



BACK TO ME

A DEVOTIONAL WALK
FOR THE COLLEGE FRESHMAN FEMALE

YOLI TAMU



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ME**

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We look forward to receiving your comments. Please contact us at
review@yolitamu.com. Thank you.

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I dedicate this book to my parents, Ken and Alpha Snell,
from whom I received my wings in an unlimited sky,
and to my parents in the arts, Professor Mike Malone and Ka-Ron
Lehman, from whom I learned to spread my wings and fly.

Introduction

A DEVOTIONAL WALK THROUGH THIS BOOK



Congratulations! You completed your exams, submitted your applications, and now you are headed to college! I am excited to help you navigate through the next four years of your life. Consider this book your personal companion as you take this unforgettable journey through some of the most important years of your life. By the time you finish reading this book, you will understand just how valuable your college experience can be if you take full advantage of all it has to offer.

Get ready to be entertained and inspired by my personal journey through the stressors of college life. You will discover how I was able to minimize stress due to personal trauma, and develop healthy relationships to ultimately find the inner peace I so desperately needed.

THE JOURNEY

Each chapter of this book reads like a personal diary for



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myself and a dear friend. The dear friend, in this case, is you! I begin each chapter with two powerful quotes, a song lyric from my album, and a Bible scripture to support the message of the chapter.

The chapters include life-changing moments that have shaped my life today. The lessons I learned are revealed and are offered to you for your consideration. I encourage you to read the chapter, answer the questions that follow, and then play the music provided for your enjoyment and contemplation. Each chapter title is also the song title listed on the music download. Allow the music to transport you to a peaceful place and offer you time to relax, digest and enjoy the message.

THE PURPOSE

It is my desire to help make your college experience an unforgettable one. This book was written with you in mind. After spending many years teaching and mentoring young women, I was constantly asked about the trials of becoming a young woman in today's society and away from home. Many of these women confided in me with their most personal concerns because they didn't feel comfortable sharing with their mothers, and they believed I could be objective and nurturing at the same time.

I also wished I could have shared some of my most private thoughts with my mother at that age, but I never felt completely comfortable either. In many cases, my teachers and coaches filled that gap for me, so I grew to understand the emotional void these young women felt. I vowed to do my part to help them close that gap for themselves.

As you read this book and begin to take your own journey,

there will be many times in your life when you will be nudged and challenged to stand up for what you believe in. In those moments, you will discover your voice over and over again. But those moments will also surprise, frighten, and enlighten you at the same time. The question you will always face:



“WHEN YOU KNOW BETTER,
WILL YOU DO BETTER?”
... OR WILL YOU BE FORCED TO
TAKE THE **SAME RIDE** AGAIN?

I selected stories that served as major turning points in my life while living away from home on a college campus. My journey was impactful because of my professors, peers, and the incredible adventures that only a college campus could provide in such a short amount of time.

I hope this book serves as a daily reminder to help you conquer many of the challenges you will face during your college years. Recognize when God is in the midst and take the time to try to identify the lessons I learned in my life and observe how they can be applied to your own.

Above all else, enjoy this fun, introspective journey through my college years!

I wouldn't change this experience for the world.

With all my love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yoli Tamm". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.



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Chapter 1

THE AFTERMATH



"Resilience is all about being able to overcome the unexpected. Sustainability is about survival. The goal of resilience is to THRIVE."

Jamais Cascio

"Did you hear about the rose that grew from a crack in the concrete? Proving nature's law wrong, it learned to walk without having feet. Funny, it seems to be keeping its dreams; it learned to breathe fresh air."

Tupac Shakur

"Everything, everything's breaking down, fallin' around us in a world crashing to the ground, our love is found...when the smoke clears all that's left is me and You."

Aftermath Lyric from my 'Back to Me' Album

"Put on all of God's armor so that you will be able to stand firm against all strategies of the devil. For we are not fighting against flesh and blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."

