

Cassidy Best blog post

When I was 12 years old, after hearing Taylor Swift sing about teardrops on her guitar, I started writing songs. I didn't own a guitar and I didn't know how to play any sort of instrument, and *barely* knew how to sing, but I would just hear stories or phrases from other people and my first instinct was to put it into a song. I was a competitive gymnast at the time, so I was in the gym 25 hours a week. I would hum tunes in my head while I was waiting for my turn on uneven bars, and then I would run to the locker room during water breaks and take out my notebook and write it down. Luckily, I have the world's' best parents, and my mom and dad quickly realized that I had some sort of natural gift, but knew that if I wanted to actually write songs, I would need to learn how to play an instrument.

So for my thirteenth birthday, I got my very first guitar. I was still a high level gymnast, so most days I was in the gym, but I would take a thirty minute guitar lesson from a family friend on Saturday mornings, my one day off. Though the voice lessons continued, after I had learned a few chords on guitar, enough that I was able to write songs with, I stopped taking the guitar lessons, and "taught" myself anything else I needed. That was because music was just something I did for fun, and gymnastics was my *real* passion. That all changed when I was 15 years old. After three ankle surgeries, multiple casts, and many days spent on crutches, I was told that I was no longer able to do gymnastics. Suddenly, I was lost. Luckily, that same year, I met my high school choir teacher, who convinced me to audition for the musicals, ultimately pushing me to pursue my music career.

Fast forward to my senior year of high school, when I decided to go to Belmont University in Nashville Tennessee to pursue a degree in songwriting. I was scared, excited, and honestly, so naively unaware of all the talent that resides in that city. I had a taste of this talent the summer after my senior year I applied for Grammy Camp, hosted by the GRAMMY foundation. After spending a week with people my age who had already dedicated their lives to learning and writing music, I realized that I was one of the oldest there and could hardly keep up with their guitar playing and theory knowledge. Terrified that I so far behind everyone else, I immediately came home and starting searching for a guitar teacher.

After a bit of time Googling "guitar teachers near Belmont," I came across the website of Shane Lamb, who was running a special at the time where I could try my first lesson for free. I went onto his website and saw that he also was a singer/songwriter and that he even taught songwriting. All the other guitar teachers I found were teaching basics chords with rigid material, and all I knew was I didn't want to feel like I was moving backwards. I wanted someone to meet me where I was and just help me learn enough chords to write better songs.

So about a week after getting to Belmont I decided to start taking lessons with Shane. Little known to me at the time, this was the best decision I have ever made for myself, one I believe was sent by God. I had no idea what to expect when I got to Shane's. The very first day, I told him what I wanted: to learn some theory, and learn enough guitar to write better songs. So he gave me charts with chords and told me that my lesson for the week was just a play through all those chords. I realized that I didn't even know how to play half of the ones that he put on the sheet.

Flash forward about 6 months, after practicing more chord progressions and strum patterns than I ever wanted, I told Shane that I really wanted to start diving into my songwriting. As a songwriter himself, he told me exactly what I needed to do to get better: we would study the greats. Soon Bob Dylan, Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, and the Rolling Stones, became all I thought about. At first I simply played through these songs, learning and studying the chords and lyrics. Then Shane told me that I was going to start listening to songs and picking out the chords for myself. I felt like I wasn't anywhere near capable of doing this, but as Shane loves to do, he threw me in, knowing I was ready. We started simple, picking songs with a repeated chord progression. Shane wrote out the first line of the verse and chorus for me, and I was sent home to figure out the rest. I spent a couple hours listening to the same verse of a simple song, over and over, until I was able to write out chords by myself I brought the song in, prouder than I have ever been, and in return, Shane gave me a "good job," and handed me another, then another, then another, and then... another. For months, I learned from writers that would soon become my heroes.

During this time, I was going through my first year of songwriting classes at Belmont. Suddenly I wasn't the only songwriter or the only musician. *Everyone* in Nashville wrote songs, and everyone was AMAZING. I felt like there was nothing I could write that would compare to the talent around me. On top of that pressure, the classes I was taking were making me think harder about every word I wrote in a song, making me over analyze everything I started to write. I went through a massive period of writer's block, so crippled by the fear of writing something "bad" that I couldn't write at all. So every time we sat down to have a lesson, Shane would address this fear one way or another. We talked about other great songwriters who have gone through the same feeling, we talked about the writing process a ton and talked about how we had to be free to write what we needed to say, and we can't let ourselves think or try too hard because then we would stop our creativity. Shane always quoted Bob Dylan, saying, "The truth is in the music you love" and that I would learn to write again by studying the music I loved.

About a year and a half into lessons, halfway through my sophomore year of college, every week I was bringing in new music that I had written and two or three charted songs into lessons. I started playing new material for Shane every week, rapidly learning from the constructive, yet kind feedback he would give me. We edit my songs and then wrote them again and then wrote them again. I soon began to look forward to writing, because I wanted to hear what Shane thought about my new song.

Then in May of this year, the end of my sophomore year, I told Shane that I wanted to record music. I didn't have any idea what that looked like or where to begin. In typical Shane fashion, he asked me a question that changed everything. He said, "What's the purpose of this recording?" He asked if it was because I wanted to fully embrace being an artist, or if I just wanted rough demos of my songs to give to other artists. When I told him that I was ready to fully embrace being an artist, he kicked it into high gear. He instantly put me in contact with Casey Wood, an engineer and producer who Shane had often recorded with. Shane made me play every song I felt was worthy of being recorded. In total, we felt I had eight songs that would make it onto the record. Knowing that this number was too long for an EP and too short for an album, Shane told me what I should do: for the entire summer, I would dedicate myself to writing, and if I could write a few more great songs, in the fall, we would record a full length

album. With his help and constant encouragement, during the three months of summer, I wrote more and better than I ever have in my life. So in August, we began recording what would become my very first album.

Still unsure of where to go next, Shane and Casey put everything together. Casey put together a band of professional musicians, we decided on a Friday we could all get together before school started back, Shane helped me write charts to my songs, and then we began. When I began the process, we all met at The Insanery, Casey's studio, early one morning, and started listening to the demos I recorded. I honestly had no idea what to expect, but as soon as I got there, the band made me feel so welcome and appreciated. Throughout the day, many tears were shed from the overwhelming happiness I felt to FINALLY take steps towards my dream.

Over the next five months, I learned what it takes to be an artist. Under Shane's guidance, I learned how to create a website, register for a performing rights organization, collect album credits, create a logo, market myself, and so much more. I went back into the studio multiple times to record lead and background vocals. I booked an album release show. Most of all, I gained CONFIDENCE in myself. I gained a purpose for my life. I found my calling. As I look forward to my release in a few weeks, I know that even if no one ever heard the album, I would be proud of the work that I did, and I wouldn't trade the last year of my life for anything. I finally feel like I understand what it takes to be an artist and I feel good about the work I completed. And I know that though I learned a lot on my own, I wouldn't even have the confidence in myself to create an album without Shane. I couldn't have done it without him.