

Golf Memories Run Deep

By

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I met Walt through a mutual acquaintance about a dozen years ago. We both had just taken up golf, several years before our retirements. Although we both fairly athletic, we held positions which didn't give either of us much time to fit a four-hour round of golf into our schedules.

We exercised, hiked with family and played an average game of tennis. I had given up tennis after three knee operations and had embraced golf, and Walt had decided to take advantage of living on a golf course to learn the game. We decided to take monthly lessons and both of us made great progress, each breaking one hundred in our first summer of play.

During our second season we each broke ninety and were hooked on this wonderful game. Our homes were about forty miles apart, limiting our play together to several times each season. However, at every social event we talked endlessly about how to lower our scores.

In our third season, Walt came to our club to have lunch and play a round with me. On the fifth hole, a difficult par four hole, with the fairway running perpendicular to a street, I hit my tee shot.

Then it was Walt's turn.

He hit his drive thin, the ball staying low and hitting the women's concrete tee marker about twenty-five yards ahead of our tee box. The ball ricocheted violently ninety degrees to the left striking a telephone pole on the opposite side of the fairway. After striking the pole, the ball again ricocheted ninety degrees to the left, passing us on the left about six feet off of the ground.

Golfers not wishing to wait for the half way house for a snack or a drink, often drove their carts through an archway in the shrubs behind tee box number five to visit a small grocery store across the street. Walt's ball zipped through that archway, across the street, through the parking lot, through the doorway and into the store as a customer was leaving!

We could not contain ourselves. We laughed so hard we could barely play. We would stop laughing, hit a few shots and then start laughing again. That shot ruined any chance we had of breaking ninety - our normal goal. For the next few years, we could not get together without talking about "The Shot."

Sadly, a few years later, Walt suffered a serious stroke and was hospitalized for months, enduring hundreds of hours of therapy. Unfortunately, his condition only declined. He could do little for himself and needed constant care from his wonderful wife. His speech was only understandable to

those close to him, and at times he didn't seem to understand what was going on around him.

One day, as we were about to visit Walt with the friends who had introduced us, I recounted the story about Walt to these non-golfers. When we arrived for the visit and after pleasantries were exchanged, it was easy to see that Walt had declined even more than the last time we had visited him. He didn't seem to follow, or even be interested in, the conversation occurring around him. It was as if he had turned outsiders off.

At that point our friend turned to Walt and said, "Glenn told me a funny story about your famous golf shot."

Walt perked up, slowly raised his right hand and inscribed the path that the ball had taken that day...even signaling that it had gone into a building by making motions of an opening and closing door with his other hand. He smiled a big smile and we all laughed with him. A few moments later, he had returned to that silent place that imprisons stroke victims.

For one moment, Walt had remembered The Shot and had responded with appropriate signs and signals. I was grateful I had been with Walt the day he hit that unbelievable shot...and more grateful that I was with him then to see him relive that moment -- a moment that was trapped deep within him -- and brought him joy to remember it!

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