

A woman with a prosthetic running blade is captured in motion, running on a paved surface. She is wearing a black t-shirt and shorts. The background features the iconic Colosseum in Rome under a clear sky. The overall scene conveys a sense of athletic achievement and resilience.

RUN to WIN

THE TRIALS & TRIUMPHS OF MISSY KOCH BILLINGSLEY

T O D D B I L L I N G S L E Y

Introduction

Cancer seemingly killed Missy's two greatest passions: running and raising a family of her own. Any chance of realizing those dreams and passions naturally seemed an impossibility.

Run to Win is both a biography and an autobiography. At the center of both is the story of Missy's trials and triumphs, told primarily through the lenses of two men: Bill Frakes, a world-renowned photographer for *Sports Illustrated* magazine and the *Miami Herald*, and myself, her husband. The biographical section takes us from Missy's humble beginnings in South Florida through her years of athletic glory at Coral Gables High, and through her grueling battle with cancer. The autobiography portion, however, is my own. It tells how Missy and I met and, as expected, shares the love story of how we became husband and wife. What it also shares, which wasn't expected, at least on such a grand scale, is how her life significantly impacted mine.

Accompanying the book is a DVD. Throughout the book are boxes instructing the reader when to view a particular video. The video segments include video footage, photographs, and interview footage with Missy sharing her perspective of that specific portion of the story

More than an inspirational account reporting the events of her life, *Run to Win* shares the way Missy handled her challenges and shows how her example continues to leave a profound and lasting impact on anyone coming into contact with her, myself included. Within these pages you will read about God, but this is not a typical Christian book. Its intended purpose is not to proselytize or convert. It is to openly and honestly share the

events, decisions, and chosen paths of Missy's life, how those decisions affected her life, and how they in turn impacted the lives of others. You may resonate with some beliefs; others you may totally reject. Ideas, thoughts, and actions that rub against the grain of your own may be presented.

Every person faces challenges and a never-ending stream of trials. Some are minor annoyances. Others can be such critical blows that they leave us completely confused and disoriented. Stunned, it seems impossible to go on. What do you do next? Where do you turn?

God provided a blueprint in both the Bible and the life of Christ to show how to handle these situations, but we humans tend to be a bit thick-headed. Therefore, every now and then, he sends along someone to provide an example.

Allow me to introduce you to my wife, Missy. Not because I am extremely proud of her, although I am. Not because she's ultra-cool, which I think she is. I'd like to introduce you to Missy because maybe you're the type of person who needs a real-life example of how to handle adversity.

I was.

Every attempt has been made to make this book as accurate as possible. While written records are easy to sift through, they provided only a fraction of the material for this book, which necessitated hours of interviews with family and friends. In many cases the accounts of family and friends were identical. The trauma during Missy's bout with cancer,

however, created such chaos and confusion for all involved that multiple versions of the story were recounted and caused a Rashomon Effect. What ended up in these pages most likely happened when the personalities of those involved were taken into account. Some accounts come simply from my own memory. If there are errors or misrepresentations in the facts, I accept full responsibility.

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize.

Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever.

Therefore I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air.

No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.

1 Corinthians 9:24–27 (NIV)

Prologue

Missy hit the 660-yard mark and made her move. In what is known today as the 800-meter race — back then in the 1970s it was called the 880 (eight-eighty) — she turned on the afterburners to pull into the front of the pack for the final 220 yards. Missy was three-quarters of the way through this race, pitting several athletes from various Miami-Dade junior high schools.

The 880 is a track and field event no one really knows much about except for two weeks every four years when the summer Olympics roll around. Suddenly, everyone becomes an expert on how to run this grueling race. Because there is no point of reference, the American brain has difficulty computing a distance of 800 meters. With most high-school tracks encircling the school's football field, the 880 consists of two laps around the football field. It is a half-mile sprint, a delicate balancing act of endurance and speed. This is a race that requires the athletes to perform as close as possible to their potential because oxygen debt and fatigue induces exhaustion rapidly. It requires very specific training. The goal is to cover as much distance at the greatest speed in the minimum time possible. Put more simply: get to the finish line as quickly as possible before fatigue becomes intolerable.

Even though she was young and inexperienced, Missy had been trained well by her coach, Paul Kilcoyne. She knew what her body could handle. Competing as a new athlete at the junior high school level, she knew adrenaline would be coursing through her veins. As she approached the start line, she willed herself to calm her nerves. She knew it was

important to maintain focus and eliminate distractions throughout the entire race. She knew to run at her pace, find her comfort zone, and stay relaxed. She knew the critically vital key was to maintain that pace, not to accelerate or decelerate. Her split differential—the amount of time between her first and second lap—should not be more than five seconds. After all, most of these races were won by the one who, rather than running the fastest, slowed down the least. It was imperative to stay comfortable and relaxed, keep track of the competition, and not fall too far behind, but above all, maintain *her* pace, run *her* race.

