

# **Well, Do That Then**

**By**

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Recently, Scott Rolen was inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame. As is customary, Rolen gave a speech. In it, he told stories that helped illustrate how he got to where he was.

The longest story involved his dad. Rolen was a two-sport star at his high school in Indiana where the sport that dominates attention is not baseball but basketball. There is a traditional basketball game each July between all-stars from Indiana and neighboring Kentucky, another basketball-crazy state.

Rolen was selected as one of the twelve representing Indiana. On the third day of practice before the game, Rolen talked with his dad.

“Dad,” he said, “everyone here can shoot a jump shot better than me. Everyone can dribble with both hands equally well, and there are guys who have not missed a free throw yet.” After each complaint, Rolen’s dad nodded and said, “okay.”

When Rolen had finished, his dad asked, “well, what can you do?” “I can rebound pretty well.” (OK) “I can scramble on the floor for loose balls.” (OK) “I can play good defense and outhustle other guys.” (OK)

A moment passed. Then Rolen’s dad said, “well, do that then.”

Rolen did not tell how well things had gone in that basketball game. But, he said, those four words changed his life. They were crucial in his capitalizing on what he could do, well enough to get drafted, play in the majors, become an All-Star several times, help win a World Series, and be elected to the Hall of Fame.

Coincidentally, we watched the movie “Quartet” again that same evening. If you have not seen it, do. It lifts the spirit for anyone at any age but especially People of a Certain Age.

“Quartet” is a story of transformation—old dogs can learn, if not always new tricks, new perspectives. It is a story of contentment and acceptance but not surrender. It is the story of doing something that you used to do brilliantly well enough to bring pleasure to others, getting past the idea of not being good enough anymore. It is a story of community in which every person knows the inevitable outcome for every person and goes on anyway.

It isn’t hard to pair the stories. Aging is, more often than not, a story about getting a step or two slower, taking a bit longer to recover, forgetting ever so briefly simple things. Focusing on what one cannot do is easy, often seemingly a default response by folks as they age.

Without knowing about Mr. Rolen, Mom took his advice. The year following Dad’s death was hard. They had been married for 56 years, and she missed her Joe White. Then the pastor of her church invited her to join the Stephan Ministry, a cross-denominational lay organization offering companionship to those in need.

Before long, Mom’s group was at maximum capacity, made up of recent widows. A few of the women became her friends after the formal period of the Stephan Ministry had ended. Mom could listen well. She could empathize. She did that, then.

Sometime later, the pastor got the idea to take one of the bears Mom loved to sew each time he visited someone who was in the hospital or unable to leave their home. “Bears by Ruth” became a going concern as Mom sewed and gave away dozens, perhaps hundreds of bears. Mom was increasingly less mobile as she aged (although she could still swim twenty lengths of her pool each day from April to October), but she could cut out and stitch a bear.

Then, after 70 years, Chad came into her life again. He was a junior high school boyfriend who once bicycled to Mom’s house with a New Dawn Rose in his hand. When he gave her a rose when he saw her again for the first time after so many years, an improbable episode in both of their lives began. They were married within the year.

Increasingly, they had difficulty getting around. Each required a pacemaker (Mom was on her third when she died). They referred to them as “matching” pacemakers. When they did get out, they were often referred to as “that cute couple,” which delighted them and caused others to smile. They enjoyed making people smile.

Neuropathy in her hands slowed bear production and then brought it to a halt. Mom could still handle a pen, so she wrote notes of encouragement on behalf of the church to anyone needing a lift or a kind word. Only when her own infirmities kept her in bed for the last few months of her life did that stop.

Scott Rolen. “Quartet.” Mom. Stories that make a point about something that might be useful to someone else. You never know.

Tell our stories. We can all do that, then.

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