

From Sidekick to Superhero  
The Journey Begins

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By:  
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Cover design by Kiersten McLennan  
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I dedicate this book to my beloved wife,  
Priya and my coach, Jeremy Pollack. For  
without either of you in my life, I would  
not have been able to write this book or be  
the man I am so proud to be today.  
Thank you to the both of you for all of  
your love, support, and dedication to me.

## About the Book

“The Journey Begins” is the first book in the Sidekick to Superhero™ series created to inspire and guide its readers to live a balanced and healthy life.

Bodhi, a young teenager, is struggling to find his identity. He's never quite able to fit into the usual crowd that surrounds him at school, until he meets Andy, a true Superhero. Together, Bodhi and Andy set off on a series of adventures that lead to Bodhi building his confidence, making new friends, and ultimately finding his path. Learning valuable life skills along the way, Bodhi uncovers his superpowers in hopes of becoming Andy's sidekick.

## CHAPTERS

- I. New Year, New Me
- II. The Secret Hero
- III. A Hero's Guide to Emotions
- IV. Beyond Just Me
- V. It's the Little Things
- VI. Standing Tall
- VII. Finding my Training Ground
- VIII. Steeping into the Mind Field
- IX. Finding my own Rhythm
- X. Perfect Imperfections
- XI. Spreading my Wings
- XII. Catching Water
- XIII. The Powers from Within
- XIV. The Journey Begins

## New Year, New Me

*“Allow yourself to be a beginner. No one starts off being excellent.” –Wendy Flynn*

At first, I was walking amongst giants just trying to survive. Now, I fly high above, stronger than any giant below.

The summer sun was cooling with each day’s passing, and it could only mean one thing: My life was about to become hard, scary, and full of fear for the next nine months, yet again. Growing up in a town built around football, I never fit in and knew that would never change. I walked amongst giants. No matter if they were younger or older, I always seemed to be the smallest. Every year, I prayed that would be the summer I would hit my growth spurt. I would no longer be walking amongst giants; I would be one of them.

It was the last day of summer, and I woke up feeling different. My bed seemed to have shrunk overnight, and my pajamas felt tight. Was this the morning I’d been waiting for? When my growth spurt finally

began? I was so excited, I jumped straight out of bed, just to try on the mud-filled jeans I had worn the day before while playing in the river. I took my pajama bottoms off with one swift jump and ran to the corner of my room where my jeans sat atop the hamper. Filthy dirty but without a care, I swooped my left leg in. With such excitement building, I fell straight over while trying to step into the right pant leg. Slowly I pulled the waist of my pants all the way up. It was a miracle! My jeans that just yesterday went beyond my feet were now sitting at my ankles. I couldn't believe it. The day had finally come. I would no longer be the smallest kid. My days of being bullied had come to an end!

I ran downstairs with a huge smile. Having forgotten to switch back out of my muddy, wet jeans, I left a trail of footprints on the rug. I ran into the kitchen and sat down in my chair, just like every other morning. My Mom, who couldn't believe I was wearing these jeans in her house, said: "You look a little extra perky this morning. Someone's excited about school to start tomorrow! Now take those filthy pants off and stop dirtying this place. You know we have company coming over." Sitting at the kitchen table eating breakfast, I couldn't stop staring at the doorway molding. Every morning before the first day of school for the last nine years, I would stand with my back on the



molding, and my Mom would draw a line with the year to mark my height. Knowing I had grown last night, I was excited to see the biggest gap yet on that wall.

Especially with family coming over for our annual end of summer barbeque, I was giddy with anticipation to finally outgrow my little cousins. They might actually say things like, "Wow Bodhi, you're so tall!" or "We need you on our team Bodhi, you're one of the tallest kids here."