The first 220 yards defines the race. Missy knew her competition. She had encountered most of the other athletes in earlier track meets. Nevertheless she had prepared by studying each runner's tendencies thoroughly, and she had developed her strategy accordingly with the aid of her coach. As the race progressed, she would make any necessary adjustments. At the 220 mark the race had just gotten underway and things had shaped up nicely. At that point she was in the thick of the pack, right where she wanted to be, and she made sure to position herself where she wouldn't be boxed in.

At the 440 mark—the first time completely around the track—Missy assessed how the race had developed. She was tired but still had something left in the tank—a good sign. She needed to be able to kick it into another gear toward the end of the race. If nothing remained in the tank, she would have known she had started the race too fast and wouldn't be among the leaders at the end of the race. For the final lap it was important to keep the pressure on the gas pedal, but above all remain relaxed.

At the 660 mark, however, Missy became concerned. A couple of competitors in front of her were still running extremely well and showed no signs of slowing down. She hoped

they had started the race too fast and would begin exhibiting signs of fatigue, but the girls were still running strong. They were proving to be worthy competitors. Missy mentally assessed her strategy and options. The remaining distance of 220 yards created a difficult gray area: the distance was too far to run at a full sprint, but the opportunities to make her move decreased with every stride. Missy was unsure of what her next tactic should be but feared if she didn't make her move now, she wouldn't have enough distance to pull in front.

Missy turned on the afterburners. Her coach and Pop, both standing on the sidelines, winced and voiced concern over her decision. In all likelihood she had made her move too early, and both men feared she would run out of steam long before crossing the finish line.

As she made the final turn of the 880, she felt as if an elephant had jumped on her shoulders. Not only had the lactic acid begun to shut down more and more muscle fibers in her legs but she faced an opponent she hadn't accounted for, an opponent she couldn't see. As she rounded out of the turn, she ran directly into a stiff fifteen-mile-per-hour wind. It felt like running into a wall. The wonderful cool South Florida morning air—these races were always held when the sun was barely up—now felt like ice accumulating and closing off her windpipe. Her throat burned and it was becoming next to impossible to breathe.

Missy's body implored her to stop, but her mind vetoed the request. She could see the finish line. After running 800 yards, she knew her competitors were hitting the same wall of wind. She only had a little more to go. She knew if she didn't decelerate, her competitors had little chance of passing her. She rocked her pelvis forward, made sure her wrists remained cocked in order to feel springier, and focused on driving her knee forward to compensate.

With only twenty yards to go, Missy searched within to see if her body could muster any additional speed. Not only was there none to be found, her body wanted to shut itself down; the ferocious pain from her legs, arms, lungs, and stomach implored her to stop.

Ten yards — almost there! Just keep going!

Her brain was still in control of the war that raged within her body. At the very least she willed her body to maintain the current speed.

Five yards — only two more steps!

For a split second there was doubt in her mind as to whether she could even make those final two steps so severe was the pain.

The ribbon snapped.

She crossed the finish line — first — to the surprise of her coach and Pop. Amid unsuccessful gasps for air, her body showing signs of collapse, Missy still beamed from ear to ear with an infectious smile. Ignoring her inability to breathe, speak, or even take a drink of water, her proud laughing coach approached her with a spoonful of honey.

“Here, drizzle this down your throat. I was afraid you turned it on a little too early there.”

Even her coach did not realize how well he had coached her.

* * *

At this early age, Missy had no way of knowing this three-minute race would provide a perfect snapshot of her life.

Part One

Chapter I

Old Miami

On an otherwise average, beautiful, South Florida day in 1970, Missy lined her toes up on the chalk line, tucked into her optimal position for starting the race, and awaited the start signal. As a third grader, races for the most part were nothing new to her; she ran them every day with her brothers, sisters, and neighborhood friends. But she suddenly found herself in unfamiliar territory. She was about to run a race with huge implications. She was moments away from running head-to-head against the fastest boy in the third grade.

“On your mark!” boomed her PE teacher’s voice.

In her mind she knew she was going to lose, but Missy simply loved to run. The spirit of competition was fun in its own right, and her competitive nature implored her to do well and put in a good showing for the girls. The din of the squealing children began to fade in Missy’s ears and was replaced with the pounding sound of her own heartbeat.

