

An Anthology for Vonda

During the course of a person's life, certain opportunities and challenges arise that are bound to change the direction and quality of our existence.

The happenstance may pertain to our vocation or our avocation, but it will influence the things we do – the way we think, and sometimes, our very lifestyle.

In retrospect, the opportunity that Danny Murrah and Robert Nelson offered me in the spring of 1974, was certainly a turning point in my life.

They invited me to join with them in that mystical, magical fraternity of individuals commonly called "coaches".

I found very quickly that some parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents had other names for it. They hinted that there was prestige involved ...I'd get to wear a t-shirt emblazoned with a catchy name like..."The Roadrunners" – "The Blue Devils" – "The Holy Terrors".

What they neglected to tell me, is that I would spend the next eight or nine years missing our fabulous Oklahoma spring bass fishing...they didn't say that I would purchase a van to haul the fifteen screaming, squirming little girls to softball games, where they would spend the majority of their time practicing cheerleading moves in center field...they didn't say that I needed to be ready to spend three or four hundred dollars out of my pocket, to make up for the things the kids needed...all of this to collect a five dollar trophy at the end of the season.

But mostly, the things that no one can put into words, is that I would have the pleasure of seeing those same squirmy kids blossom into beautiful young women...so full of life and love...friends who would share with me their pride in accomplishments...their fears and momentary setbacks...and most of all, their trust.

It was during those first few years that I had the distinct pleasure of coaching a little fireball named Vonda Murrah. A very special young lady...dedicated and naturally talented...what today we proudly refer to as a "jock".

Vonda was one of those few kids that were especially coachable. She listened and tried...if it didn't work the first time, she tried again and kept trying until it did work. In those years that I watched Vonda blossom into young adulthood, I never saw her quit trying!

As kids will do, Vonda left me and went on to play with some of the most prestigious teams in our region...the Kelly Comets...the Edison Eagles...the Union Redskins...always in demand as a pickup for tournaments...most certainly a candidate for a college scholarship.

Although the teams changed, Vonda never did. More than likely you would see her behind that catcher's mask...sweat mixed with infield dirt forming droplets of mud...her fanny covered with dirt where she slid into innumerable bases. But always...always...upbeat and energetic...cajoling her teammates to give that extra 100% that it takes to win.

Vonda and her teams won their share of games and the honors that went with them.

But Vonda lost when she entered a strange arena...a playing field where her talent and experience couldn't affect the outcome of the game.

Nearly three years ago, Vonda faced a surgeon's scalpel and a combination of drugs that would render her young body unable to respond to the stimuli of touch...of feeling...of love.

The mere fact that Vonda still fights after nearly three years in a hospital bed is a tribute to her competitive spirit. She has again refused to accept the umpire's decision.

Tonight, Vonda is benched. And if I know that kid, she wants it that way. She isn't capable of giving that full measure anymore, so she would want another catcher behind the plate.

Jackie and I are grateful to Vonda, Lance, Barbara and Danny for allowing us to be a part of their lives. We congratulate Tulsa Girls Softball Federation on the naming of this award for a true athlete...a great competitor...a beautiful young lady who personifies the spirit of our young people.

Tonight Vonda competes in the most important game of her young life...and that is, life itself.

When each of you speak to the ultimate umpire tonight, join us in asking for an appeal...the kid deserves a break.

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