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Through My Eyes: Lessons and Stories from the Fairways

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Through My Eyes: Lessons and Stories from the Fairways

A Thesis

Presented to the Department of Journalism

College of Communication

and

The Honors Program

of

Butler University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for Graduation Honors

Catherine Therese Fulton

May 6, 2022

Introduction

As I drove up the driveway of the country club, my heart fluttered. A surge of joy and excitement filled me, coursing through my body. A row of trees lined the drive as the 10th hole was immediately out the driver's side window to my left. Sunlight streamed through the leaves on the trees with light green and white buds. With the road curving right and then slightly back left, the Clubhouse came into view up ahead on the left. The American flag waved softly in the wind in front. Mid-spring was the perfect time of year. The grass was so vivid and bright, due to the regular amounts of rain received, and the weather was perfect, typically upper 60s and low 70s.

The ten minutes it took to get to the golf course each day were my favorite, because I was going to one of the places I loved most, doing one of the things I loved most, but most importantly, interacting with some of the people who meant and continue to mean the most. What was that thing, you ask? Caddying. It was caddying.

The definition of a caddie is a person who carries a golfer's clubs and provides assistance during a round of golf. It is the job of a caddie, or looper, (18 holes is also known as a loop) to carry clubs, calculate yardages to the pin, rake bunkers and read greens. The role of the caddie has been shaped by the professional caddies seen on television carrying for PGA Tour and LPGA Tour players or in movies such as *Caddyshack*, *Happy Gilmore* and *The Greatest Game Ever Played*.

Through my experience, however, it is so much more than the responsibilities and the job itself. So why is this perspective unique? What makes the job of a caddie so distinctive? First of all, the location and environment of a golf course is special. Golf courses are part of nature, a piece of the natural landscape. Individuals play golf to escape from the stresses and anxieties of daily life, allowing them to take a break from work and enjoy a game they love. Golf courses also provide the space for a respite from the digital world. The golf atmosphere is one of serenity and quiet. It is generally known and expected that phones are to be on silent and turned off so as not to disrupt play. Golf is a game played in silence. One must be quiet while shots are being played, and the recommended voice level is a whisper. While every so often a golfer has a personal or work call to take, it is very rare, and the device stays in the locker-room or the golf bag. People are encouraged and expected to spend time together, interact and share in the community of their common passion for the game. This is unlike everyday life as society is becoming increasingly digital, and face-to-face interaction is declining as people constantly have their heads buried in their phones, texting or scrolling through social media. Lastly, golf is unique in that it requires a substantial investment of time. The average round of golf takes about four to four and a half hours. In a world that wants things instantaneously, where attention spans are getting shorter and shorter and where human interactions are short and sweet, the golf course sets up an extensive amount of time for people to be together in an uninterrupted way, allowing them to focus on not only the task at hand, but also to be present with those around them.

On a personal level, I am a female caddie, which isn't very common in the industry. The golf, and caddie world for that matter, is a male dominated one. When I started caddying, there were only two girls who had been caddying at the club. Fast forward six years, and the group of female caddies had grown to about 10, but was still a small minority to the almost 40-50 other guys. Secondly, the country club industry was one I was not familiar with. There was a socioeconomic difference between myself and the members who paid an initiation fee to join the club as well as monthly dues to remain part of that community. Before I started caddying in May of 2016, I didn't know this place had even existed; it wasn't something that was on my radar screen, or part of the culture and childhood experience I had.

I also have an extremely unique perspective as I had a front row seat to learn the behind-the-scenes aspects of the caddie-golfer relationship. While most only know of this relationship from a secondary source, through hearing about it from others or watching it unfold on television, I wasn't simply observing it from afar, but was in the thick of it, walking those fairways, contributing to those interactions, conversations and relationships in a direct way.

Finally, and most importantly in my opinion, my unusual experience was shaped by the way in which I approached the job of caddying. As mentioned above, the job of a caddie is to carry golf clubs and give golf advice, but to me, it means so much more. What makes it more than just a job are the people I got to share that experience with, the individuals I interacted with each day who made the job what it was. Carrying clubs and reading greens on a fundamental and rudimentary level is one thing, and certainly a strong passion of mine. I do love the job of caddying itself, but what made it what it was, were the people I did it with, the people whose clubs I carried, the community in which that job took place.

You could ask any given caddie, and each one would have a slightly different reason for why they enjoy caddying, or what the job means to them, which even could change over time as mine did. Why I started caddying was not the reason why I have come to love it so much. The people I have met and interacted with along the way are what defined that experience. Serving those people, connecting with those people, helping those people be not only better golfers, but hopefully better people gave me such a profound sense of meaning, purpose and fulfillment. And of course it was fun. While yes it was a job, and I took it very seriously and maintained a high level of professionalism, it was a thrill, a joy and a blast. I mean after all, I got paid to spend summers on the golf course, in the sun, with some of my best friends. The golf course is one of my happy places, one of the places where I am most easily able to feel most connected to myself, others and God. The perspective I had and continue to have with caddying is that it was an absolute privilege to be in the position I was. I didn't have to do that job, I got to do that job. I didn't have to be there, well someday I did, but I genuinely wanted to be there. Again, most days. It meant so much more to me than picking up heavy bags, carrying them 18 holes and getting paid at the end. It was about the people I shared those 18 holes with, sharing life together between shots and forming relationships that would change my life, forging a bond and impact lasting far behind the property of the club.

At its core, this thesis is an examination of personal relationships, human connection and the impact individuals have on the lives of others. Amidst the craziness of everyday life, it is hard at times to press pause and reflect on how we got to where we are and more importantly, who helped us get there. The following is the story of my experience and journey of self-growth and discovery as well as lessons and stories from the people who walked that journey with me, who paved the way and who taught me things about myself that helped me to become who I am today.