“Get set!”

The time between each signal seemed to take an eternity. All of Missy’s senses were highly enlivened almost to the point of short-circuiting. Life was moving in slow motion,

enabling her to be keenly aware of her surroundings: the smells of freshly-mowed grass and other tropical vegetation in the schoolyard, the slightest movement by a child or bird.

Up to this point in her life, Missy was the average American girl, and Miami in 1970 was a happy place for a child. Except for the daily, brief rain shower in the afternoon, the weather was always sunny and warm enough for children to go outside to play every day of the year. And outside was where Missy resided. Once school was over, she would walk home and immediately knock out her homework, have a quick snack prepared by her mom, then head outside to ride bikes, swim, run races, or play some kind of ball game.

In 1970 life was much simpler, and the streets of Miami were perfectly safe. Miami in this period, when there were no security bars on windows and doors, is referred to endearingly by locals as “Old Miami.” In fact, windows and doors were mostly left open because no one owned air conditioners. Dishwashers—the stand-alone kind that required affixing the hose to the sink—were just coming into vogue.

With the Mariel Boat Lift and all the racial tensions still ten years away, Old Miami was perfectly safe for kids to walk about freely. Riding your Schwinn bike to school was not only considered safe but cool as well. The only dangerous thing in those days was maybe having a case of the cooties, or encountering the neighborhood witch. Back then every neighborhood had one: the mean, old, crotchety lady who would scream, yell, fuss, and scold children to stay off her section of sidewalk.

The city was safe enough for a couple of third-grade girls to be out and about. Living on Tarrega Street in Coral Gables, a small city of forty thousand residents, surrounded by the metropolis of Miami, Missy and her best friend and neighbor, Maria Poblocki, literally had the whole world within walking distance of their homes. The two would walk a couple

of blocks to the drug store for a candy bar or to Howard Johnson's to buy an ice cream cone for a quarter. Their mothers, while in the middle of cooking dinner, would send the girls for missing ingredients to Publix, the neighborhood grocery, located just a block away.

The two girls, often mistaken for twins, were inseparable. They took walks around the neighborhood on summer nights. The massive banyan trees with their sprawling roots would cast eerie shadows. While the girls were alike in so many ways, they were also very different. Maria was overly cautious while Missy was highly inquisitive, fearlessly taking risks to find out what she wanted to know. Not knowing what lurked beneath the shadowy banyan trees, Maria—stopping dead in her tracks—muttered a mantra Missy would hear many times for the next several years.

“You go first, Missy.”

Whatever endeavor the girls undertook, Maria spurred Missy on with some kind of encouragement—such as when Missy gave Maria a ride on her bicycle and a dog chased them.

“Faster, Missy,” Maria kept repeating matter-of-factly.

To Missy it seemed odd because there was no panic in Maria's voice. She was cool as a cucumber, but her fear had her pinching Missy on the backs of both arms like a jockey urging his horse to increase its speed.

Through her relationship with Maria, Missy learned the true meaning of friendship. There was never any jealousy between the two. Even in the early years, when playing a game they invented inspired by *Gilligan's Island*, they took turns playing the role of Ginger, a glamorous movie star.

But on this day in the third grade, as Missy awaited the coach's signal to start the race, she had no idea her life was about to change. She had no way of knowing it would be a day that the students of Sunset Elementary in South Miami would talk about for years to come. The day had started like any other. PE Coach Carifeo announced that all the third-grade classes would compete in a race. Coach Carifeo ran his classes based on his military training. Muscular, sporting a crew cut and a dark tan gained from spending most of his time outside, he had the appearance of the quintessential military man of the 1960s. He even taught the children in the class how to stand at attention as well as other military drill commands such as: "Left face!"; "Right face!"; "About face!"; and "At ease." He also taught them how to march.

On this day that would stick forever in the memories of so many, Coach Carifeo organized preliminary races by dividing the girls and boys into three groups. Six races in round one would determine the three fastest girls and the three fastest boys. Missy easily won her first race.

The next wave of races pitted the three winners against each other in their respective categories. In this heat Missy emerged as the fastest girl, and Craig Downs—as expected by all the kids in the third grade—stood alone as the fastest boy.

In the 1970s the determination of the fastest girl and boy signaled the end of the competition. Pitching a boy against a girl was unheard of. But Coach Carifeo made the shocking announcement to the students of the third grade that a championship round between the two fastest runners would be run—a colossal battle of the sexes.

