

THUNDERMOTHER



How It All Began

YouTube had only recently begun gaining traction when my partner at the time and I started uploading acoustic versions of classic rock songs we loved performing together. We were working full-time as musicians across the UK, playing seven days a week either as a duo or with our full band, Smokin' Aces. Between twenty and thirty videos went up, raw and passionate performances that captured who we were and what we stood for. One of those videos, a cover of "Back in Black" by AC/DC, changed my life forever.

On April 13th, 2013, I woke up to a voicemail from a woman I didn't know - the lead guitarist of a Swedish, all-female hard rock band called Thundermother. She said she'd seen my video online, loved my rock 'n' roll sound and whiskey voice, and believed I was the perfect fit for her band. She didn't leave a return number, but mentioned she'd also sent me a message on Facebook. I didn't see it because it had landed in the "message requests" folder - something I didn't even know existed at the time.

A day later, my phone rang just as I was leaving the gym. Sitting in my car, I answered, grateful she had called back. I planned to thank her for the offer and explain that I couldn't commit, as I was already a full-time musician with my band Smokin' Aces. We spoke for around fifteen or twenty minutes. I listened intently, but I was still prepared to tell her no. I already had a full schedule of commitments across the UK. Then she mentioned that the band had an offer and would be opening for Motörhead at Metaltown Festival in Sweden in less than a month and everything changed. The moment she said that, my ears perked up. It was an opportunity of a lifetime - one I knew I couldn't easily turn down. Only then did I start jotting down dates and making notes, realizing just how significant this could be.

Initially, I wasn't sure if I could take the opportunity. I had weddings and other gigs booked well in advance, and in the UK, those commitments were deeply personal - wedding couples often booked their musicians years ahead. But when I spoke to my bandmates, they encouraged me, saying, "You'd be crazy not to do this." I made some hard phone calls, helped reassign my bookings to other trusted musicians, and ensured every client was looked after.

Around that same time, a week after the offer, my six-year relationship had just come to an end. My partner and I shared a home, a car, and our business with Smokin Aces. The breakup hit me hard. It was one of the most painful endings I'd ever faced, yet we managed to maintain a friendship and our business despite the heartbreak. Life felt chaotic - everything I had known was shifting all at once.

A few weeks before that phone call, I had just started Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for the first time. It was my first real step toward addressing my mental health, and though I didn't realize it then, it came at the perfect time. The therapy helped steady me through the emotional upheaval of the breakup and the whirlwind that followed.

Less than a month later, I was on a plane to Sweden.

DROGHEDA LEADER

The sound of thunder

Local woman rocking with all female Swedish rock band

By IAN WATTERS

COLLON woman Clare Cunningham is rocking to a different beat as she is the lead singer of a five piece all female rock group in Sweden called Thundermother who have started a tour of the UK and Ireland.

Clare (28) divides her time between Ireland and Sweden and is loving life as she rocks around the globe with the band. They opened their tour in the Spirit Store in Dundalk on 7th November.

"We are a five piece female rock band in the style of ACDC meets Janis Joplin. It's an original band. We have recently played the 'Sweden Rock Festival' and just come off tour supporting Michael Monroe (formally Hanoi Rocks). We have gained great critical acclaim off some great names in the industry so far," Clare told the *Drogheda Leader*.

The band is made up of lead guitarist Filippa Nässil, rhythm guitarist Giorgia Carteri, bass player Linda Ström, and drum player Tilda Stenqvist, as well as Clare. Asked how she came to join the band she explained, "I got a phone call a year and a half ago after the girls found me on YouTube! It was all a bit surreal and I was told my first gig would be opening the entire 'metal town' festival where Motörhead



■ Clare Cunningham (second from right) with her band mates.

were headlining! No pressure so! The biggest news channel was there and we featured on the news that night so I knew I was onto something huge with the band and I haven't looked back."

Thundermother started in 2010 in Växjö when the guitarist and southern Swede Filippa Nässil wanted to play Rock'N'Roll and moved to Stockholm where she set up the group. The girls are playing dates in the UK until 15th November and then are finishing the tour with a number of gigs in Sweden.

