

# ~ I Told You So ~

by KG MacGregor © 2005

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From time to time, folks ask me what's new with Anna & Lily, my characters from the *Shaken* series. Rest assured they're living happily ever after in their beautiful Brentwood home with Andy and the twins, George & Eleanor. (If you don't know about the twins, you need to go read *Anna's Christmas*.)

I wrote this particular tale for *Telltale Kisses*, the short-story anthology edited by Stephanie Solomon-Lopez & Medora MacDougall. All profits from that book go to benefit youth sports programs, and I was honored to be asked to take part. But since many fans of the *Shaken* series are web-only readers, I always planned to make this update available online after the book's initial sales. So consider this a teaser for the 19 other stories in that book that would make it a worthwhile addition to your library.

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"...and don't forget that tomorrow is your spelling test." Mrs. Adler's words fell on deaf ears, as they did each day once the final bell rang. Her first-graders were already lining up at the door, their backpacks slung haplessly over their shoulders.

Andy Kaklis hadn't heard a word his teacher said since the moment he saw the black BMW Z8 pull into the circle in front of the school. Thursday was his favorite day of the week because his mom picked him up and took him back to the dealership. There, he would hang out in the showroom or watch the sales videos in the media center. Or if he was lucky, they would go to the service department where he could help her fix one of the cars.

"You are dismissed. Please go quietly through the hallway. I'll see you all tomorrow." More words to be ignored.

Andy fought the urge to cut across the front lawn of the school, instead scurrying between the other children on the sidewalk to hurry to the waiting convertible. "Hi, Mom!"

Anna Kaklis looked forward to these days as much as her son did. Not only did she get time on her own with Andy, but it gave Lily a little break too-not that being at home alone with fifteen-month-old twins was much of a break. Still, it was a schedule that seemed to work for everyone. "Hey, pal. Did you have a good day?"

Andy shrugged. He liked school, but nothing special had happened. Except- "Can I play Mighty Mite football?"

"What?"

"A man came to our room today and talked about the re-recreation apartment."

"You mean the recreation department?"

"Yeah. And he said that us first-graders could play Mighty Mite football and wear uniforms." He pulled a folded permission slip from his backpack and held it out.

"Uniforms, huh?" Lily probably wouldn't go for something like that, Anna thought. Andy was considerably smaller than most of his classmates, and therefore, at a higher risk of getting hurt in a sport like football. He and his younger cousin Jonah had played together on the same T-ball team the year before, but size didn't matter as much on the baseball diamond.

"Yeah, football players wear shoulder pads...and helmets...and pants that come to here." He drew his hand in a line just below his knees, clearly excited about the idea. "And Jonah can't be in the Mighty Mites because he's just in kindergarten."

"I thought you liked playing with Jonah."

"I do, but Mighty Mites is for big kids."

*So that's it.* This was about being able to do something Jonah couldn't do. Though the boys usually played together very well, Jonah would sometimes tease Andy about his size and quiet demeanor. Despite being younger than Andy by a year, Anna's nephew was a little taller and had a more domineering personality. Mighty Mites seemed like a good opportunity to let Andy come out on top, at least where Jonah was concerned.

"You sure you want to play football? Football players can get hurt with all that pushing and tackling."

"We don't tackle, though. We wear little flags right here"-he pointed to his sides-"and the other kids have to grab one of them. Then you have to stop running. We play sometimes in gym class."

Anna couldn't remember when she had seen this much excitement on his face.

"Can I? Please?"

To Anna, it was less about Andy playing football than it was doing something that made him feel good about himself. He really seemed to need this. "Sure, I don't see why not." The huge smile on his face was her reward.

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"We're home!" Anna announced from the family room. "Where are my babies?"

"There's Mom!" Lily gave the twins a nudge and they toddled off to meet the rest of the family at

the door.

Andy threw his book bag on the floor and ran directly to Lily for a hug. Anna squatted to greet her little ones, both of whom had spaghetti-stained chins. Eleanor tripped and fell face-down, but pulled herself right up and charged onward without a fuss.

"And now for my big baby!" As Andy stooped to hug his younger siblings, Anna held her arms wide for Lily. "How was your day?"

"Not bad. You'll be pleased to hear that your daughter has a decorative flair."

Lily's choice of possessive pronoun got her attention. "Okay, why is she 'my' daughter?"

"Because she enhanced the wallpaper in the kitchen with a box of crayons."

"Sounds nice."

"I saved it for you-along with a brush and soapy water."

"Why, thank you."

"Are you hungry?"