Ephesians 6:11-12 NLT

THE DAY MY WORLD CHANGED FOREVER

On a beautiful day in the Spring of 1993, I had just been cleared to graduate! I did it! After 4 long years of studying, training, and dedicating my life to my craft and



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commitment to the performing arts, I was finally ready to graduate with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Musical Theatre from Howard University! I dreamed about attending this school ever since I heard the incredible Dancer, Choreographer and Director, Debbie Allen graduated from there. I wanted to learn from the professors that taught her! I knew if she went there, the sky would be the limit for what I could accomplish with my life one day! Walking home to the house I shared with 2 other roommates, the sun was shining brightly and the trees seemed to greet me as I passed them by. I was on cloud nine and couldn't wait to call home to tell my parents that it was official. I thought, "Start booking your airline tickets, folks cause I'm graduating!!!"

In all of my joy and excitement about what was to come after I prepared to walk across that stage to get my diploma, all I could think about was how much I was going to miss my friends and I wanted to do my best job for my last musical performance in the historical Ira Aldridge Theatre with the cast that had become my family over the years. Those last few weeks were becoming bittersweet, but nothing prepared me for the bitter taste of life that was about to interrupt my beautiful day.



AS I CONTINUED MY WALK HOME, I COULD SEE MY STREET WHEN ALL OF A SUDDEN A STRANGER GRABBED ME FROM BEHIND.

He told me he had a gun and he was not going to hurt

me, as he poked me with it in my side. He told me to walk with him for a while because the cops were looking for him. Startled and shocked by the abrupt surprise of someone grabbing me, I told him to calm down and I could walk for a bit, but he would have to let me go. He told me to shut up and walk. I couldn't believe it. I could see my front door just a few blocks away and I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to make that celebratory call to my parents.

Moments later, he led me behind an empty house and pushed me down the basement steps. He then told me to take my pants down. I couldn't believe what was getting ready to happen. I thought to myself, "Is he gonna rape me?" I couldn't even bear the thought. I pleaded with him and told him, "The coast is clear. There are no cops. You can still get away. Why do you want me to pull my pants down?" He said as he poked me with the gun again, "I'm not gonna ask you again." I remember thinking to myself, I've come too far and my parents have worked too hard to give me the opportunity to graduate only to let someone take it away from me in an instant. As I slowly began to pull my pants down, I remember praying to God to not let me die. I told him I could not go out this way. I told Him to help me fight and if I die in the process, tell my family I love them. In that moment, I decided to fight for my life.

I began to pull my pants back up and I opened my eyes to face my attacker. But...he was gone. I can't even explain how I didn't hear him leave, but when I opened my eyes, he was gone. I was left there pulling up my pants with no sign of the person there to attack me. I knew instantly God did it. He had to have moved him away from me. Some say I experienced an out of body



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experience that God protected me from. I ran home and told my roommates to call the police. How could he have been there one minute and gone the next? Unbelievable! God intervened and I lived and I was not raped.

In the weeks that followed, the investigator found my attacker and he was arrested. But, the violation was made and my life would never be the same. I would never look at the world and all of its people the same again. My parents were so grateful to the investigator and my friends for being there for me, but the emotional scar would take years to heal for myself and my family. My family included my cast I had the pleasure of working with. But, the one person who amazed me with his strength and comfort the most was my professor/stage director. He usually never showed emotion. Often, I never knew if I was doing a good job with my characters on stage. But when he heard about my attack, he showed his compassion. He hugged me like I'd never hugged him before. He told me to take some time off from rehearsals, but to come back and do the show. He did not want my attacker to win by getting ahold of me inside. He told me, "You love to perform. Don't let him take that away from you. You were born to do this. Go rest and come back to do the amazing job you meant to do. Use this experience to make you greater."

I took a week off to be with my mother and sister, who flew out to see me. When I returned back to school to perform our last show of the season, I had to sing a song that started with the lyric, "The courage of a dreamer...". All I thought about was how much I dreamed to be onstage, how God saved me that day and left me unscathed, and how happy and supportive my family and friends were to see me perform that song and use

my own courage to make it through to the end. I began to gain strength from them and I was reminded that God didn't bring me this far just to leave me. A storm came in and took away my sunshine for a little while, but my sunshine returned when I remembered who I was all along.

