

Stacey Marshall and I meet at her family home during the summer. She has just completed her freshman year at University of Maryland, College Park where she had been recruited to play women's basketball. She is spending the summer practicing basketball, working as a camp counselor (earning \$400 per week), and waitressing part-time at a local diner (where "the money is good"). Stacey's nearly six-foot (5 feet 11 inches) body is thin, but athletic looking, much like it was when she was ten. Her straightened hair is fashionably cut, her skin is clear, and she is wearing no makeup. Dressed in shorts, a casual T-shirt, and tennis shoes, she looks younger than her nineteen years. ("I have never been too big on clothes," she says, waving off her attire. "My sister has all the fashion stuff.") Stacey is still sociable, confirming her mother's description of Stacey as a "people-person," an upbeat "everything's fine" person who, like her father, is quick to laugh.

Stacey's love of gymnastics continued beyond elementary school. At age eleven, she earned a place on a traveling team; at twelve, she competed in a national gymnastics event in San Diego. But then she "grew three inches in one summer." Still twelve, she was taller than the sixteen-year-old gymnasts. This quick growth, combined with her relatively late start in gymnastics, proved to be critical. After the national competition, the coach did not move Stacey up to the next level, and he discouraged Ms. Marshall from continuing to support her daughter's involvement at a competitive level. Recalling that period, Stacey's mother describes her daughter as struggling to adjust to a "major life disappointment." Discovering that she was no longer "good at" a sport she "really, really like[d]" and had been "really, really good at" was "a blow" that left Stacey deeply discouraged. At this point, Fern, Stacey's older sister, was playing basketball on her middle school's team. The whole family attended Fern's games. People who noticed Stacey's height began asking her, "Do you play?" Her father (still a passionate basketball fan) encouraged her to give the game a try, and the school coach tried to recruit her to play when she was in seventh

grade. Stacey flat-out refused. Gradually, however, she did begin playing. She found she had talent, particularly in rebounding. Her gymnastics training made her adept at weaving around players to make a shot. “Even to this day,” Stacey tells me, “people say that you can see my gymnastics background [in my game].” In eighth grade, she joined the school basketball team. She and Fern played together on their high school team, which won a state championship. Stacey’s bedroom at home is adorned with newspaper stories of her high school sports accomplishments as well as countless ribbons and trophies.

On the academic front, Stacey’s mother continued to carefully oversee her education during high school. Stacey took some honors-level courses but resisted Advanced Placement classes. Her grades were A’s and B’s. She took an SAT preparation course, sat for the exam once, and earned a (combined) score of 1060 [1590]. As a high school senior, Stacey had desperately wanted to go to Columbia University in New York City. The basketball coach at this Ivy League school was actively recruiting her. The coach was “concerned” about Stacey’s (relatively low) SAT score but was optimistic that she would be admitted. She was. Given the Marshalls’ six-figure annual income, however, Stacey did not qualify for much financial aid. When her parents learned that the family’s contribution would be at least \$15,000 per year, they ruled Columbia out. Since this school was Stacey’s heart’s desire, she found their decision very disappointing. She says she is still “bitter” about it. Ms. Marshall explains the decision as an effort to help her daughter avoid accumulating debt at a young age. Stacey plans to be a doctor, so her education will necessarily include medical school, a huge expense. Why add undergraduate costs to that burden, her parents reasoned, when a well-regarded public university was offering Stacey a full scholarship? The Marshalls were “happy” with Stacey’s decision, which she made early in the fall of her senior year, to attend the University of Maryland. Its academic program is strong, and the women’s basketball team has a

solid reputation. As Ms. Marshall says, “It is a challenging school; she is being challenged.” Stacey’s four-year scholarship covers tuition, room and board, and books.

Reflecting on her first year at college, Stacey says she liked her roommates and enjoyed playing on the basketball team, despite the long hours and arduous workouts. She found her classes challenging. Indeed, she got a C in biology both in the fall and in the spring; only by earning a good grade in a photography course that she took early in the summer was she able to bring up her GPA to 2.8. She reports that an African American literature class she took was so enjoyable it has prompted her to consider adding a minor in African American studies.¹ Stacey’s problems with biology have not dissuaded her from her longstanding plans to become a pediatric surgeon; so far, it remains hard for her to consider any other options. Her mother (who privately confides she is very worried about the two C’s in biology: “I feel that she has a tough road ahead of her”) indicates that she could see Stacey working in some area related to athletics, possibly as a high school teacher and coach.

Fern and Stacey get along “better” now than when they were younger. Fern refers to her sister as her “best friend.” The two sisters worked closely together as basketball teammates when they were in high school, although they took different paths socially. Stacey’s friends tended to be white and Fern’s to be African American. Fern also has continued playing basketball, first as a student at a public university and then at a small liberal arts college she transferred to in sophomore year. She hopes to become a Certified Public Accountant. With her 3.64 grade point average and a major in accounting, Fern seems likely to achieve this goal.

Stacey has no immediate plans for marriage or kids. She had a boyfriend in high school, but they broke up and she has not replaced him. She wants to get her career established first. She hopes I will be able to come to one of her college team’s games to see her play basketball.

