



Mentors That Matter

Mentors That Matter is a national project in which youth from four United States cities publicly honor the adults who matter in the lives of teenagers, beyond the home and classroom.

Sponsored by MetLife Foundation, Mentors that Matter is an initiative of What Kids Can Do, Inc., a national nonprofit whose mission is to bring forward the voices of youth about their lives and learning.

In Tampa, Chicago, Providence, and San Francisco, high school students worked to identify, interview, and photograph people in their communities who reach out to youth in ways that far surpass what their daily routines require. The students of the Mayor's Youth Corps in Tampa, who come from schools throughout the city, completed the project as part of their commitment to service in the community.

In May 2007, the resulting narratives and photographs were displayed in a celebratory event attended by Mayor Pam Iorio, and students presented each Mentor with a medal of honor. Their work then moved to City Hall for a public exhibit.

Selected essays and photographs from these four exhibitions appear in the book *Pass It On: Interviews by Youth with Mentors That Matter* (forthcoming, Next Generation Press). For more information, contact info@nextgenerationpress.org.

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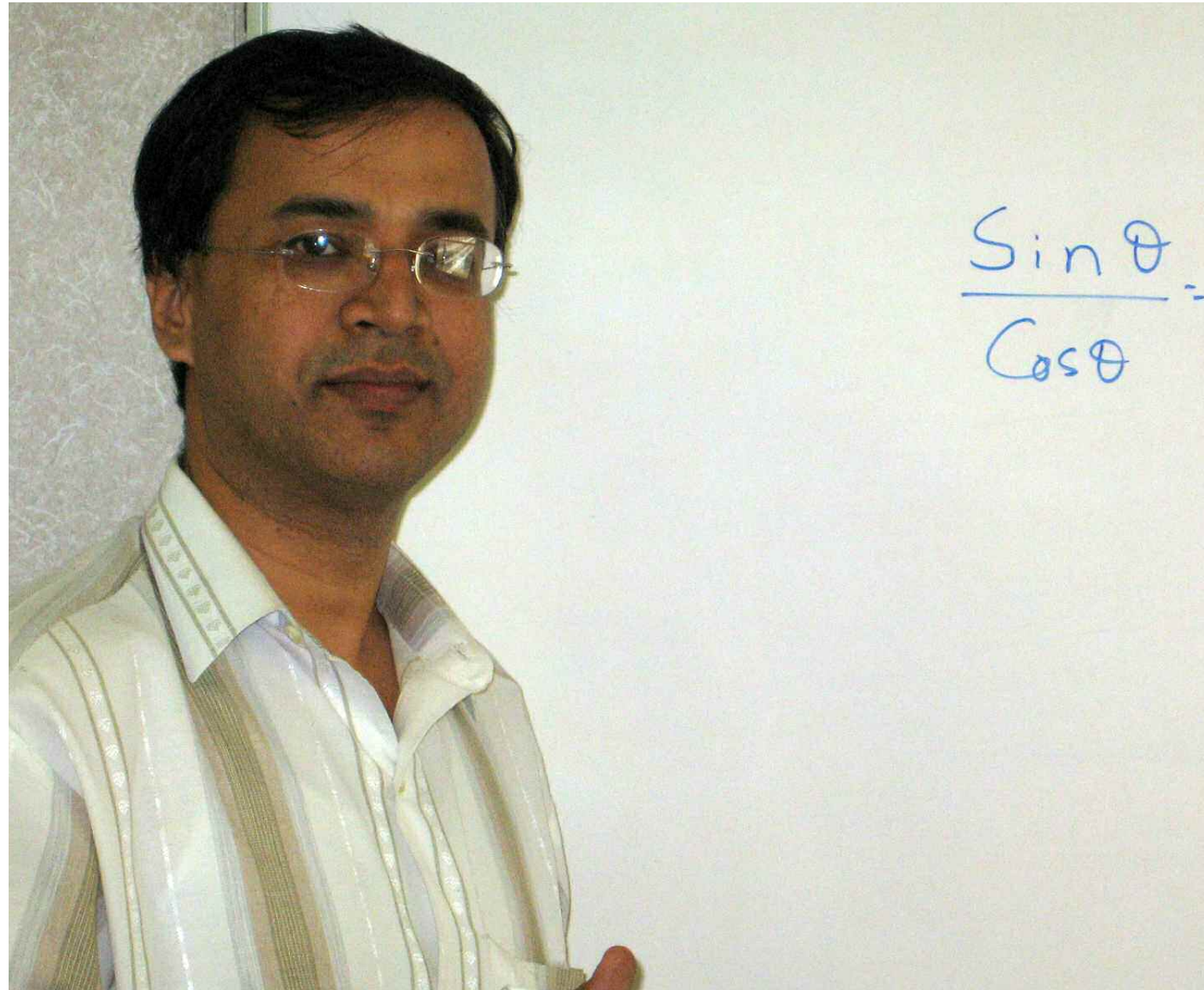
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WHAT
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WITH THE TAMPA

MAYOR'S YOUTH CORPS





Anytime a student says, "I get it," I can see the light sparkle in his or her eyes. I enjoy that moment tremendously.

What Makes My Day

When I was a student like you, and I was in India, I hadn't even heard of IT or the computer, those were completely new. Engineering did intrigue me, so I went to engineering school and later switched to information technology. Now I work at Citibank in the IT field.

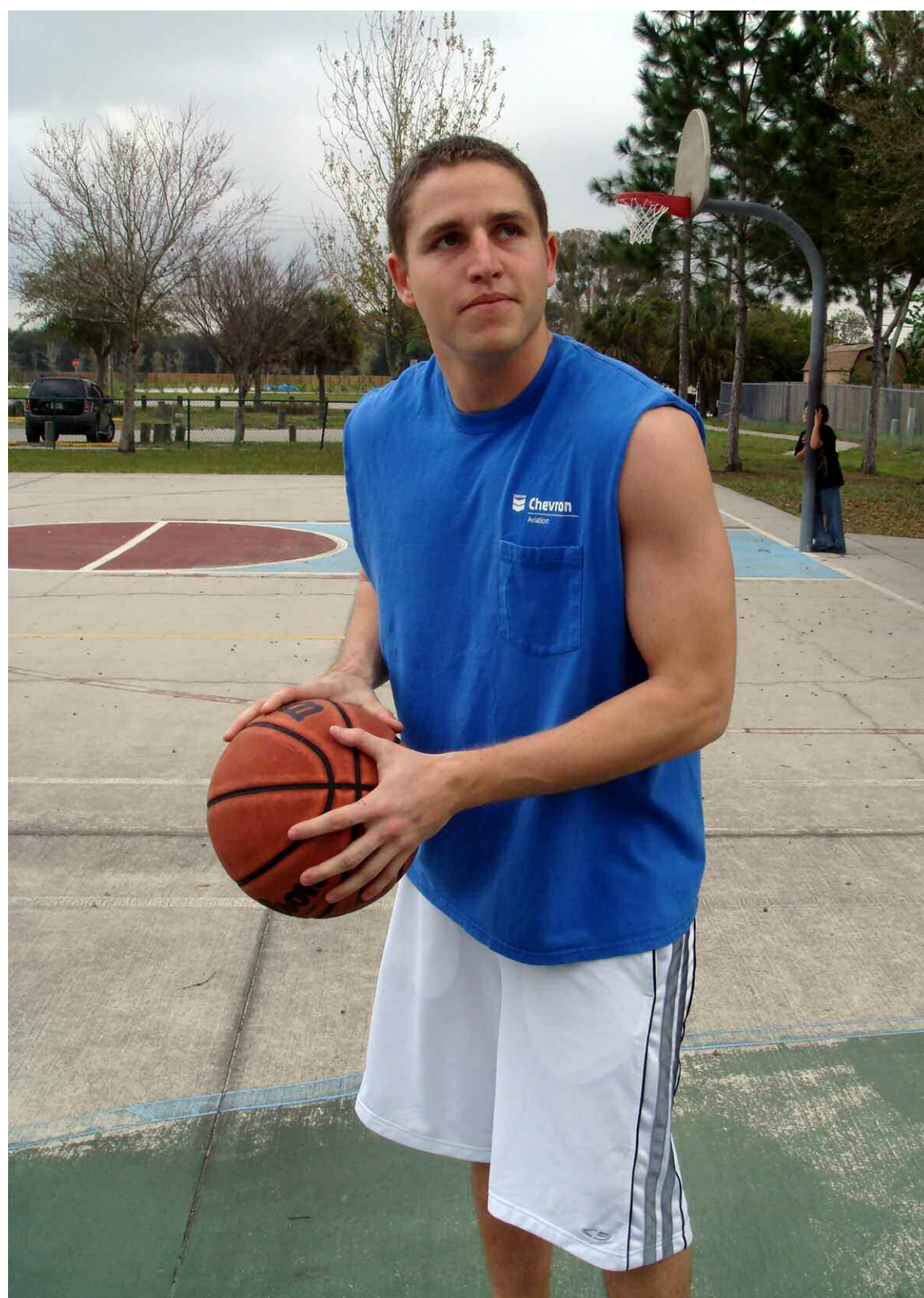
I volunteer at Vidhyalaya, which is a Sunday school kind of organization at the Hindu Temple of Florida. I teach math every Sunday for a couple of hours, and every other week I also teach Bengali language. I like teaching, so I jumped on the opportunity. The teaching here is so much different than the teaching in India, so I try to learn something from the students. It is a mutual learning process.

