

# The Mom Squad

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By Joni M. Fisher

When my daughter Jessica joined the Junior Varsity Cheerleading squad in high school, I never suspected how much it would demand of both of us. Sure, the girls cheered at football games and basketball games, but these activities merely fronted for the real action—competitive cheerleading. Not for the poor or faint of heart, competitive cheerleading demanded \$800 for uniforms, pom-poms, ribbons, shoes, team socks and the requisite gallon-size bucket of glitter, on top of two-hour practices six days a week.

The girls took cheerleading seriously, but the cheerleader moms treated the whole thing like a holy mission. Many had been cheerleaders at this same high school not so long ago and longed to cheer again. When I say that the mothers wanted to cheer again, I mean they had their own team.

The premise of the mom team was that we would surprise the girls by performing a cheer for them the night before their first big competition—the State Cheer & Dance Championships in Jacksonville. I was easily ten years older than the other mothers, so the suggestion of joining a cheerleading team made me laugh. Come on, the mothers begged. You're not dead yet, they teased. Besides, it'll be such fun. How hard could it be?

At the first meeting, the coaches assessed our skills. Sure, our tumbling runs included front rolls, one-handed cartwheels and jumps, but those were as

challenging to us as full-twisting back somersaults were for the girls. As a whopping size eight, I was recruited to be a base, that is, to hoist another mom in the air with the help of a partner. The coach announced she would videotape our practices. I seconded the motion for insurance purposes. We held our clandestine practices at the home of one of the coaches. A few of the moms had--let's call it--new equipment they wanted to display, so they suggested we buy uniforms. The majority voted instead for navy shorts and matching T-shirts. Thank you, thank you. My original equipment did not need to be showcased in tight clothing. Aside from the promise of fun, cheerleading offered a chance to counteract the effects of gravity, so I threw myself into learning to cheer.

The cheer routine seemed as complicated as a music video. I kept colliding with my neighbors because I'd step left when others stepped right. I felt like one of the hippos in Disney's cartoon classic *The Fantasia*. Risking injury and loss of dignity, I still wasn't having the promised fun.

One mom, a size zero who yearned to be mistaken for her daughter's sister, served as a 'flyer,' meaning one of the women hefted overhead. She came to a practice fresh from a massage and since none of us could properly grip her perfectly toned, oiled calves, we kept dropping her. To make the situation worse, the flyer pleaded to the coach for different bases. Two of us assigned to lifting Mrs. Size Zero had never cheered before and apparently had to be reminded of this dreadful gap in our education. To her we were posers and she apparently felt obligated to call us out. Oh, the shame.

The coach yelled at us, so I asked her to show me how to do it the right way. Hey, I can play stupid. I really enjoyed watching Mrs. Size Zero slide down

through the coach's expert hands. The coach switched to practicing dance steps without another comment. At last, the promise of fun had come through.

We used the same so-called music the girls used for their cheer. Imagine a blaring radio that switches channels every twenty seconds. Add the sounds of glass breaking, horns blaring, highway traffic and rap chants then amplify that noise to the decibel level of a jet engine at takeoff. More than dance, more than gymnastics, cheerleading demanded much from us individually and in teamwork.

Months of preparations culminated in the one and only live performance of the mom team. Never mind the broken elbow suffered by one of the moms—a trooper who continued through the routine—we had survived. We proudly inhaled handfuls of Advil while our hysterically-amused daughters and spouses congratulated us.

The next day Jessica's High School Junior Varsity girls' team took second place in the State Cheer & Dance Championships in Jacksonville, Florida. They won first place at the Florida State Fair and second place at the American Open. The Varsity team was equally impressive.

Jessica retired from cheerleading her sophomore year to devote time to a social life and studies. So, at age forty five, having followed my daughter into cheerleading, I followed her out and gleefully retired my pom-pons.