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Home Run

by Susan Alvis

*To My Son, Matthew who never gave up his heart for the game
regardless of the countless adversities he faced.*

HOME RUN

Chapter One

Tabitha watched her son sit in the dugout as other kids made their way to the field. His sesame seeds were flying and his legs were swinging with a smile that lit up the entire stadium. He had been in a baseball uniform since he could hold a bat which was at the age of three. Her husband found a league in a neighboring town that accepted three year olds and put little Johnny on the field for the great game of T-ball.

A few years later and Tabitha could have sworn she was the proud parent of the next Babe Ruth as she watched him go from T-ball to a recreational league to traveling baseball. Incidentally, the traveling club league was also known to the locals as *Daddy ball*.

Disappointments were few and far between as little Johnny used his left arm as a powerful tool. He taunted players as they struck at curve balls he shouldn't have been throwing at his age. His fast pitches were rapid enough to strike a player out and some thought his skill far surpassed his age. He was on his way as a serious and talented player or so some thought.

There's something about sports that many parents don't see when their child is the crème of the crop. They don't see the envy in the eyes of other parents and they certainly don't notice when their child is targeted to be shunned. Parents are far too busy concentrating on their child and the team atmosphere he seems to have found.

Then, when it suddenly falls apart, moms and dads aren't sure what happened because they weren't paying close attention. Tabitha watched in dismay as she realized there was only so much she could do as a parent regardless of her son's obvious natural abilities. She was surprised at what others would do to take away from her son's talent and from those talented kids around him that held similar skills behind the glove or bat.

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"Mom, it's no big deal." Johnny was disappointed because he had sat on the bench for the past three games without playing one inning. It was evident in his voice.

"It is a big deal Johnny when you aren't playing. I'd like to know why." Tabitha's voice rose slightly.

"The other kids are better than I am so I'll just have to work harder."

John, Tabitha's other half, shot Tabitha a look of warning. He wanted her to drop the conversation but her blood had boiled earlier when she'd witnessed two kids walk players around the bases like they were on a slow-moving merry-go-round. Johnny sat the bench clapping and cheering his team on. Their team had lost three straight games and the same

players had remained on the field. Mistakes were rampant and there her son was-content to be on the damn bench.

“Johnny, go throw with your dad.” She intended to call the coach and find out what the problem was because after eight years of putting her summers on hold for baseball, she wasn’t about to go down without a fight. If her son wasn’t playing because of his level of skill, it was one thing but if he wasn’t playing for another reason, perhaps a sassy mouth, she’d like to know that too.

John was typically laid back and she knew he wouldn’t say the first thing to the coach who had benched their son. After all, he was a friend of the family. He wouldn’t snub her son when half the time, the coach’s kids were at John and Tabitha’s house. *Of course not*, she thought with a huff.

John grabbed a glove smacking a quick kiss on Tabitha’s cheek, “I don’t want to hear another word about it.” He gave her a stern look knowing she wouldn’t listen.

She watched them from the kitchen window and dialed the coach’s number.

By the fifth ring, Tabitha was down-right mad. She had just about given up when Dave’s wife picked up. “Hi Charlotte, can I speak to Dave please?”

“Oh, sure you can *Tabitha*. Hang on a minute.” Her voice was cool but oozed over the words probably so she could get a point across to her husband before handing off the phone.

“Hey Tabitha, how’s it going? That was some game huh?” His words were choppy and quickly delivered.

“Yeah Dave, I guess you could say that. In fact, it is why I’m calling.” He knew why she was calling and if he had half a brain, he should’ve expected it because the call was long overdue!

“Oh. Look I know it is disappointing to the kids. We are a young team though and we’re getting stronger all the time. I’ve got your boy in my back pocket if we can’t get it together. You know he’s the youngest one on the team.”

Tabitha thought of all the late nights she had spent with Dave and Charlotte’s kids while they went out celebrating New Years, Valentine’s and Fourth of July. She was always the mom-at-home who loved being with the kids but still offered their so-called friends a break when they wanted to go out and party. Somewhere along the line, she felt like that warranted her child getting his *fair* chance to play. The other kids proved they certainly weren’t headed for careers in baseball much less interested in playing little league. Johnny lived baseball. It was his life.

