

# Roots in Ripon

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*Chuck Roots*

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## Open to Ladies

There is a term that has become somewhat of a catch phrase in the past few years. The term is "Bucket List." I'm not sure what the origins of this expression are, but it seems to indicate that we humans have a list of things we'd like to do or accomplish before we depart this life.

Do I have a bucket list? Not really. There are certainly goals I set for myself, and there are other goals that the Jesus set for me. I believe I have managed to complete the ones I'm aware of. Otherwise, I'm waiting for the Lord to reveal the next hurdle. Yes, I'm retired from the military, and I'm retired from pastoring a church, but I believe Jesus has more for me right around the corner. That's the fun part of walking with him.

One of those items that I suppose could be placed in a bucket list was an experience I enjoyed this past week. I was a volunteer at the LPGA (Ladies Professional Golf Association) Open Championship held at CordeValle Golf Course in San Martin, California.

The reason I say this experience "could be" in a bucket list is because I never thought I'd have the chance to do this. As a pastor my weekends were taken. Even getting away for a week was difficult. But last October I saw an announcement on the Internet asking for people to volunteer to work helping with this major golfing event. This is the "Big One" for the ladies. So I checked my calendar for July 4-10. I was available, so I signed up on line. Within a day or so I received an email informing me that I was being assigned to work in the Practice Area. Well, I knew what that meant! The practice area is the driving range, practice putting green, and the chipping area. It means I could see these fabulous golfers up-close-and-personal every day while they prepared for the tournament.

Solna was our boss lady for the practice area volunteers. She hails from South Africa and was absolutely delightful to work for and with. Realizing I was traveling some distance each day to perform my volunteer service, she scheduled me to work early afternoons to early evenings. This help me avoid rush hour traffic. My drive from home in Ripon to San Martin is nearly two hours barring traffic problems. So to reduce my commute time and minimize my gas consumption, Isaura and I decided to stay the week at her mother's home in Los Banos. This cut my time on the road every day by an hour each way. Was I ever glad for that!

The practice sessions for the golfers began on Monday, July 4<sup>th</sup>. When I arrived at the designated parking area, I quickly discovered that my brand spanking clean car was not going to stay that way. Parking was in a farmer's field where hay had been cut leaving stubble and dirt. We were four miles from the golf course so we had to rely on a caravan of school buses to ferry us back and forth.

One of the comical moments during the week was this sign posted in the parking area that read, "Preferred Parking." I had to chuckle at this. I mean we

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were all parking on dirt and hay stubble! Preferred? I don't think so, except the preferred parking was a bit closer to the shuttle buses.

There was lots of security of course, each of us having to wear a plastic USGA (United States Golf Association) tag authorizing us to work in our respective areas. Copious amounts of food and beverages were made available at the Volunteers Tent which was close to the shuttle drop off. From there I had to take a smaller shuttle bus to the driving range, which is where I spent the majority of my time.

The weather was quite agreeable, yet a wind picked up during the week, challenging the golfers out on the course. Except for that it was all very comfortable. Caddies and players would come to the range to use the facility, checking in at our tent to pick up a bag or two of golf balls. We would ask for the player's last name, and then take a pre-printed plastic insert with their name stenciled on it and slide it into the appropriate slot on the name placard. Then one of the volunteers would carry the placard to the spot on the driving range where the player was hitting practice shots. We would angle the placard so that golf fans who were cordoned off from the players could see who was practicing. It was also to benefit the media that was ever-present.

I think most of us consider athletes of this caliber to be spoiled and demanding, acting in ways that would be considered impetuous and insolent. I am most happy to report that nothing could be further from the truth. In my six days working the driving range, there was not one time that I witnessed anything remotely close to what I might have considered to be bad behavior. Instead, caddies and players alike were pleasant, courteous, and thoughtful. Caddies, and even the players, would often bring back the empty red bags that had held the golf balls. This may not sound like much, but the USGA only allocates a certain number of these bags for our use (20-25 balls per bag). We frequently running low on bags with balls. By bringing the empty red bags back to us, we were able to stay on top of the demand for more bags of balls.

All the big names in women's golf were there: Cristie Kerr, Lydia Ko, Lexi Thompson, Anna Nordqvist, Stacy Lewis, Gina Piller, Amy Yang, Christy Kim, Karrie Webb, Paula Creamer, Morgan Pressel, Sandra Gal, and Michelle Wie. Not only did these ladies demonstrate excellent golf skills, but they were genuinely decent people. There was a lot of hugging as players who knew each other were reunited in this tournament. There was also a fair amount of good-natured bantering between players in the practice area. Even the caddies and coaches frequently engaged in this give-and-take.

I've been asked if I would do this again. My answer is yes, if the course being played is reasonably close. It was a great experience, and it made me appreciate all the effort that goes into pulling off a successful professional golf tournament. And especially the efforts put out by the countless numbers of volunteers required!

I love golf!