Stepping Into a New World

After our first show at that festival, everything exploded overnight. The Swedish news had covered the festival and we were suddenly blasted across every major TV station in the country. The buzz was electric - articles, interviews, photos, and chatter filled the air. I remember coming off stage, still shaking with adrenaline, realizing that my life was about to change forever. It was one of those moments you can feel deep in your spirit - the kind where you just know nothing will ever be the same again.



Moving away from home at a young age can be tough, but for Colton girl, Clare Cunningham it is possibly the best thing she has ever done!

Clare, who was born and raised in the village, left home at 18 years-old to study music in Dublin for two years, later receiving her National Diploma in Popular Music Performance and Technology.

Clare then moved to London, aged 20, to further her education by completing a BA (Hons) in Popular Music Performance and Technology.

Her music career blossomed when she moved to Cardiff and started a cover band called 'Smokin' Aces'. 'Smokin' Aces were very popular performing seven nights a week and were in demand for weddings.

"This was the start of my professional music career," said Clare. "With the amazing support of my awesome family and friends I probably wouldn't have had the courage to go and seek out my dreams. Or at least it would have been harder!"

"My parents never once told me I should put my brain to better use as I was 'instructed' to do by a few leaving school. I always knew music was my life and wanted nothing else. I live! I owe everything to my parents and siblings, Ian, Laura and Mark for always being behind me 110% and for being as passionate about their dreams as mine," said Clare.

In May 2013, she woke up to a voicemail on her phone. "I listened and it was some random girl from Sweden called Filippa saying she had seen me on YouTube and really would love for me to sing in her band, and that they had festivals coming up that summer!"

At the time Clare was running the 'Smokin' Aces and she had no interest in another band. Jamie, her guitarist told her to hear the girl out, but unfortunately there was no number to call back on.

Feeling bad about not being able to say so, Clare was lucky because Filippa called back the next day. "My answer (in my head) was 'no', mainly due to the fact that we had bookings for weddings two years in advance and I was far too busy!"

But Filippa caught Clare's attention



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when she said: "Well, have a think and if you can get back to me as soon as possible, as our first show is opening up 'Metalton Festival' for Motorhead," I nearly dropped the phone! I

scrambled for a pen, got all the dates off her, went home and checked out Thundermother online and saw it was all female and thought... "Wow! I had a lot of brides-to-be to disappoint, but this was far too big an opportunity to turn my back on. I've never looked back."

There was an instant connection between the girls when they first met. Clare had flown in the day before their first performance and this was the first time they had all met as a fully-formed band.

I can't explain it but we had this instant connection... like we had known each other for years! It's so cliché to say, but we just fit really right," said Clare.

The band was founded in 2010 by Filippa Nasell, who is the lead guitarist.

Georgia Carter, who plays rhythm guitar has been alongside Filippa from the beginning. In 2013, newcomers Tilda Steqvist (drummer), Linda Ström

(bassist) and Clare Cunningham (lead vocals) joined the girls.

The five-piece classic hard rock band is made up of five women that all have different musical influences, but the group often get compared to 1970's rock band, A.L.I.C.E.

"Airborne and classic rock has definitely influenced Thundermother. It's the pure simplicity behind it. Nothing fancy just pure rock 'n' roll," said Clare.

Along with the role of lead guitarist, Filippa is also the main writer in the band. The band's upcoming second album 'Road Fever' is musically written by Filippa and half the lyrics by Clare.

"Lyrically, we draw from life experiences, usually, and the trials and tribulations of rock and roll."

"It's a tough industry we are in and we are all there for each other. Our aim is to get our music recognised worldwide, keep rock and roll alive and to just continue having fun while doing so. And yes, sell millions too

while we're at it!" said Clare.

Over the last two years the band has worked very hard to be successful. In 2014, Thundermother released their debut album 'Rock'n'Roll', 'Disaster' that reached number two in the rock charts and number 26 in the national charts in Sweden.

It was phenomenal for a breakthrough artist such as ourselves. A very proud moment! The influence behind the album is all in the name. A struggle trying to make a living from rock 'n' roll. Hopefully our second album, 'Road Fever' is as successful!" said Clare.