In the schools here they have a completely different environment than the one where I learned my stuff, so sometimes it is difficult. It's a challenge to have everyone's attention. I understand that sometimes students are not able to pay attention in class, with different distractions and environments. I have to work with that. If I sense that too many distractions are going on, I even let students take a day off or an early-off, because it is too hard to concentrate on something when you have something else on your mind. But anytime a student says, "I get it," I can see the light sparkle in his or her eyes. I enjoy that moment tremendously. That makes my day.

I get the feeling that there is a generational difference in aptitude and skill set. It is so difficult for us

adults to do certain things that are so easy for your generation. The difference in the way that learning takes place is a fundamental thing. We were focused on just one thing, but now there is so much bombardment of different kinds of information on every young mind.

The new education should not only teach knowledge as such, but also teach how to quickly make decisions and how to process information quickly. As long as you have the right aptitude, you should be able to compete against the biggest and strongest. But true education is the ability to get what you want without sacrificing certain values. Success in the true sense is not just making money, but doing it the right way, and making good contributions to society and the environment.



Simple Things

I started this as a freshman in college, as a community service project. I've always been a big basketball player, so I knew I wanted to do something with kids and basketball. I did all the athletics in high school, and played intramurals in college. So I started up a basketball league for twelve-year-olds down at the school. My friend is a gym teacher there, and he was like, "You gotta come play with the boys. They're pretty good, you know, for twelve years old." And he was right.

Kids will tell their friends, and they'll tell their friends. We had twelve or fifteen kids out there a couple Sundays ago, which is like a third of their class. We do it on Sundays between three and five, every other Sunday, pretty consistent for about five years now.

You just end up talking to them and you learn about their lives. Kids are growing up a lot quicker these days, you know. At twelve years old I think they know a lot more now than I did then.

When it started off, it was a class. Now, I don't have to do it, I do it for fun. I enjoy it, I like talking to

the kids, we have a good time for a couple of hours. It's just good to keep that sort of relationship within the community.

A few of the kids I started with, I'm actually close to. They are about seventeen now, thinking about college, so it's real easy to give them advice, 'cause I just got out of college. I know what it's like to be in the real world, and I certainly remember what it's like to be in college.

You learn to miss your childhood when you grow older. You get used to this daily routine. You forget the little things that matter to kids. It's good to hear about how simple things can make you happy.

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Saying Nothing

In high school, I was a typical, bashful, quiet sophomore. I loved the school I was at. It was the first time ever I met Christian Brothers. I was terrified of them, because they were so strict. I met this brother who used to play the piano. Five or six of us used to gather around the piano and we would play what you would call today rock and roll. I was surprised he knew all these things. I thought brothers went to this place to pray all by themselves, and the world was left behind.

That brother says, “Did you ever think of becoming a Christian Brother?” I was so embarrassed I couldn’t say anything.

A month goes by. He says, “Martin McCullagh, what did you come to?” I said, “They would never take me. They’ll hate me. I think I’m not good enough to be a brother.” He says, “You don’t have to be good enough. You want to be good enough, that’s why you join.”

I was a full time teacher for 52 years. I started in grammar school and high school. Then I worked at a college in admissions. I used to go around and get young girls and young guys to go to college there. I loved it. You meet the nicest people in the world.

Now that I’m retired, I have to do something. I’m in charge of all the copying at the high school. It occupies me for several hours a day. I call it the cave, where I work—no windows.

I love talking to the guys, and they like talking to me. I have set things that I say: “How about that

smile?” Or a guy goes by, and I say, “Smile, because you only have one more class to go.” Simple things like this. I used to put that down, as something not consequential or important.

One day, I was like, “You can smile now. You got a free day. You got a long weekend.” And the boy looked at me and he started to cry. Uh-oh, I said the wrong thing. I didn’t know. He told me everything. He was fighting at home with his parents. And they pretty well told him, “You’re a good-for-nothing. I’m sorry we ever brought you into this world.” That’s like being cut in two by family. His marks went down awfully fast. He felt useless. I don’t know if what I said meant anything. Later, I realized he doesn’t want me to say anything. He just wants me to listen.

When I started, I had to be the speaker. I had to tell the guy what to do. He would be there listening, and I would do all the talking. It should have been reversed. Saying nothing is the best sign of mentoring. After all my mistakes, I just listened.

You can pass on only those things you experience yourself. It’s like they say in writing. “Don’t write anything unless you know it.” How to handle the highs and lows in life, that’s the hard part. A mature person comes to understand that it’s not going to be easy. Students pale when I tell them: “No, you never failed. Just try again.”



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The People Are What Is Important

Sometimes I feel selfish because I get so much out of my interactions with youth. I teach sixth through eighth graders math, and occasionally I have tutored some of my older students who are in high school now. I also have a Sunday school youth group for high school students.

It's something that I enjoy doing; therefore it takes precedence in my life. I don't feel like I'm giving up things. I miss it when I don't do it, so I always go back to it one way or another.

When I was around your age, there were a few adults that mattered especially to me. I spent a lot of time with the mother of one of my friends, which was neat. My algebra teacher was extremely strict but thorough. I learned a lot from her, although she wasn't the most liked teacher. And then my German teacher was naturally wild and wonderful. She made quite an impact.

The people are what's important in teaching, not the subject matter. Treating people with respect and high regard is important. Everybody has an expertise at something and needs to be valued for that expertise.

There are a lot of things, too, that we adults haven't quite got right and we're hoping the next generation will do a better job with them. I'm surprised

every day at students' ideas and the ways they put things together. I'm encouraged for the future. I see bright lights. I see us headed in the right direction: people caring for one another, helping one another, and being there for one another. I see great hope.

I keep in contact with my youth group when they grow older and move on. We've gone to many a wedding and seen many births of babies. And that's wonderful to watch. It's a surprise in a wonderful way.



