shock and realization that there is something extremely internally wrong with me. The lady comes back with a small lap quilt that is hot pink with guitars all over it. After handing over the blanket she escorts us to my room for the night, or should I say morning, by now it is at least 3am.

Following all the excitement of the day, I finally lay down and go to sleep.

When I wake up, if I had thought it was a dream, my reality surely crushes it. There in front of me stands at least 34 neurologists and 8 brain surgeons all shrugging their shoulders in complete shock that they couldn’t figure out exactly what was going on. However, they feel confident enough to discharge me with this diagnosis that they have all agreed upon.

“Your daughter has suffered a severe nervous breakdown with severe altered mental state (AMS). Which has led to amnesia. Most amnesia patients regain full memory within 90-150 days. Just as well she has hardly any iron, vitamin D3, C, and B12. Theres’s barley any blood and oxygen flow to her brain. This is all due untreated clinical depression and anxiety as well as her being in her menstrual cycle for over 36 weeks.” My mother listens intently, like somehow this was all new profound information and not the same exact thing she heard at our local hospital. Continuing to talk as though I am not in the room, the doctor continues, “There are some things she can do to help regain memory and restore lost vitamins. We recommend going on gluten free, sugar free, dairy free, no red meat diet to help restore memory as well as take daily iron supplements and multivitamins. Her follow up should be with an OBGYN, to see if they can’t fix that problem as well.”

Before I was discharged, I relearned to walk and how to use the bathroom. It was as though my muscles and bones didn’t forget what to do or how to do it, but my brain did. My brain wasn’t sending signals to the rest of my body. However, once my body was forced to go through the motions my brain picked up on the signals and fell back in line.

The nurses wheel me out of Little Rock Children’s hospital and load me into a car with my so-called nana, mom and stepdad. I am completely lost, in my mind and in my life. I have no clue as to what is going on. I don’t know anybody or anything. The only thing I know is that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. Though this truth is comforting, I feel scared. I’m being sent home with complete strangers, that’s who they are to me at best, though the doctors told me they were my family, I don’t remember anything about them. Therefore, I don’t know them. This drive back to my so called hometown feels a lot longer than the actual two hours that it takes. My mom and stepdad sit in the front and my nana is in the backset with me. As we drive past all the city lights and the trees empty of leaves that follow, my thought process is nonexistent, all I hear is the echoing sounds of the one thing I know to be true; Jesus is my Lord and Savior.

Two sleepless nights follow, before I am thrown back into the whirlpool known as high school. As I lay in bed, I just stare at the celling repeating those words, “Jesus is my Lord and Savior”, with each breathe drifting into the arms of Jesus.

 I didn’t know it then, but the Lord was calling me back to Him. He was allowing me to experience his presence like never before. Deuteronomy 31:6 was being displayed in my life. The Lord never left me nor forsaked me, not before this day and defiantly not after.

The Return and The Graduate

 “Hannah! Get up!” Yells, my mom. “You have to get ready for school. You won’t be at band practice, but you will go to the band hall for first period.”

 I am startled out of my slumber, shocked I finally had fallen asleep. I move my bones slowly, still hesitant to trust this woman they call my mom. My personality has not been restored. It’s robotic and matter of fact. Everything is black and white, and my gaze is tunnel visioned. It has been two nights since being in this house and back with this so called family of mine, and now I have to go to school? I’m a little confused, and nervous, and stannic all at the same time.

 “Okay. What do I wear to School?” I genuinely ask, just now realizing I don’t know how I am supposed to dress for this place they call school.

 “Here!” My mom says as she tosses me a pair of jeans and a random T-shirt. “Put that on. And hurry up, we are going to be late.”

 I do as I am told and quickly put on my slip on sandals since tying shoes are the least of my worries. After I put my shoes on I grab my seemingly empty backpack and walk to the car. The ride to school is silent, not even the radio playing. I don’t know what to think or say or do. How is one suppose to behave in a car on the way to school? How am I supposed to react when we stop at the red lights? What do I do when I am bounced up because we went over a speedbump? I am not sure of all these things. So I respond how I acted the day I was sent home with this stranger. I stare out the window with my head in the palm of my hand and my elbow on the car window seal, silently repeating over and over in my head, “Jesus is my Lord and Savior.” It seems to ease my nerves.

