



Stories of Courage, Laughter & Hope

Putting My Best
Foot Forward



THINK
DIGITAL ACADEMY



“Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. It is not a thing to be waited for; it is a thing to be achieved.”

– William Jennings Bryan



I could feel the sweat start to trickle down my back, right between my shoulder blades. There I was, standing in the hot sun while the team captains chose who they wanted on their team for a baseball game during fourth-grade recess.

There were only four of us left.



“I’ll take Sandy,” said one of the team captains.

“David,” said the other.

The palms of my hands started to sweat.

“Rachel.”

My heart sank.

“All right ... I’ll take Kathy.”

I was sure everyone was looking at me—skinny Kathy, with the skinny legs and arms. Kathy, whom no one wanted on their team.



I wanted to crawl under a rock and hide.

I was humiliated ... once again.

I was a geek to most of the kids at school. I was shy, quiet, scrawny, and afraid to make friends.



At home with my parents, I always felt okay with myself. My folks were hardworking people who loved and supported me and believed in my capabilities. They taught me to go for what I wanted, no matter what it was.



In kindergarten, I had been invited to a birthday party. I wanted to get a really nice present for the girl who invited me, and my parents encouraged me to work for the money to buy the present.

My dad said to me, “You have two arms and two legs and a brain, Kathy. If you want extra money, you can simply earn it.”

Because my parents believed in me so much, I believed in myself too.



To earn the money, I painted pictures on rocks and sold them door to door in my neighbourhood, sold fruit and vegetables from our garden, and did yard work for our neighbours.

Although I was just a small child, buying a gift for my friend with the money I had earned myself gave me a tremendous sense of empowerment.



By the time I was in fourth grade, I was making enough money to buy my own clothes and toys, and whatever candy and treats I wanted from the ice cream man.

However, that was at home.



When I got to school, I felt gawky and awkward. To the kids at school, I was just a skinny, dumb kid who couldn't play baseball.

More than anything, I wanted to feel just as successful and capable at school as I did at home. And I wanted friends ... but no one would play with me.



One afternoon, near the end of my fourth-grade year, my teacher, Mrs. Sween, asked me if I could stay after school for a few minutes.

When I sat down in front of her desk, she started right in.

“I’ve noticed that you don’t hang around with any of the kids during recess, Kathy.”



“They don’t want to play with me, Mrs. Sween,” I answered.

“Do you think that is their fault?” she asked. “If you do, I have news for you. It’s not. It’s your fault. If you think it is someone else’s responsibility to make friends with you first, you are mistaken. They aren’t going to come to you—you have to go to them.”



I dropped my eyes from her face and felt tears start to sting the corners of my eyelids.

“Look at me, Kathy.”

I looked back at Mrs. Sween.

“I know you are a wonderful girl. But how are they going to know you if you don’t give them the opportunity? You have to be the one to make the effort, to be friendly, and to talk to other people. Don’t get caught up in your shyness. Take a risk! Be a friend, and you’ll make a friend.”



I don't remember exactly how I made it out of the classroom that day. But I do remember lying on my bed that night, thinking about Mrs. Sween and the things she had said to me.

She had talked to me like my parents always had: like an equal, not just like a kid.

Something sank in that night, and it changed my life.

I made a decision.



I decided to be happy and to have a happy life. No one else could do it for me; I had to do it for myself.

Over the summer, I started watching baseball. I mean really watching. I watched baseball on television; I watched baseball on the street where I lived. I studied how the best players played—how they held the bat and what they did to improve their game.



I copied everything the best players did.

And I got good at baseball.

When school started the following year, it was amazing. I was not picked last—I was picked first!

I had worked to become a good player, and the teams wanted me.



Not only that, but it was easier to make friends because I felt more confident about myself. Sure, I was still skinny tomboy Kathy, but now I had friends to laugh with and share my stories with.

I learned to have faith in myself and to know that God doesn't make mistakes.

I became more of who I knew myself to be because I had made a conscious decision to step out and put my best foot forward.



Later in life, when I began my modelling career, I realised that not all adults were like my parents and Mrs. Sween. It made me sad to see how some older people took advantage of young girls.

My parents and Mrs. Sween wanted the best for me, but there were people in the modelling world who only wanted the best for themselves—it didn't matter who got hurt in the process.



But I never let myself be put in a compromising position. I never had to take my top off to become a popular model.

I could say no and mean it.

No one was ever going to tell me how to run my life. If it wasn't something I knew was right for me to do, then I didn't do it.

I have been lucky to have my faith and the love of my family supporting me throughout my life.



Other girls in the modelling profession didn't have what I had: people like my parents and Mrs. Sween to encourage them.

They made self-destructive choices and became vulnerable to bad people.

I have walked off modelling jobs when I didn't like what was going on. My self-esteem gave me the freedom to do that.



I always knew that if a modelling job didn't work out, there were plenty of other interesting opportunities out there for me.

I could do anything if I set my mind to it and made a conscious decision to excel.

All I ever had to do was step out ... and put my best foot forward.

Kathy Ireland





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