The three main goals of this project are to 1) explore larger life themes, 2) raise awareness of the importance of relationships and 3) to inspire others. The larger life themes woven throughout this work are attributes and characteristics that unify humanity regardless of societal barriers such as, but not limited to, race, gender, sexuality, age, religion, socioeconomic status and political affiliation. Attributes such as love, trust, kindness, self-expression, acceptance and happiness that are essential to human life and that bind individuals together in strong, mutual relationships are what give meaning and direction to not only this work, but life in general. Second, to raise awareness of the importance of relationships. People are meant to be in community. How we interact with one another matters, and we never know the impact we have on those we are in community with. And lastly, I hope to inspire others. The lessons I learned on the golf course are transferable lessons applicable everyone, in any place, at any stage of life. What was made manifest on the golf course for me extends far beyond the

course to virtually any setting. My goal is for readers to apply the life lessons learned to their own lives as well as think about how their stories, their journeys can help others. Our stories are not just for us, but are meant to be shared. How can we take what we've learned in our own experiences to uplift and support those around us?

Process

While the formal research process began in 2020 after the thesis proposal was approved, the story begins long before that when I started caddying in May 2016. The research involves the members at the country club, my own family members who worked at the club as well as the rest of the community at the club including staff. It explores my experience caddying and the stories and lessons learned over my time at a specific club, that will remain nameless, in my hometown of Westlake, Ohio from May 2016 to September 2021.

Every day when I would come home from the course, there was inevitably a story to tell. The wild and crazy things that took place were sometimes too insane to make up, and I had a front row seat to watch it all unfold. The personalities and characters I witnessed on a daily basis as well as the interactions they had with one another never ceased to amaze and entertain. When retelling these stories to family and friends, they were enthused and awestruck by them, hardly believing they were true. One day after my mom asked me how my day was, what member I carried for that day and if I had any funny stories of something that happened while at work, she suggested that I write the stories down, nonchalantly saying I could compile them in a book. So I started putting pen to paper. While not every day presented an outrageous story, from time to time, a unique and colorful story would present itself, and I would write it down.

Fast forward to when this project came to be, I took a much more dedicated and detailed approach. During the two summers of heavy research collection, I recorded as much as I could. Each day when I went out to caddy, I would be keenly aware of what was going on that day, not only what I was thinking, feeling and doing, but what was happening around me. After caddie rounds, I would go home and write about what happened that day on the course, what stood out to me, what funny things happened, how the members interacted with each other, how it made me feel and what I learned. Some days I would record voice memos in the car on the drive home from the course if I was too excited about the absurd thing that happened or wanted to savor the unbridled exuberance that existed after a thrilling day, hilarious moment or sincere connection with a member. When it couldn't wait until the round was over, I would write things down in my small caddie notebook or on the back of a blank scorecard mid-round to ensure I wouldn't forget anything, so I could go back at any time, taking myself to that very moment and recreate it in my mind, not only for the book, but more importantly for my own memory.

Once the research was organized, I sorted through each story and experience to pull out major themes and lessons learned. Dividing my notes between tangible lessons learned and stories involving people, things started to take shape. Lessons such as adaptability, dedication, hard work and confidence emerged, along with characteristics such as passion, empathy, identity, trust, fulfillment and communal support. Larger narratives such as personal growth, family and relationships were also brought to the surface as it was so much deeper than simply what happened. It was about the process, the journey, the evolution from one stage of life to another and the people who shared in the journey along the way.

I also gathered secondary research by completing a literature review of several topics relating to my project. These included but were not limited to golf and caddying, books by other journalists and

human interaction and social development. I read several articles about the experiences of other caddies as well as a novel written about another local country club in my hometown to understand what previous works and angles had already been explored and the way in which my project could both add to the conversation, but also expand upon it in order to provide a new perspective. I also read several books by other journalists in order to learn about successful storytelling and narrative writing. The articles, books and other sources referenced for this project can be found in the works consulted page at the end of this document.

The lasting impact this project has is so much more than a thesis. I chose this project not only to help others with my story in hopes it would enrich their lives, but to give back and show my endless gratitude for the people I shared this experience with and the incredible opportunity that it was. This is not just for me, but rather for them and for all those who want to listen and will hopefully take something with them to apply in their own life. I can't think of a better way to say thank you than by pouring my heart out on paper in a vulnerable, authentic and honest way.

Lastly, it is important to mention that this thesis is a small part of something much larger. The end goal for this project is that it will one day be a published book. The small excerpts you will read have been picked from the larger work in order to provide an initial preview. The chapters selected will make the story seem a little chaotic and disjointed as they don't necessarily follow one after another in timing or sequence, but that was done intentionally. The goal was to choose a few stories from the beginning, middle and end in order that the reader gets a full picture of what the entirety of the book will one day look like. Each chapter provides a glimpse into the experience of caddying, bringing to light only what the behind-the-scenes perspective would know. While the chapters selected don't inherently line up, and the reader will be left with questions, wanting to know more, each story was selected for a specific reason in terms of how it relates to the overarching themes presented above. With that in mind, please go forward with the understanding that this work is fully complete in the small sense for the purpose of this project, but incomplete through the lens of the larger one.

To the people at the place that holds a special place in my heart. This book is a thank you for six extraordinary seasons spent getting to do what I love for who I love.

To my family who have given me the unconditional love, support and encouragement my entire life.
You are my world, and I'm so blessed to have you.

Prologue

What started as an idea for a senior thesis project has blossomed into the book you are about to read, the journey you are about to embark on with me, through my life, story and experience as a golf caddie and the lasting impact it has had and continues to have on my life.

In early September 2019, during the first few weeks of my sophomore year at Butler University, I attended a few informational sessions during the Spotlight on Undergraduate Research week on campus. As a member of the Butler Honors Program, there is a requirement to complete honors level coursework, along with a thesis, upon graduation, to receive Latin distinction. As a Journalism and Strategic Communication major, or any major for that matter, the thesis, research and deliverable, can look any way the student wants it to. While research typically can look like running experiments in a science lab or completing a math problem, through the lens of communication, it can operate as a content analysis, survey and/or gathering qualitative data. At that time, I didn't know what I wanted to research and write about for my thesis, so I decided to attend the presentations surrounding both the honors thesis process as well as other research opportunities at the university to learn more and be proactive about the process. I had a couple ideas for what I wanted to explore, but nothing concrete.

