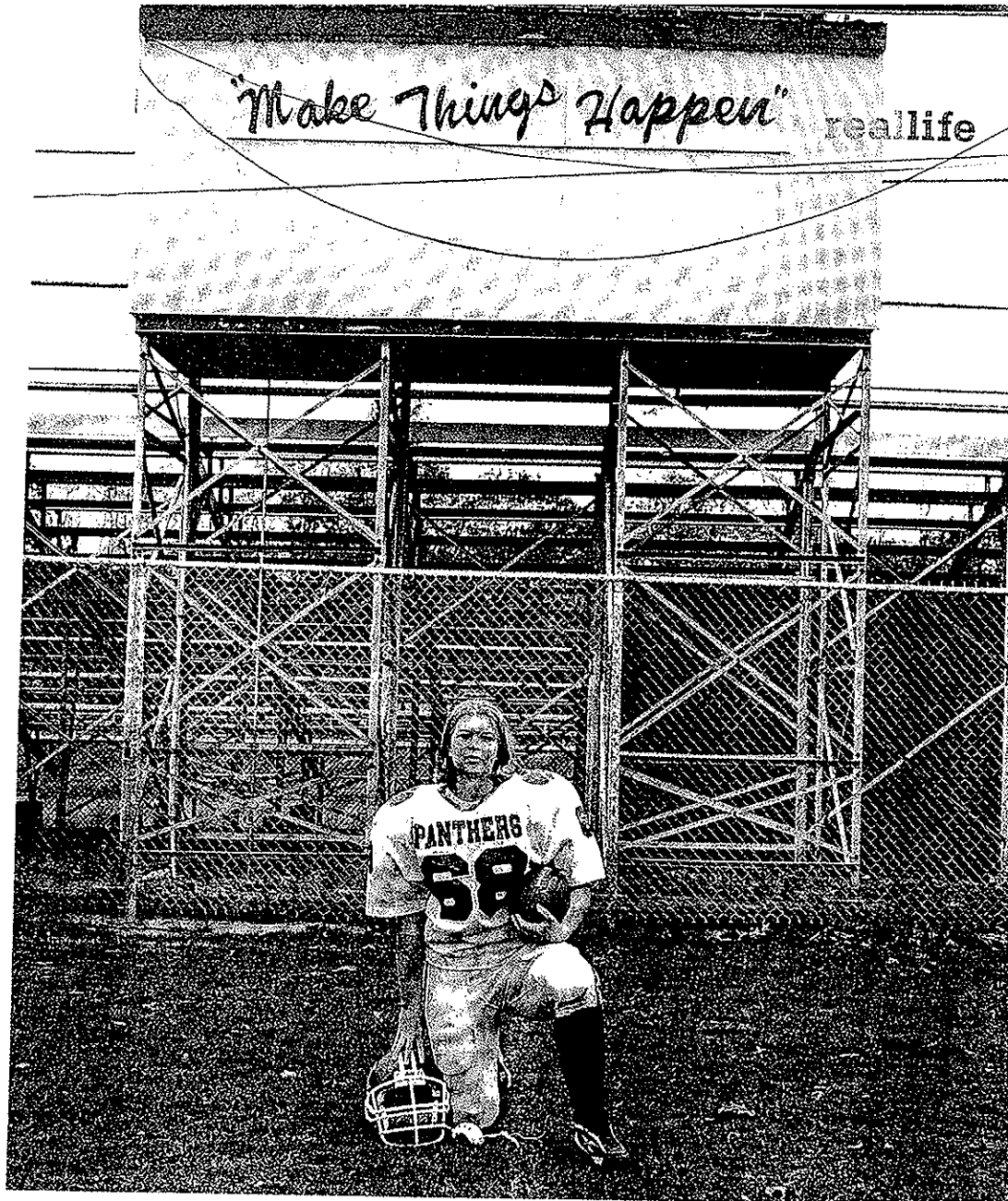


"Make Things Happen" reallife

"I was a cheerleader for a couple of years, but I would watch the games instead of paying attention to the cheers. I was friends with some of the guys on the team and would tell them what they should have done in the game.

They told me that if I thought I could do any better, then I should come play football myself."

