



# *A Journal of Conviction*

*By Hannah Hilliard*

*"You shall seek me and  
find me when you seek me  
with all your heart."*

*Jeremiah 29:13*

*NIV*

## "A Journal of Conviction"

My name is Olivia Jacobs, and I am a forty-eight year old historian. When I was in college, my life was changed by a four-hundred-year-old journal by a simple boy telling his story. My story may not change your life, but I have learned that our stories can speak to others in ways that we never would have imagined. I grew up in a small town in Ohio and was accepted at Harvard at age eighteen to study history. That's where something happened to me and in me. Everything I thought I knew about myself was gone. I felt empty and useless. I tried to brush it off as stress, but the stirring felt deeper than that. I seriously questioned the reason for my life. One day as I felt particularly down about myself, I decided to seek solace in one of my favorite places—the Harvard University Archives. I put on my cotton gloves and decided to rummage through some old books. I had a paper due on Puritan culture and its impacts on the New World. As I looked through all the documents and pamphlets Harvard had to offer, I came across a journal. And that is where my story begins.<sup>1</sup>

*Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2016*

This was quite possibly the greatest discovery of my life. I blew the dust off the old book as I held it in my glove-clad hands. I looked at the book and smiled. I imagined I was a famous historian who had just found a nearly four-hundred-year-old book that had fallen behind a bookshelf in the National Archives. I imagined I was one of the few who had ever seen the beautiful, old book. Inside the front cover written in fine print was "*Jurnal of Andrew Tobias, age 17.*"<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Find a Library," Library.harvard.edu, accessed October 1, 2016. <http://library.harvard.edu/find-library>.

<sup>2</sup> "Most Common Names," Victoria.tc.ca, accessed September 14, 2016. <http://victoria.tc.ca/~tgodwin/duncanweb/documents/names.html>.

"This is amazing," I murmured. As I heard shushes from around me, I came zooming back into reality. I was in the archives at Harvard, not the National Archives, and I was a starving twenty-two year old college student, not a famous historian. I was researching Puritan history in the US, and I had found this journal written by a boy from Massachusetts Bay Colony who was the son of a Puritan minister. How would Puritan culture look through the eyes of teenager? I got out my notebook to take some notes for my paper and opened the journal to the first entry.

*Masachusetts Bay Colonie, 1636*

*Today I watched in disgust as a man was beeten in town square. He had comitted a most horibl sin in our community—adultry. He was whiped mercilessly by the town oficial, and it sickened me to watch my very own father hang that awful leter A around the man's neck. I understand the severity of the man's sin; I simply do not understand the punishment without mercie. Mathew tels us, "But if ye not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." My father says he beleevs the Bible and folows it, but I do not see much forgivnes in his life. I wanted to protest this hipocrisie, but I could not stand up to my father. I no longer wish to be part of the Puritan societee, but how can I tel my father, one of the most important Puritan ministers in our colonie? I simply do not wish to hurt him, but I cannot continue to live in this way.<sup>3</sup>*

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<sup>3</sup> "Puritan Life," Ushistory.org, 1, accessed September 21, 2016, <http://www.ushistory.org/us/3d.asp>.  
Matt. 6:15 (King James Version).

*As I have lived in this colonie I have realised something—we traveled to this country to receive religious freedom. Yet we impose our Puritan legalistic ways on all who come here. How much better are we than the Church of England? Why did we even come to this new world?<sup>4</sup>*

As I leafed through the pages of the journal, I was amazed at the intellectual depth of this young man who was only a few years younger than me. Through his words I could tell exactly how he felt—I, too, constantly felt the struggle of wanting to be true to myself, yet I also had the insatiable desire to please others. I was also astonished at the ease with which Andrew quoted Scripture. I could tell that, even though he did not agree with the religion of his family, he knew what he believed and he knew in whom he believed. I wished for that confidence.

I also agreed with Andrew in the hypocrisy of the Puritan society. Rules were extremely strict, and there was no separation of church and state. I could not imagine what the world would be like if Puritan laws were enforced on my current society. As I carefully put the book back and rushed off to my next class, I couldn't forget the words which I had read. Something deep inside me had been stirred. I later found myself searching the verse I had read in the journal in a Bible website. I read it and studied the surrounding chapter. Little did I know that this was the Lord drawing me to Himself. I was simply amazed at the certainty Andrew had in his faith, and I wanted that assurance in my own life.

The next day I got out Andrew's journal and opened to a different entry.

*Today I spoke with a close friend and mentor, Roger Williams. He is known for his opposition to the Puritan church and has greatly inspired me. He sympathizes with my anger*

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<sup>4</sup> "Puritan Laws and Customs," Womenhistoryblog.com, October 24, 2007, accessed September 21, 2016, <http://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2007/10/puritan-laws-and-customs.html>.

*toward the Puritans. I can never forget what he said to me today, "The gratest crime is not developing your potenshal. When you do what you do best, you are helping not only yourself, but the world." He often urges me to stand up to my father for my religis convicshuns, but I am still too afraid. Roger speaks to many of the Puritans regarding their unfare behavyor, I feer he may be banishd from the colonie.<sup>5</sup>*

*Roger too knows he will soon be banishd. He has asked me to come with him to a new colonie he wishes to begin a bit farther south. What can I say? It would break my father's hart. I still do not wish to hurt him, but I am 17 yeers old, neerly a man. I wish to make my own decishuns. I think I may agree to go to the new colonie with Roger, if I can be brave enough to speek to my father. I am confused of what I should do. I will now go to consult my Hevenly Father, for I know He holds all my true ansers.*

I had studied the story of Roger Williams and knew his inevitable fate. Still, I was interested to read it from Andrew's perspective. It was amazing to me that such an important figure as Roger Williams knew this seemingly insignificant young man. I was captivated as I read Andrew's journal. Though I knew the historical facts surrounding Andrew's life, something about seeing Puritan life through the eyes of someone living then almost made it like a mystery novel to me. How would things turn out? Would Andrew agree to go with Roger Williams? How would he tell his father? What ultimate course of faith would he choose? I was certainly excited to read more.

