Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! Beep! My alarm goes off at 5:45 AM. I hit snooze until around 6:15, then jump in the shower. I pull on some blue jeans, a sweatshirt that’s comfortable, and clogs, so I know I can easily take them off later in the day. Even though I don’t want to, I apply my usual eyeliner and mascara to make sure the kids at school don’t see the ogre that lives on Macbeth Street. I never eat breakfast. The thought of hot, runny eggs with a side of greasy, salty bacon, or cold, gummy, soggy cereal, gross me out, so I pass. The first bell of the day rings at 7:10, the tardy bell at 7:20, with announcements promptly at 7:25. They include the usual pledge of allegiance, some things here and there about practices for spring sports, like lacrosse and soccer being on different fields today, and other motivational spiels they give us high school students at the beginning of every morning to try to boost us for the long day ahead. And believe me, I’ll need it.

My senior year consists of my usual gold day, periods 1, 3, 5, and 7 – band, biology, English, and history. These are much more painstaking days when it comes to paying attention and doing work compared to my even day classes, or maroon days. By mid 5th period, don’t be surprised to see me taking a catnap during Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* recap. I trudge on through lunch and make it to the 1:50 bell that dismisses us for the day. My day, however, is not done. I walk to the instrument room attached to the practice space for the band and orchestra, and grab my clarinet. I take a stand and chair, and make my way into the auditorium. Run through after run through on “Grease Lightening” starts to wear on my lips. This is the time where I congratulate myself for
choosing my clogs this morning, because I look down to see my warm, white, sock covered feet being more relaxed than the majority of my body. This is day four of production week for the spring musical, *Grease*. Production week is a grueling 4-hour, 5-day, weeklong perfection time for the actors, musicians, and techies, to put their finishing touches on the musical that has been in production for the past few months. Anyone can tell we are all tired. The hot, multi-colored lights above, beating down on us like the sun. Voices and lips alike are exhausted from continuous rehearsal and reruns of each lyric and line. Despite my draining school schedule, despite my afternoons of practices and nights of homework, and now production week in full swing, there is one thing that lingers in every senior’s mind right now as well – college acceptance. Yep, it’s the end of March. Just in time for those acceptance letters to come. I’m not anxious though; I’m actually pretty relaxed.

Maybe it had to do with the fact that I was a senior, *finally*. The past four years have been extremely intense and demanding. My mother always asked my brother and I to challenge ourselves and try our best, so we did. The classes I chose to be apart of were in the International Baccalaureate Program, which is a lot like AP. I took every class under the sun, from the sciences to music. Just like every other high school student in their junior and senior years, I complained about the long hours I worked into the night that the workloads required me to do. It was like the more work and better grades you got, the cooler you were. There were definitely times where I wished I could slack, but in the end I knew my hard work and determination would pay off. My endless hours of studying and the intense IB tests I took at the end of my senior year to see how much I absorbed in the past two years were hopefully going to help me score high enough to get
that leg up most aspiring college students wanted. I also sacrificed my weekends for
extracurricular activities to further push my qualifications, and they involved things with
my church, school, and different community activities that my grandfather was apart of.
For my church, I sang for the community choir, volunteered to work in the nursery for
parents who wanted time to worship and have their children watched during church
services, and during lent, helped during the weekly lent suppers that fell on every
Wednesday night. I started piano lessons when I was in the second grade, and kept up
with my skills through high school, or as much practicing during the week as my time
would allow. I was involved with the key club at school, did marching band in the fall,
and the jazz band in the spring. All these attempts to beef up my applications for college
were geared towards one place in particular – James Madison University.

You know those families that are like hard-core, die hard in love with their alumni
colleges? They have a room in their house dedicated to places like UVA or Penn State,
have a license plate border and bumper stickers with the name everywhere, wear
sweatshirts and hats like there’s no tomorrow to support their college, STILL go to
games, basketball and football, to show school spirit, and donate tons of money towards a
new library just so they can get their kids to love the school and go there, to continue
their legacy and love it just as much as they did? Well, that’s not quite how my family is.
Both my Dad and his sister graduated from JMU and have always talked nothing but
good things about the education and college experience they got from the school. So,
naturally, we were both on board. It is a cheaper Virginia school, too and somewhat
easier to get into than other colleges. There is also the idea dwelling in the back of our
minds about how much social freedom we will attain once squared away in a dorm too.
Being able to drink whenever we could, with whatever we could get our grubby little hands on? Such a plus to almost every graduating senior stepping foot into the fresh college scene. So once my brother gets in the year before, it’s set, I am destined, to go and with him be the next generation of the Fontana brother-sister duo to graduate.

