

## **Nantucket Book Festival Young Writer Award Finalists 2019**

### **Third Runner Up**

#### **The Habit of Not Giving Up : 9th Grade**

**Maryann Vasquez-Cruz**

Sometimes it just takes being the tortoise to win the race instead of a hare. Jesus “Chuy” Partida has proven that to me. Most commonly known as Chuy, a Mexican nickname given to people by the name of Jesus. Chuy is a house caretaker and a soccer coach. Chuy has helped Hispanics around our island enjoy the sport of soccer, helping an indoor and summer league running and helping some Hispanics just play soccer. He tries to make a point of contact for the Hispanic community with soccer, something the community appreciates, and offers help or advice to those that need it. His charismatic character that keeps cheering me on no matter how well I do. Without him, I would not have become the Maryann people know now. The one that never gives up, tries her hardest and most of all, is passionate about soccer.

It was a cold fall day, the roaring winds slapping my face as I walked down the cracked sidewalk. I looked up, only to see my destination, the Boys & Girls Club. I had heard from many people that there was indoor soccer available at the Boys & Girls Club, and I decided that I should go and take a look. Ever since I started kicking around a soccer ball, I had become enamored with the sport of soccer. From the focus and quick reactions, the tactful positioning that allowed for good passes and most of all, the amazing and exciting goals that made my heart jump in happiness.

I followed the sounds of the squeaking sneakers and cleats only to find what I was looking for. A group of boys, tall, short, skinny, chubby, all playing soccer. Two teams were playing head to head, dribbling and passing the ball. Both teams being able to pass the ball to each other smoothly as if they were pegs in a pinball machine. The boys playing were very strong as their kicks seemed to send the ball 100 miles per hour, the impact of the ball bringing you to shiver in fear, even if it didn't hit you. I stood there for what seemed like an eternity until I felt someone tap lightly my shoulder. Chuy's kind smile greeted me. He asked me if I was interested in playing with the boys. I was hesitant but I nodded my head, not wanting to reject his offer since he asked so nicely. I stood silently next to him and waited till our team was up to play, my heart racing as if I had already played. When we got into our positions on the court, all the boys were questioning why a girl was playing with them. I ignored their blank stares and tried focusing on only playing, only to play horribly as my legs kept tangling up trying to dribble the ball. Every day I went it was hard to accept the truth; none of the boys wanted to play with a girl. Every time I would watch the teams being picked, I was always last to be picked or not even picked at all. Chuy would put me in his team and I thought it was nice of him to put me in his team and try to give me a chance, but I felt like I was being pitied. I would play anyways, keeping myself open for a pass, but my presence was just ignored by all the boys. At the end of every day, I felt horrible, my mind flashing back to all the mistakes I had done, disappointment piling up on my conscience. I walked into the court one day, the sun bright gymnasium lights blinding me again

as I walked in. Chuy walked over to me and he asked me to do some drills with him. We began passing the ball to each other, him asking me to do multiple things. From chest trapping the ball to shooting the ball into the small indoor goal. He observed me, stopping me from time to time, explaining and showing me what I had done wrong. I mimicked his movements, replaying step by step in my head what he had taught me.

He kept giving me advice, willing to help me whenever I needed, and I took any chance he gave me, wanting to prove to the boys I could be like them too. Days, weeks and even months passed, and the unheard of was said. I was picked for a team and I wasn't the last one picked either. I was surprised to hear one of the boys wanting me to play in their team, which showed me that I was coming to their attention. After that day, the boys would pick me for a team and I noticed that indeed I was getting better, Chuy's teaching echoing through my head as I dribbled the ball. The shiny ball would now move with me through the court, as I kicked and passed it with life and purpose into net, achieving my goal and a goal for the team. Back then and even today, I stand next to the boys and play with them, not being considered a girl but as a teammate.

Chuy has taught me that giving up is not an option if I want to be better at something. If I gave up playing indoor soccer, maybe I would have never improved or made so many good soccer friends. His coaching has helped me improve and I want to be better, and prove to him that everything he has taught me is being translated into my playing. He's been there for me where my family hasn't, helping me improve and continue my passion for soccer. Today I still thank him for everything he's done, and hope to give back to him his efforts for mine and become the best I can be for him. My willingness to never give up, always try hard and my passion for soccer is all to be thanked for Chuy.