

Cups in the kitchen

BY DEBORAH BRESLOW

"Atta' boy!" "Good eye!" "Nice rip!" "Get down!" "Watch the steal!" "Be a hitter!" "Run it out!" If these calls are not familiar, don't despair. Welcome to the world of baseball.

Meet my family: an 11-year-old first-baseman, a 10-year-old pitcher, a 7-year-old rookie and a 50-year-old coach. Dinner on a good night during baseball season: eggs, toast, juice and pudding. Dinner on a bad night: Big Mac, Coke, fries and a Blizzard. Dinner in a pinch: the remains of a Happy Meal, warm juice, crumbled pretzels and what's left on the Good Humor truck. Health food fanatics beware: you cannot survive the season without the basic four: pizza, Gatorade, cheese-doodles and M&Ms.

My husband played baseball in utero. Though I don't have sonographic proof of this, I'm certain it's true. On our third date, I was asked to meet him at a field. Parking in the adjacent parking lot, I checked my makeup and sauntered toward the dugout. Eager to impress, I flashed my best smile. No one on the bench returned the gesture.

Jay was on the pitcher's mound. "Hi!" I called. He turned his head and shot me a scowl. It was clear there were three things that would always come between us: a leather glove, a red-stitched hard ball and a metal bat.

I was destined to give birth to boys. But three? It was a secret pact between my husband and God. I did not know that when cleats get wet, you have to stuff them with newspaper; that it's not the catcher's mound, it is home plate; that I would bond with an industrial-sized drum of



The author's husband, Jay, with sons Kenny, Danny and Robbie.

Triple Action Shout; and that every counter would house a plastic, foam-rimmed, triangular cup.

We're given a mandatory directive to purchase these for our boys. My husband defers to me. The salesman at the store is of no help. Our son is busy trying on batting helmets. "What size did you need ma'am?" How do I know?

Ask me about a coffee cup, a measuring cup, or a cup of sugar—this is just not my domain!

I am not a sports fan. I do not know the difference between foul and fair territory, the location of the strike zone, the top of the 1st or the bottom of the 6th.

But I gave in. We purchased the minivan and the folding chair with mesh cup holder. I judiciously check my e-mail for weather cancellations. My cooler holds provisions for any fan that may become hungry, thirsty, or bored. Uniforms are washed, schedules are posted, and everyone gets to practice on time.

Attempting to keep order, the dia-

logue prevails: "Did you wash my shirt?" "Which one?" "The green one!" "Is it green with a white stripe?" "No, that's the AWAY one." Sixteen green shirts; no one knows where they are.

Even Jay, who juggles a full-time job, coaches travel baseball, T-Ball, and in between, attends my other son's games, plays softball twice a week. "I need something to do in my down time," he explains.

Year to year, I ask myself: "Are we having fun yet?" The frenetic pace and commitment of time is incomprehensible. No one cares about eating dinner at 10, a double header in the hot sun, or an interminable drive to an out-of-town playing field.

Night after night, the boys toss hats, drop bat bags and peel off sticky, clay-stained uniforms. They shower with their eyes closed.

From the sidelines, I cheer "GO GREEN." But it's natural to pay close attention to your own son. You watch his wind up. "Throw strikes." You watch his batting stance. "Hit the

ball." You watch the play. "Get on base." You know he'll steal. "Run hard." At first base, a ball comes his way. "Watch your footwork." In the outfield, the ball sails high and deep over his head. "Turn and go." You hope he'll always be a good sport.

The season ends. Involved in their next summer activity, the allure of baseball is over. But not for me - I still hear cleats hit together to loosen the dirt; the thud of a hard ball caught in a glove; the skidding of heels sliding into third; the spirited chant of players converging before a game.

What resonates in my mind when the skies are grey, the air is cold and the fields are empty is the distance they keep and the focus they have throughout the season:

He hits a bomb and rounds the bases, he makes an impossible catch in the outfield; he pitches a one, two, three inning; he scores the winning run; a glorious triumph; he makes the final out: the team suffers a loss.

No matter the circumstance, it's what he gives back - the modest smile he throws your direction, a tear down his cheek from under the brim of his cap, a demonstrative high-five, or an evasive walk from the field without acknowledgement of your existence.

But when that car door slams, he waits; for you.

Words aren't necessary. It's the expression of body language or eye contact that transpires from him on the field to you in the stands that says it all. He knows you're there, he knows you care and he's happy. It's all that matters.

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