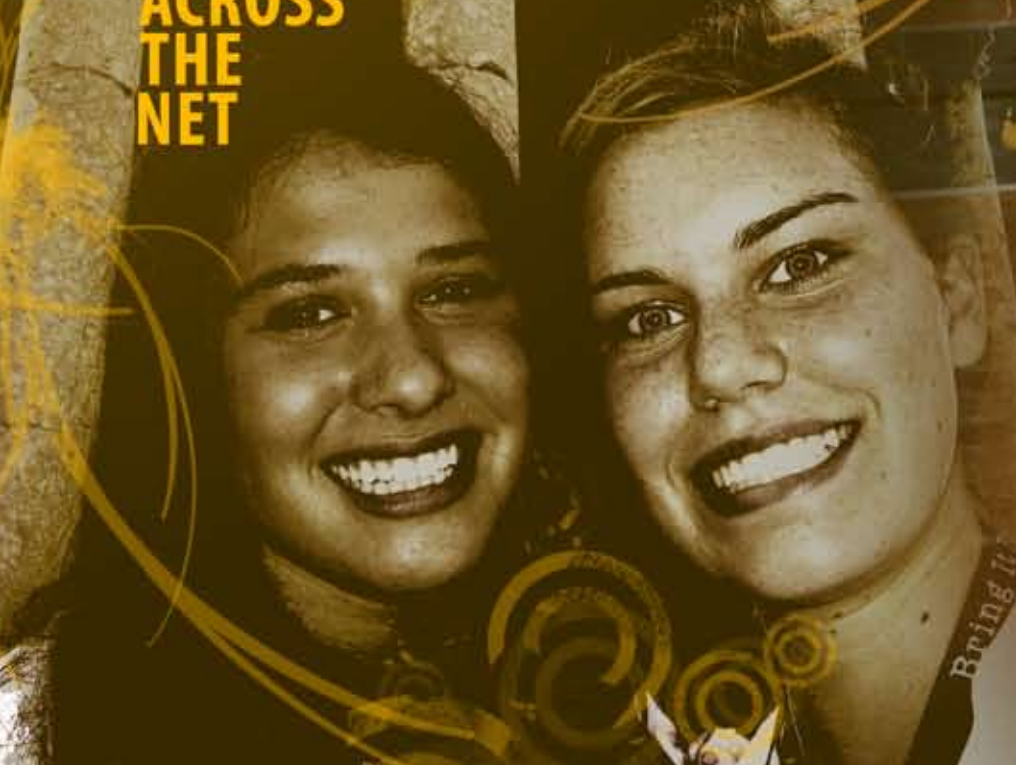


# In Their Own Words

BY MARIAH MCCALLUM & KAMRYN SHERMAN

## GROWING UP ACROSS THE NET



Mariah McCallum is a 15 year old sophomore at Nease HS. She carries a 3.6 GPA is the libero for the Varsity Volleyball team and for JJVA 16N. Mariah is also on the A honor roll and a member of Journey Church Fuel Youth Group. Mariah's next international tour will be in June to the Dalmatian Coast of Croatia.

Kamryn Sherman is a 15 year old sophomore at Nease HS. She carries a 4.21 GPA is the setter for the Varsity Volleyball team and for JJVA 16N. Kamryn is the on court captain and a group leader for FUEL with Journey Church. Kamryn's next international tour will be in December to Europe.

### We were both eleven and immersed in sports.

We wanted to play with the big girls but instead were sent to the dollhouse. Until, of course, we were allowed on the volleyball court.

I, Kam, had just moved to St. Augustine and had nothing in common with any of the girls in the area except that I could- and wanted to- play volleyball. I had grown up in the gym, watching my Mom coach college volleyball and my sister play as well. Softball was fun for a while, but I really wanted 'more action' than that sport could give me.

I, Mariah, had been tagging along with my parents, watching my sister play volleyball and I was dying to get a hold of the ball for myself. My main sport at the time was soccer, however, I was quickly falling in love with the sport of volleyball.

We became instant friends on the court, but that soon evolved. We had no idea that later we would travel the world together, spend countless nights at each others' houses, and rally towards great volleyball achievements.

It started out in our season together five years ago at the 13R Jacksonville Junior team. We were completely new and untried and it showed in so many ways. As a team, we spent more time

orchestrating the cheers then worrying about our play. Our team traveled to the AAU National Tournament and we were more mesmerized by the opening ceremonies and the singing of the national anthem than we were by the volleyball.

