

Personal Narrative - The Strike Queen

By: Katie McCafferty

The sounds of bowling balls crashing into pins echoed through the bowling alley. The smell of fresh cheesy bread and french fries flooded the air. Various sodas and waters were placed alongside the appetizers, providing much needed hydration to the bowling teams.

Cheers periodically rang out from coaches and parents alike as my high school girls' bowling team threw their custom made bowling balls down the lanes. Meanwhile, the opposing team got similar reactions from their peers.

'This is a pretty close match...' I thought to myself, brushing some of my medium length brown hair out of my face. My blue eyes turned upwards to look at my father, a man with dark brown hair wearing a fishing shirt. He had a gentle smile on his face. He or my mom would always come to watch me, and their smiles always made me feel better. I couldn't help smiling a little, too.

Both the boys' and girls' bowling teams of my school, Indian Rocks Christian School, were pitted up against the teams of a rival school named Calvary. We were in the last few frames for the girls' bowling matches.

I glanced over once more at the boys, ours dressed in identical black and white collared shirts, as they were all putting away their bowling balls and shoes. It was unclear to me who won, but my mind was more focused on our own match.

Letting out a small, inaudible sigh, my eyes return to the girls beside me. Marissa, a redhead senior, was seated next to her sister Justine, a light blonde freshman. Next to them was a dark blonde senior named Vicky. All of us were wearing identical white and yellow collared shirts to represent our team.

Vicky was new to the team, but Marissa and Justine had been on the team with me in previous years. Not only that, but I also knew them from when I was in color guard in previous years.

'I want more cheesy bread. I could really use some right about now,' I pondered, eyeing the few remaining strips of the appetizer.

Whenever we attended practice or matches, our coaches would order us cheesy bread. Or french fries. Or anything we were craving.

Mainly the cheesy bread though.

Giving in to my urge, I reached over and picked up a cheesy bread strip. The cheese pulled from the rest of the dish as I separated the lone strip from the small, red basket lined with transparent paper.

I bit into it, immediately tasting the familiar mozzarella and seasoning. Just like the ones from earlier that afternoon, it nearly melted in my mouth as I chewed the soft bread and cheese.

I was blissfully unaware of the current situation.

“Katie, your turn,” one of my teammates said. I didn’t know which one said it, but I nodded nonetheless.

Quickly, I shoved the rest of the cheesy goodness into my mouth and approached the ball returner. There, amongst the other bowling balls, sat a red and orange bowling ball I knew all too well by this point. The words **Strike King** were embedded onto the shiny surface in white font with the dots of the i’s replaced with crowns.

I noticed that JC, a large man on a lightweight wheelchair who was also the main coach of our girls’ bowling team, was strolling up to me. I stepped away from the ball returner to see what he had to say. His lips were stretched out in a thin line.

Whatever he had to say wasn’t good news, that was for sure.

“No pressure, Katie... but you need to bowl *two* strikes and some pins in this last frame to win us the game,” he informed me.

My heart immediately sank.

‘Two strikes?’ I thought in stunned silence.

All I could do was nod.

The brown-haired man returned to where the other coaches were behind my teammates as I stood there, taking in the information he just told me.

All the other girls from both teams had finished their tenth frames, so it was only my tenth frame left.

It was all up to me.

Taking a deep breath, I strided back to the ball returner and lifted the 12-pound Strike King.

I inserted my thin fingers into the three small holes and walked up to the dots strewn across the ground. Placing my feet on the left side of the lane, bending my knees slightly, and fixing my eyes forward, I took another deep breath.

Everybody could hear the Calvary girls already cheering and celebrating.

‘There’s no way I’m going to get a strike.’ That was my only thought.

Regardless, I walked up to the oily part of the lane, brought my bowling ball back, and threw it forward.

The ball rolled from the left side of the lane to the right side, rode along the gutter on the right side of the gutter, and hooked itself back into the center.

CRASH!!!

I watched as my Strike King hit the space in between the center pin and the pin right next to it. All the pins fell down in an instant as the bowling ball burst through the small, white pillars.

My eyes widened, but the shock soon wore off.

I needed two strikes, not just one.

The Calvary girls saw what happened, but continued to celebrate. My teammates, the coaches, and the parents continued to watch intently.

Clanking and clunking came from the ball returner as my Strike King bowling ball made its way back. Once it popped out from the machine, I picked it up and took up the same position I was in before.

Another deep breath. Inhale, exhale.

'Okay... There's no way I'm going to get a second strike.'

Once again, I walked up, brought the ball back, and threw it.

CRASH!!!

As the bowling ball burst through the pins again, they all fell down one after the other.

My eyes widened once again. I actually made the second strike. This was winnable!

I took a look backwards and noticed that even the Calvary girls were watching intently now alongside everybody else. They were all looking at me as if I was about to give a life-changing speech.

The clanking and clunking noises came from the ball returner again. Turning my eyes back to my Strike King that just reappeared, it was evident what had to be done.

I reached down and picked up my bowling ball one last time. Whether or not we won this match came down to how well I threw this last ball.

Not even able to recall how many pins had to be knocked down this time, I took what felt like heavy steps towards the dots on the ground. Standing on the left side, bending my knees slightly, and looking straight ahead, I got into the bowling posture one more time.

'I don't even need another strike. I just need to knock down at least half of the pins,' I mentally told myself.

As I walked forward, brought the ball back, and launched it forward for the third time that frame, it felt as if time slowed down. It felt like my Strike King bowling ball was taking its time skidding across the oil.

As the ball turned towards the center, I held my breath.

CRASH!!!

For the third time that frame, all of the pins fell down.

Loud cheering rang out from my teammates. The coaches of my school's bowling teams as well as the parents of my teammates filled the once quiet atmosphere with proud applause. Shocked silence from the Calvary girls replaced the celebratory noises from earlier.

I couldn't hold it in. Turning on my heels, I ran to my teammates and gave them all a group hug.

"Katie, you won us the game!"

"I can't believe that actually happened!"

"Oh my gosh, your bowling ball's hook scared me so much!"

Laughter and cheer came from all of us as we stood there in the tight group hug. I glanced up and saw my father still standing there with a huge smile on his face. He looked like a very proud father.

Who could blame him? His daughter just won her team the game with an outstanding play.

"I guess you do well under pressure, Katie. Maybe we should put you last from now on!" I heard JC say with a chuckle. The other coaches couldn't help but chuckle with him.

The story of that match would be one that I would never forget.