

My Mother, My Hero

The star of the movies *Think Like a Man* and *Jumping the Broom* and TV's *Minority Report* finds her greatest inspiration close to home

BY MEAGAN GOOD, Los Angeles, California



PHOTOGRAPHED FOR GUIDEPOSTS BY LARSEN & TALBERT

PEOPLE SOMETIMES ASK WHO my hero is. I'm an actress and I would love to someday play a hero. If I do, I'll have the perfect role model: my mother, Tyra Wardlow. So much of how I live my life comes from growing up watching Mom stay strong in the face of adversity and make sacrifices for the people she loves. Here are some of the most important lessons I've learned from my mom, my real-life hero.

RISE ABOVE YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

Mom married a military man and had her first child at 19—my brother, Colbert. At 18 months old, he was a bright toddler—curious, playful, already putting words together in sentences. One day he got such a high fever that he went into convulsions. He was rushed to the base hospital. Even though he came home the next day, Mom knew that something was wrong. He wasn't talking anymore, as if his speech had just dissipated. She took him to a specialist. Colbert had suffered brain damage, which caused some learning disabilities.

Mom could have unraveled. Instead, she went into action. She enrolled Colbert in a good special-education program and worked with him daily to

develop his skills. And Colbert thrived. He regained his speech, earned top honors in his classes, mastered video games and became a great athlete. He now has a good job, lives on his own and still competes in the Special Olympics. Colbert's confident, independent, a fighter. He understands his disability, but he doesn't let it define him. As Mom says, "Any challenge you put in front of him, he will strive to overcome it." I have that same go-getter attitude, and I know we both got it from our mom.

SHOW COMPASSION FOR OTHERS.

Mom's well of empathy runs deep. She has always been the one that people turn to when they have nowhere to go. She opens her heart—and even her home—to them.

There was one summer when I was a teenager and my uncle's girlfriend and their two small children needed a place to stay. Our house was already full, with Mom and my stepdad; my stepbrother; my brother; my older sister, La'Myia; and me. But Mom told my uncle's girlfriend, "You and the kids can stay in one of the girls' rooms until you get on your feet."

IN A GOOD PLACE Meagan took a break from her hectic shooting schedule to sit down for our exclusive photo session in Los Angeles.

I grudgingly agreed to move into La'Myia's room to make space for them. *They're family*, I reminded myself. *This is temporary.*

But the next thing I knew, my grandma needed a place to stay. Then our cousin. Then two young music producers La'Myia and I had been working with. And then another cousin and her new baby girl, Lexus. By the time all was said and done, there were 15 people living in a three-bedroom house with a built-on addition. Everyone shared everything and I felt suffocated. What teenager wouldn't, with no privacy and no personal space? I was upset with my mom. Why did she sacrifice our comfort to help all of these people? To me, it seemed like they were just taking advantage of her kindness.

Eventually things improved for everyone and they moved out. Looking back now, I understand what Mom was teaching us. That even when you think people should have it together, sometimes they don't. That you should reach out to them if you're able to because it's a blessing to be in a position to help and blessings are meant to be shared. That you don't have to worry about people taking advantage of you if you let God guide you in how to help them.

FAMILY AFFAIR Meagan (in red) with (l to r) her god-sister Gavin; sisters La'Myia and Lexus; her mom, Tyra; and brother Colbert

FOLLOW YOUR HEART.

My acting career began at age four, when I appeared in my first TV commercial. La'Myia and I had big personalities practically from birth, and when Mom saw how we loved being in front of the camera at family gatherings, getting us into acting seemed like a natural step. (Well, maybe it's natural if you live in Los Angeles!) She didn't put any pressure on us, so auditions and jobs were fun, not work. My love for acting grew. By the time I was 10, I was landing roles on TV shows. I started getting callbacks for roles in films.

Then, when I was 13, Mom and my stepdad split up. Just like when she found out Colbert had learning disabilities, she could've unraveled. But just like back then, she picked herself up and kept going.

She knew she'd have to be even more careful with her budget as a single mom. She sold our three-bedroom



COURTESY MEAGAN GOOD

house, moved us to an apartment in Santa Clarita, traded in her new car for a used one. She kept our lives as normal as possible otherwise. She cooked, cleaned, ironed our clothes at night, got us up for school the next morning and always dropped us off on time. She took us to auditions after school, had dinner on the table, looked over our homework and made sure we were in bed before she headed out to work the night shift as a customer-service supervisor for the Bank of America call center. She'd walk in the door at 5:00 A.M., just as our day was about to begin. She was also going back and forth to court because she was in the process of adopting our baby cousin, Lexus. Her mother wasn't able to take care of her and Mom was doing everything she could to make sure Lexus stayed with family.

