



GROWING UP WITH BASEBALL

How We Loved and Played the Game

EDITED BY GARY LAND

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UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS • LINCOLN AND LONDON

Michael V. Miranda,
“The Essence of the Game:
A Personal Memoir,” was
previously published in
*The Baseball Research
Journal* 29 (2000): 48–50.
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Library of Congress
Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Growing up with baseball :
how we loved and played the
game / edited by Gary Land.
p. cm.

ISBN 0-8032-2975-5 (cloth : alk.
paper)—ISBN 0-8032-0423-X
(electronic)

1. Baseball—United States—
Anecdotes. 2. Baseball fans
—United States—Anecdotes.

I. Land, Gary, 1944–
GV873.G76 2004
796.357—dc22
2004000615

Set in Minion by Kim Essman.
Designed by Ray Boeche.
Printed by Thomson-Shore Inc.

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Preface

Until about thirty years ago, the game of baseball was a ubiquitous part of growing up for many boys, as well as some girls. During the summer months, traveling the streets of both small towns and big cities, one would encounter groups of kids playing baseball, or a derivative of it, in vacant lots, parks, schoolyards, and even the streets. For those of us who experienced childhood during that time, those sights are unfortunately no longer common. Today one seldom sees informal games of baseball. Apart from organized youth leagues, most baseball diamonds are usually empty, and games in the parks and streets seem nonexistent.

This situation does not mean that baseball is dying, however. According to the National Sporting Goods Association, youth participation in baseball is growing slightly among seven- to eleven-year-olds, while declining among twelve- to seventeen-year-olds. In 2000 the total number of baseball participants aged seven years and older (including adults) was 15.7 million, almost exactly the same as the 15.6 million of ten years earlier (these figures may be found at nsga.org).

Because most young people are today playing baseball mainly within organized leagues, their experiences with the game differ greatly from those of earlier generations who grew up when, for many boys, summer meant endless hours spent on the diamond. The realization of this qualitative difference, whatever the quantitative situation might be, gave rise to this book. While reading a discussion on the Society of American Baseball Research (SABR) listserv regarding various ways the members had played baseball in the past, I concluded that an effort should be made to preserve their memories for our descendants. Harold Seymour has partially accomplished this in the first chapter of *Baseball: The People's Game* (New York: Oxford

University Press, 1990), where he describes things such as “choosing up” sides, stoopball, and stickball. But I wanted to fill in these broad outlines with concrete details and personal experiences.

I decided to seek individuals to write their memories of childhood and youth baseball and ask them to direct their comments toward one of three subjects: their original love for the game, the ways they played the game when young, and the baseball games they invented and played off the field. Although some nostalgia would necessarily appear in these accounts, I wanted writers to emphasize their actual experiences rather than lament how times had changed. I started the process of seeking contributors by first announcing my project on the SABR listserv, publishing an announcement in the organization’s newsletter, and distributing flyers at SABR’s annual convention. The response to these initial announcements was encouraging, so I then pursued other writers among colleagues and friends, posted an announcement on my Web site, and distributed more flyers at Indiana State University’s annual Conference on Baseball in American Literature and Culture. Some individuals heard about the project by word of mouth and others suggested people for me to contact. Gradually I received enough material to prepare this book. I appreciate very much the time the contributors took to write their memories and the patience they have shown while waiting for the project’s completion; this volume could not have come into existence without them.

Part 1 recalls how as children we fell in love with baseball and our emergence as fans of the game, including the vicarious experience of listening to it on the radio, special moments of attendance at the ballparks, and family influences. Part 2 offers memories of how we played the game, recalling such things as our invention of “ghost” runners when there was a shortage of players or laying out our own diamonds on land whose owners we often did not know. Then, because baseball really was central to our experience and could not be forgotten during such times as rainy days or even winter, part 3 reconstructs games that took place off the field, including contests played in front- or backyards, solitaire card games, or elaborate imaginary leagues that played entire seasons of board-game baseball. Within each part the accounts appear in roughly chronological order, extending from the 1930s to the 1980s. Although they sometimes range beyond the

specific topic of the section, I have placed each selection according to what seemed to be its dominant theme. I have introduced each section by identifying the themes that emerge from the various accounts and relating them to the baseball of my own childhood, although my recollections are not nearly as interesting as those of the contributors. In a few cases I have also incorporated contributors' comments into the introductions.

The writing styles vary considerably. Many of the memoirs are polished essays by experienced writers; others have the informal flavor of oral history. The variety of baseball experience is thereby reflected in the different ways it is remembered by people from many walks of life. It is my hope that the memories recorded here not only preserve a small part of our common baseball history but also stir many readers' own recollections of a time when, especially for males, being young and enjoying the game were almost synonymous.

Growing Up with Baseball

1

Loving the Game

Introduction

Remembering how we fell in love with baseball is not always easy. For some the game was always there; our families talked, played, listened to, and watched baseball. Jean Hastings Ardell, for example, recalls:

Rummaging through the past, I find no line of demarcation between not having baseball in my life, then discovering it. The game was simply there, always. My father had arrived in New York from the Midwest in the late 1920s, whereupon he fell hard for the New York Giants. Twenty years later I came along, and at the earliest possible moment he took me up to the Polo Grounds. Given his habit of following the games on the radio, I suspect it was some sort of prenatal indoctrination, much as some parents-to-be today fill their homes with the music of Mozart in the hope of instilling in the baby an appreciation for the classics.

In any event, the game took. Indeed, how could it not? Mid-century New York City was rich in baseball tradition and rivalries. (Although I was born in Brooklyn, my father never once returned me to that borough, home of the despised Dodgers). At age seven I asserted my independence by adopting the New York Yankees as my team, and we added Yankee Stadium to our baseball itinerary. From our home in Queens, we'd rock along on the subway into Manhattan or the Bronx, high on the anticipation of another ball game. I thought it would go on forever, but teams move away and fathers can die young. Only the game and memory endure.

But others experienced conscious conversions to the game, as when Bob Wilson decided that baseball would be his favorite sport or when Keith Francis discovered through baseball that he had become a Californian, both of whom tell their stories in the following pages.

My own experience tends to fall into the “unconscious” and therefore vague category.

Growing up in California’s Napa Valley in the 1950s, I had no local Major League team prior to 1958 and thus professional baseball had no dominant presence in my life. My first exposure to the game at any level came while going home with my father (I lived with what were technically foster parents, but I called them Mother and Father) after a day spent in his cabinet shop, probably during the summer of 1951 before I entered second grade. Although his sports of choice were hunting and fishing, I suspect that he thought it was time to introduce me to baseball. We therefore stopped at the Napa High School baseball field and watched a few innings of a game between the Native Sons of the Golden West (I can still picture their gold-colored shirts) and a team whose name I do not recall. I do not know how old the players were nor remember much about the game except that sitting in the bleacher seats was exciting. I must have expressed some continuing interest in baseball, for the following Christmas I received a bat (unfortunately, one too heavy for me at that age).

At about the same time, I was becoming aware of the Pacific Coast League through baseball cards that were included in Mother’s Cookies, a regional brand. I collected as many of these cards as I could, and through them learned about not only the nearby teams in San Francisco, Oakland, and Sacramento but also those in such faraway places as Seattle, Portland, and Hollywood. Of all those cards, “Spider” Jorgenson’s is the one that sticks most vividly in my mind, I’m sure because of his colorful nickname. While memory tells me that I collected those cards during the third and fourth grades, the baseball card book I checked at Barnes and Noble states that they were published a year earlier, during the 1952 and 1953 seasons. Thus, like Delmer Davis describes in part 3, I’m not sure just when I began listening to *Game of the Day* broadcasts on our old four- or five-foot-high radio. I did not realize that Les Keiter was re-creating the games I was hearing until the late 1960s when I read Willie Morris’s hilarious account, in *North Toward Home* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1967), of discovering the existence of game re-creations when he accidentally stumbled upon an Armed Forces shortwave account of the same game

that he was listening to on AM radio. In any case, those *Game of the Day* broadcasts became a basic feature of my summer days for several years.

During those years my loyalties flitted from team to team. At first it was the Yankees. Everyone wants to associate with a winner, and I suppose that was the nature of the Yankee appeal. And there were those Yankee heroes—Mantle, Berra, Ford—with which it was so easy for a nine- or ten-year-old to identify.

But increasing exposure to baseball seems to have confused my loyalties and occasionally something would happen in a game that would capture my imagination. I have no idea what caused it, but after his appearance in a *Game of the Day* broadcast, Mickey McDermott (of all pitchers) got me to follow the Washington Senators (of all teams) for a while. I must have had an inclination to root for underdogs, because a couple of years later I was following closely the fortunes of Dale Long and the Pittsburgh Pirates, snatching up the paper every evening to see whether Long had hit another home run.

All this, of course, changed in 1958 when the Giants moved to San Francisco. Nothing was more important in the life of this fourteen-year-old than the coming of Major League Baseball to the Bay Area (the California side of the story that filmmaker Ken Burns failed to tell in his otherwise enjoyable series on baseball). I immediately converted to the Giants. My classmate, Steven Ahn (now a physician), recalls the first Major League game that we attended: “It was in 1958, and our eighth-grade class went to Seals Stadium to see the Giants play the Philadelphia Phillies. Ramon Monzant pitched for the Giants. I can’t remember who won the game but I recall seeing Richie Ashburn. I’d heard of him, and I had him in baseball cards. Now here he was in the flesh. It was hard to believe.” Steve even remembers how much tickets cost: “Box seats were \$3.50, and reserved seats were \$2.50 then. We used to go on Sundays to see the Giants play. Usually we’d sit in the cheap seats, but every so often we’d get good \$3.50 seats.” I attended some of those games with Steve and our fellow baseball fanatics Glendon and Paul Conner and Ronald Wiedrick, but I wasn’t there when another classmate got his picture in the August 24, 1959, issue of *Life* magazine. “We were at Seals Stadium, and after the game we stuck around to get autographs,” Steve remembers. “*Life* was doing

a feature on Willie McCovey, who had just come up from the minors and was tearing up the league. Harold Dixon is leaning over trying to get his autograph. You can see his back in the picture.” I did get McCovey’s autograph that year (and Willie Mays’s, among others); indeed, I still have that now somewhat tattered 1959 Giants yearbook.

Although I usually could go to only a couple of games a year, I faithfully listened to Russ Hodges and Lon Simmons report Giants’ games on KSFO. I often wonder how my then-divorced mother put up with my monopolizing of the radio for baseball during the summer months and the Falstaff (I think) beer advertisements that had no appeal in our teetotaling household. But she never complained about my baseball addiction, and even bought me *Baseball Digest* every month at the grocery store, and for that I will be forever grateful. She also never objected to my constant baseball chatter, though she had no personal interest in the game, nor the hoards of baseball cards I purchased at Dee’s Market, about a block away from our house, with the money I earned mowing lawns. Unfortunately, I threw those cards away (including those from Mother’s Cookies) while in college, thinking that I had grown up and was getting rid of childish things. Again, Steve had a similar experience:

All of us collected baseball cards. They were five cents a pack and contained six cards and one slab of bubble gum. We used to ride our bikes around looking for cards. I used to get most of mine at Pine Street Market in Napa. I had the whole set in 1959, which was hard to do in those days, as you couldn’t buy the sets like you can today. I also had cards back into the early 1950s. Frank Robinson, Vada Pinson, Hank Aaron, Gill Hodges. I had them all. Unfortunately, I threw every one of them away when I was in college. I remember thinking, “What a waste of money these cards were.” I also had collected plate blocks of U.S. stamps. I should have tossed out all the stamps and kept the cards, because I destroyed a small fortune. Anyway, I remember Ron Wiedrick buying ten packs of cards for fifty cents. I kept thinking how lucky he was to be so rich as to be able to afford to buy so many cards. Fifty cents was a fortune in those days. That’s how old I’ve become.

I became older too, of course, and although I never lost my interest in baseball, like many others, time spent in college, graduate school (in hated Dodger territory, but I loved listening to Vince Scully), marriage, and children, and not least more than thirty years of teaching in southwest Michigan, have somewhat diluted my childhood Giants fervor, and the game is certainly no longer the all-consuming passion that it once was. After all, we really do have to “grow up” and accept all the responsibilities that process entails. Still in principle a Giant fan today, I catch them on ESPN whenever I can, but I know more about the Cubs and White Sox (whose games are broadcast and reported on in our area) and usually find myself hoping they will win. When the Giants and the Cubs meet I experience somewhat divided loyalties, but my Giants commitment runs deep and ultimately comes to the fore. Nonetheless, in the end, I think, it is the game itself—not the teams—that continues to capture me. Geographical mobility, exposure to the broadcasts of other teams, and perhaps a bit of maturity have played their role in bringing this change about, but more than anything else the expanse of green grass, the chess-like moves of the players, and the sharp crack of the bat have the same mysterious appeal that they did some fifty years ago when this love affair began. As the writers of these accounts warmly recall, baseball helped shape our identity and continues to be a part of who we are.

In reading these accounts it also becomes clear how important a role fathers played in shaping our love for the game. In a well-known essay, poet Donald Hall sums up the significance of the father-son relationship to baseball:

Baseball is fathers and sons. Football is brothers beating each other up in the backyard, violent and superficial. Baseball is the generations, looping backward forever with a million apparitions of sticks and balls, cricket and rounders, and the games the Iroquois played in Connecticut before the English came. Baseball is fathers and sons playing catch, lazy and murderous, wild and controlled, the profound archaic song of birth, growth, age, and death. This diamond encloses what we are. (Fathers Playing Catch with Sons: Essays on Sport [Mostly Baseball] [San Francisco: North Point, 1985], 30)

In nearly every memoir in this section, fathers introduced their children—daughters and sons—to baseball, listening to games on car and home radios, taking the kids to the ballpark, playing with them in backyards and parks, and thereby bearing out the essential truth of Hall's observation. In some cases, as with Larry Brunt, the baseball-father relationship continued into adulthood as well. I read these narratives with a certain degree of envy, for most of my childhood was spent without a father in the house. Yet even in my case, it was a foster father who first introduced me to the game, although he disappeared from my life soon after. Because the father-child relationship is apparently so important to nurturing love for the sport, I sometimes wonder if the rapidly increasing divorce rate in the last half of the twentieth century might have something to do with the relative decline of interest in baseball.

In addition, the culture of the time (I'm thinking particularly of the late 1940s to the early 1960s) had an impact on us, apart from the interests and makeups of our families. Baseball was the dominant sport and its heroes were household names. It was my mother who, although in no way a fan, first told me about Babe Ruth and alerted me to the fact that Joe DiMaggio came from San Francisco, thereby unconsciously giving witness to the cultural importance of the game. Baseball, or at least talk about it, seemed to be everywhere as well. Unless there was some political or military crisis, the San Francisco newspapers frequently put Giants victories in their headlines. When I went to the barbershop on summer afternoons, a ball game could be heard coming over the radio on the shelf behind the chair and conversation with the barber often revolved around the game's progress. And during good weather we played the game wherever we could find the space. I suspect my experience was similar to that of kids all over the country.

Perhaps the best evidence of the cultural significance of baseball in these pages appears in the several accounts from those who grew up as Seventh-day Adventists, a small Protestant Christian group that among other distinctive practices kept Saturday rather than Sunday as the Sabbath (somewhat similar to Orthodox Jews in that respect) and had an apocalyptic expectation of the coming of Jesus that produced continual concern over whether one would be ready for that event.

Because I grew up within an Adventist household from about the age of five, attended parochial schools until I went off to the University of California–Santa Barbara for graduate school, and during my adult life have worked in an Adventist university, I solicited accounts from some of my friends and colleagues. As Gary Huffaker tells in his contribution to this section, Adventists of the 1950s took a very sectarian approach to life, sharply distinguishing between “the remnant” (Adventists) and “the world” (everyone else). Yet despite this perspective and despite the physical separation of Adventist children into parochial schools, a parochial version of the Boy and Girl Scouts (“Pathfinders”), and parochial summer camps, baseball (along with popular music and—increasingly—television) entered into our lives in the same way and with the same intensity as it entered the lives of our contemporaries. However much our parents and our church might have wished to keep us separated from “the world,” such a demarcation proved impossible. For many of us baseball provided a vibrant point of contact with the life of the larger society. The fact that the game could penetrate the walls that our church and our parents so carefully built around us testifies to its power within the larger culture.

Whatever our religious or ethnic background, whether we lived in cities or small towns, sometimes even if we did not have a father to strongly nurture our love for the game, during the middle part of the twentieth century large numbers of us grew up with baseball and fell in love with a game that, despite the ravages of time, continues to hold its magic spell over us.

Ballparks I Have Known

Bob Boynton

On April 23, 1935, my Dad took me to my first game, the home opener at League Park in Cleveland. Although I was already ten years old, baseball had held no interest for me until that day, when the Indians came from behind to win 7–6. I must have supposed that all games were destined to end that way. I still recall seeing the fluid motions of baseball players swirling in my brain when I tried to fall asleep that night. I never forgot the score. I was hooked for life.

A diminutive power hitter named Odell Hale had hit a three-run homer in the first inning and he immediately became my favorite player. Memory sometimes plays strange tricks: for many years I had thought that Hale's opposite-field home run, which I vividly remembered as it disappeared over the wall, had won the game in the ninth. Only later did I learn that the winning run had actually been scored on a throwing error by catcher Rollie Hemsley of the visiting Browns. Perhaps my pleasure was greater than it would have been had I been aware that the Browns were so awful that they should have been routinely beaten without resorting to any ninth-inning heroics.

I saw many games in League Park until 1947, when Bill Veeck took over the team and moved it permanently into the cavernous Cleveland Municipal Stadium. League Park was really a dump, with wooden flooring in the upper deck, a section of original wooden slat bleachers in left-center field that never had been replaced, unsavory sanitary facilities, and a primitive scoreboard mostly operated from the back. The ball-strike-out numerals were inscribed on one side of each of seven motor-driven rotating metal plates controlled from the press box. Sometimes a number would spin crazily in the wind. The bottom part of the tall right-field wall, only 290 feet at the foul

line, featured an irregular concrete surface that followed the contours of the vertical steel beams within, from which hits would ricochet at unpredictable angles. The top half of the structure consisted of chicken wire strung between the beams, which extended forty feet from ground level. If you sat along the right-field line at just the right angle, you could see that the screen was replete with indentations from having been struck by thousands of baseballs during batting practice and games. If a ball hit the screen it would drop almost straight down, but if it hit one of the beams over which the screen was stretched or beyond the point where the chicken wire ended, it might go anywhere, in or out of the park. I saw many a ball hit by the likes of Hal Trosky and Earl Averill and sail out over everything and into Lexington Avenue.

League Park was heaven, though, especially when Mike McGeen and I, sometimes accompanied by Mike's father, sat in the Cleveland Trust Company box at the front of the upper deck, midway between home and first base. Because the post-supported upper deck was not much recessed from the lower one, we were almost on top of the action. If the seat could be projected into any of today's cantilevered ballparks, such a location would be found in midair, far forward of any real seat.

Although the Indians had played a season and a half in the stadium after it opened in July 1931, they abandoned it in 1933. Except for the 1935 All-Star Game and one regular-season contest in 1936, they played exclusively in League Park until 1937. After 1936 most Sunday games and all night games were played in the stadium, with the rest being played at League Park. From 1935 through 1948, I saw hundreds of games in the two facilities in Cleveland. When I was too young to drive, the stadium was more convenient for me because I could get there on the Shaker Rapid transit for fifteen cents each way and then pay \$1.10 for a general admission ticket, which usually entitled me to sit anywhere in the second deck behind the upper box seats. I never missed a Sunday home date if I could help it. I sometimes went alone and normally did not leave my seat even once during the whole of a doubleheader.

Tours of out-of-town ballparks began for me during the summer of 1941 when I was only sixteen. Earlier that year Dad had been less

than thrilled with my eleventh-grade academic performance. The incentive he offered to me to try harder was too good to resist: he was going east on business during the summer, he said, and if I could get my grades up to a more acceptable level, he would take me along and I would be able to see baseball games in three or four of the ballparks out east. These were places known to me only by the descriptions given by Jack Graney, the Cleveland announcer, a former Indians outfielder and the first ex-jock to broadcast baseball. (In his spirited and imaginative recreations of Indian road games—given that Western Union apparently offered no evidence to the contrary—all doubles were described as “hitting walls over outfielders’ heads.”)

Although I have no written records of that trip, I am dead certain of which parks I saw. In the New York area we went to Ebbets Field on July 1. Dodger catcher Mickey Owen was beamed in that game and had to be carried off the field on a stretcher. Maybe Owen never fully recovered: it was the season when the Dodgers won the pennant but possibly lost the World Series because of Owen’s famous passed ball on a third strike to Tommy Henrich that should have won the third game for the Dodgers.

Ebbets Field was a strictly linear place. Viewed from behind home plate, the straight stands converged toward the foul lines, almost reaching them in left and right fields and causing the modest expanse of foul territory to decrease gradually away from the home plate area. I was impressed also with the right-field wall, which was similar to League Park’s in some respects but had its own set of peculiar materials and contours. Like all ballparks in those days, there was no padding anywhere.

In Washington, Dad was much amused when I insisted on roaming all over Griffith Stadium to take its measure. The deep left field (at 405 feet it was the largest in modern Major-League history) impressed me, as did the peculiar jutting-in of the wall in left-center field, behind which (I now know) a small neighborhood of a half-dozen homes was tucked in. The right-field wall was farther away and more uniform in structure than League Park’s right field.

In Philadelphia, where I bought a scorecard for a nickel, I attended a game in Shibe Park while Dad was doing business at the

home office of his Philadelphia employer, the Curtis Publishing Company. I sat in a box seat in the open lower stands near third base. During the game a towering foul ball seemed destined to land directly on my head, and I am ashamed to say that I ducked and a gentleman in an adjacent seat garnered the trophy. Other than that episode, I have no recollection of the game, only the park. Unlike Ebbets Field and Griffith Stadium, neither of which I would see again after this trip, I visited Shibe Park again during the last year that baseball was played there. It was yet another ballpark with a tall right-field wall and more remote left-field stands.

The fourth baseball edifice visited on the trip, and by far the most memorable, was Fenway Park. Dad grew up in Bristol, Rhode Island, and our itinerary included a visit with his parents at the old homestead. My journey to Boston from Bristol was a solo adventure. After arrival by bus in Boston, I asked for directions and was informed that I should take a certain “subway circus” car. That sounded odd, so I inquired again and learned that “subway-surface” is what I should have discerned through the thick Boston accent. I arrived early enough to bowl a game of candlepins on Landsdowne Street across from the famous Green Monster, which I ogled from the outside. I paid particular attention to the home run catching-screen over my head (removed in 1993) that angled outward and upward from a point of attachment sufficiently far below the top of the wall that home runs hit over the wall and into the screen never bounced back onto the playing field.

Aided by connections with an oil company sponsor of Red Sox games, Dad had made some very special arrangements for me at Fenway Park. I sat in the broadcast booth, located on the roof of the single-decked ballpark, immediately behind announcer Jim Britt and his assistant, Tom Hussey. Before the game, Hussey asked if I would like to meet a couple of the players, to which I replied that I certainly would, especially Jimmy Foxx and Ted Williams. I was taken to the dugout where the two sluggers were standing together and shook hands with each of them. (It was the year that Williams hit .406.) Britt’s announcing style interested me. Unlike Jack Graney, who most of the time talked in disconnected phrases, Britt’s play-

by-play commentary was emitted in complete, grammatically precise sentences.

All I can remember about the game was that the Red Sox won and that the announcers were ecstatic that a rookie pitcher, starting his first game, got the victory. I also recall that Ted Williams slapped an outside pitch high against the left-field wall for a double.

Choosing Baseball

Bob Wilson

My earliest baseball memory involves a famous game, although I didn't know it would be famous at the time. It was 1945 and Dad was going somewhere in our 1936 Buick and decided to take me along. As we left the house he had a brief conversation with our next-door neighbor Mr. Schuler, who was listening to the start of a ball game on the radio out on his front porch. I surely would have forgotten about that game, except that we were gone for most of the day and part of the evening and Mr. Schuler still was listening to it when we got back. Being only eight years old, I had no idea how long a game was supposed to last, but I was impressed with Dad's total astonishment that it wasn't over yet. I learned long after that it was the longest American League game ever played, Detroit Tigers at Philadelphia Athletics, called at a 1-1 tie after twenty-four innings. I can't remember where the old car took us that day or why we were going, but I remember Mr. Schuler out there for the duration and I remember Dad's amazement.

Some time then elapsed before my own baseball interest developed. Dad would often have the Athletics and Phillies games on the car radio on our Sunday family drives, but I actually found the games an annoyance and hoped he would turn them off. Looking back now, I have a hard time believing that a baseball spark didn't light, but anyway it didn't, and that realization gives me tolerance for those who never get the spark. But then came the summer of 1947 and we got a tv! A little Philco set, or—more accurately—a big set with a little bitty screen. Of course it was black and white, and it had a plastic lens filled with mineral oil that magnified the tiny picture. It was one of the first tvs in Norristown, Pennsylvania. Uncle John had

the first and Dad couldn't let him get away with that, so he got an eight-inch set that put Uncle John's little six-inch in the shade.

So one day a ball game came on and I started watching—the Indians against the Athletics. I watched for a while and then came the call to dinner. Someone at the table asked which team I was for and I said, "The Indians." Came the reply: "But the Athletics are the home team." "Well," I said, "I know what an Indian is but I don't know what an Athletic is." Such is ten-year-old logic. That must have been near the end of the season because I don't remember watching any more televised Athletics games in 1947, but I know I watched some Phillies games because I remember their shortstop, Ralph Lapointe, and he was gone by 1948. I was especially impressed with Harry "the Hat" Walker because of his endless fidgeting with his cap.

Not only were the TV pictures small, but the only view was from behind home plate so it was difficult to tell which team was at bat and, of course, which player was batting. I came up with a simple at-a-glance criterion based on the A's and Phillies having caps in a similar shade of light blue. All the visiting teams had caps that showed up black or very dark on the black-and-white screen, whereas the A's and Phils caps looked light gray. Probably the early TV cameras weren't very red sensitive, so red showed up black. It was actually easier to identify the home team that way than comparing the white versus gray of the uniforms. Of course some visiting teams also had light blue caps, but my limited 1947 sampling didn't include any of them, so in my mind I had discovered a general law: home caps gray, visiting caps black.

One distinct memory from 1947 baseball comes from the World Series, which probably was the first one televised. I came home from school just in time to find the game nearly over and in a tense situation. The Yankees had a slim lead and a Dodger was at bat with the game on the line. The final pitch may have been the only one I saw. The batter drove it against the right-field scoreboard in Ebbets Field, the announcer lost control, and the game was over. Only then did I learn just how dramatic the situation was and that Cookie Lavagetto had broken up a no-hitter and won the game, all in one swing. If I could have seen only one pitch of the 1947 Series, that was the one

to see. I may not have watched the other games—anyway, I don't remember them.

One day around then I came to a fork in the road of sports. It happened in about five minutes and I know where I was, although not why I was there—it was in the Acme Market across the street from our house. The thought flashed through my mind that I needed to decide on my favorite sport. I sort of do that with everything—there's always a favorite in any given category. Up to then it had been football, mainly because of playing touch football in the street. The Norristown baseball fields were too far away, and baseball didn't work out well on the street. Anyway, I just stopped where I was in the Acme and took the time required to come to a permanent decision. After five minutes it was baseball for me, and it has been ever since. And then it was spring 1948. Something had happened over the winter and I was suddenly not just curious but interested in baseball, possibly from playing sandlot games and playground softball. In fact, I hit two consecutive over-the-fence home runs in a softball game, so that might have fueled the change. I started following the Philadelphia teams via sports shows, although there wasn't much to follow with the Phillies, who were near the bottom of the National League. However, the A's were another story. They had a colorful collection of players and, despite thin pitching and an almost complete absence of reserves, were fighting it out with Cleveland for first place—one day the A's would be a hair ahead and the next day it was Cleveland by a hair, back and forth through April, May, June, July, and part of August. Then injuries caught up with the A's, but it was great while it lasted. However, my window into all this was through radio, television, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. I had no visions of seeing a live game. And then came a Sunday morning in June and I was still asleep at nine a.m. when my brother Jack, eleven years older, woke me up to say that we were going to the Phillies game and I should get dressed, fast. Upon hearing that I went back to sleep because a) he was a known trickster and b) he might as well have said we were going to Mars as far as realistic possibilities were concerned. Going to a Major League game was just so far out! But then Jack came back to say, "C'mon, we'll be late, get ready!" When I realized he wasn't kidding I set some kind of world record for getting dressed.

The sixth-place Phillies were playing two games against the eighth-place Cubs at Shibe Park. I mainly remember the Cubs' Bill "Swish" Nicholson, for the simple reason that everyone yelled "Swish!" every time he took a swing. That may have been the first of many charming little quasi-cult items that drew me into baseball. No, Walker's hat came before that, but it was hard not to be impressed with all the swish yells—they involved the whole ballpark. Besides Nicholson, I mainly remember Bert Haas and Eddie Miller, the Phillies' third baseman and shortstop, because my eyesight wasn't too good and they were closest to our seats. The only disappointment was when the ice cream vendors disappeared—Jack said that they only worked up to the sixth inning of the second game. I kept hoping that some renegade ice cream guy would come by in the eighth or ninth inning, but none did. I had a toothache all through the day, but the excitement of the game, not to mention the hot dogs and ice cream, got me through just fine. I still have the black-and-white pictures Jack took that day. It was an all-around great day in the life of an eleven-year-old, which is what big brothers are for.

That summer I often walked to the YMCA in the middle of town to play Ping-Pong, checkers, and whatever. My next baseball adventure was a bus trip to an A's versus Tigers game sponsored by the Y. We had good seats, not too high in the upper deck on the first-base side, where the closest targets of my attention were Tiger first baseman George Vico and Ferris Fain of the A's. Vico had a unique style of stretching for throws on close plays. He would do a complete split, with the toe of his right foot on the bag, his left leg pointed toward the arriving ball, and both legs flat on the ground. This trick probably saved only about three inches of travel for the ball, but it was fun to watch. Fain was always doing something and was usually emotional—either laughing or angry, but rarely calm. For some reason the only uniform number I remember from that game is Fain's number 5. Of course, he was close to our seats and my eyesight wasn't great. I was most impressed by a game of Pepper, held prior to the real action, in which Detroit outfielder Pat Mullin showed amazing (to me) control in hitting ball after ball to players *in sequence*. Obviously he could hit where he intended with marvelous accuracy. I knew

I would have trouble hitting Pepper pitches properly to anyone, let alone a particular man. It gave me an inkling of the talent level of most big leaguers. The game? Well, it looked like it would go to Detroit, but then Carl Scheib, a pitcher (of all things), delivered a late pinch hit that won it. I didn't realize it at the time, but the win put the A's in first place, a half game or so ahead of Cleveland. Of course the A's were always slipping in and out of first place around that time.

Some weeks later the Y had another bus excursion, this time to see the Phillies play the league-leading Boston Braves. However, on this occasion our seats were in the not-so-great lower left-field stands. For some reason they were called the bleachers, but you couldn't get bleached because the upper stands just about completely blocked the sun—it was really dark in there. The nearest players were the two left fielders—the Phillies' Johnny Blatnik and the Braves' Mike McCormick. Frank McCormick was playing first base for the Braves, so I got to see all the big league McCormicks there were at the time. I knew about Blatnik from TV games in which the announcers had him pegged as a rising star. The line was that Blatnik and Richie Ashburn were the wave of the future for the Phillies, and both started the season well. The announcers were right about Ashburn, but Blatnik was sort of "Rookie of the Half-Year." He faded in the second half and that was about it for him. Anyway, the Braves went on to win the pennant, so I can say that I saw the Boston Braves in their last championship year, even if it was by peeking out of the left-field dungeon at Shibe. About all I remember of the game itself was the Phillies' pitcher walking the bases full in the first inning, hardly throwing any strikes, and managing to scrape through without excessive damage. I think the Braves won.

That outing may not have matched up well with the A's-Tigers game, but it was a raging success compared to the next bus trip—the one that never happened. Well, it happened just fine for those who got on the bus, but for me. . . . Here's the sad story: The next bus trip was to the A's versus Cleveland Indians—perfect, right? The teams spent alternate days in first place, so what could be better? Unfortunately, the news of this trip didn't get to me, so that Saturday morning I strolled into the YMCA just as the bus was getting ready to leave. There was time to get on the bus, but I didn't have the necessary

fifty cents. I could have gotten the money at home, but the bus would be gone by the time I could run there and back. So I didn't go, and it's been one of those what-ifs in my little book of regrets ever since. If I'd only known about the excursion. If I'd only had fifty cents! If I'd only thought to borrow the fifty cents—at least I could have tried. Then I could have gone to the one game I most wanted to see—ever. My only slight consolation, if it can be called that, is that I still hadn't gotten glasses and things would have been fuzzy. No fuzzier than the games I had seen, but it's the best rationalization I've come up with in fifty-two years. Sometimes I even think that maybe a big rock would have fallen on me and it's all for the best that I didn't go—only it wouldn't have been so bad if it had hit me on the way back.

Then there was the 1948 World Series. As I went off to school on the morning of the first game, Mom asked which team I was for. She wasn't into baseball at all, so I must have been talking up a storm about it or she wouldn't have asked. Anyway, I said the Braves, having based this choice on my animosity toward the Indians and their effrontery in beating out the A's. The fact that the Red Sox and Yankees had committed the same offense didn't enter into my decision. It essentially was a snap judgment, as I hadn't given it much thought. However, during that school day I did think about it, forgave the Indians, and decided it was logical to be for the team that led the A's league, even if it wasn't the A's. Well, the Braves won, which I found out on the walk home because someone had a portable radio, so naturally Mom greeted me with congratulations. Then I had to explain that, *au contraire*, my team had lost because I'd flipped allegiance. It was a little awkward, but Mom seemed to get over it pretty fast. Then the Indians won the Series despite losing the opener, so something worked out that year.

After the Series I wanted more baseball, but the only option was on the sandlots and it would soon be too cold for that. Well, for most people. Accordingly I organized a Polar Bears Club for winter baseball by collecting about ten phone numbers of would-be players during school lunches in October. One pretty December day, with three or four inches of snow on the ground, I started calling. Despite earlier enthusiasm, most respondents pointed out that it was way below freezing and that I must be kidding, which I wasn't. Two calls

appeared successful—“Yes, what time should I be there?” So that would be enough. We could hit grounders and fly balls with a black baseball for easy visibility. So out I went. I was genuinely surprised when no one showed up and at first thought they were just a bit late. Only they turned out to be around four months late and I was reduced to batting the ball against a backstop, which wasn’t all that much fun. That was the end of the Polar Bears.

However, better things awaited. A grade ahead at Stewart Junior High School was Marvin, a kid reputed to know everything about baseball. Marvin not only read the big league rosters, he had them cold memorized. I thought he wasn’t serious when he casually commented that he knew about all the players, so I challenged him. After he’d gone through three teams’ worth I got tired of listening and conceded. Marvin did know all kinds of sports stuff, not just baseball, and he used to win armloads of bats, fielder’s gloves, and the like, in Philadelphia on Saturday morning sports quiz shows. He had two or three friends who would go along and they knew their sports too, but nothing like Marvin. I wasn’t anywhere remotely near his level, but he let me tag along four or five times. It was some of the best fun ever—real radio studios, real live (and semi-famous) sports announcers, and just the excitement of doing new things with those of a like mind. And, of course, riding a train down to the Reading Terminal, which still exists except it isn’t a train terminal now.

“The Bill Campbell Show,” or whatever the official name was, always had a sports guest. One time it was the Browns’ Bob Dillinger and another time the A’s Lou Brissie. The show was for thirty minutes on station WCAU, and the format had one of several teenage sports geniuses asking a question and then choosing from forty screaming kids (“I know, I know!”) to get an answer. Usually it took three or four selections, unless of course the genius chose Marvin first, in which case it was all over. Marvin probably knew more than any of the geniuses, and I think he might have been a genius-guest too, but not when I was there. Anyway, to win something—and the prizes were really nice—you had to get called on and had to know the answer. Usually I didn’t know the answer, so getting called on was irrelevant. The closest I came was on the question, “Who was the Tigers’ manager when they won it all in 1935?” I was thinking Mickey Cochrane, which

is right, and I did get called on! So I said, “Mickey Cochrane,” only the expert had it wrong, so no prize. But just being there was enough.

After Bill Campbell’s show we had thirty minutes to get over to WFIL and Tom Moorhead’s show, where Marvin didn’t get called on so often, but it was worth a try. Moorhead probably knew that Marvin had 337 fielder’s gloves at home and didn’t need another one. All this was in 1949 and a few times in 1950, and then that was all. There was a new show in 1950 that started a half-hour after the other two, and I don’t recall the actual name of that one either but it was on WIBG and emceed by A’s announcer Byrum Saam, so naturally it was centered around the A’s and had guests like Bob Hooper and Elmer Valo. Attendance was smaller than at the other stations and less time was spent on the quiz part and more on interviews with the ballplayers. The quiz format was a competition between two teams of about five players each, who would take turns answering—with no frantic handwaving allowed. I still have a clear image of Valo, kind of sprawled on a couch and the absolute picture of health. Curly blond hair, ruddy complexion, big smile, not yet thirty years old. The next time I saw him up close was twenty-seven years later as he autographed a ball. He seemed to have shrunk and the hair was still curly but all gray. I’ll just keep the old image going.

