



Moving on after a dream goes bust

By Nancy McAllister

Bob Love's childhood in rural Louisiana wasn't easy. He ran away from an abusive father at age 8, then lived with his grandmother as the youngest of the 16 children and grandchildren she was raising in her tiny home. They were poor. And on top of everything, young Bob stuttered—sometimes so severely that he couldn't articulate a single word.

To help him escape children's vicious taunts and the generally bleak outlook of the family's situation, Bob's grandmother suggested this antidote: Get a dream and hang on to it.

So the boy fantasized about being a basketball star. His initial setup required some resourcefulness: a coat hanger stapled to his grandmother's house for the basket, and a sock stuffed with grass and other socks for the ball. But he took his dream seriously and hung on to it until, against all odds, he became a three-time NBA All-Star. Love played 11 seasons—eight of them with the Bulls, where he ranked second on their all-time scoring list with 12,623 points. And then the dream came to an abrupt halt. Love hurt his back and after surgery his doctors told him his playing days were over.

Not only did Love's career leave him; so did his ability to walk properly, and so did his wife (taking with her nearly everything they owned). The only thing that remained with Love was his stutter, and a refusal to give up.

He learned to live around his back pain, but his stutter prevented him from getting anything but menial jobs. He finally landed a position bussing tables for \$4.45 an hour at a Nordstrom restaurant. And instead of children taunting him about his stutter, he heard a new breed of unintentionally hurtful remarks from customers: "Hey, that's Bob Love! He used to be a great basketball player. What a shame."

But just as he'd done as a boy, Love persevered. He decided that if he was going to be a busboy, he was going to be the best one around. His diligence paid off when one of Nordstrom's owners took an interest in his career development. John Nordstrom paid for Love's speech therapy, a move that cleared the path for the former basketball star's second climb to success—this time toward the unlikely position of company spokesperson. Then the Bulls organization caught wind of Love's new skills and called him with the offer to be their director of community affairs, which he accepted.

Today the former stutterer and NBA All-Star is one of the top motivational speakers on the circuit. He gives hundreds of speeches and presentations each year, many of them to teens about the importance of education and overcoming adversity. He encourages others to rewrite their life stories by telling them how he rewrote his own. How does he do it? It's easy—he just speaks from his heart.