

July 2007

Dear Shafonia,

There are a billion words to describe how much of an impact you have been in my life. Throughout my whole career in volleyball, you have been there every step of the way; even though, it seems at times I took a hundred steps back.

When I was 13 and had only played volleyball for a year, I was excited to be on a real club team. I was an innocent little girl with a universe full of passion for volleyball. I think saying volleyball was my life was an understatement. I was in a pure bubble when I met you. I loved everything about the way you coached so different from others. I could see you truly believed in your players. You don't know how much I loved playing on your team. I loved practice even more because you were there. I would say you taught me everything I need to know about volleyball. I loved volleyball, and because of your practices and coaching, I decided right then and there my dream was to play in college (even at the age 13).

From there on when I played, I put my heart and soul into the game. I didn't want to disappoint you or myself when it came to volleyball. So when everything happened the next year at club, I was kind of crushed and balled in front of you because I felt like I disappointed you, my parents, and myself. That year I stuck it out, and you were right there beside me. When 9th grade started and I instantly felt a bad vibe from the A team coach, I still was in my bubble thinking nothing could go wrong. I would play four years at high school, four more years in club, and then I would go on to college volleyball. My bubble popped, and that was the 1st time in my life that I experienced a true taste of the world of volleyball. I collapsed and was torn. It broke my heart to love something so much and watch it fall apart. I was a kid who didn't understand a sport could be so deceiving. I hated that environment and anything that had to do with volleyball.

As hard as it was, I was so tempted to not play anymore, but in the back of my mind, I knew I loved volleyball still. I made a lot of people think I was okay with the whole situation, but I was truly torn. I wanted to stop and just give up, but for some reason (and I thank God ever day), I was strong enough to hold on to the last strand of my passion and kept on going. I played club that year for a new team, but I wasn't myself. I still had that feeling I wasn't good enough because one coach thought I wasn't. I lost all my confidence in 9th grade and the heart of the game. I missed that feeling of loving the sport and playing for you, and I was terrified that I was never going to get that sensation ever again. So I tried out my sophomore year at school and found out I made the JV team, but I wouldn't play.

Right then and there, I knew I was done with that negative environment for good. But on the other hand, it was the hardest thing to do in my whole entire life because I thought volleyball was over for me. But a voice in my head told me, "You can still play club volleyball." It killed me when we lost touch sophomore year. I would see you at tournaments, but that's all. I didn't want you to see the new me. I was ashamed of myself because of what one person thought about me. I thought I wasn't good at volleyball anymore, and I didn't want you to witness my breakdown. I knew if you saw me like that, you would see right through me and discover that I didn't have the heart of the game any more. But you did see the torn person I was, and that is why you are such an awesome coach because you still believed in me even when I was at my lowest point. You were willing to try and dig deep and try to get the old Jennifer back. I still didn't want to disappoint myself or you. I took one day at a time, and everyday I would face the school volleyball girls, their eyes I could read, knowing they thought it was stupid I was just playing club, and some times I thought I was stupid for doing so. It was so hard for me to stay in volleyball, but that voice kept me going. The rest of my high school career I could tell I was

drifting farther away from my dream, but you believed in me 100 %. I pushed through because a part of me still loved the game.

Even on the 18's team, I was skeptical about my dream. The 1st three college tryouts took me back to that dreadful feeling I was trying to forget, and I was questioning again maybe I was not cut out for college volleyball. I started talking myself out of my dream that I had for so long. A part of me wanted to just go to college, but the bigger part wanted me to believe in my dream. I didn't really believe, but I would have felt ashamed to tell you. You had worked so hard by trying to get the old Jennifer back, and then I would just quit? It would have broken your heart, and I know deep down it would have broken mine too. All because of you, I kept pushing. Then, some luck came, and Ranger College drifted our way. I felt right at home when you took me up there. Now all because of your persistence, I finally get to live my dream of playing college volleyball. You were the voice in my head all the time telling me I can do this and believe in yourself. Shafonia, you were so positive and pushed all the bad things away by just being you. You are the greatest coach and friend I have ever had, and I am honored to have played on your club team. And all the past, present, and future girls that get to meet, talk, and play for you should thank their lucky stars for coming across you. I look forward to watching you grow with Kaboom and hope that I can stay a part of giving back to you by helping with your camps and coaching in the coming years. I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for believing in me even when I didn't. I love you and am so excited to play at Ranger, all because of you.

The necklace and jewelry box will stay with me forever. Thanks.

Love,

Jennifer