After the quiz shows we would make a full day of it by going to the ball game after having lunch somewhere. Sometimes it was at a Horn and Hardart Automat where your sandwich sat behind a little glass door and thirty-five cents or so would spring the door. Marvin grossed me out by putting ketchup and mustard on whatever he was having. To me that was like putting spaghetti sauce on ice cream, so I tried not to watch. That particular day Marvin was saying that the game would be washed out, which I didn’t agree with because there had just been a little rain and it was clearing up, although still gray. It must have been the day Dillinger was on the Campbell show because the Browns were in town. Marvin was for going home and saving the trolley fare but I really wanted to see the game, so Marvin agreed to go. When we got to Shibe there was a little blue and white flag just above the main gate that said, “No Game Today.” I thought it was a mistake because it wasn’t raining. Okay, the streets were a bit moist, but if it was raining at all it was no more than a barely detectable mist.

Maybe they were just airing out the flag or they forgot to take it in from sometime last week. However, soon it became clear that there would be no game. I asked Marvin how he knew in advance and he said that the A's second baseman, Pete Suder, had been injured Friday night and they didn't want to play without him. I knew they were still in the pennant race, running about second or so, but it seemed like pretty thin logic. Still, I had to admit that there wasn't going to be a game. Ironically, all they had to replace Suder with was future Hall of Famer Nelson Fox, but Fox was just a rookie. So, anyway, *no game*. I can still feel the dampness in the air and see the little flag.

A Day of Salvation

Roy Branson

My mother the missionary shouted out encouragement to Stan Musial, Enos Slaughter, Red Schoendienst, and the rest of the St. Louis Cardinals. One other fan did the same—loudly and incessantly. The rest of us were silent. After all, this was Ebbets Field on a weekday in 1951, and the Brooklyn Dodgers were losing.

For eight long innings the Dodgers had hardly heard a peep of support. True, every time an opposing player struck out, a small band behind the Dodgers' dugout played a dirge until the opposing player sat down—to a raucously jarring chord. And the Dodger announcer tried to remain upbeat. But there was absolutely nothing to cheer about. The Cardinals were walking, getting on base through errors, then hitting double after double, knocking in everybody that got on base. By the bottom of the eighth, Musial and Company were ahead 9–0!

My mother never let up. Inning after inning she took turns with the other Cardinals' fan, urging the Cardinals on, jeering my heroes in blue. My mother had been raised by her father, a missionary to Indonesia who had established two colleges. She married a preacher who had taken her and the rest of the family to Cairo, Egypt. After we had survived World War II, my father established a senior college in Beirut, Lebanon (where my mother taught algebra to students from all over the Middle East). The Christian colleges her father and husband established continue to educate the young in the way that they should go. But being surrounded by two generations of religious fervor on several continents had not dimmed my mother's fanaticism for baseball.

Within a month of my father's becoming the president of the Greater New York Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Mom got

me on a subway and out to Ebbets Field. (It was years before Dad went to a game, and he went only because we had out-of-town visitors who insisted.) Before Ebbets Field, before the Middle East and World War II, as a young pastor's wife in St. Louis, my mother had rooted for the Gashouse Gang—Leo Duroucher at shortstop, Frankie Frisch at second, with Dizzy Dean and his brother Paul on the mound. On hot, air-conditionless summer afternoons while she ironed shirts, Mother listened to the radio and cheered the Cardinals on their long march to the 1934 National League pennant.

By the time the Cardinals were playing Detroit in the World Series, my father, the pastor of the six-hundred-member downtown St. Louis Adventist church, was holding evangelistic meetings in the Arena downtown, which seated a thousand people. Preaching three nights a week, he had gotten through Adventist teaching on the Sabbath, the image of Daniel 2, and the "Mark of the Beast." But before he could lay out the "Signs of the End," the Cardinals were playing the Tigers in the last game of the World Series. As the service started, the Cardinals were ahead. Soon, car horns started honking and cars started backfiring; firecrackers went off at a faster and faster pace. People inside the hall began having a hard time hearing the speaker. Dad bowed to the inevitable and cut short his evangelist sermon, "The Time of the End." It turned out that Dizzy, on only one day's rest, had pitched a complete game shutout. In downtown St. Louis the honking, shouting, and cheering of the Cardinals' victory went on most of the night.

From St. Louis my parents returned to the mission service in which they had been raised. In Cairo and Beirut my brother and I grew up in the "true faith" with the help of *Time* magazine and the Armed Services Radio Network. I learned to read by comparing the words of *Time's* sports section with the descriptions of the World Series I heard on the radio: Mel Allen's chronicle of the heroic struggles of Don Newcombe and Preacher Roe against Allie Reynolds, Vic Raschi, and the rest of the Yankees' dynasty. Even though the Dodgers endured defeat after defeat at the hands of the rich and powerful, I never lost hope that Jackie Robinson and the forces of righteousness would ultimately prevail.

But that first afternoon of seeing baseball face-to-face, not just hearing it, tested my faith. And my mother was part of the problem. Far from comforting me, she was cheering the oppressors. For some reason, even into the bottom of the eighth inning she still wasn't hoarse. I was furious. She was rooting, after all, against not just any team but the Dodgers! She was booing Jackie Robinson, for heaven's sake! How could any self-respecting person do that? She was lining herself up against integration, against racial harmony, against goodness and light. I was twelve and brought up by two generations of missionaries to recognize a battle in the war between good and evil. And my own mother was on the side of the powers of darkness.

Then God struck. It was not thunder and lightning. No home runs, no triples. Just the gentle dew of singles, interrupted by the occasional flash of a double. But the forces of goodness were irresistible. In the bottom of the eighth Duke Snider, Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella, and Gil Hodges pushed across four runs. In the bottom of the ninth the Boys of Summer scored five runs to win the ball game.

The Cardinals' fan had slipped out. He was nowhere to be found. My mother was smiling as broadly at me as when she had been cheering the Cardinals. Perhaps faithful devotion to the Dodgers could coexist, after all, with loyalty to my parents.

My confidence in salvation history remained untroubled for years. I was fifteen before I got around to worrying about why the innocent suffered and died in the Holocaust. Of course, no fully satisfying answer has yet arrived, but one continues to believe, the way one believes in a God who inexplicably permitted Ebbets Field to be destroyed and the Dodgers to be taken to a far country, but also a God whose faithful agents I witnessed rise up and triumph gloriously on one afternoon in Brooklyn.

The Essence of the Game

Michael V. Miranda

He was building a coffin. Thirty-one years old, the third youngest of seven children born of immigrant parents, barely five-foot-five-inches tall and stocky, he was using the wooden slats from old vegetable crates to prepare a proper resting place for the symbolic remains of the New York Giants, stealing some time from his bosses at the small Brooklyn grocery store in which he worked as the delivery man.

It was October 3, 1951. In the last inning of the last game of the playoff series made necessary because the Giants ended the season tied with the Brooklyn Dodgers for first place in the National League, the Dodgers had managed to build a 4–1 lead. The team that won today would face the New York Yankees in the World Series. But that was tomorrow’s work. Today the Dodgers would beat the Giants and Dad would not be able to suppress his smile or his good-natured needling of Giants fans who were so unfortunate as to happen to walk past their heroes’ coffin as it sat on the Bay Ridge sidewalk in front of the store in the very neighborhood in which Duke Snider, Pee Wee Reese, Carl Erskine, and Preacher Roe lived.

But after the Giants scored their second run of the game in the bottom of the ninth, Russ Hodges, the Giants announcer on WMCA screamed, “There’s a long drive. . . . It’s gonna be . . . I believe. . . . The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant! The Giants win the pennant! . . . I don’t believe it! . . . The Giants win the pennant!” Bobby Thomson’s “shot heard ’round the world,” a three-run homer, gave the Giants the National League pennant and stopped Dad in his tracks as he carried his work of heart up the cellar steps. He turned and flung the coffin down the stairs behind him where it crashed and waited to be discarded

with the rest of the next day's trash. The Dodgers, "Dem Bums" as they were known by their long-suffering but faithful fans, had disappointed once again—and this time after having led the Giants in the standings by 13½ games just weeks before.

Hours later, after work, Dad walked around the corner to his basement apartment, his wife, and his son. The trip took him longer than usual, I am sure. His mood was heavy. One week past my third birthday, I was too young to understand any of this.

There are connections between fathers and sons. Despite differences in attitudes and values that may result in very different lives, there are always connections between fathers and sons. Sometimes these connections are embodied in something tangible such as a family business, built by the father or grandfather and maintained so that it can be passed down to the son. Sometimes it's a hundred-year-old family home or a common profession, the son benefiting from the father's having preceded him down the road to success. But Dad didn't own the grocery store in which he worked seventy-two hours each week, he never owned his own home, and any possibility of a profession was dashed by his family's need for him to go to work instead of advancing to the eleventh grade. For Dad and me the connection was baseball.

One of my most vivid childhood memories is of Dad returning home from work a little after 7:00 p.m., eating alone (the rest of the family had eaten hours earlier) and eating fast. He would always be conscious of the weather and the amount of daylight remaining because his plan was to take me to the schoolyard across the street from our home to teach me how to catch and to throw and to hit. But maybe Dad's motivation was more than just a desire to have me develop my baseball skills—maybe he *needed* to do this. Maybe he knew that it was to be his legacy; he could leave me with the ability to appreciate and play the summer game. To Dad, if you were a ballplayer, you were *somebody*.

A stocky child who had to buy his clothes in the husky department at the Robert Hall store on 86th Street, I was not an athlete in those days. Among my problems was that I just couldn't seem to learn how to throw the baseball with an overhand motion. Dad's words of encouragement and instruction would quickly deteriorate to those of

criticism and exasperation. His screams of “Overhand! Overhand!” were heard even in the most remote corners of Edward B. Shallow Junior High School’s yard. He embarrassed me—and maybe I persisted with my sidearm style of throwing just to punish him for that. But I’m sure that I remember a Topps baseball card of Luis Aparicio poised to throw sidearm, probably to complete a double play after having taken the underhand toss from Nellie Fox. And Luis was an All-Star shortstop—just what Dad wanted for (and from?) me.

On some nights we would go to the schoolyard to practice hitting. He’d pitch, I’d hit the ball as far as I could, he’d chase it, bring it back, and pitch it again. Dad was in his forties by then, but each night we’d stop playing when it got too dark to see the baseball or when my arm became too sore to throw anymore, whichever came first. We *never* stopped because Dad was tired.

He pressured me to play when I didn’t enjoy it, when I didn’t want to. There were many times during the summers of my ninth and tenth years that I wished for rain on Little League game nights. But I could never share these feelings with Dad. I don’t know whether I feared his anger or his disappointment more, but I could never tell him that I didn’t really want to play, that I felt I would never meet his standards.

But in four of the seven years that I played on organized teams as a youngster, my teams won championships. And, thanks to Dad’s efforts, my skills improved. In my last year I was the league’s all-star shortstop and I led my team in home runs and stolen bases despite missing nearly one-fourth of the season with a dislocated elbow suffered in a collision during a close play at first base. Dad was never again as proud of me as he was during the summer just before my sixteenth birthday. I was a ballplayer.

Sundays of the following summer were spent watching Dad’s softball team play. He was the catcher, the position usually reserved for the team’s slowest player, but Dad wasn’t self-conscious about this because he was also the team’s oldest player. When some of his teammates did not show up for games, I would be asked to fill in for them. This pleased each of us a great deal, but in no way was this a tribute to my playing ability—Dad was the only player old enough to have a son old enough to play.

It was a thrill to play alongside him and to experience his love for the game as he played it—always talking to his teammates and at his opponents, sliding hard to break up double plays, showing disgust with himself when he failed to come through in clutch situations. Doc, though, impressed me more. A real doctor, the only one I had ever seen outside of a medical office, was the shortstop.

That September I started college. Academic requirements, the need to have a job to pay school expenses, and the fact that City College's baseball team practiced a long subway ride from the downtown location of my classes prevented baseball from fitting into my life. Dad never really accepted my choosing academics over baseball, but he never said so. By the time I completed my formal education, I had two graduate degrees to go along with my college diploma.

Now, as a psychologist, I am accustomed to having my sleep disturbed by telephone calls from patients in need. But one night at 3:00 a.m. my sleep was disturbed from within by my thoughts of baseball and Dad. It was the night after he began his last hospital stay, just a month past his sixty-ninth birthday.

We want our heroes to last forever. When professional ballplayers age, it's sad—but we have the opportunity to cheer them at old-timers' games and on other special occasions at which their enthusiasm and dedication to the game are recognized. It's sad—but we can recall their accomplishments and, while talking with other fans, we can even reminisce about specific game performances.

When Dad aged, it was just sad. Nothing else.

Family problems and circumstances had caused us to have less and less contact over the years, but saying good-bye to him was much more difficult than I had expected it to be. I suppose I never realized how much he had given me and, through me, what he continues to give to my own son.

The Brooklyn Dodgers played the New York Yankees in the World Series seven times between 1941 and 1956, winning only one championship. The rivalry between these two teams from the same city was intense. Every Dodger fan was a "Yankee hater." Dad could truly be described in this way, but he called me "Mick," an obvious reference to Yankee superstar Mickey Mantle. Only Dad ever called me Mick—and he only called me Mick while we were on the ball field.

And I signed the baseball that I placed in his coffin, “To Dad, With thanks and love, Mick.”

The meeting on the pitcher’s mound included the manager, a coach, the pitcher and catcher, and each of the four infielders. It was the last inning of a playoff game with the bases loaded, nobody out, and the team on the field holding a 6–4 lead. The batter waiting to hit was my ten-year-old son, Michael. It was June 8, 1991. As the manager of his team, I called Michael over to explain that our opponents were planning a strategy to try to keep us from scoring and that the meeting had nothing to do with him personally. He needed these words of comfort.

Michael grew up with video games, karate classes, his own color TV set, cable television, ice skating lessons, swimming lessons, and the beach and the Atlantic Ocean a half-block from his home. I grew up with a black-and-white set in the living room of my parents’ apartment a half-block from the elevated West End line in Brooklyn. Baseball has never meant as much to Michael as it did to me as a child. When I wasn’t in school, I was playing baseball, softball, stickball, stoopball, or catch-a-fly-you’re-up with a handful of friends from the block. When there was no one around, I’d practice my skills by throwing a rubber ball against the wooden fence in the yard that Dad had built specifically for that purpose.

Michael’s attachment to baseball was much looser than mine. His commitment to developing his skills and his enjoyment of the game were much less intense. Although he got upset when he struck out, he was not interested in working to give the game his best effort. He had one hit—an infield single—all season. And when he went up to the plate with the infield drawn in to get the force out at home in that playoff game, my last words to him were, “You can do it, Mikey. You can hit the ball over those guys.”

First, there was a called strike. Then, on the second pitch, there was a loud “ping.” (Aluminum bats just do not make the satisfying “crack” that the wooden bats of my youth made.) A line drive—over everybody and into left-center field—drove in three runs and gave us a 7–6 lead. Michael ended up standing on second base, absorbing the cheers and all of the excitement, his face gleaming, his head swiveling

around to take it all in. For me, the entire scene occurred in slow motion and I saw everything—the flight of the ball, the base runners speeding toward home plate, the first base coach waving Michael on to take the extra base—and my shining son.

Thanks again, Dad—from both of us.

A Kid's Catch-22 of the '54 Series *Woodrow W. Whidden*

As I write it is the fall of 2000 and the postseason playoffs are in full swing. The night before last, Fox Sports ran a great series of clips profiling the most memorable defensive gems in the history of postseason televised baseball. Probably the most memorable one of all clipped across my golden memories going back forty-six years. When one thinks of great defensive gems, certainly the legendary Willie Mays and the Polo Grounds rise up with visions of wondrous magic and never-to-be-forgotten drama.

The day was September 29, and the first game of the 1954 World Series was the event. The matchup featured the pitching-rich Cleveland Indians, the winningest team in the modern era (111 wins in a 154-game season), and the New York Giants, led by their exciting young center fielder Willie Mays. Because of their pitching and star-studded lineup, the Indians had been installed as prohibitive favorites. With a rotation of Bob Lemon, Early Wynn (eventual Hall of Famers), and Mike Garcia, the Indians featured one of the best starting staffs ever. The starters were complemented by two outstanding relievers in Don Mossi and Ray Narleski. The Giants featured 21-game-winner Johnny Antonelli, grizzled veteran Sal Maglie, Don Liddle, and Reuben Gomez, backed up by the great knuckleballing reliever Hoyt Wilhelm. The stage was set for a truly great matchup.

I was a tender ten-year-old in the fourth grade at the time. I had become a baseball fan the previous year while listening to the 1953 Fall Classic between the Yanks and the Dodgers. I shall never forget that fall day in my front yard as the radio blared out from our living room that Mickey Mantle had hit a booming grand slam for the Yankees. I was forever hooked, not only as a baseball devotee in general but as a Yankees fan in particular. I had been deeply disappointed by the

Indians' domination of the Yanks that '54 season, but my newly found passion for the game (minus my beloved Yanks) took over on that fateful afternoon of 1954.

That school year my parents had decided that my brothers and I needed to be placed in parochial school. This had been inspired by the return to Titusville, Florida, of a young hometown woman named Kathryn Matthews Subriar. Kathryn strongly believed that her two kids should be in religious school. There was no such school in Titusville, but she had located one in Cocoa, twenty miles south on old U.S. Highway 1. Having married early, she had never finished high school and decided that she would enroll at Cocoa High School to complete her secondary education. My parents, along with a number of others in the Titusville area, worked out a deal with Kathryn to haul a carload of kids to the Cocoa parochial school each day. The little pea-green, four-door Chevy was loaded to the gills with eight kids. I still vividly recall the sardine effect in the back, filled with four on the seat and two sitting on little canvas folding stools. I really don't know how Kathryn stood it day after day. It was a rolling replica of Old Mother Hubbard's shoe. I know that we tested her patience on many a day, but the greatest test was on September 29, 1954.

There were a number of kids at the school who were also baseball freaks. But the baseball passions were not limited to the kids. One of the two young rookie teachers who staffed the small two-room school had grown up in Chicago and was a diehard Cubs fan. Frieda Baethke was a short, cute brunette, full of life and the personification of the heritage of baseball fanaticism born of Wrigley Field. I poignantly recall her fond descriptions of the "Friendly Confines" and her negative reactions to the steepness and coldness that "cursed" the nearby enemy territory of County Stadium in Milwaukee.

So we were a baseball-mad mob and the World Series had fueled our passions. The only problem was that in those days the Series games were afternoon affairs and we had school to deal with. It being a small private school, we could not have snuck away even had we wanted to (though I am sure that Frieda Baethke secretly wanted to cancel school). But the good news was that when school let out we sensed that if we could find a TV, there might be some game time left to take in. The only problem with all of these plans was that

Kathryn was supposed to come pick us up by 3:45 p.m. Fatefully, however, I don't think that we ever gave Kathryn a second thought that afternoon.

As soon as school got out, we all headed for the home of classmate Roger Greek, about four blocks away from school. Commercial tv had just come to central Florida and tvs were not that plentiful. To have a tv just four blocks away was simply an irresistible temptation to a pack of baseball-crazed munchkins. Away we went and in a few moments Roger Greek's living room was a madhouse overrun with our baseball-hungry mob.

I don't recall much else about the game except the eighth inning. We had just made it to Roger's house to learn that the score had been tied 2-2 since the third inning. In that fateful eighth, the Indians had put two men on and left-handed hitting first baseman Vic Wertz was at the plate facing southpaw reliever Don Liddle. Wertz lashed into a pitch and sent it some 460 feet to straightaway center field. It was this shining moment that will never be erased from the hallowed halls of my baseball memory: the flashy Mays took off running with his back to the plate and made the memorable over-the-shoulder catch, quickly turned and fired the ball back to the infield, the whole thing over in seconds. This one play became the key turning point of the Series. The Indians seemingly never recovered. I was a hopelessly confirmed hardball addict.

With the game completed, all of a sudden we realized that it was 4:30 and way past the appointed time to meet Kathryn. I don't recollect much about the four-block dash we made back to school, but I can still recall the tongue-lashing we received from the usually long-suffering Kathryn. The poor thing, she did not have much of a sense of baseball history or the season of the year; but she did have a mother bear's sense of concern for her charges. She was beside herself with anxiety, fearing that we all had been kidnapped or that something more sinister had happened. It was bad enough that our shining moment in baseball history had to be met with her rebukes; the misery was compounded, however, by her continued scolding for the full forty-five minutes back to Titusville. But I was not about to let her wrath ruin the moment.

On that day it was my turn to sit in the back seat right behind Kathryn. I do not recall much of what she said, but I can still recall the musings that passed through my little baseball-drunk brain: “Kathryn, you can fuss all you want to, but I was privileged to be part of baseball history!! I will not allow your thunderous disapproval of our truancy to ruin this sweet, shining diamond moment.” One certainly had to be a complete imbecile to not sense that something transcendent had transpired on that day, and I had been a part of it. Sorry, Kathryn, I know what you had in mind. But you had been overshadowed by a budding legend doing his thing on America’s premier sports stage—Willie Mays had seized the ball in a magical moment and every history of baseball (including continuous replay of the clip at Cooperstown) has recalled the never-to-be-forgotten scintillation experienced by a little boy in faraway central Florida. I was grateful to be a part of it! Thanks, Willie Mays, thanks, Vic Wertz, thanks, Roger Greek, for your tv. And, last but not least, thanks to you, Kathryn, wherever you are. May you eternally rest in peace from the woes inflicted on you by those little Cracker baseball fanatics who had been hijacked by baseball history.

Dad and a Cast of (Almost) Thousands

Jan Finkel

People who play bridge exceptionally well are experts. People who thrive on *Swan Lake* and *Giselle* are ballet aficionados. There are film, jazz, railroad, and Civil War buffs. And we're baseball nuts. Very well, then, I'm a nut. Not only that, I'm good at it and proud of it.

My dad, who owned movie theaters around Pittsburgh for over sixty years, was eminently qualified to initiate me into the fraternity of baseball nuts. He had seen the first game at Forbes Field and the Wagner-Cobb brawl in 1909, Walter Johnson's last stand in the 1925 World Series, the Ruth-Gehrig war machine in 1927, and every National League player of consequence (most American Leaguers, too) up to the early 1980s.

We began playing catch when I was six or seven. Actually, I caught the ball when Dad was skillful or lucky enough to hit my glove, but the next year was my breakout season. I caught the first ball Dad threw to me, then a half-dozen more, and then, for no reason, I could do it. Ball, glove, and hand fit perfectly. The bat felt good, too, as I hit murderous (to my eyes) line drives.

Thanks to Ralph Kiner, the 1950 All-Star Game played in Comiskey Park was seminal to my development as a nut. The American League led 3–2 in the top of the ninth. With two out, Kiner, my hero, homered to tie the game. Red Schoendienst of the Cardinals homered in the fourteenth, and the National League won 4–3.

Kiner's home run hooked me for keeps because I'd seen him do something great. Dad had taken me to Forbes Field for my first game a year or two before and was pleased with the first-base box seats he had secured, but I was disappointed because I couldn't see the color of Kiner's eyes. After all, he was the first player I'd followed, and in

Pittsburgh back then we saw the Pirates as “Ralph Kiner and eight other people.”

Something else struck me that day. Forbes Field, looking out on the Cathedral of Learning and Schenley Park, was the grandest, most beautiful ballpark possible. To me, people who rhapsodize over Wrigley and Fenway either never saw Forbes Field or are just irrational, more to be pitied than scorned.

Other things happened, as if planned to fan the flames of my interest in baseball. Dad made his spring trip to Bradenton to see his father, who spent his winters there. The Boston Braves trained in Bradenton, so Dad caught a few games. One day I got home from school to find a postcard, but I have no idea what the picture was because I never saw it. What I did see was one sentence: “Warren Spahn pitched.” Spahn always beat the Pirates, but he beat everybody else, too. My dad, whom I had always considered a great man, was now a god. He had seen Warren Spahn pitch! He had seen royalty! What more could he do?

Among other powers, Dad was a genius at getting autographs for me. I have signed balls from the 1952 Boston Braves and Pirates, abysmal but intriguing teams, from the 1954 champion Giants, and from the 1960 Pirates and Yankees, who played that strange, wonderful Series. My prizes are two balls signed by Lefty Grove: one a game ball, the other signed also by Connie Mack.

One summer day when I was about eleven, Dad took me to his office on Pittsburgh’s South Side. When we were ready to head home, Dad noticed an elderly bowlegged gentleman half trundling, half waddling down the sidewalk. “That’s Honus Wagner! Let’s see where he goes.” Honus was one of the few people in Pittsburgh I thought might be bigger than my dad. I was ready to follow—if my heart would start beating and my feet would move. Off we went. Not far, it turned out, for Honus quickly stepped into one of his favorite watering holes.

Age, injuries, and rheumatism had taken their toll on Honus, but Dad said he was in good form. He slammed a ball down on the marble counter to announce his presence. All heads turned toward him as the bartender fairly swooned at the honor of handing him a tall cold one—“On me, sir, wouldn’t have it any other way.” (How

did that bartender know that everyone else in the place would order doubles?) Honus talked for what seemed like both an instant and an eternity, story upon story upon story. My favorite is the tale of the day he scooped a ground ball off an unmanicured infield with his steam shovel hands only to discover that along with the ball he had some grass, a few pebbles, a bit of dirt—and a rabbit. He fired the whole mess (with the rabbit) to first to nail a fast runner—by a hare. Having finished his gig, Honus calmly palmed the ball and left, off to the next oasis.

Baseball has given me much. It helped me develop a pretty good memory and a love of reading. Mom worried about my obsession and was probably right to be concerned, but Dad said it was helping me develop my mind. It gave me whatever mathematical sense and aptitude I have; I'm still not sure why triangles are congruent, but I can figure an ERA in my head because I learned what was important. It gave me common ground with my dad in youth and adulthood. When Dad got older, I gave him David Halberstam's *Summer of '49*, the Crabbe-Evers mysteries, and other gems, which he enjoyed because he could see the players in his mind's eye.

Like all zealots, I sometimes learned my lessons too well, excluding everything else, like wars. In the summer of 1950, when I was getting hooked on baseball, I spotted a newspaper headline that read, "Yanks and Reds Clash." What was this? Everybody knew the Yankees and Reds were in two different leagues and couldn't possibly meet until the World Series.

Most important, though, baseball made me color-blind. I give Dad much of the credit for that. He simplified the game considerably: a ballplayer did what he had to do or he didn't, and that was how you judged him. So, even though I was diving into baseball in what was only Jackie Robinson's fourth season, I never saw him as black. He was the second baseman for the Dodgers, Don Newcombe was their ace, Roy Campanella was the best catcher in the league, and they always killed the Pirates. Similarly, Larry Doby played center field for the Indians, Luke Easter and Al Rosen anchored first and third, Bobby Avila looked good at second, and Cleveland was tough. That was it—no controversy, no trauma, no anything. Roger Kahn says in *The Boys of Summer* that baseball and the Dodgers in the late 1940s and

early 1950s were all about race. Bill James makes a similar comment about the 1960s in *Whatever Happened to the Hall of Fame?* Their discussions, perceptive as I find them today, just don't apply to me back then. I obviously missed something, and I'm grateful.

Jackie was one of my three favorite players along with Kiner and Stan Musial, and I followed their every game. Stan the Man remains the greatest player I ever saw, Jackie the most courageous. The miracle Giants in 1951 had Monte Irvin, leading the league in RBI, and a rookie named Willie Mays, who was supposed to be special. Willie was special, but I liked Hank Aaron better. Ernie Banks and Frank Robinson became fast favorites. Roberto Clemente—what else can I say? Bob Gibson, Sandy Koufax, and Juan Marichal would be my choice to pitch any short series I had to win.

Even now I seldom face the morning without finding out how a veritable United Nations of players did last night. The year runs in two roughly equal parts—baseball (spring training to the end of the World Series) and the void (the rest of the year). I look at life as I learned to from baseball: people do what they're supposed to or they don't. That vision has kept me sane.

Thanks, baseball. Thank you, Dad.

How the Baseball Bug Bit

Dave Anderson

Anyone who grew up in the 1950s or 1960s saw the first grainy television pictures of baseball games or listened to the many radio announcers who added to the enjoyment of summer afternoons and evenings. Growing up in the Chicago area, the announcers I remember included Jack Brickhouse, Bob Elson, Milo Hamilton, Jack Quinlan, Vince Lloyd, and Lou Boudreau. All became household names. Sometimes, when in Michigan, I would listen to Tiger games and Ernie Harwell. Harry Caray came to Chicago long after my childhood was over. But all of these craftsmen shared a love of the game and an individual style.

The baseball bug bit because most of the men in my family were baseball fans. You could say I had no choice, but there was a natural attraction to the game and its nuances, from attending my first Major League game to trading baseball cards to loving to use my Al Kaline model glove and Jackie Robinson Louisville Slugger. Playing and following baseball in the summer was a natural activity, like sledding in the winter.

My earliest baseball memories involve witnessing my relatives watching the Cubs and Sox on WGN channel 9. In the days before cable, we could get WGN with an antenna and rotor. My early favorite player was Minnie Minoso. My mother tells me that I embarrassed the hell out of her one time on the bus. A black man got on the bus and I pointed and said, "There's Minnie Toto." There is an example of innocence for you if there ever was one.

Ballplayers were demigods to me. I loved Minoso and Jackie Robinson because of the way they played. Aparicio and Fox joined that group as I grew older. My all-time favorite team is the 1959 Sox.

What a thrill for a kid of eleven to have his team in the World Series; what a disappointment when that team did not win it all.

I saw my first ball game at Comiskey Park in 1958 against the Tigers. Kaline, Kuenn, et al., easily beat up on the Sox, but to me Comiskey was a shrine. Babe Ruth played there, as did Eddie Collins, and Shoeless Joe, and the Black Sox. I remember my dad always hoping Early Wynn wasn't starting at games we attended during that 1959 race. We went to three or four games, and Wynn started all but one. Old Gus played with hitters. First pitch strike, second pitch just off the corner, third pitch maybe inside, then another strike. Wynn always seemed to be pitching a 2–2 count and he would throw high and tight on that count. Of course that meant long games. But to a kid, the longer you were in the ballpark the better.

After my stint in the army, I returned to Comiskey in 1972 and saw Dick Allen play. He was to be the Messiah, delivering the Sox to the Promised Land. I had the chance to meet Charlie Finley just before he died, when he spoke to our Rotary Club. I got to introduce him and told him his 1972 A's broke my heart, noting that Allen always warmed up the infield with one of those blasted orange baseballs. Allen and Finley were probably kindred spirits.

My last game at the old Comiskey was 1983. My dad and I got to see the winning ugly Sox clinch the division title against Seattle. That was the last game I went to with my father. He died in 1987. But I got to treat him to the last ball game he saw in person and that was special. It has been said before, but that bond is why baseball matters.

As a kid I did not read much about the game except what was in the popular media. We were too busy playing. When it rained we listened to ball games or played *All-Star Baseball*, which I believe Cadaco-Ellis manufactured. The game's spinners and focus on old-time players helped nurture our appreciation of the game. Eventually we moved on to the dice board game of APBA. At that time the only way you could order the game was to mail a check and wait for parcel post. When I ordered my game using paper route money, the wait for the game was a long one. When it arrived it was like Christmas in midsummer. The first season I "owned" was 1961 and we replayed the World Series constantly, along with the inevitable Cub and White

Sox games for bragging rights and ordinary games just to see who was the better manager.

For me, baseball and its peripherals were a big part of growing up. When I talk about this subject to present-day high school coaches, they all say baseball is not as important to kids as it once was. Sandlot pickup games are a thing of the past in a suburban age. Baseball now is supervised by adults and organized to the point that much of the fun is squeezed from the game. Baseball is also squeezed by other activities. The emergence of football, basketball, and soccer has siphoned off interest in baseball among the athletically inclined. I am fortunate to have those baseball memories of youth. Those who did not have the opportunity to develop such memories do not know what they have missed.

The Catch

Gary Huffaker

They were the “world” and we were the “remnant.” They smoked, drank, and played cards. We were vegetarian, observed Sabbath on Saturday, and played Five in a Row. Our worlds did not intersect except where necessary. We had to shop with them, wait in the dentist’s office with them, and jostle with them at the Field Museum. Otherwise we spent our time with other members of our little group.

I grew up in the lower middle-class section of the south side of Chicago in a God-fearing Seventh-day Adventist family. Our world was surprisingly insular for being in the middle of a large bustling city, the Toddlin’ Town as others called it. We preferred the Windy City.

There was baseball, however. I was introduced to the game by my now lifelong friend, Larry Herr. He carefully instructed me in the art of throwing (“snap your elbow and wrist”), batting, and fielding. He also introduced me to the Major Leagues and the Chicago White Sox. Beginning early in the spring, we would bring our baseball gloves (my first one had an oversized little finger) and Louisville Sluggers out of the closet and, while dodging residual snow, begin our spring training. If we had enough players, we would choose up teams and have a real game. If we only had five or six, we would play Work-Up with two or three batters, a pitcher, one or two infielders, and an equal number of outfielders. The foul line was the line between home plate and second base extended into center field, and the batter was retired by throwing the ball to the pitcher before he reached first. The retired batter would move to the outfield and the pitcher took his place as the new batter, each player working his way up the hierarchy.

We all longed for the uniforms and large teams in Little League, but since they played on Friday night and Saturday, we were unable

to join them. There was also the question of competition, a subject of some considerable ambivalence. Competition was good in that it brought down gas prices, but it also caused tempers to flare at times and thus was potentially dangerous. How could a Christian in good conscience argue an umpire's call? Were we not to "submit to authority"? So Little League was out for most of us.

I was a skinny kid with no power at the plate—but I could run. So I was on base frequently, mostly from scratch hits. Our most frequently used baseball field was at the back of our church school, which was adjacent to a housing development. A wire fence separated our field from the adjoining house and anyone who hit one over the fence had an "out of the park" home run. On one lucky day, I recall swinging the bat with my usual vigor but experiencing something unusual. On that day the ball seemed "juiced" and the sweet feeling of a solid connection was followed by the satisfying arc of the ball up, up, and all the way out, over the fence! Maybe I was a power hitter after all! Alas, it never happened again.

Though I begged my father to take me to a White Sox game, he resisted until the summer of 1959. The White Sox were in the pennant race and it looked as if they might beat the hated Yankees and win the American League pennant. So on August 2, 1959, Dad and I went to my first big league game. Comiskey Park was old and decrepit by today's standards. Large supporting pillars obstructed the view of the field from some seats and the only parking was on the street. ("Watch your car for the game, sir. Only twenty-five cents!") But my first view of the field was an epiphany, a defining moment, likened only to my first view of a beautiful woman's unclad body. The smooth dirt of the infield was perfectly flat and the grass in the outfield smoothly mowed. It was more beautiful than I had imagined in my wildest fantasies. The uniforms of the players were white with pinstripes and each player had a contrasting black Sox baseball cap. Even the opposing Washington Senators were handsome in their traveling gray.

Dad loved baseball and confessed to me once that he would've loved to have been a Major League player but for the Sabbath. His delay in taking me to a game expressed his own ambivalence about the sport. He knew that it was worldly, but it wasn't easy to hate like football ("schools of brutality"). It was worldly, but it was different.

And somehow it came the closest to bridging the gap between the two worlds I was experiencing—them and us.

Since we weren't able to play baseball year-round, I began to read everything I could obtain from the public library on the subject during the long winter months. I recall my father issuing a halfhearted edict against my reading so many baseball books. It didn't last long but made his own feelings about baseball plain. It was worldly and so attractive that it must be resisted as a personal weakness.

As we grew older, Larry's and my parents allowed us to take a CTA bus from our homes around 95th Street to the ballpark at 35th and Shields. I am still surprised that they allowed us to make this trip on our own. The crowds at Comiskey were often loud and unruly, especially in the sections we could afford. Large amounts of Budweiser, the "King of Beers," were regularly consumed by patrons surrounding us, accompanied by the thick smoke of cigarettes. On one occasion a gentleman several rows behind us threw a cup of beer on a nearby fan, no doubt the finale of some personal altercation. I never liked the smell of beer but actually began to enjoy the distant scent of cigarettes.

By the time Larry and I left Chicago for the local Adventist boarding academy (high school), which was safely located about sixty miles from the city, we were avid baseball players. Though we used a softball, we called the game baseball and generally followed the same rules. One year a student attended the academy who was accustomed to pitching fast-pitch softball. Larry's skills were up to batting against him, but I found excuses to avoid the humiliation of regularly striking out and thereby failed to develop my batting reflexes. This ensured my inability to compete when I arrived at Andrews University, where fast-pitch was the norm, at least in the top-rated league.

I shall never forget, however, one autumn day when we were playing a quick and unofficial game, trying to get as far as we could before the sunset would stop the competition. I was still at the academy, so it must've been 1964, the year Lyndon Johnson trounced Barry Goldwater. Warren Jarrard was batting for the other team and I was playing left field. Warren was tall and strong and when he connected the ball always carried to the cow pasture behind the field. I was playing him too shallow and he unleashed a mighty arc over my head—well over

my head, I might say. There was no confusion—I needed to run back, and fast. Guessing where the ball might be headed, I turned and ran as swiftly as my sixteen-year-old legs would carry me. One glance over my shoulder convinced me of the worst—the ball was still well out of my range. After running as fast as I could, I made a rough and desperate gamble that the ball would be headed for the ground if I didn't do something. So, with my back to the infield à la Willie Mays, I leaped into the air with my glove in approximately the appropriate backward configuration. (This, I must tell you, was done in exquisite slow motion!) At the apex of my jump, the ball nestled nicely in the pocket of my new Wilson glove (it said “Love, Sharon” on it) and I tumbled to the ground. Miraculously, the ball stayed in my glove. I stood and made the appropriate long throw to the infield, hoping for a double play. For a relatively untalented player, that moment was baseball.

