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Five Words...

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Five Words

Beverly S. Mahoney

Five words that strike terror in my heart; words that cause my blood to run cold; in fact, words that invoke every nerve and gland to display the full wrath of Selye's "fight or flight," and it's not fighting I want to do. Rather I want to run! When those five words assaulted my eardrums, and I knew they were directed

at me, my whole nine-year-old-self was primed to run as fast as my little legs could carry me. What are those words, you ask? "STEP UP TO THE PLATE." I remember it today as if it truly were yesterday. We all have gifts, talents, things that we seem able to do well, with minimal effort.....doesn't mean they don't take practice, or that we can't make them better over time, with study, with coaching.....but they just seem to come naturally to us. We also have, however, those things that we seem unable to do, or, at the very best, are able to do marginally, no matter how we try.

When I was asked by our incoming PSAHPERD president, Judy Conroy, to write to you about 'stepping up to the plate' my whole childhood (well, from fourth grade on) came careening out of some corner of my past and screeched to a halt, front and center, on the big screen of my mind. There I was. Nine years old. In a new school with people I didn't know well. It was time for gym (yes, that's what they called it then...gym), and the sick feeling in my stomach was worsening with every passing moment. We always had to play a game where there were winners and losers, and describing me as an "athletically challenged child" would have been the understatement of the century.

My gifts were not in the area of sports. Period. It was softball time, and my record was dismal. I was hoping that class would be over before I ever had to come to bat, but such was not my fate. Worse yet, my team was slightly behind; such that a player could have made a difference in the outcome of the game, by getting a hit and getting on base. The memory is long, painful, and complicated, as well as losing detail over the decades, but the bottom line was that I, the last one chosen for the team, actually did manage to connect the bat with the ball and get to first base. Wow! Maybe there was hope for me after all! The next person hit a pop fly, and I ran with all my heart. I heard the sounds of my teammates hollering, cheering me on, I suspected...a totally new experience for me.....so I kept on running, missing the one important fact that someone out there in the greater universe of this ball field had caught the ball. I should have turned around, gone back to first base, but I didn't know it, so I kept on running, not realizing that all those cheers from my teammates were actually less than complimentary...I just ran.

In retrospect, that day was the culmination of years of feeling inadequate at any type of physical activity, and it was also the beginning of my resolve to avoid anything involving sports unless I was absolutely forced to do it, and then I would comply, respectfully, and just get it over with as fast as I could. Have you ever felt that way? Oh, it might not have been about hitting a ball. Maybe for you it was about making a speech, babysitting with a brother or sister, taking a test, cooking a meal. Doing something new or different is often adrenalin producing. Today's "buzz phrase" for that feeling is to get ourselves "outside our comfort zone," to try something new, or to try again something we felt we failed at earlier. Whatever the situation, "stepping up to the plate" can be intimidating. It can also

lead to some of the most worthwhile experiences we've ever had.

Okay, you say, so stepping up to the plate doesn't just have to be in a softball game. You may think you just don't have those opportunities, or you're just too busy. Not so! We all have opportunities to step up to the plate put before us many times over the course of a week, or month, or year. Some of them are small...you observe a child, or friend, or even a stranger, who needs help, and you intervene for a moment to tie a shoe, or drive a friend to an appointment, or loan your cell phone to the stranger to make a needed call.... the moment is over; and you go on with whatever you were doing.

Some of the opportunities are larger...and you may or may not be the one who first sees the need. You might be asked at work to chair a committee, to spearhead an activity, to lend your expertise to colleagues who ask for it. You might be asked to share your knowledge, or your skills, to provide guidance for others who need assistance. Sometimes, we even get asked to do things we don't feel confident about...the old softball fears can multiply fast at that point, and as adults, we can exercise our options not to get involved, but where does that leave us? At the end of the line, without knowing for sure whether or not we might have made a difference.

Part of my "stepping up to the plate" today has to do with volunteering, contributing my time to causes in which I believe, whether that is locally, in my hometown, at my church, or whether that is for one of my professional organizations, such as PSAHPERD. Balance is important for good health. Please be aware that I'm not advocating we all put our lives on hold to totally absorb ourselves in volunteer pursuits...far from it. I am, however, saying that through PSAHPERD you do have a chance to become involved in any number of ways. You might work with a local group, you might volunteer for committee work, you might contribute your organizational skills or your expertise, you might do a presentation at our convention, you might help others get their tasks done more efficiently, or you might share your creativity. If you have an interest, there is probably a place for you in PSAHPERD. Perhaps you don't see the need right now, but I guarantee that someone out there sees a need, and would love to have you step up to the plate to help get the job done. I'd suggest you contact the Vice President for your area of interest, and simply offer to volunteer. You might be amazed at the results. Oftentimes, when we "sign on" to help someone else, we end up benefiting as much or more ourselves. What better way to demonstrate your commitment to learning, or to assisting colleagues, students, or clients, than to jump in and help with a project?

Oh yes, and maybe you're wondering what ever happened with softball and me? I wish that I could tell you I worked at it, gained courage and stamina, and became the star of my fourth grade softball team, or even that I figured it out by fifth or sixth grade, but that was not the case. It wasn't until I reached my 30's that I actually finally became involved in several lifetime physical activities and discovered that they could be fun as well as healthful. What I did discover, however, was that I would never know whether or not I enjoyed something, or whether or not I could be good at it, unless I gave it a try. I encourage you to step up to the plate, get involved, and give something new a try. Check out your opportunities with PSAHPERD. You might discover it provides a whole new dimension to your life experience. Go ahead, you can do it!