Things were hectic. The drive from Santa Clarita to Los Angeles was 35 miles on the map, but it could take a couple of hours in traffic. It was impossible for Mom to get us to and from auditions and still make it to work.

She sat my sister and me down one day after school and explained the situation. "Girls, I have to take you out of the business," she said.

"We love acting," La'Myia said, in tears. "Please don't make us quit."

I was crying too. "Mom, this is what we want to do more than anything!"

She looked into our eyes for a long moment. Then she nodded. "I can see your hearts are really in acting," she said. "I believe God gave you the tal-

ent and love for it. But if you're going to make it in the industry, it's going to take a full-time manager and mother."

She resigned from her job and dedicated herself to managing our careers. It wasn't easy, and money was short. Somehow, though, we made the rent every month. You can probably guess what Mom said about that: "God is a miracle worker."

My first major television role was on *Cousin Skeeter*, a Nickelodeon series that ran for three years. After that, I was offered a role on another TV show. I wanted to move to film, where I'd get to play different characters and see the world. But with the threat of a writers' strike, film studios were shelving projects, and there were very few jobs.

Reluctantly I signed on with the TV show. I was grateful to be making good money for a 19-year-old. Then the writers' strike was averted. Out of the blue, I was offered an incredible role in a movie called *Deliver Us From Eva*. The problem was, I had my TV contract and we were only halfway through the season. And I wouldn't make nearly as much working on the movie for two months as I would on the TV show, which could run for a few years.

I didn't want to put our family in a financial bind. I thought Mom would tell me to stay put even though I wasn't happy, because I had already committed to the show. But she told me, "Follow your heart, Meagan. No amount of money can bring you the fullness of trusting your spirit."

We asked the TV studio to give me



ON THE BIG SCREEN Meagan (far right) with (l to r) Taraji P. Henson, Wendi McLendon-Covey, Gabrielle Union and La La Anthony in the romantic comedy *Think Like a Man Too*

time off to do the film. To my surprise, it did.

Even though the studio ultimately fired me, Mom and I weren't discouraged. We trusted that more opportunities would come. What mattered to Mom was that I was happy, that I was doing what I loved. Even now, I don't choose roles based on the size of the paycheck or the audience. I follow my heart, and even more, I follow God's lead. I've found that if I'm listening closely, they take me to the same place.


MAKE FAITH YOUR FOUNDATION.

Not that she ever let on, but there were times when Mom must have felt overwhelmed, especially after she and my dad divorced. She didn't want Colbert, La'Myia and me to miss out on anything, even though we had only one parent at home. She filled the role of

both parents and held things together for us.

There were nights Mom would go in her room, close the door and turn up the music. I'd hear Marvin Gaye from the hallway and I knew. I knew it was because she didn't want us to hear her cry. She never wanted us to feel the sadness and hurt she felt. She didn't want us to see her break. And we didn't. Instead of taking her troubles to another human being, she went to God.

Mom wasn't a regular churchgoer but she read her Bible, prayed a lot and encouraged us to do the same. She talked about God all the time (she still does) and taught us that he was the best father we could ever have. She wasn't one of those people who felt like we needed to be in church every Sunday to be close to God. Faith could develop in many ways—church, Bible study, prayer groups, mission work, private devotional time. Mom showed us that a true relationship with God could also grow from having an ongoing conversation with him, talking to him and listening when he talks to us. “Without him,” she has told me, “I would've fallen apart.”

On one level, that's hard to believe, because my mom is the strongest person I know. But deep in my heart, deep in my soul, I know what she means. Because her strength comes from making faith the foundation of her life, and she has instilled that strength in me. See why she's my hero? 

For more on this story, see **FAMILY ROOM**

FAMILY ROOM

MEET THE PEOPLE IN OUR PAGES

Meagan Good (*My Mother, My Hero*, page 28) is the star of *Minority Report*, a show set in 2065, but she admits she wasn't always high tech. “It took me a while before I realized I needed to learn to use a computer or the world would pass me by,” she says. Now Meagan uses social media to interact with her fans, participating in a “live tweet” of each *Minority Report* episode with her castmates. Meagan is also promoting the movie *A Girl Like Grace*, a coming-of-age drama that she produced. “I'm excited to show teenage girls a story about overcoming negative influences,” Meagan says. She and her husband, producer DeVon Franklin, have written a book, *The Wait*, full of advice for courting couples who want to keep God at the center of their relationship. DeVon's own story was in **GUIDEPOSTS** in October 2014. Follow @meangood on Twitter and Instagram for updates.



GOOD Meagan and husband DeVon Franklin