It is fortunate that Mr. Applegate (the “Mephistopheles” character in *Damn Yankees*) never offered me the chance to be a big league player in exchange for my soul. I would probably be a soulless retired big leaguer today had he ever approached me. Nevertheless, I still have “The Catch” and memories of these “Go Go Boys” in the summer of 1959.

Rounding the Bases

Larry Brunt

My grandfather didn't have time for baseball. He inspected parts in an airplane factory for seventy or eighty hours a week and thought sports were a waste of time. To relax, he drove into the Mojave Desert outside of Los Angeles, pulled off the road at some desolate place or another, and hiked off in search of rocks that he could take home, polish, and place in small plastic boxes. He hunted like a tiger, in great bursts of energy, rapidly and efficiently, climbing over boulders, navigating his way around sagebrush, crossing dry gullies, his shoes thick with dust, sweat trickling from his temples. He didn't have the patience to wait for his little boy, so my father sat in the car, often for hours at a time, the windows rolled down for air, waiting, hating the rocks that hid in the desert. So maybe a hint of rebellion led my father to follow baseball.

John was eight years old.

It was 1952 and in my father's mind, there were only two important Major League baseball teams: the New York Yankees and the Brooklyn Dodgers. The Yankees were moving toward the end of their run of five straight World Series titles, so to my father, they always won and the Dodgers always seemed to lose. The Yankees were managed by Casey Stengel, who happened to be from Glendale, California, where my dad was growing up. So the choice for a favorite team was obvious. He rooted for the Yankees. He talked to his classmates about the Yankees. He read Yankee box scores in the newspaper. And sometimes, waiting in the car on a dusty shoulder of a lonely stretch of highway in the Mojave Desert, he turned on the radio and listened to Yankee games. Bob Kelley, a local L.A. announcer, re-created the games, reading the facts of the game off a teletype machine and then inventing details to go around them. But the descriptions—products

of the imagination of a local radioman trapped in a small studio—could lift my father out of the suffocating car and place him in the stands of Yankee Stadium or Fenway Park.

That same year he attended his first baseball game at the invitation of a classmate. It wasn't the Major Leagues, or even the minors. A semi-pro club played at Verdugo Park in Glendale, a complex of facilities that included a civic auditorium where his father dragged him to rock collecting shows and an Olympic-sized pool where my dad learned to swim. At the end of the park, past the picnic areas and tucked up against the hills, sat Casey Stengel Field, home of the Glendale Dons. The diamond seemed a magical place, with perfectly manicured lawns, impossibly green, the smell of fresh grass, the wooden outfield fences covered with ivy, all under a cloudless California sky.

Going to games there became a habit. Initially John attended the games with his friends and their parents, but later he and his friends went alone on their bicycles. The Glendale Dons had a shoestring budget and needed the baseballs that would sometimes get fouled off and lost behind the bleachers in a concrete flood control channel or in a forest beyond that. So the boys would jump down into the channel or search through the trees on the hillside. The club paid them a dollar for each ball they found. The kids didn't find many, but once in a while they would see a bit of white up in a tree or in a ditch.

Between the world champion Yankees and the semi-pro Glendale Dons was the Pacific Coast League, considered at the time as the third major league by many on the West Coast. Two teams played in Los Angeles: the Los Angeles Angels and the Hollywood Stars. My dad didn't follow the PCL until 1953, when his father came home with a huge cardboard box that nearly filled their tiny one-bedroom apartment. Inside was a massive wooden cabinet that contained a radio and—to my father's amazement—a 10-inch TV. Baseball had come to his house. A local station carried many of the Angels' and Stars' home games, so in the summer, when his parents were at work, my dad would sit on the floor in front of the television and watch the tiny figures round the bases.

He watched countless PCL games but attended only one. In 1956 he went to see the Stars play their hated crosstown rivals. Bulky Steve

Bilko played that day—a massive power hitter still remembered by the generations of fans who lived along the West Coast in the 1950s. That year Bilko would win the PCL triple crown, hitting for a .360 average, smashing 55 home runs, and knocking in 164 runs. He was 6'1" and listed at 240 pounds, but was probably at least 270. To my father, he was larger than that.

My dad would also go to PCL spring training games. The Portland Beavers practiced just down the street at Stengel Field. He once went up to the railing and had Joe “Smacko” Macko, their best home run hitter, sign a ball with a black felt pen. My dad kept that baseball for years.

A couple of years after attending his first game, my dad started collecting baseball cards. He rode his bike down to the local grocery store, Evelhoch’s Market. The packs cost a nickel apiece and came with five cards and a flat stick of pink bubble gum. My dad bought them by the carton—twenty-four packs at a time. Mr. Evelhoch couldn’t keep enough cartons on the shelves for my dad, so he’d write up a note and send Dad to the wholesale warehouse a few blocks away. The note explained that he was buying the cards for the shop, but Mr. Evelhoch didn’t even make him return to the store. He would go straight home with his purchase, having paid wholesale prices—a dollar a carton, saving twenty cents. He figured he was the luckiest kid in L.A.

He sorted the cards into stacks on the kitchen table according to team. He pored over the statistics on the backs, learning to multiply and divide in his head. He traded cards with a classmate named Tom LePique, the son of the most famous parent in school—his father was an organist for live television soap operas. They invented simulation games based on players’ statistics, dealt out cards to create teams, played, and then shuffled the cards again. At the end of each day, he wrapped a rubber band around the team sets and stashed them in shoeboxes he kept under his bed.

In 1957 my dad’s baseball world shifted. Walter O’Malley, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, announced that he would be moving the team to Los Angeles the following season. So my father changed his loyalties. He’s been a Dodger fan ever since. A local Los Angeles radio station covered the Brooklyn Dodger games that year to prepare

the fans for the move. And so in 1957 my father was introduced to the Dodgers by the eloquent, graceful narratives of Vin Scully. He remains the voice of the Dodgers, and to my father, the voice of baseball. Scully's literate delivery and observant, nonpartisan descriptions became my father's standard for broadcasters. He developed a lifelong interest in announcers—who announced for which teams, what their styles were, who made the best calls. But no one could compare with Scully, the master of painting pictures with the perfect word. My dad would grow up to be a preacher, a theologian at a university, and an author—one who paid attention to the power of words. He has been listening to Scully for over four decades now—he still calls Ross Porter, a Dodger announcer for more than twenty years, “the new guy.”

When the Dodgers started playing at the L.A. Coliseum in April 1958, my dad went to one of the first games. The father of one of his friends had invited him to see the Dodgers play the Cubs. Hall of Famers Gil Hodges and Ernie Banks played, but Dodger great Duke Snider missed the game, having thrown out his arm while trying to win a bet by throwing a ball clear out of the immense Coliseum (he managed to reach the 76th row of 80 and lost the bet to Don Zimmer, both of whom were fined for the incident).

In 1959 my father was one of 93,103 people to see an exhibition game between the Yankees and the Dodgers—the largest crowd ever to see a baseball game. They played to raise money for Roy Campanella, the Dodger catcher who had been paralyzed in a car accident the year before. My dad was in awe at seeing all the magical Yankee stars in person. Mickey Mantle didn't play due to an injury, but he wowed my dad by hitting several monster shots in batting practice.

The Dodgers reached the World Series that year against the Chicago White Sox. My dad's physics teacher was going to game five and offered John a ride to the game if he wanted to skip school. Eagerly ditching his classes, he bought a \$7 ticket for \$6 outside the stadium. He sat in the bleachers behind left field and watched Sandy Koufax lose a 1–0 game, though the Dodgers would win the series two days later in Chicago's Comiskey Park.

Between the preseason exhibition game and the World Series game, my dad attended another game at the Coliseum. It was one

of the most memorable games of his childhood, but not because of anything that occurred on the field. As a present for his sixteenth birthday, his mother and father took him to see the Dodgers play. It was the only Major League game he ever saw with his parents.

My father wasn't an athlete himself. He played softball with his classmates at recess and participated in P.E. at school with a mixture of joy and dread. He was already heavier than most of the other kids, and he felt clumsy, uncomfortable with his body. He played right field, where few balls were hit. He wasn't the most coordinated and couldn't hit very far, but he loved the game.

And he loved going to games. The Dodgers moved into the brand-new Dodger Stadium in Chavez Ravine in 1962. That summer my dad sold books door-to-door in the San Gabriel Valley, and he regularly listened to Scully's call on the radio. He could enter the stadium free after the middle of the seventh inning, so if the game was interesting, he would hop in the car and drive down to the stadium. He saw the end of lots of contests that way, finding a seat up in the fifth tier of the stadium with an excellent view of the field below. In 1964 he took a young lady to a game in Dodger Stadium—four months later he married her.

From 1968 to 1971 as a young pastor in San Diego, right out of seminary, he would watch the last innings of Padres games in the same way he had in Los Angeles. Sometimes he'd drive up to Los Angeles to watch the Dodgers. He went on June 5, 1968. That day Don Drysdale broke the record for most consecutive shutout innings pitched. Driving home, my dad suggested to my mom that they drop by the Ambassador Hotel, where Robert Kennedy was scheduled to give a speech to supporters after winning the California presidential primary. My mother—eight months pregnant and with a two-year-old in tow—wanted to go straight home. They listened to the speech on the radio and heard the gunshot ring out and the chaos that followed.

The two-year-old in tow was my sister, but it wasn't her first game. She attended her first game at Wrigley Field when she was just two weeks old. Maybe because he wished he had seen more games with his own parents, my dad took his kids to games, even when they were too young to know what was happening. I went to Dodger and Padre

games that predate my memory. When I was still a toddler, my family moved to Walla Walla, Washington, a small town in a state where, at the time, there was no Major League baseball team. In the summer of 1975 we moved again, this time to Atlanta. I was going on eight years old. One evening my dad took me to Atlanta's Fulton County Stadium to see the Braves play. The Dodgers were in town. It was the first baseball game that would fix itself in my memory.

We walked through the dark concourse around the stadium. Salesmen shouted, "Programs, get your programs here!" and people were all mixed in a jumble, walking this way and that. I held onto my father's hand. We climbed up dirty enclosed ramps and dark tunnels, and it was disorienting. And then my dad said, "This is it." We stepped forward through another tunnel. Slowly, a green lawn spread out below, impossibly green, impossibly expansive, brilliant under a million shining lights. And the stadium dropped down at our feet, where yellow, red, and orange seats clung to the steep incline. We stood at the cusp of the vast openness of the stadium. We had seats high above home plate. "This is the best place to watch," my father explained. "This gives you the best angle of the field, and gives you some perspective of the plays." He added, "I used to sit up high at games in Dodger Stadium."

I don't remember much about the game itself, and I probably didn't understand it very well, but my initiation had begun. It became a habit to see games at Atlanta Fulton County Stadium. Over the course of three summers, with my father at my side, I became a baseball fan. Though we went to games fairly regularly, it never ceased to be a thrill every time we stepped from the dark into the light and the field opened up below.

There were three occasions that would lead us to the ballpark. One was when my father's Dodgers came to town. I never remember him rooting out loud for the Dodgers—he wasn't one to yell anyway, preferring to watch quietly, but he also knew I wanted the Braves to win, so he pretended to root for the Braves. In my mind, the Dodgers and the Braves were the only important teams in the Major Leagues. Even the national anthem, which I only knew from baseball games, drew attention to the rivalry. It started with terrifying images of bombs and the opponents: "Oh say can you see, by the Dodgersly

light,” but in the end it swung back to security and the home team: “the land of the free, and the home of the Braves.” And the fans always held out that last part, then broke into frenzied applause. And then the game would begin.

We also went to games on promotional nights when they gave out baseball caps, plastic helmets, or t-shirts. My favorite was an old-timers’ cap—never actually worn by the Braves—that rose straight up from the rim, then was flat across the top. It had blue horizontal pinstripes on a white background and an embroidered “A” across the front. I took mine to the front railing and had several of the players sign the green underside of the bill with a black felt pen. I remember that Phil Neikro signed it, the Hall of Fame knuckleball pitcher who won 318 games in spite of playing for bad Braves teams during his career. I kept that hat until the signatures had long since faded.

Finally, we went to games on special occasions, like the Fourth of July. And we always went to a game on my birthday. Once on my birthday, between innings, a stadium cameraman aimed at me and my image was displayed on the giant Diamondvision screen above center field.

I came to know the players. To the interest of no one, I can still name the starting lineup for the 1977 Atlanta Braves. I loved the names, delicious, sonorous names. Andy Messersmith. Jerry Royster. Willie Montañez. Jeff Burroughs. Barry Bonnell. Buzz Capra. I especially liked the name of the catcher—Biff Pocoroba. It was one of the most fascinating names I had ever heard.

After I had learned the basic rules, my father patiently explained the complexities of the game, like drawn-in infields and pitching around the eighth spot. I also learned two of my father’s unwritten rules about going to baseball games. Always arrive in time for batting practice, and never, never—no matter the score—leave until the final out has been made.

Sometimes, when the crowd was particularly small, we would move during the game from our high seats down to the lower-level seats behind home plate. I remember one such occasion, late in a game in which the Braves were losing badly. We moved to seats close to the on-deck circle for the Braves, where I watched the players take their practice cuts, back in the days when they put thick metal donuts

on the ends of bats. Rowland Office was my favorite player. He was a thin, quick center fielder, and I thought his improbable name had a noble sound, partially, no doubt, because we lived on Roland Road. When Office stepped into the on-deck circle, I asked my father if we could invite him to dinner.

“What would we serve him?” my father asked me.

“I don’t know. Soup?” I shrugged.

“Okay. Soup.”

And so I shouted out, in my small voice, an invitation: “Mr. Office! Do you want to come to our house for soup after the game?!” Rowland Office made no sign of hearing me, and I might have tried it again, but I remember thinking it was cool that my father was willing to let me try and that we had almost succeeded.

A couple years after attending my first game, my father gave me a present—a pack of baseball cards. I remember sitting at the kitchen table, opening the wax paper and finding the cards inside, along with a stiff pink stick of chewing gum. “It’s exactly the same,” my dad said with amusement, more to himself than to me. I can still remember some of the cards from that first pack: Milt May, Detroit Tigers; John Stearns, New York Mets; Al Oliver, Pittsburgh Pirates. Every time we went to the grocery store I would get another pack. I loved opening the mystery packs, with the promise of cards inside. Would they be the cards I was missing? Would there be any Braves? As my collection grew, I would sort through the cards at the table or on the living room floor. My father explained the significance of the numbers on the backs, and eventually I came to understand the intricacies of earned-run averages and slugging percentages. I learned a good deal of math with those baseball cards, as well as geography from looking at where players were born. And I delighted in the names of the players. Sid Monge. Manny Sanguillen. Bake McBride. Vida Blue. Rance Mulliniks. Maybe my fascination with those unusual names was a sign of my eventual interest in words, their sounds, and their meanings.

We moved back to Walla Walla in 1978, and my baseball world started to shift. One of my favorite players was a pitcher named Ross Grimsley, whose father had played back when my dad was a kid. I loved the sound of his name, a name best said out loud. Ross Grimsley.

He was traded to the Montreal Expos in 1978, and his 1979 baseball card featured him with a magnificent permanent, tight curls spinning out from underneath his cap. I tried to get a permanent myself, but it didn't hold. The next year the Expos signed Rowland Office to be a backup outfielder, and the shift of my loyalties was complete. I was an Expos fan.

A few years later the Expos and the Dodgers met each other in the playoffs—a series that went to a final game five. My seventh-grade teacher let us listen to the game on a radio in the classroom. I sat on the cupboards, swinging my legs nervously. Almost all the other students were for the Dodgers, and I still remember them cheering and my heart sinking when Rick Monday hit a home run in the ninth inning that won the game for the Dodgers, 2–1. My father seemed disappointed, too, even though his Dodgers went on to beat the Yankees in the World Series.

I also played Little League baseball in Washington. I was the smallest player in the league. I wore the smallest size uniform and used a safety pin to cinch the pants around my waist. Initially I had hoped to be a shortstop or second baseman—positions held in the big leagues by the smaller players. But I didn't have a very strong arm and I wasn't very coordinated; I ended up being the backup right fielder, coming in at the end of games.

I played for two years, and I never swung at a pitch in a game. I was small and not very strong, so I thought I had a better chance of walking than hitting. When I wasn't given a base on balls, I was called out on strikes, except for the few occasions when a pitcher tried too hard to aim a pitch into my small strike zone and sent it into my ribs instead. The pitches would sting and leave red marks. I batted with a mixture of excitement and dread. Sometimes I'd jump away from a pitch right down the middle of the plate.

My father attended every game but one, when he was away at a conference. He'd usually drive me to the field and back, but even when I rode my bicycle he'd drive to the field to watch. Once the coach took a whole van-full of players to a game fifty miles away—I rode with my teammates. Some miles behind the van was my dad, driving the distance by himself. He usually sat in the back of the bleachers behind most of the other parents. He kept my up-to-the-minute on-

base percentages in his head during my at bats, as well as my runs scored, and, if I happened to be walked with the bases loaded, my RBI. He'd report it to me after the game, saying that a walk was as good as a hit. He was a quiet man, not given to loud rooting, but he watched attentively and clapped when I came up to bat. If I walked and eventually managed to round the bases and score, he would stand and cheer when I stepped on home plate.

Once, when I was out in right field, an opponent smacked a line drive foul into the bleachers along the first base side. There was some commotion, and I wasn't sure what happened, but my dad seemed to be the center of it. Some people were clapping. When the inning was over our second baseman trotted with me to the dugout. "Your dad made a great catch," he told me. Other kids on the bench were talking about it too. At home that night, my dad showed my mother the red mark on his stomach where the ball had hit him.

Several years ago I mentioned to my dad that I had never swung at a pitch in Little League. "Really? No, that can't be right," he said. I told him it was true. "I didn't realize that."

Many people have memories of playing catch with their fathers in their yards, but my dad and I almost never played catch. I think we once went to the backyard for me to practice. But I wasn't very accurate with my throws, and he was a big man and not very mobile, and after a few minutes we went back inside. I remember him throwing some practice pitches to me another time. He had a hard time throwing strikes, and he kept apologizing, but when he did throw one I'd swing and miss, and he kept apologizing.

While we had been in Atlanta the Seattle Mariners had been created, so when we moved back to Washington State they were our closest Major League team. Almost every year we would drive the 250 miles from Walla Walla across Snoqualmie Pass to the cavernous Kingdome. We'd watch the games and scorn the artificial turf and designated hitter rule. We also went down to California on occasion to visit relatives. We went to a game at Dodger Stadium—the first time I could remember being there. My dad talked about going to games there when he was young—and I was sure that was a long, long time ago—pointed out the five different seating tiers, named the hills out

beyond the outfield bleachers from our seats high above home plate, and showed me the box from where Vin Scully announced.

After that my father and I made an effort to see the Dodgers or Expos play whenever we could. Once we had a layover in New York on our way to the Middle East for an education tour my father was leading, and we had just enough time to take a cab to Shea Stadium and catch the Expos and the Mets. With the home team behind 1–0, the fans filed the stadium with chants of “Darryl, Darryl.” Their slugger, Darryl Strawberry, responded with a towering home run to right to tie the game. The game went into extra innings, and we knew our flight wouldn’t wait, so—for the only time in my life—we left the game after 10 innings, the game still knotted at 1, the last out yet to be made.

During the summer of 1992, the Expos played a highly unusual series in Los Angeles against the Dodgers: three consecutive doubleheaders—regularly scheduled games, plus makeup games that had been canceled earlier in the season because of the riots in Los Angeles after the Rodney King verdict. I was living north of Seattle at the time, but my dad and I rendezvoused and drove down to L.A. to watch the series. We spent three full days at the stadium, Dad cheering for the Dodgers, me cheering for the Expos. The next day, on our long drive up I-5 toward home, we realized the Expos would be playing in the afternoon at the old Candlestick Park in San Francisco, so we stopped by and caught that game, too. The game went into extra innings and we stayed until the last out, even though my dad had to drive all night to get home.

One summer we went on a baseball vacation to the East Coast. We saw the Expos play an interleague game at Fenway Park, then went to a game at legendary Yankee Stadium. Neither of us had been there before. We browsed Monument Park beyond the center-field wall and read the plaques to Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig, plus those of the Yankee greats from my father’s childhood—Mickey Mantle, Yogi Berra—and from mine—Thurman Munson and Reggie Jackson.

After the game we began the eight-hour drive to Baltimore to see a game at Oriole Park at Camden Yards. Traffic on the New Jersey Turnpike was stop and go and once, when everyone else had started to go, we remained stopped. My dad had dozed off at the wheel. I

woke him up and we went on, but we invented an activity to keep him awake. We developed a list of criteria to evaluate baseball stadiums, like ambience, scoreboard information, good parking, minimal commercialism, unique ballpark features, and so on. Then we rated each park from 1–10, added the scores, and ranked the stadiums. Our debating of the relative merits of the various ballparks kept us busy—and awake—during the whole drive to Baltimore.

My wife and I lived in Arizona for several years and went to an Expos game during the Diamondbacks' opening season. After we found our seats, up high above home plate, looking down at the impossibly green field below I began evaluating the stadium using the various criteria my dad and I had come up with. Then my dad's absence struck me. We had always gone to games together. It made me feel like a stranger for a moment, there among tens of thousands of people I didn't know, and I felt grown-up and young all at once.

The next year my father flew down to Phoenix for his birthday. The Dodgers were in town. Before the game I teased him about becoming too busy with work to follow sports, putting in seventy or eighty hours a week. "How many Dodger starters can you name?" I asked him, and he laughed and blushed a little bit, and then listed players, slowly, one at a time, up and down the whole lineup, updating me on who was with his team. At the ballpark we rooted for the Dodgers together.

While I lived in Arizona, coming home from teaching night classes, I would listen to the last few innings of baseball games on the radio. In the car I could get stations that carried the Diamondbacks, the Rockies, and the Giants. I preferred to listen to Giants games because of their announcer, Jon Miller. I appreciated his playful, non-partisan descriptions of the action and his ability to paint pictures with words. Sometimes he'd reveal his dead-on impersonation of his favorite announcer, Vin Scully.

Several years ago we took another baseball vacation, this time to Midwest parks, including Wrigley Field, Jacob's Field, and, in its last season, Tiger Stadium. At Tiger Stadium Dad pointed up at the press booth. "That's Ernie Harwell up there, doing the Tigers' games," he said. "He's been calling Tigers games for years. One of the best." He took out his little radio and headphones and had me listen.

We caught an afternoon game at the new Comiskey Park in Southside Chicago. After several innings we learned that it was Senior Citizens Day at the ballpark, and we were delighted (I more than he) that my father qualified. The public address announcer informed us that when the game ended the seniors would be invited to run around the bases. I told Dad that he was going to run. He dismissed it with a laugh. As the game went on I continued to press him. Eventually I didn't give him a choice.

After the last out had been made, I led him along the concourse and down to the backstop. He lined up with a couple hundred other seniors, most of them much older than he. The grounds crew laid out a plastic tarp from the fence to the batters' box to protect the grass. Dad waited near the back of the line. After thirty minutes or so, it was time. The ushers sifted the men and women so that the stream of runners was thin but constant. Dad slowly approached the plate as the line progressed. Finally his turn came, and he began his slow jog up the first base line. I clapped and shouted my encouragement. My father touched first base and rounded the corner toward second. The stadium had emptied by now, except for the cluster of families standing along the railing behind home plate. My dad stepped on second and trotted toward third. He had somehow separated from the others; the runners immediately in front of him had been faster, and the runners behind were slower. As he neared third base the stadium camera fixed on him, and his image beamed from the giant Diamondvision screen above center field. It seemed like he was the only one on the base paths. He headed down the third base line. He slowed down for the last several yards. I stood and cheered as he stepped firmly on home plate. When Dad looked over at me in the front row, he grinned with the glee of an eight-year-old boy.

The Impossible Dream

Terrie Dopp Aamodt

What happens when a barely adolescent girl hits junior high? Do they put something in the water or what? In the ten weeks between the end of my sixth grade and the beginning of seventh, my childhood went gawky. My psyche swallowed “self-confident” and spat out “self-conscious”; hyperawareness magnified every twitch of awkwardness and uncertainty. My friends and I noticed that boys changed overnight: no longer invisible, they loomed hideously over our lives, their language fluctuating between potty humor and sexual innuendo. As much as we publicly loathed them, we privately realized that in some mysterious, primordial way, what they thought of us really mattered.

We needed diversions from our painful realities. I remember a simpler time, just before fourth grade, when my father took my brother and me to a Giants game in San Francisco. We sat behind the outfielders in Candlestick Park that June day in 1963, and we got to see Willie Mays make a basket catch. Aping my older brother, I decided baseball was for me, and I dreamed of hitting home runs, just like Willie Mays. We played “500” (a caught fly was worth 100 points, a one-bouncer 75, a two-bouncer 50, and a cleanly fielded grounder 50; the first fielder to reach 500 became the next batter) in the street outside our house, using a tennis ball to spare the neighbors’ windows and often watching it soar over a six-foot wooden fence into someone else’s postage-stamp backyard. When we tired of that game we played “Bunt” in our front yard. It was just like baseball, except that anyone who bunted the ball past the hose delineating the outfield was out. (These rules arose from bitter experience with our parents’ own front windows.) Bunt was especially nice because my brother and I

had uniforms. We wore some of his flannel pajama pants, the ones spattered with fighter jets, and tucked them into long white socks.

When we moved back east to Massachusetts a couple of years later, life became more complicated. The proper role models did not exist. Willie Mays was too far away. The Boston Red Sox, forgettable and saddled with unpronounceable names, finished ninth in the ten-team American League in 1965 and 1966. My brother and I had a bigger yard but we didn't play baseball surrogates after school anymore. When my seventh-grade year rolled around, new questions pestered my friends and me. Should seventh-grade girls play sports like baseball at recess? Would we mess up our dresses (pants were forbidden for girls)? Would our garter belts show if we bent over to field a grounder? What would the boys think?

As we painfully evolved through seventh grade, the answers to those questions became yes, probably not, who knows, and who cares. We segregated ourselves from the boys at recess, and for fifteen entire minutes their opinions did not matter. Even our opinions of each other didn't matter as much—classroom spats and hallway bitchiness evaporated when we formed up two small teams of girls from our room. All fall we played baseball during every recess, and during the winter I dreamed about how good our team could be if we all played on the same side: Deanna would be our shortstop. She was coordinated and never muffed grounders. Colleen, graceful and quick, was ideal at second base. Rita was lively and funny, the perfect one to hold down the hot corner at third. Peggy R., even more uninhibited and hilarious, would keep us loose from her spot as catcher. Peggy D. combined her Southern accent and crazy self with an accurate pitching arm. Sharleen, the only black girl in our class, was a superb hitter and fielder and would patrol center field with quiet authority. Candi and Ruth would do just fine in left and right. On my dream team I got to play first base, not because I deserved to but because it coincided nicely with my fierce nearsightedness and my preference for catching a ball in the air rather than bending over to field a grounder. Nine players was plenty on our little field, and we wanted it to feel like baseball, not some alien “softball” sport, although that's what we threw and hit.

Innumerable math classes caught me gazing past squirming, giggling boys toward the fuzzy equations on the blackboard, setting up the perfect at bat in my imagination. Rita would lead off and beat out a grounder to first, stomping on the base with both feet and doubling over with laughter. Peggy R. would send a screaming low line drive just inside the third base line and shriek, head down and elbows flying, as she roared toward first, distracting the fielders. Then Sharleen would send a solid single to left, loading the bases, and it would be my turn. The slowly chucked softball would float toward the plate, growing huge as a blurry pomelo. As it came into semifocus, my bat would swing late and catch it on the outside part of the plate, sending a lazy, looping fly into the hole ten feet to the right of second and semi-deep in the outfield, clearing the bases. (In junior high I managed to actually hit a fly a couple of times, but never with the bases loaded.)

When spring came we played softball again, did math, and honed our impish behavior on our unappreciative teachers and on each other. Summer, free of leagues open to girls, loomed ahead like a dark void, followed by the more frightening prospect of eighth grade and impending adulthood. It was dawning on us that there would be no turning back to a simpler time.

And then something magical happened. The Boston Red Sox emerged from their primordial lethargy, began winning, and, better yet, became interesting. The Red Sox of old, renowned for their gargantuan partying skills and pathetic play, snapped into competence under the strenuous thumb of their new skipper, Dick Williams. Left fielder Carl Yastrzemski, who until then had been most notable for his indifferent spirit and reluctant team leadership, took off on a season-long hitting tear. The White Sox's manager Eddie Stanky had goaded him into a frenzy by saying Carl was an All-Star "from the neck down," and then tried to acquire him in a trade. In his first Major League start in April of that 1967 season, Bill Rohr pitched a one-hitter, yielding a slender single to the Yankees' catcher Elston Howard with two outs in the ninth inning. Jim Lonborg pitched brilliantly. Better yet, he was cute, single, and, at twenty-four, was a mere ten years older than us. In the "cute, young, and single" department, right fielder Tony Conigliaro wasn't bad either, bashing bunches of home runs and

threatening to take a second home run title before his twenty-third birthday.

At the All-Star break, sportswriters who had made their living deriding the Red Sox were forced to admit the team was in a five-way pennant struggle with the Chicago White Sox, Minnesota Twins, Detroit Tigers, and California Angels. I started paying attention. Though our house lacked a tv, listening to the radio was a splendid way of imagining the games and inhabiting their dramatic moments. The Red Sox seemed destined for glory; they kept clawing back in the late innings to snag improbable come-from-behind victories. I filled my desk drawer with thumbnail-sized mug shots of Red Sox players clipped from the sports section of the Worcester *Telegram and Gazette*. Joe Foy, Jose Tartabull, Reggie Smith, Lee Stange, John Wyatt, and Mike Andrews gazed up at me confidently. They would prevail. And if *they* could, anyone could. When Jack Jones belted out “The Impossible Dream” over the New England airwaves, the song was meant for them. For us. Even when Tony Conigliaro crumpled to the dirt in August, his left cheekbone splintered by a Jack Hamilton fastball, we weren’t too worried—he would be back in three weeks, the sportswriters said. The Red Sox picked up Ken Harrelson from the Kansas City Athletics and carried on.

I thought my obsession with the Red Sox stemmed from some compulsive disorder deep in my introverted soul, but when school started everyone was nuts about the team—the giggling boys, the girls who had never thought about sports in their lives, even our humorless math teacher. We spat obscure statistics at each other and defended our favorites with lovers’ intensity. Peggy R. was deeply smitten with Jim Lonborg, and she was the only person I knew who had a 45RPM single of Tony Conigliaro’s latest hit, “Limited Man.” My favorite player was Yastrzemski. I liked him because he was a great player. I liked him because he could alter the course of a game with his two hands and his will.

In September my dad took my brother and me to Fenway Park to see the Red Sox play the Athletics. We sat behind the outfielders and saw Jim Lonborg earn his twentieth victory over the team in the garish green and gold uniforms. Then I knew the Red Sox could win

the pennant. Forget the 100–1 odds at the beginning of the season. Forget the pundits who said they were playing over their heads.

Each game became crucial. At school Peggy R. smuggled a contraband radio into her desk, lifted the lid, popped in her earphone, and whispered highlights to the rest of us. When games got really good she took her radio to the bathroom and one by one we would crawl past the outer perimeter of desks, past the portable wardrobe, and out the door to the bathroom, where we took turns listening.

When the season's final weekend began, four teams were still in reach of the pennant: Red Sox, White Sox, Twins, and Tigers. By Sunday it was down to the Red Sox, Twins, and Tigers. As Jim Lonborg faced the Twins at Fenway, I got to watch the game on someone's TV; radio was not enough for this one.

How long would the Red Sox's luck hold? It seemed to slip away when Yaz let Harmon Killebrew's base hit go through his legs for an error, giving Minnesota a 2–0 lead. But in the bottom of the sixth Lonborg opened the inning with a perfect bunt single and his teammates loaded the bases for Yaz, who singled to center to tie the game. Fate's pendulum began to swing the other way again in the seventh when the Twins threatened to regain the lead, but Yaz cut down Bob Allison at second after an apparently routine double into the left-field corner.

I will never forget the feeling of my heart pounding in my throat and my stomach twisting in knots as I watched the Red Sox hold on for the last couple of innings to win. It was too good to be true. Determination and will and gritty effort had toppled complacent teams who looked better on paper. If the Red Sox could succeed, anyone with enough heart and desire could succeed. The season was perfect.

Well, not quite perfect. Tony Conigliaro's career was ruined. The Red Sox lost the World Series to the St. Louis Cardinals in seven games because, according to baseball scribes yearning to be right at last, the Cards were a far superior team. Hogwash, we said. The Cardinals won the Series because Lonborg, having just pitched the last game of the regular season, did not go head to head against Bob Gibson in games 1 and 4. The Cardinals won because Lonborg tried to pitch the seventh game on two days' rest. It really didn't

matter. As our eighth-grade class sat and watched each World Series game, schoolwork forgotten, for a few shining days we were one. The beautiful girls, the sullen girls, the giggling boys, the humorless math teacher. Our team overcame impossible odds and tragic injury to obliterate awkwardness and failure and replace them with grace. It was the perfect antidote to junior high.

Loving and Learning the Game

Tom Nahigian

I have loved baseball for as long as I can remember. I can still recall going to my first game on a beautiful summer's day, Indians and Red Sox at Fenway, Sunday, July 5, 1970, Red Sox 8, Indians 4, Mike Nagy started against Rick Austin. I was only eight at the time but I can still remember being at the game with my whole family. My grandmother's brother, our Uncle John, was visiting from Worcester and got tickets for all of us. This was only three years after the Impossible Dream Red Sox of 1967. That team energized a whole region. Some critics have said the Red Sox have been living off it ever since.

As my enthusiasm for baseball grew, I developed a strong interest in baseball simulations. I can remember Cadaco's *All-Star Baseball*, flipping the spinner, but this game seemed too basic; something was missing. My first real introduction to a serious baseball simulation began on a beautiful spring day in 1971. When I was nine, my family was visiting my grandparents in New Jersey. My cousin Bill came over one afternoon and set up APBA on my grandmother's kitchen table. My dad managed the Red Sox (1970 vintage) and my cousin the Yankees (they had a bit of a resurgence that year, winning 93 games). I was spellbound, totally enthralled. I never knew something so wonderful existed. I thought being able to create a game was wonderful. The idea that I could be a manager—general manager just blew me away. It is like when a Christian visits the Holy Land or when a Muslim visits Mecca or when a baseball fan sees Yankee Stadium, Fenway, or Wrigley for the first time. I got to play the next game, my Dodgers against the Mets. It was wonderful to hold the cards (same size of course as a standard deck of cards), and there was an element of mystery when my cousin referred to those big boards for the results; I soon realized that low numbers were good (the number 1 always

a homer) and high numbers usually were outs. I am still infatuated. Although, as fate would have it, I became a Strat-O-Matic rather than an APBA player.

I was a Cub Scout then and used to get *Boy's Life* magazine. They would often put "wholesome" players on the cover with a feature story: Willie Mays, Johnny Bench, Brooks Robinson, etc. (poor Dick Allen and Alex Johnson never had a chance). There was an ad in the back for Strat-O-Matic and I asked Santa for the game. My wish was granted; the game was sitting under the tree that Christmas morning in 1972. I remember opening the box and being mad that the 1971 season cards were inside. Where was Luis Tiant? Carlton Fisk? I didn't know then that game companies usually don't release the most recent season cards until spring.

Another great Christmas present was *The Baseball Encyclopedia*, updated through the 1973 season. I immediately came under its spell and sat transfixed as I turned the pages and saw the whole history of baseball unfold before me.

I got a birthday subscription to *Sports Illustrated* when I was eleven and recall seeing Bobby Murcer and Ron Blomberg on the cover. At age sixteen I started a subscription to *The Sporting News*; my first issue featured Jack Clark on the cover. What a magazine! Box scores! Full baseball coverage, great stuff.

In 1975, when I was thirteen, the Red Sox mounted a strong challenge to the rest of the American League. Fred Lynn enjoyed a magical season, first ever Rookie of the Year, MVP, and Gold Glover. I watched on tv as Lynn staged a one-man assault on Tiger Stadium on June 18, belting out 3 home runs (just missing a fourth), a triple, and a single, driving in 10 runs in a 15-1 trashing of the Tigers. My grandmother was a big Red Sox fan and that summer she bravely endured an eventual losing battle to cancer. One afternoon she was lying in bed while the Red Sox game played over the tv. I went upstairs to visit her and wanted to say something to cheer her up. I said, "Grandma, the Red Sox are going to win the pennant for you." She said, "Oh, no, dear, the Red Sox are going to win the pennant for you." She died in early September and a few weeks later her prediction came true.

Some years later, in the spring of 1986, I made plans with an old friend to go to a Red Sox game. We chose a late April game with the Mariners. Little did we know that we would witness baseball history, as Rocket Roger Clemens kick-started another Red Sox pennant run by striking out twenty Mariners and walking none. One of the greatest performances I have ever seen.

One big milestone for me was laying my eyes on the 1979 *Bill James Baseball Abstract* (this was in the homemade days of the *Abstract*). My friend Philip received a copy from his stepdad, who had seen an advertisement in a poetry magazine or something. I copied down the address from the back of the book and quickly sent off my seven dollars to the post office box in Lawrence, Kansas. Wow! Monthly hitting statistics and other stuff not published anywhere else. I had innocently stumbled upon the greatest baseball analyst ever. I was nurtured on the *Boston Globe's* intelligent baseball coverage, but this kind of baseball analysis blew me out of the water. I look forward to every book Bill James publishes. Over the last few years he has treated us to books on the Baseball Hall of Fame and, more recently, on baseball managers. First and foremost, James is a great writer. I heard a story from Don Zminda, formerly of Stats Inc., that James was honored at a writers' banquet and the emcee said something to the effect that it was a shame that such a great writer had to have his talent wasted on baseball. Not so!

