MARY PETERS — The Story on One Page

The true chronology, for anyone who only knows the picture book.

Bellingham, WA, 2000s. A luminous, physical child — fast, fearless, magnetic. Catches snakes, paints, sews, plays piano by ear, leads other kids by sheer certainty. Popular through confidence, not conversation. Home is loud, close-knit: engineer-brained father, capable mother, cerebral older brother, adoring little sister.

Age 12–13 (2012–13). Adolescence rewrites the social rules overnight: performance, status, poses — a world made of pretending, arriving alongside social media. For a girl who can only be real, it isn't hard; it's *empty*, and then it's dangerous. Withdrawal, rage, an eating disorder, self-harm. Her loving family reaches in with words and questions — not knowing the questions themselves are the wound. By 13 she has stopped going to school, stopped seeing anyone. Her parents will tell you plainly: they were at the end.

The dog (2014). She sees a dog-training video and becomes obsessed. She puts everything on it — *this is my last chance* — and the family drives 200 miles to Oregon for the last Australian Shepherd puppy of a litter. The puppy crosses the pen, leans into her, and doesn't leave her side for seven years. She names her Secret and never explains why.

The climb (2014–2020). Training Secret, she retrains herself — restaurants, stores, classrooms, the world. She creates @my_aussie_gal; an Irish-dance video with the dog goes viral worldwide. She reads about autism, recognizes herself, and is formally diagnosed at UW Medicine — she calls it *relief*: "there was a reason." Homeschool becomes Running Start becomes an associate degree. Lil Wayne, SportsCenter, 100M views. She turns down every sponsorship.

UW (2021). Waitlisted, she writes the letter herself and gets in. She and Secret become Huskies; she discovers Japanese and absorbs it by ear.

The fight (2022). A small limp becomes a leukemia diagnosis — a disease no dog has survived. She leaves school. One of two vets in America doing canine bone-marrow transplants happens to practice in her hometown; her sister's GoFundMe draws tens of thousands of donors; her father was himself a Fred Hutch marrow donor whose brother survived. One week before the transplant trip, Mary — who reads this dog the way she reads everything — sees that Secret is staying alive *for her*. So she releases her. Four words, eleven letters: **"I will be okay."** Secret dies the next day.

The promise kept (2022–2024). She founds a canine-cancer nonprofit with the leftover donations, works at the vet clinic that treated Secret, and — after a dream she has never explained — drives to Utah and chooses a blue merle puppy she names Promise. In June 2024 she graduates from UW, Promise beside her on stage, four words painted on her cap: **"WE DID IT, SECRET."**

She is 25. She lives in Bellingham. All of it is documented, most of it on video.