

Pass It On®...

From Homeless to Johns Hopkins.

Life is never fair. But if you work hard enough, and help someone along the way, you give yourself a better chance to make it.

Chris Smith looked like any other young boy in his class: bushy hair, a wide smile and enough freckles to charm a grandmother out of a whole jar of cookies. He played sports, working his way onto the football and wrestling teams. By all appearances, life for Chris was the same as it was for a hundred other boys in the small town where he grew up. Except for the constant evictions, living like a squatter without electricity and eventually being homeless.

Chris' father was reckless with finances and dishonest in business. His mother coped the best she could until Chris' little brother drowned, and his father went to jail. Then it all fell apart.

"My mom shut down emotionally. Everything got worse," Chris remembers. And then she was gone, moved on without telling Chris. He did the best he could, sleeping on his newly married sister's couch. "They didn't have much money, and I know it was a burden to take me in at 17 years old. I was just hoping to graduate from high school and make it on my own."

But Chris' history teacher had other ideas. When Chris began to falter on assignments, she cornered him. "You're the smartest kid in the class," she told him. "If you don't graduate, you're going to regret it."

A good mentor makes all the difference, and sometimes you need more than one to help you along. Chris' wrestling coach taught him how to work hard to value teamwork over individual achievement.

"School was my safe place," Chris says. He spent a lot of time in the library and the gym, ingesting the lessons of underdogs who overcame incredible odds to make it. School also offered heat and food. It became the closest thing to home he could find, compared to his father's old Chevy truck that became his bed and his study space. He remembers his hair freezing onto the window in the winter.

When graduation came, Chris earned a full scholarship to college, but the load was heavy, and his grades slipped just enough to lose his funding. Still, Chris refused to give up. He found grants and loans, transferred to a smaller college and graduated in the top 10 of his class. And then on to bigger dreams.

Chris was accepted to medical school, got married and threw himself into the grind. That's when another challenge hit. A family member lost custody of her child, so Chris and his new wife adopted the baby girl and tried to balance life together.

When it came time to apply for medical residencies, Chris set his sights high. He applied to residencies around the country and included the No. 1 program in the nation: Johns Hopkins.

"I didn't really think I had a chance. But I had learned to give everything your best shot."

And then the letter came. Chris was in.

They say dreams are made of hard work. Chris had to work harder than most. And now, as a practicing radiologist, he takes time to speak to students about what it takes to make it. "You can do it," he says, echoing the words of his history teacher. "You are the smartest kids in the world."

Determination... [PassItOn.com](https://www.passiton.com)

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