During the baseball strike of 1994 I realized how much I love baseball. It's like a junkie needing his fix. I suffered from a great baseball withdrawal and I'm still catching up. During the 1992, 1993, and 1994 seasons I went to Fenway only a couple of times a season. But since 1995 I've been going to 12–15 games a season. In 1999 I broke my all-time record of 31 games set back in 1982 when I was a student at nearby Boston University (a year that followed another strike season, coincidentally). In 1999 I attended 32 games, and the Red Sox went 24–8. I was their good-luck charm. One of the greatest games I have ever seen was in May that year when Nomar Garciaparra smacked 3 home runs, 2 of them grand slams, and drove in 10 as the Red Sox crushed the Mariners 12–4. A few weeks later I saw another great game as Pedro Martinez overpowered the Braves, striking out sixteen in a complete game masterpiece. Nomar and Pedro make one proud to

be a Red Sox fan. Perhaps someday soon these two wonderful players can help the Red Sox bring home that long-elusive World Series Championship.

Once in a while, when I am in need of inspiration, I put the “Impossible Dream” 1967 Red Sox phonograph record on the turntable. “This is really a love story, an affair twixt a town and a team,” begins all-time great Red Sox announcer, the late Ken Coleman. I can remember listening to that record when I was around ten and feeling as though I had just entered a special and magical world. My friend and I would hear that album and go outside and practice making great catches like the one Carl Yastrzemski made on Tom Tresh in the ninth inning during Billy Rohr’s no-hit bid in Yankee Stadium.

During spring training in 2000, a sportswriter asked Gary Gaetti, age forty-one, who at the time was in the Red Sox spring training camp, why he still wanted to play. Why didn’t he just retire? Gaetti gave a wonderful reply, asking, why didn’t they just stop watching? Right! As Jim Bouton wrote when he closed out *Ball Four*, “You spend a good piece of your life gripping a baseball and in the end it turns out that it was the other way around all the time.”

How Baseball Turned Me into a Californian

Keith Francis

My earliest memories of baseball are vague childhood recollections. My favorite uncle's house. (He was actually my father's uncle but my sister and I always called him Uncle Leon.) Saturday afternoon. Grainy images on a TV set. The sports program *Grandstand* (a British program similar to ABC's *Wide World of Sports*) showing an American game called baseball. Men in brightly colored clothing moving around. (Baseball uniforms in the 1970s left much to be desired in terms of fashion.) Not playing cricket (played professionally around the world, mainly in places colonized by the British) or rounders (a watered-down version of baseball) but some kind of hybrid. Very strange.

My next memory of baseball is shrouded in the mists of sleepiness. It was August 9, 1981, and I had just finished working at Mt. Aetna Summer Camp in Hagerstown, Maryland. I was exhausted (after working ten-hour days as a camp counselor and lifeguard) and looked forward to an early night. The family I was staying with until I flew back to England had other ideas. Thanks to a midseason players' strike—what was that? I wondered—I had the opportunity to witness a great American tradition: the All-Star Game. An announcer said that the game was being played at Municipal Stadium, Cleveland; that fact and the (to my eyes) strangely colored uniforms are all I can remember about the game. I recall being vaguely interested in the proceedings but not interested enough to stay awake past the fifth inning. As always happens, I found out that I had missed the fireworks—Mike Schmidt of the Philadelphia Phillies had hit a two-run homer off Rollie Fingers of the Milwaukee Brewers to give the National League team a 5–4 victory, the tenth win in a row for the National League. Even after being inundated with these facts and

others—the crowd of 72,086 was the largest ever for an All-Star Game; the National League had won 18 of the 19 games played up to 1982; August 9 was the latest date on which an All-Star Game had been held—I was not overly concerned at having “missed out,” as my hosts put it.

My third memory is much clearer and certainly more vivid. It was April 1988, and I had traveled to Takoma Park, Maryland, to attend my sister’s graduation from Columbia Union College and stay with an old friend from secondary school. As I was studying for a doctoral degree at the time, I decided to put some of my “spare” time to good use by doing research at the Library of Congress. Each day before I left my friend’s apartment I listened to the news. And what was the major topic of conversation? The losing streak of the Baltimore Orioles.

In 1988 the Orioles set a record for “season-opening futility,” as one radio commentator put it, by losing the first 21 games of the season. Each morning I would listen to the sports news with a kind of mild sadism—the kind needed to watch a boxing match?—in order to find out whether the Orioles had failed again; usually they had. By the time I had arrived in Maryland, the streak was already at 14 and the Orioles continued to pile up losses until April 28. I could not help myself: I was drawn by such abject inadequacy. No matter what they did or how hard they tried, the Orioles seemed to find a way to lose. What was even more interesting to me was the fact that although the Orioles played so poorly, the team seemed to have a lot of fans. Everywhere I went in Washington DC people talked about what was happening to “our Orioles.” Furthermore, I could understand their feelings. I supported a soccer team in England—Chelsea—that seemed mired in mediocrity; apart from two glorious years in 1970 and 1971, the team had done little of note in the twenty years I had been supporting it. “Perhaps there was something to this strange game called baseball,” I thought to myself while riding the Metro one day.

After the summer of 1988 I forgot all about baseball for the next two years. I found out that the Orioles had lost 107 out of 161 games—which seemed like a lot (and was!)—but the other details of the season were not of great interest to me. As an Englishman living in England who loved his soccer, cricket, and rugby, and had never

played baseball, why should I care who won the World Series or the batting title? There were more important games demanding my attention.

My attitude changed substantially in September 1990. I was now, thanks to my new job as assistant professor of history at Pacific Union College, a resident of the state of California. I had no choice but to pay attention to what was happening in the United States. Like most immigrants, I looked for ways to become acclimatized to American culture. Within a couple of weeks of my arrival (on August 28) I was presented with a golden opportunity: a group of faculty and staff were going to a baseball game. Would I like to go as well?

The game in question was played on September 16 between the Oakland A's and the Minnesota Twins. Like my childhood memories and the All-Star Game of 1981, I do not remember much about the game. I remember it was a gloriously sunny day—there were many of those during the California drought of the late 1980s and early 1990s—and that the game seemed to go on for a long time—“You should have been here when we used to go to doubleheaders!” one of my colleagues in the history department joked—but not much else. Everyone went home happy—the A's won 5–4 on a Walt Weiss single to right field in the eleventh inning—and I remember thinking that baseball games were much more of a family affair than the soccer games I was used to seeing. I made a mental note to pay attention to baseball; I had not understood the intricacies of the game, obviously, but seeing the game live gave me a general sense of what was going on: the game seemed quite interesting.

Of course, the season of 1990, as it had run thus far, was a good one for the A's. They were the world champions; they were leading the American League West comfortably and seemed to be on their way to a third consecutive title; they were one of the favorites to win the World Series; the team contained three previous winners of Rookie-of-the-Year honors, at least one future Hall-of-Fame pitcher, and the premier base stealer in the Major Leagues; and to cap it all off there were the “Bash Brothers,” Jose Canseco and Mark McGwire. The A's made the Bay Area proud and so, not surprisingly, when the team qualified to play in the American League Championship Series (ALCS) I decided to watch some of the games.

Given that the A's swept the Boston Red Sox 4–0 in the ALCS, I can understand why I only remember one of the games clearly; in game 1 there was everything to play for, whereas in the other games I already knew that the A's were a superior team and there was not much in the way of suspense. The A's and Red Sox played game 1 on October 6, a Saturday, and I had been invited by Andy and Lisa Demsky, a couple who worked at Pacific Union College and were my age, to come and hang out that evening. The game was a tense affair, thanks to some good pitching by Roger Clemens and Dave Stewart, and by the top of the ninth inning the A's were clinging to a 2–1 lead. And then it happened: after “an explosion of A's power,” as the TV commentator described it, the A's scored 7 runs. I remember that the inning seemed to last a very long time—which it did compared to the others—and the A's players seeming to process across home plate. No sooner had Red Sox manager Joe Morgan called for a relief pitcher than another A's player would score. (Of course, that was not what actually happened; 4 of the A's 7 runs were scored off a sole unfortunate Red Sox reliever, Dennis Lamp.) The whole inning was a thing of beauty—particularly Dennis Eckersley's rapid ending of proceedings in the bottom of the ninth—and I remember thinking that baseball did in fact fit my definition of a good sport: it had the capacity to both enthrall and surprise.

My memories of the 1990 season do not have a happy ending. The A's did overwhelm the Red Sox, but then, having been installed as the prohibitive favorites to win the World Series, were themselves overwhelmed, and swept, by the Cincinnati Reds. The loss of game 1 by a score of 7–0 was a bad start but, as one writer noted, “Baseball often produces that type of aberrational game, even in postseason play,” and, as everyone knows, even an underdog can win one game in a 7-game series. A second loss in a row was a real surprise—“Mighty A's on the Verge of Panic” read one headline in Santa Rosa's *Press Democrat* and “The Reds, everybody's favorite whipping boy before the playoffs, are shocking the A's with their play,” commented a sportswriter in the same newspaper—but after the A's lost 8–3 in game 3, only the very hopeful, or the exceedingly naive, believed that the Series was not a lost cause: “Sure, the A's might win this series,” said San Francisco sports columnist Lowell Cohn in the *Chronicle*,

“it’s also possible that the snowcap will melt on Mt. Everest and the Pacific Ocean will go dry.” I felt a kind of sadness when the Reds finally completed the sweep—a longing for something that was not quite mine but whose loss was regrettable anyway: the A’s were not my team yet. This feeling was confirmed when I saw a picture of the broad backs of “The Nasty Boys”—the Reds’ relievers Norm Charlton, Rob Dibble, and Randy Myers—in *Sports Illustrated*. I assumed that my interest in baseball was just a passing fancy.

In the season of 1992 I became hooked on baseball. My interest started quite surreptitiously. In April I was driving to and from Berkeley on a regular basis. I was completing the research for my doctoral dissertation and the library at the university had the material I was using; the radio commentary on baseball games was my company during the tiresome drive home on traffic-bound Highway 80. I had not planned to listen to baseball games, but I found that they provided useful bookends for my journey: if the game started around 7:00 PST I would hear the first six innings or so and could listen to the concluding innings when I arrived home (if I was interested enough); if the game started around 5:00 PST I would hear the last three innings or so and then listen to the postgame wrap-up and talk show. This diversion was certainly a much better use of my brain than worrying about the crawling traffic around me.

By June I realized that one reason I looked forward to my trips to Berkeley was because of the opportunity to listen to a baseball game. I began to listen to baseball games while working at home. This time my interest in baseball was not just a temporary fad and I knew why. I had found in baseball something that had been a crucial part of my interest in sports when I was a child: use of my imagination. I could remember spending hours listening to radio commentary on cricket matches from faraway places such as Sydney, Australia, and I found that I could use the same skill for baseball games. Just as I had had to imagine the distance between the batsman and the cover point, a fielder, so I had to imagine the distance between the batter and the first baseman. Just as I had had to imagine the way a cricket ball would bounce and move when bowled by an off-spinner—from right to left—so I had to imagine what a breaking ball would do when thrown by a pitcher. Just as I had to imagine the difference between

Lord's cricket ground in England and the cricket ground of Sabina Park, Jamaica, so I had to imagine the difference between the Oakland Coliseum and Fenway Park.

As I listened to more baseball games on the radio I came to appreciate baseball for its uniqueness, rather than comparing it to any game or experience that I had had in England. I found that baseball had its own rhythms. There was the style of the commentators: the "Holy Toledo!" of veteran A's radio broadcaster Bill King whenever a spectacular play occurred or the off-the-wall, or the dry sense of humor of King's colleague Lon Simmons. There was the clear demarcation of time during ball games: no matter what the score, "the stretch" always occurred after the top half of the seventh inning. (The ritualistic nature of the games reminded me of a High Church service in the Church of England.) There were the subtleties of the plays: moving a runner over to second with a sacrifice bunt might prove just as important as a four-hundred-foot home run. Baseball could be both wonderfully simple—see the ball, hit the ball—and terribly complex—the mysteries of the infield fly rule (I began to see it as a beautiful "creature").

And then there was the performance of the A's. No sportswriter or commentator in the San Francisco Bay Area, or anywhere else for that matter, predicted that the team could win the American League West, but the A's managed the feat. Almost inexorably, by sheer force of will, the A's managed to catch and overtake the Minnesota Twins, the World Series champions the previous year. Typical of this effort was the 3-game series against the Twins at the end of July.

The A's went to Minnesota trailing the Twins by 3 games. Some of the A's best players were injured—including Jose Canseco, Dave Henderson, and Rickey Henderson, among the nineteen on the disabled list—and the A's still swept the series! I remember lying on my bed listening to the third game of the series; I had only just returned from a trip to England and was still recovering from the effects of jetlag. I was "relaxing," dozing, at the end of a beautiful summer day in California. The atmosphere in the Metrodome, the Twins' stadium, was far from relaxed, however. After unsteady starts, both Dave Stewart of the A's and Bill Krueger of the Twins kept the opposition from breaking the game open; by the top of the ninth inning the Twins were leading 4–2.

With the Twins ace closer Rick Aguilera due to pitch the ninth, the game seemed to be over; however, to the dismay of the home crowd and my (sleepy) delight, Eric Fox, one of the “scrubs” on the team, hit a 3-run homer and Dennis Eckersley closed the game in the bottom of the ninth. “My team won!” I thought.

Reflecting on the game the next day, I realized that something important had occurred: I had called something Californian (and American!), a baseball team, “mine.” The A’s were a part of me in the same way as Chelsea Football Club in London had been; the A’s were a part of home. I couldn’t say when this new feeling had begun, I just knew it existed. I was an immigrant, true, but one who belonged to California. To steal a line from Samuel Regalado, “Viva baseball!”

2

Playing the Game

Introduction

As I read the accounts in this section, I am struck by the common elements of our baseball experience. No matter whether we lived on the East Coast or the West Coast, whether it was in the 1930s or 1960s, we seemed to invent similar rules for playing our games and went through the same rituals. And for many of us who had limited athletic skills, the game continued to attract us despite our frustrations.

Why I liked to play baseball is something of a mystery. I was slow in terms of quickness and running speed, had poor coordination, and, despite nearsightedness, refused to wear glasses. Consequently, I was always chosen last for teams, relegated to right field, and placed at the end of the batting order. And yet I loved the game and never missed an opportunity to play.

Like many other boys, I preserved baseballs by wrapping them in electrical tape, put screws in broken bats, and rubbed my glove with neat's-foot oil. I also would carefully place a ball in my glove and wrap them tightly with a rag at night in an effort to form the perfect pocket. Perhaps if I had the right equipment I really could become the shortstop I wanted to be!

And I would look for ball games. During my early years, probably about seven to ten years of age, most of my away-from-school playing took place in my front yard. Fortunately my lawn was shaped roughly like a baseball diamond and proved to be an excellent place to play until we—various neighborhood kids—started hitting the ball over the picket fence too many times. On one memorable occasion someone hit the ball into the street just as a car was going by and it went through the open back window into the seat. We thought the ball was gone for good until the car stopped and its driver, a seemingly huge high school student, walked over to us, ball in hand. After scaring us

sufficiently with tough talk, he returned the ball and we resumed the game.

Because those games on my lawn never involved more than three or four boys, we invented rules that adapted baseball to our situation. Actually the word *invent* is too strong, for most of these adaptations we picked up at school and then applied to our home situation. Ghost runners, as some of the following memoirs also recall, were common, each one advancing as many bases as the “real” batter-runner. Also, if memory serves me correctly, balls hit into my mother’s many bushes that surrounded the lawn or that went over the fence were foul balls. Those who learned bat control and could hit high bouncers did the best. I, obviously, was not one of them. For some reason we didn’t know anything about whiffle balls, which would have been perfect for our constricted playing field.

As I grew older and was able to get around town on my bicycle, I participated in Sunday games at Westwood School in Napa, California. My classmate, Steven Ahn, remembers those games well:

We used a ten-inch softball, . . . which we called a “fly league” ball [because it was used by the local youth leagues whose teams were named after flying insects].¹ We could play teams with about three players on each side. We had a pitcher, an infielder, and an outfielder. The team that was up would catch for themselves. Fair territory was from second base (half of centerfield) over into left field. Balls hit to right field were outs. Fielders returned balls to the pitcher’s mound for outs, and runners went from home to second base, then third base, and home again.

For some reason these Sunday games differed from those at school, where the winner was important and my status as last-chosen and automatic right fielder was a conscious part of the team captain’s strategy. Although on Sundays I was playing with many of the same kids, winning never was important and my ineptitude was more the subject of good-humored remarks than angry criticism for causing

1. This seems to have been the same ball that Merritt Clifton calls a “semi-soft” elsewhere in these pages.

my team to lose. Maybe because they were outside a school situation, where hierarchies were always being formed and reformed, these games carried no status pressure. Whatever the explanation, they were pure fun.

We also played Work-Up, as Steve again recalls, “ideally with nine fielders (though probably only at school did we ever have that many) and three or four batters. If you made an out, you went to right field, and worked your way back up. If you caught a batted ball on the fly, you would trade positions with the batter who made the out.” As with the right-field out and ghost-runner rules of our other games, there was nothing unique about the way we played Work-Up. How, I now wonder, did these rules pass from generation to generation, and travel from one part of the country to another? I don’t know who we learned them from, for we certainly didn’t invent these variations on the game. And although we seemed to primarily play with those in our own age group or grade, there must have been a process whereby we learned from those a year or two older who in turn had learned from their elders.

Despite my inability to play the game well, a few distinct memories stand out. First, probably the summer before or after sixth grade, my mother one day had asked me to weed the rose garden. Hating weeding, I put it off in favor of joining a ball game that was taking place on the dirt road that ran behind our property. We were probably playing Work-Up, for I was pitching when the batter drove a sharp line drive that hit me in the left eye. I remember seeing spiraling bright circles of sparkling lights and hearing a loud buzzing sound as I staggered off the street into the bordering prune orchard. Gradually the lights and sounds disappeared as I regained my vision and Roger Loewen, one of the players, helped me home. I put an ice pack on my eye and waited in dread, for the garden remained unweeded, until my mother came home from work. Although chiding me gently for not doing my work, she must have thought that I had suffered enough, for she gave me sympathy rather than punishment. While painful, the experience wasn’t all bad, for with perhaps the biggest black eye that any of my friends had ever seen, I was the star attraction at church for the next couple of weeks. I wish now that I had a picture.

But my most vivid memory perhaps in some sense reflects the magic spell that baseball has cast on many of the writers who have contributed to this collection. When I was in the tenth grade and playing second base in a game of Work-Up, someone hit a pop fly into shallow center field. Unlike my usual response of wandering around hoping the ball would land nearby, I got a bead on this one, confidently turned toward the outfield and slowly drifted back, catching the ball over my shoulder. There was nothing spectacular about the play, except for the fact that I was making it, but I experienced a sense of oneness with the ball and the field that gave me a glimpse of what excellent ballplayers must regularly encounter. Like Gary Huffaker's own catch, related earlier in these pages, it gave me a special memory that continues to color the way that I perceive and appreciate the game.

In addition to the commonality of the various rules of play in diverse parts of the country over successive generations, one other significant pattern emerges from the narratives that follow. Whereas in the previous stories fathers play a major role in nurturing love for baseball, they disappear almost entirely in the following accounts of the actual playing of the game. Those writers who describe their Little League experiences necessarily emphasize the significance of adult coaches. Although they were seldom parents of the team members, such coaches could play a role in the socialization of young ballplayers.

In contrast to these Little League experiences, however, most of the narratives portray a decidedly self-contained boy's world. Indeed, Dave Anderson argues that the absence of adult interference accounted for the success of the South Bend park district's summer baseball program. Perhaps what we are seeing here is an inescapable element of the process of growing up. Fathers introduced their sons and sometimes their daughters to baseball at an early age and nurtured their love for the game in part through playing catch. But as the children grew older, apparently around age nine or ten, they sought fellow players of somewhat equal ability with whom they could form teams and play independently of adult supervision. Significantly, girls—some of whom were fellow baseball fans—did not participate in these games. Observing children in the 1970s, just at the end of the

period covered by these narratives, sociologist Janet Lever determined that boys preferred games involving competition between groups and a greater complexity of rules while girls participated in simpler games in which they competed as individuals (“Sex Differences in the Complexity of Children’s Play and Games,” *American Sociological Review* 43 [August 1978]: 471–83). Probably differences in physical abilities, particularly at a time when girls were not encouraged to participate in sports, played an important role in this demarcation of the sexes, but it is also apparent that through their participation in this emerging all-male world of baseball, the boys in the following narratives developed a feeling of group and gender identity, as in Gene Carney’s “Tennis Court.” Since these accounts have not been collected on a scientific basis, no firm conclusions are justified, but the stories suggest that sports (and for the period covered in these pages, baseball was the primary sport) provided preteen boys a means of developing both a small society of their own and personal identities that distinguished their world from that of the adults. While we did not think about these things when I was growing up, those Sunday baseball games at Westwood School gave us a realm over which we had virtually full control and provided social bonds that for several of us continue to this day. Baseball offered a road by which we passed from being children into adolescents.

My Father Never Took Me to a Baseball Game

Walter Kephart

I have often wondered how I became a fan of baseball. Most boys have fathers, grandfathers, or uncles who introduce them to baseball and take them to their first game, but my father never took me to a baseball game. If I ever publish my memoirs the title will be the same as the title of this essay. I did have a faithful and loyal father but baseball was not one of his interests. The same was true of my grandfather, who as a fatherless boy in Richmond, Virginia, during the Civil War had to be more concerned with survival rather than games. I had no uncles who could introduce me to baseball, my mother was an only child, and my father's brothers lived in another state and we never saw them.

I was born in Washington DC in 1926, where my parents lived for about ten years until they moved to Richmond in 1931. The only reference I can remember hearing my father make to baseball had to do with the Senators' two pennants in 1924 and 1925 and their World Series victory in 1924, and being aware that Bucky Harris was known as the "Boy Wonder." That was the limit of his baseball knowledge as far as I knew, and I am sure that the furor in DC over the Senators was so great those two years that he could not have missed it.

My fascination with the game began after we had moved to Richmond and I still do not know why. I did not own a ball, glove, or bat, but the boy across the street did. We would play in the street, taking turns hitting and fielding with the glove, which was a first baseman's mitt. In those days not many people had automobiles in our neighborhood so there were few obstacles and we had the street to ourselves. When we wanted to get more participants we would take our meager equipment to Battery Park, which was about four blocks from our home. The name was derived from the gun emplacements

there during the Civil War. This was a large playground built in a ravine with tennis courts, volleyball courts, and basketball facilities, but, strangely, no baseball diamond.

We would contrive games of what we called “Work-Up” when there weren’t enough boys to make two teams. There was a pitcher, catcher, and batter; the rest were in the field. When the batter was out we would move up in position so all would have a turn hitting. When we had enough to play a game we improvised a diamond that covered the short distance across the ravine. This meant there was a great distance in left and center fields, but right field was defined by the end of the ravine and the right fielder stood immediately behind the first and second basemen.

There was no organized youth baseball like the Little Leagues of today. However, one summer the Atlantic Refining Company sponsored a baseball school at Hotchkiss Field. This was a much larger playground, more than a mile from our home, with a real baseball diamond in addition to a softball field. I remember the leader of this school was named Dick Esleek and his day job was coaching the John Marshall High School football team, which had gained some national fame at the time for going undefeated, untied, and unscored upon for several consecutive seasons. He obviously did this baseball thing because he needed the money; he seemed bored to tears. He did organize some games, and for the first time some of us got to play in what approximated real games.

I remember that the first game I played in included a very embarrassing incident for me. I was playing second base and one of the first plays of the game was a high pop-up to my position. I very confidently got myself under it and was waiting for it to come down, which seemed to take forever. All of a sudden I thought everything had gotten very quiet and wondered if everyone had left. I took my eye off the ball for an instant; at that moment it seemed to have accelerated its fall and landed on my head. Everyone got a chance to play, including a boy whose family were refugees from Nazi Germany. He had enthusiasm but had never played the game before. Therefore, when he was positioned at third base I moved to short so that I could back him up and essentially play both positions. The highlight of this baseball school experience was that all participants

got a baseball cap with an "A" on it. It was the first cap I ever had, and although my baseball-playing career essentially ended that summer, my enthusiasm for the game grew.

The local professional team was called the Richmond Colts, and they became the focus of my baseball interest. I followed their every move in the newspaper and on the radio and came to know the pattern of their schedule so that I could recite it for the entire year. I made a scrapbook of pictures cut from the daily paper and listened to every game on the radio, although other activities often cut into my listening time. During the summer I would go to Battery Park playground where other children from the surrounding neighborhoods would gather in the evening for supervised activities, which included, in addition to the sports mentioned previously, shuffleboard, horseshoes, and dancing to such tunes as "Jump Jim Crow." Because the playground hours ran something like from seven until nine p.m., the Colts games usually had already started and on the way home I could pick up the radio broadcast from houses as I passed, pausing long enough to get the score and inning before I got home to hear the conclusion of the game. One of the announcers was Peaco Gleason and the biggest sponsor was Arrow Beer ("It hits the spot").

After years of hoping my father would take me to a game I finally got up the nerve to ask my parents if I could go by myself. I was probably about twelve or thirteen and we lived in the Barton Heights section of north Richmond. The ballpark was on an island in the middle of the James River on the south side of town. It was necessary to take the streetcar a couple of blocks from where we lived to downtown Richmond and then transfer to a car going to the south side, which stopped at the ballpark. The streetcar fare was seven cents each way and the ticket to the game was probably a quarter. Rather than be bored with sitting through a baseball game, my father agreed to let me go and to this day seeing a real professional game for the first time that night is the highlight of my life. By any standards I am sure this was a fourth-rate ballpark at best, but Yankee Stadium could not have been grander to me. From pictures I saw in later years, the wooden stands were dilapidated and the facilities looked very poor. Located in the middle of the river, the park regularly flooded and had

to be rebuilt until 1940 when the local owner gave up and built a new park on higher ground on the north side of town.

Otherwise, my need to view games was satisfied by watching semi-pro games on the weekend at Hotchkiss Field. This was a very fast league and probably the equivalent of some of the lower leagues of professional baseball today. Local industries like DuPont sponsored teams, and there was a regular schedule of games played at various ball fields throughout the city. Many high school and college players participated, as well as some former professional players who were not going anywhere in their careers and appreciated the opportunity to have a job with a company like DuPont and a chance to play more baseball. There was no admission charged for these games, they were close enough to home for me to walk, and most of the time on both Saturday and Sunday two games were played, which I would watch from beginning to end.

Across the street from us lived a salesman for the local radio station, WMBG. He had previously worked in Cincinnati and claimed to be friends with the Crosleys connected to the Reds baseball team. When he learned about my interest in baseball he loaned me a baseball game that he said had been given to him by Mr. Crosley. Playing this game was almost as thrilling as watching a game. It was very detailed and consisted of cards that gave outcomes for every type of game situation. The outcome was determined by a roll of dice reflecting the inning, runners on base, etc. It was very complicated and I played full schedules of games with box scores and standings for each of the Major League teams. I also simulated the World Series with cumulative statistics for each team. As much as I would have liked to keep the game as a souvenir, I was reluctant to ask if I could have it and did not want to just retain it. Thus when I was too old to play games any longer, probably when I joined the navy in World War II, I returned the game to the owner, who by that time had forgotten about it and did not really care what had happened to it.

The Hill

Willie Runquist

I was raised on “the Hill.” No groans, please. This is not another story about “the Hill” in St. Louis with Yogi and Joe and the other boys of summer. This hill was in another time and place. It was a two-mile string of sand dunes along the ocean rising out of the tidal marsh south of Venice, California, and lying just north of El Segundo, which was home to Standard Oil’s huge refinery and company town. That tidal marsh, or at least part of it, eventually became Marina Del Rey, but during the late throes of the Great Depression it was merely a gleam in the eye of real estate agent T. O. McCoy. The Hill was formally known as Playa Del Rey. Some unnamed developer had planned the area as a movie colony; he dreamed of it as “Malibu Beach South,” but it never came off. Lots had been laid out, roads snaked among the sand dunes, and a fancy beach club was nestled along the ocean. There were a few celebrities living on the Hill, notably producer William DeMille, actor Charles Bickford, and Mel Blanc, who did cartoon voices, but most of the residents had simply taken advantage of the fire-sale prices and built ocean-view homes scattered among the unsold lots.

The Hill was pretty much isolated from the rest of the world. It was separated from Venice three miles to the north and Culver City five miles to the northeast by an immense tidal flat, with a quarter-mile strip of oil wells along the ocean. To the east it was five miles to the community of Inglewood. Almost the entire distance consisted of empty fields. Before the war (to members of my generation “the war” always refers to World War II) the Japanese inhabitants grew lima beans in those fields. Whether they actually ever owned the land is not clear. During the war they were moved out, and it was mostly weeds. The small community surrounding Loyola University was the

only area between Playa Del Rey and Inglewood not populated with jackrabbits. It eventually became known as Westchester, but we all called it Loyola. To the south the dunes tailed off into the Standard Oil Refinery at El Segundo, three miles away from downtown Playa Del Rey. El Segundo was the major shopping center for Playa Del Rey. Although most of the parents wanted their kids to go to school in El Segundo, the bureaucrats decreed otherwise and bused us across the mud flats to Venice. It wasn't until after the war that a parents' action committee got us into school in the oil town.

There weren't a lot of kids of the same age, so most of our recreational pursuits involved a mixture of ages. It was great if you were one of the older ones but not so good if you were like me—not only young, but little.

I don't think the boys on the Hill invented sand football, but they certainly polished it to an art form. The game was born of necessity.

Before the war the primary recreation was on the beach and team games were not much a part of it. Playa Del Rey (“beach of the king” in Spanish) might have been the best surfing beach on Santa Monica Bay, and most of the kids took advantage of it. Unfortunately, this was before the days of the spiffy fiberglass and balsa wood surfboards that are now the common carrier for wave riders. And there wasn't really a subculture built up around the boards. Surfboards were one-hundred-pound hollow monsters made of plywood over a mahogany frame. Not only were they awkward and heavy, but they were expensive. Only one kid on the Hill owned one and he was not the sharing type. We mostly body surfed or used card and cut planks (what we now might call boogie boards), but except for a few winter months our life lay on the beach. During those months we little guys played cowboys and Indians in the brush. What the older boys did, I don't know.

Then came the war and with it the first disruption of this idyllic life. South of Playa Del Rey and just before you reached the oil refinery was Los Angeles's major sewage disposal plant, known as Hyperion. Sewage from all of Los Angeles was treated and piped several miles out into the bay where it headed in the general direction of Mexico. Shortly after the beginning of the war, two things happened that

produced what would now be called an ecological disaster. First, the influx of immigrants looking for work in the war industries of Los Angeles became so large that the plant was unable to carry the load. As a result, raw sewage was dumped into the ocean. In and of itself that would not have caused problems on the beach, but then the large pipe that carried the load several miles out to sea broke right at the low tide line. Now we were getting huge amounts of raw sewage poured almost directly onto the beach. With no material available to fix the leak or to expand treatment facilities, authorities had no recourse but to quarantine the beach, and the best beach on the coast now became useless for five miles in either direction of Hyperion. All that was left was the view.

But this is supposed to be a story about sand football (actually baseball, but that will come). The Hill had no formal parks or playgrounds and no schoolyards, so we were left with sand dunes, a few lumpy weed-covered lots, and the Simpsons' lawn. This plot of grass was about fifteen yards wide and twenty-five yards long, but with no more than three players on a side (one of whom had to be the Simpsons' son) you could play football on it—sort of. We had to be careful not to kick the ball either into Mrs. Simpson's garden that bordered one side or down the fifty-foot cliff at the end of the yard.

But we had one out. We could play in a place known as "the Lagoon." At one time the lagoon was just that, a small bay with a narrow opening to the ocean that brought in waves with the tides. As part of the big development plan for Playa Del Rey, there was an attempt to make a kind of resort beach with boat rentals, hot dog stands, etc., but eventually the incoming surf filled the opening with sand and with no funds to unplug it, the lagoon dried up, leaving a big flat beach. Since the ocean never reached it anymore, it was not part of the beach quarantine, but it left us with the world's greatest sand football stadium. All the boys that lived on the Hill bicycled to the lagoon almost every day after school for pickup games, and it wasn't until well after World War II that the dredges and bulldozers converted the lagoon into Marina Del Rey, and condos instead of seagulls lined its perimeter.

Sand football was played with teams of up to about eight kids. The size of the teams varied depending on who showed up to play, and

the rules for forming teams were flexible. We didn't exactly choose up sides, but sides were somehow agreed upon to keep the competition fair and make sure that certain "friends" always seemed to end up playing together and certain "enemies" played against each other. We played real tackle football, none of the namby-pamby two-hand-touch or flag football stuff they made us play at school. The only equipment necessary was a ball. Most of the time we played bare-footed, because if you didn't you spent most of the time emptying sand from your shoes. As it was, we went home with sand in our hair and oozing from every pore. I was sixteen years old before I realized that most people did not have sand in their beds. A few kids actually had helmets, if you could call them that. They were simply molded leather caps with a kind of padded ear flap, a far cry from the shiny plastic jobs today's youth wear.

The rules of the game were simple. We marked out a field of about fifty yards in the sand, and you had four downs to score a touchdown. There were no "points after." You could punt, but you had to tell the other team when you were going to kick it by shouting out, "Punt formation!" or sometimes, "Punt formation under conditions!" I never did understand what the conditions were, but it meant you had to kick unless you decided you didn't want to. The code didn't allow the defending team to rush the kicker. I think it was more for the protection of the lineman than the punter. No one wanted to get a ball in the face. Fourth down was often an adventure. Punting a somewhat wet and sandy football with bare feet was not a great experience. Most of the time we ran plays out of a kind of shotgun formation. Plays were pretty simple. It was either "Everyone out for a pass" or "Block the guy in front of you, and I'll run it." Occasionally we would come up with something exotic, like the "Statue of Liberty" play, usually drawn in the wet sand and scratched out before the play started.

While most of the time we played among ourselves, it was inevitable that we eventually would make up a Hill team and play games against teams from Venice, El Segundo, and Loyola. We didn't have uniforms, but someone got us team sweatshirts. They were orange with black sleeves and made us look like refugees from a Halloween

party. The mothers even sewed numbers on them. Everyone picked his own number, usually one worn by a favorite player from USC or UCLA. I am sure Johnny Roesch, a seldom-remembered running back for the Bruins, would have been thrilled to see his "32" adorning my jazzy orange and black jersey.

Most of the kids had nicknames, derived from some obvious physical characteristic or a corruption of their real name. There was "Mole," a ferret-faced string bean of a kid, who usually played tailback and whose great skill was his ability to throw the football the entire length of the field. Mole was a pretty good runner, too. When we all ended up at El Segundo, he ran the 880 for the track team and won his share of races. He also played on the school football team, but in a somewhat bizarre twist he was a pass-catching end. For us, he was our thrower. His favorite receiver was "Tayl," a big, strong, good-looking kid who could run pretty well but was so tall and strong that no one could really cover him when he was after one of Mole's passes.

One of the best athletes on the Hill was Marty, who, with typical adolescent cruelty, was called "Tubby" or mostly just "Tub." Marty wasn't really fat but just heavysset (if that euphemistic distinction makes any sense), but he hadn't lost the baby fat around his face and was big for his age. Marty's real value was that he was the only kid in the group who had parents with money and, therefore, he owned the football. Because he had control of the toys, Marty always had a big say in how the games were organized. If things weren't going to his liking, he might just pick up the ball and go home. Therefore, he had to play tailback at least part of the time, even if he wasn't a very good runner. However, he was really an excellent pass receiver, and with Marty on one end and Tayl on the other we had an awesome pass attack. Marty was also one of the few kids on the Hill that ever made it in sports. He played end at Pomona College, a small liberal arts college just east of Los Angeles.

"Weevil," a sandy-haired, freckle-faced kid with the expression of a cat, was considered the group's eccentric inventor. He was more memorable for the fact that he arrived on a bicycle that had an automobile steering wheel instead of handlebars than he was for his football ability, but he was a strong kid who was a pretty good player when he felt like it. There was a big skinny Jewish kid every one called

“Blindy,” who was so uncoordinated that he ran like a crippled giraffe and couldn’t catch a cold in a blizzard. Even I usually got picked before Blindy. “Dare” was a big tough kid who looked even meaner because he had a triangular chip missing from his front tooth. He was the only one from the Hill who made a high school football team (at Venice High School). Dare’s real name was Clarence, but no one ever called him that to his face, except maybe his mother.

As for me, I was “Runt.” I was not really all that good at football. I was a lot smaller than the other kids and was slow and uncoordinated. Dad once told me that when he tried to teach me how to catch a ball, I was lucky to escape with my nose in place. The bigger boys let me play most of the time anyway. I was a decent tackler and bright enough to figure out how to get in the way on defense even if I couldn’t tackle the runner. On offense I wasn’t much use except for one small skill: I learned how to center the ball between my legs to the tailback on a spiral. No one else on the Hill except Dare ever learned how to do this. Dare was one of the big guys, so playing center was beneath him. I got the center position by default. This brings us to Willie’s first principle of athletics: if you want to play a lot and aren’t very good, learn how to do something important that no one else wants to do.