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“Dave, listen. Johnny has played baseball since he could practically walk. This is the first year he has sat the bench. While I don’t expect him to be a starter, I do expect him to have a fair opportunity to play. You have kids out there who number one, can’t swing the bat and number two, can’t pitch, and finally, can’t catch. I’m calling to see if there’s a problem. Has Johnny done something to piss you off?” Tabitha was direct.

“Well,” Dave began with a slow draw, “this is a young team and I will play him some but as I said, he’s one of the younger ones out there. I’ve had him in the line-up as much as anyone else his age.”

Tabitha hated to be played as a fool. “Really? *Is that so?* How many kids do you have on the team Dave?” She was hot.

He was quiet for a moment before he answered her. “We’ve got fifteen this year.”

“Hmm. Yes, there are fifteen kids out there and guess what? Fourteen of the fifteen have played every single game. Fourteen. Still, the one kid that hasn’t played is the one child who continues to think you’re the greatest thing since sliced bread. He’s also one of five kids who has been playing longer than the rest of those out there. I’d like to hear a reason why he isn’t out on the field rather than a cop-out about his age. He was old enough to make the team. He should be playing.”

“Well, as I said...” He didn’t know what to say and that much was apparent.

“Yes, he’s young. You said that.” Tabitha interrupted him.

“I don’t know what to tell you except that I’ll play him. How’s that?” He had to say something.

“Dave, that would be really nice. We’re paying to go out of town on these trips coming up and we have invested as much, and in most cases, more time at the baseball field than any of your other players and parents. I’d appreciate the opportunity to see my child play and then we can all see if he belongs out there or not.” Tabitha rattled off at the mouth when she was mad and had quite the reputation for doing so but it took a lot to provoke her. Most of the time she was pleasant to be around but if someone wronged her child, look out!

Going back to his jovial self, Dave laughed. “You got it neighbor! By the way, Charlotte and I are going out for the fourth. Do you all have plans?”

“Same as always.” Tabitha knew what was next.

“Great, do you want three more?” Dave never cared to ask.

“Sure, they are welcome to come over as always.” Tabitha’s tone was cool. When it came to the kids, she couldn’t take it out on them but she really didn’t want to help Dave out if

her son wasn't going to be given his fair shot at playing time. Since Dave was from California, he had few options for baby-sitters and Tabitha thought he should keep that in mind.

Dave was chummier than ever. "Fantastic! It's going to be a late night so they can stay over right?" He was a pushy SOB. She had to hand it to him.

"They're welcome to stay." After all, maybe it would help Johnny get a fair shake. The thought entered her mind and she pushed it aside. *Who am I kidding?* She almost said the words out loud when she hung up the phone.

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The day before Independence Day, Johnny was clearly excited. The biggest tournament of the year was coming up and he had practiced hard for the game. He didn't know his mother had talked to Dave because Tabitha made sure he didn't. Johnny went to the game with a positive attitude ready to spend some time on the bench but optimistic that he might get a chance to play at least one inning.

John and Tabitha sat in the bleachers waiting for the game to start when they overheard one of the other mother's conversations as she spoke to an attentive audience.

"Yes, they called him at home. Yes! They did. Shouting about the fact that their son had been to all of these baseball camps and the least Dave could do was put him in the game. So Tim isn't starting today. He'll be on *the bench*." She turned to look at Johnny's parents with heated anger.

Tabitha glared back in her direction. She was about to let her know her side of the conversation but John stopped her. He pointed toward Johnny taking the pitcher's mound. His eyes were fiery as he pitched strike after strike. He didn't walk one player in the first inning and no one scored any runs for the opposing team. The second inning, he struck three batters out back to back. The third inning, again he was flawless and then, it was over.

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Chapter Two

It had been two weeks since the moment of truth. Johnny had played three innings to perfection and then was benched for the rest of the season without any excuses made. Tabitha had tried to call Dave but Charlotte always intervened and claimed he couldn't come to the phone or that he was working. Finally, Tabitha had enough. She was going to pull Johnny off the team.

