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I'VE GOT A FEVER

By Liz Holzemer

I'm burning up. Even though it says winter on the calendar, I'm on fire. The mercury is boiling over, and it has nothing to do with the change. I'm hot and only getting hotter. No fan can extinguish these flames.

I've got a bad case of spring training fever.

My yearn to return to the annual burn began after I attended my first Angels spring training games in 1994 at Diablo Stadium in Tempe, Arizona. I was on spring break from CU Boulder where I was pursuing my graduate degree in journalism.

Having grown up in Orange County not far from Anaheim Stadium--home to the formerly and correctly called California Angels--it was exhilarating to be this up close and personal with the boys of summer hopefuls, including one in particular, my soon-to-be husband Mark. Having never participated in team sports myself, I devoured the discipline these hunky pin-striped phenoms exhibited as they toiled in the dusty landscape fine tuning their fielding and hitting; perfecting their nasty sliders, change-ups and curveballs in preparation for a long and grueling 162-game season.

Exhilaration and elation quickly evaporated into the desert air. Mark didn't make the 25-man roster cut that spring and was assigned to Triple-A in Vancouver for the season. As disappointing as this setback was, it would prepare Mark and me for a lifetime of errant curveballs.

Whether Mark was cut from a team, undergoing arm surgery and uncertain about his pitching future, or reproofing himself on the mound to maintain his major league roster spot, his perseverance season after season caught on like an incurable disease.

Defeat wasn't in his dictionary--a dictionary he would ultimately pass on and still thumbs through when imparting words of wisdom to our daughter Hannah and son Hunter.

Disappointment. Dejection. Disqualification.

The words are real, but when experienced in the Holzemer household, Mark uses them as a teaching tool. Like everyone else's, our kids will confront them regardless, whether it's with school, sports or plain old surviving life. And when ours do, we often hear, "When daddy walked the batter or didn't make the team, he didn't give up. He kept trying."

Despite Mark's retirement years ago, I still hanker for the annual Arizona pilgrimage where simple yet valuable lessons were first honed in the hot desert and passed on.

I'm burning up again, and it's a fever I hope never to contain.

Liz Holzemer is the author of Curveball: When Life Throws You A Brain Tumor and founder of the non-profit, Meningioma Mommas (meningiomamommas.org). For more information on Liz, visit her website



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