 Even though my mom is a teacher here and can park us in the teacher parking lot, she takes me through the car rider line and drops me off in time to meet up with Em.

“I’m Em. We are on drumline together. You can trust me.” Em exclaims reaching out her hand waiting for me to take it.

 I am frighted by the gesture. I don’t know who she is. She seems familiar, but even with a name being offered, I cannot pinpoint who she is, and even though she says she is on drumline with me, I cannot compute what drumline is. I know my face has a gaze on it as I try to search for the needed information to force my feet to move, but at last all is lost.

 “Who are you? What is drumline?” I manage to robotically say. “My head hurts.”

 Just then, I see a girl running towards us. Her face is more familiar than Em’s. Could it be, the girl from the hospital just before I got on the ambulance?

 “Hi, I’m Zynmari.” She reintroduces herself.

 “Hi. My name is Hannah, so they say.” I respond in separated syllables.

 Zynmari reaches out her hand, sweetly and calmly responds, “nice to meet you, Hannah. Would you like me to walk you to class?”

 With a shake of my head and an outreached hand I agree to the company.

 Em lead the way as we stepped off the sidewalk and into the grass, only to land on more concrete in front of a set of double glass doors outlined in black, that leads into the band hall. I force Zynmari to come to a complete stop as Em opens the door.

 “Whenever you are ready.” Zynmari says patiently waiting and staring at Em still holding the door open.

“Take your time.” Em reassures me.

I take a deep breathe in, and held it for a second then I let it out. I move one foot forward. Instead of my other foot going in front of the already planted foot it stops right beside its twin. I take another deep breath in, and without holding it I release it. Now I feel my feet are ready to slowly emerge into these doors. Zynmari’s arm is locked with mine and Em is now behind us. The first hallway is not too long, plus there is barely anyone else in the hall, besides us. Then Zynmari stops. “We have to turn here and go down this hall now.” She instructs, reassuring I am okay with these movements, she asks, “Are you ready?”

As we pivot to face the new hallway, I reluctantly shake my head yes, while taking in another deep breath and release in. The hallway is crowded. Zynmari starts to explain to me where we are going and who we are going to see, but as we weave in and out of the other students, I hear the many independent conversations going on and see the eyes of everyone staring.

 “She’s back.” “That was fast.” “Wish she had stayed gone longer.” “I bet she’s faking it for attention” “Who does she think she is?” “Poor girl, this must be so scarry.” “How is she going to graduate now?” The conversations echo in my mind as we pass windows that peep into the band director’s offices. At last we pass the last office.

Em points at the window and says, “That’s our percussion director.”

I nod my head as if that means something to me.

Next to the window is a set of double black wooden doors with one long rectangle window in each door toward the middle where they meet.

Em hurries from behind us to open the door, “I’ll get that.”

“Thank you.” Zynmari says.

The room is big and in the shape of a square. I take two steps into the room and come to an abrupt halt, covering my ears with my hands. It’s loud. Too loud. How can anyone hear each other or even think. Our percussion director comes out of his office and silences the room.

“Hey sweetie you can come in here, it’s alright, you’re okay.” He says in a quiet but somewhat deep voice. His voice is calming. His face is familiar.

Zynmari escorts me into the office and sets me in a chair. Em followed behind us and closed the door. The chair I am sitting in is on the wall connected to the loud room. There are giant windows behind me, that allow me to see what everyone is doing in there. His desk is against the windows that peer into that long-dreaded hallway we just came from. As my eyes float to the right of me, I see a single door opened to a rectangular storage closet filled with extra percussion equipment and lots of music. Refocusing my eyes on what’s in front of me, I notice there is yet another single door, it leads into yet another big square room. All of this is overwhelming. I let out a big sigh.

“How are you today, Hannah?” my percussion instructor asks.

“It is a sunny but cold day. I am fine.” I robotically respond.

“What does the weather have to do with how you are?” He questioned.

“The weather is good therefore, I am good.”

“Gotcha. Well, I am glad to see you here!” He assures.

The room goes silent.

I chose to stay here all day. Seeing as the plan was to not go to my classes today but instead get reacclimated to the setting. Minute by minute the day goes by. I am unfazed by the random people who come into the office. Everyone who entered today tried to speak to me, but my voice seemed in shock, as if it was mute.

