

One day, mid-way through my fifth grade year, I walked in the door of our home in Temecula, California and found a television crew in our living room. Somewhat surprised, I asked my mother what was happening, to which she replied that they were there to record a TV series called “Beyond the Glory.” It was a program based on the lives of famous sports families. Since there was really nothing famous about the people in my immediate family, it was a bit shocking to see the talking heads rushing around our home setting up cameras, lights, microphones, and other various equipment completely foreign to an 11 year old. Nonetheless, it was the day that I began to realize that our humble little family, known in our community for charity work and participation at my school, was living in the shadow of a sports icon, my grandfather, Dr. Jerry Buss. Grandpa Buss is nothing short of a tremendous entrepreneur, and among his many achievements was one small little detail... He owns the Los Angeles Lakers.

Growing up as the “Laker Kid” one might think that my life would be shaped and molded in some bizarre entanglement ranging from eccentric to glamorous. After all, how could the descendants of a multi-millionaire live a “normal” existence? But in reality, nothing could be farther from the truth. True, Grandpa Buss gave his legacy, but it was actually my paternal Grandfather Fred Drexel who played the larger role in forming my personality, my opinions, my self-confidence, and to a great degree, my happiness. Without a doubt, Grandpa Fred has always been an inspiration to me. A constant source of encouragement, he never hesitated to tell me that there “was nothing that I couldn’t accomplish” or that I “could be anything I wanted to be”. He was a hard worker, a devoted husband, a loving father, and although he didn’t build a sports empire, he built something that was perhaps more important, a stable and supportive family. I am proud of the Drexel side of my family and can honestly say that the person I am today is far more their handiwork than one might think, given my mother’s heritage.

So, when you ask me “Where I come from?” and “How has that shaped me?” it’s tempting to paint the page with elaborate words celebrating my Laker connections but that portrait, albeit interesting, would not really be accurate. Where I truly come from is a family dedicated to raising respectful children, a family that cares deeply for the welfare of others, and a family that strives to make the small world around them a better place. I have been taught to respect authority, to learn from my mistakes, and to do what I can to help those around me. Today, and in the days to come, that’s the real Riley Drexel.