The kid that everyone wanted on his team was “Big John.” John was built like an outhouse and was probably the strongest kid in the neighborhood. Everyone was nice to John because if he wanted to he could probably rip you in half and eat you for breakfast. Like a lot of big, strong kids, however, he was basically a pussycat. In another game he would have been a guard or tackle, but he was the perfect sand football running back. Big John wasn’t very fast; at top speed he was almost standing still. Nor was he smart and tricky, but it took at least three tacklers to bring him to his knees. Whoever had Big John on his team would just give him the ball, point him toward the goal line, and stand back and watch as he rumbled off, plodding through the sand with his head down like an elephant in the canebreak and with tacklers hanging from him like Christmas tree ornaments. Eventually Big John would reach the goal line and stand there grinning and holding the ball up for everyone to see. It was as close as we came in those days to a touchdown celebration.

Baseball was never a very big sport on the Hill. We didn't have a good field, and somehow sand baseball never caught on. Before the sewer breakdown, we never had time for baseball in the summer anyway. The beach was too inviting. But Marty and I were big baseball fans. We used to take the bus to the Pacific Coast League games every Saturday afternoon. After an hour bus ride into Los Angeles, we would then transfer to a streetcar that went either to Wrigley Field in southwest Los Angeles or Gilmore Field in Hollywood. We wouldn't get home until after dark. Catching a streetcar after the game was part of the adventure. The Los Angeles streetcars didn't have any glass in the windows, but there were bars across them to keep the passengers in. After a game they were so crowded that we couldn't get on, so we used to save our carfare by hanging onto those bars on the outside. It was pretty scary to look down and see wheels, tracks, and pavement whizzing by a few inches below our feet. That part of the Saturday outing was something we never told our mothers about.

Marty was by far the best baseball player on the Hill. He made his reputation in a softball game at good old Florence Nightingale Elementary School in Venice. Somehow the playgrounds of elementary schools were never designed with baseball games in mind. Our field was long and skinny with a short right field that was bounded by the classroom building. We had a good game going in the annual contest between fifth and sixth graders when Marty ended it with one blow. He got hold of one and hit a Ruthian shot to deep right center field. When we heard the tinkling of breaking glass we knew we were in trouble. Tub had managed to put the ball through the window of Mrs. Domer's sixth-grade classroom. Mrs. Domer, who had a reputation for being somewhat of an ogre, refused to return the ball, and the game was over. We decided in all fairness that the game should be declared a draw and be rescheduled, but the powers that be wouldn't ever let us play softball on the school playground again.

The lack of Little League and other adult-sponsored formal competition, or even a decent playing field, proved to be only an inconvenience, not a terminal illness. Marty and I were determined to play baseball, even if it wasn't real baseball, so we played a concoction of

standard bat-and-ball games and even invented a few of our own. Over-the-Line and Hit-the-Bat were well-known games that were easily played on a seldom-used gravel road with as many kids as would show up.

We also invented a few two-person games that filled lots of summer hours. One was a simple pitch-and-catch game in which the object was to throw strikes. Marty and I took turns pitching “innings” while the other one caught (and even called) pitches (you had to be able to throw a curve ball for strikes, too) and umpired simultaneously. The object was to not walk our imaginary batters. Four walks in an inning (three strikeouts being an inning) produced a run. The trouble with this game was that we both got too good, and some games would go twenty innings or more before one of us would hit a wild streak and walk in a run. We eventually incorporated wild pitches into the game to increase the scoring. We also played a similar game in which one of us would throw ground balls to the other, who had to “throw out” the imaginary runners. This game produced a bit more scoring, especially when the gravel road we played on would develop a case of the ruts. We even had one variation where one of us would make throws into the dust and the other would have to dig them out. While these games, I am sure, helped us develop our skills, we thirsted for games that came closer to simulating real baseball.

Once we tried to convert a weed-covered lot into a field. We placed stakes in the field to represent the seven defensive players. One of us would then pitch to the other, who would try to hit the ball away from the stakes in order to get base hits. This game did not last long. Since there weren’t any fielders to retrieve batted balls, we spent most of the time going after the ball. Not having a backstop other than a small embankment fronting the sidewalk didn’t help either. You soon developed a strategy of swinging at anything within reach to avoid having to chase the ball across the street. Not only that, but we usually had to hunt for a batted ball in the weeds, and a few of them were never found. At two dollars a pop for balls, the game was too expensive, even for Marty. And during the war we couldn’t get decent balls at any price. Every time you hit one, it returned in the shape of an oval and had to be massaged back into shape. Sometimes I think it is a wonder we ever played baseball at all.

The best games required four players. Weevil and the Simpsons' kid, a short, stocky, redheaded boy known as "Rusty," were not as wildly enthusiastic about baseball as Marty and I, but we could occasionally entice Weevil out of his garage workshop and get Rusty out from under his mother's omnipresent thumb to play some of our games.

One of the most fun games was one we called Peanut Baseball. It was played on the outside of a tennis court fence, and was kind of like the game of Pepper played by real baseball players. The object of the game was to bat the ball against the fence, while two players tried to prevent the ball from hitting it. Like the game Over-the-Line, one player on the attacking team batted and the other lob-pitched the ball to him. There were various targets on the fence for which you received credit for extra bases if they were hit, but any ball over the fence or too far wide (foul) were outs, as well as any fair ball that was cleanly fielded before hitting the fence. It was definitely a game of bat control. Guarding the fence, particularly when the hard-hitting Marty was at bat, was somewhat life threatening, but it sure helped develop fielding reflexes. Otherwise, you lived a short happy life or ended up with fat lips, a crooked nose, and lumpy shins. I think I developed my skills as a hockey goalie playing Peanut Baseball. We also played this game with just two, but it wasn't as much fun. You just reduced the width of the fair ball area and required the fielder to pitch.

The best game we invented was pretty close to real baseball (or maybe more like cricket). We played it in a sandy vacant lot that ran considerably uphill, then about twenty feet down a steep bank. It was a big lot and Marty was the only one that ever hit a ball over the bank (once!). There were two players on a team, with one pitching and the other in the field. The pitcher tried to pitch real pitches and the batter tried to hit it as far as he could and run like hell. When the fielder retrieved the ball, he would throw it to the pitcher, who was now covering the bases. When the pitcher tagged the base ahead of the runner, the runner could advance no further. The other batter then came to the plate and tried to bat the runner in. If the fielder retrieved the ball and got it to the pitcher who tagged the plate before the runner could score, the runner was out and the batter had to stop

wherever he was. It only worked because the field was uphill and the ball didn't roll in the sand, so the fielder didn't have to run forever to get to the ball. We tried it once in a grass park and it was a disaster. We also made several adjustments on the width of the fair ball territory and the distance between bases until we got it right. Our field was truly diamond shaped, with the distance from first base to third being shorter than the distance from home to second. You could put the batter out by catching a fly, beating him to first base, or by strikeout, but most of the outs were force outs at home. Bases on balls weren't allowed, but four balls started the strike count over. Strangely, there were few arguments over balls and strikes. Marty outweighed each of us by at least fifty pounds and if he decided it was a ball or strike, we generally gave in. Besides, he still owned most of the toys. Even with the trunk of a downed palm tree and six-foot bank behind home plate, every pitch that the batter missed or let go had to be chased down. Like most of our games, it encouraged swinging at anything remotely resembling a hittable pitch.

All in all, it was fairly elaborate. The sides were usually Marty and Rusty against Weevil and me, and we kept batting averages and pitching statistics as well as league standings. Marty had a real advantage in this league because he was by far the longest hitter, but, despite the fact that Weevil was strikeout prone, we still won our share of the games with guile and pitching. The two-team league folded unexpectedly after about a year when someone built a house on second base.

We left the Hill after I finished tenth grade and moved to Pasadena, where the recreation department ran organized programs in several sports. We didn't play a lot of baseball, mostly fast-pitch softball (Canadians call it "fastball") and the crazy hybrid game peculiar to Pasadena, which was baseball played on a slightly shortened field (eighty-foot bases and fifty-foot pitching distance) but using a softball. I wasn't good enough to make the high school team anywhere I went, but I became a better-than-average fastball player and, because of my reputation, was invited to play baseball for the University of Redlands. I was a semi-regular my junior year and caught all but three games my senior year. After university I did not play baseball again, but I played fastball off and on until I was in my fifties.

But those games on the Hill shaped my abilities. I was really a hacker; if a pitch was in reach, I would swing. Not only that, I hardly ever missed putting the ball in play when I did swing. In the two years I played for Redlands, I only struck out once (in a game that should have been called for darkness). None of those “deep in the count” at bats for me! This I attribute to all of those games we played as kids without a catcher or backstop. At Redlands I often pitched batting practice largely because I could throw strike after strike of hittable pitches better than a pitching machine. When I was forty-five, I was a base coach for a team in Alberta’s fastest men’s amateur baseball league and pitched batting practice for those guys as well, no doubt in part a result of all those days I spent playing pitch and catch with Marty.

Marvelous Marv

Dennis Brislen

“The Little League is coming to Homewood!” It’s funny how some things stay with you forever. I can’t recall whose excited voice made the announcement, but I’ve never forgotten it. For an eleven-year-old boy in 1952 it was a thundering pronouncement. For those who grew up in later decades, I know it’s difficult to conceive of a time when there were few (in many cases no) organized sports leagues for youngsters. Nineteen-fifty-two was such a time. Therefore, the thought of an organized baseball league complete with real games, coaches, umpires, and (most important) uniforms, was truly exciting news.

A few days went by and we learned that there would be tryouts held at the Central School playground on successive Saturday mornings. The coaches would be there to watch each boy bat, field, run, and throw. After the tryouts we would be “drafted” by the coaches of each team. All the service clubs of Homewood were team sponsors, and I learned soon after tryouts that I would play on the vfw team. I remember my mother telling me one day that “somebody named Marv” had called to tell me that he would be our coach and to schedule our first practice. I was so excited to be playing baseball that the name of the coach wasn’t very important at the time. Soon, however, I was to learn how lucky I had been to be selected to play on a Marv Austin-coached team. At the first practice Marv made an immediate impression on me. He was youthful (mid-twenties), energetic, and personable. I went home after that first practice knowing that Marv would be fun to play for and that I was going to learn a lot about baseball.

Practices began as soon as Marv got off work in the evening and continued until darkness set in. After a couple of weeks of practices

it was time for our first game. We won. It was apparent that Marv had drafted well, for as the season progressed we continued to win. We not only won the league championship that year but repeated as champs the following season. Marv was a coach, about that there was little doubt. He was an excellent teacher of the fundamentals and we seldom made mistakes on the field. He taught us to think one and two plays ahead during the game. We knew how to position ourselves in the field, what base to throw to, how to hit the cutoff man, and how to run the bases. I later played on a college team that won three consecutive league championships. I never learned anything from my college coach that Marv hadn't already taught me.

As good as he was as a coach, however, it's Marv the man whom I think of most often today. I think of all the meals that he missed to be at practice on time after working all day long. I think of the summer evenings he could have been spending with his gorgeous young wife instead of with a bunch of sweaty eleven- and twelve-year-olds. He gave so much of his time and talent to the youngsters of Homewood. In addition to baseball in the spring and summer, during the winter he organized and managed several all-day Saturday basketball leagues that encouraged girls to participate along with the boys, a rarity for the time. Realizing that after age twelve we were no longer eligible for Little League baseball, he was instrumental in the creation of the Homewood Pony League for thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds and continued to coach in that league.

One of Marv's talents was to see us not just as athletes but as individuals with different temperaments and personalities. I will always remember the evening when we finished practice and he called us together to talk about motivation. He discussed each of our personal traits; how some of us needed a pat on the back and some needed a figurative "kick" in the pants and some of us needed both, but at different times. It's always dangerous to discuss someone's personal characteristics in front of others, but he pulled it off. He knew us better than we knew ourselves and when he was done, we knew each other a lot better, too.

I was a good athlete and usually did well at whatever sport I attempted. During the first season of Little League I was a good fielder and base runner, but for some reason I couldn't hit at all. This was

extremely frustrating because I knew I had a good swing and I wasn't afraid at the plate. I had no more than a handful of base hits during the season and struck out often. Marv worked patiently with me but in spite of his knowledge and patience, nothing seemed to help. At the end of the season he suggested to my parents that they have my eyes examined. That didn't happen. I don't think they believed my eyes were bad and there probably wasn't a lot of extra money for things that weren't necessary.

At the start of the next season I was borrowing my classmates' glasses to be able to see the blackboard in school. When the teacher called my parents to tell them, they were still reluctant to believe it. They figured I wanted glasses because my friend Bob Dahlsgaard had them. (Believe me, no one thought glasses were cool in those days! Designer frames were way down the road.) They finally gave in and scheduled an exam. Sure enough, I was quite nearsighted.

It took a week or so to get my new glasses, during which time I played several games with results similar to the season before. Good field, no hit. My glasses arrived on the day of a game. After my teammates had all tried them on and given me my share of good-natured jibes, the game began. Bill Ormsby was pitching against us. He was the best pitcher in the league. He was big and could throw the ball extremely fast. Whether he would get a no-hitter or not was the usual question when he pitched. I'm sure I had done nothing but strike out against him in the past. It came time for my first at bat against him. I swung at his first pitch and missed. Nothing new here. But there was! And I realized it immediately. I had swung in front of the pitch! I had always been late swinging in the past. I took his next pitch outside for ball one. I saw the ball perfectly! I knew if I timed it right, I could hit it. I swung and hit the next pitch on a line to left-center for a stand-up double! I wasn't trying to show Bill up, but I know I stood on second base grinning from ear to ear. He turned and looked at me with a smile on his face. He couldn't believe it either. I went 4 for 4 with a home run that game. Hell, no one could believe it. I was the talk of the town! From that point on, I was always a good hitter. My parents went to Marv after the game and told him they'd never doubt him again.

When necessary, Marv could be tough on us. He wasn't the least bit afraid to put one of us on the bench for a while if we became a little too impressed with ourselves. So much did we respect him, however, that he seldom had to do more than give us a look to settle us down. We also came to adore Marv's wife, Marilyn. We all thought she was the best-looking woman we had ever seen. At the time they had no children and I think they kind of adopted us all. On a typical summer day we would meet in the morning at the playground and play ball until lunchtime. After lunch we frequently would ride our bikes to Marv and Marilyn's house on Ridge Road. There we would laugh and joke around with Marilyn and it seemed like she always just happened to have some pies or cookies that needed to be "sampled." One day we must have carried our joking and clowning around too far because Marilyn became quite upset with us. That night we got a talking-to from Marv. We all felt bad, so the next day we pooled our coins and bought a card and some flowers and took them over to the house and apologized. Marilyn laughed and cried and gave us all a big hug.

Homewood didn't have a high school; we therefore eventually went our separate ways and our group was no more. Marv continued to stay in touch with us, though, and never failed to congratulate us when we accomplished something or to encourage us not to give up if things weren't going well. He always told us he was proud of us. I am not so sure we told him how proud we were of him. I hope he knows now. The other day on C-SPAN I saw Senator Bob Kerrey of Nebraska receive an award from his fellow senators on the thirtieth anniversary of his Medal of Honor award for service during the Vietnam War. In his acceptance speech he said that he didn't really consider himself a hero. He did a brave thing on one day in his life. While he didn't diminish the significance of his own actions, Kerrey said he considers the real heroes to be those everyday people who, day in and day out, quietly give of themselves that which they don't have to give. Things like time, patience, kindness to others—things that touch lives forever. I agree. By that definition, Marv Austin is truly a hero.

The Tennis Court

Gene Carney

In the 1950s baseball for me was primarily a neighborhood game. My friends and I played it in the street, rarely on a real playground with a backstop and outfield fences, and mostly at a field we called the Tennis Court.

My family had moved after my father's first heart attack to Kennedy Avenue—maybe a half-mile away on Pittsburgh's north side. The feature that sold my mother on the house was its lack of steps—my father could enter the house from the driveway without a climb. Kennedy was steep and dead-ended into Riverview Park, which is famous for its observatory.

A trail at the bottom of the dead end led to a clearing, which in fact had once been a tennis court. It wasn't much, but it served as an infield. Our "diamond" was more like a kite, squeezed in on both sides to fit the terrain.

The field was bound on three sides by forest. Ballparks used to be called orchards—ours was *literally* one! We saturated those woods with lost balls, so much so that after a few years we could almost always come out of there with a ball—if not the one we were looking for then a different one, which we hoped would not be too moldy or waterlogged to be used again. We favored taping our baseballs—after we knocked the covers off—with black electrical tape, which was waterproof. Most of the time. On a lucky day someone would come up with a roll of white adhesive tape. This was double protection (when we "mummified" a baseball core with that elegant stuff)—from the dreaded rains, when the ball was temporarily lost to us, and from getting lost in the first place (the white was easier to spot among the weeds and bramble).

Needless to say, baseballs that were “new” (with original covers and fairly light in color) were treated with reverence. They were exempt from games of Pepper or infield practice so that their first grass and dirt stains came in actual field combat. The kid who owned the new ball was “King for the Day.”

But he suffered most, too, because few balls left the playing field in as good a shape as they were before we used them. At the Tennis Court, a “lively ball” was one with its cover and most of its stitches intact. A “dead ball” was one that we literally beat to death, its yarn relentlessly unwinding, the sphere shrinking with each contact, until finally its exploded wool and yarn stuffing was scattered between home plate and second base. A game within the game was to see who would apply the final, fatal swat.

Naturally we were fascinated to see the inside of a baseball—I bet every kid had dissected one, first chance he had, when it started to unravel. (It was a dull project, compared to slicing open a golf ball, which can take over and hatch itself at a certain point—something we’d already done together—stand back!)

New bats received similar “use it ’til it ain’t useable” treatment. All our bats were wooden (aluminum was for screens and siding—still is, if you want my opinion—the pinging sound of a baseball meeting aluminum is downright alienating), and it was understood that everyone brought all of their bats to every game. Someone had a forty-two-ouncer that was fine for bunting but impossible to swing at fast pitching. I had a thirty-two-ounce Mickey Mantle model that we kept in play until it was almost flat on one side, worn down mostly by a solitaire backyard game of hitting rocks that we tossed in the air (lining them off or over an abandoned wooden garage wall).

Our ground rule was that anyone could use anyone else’s lumber. If the club broke, it was no one’s fault—it was accepted as part of the game. We tried to ignore breaks, actually, but finally had to doctor them with nails or tape. This wasn’t Boston, and splinters were not splendid.

Behind the Tennis Court’s second base was a sharp rise of maybe two feet, dividing the makeshift infield from the zany outfield. A tall elm was the left-field marker that divided fair from foul—it dis-

couraged right-handed hitters from yanking the ball into the hungry woods.

The Tennis Court encouraged place-hitting—fair balls were limited to a narrow slot, roughly the space between the shortstop and the second baseman on a normal diamond. Our homemade ground rules came down hard on balls smacked into the deep woods (they were “automatic outs” because they ate up precious daylight while we turned search party.) “Pull-hitters” were simply out of luck.

In dead center was a print shop run by Sam Hamilton, a white-haired, friendly neighbor. Sam must have loved baseball, or kids, or both. We shattered the window on his shop’s door more than once, before he kindly built a screened frame to prevent further damage (and more collections to pay for new windows).

Sam would stop the presses and amble out of his shop, wiping his brow, our culprit ball in hand. We’d all march out to center and apologize as a group—the batter was never allowed to take full blame—and we’d probably joke about Aunt Minnie not raising the window in time. Pittsburgh fans from Ralph Kiner days will remember Rosey Rowswell calling Buc homers that way on the radio. Rosey was before my time, but everyone knew about Aunt Minnie (“she n-e-v-e-r made it”). I don’t ever remember Sam getting mad when the crashes came.

There were no walls anywhere in our outfield; balls past the fielders were stopped by Sam’s tin-covered shed or by natural ramparts, mostly trees. So we had to practice our “play-of-the-game” catches back up on Kennedy Avenue, hitting flies up the steep street against the sloping ivy-covered stone wall in front of my house. The perfect hit backed the fielder up to where he had to stretch or leap, snagging the would-be homer.

We copied everything we could about Major League ball without shame. The Pirates had pioneered the use of batting helmets in the 1950s, and kids all over the city started wearing plastic and foam rubber versions on the sandlots (until the hats cracked, usually from being slammed down after a whiff).

Our “uniforms” were jeans, t-shirts, and “tennis shoes” or “tennies”—no designer sneaks. I can’t remember what brand of shoes anyone wore—who cared? They weren’t Nikes; Nikes were those missiles out at North Park, guarding the city from Russian bombers. (The

cold war was in full freeze.) The army built one launch site right near one of our favorite groves. I knew what Nikes looked like because I had built plastic models of them. They weren't shoes. Adidas? That was something that Pancho might have said to Cisco at the end of their TV show. No, we wore "tennies," and they worked just fine.

Flip-down sunglasses were clipped onto the visors of our caps, even though little sun broke through to the court's playing field. We were ready for it, if and when it did! And those caps were worn loose, too, so they'd fly off when we ran hard—just like Mays's or Clemente's cap. It may sound dumb, but it was "big league."

We also copied Major League stances (Johnny Powers was a favorite to mimic: he held the bat not even level, which would have been odd enough, but he let it tilt downward, before he swung), glances (a sneaky squint and scowl at the base runner, when pitching from the set position), and dances (in those more reserved times no one high-fived, but we could jump for joy when we had reason to). We didn't imitate everything we saw; our pats were confined to backs, and none of us had any use for tobacco.

In right field was a vegetable garden, and that posed a problem. We struck a deal with its owner—they wouldn't mind if we hit a few balls into it as long as we didn't trample anything "rigging" (retrieving) them. So the garden was a ground-rule double, and the outfielders could leisurely root around among the cornstalks and tomatoes, not worrying about the batter going any farther than second.

The bases were either flat rocks or hunks of discarded concrete, the squarer the better, which we sunk into the ground so that they stuck up about an inch above ground level. They were somewhat disposable and were replaced when a more base-like chunk of stone was discovered. We painted the bases white every so often, sometimes with whitewash. Baseball was originally known as "base ball"—two words—as distinct from ball games where players ran from stake to stake or from stool to wooden stool. So I guess at the Tennis Court we played "boulder ball."

Behind home plate, which was a metal rectangle from some scrap heap, we fashioned an ever-growing backstop, anchored to a huge thick-barked tree that towered over the infield. Often we had no catcher, so wild pitches, unabated, would go on forever, down

a steep embankment, if the backstop failed its duty. So we tacked on old doors, screens, boards—whatever we could salvage from the neighborhood curbside. There was another motive for expanding the backstop: increased privacy for when “nature called.”

That barricade-supporting tree required a special version of the infield fly rule: pop-ups that stuck in its leafy branches, if dislodged by tossing rocks, were not outs if they were caught. Probably half of our time at the Tennis Court was spent looking for lost balls. We learned to recognize poison ivy without ever joining the Scouts.

We didn't need eighteen for a game at the Tennis Court—indeed, there was room for only six or seven fielders maximum. With just two, we played Pepper or hit grounders, or practiced pegging (home to second to home—YES!!!). Or, with whiffle balls or rubber balls, we played one-on-one, pitcher versus batter.

Three players meant a variation on all of the above—for example, rehearsing double-play pivots on grounders, hands like “Maz”—“Get two!” Any kid in Pittsburgh who found himself at the Keystone position imagined himself to be “Maz”—Bill Mazerowski. Maz became a great fielder, we heard, by bouncing a rubber ball off a wall for hours as a kid in Wheeling, West Virginia—that was close enough to Pittsburgh to consider Maz a hometown hero. Anyway, like Maz, we all tossed rubber balls all the time, against our garages (or inside, when it rained), porch steps, or houses (I had certain shingles pretty worn down). And with three we could also play “Run-Down”—the runner was given a fair chance to avoid the tag out and reach a base safely. We danced and darted and juked in our “tennies” (no one wore spikes) like Willie Mays, scoring points for elusiveness.

Four players meant “Game Time.” We played those two-on-two contests in several different ways: in one, a runner had to score or he was out—forced at home, even if he was on first. This gave the single fielder a chance to chase hits down and get them back to the pitcher, who covered all the bases. Another way to go was to employ what we called ghost runners—imaginary teammates who advanced only as far as the real kid on base behind him, as I recall. With a ghost runner on second and a real runner on first, a pitcher could field a grounder and race to step on third before the real runner made it to second. Got it?

Since there were no umpires handy, we spent almost as much time arguing at the Tennis Court as we did looking for lost balls. The ghost runners didn't help. But we learned to settle things by ourselves, and quickly. Often we settled a deadlock with the old "toss a bat and climb hands, last one to get their whole hand on the handle wins." This really was not leaving things up to chance, because we all learned to expand our fists or squeeze our fingers, whatever was required to settle these duels.

And then there was always "Roundsies" (not to be confused with that baseball ancestor "Rounders"—but maybe that's where the name came from). Roundsies was a game ideal when the number of players was odd. We all took turns batting in a rotation, staying on the at bat team until we made an out. A fielder catching a ball on the fly joined the offense immediately (exchanging places with the batter). We didn't keep score—just played on until we were tired or the sun went down. Roundsies was a great game to play when a regular game ended and we still had some daylight left.

Oddly enough, although I must have played hundreds of games at the Tennis Court—naturally, it was also our football field—I remember other events better.

Just behind second base was a pole, maybe eight feet high, a leftover from the original tennis court. One summer it became the home for a nest of wasps. On a sunny afternoon one of them stung Jimmy Kerr, whose face puffed up so much that in a few minutes one of his eyes was closed as though he had been punched by a heavyweight boxer. First severe allergic reaction that any of us had ever seen. He was whisked off to a hospital and survived, and soon after the wasps were gasolined and torched out of their pole. The pole was taken down so they wouldn't try that again, not on our field. Actually, it wasn't our field at all, and to this day I have no idea who owned the property. Today it's overgrown with weeds.

Bill Lerach and I would never have let that happen. We were not only players; we were groundskeepers. We treated that sorry excuse for a field like it was the eighteenth green at Augusta, nurturing its crabgrass, raking out its rocks, even laying down lines of lime between home and first, and home and third. In our yards at home we were useless, but the Tennis Court—that was different!

We kept an old canvas paint tarp handy behind first base, rushing it out to cover the swamp-prone second base area when the rains came. Eddie Dunn, the head groundskeeper of Forbes Field in those days, would have been proud of us. Our own shelter from the elements was a nearby picnic table, where we lunched on days when we started playing soon after dawn until suppertime. In a storm we'd crouch under it, along with the daddy longlegs and grasshoppers, and learn patience.

Near third base was another pole—shorter, a pole that once must have supported a tennis net. It was cemented into the ground, or else we'd have removed it. I grit my teeth even now, remembering how my friend Bill, running into third base, head down, ran beyond the base and into a bolt sticking out from that pole—puncturing the top of his head and producing the bloodiest mess I've ever seen.

We stuffed a shirt or two onto the bright red geyser and marched off to Bill's house, which was fortunately close by. His mother gasped, then stuck his head in their basement stationary tub (a heavy-duty sink that preceded automatic washing machines). I took in the entire event wide-eyed, wondering if anything could stop the flow. Bill was whisked off to a hospital and survived, with a bald spot shaved out of his blond curls to make room for a bandage, a white badge of courage.

I earned my badge a few years later. I was in the outfield racing to my right and reaching out to backhand a line drive. But the ball ricocheted off that fair/foul elm in left, into my face, gashing me below my left eye, earning me the only stitches I've ever needed as well as another scar, which was neatly covered a few months later when I myself became a kid who wore glasses!

Band-Aids, slings, and crutches are great when you're young and everything is temporary. They draw attention, and there's nothing like a lot of attention to make you forget your aches and pains.

A few times our games were interrupted by a deer straying by. Usually our clamor kept all animals out of sight, but maybe on a prolonged, silent ball search, someone would look up—and there it was. Word spread rapidly in whispers, and, awestruck, we'd crouch and creep and crawl, Indian-like (don't snap a twig), to see how close we could get to this amazing creature. We were city kids who had never hunted anything but lost baseballs, so this rare chance to stalk

was tremendously exciting stuff. When at last we were sensed and the wild animal bolted off, we cheered—and resumed the harder pursuit.

The summer that I turned twelve, the ex-Brooklyn Dodgers and ex-New York Giants played their first season in California. It was a terrible turn of events for residents of that immense city, a tragedy I cannot begin to imagine. Had the Pirates moved west—well, I guess my life would have been quite different! Young Pirate fans with radio curfews on nights before school days felt only a sliver of inconvenience. Those games from the West Coast started when the games in the East were ending. However, when school was out in June, on through until it started up again in September, those late-late night games provided our neighborhood with some very special adventures.

We'd play our usual ball at the Tennis Court until dusk, when the odds of finding lost balls dropped as low as the sun on the horizon. But instead of heading home, we'd unpack our sleeping bags and gather wood for an all-night campfire.

I'd camped out overnight at our parish's summer retreat in the Laurel Mountains a couple of times, but that was with plenty of adult supervision. No counselors at the Tennis Court: kids only.

The red bricks that lined the third base/home corner of the field (to prevent rollers over the hill) were converted into a small wall, encircling the pitcher's mound (which was never very high.) The two-foot by six-inch piece of board that we had nailed into the clay to serve as a rubber was removed, and that's where our fires were built—on the mound, the center of our universe.

Our bags were strung out like spokes around that inner circle, close enough to the flames to lean our sharpened branches on the bricks and toast marshmallows while we laid safely inside, tucked away from mosquitoes and no-see-ums.

At 11:00 my trusty RCA portable transistor radio was clicked on, and our ghost stories and fireside chatter took second place to Bob Prince and the Pirates' game. Paradise could not have been much better for Pittsburgh teenagers.

More often than not the batteries would fade. Off went the radio, to let them rest up. Click—back on, to catch a critical at bat or a new score, and so on, into the deep night.

As the batteries died their slow death, we'd take turns pressing the radio against our ears, trying to squeeze out pieces of vital information. We definitely didn't want to wait until the morning newspaper's arrival to find out who had won. And if the box from California was late, we'd have to wait until the *afternoon* paper!

At daybreak the birds would wake us up. We'd douse any remaining sparks and coals, scatter the ashes, and rebuild the roller barrier if the bricks were cool enough to carry. Then we'd trudge home, smelling of smoke, to take baths and go to bed—resting up for an afternoon game, perhaps, back at the Tennis Court, where every game was a home game.

Little Chiefs

Benjamin McArthur

Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1960 was far from the majors. True, Kansas City lay only two hundred miles to the southeast. But its Athletics (the team that gave up Roger Maris to the Yankees) qualified as a Major League team only by a generous use of that term. Whatever baseball I grew up with came from two local sources: our Class A Lincoln Chiefs and the city's Little League, the Little Chiefs. Of the first not a great deal need be said. As a low-level minor league team affiliated with the Pittsburgh Pirates, the Chiefs are remembered mainly for Dick Stuart's hitting 66 home runs one season in the 1950s, a record at that time for a professional team. Although on summer nights I haunted the shambling Sherman Field, which I could observe by looking down the nearby railroad tracks and see the lights blazing above the field (thus discovering it was game night), and though I got to watch a number of athletes who went on to some prominence in the majors (Julian Javier, Al Weiss, Don Buford), my real field of dreams lay with the Little Chiefs.

I spent two years in the "minors" (eight- and nine-year-olds) before graduating to the "majors" (ages ten to twelve). No memories of my youth—or really of my entire life—are more vivid than those of midsummer late afternoons when we gathered to play. This was not because our modest teams had the accouterments Little Leagues normally sport. We had no faux Major League uniforms with our names blazoned on the back, no bleachers for our parents, no soda stand dispensing treats, no outfield fence to demarcate the playing area. I never received a single trophy during all my years (nor, I think, did anyone else). Not one of these things did we miss. Instead, every player wore a simple white t-shirt with "Little Chief" inscribed on the front and a red cap (sans lettering). Outfields spread out into the

next field or an adjoining playground. Parents brought lawn chairs if they wished to sit and coolers if they needed a drink.

Not only did we not miss the flashier accessories of Little League baseball life, we had something often missing today: pitching. If home runs now fly out of Major League parks with distressing regularity, one might look no further than the advent of tee-ball for an explanation why kids today don't develop an interest in pitching. Not so in my day. Pitching was nurtured as an essential element of the game. From an eight-year-old's first at bat he had to confront the overhand pitch. Granted, this sometimes made for ugly baseball. A merry-go-round of walks often resulted. But the game was learned (if not mastered) in its entirety.

Unlike many Little Leagues then and now, the organizers of the Little Chiefs successfully kept competition within reasonable boundaries. Coaches and parents would get zealous, but I think my memory well serves me in recalling remarkably little contention over calls or unsportsmanlike behavior. Further, every member of a team played at least three (out of five) innings and was ensured a time at bat. I played alongside some truly unskilled children who nonetheless got their fun.

Was I any better? Marginally. Before the difficult years of puberty abruptly and permanently set me behind my peers in physical strength, my decent coordination honed by hours of bouncing rubber balls off our house and batting rocks in my driveway gave me some advantage. I played the skill positions: shortstop, center field, and occasionally pitcher (almost always as a reliever). My youthful self-esteem was built substantially on my competence (really, no stronger word fits) in Little League. I recall the happy end of one game, when I caught a fly in center field for the last out. The catch was routine, but my pride took a start when I heard the coach tell my parents that he "never worried about that out."

Still, not all moments were golden. Even more firmly embedded in my mind—and somehow more emblematic of my lifelong athletic career—was the final inning of a game where we trailed by a run but had the bases loaded. I was at bat. The other team brought in a relief pitcher, who, in the parlance of today, "brought some heat." Our coach had confidence that I could drive in the winning run. But

I was intimidated and never came close to making contact. In three pitches I went down, leaving the bases full. In the clutch I had failed. Through the years that moment has haunted me. It has come to seem indicative of a character flaw, the absence of some essential quality of fortitude. I've relived that at bat many times, always with the resolve that if given another chance I would hang in and make contact. Thus baseball, ever a child's game, becomes for adults a template upon which we trace the formation of our very being.

Take Two and Hit It into the Trees in Right

Terry Sloop

I am old enough to remember baseball before free agency, a time when young boys felt safe rooting for their favorite teams, secure in the knowledge that when next season rolled around Gibson would still be pitching for the Cardinals and Aaron would still be quietly stroking them over the fence for the Braves. Sure, there were the usual trades and every now and then a blockbuster trade, but back then these were exciting, mysterious dealings that provided much-needed fuel for the long winter's hot stove league. These were the days before ESPN, CNN, *USA Today's Sports Weekly*, or the Internet. Baseball news—especially timely baseball news—simply wasn't available to many of us during the winter months, and where I grew up most of the stores didn't carry *The Sporting News*.

These also were the days before SEGA consoles, Sony Playstations, and whatever other video-based entertainment happens to be the current rage. Soccer had not yet caught on in our area. You certainly didn't play football between the months of April and September (at least I didn't). This was suburbia before the days of the secluded cul-de-sac, when neighborhoods were really neighborhoods, laid out in relatively expansive rectangular grids connected by a series of intersecting streets. It was easy—and relatively safe—to get from one area to another without needing Mom or Dad to drive you, or without having to take your life into your hands by walking or riding your bike on a major street in order to get where you wanted to go. The neighborhood school was always close by and usually a church or two. Kids who might live a mile apart could easily interact on a fairly regular basis. Oftentimes this meant congregating at the local school or church grounds for a pick-up game of baseball.

In my immediate neighborhood, there was a slight problem by the time I was a teenager looking for a pick-up game. My older brother, Warren, had plenty of kids in his age cohort to run around with when he was in his early teens (although, given the kinds of activities they were inclined to be involved in, this may not have been a good thing). By the time I was in my early teens there were fewer of us left, and some of my peers weren't particularly interested in baseball. That left three of us in my neighborhood, who spent most of their free time during the summer playing baseball.

Randy S. was a year younger than I and lived across the street. Uncoordinated and somewhat awkward as a young boy, he had started a workout and dieting regimen by the time he entered middle school that turned him into a solid, well-built kid. Although he wasn't very tall (none of us was), there wasn't an ounce of fat on him by the time he was fourteen. While he was never the most graceful or fastest athlete to hit the field, he went on to become a good baseball player (a catcher), and a better football player. I guess I've never told him this to his face, but I always admired him for his determination to make himself into a decent athlete and for having the guts to work hard to make the high school teams. He still lives in the Richmond area, not too far from where we grew up. His parents continue to reside on the same road, across the street from my mother.

Freddie M. lived a little farther down the road from Randy and me and was a year younger. Freddie was a nice guy, but he was the smallest of the three of us. Relatively short and thin, Freddie was fast but had no power at the plate, strictly a singles hitter. He was a Mormon and eventually moved away to complete his required missionary service for the church. I don't know where he is today, or what he is doing. I'd like to find out, though.

As a teenager, I was fairly well coordinated and a decent athlete. I loved baseball, played Little League each year (in the Tuckahoe Little League, which has sent several all-star teams to Williamsport over the years), and dabbled in basketball and football around the neighborhood. I never received much attention as an athlete, however, for a couple of reasons. First, I was relatively small without much power. Let's face it; in the teen years, the best athletes who get most of the recognition tend to be the bigger, stronger kids. When I was

fourteen, I was probably about five-foot-five-inches tall and may have weighed 110 pounds. Since I wasn't known to lift anything heavier than a baseball bat, I wasn't very strong. The second reason no one really knew whether or not I was a good athlete was because of my personality. I was shy, not terribly extroverted, and probably believed that I wasn't as good as most of my peers who were athletes. So I never made a point of trying to show anyone what I could do on a baseball field. But I didn't care either; I never based my sense of self-worth on what other people thought of me, or whether or not I made the team, or belonged to any given club or group. It wasn't important to me. I had a friend in high school who lived and died based on whether he was accepted into certain cliques or made the football and baseball teams. I didn't understand that outlook and never worried about it. But looking back on it, I realize that by the time I was fifteen I was a decent ballplayer: I was a good fielder (I played center field), had a strong, accurate arm, and had figured out the secret to hitting (or so I believed). I could hit for average, if not power. Now I wish that I had had the drive, the self-confidence, to at least try to make my high school teams.