"Mom, I'm not a quitter. So, Dave doesn't like me. It really doesn't matter in my world whether he likes me or not. There's always next year." The young boy spoke with maturity.

"Yes, there is but the problem is that while he decided to play everyone else, not only did your team look like the Bad News Bears but you weren't able to get the practice or the experience you deserve to have. At least when you're at practice you can get *some* playing time." She tapped her fingernails on the marble countertops.

Johnny opened the refrigerator and took out a bottle of water. Tabitha noticed he didn't respond to her.

"You *do* practice when you're dropped off at the field by Nana right?" Tabitha held her breath waiting for his answer. Since she worked weird hours, her mother always took Johnny to his practices.

Johnny shifted his weight from one foot to the other. "I decided I'm going to get through this season without any more problems." The kids had teased him something terrible after his mother had called the coach demanding that he get more playing time. He didn't tell her he knew she'd called because he didn't want her to know the kids were making fun of him because his "mommy called when Johnny didn't get to play."

"You are practicing, right?" She already knew the answer because he looked like a cat had his tongue.

Johnny was going to have to come clean. His mother wasn't a push over and Johnny couldn't avoid the truth. "No mom. I'm not."

"You're not?" Tabitha was exhausted with the whole baseball thing. It was time for husband to deal with Dave.

"No, but its okay." Johnny looked down.

It wasn't okay.

“Damn it, Johnny. No it isn’t.” Her voice was rough as she raised the window in the kitchen. Tabitha yelled for her husband. “JOHN!!! Get in here!”

John rushed inside probably expecting a fire or something after his wife’s loud wailing. “What’s going on?”

Tabitha’s eyes were fiery. “Johnny, tell your father why you haven’t been practicing.”

“It’s no big deal.” Johnny down-played it again.

“It *is* a big deal.” Tabitha bounced looks in between her husband and her son. “Talk.”

The young boy began what would tell a story of a heart-wrenching battle that he couldn’t win but shouldn’t have had to fight alone. He told of how his coach, their so-called neighbor and friend, had ridiculed him in front of the other kids. He told him again and again that he was too young to start and too spoiled to be on a team of hard-working young men. His team, after all, were *real men* who could come and talk to their coach if there was a problem. They didn’t run home crying to mommy because they didn’t get to play.

By the end of the conversation, John was mad as hell. He’d heard all he wanted to hear and left without a word. Tabitha knew where he was headed and she left right behind him pulling in Dave’s driveway soon after her husband.

Dave saw them coming. “Hey guys! You’re just in time for the party. Wanna beer, John?” Dave started to toss a can in his neighbor’s direction.

“No, hell no. I don’t want anything from you. Let me tell you something Dave, you are going to need several beers after I leave because I’m here for one reason and one reason only. I want you to know the truth about my son because from what I can tell, he’s more of a man than you’ll ever be.” John was showing some restraint from where Tabitha was standing but she wasn’t sure it would last long.

Dave’s eyes sparked the mean spirit that she had heard Charlotte’s kids talk about in the past. He was a step-father who had been the epitome of a perfect father in public while being a royal ass behind closed doors. Tabitha never considered him to be anything more than someone she tolerated even though her husband thought he was okay. However, all bets for any kind of friendship were off. He’d crossed the line when he’d ridiculed their son.

Dave propped up on the front of his Dodge truck with his elbow and waited for John to tell him what was on his mind. He appeared uninterested which didn’t surprise Tabitha.

John had no problem getting warmed up. “Dave, first I want to tell you. You’re a royal ass. I’ve been as good as I can be to your children, wait they’re Charlotte’s kids so that

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explains why they're good kids. They don't have your tainted blood flowing through their veins."

Tabitha stood back with her arms crossed. *Give him hell honey.*

“Tabitha asked Johnny why he wasn’t playing before she talked to you a few weeks back. Would you like to know what he told her?” He paused only for a moment probably not expecting an answer. “He told her that it could be that the other kids were better players. Then, he told her he’d have to work harder. Can you believe that? He told her he’d have to work harder.” The sarcasm was in every word.