I was forever changed that graduation year. I discovered a new strength and resilience to continue to be my best self in the midst of pain and disappointment. God had my back and I went on to sing and graduate in spite of my tragedy! I did it anyway and so can you!

THE SKY IS THE LIMIT

It is so important to dream your biggest dream and make it your life's goal to go after all the resources, people, and experiences needed to make it happen. When you dream BIG, you require so much of yourself and the people around you. You are no longer interested in just living a comfortable life. Instead you develop a desire to be challenged and stretched in ways that push you to your greatest potential. When you dream big, you are open to new and exciting opportunities that may scare you at first, but quickly expose you to people who are on the same journey seeking the same uncomfortable ride of a lifetime!

THE BITTER TASTE OF LIFE

Life will definitely be bittersweet. Get ready for it to throw you some curve balls that will interrupt the plan you thought you had for your life. Those curveballs and interruptions will cause you to doubt yourself and wonder whether the dream was ever worth pursuing in the first place. Don't fall victim to the circumstances of your life. They are all just that, circumstances. The plan



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you and your Creator have designed will not be stopped permanently by your circumstances unless you allow it. Your plans may take a turn down a different path, but the ultimate goal will always be there. With the support of your Creator and the exciting people that will come into your life, you will be guided toward your ultimate goal. All you have to do is remember what your goal is and look out for people who want to help you get there. See your circumstances as experiences that are meant to help you understand who you are and what you really stand for.

I'VE COME TOO FAR TO GIVE UP NOW! HELP ME FIGHT!

I found out what I stood for when I was attacked. In the midst of my fear, I remained focused on what I wanted out of life. I knew God did not bring me this far to let a stranger take my dream away. I decided to fight back with God's help. I knew I couldn't do it alone because I was being held at gunpoint. But, I did know that a greater Source more powerful than my attacker and me could and would intervene. How God was going to help me was unclear. But, I knew that I wanted to fight to see my parents again. I wanted to fight to walk across that stage, graduate and sing again. I had a dream for my life that I was willing to fight to see realized. You have to be that committed to your dream. Take God with you and I know you'll get there. After all, God helped you create the dream and He wants you to realize it too.

EMOTIONAL SCARS

The pain of the interruption will take time to heal. But, just like a scar on your leg that heals faster with a Band-Aid and a little ointment, family, friends and your Creator will rush in to comfort and heal you too. I thoroughly appreciated the love and comfort I received from

praying to God and talking to family. But I discovered I also needed the support of a professional psychologist to help me understand what had happened to me. Many people shy away from therapy. But, I believe some scars need extra attention and a psychologist can offer that additional perspective that our loved ones cannot. Don't be afraid to heal your emotional scars with the comfort of prayer, family members, and a licensed professional. You have too much life to live. So, treat yourself to a healing process that is productive and gets you back on track.

DO IT ANYWAY

During the healing process, life will continue to interrupt your path, but stay the course. The interruption, although painful, is not as powerful as it may appear. My professor told me not to let my attacker win by giving in to my pain. So, don't let your circumstance win in the midst of your pain. Think about the joy you feel when you imagine yourself achieving your goals. Think about the support you have and will continue to receive from others as you press forward. Realize you are not in this game of life by yourself. You have an army of support just waiting to embrace you. So, in the midst of your fear and doubt, do it anyway!

THE SUN ALWAYS SHINES AGAIN

A new day awaits you. New dreams and new opportunities can't wait to meet you. When the storm subsides and the rain washes away the past, the sun will return to shine again. What will be revealed this time will be the glow of the aftermath!!

EMBRACE IT NOW!



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Who do you know in your life that has inspired you to be your best and keep moving toward your dreams? Was it your parents, a grandparent, a teacher, or someone you grew up admiring on TV?

What words of comfort were said to you?

What did you admire about their life that encouraged you?

How do you currently handle the curveballs and interruptions in your life?

