

“...but now I was being forced into a world I was not quite ready to embrace.”

Finding My Way To Almost Heaven

By Andrea Ard

I can still vividly picture my high school graduation ceremony. I had no idea what to expect after that moment, and was afraid of the next step in life – college. I wanted nothing more than to retreat to my own safe haven back at Live Oak High School in Watson, LA.

Feeling this anxiety was new for me, since I already had a place where I belonged, but now I was being forced into a world I was not quite ready to embrace. I grew up in a close knit community. My high school was relatively small, so I had known many of my fellow graduates from the first day of kindergarten. I had my first kiss in second grade on the school playground, and even ten years later, I would go to prom with the same boy. I survived all of life’s crises, or at least they seemed that monumental, with my two best friends. I was accustomed to seeing the same faces of classmates on a daily basis, but now high school was over and I had to move onward.

During the next month as I tried to prepare for college, the moving van did not help my approaching anxiety. After many tearful goodbyes, I left for college precisely 978 miles away. Moving to West Virginia was not an entirely drastic change for me because I had spent most summers here since the age of seven visiting with my grandparents. My anxieties would soon come to an end after I found my place at WVU Institute of Technology as a chemistry/pre-med major.

Soon after the first semester of college began, Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast. I was blessed to escape the storm during late August as it destroyed the coast, including areas in my home state. Many of my relatives and friends were horribly affected by Katrina’s devastation, and some relocated here in West Virginia. I thank God for the choice I made to come to WVU Tech and the strength He gave me to help support my loved ones through this ordeal.

College is an opportunity to meet new people and experience new things; it should not be frightening. It is not all about attending classes and homework, but also participating in extracurricular activities through clubs, organizations, and sports. In October, I traveled to Cincinnati for a chemical engineering conference; I tried skiing in Canaan Valley in February; and during spring break I went to Florida. I have found the same friendship and solidarity that I once had in high school. I find myself waving to the same familiar faces in the hallways; they just belong to different people now. My professors know me by my first name, and I have actually eaten dinner with them. Now I have my own college memories such as avoiding parking tickets at all costs, late night delirious study groups, and naps between classes on the couches in the Tech Center. I have prayed silently as I watched my tennis ball come within an inch of the President’s car. I truly have immersed myself into my new home just like other Freshmen from around the nation, reading the school’s newspaper for the latest about campus life, watching the Weather Channel in hopes that class will be delayed because of snow, and trying to avoid the “freshman fifteen.” Luckily, all the stairs on campus seemed to help me in that department.

Just in my first year of college, I have learned so many things inside and outside the classroom. I am the same person today as I was graduation night and the first day of college; I have overcome my fears and benefited immensely from doing so. Maybe some of you share the same feelings that I once had as your own high school career comes to an end. In that case, remember the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, “What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.”