The quiet, picturesque, grass field of Sunset Elementary, lined by massive banyan trees, suddenly became electrified, crackling with nervous energy. The crowd of children

in the middle of the field separated, the boys migrating to one side as the girls congregated on the other. The boys, naturally brimming with confidence, lofted volleys of typical third-grade trash talk toward the girls. Undeterred, the girls squealed words of encouragement to Missy.

“You can do it, Missy!”

“Go, Missy!”

As Missy and Craig took their places at the starting line, Coach Carifeo spotted an infraction and instructed Craig to put his shoes on. Despite Craig’s protests, Coach Carifeo stood firm—all competitors had to wear shoes. Craig and Missy lined their toes up on the chalk line, tucked into their optimal positions for starting the race, and anxiously awaited Coach Carifeo’s start signal.

“Get set!”

The din of the squealing children began to fade in Missy’s ears and was replaced with the pounding sound of her own heartbeat.

“Go!”

Missy began pumping her legs as hard and fast as she could. Having launched herself powerfully, she gained an early lead. It was common knowledge among the students that Craig was the fastest runner in the third grade. Figuring without a doubt he would win, Missy kept her eyes focused straight ahead and waited for him to blow past her.

He never did.

Crossing the finish line, Missy looked back at the students. The scene was not what she expected. The girls had erupted in a joyous celebration while the boys, initially with expressions of shock on their faces, now bowed their heads in quiet humiliation.

No matter the gender of those third-grade students, their world had just changed. This was 1970, a full three years before the most famous battle of the sexes, which took place when Billie Jean King beat Bobby Riggs in a tennis match that created a media frenzy. Missy's achievement was huge, and the third-grade students of Sunset Elementary would talk about it for years to come.

Missy had made her first mark as a gifted athlete, a mantle she would carry with her through her junior high and high school years.

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Sports were a way of life in the Koch (pronounced "cook") household. Jon Koch, Missy's father, whom she and her siblings affectionately called Pop, was a coach for one of Dade County's Khoury League baseball teams. Even to the Koch children's friends, he was simply known as Pop, the politest man on earth. The small, stocky fireplug of a man encouraged all five Koch children to try all sorts of sporting activities. To his mind, if it involved sports, you could never do too much. So the Koch children were constantly involved in sports.

It was no different on St. Patrick's Day, 1978. It was a typical glorious spring day in Miami: no humidity, the temperature hovering around a perfect seventy degrees. In the month of March Miami hosts several annual events such as the Youth Fair, the Doral Open golf tournament, and the Miami Grand Prix. The several practices and games in which the Koch family participated on this St. Patrick's Day made it a typical day for them, so there was no time for special events. For Pop and Missy's mother, Elaine, the

schedule of chauffeuring their children to sporting events and practices was a carefully choreographed dance of logistics. On this day Elaine was charged with taking Missy to her soccer game, delivering Jimmy to his baseball practice, and somehow finding time to pick up groceries along the way.

After successfully uniting nine-year-old Jimmy, their youngest son, with Pop at the baseball field at Flagami Park, Elaine steered the family's Mercury Marquis station wagon back to Missy's soccer game. She had been able to see the entire first half of Missy's game before dropping off Jimmy and making a quick trip to the grocery store for dinner. She hoped to see the end of Missy's game.

Things seemed to be getting easier on the parenting front. With their two oldest daughters, Lauren and Leslie, off to college, they now only had a girl and two boys at home. They would have Jimmy around for a few more years, as he was only nine, but two more of their children would be off to college in a couple of years. Jon, the oldest of their sons, was a freshman in high school, and Missy, a junior, would be off to college in two years.

Nearing the high school, Elaine peered into her rearview mirror and noticed an ambulance quickly approaching. She pulled out of the way to let it pass and resumed driving. Her face fell once she saw the ambulance turning into the high school's parking lot. At first she exhaled a sigh of concern, as any mother would, regardless of whose child was hurt, but then her intuition kicked in; Elaine instinctively knew the ambulance was there for Missy.

As Elaine approached, she quickly scanned the field. Although the ambulance had been driven onto the field, what she saw made her feel a little better. "It's funny the things

you remember. I thought, ‘Oh, they’ve resumed play. It’s obviously not a fatality,’” Elaine recalls, her eyes shimmering and a giggle erupting.

Once she passed through the gate to the field, though, all eyes turned toward her, and she knew something was wrong with Missy. As she made her way toward the huddled mass of people, Paul Kilcoyne, a fireman for the city of Coral Gables, approached Elaine. The small, solid man in his forties was a close friend of Pop’s, and was also regularly seen coaching community softball and track teams.

