

## Jerry's Magic Shoes, by Paul Arinaga

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"I've always believed that if you put in the work, the results will come. I don't do things half-heartedly. Because I know if I do, then I can expect half-hearted results."

~Michael Jordan

Jerry was having a tough time.

Ever since his mom and dad had split up it seemed like his life and taken a turn for the worse.

For one thing, he'd had to leave his school and all his good friends. When Jerry arrived in January for the first day at his new school in Brooklyn, the other children gave him strange looks and said: "you talk funny." Jerry's mom was from Hungary and his Dad was from Texas.

After that things seemed to get worse and worse. Jerry had always had trouble concentrating in school but without his dad (who was a professor) around all the time to help him with his homework he really started to have trouble in class. Pretty soon the other kids started to call him "sluggard" because they said he was "as slow as a slug."

Jerry was slow in sports, too. His folks had never been into sports and since he didn't have any brothers or sisters he didn't have anyone to play with. It hadn't mattered at his old school since people seemed to just do their own thing and let other people do their own thing, too. But at Jerry's new school the kids who were good at sports were "cool" and anyone who wasn't good at sports was a "wimp."

Jerry actually loved sports. He especially loved to watch basketball on TV. He dreamed of one day playing in the NBA, even though he was extra short for his age (the other kids called him "shrimp" and "shortie", too). In fact, Jerry often had daydreams about becoming the top scorer in the NBA.

One afternoon as Jerry was sitting in math class, Mr. Marconi was droning on about circles and pi. Jerry looked out the window and saw a truck driving by. On the side of the truck was a picture of Michael Jordan in an ad for Nike's latest basketball shoes.

Jerry started to get that glazed look in his eyes. Pretty soon he was having a vivid daydream. He was playing basketball with Michael Jordan. "Whoa!" he almost said out loud as he swished a jump shot from the top of the key. Michael gave him a high five and Jerry smiled.

"Mr. Rumple, perhaps you could tell the class how to calculate the circumference of this circle," Mr. Marconi was peering down at Jerry and pointing to a circle on the blackboard.

"You take...ah...pi...ah times..." Jerry spluttered.

"Perhaps if you got off your *rump*, Mr. *Rumple*, and actually did your homework you'd be able to answer these questions," said Mr. Marconi in a voice dripping with sarcasm. The whole class erupted with laughter and someone at the back said: "yeah, get off your rump, Rumple!"

Just then the school bell went off and everyone made a mad dash to get out.

A few minutes later, Jerry was walking out of the school.

Groups of his classmates hovered around the school steps chatting. Some of them pointed at Jerry and then they all laughed. They were probably telling the story about geometry class.

Jerry rounded the corner and almost stopped dead in his tracks. There was a gang of the toughest boys.

"Hey Rumple, watcha got on your rump?" asked one of them with a sly grin.

Jerry looked at his backside. Someone had taped a note to his butt that said: "Jerry the Rump." No wonder everyone had been laughing as he left school.

One of the boys grabbed Jerry's book bag.

"Hey, give that back!" screamed Jerry.

The boys started tossing it back and forth to each other as Jerry ran from one to the other. They laughed uproariously at the sight of Jerry running around frantically. In all the commotion Jerry's glasses fell off. He scuffled with one of the mean boys to get them but the boy was too

fast. With that, all the boys ran off...taking Jerry's glasses and book bag with them.

Jerry slumped down in the alleyway. Now he was really discouraged. He hated his new school and his new life. "I wish I could go back to my old school," thought Jerry to himself. In frustration he picked up a rock and threw it against the metal dumpster in front of him.

It ricocheted off and landed next to a pair of white shoes. Jerry looked at the shoes. These weren't just any shoes. They were basketball shoes. In fact, they were the very same shoes he'd seen in the Michael Jordan Nike ad.

Jerry picked himself up and walked over to the shoes.

