

August 2015

Well, here I am. I have made it to college! I am living on campus here at UALR and I am so excited. My roommates seem wonderful, I think we will get along great!

I am very excited to be here. I worked so hard since 10th grade to receive a scholarship and to go off and receive a wonderful education. I am a little disappointed that I am still so close to mom and dad. When I pictured move in day it seemed so different. I thought I would be far away from Little Rock! However, at least I am not living at home, even though mom would want me to if she had the choice. She would say that the dorms were too expensive and that I should save the money. Thank goodness for being an EAST Scholar and for me having to live on campus!

Mom was very cool today during move in and was a lot of fun to be around! She also helped me organize my room very efficiently. I wish I could visualize things like she can. As glad as I am to be on my own here at school, I am happy that she is close by if I need something!

- McKenzie

October 2015

After many weeks of trying to get BJ to go on a date with me, he finally did! Ever since he and Lauren broke up, I have been trying to find a way to tell him that I like him. I feel like a horrible person because I have been crushing on him since they started talking. However, Lauren is totally cool with it. She told me that I should go for it because they weren't meant to be.

So finally, after a few weeks of hanging out together and working on the invitation for UALR's EAST Night Out, it happened. When we were done with dinner, he came inside to watch a movie. He gave me a kiss and snuggled up next to me. After a while, I asked him if this meant I was his girlfriend. He said yes, even though we have "officially" been on one date. But I guess he counted the 2 AM Waffle House trip, coming over and watching all four seasons of American Horror Story on Netflix, and the countless number of lunches and coffee runs together as dates, too!

- McKenzie

November 2015

BJ met my family today at Thanksgiving! It was totally embarrassing because everyone we talked to was always talking about someone else. I know that this was giving BJ and bad impression of everyone. I warned him before we got there, though, that my family gossips and talks about each other constantly. Maybe he thought I was over exaggerating at first, but he learned real quick that I wasn't!

After Thanksgiving with my family, he went home and had Thanksgiving with his mom and brother. However, we met up afterwards and we went up to Chenal Towers to talk and hang out. We sat in the bed of his truck and had blankets and a couple of pillows so that we could see the stars and the lights of West Little Rock. It was so pretty!

He dropped me off at my dorm pretty late. I gave him a kiss and told him that I loved him!

- McKenzie

Christmas Eve 2015

BJ invited me over for Christmas with his family tonight. It was so wonderful and very different than the way my family gets together and celebrates. The way his family celebrates Christmas is like a movie! His aunt decorated her house from floor to ceiling with garland, ornaments, Christmas lights, and there is glitter everywhere! Presents were stacked up in front of the fireplace because they do not put up a Christmas tree. His aunt, mom, and grandmother cooked a big Christmas feast big enough to feed an army, even though there was only twelve of us eating. After dinner, they set up their instruments and played Christmas music. BJ played the keyboard while his cousin played the bass and his uncle played the guitar. They are all great musicians and it is really awesome to hear them play and hear his family sing along.

After a while I went home to be with my family and they all snapped at me for being so late. McKlay and Mason were just in a hurry to open their presents, but mom and Jimmy seemed like they were jealous that I was spending time over there instead of at home. I think mom is also still adjusting to the fact that she cannot “parent” (meaning control) me the way she can McKlay and Mason. I know that must be driving her crazy. She is just very snippy and kind of has been that way for the past few weeks.

- McKenzie

February 2016

I have been spending a lot of time with BJ’s family. We all have been getting together and having a lot of fun. Mom and I haven’t really talked a whole lot. Every time we do, it seems like we fall into the same pattern. She tells me how she feels, I try to tell her how I feel, she gets defensive, and then I just pretend like I understand where she’s coming from and that I am wrong. It reminds me of high school when we would argue about me going and spending time with my friends. I eventually would just give in to whatever her reasoning was and then go call Grandma. I really miss her. I can’t believe she has almost been gone a year. I still pick up the phone to call her and have to remind myself that there is no one to call, so I just listen to a voicemail that I kept of hers.

- McKenzie

Easter 2016

Well today has been a shit-show! I went to church with BJ at his aunt's house. His family does not attend a physical church but gathers together as a family to worship Christ in his aunt and uncle's living room. I went into the Easter service looking forward to hearing about how Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice for us and because He died for us, we will get to live forever with Him in Heaven.

That is not what happened! Instead, I got an earful about how demonic the Catholic Church is. With Easter being my favorite holiday and having Easter "ruined" last year because Grandma passed away, I was really looking forward to having a great one this year! So not only have I had two Easters in a row now ruined, but I felt uncomfortable because I know what the Catholic church is like. I have been going to a Catholic church with Nana and Papa John since I was little, even though I am not Catholic. I have always known that people have had a weird outlook and view on the Catholic Church, but I have never heard it. I was so uncomfortable, and the worst part was, I felt like I couldn't get up and leave during the service because we still had Easter lunch afterwards.

When I got in the truck for BJ to take me home, I bawled. We also got into an argument about what his aunt was saying. I understand he was taking up for his family, but there was no denying that she was preaching about how demonic the Catholic Church was!

- McKenzie

April 2016

BJ and I have been fighting a lot here recently. Ever since his family heard that I was uncomfortable during the Easter service, they have been saying mean things about me. His mom sent a text to him asking what I thought, and he told her. She came back saying that I need to know the word and the truth. She also said that I wouldn't make a good wife for him. His aunt also told him that I am not a true Christian. I think that part bothers me the most because a goal of mine is to be a great wife, mother, and servant of the Lord, just like Grandma. They also haven't taken the time to get to know me, so how can they make judgements like that? They don't sound like true Christians to me!

