

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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The Girls of Summer

There was my granddaughter, Brooklyne, proudly wearing her red team jersey with the name in black emblazoned across the chest, Lady Warriors, one of the many softball teams for 9-11-year-old girls in Turlock.

I had to smile at that, remembering my Little League days when I played for a team in our town of Mount Kisco, New York, called Briccetti's. This appliance store in the downtown area was responsible for sponsoring our team. Those days of playing endless hours of baseball are as alive in me today as they were nearly sixty years ago.

Over the years I played some baseball in high school, and later softball, both fast-pitch and slow pitch, while serving in the Navy. I spent countless hours teaching both Laura and Jenny how to play softball. I even coached Jenny's 7th grade team which is an article for another time. Yet, those early memories of playing with my friends is a cherished part of my childhood. I never wanted those games to end.

After arriving at Pedretti Sports Complex in Turlock for the 10:30 game, I set up the folding lounge chairs for Isaura and me in a shaded area since we've had a string of very hot days. Once the game started, however, I moved to the bleachers which offered a much better view of the field. This worked well as Brook was playing 3rd base, and the bleachers were on the 3rd base side. There she was, anticipating each pitch, dropping into a crouch, expecting the batter to hit the ball to her. As a nine-year-old, she has a lot to learn. But she's game, and even got a hit!

Since I've been away from the game a very long time, I would ask questions about the finer points of today's version of softball of the folks seated around me, hopefully without being annoying. At one point, I turned to a number of the adults sitting behind me, and asked a question about the diminutive pitcher for the Lady Warriors. I quipped, "Is this girl really nine-years-old?" A young woman smiled and said, "She is ten!" This little player, named Haven, is her daughter, and her husband is one of the coaches. I just had to ask another question. "How much does she weigh?" Mom smiled and said, "43 pounds." She then told me that at the beginning of the school year, Haven weighed 42 pounds, and had managed to grow an inch. I was floored! She might be really tiny, which she literally comes by naturally (her dad the coach is 5'2"), but this little dynamo can play! I watched her in the batter's circle practicing her swing motion, and let me tell you, she is all

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business. She proceeded to smack a hit, eventually scoring her team's second run of the game.

It was such fun sitting there watching these girls playing their hearts out. I was transported again and again back to my days of playing. There were the smells of the dirt and leather mitts, the sounds of players chattering, and coaches encouraging, along with the "ping" sound of aluminum bats, all within the confines of a neatly manicured grass ballfield with chalk lines marking the base paths, and the fair and foul territories. The sky was a bright blue with an ever-rising temperature, but so what! After all! This was a ball game!

Brook and her five-year-old brother, Colson, had spent the previous night at our home. In the early evening at the request of both Brook and Colson, I piled them into the car and headed for Spring Creek Golf and Country Club. Their very favorite thing to do is have me drive them around in a golf cart through the almond and walnut orchards that surround the golf course. It is especially exciting if they find a few lost golf balls. Back home, Brook made Russian Tea Cakes, which were delicious, and Colson helped me make a big bowl of popcorn the old-fashioned way – over fire on the stove – which we ate while watching the movie, *Black Beauty*.

To cap off our time with these two terrific grandkids, following the game, which the Lady Warriors won, 4-2, Isaura and I took them to the McDonalds in Turlock that has an indoor playground. We ordered lunch and an ice cream cone before finally returning them to their home.

For years I had heard grandparent-aged folks go on and on about how much fun their grandkids were, and how much they looked forward to the time they spent with them. Isaura and I never quite understood this effusiveness over grandkids until we had our own. What a blessing these little ones are!

Did I mention there's another game on Monday?