"I can wait. You and Andy go ahead." This part of their evening had become routine. Lily and Andy would eat dinner together, while Anna played nearby with the twins. Everyone talked about their day, and as soon as Lily finished eating, they would switch places.

"Andy has some big news, don't you, pal?"

His face lit up at once. "Mom said I could play Mighty Mite football this year."

Lily looked at Anna with a scowl. "She did, did she?"

Anna confirmed with a sheepish nod. Something about Lily's tone told her that it might have been best to talk this over with her before giving Andy permission.

"I don't think that's such a good idea, Andy. Football can be a pretty rough sport."

"It isn't rough. It's tough!" As if that made all the difference.

"But you aren't as big as the other kids. What if they step on you?"

"They won't, Mama. I'll run faster and they won't be able to catch me."

"I don't think so, Andy. Maybe next year, or the year after that when you've grown a little more. Besides, I thought you liked T-ball. Wouldn't you rather concentrate on that?"

"But football has cool uniforms," he whined, clearly anxious that his good fortune had changed.

Anna knew she needed to make the case about Jonah, but she didn't want to do that in front of Andy. "Why don't we talk about it a little later? Finish your dinner, Andy." She could see the worry on her son's face and gave him a hopeful wink.

Anna cleaned up the kitchen while Lily watched the babies. Andy chose a puzzle from the play closet and dumped its pieces on the family room floor.

"Do you have homework?" Lily asked.

"I did it already," he answered glumly. His excitement from earlier in the day was long gone.

"That's right," Anna called from the kitchen, feeling a need to earn back a few parenting points after jumping the gun by giving Andy permission. "He did all of his homework at the office and I checked it." She joined them in the family room and picked up George. "Are you getting sleepy, little man?"

"They've both been on the go all afternoon," Lily said. She picked up Eleanor and pressed her nose into the baby's cheek. "I bet you fall asleep in the bathtub."

"Unh-uh," Eleanor answered, shaking her head.

Anna turned back to Andy as Lily left and lowered her voice. "I'll talk to your mama about the Mighty Mites, pal. Maybe I can get her to change her mind."

Andy nodded his understanding, but Anna could see his look of defeat. They both knew that Lily's objections would be difficult to overcome.

"She loves you, you know. She's just worried that you'll get hurt. That's why she wants you to wait until you're a little bigger."

"But by the time I get bigger, everybody else is going to be bigger too." He had a point. "I'm always going to be a pipsqueak."

"Who says you're a pipsqueak?"

"Jonah. He say's he's going to be a lot bigger than me when we grow up."

Anna sighed. "Maybe, maybe not. You might start growing real fast one of these days and then you'll be bigger than Jonah. But even if you aren't, it won't mean anything. I'm taller than your mama and she's way tougher than I am."

"She is not."

"She is! She has big muscles, and she can beat me up."

"But she never does."

"That's because it's not nice."

"And because you love each other."

Anna grinned broadly. "That's the big reason. I'll be back down in a little while, okay?"

She carried George upstairs to the bathroom, where Lily was already bathing Eleanor. She undressed her son and put him in the tub with his sister. "Are you mad at me?"

Lily handed her a washcloth and the baby soap. "No, but you shouldn't have told him yes without talking to me. Now he's going to be even more disappointed."

"I really think we should let him play. It's not tackle football. He explained it to me. All they do is grab a flag from the other kid's belt."

"You know it isn't that simple. They'll be blocking each other and the big kids will run right over him. And they'll all pick on him because he'll be the smallest one out there. I just hate to see him get his feelings hurt."

"Maybe they will pick on him, but I don't think Andy cares about what the other boys say. I think he just wants to do something with kids his own age. He told me that Jonah couldn't play Mighty Mites because he's just in kindergarten."

"What does Jonah have to do with this?"

"Everything, I think. You know how Jonah always teases Andy about being so little. If Andy played Mighty Mites, it would be one thing he could do that Jonah couldn't do. I think that's pretty important to him." It was obvious from Lily's expression that she didn't like the idea, but Anna could see that her argument was getting through. "It says on the permission slip that they need parents to help out with stuff on the sidelines, like passing out drinks and keeping the kids back out of the way. If you're really worried about him, you could volunteer to do that."

Lily arched an eyebrow that seemed to say, "Are you insane?"

"Or...I guess I could volunteer to do that."

