

Nine Holes of Fun!

I started playing golf when I retired, at age sixty. Some of my friends said my interest in golf would wane once I found out how difficult it was to learn...especially at my age. I am now seventy-seven, have a seventeen handicap and love to play and practice. In fact, I know my retirement would not be the joy it is without my new hobby. When my wife, Ruth, hears me talk about my new hobby, she laughs and asks, "How long are you going to ride that 'new hobby horse?'" I suppose she says that because I have been playing golf for seventeen years now!

I hope to play many more years...and even have aspirations of getting better (I continue to take lessons and am in a constant state of flux with regard to my swing). Learning golf later in life has some added problems... I can throw a baseball or football without thinking about cocking my arm or wrist, but my golf muscle memory is not the same and I must constantly remind myself to "rotate not slide" or "hit from the inside" or "follow through with a long right arm" ...my muscles just do not seem to remember! I will get better.... but it will take time...I just hope I have enough time!

My golf competency is not the reason I am writing this story. I belonged to a private club, where Ruth and I played tennis and enjoyed the social activities. After both Ruth and I had knee surgeries on both knees, we decided to try golf. I fell in love with golf and Ruth fell in love with me being gone to play golf! Our club had an old fashion nine-hole course with a 121 slope rating...quite difficult for a beginner. But with

lessons I broke 100 my first summer and played in many of the club's events...I even became a valued high handicapper in events where teams liked a player with a two strokes on a par three! Each hole on the course triggers memories of something funny that happened while playing my new sport. I want to tell you my favorite story regarding each hole.

Hole One

Hole One is a dog leg right, measuring 391-yards (we always played the white tees) and is a par four. One needs to hit a drive of at least two hundred and twenty yards (a drive of 300-yards would land in the lake at the end of the fairway) to have a clear shot at the green, unless you can cut the corner over one hundred year old trees.

My favorite memory of this hole regards Dr. Atila Can, a general surgeon, now deceased, who loved to play golf. He was probably a thirty-six handicapper and always shot between 110 and 120. He would sit in his cart while we hit a few practice shots, then get out of his cart at the first tee, put a ball on a tee and hit it without ever taking a practice swing.

Not only did he never take a practice swing before his first shot, he never took a practice swing during the entire round of golf! One hundred and ten strokes, one hundred and ten swings. When asked about this practice, he said he "loved playing golf but not practicing." I have never seen anyone love a sport as much as Atila loved golf without caring one iota how he scored. Atila loved being outdoors (probably

being far from the tensions he experienced while in surgery) and sharing stories with each of us on Wednesdays and Saturdays. On second thought, I doubt he was stressed doing surgery...he was a man who knew who he was and what he wanted to do. I am really glad I had the honor of knowing, and playing with, Atila.

Hole 2

Hole 2 is a 144-yard par three over water. When playing the second time around (Remember that this is a nine hole course and each hole has several tee boxes requiring different clubs for the same hole), the hole is a much tougher 171-yard hole. It is probably the signature hole of the course. The green is surrounded by extremely deep (8-10 feet) sand traps and the green is sloped very severely towards the front...hit is past the hole and you might putt it off the green on your second shot!

On this particular warm June day, I had gone out to play 18 holes by myself as I did from time to time to take extra shots in an effort to improve this difficult new game. As I approached the tee box at number 11, there was a foursome leaving from the tee box. I realized that the group consisted of four very good golfers, including a Kent State University coach who was full of himself and still "met me for the first time" even after I had met him six or eight times! When they got to the green, they looked back at me, saw I was a single and waived at me to play through. At this point in my golf game (My first year) my skill level was still very low. I didn't want to hit in front of these good golfers, but I didn't want to

wait on them for the next seven holes, so I teed it up and hit a seven wood. I didn't expect to hit the green, but had high hopes that I might get over the water...a shot of at least 150-yards. I hit the best shot I ever hit on that hole and to this day (sixteen years later) have never hit one better on that hole. It landed at about 2:00 (Most golfers describe where their ball is by using a clock face) on the green, curved forward to about 12:00 and started downward toward the hole, located at about 7:00. The ball stopped about 5 inches above the hole and I when I arrived at the hole was able to tap the ball in for a birdie. One golfer said, "Nice shot" and no one else said a word. As usual, the coach did not recognize me when I said "Hi." I never hit that green again from the 171-yard tee box on my first shot in two years...but it was sure sweet that day.