How reliable is your support system of family and friends?

Do you have someone you can call in a real time of need?

What is worth fighting for in your life today?

How committed are you to realizing your dreams and your greatest potential?

When you are in pain, what is your healing process?

What fears sometimes prevent you from moving forward in your life?

After the healing process begins, the glow of the aftermath will be revealed. What will your glow reflect to others watching?

How will your life be different after surviving your circumstance?



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Chapter 2



GONE AWAY

"Everything will CHANGE. The only question is growing up or decaying." **Nikki Giovanni**

"I'm gonna make a change for once in my life. It's gonna feel real good.
Gonna make a difference. Gonna make it right." **Siedah Garrett's
Lyric for 'Man in the Mirror' from Michael Jackson's 'Bad' Album**

"No longer a glass ceiling holding me. Shattered glass falls over my
head ...and I'm gone away!"
Gone Away Lyric from my 'Back to Me' Album

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own
understanding. Seek His will in all you do, and He will show you which
path to take." **Proverbs 3:5-6 NLT**

TAKING A RISK

My freshman year of college was full of excitement and nervous energy. I finally made it to the one school I applied for, Howard University and I actually got in! I was accepted! Just being accepted felt like a prize in itself. I remember waiting anxiously in the halls of the Fine Arts Dept. to meet one of my professors for the first time. This was the meeting that would solidify my college major.



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I was a dance major at my performing arts high school and I sang in church. During the summer months, I also enjoyed participating in acting workshops. So, when I applied to Howard University, I chose Acting as a major because I was told Debbie Allen and her equally amazing sister, Phylicia Rashad pursued acting majors.

When my name was called to enter the classroom to meet the professor, my heart was beating out of my chest. I was happy and scared at the same time. I wanted to be my best and present myself well in front of the professor. I entered the room and there he was, Professor M, the man I had heard so much about from other students earlier in the hallway. They told me he was firm and he was strict, but he was one of the best instructors in the dept. They also told me he had taught Debbie Allen! So, imagine my surprise when I found out I'd be able to meet Debbie Allen's professor on my first day!!

I slowly entered the room and stood in front of him and his assistant. This stalky man with a pot belly and balding head of silvery hair greeted me with a "Hello", but he remained seated with his arms crossed. He did not ask me to sit down. Instead, he asked me to perform my monologue. I took a deep breath, walked to the center of the room and quietly got into character. I began to perform my monologue and I could hear the shaking in my voice. Fortunately, my shaking voice worked for the scene because I was playing a mother who had just lost her children at the hands of her husband, who killed them by dropping them out of a window. It was a scene from the play, "For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Is Not Enough". I made it through my monologue and waited for Professor M to say something... anything!! He was so quiet as he stared at me. I wanted

to ask if he liked it, but I decided to be quiet and just wait. After what seemed like an eternity, he finally spoke and said, "I understand you can sing and dance too. Is that right?" I said, "Yes. I majored in dance in high school, but I really only sang in church". He said, "Let me here you sing. Do you have a song prepared?" I thought to myself, "A song prepared? I came here to act, not sing". But of course, I wouldn't dare say that out loud. Instead I said, "Uh, well, uh I can sing 'Amazing Grace'". He said, "Let's hear it." I began to sing the song and as I began to sing it, I started to forget who was in the room and that song became a saving grace for me right in that instant. My nerves began to subside and my voice no longer shook with fear. I was singing to the Lord thanking Him for His amazing grace. It had certainly carried me through. I went into that room blind, but now I could see that He was there with me carrying me through the moment. I knew I loved to sing, but I didn't think it would feel like it did in that room outside of church. When I ended the song, I smiled inside and I was happy I did it. That song gave me the courage to stand in front of such an important man and sing my heart out.



AFTER I FINISHED SINGING, I REMEMBER OPENING MY EYES AND ASKING PROFESSOR M IF IT WAS OK. HE SAT UP IN HIS SEAT, LOOKED AT HIS ASSISTANT AND HE SAID TO ME, "WE NEED TO CHANGE YOUR MAJOR. YOU'RE A MUSICAL THEATRE MAJOR, NOT AN ACTING MAJOR".