At the end of today my mom came to get me out of his office. “How did she do today?”

My percussion director leads her out the office, “Can we talk out here?”

I am suddenly aware that something is wrong. I can see their lips moving but I hear no sound. I can only assume there was pressure and an expectation to have a good day and make significant progress in recovery, but I failed to meet those expectations. Whatever they are saying, I am sure I disappointed someone.

The walk to the car is silent, and so is the car ride home.

The car came to a halt. We are home. My mom opens her mouth and speaks for the first time since we have been in the car today. “Tomorrow is a big day. You will return to your normal schedule at school. Although you will not be taking final exams, you will sit in all your classes. You also will be pulled from second period to have a 504-plan conference with your advisors, teachers and me. This meeting is how we are going to make sure you still graduate, that is top priority right now.”

“Okay.” I respond pretending to know exactly what every word she just said meant.

We step out of the car and walk into the house; I head to my room and remain in there until the morning.

The morning came quickly, and I didn’t get much sleep last night. I drag my feet around the room looking for something to wear. Yet another day, another pair of jeans, and a random T-shirt with my same slip-on sandals. The car ride feels repetitive, I’ve been here before. Oh yeah, it’s identical to the car ride we took yesterday to school. Quiet and long.

Em and Zynmmri are standing on the sidewalk awaiting my arrival.

“Good morning!” they cheeringly say in unison.

“Good good morning.” I respond stutteringly

Zynmmri stretches out her arm and ask, “ready?”

I nod my head and wrap my arm around hers as we start to walk towards the band hall. Today is the day I will stand in front of a snare drum, marimba, bass drum, triangle and all the other percussion instruments for the first time since I lost my memory. It’s the first time I will walk into each one of my classes and try to attentively listen to each teacher. The day I walk into my favorite class, college algebra, and see what all I can remember. The day my mom and I meet with the counselors and administration to devise a plan. Today is the first day of the rest of my high school career.

“Are you ready to play today?” My percussion instructor asks.

“I am here, so why not.” I say, already regretting my decision.

“Let’s go in here. You are in first band. That means you are a really really good player.” Em says leading the way into the big band room.

Band is seemingly calm as a whole; however my body is filled with unease, frustration, and confusion. The time moves quickly. I didn’t feel like we had been there for an hour and a half but somehow that’s how much time has passed because the bell rings. Zynmari walks me to forensic science. When we arrive, she reminds my teacher that I will be called out for a meeting. My teacher shakes her head and points to a chair seated next to her desk. Ten minutes pass and my teacher gets a call. “Please send Hannah to the academic conference room for her 504-plan meeting.” the lady on the phone instructs my teacher. She relays the information to me and sends another student with me, since I have no idea where the office is.

Upon walking into the room, I am handed a fidget to play with to help keep me calm. My mom does most of the talking. The counselors attempt to do a mild testing procedure to see what progress I have made, but the results are inconclusive due to me not saying a single word. The principals disgust what measures should be taken and agree for each teacher to do their own individual assessment, as well as each teacher gets the say of rather, I drop down to non-advance classes or if I stay in the advance class. The guidance counselor agreed to see me for thirty minutes each day. The academic advisor recommended I take my final exams in two weeks, at the end of Christmas break and in the meantime I receive extra help such as, printed out note, a buddy in each class, the ability to lay my head down for five minutes, and the ability to leave each class five minutes before the bell rings in order to beat the crowds, all of these things were to be offered until further notice. My mom seems to agree with all that has been suggested.

“Can we keep her in college algebra? I’m sure she will be able to pick up on everything easily. That’s her best subject.” My mom says.

“We can, but if she is not improved in that subject by Christmas break she will have to drop it in the spring.” The academic advisor mentioned.

“Deal.” My mom agrees and signs the document then slides it over to me to sign my name. She hands me a pen and puts it in my hand, positioning it exactly right so I could easily glide it across the paper. I try to write but I quickly realize I do not know how to spell my name or how to write it. I drop the pen and burst into tears. Everyone jumps at the chance to calm me down and finally my mom speaks up, “on behalf of Hannah she consents to the previously determined measures.”

“Thank you. She can be dismissed now.” One of the principals stated.

