

Cheryl Kaye Marshall

Age: 17, Grade: 12

Home School, Birmingham, AL

Educator: Emily Marshall

Category: Personal Essay & Memoir

Parents: Quite the Tale

Part 1: Best Behavior

What is the most destructive thing that a baseball player has to endure? Is it the constant strain on one's arm from throwing or other players intentionally spiking an opposing player? Is it simply not being happy with one's performance? After years of watching the games that my dad coaches, I've realized that it is the young players' parents. Some think they know everything because they played a bit of high school baseball. Some don't go to the games for their sons but rather to socialize.

I'm going to tell a tale about the first baseball game of the season. I know it's odd to think about a baseball game as an interesting story, but I think that this particular team might just turn into one. A brand-new team stood in the dugout, and my dad was ready to embark on the journey of coaching a team of fifteen-year-olds. It was the third weekend in August around one o'clock, so I was scorched just from walking down the steps to the baseball field. I put on a lot of Aloe Vera later that night. We were at Birmingham-Southern College for this game. As I descended the concrete steps that I have so often walked, I spotted where the parents sat. They were right behind the batter's box in the red chairs, chairs that before someone sits on them, he or she must move away the spider webs. There was beautiful greenery going up a hill directly behind the chairs. I have always enjoyed watching or joining kids who like to attempt to climb the steep hill. I sat a row or two back in one of those red chairs, giving the parents their space. I could see cliques had formed throughout the parents' group. It was as if I were at a high school football game looking at the mean group, the outcasts, and the social ones. I'm sure everyone has seen it a million times one way or another. I did not know any of the parents' names, but I was determined to be able to label them later on in the season. There was a "clique" of four dads who appeared to be complaining about whether their sons would be playing or not. I could tell these men didn't want their griping to be known just yet because they didn't want the coach seeing their true colors this early in the season. I could tell this by their whispering voices and their attempts to hide their faces. Two moms and a dad sat behind them and stared into the dugout never saying a word. Their eyes had a nervous gleam, and the creases in their foreheads showed that they were on guard. I think if the wind had blown in an odd way, they would've jumped out of their seats. The majority of women, from varying cliques, didn't even watch their sons hit. This was their girl time, I suppose. A sister of one of the players, Chloe, had come to support her brother Hewitt, and anytime she asked her mom for something, she was ignored.

If Chloe kept on asking, her mother would snap and say "In a minute!" When the minute had long passed, she gave up and went to someone else for help. Karyl McBride, an author of many insightful articles and books, talks about how children with parents who are self-centered are often told they are selfish. She says, "(...) the child grows up wondering about their own self-worth and value"(McBride). I only hope that one day Chloe's mother opens her heart to think more about her child. Believe me when I say that this mom won't be the biggest problem.

Another dad, who I later found out was Craig, stood right at the fence and yelled to his son constantly, "Stay loose!"

I find it sad that most of the fathers pay too much attention, ready to nitpick every movement that their sons make, yet most of the mothers don't care to even glance their way. This cycle continued throughout the entire game. The dads got a little more brave each inning, with both their sons and the umpires.

"Make the play," a dad whose name I did not know shouted. Their voices became a little louder and a little sharper. It was like I could see their words leaving their mouths and forming into a dagger. Then one of their sons, Grant, was called out for a pop-up in the fifth inning.

The dad, Louis, threw his hands up and raised his voice, "Come on, blue! There's no way he was out!"

The umpire took his mask off and walked off not even raising his head, not even to lock eyes with the father. The father proceeded to fuss quietly to himself and to his peers. I could only hear bits and pieces of what he said. I heard the words "umpire," "idiot," and "safe." I assume that he believed the umpire to be an idiot because he thought

his son was safe even though it was quite obvious he wasn't. Even my dad, who obviously wanted him to be safe because the player was on his team, said that he agreed he was out.

The air was stagnant, and the sun was blazing into the depths of my skin. My mom and I walked up the steps to an area with some trees to protect us from the sun. The parents rooting for the other team were sitting up there. They were very talkative, but as soon as we sat down, they became very quiet. I assumed they were trying to figure out who we were and what we were doing. We lost that game, and the parents whose kids were on the other team raised their heads so high that they could have fallen over. The majority of our parents walked quietly away from the field and didn't speak to their sons. Some went to their cars before their sons even got out of the dugout. A couple of parents talked with their sons happily, but those were the limited-edition ones. I know it's surprising when I say that parents are the most harmful thing to a baseball player, but it is true.