Dave cleared his throat. “Well, you must’ve been real proud of his attitude. One thing I’ll say for the boy, he’s got a good attitude.”

Tabitha chimed in even though John had held up his hand for her to let him finish. “Yes, but you know and we know he never had that chance!”

John ignored her. He looked directly into Dave’s eyes before he spat more words. “There are only two games left. I hate to encourage my child to be a quitter, but the last thing I want is for you to tear down what we’ve spent a good number of years building up. Now, I know the way this little community works, there will be lots of gossip. We’ve already heard a lot of it because we overheard some of the team mothers talking about Tabitha’s phone conversation with you. I have one piece of advice for you and that is, it would be wise to keep your mouth shut if you want to have your built-in-babysitters still around for your step-children. I imagine it would be tough on you and Charlotte without any help raising your children. The party would be over and I doubt anyone else will step in to replace us.”

Dave looked like a wounded dog and started to say something but John pressed on, he wasn’t finished.

“Another thing, just so you know and things aren’t twisted to serve your own purpose, whatever that may be. Johnny’s mother had to drag it out of him about the practices. He didn’t want to tell her that he’d been keeping the fields in tip-top shape. Damn, I’ve paid out over a thousand dollars this year in traveling expenses and dues for my son to be your lawn boy at the field. You’re a piece of work and all I can say is that when my son said it is better to avoid confrontations, he is only half right.”

Dave raised an eyebrow.

“It’s better to avoid confrontations when you can find a resolution yourself to resolve things appropriately but when you can’t, it’s better to meet it head on. If I’d allowed Tabitha to stay on your ass all season long, Johnny would’ve played. After all, it worked once.”

Tabitha’s hot temper got the best of her and she couldn’t stand it any longer. “My son liked you but he couldn’t see you for the puppet you are. Obviously, you are more interested in rubbing shoulders with the kids who have parents in the right inner circles.

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Dave, their kids haven't played as long or as well as my son showed you he could play. You know it. I just don't get it and maybe I never will."

He offered no explanations. Tabitha knew he wouldn't.

Chapter Three

A few years later, John and Tabitha sat on the sidelines watching proudly as their son played first base. He'd had an awesome game for a freshman. After the game, the parents were called inside the gymnasium for a coach's meeting specifically for parents.

Tabitha and John sat listening as the coach explained he had several parents still convinced that the high school coaches needed help with coaching their teams. He reviewed over some of the things that seemed to be common complaints making the statement that if "little Johnny" didn't get to play, he didn't want to hear about it. In fact, he would rebuke any challenges by pulling a kid off the team if the parents didn't learn that the parents belonged off the field. A few grumbles generated throughout the room but no one seemed very disturbed with his overall comments.

The next day, Johnny experienced first-handed how things could be misconstrued. His teammates, many guys he'd known throughout his life, made fun of him with comments like "Your mom and dad can't pitch a fit if you don't play because the coach said he didn't want to hear about it." "If little Johnny can't play, it's because he can't play." The teasing went on for several weeks.

Unfortunately, what Tabitha and John didn't know was that their son was becoming the victim of some ruthless badgering. By the time he began to have problems with the coach, the damage was done. Many of the bullies had picked on him throughout the school day, only to make snide remarks on the field which left Johnny wide-open to catch slack from coaches when he retaliated. He was becoming the kid everyone loved to hate.

With the season in full swing, Tabitha and John fully expected to see Johnny play. He'd proven himself. He clearly stood out in the early games and was pitching with accuracy and speed. When he played first base, he was skilled and his batting average was the best on the team.

Equally quick with the right moves, some of the parents who knew their advice wouldn't be needed on the field, decided to take the initiative to help out with maintenance, ticket sales, and concessions. Their kids had fantastic playing time opportunities. After all, they'd earned them that right without ever bringing it to the coach's attention.

It didn't hit Tabitha until they sat at the fourth game during their regular season. "John, have you noticed that Johnny went from playing pitcher, to first base, to right field to the bench?"

"Don't start Tabitha. The coach is just trying to find the best positions for his players." John's tone told her that he really didn't believe what he was saying.

