

FIRST PERSON

Graduating Senior Recalls Obstacles He Overcame

By Elliot Hansen

This essay is a reflection of an intelligent, gifted, and blessed young black man and his journey through college. Hopefully it will inspire others who may or may not be able to relate to some of the barriers this young man has broken down and the trials and tribulations he has overcome to become a scholar. Greatness does not come to those who don't go out and get it. This young man knew he was destined for Greatness but was unsure of the path he should travel and eventually where it would end. He made it through all these obstacles by keeping his faith in God and with help of many individuals, including his parents, friends, family, and staff members of North Carolina Wesleyan College. He dedicates this writing to all who have supported him through the hard times and are still here for the joyous occasion of his graduation, which is only the beginning of a long and hard journey that is still to come. This young man is me, Elliot Luke Hansen.

First off I will explain how I ended up here at Wesleyan and what my expectations were. I was recruited as a football prospect from East Wake High School in Wendell, North Carolina. My plans had been to get a football scholarship at a larger school until my ACL blew out in my senior year of high school. I rehabbed and tried to get back to at least where I had been in the past but I just wasn't there and felt I would never be again. I was still a great athlete and was confident of my talent, having been a superstar athlete in high school even after the injury. Even though I hadn't earned a football scholarship, I was still aspiring to play college football and go to a four-year college or university. I would be the first one out of my immediate family to gain a bachelors degree and become a success. I was the youngest child of six and was the last hope for something special. My siblings seem to be happy with just making it but my parents looked at me differently because I wanted more and they could see it. They were willing to do everything they could to help, the same as they would for my brothers and sisters. Then came a visit from the football coach at NCWC and he was promising me a chance at Greatness and he told me he saw my talent and felt I would be a great asset to the program.

I showed up for the camp with

hundreds of other players who all felt the same as me. I felt a bit misled by the coach because even though my talent stood out in the mass population I was not getting the attention I was used to and deserved. I had gone from being the superstar to being a mere number and I felt my individualism being taken away. I was just another player here but I knew I was better and so did the rest of the players. Even though I felt mistreated by the staff, I stayed and did what they wanted. I played scout team and whatever other tasks I was given. I shined and embarrassed starting teams but still I was given no glory and no playing time. I was embarrassed to be playing scout and mad that I was better than those who were in front of me. For whatever reasons the coaches placed them there. We all knew it wasn't talent; it might have been favoritism. That is all irrelevant when it comes to this unfortunate event that took place next.

On a normal night a neighbor from across the hall asked me to walk with him and his roommate to Food Lion and I agreed. I walked to McDonald's while they were in the supermarket and then we began our short walk back. Once we got to the tennis courts, I saw three individuals walking and looking suspicious. A feeling overcame me that something was wrong and then I heard a familiar and horrifying sound; the cock of a gun and the bullet going into the chamber. At this point two of the individuals walked up to my neighbor's roommate, who was by then far ahead of us. The individual that had cocked the gun ran up to my neighbor. I was about twenty feet from them because I had started in the other direction after realizing what was happening. I turned and was about to take a dash for it, but then I saw my neighbor who was not getting away and would probably be shot if I ran. So I stopped; I was also thinking about the possibility of a lucky shot that could hit me in the back, even though it was not likely. I was confident I could get away but my neighbor couldn't and it wasn't worth the risk of his life or my own.

I knew the change from my meal wasn't worth a life so I looked at the individual with the gun and calmly told him to take what he wanted. He took a few dollars and ran but I saw the fear in his eyes. Fear makes people do strange and desperate things but if he would have asked for the money without a gun

I would still have given it to him because that was how I was raised. If you see those in need and you can help, do it because you have been blessed to be fortunate enough to have and there are many less fortunate. These people are not to be looked down upon but instead given a helping hand; you will be a better person for it. The individual with the gun looked like me and many I know. This made me be even more grateful for life and the opportunity that I had been given to attend college and not have to be in the streets. I was happy that no life was lost but I was angry at the situation. Now looking back I feel that I was there for a reason and the incident was in some ways destined. If I wasn't there, my neighbor might have been dead. If my presence there could save a life, I'm glad I was there and would not change a thing even if I could. God put me there for a reason and I was being used for a noble purpose. God doesn't put you in situations that he is not sure you can overcome. Proof of this is my presence here now and being a better man from the experience. I forgive the individual with the gun, and I'm sorry that he had to live that unfortunate life that many of us black men are trapped into, and hopefully he has overcome the trap and done something positive with his life. I prayed for him and hopefully my prayers were answered.