Supporting big name bands such as 'Michael Monroe', 'Danko Jones' and 'Nortle Beas' has blown the girls away. Over the summer they are set to play alongside lots of amazing artists at festivals such as Alice Cooper, Rob Zombie, Black Label Society, Ghost and Slipknot.

"Every week or month varies in performance. When on tour abroad (mainly around Europe) we usually do anything from seven days to 14 days with a possible day off. When in Sweden and the Nordics it's mainly festivals and bigger shows."

"I think this summer we have a total of 13 festivals - small pubs, big venues, charity events, you name it!"

Last year Thundermother came to Ireland, playing in the 'Bipart Stave, Dundalk, Moore's in Galway and the Pavilion in Belfast.

And lastly a word of advice "This will sound cliché, but just never give up! It won't be easy, and yes, your parents will probably give out about the noise and your friends will be annoyed that you can't come out on a Saturday night because you'll have a gig."

"But it's all about give and take. You will have to make sacrifices to follow your dreams, but if you do you will reap the rewards! Always stay focused and true to yourself and let nobody tell you to go get a 'real' job."

"If somebody can tell me that sitting in front of a computer 9-5 is normal, well, then thank God we are not normal!"

"Follow your heart and dreams. Practice, until your fingers bleed, but above all enjoy yourself on the journey!"



Three months after joining, we were performing at a festival near Lapland when an executive from Warner Music Sweden approached me. He handed me his card, told us to get in touch, and not long after, we signed our first major record deal. Despite my background in studying music business - and knowing some of the industry's pitfalls - I was still filled with excitement and gratitude.



First major record deal signing, Warner Sweden, September 2013.

The workload was immense. I spent over a year and a half traveling between the UK and Sweden, balancing my existing life and a demanding new one. It was exhilarating but exhausting. My voice was constantly strained; the shows were long, and the pressure was relentless. When my vocals began to give out, I turned to cortisone shots and alcohol just to get through the shows. I didn't realize at the time that the very dream I'd been chasing was slowly breaking me down.

Control, Jealousy, and Manipulation

From early on, I sensed something was off. I've always had strong discernment - something I now recognize as a gift from God, even before I knew Him personally. When I brought it up to the other members, they didn't see it at first, and I began to wonder if I was wrong.

As the years went by, I began to notice cracks behind the scenes. There were moments that didn't sit right with me, and I realized the control over finances and creative decisions was extreme.

I distinctly remember one day when she said she could "smell the money from the royalties," and it hit me. While I was living out of plastic bags and living on top of my drummer in her one bedroom apartment, she was rolling up in brand-new clothes and vehicles, completely unconcerned about money or our wellbeing. After all, she owned the bank account, and everything was going into it.

When I eventually mustered the courage to ask about it, I was met with, “Why don’t you trust me? You don’t trust me. You’re my friend - you must trust me...if we are to be in a band there must be trust”. The cheek. It was a classic narcissistic response, designed to make me feel guilty for even asking. That moment was a wake-up call - the financial control in the band was extreme, deeply unbalanced, and it became clear that the dream I had jumped into was not entirely what it seemed.

We also weren’t allowed to help with songwriting, even though English was my first language. I was forced to sing lyrics that were sometimes nonsensical, and when one Amazon review pointed out that “it was obvious the lead singer isn’t English because of the lyrics,” I was angry and brought it to her attention. She dismissed it immediately, telling me I should be grateful for the opportunity and reminding me that I would never be involved in the writing process. We had long, drawn-out conversations about it, and on numerous occasions, I was made to apologize simply for suggesting such a thing.

After a few years, I finally gave an ultimatum: I wouldn’t be able to continue in the band if I wasn’t at least involved in some of the writing. Reluctantly, she caved, giving me a sliver of a chance to contribute to a few songs.

Photographers, whether during photo sessions or live performances, naturally gravitated toward me. It was part of being the lead singer, but it created huge tension. She became increasingly possessive over attention. I wasn’t seeking the spotlight; in fact, I often felt uncomfortable with it, especially since I was already dealing with stalkers at the time. Every photoshoot became a nightmare, and I was constantly on edge. If I was asked to step even a few feet forward, I’d hesitate, afraid of the backlash that would follow. I knew I’d be accused of being “big-headed,” and I wouldn’t hear the end of it. The jealousy was ridiculous. Even on tour, she would get jealous if other bigger bands spoke to any of our members besides her. She craved attention constantly. It felt like living with a child at times. She was so unpredictable that we often rotated as her “best friend,” while she spoke negatively about the other members. It just became a living nightmare.