At any rate, during our free time we (particularly Randy and I) often met out in the street to just play catch. We played catch for at least a few minutes almost every day. (My brother and I continued that tradition well into our adult years whenever we both were at our parents' house.) When we were eleven or twelve years old and all three of us could get together, we'd play a scaled-down, relatively unstructured game, usually in Randy's backyard. When we got into our teens, however, we outgrew Randy's backyard so, when the opportunity arose, we moved our "games" over to the local church yard. Our new playing field, along with the fact that there were just the three of us, required some creative modifications of the rules.

Derbyshire Baptist Church was located one road over from our street, Avalon Drive. We just had to cut through the woods behind Randy's house and we were there. One wing of the church extended east from the main sanctuary and contained the administrative offices, kitchen, and Sunday school classrooms. (I know it had a kitchen because every now and then we were able to gain entrance to the building and help ourselves to an occasional Coke from the refrig-

erator. Yes, I'll probably go to hell for stealing from a church. I beg forgiveness! I am older and wiser now.) At the end of this wing was a side lot that we used for a field. Because of some of the surrounding terrain, we had to set the field up so that we would be hitting toward the south, toward Derbyshire Road, which was probably about 220 feet away. Derbyshire was our outfield "fence." Any fly ball on or over the road was a home run. Of course, in this case the home run distance to center field was shorter than it was to the rest of the outfield. Other factors, which I'll discuss shortly, made that fact irrelevant, however. There was a lone tall tree about forty feet or so behind the pitcher's spot (use of the word *mound* would be terribly inaccurate in this case), and it was aligned perfectly with the pitcher's spot and home (again, I decline to use the word *plate*), so the tree became second base. First base was a bare spot just in front of the door leading into the administrative wing of the church. (This meant that one corner of the building was "in play.") Third base was a rag on a bare spot that was roughly on a straight line with the pitcher's spot and first, although I seriously doubt the distances between the bases were anywhere close to consistent.

Two other unique features of the field should be mentioned. First, there was a line of trees on the edge of the woods that ran from about ten feet behind third base to Derbyshire Road. Since this line of trees was on a path parallel to an imaginary line running from home through second base to Derbyshire Drive, it presented some difficulties in regards to balls hit to left field. There was no left field. Second, another group of trees impolitely sprouted from the ground in medium right-center. Problematic, but nothing that we couldn't overcome. With these constraints in mind, we invented a three-person game with the following rules:

1. One person hit, another pitched, and another played the outfield. Scores were kept for each individual. When the batter made three outs, the pitcher would move to the plate and the outfielder became the pitcher.
2. Unlike, I suppose, most short-handed pick-up games, for us anything hit to the left side of second base was a foul ball. This wasn't a problem for Freddie, because he was a natural left-handed hitter any-

way. Randy and I adjusted without too much problem. I had decent bat control and used to switch hit sometimes anyway just for the hell of it. Randy didn't have too many problems with it, but he was so strong to all fields that every now and then he would pull a ball way into the woods in left, requiring a dreaded ball hunt.

3. With no one on base, the batter had only to get a single. Once there were base runners, however, the batter would be required to get whatever hit was necessary to move the lead ghost runner to third base. So if the lead runner was on first, the next hit would have to be a double. If that batter was thrown out at second base (or if he didn't try for second and settled for a single), he would get credit for moving the ghost runner up to second, but the batter was out, with no runner on first base. A single would be sufficient for the next hit, which would move the runner to third.

4. Any ball hit into the trees in right-center was in play. Good luck.

5. Any ball hit down the first base line that struck the corner of the church annex that stuck out a couple of feet into fair territory was in play. Play it as it rolls. Hey, Fenway had nothing on us.

6. For the purpose of making a fielding play at first, the pitcher's spot was first base. The batter still had to run to first, but any throw back to the pitcher on the pitcher's spot that beat the runner to first was considered a ground out.

I wish I could say that I have a lot of indelible memories of specific plays from our games, but I can't. I remember a few. I remember catching a few flies as they came down through the tree limbs in right-center. I remember a few good running catches, a couple of good throws to catch the batter/runner at second or third. Every now and then I threw Freddie out at first base from the outfield. Most of my memories are more general in nature, however. I don't remember what system we used to determine who would pitch, bat, or field first. I do remember hoping like hell that I would end up pitching to Randy, because whoever was in the outfield when Randy batted was going to end up running their ass off. Randy hit the ball a long way. He could regularly hit the ball onto Derbyshire Drive, which was a problem because across the street from the field were more woods,

which meant we spent a considerable amount of time looking for stray balls when Randy was batting. When Randy was batting, it also meant the trees in right-center were much more likely to come into play. I remember playing under those trees many a time when I was unfortunate enough to be in the outfield while Randy was hitting. Of course, the trees prevented more home runs off of Randy's bat, so I suppose there were some strategic advantages there. Pitching to Randy meant I would be in the outfield when Freddie was hitting, and the trees would not come into play so often. Much easier duty. I remember straining to hit home runs myself; eventually I was able to "go yard" with some frequency.

I remember switch hitting according to the characteristics of the players on my favorite team at the time, the St. Louis Cardinals. My first at bat was always left-handed, in honor of Lou Brock. I even emulated his extremely closed stance. In honor of my boyhood hero, Bob Gibson, I may have even thrown a knockdown pitch or two (which wouldn't have done any damage since we were usually just lobbing the ball from about twenty-five feet away). Randy played as the Braves; he idolized Hank Aaron. He used a Jackie Robinson model Louisville Slugger which, some of you may remember, had one of the thickest handles you could find on a bat. He was strong enough to use one of those. Not me. I had a thin handle on my bat. (I wish I could remember what model it was.) Freddie sometimes would fabricate a Giants' lineup, with the two Willies (Mays and McCovey) and a few others. I remember having to retrieve many a foul ball from the roof of the church. This happened quite often, and we usually found an old tire laying around, propped it up against the church wall, and up I went. It was almost always me because Freddie was too short to stand on the tire and still be able to reach the top of the building where he could pull himself up; Randy was too damn heavy for Freddie and me to help push him up once he got on the tire. Amazingly enough, we never broke any windows while we were playing, although I seem to remember that one window was broken during a larger pick-up game when I was fortunate enough to be on vacation. Finally, I remember we were usually lucky if we could play for longer than an hour or so; somebody's mom was always going to the store or on some other errand and wanted all her kiddies with her.

I miss those days and I regret the fact that for my son Zack (born in 1997) and most of the kids of his generation, baseball probably will not become a favorite leisure activity. Oh, he will play baseball: he already likes to sit with me and watch baseball on tv (although I can't get him to understand yet that Sammy Sosa does not play in every televised game), and I am well on my way to becoming a typical Little League dad (heaven forbid). But the age-old ritual of getting together with friends to sneak off for a few minutes for a pick-up game down at the church or school will find no takers here. You see, we live in a small, isolated, insulated subdivision, down the road from other small, isolated, and insulated subdivisions, and the local schools and churches are miles away. And, besides, what few kids there are who live close to us are busy inside with their Game Boys. Better, I guess, to make Ken Griffey Jr. hit a home run than take a chance of hitting one yourself, even on an old, convoluted church lot.

Looking for a Game of Ball

Dave Anderson

The summers of the early 1960s in my neighborhood in South Bend, Indiana, can be best described as an eternal search for a ball game. Kids in the neighborhood always had ball gloves hanging from the handlebars of their bicycles or a glove and ball in a basket. Sometimes we held bats atop our handlebars as we biked to a game. Those who did not play baseball were thought to be dangerously different, if not downright strange.

South Bend schools sponsored a summer recreation program that included baseball leagues for 7-, 8-, and 9-year-olds; 10- and 11-year-olds; 12- and 13-year-olds; and 14- and 15-year-olds. Budget cuts and the Little League invasion ended this program, but while it existed many of us learned and played the game and stayed out of trouble. The charm of the school parks' program was twofold. First, tryouts were held, but only for rank players. Anyone who wanted to play got to play. Second, the program was accomplished with a minimum of adult supervision. Our parents encouraged us but rarely attended because our games were played in the early afternoon. Thus, the concept of the Little League parent was a foreign one to us. Often the only adult at a game was the umpire.

We'd play baseball in the summer program for two days a week and practiced during three non-game mornings. The "season" was six weeks long. In our spare time we'd play whiffle ball, not the ball with the notches but the ball with holes all over it. Whiffle ball as we played it was a flexible game. If there were just a couple of us, we'd play home-run derby. If there were six or more, we'd choose up squads and play a nine-inning game.

The rules were simple. Official baseball rules, except for "pitcher's hand out." That meant any ball hit on the ground had to be thrown

to the pitcher. If the ball beat the runner to first, the runner was out. The pitcher was not required to be on the rubber to get the out, so a smart pitcher would run to the ball to make the throw shorter. It was a version of the first baseman's stretch.

Our games were self-umpired. All we asked was for a player to say safe or out on pitchers' hand plays. The runner would yell "Safe!" when he hit first base, and the pitcher would yell "Out!" upon catching the ball. We played by the honor system, and disputes were settled among ourselves without umpires or parents.

If we had an odd number of players, the team with more players would furnish the defensive catcher for both teams. If there was an adequate number of players, five or more on a team, the catcher's position would be manned by each defensive team. If there were fewer than five players on a team, then the offensive team would have to furnish the catcher. That player was obligated under our honor system to be a legitimate member of the defense should a play come his way. Any lack of hustle or deliberately dropping a pop-up or throw to get a runner at the plate resulted in an automatic out.

Looking back on my experience as a Babe Ruth and high school umpire, I am amazed at how we were able to administer our games so easily and without major controversies or fights. Perhaps a reason for this was that different teams were chosen for each game—opponents in one game would be teammates in the next. Another reason was that we worked things out ourselves, without parents hovering around. The stereotypical Little League parent is not one of my icons. I believe some parents do more harm than good, especially at the lower levels of the game. There are plenty of positive role models in youth baseball, but too often the Little League parent leaves people with a bad impression of the game.

The search for ball games to play also involved finding a place to play. We'd play whiffle ball at the school park, but its asphalt surface and crowded conditions made it a less than an ideal venue. The hardtop would literally "eat" balls at a rate of one or two a week. We tried variations of baseball, using a tennis ball, which all but ruined my arm, and even stickball was introduced to us. But if we couldn't play baseball, whiffle ball and its variations were the games of choice.

Our ballpark problems were solved when one of my friends found a vacant lot behind what was at the time the Wesleyan Methodist Church on South Michigan Street. The site was shaped almost the opposite of Fenway Park, with a mix of Yankee Stadium and Wrigley Field thrown in. Left field was about 150 feet away. The “fence” was marked by a row of hedges that was behind an alley, which served as a warning track. Center had no fence. Straightaway center field was a gap between hedges and the right-field fence. Any balls hit onto the alley and rolling down it were live. Right field was the fun part of things. It was no more than 100 feet away. Because of the distance, a special ground rule was set. Anything hit over the fence but under the telephone wire was a double. Over the phone wire was a homer.

We discovered this “ballpark” at the time the Dodgers were playing in the Los Angeles Coliseum and outfielder Wally Moon was hitting opposite-field homers to the short left-field fence. I copied his inside-out swing and was able to hit a respectable number of doubles and homers to the right-field porch. We spent many mornings and afternoons at our special ballpark. Another memory was the pastor of the church. He was Reverend Smith to us; I cannot recall his first name. We kind of glommed on to the lot behind his church, and the land beyond the right-field fence was his backyard. I suppose he could have told us we couldn’t use the lot, but he didn’t. Of course that was before the days of outlandish lawsuits, and liability suits were thankfully uncommon. Reverend Smith would watch us play when he had the time and even chipped in an occasional ball and bat. We were probably viewed by this gentle man as part of his ministry, and he may have saved more souls with that gift of a bat and ball than he saved in the pulpit. But we never talked church; we played ball. Like other ballparks of the 1960s, our whiffle ball park is now a parking lot behind a larger church.

When I turned thirteen, things changed. Little League came to South Bend’s south side. Most of the gang refused to join Little League because the coaches immediately banned whiffle ball and participation in the recreation leagues. I thought Little Leaguers were sissies. They had rubber spikes, couldn’t steal bases, and did not use the ninety-foot bases we used. The recreation leagues in South Bend

died away by the mid-1960s. Little League and its spin-offs became dominant.

Today the game is nothing like it was when I played. I swear many of the kids today are playing baseball because their parents want them to. The Harris Township Babe Ruth League has become a farm league for the local high school, which has won a couple of state championships. While that is great for the organization, it is not so good for many of the kids, for you do not see the spontaneous bat and ball and glove games today. Is it because the grown-ups have taken all the fun out of the game?

A Game of Bunt

Charlie Bevis

We lived on a quarter-acre parcel near the center of our small town, Bridgewater, Massachusetts. The small backyard was . . . well, small. We put up a basketball backboard on stilts to shoot hoops, but playing baseball was out of the question. So I invented a variation of the game for my backyard called, imaginatively, “Bunt.”

I laid out a baseball diamond, in a loose sense of the word, as the bases were not close to being equidistant from one another. Home plate was near the trees in back. First base was a short distance away at the basketball pole, but second base was a longer haul to get beyond the dirt area to some grass. Third base was a lot closer to home plate near the patio corner, in order to get around the septic tank cover.

This was a one-on-one game, so we used ghost runners. As the batter squared away to bunt, the pitcher would deliver the ball underhanded and then get into fielding position, either staying stationary or backpedaling to cover more territory. The batter would then bunt the ball. Getting one ghost runner on first base was pretty easy; just drop a bunt in front of the plate and easily beat the pitcher to first base. Adding a second ghost runner was not all that difficult either. But once ghosts were on first and second bases, the advantage shifted to the pitcher, who could simply make a force play at third on an easily fielded bunt. All the pitcher needed to do was reach third before the batter reached first and the lead ghost runner would be out. Bases-loaded situations were even more advantageous to the pitcher—just step on home. We were our own umpires. We didn’t disagree too often, as I remember, since we tried to be fair and win. If we disagreed on who reached a base first, the pitcher to force a ghost or the batter, we invoked the “do over” rule and replayed the pitch.

To score runs the batter needed to direct the bunt far enough from

the pitcher to both avoid a force play on the ghosts and being put out at first base. Easy enough, you say, just slap it over the pitcher's head. Well, the rules of Bunt made an out of anything that hit the house or rolled into the bordering garden plots (left and center fields). Also, an out was anything hit over the property line into our neighbor's yard (well marked by the variation in grass cutting), which more or less paralleled by maybe fifteen feet the path from first to second base. Our neighbor, Mr. Dainis, didn't like us playing ball near his house, nor did he seem to care that much for kids, for that matter.

There wasn't much open territory to shoot for, so the bunt needed to be well executed as far as placement. It got so I could push a bunt past the first base line without it going into my neighbor's yard, enabling me to scoot to second base for a double. Or I could place the bunt just past the septic tank where the pitcher would have trouble fielding it. These were the preferred strategies with ghost runners on base. Another was to lob the bunt over the pitcher so the ball would dribble over second base and down a narrow six-foot corridor of grass between my house and some shrubs on the property line. You risked, however, hitting into the garden on one side and going into our neighbor's yard on the other. If successful, the hit was at least a triple if not a home run. I remember a number of attempts at inside-the-park homers, with flying headfirst slides into home. Many were successful. You had to take risks in Bunt. Playing it safe wouldn't win you the game.

My friends and I would play Bunt for hours. Nine innings could go a long time, and scores of 32–25 would not be uncommon. No lead was safe. We'd wind up with grass stains, ripped shirts, and dust-covered arms, legs, and faces. I could sure put down a good bunt in a regular baseball game with the skills I developed in Bunt. It also sharpened my baseball strategy skills. I was never one of the best players in town, but I always made the team because I "knew" the game. Even in high school, where as a senior I was the eighteenth player on an eighteen-man varsity team and hardly played, I was kept on the team because I was an ace batting practice pitcher and base coach. In my coat closet I still have my 1972 state championship jacket, embroidered with "Bridgewater-Raynham Trojans State B Champs."

Those hours of playing Bunt in my backyard were largely responsible for my acquiring that state championship jacket.

Getting bats and balls for those games of Bunt was not difficult. I lived not far from Legion Field, the playing fields in Bridgewater. During the 1960s and early 1970s, I was able to watch many Little League, Babe Ruth, and American Legion games, as well as high school and even college games. Besides picking up more baseball knowledge by observing the game, I never needed to buy a piece of baseball equipment.

If I got to be the batboy for a team, I usually was “paid” with either a baseball (not new, but a decent enough used one) or a broken bat that could easily be put back into use with some electrical tape. My favorite bat was a flame-tempered Tony Oliva model, which I used for many years in pick-up games, batting practice (which often became a home run derby), and Bunt games. For left-behind severely broken bats, I used screws to fix the impairments, then taped them over. I also watched closely to see where the “lost” foul balls went into the woods behind the backstops and retrieved them later if someone else wasn’t able to locate them during the game.

We used and reused this “found” equipment until it was totally useless. My mom taught me how to re-stitch a baseball when the seams broke by soaking in water the two pieces of the leather cover so that they’d expand. Then I’d use heavy red button thread with a thick sewing needle to weave the thread between the covers. When the covers dried out, the stitching would be tight and the ball ready for play again. Essentially the leather cover of the ball would need to rot before it was discarded (if it wasn’t lost first). A bat would need to break into two pieces to be thrown away. We were quite resourceful in our small New England town. In today’s world, my wife would say we were frugal; my kids would say we were cheap!

The Clincher

Eric C. Hageman

Playing baseball in my Chicago neighborhood was an obsession. As soon as school let out I would dart home, grab my glove, and meet my friends in Merrick Park. We would lay out bases, pick sides, and play until dark. Rainy days were a real letdown, as I would be the only one there. This prompted my friend, Jim Provost, to refer to me as “Charlie Brown.”

There were no parents around when we played ball. We would resort to making our own calls, sometimes with passionate differences of opinion. I recall one day when I was playing second base and had to field a tough grounder and get it over to first. My Turkish friend, Hakan Yigit, called the runner safe. I quickly charged up to him, much in the fashion of Billy Martin, to take issue with the call. I yelled and hollered and carried on, but Hakan never said a word and just stared at me. Finally, he must have had enough; without warning he slapped me across the cheek with an open hand! Now, I had had my share of scraps around the neighborhood and had experienced being punched enough, but this was the first time I had ever been slapped in the face. I just stood there with my jaw wide open, totally dumbfounded. Quite frankly, I didn’t know how to respond. He never said a word either and, humiliated, I returned to second and the call stood.

Besides baseball, softball was a great game, too. Unlike elsewhere, Chicago softball is played barehanded, using a very large sixteen-inch “Clincher.” In fact, I never saw a twelve-inch softball until I was twenty-seven years old and had moved out of Chicago to Michigan. Although I played some sixteen-inch softball in the leagues, most of my playing took place in the middle of the street.

We lived on Ohio Street, which was a one-way street and infrequently used. This enabled us to play right in front of our houses. We

would draw bases with chalk, pick sides, and ignore mothers' calls for dinner. Due to its large size, the Clincher had limited flight potential, but not enough that I didn't need to keep an early morning paper route with the Chicago *American* to pay for all of the windows that I broke. Many of the cars parked on our street lacked antennas and side-view mirrors, and had unexplained dents in the panels.

During a game when a car needed to pass, we would simply move off to the side and resume our game once it went through. Once, when a car slowly proceeded past us, Tom O'Brien gave the rear tire a swift kick and rolled a couple of times as if he had been hit. The startled driver slammed on the brakes and we all cut out just as fast as our legs could carry us.

Another fun street game that we would play with the Clincher was called "500." One player would fungo hit the ball out to the fielders that were spread out down the street. If a fielder caught the ball on the fly, he would receive 100 points. One bounce was worth 75 points, 50 points for a two-hopper, and 25 for three or more. We would deduct the same values for an error. Upon reaching the sum of 500, a fielder would become the next batter. A trick I liked to pull in this game took place when I had, say, 475 points, and another player was just 25 points behind me. I would "accidentally" muff one so that I would be just behind him. Letting him get to 500 first meant that he would get only one or two hits before I made my catch for 500, therefore enabling me to extend my time at bat.

From playing baseball at the park to just tossing a ball for catch on the sidewalk, baseball dominated much of the years when I was growing up. I never did fulfill my grandiose dreams of playing ball for the White Sox. But for several years I had the pleasure of playing on a vintage baseball team in Michigan. We called ourselves "The Berrien County Cranberry Boppers" and used 1850s uniforms, equipment, and rules. Our opponents were other vintage baseball teams from around the Midwest. Playing barehanded reminded me of the days of my youth with the sixteen-inch Clincher, sparking cherished memories of growing up in Chicago, and the varied styles of baseball I played with long-lost friends.

The Sandlots of Berkeley

Merritt Clifton

In Berkeley, California, in the mid- to late 1960s, we somewhat contemptuously called a rubber-covered, ten-inch softball with simulated seams a “semi-soft.” It was used on asphalt playgrounds in games among neighborhood teams that (of necessity, in order to get enough people) included some players who were afraid of the ball.

More macho teams used a “semi-hard,” which was a rubber-covered hardball that came off asphalt like a bullet, especially on the second hop. The seams were flatter than on a regular baseball, and I was the only pitcher in my end of town, maybe one of the few in the whole town, who could routinely make one break. I threw both a curve ball and a screwball, and had seasons of 14-1, 8-2, and 20-11 in local leagues that used it.

In 1967, the year I was 14-1, with a preteen girl who was not afraid of the ball playing second base, we used both the semi-soft and the semi-hard, depending on the field and the competition.

Usually we used a different pitcher to throw the semi-soft, as I couldn't do anything with it, or even control it, as for some reason it tended to sail out of my hand prematurely, but my brother could really fog it, and a kid named Tim Moellering, now the longtime baseball coach at Willard Junior High, could bend it pretty well. My one defeat was in the game where I pitched the semi-soft.

In my 20-11 year we used both regulation hardballs at Clint Evans Field (the UC Berkeley baseball stadium) and semi-hards on asphalt elsewhere. I had no trouble going from one ball to the other, but the infielders did. Though the semi-hard had a wicked reputation for coming up unexpectedly high on a hop and knocking people's teeth out, it really behaved very much like a regulation baseball on artificial

turf. Infielders played farther back, made cleaner plays, and turned two more often.

The semi-hard would also rebound hard enough off of concrete outfield retaining walls to enable outfielders to hold runners to singles on balls that on grass fields would have been doubles or even triples. On the other hand, it really jumped off aluminum bats, or even wood (which most players still preferred). My ERA of 7.35 was better than 3 runs below league, and the league ERA was 10-plus largely because of home runs that would not have been home runs with wooden bats and regulation balls. I pitched the only 4 shutouts in the league that year or ever, as far as I know, but two of them were at Clint Evans, where hitting a ball out was almost impossible. (It was 535 feet to the left-field line, 338 to right, with the very high back wall of the Edwards Field track stadium forming the right-field fence. Even Mike Epstein found that a tough target. Later they installed a roll-out temporary fence to give the place more normal dimensions, but that was after my time.)

It was also a semi-hard that top local amateur hockey player Don Nelson smashed off my head at deep shortstop one day in 1968 in a game pitched by future San Francisco State ace Gary Hart. It came under my glove when I lost it in the setting sun, careened off my forehead like a headed soccer ball, and traveled on over the center-field fence for a grand slam homer, costing Hart the game.

And it was a semi-hard that we used in games of “Firing Squad,” which was essentially Pepper with a high concrete wall behind the fielders. The batter would try to blast the ball through the defense; if the fielders missed, they’d often get the ball in the butt as it bounced back. If the ball bounced back so that the batter could hit it, it was legal to blast it again. However, anything hit outside of an area about the size of a soccer net, guarded by two players, was an out. Yup, we developed bat control.

A variant was played on the UC Berkeley football field at Memorial Stadium, using the goalposts to define the fair territory. That was called “El Kabong” because of the sound the ball made hitting the posts or crossbar.

When alone, a lot of us would fungo a semi-hard against a high concrete wall and then hit the rebounds. The best of us at it (Hart

and I) could keep a volley going for up to one hundred cuts—not full swings, more like hard check swings. You could do the same thing with any other kind of ball, but the semi-hard gave the truest hop back. With a softball or semi-soft you'd have to use a full cut, sacrificing some ability to get into position to hit the next rebound. A regulation hardball behaved a lot more erratically. A rubber dog ball probably worked next best after a semi-hard.

I never fail to find a ball or two lying right out in the open, unmolested, whenever I jog past a diamond used by youth leagues these days, and I remember how difficult balls were to come by and how highly they were valued when I was young. We had two rules about the care and maintenance of baseballs, in effect everywhere I ever played until I turned semi-pro:

1. Hits it gets it. If you hit a ball out of the playing field, fair or foul, you chased it, and you didn't come back until you found it. Your team might have to take the field short a fielder, but you found the ball or else, because there might be only one or two spares—or none, in which case everyone on both sides would help look.
2. There is no such thing as a lost ball—just one you haven't found yet.

This second rule had an application in my most memorable outfield assist. In 1975, six years after going away to college, I was temporarily back in Berkeley and was invited to play center field for my old team in a game at Codornices Park, a very small field for regulation hardball, with the embankment extending to a covered reservoir forming the outfield fence. The weed-covered embankment was in play, in theory, but in practice any ball hit into the weeds was usually an easy inside-the-park home run, as it took five or ten minutes to find.

That particular day an opposition slugger named Mike Jaffe, who was more or less Berkeley's Northside edition of Mike Epstein, smashed a ball into the weeds at the very top of the embankment. I raced up the embankment after it, found it astonishingly easily, and looked back down at the field to see the one player I'd ever played with much before, third baseman Tim Moellering, awaiting a throw. Everyone else was treating it like a home run. I threw Jaffe out by

twenty feet, and he and the majority of the other players were sure Tim, a master of the hidden ball trick, had switched balls somehow. Fortunately our catcher and left fielder had seen me find the ball and had alerted the ump, just in time for him to see the throw.

I asked Tim how it was that he knew to be ready. “There is no such thing as a lost ball,” he quoted, “and I figured you might find it faster than Jaffe was going to circle the bases.”

There was also no such thing as a wasted ball. Every ball, when the cover wore out, was recovered with electrical tape and used for batting and fielding practice until it split and unwound.

We routinely did things like climb iron volleyball poles to reach the roofs of school buildings to retrieve lost balls; hopped fences into yards to get them, hoping the irate owners’ apparent shotguns were only airguns filled with rock salt; and set up distractions by ringing doorbells and running, so that someone else could sneak into a yard the back way to get a ball.

When I was in high school, several of us set up a relay system to pilfer balls fouled out of Clint Evans Field at the University of California–Berkeley. The gist of it was that two guys would chase the balls and throw them to me in the street behind the backstop because I had the best arm. I’d then gun the balls over Strawberry Creek and the live oaks to a fourth guy, who would be stationed on his bicycle over by the Life Sciences Building.

I’d usually have just enough time to get the throw off before I’d be hit from behind by some of the JV football players the Cal baseball team used as foul ball chasers. Usually two of them hit me at once. It was a little like quarterbacking on asphalt with the opposing linemen coming from one’s own twenty-yard line. I’d shake them off with a little judo and run like hell. They’d go back into the park, and I’d limp back with my skinned elbows and knees to await the next relay mission.

It was stealing, yes, but in fact we returned most of the balls soon afterward, because as soon as the Cal game was over, we’d enter the stadium, clear the bleachers of trash (we always did this chore voluntarily), and play our own game, usually using the ball or balls we’d obtained, and the game would often end when they’d all been

fouled into locked parking lots with unclimbable high fences or other nearby areas to which we had no access.

One evening a couple of us climbed to the roof of one of those areas, the navy ROTC building, trying to get a hard-won ball back. That same night someone set off a pipe bomb in the building, and it was page one in the local papers that the cops were looking for a couple of suspects who had been seen on the roof wearing baseball caps. I turned myself in, and the campus police just called over to the Harmon Gym, spoke briefly to one of the Cal coaches (possibly Jackie Jensen), and let me go: I was a well-known local character, as were the guys I played ball with, and despite the transiently violent conflicts over possession of foul balls, we were always welcome on the field, in the batting cage, etc. In fact, Cal team reserves and even some of the goons often played with us. In hindsight I think the tackling and such was mostly a game in itself.

These adventures reached their zenith one afternoon when we got two foul balls in a row. When the second one came over the fence, my relay team still hadn't returned from absconding with the first one, and I'd just noticed that they had goofed and left all our bats and gloves and the "tools of ignorance" unattended in plain sight. I let the ball go and grabbed the equipment before the goons seized it and held it for ransom. It was immediately clear, though, that I couldn't outrun three or four of them with all that stuff in my arms, so I plunged into Strawberry Creek, under a footbridge, and hastily pushed everything through a broken screen into a pipe conduit that ran under the bridge.

As luck would have it, the ball I'd not chased happened to roll down the slope, into the creek, right at my feet, so I tossed it into the conduit too. The goons had the bridge surrounded, but when they looked underneath, I pretended to be taking a leak and—since I obviously did not have the ball in my hands—they let me go, searching elsewhere for a few minutes, until the Cal game ended and they left.

The rest of our team trickled back and began looking for me and the equipment. That's when I discovered that the bottom of the conduit was out of reach of the small opening created by the broken screen. The only way to retrieve the stuff was to lift a very heavy manhole cover half a block away in the middle of the street behind

Clint Evans Field, right where I'd often been tackled, and descend into the depths.

That was a mission guaranteed to attract attention and possibly a police record. But I'd lost the equipment, and it was my duty to retrieve it. With the other guys standing guard, I worked the manhole cover loose and did my duty. I pushed the equipment back out the screen to a teammate, then returned to the surface to find the rest of my team, a gaggle of opposing players, a whole lot of passersby, and a couple of campus cops all peering down the hole wondering what was going on.

"It was just a kitten," I said, emerging and brushing sweat and dirt off my face. "I passed her out the screen under the bridge to the girls who heard it."

That brought a round of applause from the bystanders, including the cops, and I felt much guiltier at not having rescued a kitten than I ever did about temporarily misappropriating a UC Berkeley baseball.

Ironically, I have subsequently rescued hundreds of kittens, cats, and all sorts of other creatures from all sorts of predicaments, including skunks who needed to be extricated from tight places and kittens who were being used as live coyote and fox bait by trappers in the bitter depths of Quebec winters—and at least three times I've faced down poachers who pointed their guns at me—yet that one time I lied about helping an animal is still the only time I ever got on-the-spot applause for supposedly having done it.

Among my other adventures and misadventures playing ball, I played in quite a few softball games as a teammate of Tom and John Fogerty at Underhill Field, the Astroturf recreation field above a parking lot that collapsed in the 1989 World Series earthquake. This was in 1971–72, right at the zenith of the popularity of the Fogertys' band, Creedence Clearwater Revival.

At the time I was playing a lot of first base on Saturdays and Sundays with a pick-up team of excellent ballplayers mainly recruited from the Alameda Naval Air Station. I think I was the only civilian regular and one of only three white guys. We'd get down to Underhill by about eight a.m. on Saturday and just keep beating the crap out of all comers until maybe five or six p.m., playing four or five games a day. Then we'd do it again on Sunday, with always the same core

of six or eight players and a couple of guys picked up to complete a ten-man lineup.

The way it worked was, we'd get whoever was left after the challenging team took their pick of the other guys waiting to play. The first time the Fogertys came, we were just about to start the last game of the day. We were already taking the field, shy a buck-short and a right fielder, so Tom took buck-short and John played right. Tom was a fairly good athlete, as I recall, but a rusty ballplayer; John was the most enthusiastic but thoroughly lousy ballplayer I'd ever seen. He couldn't do anything well, but man did he hustle!

We didn't know who they were at first, but by the time we figured it out they were already popular enough that John was nicknamed "Turkey," because he reminded our second baseman of a turkey when he ran with arms outstretched trying to catch a pop fly. I'd run from first base all the way out to right field to catch his relay throws.

At bat they were also awful. It didn't matter. We crushed the opposition about 20–4 or so, as always, and never thought we'd see the Fogertys again, but next Saturday morning damn if they weren't the first two guys on the field. One or the other or both showed up fairly often for the next three or four months. They never did get much better, but Turkey did hit an inside-the-park home run once—a clean one that found a gap—and we thought he'd kill himself legging it out. They'd play one game or two, never the whole day, but always came back.

Years later when "Centerfield" came out, I had to laugh, recalling that one day the guy who more or less managed our crew (to the extent we could be managed) had the bright idea of moving me out to center because I could run and throw, putting me between the Fogertys, with another tall guy at first. The idea was to have someone out there to get the balls they weren't getting. I'd never played center before, or much outfield for that matter, but a long time later it turned out to be one of my best positions. My first inkling that it was going to work out came when I made a Willie Mays-style over-the-shoulder running catch and looked back to the infield, whirling around to throw, to see Turkey right there in front of me, ready to be the relay man, except that he couldn't possibly have thrown the ball even to second base from that far out. But I used him to line up my throw

and then gunned it over his head to our shortstop. He asserted that I was fined fifty bucks for missing the cutoff.

If you really did put John in center field, I have no doubt that he'd still be ready to play, psychologically anyhow. And he'd be better at it than I would be playing a guitar or singing. On the other hand, I think his talents were all better used where he used them.

I'm certainly not knocking either Fogerty here; they were great guys to have on a team. They didn't give a damn if they hit low in the order, weren't fazed by anyone's mistakes, never stopped running, played hurt if necessary, and probably did a lot, all considered, to keep the rest of us rowdies from falling apart through the inevitable friction of being a bunch of frustrated young guys who all wanted to be the best, all the time, at everything, but were in the navy or in college and not in pro ball where we wanted to be, making good.

The Mounds of Summer

David Petreman

Corky threw fastballs past our trembling knees. I was eight, he was sixteen and the strongest kid in high school. Better for him to pitch than his older brother Karl, who was so cross-eyed that even Corky didn't trust him to pitch.

We played for hours every summer day, forgetting lunch and thirst, in the field across the alley from my house. We mowed out a diamond, a grounds crew of several neighborhood kids and as many old, crummy lawnmowers as we could borrow. One summer we built our own backstop with some discarded Cyclone fence and railroad ties. It leaned and periodically had to be propped up again, but it served its purpose. Right field ended at my Uncle Hughie's woodpile—the automatic home run for everyone except Corky. He had to hit past the row of pear trees located another forty feet away. Center field was pretty wide open. Left field was up for grabs; in play down the line were the mounds. These were low dirt piles left by the bulldozers that carved out basements for the houses down the street. There was a wavy line of them, covered with weeds and small bushes. Beyond them was the field of cut grass. This was a semi-swampy area that generally provided “soakers” for the fielder who had to retrieve a ball in there. Most of us were righties, so many a ball went into the mounds or the tall grass. Then it was as many bases as you could get. Meanwhile, the fielders tripped on the mounds and, running shirtless and in shorts, would emerge from the field with several thin and stinging and sometimes bloody cuts from the notorious grass.

This is where I learned the game and developed my skills. I never quite understood why, but kids who had better fields in their own neighborhoods came to play at ours. Maybe it was the challenge of our obstacle course. Also, the neighbors across the alley and down

a ways, who lived in a big, square, three-story house that had been moved from the other side of the North Shore tracks, eventually had nineteen children, so we could always get up some kind of game. The captains were picked, teams chosen. First raps or last raps were decided by one guy tossing a bat to another who grabbed it, then by turns each of the two clenched a hand up the handle until there was no room left. The person with the hand—or sometimes just two fingers, spread apart like those of a pitcher throwing a split-fingered fastball—closest to the knob got to choose who batted last. Often there was just enough room for “chicken’s claws”: the last person to try to win this contest could grab the bat just below the knob with the tips of his fingers. Then the opponent got one chance to kick the bat, now “chicken-clawed” at the end of an outstretched arm. If the guy holding the bat hung on, it was his choice; if the bat went flying, the kicker won. If in the initial stages of this ritual the bat was thrown to Corky, he would simply catch it at the knob and say, “We get last raps.” No argument there.

There were, however, plenty of arguments once the game started. Games would even break up because of them, and kids would grab their gloves and bats and go home. Almost always the suspended games were resumed within a half hour. On a bad day we’d play four or five hours. On the good days we’d play for a week.

We played with whatever turned out to be the best ball on a given day: sixteen-inch, twelve-inch, hardball, a “soft” hardball with the stitches coming loose, a “stringball” that had lost its cover, which sometimes we taped up with black electrician’s tape. One time Corky brought a rubber-coated hardball. It lasted all summer: it had no stitches, couldn’t fall apart, and didn’t get soaked when it was pulled into the swamp. Of course, he had to pitch when he showed up, and he would tease us with blazing fastballs that no one could hit. Actually he didn’t really play that much; he was older and had girlfriends and other things on his mind.

The dugout was Perky’s doghouse. We leaned on it when we weren’t coming to the plate. On-deck hitters would get clumps of dirt from the mounds and hurl them at the fielders to distract them. One day when a mean kid showed up—a good ballplayer with whom I played many years later in a run on the American Legion state

championship—the dirt clods turned to rocks, and I ended up with a bloody head. I sicced Perky on him and the dog bit the kid in the stomach. His mother visited mine that evening at suppertime and the next day it was game time as usual and nobody thought twice about blood or dog bites.