The first couple of evenings were all about the thesis process; from identifying a topic, finding an advisor, writing a thesis proposal and eventually completing the thesis. It was daunting, overwhelming, and I was relieved I had attended the presentations to know what I was up against and what the journey entailed. One of my professors from fall of freshmen year delivered the presentations. After the first night, I stayed after for a few minutes to catch up with her and ask a follow-up question in response to the thesis process. Following my question, she asked me if I had an idea or topic in mind for my project. I responded by saying I had a few ideas, but nothing firm, and I was still very much in the process of figuring it out. As it was the beginning of the fall semester, and everyone had recently returned to campus after summer break, our conversation shifted to recapping the summer. My professor asked me how I spent the last three months or so, and I told her about my summer, working practically every day as a golf caddie at a local country club in my hometown. Instantly upon sharing a little bit about my job, she noticed how I absolutely light up, from the inside out, talking about it. I got the biggest smile on my face, as my eyes widened and sparkled. I couldn't wait to tell her about this job that I loved with my entire being, what was my favorite thing to do. Witnessing the change in my body language and facial expressions, my former professor saw something in me that prompted her to ask me a question that would change the course of my life and lead to the evolution and process of this book, one of the hardest things I have done in my 22 years of life. "Do you know you can do something with this for your thesis project?" she asked me.

I was first in a little disbelief and shock, followed by intrigue and curiosity. I thought to myself. "Can I actually do something about this experience that means so much to me? I could GET to do that?!" So many questions swirled in my mind about what angle I would take, how it would work, what the deliverable would be. I had none of the answers, but none of that mattered. Someone had just given me the golden ticket, the opportunity to take one of my greatest passions and create something out of it, get to explore it further. I left that session feeling uncertain and anxious about what was to come of this idea, breakthrough and realization, but had this glow of inspiration and untouchable exuberance about the possibility of what lie ahead.

So why golf and why caddying? As I discerned what about caddying was so impactful, to the point of wanting to do a thesis project on it, I was moved to reflect on my experience. What about it was so profound? How had it shaped me? Why caddying and not another experience or event in my life?

Caddying is a unique experience based on two main concepts intricately impacting human interaction, time and technology. The golf course is special because the caddie and golfer spend a significant amount of time together. An average round of golf is played in four hours, or a little more, so there is a substantial period of time in which human interaction and conversation take place, fostering and giving way to genuine relationships. Other than being on the golf course with someone, there are very few opportunities in everyday life for people to spend that much time together virtually uninterrupted. Secondly, the golf course is a haven of sorts, an escape from the stresses of work or school. People play golf to get lost in nature and have fun. With that comes the technology piece as there is limited, if any, use of cell phones or technology on the course. Golfers make it a priority to turn their devices off, not only because ringing phones are a disruption, but because they want to be present, focused and attentive to their games and respectful to the people they are playing with. With these factors combined, it offers a unique experience that sets the stage for sustained human interaction and relationships. As a person who cultivates meaningful relationships and seeks opportunities for human connection, I was particularly struck by the ability to foster and create these moments. Of all the things I love about caddying, the relationships that have flourished because of circumstances on the golf course are what touched and stuck with me the most.

Writing has been an integral part of my life. It was an interest I developed growing up, as I recall enjoying creating fiction stories in language arts classes through grade school, and choosing to take AP Language senior year of high school because I preferred to write. I'm the person who would much rather have reflection and research papers for homework as opposed to studying for hours on end. It's the reason why I chose to be a Journalism major; because I love to write, and I wanted to learn how to write well.

Writing is one of the best ways I express myself and share that with others. It is a form of outlet, creativity and escape, but also allows my mind to not be confined to a certain answer or conclusion. I am the author of what gets put on the paper, I have the opportunity to pen down what something means to me, what I think, or how I feel. Over the years, I have been fascinated with the power and impact words can have to move an individual. I've seen firsthand the ability that words and the writing of others has in touching my life and making me think in deeper ways. Additionally, I also know the privilege I have to use my words and writing to touch and impact the lives of others, helping them to think deeper about themselves and their lives. It's why I love writing "thank you" notes so much, or talking with someone on the phone. Language matters and can so profoundly shape minds and hearts.

When thinking about the deliverable I wanted to submit, I didn't want it to look like a traditional 20-30 page research paper. I wanted to be different, not do what everyone else was doing, or what typically is done. I wanted to make it my own, make it meaningful to me. If you haven't picked up on it already, I'm the type of person who wants to operate outside of the box or not even know the box exists. So what would be most meaningful to me and allow me to convey the narrative and story I wanted to share, the one that poured out of me? In my mind, there was no better way than to write a book. You may ask, a book?! How does one go from thesis project to book? Yes, it's quite a jump and quite an undertaking. But nonetheless, the best way, in my eyes, to express what I wanted to in a full and complete way, the best, and only way I knew how.

At other honors thesis meetings along the way, the Honors Program Director would give us students advice and encouragement about the ups and downs of the process. He shared with us how with any project, there would be some days where we would be fired up about it, in love with it and couldn't wait to work on it, but on the other side, there would be days that it wouldn't be easy, when we would

hate it, didn't want to engage with it, wish it didn't happen, or that we were not going to always love our thesis. It's a journey and a process, and boy is that the truth.

Yes, this thesis process would be hard. Yes, there would be days when I wouldn't want to work on it or couldn't work on it. But never would there be a day that I said I didn't love my thesis. There wouldn't be a day I would hate it or want it to just be done. Because it is something so personal, so near to my heart, so intimate to me, that it would never be something I didn't want to do. In fact, part of me didn't want it to come to an end, because it meant the closing of a chapter in my life that to this point has been one of the most impactful experiences in terms of helping define and shape me into the woman I am today.

So much so that I have enjoyed every step of the way, and fell in love with the entire process. As much as I wanted to finish the book, see the project through and have it come to fruition, the journey it has taken me on, the ways in which I have grown from this experience, is something that has meant so much. What started as a thesis and a requirement for graduation has turned into something much more than that; in a practical sense of a book, but also it means more than something I would turn in to get a distinction. It's my story, my life, my heart bore on and weaved throughout these pages.

