

The IALAC Story

This is a story about Michaela and one of her most prized possessions — her IALAC sign. When Michaela was born, she was just like the rest of us. She came equipped with a sign called IALAC. IALAC stands for “I am Loveable and Capable.”

Because it was invisible, no one — not her parents, relatives, or the doctor who delivered her — knew it was there. Nevertheless, it was shiny and new and in the earliest days of Michaela’s life when her young mother and father (who were happy and in love) stroked her, kissed her and admired her, her IALAC sign actually grew a little bit larger and stronger every day.

The IALAC sign is an indication that children come into this world free of self-doubt, feelings of shame, inferiority or anything negative. They must learn those things from the people and the world around them. And so it began for Michaela.

At age five, Michaela, her young mom and dad did a lot of things together. They had fun on the playground and watched cartoons on Saturdays. Michaela spent a lot of time with both sets of grandparents and got lots of attention. One day at the playground, she heard her mom and dad yelling at each other. Michaela felt scared. She went over to give her dad a hug, and her father frowned and told her to go back to the swings. Her father’s face looked so mean that Michaela started to cry. Her mom came over and hugged her, but Michaela still felt scared.

(RIP)

A very small piece of Michaela’s IALAC sign fell off. Michaela didn’t feel so loveable and capable at that moment.

On her 9th birthday, Michaela was excited because she was having a birthday sleepover. She and her mother were living with her grandmother at that point. Six girls were at her house, four of her best friends, and two other popular girls from her class at school. They had played games and had just sung happy birthday. It was finally time for the cake — lemon supreme — her favorite. As Michaela cut herself a big slice, she heard her two classmates giggle under their breath. Michaela looked down and saw her stomach protruding over her jeans. She immediately felt self conscious and ashamed. **(RIP)**

Time passed and before you knew it, Michaela was starting sixth grade in a new middle school. Her body was changing so much — she still thought she was “too fat,” but she now had breasts and a big behind that got a lot of comments from the older boys in her new school. Michaela liked the attention, but it was also scary. Sometimes boys would ask her to go into a vacant room and have sex. She always just laughed and waved them away, but it was exciting.

Michaela was tall, so her friends all thought she would be a good basketball player like Sheryl Swoops. Sometimes her father would come take her to the neighborhood court to shoot some hoops. It was fun because her dad was always patient and encouraging. But Michaela was rather uncoordinated and had a hard time handling the basketball. She really wanted to play on the school team, but the other kids would laugh when she awkwardly dribbled the ball and missed shots. **(RIP)**

It was all kind of frustrating. When she would shoot the ball, Michaela would find herself thinking, “Oh Goodness, I know I’m going to miss it. Please don’t let me miss it.” **(RIP)**

One day, when she missed the basket for the fifth time, she overheard her PE teacher say, “All that height is wasted on that girl. She’s just pitiful!” Michaela lost interest in basketball after that. **(RIP)**

By 7th grade, Michaela’s mother had started giving her lectures about boys and sex. She seemed worried that Michaela was going to have sex soon. Her typical speech went like this, “I hope you’ve learned something by being in this house. I handle my business. Your daddy hasn’t done right by me or you, so I hope you’ve learned that you can’t count on a man. I know you think you’re grown and all, but you aren’t. Please don’t let some stupid boy sweet talk you and get you to have sex with him. You can’t believe anything guys say to you. They’re just out for what they can get. You better be able to take care of yourself.”

At first, those conversations really bothered Michaela because she felt like her mother didn’t know her and didn’t trust her. **(RIP)** But soon she began to tune her mother out and go on about her business.

Michaela has a sort of hole or wound inside her when she thinks about her father. She doesn’t feel that she gets enough attention from him. She misses him and wonders why he doesn’t come see her more often. Sometimes she thinks her mother is right — her dad is just a loser. Or maybe her dad stays away because her mother fusses all the time, and it’s too much trouble to have to deal with her. Other times she thinks that there’s just something about her that her dad can’t completely love. **(RIP)**

That same year Michaela’s grandmother died. Her mother took it very hard and on top of that, they had to move to a less expensive apartment away from all of her old friends. Michaela had to go to a new school. Her classes were bigger, and the teacher’s didn’t seem as helpful. Michaela’s grades started to fall. What she hated worst was the time after school. At her old school, she had belonged to several clubs and did after-school activities. In her new neighborhood, there was nothing to do — no recreation center, no fun activities. It was so boring. She felt down because she had nothing to do to interest or challenge her. **(RIP)**

Then this 8th grader, DeShawn, started talking to Michaela. He was nice, and it made Michaela feel good to spend time with him and have him care about her. When he started making a move to have sex with her, Michaela agreed. She thought it would make him feel good in return and want to stay with her. She called him every day and they had good conversations. But then DeShawn started pulling away from her. When she tried to talk to him, he said nothing was wrong, but she could tell it was. One day she saw DeShawn with his arm around another girl. When she walked over to him, he said, "Hey Michaela, I want you to meet my new girlfriend, Shana." Michaela was so hurt.

(Final **RIP** — Make sure you leave a significant piece of the sign intact.)

At the end of the reading, hold up the second sign with the tears and cracks. Say, "When Michaela became an adult, her IALAC sign had done a lot of mending. She never became a basketball player but one of her aunts introduced her to tennis, and she became very good at it after a lot of practice and hard work. Michaela and her father also developed a closer relationship when she was in high school. Young people are very resilient. BUT there were some lingering cracks in her IALAC sign."