About the only time a peaceful game broke up was when someone homered out by the pear trees and the fielder would catch sight of a ripe one. Pretty soon gloves and dirt clods and baseballs were flying toward choice pears. But the respite was momentary, and before our sweat dried someone was pulling one into the cut grass.

3

The Game Off the Field

Introduction

Unfortunately, we couldn't play baseball all of the time. Apart from having to go to school, there weren't always enough kids to play or a convenient place for a game. Weather, even during the summer, often did not cooperate; in the Midwest and East it might rain and almost everywhere it sometimes just got too hot. And then, from late fall to early spring, there was cold and snow or rain, depending on where one lived, that prevented us from participating in our favorite pastime.

But many of us were up to the task of creating substitutes. Michael Frank lived in New York:

There was a Little League field almost a mile away, but kids I knew weren't in it; we played, mostly "Punchball," in the playground across the street. It was generally four against four, using infield positions only; we hit the pink ball by punching it. Rarely would any of our parents be there; for them to try to tell us how to play would have been unimaginable. The younger group of kids would sometimes play with only three bases on one side of the concrete playground and shared second base with the older group, which meant that balls hit into the outfield interfered with the other game. There also was a small softball program after school, so we didn't play much softball otherwise until we were teens. Hardball? Never. Other baseball-related games we played included stickball in the street and "Flies-Up" in the playground. We also talked baseball and collected cards, except if we took the cards out during school hours the teacher could take them away. Most of the action was in the schoolyard. There was some flipping, but I wasn't too involved.

Living near the outskirts of a relatively small town, I did not know anything about stickball or Punchball, for with our large front and backyards we did not need to play games of that kind. Indeed, we didn't have porches or steps on our houses, so some of the games that the writers in this section describe were impossible for us. For me, the principal substitute for an actual game was playing catch in the front yard, usually with my younger neighbor Walter Tretheway, in which we would yell out plays involving our favorite Major League players—"Look out, Banks is stealing second!" When alone, I would simply throw the ball in the air and catch it while imagining that I was Mickey Mantle or—after the Giants moved to San Francisco—Willie Mays.

Also, realizing that I could never become a shortstop, I thought that pitching might be an option for a slow-footed person such as myself. I read somewhere, probably in *Boy's Life*, about how one could construct a device for practicing pitching. I put some posts in the ground in the field behind our house, strung wire through pieces of hose that I connected horizontally to the posts at about knee and armpit height (the strike zone as we understood it in those days), and then between the horizontal lines fastened vertical pieces about seventeen inches apart. I constructed a rickety backstop out of some old chicken wire and discarded pieces of wood. Then I measured sixty feet, six inches from my "strike zone" and built a mound, placing in it a piece of two-by-four that served as my pitcher's "rubber." For the next couple of years, I spent hours on that mound, imagining that I was Mike McCormick—my favorite Giants pitcher—as I experimented with different motions, pitching the ball toward—if not always through—that strike zone. Because I never owned more than a couple of baseballs at once, I spent a lot of time trudging between my mound and the backstop. Although I had no way of measuring it, the speed of my pitches seemed to increase considerably; Leonard—Walter's older brother—at least thought that they were too fast for his safety when one day he acted as a batter and on the first pitch ducked out of his imaginary batter's box, never to return. But consistent accuracy eluded me and I never dared to put myself forward as a pitcher in a real game; only in my imagination could I be a baseball hero.

Such experiences were apparently common. Because baseball was so important to us, we naturally came up with versions of the game when faced with idle time during the summer. Larry Herr writes:

My family were pious, practicing Seventh-day Adventists and we were not permitted to play baseball on Saturdays. Alas, that was the busiest day of the Little League schedule. I had to be content to play wherever and whenever I could. This usually meant biking to a schoolyard or public park a mile or two away with a couple of friends and playing 500 or joining up with others and playing various versions of the game designed for small groups of players. Or I would simply go into our backyard, which was approximately 200 feet long behind the house, and try to hit balls over three large fruit trees and beyond the fence into the neighbor's yard. I would hit the ball and then hike to the other end of the yard and hit it back. Perhaps a White Sox scout would see me and all my dreams would come true! The only notice I got was from the neighbor when I shattered the glass of his garage window. But I didn't give up. What else was there to do?

Like me and my pitching or Larry and his backyard hitting, other boys, as the authors in these pages recall, were playing baseball games using whatever was at hand, such as garages and barn walls. In varied situations—country, city, small town—they developed baseball derivatives that fulfilled their need to continue experiencing the game even when conditions seemed to rule otherwise.

Similarly, these same children would invent baseball games to pass the time indoors when they could not play outside or simply find another way of fulfilling their baseball passion. In reading some of these pieces, I am impressed that my friends and I must have had somewhat limited imaginations. Although I owned Ethan Allen's All-Star Baseball and during the winter months played it frequently, especially with Glendon and Paul Conner, schoolmates who lived not far away, it never occurred to us to establish leagues and play out full seasons. And for some reason I wasn't aware of APBA Baseball, though it must have been advertised in those *Baseball Digests* that I devoured, and Strat-O-Matic had not yet been developed, so these more complex simulations did not become part of my life. Such

games, however, had long-lasting effects on some of those who played them as young people. Dave Anderson recalls:

All-Star Baseball was my first exposure to baseball in a box. But the king of them all was APBA's dice game, my first edition of which was 1961. I still play the computer version on occasion. One of my fondest (and a strange moment to boot) memories is of the time when I received Ronald Mayer's Perfect! and decided to replay the Addie Joss perfect game of 1908 against the White Sox. I used the exact lineups of the original game, for I was working on my history of the 1908 season at the time and felt replaying that game would be neat. In that simulated game Joss threw a no-hitter! I realized at that moment my More than Merkle project would eventually get published.¹

Although the results of these games were not always so close to the real thing, it was that similitude that attracted devoted attention.

Some kids wanted more than came in the box and creatively adapted the games to their interests. Willie Runquist recounts how he and a friend created a Pacific Coast League version of All-Star Baseball and, like Anderson, speaks of its lifelong impact:

My friend Marty and I spent hundreds of hours when we were thirteen to fourteen years old playing Ethan Allen's All-Star Baseball. At first we used the Major League player cards that came with the game, but we were frantic Pacific Coast League fans. Marty followed the Los Angeles Angels, who were the reigning power of the league at the time, while I preferred the Hollywood Stars. Marty, meanwhile, figured out how to make player cards from the published statistics in the newspapers and with a little practice was able to produce really good ones, using cardboard, India ink, and some drafting tools that belonged to his father. We (or, mostly he) made the entire eight-team PCL, about a dozen position players plus a half-dozen pitchers per team. We replayed the entire 1943

¹ Ronald Mayer, *Perfect!* (Jefferson NC: McFarland, 1991); David W. Anderson, *More than Merkle: A History of the Best and Most Exciting Baseball Season in Human History*, foreword by Keith Olberman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

season, at the rate of about a half-hour per game. After that season was over, we added a few star players from 1944 to the roster. We kept detailed stats on all of our games by the crude procedure of making tally marks in columns for each event (we did the same thing for College Football). Although I moved away before we ever finished the next season, I continued to be interested in this stuff and one summer replicated the 1945 season, although I used paper disks instead of the more permanent cardboard ones.

I guess this game has always fascinated me. When I was fifty years old, I wrote a computer program in Basic for the Apple II and played nine PCL seasons of 56 games per team (1938–46) before I lost interest. The program involved so many subroutines that by the time I had finished it, I had no idea of the details. It also computed cumulative stats game by game; I still have the “books” of stats on my shelf. As Neal Traven puts it, “You are only young once but you can be immature forever.”

Bob Boynton and Ed Luteran, whose stories appear in this section, went even further, creating games out of whole cloth, so to speak. In reading their accounts of the elaborate games they played and leagues they invented, I am amazed by the creativity and commitment involved. I really wonder whether the video and computer games that fill so much of children’s time today will provide such warm memories. Whether simulating the game with baseball cards, using a board game out of a box, or creating our own versions of table-top baseball, we found satisfying ways of playing the game off the field. Baseball ultimately became a game of the imagination.

Diceball and Pingball

Bob Boynton

For fifteen years, as I more than doubled in years from a preadolescent eleven to a young-adult twenty-six, an important part of my life was devoted to the activities of imaginary baseball players. Not even World War II, an inconvenience that occurred midway during the span, was able to stop the action. In Shaker Heights, Ohio, where it began and ended, five others were involved at one time or another, but only J. Michael McGean stayed the course with me from beginning to end.

For a long time the on-field moves of our imaginary players were literally determined by rolls of the dice. At first we had no name for the game; later we called it “Diceball” to distinguish it from “Pingball,” an outdoor game that we subsequently developed.

Throughout the last decade of the fifteen-year period, we kept records, published standings, and documented the exploits of the players in a publication I called the *B & M News*, written at fourteen different locations spanning the continent, depending on where I happened to be.

Four of us played both Diceball and Pingball, mostly in Shaker Heights, but a handful of additional people, and sometimes pairs of regulars, briefly became involved at one time or another at remote locations. During the war there were Diceball contests at the University of Illinois and in hotel rooms in Chicago and Indianapolis. After the war we completed a few Diceball games by mail and played Pingball briefly at Amherst and once in the Dartmouth College field house.

In 1934 when I was going on ten, my thirteen-year-old brother Ted invented a baseball table game that we played for a while with a pair of dice. The next year I began the modification of Ted’s game by expanding it to a simple three-dice version. With Mike McGean,

three years my junior, we formed the “B & M Baseball Company” and played hundreds of Diceball games in the years that followed.

We rolled our dice on large pieces of pressboard inscribed with the important features of our fantasy ballparks and positioned tokens representing pitchers, catchers, batters, and base runners appropriately. We fashioned these tokens from the playing pieces of a commercially available game called Peggity. Each piece was a small wooden cylinder, about a half-inch long and a quarter-inch in diameter, with a short rounded peg projecting from one end. When on the field, our players stood on labels glued to their undersides with their peg-heads upward. Otherwise, the pieces were stored in the perforated Peggity boards, heads down and labels up, easy to spot and ready for action.

Our activity took place under the aegis of the B & M Baseball Company, within which Mike and I were the owners of our teams. Commissioner William Makepeace Porridge kept out the gambling element and was never deposed, despite repeated efforts by McGean to do so. The game evolved steadily over the years: we revised the dice combinations seven times between 1935 and 1941, and twice more in 1942 with the help of the late James Campbell Cory, president of the Cory Crackers, who had joined the league the previous year. In the final version we rolled five dice. Two of these were small, one white and the other green. The small white die mainly determined balls and strikes; most of the time the three large dice could be ignored, usually becoming relevant only when the small white one came up 6, although there were also other activating circumstances too complicated to discuss.

The little green die had infrequent modulating effects. For example, if the little white die caused the 5–5–5 large-dice combination to be implemented and a 6 was also showing on the green die (for which the joint probability was less than one in ten thousand), then we would immediately call off the game. (Other green die numbers with 5–5–5 on the big whites caused injuries to occur.) Occasionally completion of a play required successive tosses of the dice—for example, to determine who was injured and for how many games the player would be out of action. Without recourse to the records I have kept, Mike McGean still remembers many of the 56 large-dice combinations (permutations did not matter), especially those 12 that

could result (depending on the white die and other things) in base hits. The ultimate and final 1943 version of the rules required nine single-spaced pages for its full description.

From the beginning we managed squads of imaginary players. In the early years, when Mike and I were the only participants, these were the actual members of the American League teams from Cleveland, Chicago, Boston, and Detroit; we each controlled two teams. Later we invented our own teams, whose members had distinct personalities. The original teams were the Boynton Power House and the McGean Accumulators, names borrowed from important features of brother Ted's pinball machine. Within a year or two, McGean elected to bestow upon his team the more alliterative appellation "Minnows." Some of our player names were variants of Major League monikers (for example, Fob Beller and Buck Newsance). Others (such as Dick Chennery and Fontaine Penn) were whimsical double entendres. Homomorphic names like Howie Hitzum and Bernard Blaze-ball were akin to characters like B. O. Plenty in Chester Gould's Dick Tracy comic strip. Many names were of no identifiable origin, such as a quartet of Cory Crackers usually considered as a unit, who later formed the law firm of Fizzle, Foom, Sick, and Jolt. The longest name was that of Valspinie Thortasskievitchehnauserstein-bergerbaumolioentoff, a mediocre pitcher believed to be of Russian origin.

By 1943 the rosters included fifty or more names on each team. On one occasion Mike McGean supplied the birthplaces of his eighty-nine boys, most of whom were cruelly held in perpetuity down at the farm at Pompamoose or, even worse, at the infamous West Bean. Here are the names of a few of his Minnows and their places of birth:

Tom Catt Baretta	Junction, Massachusetts
Jothia Dupoint	Paris, France (killed in World War II)
Harry "Chicken" Gumbo	Yoder, Wyoming
Matthew Mack	Mineral Point, Wisconsin
Hudson River	Beebe River, New Hampshire
Emil Sockitfar	Wando, South Carolina
Max Wax	Fishkill, New York
"Work Horse" Walters	St. Louis, Missouri

There were occasional trades and exchanges of cash based on a league pool of about \$750,000. Some deals were trivial: for example, on September 28, 1942, Charley Foote of the McGean Minnows was sold to the (William) Rossiter Rockets for \$100. On that same day, however, the sale of the venerable Boynton Power House third sacker Marvin Out to the Rockets for \$30,000 was a monumental and most unusual transaction. The sale carried with it a clause, signed by both parties, that Out would be returned to the Power House upon demand in exchange for \$55,000—which in fact happened during the 1943 season. And of course there were straight player deals. For example, on the same date the Minnows acquired Lester Lester, Buster Fence, and Gee Tanks from the Power House, all three in exchange for the former parking lot superintendent Parker Closserbuddy.

By 1942, with four teams in the league, we played the first of two consecutive seasons with a balanced round-robin schedule of 78 games each. As already mentioned, the other two teams were the Crackers, owned by Jim Cory, and the Rockets of Bill Rossiter. Both lived on Sydenham Road in Shaker Heights (McGean was located on Byron Road, the next street to the north).

The outcomes of our games resulted from pure chance, but it never seemed that way to us. As all gamblers know, it is fascinating (and addicting) what randomness can produce. I am convinced now that chance plays a much greater role in real Major League Baseball than is usually appreciated. As an extreme example, in 1942 the Power House finished 14 games above .500, while the Rossiter Rockets fell 16 games below. The range from my pennant-winning .590 to Bill Rossiter's cellar-dwelling .397 was greater than what sometimes occurs in real baseball. Total runs scored in a game varied from 1 in thirteen innings to nearly 40 in nine. Compare also the three-year records from *Who's Who in B & M Baseball*, shown in the accompanying table, of a pair of first-string position players, followed by the single-season pitching records, and for two of the hardest-working starters of 1942.

Diceball continued through 1948, with reduced activity during the war years when Jim Cory and I were both in the navy. Jim and I played some games in Chicago and Indianapolis, and I had a league going for a while at the University of Illinois. Nonetheless, starting

Blast, William (shortstop)

Year	Club	AB	H	D	T	HR	RBI	Pct.
1941	Crax	232	62	14	4	11	38	.267
1942	Crax	215	52	16	9	3	29	.242
1943	Crax-Min*	85	26	8	0	2	19	.242
3-year total		532	140	38	13	16	86	.263 avg.

*Traded from the Cory Crackers to the McGean Minnows, 1943, with \$1,000 for Sundra Sun and Matthew Mack.

Dollam, Rollo (first base)

Year	Club	AB	H	D	T	HR	RBI	Pct.
1941	Crax	261	95	17	9	14	58	.364**
1942	Crax	254	87**	18	9	6	34	.343
1943	Crax	281	87	11	8	10	62*	.310
3-year total		796	269	46	26	30	154	.338 avg.

**League leader in category indicated.

	G	W	L	Pct.	IP	ER	ERA	SO	BB
Beller, Fob (pitcher)									
Power House	18	10	5	.667	139.1	59	3.82	49	43

	G	W	L	Pct.	IP	ER	ERA	SO	BB
Bender, Oliver (pitcher)									
Rockets	17	5	7	.417	132.2	83	5.54	63	70

around 1941, a different and more active kind of fantasy baseball gradually replaced Diceball. For reasons that will become obvious, we called it Pingball.

Pingball was a game of both skill and endurance that combined both pitching and batting skills similar to those encountered in actual baseball. It was an exacting task to hurl the almost weightless pellet (a Ping-Pong ball) with both speed and accuracy through a double-header without offering even one “sucker pitch” that might spell the difference between victory and defeat. It was a challenge (much like real baseball) that required ability, experience, endurance, and luck. Trying to hit the rising, diving, floating, spinning pellet after its thirty-three-foot journey from the mound offered every opportunity for the batter to use his skill, experience, and ingenuity. A major advantage

of Pingball, in addition to the fact that only two players were needed, was that it could be played in a confined area.

There were many detours along the long route that led to the game, which has eventually emerged in an almost standardized form. These experiments included various kinds of “court ball,” played in fields as large as seventy-five-by-one-hundred feet. At the other extreme was another game also played with a Ping-Pong ball but which used an automatic electric pitcher and a twelve-inch bat, the field being only about thirty-five feet square. This game did not involve pitching skill; it was merely a slugging contest. The court-ball game, which was played at one time with a rubber ball the size of a baseball, required too much room, too much hunting for lost balls, and less pitching skill than Pingball. Other games merely involved “hitting the ball out.” Some of these were played at the old South Woodland Baseball Field. The forerunner of them all used first a golf and later a tennis ball, with Bambergers’ house (that of remarkably tolerant neighbors across the street) serving as a center-field fence. These games embodied more fielding skill than Pingball, but they also required more room and were poor baseball substitutes because they left out pitching entirely. Other games, played from time to time, utilized homemade balls of paper and tape, softballs, corks, and even marbles.

Eventually Pingball evolved. All the desired requirements were satisfied: pitching, fielding, and hitting—all similar to baseball yet played with only two men on a field small enough for a backyard, yet large enough to create a fair illusion of distance.

We started in our backyard driveways, larger than most because of zoning regulations in our area that prohibited both garage doors on the front or detached structures in back. Later we built Daney Field in a vacant lot that lay between the developed property of the McGeans and that of the Daneys. The field was lit with a dozen or more 150-watt projector bulbs. Night play turned out to be important, not only because we had daytime jobs but also because of the wind factor. Northern Ohio summer winds are a daily occurrence, but they usually die down at dusk. The field was fenced in, and we built a proper backstop. I fashioned an electric ball-strike-out scoreboard from old pinball parts, which my wife Allie frequently operated as umpire. The device had only three push buttons on top, one each for

balls, strikes, and outs. It counted these automatically and reset itself. For example, a 3-2 count with 1 out was registered with three green lights, two red ones, and one yellow one. Pushing either the strike or the out button turned off the green and red lights and added a second yellow one. All lights were extinguished with the third out.

The pitcher stood thirty-three feet from a home plate twelve inches square. A quarter circle including the pitching rubber established the singles line. A doubles line further out was similarly inscribed. There were three "hitter's lanes," located on the singles line. These included three feet on either side of the rubber and similar zones nearer the foul lines. A ground ball striking in front of the singles line was an automatic out, unless it passed through a hitter's lane. The pitcher could prevent this on some occasions. Any ball landing between the singles and doubles line was a single, and beyond the doubles line but in front of the fence a double. Balls striking the fence beyond a distance of about fifty feet were triples, or a double if closer, unless caught off the wall before hitting the ground, which counted as an out. Ordinary fly balls, if caught, were also outs as were ground balls that crossed the singles line (or even beyond) without passing through one of the hitter's lanes.

If struck with a regular bat, a Ping-Pong ball will not last long. Our bats were built on a broomstick wooden core "not more than 3.5 nor less than 3 inches in circumference" and padded with a "towel wrapped symmetrically and tied with strings, held also with not more than 4 small nails such that the total circumference is at least 3 inches more than the circumference of the core." The bat was not to exceed thirty-eight inches in length, including a handle not to exceed twelve inches, and an extension beyond the core (called the "flub end") whose maximum length was seven inches.

Although only two players were actually on the field, we used imaginary players, many of whom had appeared in Diceball. Different batters used different stances, and I had both right- and left-handed hitters. (Jim Cory was left-handed all the way; the others were righties.) Pitchers varied also. For me, Fob Beller threw with a straight overhand motion. Dizzy Fish was a devastating side-armeder, and Alden Eucker was my submarine specialist. By bending the thumb inward and placing the ball between it and the index finger above, a snapping

motion imparts a spin that results in a terrific curve that breaks laterally three or four feet—definitely no illusion. Using the two middle fingers on top of the ball, rather like a knuckler, imparts a forward spin that produces a terrific and sudden drop just as the ball nears home plate. Actual rising fastballs result from an overhand motion that imparts a backspin as the ball comes off the fingers. McGean, the craftiest of the pitchers, included a screwball in his repertoire. Gary Colton (the *Torpedoes*) relied almost exclusively on blazing speed. Jim Cory, who for a long time refused to play Pingball, became a good hitter, but his pitching was relatively weak. The McGean Deers, operated by Mike's younger brother Lee, were not strong in either department.

Getting hit by a pitch was commonplace, but it never hurt (unlike real baseball, which I also tried but with little success). A batter hit in the face was awarded first base, however. Base running was strictly imaginary.

Even with padded bats, balls were often broken or dented beyond redemption. During the war Ping-Pong balls were used by the military to fill airplane wings, but we were lucky that the Shaker Heights Hardware, which had a huge stock of everything before its postwar fire, kept us going, supplemented from a supply gradually obtained from the canteen at the University of Illinois, which would sell only one per day per customer.

In addition to our summer games, Mike McGean and I once removed enough snow from Daney Field to permit a winter "Ice-bowl" game, and on another occasion we staged a contest inside the Dartmouth Field House. For years we have wistfully discussed a "last Pingball game." Finally we had one in a field cleared by McGean in Norwich, Vermont, in July 1992. It was nostalgic, but otherwise a sorry exhibition by a pair of sexagenarians.

I should have passed the game of Pingball along to my kids, but for some reason this never happened. I believe that Mike McGean did better. Whiffle ball, which came along later, has some similar features, but Pingball is better. I can say for certain that playing Pingball was one of the most enjoyable activities of my life. I had been in graduate school for two years before we finally gave it up.

Island Games

Paul L. Wysard

Honolulu, Territory of Hawaii, in 1945. The big leagues were far away, mysterious, but some great players—Mize, Musial, DiMaggio—had been in the islands during their World War II military service. As kids between nine and twelve, we had seen them perform in various types of competitions and exhibitions. Then when the 1945 World Series came on top of those experiences, we became both fans and players.

As players we adapted baseball to our situation in several ways:

Regular-Street/Yard: One-on-one or two-on-two, with the usual complicated rules as to balls hitting parked cars, curbs, plantings, etc. This version was not much different from what kids played on the mainland.

Throw/Pop: One-on-one or alone in certain backyard or home situations in which there were steps or uneven surfaces. We pitched a tennis ball as hard as possible at the target. A ground ball was an out while balls in the air or over various fences and hedges became doubles or homers. If one was able to catch a ball in the air it was an out, but balls in trees became ground-rule doubles. This game was the most fun because of the variety of hits—like the “real thing,” we thought. Sometimes we used a golf ball, throwing at three-quarter speed.

Knee Baseball: Because a few stray balls hit windows and other “no-no” areas, mothers snuffed out the styles mentioned above. One alternative was to play a mini-game using a ten-foot line from home plate to first base, the latter a box or pillow, which was at least eighteen inches square. We used older softballs or hardballs and small (fifteen- to twenty-inch) toy bats. The pitcher delivered slow and underhand while the batter slapped or punched the ball in the mode of Pepper. The ball could not be hit past a certain agreed-upon distance (usually fifteen

feet) or it was an out. After the batter hit the ball (almost always on the ground), the pitcher “knead” his way to get it while the batter likewise “knead” his way to first base. When the pitcher retrieved the ball he threw it to first (box), and if he hit the box on the fly or bounce, the batter was out. Runs (sort of like Cricket) were scored if you could get two, three, four, etc., “safes” in a row. Whatever . . . it was a good way to learn bunting, but bad for those joints.

Power Ball: When we got older we went to a park nearby where there was a grassy slope about 180–200 feet distant. Pitched to by someone else or tossing the ball up for yourself, if you hit it onto the slope, you got “homer” points.

Control: We had a home plate and a pitcher’s rubber sixty feet, six inches away. One player pitched and the opponent-batter caught. There were called strikeouts or walks and the opponent was allowed one hit per inning at a time of his choice; that is, if there were (ghost) men on first and second, the batter could call for the hit, which would score one run from second. You could wait, gambling that you could get another walk to load the bases before taking your hit option. This would give you two runs scored when using your one hit. We had pretty good control, so these games were low-scoring affairs.

The Elks League

Edward Luteran

My game away from the playing field began on Christmas Day 1949. My Aunt Alverta bought me a baseball game, a game far different than any I had ever seen before. I was eleven years old at the time and had been madly in love with baseball for six years. I followed the Pirates with the passion of a committed monk. I had played many of the familiar board games by that time, including the very popular All-Star Baseball with player disks that fit over a spinner and executed action very near the player's daily routine.

This new game was different because people had to actually play the game in order to make it work. By that I mean someone had to pitch the ball and someone had to hit it. The only odd measure about the game's setup was the fact that the hurler had to pitch from second base. The regular on-field pitching mound was too close to the batter. That seems strange, but not if I explain the entire layout. The playing field was painted on a one-square-yard piece of micarta. The field was surrounded on all four sides by a short fence no more than 1½ inches high. Its main task was to keep the ball on the playing surface to maintain continuous action. The outfield was green like grass and the infield was brown like dirt. There was green surrounding the brown pitching mound inside the base paths, and this thing looked like Forbes Field to me. The biggest problem with this game was that two people had to play it, one to pitch and the other to hit. I could not lose myself in a world of pretend. I actually needed another competitor.

My dad was not a big baseball fan, so I could not count on him for regular games. Besides, he worked second shift, which meant he was at work during the week when I was home from school. He was not around much to pester. My sisters wanted nothing to do with me and

this new game, and so my last resort was a nine-year-old buddy who lived in the house behind ours across the back alley. His name was Kenny Stewart. He was a blossoming baseball fan and he loved games of sport as much as I. Our mothers let us get together regularly, even at night, because our houses were close enough that they could watch us walk from door to door. We would play everything, including football games, basketball games, cards, and Monopoly. We loved to compete with each other all the time. I had a two-year advantage on Kenny, but he was smart and not easily fooled. Today he is an electrical engineer working on rocket ships that fly into space. Me, I work on the plumbing that helps get them there. We got along like champs then, and still do.

Anyway, what made this game a lot of fun for us was that it played like the real thing. Remember, going to the ballpark in 1950 was not an everyday happening. Our families each had one car, which our fathers used to go to and from work. Pleasure trips, like going to a ball game, were reserved for the weekends. By the spring of 1950, this game had become our everyday fantasy. It was our daily trip to Forbes Field.

Without going into too many boring details, the game had seven defensive position players. They were made of plastic and stood about two inches tall. They were placed at the seven positions in the field excluding pitcher and catcher. If a batted ball knocked one of them over, the batter was out. The batter was also out if his batted ball landed in the brown or on any of the dividing lines in the outfield that separated singles, doubles, triples, and homers. And there was a brown warning track around the outfield; if the batted ball landed there, the batter was also out. Lastly, the batter was out if he struck a base runner and knocked him over. The base runners looked much like the defensive players except they were gray figures with green caps. The defensive players were white figures with red caps. When the bases were loaded, it was difficult to get the ball through the infield without knocking something over.

A batted ball that landed in the green without touching brown dirt or dividing lines was a base hit. Sometimes the arguments over where a ball landed got so heated that we finally had to include a magnifying glass as part of the playing equipment. The bat was five

and a half inches long and looked like a pencil. The ball was the size of a marble and a third of it was flattened so it could stop and land and establish the action. A batter could also hit the ball out of the park for a homer, but that did not happen all that often. Going for the homer required a little extra effort, a harder swing. If the batted ball that failed to leave the park was hit hard enough, it would knock over a couple of plastic players for a double play. But if the batter decided to go for the homer and happened to catch the flat side of the ball, that sucker flew out of the park like a Bambino bazooka shot.

At first we just played the game as kids will, a day here and a day there. But as we developed technique and started playing more regularly, we developed a new approach that brought baseball cards into the action. We used the baseball cards from the All-Star series of 1948–49 to pick teams and keep statistics. And that is what really sent us on our way. We started keeping notebooks of batting statistics and discovered that our new heroes weren't Babe Ruth and Stan Musial. They were Andy Pafko and George Stirnweiss. We established very rigid rules of etiquette that required that lineups be introduced before the start of the game, that each player be announced before his turn at bat, and that his picture be on top of the nine-player stack. If these rules weren't followed, the batter was out. We kept batting averages, pitching records, and league leaders in amazing detail for a couple of little boys. In our minds, we were the Major Leagues. Our games were more real than those on the radio. We broadcasted the play-by-play action of our games. We cheered like a crowd of thousands. We were having a ball. Every day was our day of joy at the ball yard. We believed that we were the real thing. In 1950 we played about thirty games and finally called it quits when school began in September.

Over the winter Kenny and I invited two other friends, Vinnie Malone and Wally Salac, to join us in a baseball league of four teams, and for the next three summers the four of us enjoyed a baseball experience that few others in the country ever thought of. We played a 24-game schedule for each team. We used the All-Star cards again for 1951, but in 1952 we used the new Topps cards. They were nice and big and easy to handle. More important, they were far more numerous than the previous cards, and we expanded our team rosters to twenty-five players with five minor leaguers who could be raised or dropped.

With four of us buying and flipping, we had so many 1952 Topps cards that if we had kept them, we would all be millionaires today.

As usual we kept our stats, and we even awarded plaques at the end of the first two seasons. We played practically every day on the picnic table on the front porch of Kenny's house. Some days we played one game and sometimes two. In the heat of a good game or an important contest for first place, our hands would shake and beads of sweat would drip off our faces. I can remember being so nervous at times that I had extreme difficulty writing down my batting stats during the course of the game. But I had to; the only compromise was a forfeit. This league of ours could be more nerve-wracking than parachute jumping. We called our league the Elks League." You know, Eddie Luteran and Kenny Stewart, Elks. The Elks League never completed its run in 1953 because all four of us were playing ball in either the Pony League or Little League by then, and we just started running out of time to do everything. We tried to reestablish ourselves in the spring of 1954. We drafted our teams using the 1953 Bowman baseball cards, but that was as far as it ever got. The Elks League finally died. But what a glorious four years it gave us, and we still talk about it every now and then when we get together. Many a time we have wondered if four other little boys somewhere in the USA ever did what we did and put themselves through so much purgatory on the way to a great experience in growing up.

Lawn Baseball Solitaire

Delmer Davis

In the spring of 1949 when I was nine years old, “real” baseball discovered me, almost literally reaching out from the radio and sucking me into a lifelong and perhaps time-wasting allegiance. I grew up on Howell Mountain, above California’s Napa Valley, in the Seventh-day Adventist community of Angwin, home of Pacific Union College. Seventh-day Adventists hold peculiar, although changing, reservations regarding competitive sports. As a result, when I was young real baseball—what we called “hardball”—was forbidden as an organized sport. We had no Little League options—not even a regular playing field.

On the dangerously hard asphalt playground at our parochial school, our kickball games, with brown soccer-like balls, mirrored baseball as closely as possible, but the pitcher rolled the ball on the ground to home plate, where the person who was up would kick the ball and runners were thrown out by direct hits with the ball as they ran the bases. Somehow this guided-missile approach to playground survival seemed less threatening to our Adventist teachers and the supporting church than the pale imitation of big-time baseball, which we might have managed had we been given the opportunity.

Students in the upper grades played Work-Up or “Choose-Up,” team versions of softball (perhaps the size of the ball and the underhanded pitching motion defused some of the supposed dangers inherent in “real” baseball), and on special days (what we called picnics) they actually formed teams that practiced a few days ahead of time and used basic equipment, bats, and bases supplied by the school, with mitts restricted to those students able to afford their own. (I don’t remember seeing a mask on a catcher until I reached high school.) Indeed, mitt owners often claimed prime positions,

like first base, in relationship to their gloves rather than their ability. Even though I was always short and chubby with almost no jumping ability, I managed to play first base for several years because I had the good sense to buy a first baseman's glove instead of the generic fielder's glove, which, with my paltry skills, would have definitely left me languishing in right field. Eighth-grade boys even participated in an annual ritual softball game against their fathers, a potential embarrassment to my father and me that I sneakily avoided by carefully "forgetting" to tell my dad, even more deficient than I in baseball skills, about the proposed date for the event.

One spring night, as I sat in my third-grader reverie, huddled by my first love (television in its infancy was at best a chancy reception option in 1949 on Howell Mountain), the aging, brown Philco console radio in our living room, my ear to the cloth-covered speaker, I dialed past the usual nighttime network radio fare of family comedies and mystery shows and chanced on to station KLX from Oakland and for the first time heard the play-by-play announcing of a professional baseball game. I don't remember what team the Oakland Oaks of the Pacific Coast League were playing that night (could it have been their cross-Bay rivals, the San Francisco Seals?), but I was hooked by the breathless account narrated by the local announcer.

In 1949 the Oakland Oaks were an ideal team to follow. They had finished first in the league in 1948, managed by the legendary Casey Stengel, who, based on his success in Oakland, had just been elevated to the prime position of manager of the New York Yankees. Although the team was rebuilding during much of the 1949 season under the management of Charlie Dressen, they still finished second in the league. Besides, their second baseman was a young brash kid by the name of Billy Martin, and all-around athlete and ballyhooed local football legend from the University of California–Berkeley, Jackie Jenson, was playing his rookie baseball season in the outfield. All through the 1949 season, I caught as many Oaks' games as possible. I particularly remember thrilling regularly to the Sunday doubleheader games, the first game on the twin bill lasting the usual nine innings, followed by the shorter, seven-inning second game.

Since we did not subscribe to a daily or even weekly newspaper, my only source of sports information was the radio. I heard the an-

nouncers discussing batting averages and earned-run averages, but I had no real idea how these were figured until one day in the local St. Helena newsstand–magazine store I stumbled onto a baseball yearbook or almanac for the 1949 season. I do not remember the exact title of the little paperback volume, although I clearly remember its cover was mostly a colorful green. Within it I found a summary of the 1949 Major League season, including many tables of statistics for the year, and information about how the statistics were figured. The book became my sports bible for the next year. The Oakland Oaks and their rivals in the Pacific Coast League paled in comparison to the details about the Major League teams in this yearbook. I fell in love with the American League champions of that season—the New York Yankees. I memorized many of the statistics for the Yankee lineup and the next year began following the team through radio news reports as well as through the national *Game of the Day* radio broadcasts, which I became addicted to over the next several years. Although I occasionally still listened to an Oakland Oaks’ broadcast, these minor league games no longer carried as much importance now that I had discovered the big leagues.

What was perhaps most odd about my baseball addiction was how I carried my obsession over into my own play life. Although by sixth grade, age twelve or so, we often played Choose-Up at recess and during the noon hour on the all-dirt field used by college students, and I had nailed down a first base position because of my investment of the money I earned over the summer (twelve dollars) in that much-envied first baseman’s glove bought at the Montgomery Wards store in Napa (the minor league “Claw,” “Nippy Jones” model, which I still have), I spent far more hours playing my own version of “real” baseball at home, alone, on my front lawn. What little creativity I had seems to have gone into my version of a kind of baseball solitaire made necessary because there were few other children my age in the rural neighborhood and the nearest baseball field at the college was a long, mile-walk away. Besides, one advantage to my version of baseball was that I was in charge and could manipulate the play any way I wanted. No one else on the “team” could hassle me when I was the whole team!

I am not sure how I invented my singular approach to play on the front lawn. The family owned a bat, wooden and somewhat scarred. And of course I had bought both a soft ball and a hard ball—although why I had the latter I am not sure, since we never had real opportunity at school to use such. The family front lawn was not large (the backyard was essentially a wilderness)—perhaps a rectangle of around forty by fifty feet—flanked on the various sides by the large windows of the house living room and study, our garden space, the street in front of the house, and our steep driveway down to our garage. Home plate was the small area at the front of the lawn, near a rain ditch and culvert where the driveway joined the street. Left field occupied the area in front of the living room windows, mostly protected by a large, multitrunked oak tree from most of my errant hits and provided much-needed shade during the long, hot summer months. Center field took in the area in front of the study windows and part of the area in front of the garden space. Right field ended in shrubs that separated the lawn from the garden.

I knew better than to use a regular ball for my lawn baseball games. Even with my meager hitting ability, those big living room and study windows were far too close to allow for play with a real ball. My mother, short on tolerance for games in general, would never have allowed more than one broken window before banning lawn baseball forever.

My solution to the ball dilemma was certainly environmentally original. Howell Mountain, like much of northern California, produces oak trees in abundance. Many grew on our nearly two-acre property. Every year these trees hatched numerous small growths, the often nearly round appendages we called oak balls, generally somewhat smaller than real baseballs but close enough in size for my fantasies and not hard enough to damage the looming house windows. A check of the dictionary could have told me that the official name for such growth was oak gall or oak apple and that they are created by wasp larva. It must be said, of course, that the new crop of oak balls in the spring was nearly white in color and somewhat firm and could carry to the windows, if I allowed such to happen. As the season developed, however, the balls on the trees would dry out and turn dark brown and black, losing their hard qualities and

becoming very light and rather feathery, often easily breaking in two with a particularly hard swing of the bat. When the oak balls became extremely light, a windy day would make it difficult for a fly ball to get beyond the imaginary pitcher's mound. Although such balls might not last beyond a couple of innings, I always had a ready supply near at hand since I could knock them at will from the surrounding trees with a rake or a hoe. By fall many of the balls would actually have fallen from the trees and lay around the ground within easy reach.