- McKenzie

Thanksgiving 2016

I am continuing to have a very rocky relationship with BJ's family. It doesn't seem like it is getting better. They surprise us with church services because I told him that I can't sit during them and we haven't been going. I don't know if we will ever get along. His family is putting a serious strain on our relationship because I don't want to be around his family or see them. They make me feel uncomfortable because I feel like they are constantly judging me. I feel like they

don't like me. However, I went for Thanksgiving today. It wasn't horrible, but I feel like an outsider. I am seriously questioning if BJ and I are supposed to be together...

- McKenzie

Easter 2017

I avoided Easter with his family this year because I refuse to have a third Easter in a row ruined. It was a perfect set up too because BJ and his brother went to visit their dad. I honestly think that it wouldn't have been so bad to go because his aunt made some revisions to her sermon I guess for me. However, it still bothers me that revisions needed to be made, but it did make me feel good when BJ told me that. It sounds like she might be trying to make me more welcome.

- McKenzie

Thanksgiving 2017

BJ asked me to marry him on November 11th, so we had something to celebrate at our Thanksgiving this year! We attended three Thanksgivings this year—my mom's, his family's, and we hosted his mom and brother. The way his family treated me this year has been completely different than year's past. I felt welcomed and part of the family. I made some desserts without being given "restrictions" from his mom and everyone thought my Oreo Balls made like pumpkins were adorable. His aunt even said that I was creative and that she would love to teach me some recipes one day.

I think they are finally getting to know me, which makes me feel good. However, it is all coming on so strong. Like where was this when BJ and I were dating? Why didn't they get to know me then? I guess I don't need to think like that, but it's hard.

- McKenzie

February 2018

Minor setback on establishing boundaries with BJ's family. His family is very communicative, which is something that I am getting used to. And they, honestly, have no boundaries. His mom crossed a major one, in my opinion. His mom called him today to ask him how he felt about me having a Bachelorette party. Once he said he didn't mind, she continued to press the issue.

The only thing that I appreciate out of this situation is that BJ finally established some boundaries with his mom. She apologized and said that she will respect our decisions. I truly appreciated that, however, since it had to deal with my party, I feel like she should have contacted me instead of talking to BJ. It just came across like she was wanting to tell him to have

a problem with me having a Bachelorette party. Another thing though, Bachelorette parties have a negative connotation attached to it, but if she really knew me, she would know that I do not act like that. It's just frustrating!

Dealing with these issues though has made my relationship with mom a lot better. I ask her for advice on how to deal with this stuff and she just told me to be myself. If they don't like me then it's not my problem. BJ has decided to spend the rest of his life with me and they will learn to accept me into their family.

- McKenzie

Our Wedding Day – May 12, 2018

Our wedding day was amazing! Everyone worked hard to make our day perfect. BJ's aunt picked up my bouquet for me and it was beautiful. The florist didn't listen to our exact instructions, so we were both bothered by that, but it was still so beautiful! His extended family all welcomed me into their family and I was so appreciative that they were happy and excited for us.

However, after we left, our families were supposed to pack everything up. His mom called and asked to come over and drop food and stuff off. To me, this was so inconsiderate to our time together. BJ said she could come over, but I didn't really like that idea. It crossed a boundary in my opinion. It just isn't something that I would do!

- McKenzie

May 2018

We just got back from our family vacation with BJ's family. Overall, it went very well, except for me injuring my ankle! BJ and I had a great time together, making memories together, and enjoying the beach. The timing for this vacation was not very good, however, it was still awesome.

This trip allowed me to spend an extended amount of time with my new family. It was very nice. We stayed up late talking and playing games, we went out on a boat, we went shopping, and enjoyed some yummy food! After the trip, my mother-in-law and I made scrapbooks of the whole trip. It was a lot of fun and we were able to spend more time together. We had some great talks while working on them.

- McKenzie

September 2018

BJ and I are still adjusting to married life and some days we struggle, mainly when it comes to spending time with family. Family is not a priority for me, but it is for him. And something that I have been learning is that when you get married, you are not just marrying your spouse, but you marry their family, too. Though I have had some rough times with my in-laws, I know that I need to continue to grow and build a relationship with them. Family is important to BJ and I want to make family important to me. It just has never been my priority because of how my family is. I haven't had any major issues with my in-laws since the Bachelorette party incident, so I think that everyone is adjusting well to us getting married. I hope that as I spend more time with them that the old, bad memories will be replaced with fun, amazing memories. I am looking forward to them and really becoming a part of BJ's family!

- McKenzie

Jaci "McKenzie" Hansen, a Little Rock native, is currently starting her Senior year at UA Little Rock. McKenzie will graduate in May of 2019 with a bachelor's in Professional and Technical Writing and a minor in Information Technology. The skills she has developed from her academic pursuits has allowed her to move forward with starting her own non-profit organization that provides students ages 10 - 17 in Central Arkansas the opportunity to learn professional skills, as well as sophisticated technology.

McKenzie has always loved writing. During her high school career, her poem "The House in Carlisle" was selected as a finalist in a student poetry contest and published in Eloquent: 2015 Poetry Collection. Though she still likes to write creatively, her focus has shifted to writing content for the web and developing curriculum for her non-profit organization.