Through My Eyes, as the titled suggests, holds the notion that we each see the world through a different lens, with a unique pair of glasses based on our values, upbringing, life experience, people we surround ourselves with and perspective we have. This book is the story, "through my eyes" of my experience being a female caddie at this club and the lessons I learned, which spanned the time from May 2016 to September 2022. Six summers, six years of my life. And while these stories and lessons manifested themselves for me, on the course, they can be applied and applicable to any person, in any place, at any time. This is the account, through my eyes, of those six summers and how that job, that place, the people I shared it with and the experiences that I had, formed me into who I am today. It is how I saw things, from my unique perspective, and how that led to the wonderful journey it has been. It is the story of everything, the good, the bad, the messy and everything in between. It is a vulnerable, raw and honest narrative of how I found myself on those fairways and the personal, professional transformation that occurred and the stories I have from carrying clubs, reading greens and walking the fairways.

Don't Be Afraid to Put Yourself Out There

The very beginning of the journey, how it started and the context of my childhood and background in golf. Essential to include to understand the who, what, where, when, why and how.

Sunday, April 3, 2016. 9:22 p.m.

Good Evening Mr. (Caddie master's name),

I am interested in becoming a caddie at (club's name). Attached is my application for your review. Thank you very much for your consideration. Have a great week.

Kate Fulton

I had filled out the caddie application with such diligence and care. I checked it over multiple times before scanning it, making sure everything was spelled correctly and written in my very best handwriting. I wanted this opportunity so badly and wanted to put my best foot forward. My heart pounded as I filled out the application and sent it over. On paper, it appeared that I was not the most ideal candidate as I didn't have, in my eyes, the "ideal answer" for two questions on the application form:

Have you caddied before?

No.

Do you play golf?

No.

Well, technically yes, if you count for fun, but I had no caddie experience and no competitive golf experience. Unless hitting balls at the driving range occasionally, the one-off times I played a par 3 course with my dad for recreation growing up, or mini golf counted. By the way, family mini golf was always very competitive. As I sat at the computer putting the final touches on my email, I wondered if those "no's" would deter me from getting accepted, or how it looked that I had no golf experience even though I knew and followed the game.

Sports were always on TV growing up. We watched everything depending on what was on, football, basketball, baseball, tennis and yes, golf. I always had a passion for and fascination with golf. I can't say I fully understood what went into the game and how complex it really was growing up, but the professional golfers made hitting that little white ball look so easy. I mostly watched the game with my dad. My dad and I have a special bond and relationship. I always looked up to him and wanted to be just like him. My dad really liked and was passionate about Tiger Woods, which definitely rubbed off on me. We watched and rooted for Tiger together, who was in his prime as I was in elementary and middle school.

April was one of the best months in the Fulton household in my opinion and still continues to be. The first major of the year, The Masters, always played on the second weekend, has always been my favorite, and I have many memories watching it in our living room. The tournament always falls

around my birthday as well, which I share with my twin sister, Megan, and that falls two days after our brother Ethan's, who is five years younger. Cake, ice cream and The Masters is quite a celebration.

My first exposure to playing golf was with a toddler's set of plastic golf clubs complete with a driver, iron and putter. Each were their own color and had heads unproportionally larger than the rest of the club. Megan and I would use them to hit the ball around the basement or just mess around. At a young age, we were exposed to a variety of sports as a way to get physical activity and be outside in the fresh air.

Growing up, we were a big sports family. Us kids tried every sport in the book and loved shooting hoops in the driveway, going bowling and having wiffleball tournaments in the backyard. Whatever season it was, that's what we did. Soccer was in the fall and spring, basketball in the winter, swimming and softball in the summer. While all those were performed competitively, golf was another sport to play outside, just for fun. My parents golfed on occasion, either mom for work outings or dad with his buddies on the weekends over the summer, but I never had a strong desire to ever play golf competitively. I would much rather have played competitive basketball, which I did from grade school through high school.

I somewhat seriously picked up a golf club around age 10. My dad had purchased a set of clubs for Megan and me to share growing up, and the three of us would go to the driving range occasionally, to a local par 3 course in Westlake, or hit *plastic* practice balls around the backyard. Plastic being the key word as Megan and I tried using real ones when we got curious one time, which resulted in accidentally striking the neighbor's house. Don't worry, no damage was done to the house, but we certainly got a stern talking to.

For several years, my dad would take Megan and I, then Ethan, when he was old enough, to Firestone Country Club to watch the World Golf Championships Bridgestone Invitational in early August. Held in Akron, Ohio, about 45 minutes from our house, we attended the tournament numerous years in a row. That was the first golf tournament I had ever been to in person, and it was spectacular. To be watching the guys in person, when you've only seen them on TV is a surreal feeling. The optimal viewing spot was the 9th green, right at the opening of the walkway to the 10th tee. Megan and I would perch ourselves right along the rope line and stick our hands out for the players to high five. Seeing the likes of professional golfers literally walk inches from us was a thrill. Our favorite thing though, was when the player would occasionally roll or hand us a golf ball, which he had just made a putt with. I mean, who wouldn't want to give a ball to a smiling, cute young girl?! The feeling from having them make eye contact with you and give you something that felt so person was so freaking awesome. At the end of the day, we left with great memories and pockets full of golf balls from the likes of Sergio Garcia, Lee Westwood and Darren Clarke. Back at home, we put those balls into use, putting them around the basement floor.

Fast forward to sophomore year in high school, and my relationship with golf changed as I was introduced to the world of caddying. Now I had been familiar with caddying as I watched the guys do it on TV for the pros, but I guess I never thought of it as something a teenager could do for a job. Other than a few of my uncles who had caddied growing up for several years, I didn't know it was a possibility, let alone something I could do. It was only recently too, that I found out my dad tried to be a caddie. He showed up one time to meet the caddie master and no one was there, so he decided to find something else. I didn't know where I was headed, but I was given an opportunity and jumped at it.

A Foot in the Door

Life is not as much about what you know, but who you know. This chapter introduces the importance and of human relationships and the role certain individuals played in my experience. As you will learn, without them, I am not where I am today...quite literally.

