



## John Lopez

There are no shortage of golf sayings. Not surprising. In the end, golf is a metaphor for life. It can tell you a lot about your playing partner.

“To find a man’s true character, play golf with him.” – P.G. Wodehouse.

The game also tells you a lot about yourself.

“Mistakes are part of the game. It’s how well you recover from them, that’s the mark of a great player.”  
– Alice Cooper.

John Lopez is no stranger to learning how to play the hand dealt to you. Whether poker, golf or life, it’s all about perspective.

Most people count sheep to fall asleep but this guy counts golf holes. This San Gabriel Valley transplant only started playing the game in earnest 4 years ago but now it’s part of his regular weekly schedule.

“I kinda golfed during the years but never seriously,” he recalls.

His even keel on the links serves him well. “I don’t get mad,” he said. “I’m not a pro.”

For most of John’s young life he had to play the ball down – as it lies.

He had a tough childhood. His parents divorced when he was young. His mom was into drugs and prostitution. He moved around a lot in the San Gabriel Valley. Ultimately, he and his younger brother, Jay, and half-sister ended up in McClaren Hall in El Monte. The facility, which opened in 1961, served as Los Angeles County's shelter for abused and neglected children. It closed in 2003 but was a controversial institution with a checkered history of child neglect and mistreatment.

Sadly, John got separated from his half-sister and only reconnected with her last year.

Despite its track record, John welcomed the routine McClaren offered. "I liked the structure," he said. "We got breakfast lunch and dinner." Perspective.

Eventually John and his brother were rescued by their dad, who had remarried. "He was a smart guy but a disciplinarian," recalls John, who was a rebellious teen. He tried junior college but it seems John wasn't the studious type. He joined the Army when he was 18 and spent a couple years in Germany. After he got out, he did some construction work in Salt Lake City, joined a friend who worked in a coal mine in East Carbon, Utah and in a machine shop.

Along the way John got married. But he kept running into a cousin at family gatherings who worked at LA County Fire -- he always seemed to be off work. Not a bad place to work, he thought. The relative told John what to do to get hired at LACFD, a process that took about 3 years.

Eventually John passed the physical and was hired on to LA County Fire Department. Ten weeks of fire department boot camp at The Training Tower was a breeze for Lopez. "It was so easy for me," he said. "These guys were nothing like the drill sergeants I ran into in the Army."

By 1988 John was drafted in the paramedic program. But he was forced to retire after more than two decades of service due to medical issues. While John doesn't have a garage filled with Skidoos, motorcycles or boats like most of his brethren, he does have two cars. It's not unusual for him to take off on extended cross country road trips seemingly on the spur of the moment. But John actually has a plan.

He survived two divorces and countless girlfriends, but one thing has been a constant in his life -- his guitar and music. He started playing guitar in the 8<sup>th</sup> grade and has been plucking away ever since. In the late 1980s he and four other fire fighters formed a band called the Turnouts -- the name for the protective gear firefighters typically wear.

The group played all over, mainly in bars and mostly dance music, which "women loved," he said. But after years of dragging around amps, speakers, monitors and mixing boards, John said he had enough of being a rock star three years ago. "I didn't like it anymore," he confessed.

But John stills plays around on his guitar every day, if for no other reason than to learn something new.

"It's my only true love," he said.