She saw everything as a threat. During shows, she demanded the entire stage during her solos, and we were instructed to move completely out of her way. Initially, I was told to step behind the drum kit, but even then, she claimed I was still drawing attention from the crowd. Eventually, I had to move completely off the visible stage, out of the audience’s sight, just so she could have the spotlight entirely to herself.

On one occasion in Spain, when I didn’t move quickly enough, she physically kicked me aside. By then, she was drinking heavily, and we never knew which version of her we were going to get. I also began noticing drug use, and the atmosphere grew darker. I started to feel genuinely unsafe.

Our sound checks were often battles. I and the other members struggled to hear ourselves on the floor monitor because her guitar always had to dominate the mix. That took a heavy toll on my voice and confidence. Behind the scenes, we were constantly putting out fires caused by her behavior toward staff and engineers. Industry professionals stopped wanting to work with us, not because of the band, but because of her. Yet we were silenced. Bound by contracts and fear, we couldn’t speak publicly about what was happening.

The psychological manipulation grew worse over time. We were told what to say in interviews and sometimes even told to lie. I hated every second of that part. I'm not someone who can fake authenticity, but if I refused, it created more tension and punishment. I started to feel trapped. My passion was turning into prison walls. The very thing I once loved had become something I feared, and I no longer recognized myself in it.

Silenced and Broken

As years passed, my mental and physical health began to deteriorate. I told the other girls I couldn't do it anymore. I was losing my spark, my joy, and my voice. Some nights before shows, we'd sit in our hotel rooms and cry, wondering how much longer we could keep going. I was putting on a smile for the public, performing for the cameras and the tabloids, but inside, I was a complete mess.

When I finally made the decision to leave - after years of abuse and countless other experiences that won't make it into this story - it was one of the hardest things I've ever done. The band had become part of my identity, and walking away felt like losing a piece of myself. I was also walking away from the other members, who had become my best friends and truly felt like family. But I knew that if I didn't leave, I might not survive. That realization alone told me everything I needed to know.

I was told I was "her singer," that I would live and die by the band - but I realized I didn't want that. In true narcissistic fashion, she gave as many compliments as she did insults. One moment, she made me feel like I was the best in the world, the most wanted singer, the reason for her success, and the next, she would tear me down completely and make me feel like nothing. The constant flip-flopping between praise and abuse was exhausting, and at the time, I didn't understand narcissism. It took a deep toll on my mind and spirit.

I had to maintain a fake front, publicly claiming that I was leaving to start a new life in America, exactly what she told everyone in interviews. When journalists asked why I had departed, I couldn't tell the truth. I wasn't the only one to leave under these circumstances; the three other members, who she had also been tearing apart, left the band as well. Leaving was both painful and freeing. We weren't allowed to say why publicly and had essentially signed an NDA, so people often misunderstood our departure. But I had peace in knowing that I had chosen life over destruction.

At the time, I didn't have God, but I took comfort in believing that the universe would serve her revenge on a plate and that the truth would eventually come out, and I was right. Looking back now, I can see how even then, God's hand was over my life, guiding me out of a place of bondage long before I even knew Him personally. What I thought was karma was really His divine protection and justice at work.

Years later, I learned that the band members who came after us experienced the same treatment. We were in contact with them. They, too, eventually were forced to walk away and found themselves in legal battles over finances and royalties. We've since joined together in reclaiming what was rightfully ours and it continues today. I found solace in the fact that, despite the number of band members she had gone through, I could see that her patterns would continue only as long as she chased success and power. Recognizing this gave me peace, knowing I had removed myself from the cycle and could no longer be caught in it. No regrets.

Even now, I hold no hatred toward her. I see it as an illness - a deep spiritual and emotional brokenness. When a person values money, fame, and control over people's lives, that's a sickness of the soul.