Hole 3

Hole 3 is a 495-yard severe dogleg left, par five. To have an open shot to the green, one would have to hit a 300-yard drive, so the average golfer tried to hit his second shot over the corner, thereby reducing his/her distance to the green on the second shot.

I was playing in an event with Tom Hall, one of the best golfers in our club. I had only been playing for a year or two and occasionally broke 100 for a round, while he would shoot in the seventies on a regular basis. This hole is/was surrounded by trees on both sides and on my drive, I hit the ball deep into the trees on the left, shortening the hole but needing great luck to have any shot at all. When we found

the ball, miraculously, I had an open shot to the green of about 170 yards up hill. Tom said, "Take a 5-wood and hit it as hard as you can." I did what he said, cleared the trees through a small opening and landed in front of the green, between two sand traps, which were guarding the green. There I was, a sand trap on each side of me, but a clear shot to the hole about thirty yards away. If I could get up and down for a 4, we would gain three strokes as my handicap call for me to get two strokes on this par 5. Even if I were to take three shots to finish the hole we would pick up two shots. I lined up my chip, shanked it into the sand trap, took two shots to get out of the trap, chipped onto the green and three putted for a 9. Ouch! Golf is a four-letter word!

Hole 4

Hole 4 in 409-yard par four. The tee box is 20-30 yards above the fairway as is the green. The fairway is straight, but one hits into a valley and then back up the hill to the green. A lovely hole but made more difficult by the changes in elevation.

On this particular day, I was playing with Dr. Can, his son Erroll, and Marsh Lane. Erroll and Marsh were riding together and I was chauffeuring Dr. Can. After hitting our drives, we jumped into our carts and started down the rather severe hill linking the tee box to the fairway. As Erroll, a young and particularly fearless driver, stated down the dew covered hill, his speed built up rather quickly and so he applied the brakes. The brakes on most golf carts have a feature that allows one to lock the brake by hitting a small

tab in the upper left corner of the brake when parking. When Erroll hit the brake, he accidentally engaged the lock and the cart went out of control, spinning completely around several times before coming to a stop at the bottom of the hill!

Stunned, Erroll said, "What should I do now?" Marsh, not known for his patience, tact or temper control said, "Get the _____ out of the driver's seat!!!" We laughed about this later, but we were all pretty quiet for the next few holes, thinking about what might have happened.

I also have fond memories of playing this hole with Alex Geldhoff and Dr. Ulrich, (Both now deceased) and having them work with me about hitting fairway woods.

Hole 5

Hole 5 is a treacherous 364-yard par 4, with a narrow fairway, trees on the left and a ravine to the right which curves between the fairway and the green about 100 yards from the green. Low handicap players do not find this a difficult hole, but high handicappers have dozens of reasons to fear it. I have many stories about this hole, but will share only a couple.

One of my favorite stories is about Walt Williams caroming a shot off of a tree and into Market 43 behind the tee box and I have written about it at length in a story **Golf Memories Run Deep** on my web site. The story is about the above funny occurrence remembered many years later by Walt, who had suffered a serious stroke. Walt is now deceased. Playing with him was a joy.

I wrote the following story, **Eagles Aren't Good Enough**, which appears in the Stories section of my web site, but will repeat it here.

While playing golf one afternoon with Dr. Bob Dumm, Fred Gressard and Dr. Ed Webb, a very strange thing happened. On the fifth hole at Twin Lakes Country Club, a challenging par four, Ed Webb hit his second shot over the ravine and onto the green...a shot of about one hundred and sixty-five yards. Ed hit the shot with a 7-wood and as it landed, it rolled past the hole and stopped on the first cut of grass about twenty yards past the hole. The rest of us had not been as good and were either short of the green or had to lay up before hitting our third shots to the green.