—LISA WELCH, AGE 15  
MIDLAND PARK, NEW JERSEY



# generation IX

[ HOW AN ACT OF CONGRESS CHANGED THE LIVES OF THOUSANDS OF AMERICAN GIRLS ]

**O**n a typical summer afternoon in 1973 at our rambling New Jersey house, my stepbrothers could be found playing football on the broad front lawn while I curled up on the couch reading, my sister Martha dressed her dolls on the deck, and our other sister, Laura, photographed the lot of us—10 children altogether, who had recently been

brought together as a family by my mother and stepfather. The previous summer, Congress had passed Title IX, the law prohibiting gender discrimination in educational activities that receive federal money, but the effects of Title IX had not yet reached us. For our half sister, Joan, however, who was born that summer of 1973, childhood was something quite dif-

WRITTEN BY JENNY MCPHEE  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAURA MCPHEE

*This article is adapted from the book Girls: Ordinary Girls and Their Extraordinary Pursuits, by Jenny McPhee, Laura McPhee, and Martha McPhee, which is being published this month by Random House Trade Publishing.*

“At races I’ll always see the Native Americans at the head. It’s part of our culture, like so many things, like long hair, like my hair. Cutting it would be like cutting off my knowledge and wisdom. My trainer says I’ll gain five seconds a minute if I cut it off. But I wouldn’t do that, not even for running.”

—ALVINA BEGAY, AGE 18  
GANADO, ARIZONA



ferent. Just seven years later, on a typical Saturday, our stepfather could be found taking Joan to youth-league football practice (she was one of two girls on the team) or to her soccer games or, later on, when she was in high school, to basketball or lacrosse.

Over the past 25 years, the relationship between girls and sports has changed dramatically. Today one in three high school girls plays sports, whereas in 1971 only one in 27 did. This is not to say that sports have not always been important to the few who did participate. Eleanor Roosevelt once remarked that one of the proudest moments in her life was when she made the first team in field hockey; she liked to acknowledge that competitive sports had played an important role in preparing her to lead and achieve in her adult life. And in her study of successful women, *See Jane Win* (Three Rivers

Press, \$15), psychologist Sylvia Rimma found that the most positive and influential girlhood experience remembered by many flourishing women was winning in competition. Today, although lack of self-esteem (usually associated with issues of beauty and popularity) is still the number one problem for girls, the thrills of competing and winning in sports are giving many girls a new confidence.

“When girls compete against boys, it destroys a lot of the mythology around women being inferior physically to men,” says Edward Dick, the father of Teresa Gordon-Dick, a national Greco-Roman wrestling champion. “It becomes a lot harder for boys to get the idea that the sex has some sort of innate superiority, which does a lot to perpetuate discrimination against women in our society.”

Two years ago, my sisters Laura and Martha and I embarked on a collaborative

Her father, a minor-league hockey player, dreamed that his son would someday play in the NHL. For Angela, his wish was simply that she love the sport as much as he did. But in 1998 she won an Olympic gold medal in women's ice hockey in Nagano, Japan.

—ANGELA RUGGIERO, AGE 18  
SIMI VALLEY, CALIFORNIA



book project about girlhood. For a year, we crisscrossed America, interviewing and photographing girls from a variety of backgrounds—ordinary girls pursuing all manner of activities, including investing, philanthropy, neurobiology, blues rock guitar, and many sports. Again and again, we heard how crucial girls believe Title IX has been in changing, at the very least, their perspective on life. We were impressed that Title IX, a law passed before any of them were born, was a byword for them. They were conscious of the important ways in which schools were failing to enforce Title IX. We heard repeatedly about how boys continue to receive preferential treatment, from better uniforms to better practice time slots, from better and more highly paid coaches to a greater variety of varsity sports. Yet our overwhelming observation was that the change in school athletics has profoundly improved prospects for girls.

When we talked to Angela Ruggiero, an Olympic gold medalist in women's ice hockey, she immediately credited Title IX

with changing the course of her life. When she was 14, she played on one of the first girls' hockey teams to come out of California. Her team made a trip to Cromwell, Connecticut, to play against the Connecticut Polar Bears. The Bears' coach spotted Angela, wanted her for his team, and quickly arranged admission and financial aid for her at the exclusive prep school Choate Rosemary Hall. Angela says, "I had no clue I could go anywhere with this sport, that there was college hockey or the Olympics. When I went to Choate, my eyes were opened; I was inspired to achieve more. The bare truth for me is that my sister never finished high school and I'm a student at Harvard. This is entirely due to the fact that I was able to pursue my passion and play ice hockey." ❧