As family started to arrive, I knew we would start off the barbecue with a game of football. Usually, this was the beginning of the next nine miserable months for me, but not this year! As we gathered in the backyard, all the cousins stood on the line to select teams. I typically would've stood at the end of the line, because it always feels better to have only one taller person on your side. But this year I walked right up to the middle. With my chest puffed out and shoulders raised, I was ready. I looked to my left, and there was my older cousin Garrett. He'd always been the tallest and strongest. And to my right was my younger brother. A full two years younger, my brother Will out stood me by a good 3 inches. But not today! Standing tall, ready for this to be the telling moment, I turned to my right side and looked at Will. Expecting him to notice immediately that he would once again be known as my "little" brother, I

was met with disappointment. My eye level seemed to still be lower than his. Something must have been wrong! I was so confident that I had grown. My bed was smaller, my pajamas were too tight, and my jeans only went to my ankles. Did he really grow the same night as I did?

I enjoyed the family BBQ, but I still needed to know how much I had really grown. The next morning, my excitement was boiling up. Today was the real test; it was time for my Mom to measure me against the doorway. I jumped out of bed and slipped out of my pajamas. Getting ready for school, I washed my face, put on my school uniform, packed my bag, and was down the stairs in a flash. After my last bite of oatmeal, I heard the kitchen drawer creek open as my Mom searched for a pencil. It was time, and I was ready. How many inches would it be...three? Four? Five? Could six even be real? I pressed my heels up against the door molding, my back as straight as the molding it leaned against. The swooshing of the pencil touched my hair as my Mom marked the molding. I was ready for my Mom to say the magical words, "step back and close your eyes. Now open them in 3, 2, 1!" It was if as if I had just seen a ghost. I was shocked. The pencil mark my Mom had drawn was only one inch above last year's mark. How could this be?

Immediately, I was in a rage, in total disbelief, and forced my Mom to try again. But, still, she marked the same exact spot. I did not want to face another year of school where I was the smallest. I turned my back, ran out of the kitchen, through the living room and up the stairs back to my room yelling, "I'm never going to grow. My life is over!" I slammed the door so hard that it knocked the picture off the hallway wall. Hiding under my covers, I could hear my Mom's footsteps. "Go away!" I yelled. "I'm not going to school, and you can't make me." Mom continued into my room, sat on the edge of my bed and put her hand on my back. "It's going to be alright, Bodhi. Your day will come," she said. But, how could she be so sure? And even if she were right, it wasn't going to be that day. She didn't understand. She wasn't the one who had to go to school each day, get humiliated by others, and walk the hallways scared of who was around the next corner.

After lying in bed for ten minutes, I calmed down and got myself together. I knew school was necessary, and skipping was not a choice. I splashed some water on my face, got my backpack and stepped into the car. It was about a 10-minute drive to school. First I'd see a stop sign, next the park, followed by the high school and then my school. With every familiar site, my emotions would twirl even more. I

was angry, scared, frustrated, sad, and nervous. I feared everything that was yet to come. How was I ever going to get through another year of school? As we passed the high school, I could feel the car start to slow down. “You’ll never get through this year alive. They are just waiting to knock you down. There’s no turning back now.” The negative thoughts came rushing one after another. The blinker was ticking, the wheels began spinning, and I was staring straight down the belly of the monster.

There it was. The driveway to the front entrance of Jefferson Middle School. I looked for my opening, but it seemed as though there wasn’t a clear path anywhere. Hundreds of students filled every gap. The only thing between the first day of school and me was a round patch of grass with a flagpole in the middle that created a loop in front of the entrance. The car circled the flag, and we pulled up to the sidewalk. It was time to step out from the safety of our car and walk up the dreaded stairs. I just stared at the entrance, waiting for someone else to take the first step. But then I heard it, “Bye, Bodhi, have a wonderful day! Love you!” My Mom just made me prey for hungry predators.

Before I could even step into the school entrance, the football team began to tease

me. I ran to my classroom as fast as possible and took three deep breaths. I was safe for now. Looking around the classroom, I looked for a seat as close to the teacher as possible. For the last three years, I spent most of my time searching for the safest place away from Donovan. Donovan was a transfer student from the school across town, who had stayed back a grade. He may not have been the brightest kid, but that didn't matter. He was the oldest, strongest, fastest, and meanest kid in our grade. He was my worst nightmare.

