

“The Truth” by Tianna Bartoletta

Email sent to Tim Warsinskey, Managing Editor | Plain Dealer, Cleveland, Ohio

July 21, 2012

The Games are just around the corner. In fact, opening ceremonies are at the end of this coming week. As expected, Olympic themed festivities are in full swing. Like the one that took place in Elyria last Wednesday. I learned of the event through a google alert that was sent to my email. The headline caught my attention and as I read the ensuing articles I grew more and more uneasy about what was taking place. So I called the Mayor who completely surprised me with her willingness to listen to me and respect my wishes.

I wish I could say the same for my parents who have put me in the most awkward situation with their blatant misrepresentations of reality. Readers, I'm fully aware that I run the risk of making myself look bad by being completely honest with you but more important than protecting my own image at this point is the fact that I've been living by these three principles that I talk about all the time: integrity, honor, and self-respect.

In fact, I stand and live by those principles with such conviction that I am launching a personal development program for girls and young women based on them. I changed my life living this way and at 26 years old I can truly say I've only just begun living. I believe it's never too early to change your life and that's exactly what Club 360 is about.

With that said, I cannot allow these lies to continue or for people struggling in a recession to donate money thinking they are helping a family come together for a once in a lifetime experience when that is absolutely not true. The very fact that I have to say this publicly in order to run “free” at these games is indicative of how heavily this entire situation weighs on me. I have to address this so that I can let it go.

I’ve had to overcome so much to get to this place in my life. I was molested in high school and as a result I sort of took a passive approach to life, letting things just happen to me. For example, my mother invited my molester to dinner one evening-- after she found out what the boy had done to me. My father just allowed these things to happen. In this atmosphere it was easier to let people talk down to me or take advantage of me than to stand up for myself. I never thought I was living life as a victim but I was.

Most of you know I turned professional after my sophomore year in college. I made north of \$250,000 that year being only 20 years old my finances were handled by my track and field manager and a family member. My agent would send the checks to them and they would deposit the checks and wire \$1000 to my personal checking account. That was the amount of money I was allowed to blow, my bills and expenses came from the remaining money in the bank. I also got a \$35,000 signing bonus which my mother and I agreed we would use to pay back a small student loan that I needed to cover what my two full scholarships didn’t when I moved off campus. When I left school a year early to train in Los Angeles I started to receive invoices for two student loans that totaled over \$40,000.

Three miserable years later, I was forced to file for bankruptcy, lost my cars, had my Los Angeles/Westwood Condo foreclosed on, and was stuck with an IRS tax bill of almost \$75,000 that I am still paying down. I have nothing to show for the money, and any and all of my requests to have those statements released to me so that my accountant, husband, and I can start to dig myself out of this hole have been ignored or denied outright.

So recently I was finally able to stand up for myself to my parents and say that I've had enough. That I no longer wanted to be taken advantage of and used. I currently have absolutely no relationship with my parents although they are in the media perpetuating the most boldface lie about how their unconditional support elevated me to this point. I asked them politely at first and became increasingly vehement every time my requests for them to not attend major meets like the Indoor World Championships, the Olympic Trials, or the Olympic Games were ignored. They don't have my cell phone number or my email addresses and this was a separation I needed to make for myself. A separation that they fully abide by in private and completely disregard in the media.

The last decade of my life has been littered with experiences and circumstances that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy. As I was winning races and turning my career around I was taking my life back. I had the strength, confidence, and belief of my husband and every day I made giant leaps forward.

In reality, my husband was the one who supported me unselfishly and unconditionally. Before we were even married he moved me out of my sister's apartment so that I could have a peaceful home to retreat to after the intensity of long workouts. He bought me a reliable car to get me to and from practice and made sure I never had to pay for gas. Because I was 25 pounds overweight he cooked every meal for me and packaged the leftovers in tupperware so that I could have it for lunch after my workout. He paid my coach his monthly fees when I couldn't afford to. Most importantly he's the one who made sure I had absolutely nothing to stress about. We travel to every meet together and he takes the dreaded middle seat on airplanes so that we can create a little cockpit like area to watch movies (our favorite is "It's Complicated"). Before we even get on our flight he's located every Starbucks within walking distance of the hotel where we'll be staying and any restaurant that serves lamb chops which is my favorite pre-meet meal and I'm addicted to Starbucks. We watch "Cinderella Man" and shadow box with each other as we get fired up for the track meet. And we laugh constantly and nonstop all the way up to the time I have to kiss him goodbye and enter the call room. His love and support has made all the difference. To me, he's the X-factor and it's so obvious considering how drastically my life has changed since he's been in it!

What kind of wife would I be to let my husband's role in my life be totally diminished?
What kind of lesson am I teaching to girls and young women if I continue remain silent?
Or allow one lie after another to be perpetrated on me? I've been barraged constantly this week with article after article and video clip after clip each lie more intricate than the last, and to be completely honest I don't want to deal with this anymore. This has to

stop. And just like I've been sharing with you through these blogs since the start of the trials it's important that I stop cutting corners, that I don't push things under the rug, that I stop playing victim, and say, "enough is enough".

This year hasn't been just about a great track season or making the Olympic Team. I am a new person. I want to go into these Games with an unburdened heart, without the pressure of maintaining appearances. I'm not a superstar athlete. I am a young woman desperately fighting to be free from negativity, lies, and facades. Even in my own life, I previously put too much value in my overly made up face, or my hair extensions. I want to be real and honest. I don't need to hide behind those things anymore, I don't have to remain silent or be embarrassed about the things that I've gone through because I am still standing. And now I am on the US Olympic Team.

This is who is going to represent Tampa, Florida, Elyria, Ohio, the Midwest, and USA in the Olympic Games, a real person who actually didn't have an easy time in high school, who wasn't left untouched by the recession, or immune from dysfunction in her family. When I get in those blocks on August 3rd with the world watching I'll be Tianna who is running free of all expectations and any pressure.

And when the gun goes off I'll be running to the kind of life we all deserve: true love, respect, happiness, and the ability to look back with the people who truly love and support me and say "look what we've overcome, together." That's worth more than it's weight in gold.