

## Butts in Bleachers

Brooke Johnson

*Note: This spoken word poem was written and presented by Brooke Johnson at the October 2015 KATE Storytelling Conference.*

I traveled week after week following my mom's butt to the bleachers.  
My five-year-old bright eyes held her rear at eye level.  
I kept it in sight so as not to get lost.  
Where she sat, we stayed, for bubby.  
Win or lose, we stayed.  
Physically, she taught me how to show up, sit down, and support.  
Secretly, she taught me the extraordinary ability to value a person,  
Someone outside myself.  
When our butts landed in the bleachers it carried a quiet presence, loudly speaking.

My mom had 4 kids: boy-girl-boy-girl.  
Four kids, four times the activities.  
Her butt sat in every bleacher, pew, auditorium and sideline seat you could imagine.  
She was there for it all.  
Week after week, year after year, kid after kid.  
She would sit and wait, sit and wait, sit and wait,  
Then jump to her feet exclaiming, "That's my boy - *or girl, or boy, or girl!*"  
Every activity ended with a smile of pride  
A pat on the back followed with, "You did good out there!"  
I thought nothing of it, expected it actually.  
It's just what moms do, right?

The level of extraordinary breezed past the top of my highly hair sprayed head and  
Cartwheeled over my starched glittery dance team bow.  
The sacrificial gift of her butt in the bleachers week after week was all too often lost on me.

Then, I started teaching.  
My first year out, no kids of my own,  
I did the only thing I knew how.  
I became my mom, my backside planted in the bleachers.  
I would sit and wait, sit and wait, sit and wait,  
Exploding to my feet with exclamations of, "That's my boy - *or girl, or boy, or girl!*"

Don't let my butt in the bleachers fool you.  
I was no saint.  
My sacrificial gift was riddled with judgment, hardly a gift at all.  
Game after game the bleachers overflowing with the opposing team's parents  
Left me annoyed and confused.  
Where are the parents? Our parents?  
What could they possibly have to do?  
Who will greet our kids smiling with pride in their eyes, pat them on their backs and tell them,

“You did good out there!”  
Well, if they won’t come then I WILL!

Little did I know, they would if they could.  
They would gladly put their butts in the bleachers to whoop and holler.  
They would travel from school to school, game to game– if they could.  
You see, it has taken years of surgical precision to extract judgment from my screwed-up vision.

I met these families face to face.  
I spoke broken Spanglish sprinkled with laughter.  
I saw their eyes smile with pride at baby’s first baptism.  
I sang Happy Birthday at their grandchild’s first party.  
I accepted impromptu tamale luncheons seated at their dining room tables.

I packed makeshift mini vending machines for their hospital stays.  
I prayed over parents delirious with exhaustion, while a steady heart beat echoed in critical care.  
I wept, tightly hugging a son crumpled in the pew, at a funeral where death stole life too soon.  
I held my breath in the courtroom with one anxious family, waiting for one judge’s decision.  
I lifted mere ounces of the weight they carried.  
I stood in awe at the joy rooted behind their smiles.

Gone is the question, where are these parents?  
They have their reasons, they have their stories, they have their butts in the bleachers from afar.  
I still go – like my mom – sliding my backside into every bleacher, pew, auditorium and sideline seat.  
I am not a parent replacement.  
With slightly clearer vision, I see my butt in that bleacher for what it really is:  
A family representative, an extension of what is and could be.

To all the teachers whose butts land in bleachers, you serve as a rare gift  
affirming these families as extraordinary, valued beyond measure.  
So, we go, we sit, and we wait for the moments that shout both near and far,  
“There goes our boy - *or girl, or boy, or girl!*”  
We all did good out there.

### **Author Biography**

Brooke Johnson was born and raised in Wichita, KS. She loves the wide-open spaces but continually feels the need to travel abroad. After graduating from Wichita State University in 2008, she taught English Language Arts at Wichita North High School for nine years. Six of those years she worked with the AVID system, encouraging students to seize every opportunity they could for their future. Currently, Brooke teaches ESOL English Language Arts at Wichita East High School. Recently she received her MLA degree from Baker University with an emphasis in literature. Brooke is also a National Staff Developer for AVID, where she trains other content teachers in AVID reading strategies that can help increase rigor and comprehension in the classroom for all students. Brooke was the 2015 Summer Teacher Speaker at the Dallas AVID Summer institute. She enjoys sharing her stories and lessons learned in the classroom. She can be reached at [brooke.bn@gmail.com](mailto:brooke.bn@gmail.com).