Basketball was ultimately the reason why and how I found caddying. As it was my favorite sport, I played competitively from fourth grade all the way through senior year of high school. Towards the end of basketball season in early 2016, months before my 16th birthday, I was approached by two of my teammates, twin girls, who were a grade below me. I was a sophomore, and they were freshmen. I don't exactly recall how we got on the topic, but one day at practice, they had told me how they had spent the previous summer caddying at this local country club. Knowing my passion for the game and how much I enjoyed watching it and following certain players, they told me about their summer, encouraging me to apply for the upcoming season. They had loved their first year, and thought it would be a fun thing for me to do in the summer. At the time, they were the only female caddies and probably wanted to recruit some other girls they knew would enjoy it as well.

I remember my eyes opening wide when they told me, and the biggest smile appeared on my face. "We do this thing Kate," one of the twins said. "And we think you would enjoy it and be good at it too." Hearing about how much they enjoyed it, I was intrigued and excited to see what caddying was all about. But it was also scary and uncertain as it was uncharted territory because at the time, I knew nothing more than caddies carried clubs and gave advice. I had no idea the nuances, subtleties or details, let alone exactly how to actually do the job. I loved golf though, so I thought why not, and that this opportunity could be fun. So I applied. I looked into the application and submitted it, putting the twins' names down for references and hoping for the best.

Looking back, that invitation was what got this whole thing in motion. Without their encouragement and excitement, them helping me to get my foot in the door, this entire experience wouldn't have been possible. Isn't it crazy and absolutely wonderful how one moment can change the course of your life? I didn't know it at the time, but my life was about to shift in one of the most extraordinary ways possible, setting into action a journey that would shape and define my life. While I was jumping into something rather unknown, I took a chance and stepped my foot through that door.

And So It Begins...Find Someone Who Will Take a Chance on You

This chapter is the launching off point of the caddie experience, providing insight into day 1 of figuring out what caddying truly was and how I felt walking into this new experience.

18 days after I sent the initial email, the verdict came. Thursday, April 21, 2016, 5:37 p.m.:

Caddie Applicants,

Congratulations, you have been chosen to take the caddie training with the possibility of becoming a caddie at (club name). After attending the training sessions, you will be required to pass a test to be added to the caddie staff.

You and 35 others were chosen to take the training. There were 81 applicants so many had to be turned away. Make sure you definitely want to become a caddie and it's not your parents that want you to and that YOU have a desire to caddy. There are a lot of disappointed applicants who would like a chance to caddy. If you pass the test and are added to the staff, you will be required to purchase a uniform (caddie bib, shirt and hat) for approximately \$60.00. Another reason to make sure you want to caddy.

Our first training session is Monday, April 25th from 4:30-6:30. Please note it ends at 6:30 and not 6:00 as the application stated. All sessions will end at 6:30, weather permitting. You will need to bring a pen/pencil, sharpie and highlighter. Dress for the weather, as part of the training will be on the golf course. Normally jeans are NOT proper attire at a country club but are all right for the training. Wear smooth soled tennis shoes (not studded). No boat shoes or golf spikes. Shorts may be worn if warm enough and you may need a jacket or sweatshirt.

I will email you Sunday evening with directions to where we will meet. Please email me now, stating that you received this email. Don't make me call you. Some email addresses were not completely legible and if I guessed wrong, the message didn't go through. Do NOT hit "reply all" when responding, just hit reply and identify yourself in case you are not identifiable by your email address.

Thanks, (caddie master's name)

I was elated. While I had limited knowledge about what I was getting myself into, I was so freaking excited. Energy coursed through my body, along with surprise and contentment. Despite my limited competitive golf experience, I was selected, given a chance.

After several years of not knowing, I finally called the old caddie master to figure out what he saw in my application, why he chose me, knowing I wasn't the most ideal candidate on paper. On my application when asked if I played any other sports, I included that I was on the high school basketball team. What I didn't know at the time and learned later, is that the caddie master actually knew the head coach of our team, the two were friendly with one another. After seeing my name and knowing the mutual connection, the caddie master called my basketball coach on my behalf, wanting to learn more about me and if I could be a good fit for the job. My coach had given him the honest answer. I wasn't the best basketball player, the fastest or the strongest, and I couldn't put up 25 points a game. However, I did whatever it took to work hard enough until I got to that level. I had the will, the

determination, the desire to work harder than everyone else. Yep, I wasn't the tallest or commanded the most attention in the room, but you were not going to outwork me. I was going to make my presence known by the way in which I showed up and busted my tail to prove that I should be in that room.

Having someone give you a chance, an opportunity is one of the best gifts to receive. It means that person believes in you, thinks you will succeed and is willing to put in the effort, investment and care to help you do so. I want to thank that caddie master who did that for me, for seeing something on my application and being willing to roll the dice on a small, 105-pound girl, who at the time was not much taller or bigger than a golf bag herself and at first had trouble carrying one bag, let alone two which quickly would become the norm. Having an advocate and supporter means everything, especially when you are just starting out. Having someone who believes in you and cheers for you even when you may not believe in yourself allows you to begin to develop the self-confidence and belief needed to succeed.

To be selected felt amazing. I was so proud of myself and so happy, but at the same time felt the deepest sense of responsibility. This was something I cared so much about, and I felt an obligation and strong sense of duty to do a good job, represent myself well and ensure there was a reason I was one of the ones awarded the opportunity. I mean, there were 50 other people who wanted my space; I had to work my butt off to make sure picking me was a good choice. That feeling was thrilling and daunting at the same time. It was overwhelming a little, not only because of the wealth of information, but what it would look like for me to prove myself. After all, of the 36 accepted applicants, only five of us were girls. The four days between the email and the first day of training were agonizing. I could not wait for Monday and to see what caddying was all about. While it was nerve-wracking and a little intimidating, I was so eager, so enthusiastic to see what the future would hold.

You Can't Teach Effort and Attitude

Arguably the most important lesson learned, it was essential to include this story. The crux of my success as a caddie was, at the core, because of these two things, effort and attitude. They are how I defined my job as well as what I strove to convey each and every time I served a member. I wanted them to know they were getting everything I had to give them and that I wanted to be there; that I cared so deeply for them and about the service I was providing them.

I walked down the ramp and into the cart barn to put the clubs away after my round. After stowing the bag and making sure it was back in the right numbered spot that corresponded with the Member's name, I started to walk out of the bag room and into the garage to walk back up the ramp and out to the parking lot to leave.

