# Chapter 2: I Used to Love H.E.R.

“I met this girl when I was ten years old.” — Common

I met this girl when I was ten years old. She didn’t speak, but I heard her in every bounce of the ball. Every rim-rattling swish, every squeak of sneakers on concrete. She was the game—and I loved her like only a kid could love: fully, wildly, without thought.  
  
Back then, it was just me and her. A driveway hoop. A VHS tape of MJ’s fadeaway. A net that ripped like a whip. No audience. No rankings. No pressure. Just discovery. Just joy. I learned to lose and still love the next play. I learned to win and still stay humble. She taught me that. The game taught me that.  
  
But somewhere along the way, we drifted.  
  
The joy got replaced. First by pressure, then by performance. What used to be freedom became formality. Training moved from exploration to expectation. Suddenly, everyone had a trainer. Everyone had a mixtape. Kids were getting coached on how to brand themselves before they knew who they were.  
  
I didn’t see it at first. I just thought, “This is how you stay ahead.” I coached that way. I trained that way. I fathered that way.  
  
When Cole started playing, I thought I was giving him a gift. I was giving him access to my knowledge, my experience, my blueprint. But that blueprint wasn’t his. It was mine. And it came with weight. With expectation. With pressure that felt familiar—but never belonged to him.  
  
I remember watching him shoot one day. Something about his body language struck me. The way he exhaled. The way his shoulders sagged just slightly after every shot that missed. He wasn’t failing. He was fading.  
  
And I recognized it. Because I had faded once too. When the love went from internal to external—when it became about approval, attention, achievement. I was watching my son fall out of love with the game, the same way I once did. And I had a hand in it.  
  
That was the hardest part to admit: that I’d contributed to the erosion of something I claimed to love.  
  
I used to coach for retention. For trophies. For reputation. And even though I knew better now, I realized I was still carrying those old instincts into parenting. Into training. Into our driveway.  
  
That’s when I stopped talking. And started listening.  
  
I asked Cole what he liked about the game. Not what he wanted to achieve. Just what he liked. It took him a while to answer. But when he did, he said, “When it’s fun.”  
  
That cracked me open.  
  
We stripped it all back. No cones. No timers. Just play. Just joy. Just mess. And over time, the spark came back. His bounce changed. His breath was lighter. He smiled again. And I knew we were on the right path—not back to the game as it was, but forward into what it could be again.  
  
Max Potential wasn’t born in a boardroom. It was born in that driveway. It was born in silence, in reflection, in the deep grief of realizing what I’d lost and the slow joy of rediscovering it alongside my sons.  
  
This isn’t just a program. It’s a return. A return to play. To curiosity. To creativity. To kids playing tag on the court, not running sprints. To parents watching with open hearts, not stopwatches.  
  
I used to love her. I still do.  
  
But now I love her with eyes wide open.