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I was shocked to hear him say those words because I didn't consider myself a great singer. I thought my acting would take me to places that I never dreamed of. I said to him, "Do you really think I should be a musical theatre major?" He said, "Of course". "Don't you? You're an amazing singer. Your voice deserves to be heard and I want to hear more of it." I couldn't believe he thought my voice was amazing. I knew it touched people in church and I played around with singing some in high school, but coming from the person I traveled across the country to meet was a moment I'll never forget. I wasn't sure how I would measure up against all the really great powerful singers I heard earlier that day, but Professor M knew and I decided to take the risk and I changed my major to Musical Theatre. Something told me I was destined for great things and this man was gonna help me get there!

MAKE A PLAN

When I was accepted to the one school I applied for, I was speechless. By not applying to more than one school, I took my first risk at going after what I wanted. I had tunnel vision and knew Howard was the place for me. But, knowing in my gut where I wanted to attend was not enough. I had to put forth the effort to find out just what it would take to be accepted. I met with my high school counselor and talked to other college students that I knew in my neighborhood about Howard and other HBCUs before I made the leap to apply. In other words, I did my homework. I don't encourage you to apply to only one school if you're interested in other schools. By all means, apply to those that interest you. I set a goal to study for my SATs. I shared my application essay with my parents and my English teacher, discussed my college major with my counselor, and I rehearsed my monologue daily before my audition. My passion to achieve what I wanted only

happened because I had a plan. Make sure you have a plan, and then make your move.

MAKE A MOVE

Fear has a funny way of showing up even after you've made a plan and you're ready to take action. How many times have you asked yourself if you were good enough to have what you want? How many times have you allowed the naysayers, the "haters", and your negative thoughts to stop you cold in your tracks before you made the move you knew felt right in your soul? If you're anything like me, I'm guessing you have doubted yourself more times than you'd care to admit. It's ok. Fear is an emotional indicator that it's time for you to make some kind of move one way or another. Either you will retreat, fall back and convince yourself that your idea is crazy and impossible to achieve or you'll jump in and give it a try no matter what happens. Jumping in and giving it a try will not only silence the "bullies" in your head, but it will propel you to another level of understanding within yourself that will cause "fear" to take notice. When you decide to move full steam ahead, your pathway can't help but open up and accommodate you. The stronger you feel about something, the sooner God will align others to assist you or He'll cause them to step aside and watch.

MEET YOUR OPPORTUNITY

You can't lose when you convince yourself and the people around you that you intend to make your goals happen. The experience alone will offer you insight into the next steps you must take to maintain your momentum. I did not expect to sing in my acting audition. I prepared myself for a college major in Acting, but God had another plan. When I listed my singing and dancing skills on my application, Professor M took notice. I found myself caught up in the momentum of the moment



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and I sang for him. My preparation in acting served a purpose, but my preparation in the church served one as well. All of my experiences led me to that moment of incredible opportunity and I was ready. I didn't know that opportunity would present itself, but it did and I seized the moment and won! I won the acceptance of the professor. I conquered the fear of not feeling good enough, and I discovered I was destined for a college major in musical theatre that I never even considered.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF

I took the risk by taking a chance on me. I recognized my silent comfort in God, the unexpected support of my new professor, and I was willing to open myself to a new adventure that frightened me, but excited me at the same time. When you are able to replace your expectation with something even greater than you expected, you are on your way to places you can't even imagine. What was once familiar is now gone away!

TAKE THE LEAP!

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

When was the last time you stopped yourself because you were afraid you weren't good enough or prepared enough to have what you wanted?

How did that make you feel?

Who agreed with you and who did not?

Is there someone in your life that encourages you to try anyway?

What important goal do you have for yourself right now?

What steps will you take to help you reach it?

Name your current skills, hobbies, and interests. What do you enjoy about these things? How do they make you feel?

Have you ever took a chance on you before?