All of a sudden, something caught my eye. There was a piece of paper posted on one of the double doors headed out to the garage. It was only my second full month on the job, and I was still getting acclimated to my surroundings and was curious about everything in the cart barn. This day in particular for some reason, I stopped for long enough to read the title:

10 Things That Require Zero Talent

I was immediately intrigued and read the list of items.

1. *Being on time*
2. *Work Ethic*
3. *Effort*
4. *Body Language*
5. *Energy*
6. *Attitude*
7. *Being Coachable*
8. *Passion*
9. *Doing Extra*
10. *Being Prepared*

Wow, I thought to myself. I paused for a second after reading it to let each one sink in and digest how spot-on the advice was. What struck me in the moment was how much it resonated with how I was raised as well as how applicable it was to where I was at as a beginner caddie. First, how I was raised. Growing up, my parents instilled in my siblings and I the importance of a strong work ethic and taking pride in everything we did. They preached that effort and attitude, the things you can't teach, were more important than a quantifiable performance indicator. This could not be exemplified any better than with our report cards growing up. At the end of each quarter, a report card from school would get mailed home. Typically, they consisted of three or four pages with a breakdown of each subject. Instead of looking at the letters or numbers assigned to each class, they flipped to the last page, which gave the behavior, effort and attitude. That was always most important. Not the grade, but how we conducted ourselves and the work we put in. I can recall even in kindergarten, he would make Megan and I rewrite the letters of the alphabet over and over, sometimes erasing holes in the paper until each letter touched the line and wasn't written sloppily or careless. From a young age, we learned the value and importance of putting in effort and having the right attitude, and this experience was no different. There will always be someone better than you at something, but I was determined to ensure no one

would work harder or had a better outlook and attitude. Because deep down, that was who I truly was; someone who gave everything they had to the things they did and the people around them.

Secondly, the piece of paper resonated with where I was at as a beginner caddie. I was the low-woman on the totem pole. I was still very much learning the ropes, working for my place and proving myself and my capabilities as a caddie. In that regard, I was working towards what it meant to be a good caddie and how to learn as much as I could, but also distinguish myself from the rest of the kids my age. Being a female set me apart in some respects, but I had to stand out by my actions and the quality of work and service I provided. Learning how to caddie as well as the nuances of the game of golf took time. One doesn't learn how to manage clubs and multitask overnight, let alone how the greens break or how to gauge the strength of the wind. It was something that required practice, and a lot of it. It required rounds and rounds of practice, watching others, taking things in and asking questions as well as messing up a few times to learn for myself. Lessons like making sure to constantly be checking the bag that all the headcovers were on and one was not lying in the previous fairway, or double-checking yardage calculations with the rangefinder to ensure I wasn't shooting the tree standing 50 yards behind the flag. It would take time and patience, but I was all in. Since I cared so deeply and wanted to be there so much, I was willing to do whatever it took to work my butt off and be the best I could be to ensure each member I interacted with felt supported and special.

While this piece of advice was posted on a door to a bag room at a golf club, it extended way past the 18th green or grounds of the club. These 10 things are applicable to any person, at any time, in any situation they may find themselves in. No matter how old you are, where you came from or what you are doing now, these attributes are objectives that don't require talent or knowledge, privilege or fame. They require an individual to look inside themselves and decide to be the best version of themselves by digging a little deeper and making an intentional choice to perhaps shift their perspective and do the small things.

Talent only gets you so far in life. You have to work at things to get better. You have to put in the time and effort and be willing to do the little things, the things that aren't super flashy and grand. I had to do the same thing. I wasn't the best caddie, green reader, advice giver and club selector. I hadn't figured out how all the greens broke or what was the best way to communicate with different people based on their needs. Those things all came with time, and I couldn't inherently change them right then and there.

But in that moment, looking at that sign, each one of those items was something attainable, something I could work on and was inspired to in order to stand out, set myself apart while I was developing my role as the player's advisor. I didn't have to be the best green reader, the one who had all the golf answers or knowledge, but I could be the one who worked the hardest, who gave the best effort each day, who had the best attitude, energy and passion, and who did the extra things, the small things. Maybe I wouldn't be the best caddie, but I would sure have the biggest heart, the most hustle and the greatest outlook.

I strove each and every day to show up and work incredibly hard, to always be in front of my golfer and always, always have a smile on my face. That part wasn't hard as I love to smile, and in my mind, I had the greatest job on the planet.

Learn to Laugh At Yourself

This story showcases the lighter side of some of these lessons. Not every story will be heavy and deep, and this one is a perfect example of that. Caddies perform multiple tasks quickly and have to be the masters of multi-tasking at various moments of time throughout play, which by the way is not easy. Sometimes an extra hand or too would have been helpful. Sometimes things are clumsy and awkward and out of your control. This is one of those moments as I navigated the common feeling of desperately trying to keep it all together. Hopefully this chapter provides levity, brings a smile to your face and has you chuckling at my expense.

It's Opening Day, May 23, 2020. Due to the coronavirus pandemic and restrictions, this was the first day caddies were able to carry bags. Opening Day had already been rescheduled twice due to weather, so the event was being played that day no matter how sloppy the conditions. It had rained quite a bit the night before, so there was standing water in places on the course, and all of the fairways were slick. There were two shotguns that day, a morning and afternoon session to accommodate for the large quantity of golfers. Caddies were needed for both sessions, so I was on the course first thing when the course had very little time to fully dry out.

My group happened to start on #1. I had to carefully navigate the fairways, weaving my way out and around the puddles and wet spots. All was successful until the 15th hole. Standing on the left side of the fairway, I shot the distance for my golfer with the rangefinder, and he picked his club. Like he had been doing all morning, he took a large divot with his shot, which landed 20 or so feet in front of us. As always, as soon as he hit the ball, I took off in a sprint to go run and retrieve the divot. I hustled to the large piece of turf, so I could get back to the bags and pull the next club for the golfer. Just as I got to the divot and began to slow my sprint, my foot slipped out from under me.