Despite it all, I remain grateful. Thundermother gave me incredible experiences, friendships, and a global platform. But it also exposed me to the dark side of the industry and forced me to confront my limits. It was both the best and worst season of my life.

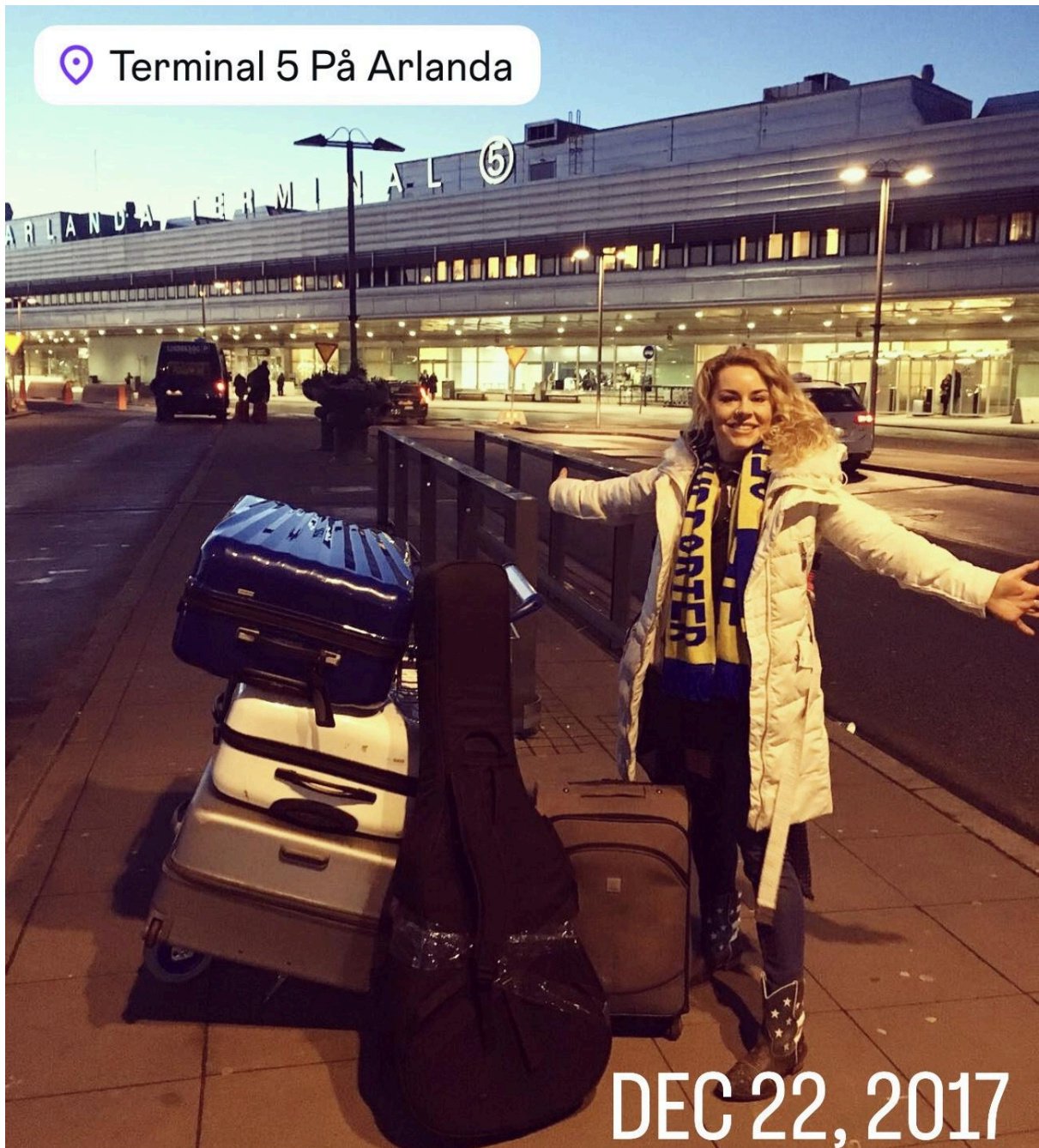
Stepping Into America

Leaving Thundermother was bittersweet. The band had given me my first major record deal, access to some of the biggest stages in Europe, and the chance to rub shoulders with musical heroes I had grown up admiring. But the cost had been high, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I had poured so much of myself into the band, and in return, I received lessons I would carry for the rest of my life.