Not Just a Pop-Star Boot Camp



I often say I need to get out of the way. I tell the girls what to do, but after they learn it, they know it better than I do.

I was a kid who wanted more opportunities to perform. That in part was my inspiration to start Entertainment Revue. I started the group while I was in college. I never really imagined I would work with children. I was a political science major; I wanted to become a lobbyist and move to Washington. It started off as a great part-time job and evolved quite quickly from just a few classes to a summer camp. Eighteen years later, I couldn't imagine leaving Entertainment Revue.

We have three casts of approximately 25 girls ranging in age from six to eighteen. They rehearse once a week, sometimes more, four hours a week on average. It is not unheard of for the professional cast to have an eight-hour rehearsal. I perform the function of director and producer. I create the concepts and I cast the characters, the singers, and dancers.

When you watch our shows, you will see medleys of songs from different genres and different eras, everything from big band to country to patriotic. The girls perform at 30 to 40 shows a year, from community fairs to corporate events to the Democratic National Convention. We have performed for two different Presidents, multiple Senators, and at several professional sporting events.

I think 50 percent of the benefits the girls get have nothing to do with the professional arts training; they learn so much from each other. They are part of a wonderful supportive network of other girls who share their

common interests. These friendships will last a lifetime. They also gain onstage experience, performing in front of a real audience and dealing with microphones, staging and those unforeseen things that happen in a show. Because they are onstage so much, the girls can truly express themselves as artists. We place all money from performances in a trust that is available to the girls when they leave for college. We have awarded over \$40,000 in scholarship funds.

I think it is more difficult to learn the responsibility side of Entertainment Revue than it is to learn the choreography and performance side. All of the cast members are responsible for their costumes. The girls have to memorize how they hand off their microphone, when to change, and where to enter. For someone who does not know what is going on, it appears very chaotic. I often say I need to get out of the way. I tell the girls what to do, but after they learn it, they know it better than I do.

There aren't a lot of programs like this in other places. In the height of the pop music movement I was bombarded by record executives from New York and L.A., who wanted to sign teenagers. We signed eight girls within two years. One girl described Entertainment Revue as "pop-star boot camp." But you cannot be a successful member of this group if you have a big ego. It just doesn't work. Our group is not about having one or two stars, but having an ensemble cast of stars.



The Brain Is the Most Wonderful Organ

During summer vacation when I was in med school, some of the neighborhood children and teens wanted to ask me questions, clear their doubts, and get help with their homework. Because many of their essays were science or math, their parents would encourage them: “Oh, Ravi is back here from school, so why don’t you go ask him.” Back at home in Kerala, people will drop into your house and visit with you. When they ask you for your help, you don’t feel like saying no, especially when it is something close to your heart.

After I became a pediatrician, I used to sit down and chat with my patients and help them sort out their problems, especially with school. You see so many people wasting their potential, because they don’t have the proper guidance. If you have an interest in arts, or sports, you should develop that. But I always told youngsters, “Your priority should be developing your brain, which is the most wonderful organ.”

We have been involved with middle school and high school children of this area for many years, directing science fair projects. In fact, we were the Institutional Review Board for every medical project which students conducted during those years. And

both of us were judges for the Florida Junior Academy of Sciences. We were very much into science teaching and coaching.

I would tell my patients that they should enter with a science project. They would ask for ideas and I would mention something simple that they could start with. Then they would bring their projects and abstracts for correction. I used to guide them through that.

I am a scientist, and I tell students: If you become a good scientist, it doesn’t matter if it’s mathematics, computers, medicine, engineering. Whatever it is, there is going to be a job for you. We cannot live without science.

Whatever you learn in your childhood usually stays with you. Some children don’t mind being forced, but many children don’t like it. However, there is a fine line between guiding and forcing. If you have no interest, you will not succeed. It depends on your level of interest, and how much you can put into it. Basically that’s the equation.

Whatever you learned, you have to pass it on to the younger generation.



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* Dr. Susheela Nathan’s words appear in italics, Dr. Ravindra Nathan’s words in roman type.



Fingerprints All Over the World



When I was young, the people I wanted to be like were older people. Now, I really want to be like the people I work with who are young.

My parents were not people of wealth. My mother had a tradition: Every holiday she would find scraps of materials, and we would make crafts for all of our neighbors in St. Petersburg. All of them were senior citizens; we were pretty much the only young people on the block. We would leave our house on Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving at about five in the morning and we would sneak to each house and drop off little crafts.

I pretty much hated high school. It wasn't a place where I felt real safe or comfortable. I went to a huge public high school and I was one of those anonymous kids who made it through without anyone noticing them. There are a lot of people who are there for the brilliant kids, and a lot of people who are there for the athletes, but who is there for the anonymous crowd? I thought, "That's what I want to do."

I was very drawn to people who wanted to change the world, who were calling for social justice and working on behalf of the poor. I wanted to be a youth minister and so I ended up working for the Bishop of St. Petersburg. Every year for three years, I would visit all 110 parishes and put on youth rallies. I would make sure kids knew the change wasn't coming from adults, it was coming from them. Our job is to empower kids to take charge. No teenager should hear the news that they can't change the world.

When Key Club started, we wanted to make change locally. Now our fingerprints are all over the world. Here in Tampa, the kids donated large sums of money to an ESOL [English as a Second Language] program so that every child would have at least three books and could go on field trips for free. We've helped to build an orphanage in Africa for Rwandan orphans, and this year we've donated a classroom to a school in the poorest part of Haiti. We've already got 2,000 jars of peanut butter that we're shipping Monday. In the last seven years we've put in about 20,000 hours of community service.

Project Outreach started out with one or two schools. Every school has kids with needs, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, all kinds of challenges, even kids who just couldn't beat the FCAT. Now we go to about ten elementary schools, including one exceptional center. Our students do seven hours of committed service on their day off from school. I don't know who gets more out of it, the little kids or the big kids, but everybody comes back saying that it was a great day. Project Outreach has become colossal. We have schools calling us, and asking for us to send kids to their schools.

When I was young, the people I wanted to be like were older people. Now that I'm not as young, I really want to be like the people I work with who are young. I tell them: If you can do this at fifteen and sixteen, then the sky's the limit. When you're thirty and forty, no one can stop you.



You can form a bond in a short period of time with someone. When you have to move on, you hope that you made a lasting impression.

Success in Small Steps

When I was your age I loved to read. I read everything I could get my hands on, and I wrote poetry and short stories. Now, I'm a staff writer with the Florida Sentinel Bulletin newspaper, and I also write columns on my point of view.