“Here you go, Elaine,” he said as he held up his hand clenched in a fist. Elaine held out her open hand. When Paul relaxed his grip, into Elaine’s hand fell Missy’s contacts. The mother of one of Missy’s teammates came by to deliver something else of Missy’s: her two front teeth. Missy’s teammates, friends, and other parents had searched the field and recovered Missy’s teeth and contacts, carefully wiping away all the grass from each item. Paul began informing Elaine what had happened.

The Coral Gables Cavaliers girls’ soccer team was taking on the Miami Springs Golden Hawks. The game, which had been scoreless, became exciting when the Cavaliers advanced the ball close to Miami Spring’s goal. Missy was playing forward, and a teammate launched a beautiful pass toward her. With the ball in the air and approaching the goalie’s box, Missy positioned herself for an attempt to head the ball into the goal. Her focus was completely on the ball, so she never saw the opposing goalie moving forward in an attempt to block the shot. Timing it just right, Missy launched into the air, but just as she made contact with the ball, her face smashed into the head of the goalie. Missy was out cold before she hit the ground.

After recounting the story for Elaine, Paul added that Missy was still unconscious. Elaine and Paul's attention turned to Missy. Already loaded into the ambulance, she was being prepped for the ride to Doctors Hospital. Aro Sastre, a young man in his twenties and a close friend of the Koch family, had rushed off to Flagami Park to inform Pop of the news.

At Doctors Hospital near the University of Miami Missy still had not regained consciousness. When Elaine asked the ambulance driver how Missy was doing, his reply was terse.

"She's stable—for now."

Not the comforting words a mother wants to hear.

Making matters even more worrisome, Missy was still on a gurney in the emergency room hallway when Pop arrived. A doctor led Pop to Missy. Her big brown eyes, usually full of life, were closed. Her long thick brown hair was still wet with perspiration from the game. The doctor held up both of Missy's arms by her wrists and let them go. Her arms fell limply back to the gurney. She was still unconscious.

That exhibition of lifelessness unnerved Pop and Elaine. Sure, they had experienced their children suffering various injuries and even other ER trips. With five children the odds of that happening were rather high. But seeing their youngest daughter lying motionless on a gurney was something they had never experienced as parents.

After a few hours concern subsided as Missy regained consciousness. Other than a slight concussion, the tests revealed she would be just fine. Assured all was well, Elaine called home to let little Jimmy know his big sister was going to be okay. With the important news out of the way, Jimmy had one more question.

“Did she score?”

“What?” Elaine responded with confusion.

“Did ... Missy ... score?” he repeated emphatically, stressing each word.

“Oh,” Elaine replied. “Yes, she did!”

Because it was late Friday afternoon, all dentist and oral surgeon offices were closed. Using the payphone in the waiting room, Pop called a friend from his softball team, Alan Stoler, who happened to be an oral surgeon. Dr. Stoler came that evening to temporarily wire Missy’s teeth together, which would hold them in place until Monday. The procedure gave him time to accurately determine what needed to be done to repair her teeth.

Later that evening Missy regained consciousness. Approaching her while she was recovering on the gurney, Dr. Stoler asked how she was feeling, playfully slapping her on the ankle as he did so. Little did he know, she had been nursing a chronically sprained ankle, suffered during a soccer game earlier in the season. Her wince surprised him. Even though it was obvious she was a tough cookie, he had her monitored in the hospital overnight.

She was released the next morning with no long-term neurological effects. The teeth, though, were a different story. She saw Dr. Stoler on Monday, but the teeth weren’t repaired in a single trip. Instead, a series of multiple trips were required before he finally managed to replace her two missing teeth along with root canals in all four upper front teeth.

The injury caused a few problems for Missy. Fortunately, Dr. Stoler had replaced her teeth pretty quickly, so appearance wasn’t one of them. Nor did she have to repeatedly tell

people how the injury had occurred because the news had spread like wildfire. When she returned to playing soccer, she had to fight through the fear of sustaining a similar injury. Initially, she found herself shying away from opportunities to head the ball and knew she would never be the same player if she didn't get over the fear. She also struggled while playing because the mouth guard she was required to wear restricted her breathing.

The toughest part of her recuperation was the necessity of cutting all her food into small pieces. Burger King was a frequent hangout for Missy and her friends because it was close and it offered a lot of perks. Because the chain's corporate headquarters were located in Miami, it tested various marketing strategies there, usually in the form of contests for free food or soft drinks, and the children in Missy's neighborhood reaped the benefits. Missy and her friends won those contests frequently enough to enjoy a steady supply of after-school snacks. Her teeth, however, continued to cause problems, so Missy would ask the employees to cut her food into small pieces.