When we arrived at the green and started to walk towards our respective balls, Fred shouted, "Look at Ed's ball!" We all looked and noticed that it was starting to move. Apparently, the compressed grass under the ball had started to return to its original upright position and was gently lifting the ball. The ball started to roll, quickly gaining speed on this sharply contoured green. The ball moved from its 1:00 position just off the green in a large looping semi-circular trajectory towards the lower part of the green. The hole was at the 5:00 position and the ball moved towards the 9:00 position before turning and heading towards the hole at an ever increasing speed. The ball clanked against the flag staff and dropped into the hole! An eagle for Ed as we all cheered and high-fived him for his rare and unusual shot.

We talked about “the shot” all during the remainder of the round and in the club house after the round while we were having drinks. We were joined by Katie Dumm, Bob’s wife, and she listened as we were all sharing our “Career Shots.” Several of us had had eagles in the past and recounted how they had been accomplished. As the bragging continued, Katie got up, and as she turned to leave said, “I have had two holes-in-one on number two!” and walked away. We all looked at one another and started to laugh! She had had two holes-in-one on the over the water difficult par three and had more to brag about than any of us. I can’t remember what we talked about after her comment, but it wasn’t about golf. Eagles aren’t good enough!

Postscript: I sent this story to Ed’s son, David, and the following was his reply:

Glenn: How wonderful of you to refresh my memory with such an entertaining story about my father and his buddies! I remember Katie Dumm as being straight forward and to the point in conversation! I do remember both Fred and Dad telling this story with a giggle on several occasions. What a treat! Hearing this reminds me that Dad had 4 holes in one that I can remember and may have had a fifth as well. His first was at what is now the Kent State Golf Course on Hole 7. I was present for a hole in one on Hole 8 at Windmill. The others were at the Glades Country Club in Naples and on Hole 2 at Twin Lakes. I have a less than clear memory a story of his having had a fifth at Bedford Springs in Bedford Pa. I started playing golf at age 8 and am still looking for my first ace!

And lastly, as I said, Hole 5 is a hole where stories are born. I got two eagles there myself, both with 7-woods. And, one day we drove up to the green, hidden on one side by large trees, to find a worker, lying unconscious in the left sand trap after being hit by one of my partner's errant shots. One of my physician playing partners examined him and he suffered no ill effects.

Another day, Wafa Kuri, Al's wife, hit a shot over the green and into a flowerbed. An impossible 20-yard chip shot over the cart path, over a waist-high mound to a green sloped so severely toward the fairway that not even Arnold Palmer could stop a shot like that....but...Wafa chipped the ball directly into the hole!

Hole 5...what a hole!!!

Hole 6

Hole 6 is a 345-yard par 4. You need to drive the ball 200-yards to the edge of a valley, which is along the left side, and extend to in front of an elevated green. The green is surrounded by trees and sand and is undulating and sloped towards the fairway.

Early in my golf career, I was playing in an event with Bob Meeker and we were both on the green. My ball was only 18 inches from the hole and Bob reminded me to hit the putt firmly as I had a side hill lie. I hit the ball firmly, it rimmed the cup and headed towards the fairway...off the green, down an embankment, and picking up speed, ended in the fairway,

about forty yards from where I was standing. Needless to say, I didn't score any points for our team on that hole!

Hole 7

Hole 7 is a 374-yard par 4. A rather simple hole with trees on both sides and bunkers on the left at about 200-yards. Fred Gressard used to hit his drives in that bunker and I used to say that was my goal in life...to hit my drives that far. When I was able to do that I became as annoyed as Fred had been a season or two before. One evening, four of us were playing a round when one of our playing partners hit his second shot into the flowerbed that was behind the green. Instead of dropping out of the bed without penalty, our friend decided to chip from the bed to the flag about 5-yards away. The rest of our group stood at the front of the green, about 20-yards away from the person about to hit.

As he practiced his chip outside the flowerbed, he took 8-10 practice chips as we watched. He then stepped into the flowerbed and instead of chipping, hit a full sand shot type shot in an effort to blast out of the wood chips. We were not expecting the shot he was attempting or we would not have been standing in the line he was about to hit. He hit the ball thin and it came screaming in our direction. My friend Jim Schubert tried to avoid the ball, but was hit directly in the mouth...breaking his jawbone and knocking out several teeth. We hunted for the teeth to no avail and then headed to Dr. Ferrara's for treatment. This was an expensive lesson and reminds me to never stand in anyone's line, and as the person hitting the ball to warn everyone of the shot you will

be taking and to give them a “heads up” before striking the ball. Golf can be a dangerous sport!

