

# allison hammer:

## Weathering a tough year, returning to faithful friends



At home in Knoxville, Allison Hammer packs for her return to East Tennessee State University.

**O**n Jan. 13, Allison Hammer will return to East Tennessee State University after an absence of seven months.

She'll return to completing her degree in special education, and she'll return to the Wesley Foundation.

But when she walks past the hill next to her dormitory, she'll probably feel a little sick to her stomach. Because that's where she experienced a sledding accident that, one year ago in February, changed her life and challenged her faith.

"I had only been there for a short time," says Hammer, explaining how she had just begun participating in Wesley activities a few weeks before the accident. As an incoming freshman from Cokesbury United Methodist Church in Knoxville District, her first encounter with the ETSU Wesley Foundation occurred at a campus activity fair. The Rev. Jerry Everley, Foundation director, was there.

"He was giving everyone hugs, telling them, 'We would love to see you,'" says Hammer,

age 20. "It seemed like a place where people were having fun."

Some weeks later, Hammer came to a Tuesday-night dinner. She joined Wesley's intramural volleyball team and started attending Cherokee UMC with other Wesley students. She also attended Divine Rhythm, the conference's spiritual event for young adults, held each January in Pigeon Forge.

"Divine Rhythm really seemed to help with the bonding experience," Hammer says of her newfound friends. "They weren't superficial with their friendships, but seemed like they would be there for you in hard times."

On Feb. 18, ETSU students woke to find seven inches of snow. On her first sled ride of the day, Hammer collided with a metal pole. Friends rushed her to the hospital with an open, compound

fracture of the leg. That night, surgeons placed a rod in her leg with three screws to stabilize it.

The next several months proved difficult as she finished the school year on crutches, then returned home to Knoxville. In August, she underwent another surgery because her leg wasn't healing properly. Last fall, she stayed home to recover.

Hammer says she was surprised by two occurrences.

First, "the friends who were with me during the accident got weary, but the Wesley kids stayed with me." While Everley and his students visited her in the hospital, sent cards and e-mails, took her to lunch, and kept her name on the prayer board, some of her other friends grew tired of carrying her books and helping her to class. Yet, Hammer says she understands why, attributing their "standoffishness" to the trauma of witnessing the accident.

A veteran of Bible studies and mission trips with the Cokesbury youth ministry, Hammer was also surprised by her own physical and spiritual weariness.

"I started to think, 'How much more can I take?'" says Hammer. "You can only have so much hope and strength. But I know that Christ was tested and there's a reason for everything. I know that God is going to provide for me, but in his time, not mine."

In November, Hammer was able to walk with a cane. At Christmas, she was able to drive again. She expects to make a full recovery, but in February, she'll learn if the last surgery was successful.

As the daughter of a prosthesis specialist and a physical therapist, Hammer says it was natural for her to want to help people with disabilities. "Special education is something I have a passion for," she says. "It's a hard job, and somebody's got to do it."

Her long road to recovery has left her with a poignant impression: "Being disabled has taught me that society does not cater to people with special needs as much as it could." ■



## Life at the WF

**Location:** 1100 Seminole Drive, Johnson City, TN 37403-2002

**Director:** Rev. Jerry Everley

**Highest attendance:** 90 for joint service with the Baptist Student Center

**Core group:** 45 participate in the Tuesday-night program

**Wish list:** Gift cards from Kroger or Food Lion, for providing dinner on Tuesday

**Web site:** none

**Phone:** (423) 929-2121