After nationals that Summer, we traveled to Nicaragua together. We were both gangly girls with fuzzy hair and braces. We had no idea what we were getting into but we laughed as we braved the hardships, carried buckets of water to shower in, and fought our way through the Nicaraguan Mercado in our broken Spanish. We were fondly given the moniker "mighty mites" by our tour guide and our teammates. After we had zip-lined across the Nicaraguan rainforest and played in sweltering heat, we headed back to the USA for our first season apart since we met. Luckily, our friendship was more developed than our game. As the seasons progressed we would each go to our respective school teams but we always remained "sisters" on and off the court.

That winter we embarked on our next great journey and adventure together, the New Years Bash. We travelled to Venice, Maribor, Izola, Prague and Vienna. There we played our first international tournament, making a come-back as the "mighty

mites". We watched each other nurse our wind-burn wounds and lost each other skiing on the Pohorje Mountain in Slovenia.

Upon our return, it was time to buckle down and prepare for our 14National club season. Our season was fun and once again, we left the season with a great love for the sport and for our teammates. We next partnered up in Australia, Fiji and New Zealand. Our friendship became stronger as did our game. In a matter of twelve days we gained the knowledge, not only of each others' preferences on the court, but off the court as well.

We expected to come into the 15National season and be competitive. What we didn't know is that we would become one of the best! Within the first couple of weeks we were number one in the Florida Region and we won all but three of our tournaments gaining a qualification for the American level Junior Olympics. Much to everyone's surprise, we swept our opponents at JO's, going 6-0 in the first three days. Unfortunately, we met a difficult team from California in the playoffs and ended our run at 7-2, placing 13th overall. It was a bittersweet ending because although we finished well, our season ended, sending us back to separate schools.

It was the summer and time for another adventure. This time it was the Ionian Peninsula where we soaked up knowledge of Athens, Greece, camped in Loutraki(Greece) and rode mopeds around the island of Paros(Greece). We had to prepare for another season apart-our transition into high school, which meant conflicting seasons. In our ninth grade high school seasons, we both were fortunate enough to contribute as starters to our school's varsity teams. In a way, our schools were rivals, but that couldn't keep us apart. Before and after games we would update each other about our experiences. The high school seasons carried both of us to the State semifinals. We then consoled each other as both our teams were defeated and went home without a state championship victory. We received many post season honors and were recognized by Prep Volleyball as Fab Freshman. For us, none of those titles meant as much as our own drive to improve. Still reeling from the state tournament, we knew we could look forward to the upcoming JJVA 16National club season where we could play and win together. That time, as club season approached, we found we had to fight for our spots on the team we originated. The success of our previous year

had made our team desirable to players from other clubs. Therefore, we had to prove that, despite being one year younger than the rest of our teammates, we deserved to be on this team.

Each year, we welcomed the new members and before long, we are all close on and off the court. Unfortunately our season was marred by injuries. Although we did not win many tournaments we placed in the gold division the majority of the time and we won the one tournament we had the whole team together on the court. Despite are hardships, the season was still full of fun and was a learning experience that further improved our skills.

With the end of this past club season came a new adventure: Nicaragua part II, four years after our first visit. Once again we set off with our bug spray, sunscreen and Malaria pills to face the rigors of playing in a third world country. Whereas the last time we were the "the mighty mites", this time we were the older, more experienced members of the tour who were looked upon to help the youngsters. Our itineraries were full of community service projects like helping local schools and assisting with the earth ship building project. That time around, the tour didn't "rough it" quite as much, but it still

had its mental and physical challenges. Nicaragua was a mentally humbling trip; however, our next trip pushed our game to even greater heights.

Our most recent overseas trip was to the Global Challenge 2008 in Pula, Croatia. That trip took us through Germany, Austria, Slovenia, Italy and Croatia. After sightseeing and practicing for five days, we ended in Pula, Croatia, where we competed in the Global Challenge against top teams from Europe and the US. That tournament challenged our skills on the court as we have never been challenged before. We played against players more experienced and years older in age. Although we lost more than we won, we learned more than any victory had taught us to that point.

For once, we start the high school season together- not only in spirit, but on the court. We hope to take our experiences, our skills and our friendships to new heights as we fight to win the state title. Of course, just like all sisters, we argue and we get mad at each other. Mostly, however, we pray together, we play together and we stay together as we continue to grow up across the net. ■