Her original teeth, which her doctor was able to replace, lasted eight years until Missy bit down a little too hard on a regulator mouthpiece while scuba diving. The original teeth had to be taken out and replaced with a permanent bridge.

Missy was eventually put back together from that head-on collision and returned to finish the soccer season. Later that summer she coached soccer at the Youth Center and thought the world couldn't be any better: doing something she loved to do and getting paid for it.

Fall rolled around, signifying the beginning of Missy's senior year. It was one of those times when she juggled multiple sports: volleyball and cheerleading. While playing volleyball, she noticed a lump at the base of the second toe on her right foot. It was painful

whenever she jumped. By the time soccer season rolled around toward the end of her senior year, the lump had turned into a marble-sized growth. It hurt her to kick the ball, so the trainer placed a donut-shaped pad around the growth and wrapped her foot and ankle to cushion it against any blows.

The growth continued to enlarge, so Missy decided she had better have it checked by the family doctor. Assuming it was a cyst, he thought it was a simple matter of draining the fluid. Upon inserting a needle, however, he was surprised to find no fluid. This was beyond his scope, so he sent Missy to an orthopedic surgeon to have it checked.

Following doctor's orders, Missy promptly saw the orthopedic surgeon, whose diagnosis determined the growth was a benign tumor that, nevertheless, needed to be removed. Feeling no sense of urgency, Missy and the surgeon scheduled the surgery for convenience between the prom and graduation.

Like any senior, Missy was excited as she looked ahead to graduation and college. Her senior year ended on a high note: she was selected to the *Miami Herald's* All-Dade girls' soccer team. Heading off to college is a life-changing experience for everyone, but it was a bit more so for Missy. In March 1979 her mom, who had been the consummate housewife while raising her children, decided to return to the working world. She landed a job at the nearby University of Miami as the secretary to the athletic director, Dr. Harry Mallios. The job not only offered additional income, but another enormous benefit: a 75 percent discount on tuition.

Money was tight in the Koch household. As a commercial real estate broker, Pop did all he possibly could to provide for his family, but great chunks of time could pass between paydays. Sometimes that required creativity with ultra-frugal dinner plans, which Elaine

mastered. Despite budget crunches, the needs of the family were always met. Pop not only learned how to stretch money but always had an eye out for a good deal.

Missy fondly remembers that real estate bargain hunting was a practice from which Pop never took a break. The family station wagon, which had no air conditioning, would be loaded to the gills on family vacations with luggage, five kids, Olga, the German Shepherd, and Rover, the Chihuahua. Despite the discomfort and miserable conditions, Pop would prolong the trip even further by stopping at real estate offices along the way to check out the local deals. All five Koch children would bellow out in protest each time Pop made an unscheduled stop.

Of course, he also left no stone unturned where he lived. One of the bargain deals he landed included a small bungalow on Plantation Key in the Florida Keys. Nearly every weekend, the Koch family would head to their weekend retreat. Pop would have the five Koch children mowing, painting, and cleaning the property—things Missy would complain about as a child but look back upon fondly—but he also taught them how to fish, dive, and hunt for lobster.

He came across a sweetheart of a deal on a home on Blue Road in Coral Gables, just a couple of blocks from the University of Miami's campus. In 1976 the Koch family relocated across U.S. 1, or South Dixie Highway, to the north part of Coral Gables.

Enrolling at the University of Miami three years later, Missy did her part in helping keep expenses down by living at home because it was so close to the campus. She jumped whole-heartedly into co-ed life despite living at home. She went through sorority rush with Delta Gamma (DG), which required membership candidates to demonstrate some kind of talent. In the sorority room Missy met Martha Freeman who was sitting at the piano

offering her piano-playing services to any new pledges who might need them. Martha, a budding mezzo-soprano from Chicago, was full of life. Another fresh-faced, blond freshman from Dallas, Texas, named Gina Robinson, was on her way out of the room. Stopping at the door before leaving, Gina turned and addressed the other girls in the room.

“If anyone wants to get together later this evening, please give me a call.”

Missy and Gina did get together that evening.

Within a few days of their arrival on campus, a new circle of friends began to form. As the semester progressed, Missy developed close friendships with Martha and another DG member named Patti Heydet, a beautiful brunette who was a University of Miami cheerleader.