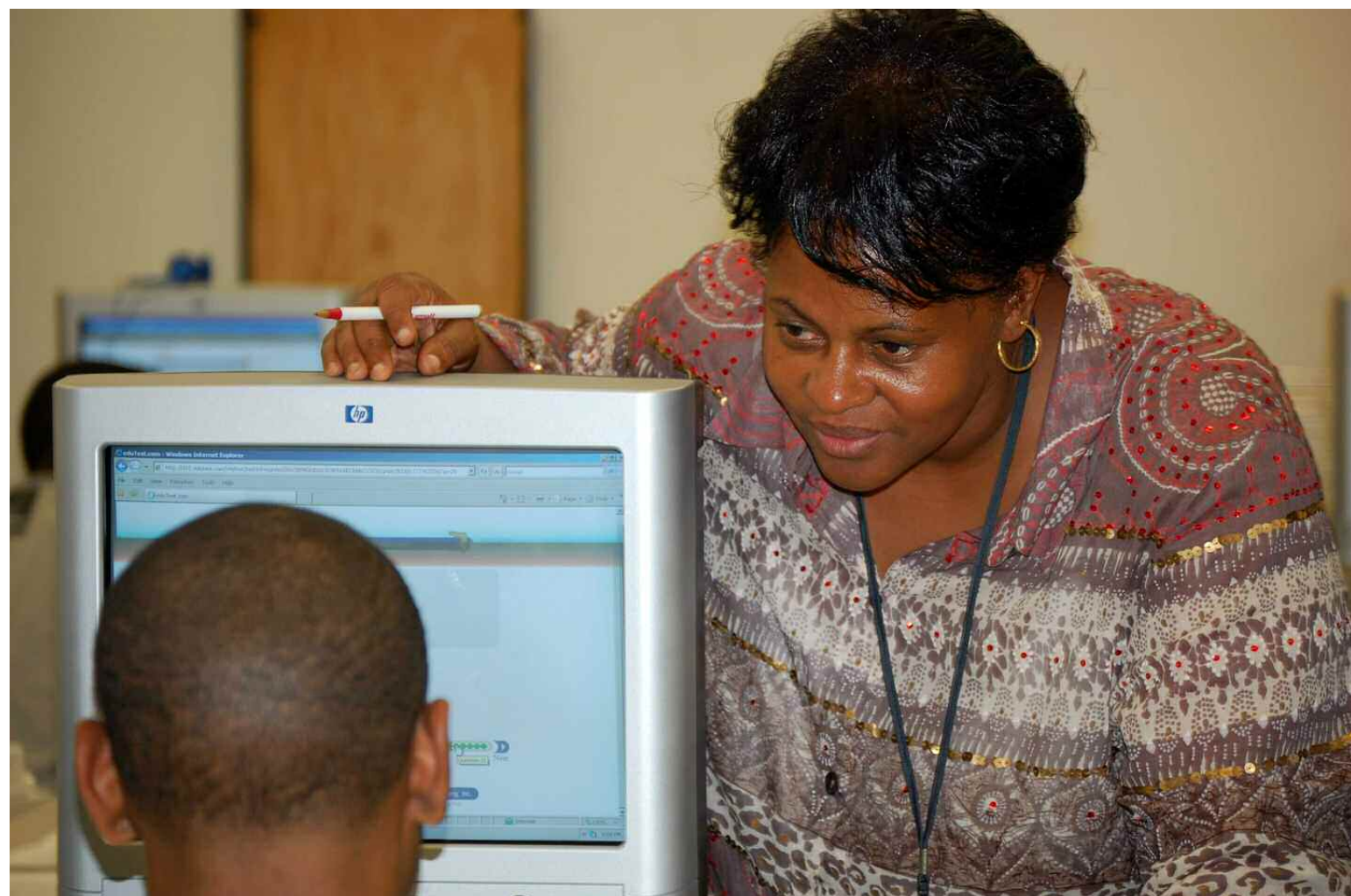
I write articles on both the good and the bad things that happen to teenagers. When kids are going off to college, I interview them and find out what their plans are for their future. I meet a lot of teenagers who are involved in different projects, who receive awards or scholarships. I interact with some who are trying to raise funds for special trips, others that have terminal illnesses. If there's a family in distress, I write articles asking the community to help financially. My primary objective is to find a way that we can help. I have sponsored various organizations, both academic and athletic.

A lot of times you can't talk to people between eight and five Monday through Friday, so to get with the kids I'll do interviews at night and on the weekends. I just rearrange my schedule to accommodate whomever I need to do that for.

Young people now are extremely intelligent, and more outspoken than my generation. I like to hear your points of view, I like to see how you see things. Kids can't wait to leave and go off to college, and I admire that. The idea of leaving home and going away to school—that was frightening to me, but your generation embraced it. It means exposure to other parts of the world. You are not afraid to ask questions. It helps to make you more well-rounded. If you don't ask, you'll never know.

I never saw myself as a mentor. I just do what I do. But people don't see you the way you see yourself. You think I'm a mentor. You can form a bond in a short period of time with someone. When you have to move on, you hope that you made a lasting impression that will help that person as they grow up.

A lot of times, people get depressed when things don't happen overnight. You may think that you're not doing anything, not going anywhere. But as long as you are trying, you are always making progress. Sometimes you measure success in small steps.



Sometimes I need a hug and encouraging words. We need to be encouraged also. And the kids that I mentor, they keep me going.

Each One Reach One

I came from an era where we had extended family, and I see that is happening less now. You all are a group that no one wants to bother with. There's so many children who just need someone they can talk to. I decided I would be that person, whether it be a mother figure, auntie figure, sister figure. I interact in whatever way teens need me. I get to know them, I hang out with them, see what they are listening to, what they are talking about, what their interests are.

Even when I was a teen, teens came to me, so I would probably have to say that I was born to teach. That was not a route that I was going to when I came out of college. It was a time that blacks could be anything we wanted to. I was going to be one of those people who would make money, but God said no. I taught that year—loved it. I'm a third-generation teacher, and my daughter's a fourth-generation. My grandma taught for 42 years. A lot of my life has been spent in a school, and I have no regrets. I don't know what I would do without it.

It's hard being a parent, it's hard being a teacher, and it's hard being a mentor. Sometimes I need a hug and encouraging words. We need to be encouraged also. And the kids that I mentor, they keep me going. Most

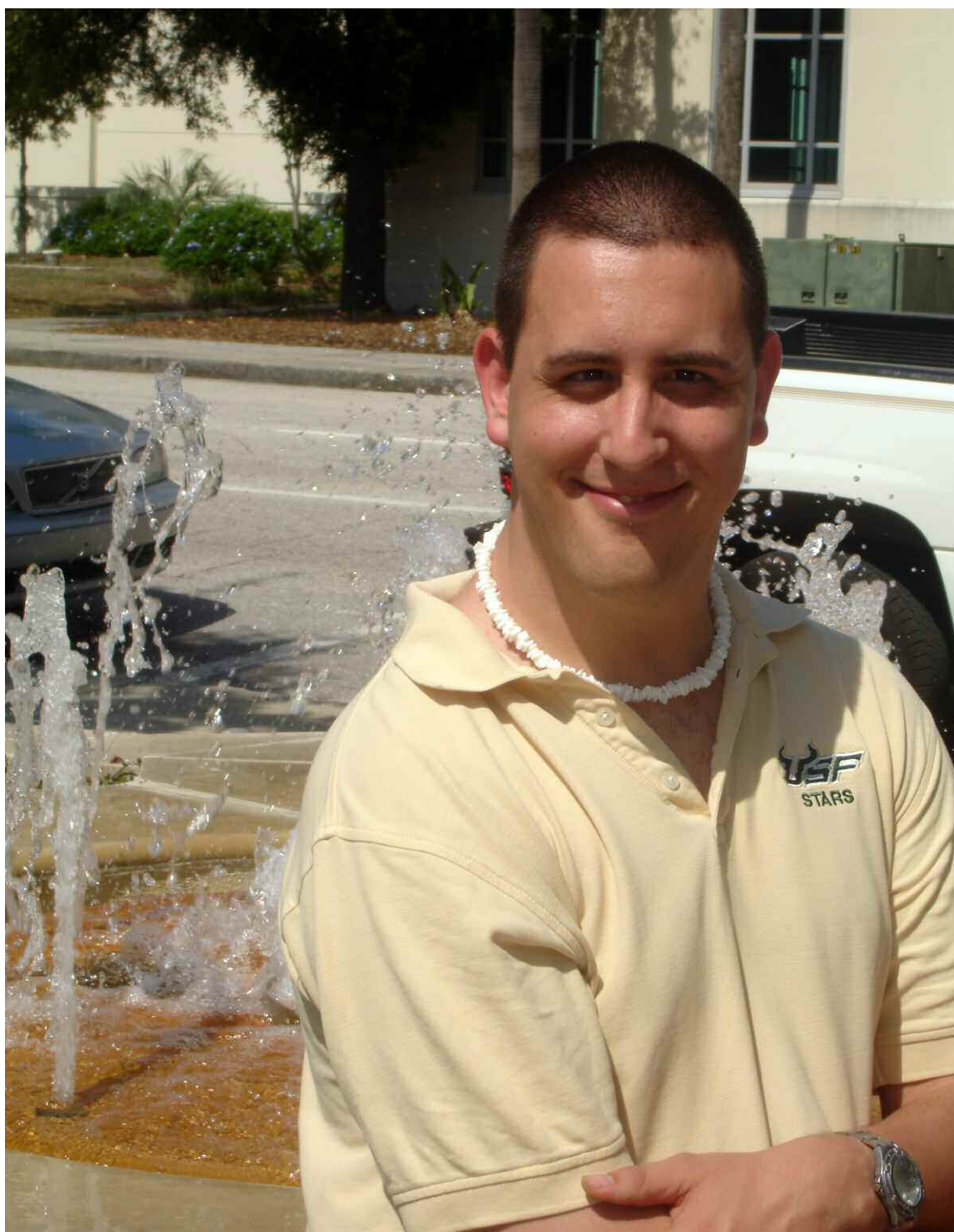
of the kids that I used to tutor went to college. One is a lawyer now, one is an engineer. You can be whatever you set your mind out to be, regardless of who you are or where you come from. It's okay to fail, but you don't get stuck there. Sometimes failing brings the best lesson anyone can learn, especially if they want to be successful.

