

The Edge of the Field

by Cara Liebowitz

We crutch, wobble, roll, and shuffle onto the dance floor, moving to the music in our own unique ways. Pausing, I take a minute to look around at my comrades, my equals. One of the big kids, on the older team, is wandering around aimlessly, singing off-key and clapping his hands not in time with the music. Another girl is dancing with her mother, staring off into space as she moves awkwardly. I love this part, watching everyone dance freely.

The awards begin. Each kid gets a trophy, an award of his or her own to cherish forever. It doesn't matter if they hit a home run or not. Every kid has his or her own achievements, and John makes sure to highlight them all. John, our most beloved coach, who works so diligently every week simply to make sure that we have a good time. He throws himself into the speeches, just like he throws himself into the game every single Saturday morning. His face glows with pride as he lists the accomplishments of each player: this one learned to hit by himself, this one ran without a buddy, this one transitioned to the metal bat. Insignificant strides for the "normal" Little League teams, but for us they're monumental.

As the awards continue, I let my mind wander, rewinding through five glorious years until I'm twelve years old again, standing on the edge of a baseball field with no clue what to do. Before me, four coaches stood scattered throughout the field, throwing balls to each other in a bizarre game of catch. One kid was trying to climb the fence, with little success. Several others were drawing pictures in the dirt, throwing tantrums,

or just plain spacing out. It seemed truly impossible to me that this motley crew could ever form a baseball team. Nevertheless, John warned everyone to stand back as the next batter stepped up to the plate. Apparently, this kid was a "good hitter". I counted one, two, three strikes, and still the ball kept coming. It must've taken ten tries before the kid hit the ball, but John was exceedingly patient. As the batter rounded home plate, the coaches tossed the ball back and forth, making a big production out of *almost* tagging the kid out. Almost, but not quite, and the ump called him safe. Then John extended his hand to me, and I stepped onto the field and never looked back.

Five years later, I no longer feel alienated from the others on the Challenger team. I'm one of them now, with all my heart and soul. Things haven't changed much. There are still at least six balls in motion per game, and everyone is always safe. One kid inevitably tries to climb the fence each week, and no one ever strikes out. And today, at the annual Challenger dance, no one dances "funny". There is no right or wrong way to do things. Each one of us brings something different to the table, and every player, no matter how severely impaired, is invaluable. We might not be your typical Little Leaguers, but somehow, we are a team.