

On April 26, 2008 Sara Tucholsky, a senior on the Western Oregon University softball team, hit her first ever, and only ever, home run. She had never hit a home run in her entire collegiate career, in her entire high school career, and even in her entire little league career...first home run ever!

In the 2nd inning of her game against the rival Central Washington University, she connected with a pitch and launched it over the center field fence; the deepest part of the field. With two of her teammates on base it was a three-run homer.

You could imagine her joy and elation as she watched the ball leave the field of play. Actually, she was so exuberant that she missed first base while rounding it. She immediately realized her mistake and turned back to touch it. When she did, something snapped in her knee. She fell to the ground in pain and crawled back to first base.

Now the rules state that if any teammate touched her, she would be out and not credited with the home run. With Sara clutching the base while still on the ground in pain, her coach approached the first base umpire and asked him if a pinch runner could run the bases for her. The umpire said no; no runner could run for her; no member of her team could come onto the field and assist her in any way.

Then the first baseman of the other team, listening in on the conversation, spoke up. "What if we carried her around the bases?" Both Sara's coach and the umpire were dumbfounded...speechless. "Yes," said the first baseman, "what if we carried her around the bases?" The umpire consulted his rulebook and indicated that there was no such rule preventing a member of the opposite team helping someone around the bases. So the first baseman and the shortstop of the opposing team picked up Sara and carried her around the basepath, stopping at each base momentarily to allow Sara to reach down with her good leg to touch each base.

As they made their way around the bases, the three young women, from opposing teams laughed amongst themselves. They thought people in the stands watching would be laughing at such a ridiculous spectacle.

They were wrong. After completing their journey around the bases, the three young women realized that nobody in the crowd was laughing; many were crying. This selfless display of sportsmanship touched the hearts of those honored to be on hand to witness something profound; and it brought tears to the eyes of many.

Because this took place during a sporting event, we call this sportsmanship, or perhaps, in this case, it should sportswomanship or sportspersonship, but when you get right down to it, it is merely graciously doing the right thing. It just happened to take place on a softball field.

Both teams wanted to win. Both teams were battling for a playoff spot, yet the first baseman, who was the all-time home run leader at Central Washington University, felt compelled to extend to her opponent what she knew to be the right thing. She didn't have to do this. You can call it sportsmanship, the right thing to do; you can also call it an extension of grace – a gift that wasn't required to be given.

We've had our Family Promise guests with us this past week. As the week began, the executive director at Family Promise informed us that due to the unfolding pandemic, a couple of the churches, including next week's hosts, had backed out of the rotation essentially closing their doors to our vulnerable guests. I don't know the details and maybe it's being presumptuous but...talk about no room at the inn!

I'm very proud that our Board, without hesitation, stepped up with their decision to shelter the Family Promise guests at our inn for an additional week. We could have said no. We could have closed our doors. We could have said, "Sorry, there's no room at the inn."

Susan Manker-Seale, in our call to worship this morning writes, "Love is deciding to care for this world no matter what horrors come our way (Susan Manker-Seale, Nada te Turbe, *Voices from the Margins*, p57)." UUMAN's Family Promise ministry is doing exactly that.

I'm so proud that this congregation is the congregation that extends grace to those most vulnerable....and I'm so proud of all the Family Promise volunteers and gift card donors from both UUMAN and RCM. This is shared ministry at its best!

In June 2003, Hope, a twelve-year-old girl in Charlotte, NC felt a pain in her knee. After a visit with doctors, her worst nightmare was realized; she was diagnosed with an aggressive bone cancer that could cost her her life. She was contacted by the Make-A-Wish Foundation and placed on their list. On their website, the Make-A-Wish Foundation says that they "create life-changing wishes for children with critical illnesses." Some of the children's wishes include, "I wish to be a firefighter," "I wish to have my quinceanera," and "I wish to meet a unicorn." When the foundation raises the money, and if there is time enough in the young person's life, quinceaneras are held, rides on a siren-wailing firetruck are made and unicorns are found.

If there is time enough....many children never live long enough for their wish to come true. They are taken from us far too early, far too early even for them to have their sole wish granted.

In a matter of months, twelve-year-old Hope rose to the top of the list. One does not rise to the top of the list unless one's situation is dire. She passed away in January 2004, just seven months after her diagnosis. Hope was the only Make-A-Wish Foundation child to ever have their wish granted posthumously.

Shortly after her death, all the children on the list began having their wishes granted: ponies, meetings with sports idols, trips to the shore, roller coasters....For Hope's wish

was to have every child on the list have their wish granted immediately. 155 wishes for 155 children!

Shortly after her death, word spread regarding her gracious and selfless wish. Donations started pouring in in small numbers. A homeless person in Charlotte attended one of their functions, opened up her pocketbook and emptied its contents into their collection box.

Her name was Hope. Hope extending grace...may we continue to extend...no matter what comes our way.