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Anna worked on the sidelines to line up one last row of cold drinks. The boys had lost interest in the refreshment table as the game wore on and their excitement waned. Andy's team was behind by three touchdowns, and the other team was driving again toward the end zone. She was less concerned about the score, though, than about the look of frustration on Andy's face. He hadn't seen action at all in this, the Mighty Mite's first game.

The coach had met briefly with all of the parents before the game, assuring them that everyone would probably see at least a smidgen of action. However, the chances of that were fading with the clock.

Lily sat in the bleachers with their brother-in-law, Hal, and five-year-old Jonah, who had been cheering loudly for Andy's team. Despite her reservations about Andy playing football with the bigger boys, she also wore a disappointed look that he hadn't played at all.

"Kaklis! Brewster! Karnicki!"

Andy leapt off the bench to stand before the coach as Anna leaned close to hear the instructions.

"Okay, boys. We need you out there. All we have to do is stop 'em on this drive. You know your positions. If he tries to run by you with the ball, grab that flag!"

Anna turned to see the rest of her family clapping and shouting at finally seeing Andy take the field. She beamed with pride as her son tugged his huge helmet into place and ran onto the field to take his position on the defensive line. But Lily was right-Andy looked very, very small next to these other boys, and for the first time, Anna found herself worried for his safety.

On the first play, the quarterback threw a short pass that fell harmlessly to the ground, and Andy's teammates cheered themselves for their defensive effort. Andy had been pushed to the ground by the opposing lineman, but had gotten up quickly. His now-dirty uniform would no doubt be a badge of honor.

On the second down, they ran the ball to the opposite side of the field, so Andy wasn't involved in the play at all. Anna breathed a small sigh of relief as she watched the clock wind down. They had time for only one more play, so it looked like her son would finish his first game unscathed. She turned back and flashed a proud grin at the rest of her family, not missing Lily's crossed fingers and arms as she too waited anxiously for the end of the game.

On the game's final snap, the quarterback spun to place the ball in the belly of his halfback. But the boy's head turned at just the wrong moment and the pigskin tumbled free, falling end over end toward the sidelines where Andy's teammates screamed with excitement. First one boy, then another, tried to cover the fumble, but with each touch, it careened closer to the sideline where Anna and the rest of Andy's team stood.

She watched in horror as the action seemed to slow. Andy was the closest player to the ball and was stooping low to pick it up just as the largest player on the field dived toward the sideline to make the grab. The motion picture behind Anna's eyes played a few frames ahead of real time,

and she could envision the next few moments when her son was pulverized beneath the bigger boy right before her eyes.

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It could have been a lot worse, Anna knew. The x-rays showed a small break in the fibula, the small bone in the lower leg. The doctor had promised to exchange the crutches for a walking cast after two weeks.

Lily pulled into the driveway alongside her mother-in-law's car. "Thank goodness Martine had the twins. That would have been even more of a circus than it already was."

Anna snorted her agreement. The trip to the hospital had been chaotic, what with the coach and half the parents following along. Everyone had been so concerned.

"Andy, can you handle the crutches?"

"Sure, Mama." Andy hopped out of the back seat and pulled the long crutches from the floorboard.

Lily came around to the passenger side just as Anna opened the front door. "Need any help?"

Anna grunted and turned gingerly in the seat, swinging her throbbing leg to the open door.

"Mom, Justin's mother said she would hand out the drinks next time so you won't have to."

"That's nice, Andy," Anna said without a trace of enthusiasm.

"And Coach said we were lucky because everybody was looking at you when I picked up the ball and made the touchdown."

"Be sure to tell Coach how glad I was to help."

Andy skipped ahead into the house as Anna struggled with her bum leg. Lily walked alongside carrying their things.

"Go ahead and say it," Anna said. "I know you're dying to."

"Say what?"

"I told you so...that football is dangerous and people can get hurt."

"Nah, it wouldn't be any fun to rub it in. You feel bad enough as it is." She placed her hand on Anna's back to help her along. "Besides, if I say anything, it's that you were absolutely right about letting Andy play Mighty Mites."

"I was?"

"Yep. You should have heard the boys at the hospital. Jonah said he couldn't wait until next year when he got to play, and Andy said he couldn't wait either. It really meant a lot to Andy to be the big kid this time. I could see it all over his face."

Anna smiled for the first time since she had gone down underneath that boy's weight on the sidelines. "You think it was worth it?"

Lily shrugged. "You're the only one that can answer that."

"At least this gets me out of housework for a while."

"Don't count on it, Amazon."

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Thanks for reading. Drop me a line if you like at [kgmacgregor@yahoo.com](mailto:kgmacgregor@yahoo.com).

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