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She pressed on. "Yes, I understand that but take a look at the kids who aren't coming off the field. It's not the talented ones who are starting each game and it isn't the older and more experienced players. I would think at this level, the coaches would want to win more games."

Tabitha was talking back and forth with her husband when she noticed Johnny sitting on the bench grinning from ear to ear just happy to be on the team. He seemed content to sit in the dugout. He was among kids who typically avoided him at school during the normal activities of the day but obviously, Johnny was proud to be in his uniform.

John and Tabitha knew their son had dealt with several bullies in class and was under the constant pain of ridicule from other children. He was an easy child to pick on because he would take it most of the time. On occasion, he'd blow up and it only fueled the others to provoke him more, hoping for an outburst someone else would see.

As they watched the game that day, Tabitha noticed her neighbors, Dave and Charlotte, as they worked diligently in the concessions stand with a woman Tabitha recognized but couldn't place. "Who is the woman working in the concessions with the Harpers?"

John turned around to take a look. With a smirk, he nodded down to the pitcher's mound. "Recognize our pitcher?"

Tabitha focused on him as he walked his first batter. "No, I don't think so but he can't pitch. He's too slow and far from accurate." She said it quietly so only her husband could hear her comments.

"Take a better look Tabitha." John nodded again in the kid's direction.

The young man walked another batter throwing his cap off at the mound as he threw a fit she immediately recognized. "Well, well, well. If it isn't little Timmy."

Her eyes shifted and she turned to look back to the concessions stand. "Mommy dearest is still up to her same tricks I see. Rubbing shoulders with Tim's former travel team coach and doing things to help out the new one. She's still getting those brownie points, just in a way that's more acceptable."

John huffed and puffed just like he always did when he saw a confrontation rising. Tim continued to pitch for two innings before he was moved to first base. He didn't do any better on first but he continued to play. Everyone played during the game except Johnny. Finally, he walked up to the coach in the dugout during the ninth inning. The team was already down by two points.

Tabitha looked down as she watched the coach look straight ahead determined to avoid eye contact with the young man who stood in front of him. "I wonder what Johnny is

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saying to him.” She stood up like standing would allow her to hear the conversation but instead only drew attention to the fact her son was having a little pow wow with the team coach.

From the concessions, whispers were flying and she turned to shoot a look over in the direction from where they originated. While the gossip halted, the sarcastic looks were like daggers. Tabitha didn’t care. She knew how their kids were on the field. These people who didn’t hold down a real job could afford to donate time. She worked fourteen hours a day and with other children of her own, it was impossible to be on-call for volunteering at the school or anywhere else for that matter. She felt lucky when she barely made it to the games.

Tabitha watched as the coach turned to look up at the stands. He sent her son back to the bench with a dismissive hand and Johnny seemingly took it well. However, when she caught the smirk the junior varsity coach gave to a teacher sitting nearby, her anger flooded around her.

“John, this is down-right ridiculous. This coach is no better than the parents who dictated the sport when we were forced to play daddy-ball. You are going to get up off your butt and at least go down closer to the field and stand. That man is intimidating our son.” Tabitha pointed an accusing finger as she spoke and didn’t care who saw her.

John sighed. “Okay Tabitha. I agree with you. Johnny looks deflated and the coach seems more interested in pleasing the right parents than in winning ballgames.”

She wanted more.” I’m only going to say this once,” Tabitha’s voice was stern, “You either go down there and stand with the other dads watching the game, not to mention the coach, or I will handle this in my own way immediately after the game.” Tabitha crossed her arms and she knew John could translate her seriousness by tone alone.

“Damn it Tabitha. You can’t win here. Don’t you know that?” He was completely pissed off but he had to know that she was right. “I’ve paid close attention to a lot of things that I haven’t always mentioned to you. Our son *is* getting the same treatment in high school as he experienced in the daddy leagues. So, now what?”

“I know I can’t win in this school but when I yank my son out of here, they’ll know what they did wrong. I’ll write letters, go on radio shows and draw attention to the way the sports programs around here work because I’ve never seen anything like it.” Tabitha’s eyes were blazing and her mouth was moving full-speed ahead.

