Pop

By, David Klass

 I remember how embarrassed I was when Pop announced that he was going to join my summer league team as an assistant coach. He was a college professor. Plump. A gray beard. Not particularly athletic.

“But you don’t know anything about baseball.”

 “I know lots about baseball,” he assured me. “I’ve been a Mets fan for years.”

 “Yeah, but you don’t know how to play baseball. You can’t even throw.”

 That stopped him for a second. That hurt. “It’ll be OK,” he said. “Trust me.”

 I remember him at practice, devising a way to chart balls and strikes for the pitchers. Other dads hitting fungos, throwing for batting practice, demonstrating technique. Mine with a pen and a pad, explaining his new method. How ashamed I felt.

 Other dads driving us to away games. One of them sipping whiskey from a brown paper bag as he steered. *How daring*, I thought.

 Pop driving us to an away game. We pass two guys walking side by side. A kid on my team rolls down the window.

 “Homos!” he shouts.

 My dad pulls the car over to the curb. “Just for your information,” he says, “*homo-* is a Greek root. It means ‘equal’ or ‘like.’ As in *homogeneous*. It also means ‘man,’ from the Latin. As in *Homo sapiens.* So if you were trying to say those two guys are alike, or that they’re both men, you were right. Otherwise, you don’t know what you’re talking about.”

 He drives on. Kids in the car look at me. “Your dad is weird.”

 Away soccer games in high school. Pop shows up at every single one. Stands on grass, watching and unconsciously kicking his feet. “Looks like your dad wants to play,” a teammate snickers.

 One game in South Jersey. Bus ride takes more than an hour. Driver gets lost. We go over a bridge, down back roads, through marsh. Finally find soccer field. Pop is waiting there, all alone. He waves.

 “You know, you don’t have to come to every single game,” I finally tell him.

 “I know,” he says.

 It’s only later, in college, that I start to fully appreciate what a wise, gentle, wonderful father I have.

 Now, at forty-three, I still play in soccer games. Pop isn’t there anymore. How badly I miss him. How very lucky I was.

Dialogue – Yellow

Description – Blue

Action – Green

Thinking/Reflection – Pink

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