

“Spreading My Wings”

Briana Weigel

April 29, 2011

When I first walked onto the campus of Augustana College in the Fall of 2007 I was at a fork in the road of my life. I was not ready to leave the life I had built for myself back home. Who wants to leave a life of comfort and try something completely new? Definitely not me. BUT as I sat and thought about how much of a great experience this would be in my life, I had to remind myself that it was time to prove to myself, and everyone else back home, that I could move forward with my life and find out who I am on my own. I was not ready for new experiences, especially making new friends and being away from my support system. I had a great group of friends in High School that knew so much about me and to be honest, I was not too sure that any of these people at college could ever truly “replace” them. It was a challenge for me to new people and think “these people will become some of the closest friends I have ever had.”

Because of my insecurities and fear of bad influences from some “risky” freshmen on my dorm floor, I spent the first month of school keeping pretty quiet. Now for most of you who know me, you are probably thinking “how could SHE possibly keep to herself? or “Can she even be quiet?” but believe me, I did and it was one of the most difficult times of my life! I went from someone who was so talkative and interested in all of my friends in high school to a person who was scared and not ready to accept that I needed to find new friends. I spent SO much of my time thinking about how much I missed my family and friends that I never allowed myself to have real fun and find other people to be a part of my “new” life at school. Calling my high school friends also proved to be difficult because although I had no positive news to give to them, they were informing me of all the fun they were having with their new friends at college. Not only did I struggle to find new friends to hang out with, but I also struggled deeply with my faith. I was not too sure of where I stood with God and was continually searching for new experiences that would fulfill my need for Him in my life. At the beginning of my life at Augie, I often found myself wondering “Why is it so hard to find quality, Christian friends at a Christian school?” I spent too much of my time searching that I could not see what was right in front of me.

As the first month of school progress I started to find friends that I really connected with. They were a select few girls that I really found myself enjoying all of times we hung out because they kept me laughing and wanting to learn more and more about them every day. Slowly but surely we all began to open up about ourselves, letting each other know our experiences in life and allowing each other to see who we really were. I was lucky enough to start feeling “whole” again, like I found friends I could count on and lean on. At this point of college I knew that a few of my friends were forever apart of my life when I sat in my room after receiving a phone call that my great-grandma died and instantly started crying. Instead of getting up and leaving me alone in my room, these friends sat and stared at me, trying to make sure I was going to be okay. Although it would seem to be a little creepy to have people stare at you, I had never felt more connected to those anybody at college before. This moment of loss forced me to look beyond death and realize that God blessed me with something I needed so desperately in my life; friends. I can still recall laying in my bed that night thinking to myself how lucky I was that God started to find me true friends who cared for me, and in record time; only one month into school. I knew

He was starting to show me that through difficult but also good times I was more than able to spread my wings and become the person I was to be, if I was willing to let Him teach me.

It was not until the beginning of my Sophomore year that I really began to learn who I was. Two close friends of mine were on an Outreach Team through the Chapel and I always had a deep curiosity about what this group was all about. I knew they went out to local lock-ins, but I was never sure what the point of these lock-ins were. One day my friends asked me if I would be interested in joining their team. Deep down I was a little nervous about the idea of joining this group because of my lack of God in past, but quickly agreed to at least check an event out. About one month after the school year began, I went to a lock-in with the group at a local church and it was at that moment when that I realized how fitting this opportunity would be for me. It was as if God was telling me that this was my calling and that I could finally find a place to go where I felt as though I belonged. It also proved to be an opportunity for me to take my struggling faith and help middle schoolers come to find out who God was and the purpose he had in their lives. I looked at this experience as the perfect opportunity for these middle schoolers to see a college student who still struggled with faith and see that no matter how old we are, our lives are a constant struggle to find out who we really are.

It was the same year where I truly found MOST of friends I now consider my “Augie family”. These friends made it a point to make God a priority in their life, which was something I had been looking for, for a long time. We would share thoughts, ideas and bible verses to help each other and encourage each other through tough times in our life. These friends also showed me that it is okay to be who you really are. I was lucky enough to find people who celebrated my sadness, happiness, anger, fear, frustrations and accepted me for who I was. Celebrating these wonderful blessing in my life helped me to understand that I could lean on God during difficult and easy times. I would pray on an everyday basis, something that I neglected to do for most of my middle school and high school years. Going to church on Sunday mornings became more of a priority, rather than forcing myself to go. Church became a place that I began to feel even closer to God, and that was exactly what I needed in my life.

As time progressed, Junior year flew by so fast that I forgot to take time and examine my life to see the person I was becoming. Without even thinking about the consequences I would face for my choices, I re-prioritized my life and put God on the back burner. Slowly there were other things that began to take up my time, and before I knew it, I was falling slowly back into my old non-believing days. It was not until I was in desperate need for God’s love and grace in my life that I realized the downward spiral I had been taking for much too long. Soon the prayers in my head began to say the words I once heard by the group Decemberadio stating “Lord, I’ve been gone for far too long heading to places I don’t belong and I want to get back home to you.” Once again my prayers were answered and I told myself “this is the last time I question the importance of God in my life.” I turned to the words for from Isaiah for comfort when it reads “but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.” There is great hope in these words because although we may have moments of weakness, we can renew our strength and soar to bigger and better places because of God. He gives us hope in the times when we have become weary.

So now I find myself standing back at the same fork in the road I faced four years ago. I am nervous to start all over again, trying to find friends that understand who I really am. I am not too sure where my future will take me, but what I have learned throughout my college years is that God is the only one who knows my plan. Starting a new chapter in life is always nerve-wracking but I will have to constantly remind myself to “Let Go and Let God.” I know that I will struggle and face many difficult times throughout my future, but I also know that I am never alone. I can confidently say today, there is no doubt that God will be there for me in my time of need. Laura Story wrote a song titled “Blessings” that I think defines everyday struggles we may face. She states “What if trials of this life the rain, the storms, the hardest nights are Your mercies in disguise?” Instead of asking “what if”, we should find comfort in knowing that our struggles lead us straight to God. He knows our hearts and the plans He has for our lives. I want to leave you with this one reminder, “We all may struggle through the difficult times in life but God will lift us up, teach us how to fly and guide us along the right path when we need Him the most.”

Amen.