Hole 8

Hole 8 is a 150-yard par 3. This short hole is flanked on the left by a pond edged by basketball-sized rocks and the green is surrounded by sand except for a six-foot grass area at the 6:00 position.

Both of my Hole 8 stories involve Dr. Al Kuri, my good friend (Now deceased) and a local plastic surgeon. Al grew up in Lebanon and spent his early years playing tennis. He was an outstanding athlete.

Story 1: It was Al's turn to hit and he struck the ball thin causing it to leave the tee box on a low trajectory. The ball struck a rock about seventy-five yards away and headed for heaven. None of us could see where his ball was heading. As we were standing there, the ball landed six-feet behind Al and in the midst of the three of us standing there. Al had just turned this 150-yard hole into a 152-yard hole! We couldn't stop laughing.

Story 2: On another day, Al, who was not as strong as he had been before he had a bout with colon cancer, selected a 5-wood to negotiate this 150-yard hole. Once again, he hit the ball thin and it went bouncing down the fairway. We watched as it bounced directly between the two sand traps guarding the green, onto the green, curved left and went into the hole. A Hole-In-One on a poorly struck ball! We all hit

good shots to the green that day, but Al was the only one to get a Hole-In-One!! Golf isn't fair! Life isn't fair.

Hole 9

Hole 9 is the number 1 handicap hole, that is, the hardest hole on the course. It is a 436-yard par 4, over water for the first 170-yards, to a climbing fairway that is slanted to the left which catches balls and sucks them into the woods. One must hit a drive of over 230-yards to get to the top of the hill and have an unimpeded view of the green.

Story 1. In a Member-Guest event with Dr. George Melnykovich, a long time friend from Reston, VA, we were finishing the tournament and were in the top ten. I hit my drive and it dribbled into the left rough...not in the trees, but not in position A. George suggested that since I had not used the mulligan we had purchased for the event (a non-penalized shot to replace the first shot), that I should use it at this time. Good idea! Actually a bad idea as I hit my mulligan into the water, had to take a penalty shot and hit yet another shot...which I hit several yards from my first shot, but now was lying three!!

Story 2. Probably my favorite story about Hole 9 involves the person from whom I first took lessons, the Club Pro, Tim Starrett. Once again, I was playing a round by myself late in the afternoon before evening league play and had just hit one of my best drives ever to the top of the hill. I was about 200-yards from the hole. Just as I was about to hit my second shot, Tim came down the fairway with 3-4 carts full

of prospective members. At the time, I was on the Membership Committee and Tim wanted me to say a few words to them...about membership, about being a new golfer (as several of them wanted to try golf they said) and about the club in general. After a few minutes, Tim said they were moving on to see the remainder of the course but that I should show them how to hit a 3-wood. Under normal circumstances, I would have hit a slice down the right side while flirting with out-of-bounds on the right side.

But not this time! I hit the 3-wood, square and firm, and it landed 10-15-yards in front of the green and rolled onto the green. Tim said, "Nice Shot" and he and the prospective members drove off! This was the first, and only, time I have ever got on Hole 9 in two shots. I have played that hole since my retirement in 1996 and just this year was in 20-yards in front of the green on my second shot...the second closest I have ever come to making it onto that green in two shots. When I saw Tim back in the pro shop a few minutes later, he said, "Where did you get that shot?" We both laughed and realized that this game of golf is great on some shots, but will keep you humble over the long haul! I love golf!!

Those are my stories about golf on the nine holes of Twin Lakes Country Club (in 2012, TLCC became The Fairways of Twin Lakes and is now a public course). I learned how to play golf at age sixty and have never regretted commencing this new sports journey. I like to play and I like to practice, but the most fun is being with friends, hearing their stories and sharing their lives. Whether it is nine holes or eighteen

holes, golf is fun if we all remember that it is just a game. Did I say that?

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Note: The author is now 77 and has a 17.0 handicap. Like Boxer in **Animal Farm**, I plan to work harder (on my golf).