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## Stalling on the Bottom

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## Stalling on the Bottom

### **Author Bio**

Erin is a sophomore from Frenchtown, New Jersey. On campus, she is a staff writer for the Features section of the Gettysburgian and a brother of Alpha Phi Omega.

# Stalling on the Bottom

Erin Gallagher

“Erin Gallagher, 45 pounds,” I said to my father, checking in at the end table bisecting the family room couches.

My mother sighed from the kitchen. She hated when my dad hosted these wrestling tournaments.

“Come on, Kendra,” he’d argue. “It’s good for them. Do you want them to turn out to be babies?”

“Tim,” she’d chide. “Little girls shouldn’t know the difference between a headlock and a crossface. They’re not boys!”

My mother was the first to see Dad’s wrestling matches for what they really were: ruthless contests that pitted sister-against-sister, with the winner receiving the grand prize of Dad’s affection. Seeing past the immediate outcomes of each match, scraped knees or bruised egos, she foresaw the emotional rift that would ultimately be driven between my sister and I, a fissure that would only lessen with time and age, once we both became too old to wrestle.

But Dad didn’t care. I could see how the evergreen carpet of our family room transformed into the wrestling mat of South Plainfield High for him, the way he became that freckled, floppy-haired boy again, his green singlet loose on his 119-pound frame.

We’d wait for him. At exactly 5:00 each evening, Ashley and I would sit expectantly on the suede couch, waiting for the headlights of his Crown Victoria to seep through the bay windows and dance across the ceiling, to hear the groan of the garage door opening underneath. At last, when his footsteps pounded the floorboards of the stairs, we’d run to the doorway, where he’d greet us both with a kiss and get on his hands and knees in his New Jersey State Police uniform, ready to wrestle.

Although she was two years older, my seven-year-old sister, Ashley, was still no match for me. She was, as my mother would say proudly to anyone who’d listen, a peanut. “When she was born, she only weighed six pounds, eleven ounces. At a year, she only weighed fifteen pounds. Teeny, tiny little thing,” she’d say, the corners of her mouth lifting into a reminiscent smile.

We couldn’t have been more different. Ashley’s pale, porcelain complexion and blonde hair clashed strikingly with my heavily freckled skin and dark locks, inherited from my mother. Her slight frame and stature

caused strangers to smile knowingly at me and say, “And *you* must be the *big* sister!”

When it came to wrestling, I didn’t mind being the pudgy one. Size was an advantage. And today, I could really use it. To start the match, Dad gave Ashley top position, much to her satisfaction. Everyone knew bottom was the worse option of the two. On bottom, you are under the complete control of your opponent, blind to any of her moves, left only to counteract each one two seconds too late. Even under Ashley’s light weight, I knew wriggling out from underneath would be a challenge. As I reluctantly knelt on the ground, both hands planted on the carpet, she smirked and stuck out her tongue.

I waited as she planted her left knee just to the side of my left foot, grabbed my elbow with her left hand, and reached around my waist with the other. Her breath felt hot and sticky on my ear.

Dad surveyed our stances. “Good,” he said. “Ready, set...go!”

Immediately, Ashley pressed all fifty pounds of herself onto my back, pulling my left arm out from under me. Surprised, I collapsed brusquely onto the floor.

“C’mon, Er,” Dad said, his eyes excited. “Get off your belly!”

But I had lost my elevation. With my hips down and stomach on the floor, a reversal was impossible. I bit my lip hard and heaved upward, attempting to throw Ashley off of my back but quickly thudded back to the carpet. Her weight was too much to buck.

“What’s going on in there?” Mom asked, her voice distant and muffled by the sound of a crackling skillet.

Dad ignored her. “Control the hips, Ash! Ride your toes!” he hollered traitorously. Always eager to please, Ashley crushed me even harder into the floor, paralyzing the bottom half of my body. The carpet callously scraped my cheek, leaving it raw and stinging. Tears sprang into my eyes, and I struggled to control them from streaming unmercifully down my face.

Dad pounded the floor in warning. “Stalling on the bottom,” he said. “Let’s go, Er. Hips up! Go for the reversal!”

Stalling? That couldn’t be possible. I was Dad’s greatest student: a role, I later realized, I could never shake. Mindful of his every tip, I prided myself on remembering to always remain confident during a match, to remember that technique wins over strength every time, and to never let my opponent know I was tired. Every time I had remembered these things, I was rewarded with a win by my father, and my hand thrust into the air as a champion. And afterwards, when the mat transfigured back into the family room carpet, my father would say to no one in particular, “She may be younger, but she’s *scrappy*.”

Ashley's fingernails dug into my shoulder, forcefully trying to unpeel me from the floor as if I were a wad of gum stuck to her shoe. She was off-balance; I could feel it. "Nice try, baby," she sneered into my ear. Suddenly, I was exploding upward, elevating my weight through the curvature of my back, springing to my feet with a familiar ease.

"Two points! Plus two!" Dad said excitedly. I met Ashley's eyes for the first time, their bizarre shade of gray-blue, and they instantly gave her away. Crouching on her too-skinny legs, her arms outstretched as if in an embrace. She looked comical, a caricature of a wrestler. For a second, I almost felt sorry for her. But then I remembered what we were fighting for, what we would always be fighting for.

Without breaking eye contact, I shot for her leg. Mercilessly, I grabbed at her ankle, completely exposed and unprotected, and pulled it out from beneath her. Like an animal snagged in a bear trap, Ashley whimpered on the floor helplessly, losing any advantage she had.

"Go for the pin! Go for the pin!" Dad hollered.

"Tim!" my mom shouted from the kitchen. "If one of these girls comes crying to me afterwards, I swear--"

I didn't hear the rest. I flipped Ashley onto her back, smothering her with my weight. Surprisingly, she hadn't given up yet.

"Lift your shoulder blade up off the ground, Ash! Hurry!" Dad said, always the double-sided coach. Struggling underneath my weight, she lifted her shoulder off the carpet in a last-ditch effort at victory. Swiftly, I came down on her, digging my chin into the soft spot under her shoulder.

"Ouch!" she cried, her voice quavering from the pain.

Dad scrambled to the ground, frantically looking at the move from each angle, before pounding the floor and crying triumphantly, "Pin! Pin!" He pulled me to my feet and grabbed my hand, raising it into the air. "Winner!" he exclaimed. Ashley's lip quivered, her eyes pooling with tears. "Come on now, shake hands," Dad said. Contorting her face grotesquely, Ashley began to cry uncontrollably, hiccups violently shaking her tiny frame.

"Mommaaaa!" she cried as she ran into the kitchen.

"Aw, c'mon. Don't be a baby!" Dad called after her.

He patted me on the back. "Come on, now, Scrappy. Time to go eat."

As we walked to the kitchen table, Mom shot Dad a glare from the stovetop, brushing away pieces of hair stuck to Ashley's tear-stained cheeks. "I hope you're happy, Tim," she said. "What are you teaching your kids?"

Dad's mouth opened, as if about to say something, and then it shut.

*To be a winner*, I answered for him. *To always come out on top*.