It turned out that all three of Missy’s new friends — Martha, Gina, and Patti — had close ties with the Pi Kappa Alpha fraternity. All three girls dated Pikes. Martha dated Charlie Bartz; Patti was in a relationship with Andrew Kirsch; and Gina was still dating her childhood sweetheart from Dallas, Andrew Kelton, who was also attending the University of Miami.

In a strange twist for that day and age, Martha and Patti not only dated Pikes, but lived with one as well, a fellow from New Jersey named Vinny Quaranta. A couple of years earlier a new television sitcom called *Three’s Company* had aired. It was controversial in its day because it depicted two single women living with a single guy. Pretty risqué stuff considering that just ten years earlier *The Dick Van Dyke Show* had featured a married couple sleeping in twin beds. But Patti, Martha, and Vinny decided to try it in real life. Of course, their friends enjoyed making comparisons with the show.

Missy's world was changing on several fronts. She was saying goodbye to friends she had known all her life who were leaving Miami to attend schools around the country. By the same token she was meeting new friends from different parts of the country. Her mom was working and no longer at home during the day. And the growth on her foot had reappeared.

In December, just a few months after having had the growth removed, Missy was back in the hospital to have the new growth removed. It was a relatively easy surgery. A few days later the doctor removed her stitches and told Missy she could do anything she desired. This was an error because he knew nothing of Missy's athleticism. Missy was playing in an under nineteen soccer league out on Key Biscayne, which is a quaint, upscale, island village located just off downtown Miami. To locals it's simply known as The Key.

The day after the stitches were removed, Missy had a soccer game. She gave no thought to whether or not she should play in the game. After all, the doctor had said she could do whatever she wanted. She dressed, warmed up, and started the game. The first time the ball met her foot, her foot split wide open. Not only did she reopen the incision that ran between her first and second toes, she tore new skin.

She found herself back in the surgeon's office. He had very few words. "You really made quite a mess of your foot."

This time, he placed her foot in a cast to slow her down.

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Missy received her love of sports and a heavy dose of her values from Pop. Her father possesses a huge heart. Her earliest memories of him are of her sitting on his knee while he sang “You Are My Sunshine” and other fun folk songs. Pop played with Missy and her brothers and sisters every day in the yard after they came home from school. He would teach football plays, and then yell “Hut!” to send the children scurrying off on their pass routes. The family had a full-length chalkboard on the hallway wall where he would write math equations for each child to solve.

Missy has a love for animals, which she inherited from her father. The Koch household at times looked like the oddest menagerie you have ever seen. Wounded cats, mangy dogs, pigeons, iguanas, and snakes were nurtured back to health under Pop’s care. Pop once rescued a turtle from two guys intending to turn it into stew. On a family vacation when another car driver had made no attempt to avoid running over and crushing a turtle, he followed the car for miles out of his way to give the insensitive driver a piece of his mind. Missy also learned from Pop that compassion wasn’t only for animals; it extended to people, too. Pop is deeply respected in the Miami community because of this. One act of compassion that had a profound impact on Missy occurred when Pop came across a man named Eli Jones, who was struggling to make ends meet. Most would simply have handed over a few bucks and sent Eli on his way. Even though Pop really couldn’t afford it, he asked Eli to mow his yard. The act of offering a job rather than a handout not only helped Eli feed his family but allowed him to keep his dignity as well. Her father’s compassion deeply moved Missy.

Pop can also be brash and rough around the edges. He may have mellowed over the years, but not by much. As a young lad, he never backed down from a fight. As an adult

and protective father, he enforced the speed limit on their street with his own speed traps. Speeders were encouraged to slow down with flying coconuts. He also possesses a controlling streak and loves to offer his two cents' worth. When Missy went out on dates, he would insist she wore a certain outfit, or bracelet, or wore her hair a certain way. Of course, as soon as she was out the door, whatever she had been required to wear was immediately discarded.

With her two older sisters off at college—Lauren to Biola University in Southern California and Leslie to Kansas University in Lawrence, Kansas—Missy was the only daughter at home. Although she too was in college, she didn't enjoy the same liberties as her two older sisters, the difference being that Missy lived at home: Pop enforced boundaries and curfews as if she were still in high school.

Missy, by her mother's account, had always been extremely inquisitive and a source of never-ending questions. The Question Child is what Elaine called her. This trait did not begin in college; she had always been that way. Missy has never been one to simply accept things as they are. In her mind there is always a reason for the existence of something. Above all, as a child, if she was not allowed to do something, she needed to know why.

While growing up, the Koch children respected Pop and followed his orders without much question. Of course, the fear of being sent to their room as a punishment helped keep most questions at bay.