I could hide from the older boys in the classroom and avoid the lunchroom, but I couldn't evade Donovan. The bell rang, class was about to begin, and I couldn't turn my head around. I knew he would be just a few seats back, waiting for me to turn so he could let me know he was there. Our teacher stood at her desk. "Good morning students and welcome to seventh grade. My name is Ms. Zaccone, but you can refer to me as Ms. Z." SMACK! As soon as Ms. Z had turned her back to write her name on the board, a rubber band bounced off my neck. The pain was sharp. All I wanted to do was scream, but I knew doing so would only let him know it hurt. So instead, I held the pain in, squinted my eyes, and waited for it to go away.

A few hours went by, and Ms. Z hadn't turned around long enough for Donovan to pick on me again. But now it was time for gym class, and I knew I would have to turn around eventually. I slowly turned my neck to the right as I got up out of my chair, hoping to not make eye contact with Donovan. I was out of my chair, walking into line and the coast was clear. The line started moving forward as we followed Ms. Z. I was just about to put my right foot forward when I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was a very light tap, but it felt as if someone had just dropped a brick onto it. I didn't even have to turn to know who it was. But, I made the mistake of turning anyway. I turned around and there we were. Standing face to face, looking each other in the eyes. He had a slight smile, and my jaw just dropped wide open. He was right behind me, and I could tell from his smile that he was about to do something.

Walking past the other classrooms, all eyes were watching us walk by. Everything seemed ordinary, one student after another lined the halls, but then something caught my eye. There was a glow around one of the students. I never saw her before, but immediately felt something special. Who was this girl? Where did she come from? As I started to walk by, I glanced over and couldn't help from smiling. Without hesitation, the girl

smiled back, and I was in awe. She was beautiful, and as I walked past her, I could feel my heart racing faster. For that moment, I was on top of the world. I could barely stop staring. I slowly turned my head, trying to get just one more glimpse, and then reality struck from behind. Donovan flung his foot into the back of my heel, kicking my foot around my other leg and making me fall flat on my back. There I lie in front of fifty other students, flat on the ground as they all laughed at me. I was experiencing the big and humiliating “new school year welcome” that kept me up at nights. As I lay there on the floor in complete humiliation, I couldn’t bring myself to my feet knowing she was probably laughing at me too. Ms. Z left the front of the line and helped me to my feet. Still laughing, all of the other students continued outside to the football field for class. Brushing off the knees of my pants, I picked up my head to tell Ms. Z, “I must have tripped, I’m not hurt.”

I knew I couldn’t tell on Donovan or things would just get worse tomorrow. I walked outside and passed through the different circles of friends. I could feel the stares, see the fingers pointing, and hear the laughter. Without saying a word, I continued to the bench and sat down by myself. Lowering my head down to my chest, I caught a glimpse of a group of girls still laughing. But, right before my

eyes met the ground, I saw the girl from the hallway. Unlike the other girls in the group, she was not laughing. Instead, she was slightly smiling. A kind smile that felt different from the piercing laughs of her classmates. I couldn't tell if she was just holding in the laughter or if she was trying to smile at me. But either way, with my head now down, just the thought of her smiling started to make me feel better. I was no longer worried about who was still laughing, what they were saying, or anything. All I could think about was the smile of this girl and how fast she made my heart race.

Gym class had come to an end, and it was almost time to go home. For the rest of the school day, it seemed as if nothing else mattered. Not once did I worry about Donovan sitting behind me, what he might do the next time Ms. Z turned her back, or about being small. All I could think about was this mysterious girl and when I would see her next. It was as if with just a smile, she had defeated all the demons that had haunted me.

But the end-of-the-day bell rang, and I was brought back to reality. There he was, staring at me for who knows how long. Just seeing his eyes made me feel like I shrunk two feet. It was now time to find the path to the bus that would keep me away from the swarms of students. Every



day, I begged my Mom to pick me up, but the answer was always the same, “You know nothing in this world would make me happier than picking you up, but Mom has to work.”

The school bus was the scariest time for me. Every ride felt like I was in a real haunted hayride surrounded by monsters. There were older boys in the back who always caused trouble, some football players in front of them, and then Donovan even further in front of them. It was my worst nightmare, and they knew it. With no authority on the bus except the bus driver who was too busy driving, this is where I got it the worst. From stealing my stuff to flicking my ears, every ride seemed to last a lifetime. I would count the bus stops, pray we never hit a red light, and have my backpack around my shoulder while I sat on the edge of the seat ready to jump up and off the bus when we hit my stop.