John knew he had no choice but to go down to the fence and stand with the other parents who were watching the game. “I see now why my mother used to tell me I needed to wear the pants.”

Ignoring her husband, Tabitha watched her son. Johnny's face showed a glimpse of hurt but it also showed something else. She couldn't understand why it was there but she knew what it was because it was something she'd seen in him many times throughout his life. He was *determined*. Her heart broke for him and her eyes were filling fast with tears ready to spill.

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Before the moisture could settle in her eyes, she was caught off guard. Her husband had only been at the fence for a moment but it appeared to have paid off handsomely. Johnny was up to bat.

She didn't know who he subbed for or why he was suddenly able to play but she didn't care. The only thing she hoped was that he wouldn't strike out. "*Come on Johnny! Hit a double!*" She screamed at the top of her lungs as the ump called the first strike.

"SSstreaikkke" He almost sounded overjoyed to be calling it out. All umps did. It wasn't just Johnny. If her son wasn't up to bat, she'd likely find the umpire's theatrics amusing.

Johnny stepped back up with equal poise and determination. His jaw was set as he shifted his feet to stand in a comfortable position.

That's it buddy. Show them what you're made of, knock it out of here. Tabitha crossed her fingers.

If he could have heard his mother's thoughts, he would've translated them appropriately. Johnny connected with the bat sending it over the fence in center field. Everyone jumped to their feet with applause as he went around the bases. He ran like he needed to be concerned with where the ball might find a glove stopping his victorious stride.

The team lined up to shake hands and high-five him as he made his way to home plate and the coach looked pleased, but shocked, at Johnny's display of talent. "Nice, very nice kid." He complimented Johnny with a wide smile.

Beaming, John returned to sit with Tabitha. "That's the boy we knew we always had."

"He's always been able to connect with the ball. I don't know why you'd be surprised. He's a natural. You know it and I know it." Leave it to a proud mom-in-motion to point out the obvious. Both parents clapped until their hands were numb.

When the game ended, Johnny waved for his parents to come down to the dugout. The other players packed up their stuff and headed home. "I need to talk to the coach and I want you both to hear what I have to say." Johnny was matter-of-fact.

Tabitha grinned. She couldn't say that she blamed him. He was going to find out what it would take to get more playing time. He probably picked a good time to discuss it.

After everyone had cleared out, Johnny's coaches stood attentive and ready to hear him out. "Good game today Johnny," one of the assistant coaches offered patting him on the back. The head coach only nodded his approval.

Tabitha and John waited quietly for Johnny to say what was on his mind. They originally planned to fully support him.

“I wanted to talk to all of you together because I’ve given this a lot of thought.” He turned to his mother. His voice seemed to catch in his throat. “I’ve been fighting for playing time, or I guess,” he turned to his mom with kind eyes, “You’ve been fighting for me, for as long as I can remember.”

Tabitha started to say something but couldn’t find the right words. She didn’t know what to say because she didn’t know where her son was headed with the mini-conference he’d called.

“I’ve watched for years as parents pushed their kids to become better and better while mine just allowed me to play. I thought all I really wanted to do was play baseball because I’d been involved in the sport for so long that I didn’t know I wanted to do anything else. Things have changed now.”

Coach Collier, the head coach, studied Johnny with obvious curiosity.

Johnny continued. “I’ve looked for my friends in baseball but the truth is, they aren’t interested in being my friend. I want to tell all of you why because I think it’s important that you know. These players aren’t interested in being friends because I’m their competition and unfortunately, so is everyone else who sits on this bench. The adults involved with this sport have made it that way.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about Johnny. We’re a team here.” Coach Collier’s words were firm and his face showed a touch of red flushing his cheeks.

“I’m sure there are times you believe that, Coach Collier, but when your assistant coaches hear some of the ridicule I’ve caught, I doubt in all honesty they would agree with you.” Johnny’s eyes held a sadness that was undeniable.

“Ahh, now Johnny, there you go with that whining again.” The coach’s tone mimicked the teenager in front of him.

