

Softball: Then and Now

Judy S. West

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Instructor: Ms. Winbourne Gautreaux

Essay Type: Compare / Contrast

My daughter, Jennifer, was an excellent softball player. She was a natural. She is not very big, but she could throw a softball from shortstop to first base before you could blink. So many people throughout the years have commented on her abilities. "She throws like a man," they would say. "With an arm like that and a bat to match it, her possibilities are endless." It was Jennifer's dream to play softball in college and the Olympics, and her father and I wanted to help her achieve this dream. We became involved with a highly competitive softball team that traveled the Southern region of the United States to play in tournaments. With each passing year, our lives became engulfed in the world of tournament softball. When she decided to quit, we were lost for a while. Our lives had revolved around her playing this sport. Eventually, we found different ways of spending our time; my daughter now has other goals, and perhaps most importantly is the change I have noticed in her personality.

While Jennifer was playing softball, there was not time for anything else. She played year round. In the winter, she had practice on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday. In the spring, summer, and fall, another day was added during the week to prepare for tournament play on the weekend. We had traveled to Texas, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Tennessee, and Oklahoma for her to play ball. To cover expenses, her team held various fundraisers throughout the year that involved family participation. We were also required to work in the concession stand at the Riverside Centroplex once a week. We did not socialize outside of the team; we did not take family

vacations, nor did we have time to relax at home. Our life was a whirlwind; we were always in a rush.

We did these things to help Jennifer attain her goals. She had a precise plan: play college ball at LSU, play on the Olympic team, and play professionally. She had not decided on a major, but it would have been sports related. One famous athlete she admired was Dot Richardson; she is a doctor who played on the Olympic team. Jennifer used to dream of wearing that red, white, and blue uniform; she would be standing on a platform with a gold medal around her neck. She was thrilled when she learned about the professional league for women. It seemed as if everything was falling into place for her.

During this time, Jennifer's personality could be described as driven and serious. She was a perfectionist who oftentimes wanted to practice longer to master a skill. Her determination impressed her coaches. While some other teammates often clowned around, she was always focused. Even off of the field, she did not laugh much or joke with her friends. She was well liked, but did not enjoy doing what most girls her age did. Being silly and hanging out with a group of girls was not her style. She was quiet and reserved and preferred to be alone most of the time. One night on the way home from practice she told me, "Please don't be mad at me; I don't want to play anymore." Of course, I was not mad at her; I only wanted her to be happy. From that moment on, our lives changed drastically.

In the weeks that followed, we had an abundance of undesignated time. Gradually, we learned to savor every moment, and we discovered new, pleasurable activities. Jennifer now enjoys reading books, writing poetry, and playing the guitar. She loves to draw pictures and do oil paintings. On weekends, we rent movies, eat popcorn, and sleep late. Our family bought a

camper, and we love to take leisurely trips as often as possible. We have rediscovered the pleasure of each other's company.

Also, she has set different goals for herself. She is currently a junior in high school and has made arrangements to take college courses her senior year. There is a strong possibility she will receive a scholarship, not for softball, but for her academic achievements. She would still like to attend LSU but to study forensic pathology and French. Softball is no longer a factor in her life.

There are also noticeable changes in Jennifer's personality. She does not take everything as seriously now. She still works hard to achieve her goals, but does not put herself under the intense pressure as she did then. I would still characterize her as a perfectionist, but she now realizes it is impossible to be perfect. She laughs a lot now and likes to play practical jokes. Jennifer is more talkative, and enjoys interaction with others. In my observation, she is much happier and satisfied with her life.

It has been over a year since Jennifer quit playing softball, and some of the people in the organization are still in disbelief. They think something is wrong with her. Some have commented to me, "Don't worry, she is confused. Eventually, she will grow out of this stage." Others have asked, "What is wrong with Jennifer? Is she in some kind of trouble?" They think it is impossible for her to be happier now. They cannot understand because they are still in "the world" from which we escaped. Now that we are distanced from "that world," I see things more clearly. Everything should be done in moderation, and I let Jennifer's softball experience get out of control. At the time I truly believed I was helping her achieve her dream. However, I got caught up in the process, and I could not see what was happening to my little girl. The excessive amount of time and energy this involved made her miserable; it made her hate a sport she once

loved. She had been hiding her desire to quit for almost a year in fear of disappointing us. I regret I could not see what is so clear to me now. Moreover, I am thankful she found the courage to speak up because the sparkle that was unnoticeably absent from her eyes has returned.

Judy S. West is a Nursing major. Winborne Gautreaux was her English instructor.

Ms. Gautreaux's Comments: *This paper is a good example of a compare and contrast essay. It follows the correct format, and the grammar and mechanics were smooth. The details in this paper are what stood out the most and made this paper an interesting read.*