As I’m sitting in the pit of the auditorium, thoughts and pictures of two of my mom’s dinners - pork chops with mushroom gravy and mashed potatoes or grilled chicken with macaroni and cheese - are distracting me during another line tweak with the actors when I get a text message. It’s my best friend Sarah. She tells me “I GOT MY ACCEPTANCE LETTER TO JMU! DID YOU GET YOURS?!?” My heart practically stops. All those people who told me it is going to be a breeze, a shoe in, an easy acceptance to JMU, are all now washed away by my anxiety and doubts. I can feel the blood pumping in my head, my stomach tightening up into one huge knot, my hands shaking. Everything I have worked for in the past 12 years of school have come down to this one letter, a letter that will determine a large chunk of my life. I get a few more texts of other close friends telling me they got theirs, causing even more angst, when finally we get a break from running scenes and I call my mom. “No acceptance letter yet, honey. You’ll be the first to know when you get in!” she tells me. So I patiently wait. The butterflies continue to swarm. I keep telling myself what everyone has said to me all along: “You’re a shoe in! Don’t worry about it.” About 20 minutes later, I got a call: “Hello?!? Well!?! What does it say?? …I’m sorry Kelly, you didn’t get in…” Silence. My mouth is open, but nothing. The word rejection starts to seep into my brain; the knot in my stomach rises into my throat. My face becomes red hot with tears welling up in my eyes. My whole world changed.
I tried to keep my composure throughout the rest of practice. I swallowed that knot and kept it down as best I could. I continue to deny my friends of the answer from the college. The last thing I want to hear is an “I’m so sorry, how did you not get in?” from 15 different people. To me, right then, I’m thinking they’re sorry, they’re just glad it’s not them in my place. Once I make it home, I come down into the den of our house. My mom is sitting on the couch, with a small envelope beside her, addressed to me. I stare at it for a few seconds, looking at the fancy James Madison seal is staring me in the face. The usual large envelope that comes with exciting welcoming and congratulatory letters are not what I read, instead, my shaky hands pick up the pathetic apology letter from the university, trying to explain the mass of people who applied were just too large and they could not accommodate one more person. Not one more person? Really? Do they know who I am? Who my family is? All those jokes I thought towards those families who used that tactic to give their college bound kids a leg up did not work for me, and I am furious. The knot in my stomach explodes. Hot, wet, salty tears start streaming from my blood shot eyes. My entire body is so exhausted. My weak and wobbly knees give out and I collapse into my mom’s arms. A thousand thoughts are racing through my mind: “How could I let this happen? What is my family going to think? My friends? Where am I going to go now? Do I even have any friends going anywhere else?” Why me? I worked so hard! The last few months of school and summer were probably one of the most difficult times I had to deal with during this time. Instead of being stoked, partying it up with my friends during the summer before college, I had to hear about their orientations, seeing what sweatshirts and other JMU branded paraphernalia they brought home, who their roommate assignments are, were just devastating. The longer my rejection from
JMU weighed on my shoulders, the harder it was for everyone’s sympathy to remain with me. And the longer I wanted their sympathy and the more they didn’t give it to me, the harder it was for me to remain happy for them and their success. So the time came for me to go to my orientation, at my safety school, the place I never dreamed of going to, George Mason.

All I saw at George Mason was disappointment. They have no marching band, the college atmosphere is not like a usual college life since the majority of students commute, and worst of all when I was an 18 year old student, on a hard core dry campus. As nerdy as this sounds to a lot of people, I had a lot of fun in my four years of marching band and was so stoked to continue being apart of the band at JMU. I am extremely close with my brother, and the dream of being with him in a bigger and better marching band was no longer real. Some of my closest friends were met through band, it helps break people into a new environment like a new school, but not at Mason. I had absolutely no intention of living at home either. I only live about 20 minutes away from Fairfax, but I was damned if I wasn’t going to try to make the best of my situation by living in a dorm. Thankfully I decided to do this and was supported by my parents, because the four roommates I lived with basically got me through my freshman year. Despite some issues with one of them, I became close with the others. I was able to successfully beat the system of the dry freshman Presidents Park and drank for the majority of my freshman year. I had a few more bumps in my road, like struggling through and ultimately failing physics which made me come to the realization that I was not going to stay a biology major, massive boyfriend problems, and getting pink eye in both eyes and the flu at the same time. Despite the issues, I learned to deal with Mason.
Event though I am now happy, I still stand by my views about Mason. If you don’t join a frat or sorority, you don’t have much of a chance in getting what most other kids in college experience - stupidly drinking every weekend. As juvenile as that sounds, it is a large part of going to college, and I felt even more robbed and angered towards Mason for being so uptight. It plays a large role in making a college have an atmosphere. The area where Mason is based isn’t like others either, because most colleges are based in towns with nothing in them but the college. Harrisonburg and Blacksburg have all of their stores supported by the college students, so much paraphernalia to support the colleges are sold there, and even the townies know what their town is for. Fairfax is trying to do the complete opposite. We don’t have a football team apparently because the county does not want the college to attract any more attention than it already does. So stupid and selfish. But, one shining light through my years has been the entire reason I’m paying $3,700…my classes! I have been challenged in every class and have had some exceptional professors. My love for Shakespeare was fed through two amazing classes geared towards the four types of plays he wrote, taught by a man who went to Harvard and Oxford, offering nothing but the best knowledge for his students. My Dimensions of Literature and Writing class was one of the most challenging literature classes I have ever taken, and I give my aspiring dreams to become an editor to a man who spoke at one of the recitations. It has taken me some time, but the sacrifices I thought I was making as a college student have only pushed me towards being a more mature and levelheaded young woman. The friends I did make are still with me, and will be kept close in the years to come. Since I do have my brother and other best friends at JMU and tech, I can choose a weekend and get my fill of crazy nights of drinking, then come home to my life
here at Mason. I have made great friends since being at mason as well, and now that I am 21, I really have no more problems. 😊 I can give Mason their due credit for helping me be more knowledgeable in my major from their challenging courses and to me and the other professionals who are going to be extremely picky when my time comes for hiring, that’s all that really matters.