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<sup>5</sup> "Roger Williams." History.com, accessed September 29, 2016. <http://www.history.com/topics/roger-williams>.  
"Roger Williams Quotes." Azquotes.com, accessed September 29, 2016. [http://www.azquotes.com/author/28074-Roger\\_Williams](http://www.azquotes.com/author/28074-Roger_Williams).

Once again the strength of Andrew's faith struck me. Even when things were difficult and confusing, he remained steadfast in his faith. I felt a longing for a faith like that. Later that night and throughout the coming weeks, I continued to read the Bible, learning more about a faith that such a young man held so dearly. The empty space in my soul didn't seem so vast anymore. I became closer and closer to God, the one whom Andrew called his "Heavenly Father," yet I wasn't really ready for a personal relationship with Him. I submerged myself in classes and social activities, trying to ignore the craving I felt stirred by a seventeenth century Puritan teenager. But I simply couldn't deny it. I didn't want to accept Him, but I continued studying Andrew's journal and was influenced by the determination in his faith.

*I spake with my father today. He told me that Roger Williams is to be banishd. He will be sent away tomorrow after the church servises. I do not fear for Roger, for I know he is a strong, brave man. But I fear for myself, how will I speak to my father? I beleev the Lord is telling me to go with Roger and witnes in his new colonie, and the advenshure seems exciting. But how can I tel my father the news? It is late now, however he will be studying his sermon notes for tomorrow. I must speek to him now. I ask my Hevenly Father for strength and guidance.*

*My hart is broken. My father has told me the one thing I never wished to hear from him: that I have disgraced him. But it is what I must do to follow Christ's calling. My community will be disapointed in me, but I hold fast to Jesus' words in Mathew 11:6, "And blesed is he, whosoever shall not be ofended in me." I desprately wishd not to hurt my father, and I have. But I remane confident in my Lord and Savier. I must go where He is leeding me. I reelise I have made a discovery in my life. Through Christ, I have discovered my identity and my purpose—and*

*that is seen in Colossians 3:23, which says: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."<sup>6</sup>*

I put the journal away and ran home to my dorm room. As soon as I went in, I sat down on my bed and pulled out a Bible I had bought the day before from my nightstand drawer. I opened it to the end of Matthew 11, the chapter that Andrew had referenced in his journal, and read: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." I put my head in my hands and prayed to myself: "I want 'rest for my soul,' God. Come into my life. I am Yours."<sup>7</sup>

That very day I was radically changed. I now understood the reason I had been placed on the earth, and that reason was to glorify my "Heavenly Father." Life gained its true color and passion, and my new relationship with Christ affected everything I did. I didn't know what He had in store for me, but I wanted to follow Andrew's example and simply "go where He is leading me."

As I finished writing my paper at the library, I got out Andrew's journal one last time. I had to find out if he decided to go to Rhode Island with Roger Williams.

*Yesterday I set out for the new colonie with Roger Williams. I neerly decided not to go, seeing my mother cry so, but I knew that this journey was the call of God. And I must folow. My father refused to say goodbye to me, but I do not resent him for it. While I continue to disagree with the Puritan legalism, I realize that my father and I are truly much alike. We both love God*

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<sup>6</sup> Matt. 11:6. King James Version.

Colossians 3:23. King James Version.

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 11:28-30. New International Version.

*and deeply desire a relationship with Him. I continue to hold my father in respect, but my love for him is currently strained. If the Lord wills, we will come together again one day. But now I follow where my Heavenly Father leads, and He leads me to Rhode Island with Roger, where I will witness to the newcomers there. I will preach God's love and grace, and I will offer a personal relationship with God to any who wish to receive it. I must now go, Roger is readying to continue for Rhode Island. I leave with this word I have received from God in the book of Exodus: "And in very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to shew in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth." Lord, I pledge myself to "declare Your name." I am Yours.<sup>8</sup>*

My eyes filled with tears, and I pushed back from the desk to keep my tears from dripping onto the precious old book. Andrew prayed the very same prayer I had prayed only a few days before. That was the first time I truly felt the call of God on my life.

It's been twenty-six years since I found that journal, and I am proud to say that a seventeen-year-old Puritan showed me just how much I needed Christ. I went on to get my doctorate in history and became an expert in Biblical history. In a typical week, I lead about two to three seminars, in which I prove the validity of the Bible and prove the existence of Christ using historical facts. I not only prove that He existed on this earth, but I also show people that Christ really was who He said He was—the Son of God.

Like Andrew, I had a deep self-realization in my life. God drew me toward Himself and showed me everything I ever wanted to know. He showed me who I was and who he wanted me to be. He revealed to me His true purpose for me and fulfilled everything I could ever want or

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<sup>8</sup> Exodus 9:16. King James Version.



need. Jesus Christ is the greatest discovery I have ever made, and I found Him in the journal of a teenage boy in Puritan Massachusetts Bay Colony.

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