When I grew up, there weren't too many roadblocks for children. It was wonderful back then. We didn't have a lot, but with what we had we were so happy. The family structures that we had, even the extended family . . . if Miss Sally down the street knew that something was wrong, Miss Sally could whip you. And then somebody would whip you when you got home! We don't have that today—if I beat your child, it's something against your child. Never, ever, ever would I want to be coming up in the time you guys are today. I think you guys are missing out on a lot of love.

Some kids will make it regardless of their circumstance. I just try to plant seeds and hope that someone will come behind me and make them blossom. Some good things are going to come out of some kids, if we all just remember, "Each one reach one."



Mentorship 101



I didn't think that I could be a mentor, because I was disabled. I never imagined I could have this much impact.

I was born nine weeks early, one pound two ounces. I was the size of a dollar bill. And on top of all that, I was born dead. I had no heartbeat, so I didn't have oxygen to my brain, causing parts of my brain cells to die off. The doctors predicted I would never walk or talk.

My childhood was difficult. My family was a military family, so I moved every two to three years. I never had any lifelong friends like most kids. I thought that I would be a person who people pick on, day in and day out.

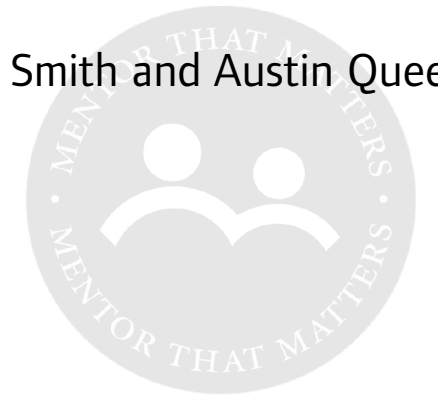
I participated in Anytown as a delegate once, in ninth grade. It's a national program, a week-long diversity and leadership training for high school students from fourteen to eighteen. I asked the director if I could go home, because I was not enjoying myself. I wanted to be with my mom and dad. He said, "You have to stick it out." He would not let me go home. That stuck with me my whole life. If I would have gone home, I wouldn't be the person I am today.

I've just finished my eighth Anytown as a counselor. On the first day, when the delegates come on the big bus, I get a pump of adrenaline. Who's going to be on that bus? Who's going to be closed-minded and not want to talk to me? But by the very last day we are best friends. And of course, on the last day I am very sad. Because we have built this community, but then after Anytown they go their separate ways.

I didn't think that I could be a mentor, because I was disabled. No one would want me to help out. I never imagined I could have this much impact. I was elected to the Advisory Board, which plans Anytown for next year. I have subcommittees which I check upon each month and I guide them so that we can make sure that this summer goes out with a hit. I'm creating a documentary about Anytown with a couple of student filmmakers.

I am not getting paid for any of this. This is because I love the program so freaking much. I think mentoring has always been in my personality. I never took a class like mentorship 101. It is in my nature: I love to help and I love people. No matter how old I am, no matter what I'm into, I want to keep that line of communication open.

You are going to come across people who look or talk different than you, who may have a different lifestyle or funky hair, whatever it may be. You have to keep an open mind. We are all human. Genetically, we are 99.99 percent alike. If you degrade the person you sit next to, you are basically degrading a brother or sister. If you make any limits, you can limit the stuff you are going to learn.



Kids Have the Light

When I was your age, I thought that I was perfect. I was conceited, just like you. I once prayed that I wouldn't change. Many years later, I am so happy my wish didn't come true. I've learned a lot, and I've seen a lot.

Now I work for the Housing Authority of the city of Tampa. During my lunch period, I read to preschool students in the Head Start program. In these pre-K classes, very rarely will you find an African American male doing these types of things. Some kids, they may not even have a male in the household, so at a very young age it's important that you start modeling proper behavior. Instead of saying, "I'd like to see more people involved in doing so," get up and do it! These little kids look up to me. I'm 6 foot 3, and 230 pounds, and to them I'm a giant.

Individuals around your age, they're pretty much the same universally. You'll find kids in Jamaica looking for that cell phone. They still look for that flashy car; they're still looking for that special girl in the class. They want to be seen; they want to make sure they have the fresh cut. They're listening to the same type of music, influenced by the media. You influence people around the world.

The worst thing you can do is to morph into something that others want you to be, in order to be acceptable. Being odd is cool. Being yourself is very, very cool. If you blend in with the pack, you are just one of them. If you show a high degree of intelligence towards aca-

demics, the individuals who will pull you away are afraid that they in turn are going to be challenged. In fact, they wish they had the courage that you have.

When I used to work on Wall Street, I used to go into high schools and junior high schools and talk to the kids about what it takes to make you successful. Youth are told that you succeed in life when you get the job that pays the most, but they will find out eventually that a lot of these people are dissatisfied. They start chasing individual goals and dreams, and stop looking at what it takes to hold a family together and build a community. Many people have money but they do not have happiness. The work that you produce should reflect the person you are.

Mentoring keeps my dream alive. It's selfish that way: I'm feeding on the youth. A mentor sees the light in an individual and helps them bring it out to shine. One of the best ways to get out of depression is to look towards the light. And kids have the light. After I leave you, I wish that you just look back and go, "Yeah—that's cool."



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God-Sent Mom

I grew up too fast. We lived on a plantation, so I just wanted to grow up and get out. I had a sweet mom, but our father left us at a young age. A lot of things that we wanted to do, my mom couldn't afford it. But I always said, "When I grow up, I'm going to be a mom for other kids that their moms can't afford to have things." All through my life, that's what was on my heart. I want to be there for children.

When I heard about foster parents, it would always be something about the kids getting thrown out, the father wasn't taking care of them and the mother was real young. One Friday I just started attending the classes. After about five years, these lil' kids came through and I was lucky enough to get them. Those was my first kids. Oh, Lord, by now there must be hundreds. And it just filled a gap in my life.

It doesn't take much for kids: You have to hug and you have to make them feel safe. They might come to you all disturbed, but once they feel safe, then some mischievous come out, some behavior problems come out. But whenever they feel safe, you got it. My family tell me, "You're not God, you can't change them all." But I can make a difference. It's not about changing them.

