

Staying Humble

It is the middle of May, and the snow has finally all melted. This past week I have seen the buds on most of the trees around the city, sprout into leaves, and flowers begin to appear in beds. We have not had any snow fall for weeks, the weather has warmed up enough to wear shorts, and the golf courses have opened for another year.

Two weekends ago, unable to get a tee off time, my husband and I had to content ourselves with hitting a bucket of balls at the driving range. This weekend, we managed to book tee off times early Saturday and Sunday morning, at one of the courses here in Saskatoon. Last year circumstances prevented me from getting out to play any more than three times, so I was sure that my first game would be bad. Much to my surprise, I did very well when I went out on Saturday. Sunday's game though, was a humbling experience.

I am not what anyone would call a serious golfer. I have been playing for about five years, and only started going so I could hang out and drink beer with my husband, and a couple of our friends when they went. After a couple of years, my husband talked me into buying my own set of clubs, so that I would have something decent to slap the ball around with. Most of the time, I was able to make my ball bounce a few meters ahead of me in a fairly straight line, happily running after it, while everyone else scrounged the bushes for theirs. When I got too far behind everyone else, I would just pick up my ball and catch up with them.

Eventually I realized that improving my skills, would make the game much more enjoyable for me. I don't consider myself a competitive person, but I do feel that if you are going to do something, you should try to do it to the best of your ability. I had the opportunity to take a swing clinic the summer we were living in Thompson Manitoba, so I signed up for the one day workshop. I learned not just techniques in this class, I learned why golf is such a humbling past time.

I had been trying to hit the ball. I wanted to drive that sucker as far as I possibly could, and became frustrated when it only rolled a few meters. From the swing clinic, I learned that the object wasn't to hit the ball, it was to swing the club; the ball just happens to be in the path of the club. You must concentrate on consistently swinging the club so that the ball in its path, will go in the direction you intended it to. How far the ball travels, depends on what club you are using. As your swing improves, she has told us, your ball will travel farther. The key is consistency in your swing.

In the two years since the swing clinic, my husband tells me that my game has come along way. That being said, if you were picking team members for a tournament, I would understand if I was your last choice. My progress would be greater if I put more time into practicing, but over all, I'm having fun putting

around at the golf course. I enjoy walking from hole to hole, pulling my clubs behind me, fighting marauding geese for possession of my ball, and the cold one after after the game.

I was thinking on Sunday, that golf sort of reflects how life goes. Keeping your head down and your eyes on the ball, will make sure that it gets off the tee and moving. Hitting your ball square and in the middle, sends it straight down the fairway, instead of lost in the woods. If you take your time setting up your shot, it will save you the grief of your ball ending up in places your never intended it to go. Getting frustrated and focusing on past mistakes, only keeps you from learning from them, and you stay stuck. Some things just can't be fixed, learn to live with it. Don't take things so seriously; every time you step up to the ball, is a new chance to do it better.

To me, the true challenge of this game is self mastery, although it does feel good to make par on a hole. When I step up to address the ball, there are so many details to pay attention to. Are my shoulders lined up with the intended target? Is the club face correctly lined up with the ball, and my shoulders relaxed? When I go to swing my club, am I keeping my head down and following through? These things are all that I must be thinking of, anything else is a distraction. It requires that I be entirely in the moment. Sometimes I am able to find in myself, the discipline to hold it all together, most times I don't. It is a work in progress, much like the rest of my life.

The beautiful thing about self mastery is that once you achieve it, you get to take another shot at it on a higher level. Success tends to raise expectations, and it has been my experience that the bar gets raised on you, the minute you start doing something well. That being said, your best from one day to another will seldom give the same results. I played my best both days that weekend, but the second day out, I didn't do as well as the first. At first I got upset about it, then I relaxed and started to see my botched shots, as an opportunity to practice with clubs I don't usually use. It brought to my attention that I needed to work on my putter and pitching wedge, now that I had the other ones working for me.

I will most likely never become good at golf, it's not that big of a priority for me, but it is a wonderful way to enjoy the outdoors, get some exercise, and socialize with friends. It is an activity that allows for relaxation and contemplation, while searching for that ball went wild on you. You will never have to worry that success will cause you to become conceited, since golf like life, will always take you down a peg or two when you really need it.

Here's wishing that your ball always manages to avoid the sand traps.

Gladys McElrea

The Northern Gypsie

GladyMcElrea.com