I get up and walk back to class with my paperwork in hand ready to give to each of my teachers. Not long after returning to class the bell rings, and I head to UIL practice in my mom’s room.

“Hannah!! I am so glad to see you back!!” Sophie Bradford yelled while running towards me with her arms stretched out ready to hug me. She wraps her arms around my arms that are down by my side and squeezes me tight.

Sophie Bradford is a freshman who is on drumline. I met her last year when she was an eighth grader on pit crew helping me push my equipment down the sidelines at football games. She has become like a sister to me. During band she has been giving me space to get adjusted but since this is UIL practice and there are only 5 students in the room, I guess she has decided I don’t need space while I am in this class.

“Ummmmm, okay.” I say confused as to why this blonde-haired girl is hugging me.

“That is Sophie Bradford, Hannah. She’s one of your greatest friends. Along with Alex.” My mom clarifies while pointing at the brunette standing in the middle of the front of the room.

I have known Alex since we were in sixth grade beginner band. We have been through a lot together. She stood by my side our freshman year when my grandparents died, and my parents divorced. She has always been a super solid God loving friend.

“Hey, friend.” Alex says as she waves at me.

The wheels in my head start turning. Theres something sweet and familiar about these girls. I feel connected to them but at the same time I am stunned by my lack of knowledge of who they are.

“Come sit by me!” Sophie Bradford eagerly shouts.

“You can sit here by me, or wherever you would like.” Alex says.

I start to walk over by them and take a sit in the desk that’s in between them, when my mom says, “alright, calm down. We still have work to do,” she pauses, eyeing Alex whose face does not seem eager to move right past my return. “uh but I suppose we can take a few minutes to just talk.”

So that is what we do, well what they do. I am overwhelmed by all the things Sophie Bradford is saying, all the stories she is telling. On one hand I appreciate her eagerness to reinform me, on the other, I can’t even begin to process everything she is saying to me.

“I think we should give Hannah a break,” Alex politely suggests.

“Yes of course,” Sophie Bradford agrees as she puts her hand on my back and starts to rub it to show sympathy.

“My head hurts,” I mention while folding my arms on top of my desk as a makeshift pillow for my head to lay.

“Today can just be a study hall,” my mom states.

Twenty short minutes pass, my mom interrupts the silence, “Who wants to walk Hannah to lunch before the bell rings?”

“I will.” Alex says while raising her hand. “Here, I’ll carry your backpack.”

I nod my head and manage to say, “Oh okay. Thank you.”

Upon arriving at lunch, I come to the realization that lunch is overly crowded, so I begin to panic. Alex puts her arm around my shoulders, “Everything is going to be okay, feel your feelings, but know I am going to be by your side every step of the way.” She reassures me.

“I can’t… I can’t do it.” I timidly say as I take a step back towards my mom’s class.

“Let’s stop and take a breather. We can try again in a minute.” Alex suggests while she motions to the outside bench.

We didn’t eat lunch that day. Once we sat down at the picnic table we just talked. She wanted to see how I was really doing and not many words came out of my mouth before she noticed it was time to take me to my next class.

“It’s time to go so we can beat the crowd. You have college Algebra next, right?” Alex asks. I shrug my shoulders. “Yes I believe that’s what you have next. I’ll lead, all you have to do is follow.’ She reassures me.

Once we arrive at my class, she walks me to up to my teacher and I hand her the paperwork from this morning’s meeting. “Thank you.” Mrs. Blanco says. “I am glad to have you back in class Hannah. I would like you to, on your own, try to do this packet during class today while everyone else takes their final. It’s a quick and easy way for me to see what you remember. Do you think you can handle that?” She asks concerningly.

I nod my head yes and reach out to grab the packet, Mrs. Blanco acknowledges my shaky hand and lays her hand on top of mine, “it’s okay if you don’t know anything, but please try.” She softly reassures me.

I return to my desk and see a page full of numbers staring back at me. I know it’s not meant to be hard, and I know I should know what to do, however, consciously I’m lost, but as the moment passes, I come to the realization that my right hand is writing in answers. Two plus two is four. Five times ten is fifty. Ninety divided by three is twenty. Label the numbers on the number line, easy, one through ten. Calculate the slop, that’s funny, it’s rise over run of course. All the things from counting to multiplication and long division to the Pythagorean Theorem to geometry, flying my way through the calculus questions just to get stumped on the college algebra problems. My hand knew exactly what to write even if I couldn’t explain it in words.

