

INTRODUCTION TO MY LIFE -

I am so glad that you decided to visit my website. I grew up in Pierson, Florida, a small town in Central Florida which is known as the "Fern Capital of the World." Most people that live in Pierson are hard-working folks which have made farming their lives. Every time you get and send flowers, fern is probably all throughout the arrangement. It was great growing up there, as some of my most treasured memories were spent in that town.

I grew up living, breathing and talking baseball. I loved all sports, but baseball was my true passion. My dad was a teacher and coach at Taylor High School in Pierson and I would go out to practices with him from the time I was three years old. The older guys would always play catch with me and I would try to swing their bats, which felt like huge metal poles to me at the time. It was here that I was introduced to the game that I now love and respect.

As I continued to get older, I started to play in organized leagues. The first was the DeLand/Pierson Minor League program. I played shortstop and pitcher for my minor league team. It was a little tough for me, because a lot of my friends were a little older than me, and they were playing Little League. This drove me to play at that level, which sometimes wasn't very easy at the age of 7. As you can imagine, there is a big difference between two kids a few years apart at that age. But, it made me a better player and ultimately helped to shape me into the player that I am today.

After Minor League, I graduated to Little League where I played on some of the best teams in Florida. One particular year, we were undefeated and won the Top Team Tournament without a single defeat. My Little League coach, Richard Hagstrom, did a great job and continues to be in my life, as I hunt with him every year. He has gone from being my coach to becoming a good friend.

Growing up during these years, my friend down the street, B.B. Abbott, and I would play baseball almost everyday. A lot of times, we would try to round up games with other kids in the "neighborhood." I say "neighborhood," because our houses in Pierson were many times separated by miles. It made it tough when our only form of transportation were bikes or our two feet. The lack of teammates never stopped us, as we simply played the parts of the entire two teams. A vivid imagination was a great thing. Our "teammates" had pretty tough names like Johnny Johnson and Slick Green. Sometimes we'd play with our dads or just go through our favorite professional teams' line-ups, which was my first exposure to switch-hitting. It was great.

I played Babe Ruth and High School baseball after starting school at Taylor High School, which was 7th through 12th grades at the time. In the summer, I played for the American Legion program in nearby DeLand. I continued to play shortstop and pitcher most of the time, but I got the opportunity to play American Legion as

a 15 year old and played right field. Our teams were constantly at the top of the ring in the State of Florida. There were some great athletes in Pierson and DeLand.

After ninth grade, my parents decided it was time for a change. As I mentioned, my dad was a teacher at Taylor High School, where I was then a starting pitcher and shortstop. My mom and dad thought I was getting some preferential treatment at Taylor and wanted me to attend Bolles High School, a boarding school in Jacksonville. It was extremely tough at first. I was a little homesick and missed my friends. I know it was tough for my parents, too, because I'm an only child and I know they missed me. They went with this policy, though - Coming Home is Not an Option. It turned out to be the best thing that my parents ever did for me. It forced me to grow up, to overcome my fears and insecurities, to be challenged academically, and to play sports in a place where I wasn't already guaranteed a spot because of my past performance. It made me prove myself all over again, which was something I needed at the time. Would I have made it had I stayed at Pierson? Probably so, because my parents would have pushed me to the level that I'm at now. However, while I owe so much to the town of Pierson, the coaches I had growing up, and the entire population for their support (which continues today), I needed to be in an environment where I was playing for academic and athletic lives.

Our baseball team at Bolles (I also played football and basketball), won the 2A State Championship my junior year. We had an awesome team. We got to the championship game my senior year, but lost in the late innings. It was a disappointing end to a great athletic run for me at Bolles. I owe a great deal to Coach Don Suriano and the teaching staff at Bolles for pushing me so hard my three years there.

In June, 1990, the Atlanta Braves chose me with the 1st pick in the Amateur Draft. That was a day I will never forget, and one which marked the accomplishment of a personal goal for me. What an incredible honor. To be chosen as the first player in the nation to play the game that I love was a dream come true for me. Bobby Cox was the General Manager at the time, and I suppose I owe him a heartfelt "thanks" for making me a Brave that day. It has been an incredible ten year run.

The rest is well-known history. I went through the minor leagues with some ups and downs, but arrived officially in Atlanta in 1995 as the starting third baseman. Although I had been drafted as a shortstop, the Braves organization moved me to third while I was in the minors. It turned out to be the right move. Of course, my arrival that year was topped off with a World Championship later that season. Playing in a World Series is something which I cannot describe sufficiently. All I can say is that it was the most crowning athletic achievement in my life. Until I saw my son for the first time, I thought it was the most important thing that had happened in my life. Now I know differently.

Now, almost five years after that World Championship, I have played in several other World Series, been voted the National League MVP in 1999, and won a Players' Choice Award (which is voted on by the players). I have experienced some incredibly wonderful personal moments, such as marrying a terrific and loving woman in March of this year, and getting to know my son, Matthew, who was 2 years old in March. Unfortunately, I have also experienced some very low times in my personal life in the last five years. I have gone through a marriage which ended in a divorce, and made some horrible mistakes in my personal life. I'm certainly glad that these times are behind me, but I have learned from these unfortunate moments and have grown into the man I am today because of them. Through it all, I have received unwavering support from my friends, my family and many baseball fans. I want to take this time to thank you all for your support since I joined the Braves organization in 1990. I have recently started the *Chipper Jones Family Foundation*, and I am committing myself to giving back to the communities which have helped me get where I am today. I promise you many more good times as you watch me through future years. Thanks again and enjoy my website.