

SPECIAL ELLEN G. WHITE ISSUE

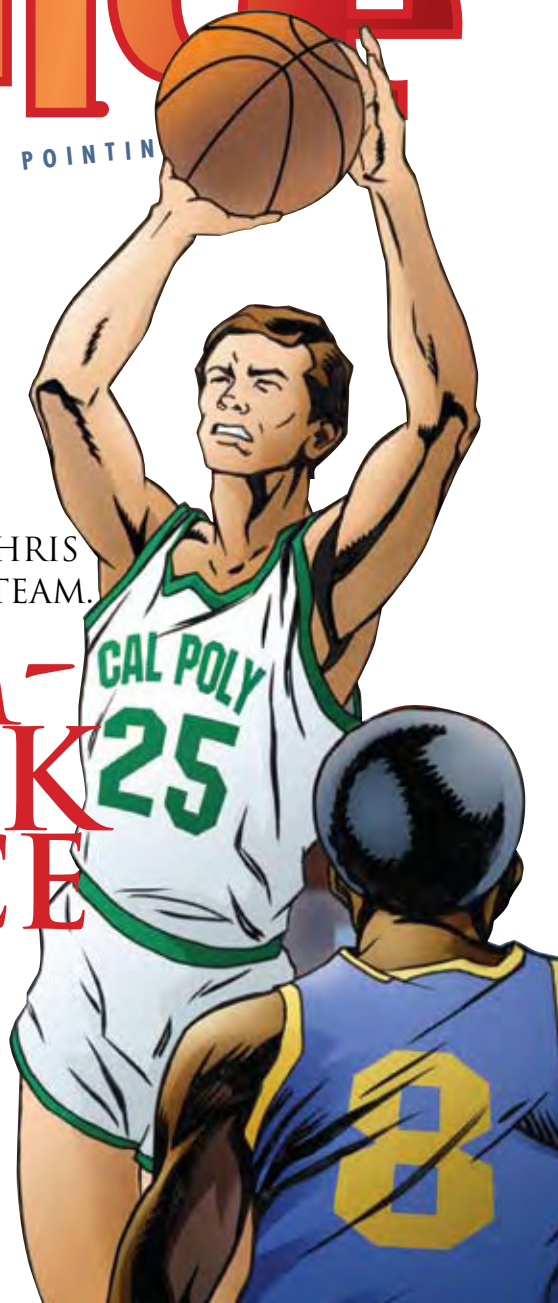


Guide

TRUE STORIES POINTING

GOD RECRUITED CHRIS
FOR HIS WINNING TEAM.

SLAM- DUNK GRACE



SLAM- DUNK GRACE

A GOOD
FRIEND
AND AN
IRRESISTIBLE
GOD CAPTURED
CHRIS'S
HEART.

BY MAYLAN SCHURCH

ILLUSTRATED BY SHANE L. JOHNSON

No, Chris," Mom called from the kitchen. "Not 'Indian War Dance!'"

Blannngggggg! Ten-year-old Christopher Blake let both palms land on the piano keys. "'Indian War Dance' is the one I'm on!"

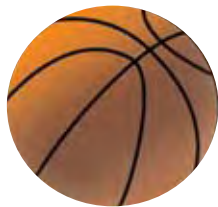
"No, it isn't," his mother said. "'Spring Song' is the one you're supposed to play for the recital."

Well, I tried, Chris told himself. He reached up to his *John Thompson Grade One* piano book, turned some pages, and flattened them so the book would stay open.

GUIDE SPECIAL ISSUE



CHRIS LEARNED TO PENETRATE DEFENSES AND SCORE POINTS.



Tinkle-tee-tink! Tinkle-tee-tink!

An alarmed cry came from the kitchen. "It's in three sharps! You're playing it with no sharps!"

"It sounds better that way."

"No, it doesn't."

Chris adjusted his fingers and started tinkling again. *I wish I could play something else—like basketball . . . football . . . baseball. It wouldn't be so bad if Mom wasn't a piano teacher.*

Five boring minutes passed, during which Chris tinkled and his mom called out weary corrections. Then suddenly he became aware that even though he was still playing as badly as before, he wasn't hearing from Mom. He glanced around.

There she stood, right behind him. In her hands she held his basketball.

He looked from her face to the ball. "What?" he finally said.

She gently handed him the ball. "Go on outside and shoot

before I shoot myself."

Clutching the ball, he stared at her.

"You're off the hook," she said.

"You mean I don't have to take lessons anymore?"