“I’ll get this graded and let you know where you are at, Hannah. In the meantime, did you know you made a one hundred and ten on the test you took last Friday?” Mrs. Blanco says.

“What test?” I question.

“The one you took the day your head hurt.” She reminds me.

“Oh. Is that good?” I ask in wonder.

“It’s the best! I am proud of you.” She says while she pats me on my back. “Get your backpack, its time you head out to beat the crowd.”

I grab my backpack and head out for my fourth period class. The walk is easy since the bell has yet to ring, I don’t have to worry about bobbing and weaving through the crowd. I make it two fourth period, government. I don’t really like government, which is funny to me since everyone around me says I am going to Ouachita to study Political Science and then after that Law School and one day Congress. Maybe that’s what the old me wanted, but the new me couldn’t care less about government. Anyways, per my 504-plan I receive a printed out copy of all the notes.

“Thank you.” I tell the teacher.

“Your welcome, she will be your partner.” He says pointing to the girl sitting right next to me.

“Hi, I’m Kadence. We were best friends in sixth grade.” Kadence says excitedly. “Do you remember me?” Her face turns from excited to nervous and curious.

“Hi Kadence, I’m Hannah.” I stutter. “I want to remember you, but I can’t. I’m sorry.” I say answering her previous question with reservation.

“It’s okay. I understand,” she says while patting my back.

“Thank you.” I nod and face forward as our teacher walks to the front of the room.

I stay in my head the whole class period, not understanding one thing he says.

“You need to leave now before the bell rings.” He instructs.

“Bye Kadence.” I wave and walk out the door to head to my class, English.

Upon arrival I am greeted by my teacher who looks kind and sweet. “Good afternoon Hannah I have you a seat at the front. Your class can be rowdy but I have paired you with the best student in the room.” She assures me while pointing me in the right direction to my seat.

The bell rings and the students in the room leave while I await for the next class, my class, to come in. In walks a tall red head boy who seems shocked when he sees me sitting right next to his empty desk.

Hesitantly the red hair boy asks, “Um, hi, Hannah. When did you switch classes?”

“They moved me here.” I remind him this was not my choice. “Why?”

“Do you know who I am?”

“Why would I know you?”

“We went to the Saidie Hawkins dance together when we were in nineth grade. See!” He says as he pulls out a picture of us from that night out of his wallet.

I carefully take the picture from his hand and hold it close to my eyes. I point and ask, “That is you,” I pause. “and that is uh that is me?” I question.

“Yes, that is us. You had the biggest crush on me back then.” He says with excitement and suddenly switches his tone, “Do you know what that is?” he says with wonder in his eyes.

“I am unaware of this thing you speak of.” I huff and turn to face the front of the classroom. For the rest of class, we do not speak. This class was the shortest class of the day and before the bell rings, I am once again told to leave and head to my mom’s classroom. We gather her things and go home. The rest of the week is more of the same, awkward social interactions and conversations with each one of my teachers about how to prepare for semester exams.

Christmas comes and goes. I take my semester exams the day before we go back to school for the spring semester and I make passing grades on all of them, including a perfect score on the college algebra semester exam. Sophie Bradford and Alex toke turns all Christmas break coming over every day to help prepare for exams and social interactions. They have been so helpful in my recovery and have promised to be by my side every step of the way. They even helped me get back to church along with Marie and S.J., my two friends, who are siblings, from church and school.

A few weeks pass and lots of improvements are made. I have been doing private lessons with my percussion director gearing up for college tryouts. We have prepared a two-mallet marimba piece and a snare drum piece, for my audition that’s in mid-February, which is now. My mom had previously emailed Ouachita’s Director of Percussion, Dr. Nyal, to alert him of my condition; however, he did not want to reschedule my audition.

My mom drives us an hour to the college for my audition. We are both led to his office and sit across from his desk. He proceeds to ask some questions and wants to hear about what happened and the progress I have made.

“As I stated in the email I sent to you in January, Hannah suffered from a serve nervous breakdown which caused her to lose all of her memory.” My mom begins to explain. “However, Hannah and her percussion director have been working diligently to allow Hannah to relearn everything in a short amount of time. With that being said, she did not have time to prepare a timpani piece, only a mallet and snare drum piece.”