"The fear was even worse if Pop was standing in the doorway of your room, pointing in the direction you were to go," Missy reflects. "Passing by in the narrow space between him and the doorframe, with no chance for any kind of evasive maneuver, you never knew if you were going to get swatted on the bottom or not."

That fear didn't deter Missy from asking questions, so Pop would employ the tactic of delaying his answer to buy time. Ignoring Missy was never a viable solution, though, because she possessed—and still possesses—an abundance of persistence that gets under the most patient person's skin. Missy detected early on that a delayed answer from Pop—for example, on whether she could spend the night at a friend's house—meant a valid reason for the delay didn't exist.

The parental mantra, "because I said so," simply wasn't acceptable to Missy. For that reason she began to find herself in Pop's doghouse frequently. A strain began to develop between the father and daughter during her high school years. Despite the punishment, if a valid reason wasn't provided, there was strife in the Koch household. Missy has always adored her father, but as she settled into her new environment at the university, the tension in their relationship worsened.

The irony is that Pop and Missy are so much alike. Both can be hard-headed and stubborn. While the adage states that "opposites attract," these two during Missy's college years were the poster children for "similars collide." Tension mounted with each unexplained order Pop would try to enforce.

The boiling point came on a night when Missy didn't come home on time. When she finally arrived, Pop lost his temper and launched into a verbal tirade. He interrogated her about where she had been and angrily reminded her of her curfew. As he attempted to lay down the law in the form of some kind of restriction or grounding, Missy interrupted him.

Rather than fully tolerating the lecture, Missy geared up and matched him in intensity with her side of the disagreement. Missy communicated her point that, as a college student, she wasn't being given the same liberties as her sisters. Because he was being unfair with

her, she told him that she was not inclined to listen to anything he had to say or pay attention to any discipline he might try to enforce. As the two engaged in the heated shouting match, Elaine watched quietly from a distance.

After the disagreement, Pop and Elaine left the house for the evening. Missy at first had not made plans for the evening, but that changed. She had not contemplated moving out before because she had assumed her problems with Pop would eventually work out. Instead of becoming more tolerant, however, Pop became more and more controlling. That night Missy called her friend, Gina Robinson, and asked if she had room in her apartment for another roommate. Gina told her she'd love to have a new roommate, so Missy spent the evening moving out. Elaine's motherly intuition would prove to be correct again: "I knew you would be gone when we got back."

Missy was finally on her own. The bonds with her new friends grew stronger. She plugged into other activities around the campus such as being a batgirl for the University of Miami baseball team and serving as a Hurricane Honey by baking bags of goodies for football players. She also began dating Martha and Patti's roommate, Vinny Quaranta. Vinny possessed a great smile, a swagger, and an unbridled machismo. He exuded self-confidence, which some may have thought a little over the top, but which Missy thought was a strength. He was protective and possessive—qualities she liked.

By the same token, Vinny was attracted to Missy's brand of self-confidence. She didn't possess the swagger he had, but she did indeed exude self-confidence. Outwardly, she was quiet and soft-spoken, but she knew who she was and was comfortable in her own skin. She'd never tell you how great she was at something, but if an athletic competitive

challenge were to come along, chances were good that her athletic prowess would be put on display.

In May, as the school year was winding to a close, the growth on her foot appeared yet again. Vinny was in the process of packing up to head back to New Jersey for the summer, but Missy was gearing up for a third surgery to remove the growth. The two couldn't stand the thought of being apart for any length of time, so Vinny invited Missy to his home in New Jersey after the surgery. She didn't think seriously about it until he sent her money for a plane ticket. As she was in love, it didn't require much thought on her part.

Pop's thoughts were entirely different: "You are *not* going to New Jersey!"

Although Missy no longer lived under Pop's rule, she still felt his presence. He had gotten wind of the New Jersey plans and had attempted to deliver an emphatic veto. It fell upon deaf ears.

Missy informed Vinny that Pop did not like the idea.

"Are you still coming?"

"Oh, absolutely."

"Are you sure?"

Unwavering, Missy boarded the Eastern Airlines flight to Newark. While she was en route, Vinny, who had tremendous respect for Pop, realized that this trip could cause a sizeable rift between Missy and her father. Upsetting Pop was one thing he did not want to do. When he met Missy at the airport, he had cash in hand for an immediate return flight home and suggested she use it if she had any second thoughts. Missy wouldn't hear of it; she was staying.

It was a decision that would ultimately save her life.

VIDEO

Old Miami