After that was done with I met an individual that cared; his name was Dr. Grattan and he was my English professor. He spoke with me about the event and let me know his door was open and that other professors did care. This was monumental because no staff acted as if they cared except him. Even the coaches on the football team that I was on didn't seem to care. One coach talked with me to see how I was after this unfortunate event and I told him I was okay and I knew that it's life and things happen, even to the best of us. At this point I didn't know how to feel and was still angry. I didn't know how to express this and I had few friends but they were there and they were good friends. Then another unfortunate event occurred which was the death of one of my aunts. I was down about her death but it seemed that the coaches didn't care. I was missing practices due to my depressed and confused state and then this happened and I had to leave that Friday for the funeral. I was not in a close relationship with the coaches and had no way to let them know I had to leave but I wasn't thinking about football right then. The sport I loved was not my main concern at the time but the coaches were like "Where is our star scout player?"

After I returned from home and the funeral I went to talk with the coach about missing the game that weekend and to talk about what's going on but once I arrived he was not in his office so I entered the locker room and saw that my locker had been emptied and my stuff that I bought had been washed and placed with the rest of the extra equipment. I felt enraged at this and went to talk to one of the coaches. When I saw one of the coaches, I asked him why my stuff was gone and where it was; he answered with an attitude that I was no longer on the team because I missed a game and I just told him to take me to my stuff so I could leave.

This was a life-changing experience because my life was football and it was what I was used to and wanted to do. I played intramural sports and loved it because it was for fun and it gave me a chance to show my skill and let others know that I was the best at what I do. This also gave me a chance to blow off steam because I had gone through a lot in this first year of college but I made it and passed most of my classes. Later I realized that passing most of your classes wasn't enough, and that I had to excel and live up to my potential. I knew I was intelligent but it seemed that I was not being pushed or helped to achieve what I was truly capable of achieving. Then I realized that I, and not someone else, had to make these decisions and that the ball was in my court.

I began to excel in courses. I had begun to apply myself to my studies more than ever but another road block was about to present itself to me. First, my best friend had a falling out with his mother, who was sick with cancer and she kicked him out. He moved somewhere and I didn't hear from him for what seemed like a lifetime. I would pray that he was safe and go to see his mother, who looked at me as a son. She and his sister both were heart broken and searching for the man of their house, my brother and best friend. I knew he was okay because he was strong but I felt that something had to be wrong because we had never gone this long without speaking and he wasn't the type to leave his family and friends worried. I did my studies and found that some of my professors showed a disinterest in me and other black students that were in their classes.

At first I thought I was just imagining this but one day I entered a class to find that the teacher had started calling the roll before 1:00 p.m. when the class was supposed to start. I ran in before my name was called and as I sat down feeling like "That was close but I was on time." I had left my calculator and ran to get it and then back to class; this was the reason I had cut it so close. The teacher told me to leave the class. But I was on time, so I asked if I could at least turn in my assignment, since I had done it. She said no. I went from having a 98 average in the class to having an F because I was kicked out of class and given all zeros for the day. This was the first class I missed but it killed my grade. I decided I had to work harder and be early even though I had been mistreated. I talked with staff members and no one would help me. I worked to pull the grade up but ended up with a C or a D in the class.

This is when I realized that there were people here that didn't want to see me succeed; I knew this, but it was not always this obvious. I knew I had strikes against me just because I was black and male. I had been told this my whole life and knew it was true but I wondered why someone that I had done nothing to would try to jeopardize my future when I tried my hardest and showed no disrespect. I was not raised to discriminate or disrespect. I thank my loving parents for this wisdom and for instilling the love and understanding of God and of life. I carried on and kept handling business and looking for my brother but with no success. I even had my mother look and use church resources and our pastor to help find and him but we didn't.

The next trial that was put in my path was really a trial. An individual that I once considered a friend committed a crime and was caught. His next move was to involve me and try to get his sentence shortened. His accusations were preposterous and false but this was just another test. This test was to see if I was worthy of the Greatness that was bestowed upon me. I knew I was, and I wanted to hate him so much for falsely accusing me and jeopardizing my future. First, I was made aware of these accusations by the dean of students and he said that a detective wanted to speak with me. I replied "where is he because I am not on the run; if he wants to speak with me I will talk to him." The dean called him and he gave me the detective's number so we could arrange a time to speak. I called the detective several times to arrange the meeting and left messages when he didn't answer. Months passed by and still no word from the detective. I spoke with the dean during this long period and he said not to worry because he would get back to me if he needed to talk. So I didn't contact him anymore.