The bus had just dropped off a few students at bus stop number five, and I was number six. I could see the stop sign that marked my stop. Five hundred feet, four hundred feet, one hundred feet... Before the bus came to a complete stop, I was out of my seat and walking up the aisle, hoping the bus driver didn't notice. The bus brakes creaked, it came to a jolting stop pushing me backward,

forwards, and then I heard the door fold open. Before the door could open to its entirety, I sneaked my way to the front and began sprinting towards my house. I knew that all I had to do was make it past the first two streets before I was in the clear. “Stop running, Bodhi, you will only make it worst,” screamed one of the boys. “Look at him run to his Mommy! Run to Mommy, run,” another would shout. I was now in a full sprint, my book bag swinging from side to side almost making me run in zigzags. I could hear the shoes of the boys behind me hitting the ground faster and faster with each step. My heart was racing.

With fear fueling my body, I ran harder and harder. Running past the first street, I knew I was almost in the clear. “Here we come!” shouted Donovan. “You aren’t fast enough.” Halfway to the second street, I could hear their steps even closer. I knew I couldn’t look back and risk tripping. All I could think about was the moment one of them would reach out for my book bag, grab hold of me, and pull me to the ground. The second street was now in my sight. Just when I thought I was finally in the clear, it happened.

The footsteps were now next to me. I could see the boy’s arm reaching out from the corner of my eye. With my bag swinging, I felt a firm tug as his fingers grasped the

front pocket. His great force pushed my bag back to the left, and the weight of the bag twirled me like a top until I fell onto the grass. Lying face first in the grass, the boys stripped the straps off my shoulders and took my bag. They unzipped it, dumped out all my books and walked the other way. High-fiving as they left me broken in their tracks. My clothes were now grass-stained, and my book covers were all ripped. I picked my belongings up, put them back into my bag, and walked the remaining block home. With tears in my eyes, I just wanted to quit school. I couldn't go through this for another year, there was just no way. A few houses from home, the tears stopped, and my breathing slowed down. I approached our house and was greeted by my babysitter at the front door. Having had an awful first day, I immediately went into my room and closed my bedroom door.

A few hours went by, and my parents would be arriving home from work soon. Staring out my bedroom window, I could see my Mom's car approaching. As she pulled into the driveway, before even opening her door, my Dad pulled up as well. I knew it would be just a matter of time before they were calling my name to come tell them about the first day of school. What was I going to say to them? It was the worst day ever, everyone laughed at me, and my uniform was

ruined because I was swung into the grass? I couldn't tell them the truth; I had to think of another story. In what felt like the blink of an eye, I heard my Dad's voice, "Bodhi, come down and say hi to your Mom and Dad. We want to hear how your first day went."

Taking baby steps, I slowly crept my way down the stairs and into the living room. I was still contemplating what to say. I replayed the entire day in my head from being dropped off, being laughed at as my Mom yelled "I love you," the pain of the rubber band, the tap on the shoulder, to being tripped in the hallway. But then, I remembered the girl I saw. That special glow around her and the warmth of her smile. Immediately, all the bad things that happened earlier disappeared. I looked at my parents and with a smile on my face said, "The first day went great." I don't know what changed, but all of a sudden, everything I could remember was positive. I told them about how friendly Ms. Z was, the new equipment in gym class, and how much I loved learning about science. I can't tell you what had happened at that moment. All I knew was, that was the best first day of school I ever had.

## About the Author

Justin McLennan is a certified life coach and co-founder of Living with Shape, a program dedicated to engaging and motivating today's youth to live an inspired and balanced life. Justin currently works with kids of all ages to increase their awareness of healthy living through mindfulness, physical training, and through incorporating valuable life lessons into short and long-term goal setting.

Justin dedicates himself to helping children find their passion and become the best version of themselves. This series is written in a creative, fun way to incorporate life lessons that will hopefully motivate our youth to live a healthy lifestyle.

For more on Living with SHAPE, please visit [www.livingwithshape.com](http://www.livingwithshape.com).