



Baseball

*The Game, Business, Pastime, Strategies, Teamwork
Moral Builder*

Ink Free # 18

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My father was not a tall man, but he was that day. Holding my unsure second-grade hand, he wove us between dark long coats, strange fedora hats, and a few my size ghosts. Stumbling inside an almost black erector set, echoing loud crowd noises, and looking for our seats. It was scary until I spied a vast grass field, white chalk lines, and cloth squares within a dirt area. My first glimpse of a major league baseball park. Griffith Stadium 1952.

Dad loved sports, not to participate, but to watch. He was not particularly athletic, but I recall only a few times when he would play catch or come to any event I entered, except at Pismo Beach, the year I gave him a baseball glove and broke his leg.

Remember not if we sat in the bleachers or grandstands, nor do I recall if we found peanuts and stadium stuff. I vividly remember Mickey Vernon beating out a bunt and moving Ed Yost to second. I learned the importance of always to beat the Yankees. I am unsure when baseball knowledge became part of me, yet it remains in my soul. Looking back, my respect for baseball started with Griffith Stadium, Washington Senators with Mickey Vernon, Jackie Jenson, and Ed Yost playing the dreaded Yankees with Mantle, Martin, Berra, Rizzuto, and others.

A fan I am. Devastated and pouting, I found no comfort when Dad announced the family move to Palo Alto in 1953. "Dad, there will be no baseball in California." Any kid knew that would be enough to stop this moving mistake. Dad reminded me that the New York Giants would move to San Francisco for the 1958 season. "SO!".

We moved, Dad was on the ground floor of a new US Geological Survey office, and I was back in grade school. I eventually learned to follow the Sanford teams and the 49ers, then playing in the old Kesar Stadium.

Next thing I know, Dad packs us into the 1953 Studebaker and heads toward "the City" (as San Franciso once was honored). Mom and Dad were totally mum. It turned out we watched the fourth game the new San Francisco Giants played at the old Seals Stadium, the two-year home until a new stadium became their home. Over the years, we attended Giants games. From Seals to Candlestick, we, mostly me, were thrilled by Mays, Cepeda, Hiller, Alou, Marichal, Pagan, McCovey, and good teams.

I recall listening on board radio while on short final nearing touchdown in a United Airlines 735 when an earthquake in the Bay Area diverted us to Sacramento and interrupted a World Series game. Witnessing the confusion from the air, I will never forget the broadcasts, which did not yet understand what the fans felt.

My family later moved to Spokane. We discovered a robust Triple-A team playing good ball. I took our two daughters to ballgames, explaining the rules, situations, and strategies. One family-wide memory, known now by one word, lives with us forever. The Giants hosted the Phillies and Pete Rose. Fifteen rows back on the third base side, we teetered on the seat edges during a tight, low-scoring game featuring all the strategies and patience baseball can be. Vendors hawking cotton can-

dy, hot dogs, popcorn, and drinks sprinted a ten-lap parade each inning. Part of the experience and crazy for a foreign exchange student with us that day. One vendor, bent over at the waist and shoulders from age, lugging a metal box, will forever live in our thoughts. Old enough to my grandfather, the voice worn rusty with time, despite loud he shreeks out a frail Cooooook iessssssssssssssssss. I have no idea if Rose got a hit or why the Giants lost the game; we learned something more valuable. A good man earning an honest living is a remarkable example of life and freedom. Oh, and yes, most of the rest of the section bought chocolate chip cookies the size of small pancakes. How much did each cost? We have no idea, and these were the best Cooooook iessssssssssssssss ever.

Another time, Mom conned me into teaching her how to ear pierce whistle using the palate bird whistle. High in the rightfield stands, Dad, Mom, and I bask in a winning game and pleasant California sun. Someone hit a home run, and Mom stood screeching out the loudest whistle, yelling, "Go Willie." Dad starts the search for the source of the audible sound despite Mom claiming it was her. "Could not be Gen," Dad thinks. Disbelief turned to embarrassment after she showed him the small device and squeaked out another toot. Mom's sense of humor proved contagious.

Upon returning from living overseas in 1999, our daughter invited us to a baseball game. What, there is a team in Phoenix? Who knew that we attended our first World Series game the following year. What a thrill. More so for me, when the 9/11 delayed games conflicted with a prior speaking comment, I watched the decisive game seven from the bar Cheers. No one in Boston liked the Yankees. Real Arizona fans enjoyed their support. Hordes of empty glass proved it.

I am still a baseball fan as much for the country heal-

ing pastime boot-strapping the nation through difficult times as for the game's subtleties. Baseball did not stop for any war or attack—a game that boosts morale as much as it is an entertainment sport. I am not so much a fan of rule changes. Pitchers should hit, and defensive shifting should continue until hitters learn to hit the gaps. Timers and speeding up the game; that is TV-driven. When I am in the stadium with popcorn and cold beer, I stay to enjoy the game and ambiance, commercial free.

Batting, pitching, and fielding records, sell tickets, and media deals. Yes, following a new home run record assault on the record is exciting. Well, until I remember, each stadium is its own unique size in the outfield. Willy Mays played for years in the old Polo Grounds with 450 feet to the center field wall. Today, only a few stadiums' center field walls are 400 from home plate, and the wall height varies. Some stadiums are near wind tunnels while others are in rarefied air. It is not equal, and you know what, it does not matter. While baseball is a business boasting lottery-size contracts, it is much more. Baseball is not a collection of rules attracting talented minds and athletes; it is an institution that embodies the fiber of cohesive, caring people and fundamental freedoms.



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Greg McKelvey

gemprssphotos@gmail.com