The next thing I knew a knock at my room disturbed me from my sleep and my first response was: "Who is this knocking at my door like they are the police?" And it was the police. I told them to let me get dressed and I would come willingly because I had done nothing wrong and one cop said "Yeah, right. You're just like the rest." After getting dressed, I grabbed my Bible for protection. My father always said if you need protection pray and grab the first Bible you see. When the cop said "like all the rest," I guess the cop meant black

people but I said nothing and went with the other officer who was black. While in the police car I spoke with the officer. He confessed to me that I was accused by my former classmate but most of the criminal's confession was lies and not credible. I replied that "if he was lying, what am I doing here? I have a class in an hour." He agreed and treated me with respect because he knew I took no part in the actions that I was accused of. We arrived at the station and I asked if I could use my phone to call my parents.

The officer said yes and I used my cell phone to call home. While speaking with my father, my phone went dead and the officer gave me his personal cell phone to use. The whole time I thinking, "I'm not supposed to be here," and the officer was thinking the same. Even though I was arrested, I was not treated like a criminal; he showed me the same respect I showed him and he could see in my character that I was innocent. I handed him the phone and he spoke with my father. I sat reading the Bible and watched them try to process me in the computer but it wouldn't work. This was a sign from God and not a coincidence; I was released with no bail and in time to make it to class. With the help and support of my parents and God, I eventually got past this hurdle but it took over a year and was costly. I had to deal with going to packed courthouses on several occasions. I missed one class for court and we had a test; I explained to the teacher and gave her documentation. She looked at me like a criminal without knowing what had really happened and stereotyped me as the same as the rest.

She said nothing disrespectful but I could tell in her actions that she thought I was guilty. She didn't want to help me in class and treated me like scum; I eventually failed the class for an unknown reason. I was passing the class the whole semester with at least a B- but ended up failing. I took it over and passed it but her view of me would come up later in another staff member that was in her same department. This teacher looked at me as a hoodlum and treated me with little respect. I brushed it off and did what I had to do because there was no reason to lower myself to the level of a hater. God doesn't like ugly and I wouldn't be ugly because someone was ugly to me.

Next, my brother's mother was on her death bed. I went to visit and wiped the tears from his sister's eyes. I walked into his mother's room and she asked me to close the door. I did as she asked and sat with her after giving her small and lifeless body a kiss and a hug. The cancer had eaten her former full and lively body and her hair was almost all gone. She was dragged up but could understand and tell who I was. She called me son and asked where David was. I told her I would find him and that he loved her with all his heart the same as I did and even more. She told me to succeed and finish school. I told her I would and she had been a great mother to us and read her a prayer my father had given me when I told him I was going to see her. After seeing her I felt relieved that the pain was almost over but so heartbroken that my brother would not be able to see his mother and make things right before she was gone.

I attended the funeral and still no David. I cannot even begin to feel what he will feel when he finds out. I went home and hugged my mother tight and thanked God for her being there. I had lost one mother but my mother was still here and as strong as ever. My mother has been one of the most influential and supportive individuals in my life along with my father who is always there too. He has always been in my life as a father, provider, mentor, and a great man. He is one of the best men I have ever met and is the reason I am the man I am today. My mother is the most loving person I have encountered and I love her with all my heart. She has always been there even now and I am blessed to have a team of parents this wonderful.

While attending and mourning the funeral, I missed a class in which there was another test but I was prepared and

see **OBSTACLES** on pg 7

THE DECREE

since 1960 "of, by, and for the Wesleyan community."

STAFF

Editors, News & Features

Joyce Collins
James Randolph

Editors, Sports & Activities

Jarad Brown
Jade Johnson

Senior Editor

Jessica Smith

Cartoonist

Lorenzo Whitley

Faculty Advisor

Dr. William Grattan
171 Braswell • Phone: 985-5336
Email: WJGrattan@ncwc.edu

Staff Writers

Ashley Ball
Mikey Case
Julianne Cyr
Richie Fender (ADP correspondent)
Meghan Herd
Amanda Landi
Kimberly McCorkle
Kathleen Penrod
Makeda Rose
Catherine Weathers (ADP correspondent)

Staff Photographers

Kathleen Penrod
Claudricia Thomas
Lorenzo Whitley

Special Contributors

Grace Wallace

The Decree office is on the first floor of the Hartness Center.

Copyright Policy

The Decree holds the copyright of every article and graphic for one-time and future publication at the discretion of the editorial board. Submission implies agreement with this policy.

Editorial Statement

Commentary/opinion and letters to the editor represent the individual author's views, and not necessarily those of North Carolina Wesleyan College, the Decree staff or the Decree advisor.

Submissions

To suggest an article, or submit an opinion piece or letter to the editor, send an email attachment (Microsoft Word) to: WJGrattan@ncwc.edu. Note that the Decree staff checks all submissions for accuracy and edits in accordance with acceptable grammar and punctuation as well as AP Style.

Corrections

The Decree corrects mistakes of substance. If you would like to request a correction, send an email to WJGrattan@ncwc.edu, or call 985-5336