Tabitha shot Collier a condescending look.

“No, sir. I’m not whining. I’m quitting and I want you to know why.”

“You’re what?” Tabitha couldn’t believe her ears.

Coach Collier was expressionless. “Mighty fine time to quit son after the game you had today.”

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“That’s why I’m quitting. You see Coach, I didn’t have a game. I had my ten seconds of glory just like I’ve had for the last five or six years. This sport isn’t about the kids anymore. It’s not about winning. It’s about the parents and the coaches. It’s about who can one-up who just so their kid can get more playing time. It’s about who did the best job manipulating the situations so their son gets a starting position. Sir, I mean you no disrespect but at the same time, I’m through with it. In a couple of years, if I want to play

baseball, I’ll walk on somewhere in college. I think they’ll understand when they see how I play. Coach Collier, I’m just that good and I’m confident a college coach will see it and respect it.”

Collier was offended and it became obvious in his tone. “You think a coach will want you if you haven’t been playing team sports in high school?”

Tabitha saw the coach’s point but she also saw and understood Johnny’s. She had watched him lose interest in a sport he once loved and for what? So he could sit on a bench and listen to ridicule from other players who had learned how to earn playing time they didn’t deserve.

“Sir, I think you are an exceptional coach. I’ve told my parents as much. However, I’ve been playing this sport for so long that I’m tired of it but more than anything else, I’m exhausted by what it’s become.” Johnny was ready to give it all up and the fact was evident in his voice.

“And what is that?” The coach frowned but was apparently interested in hearing the boy’s opinion.

Johnny took off his cap and turned to look at his parents before he glanced back at his coach. “It has become a gathering place for parents and other adults to use their own kids as well as this sport as a platform for bad behavior. The adults today who are coming to these games and have children playing in them, are far more immature than any player you have on the field. Sir, I don’t want my parents to be a part of it and I don’t want to be a part of it. If it means giving up baseball for right now, so be it.”

The coach studied the young man before him. He should’ve realized the role he played in Johnny’s decision but whether he did or didn’t was anyone’s guess.” I don’t suppose there is anything I can do to change your mind?”

“No sir.” Johnny had made up his mind.

“I hate to lose you Johnny because I think you have a talent in the sport.”

“Yes sir I do.” He still had the talent whether he played for the school or not.

“That was a helluva way to end a high school baseball career in your freshman year. Homeruns don’t come easy around here.” The coach spoke the truth.

Johnny grinned. He was thoughtful when he answered him. “No sir, they sure don’t and I imagine they never will.”

HOME RUN

Epilogue

Johnny forgot about baseball as a competitive sport but still attended camps while working out and focusing on his goal. He was smart enough to realize that sometimes you can't beat the system when there are too many politics and underhanded things going on in small-town community sports. In high school, he missed out on the team sport he wanted so desperately to play. However, he realized there were some things he couldn't change.

When he walked into the coach's office at The University of Georgia, he had one thing on his mind. He wanted to play baseball. He didn't care if he had to walk on and prove himself. He knew he could do that without any problem. He handed his own tapes over to the coach and looked him directly in the eye. "I'm not going to tell you I'll be the next Chipper Jones," he began, "but I'll show you what I can do if you'll put a baseball in my hand."

Five years later, Johnny stepped into the famed Yankee Stadium. He shook hands with fellow teammates as the coach introduced him to everyone. They all seemed to welcome him with a positive attitude and a winning spirit. He'd finally made it.

Johnny hit the big time with the home run many never wanted him to make and while he was forced to do it outside of conventional realms, it was all the sweeter knowing he didn't have to run over anyone to get there. He'd made it to the top without anyone's help and without anyone to stand in his way. He also did it on his own terms which made success much sweeter.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Susan Smith Alvis is an author who lives in Tennessee with her husband and two children. She writes romance, mystery, suspense, and non-fiction material under her name and pseudonym. New to the young adult arena, Susan hopes to touch on sensitive true-life issues that will inspire the young readers who read them as well as their parents. You are welcome to join her active MySpace connection at www.myspace.com/susanalvis.