Of course they are problem kids! The one thing I did is made their problem my problem. Who do we think we are to pin tags on these kids? We forget that they have a heart, they have feelings. I open my heart, I open my door, and I open my wallet. Unless we reach out, there are not going to be many kids for tomorrow.

If I was able, I would have this big house and just

go through the projects, go to the children that need somebody, and pick them up and go shopping for them for school clothes. I would gather them up and take them out to dinner. There are children who have never been out to dinner, have never been to a fair. There are children who don't have a tomorrow if we don't pick them up. Quit pushing them down, and pick them up.

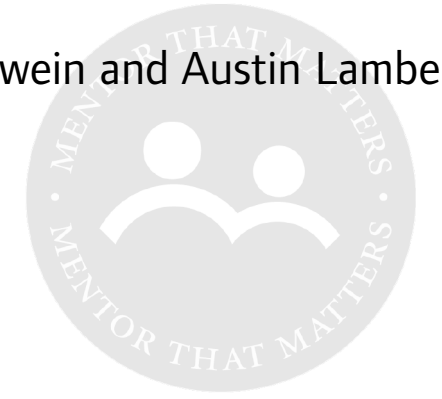
In 35 years we never had a kid get shot up, no guns. I have never seen a stolen car parked in my driveway from none of them. But they had to grow to that. When they walk in, you can't just push them, you got to show some tears every now and then. You got to let them know, "I feel you." If we don't understand them, then they don't care. Teenage boys are just as easy as the babies, once they get your trust. You can't fool them, you just got to be real with them. You can't bake a pan of cornbread and say that this is a cake.

Many of my kids come now and say, "Oh, mama, how did I take you through that. You so super." I don't need a pat on the back. It might seem that it's putting wear on me, but it's not. My heart feel good, I feel good. When I go into the kitchen to cook, it's a good feeling to know that I have to cook more than one piece of chicken; it's a good feeling to feed all of the kids.

My whole life is different because I had these kids in my life. I'm not helpless anymore. I find something to heal my pain, what I had from a lil' girl. I find joy. I have loved them, I have learned them strength and I've grown from their strength. I'm not even tired, because I know I am a God-sent mom.



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You Either Accept Kids, or You Don't

As a teenager, I always wanted to be a lawyer. I certainly never thought that I would work for a church and school. Now I split my workday between my two jobs: I'm a part-time lawyer and a full-time youth director at St. John's Episcopal Church.

I have realized that you either like kids, or you don't. You either accept kids, or you don't. I have always loved young kids, but I actually think the middle and high school kids need adults to listen to them more; therefore, I give my time to that age group. Kids teach adults, if adults would just stop and listen to them. Not only do you speak the truth more, but I think that God talks through you more.

It is interesting the way your age group sees itself, though. So often, you sell yourselves short. You don't see all the gifts and qualities that God has given you. My goal as a youth counselor is to help you figure out all that you have to offer and give back to your community.

Adults forget that it is not easy being young. At that age, you do feel alone. When kids have issues, they turn to me when their own parents won't get involved. I have taken them to the hospital. I deal with suicide. We have been to clinics. We go to the libraries for help. I go to their homes. These are kids from great families!

Mainly, my objective is to give kids a safe place to hang out. I teach three different Bible study classes during the week. On Saturdays we work at Faith Café,

which serves a very needy group. Every Sunday, I start off my morning at 5:30 and I get home at 9:00 p.m. I have three kids, ages three to thirteen, and a great husband who pitches in whenever he can. I am not a superwoman. I am not a great lawyer. My social life is definitely on the back burner. But I am on this earth for something, and that is to help others.

Gasparilla is our most awesome outreach program. Our church has a safe house. We open our doors to all teenagers who come in impaired during the festivities. They don't necessarily come to us—our teens go out and assist them. This year, we had 38 kids come who basically could not walk on their own.

Last summer, I took a group of fifteen kids to Key West for a mission trip. We worked at five different locations, with elderly people and with hurricane victims. My biggest moment was to watch these kids come together and not only serve others, but also be so Christ-like toward each other. They put everything aside, including their makeup. They slept on the floor of the church, and at the end of the week there was a real sense of cohesiveness. They were all crying and saying goodbye. The kids felt as though it really does mean something when you help other people.



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Around the Campfire a Lot of Things Come Up

When I was your age, Senior Girl Scouts wasn't like it is now. After you finished Cadets, there wasn't much. The highest award in Girl Scouts was First Class Scout, which I earned in my last year in Cadets. We tried to continue, but it didn't work out. Actually, the youth pastor at my church became the primary mentor in my life. He was the first adult who treated me and other teenagers with respect, more like we were adults with abilities, thoughts, and opinions. We could do a lot for ourselves, and he expected that from us, he encouraged us.

My primary involvement now is with my Senior Girl Scout troop. Teenagers, especially my six girls, can be very responsible, very capable. They can do almost anything they want. So many things are going on in their lives that they tend to get a little distracted. I see my major role as trying to help them keep focus and remember their goals. They have this ultimate goal of achieving their Gold Award, the equivalent to an Eagle Scout in Boy Scouts. It wouldn't mean anything if it was easy.

Around the campfire a lot of things come up. You guys feel that you can talk to me about different things, whether it's who likes whom, pressures of school work, God and church and how that all fits in. I feel that I have something to offer that I want to give. A lot of stuff in life comes with experience and with living. You can handle a lot. Things are going to go wrong, bad things

happen, and hopefully you'll learn something from it.

I've made mistakes along the way as a Scout leader. There are times when you come down too hard on a girl. I have high expectations because that's how you help kids achieve, you set the bar high. At times, with certain girls, I needed to not do that, I needed to be a little more nurturing. That has been the biggest challenge.

Between fifth and sixth grades, we had a bigger troop, maybe 20 girls, and a lot of different personalities. We had clashes. You learn you can't deal with each girl the same way. If two girls just can't stand each other or one's picking on another, I had to find a way to deal appropriately with both. Oftentimes, those were the girls who needed Scouting the most, and, to be honest, those are the girls we didn't hang on to.

I don't feel like I am giving up anything to be a Scout leader. The sacrifices are hardly worth being called sacrifices. I wouldn't be doing this if I wasn't having fun. I have watched you girls gradually grow up and take on more responsibility. Around sixth grade was the first time that the girls as a troop led the singing and ran the talent show at an encampment. And to see you step up in a leadership role and do it so well at such a young age, I was just so impressed. That weekend showed me that, wow, this Girl Scouting stuff really works. The girls are becoming leaders, young women. I don't think I'll ever lose touch with the six of you who are left.



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They Never Cease to Amaze Me

I always wanted to be a mother and a wife. There is a bond between a mother and her child that is deeper than between a man and a woman. I would like to be remembered as a good mother. It wasn't always easy, because for sixteen years I was a single mother and I had to work but I still had two boys that I had get through school and college. The loss of my husband was very difficult for me to deal with.

I was brought up in a very strict manner, and therefore I don't think I had as good a sense of humor as I would like. I didn't have a close relationship with my teachers. I was in awe of teachers, afraid of them. I was very quiet and obedient. I wanted to be a harpist in a symphony orchestra, but never got the chance. I would never have imagined I would be president of the Women's Club or adviser to this group of young women that I am now. The whole time I had to run a meeting, I was soaking wet and shaking in my shoes. I am not as bad with the girls, because if I make a mistake, they just laugh at me.

