
From: tianna@club-360.com
Sent: Thursday, May 11, 2017 6:34 PM
To: charles.william.ryan@gmail.com
Subject: Gmail is banned here.
Attachments: Note2Self.docx

I keep forgetting about the great "firewall" of China. They don't do google here. So I had to send from this account.

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Note to Self

Tee,

You don't know me. At least not yet. If I passed you on the street something about me would seem familiar and give you pause but you'll keep walking because you won't quite be able to put your finger on what it is.

Today is your first day of seventh grade at Northwood Junior High. You're a little nervous because for seven years at Windsor Elementary you were comfortable. Now, that 's all going to change, and quickly.

I know you love being passed notes so I wrote you this one because you'll tear it open and devour its contents in a matter of seconds. You love to read, I do too. It's really important that you finish this note before your lunch period.

Lunch is when everything changes.

At lunch, your core group of friends from Windsor are going to turn their backs on you. They are going to figure out before you do that being "black" means something—and for them it isn't necessarily positive. This will be the most painful thing you experience to date. You won't know where to sit at lunch now, you'll sit alone, and after several days some black girls you don't know will invite you to join them at their table. You'll accept. They'll tease you for the way you speak but you know that for most of them their intentions are pure. You develop a double consciousness ala W.E.B DuBois (I know you know what I'm talking about even at your age you are very well read).

Teachers will pick on you for your change in social group. They'll call you to the office and accuse you of some outlandish things. You'll keep your head...you're in the GIFTED curriculum program and they don't have a clue what they are talking about. Keep up your good work. Your brain- later in life- is going to be a hot item.

You will figure out quickly that you have a lot of the same issues that biracial children have with self-identifying and belonging. You'll find your identity and sense of belonging on team sports.

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Sports catapults you into the light. Your natural athleticism is a draw. Students who wanted nothing to do with you before will gravitate towards you. You may be flat chested and slight but boys still gravitate towards you too, they don't touch you or even flirt but they are malicious in their teasing. I know this bothers you. Criticism hurts you...especially about things that you cant control. You try to make yourself "prettier" thinking the teasing will stop. You change your personality to have more of an edge, you embrace your black friends more closely, you change your vernacular, play more aggressively. And you take it all off like a costume when you get home. You'll be exhausted from the energy that goes toward maintaining the facade.

At school you have a crush on Brandon a black kid from a side of town you've never even been to that wears an oversized first down jacket and Lugz boots. At home you have a crush on David a white boy who's the son of an ophthalmologist who always looked like he was headed straight to a yacht after school. Neither paid you any mind. Except for one incident when Brandon decided to announce in computer lab in front of the entire class that your back was just as flat as your front. I assure you...people will have a lot to say about your back in the future and it won't be *that*.

You'll make it out of middle school relatively unscathed. But high school, little one, is a different story. You'll be molested there. More than once by a kid who scares you to death. In a dark secluded hallway. You'll get beat up for the first time by a man who's much bigger than you, and you'll learn the importance of hitting back. You'll promise to never let something like that happen again. And you will break that promise. And you will hate yourself for it.

During this time your relationship with your mom goes down the toilet. You needed her to do something for you and she didn't/wouldn't—so taking a lesson you learned from that day in lunch when your Windsor friends showed you who they really are and you cut them off, you cut her off- as much as practically possible. This souring of your relationship with your mom is a simmering pot of pain for you. You won't realize until many years later, after you've moved far away from home, how much this pain had colored your decisions.

High school may have prematurely introduced you to your sexual self in the most negative of ways but it also provided you the sports platform you needed to get a scholarship. So you could leave home. You'll go to the University of Tennessee on a full scholarship for both academics

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and athletics. You'll love it there. You'll never want to leave. But you will leave, and it won't be under the best of terms.

But before that happens...

Your freshman summer you'll walk into the apartment of one of your teammates and be stopped dead in your tracks by a new guy sitting on her sofa. His name is Charles. You will never forget that moment and you will never forget him.

Your sophomore summer you'll win the IAAF World Championships. You were ready to jump, but you weren't ready for what would happen next. You'll go pro, but things quickly start to go badly for you. You'll move to LA and that will be the loneliest time of your life. You'll move back to Florida, and go back to school. You'll be ready to leave the sport.

But then...

You meet two men at almost the same time. One man's name is John, the other man's name is Rana. John will woo you, he'll make you feel like a queen who's lost her crown. He'll make you believe he can help you find it and restore you to your former glory. Rana is an elite coach who decided to take me on and through his workouts and patience actually recreated me into hardcore elite athlete.

Back to John though...Tee. I've gotta tell you. You have a huge heart, you want so badly to believe the good in everything. Your capacity for empathy is enormous. You'll have no way of knowing this when it happens but the price will be way too high to maintain this relationship. You will lose yourself, and your personality, but win medals and break records. You will hurt in ways you didn't think were possible but give amazing interviews about your "perfect life". You will get into physical fights and then climb into the same bed and go to sleep. You will try to kill yourself by hanging on gym equipment, prescription drug overdoses, excess alcohol mixed with sleeping pills and Xanax, leaving the car running in the closed garage, drowning in the deep side of the pool, you'll even contemplate while on the platform taking that tiny step in front of a train in Europe, all because you will come to believe that the only rest you'd get from your misery would

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be in death. You will start to believe that the world never needed you, that no one actually ever loved you, and no one would miss you if you were gone.

But you will realize through your meditation and yoga practice that even if no one else cares, YOU care. And that's a start. You still care, you still feel like you have more to give to the sport and to the world, you still feel capable of giving and receiving love. YOU care. Tee, little one, that's all you'll need to keep moving forward.

Keep caring kid.

Because on May 1st, 2017 you'll step into the light. You'll file for divorce, you'll leave your home forever. You'll be afraid, you'll feel like you're on the run, but you won't be alone. Remember Charles? Charles and Emily (whom you'll meet when you join the Bobsled team in 2012) will be with you every step of the way. You will become in that moment a butterfly. A beautiful monarch spreading its wings to heat itself in the sun after a tumultuous time in a dark cocoon.

That's the day you meet me.

I hope I've made you proud kid. You've survived so much, you proved yourself to be so strong, so resilient, so tenacious.

With everything I am, with my entire heart, and my entire being. I love you. I know who you are, and I promise to honor that for as long as I shall live.

Yours Truly,

Tianna Bartoletta