Part 2: Reality

It's the same thing with every team. At the end of the day, the parents don't care about their sons. They care about themselves and if their sons are making them look good. However, this team was different in one way. Usually with a new team the parents are quiet for the first game but not this group. It only made me wonder how they would act once they're comfortable. I don't know how this team will end up, but I think it will make for quite a tale.

The next weekend arrived, and it was time for another baseball game to watch. The game started around sunset. The sky was filled with oranges, pinks, and yellows. The clouds were like paint strokes. My mom and I sat in the back row of bleachers with another mom who was very kind, Sky. The bleachers were smaller than the seating area where we had had our last game, so all of the parents were forced to sit together. There were a few dads who stood by the dugout though, periodically giving their sons corrections. Once these dads were done giving corrections, they walked over close to the field. I could not even count to ten before another dad was making a smart comment to the umpire. one...two...three...four...five...six...seven...eight...nine..., "Come on! I bet you didn't even play baseball, ump." That's just one example from a father named Scott. I waited another few seconds, and they were back telling their sons what they did wrong. This cycle repeated itself for what felt like twenty-million times.

Later, I stood up to spend some time with two young girls who were players' sisters, Riley and Ashley. Their brothers were Reggie and Greg. We sat in the batting cages, which were only a few feet from the bleachers, so we still watched the game. Reggie had been pitching for about four innings, and I could tell he was getting tired. He had given his everything on the mound. Riley and Reggie's dad walked behind the bleachers and began to pace. His jaw was clenched, and his arms were crossed so tightly that it might have cut off his blood circulation. My dad, the coach, went to the mound to check on Reggie and see if it was to time to bring in a new pitcher. Reggie gave a soft nod and began to walk back to the dugout.

His dad, Louis, began to scream at his son before he even got to the dugout, "You got to be there for your team! How dare you give up like that! Meet me at the car!" He stormed out of the arena.

Reggie sat down and iced his arm with tears filling the rim of his eyes. Riley told me that this wasn't a rare occurrence. She was extremely worried about her brother but gave him his space. He didn't look up for a long time. Anyone could tell that he was in pain mentally, physically, and emotionally. Riley kept checking to see if her dad was going to leave. We could see his headlights, but finally he parked once more. The fact that this even crossed her mind that he would leave gave me a stomach ache for her. This was all because of a stupid baseball game. Louis soon came back but stood as far as he could away from everyone. When the game was over, he went back to the car. Reggie and Riley slowly made their way back to their car as well. All the parents either tried to talk to Reggie, tried to give him a hug, or made some sort of attempt to let him know that they felt sorry for him. As I watched, I wondered if some of them did this to make themselves feel like a better person. In reality, it could've been any of them. Some of them learned from Louis's mistake. Some of them were oblivious that it could've been them. Some of them had never done that but made sure not to emulate his actions after that night to a higher level.

Part 3: The Intentions and The Effects

Parents do not realize the power they have over their child. They can make their kids rise to the top of the clouds, or they can send them crumbling like a building being hit with a wrecking ball. Most of the time parents are hardest on kids in whatever area they love. In this case it was baseball. Why would these dads want to destroy their kids' passions for the main thing they love? They don't want to intentionally crush their children's passions. So why do they sometimes treat their children as if they do? I believe it's probably different for each scenario. I think sometimes the parent is simply an arrogant person who believes he or she knows everything. It might be possible that, for parents who used to practice the thing their child now does, that he or she has forgotten just how hard it is. Maybe they have higher expectations than their sons can achieve. A lot of parents just don't understand the injuries, the time, the exhaustion, or the need for mental breaks. They may expect their kid to keep going when they probably would've stopped a long time ago. What it takes to be great isn't just spending a million hours working. Maybe they simply don't understand. To me, the saddest of these options is when a parent feels that their child's ability might

damage his or her reputation. These parents put others' opinions above their child's enjoyment of the game and of life. Some have to learn; some don't have to learn; and some never learn though they should.

When these parents have these types of intentions and thought processes, the effects on their child only becomes worse. A study was done on new middle schoolers to see what they felt like their parents would be the proudest of them. The options were happiness, success, and kindness to others. The majority of the kids said that their parents would value success over happiness or kindness. The study found that the kids who said happiness and kindness had a higher GPA. There were more negatives than just academically. Rick Nauert states that "much poorer outcomes were seen among children who perceived either mothers or fathers valuing their achievements more highly than they valued being kind to others. These youth experienced more internalizing symptoms such as depression and anxiety, externalizing or acting out behaviors and lower self-esteem, as well as more parental criticism"(Nauert). So, if the parent truly wants what is best for their kid, they should encourage their child and make them believe in themselves. Who knows what somebody can do if they simply believe they can?