

You Were an Inspiration (Tie - Third Place)

By Jennifer Masztal

Ware High School

Dear Mom,

You'd be proud of me. I know you would be. Remember when you came and watched me at my soccer games and hated it because I would push and kick the other players just because I was mad. Remember when you encouraged me to play just for fun and not play to hurt others and be aggressive. Remember when I didn't take your advice seriously.

You would calm down that other mother, Mrs. Snipt, when she started harassing the referee about his calls. You would give me encouraging shouts like, "You go girl!" or "You're doing great honey, keep up the good work." You gave my brother the same advice. You came to our games faithfully and celebrated and mourned with us. You even were a great example of superb sportsmanship when you congratulated the opposing team on their win when the other parents were throwing scorn at them. I didn't understand you. Eventually you stopped coming to my games because you couldn't bear to see my pounding the opponents on purpose, but you would still encourage me to be more kind hearted on the field. I thought you were being silly and worrying too much. I should have listened to your advice.

It was a cold and rainy fall day. The kind of day where you could just cuddle up on the couch with a mug of hot cocoa and watch cartoons. It was the last five minutes of the game and the score was tied, 2-2. My coach sent me in as a substitute for the left halfback. We started, and I was passed the ball. I dribbled past everyone and set up for the winning shot when the center defensive player stole the ball and passed it away for their winning goal. I can barely remember what happened next. All I know is that I became more enraged than I ever was and intentionally kicked that center defense player straight in the right knee. Of course I was carded, but that wasn't what I was afraid of. That night I announced to our sports fanatic family and to you that I had quit the soccer team, forever. I didn't want to disappoint you like that again. I figured that I couldn't fix my mistakes so I just had to stop. Yeah, your worries were over, but I was never able to make you proud.

That was what I regretted the most as I sat there next to you, holding your hand, as God took you away from us. You taught us, you preached to us, you even set an excellent example, but I never took it upon myself to do as you did. I never fulfilled your wish of having me possess great sportsmanship as you did. That's why I'm telling this to you to say that I think I finally have done it, even if it is a little late. I don't know if you could have seen it through the clouds, but I helped a girl up after I accidentally knocked her over and I apologized to her. I even thought of you as I congratulated the opposing goalie on her almost impossible save. I rejoined the team a year after you left us. I wanted to make amends.

You were an inspiration to me. You are an inspiration to others. My team has learned your ways. I have become a referee for the under 8 league so that I hope I can spread the message to other players and their parents. Mrs. Snipt has even stopped harassing the referees and the other teams because of you. Mom, I know that you might have thought it hopeless to teach me good sportsmanship while you were here, but it was not in vain. I learned it and others saw your example. I hope I made you proud. Love always, your daughter, Jenn