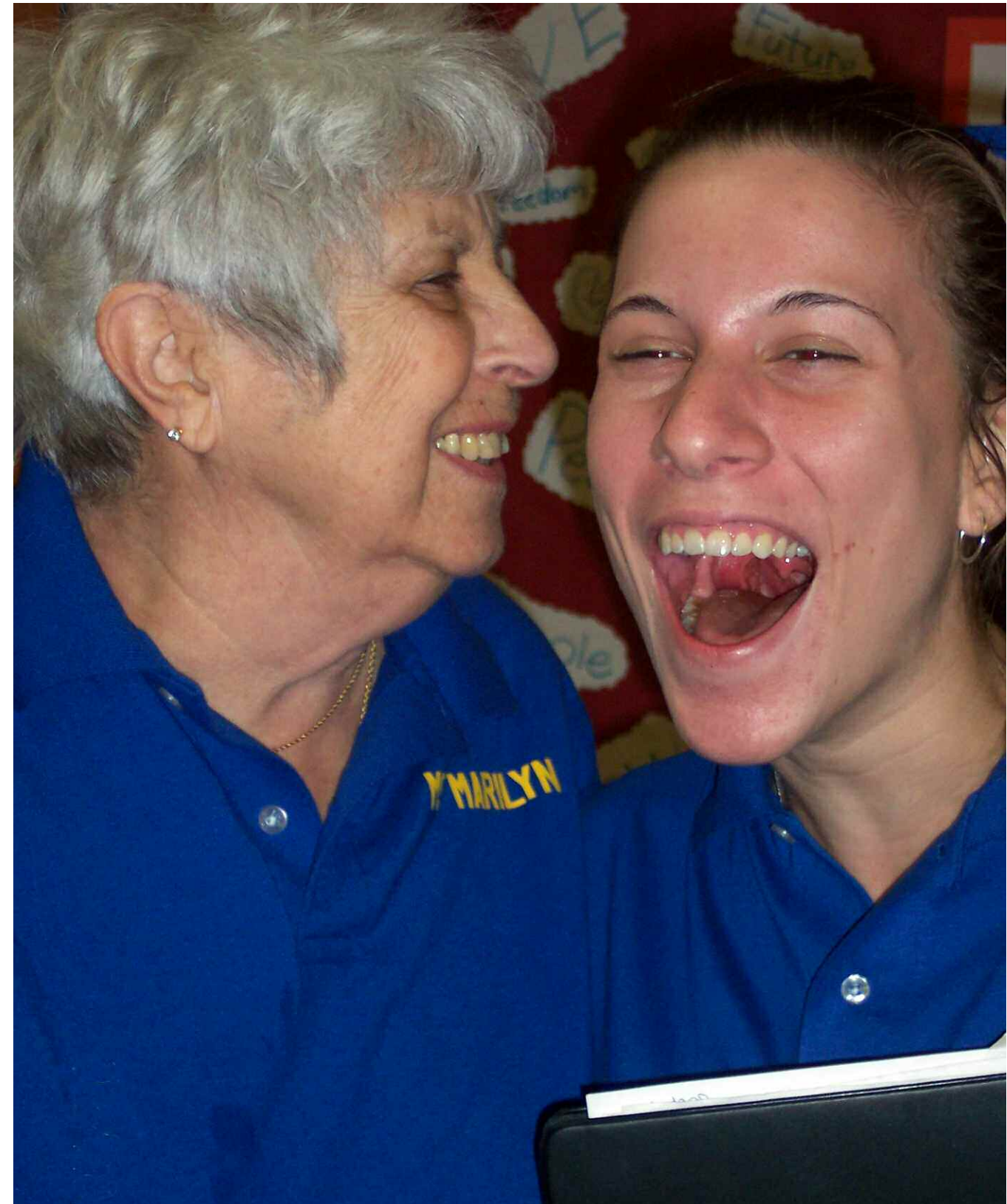
Every day I learn something about mentoring with these girls. Miss Annie, my co-advisor, is the fun one and I am the disciplinarian, which I think is part of my problem. I would like to give back to parents and teachers the rights they had when I grew up. If you did something wrong, you got a spanking for it. It is not abuse; it is a way of learning. I don't mean beating a child with

a belt buckle, but I don't think the child has a right to talk back to his parents or to a teacher. I would like the girls to be a little more respectful. I don't think they are quite as understanding when parents or teachers come down on them because they feel they should do better.

I am very fortunate that the girls come to me for advice and help. They never cease to amaze me. I am not sure they always take my advice, but I think they listen. And they can talk freely to me. The younger generation is much more open about sex than I was when I was a young girl. Sometimes I think that's good, and sometimes I don't think it's good. Sometimes I tell them, "Talk to your mom the same way you talk to me."

I am a widow, so I don't have anyone at home to answer to. I call my time my own and do what I want to do. Sometimes, health will restrict some of the things that I would like to do with the girls, but I don't really have to give up anything. Being able to give of oneself is important for our own peace of mind.

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Encourager and Friend

The first time I started connecting with kids was when I first ran for public office in 2002. I had billboards which displayed my photograph, and I received a call from a fifth grade student asking if I would go to his class to speak. Since that time, I make an effort to regularly speak with youth—either in a public school setting, or with youth groups of a church, or any other opportunities within the community.

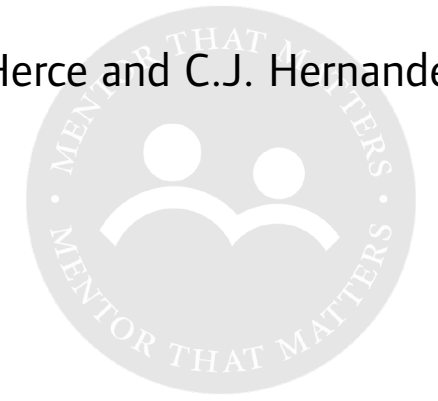
We judges noticed that many teenagers in foster care have never had the guidance that many teens receive directly from parents while developing. Those few children that have a mentor are more focused on school and more socially adept. I am helping to organize a program that unites each teenage foster child with one adult in the Tampa Bay area. The aim is to impart stability into the child's life while the child is removed from the parent and under the care of the state. Not only will I be applying to be matched with a teen, but my role is to speak out in the community requesting men and women to consider mentoring a child in foster care.

Did you know that John Quincy Adams traveled for nearly two years in the 1780s, accompanying Francis Dana on a mission to St. Petersburg, Russia, to gain recognition for the new republic of the United

States of America? John Quincy Adams was fourteen years old at the time, and he later became President of the United States. There is much that this nation and this community can gain from people your age. There are future ambassadors and leaders for America that merely need assurance and encouragement from a friend whom they respect. I believe that mentors fill the role of encourager and friend.



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Life Is a Series of Beginnings

I was born in Northern Ireland in a small town in the mountains, in the southern part of a county called Derry. I lived there for 24 and a half years until I came to the United States as a priest. I've worked in Florida for 54 years this year. Life is a series of beginnings.

At sixteen I had no idea I was going to end up as a priest. I was thinking I would be a professional football player. But my father was very much opposed to that, so that ended my career there. I went to medical school, and from medical school I went into the seminary. But I have been associated with American football ever since I came here. I just enjoy sports immensely.