“That is quite alright,” Dr. Nyal expresses with sympathy, “I would still like to see what you can do. If you are up for it, Hannah.” His eyes gaze at mine and suddenly all the nerves in my body are claimed. As if for the first time in my life there are no expectations. There probably are some sort of expectations, but for the first time I do not feel the pressure to meet them.

“Mrs. Terry, would you mind staying here while Hannah and I go to the percussion suite for the playing part of her audition?” Dr. Nyal asks kindly.

“Sure.” My mom responds.

“Alright. Thank you.” Dr.Nyal nods his head towards my mom. “Are you ready Hannah?”

There is nothing that he has done to make me feel worried or insecure. He is a man and right now I do not feel safe or secure around men. I didn’t tell my mom that, I didn’t know how to say it. So I turn and look at my mom trying to hold back the tears held captive in my eyes and tell myself; Jesus is my Lord and Savior and He is with me now, it’s all going to be okay. That seems to ease all my nerves.

Dr. Nyal keeps his distance and is very professional. He makes sure I am okay every step of the way. We walk into the percussion suite, “Take your time getting use to the environment and the sound of the instrument,” He suggests while holding his arm up in the direction of the beautiful 5-octive DeMorrow studio marimba sitting up against the wall.

 I walk over to the marimba, “It’s beautiful,” I say as I gloss my mallet over each bar. “It even sounds better than it looks.” My face lights up and suddenly I am excited to play my marimba piece. “I am ready now.” I announce.

“Go ahead.”

I nod my head, take a deep breath, tap my foot four times, and then begin to move up and down the marimba playing the wonderous melodies written on the page in front of me. It’s the last measure, “Ahhh” I let out a big sigh and play the last four counts.

The moment is silent, then I let down my mallets and hold them to my side. I pivot on my right foot in an about face so that I am now facing Dr. Nyal. I take a slight bow and say, “Thank you.”

“Very good. Lots of potential. Your grip and technique is outstanding. You flow very well, movement wise, you’re not stiff. You played the notes on the page. I am proud of you!” Dr. Nyal takes a deep breath, “I can work with what you have. May I hear your snare drum piece?”

“Sure.” I say as I hesitantly walk over to the music stand holding my drumsticks. I lay down the mallets and pick up the drumsticks. While taking a deep breath I am suddenly engulfed with the realization of where I am and what I am doing.

“Ms. Hannah, are you okay?” Dr. Nyal asks, snapping me out of my inward thoughts and back into reality.

“Yes sir.” I respond as I take steps toward the snare drum. The drum is too short, and my hand begins to shake as I attempt to raise the height by myself.

“I’ll get that for you.” Dr. Nyal steps forward and raises the drum to the perfect height. “Breathe. Take your time.” He says calmly.

I take a deep breath and let it out. Then I raise my drumsticks in position, tap my foot three times since there’s a pickup beat and BAME! The beats are coming alive off the page into my hands through the air into our ears. I am taken to another place. One where only the snare drum and I exist.

I am brought back to earth when I realize I only have one line left to play.

Dut da da dut da da dut click clack tat.

*Sigh.* I let out the breath I seemingly held the whole time I was playing. Relieved I got through it and happy because in my opinion it didn’t sound half bad.

“Ms. Hannah, I am so thankful, that against all of the circumstances going against you that you came out to play for me today.” Dr. Nyal says as he reaches out for a hand shake. “Say we go back upstairs and tell your mom the good news.”

We head back upstairs, and he offers me a band scholarship to play for him. I accept it.

I didn’t know it then, but that day would be the start of an amazing mentorship that would uphold me and push me to be the best in every way possible. He would go on to teach me more than just music, he would show me how to maintain balance, and a good work ethic. He would provide a listening ear when I needed godly advice on the next steps and he would remind me to always give God the glory and follow what God says too. He would talk me out of quitting more times then I can count. He taught me to never give up even when it’s hard. It was always more than just music to him, percussion was and still is a family who I can always lean on.

My mom and I left Ouachita and went to eat at the local bbq place. We enjoyed small talk and dreaming of the future. When we were finished eating we headed back home.