She smiled and shook her head. "I guess you've got more of your dad's DNA than mine. Go on—scoot."

Leaping to his feet, Chris raced to the hoop in the backyard, saying over and over, "Thank you, Dad, for your DNA!"

No doubt about it, Chris's dad had hoopster DNA. Jim Blake was head basketball coach at Chaffey High School in Ontario, California, 40 miles east of Los Angeles. Nearly 4,000 students attended Chaffey, where Coach Blake was a popular history teacher and coach. One year his Tigers won the California Interscholastic Federation championship for southern California.

With his dad so involved in

basketball, Chris pretty much grew up in the gym. He swept the floor, watched the players, and later refereed and coached. And he practiced a hundred times more than he ever had on the piano. He learned to dribble, pass behind his back, pick apart and penetrate defenses, and score points from anywhere on the court. He set a school record for steals.

But the most fun of all was finally getting to play on his dad's team. The team members were very close and enjoyed traveling together. While guard Jim Larrance played the guitar, they rode the bus and sang the miles away, belting out popular songs. They called themselves Rocky Raccoon's Traveling Band and Chorus. After each home game they sang, "To Chaffey's glowing colors we owe allegiance true . . ."



One December day during his senior year, something unusual happened that would change Chris's life forever. He was with a crowd of students at a school event.

"Hey! Look! It's snowing!" somebody shouted.

Sure enough, it was the first day in about a hundred years of Ontario, California, history that snowflakes poured from the sky and piled on the surprised grass.

Chris scrambled out to the parking lot. He glanced around for a target, saw a pretty girl with a dazzling smile, reached down, and scooped up some snow.

Whack! The snowball caught her on the shoulder of her coat. After a startled squeak she reached down and came up with her own snowball, hard-packed. Desperately Chris tried to dodge the projectile.

Whumpffff!

The warfare escalated, and soon the two were screaming with laughter, hurling fat, squishy missiles at each other, ducking behind cars. Finally they paused to rest.

"I'm Chris," the teen gasped.

"I know. Your dad's the coach."

"What's your name?"

"Yolanda Cervantes," she replied.

Nice name, Chris thought. He didn't realize that 17 years

earlier the newborn Yolanda Yvonne Cervantes had won Loma Linda Hospital's prize for the prettiest baby name.

Nice smile, too, Chris thought.

As Yolanda got to know Chris better, she found behind his blue eyes and carefree smile a deeper Chris than she'd thought.

"Chris reads a lot," she told her parents when they asked about him. "He knows quite a bit about what's going on in the world. And he cares enough to have really strong opinions about a lot of things."

But in her heart, Yolanda longed for Chris to know the Jesus she loved.

I'm a Seventh-day Adventist, she told herself. *And though Chris sometimes asks me about my faith, I get the impression he's doing it only to learn about another religion.*

Yolanda was a senior too, so the two friends graduated together. Chris received a full-ride basketball scholarship to Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, where for four years he would play NCAA ball for the Mustangs and major in English. He wanted to be a high school

English teacher. Yolanda also wanted to become a teacher, so she enrolled in the education program at La Sierra College.

As summer ended and the two friends went off to their separate colleges, Yolanda was thinking very seriously.

Dear Jesus, she prayed, *please, somehow, help Chris see the depth and truth of the Adventist faith.*



As often as she could Yolanda attended Chris's college games. Basketball on the NCAA level was a lot tougher than in high school. Yolanda screamed along with the rest of the fans as the six-foot-two-inch Chris made shots and free throws. He was an extremely good defender, and his sophomore year he played in the NCAA tournament.

He also got hurt—plenty. Partially torn Achilles tendons. Pulled muscles. Sprained thumb. Forehead stitches. Damaged back disk. Separated shoulder.

When Chris fell hard, Yolanda often thought, *God, please take care of him. In*

CHRIS PLAYED IN THE NCAA TOURNAMENT.

every way. Help him to learn to love You.

But Chris wasn't in any hurry.

"You're always so critical about religion," one of his friends told him once. "What is it that you don't like about Christianity?"

"Christians," Chris replied.

"Christians?"

"They're so arrogant," he said. "They carry God around in their pocket, and they pull Him out when they want to attack someone. A lot of the worst figures in history have been religious people. And another thing that turns me off is their forever-burning hell. I wouldn't even burn a worm for a week. Why would God do that to people? And one more thing."

"What?"

"Heaven."

His friend blinked. "You don't like heaven? Why not?"

"Not interested. When I was a kid in Sunday school I heard