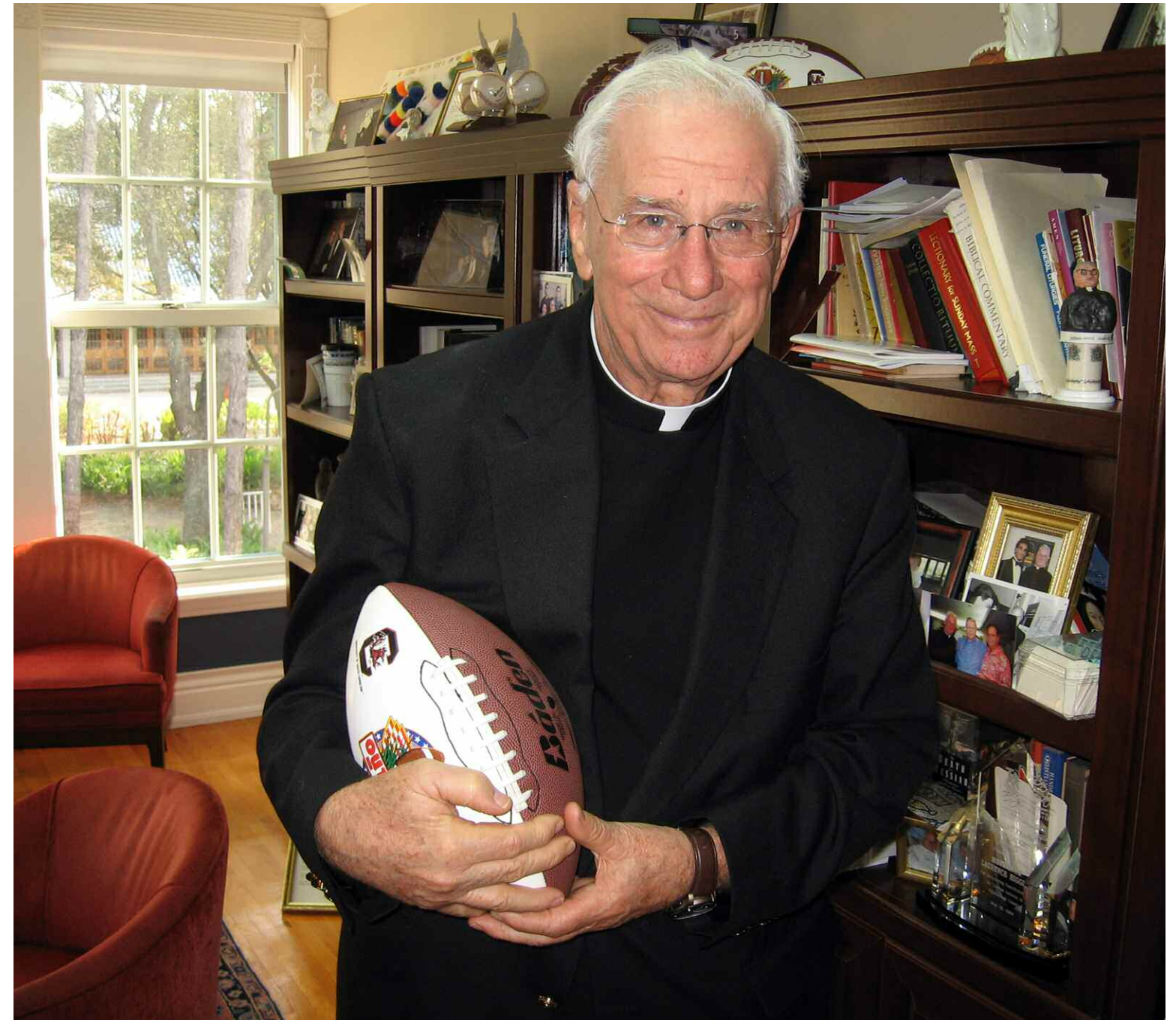
I was sent to Florida in 1953. I'm the pastor of the church that I founded, St. Lawrence Parish. I started that in 1958 and I opened up three missions around here. There was nothing here when I came, a cow patch. The Archbishop foresaw that it would explode, he wanted to be ahead of the crew. We were building rapidly. It was a good opportunity for a young man.

A pastor in the Catholic Church is really married to his parish. His first and total obligation is to the people of the parish. It's a full time job, the same as a doctor. But my obligation is taking care of people who are sick spiritually. Some teenagers have drug problems, trouble with the law, problems at home. I am able to help them see that they could do better and maybe turn them around.

The young people today have a lot more temptations than my generation ever had. It's far more difficult for them to follow the straight lines. They have a tremendously rough road. Many times they don't get as much help as they should from older people. But the quality of youth today is the same as it always was. They are just as generous and just as noble and idealistic as the youth of any other time.

It's in the home that you learn everything, the foundations. A child is like a computer, it sucks in all the knowledge it can and all the things it sees and all the things it hears, good and bad. Many times teenagers don't realize it, but as you grow older you go back to what you were taught as a child.

You learn about mentoring children, really, from what's happened to you. You learn a tremendous lot by watching and listening. That's how wisdom comes about. It's by listening not only to God and the silence but also listening to all people, from the smallest child to the oldest person, from the most important person to the person that brushes the streets.



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Do the Right Thing

When I was seventeen, I was shy, but I had a great group of friends. They believed as I did, in doing the right thing. I learned as a teenager always to be honest and truthful. Few adults made a lasting impression on me, other than my parents.

I got most of my medical training in the Air Force reserves. After I returned to civilian life, a guy hired me to take blood pressure when no one else would, because he believed I could do the job. In my training I had many different rotations to learn different services. Now, by being a health provider, I feel I am really helping someone.

I was a pretty good athlete myself. When I came to Florida, I got my girls involved in basketball. I got interested in coaching, and it grew from that point on. I ran into another guy who had a child involved in basketball and convinced him to coach as well.

Now, I work with young people to teach them basketball and how to be successful in life. I have worked with two organizations and plenty of teams since I started four years ago. I coach age groups nine through fifteen years old. We let them play out of their league, in order to make them better players. If they can move up, we encourage it.

I still see some of the kids that we trained. Now they are pretty good athletes. I follow some of them to see how they turn out. My satisfaction is to see them grow into good people. Kids' attitudes can be their own downfall.

I never dreamed I would be shaping young lives like this, never even thought I would be in a position like this. My advice to teenagers now is: Your word is your bond. Do what you say you are going to do, and always be honest. Do not be lazy, because at this point in your life, the world is yours. Do it now, don't wait until later on. And keep your eye on the prize.



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On Top of Their Game

When I was in middle school, I was a pretty bad kid. I was the kind of kid who was getting suspended. People who knew me then think it's hilarious that I turned out to be a teacher.

Now I see teenagers all day. I see kids who are struggling and at risk and kids who are the cream of the crop. I have kids who are smarter than me and keep me on my toes. I have always been real good with kids. But when I taught elementary school I was just laughing at my own jokes. Then I get to high school and somebody gets it. I realized that that was the better place for me.

I had this student who was just a horrible discipline problem. I could not tolerate her, there was nothing appealing about her. I prayed for patience. Then I started seeing things from her point of view. My student didn't change, my attitude changed. She started coming around. She ended up being the most improved student in the grade. If you have high expectations for students, and you are kind, and you act like you are invested in them, then kids usually rise to the occasion.

When I came here, I taught the lowest reading by far in the school. Several of the kids were in second grade level and here we were in high school. We worked from the time the bell rang to the time the bell dismissed them. Why? Because I owe it to you. There's no day off in here, ever. I don't have time, you don't have

time. If you know you are doing the right thing, then it's not hard.

It surprises me, the things kids say. Things I would never dream of saying to an adult, when I was in high school. I'm glad that kids trust me, and I try not to appear shocked. If I keep calm, it just keeps coming.

The older I get, the more confident I am. I adopted a kid from the school, you know. As long as I'm doing the right thing, I'm not going to get in trouble. I'm just happy that I can be in a position where I can affect so many students. I get more out of it than they do in many cases.

At this point in life, you can be anything, and I can help you. The future is so ripe. I can be a part of your life at a time when these decisions are being made. To see you when you come into the ninth grade and usually are so scared and awkward—and to be able to see how you evolve in four years! Some of you leave here like adults. Like adults on top of their game.



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