

Josh's First Season

by

April Kutger

I woke up early that Saturday morning. I had to make sure the kids had a good breakfast and then pack lunches since we would be gone all day. The boys' uniforms were clean and Anna was used to coming along to watch their games.

Luke's slow-pitch game started at 9:00 a.m. He wasn't yet old enough to play on the regular Little League team with his brother, Josh, so I regularly attended two games every Saturday that summer. Even though the rules had recently changed so that girls could play, few did in those days, and Anna was never interested. She and I were there to cheer them on when they were winning or cheer them up when they were losing. Besides, I couldn't leave her home alone.

Luke got a couple of good hits in his game and one run. Since the coaches pitched underhand to the players, it was a little bit easier for the kids to get hits. Neither Josh nor Luke had spikes like most of the other kids but Luke played with far more skill and maturity than the other seven-year-olds on his team. Josh, Anna, and I yelled out the normal, "Hey, batter, batter, batter, batter. Hey batter, batter, batter, hey batter..." and "Good eye, good eye," and "That's all right, that's all right." I was thankful his games

were only seven innings (or less, if the score was too lopsided). Sometimes one inning could last more than a half hour with the outbursts, fielding errors, time-outs, parental interference, crying spells, and minor injuries.

After Luke's team and their opponents high-fived each other to show good sportsmanship, we jumped into the old Volvo and drove to the field where Josh was going to play. Josh had a real uniform, white with green trim, his sponsor's name and his number on the back. Luke only had a blue T-shirt and a hat.

Josh's game was nine innings. He traded off playing right field with the only girl on the team. He didn't get a hit that day. In fact, he never got a hit until almost the end of the season, but he stuck in there, slowly improving his swing and his defense, with coaching and grit, throughout the summer. Josh got his first hit in the last game of the season. When he made it safely to first base, every parent and child in the stands stood and cheered along with Anna and me. I never saw a prouder look on his face than I did at that moment. Despite his bony frame and asthma, Josh never copped out throughout that entire desperate season or any of the years that followed as he and his brother competed in swimming, football, basketball, track, and, of course, baseball.

Ten years later, when they were seventeen and eighteen and played for two competing city teams, they ended up playing against each other in the finals. I sat on one side of the field for the first four and a half innings and

the other for the last four and a half. Luke's team won, but Josh got the game ball for his outstanding play at second base.

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