They looked like they were brand new. "How did these ever get here?" he wondered. "They must have fallen off the truck," he thought to himself. They looked big, but without thinking Jerry grabbed the shoes and tried them on.

Oddly, when he put them on it seemed like his feet grew to fill the shoes.

Just then, one of the boys who had been bullying Jerry popped his head into the alleyway, looked straight at Jerry and shouted "He's gone!" Then he threw Jerry's glasses and book bag into the dumpster and ran off.

Jerry went over to the dumpster, grabbed his bag and headed home.

He cast a last glance back at the school to make sure the coast was clear and did a double take.

There, standing in the middle of the basketball court was Michael Jordan.

"It can't be," said Jerry to himself. He walked over to the chain link fence, mesmerized by the sight of his hero.

Sure enough, Michael Jordan was talking to members of the basketball team.

"Any volunteers for an exhibition match," he asked.

Without thinking, Jerry threw his bag down and ran onto the court.

“What are you doing, boy? You can’t play,” he heard Mr. Steele, the basketball coach say sternly.

“Hey, it’s cool...let the kid play,” said Michael. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“Alright, Jerry’s on my team,” said Michael.

Suddenly, Jerry realized that half the school was watching and he felt a twinge of self-doubt.

“Uh-oh!” he thought to himself.

But he didn’t have time to think much more. Jack, the star of the basketball team whipped the ball at him and said roughly, “You start.”

Jerry put his glasses on and started dribbling cautiously down the court.

Someone watching shouted derisively, “Jerry the rump!”

Pretty soon the whole crowd was chanting “Jerry the rump! Jerry the rump!”

Jerry passed to Michael, but Jack intercepted it and scored. Then Jack stole the ball and scored again.

Pretty soon, Michael and Jerry were down by 10 points.

“Rump, you suck!” one of the onlookers shouted.

“Time out,” said Michael.

He rested a big hand on Jerry’s shoulder and said, “Jerry, what’s the matter?”

“Aaawww, they’re right...I do suck, I’m not good at basketball or anything,” said Jerry in a dejected tone.

“You know what, Jerry,” said Michael, “I got cut the first time I tried out for the junior varsity team, and some people said I’d never make it. But I loved basketball so much that I found me a great teacher, just kept practicin’ and practicin’, and played every time like I was already a great player.”

“And you know what,” Michael continued, “it didn’t happen overnight, but I finally did make the team, and, well, look at me now.”

Michael softened his voice and stared into Jerry’s face.

“Jerry, it looks like you’re not the most popular guy around here, but the only thing that really matters is what YOU think,” he said, pointing to his head.

“Now, I want you to go out there and play like you’re a pro...remember, you got the magic shoes.”

The game started again and immediately Jerry flubbed a pass.

“C’mon, Jerry, use the magic shoes, kid!” shouted Michael.

Jerry passed to Michael and he scored.

“Rumple rocks!” said Michael, giving Jerry a high five and doing a little dance.

“Swish,” Jerry scored his first basket.

“Yeah, baby, he be using them magic shoes,” exclaimed Michael with a big grin on his face.

In the end, Jerry and Michael won the game 52-37, but only because Michael scored 10 times in a row to catch up.

The next day at school, a lot of Jerry’s classmates came up to him and said “good game, Rumple.”

Even Mr. Marconi said acidly: “Now, if only you could do math as well as you play basketball.”

And even one of the nastiest bullies said “Not bad, Rumple.”

Some of the other bullies still gave Jerry a hard time. But it didn’t bother him too much anymore. Every time he started to feel down, he’d remember what Michael had said. Then Jerry would tap his head and say to himself, “use the magic shoes.”

And did Jerry become a star player in the NBA?

Nope. But he **did** practice basketball everyday and play with the heart of a pro.

Like Michael, he got cut the first time he tried out for the JV basketball tem. But he **did** make it on his second try.

And whenever he played, Jerry always felt like he was wearing magic shoes.

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