

SMALL STEPS OF A BIGJOHNY

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

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Abstract:

My life has been shaped by change, challenge and opportunity. Growing up I stood out from the others with my outgoing and positive attitude; despite the changes I endured from a divorce and from moving back and forth. After a couple broken bones and a couple surgeries I was ready to take on the world. In high school I excelled and proved to myself and to my parents that I could do anything that I set my mind to do. I not only challenged myself academically but also pushed myself in athletics and participating in organizations. As I took my next leap into college, I did not stop pushing myself. It was at Manchester College, with the help of the friendly people, that I decided to become a high school teacher, and now I am working from there in order to get to my next step in life.

SMALL STEPS OF A BIGJOHNY

As I walked down the stairs to see the Freeman's new furniture in their basement, I was instantly stopped by silly string bombarding my body from head to toe along with the screams of "Happy Birthday!" and the sound of horns blowing. I was shocked and thrilled as I found out that I was the last person to know about my 20th birthday party. All of my friends from home and college, along with my close family, were there to wish me a happy birthday. As I went around giving hugs and thanking everyone for coming, I realized twenty years of my life had already passed since I entered this world on August 4th, 1988. Contrary to the multitudes of people whom I had bonded with throughout my life that waited for my arrival to my 20th birthday party, I was greeted by my mother, my father and my eight year old sister when I, Alina Renee BigJohnny, arrived to my first birthday at Parkview Hospital in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I was a healthy baby of eight pounds, two ounces with dark brown hair and eyes.

During the next few years, memories were a blur, but many stories have been told and retold about my childhood. Such as, when I was nine months old my mother and grandfather were tossing me back and forth across the concrete sidewalk. At one point my grandpa thought my mom had me and my mom thought my grandpa had me and there I was lying on the concrete screaming at the top of my lungs. Even with a cast from my toes all the way up and around my midsection, I still managed to walk at ten months. I was always surprising my parents with my feats.

When I was a child I was not shy, timid or afraid of many things. At the ripe age of two I decided that I was Supergirl. As I jumped back and forth from couch to couch my father nonchalantly repeated several times, "Alina, stop doing that you are going to hurt yourself." Sure enough a snap, crack and pop later I was in the hospital again, this time with a broken arm. But I was not going to let the doctors hold me back this time either. I was a mere 24 months when I figured out that if I dunked my cast into the

toilet it would come off of my arm. That was when the doctors figured out how stubborn I was and had to put a fiberglass cast on my arm.

I was too young to be affected by my parents' divorce the way that my ten year old sister, Christy, was. From that year on, every summer we traveled down south to Louisiana, and later Arkansas, to spend our entire summer vacation with our father. When I was younger I loved getting to see my dad, and we always went on vacations within our vacation. We went to places such as Florida (multiple times), Texas, California and Las Vegas. As I got into my preteen years, leaving my mom and friends behind for three months was very rough on me. It was during these summers that my sister and I bonded the most. Since Christy was much older than I, she has always been a huge influence in my life. I looked up to her in everything I did and do. I wanted to look like her, dress like her, talk like her and just be her.

When I was eight years old my mother told me that she was having another baby. I guess you could say she had an eight-year itch. Nine months later my baby brother, Antonio Jose Guerrero, was born. Technically he is my half-brother, but I have never seen him that way. From that point on is what I call my academic era. From the day I stepped into kindergarten I excelled above most of my classmates in grades and learning skills. I always brought home straight A's and eventually, when work did get harder, I strived for those A's even if they didn't come as easily. I always wanted to hear that, "Good Job," from my parents accompanied by their smile of pride for their daughter.

In high school A's were my priority. My lowest grade was one A- in biology my freshman year. However, just academics were not enough to keep my mind occupied. I joined Student Council, Gymnastics team, Yearbook Staff and National Honors Society, along with working part-time at Chuck E. Cheese and tutoring elementary and middle school children. By my senior year, I was ranked second in my class with a 4.3 GPA. I was Senior Class President, Captain of the Gymnastics team and Editor-in-

Chief of the Yearbook. I was proud of my accomplishments and my parents were filled with joy as they evaluated their daughter's honors and achievements.

Being involved in academics and so many activities still did not hinder me from having a social life. I lived for being with my friends. I always surrounded myself with friends and people who care about me. As any other teenager, I suffered a few broken hearts and stabs in the back, but I always had family and friends standing right beside me every step of the way. Two big influences on my life, besides my big sister, were my youth group leaders, Shawn and Heidi. At the end of my freshmen year of high school I started attending youth group and church with one of my best friends, Amanda. Throughout high school they were my rock. I learned so much about life and God during those years in youth group. I am not sure where I would be if I hadn't met Shawn and Heidi.

However, my life has not only been filled with accomplishments. I have done a few things in my life that I do regret. I was never the teenager to give in to peer pressure or follow others. I was always more of the leader, but at the end of my senior year a large group of us decided it would be a brilliant idea to pull a senior prank. We were the school heroes as our peers gossiped about the cement and superglue that had been placed in the worst places. But we didn't think much of ourselves the next day, as we all sat in the office and found out that the school was not going to let us walk in our graduation ceremony the next day. As I sat with eleven of my closest friends, five of us being in the top ten of our class, we could not stop crying.

After four years of the hardest work of my life I was not going to be able to walk with my class. I was not going to be able to give my Salutatorian/Senior Class President speech. Later that night, after our parents had all met at the school and protested, we received phone calls saying that we were allowed to walk the next day; however, our speeches were still taken away. The next morning we awoke to newspapers, newscasts and radio stations broadcasting our story all over Indiana. Even Indianapolis

had got wind of our high school trying not to let us walk because of a senior prank. It was a time in my life when I watched the disappointment on my parents' faces and struggled alongside my peers.

After graduation, one really important event in my life that I recently experienced was traveling to Armenia. I am half Armenian, and I have always wanted to be able to provide some background when asked the age-old question, "Where does BigJohny come from?" It was my first time there but definitely not my last. Traveling across the world for 20 hours, alone, and on crutches (because of the second knee surgery I had to have) was a very difficult physical and mental endeavor. Once I got there, I could not explore the country as much as I would have liked to, thanks to my silver walking sticks. However, I got to bond with many family members who I had never met, and I got to learn more about my heritage.

Family has always been a very important factor in my life. So, choosing Manchester College was the best choice for me because it was fairly close to home in Fort Wayne. After receiving a \$14,000 scholarship from Manchester and finding out that financial aid was covering the rest, I knew it was the smartest option. Once I got to MC, I knew I had found the school that was a perfect fit for me. I found everything I had been looking for in a college at Manchester. I found acceptance, help, friends who were more like family, warmth, compassion... I pretty much found a new home. I could not ask for more than the small community that strives for success and the atmosphere of all the caring people around me here at MC. I think that coming to Manchester College was one of the best decisions I could have made for myself. It was at Manchester, with the help of the caring individuals I am surrounded by, that I decided to become a high school teacher. And now, I continue on that path of making the best decisions that will work for me and my future.

Through change, challenge and opportunity I have learned to take what I am given and do my best with it. Growing up I stood out from my peers in all positive ways, and as an adult, I hope to do the same. I have proved to myself and others around me that if I want something badly enough I can achieve it. That is what I plan to do with the rest of my life. As I venture out into the real world, I will

take with me what I have learned so far in my life and apply it to my decision making. I hope to become a successful teacher and by successful, I mean one who instills in my students knowledge and skills to be prosperous in their lives. With the qualities and traits that have been instilled within me I will move through the next steps of my life, always looking back for reminders and reassurance and always looking forward with faith and hope.