As almost in slow motion, or what seemed like slow motion, I bit the dust, my heel came out from under me, and I slid into the divot as if it was home plate. Splat. I fell squarely on my rear-end, getting it both muddy and wet, the whole nine yards, no pun intended. Except for my golfer, who got a front row seat, all the other members in the group were in front of me, but turned around as they heard me hit the standing water on the fairway. It's hard to explain how embarrassing it was. Not only falling down as hard as I did, but now my shorts were soaking wet with a huge mud and grass stain down the side and back.

Everyone in the group seemed to just stop and stare for a second, not sure if I was okay, but also wanting to laugh as it was quite a scene. No one knew what to do at first or what reaction to have. Was I actually hurt, or was I fine and could easily pop right up? It's as if they were waiting for my reaction to ensure they had an appropriate reaction and response. For the few seconds I sat on the ground, I had a decision to make. Yes, falling smack on my butt hurt and did not feel good, but I didn't want to show the pain of the hard fall. In my mind, I had to keep going. It wasn't an option to not get up, pick the bags up and keep walking. Part of me wanted to shrink to the size of an ant from the embarrassment and humiliation. Completely wiping out leaves you in a vulnerable position. You become the center of attention with all eyes on you, which it's the caddie's job to not be the center of attention, but rather make it seem as if they aren't really there at all.

At the same time though, I couldn't do anything about the situation. I couldn't undo the fall or dry the wet spot, or get rid of the grass and dirt stains. Must I say as well, the manner in which the events unfortunately unfolded was actually quite comical. Maybe not for me at first, but when watching someone take a spill, it is hard not to crack a smile. Ultimately, I decided that all I could do was laugh

at myself and allow others to laugh at and with me too. The only way to survive the mortification I felt was to laugh it off and make light of the situation. I told the guys I was totally fine, and everyone laughed at my misfortune. Using my hands and arms to push myself off the ground, I brushed off my legs and used the towel I carried to clean clubs to wipe my hands and butt as best I could. Then I picked up the divot, WALKED back to replace it and grabbed the bags to meet my other golfer. I guess next time I wouldn't run so hard for a divot when it was so wet.

Be Kind to and Celebrate Your Body; It Does a Lot for You

This story is a small snapshot of some of the personal things I worked through during this experience. The personal growth made from age 16 to 21 is quite profound and certainly a rollercoaster. Body image is something I deal with on a daily basis. While I have come to a place now where I have a generally positive view of my body, that has not always been the case. Carrying heavy bags and walking five miles or more each day is physically demanding. My body went through changes as I grew taller and stronger to accommodate the physicality of the job. This story pulls back the curtain to reveal the mental struggles and critiques that exist when looking in the mirror and not exactly loving what you see reflected back.

I hate to make generalizations, but I am confident in saying that every woman has dealt with body image at one point or another. As women, we look in the mirror and pick out things we don't love about ourselves, things we want to fix or wish were different. We look at the reflection of ourselves and have some negative thought, feeling or insecurity. I am no different. I am self-conscious when I look in the mirror, when I try on clothes and when I look at pictures of myself. While sometimes it is a positive thought, it oftentimes is a negative critique. "I hate this. I look bad. I'm so ugly." I see pictures of others and marvel at how pretty they are or how skinny they look, or how defined their muscles and abs are.

When I look in the mirror, I'm not always crazy about certain parts of my body. Especially a few years ago, and still a little bit today, I don't love, at times, how broad my shoulders and upper arms and back look. In my opinion, I'm a bit wider on top and it's not as feminine looking. I hate how my shoulders look in some clothes and am self-conscious about certain necklines and styles. Or take my quads. Same thing, perhaps wider than I would like. I have a little bit more of an athletic build, and while most days, I am so happy about it and celebrate it, some days, I wish I was a little bit smaller in those areas.

When I have one of those moments though, when I hate the way I look or make a negative critique, I try to stop myself and thank my body for everything it has done for me and everything it allows me to do. I mean if you actually think about it, the human body is a pretty special and miraculous thing based on what it can do.

The beautiful and amazing thing about our bodies is that they allow us to do the things we do. It's amazing how they change to meet the needs of our exercise, routines and daily activities. After thinking about this, my body has adapted to allow me to do my job and the thing I find passion in. My broad shoulders and arms and athletic back have allowed me to carry two golf bags for 18 holes once or even twice a day for six days a week. My muscular quads provide the energy and power to drive my legs and engage my core because without them, I'm not making it up the big hill on the tenth hole. Which, for context, is quite a doozy no matter how many times you've walked it, requiring me to get a running start to carry enough momentum to propel myself forward and upward using the biggest strides I could muster. I mean, how else is a 5'4" person able to lug heavy bags around?

I've learned to embrace my body and celebrate it for what it has given me, what it allows me to do. It's a wonderful thing. Now when I look in the mirror and a negative thought crosses my mind, I try to retrain my brain so the next thought that quickly follows is one of gratitude. Awareness and gratitude for what it has allowed me to do. My body has allowed me to do one of the things I love most in the world, like caddying, among the simple things of everyday life such as walking, breathing and jumping. I have to practice thanking it more often as it's all mine, the powerful, beautiful, wonderful thing it is.

Pay It Forward

Not knowing what the following 2022 summer would look like in terms of where I would be or what I would be doing, due to my upcoming college graduation in May of 2022, I knew it wasn't going to look anywhere close to the previous ones, and that was a tough pill to swallow. The last few weeks of caddying were hard, realizing the journey was coming to a close, but the last week was especially emotional. So many emotions filled my heart as I was preparing to say goodbye and reflected on what the experience and people had meant to me. Some of the most important life lessons gave from that week as I was stepping into the uncertainty of the future and not ready to let go of something that had been so good, that had so profoundly changed my life.

August 31, 2021.

It was Tuesday, and my last day at the course was Friday. That last week was unlike any other week I had experienced before. Even though I had known for months that this was most likely my last summer of caddying at the club, it could not have been more top of mind that week. I was trying my best to be as present as possible, but I couldn't help but think about how it would be the last time I would be carrying some of these member's bags.

"Can you again?" the caddie master asked me. I had just come in from a round with the ladies earlier that morning. It wasn't even a question. "Of course," I responded. It wasn't even a question in my mind.