Playing lawn baseball alone with oak balls meant that I was always up at the plate and that there were no fielders and no pitcher. Everything, except the swing of the bat and the succeeding hits, was imaginary! The game went like this. I would pretend, sequentially, to be every hitter in the Yankee or opposition lineup. I would throw the oak ball into the air, swing the bat as the ball came down, and hit the ball out into the field, pretending that the ball would fall in for a hit, be caught, or be fielded, or, when Mickey Mantle or Yogi Berra or another power hitter was up, be lofted over the pretend fences. I would keep track mentally of what men were on what base, how many outs there were, and how many runs had scored. As the person in charge of the game, I could manipulate events in such a way that the Yankee rallies could go on for many minutes, with the opposition fielders making all sorts of errors, dropping balls, overthrowing bases and the like, while the Yankee lineup often batted twice around in an inning.

The one drawback to my game was that each time I hit the oak ball, I would need to go retrieve it before the game could continue. On the other hand, those trips across the lawn provided ample opportunity for me to manufacture lots of colorful commentary in my head as to what was going on, similar to the radio broadcasts I was listening to with great regularity.

My favorite opposition team was the Brooklyn Dodgers, based, no doubt, on the many World Series games of the time that pitted the two teams against each other, rather than on the reality that the two teams never met during regular season play since they were in different leagues. It was amazing how often my fantasy pitchers, great ones like Allie Reynolds or Vic Raschi, or, after he came up, Whitey Ford, used to set down those Dodger batters in one-two-three order,

while I could make my Yankee team score ten runs or more in an inning without so much as a pang of conscience. The Yankees were a great team during those years, but never greater than when playing on my front lawn!

In imitating the batters I even tried to mirror their actual stances as described by the radio broadcasters. I remember that Yankee infielder Gil McDougald was said to have a very unusual stance, his bat held very low around his waist rather than off the shoulder. I tried my best to manufacture a similar stance for McDougald on my front lawn, although throwing an oak ball into the air, briefly assuming a low-bat McDougald stance, and then swinging with any certainty usually ended up in McDougald's popping the ball up, thus forcing me to imagine Dodger fielders dropping the ball in order for McDougald to get any hits.

Somewhat embarrassed by my individualized brand of after-school play, I would never allow the game to proceed while a car was going by. This meant that I would have to keep an ear cocked for approaching traffic and assume a nonchalant, oh-I'm-just-standing-here-with-a-bat attitude while I camouflaged the oak ball in my hand until the street became free of traffic.

Such was my homemade, afternoon substitute for Little League play. When I tell my children, both of whom played in Little League, about my made-up games, they find it rather pathetic. Certainly my ball-playing skills did not develop much from those afternoon sessions on the lawn. There is not, I think, much carryover from hitting an oak ball thrown gently into the air to hitting a moving fastball or curve ball. Regardless, those imaginary games helped focus my interest on baseball teams and statistics and sparked an interest in baseball that continues to this day.

All Kinds of Ball Games

David A. Goss

I can't remember a time when I didn't love baseball. I don't suppose I was born with a love for baseball, but it does seem to have always been a part of me. I grew up in a tiny northern Illinois town named Rollo, which consisted of eight houses, a school, a multipurpose store with a gas pump, a church, and a grain elevator. Corn and soybean fields stretched for miles in every direction. The closest town large enough to have a stoplight was fifteen miles away and the nearest indoor movie theater was twenty-five miles away. There are probably those who would perceive that as a deprived childhood, but it never seemed that way to me. We saw plenty of baseball games on television from Chicago, we never worried about city traffic or pollution, every seed we threw in the ground grew like crazy, my parents cared deeply about me, and there was more than enough space for all kinds of ball games.

There was plenty of space for ball games, but not enough kids for full teams. The only time I remember playing full nine-on-nine baseball at an early age was in Little League. So I played different games that I could play by myself or with just one or a few other kids.

I grew up in a big, brick, two-story house built in 1914. Like many of the houses built at that time in small towns in the Midwest, it had cement steps leading up to a large porch that extended across the front of the house. A cement walkway about thirty feet long led directly out from the porch to the gravel road in front of the house. I spent many hours throwing a rubber ball against those cement steps from the end of the sidewalk in front of them. Depending on how the ball hit the steps, it could come back as a ground ball (most common), a line drive, or a pop-up. If I successfully fielded the ball it was an out. If not, the distance traveled by the ball on the fly or on the

roll determined the number of bases the batter got. The games were usually low scoring, with scoreless extra-inning games occurring once in a while. I must admit that when pitching for one of my favorite teams I sometimes threw softer to reduce the likelihood of a fly ball going over my head.

My cousin Mike Sillar sometimes played this game with me. We would take turns pitching and playing first base. A ground ball out was registered only if the ball was fielded cleanly and then thrown without error to the first baseman. The teams in our games were often Major League teams, but we also made up teams and leagues. Like most kids we had a fascination for words that our mothers didn't want us to say. I remember one year when the Boogers won the league behind their dominating pitcher, Puke.

Another game I played by myself involved throwing a rubber ball against the second-floor brick wall of our house and catching the return. Balls caught on the fly were outs. Behind me was a clothesline. A ball over the clothesline on the fly was a home run. There was a small incline from the clothesline (the outfield fence) to the cement driveway alongside the house, which made going back for fly balls difficult. I tried to throw the ball so that challenging catches at the fence were required. I saved many a game in the ninth inning, preventing a home run ball from sailing over the fence with a leaping catch. One hazard was that I could get myself in trouble if I knocked clothes off the line.

During my childhood the television show *Home Run Derby* was popular. It was a one-on-one contest of Major League sluggers, with a different pairing of players each week. Batting practice pitchers threw to them. They played a nine-inning contest with three outs each per inning. Anything other than a home run—swing and a miss, foul ball, ground ball, fly ball short of the fence—was an out. My cousin Mike and I played a lot of Home Run Derby.

When we were at my house we played Home Run Derby on the grass triangle formed in the front by the confluence of three gravel roads. Two conveniently placed telephone poles were first and third base and thus marked the foul lines. A ball hit on the fly over the grass onto the gravel was a home run. For many years I saved a drawing of

the triangle based on my inaccurate pacing: 95 feet to right field, 120 feet to straightaway center, and 80 feet to left.

Mike lived with his family on our grandfather's farm a few miles north of Plainfield, Illinois. When we were at Mike's house, our Home Run Derby games were played on a grass oval surrounded by a gravel drive that made a loop by the house, garage, barn, and sheds. The rules were the same as at my house but because of the oval shape of the field, home runs down the line were pretty short and a home run to center was much longer in comparison. I can recall thinking that I had arrived as a power hitter when I pulled a ball to right that went over one of the farm sheds. My fascination with Home Run Derby has occasionally surfaced through the years. Even today my son—twenty-one years old as I write this—and I will sometimes play whiffle ball Home Run Derby in the backyard.

Mike and I also spent a lot of time playing catch. We enjoyed playing pitcher-catcher with a whiffle ball because it was possible to throw all kinds of curve balls, screw balls, and knuckleballs that broke quite a bit. When we came inside we watched baseball games on television or played the spinner board game, Ethan Allen's All-Star Baseball. Mike and I each had our own games that we played for hours. They were purchased in different years so many of the players were not duplicated. Each summer for several years we had an all-star seven-game series of old-timers versus active or recently retired players. Mike has said that the appreciation he gained for numbers from all the statistics we kept for those games was part of what led him to his college major in accounting.

A game with three or more players was "500." A batter threw the ball up and hit it to the others. A ball caught on the fly was worth 100 points, one caught on the first bounce was 50 points, and a ground ball was 25 points. If the ball was dropped those point values were deducted from that player's score. The first player to get 500 points would go up to bat. In one variation of this game, the batter laid the bat on the ground perpendicular to the line of the fielder's return throw. The fielder threw the ball back on the ground. If the ball hit the bat and stopped, that fielder came up to bat regardless of his score at the time. If the ball hit the bat, went over the bat, and the batter

caught the ball before it hit the ground again, the batter stayed at bat and the fielder who threw the ball had his score go back to zero.

I can recall playing one team against another with as few as six players—three vs. three. The team in the field had one pitcher, one fielder on the left side of the diamond and one fielder on the right side of the field. These games were played “pitcher’s hand out”; when a fielder caught a ground ball he threw to the pitcher rather than a first baseman, and if the pitcher caught the throw before the batter reached first base, the batter was out. The team at bat provided a catcher. On occasion an argument ensued if the team in the field didn’t think that the catcher tried hard enough on a play at the plate. If a base runner had his turn at bat come up, one of his teammates took his place on the bases or there would be a ghost runner. The ghost runner advanced as many bases as the batter or as many bases as the runner immediately behind the ghost runner if different from the batter.

A game that could be played with as few as about five players or as many as about twelve players was Work-Up. One to three players batted and the remainder were in the field. When an out was made, the fielders “worked up” closer to being one of the batters: right field to center field to left field to shortstop to third base to second base to first base to pitcher to catcher to batter. Hitters who made outs went to right field. Depending on how many players there were, this could also be played pitcher’s hand out or with those at bat providing a catcher. A variation of this game was that a fielder who caught a batted ball on the fly would go directly to bat regardless of his position in the field.

A few evenings each week my dad hit fly balls to my brother and me on the triangle in front of our house. My brother, who is six and a half years younger than I am, was quite precocious in his baseball skills. Occasionally people who had come to town to the church next to our house for choir practice or other activities stopped, surprised to see such a young child catch the ball. Dad also spent many hours pitching batting practice to my brother and me and hitting us fly balls at the school’s ball diamond. I have very fond memories of those times. Like many country ball fields, there were cornfields and trees next to the field. A cornfield marked the edge of the field in

right, and in deep left field there was a fence that enclosed a row of corn storage bins. To this day, a useful relaxation technique for me is to think of the sound made by a light breeze blowing through the leaves of the trees and corn stalks at that field.

I feel very lucky to have lived the type of childhood that I did. Growing up in the country with loving parents was wonderful, as were the many hours spent on various kinds of baseball games.

Off the Wall

Al Smitley

I had the perfect backyard for solitary play using a tennis ball or, more commonly, a rubber ball and the back of the garage, against which I threw grounders and fly balls. I worked out rules of play and conducted imaginary league games until my chronically sore arm throbbed. Basic rules included beginning each half-inning with 2 ground balls, which required that they be fielded cleanly and thrown to first base (back against the garage wall at shoulder height) and caught (again cleanly) with my foot on the wooden slab (first base). If 2 ground balls were fielded cleanly, thereby resulting in 2 outs, I could then produce a fly ball by standing in foul territory (marked by a young maple tree) and throwing the ball high against the peak of the garage (over the utility wire) so that the angle of its glance would force me to catch the fly ball on the run to my right. Ground balls not fielded cleanly were singles. If touched but then continuing on to hit the chain-link fence behind me, the ball would be counted as a double. If it scooted under the fence, the ball would result in a triple and I would have to retrieve it from the neighbor's yard. If a ball eluded me completely (that is, without my touching it) and reached the fence, it was a home run. This situation was not terribly uncommon, as the yard had plenty of bad hops waiting to happen. These games resulted in scores that were within the range of normal Major League games. If not, I would have augmented the rules since realistic results were always a priority in any game I attempted to create. Two floodlights mounted on the back of the garage provided the option of playing night games.

My father and brother were less sports-minded and more mechanically inclined than I. Sometimes they were in the garage working while I was banging away on the wall with that rubber ball. On the

inside wall of my playing surface they also had shelves that held all kinds of containers of nuts, bolts, and auto parts. It was common for me to hear cans of accessories crashing to the floor while I fielded ground balls, even after wooden ledges were nailed onto the shelf edges in an attempt to prevent the containers from falling. When I was in junior high school, my parents put aluminum siding on the entire house . . . except for the back side of the garage due to my mild protest. I must confess, however, that I hardly used the wall after that.

Playing My Cards Right

Edward J. Rielly

I still have my baseball cards from the 1950s and 1960s—literally thousands of them. Rookie Hank Aarons, MVP Mickey Mantles, Batting Champion Stan Musials, along with the Tom Borlands, Dave Popes, and Carroll Hardys. This is my retirement fund, I say jokingly, almost sadly at times, for in truth it almost could have been.

Alas, in my youth I had absolutely no sense of baseball cards as investments. Instead, I collected them and kept them (a wise move), but I also played with them (not so wise) and wrote on many of them (very unwise indeed).

First, the playing. I had this game whereby I would stage surrogate baseball games with the cards, using them as players around a makeshift diamond on a rug or on top of a bed. To determine whether a player made an out, managed a single, stroked a home run, and so forth, I used the numbers on the cards not engaged in the game. So, if the game were between the White Sox and Yankees, all cards for other players would supply the numbers. Take, for example, the number on the back of the 1961 Chris Cannizzaro Topps card—118. If Minnie Minoso were at bat, and the next card I drew from the pile were this card, I would use the relevant number, the final one, eight, which would mean a triple for Minoso. A nine would have given him a home run. Lower numbers would have led downward to a double, a single, or an out, with certain options for a double play or strikeout.

All of this was great fun, especially during inclement weather. One of the advantages was that I needed nothing beyond the cards to play the game, although, as I recall, I usually had paper and pencil to keep track of the action as the game progressed. Playing with my cards in this way was not smart from a financial investment standpoint, for it inevitably led to rounded corners and occasionally a lasting crease.

The larger proof of my lack of investment sense was my writing on the cards. I have always been in love with baseball statistics, although my skill at memorization was sharper in my youth than it is now. Given this interest, it made sense to me at the time to keep updating my cards—the statistics on them, that is. So when a new season ended, I would take out my Willie Mays or Ted Williams (yes, I can hear the gasps) and write the new set of statistics below the old. And I wrote in ink.

So there you have it. My cards remain in all their corner-folded, statistically updated glory—constant reminders of enormously enjoyable (and financially wasteful) years of playing baseball in and out of season. Yet I do not think, even now, with a book before me detailing current prices of baseball cards, I would do it differently. There are other types of investments even more vital than those measured in dollars.

Just Me and the Barn

Edward J. Rielly

I grew up on a farm in southwestern Wisconsin, youngest by seven years of five children, and an energetic hike or bicycle ride away from our nearest neighbors. So as baseball came early into my blood, circulating ceaselessly through arms and hands created for nothing so much as swinging a bat or throwing a ball, my isolation set up problems higher than even an outfield fence. But not so high as an old red barn on our farm, and that helped me solve my problem.

A baseball game needs players, but imagination can fashion those players. And above all, I learned to make do with what I had, which is to say the barn, my bat, a rubber baseball that bounced much better than a real one, and some quick hands and feet.

My favorite team was the Chicago White Sox of my 1950s youth, and my favorite player was Nellie Fox, the second baseman. I especially enjoyed being Nellie, but out of necessity I was also everyone else.

It went like this: I marked home plate in the dirt, facing the barn, just where the dirt and grass met the driveway that ran behind me. Still further behind was a grassy slope leading up to the fence that enclosed our yard. The home plate, by the way, doubled as first base. The White Sox usually were the home team, so the opponent batted first. I would stand by home plate, bat in my left hand, ball in the right, and throw the ball barnward, aiming it so the rebound brought the “pitch” over my home plate. Quickly I shouldered my bat and prepared to swing. Sometimes, of course, the pitch would be off, and the umpire in me would call a ball. If I misjudged and a crazy bounce—for example, when the ball hit a rut—sent it at the last second over the plate, I would call a strike. Unless fooled, I swung at anything reasonably good, and usually the ball followed by banging off the barn wall.

Having now been pitcher, umpire, and batter, I dropped the bat and instantly became a fielder. If I caught the ball on the fly, the batter, of course, would be out, victim of a fly ball to the outfield. If the ball bounced, I would field it—as the second baseman, shortstop, or third baseman, depending on where I handled the ball—and fire to first. With my foot on first base (the former home plate), I speared the ball and chalked up another out. Once in a while, sad to say, I would make an error, and the runner would be safe.

Sometimes, of course, the ball went beyond me quite cleanly for a hit, the distance it traveled determining a single, double, triple, or home run. A double, for example, passed the driveway and reached a line of decorative rocks painted white by my mother to keep cars off the grass outside the yard. A triple landed just this side of the fence, but if the ball went over or through the fence, reaching our yard, the hitter rejoiced in a home run.

Looking back, I remember that the White Sox usually won. I do not think, honest fellow that I was, that I deliberately “threw” games when batting for the Yankees, Indians, or whatever team was visiting that day. But somewhere down in my deepest desires there must have been a force withholding a slight portion of power at the plate, or perhaps making Nellie and “Little Looie” Aparicio a bit more dexterous in the field than their counterparts.

There were many other rules and regulations that I followed. It was essential in my mind to bat as the actual player did, right if right-handed, left if left-handed. Nellie was a lefty, so I worked hard at learning how to bat that way. Then there was the high blow over the very top of the barn. I saw no solution other than to call it a home run, but I passionately hated that type of hit and did my best to keep the ball on my side of the barn. The reason was the almost always muddy (and, of course, much more than muddy) barnyard. No one wants to wipe all that off his new white ball. With Aparicio as my shortstop, I also learned to factor in stolen bases. Then, as the catcher, I would fire the ball to second, catch it, and apply the tag. For a great runner like Looie to be out, the peg would have to be just so, right at the top of my feet, my catch clean, and the tag swift. He seldom was thrown out.

I spent countless hours at these baseball games and would not trade that experience for all the Little League contests in the world. It has been about forty years since I took my last time at bat, and the farm is no longer in my family. The painted rocks are gone, as is the fence. But the driveway is still there—and so is the barn. So maybe some nice evening when the moon is full and the owners are away, I will sneak back there with my bat and ball and have another game. I will leave a note for my grandchildren with the address of the nearest jail, just in case.

The Day Mick Kelleher Hit Two Home Runs

Jason Myers

In the sweltering summer heat, even the top athletes in Major League baseball need to take an occasional day off to escape the blazing sun for the cool shade of the dugout. On a hot August day in 1979, Mick Kelleher, a reserve utility infielder, took full advantage of an infrequent starting assignment given him so that the regular shortstop could rest. Kelleher, a lifetime .216 hitter entering the 1979 season, was not a household name. Perhaps his greatest claim to fame was that at fivefoot nine and 176 pounds he instigated a fight with Dave Kingman, six foot six and 210 pounds, in 1977 when “Kong” came in a bit too hard at Mick to break up a double play. The bench-clearing brawl that ensued between the Cubs and Padres was so intense, many people wondered if the animosity between the two players would continue in the clubhouse when the Cubs signed Kingman as a free agent in the following off-season. Alas, cooler heads prevailed and the two professionals coexisted without incident.

On this day in August 1979, the weather was much the same as it had been for the past several weeks: bright sun that burns through one’s skin and humidity so high that even the lightest piece of clothing seems too heavy. The fans in the bleachers were taking advantage of their quick escape from the office by soaking in the rays and a few brews. The crowd ventured to the ballpark to have some fun and watch the game. What they got was the baseball surprise of their lives.

Kelleher’s first at bat was in the bottom of the third. With no one out and a man on first, Kelleher dug into the batter’s box against Bert Blylevan. Blylevan, a well-traveled veteran even at that point in his career, was an excellent pitcher and consistent winner although the teams he played on did not always reciprocate. Blylevan worked

the count to 1-2. He received the signal from the catcher, who set up for a curve ball on the outside part of the plate. Perhaps a bit overconfident in facing Kelleher, Blylevan did not get the movement he wanted on the pitch. As the ball fought a losing battle to break against the heavy air, Kelleher strode into the hanging curve. With a swing that resembled Mighty Mick from the Bronx rather than Wee Willie Kelleher, the reserve infielder stroked the ball over the wall in left-center and into the waiting hands of the fans in the bleachers.

As Kelleher rounded the bases, he savored the moment of his first Major League home run. Most of the fans were aware of what they had witnessed. When the stadium announcer told the fans of the significance of the event, Kelleher was summoned out of the dugout for a courtesy tip of the hat.

Blylevan, who was well known for giving up the long-ball, was slightly embarrassed that he gave up the dinger that ended Kelleher's round-tripper drought. But he took a small measure of revenge when he struck out the diminutive infielder in the fifth. When the heat took its toll on Blylevan, he gave way to a pinch hitter in the top of the seventh. The Holland-born redhead joined his teammates on the bench to watch an even more shocking moment.

A middle reliever who has long since faded into obscurity replaced Blylevan in the bottom frame of the inning. After just one out, the heat and sun were starting to weaken the new pitcher as Kelleher strode toward the plate. Mick got ahead in the count 3-1. Not wanting to walk the generally weak-hitting Kelleher to put the go-ahead run on first, the pitcher heaved the ball with as much velocity as he could put on it to handcuff Kelleher with an inside pitch. Kelleher pivoted and got the bat around on the ball. The ball benefited from a slight breeze blowing toward left. Kelleher glanced up as he rounded first to see the ball clear the wall just inside of the foul pole.

For the first home run, the crowd had jumped for joy. For this home run, they were stunned silent. Suddenly a laughter stemming from their collective disbelief started to erupt. Mick Kelleher, a journeyman middle infielder who made the best use of his glove to stay in the Majors, provided the winning margin with his bat. Mick Kelleher, for at least one game, was a home run king.

Now before all you aficionados of 1970s baseball go running to your *Baseball Encyclopedia*, you are right. Mick Kelleher never hit a home run in his Major League career. I remember a brief story in *The Sporting News* in the early 1980s about Kelleher hitting a home run in the minor leagues. But as far as Kelleher's Major League career goes, he went 1,081 at bats without a single four-bagger.

The game that was just described did happen, however. It is as real as any other played that day. It occurred not in the friendly confines of Wrigley Field but in the back bedroom of a house in Asheville, North Carolina. It was not played on natural grass or Astroturf with bats and balls but on cardboard with dice and a fielding chart. The game that took place was played by a twelve-year-old baseball fanatic who spent his summer days and nights watching the games that unfolded in the "Strat-O-Matic All-Star League."

Strat-O-Matic uses dice and probabilities based on real players' actual statistics to recreate a Major League baseball game. Each player has his own card designed to reflect his real-life performance. When a batter comes up, three dice (one small and two larger dice) are rolled at once. The combined total of the two large dice determines which cell in one of six columns will be used to determine the batter's result. The small die dictates which column is considered. If it turns up as a 1, 2, or 3, the batter's card—based on his abilities as a hitter—will determine the outcome of the at bat; with a 4, 5, or 6 on the small die, the pitcher's card is utilized. This is how Mick Kelleher could club two long-balls in one game. Although Kelleher's card was void of any home runs, Blylevan's proclivity for giving up the gopher ball (430 in his career, ranking him seventh among the all-time Home Runs Allowed leaders) created the possibility that led to the first of Kelleher's clouts.

Strat-O-Matic does more than mirror the statistical probabilities of the game; it also mirrors the magic of baseball—of being at the game, of playing the game, of following the game, of loving the game. The excitement of seeing something improbable happen at a game flows through to the excitement of having the statistical improbabilities come up at the right time, just as they are most needed. From this, heroes are born, even if they take the shape of a three-by-five-inch card.

I first played Strat-O-Matic in the early 1970s as a youngster learning the joy of baseball. Like many rookies, I struggled through the first part of my Strat-O-Matic career and built a losing streak that caused me great anguish. I finally reveled in victory in 1972 as Dennis Menke tripled home the winning runs in the bottom of the tenth, just when I thought for sure I would end up with another devastating tally in the loss column. The real-life Dennis Menke, who legged out the last two of forty career triples in 1972, still holds a valued spot in my childhood memories.

By 1979 I took baseball on as my own, relishing every aspect of the game, from poring over box scores to listening to Lou Brock's 3,000th hit over heavy static from KMOX out of St. Louis. I created my "Strat-O-Matic All-Star League" and spent my time rolling the dice and experiencing the magic. But no moment was more magical than when Mick Kelleher beat the odds to hit these home runs. The Strat-O-Matic gods were smiling on Mick that day—and on me. After Kelleher hit his second home run, I smiled, I jumped for joy, I ran around the house celebrating, having been given a special gift and a new hero.

The game reemerged in my life nearly twenty years later. My wife surprised me at Christmas by reuniting me with the joys of Strat-O-Matic: a complete set of the then twenty-eight teams. Knowing the pleasure the game gave me as a child (I guess I might have rambled on a little bit over the years), she wanted me to have something enjoyable to do when my insomnia keeps me awake. The new 1998 "Strat-O-Matic All-Star League" saw many exciting moments, with perhaps the most dramatic being Rex Hudler coming off the bench to replace an injured Robby Alomar and hitting three home runs in a game.

As the saying goes, everything that goes around comes around and the same is true for my Strat-O-Matic experience. After a recent move into our first house, I finally had the space to break out a long-ago packed box of baseball cards and memorabilia. Buried in the midst of my Topps cards, *Baseball Digests*, and the program from the 1983 All-Star Game (I attended the practices and old-timers' game the day before) were my old Strat-O-Matic cards. As I thumbed through the pile of cards that I thought I had lost many years ago, I found Bert

Blylevan's card and smiled. Finally, near the bottom of the pile, I saw Mick's card and I returned to that bedroom in North Carolina.

Naturally I incorporated Bench, Carew, Blylevan, and other top 1970s players available into my current "Strat-O-Matic All-Star League" to see how they would fare against the likes of Sosa, Maddux, and Pudge Rodriguez. Of course I had no choice but to save a roster spot for Mick Kelleher.

In Mick's first at bat, the most ironic thing happened: the roll of the dice turned up a chance for Mick to hit another home run. Whether he would was left to the roll of a twenty-sided die that has replaced the numbered split cards that were used in the 1970s. I paused before rolling the die to think about what I wanted the result to be. Did I want Mick, after a two-decade retirement from Strat-O-Matic play, to once again do the improbable? Or did I want to keep Mick's special accomplishments in the past? Still ambivalent, I released the die.

Mick's shot sailed toward the fence. In my mind, Harry Caray was doing the play-by-play: "It might be . . . it could be . . . it's off the wall and Kelleher goes into second with a stand-up double." The odds and the gods were not with Mick that day, but he still managed to drive in what turned out to be the game-winning RBI. For my part, I decided that I was glad that Mick's only home runs remained a treasured part of my childhood.

Thanks to Strat-O-Matic I have been reconnected with those childhood memories and with the beauty of the game of baseball. I am reminded of that part of me that blindly believes in the purity of the game; that has simple faith in things that are good; that always believes each spring that this year the Cubs will not only make it to the World Series but actually win the whole darn shootin' match. As the twelve-year-old child in my memories reminds this thirty-something man, all in all, it is not a bad way to view the world. All this because a few rolls of the dice two decades ago beat the odds and gave me a new hero.

Thank you, Mick. Wherever you are, I hope you keep slugging!

Contributors

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STEVEN AHN received his medical degree from Loma Linda University and is currently an OB/GYN specialist in Tracy, California. He and his wife, Sylvia, have two grown sons. Still an avid Giants fan, he aims to see games in all existing stadiums. Thus far he has been to twenty parks, including Crosley Field, old Comiskey Park, and both versions of Yankee Stadium.

DAVE ANDERSON was born in 1948 and grew up a White Sox fan and Yankee hater in South Bend, Indiana. He currently works as a contract negotiator for Sprint in the Kansas City area and recently wrote *More than Merkle* (Nebraska, 2000). This volume was a finalist for the 2001 Seymour Medal given by SABR to honor the best baseball history or biography published during the previous year.

JEAN HASTINGS ARDELL grew up in Jackson Heights, New York, and now lives and writes in Corona del Mar, California. She is currently working on a book about women and baseball.

CHARLIE BEVIS grew up in Bridgewater and currently resides in Chelmsford, Massachusetts, with his wife Kathie, children Scott and Kelly, and dog Kris. His day job is a writer-editor for a mutual fund research and consulting firm but at night he is a freelance writer of baseball history. He has written two baseball books: *Mickey Cochrane: The Life of a Baseball Hall of Fame Catcher* (McFarland, 1998) and *Sunday Baseball: The Major Leagues' Struggle to Play Baseball on the Lord's Day, 1876–1934* (McFarland, 2003).

BOB BOYNTON retired from the University of California–San Diego in 1991 after a thirty-nine-year career as an academic experimental psychologist, researching human vision. He founded the Center for Visual Science at the University of Rochester before moving to California. In addition to receiving awards from the Optical Society of America and the American Academy of Optometry, he was elected in 1981 to the National Academy of Sciences. Writing about baseball has been his major hobby since retirement, with publications in *Baseball Research Journal*, *Grandstand Baseball Annual*, and *Nine*. He has also written a biography of Los Angeles sportswriter Jim Murray for the *Dictionary of Literary Biography*.

ROY BRANSON received a Ph.D. in religious ethics from Harvard University and is currently director of the Center for Law and Public Policy and professor of ethics and public policy at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland. He has previously published articles in *Christian Century*, *Christianity Today*, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, and *Judaism*, and has contributed to the *Dictionary of Christian Ethics*.

DENNIS BRISLEN writes as an avocation. He has had essays and articles published in *Finelines Journal of Literature* and other regional publications. He is currently working on a series of essays about growing up in the Chicago suburb of Homewood.

LARRY BRUNT has a master's degree in creative writing from Western Washington University and has taught writing in Washington and Arizona. He recently spent a year and a half in Spain where he taught English and got his baseball fix by listening to games over the Internet. He finds being an Expos fan suits his melancholy personality. He has published poetry, fiction, and humor pieces in various literary journals, including *Paper Salad Poetry Journal*, *CrossCurrents*, and *Greasefire*.

GENE CARNEY is the author of *Romancing the Horsehide* (McFarland, 1993). His essays, fiction, and baseball poetry have appeared in a wide variety of publications. Since 1993 he has written and edited "Notes from the Shadows of Cooperstown," now on the baseball.com Web site.

MERRITT CLIFTON is editor of *Animal People*, the leading independent newspaper providing original investigative coverage of animal protection worldwide. He still plays softball, mostly in center field.

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JAN FINKEL was born and raised in Pittsburgh. He received his Ph.D. from Indiana University with a specialty in American literature and served as an English professor at Union College in Kentucky. He now lives on Deep Creek Lake in western Maryland with Judy, his wife of thirty years. Apart from thinking about baseball, he reads widely, fishes, and tries to keep up with his grown son and daughter.

KEITH FRANCIS now teaches at Baylor University, after having served for several years in the history department at Pacific Union College, located in the hills surrounding Napa Valley. He still faithfully supports his favorite soccer club, Chelsea, but while in California was more likely to be seen at an Oakland A's game. He now lists his favorite baseball "moment" as watching the A's "frighten the living daylight" out of the Yankees in game 5 of the divisional playoffs in October 2000.

DAVID A. GOSS grew up in rural northern Illinois, about eighty miles west of Chicago, and attended Illinois Wesleyan University, Pacific University, and Indiana University. He has served on the faculties of Northeastern Oklahoma State University and Indiana University, where he is currently professor of optometry. A member of the Society for American Baseball Research, his baseball research interests include the history of eye and vision problems of Major League players and the early history of baseball at Indiana University.

ERIC C. HAGEMAN graduated from Northeastern Illinois University with a degree in elementary education. Currently living in Buchanan, Michigan, with his wife Carol and three children, he is active in living history programs. In addition to playing first base for the Berrien County Cranberry Boppers, he has recently worked with film companies producing Civil War movies, including *Gods and Generals*.

LARRY HERR is professor of religious studies at Canadian University College. An archaeologist, he has helped lead the Madaba Plains Project in Jordan and has published extensively on the ancient Middle East. A lifelong White Sox fan, he is proud to say that he has never stepped inside Wrigley Field.

GARY HUFFAKER grew up in Illinois and attended Broadview Academy and Andrews University, graduating from the latter in 1970. He is now married

with three children and living in Riverside, California. The memory of his first big league game is particularly poignant, as his father recently was killed in a tractor accident.

WALTER KEPHART received his bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary and a master's degree from the University of Utah. A retired social worker for the federal government, he is married with two children and one grandchild.

GARY LAND received his bachelor's degree in history from Pacific Union College and his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of California—Santa Barbara, where he specialized in American intellectual history. He currently serves as chair of the Department of History and Political Science at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, where he occasionally co-teaches a course in baseball literature with an English department colleague. He has edited *Adventism in America: A History* (Eerdmans, 1986) and *The World of Ellen G. White* (Review and Herald, 1987), and coauthored, with Calvin W. Edwards, *Seeker After Light: A. F. Ballenger, Adventism, and American Christianity* (Andrews University, 2000), among other publications. A member of the Society for American Baseball Research, he also continues to wait for the San Francisco Giants to win a World Series championship.

EDWARD LUTERAN, now in his sixties, is still a strong baseball fan. He graduated from Notre Dame nearly forty years ago, and has spent most of his adult life working as a hydraulics plumbing engineer. For five years he worked in radio as a newscaster, and today makes odd dollars reporting Major League games over the Internet. He is still very familiar with two of his three pals in his story and enjoys their company at get-togethers two or three times a year.

BENJAMIN MCARTHUR is professor of history at Southern Adventist University. He has published *Actors and American Culture, 1880–1920* (Temple, 1984), and is especially interested in history of the American theater. As a youth growing up in Nebraska, he attended the College World Series in Omaha before it became the major event it is today.

MICHAEL V. MIRANDA is a psychologist in private practice on Long Island. He is also the first baseman for the Minfula Washingtons, a vintage 1860s baseball team. Michael lives in Atlantic Beach, New York, with his wife, son, and daughter, the latter a slick-fielding third base-person on her high school softball team.

JASON MYERS lives in Arlington, Texas, with Victoria, his wife, and Tego, their dog. He is an attorney in the Dallas office of Vinson-Elkins L.L.P. He is the author of “Shaking Up the Line-Up: Generating Principles for an Electrifying Economic Structure for Major League Baseball,” published in the *Marquette Sports Law Review*. And, in case you could not guess it, he remains a lifelong diehard Cubs fan.

TOM NAHIGIAN has been a SABR member since 1983. A graduate of Boston University, he is employed by a local software company as office manager and remains a lifelong Red Sox fan. Although single, he is blessed with a wonderful family. When his nephew was born in April 2000, his brother-in-law announced, “It’s a boy. When he’s old enough you can take him to a ball game.” Tom is looking forward to that event, but only if the boy wants to go. He won’t force the child.

DAVE PETREMAN is a professor of Spanish and Latin American literature at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio. He grew up near Milwaukee, so a great deal of his baseball nostalgia conjures up the Milwaukee Braves. He had to make a trip to County Stadium before they tore it down. Baseball is in his blood: his father signed with the Cubs in 1939 and played in their minor league system. For Dave the “dream” died hard: he played university ball and several years of semi-pro baseball in Illinois and Wisconsin. He currently embraces minor league baseball and is a season-ticket holder with the Dayton Dragons Class A franchise.

EDWARD J. RIELLY chairs the English department at Saint Joseph’s College in Maine where, among other courses, he teaches “The Modern Novel, Baseball, and Society.” He recently published *Baseball: An Encyclopedia of Popular Culture* (ABC-CLIO, 2000) and an edited collection of essays titled *Baseball and American Culture: Across the Diamond* (Haworth, 2003).

WILLIE RUNQUIST, now a retired professor of psychology, spent twenty-five years in Edmonton, Alberta, playing fastball and hockey and coaching baseball. A longtime member of SABR, he has published articles on Pacific Coast League history and statistics and has written *Baseball by the Numbers: How Statistics Are Collected, What They Mean, and How They Reveal the Game* (McFarland, 1995). At present he is working on a series of statistical summaries of the PCL in the 1940s and 1950s.

TERRY SLOOPE was born and raised in the far west end of Richmond, Virginia, and developed a devotion to the St. Louis Cardinals during their glory years of ’67 and ’68 (damn that Mickey Lolich!). He received a bachelor’s degree in

political science from Virginia Tech and a master's degree in the same field from Florida State University. He lives in Cartersville, Georgia, northwest of Atlanta, with his wife and son. He currently works for a research institute at a local university. Naturally, the Braves have supplanted his boyhood Cardinals as his favorite team. He has been a member of SABR since 1996 and is president of its Magnolia Chapter.

AL SMITLEY holds a master's degree in library science—archives administration and is employed by the Northville District Library in Michigan. He enjoys folk fiddling and computer programming—baseball simulation and with longtime friend Tom Militzer has contributed articles to *Old Tyme Baseball News*. Finally married at age forty-seven, he resides with his wife, Tammie Graves, in Hartland, Michigan, with two cats, Hickory and Willow.

WOODROW W. WHIDDEN teaches religion to undergraduates at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan. His passions include travel, historical and theological scholarship, and baseball. Woody grew up on the east coast of Florida not far from the ballpark where his Uncle George was a semi-pro player. Two of his three siblings shared his passion for the game and for theology, though they all worshiped different “stars” in different galaxies of the baseball universe. The “hot-stove” league was always active in their household, even on the warmest of Florida summer afternoons!

BOB WILSON teaches astronomy at the University of Florida—Gainesville. In addition to his professional studies in astronomy and astrophysics, he is also interested in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American spectator sports, especially baseball. He collects such things as old game programs, record books, other related publications, and pieces of old ballparks.

PAUL L. WYSARD is a lifelong resident of Hawaii, where he is now a retired private school administrator. A graduate of Dartmouth, he played ball in high school, the army, and in a local amateur league, he has published articles in *The Sporting News* and SABR publications, and he was a presenter at the 1998 SABR convention.