With the experience, connections, and visibility I gained, I was able to launch the next chapter of my career: America. It wasn't just a move. It was an escape, a reset, and the beginning of something I didn't yet understand. It was a clean slate, a place to create freely, heal deeply, and finally have control over my own music and voice. It was also a place of freedom. For the first time in a long time, I could hear my own thoughts again. Freedom to explore who I truly was outside the confines of the band, outside the expectations of others, and outside the pressures that had weighed on me for years.

The transition wasn't just geographical. It was spiritual. I left behind control, manipulation, and fear, carrying with me only gratitude and the lessons I had learned. America became a place of rediscovery, a space where I could reclaim my sound, rebuild my confidence, and write from a place of truth and freedom. Every studio session, every lyric, and every note became a reflection of my growth and my newfound clarity.

That season taught me that success without peace is failure. Every door God opens, no matter how painful the journey, prepares us for something greater. It also reminded me that transitions are an unavoidable part of life. They come for everyone. Some are planned and celebrated - a move, a promotion, a marriage, a long-awaited dream fulfilled. Others arrive suddenly, without warning - a loss, a betrayal, a heartbreak, or a change we did not see coming. And some are divinely orchestrated, even when they feel confusing, uncomfortable, or painful.



Stockholm Arlanda Airport December 22nd 2017.

The Lessons of Transition

Looking back, my time in the band was both a blessing and a trial. It gave me incredible opportunities, experiences, and friendships that I will always cherish. But it also taught me hard lessons about boundaries, self-worth, and the dangers of narcissistic influence. I found solace in the fact that, despite the number of band members she had gone through, I could see her patterns would continue only as long as she chased success and power. Recognizing this gave me peace. I had removed myself from the cycle, and I could no longer be caught in it.

Leaving was painful, yes, but it allowed me to reclaim my voice, my creativity, and my life. I began to understand that sometimes stepping away is the bravest, most life-affirming choice you can make. There is a strange power in releasing what no longer serves you, even when your heart wants to hold on.

Transition rarely feels holy in the moment. It often feels like loss before it looks like purpose. Even as I packed up my life and prepared for the move, I sensed a quiet stirring in my spirit - a gentle whisper that God was guiding me down a path I might never have chosen on my own. That awareness had been there long before I stepped onto the plane, even before I fully understood it. Sometimes God closes doors we would never choose to walk away from, not to punish us, but to protect our future and redirect us toward our calling.

I began to understand that life is fluid, not static. Transitions are constant. Everyone experiences them, from the smallest childhood change to life-altering adult shifts. Some are planned and celebrated, a move, a promotion, a marriage, a long-awaited dream fulfilled. Others arrive suddenly, without warning, a loss, a betrayal, a heartbreak, or a change we did not see coming. And while we may resist or fear them in the moment, each transition carries a lesson, a gift, or a course correction we cannot yet see.

America became more than a new stage; it became a classroom. I began to understand my own resilience, my own voice, and my own heart in ways I never had before. I learned to pay attention to the stirrings of my spirit, to trust the nudges that often feel like quiet discomfort, and to recognize that these are the ways God prepares us for the next season.

Takeaways:

- Trust the stirring in your spirit; it often signals God's guidance before your mind can see it.
- Painful transitions are not necessarily setbacks; they are invitations to growth, freedom, and alignment with your purpose.
- Every ending can be a new beginning if you let go and follow where God leads.
- Life is not static. Change is inevitable, and each transition, whether planned, unexpected, or divinely orchestrated, is a step toward who you are meant to become.

Reflection

With every step into the unknown, I felt God weaving a path before me, turning every painful ending into a bridge, every lost moment into a lesson, and every closed door into a doorway to freedom. And as I stood on the threshold of this new life in America, I knew that Nashville, with all its promise and challenges, would become the place where God would continue shaping me, refining me, and preparing me for the life He had always intended me to live.