The staging area was packed full as there was a city wide event that afternoon sponsored by the Northern Ohio PGA and Northern Ohio Golf Association. PGA professionals across Northern Ohio came to play. While the majority were guests and faces I didn't recognize, there were two groups of club members that were playing that afternoon, who wanted caddies.

One of those members was a guy I had grown incredibly close with over the years. A caddie at this very club himself, then a professional, now a member, he had walked in my shoes and knew exactly how I was feeling that last week. In fact three days prior, he had sent me this text, encouraging me and letting me know he knew what I was going through as I prepared to finish my last week.

"Thanks for everything you've done Kate for the club and membership. As hard as it is for you to go, it's even harder for us to watch you go. It's not goodbye forever, it's just onto a new chapter of your life. I can't wait to see what unfolds for you... Your parents should be so proud of you; they raised a young woman that has shown the membership what it means to work hard and put your heart and soul into something. You'll never be forgotten."

It's funny how things always find a way of working themselves out. Prior to this Tuesday, the member had asked me if I was able to caddy for him on Thursday that week, however I already had a scheduled match in which I was carrying for two other guys. I reluctantly had to turn him down, but once I knew he was playing this afternoon, I politely requested to carry for him that afternoon.

He could not have been more thrilled to see me standing next to his back, and I felt the same way. I was excited to share the time with him, knowing it was going to be about way more than just the golf. I was looking forward to the conversations between shots about ending the summer, moving to Washington DC where I had landed an internship for the upcoming semester and even post-graduation plans. Additionally, it was nice because it was going to be a rather easy day in terms of chasing golf

balls around. The member was a low single handicapper, one of the best golfers at the club. He was one of the guys who kept the ball in the fairway, always pulled his next club and helped caddies in any way he could. Again, as a former caddie himself, he understood the view from our end.

That being said, he also didn't usually need help around the greens reading putts. While it certainly made my job a little easier, when I carried for this member, it felt weird for me as I enjoyed helping in as many ways as possible and wanted to have a hand in every aspect of their game. Green reading was my favorite thing to do, not to mention something I was pretty good at, if I do say so myself. But that's okay. It was my job to assist each golfer in whatever way they needed or wanted, not how I thought they should be helped.

As we were walking up the first fairway, he made a comment to me and the other guys in the group that I never would have expected. "And since it's the last time she's on the bag, she's going to help read every putt I have," he said.

I stopped in my tracks and did a double take, looked back at him to make sure that's what he actually said. "Are you serious?" I asked. "Absolutely," he replied. I felt so honored. My heart fluttered with excitement, wonder and awe. The guy who usually politely tells caddies he doesn't need their help on the greens, the guy who never asks for reads wants ME to read every single one of his putts?! I beamed on the inside, but also felt a heightened sense of responsibility and duty to ensure all of my reads were spot on. After all, a golfer of his magnitude has the ability to put the ball exactly where I say, so if I was off by a little bit, the putts wouldn't fall. I strove to be so spot-on that day, that all the putts fell, doing everything in my power to help get the ball in the hole.

What a round. Not only was it great company and great conversation, it was an absolute blast. I was grinning from ear to ear the entire round, and I felt so seen and valued. Not that I didn't most days, but this one was special due to the people I shared it with set across the backdrop of the end of the journey.

Throughout the day, the member and I talked about my future, what I wanted to do post-graduation, the steps I was taking to get there and what caddying had meant to me, the impact it had on my life. While it was at times hard to put the overwhelming emotions of love and gratitude into words, I tried my best.

Walking up the 18th hole, I had expressed to him the strongest pull and desire in my heart. After taking in the endless amounts of support and care from members over the years, I was bursting at the seams with what to do with it. I wanted nothing more than for everyone else in the world to feel the way I did when I was at that specific place, with those specific people. The joy, contentment and fulfillment that bubbled up in my heart absolutely radiated from me, and I wanted to share that with others, to let all of those people know how incredibly grateful I was for the impact they made, how they made my experience so wonderful, one that would stick with me the rest of my life. While he didn't really give a response in the moment, he nodded his head as he both empathized and understood what that feeling was and the weight of the sentiment.

After he holed his putt on the green, we stepped off the course. He stopped, thanked me for my efforts and shook my hand. As if to circle back to our previous conversation coming up the fairway, he had formulated a response for my uncontainable joy, admiration and gratitude. He looked right into my eyes, and our gaze connected.

“Promise me this,” he said. “You’ll pay it forward, because that’s true gratitude.” I let that one sit for a few seconds as I worked through what it meant and how I was going to take that invitation and move forward with it. “I promise.” I replied. And I meant it. In that moment, I wanted nothing more than to pay it forward, to give back, to help the next caddie coming up, whomever needed my help. As I thought about his words, I sincerely believed him. What is true gratitude? Is it enough to just have feelings of appreciation and gratefulness? Maybe, but not in my mind. There was too strong a pull in my heart to not act upon it.

Paying it forward is one of the most selfless things one can do. It requires looking inside of yourself and asking what you can do, what you can give of yourself to make the life and journey of someone else a little bit easier. When you look around in your own life, where is there a need and how can you fill that need, bringing joy and light to those around you?

Conclusion and Acknowledgements

As stated in the introduction, this was only a snapshot of the larger story. More is to come in the book ahead that will hopefully be published one day. This piece was meant to be only the beginning, a vision of how one experience so profoundly touched my life. Themes of personal growth, family and relationships, woven into these stories are only beginning to unfold and manifest themselves. Like me, each individual has a story to share, so I invite you to share yours with those around you. It is one of the greatest gifts you can give them, and you may not know the impact it can have.

This project would not have been possible without the guidance and support of numerous people. From the bottom of my heart, I want to thank each and every person who helped in some way, big or small, to make this a possibility and produce the work and story shared. From the faculty and staff at Butler University, to the former professor who inspired me to pursue this story, to the individuals in which these stories are about, and my parents, family and friends, I would not be standing where I am if it weren't for the role you have played in my life and the impact you have made. Thank you all for the unconditional love, encouragement and strength you give me, challenging me to be my most authentic self. Words cannot fully convey my deepest gratitude. My heart is so full because all of you occupy so much space in it.

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