



LITTLE DID I KNOW

By Debbie Waitkus, Golf for Cause

I didn't discover golf on my own. A colleague, Laura, invited me to play not long after her uncle, who had only recently begun to teach her the game, rewarded her enthusiasm with a set of clubs. Enthusiastic she was. "You'll just love it, Deb!" We'd see about that.

Understand that I am an athlete, or was, until I blew out my knee. I grew up playing just about every sport there is — except golf. Golf wasn't a sport, as I saw it. You didn't run around and sweat, and no teammates were involved with whom to high-five in celebration of goals and victory. And, frankly, golf looked boring! Still, with zero expectations for anything more than a few hours of social time with Laura, and despite being concerned about a couple of things, I said I would play.

I was concerned about my artificial knee. I was concerned that it was summer in Phoenix and that we'd be playing in triple-digit heat. I was even more concerned that I was pregnant. Plus, I had no equipment. I did what anyone does in such a situation: I called Mother.

"Laura has invited me to play golf," I said. "Do we have any golf clubs?" With four siblings, I felt the odds were good. She called back moments later with the excellent news that she had found a set in the garage, but that I'd have to dust them off and would still need a driver. I told her I wouldn't need a driver, because Laura said we'd be using pull carts. Mother laughed out loud and then

gave me my first lesson in golf terminology. *Oh. A driver is a club.* She added that it is the longest club in the bag, sends the ball the farthest, and is the most difficult to use — and that I could probably borrow a driver from one of my playing partners.

Next I had to address the matter of a wardrobe.

Laura had assured me we weren't going to a fashion show, but that I should dress respectfully. *Let's see...pregnant, 100+ degree heat...what to wear? What to wear?* I found a pair of maternity shorts with pockets for my tissues. (I would discover later that pockets were good for other items too — tees, ball markers, divot tools, balls.) A collared shirt big enough to fit over my belly and light enough to tolerate the heat was easier to find than I expected. My husband had a stack of them. I "borrowed" one of his polo shirts. Golf shoes? Laura said sneakers would be fine. I was good to go.



Encanto Golf Course is a 9-hole executive course in downtown Phoenix. I parked and entertained myself trying to get the golf bag to sit right on the pull cart. Successful at last, and armed with several bottles of water, I maneuvered through the parking lot to the clubhouse and paid my green fee. The gentleman

behind the counter let me know my group was already at the first tee. *What did I know about the importance of timeliness at the golf course?*

As I pulled my cart toward the first tee I was struck by the peaceful, open feeling of the golf course. Here I was in downtown Phoenix, tall buildings from Central Avenue within sight, yet I was surrounded by wide fairways, palm trees and flowering oleander bushes. (I would examine those oleanders a bit more closely soon enough.)

Laura and three male colleagues awaited me at the first tee. Yes, three, plus Laura. We were five. Golf is typically played in foursomes. I was a fifth wheel and didn't even know it. (And I was carrying a spare, to boot!)

Executive golf courses are much shorter than the championship courses the professionals play on television. At *Encanto*, however, the first hole is longer, one of the longest on the course.

I watched as my playing partners teed off. Phil, a country boy from around Atlanta, Georgia — he came complete with a sonorous southern drawl and a smile to melt a woman even on a hot day — used to play Triple A baseball. He hit his ball a — yes, country mile, and then there were high fives all around. *Hey — high fives!* Inspired, I stepped onto the teeing ground.

I can't recall whether I asked to borrow a driver. I do remember contemplating how on earth I was going to bend over and get the ball teed up. I maintained my balance somehow and managed — finally — to get the tee into the ground and the ball onto the tee. With my

tennis-shoed feet wide apart, I placed the head of the club behind the ball and imagined that I was executing a simple forehand stroke on a tennis ball. I gave it my all. *Yes! Contact!*

The ball went a full 30 yards and probably would have gone much farther had the oleanders on the left side of the fairway not gotten in the way.

“Miss Debbie,” I heard Phil drawl behind me. “Do you have a foot wedge in that bag?” I knew for sure I had a foot wedge. Mother said the only club I didn't have was a driver.

I walked toward the oleanders pushing the pull cart so that I could look at my clubs. I was delighted to discover that each club was labeled with numbers or letters. I found the “SW” and the “PW” and looked in vain for the “FW.” Phil was already at the oleander bushes and, as I approached, I looked up just as he kicked my ball out of the bushes and into the fairway. “There you go, Miss Debbie,” he said. “That's a foot wedge.” I proudly told him that I knew I had one all along.

That's pretty much how my first day of playing golf went. It was a great afternoon of fun and enlightenment for me. I learned some new words and terminology. I learned basic golf etiquette. I learned golf is not boring, and that you shouldn't take yourself too seriously. I learned you can have fun playing golf even when your score for nine holes is more like a good bowling score. I managed to hit a few shots that actually went into the air. That day was the first of many enjoyable days of playing golf with my coworkers, and recalling it now reminds me never to be

afraid of trying new things. But of all the things I learned that day, one lesson stands out: When a friend invites you to do something you've never tried, and punctuates it with *You'll just love it!* — trust the friendship. Friends know stuff.

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