

## A “Magic” Life

I recently attended the YMCA Association Assembly in Chicago at which Earvin “Magic” Johnson was the keynote speaker. As a kid of the 70’s and 80’s I have fond memories of the 1979 NCAA title game in which Magic’s Michigan State team downed the undefeated Indiana State Sycamore’s led by Larry Bird. He went on to win 5 NBA Championships, an Olympic Gold with the Dream Team and is in the Basketball Hall of Fame.

The question you may ask is why was Magic Johnson speaking to a room full of YMCA executives and board volunteers? The answer is similar to millions of American children and is told through his Y Story as a youngster growing up in Lansing, Michigan. In the tough streets of Lansing he found the Y at an early age and played basketball around the clock, often practicing and imitating his favorite player’s hours before his friends arrived. His mom even sent food with one of his six siblings as she knew he wouldn’t leave the court for lunch. The Y provided him experiences that were generally out of reach for children in Lansing. He participated in arts & crafts, visited the zoo and was able to attend a YMCA camp where we watched the other kids ride horses. His Y Basketball shirt was his prized possession and he started winning Y league championships in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. In high school he was required to be bussed to the predominately white Everett High School and for the first time in his life did not find instant success but by his senior year he took Everett to a state championship. He even decided to attend Michigan State because of an experience playing on their court at halftime with his Y team as a child.

His message to us was two-fold. First and foremost to thank us for working for the Y. An organization whose mission is to serve all. He really feels the Y is what made it possible for him to achieve success in life. He did not understand it at the time but similar to Marshall the community of Lansing supported the Y with their time and treasure, making it possible for all children to access the positive atmosphere which the Y provided. He also challenged us to go back to our home Ys and expand our efforts to serve children. In essence to nurture the potential of all children whether it be through sports, arts, camps, etc. Nobody knew that a little kid who loved basketball would grow 8 inches in two years and become one of the greatest stars of the game. The Y story is the same in Marshall today. We have no idea who our children will become and the difference they will make in this world but it is our duty as a Y and a community to nurture their potential so they can become whatever they dream.