

## NOT INVICIBLE

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Realizing you're not invincible is a part of growing up, according to Belinda Reed, 55, of rural Jones, Alabama.

Reed grew up in a very small community where her interactions with people were mostly limited to family. About an hour northwest of Montgomery, Jones was so small that it did not meet the minimum population requirement to even be considered a town.

As a result, she based what adulthood looked like only what she had: her books full of heroes and her parents' determined attitudes. Her parents, Bob and Golda Reed, were known for how hard they worked and that circumstances never got them down, so Belinda Reed was convinced she could do the same.

Reed, like most children, saw her parents as one of the unbeatable heroes in her books and didn't realize that they had troubles and fears, too. Her parents were jacks of all trades. From working in the fields to catching rattlesnakes to sell to zoos, she saw how they worked in very dangerous situations without even flinching.

Unlike most snake catchers on television shows, Reed's father could catch a rattlesnake with only his bare hands. Reed was determined to follow in those footsteps.

As a teenager, she was sure she was as invincible and fearless as her parents and just hadn't had the opportunity to show it. She did much of the rough manual work with them, but had never truly taken on something like a dangerous animal like her parents had.

She went out one morning with the intent to do some yardwork behind her play house not knowing that today she was going to have the chance to prove who she thought she was.

"I remember that I thought that the hoe was sliding [down the wall]... I was reaching for it," Reed says. She decided to let it hit the ground because she was busy at the moment and didn't need the hoe right then.

After it fell with an odd sound, she glanced over and realized, "It wasn't the hoe that fell, it was a chicken snake... I literally would have grabbed it if I had lunged for the hoe."

Taken aback, she realized what her whole family always said she had to do if she crossed paths with a snake: kill it. While chicken snakes aren't venomous, it still would eat their small animals. Everyone in her whole family had killed snakes before, so this was the moment she had been waiting for: she was going to kill her first snake.

"I had the hoe. I had a shovel. The snake was there, full, not moving fast. But I was faced with the fear that I would not be able to complete the task and that it would turn on me and all kinds of horrors."

She stood there petrified for a moment, eyeing the 4-foot-long snake, before sprinting up the hill to her cousins' house next door to get her parents visiting there. The snake was long gone by the time they got back.

Her cousins were furious that she had not killed the snake, and she felt ashamed wondering if her family was disappointed in her for not doing a task they all did with ease.

“That was one of my first fears: that I didn't live up to my dream that I could do the big things... thinking we were the heroes and heroines of the time, and I failed that test.”

She always thought that she was invincible because she had Reed blood and Reeds weren't scared of country danger like city-folk; Reeds always won their battles. Yet, here she was, too scared to kill a slow, non-venomous snake.

“Talk about growing up,” she laughed. “It was just another step in reckoning [sic] that there was some things in life that I wouldn't conquer easy. That I was human... I thought I could rule the land because it was our valley. But there are some things that pop up that you do not come out on top of. And that's OK.”

As she got older, she realized that her parents were afraid of things too, but being afraid doesn't mean they couldn't be brave. In fact, acting in the face of fear is what made them brave.

Reed realized that “I could be a hero to myself even if I wasn't invincible. Reeds aren't born to be fearless. They are born to be dedicated. That means choosing to accept failures and learn how to improve. Practicing hard so that when we eventually face our fears again, we know our worth is in our work and in our blood.”



On the left: Reed in her rural home besides ponds and falls where she says the worst snakes hide



On the left: a close up of Reed